

New York Times
Oct 29, 2006

CHECK IN/CHECK OUT

DOMINICA:
JUNGLE BAY

THE BASICS

Dominica is the Caribbean in its purest form. "I cannot believe that in terms of grandeur and majesty there can be found anything in the world to rival Dominica's succession of forest-covered mountains," Alec Waugh wrote in 1948. "It is green, all green." Perhaps no hotel on the island captures that sense of the wilderness better than Jungle Bay, an ecolodge on a 55-acre site filled with lush white cedar, almond and gomier trees, overlooking gleaming Pointe Mulâtre Bay.

Opened in March 2005 by Sam Raphael, a real-estate developer from the United States Virgin Islands, the resort has been an economic lifeline to local residents; many of its 55 employees are former farmers hit by a decline in the banana trade. "I was here from the first machete stroke," said Francis Emmanuel, known as Brother, who does everything from climbing the trees for breakfast coconut water to guiding hikes.

THE LOCATION

Remote. Set on the southwest coast on the island, Jungle Bay is an hour and a half from the airport in Melville Hall. The roads are narrow, winding and dangerous. (Best to take advantage of an airport pickup by hotel staff.) The island's big attractions are readily accessible to guests, especially those who want to spend their time hiking, diving, ocean kayaking and mountain biking rather than sunbathing. Victoria Falls, 130 feet tall, is within walking distance. Zom Zom Lookout Point and Perdu Temps Heritage Trail are nearby hikes.

THE ROOMS

Rustic luxe. The 35 individual, spacious cottages are on stilts, filled with sunlight (some seeping through the floorboards), and the sounds of the hummingbirds. All have balconies and views of either the water or the rain forest and are made out of local tropical hardwoods and volcanic stone. There is no air-conditioning or television. Some guests need to be in good shape: a series of footpaths connects the cottages, the highest perched like a bird's nest up 189 steps. And the vertical is steep.

THE BATHROOMS

An outdoor shower under an awning of trees with infinite shades of greens; bathing guests may spot a Lesser Antillean bullfinch flitting overhead. On a visit earlier this year, the solar-heated water defied

expectations; the shower was hot with shockingly good water pressure. Sublime.

AMENITIES

A computer with Internet hookup is in the main lobby, but calls to the United States had to be dialed by the front desk operator. The Spa du Soleil's cliffside treatment rooms are partially open, overlooking the Atlantic Coast. Daily yoga classes in a sun-filled room are hearty sessions.

ROOM SERVICE

Although room service is available, it would be a heartless soul who made someone climb the steps with a tray. The rooms have small refrigerators, ice and Melitta coffee and tea brands, including the delicious Love at First Sip and All That Razzberry.



Todd Anderson/Black Star

One of the 35 cottages at Jungle Bay. All have balconies and views of the water or the rain forest.

THE RESTAURANT

The Jungle Pavilion is an open-air octagonal structure overlooking the beautiful stone pool and the ocean. Fresh ingredients, fresh fish and 95 percent organic. One standout is the herbed grilled chicken with papaya, pineapple and tomato salsa. Jungle Bay's staff is unfailingly gracious, but many who work at the resort have no previous hotel or restaurant experience. At times the service was a bit tentative.

THE CROWD

Honeymooners, granola eaters, Johnny Depp fans (parts of the second "Pirates of the Caribbean" was filmed on the island) and a few very fit hikers from the United States wearing triathlon T-shirts.

BOTTOM LINE

Rooms are \$199 in the off-season to \$249 in season, meals included. Jungle Bay, (767) 446-1789. Pointe Mulâtre, Dominica; junglebaydominica.com.

MARY BILLARD