

ANTIDOTE

Going to Extremes | Where Vice's Senior War Correspondent Goes to Escape

When going to war is your job, what's the antidote?

By [Ben Anderson](#) | Apr 12 2019, 12:17pm

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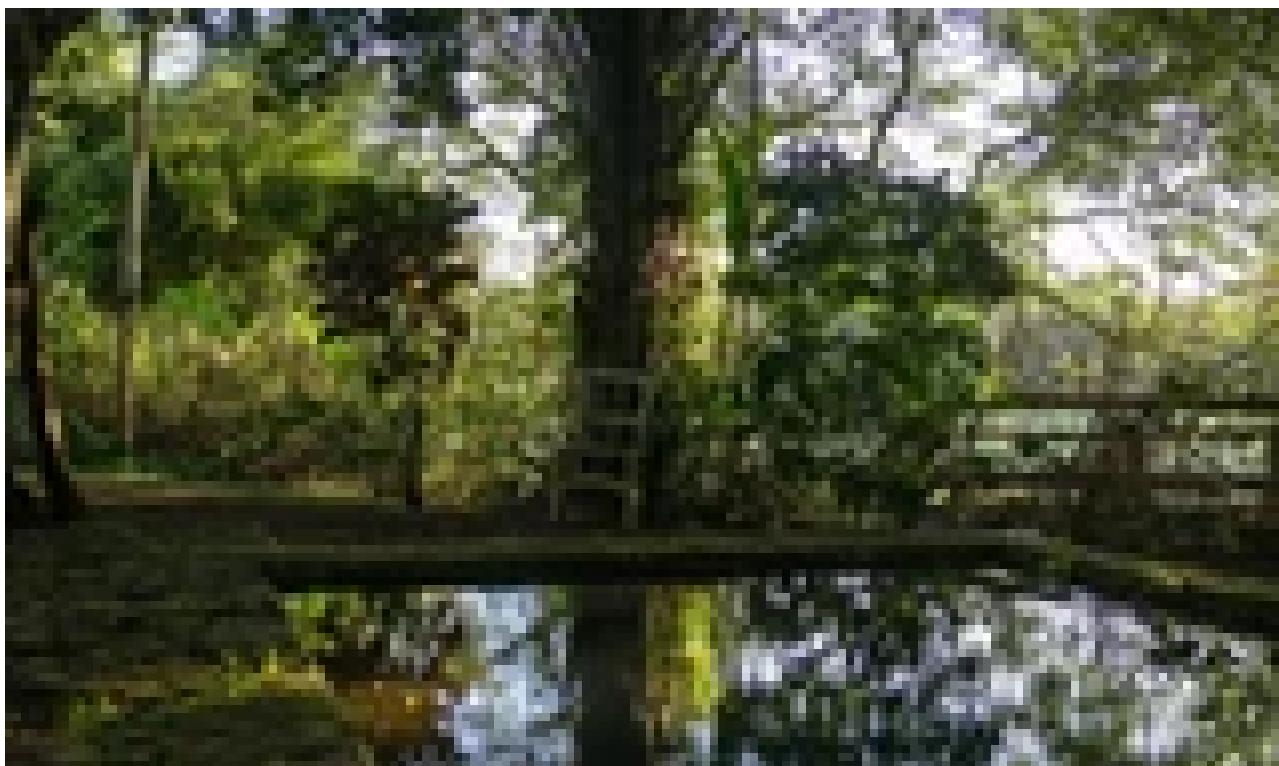
*Ben Anderson is a Senior Correspondent for Vice, who's spent the bulk of his career reporting from **the world's conflict zones**. In this new column, he shares stories from some of the more extreme destinations he's visited - and talks about where he goes to get away from it all.*

Because I spend much of my time in the world's worst places, there is no longer any romance in travel for me. It's not a new adventure when I get on a plane, it's an endurance test; a series of discomforts, dangers and dramas that make me wake up each morning with no idea how I can get through another day.

Occasionally throughout the years of travelling rough, I've managed a few nights of luxury, but they were mostly a let down. Luxury often just means tacky, or posey, or simply a contract that allows the wealthy and entitled to lord it over those less fortunate than them. I've long ago stopped thinking of travel to these places as a way of getting away from it all, recharging your senses, re-awakening your spirits and whatever else is promised in those glossy videos with the drone shots and models looking philosophically out to sea.

"It's not a new adventure when I get on a plane, it's an endurance test"

Late last year, I was told that if I didn't take a break, I would do irreparable damage to myself. I'd spent years travelling to war zones, sometimes without even coming home in between trips, and my nervous system was locked in fight or flight



"Jamaica is the only place I've been in the last decade where I've woken up feeling genuinely refreshed." Photo: Courtesy of Pantrepant

I decided to go to [Jamaica](#), the only place I've been in the last decade where I've woken up feeling genuinely refreshed. Jamaica's one of the few places in the [Caribbean](#) where you definitely won't bump into someone like Philip Green smoking a cigar with his belly out. Its best places are high end, but it's a very different kind of luxury; no bling, nothing fancy.

There is none of that awful spa music you only hear in 5 star hotels, no tuxedo'd waiters or silver service. It's more wooden huts with entire walls missing, thick flora everywhere, rocking chairs and hammocks with books lying around that you actually want to read and dinner barbequed in steel drums with locally farmed fruit and vegetables that are fresh and ripe - which is somehow a rarity in luxury resorts.

Some of the best examples of this are the hotels created and owned by Chris Blackwell, the legendary music producer who made Bob Marley and Grace Jones into international stars. He owns three resorts on the island, including the Goldeneye villa where Ian Fleming wrote the James Bond books.



The rural landscape around Pantrepant is part of the farm's appeal. Photo: Marc Babin / Unsplash

But the place that's intrigued me for years is the 850 acre farm called [Pantrepant](#) that Blackwell had bought as a private retreat when he sold Island Records in 1990. A couple of people had told me about the farm as if it was a rumor - a magical retreat far into the hills next to Cockpit Country, an hour away from Montego Bay and 300 feet above sea level.

Even the website has just five main pictures; two of thick rainforest cloaked in mist, the others of an old and overgrown stone pool, a herd of cream colored Brahman cattle and a local woman carrying a bowl of greens into the cottage, her back to the camera. All I knew for certain was that in the middle of the working farm that supplied Chris' hotels with much of their produce, there was a two bedroom cottage that was now available to rent.

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The drive to Pantrepant finishes on a long stretch along a thin bumpy mud road through orchards of oranges and "ugly fruit." When you finally pull up, you see Chris' great house, originally built by an English family in 1740. Behind it is a giant Guango tree, said to be hundreds of years old, which Blackwell says he fell in love

direction and all you can hear are Cicadas, parrots and the odd cow.



"You can't see another building in any direction and all you can hear are Cicadas, parrots and the odd cow."

Photo: Courtesy of Pantrepant

Chris was there when I arrived (this was pure luck and is not guaranteed when you stay at Pantrepant) and he took me out on the verandah, where we drank rum punch overlooking the ruins of an old stone water mill. He told me we had some great guests joining us for dinner, and soon Bob Marley's lawyer and one of his oldest friends arrived.

Both of them had been interviewed for a new documentary about Marley's shooting, but neither of them had bothered to watch it. After dinner I got it to play on my laptop and as soon as it ended, the lawyer and the old friend got into a heated discussion about who was behind the attempted assassination, and which Kingston don had the power to order it. It was one of those nights that was so good, and so rare, that I honestly couldn't understand what I'd done to deserve being there.

wanted to know if I was ready for breakfast. She came back with a fruit salad, including Papaya with thin slices of lime for squeezing (I will now never eat Papaya any other way).

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The main course, poached eggs on boiled callaloo, was such a perfect breakfast meal that I still regularly wake up craving it. Marva showed me around the garden and taught me when to pick the callaloo, gently and proudly letting me know why it won't taste as good anywhere else because it can't be as fresh and perfectly ripe as it is here.



"Callaloo won't taste as good anywhere else because it can't be as fresh and perfectly ripe as it is here" Photo: Courtesy of Pantrepant

The same, I would soon learn, was true for the coffee, the clear-as-glass coconut water and the chicken stew. The butter is made by Mama J, the head cook, and there was even a tub of her homemade coffee ice cream casually left in the freezer - it was the tastiest, chewiest ice cream I've ever had.

wide and deep enough for diving, kayaking or just floating around in tractor tyre inner tubes, surrounded by thick forest.

If you swim across the hole and climb the hill, you'll find an old cave that was once home to the Tainos, who inhabited Jamaica hundreds of years before any Europeans set foot here. I couldn't imagine there's a more tranquil place to swim on the island, or perhaps even the entire Caribbean.



Jamaican foliage. Photo: Chris Howell / Unsplash

I spent the afternoon touring the farm on horseback, playing the iPod full of Island records' classics and laying on a hammock on the cottage veranda, immersing myself in a book more deeply than I have all year. I imagined how good I'd feel if I spent more time there, how daily life could be stripped down to the bare essentials, how I could clear my mind so thoroughly that I'd not only read books but write them too.

I've lived in towns or cities my entire life and covered conflict for most of my career. I've rarely imagined wanting it any other way. A few days at Pantrepant convinced

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Ben Anderson's stay was hosted by Pantrepant - for further info and bookings [check their website](#). You can keep up with Ben Anderson on [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#).



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