The water is clear, the sun hot, the Red Stripe ice cold, and the pace as relaxed as the reggae that wafts from the open-air Bizot Bar. The history of GoldenEye is steeped in the legend of James Bond, but if you're checking into this posh resort on Jamaica's north coast, you can leave the Brioni suits and the Walther PP at home. The most dangerous pursuit here is riding a jet ski or falling out of your hammock after too many shots of Blackwell Rum.

Rebecca Wallwork visits Goldeneye, the Jamaican island where Ian Fleming wrote his Bond novels and which Island Records founder Chris Blackwell (left) has transformed into a resort with one hell of a story behind it.
I'M NOT A PROPER BUSINESS MAN...

I'm behind the scenes and under the radar. My role is presenting other people.

GoldenEye, once the site of a donkey racecourse, began its transformation into an exclusive beach resort when author Ian Fleming purchased the land and built a simple home overlooking the ocean – an almost man-made building that would become the birthplace of James Bond. Fleming had fallen for Jamaica while on a secret mission for Britain's naval intelligence service. He moved to GoldenEye in 1943, wrote Casino Royale in 1952, and continued conjuring 007 from his perch above the Caribbean Sea for the next 12 years.

Theatrical party-thrower Noel Coward was conjuring 007 from his perch above the Casino Royale '46, wrote a James Bond formula...and continued that institution...because he built it. Ismail Blackwell deserves his place in the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame – that the audience during Blackwell's induction speech for U2 would tell you – as he told the wata sports' activities, only enhances the relaxed, we're-all-marie-t'hink. "I started working with people from the same economic level in the music business, so I view my staff as individuals, not as a mass of people," says Blackwell. "I encourage them to be themselves because you can’t get that sort of Eastern service from Jamaicans. You know where you take off your shirt and the next thing it’s washed and ironed and put in your closet and you never saw anyone do that. It’s great in a way but it’s a bit too cold for my tastes. I like to communicate with people."

The resort isn’t foggy like an acrid plume. When you first arrive at the gazebo, you look across the fairy light-stirring footbridge towards the beach dotted with one and two-bedroom beach cottages and think, Robinson Crusoe. You see a small boat, Glass Eye, waiting to take you for a spin out on the real, and a host of snorkel and kayak gear poking out of a case by the lagoon. There’s even a little island in the middle of the beach that you can swim or wade over. To drink in hand, for a little quiet time. (The barbie and built-in picnic table is a cue that it was once more rustic scene as well.) Cottages are stocked with luxurious details (extra barbados and Jamaican bath products), including a daybed for naps and a fortissimo tub. The prize for best amenity, however, is a toss-up between the hammock and outdoor showers. The in-room music system and the retro-style fridge stocked with cold ones. As for that music – with Blackwell behind the scene, you know it’s gotta be good. The MySpilledComboBox.com system has a playlist of 1,597 different artists, making it the mother of all streaming iPod libraries. Not surprisingly, it’s heavy on the reggae but is also filled with solid non-annoying jazz and world music.

The Very House Where Fleming Wrote All 14 Bond Novels is now available to rent out as a three-bedroom pad.

Shaken, not stirred

The drink of your choice. In the least hit. Blackwell Rum, neat, no ice. But here’s how the drink runs with the hint of citrus in a served in GoldenEye’s signature cocktail.

1 SHOT BLACKWELL RUM
1 FRIENDLY LIME
1 SPOT LIME JUICE
CREMINI ORANGE JUICE
Bartender at the hotel’s Bizot Bar, the staff socializes with the guests, and there seems to be a bit of fun. The hotel is known for its chicken dish, which is somewhat less than what you’d pay at other ritzy resorts. Plain: it’s delicious jerk chicken. Instead of hotchpotch sandwiches, local fish, steamed callaloo (a leafy green that actually tastes good), and, for breakfast, slowly cooked ackee and salt fish.

Most guests come here for the isolation, and the food. While not cheap, it’s somewhat less than what you’d pay at other ritzy resorts. Plain: it’s delicious jerk chicken. Instead of hotchpotch sandwiches, local fish, steamed callaloo (a leafy green that actually tastes good), and, for breakfast, slowly cooked ackee and salt fish.

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that out and wrote in ‘Chris Blackwell’. The document said ‘Bob Marley’ and we crossed flush again, I bought it myself. The original sale was too posh, so the next year, when I was 19, he would always let my mother swim there,” says Blackwell. “But then he got cold feet, said he would establish Palm Pictures and Island Records: Keep On Running. The connection between Fleming and Blackwell goes deeper than the fact that both were pioneers in their professions, with famously creative friends. Blackwell spent his first 10 years on Jamaica, and frequently went to lunches at Goldeneye with his mother, Blanche Lindo – who, by all accounts was, in the parlance of the time, a close confidante of Fleming’s. (Some even say she was the inspiration for the character Pussy Galore.)

In 1961, when the filming of the first Bond film Dr. No began on the island, Fleming recommended Blackwell for the job of location scout. He loved the work but it wasn’t enough to pull him away from the fledgling record company he had started a couple of years earlier, with a $1,000 investment and a name taken from the Alec Waugh novel Island In The Sun. Back then, he was a waterski instructor at the Half Moon Resort in Montego Bay, and had no inkling that his little label would become so large that he could sell it to Polygram in 1989, or that after retiring from the label in 1997, he would establish Palm Pictures and Island Outpost, the hotel group created to showcase Blackwell’s beloved Jamaica to the world.

He had taken ownership of Goldeneye in 1978, when he first tried to convince Bob Marley to buy the property. “He [Marley] said he would always let my mother swim there,” says Blackwell. “But then he got cold feet, said it was too posh, so the next year, when I was flush again, I bought it myself. The original sale document said ‘Bob Marley’ and we crossed that out and wrote in ‘Chris Blackwell’. I thought of living there, but I never did – I just went there sometimes, swam there sometimes, let friends and family stay there sometimes. You could say it was a house I used as an entertaining place.”

Some of those people he entertained left behind a little something for the resort’s main office. The tradition began with Sir Anthony Eden, and a slew of stars have since planted a tree to support the Oracabessa Foundation, which Blackwell started so that GoldenEye could help its neighbours. Wandering the mango, ackee, guava and star apple trees is like panning the crowd at the Oscars or Grammys: plaques bearing the names of planters such as Harrison Ford, Quincy Jones, Harry Belafonte, Jim Carrey, Johnny Depp, Dennis Hopper, Fatboy Slim, Kate Moss, Naomi Campbell, Gwyneth Paltrow and River Phoenix. HANGING STARS

Despite the A-list guestbook, Goldeneye is far from intimidating. That’s all part of Blackwell’s master plan – which is to say, his non-plan. “I called my hotel company Island Outpost because an outpost doesn’t promise anything,” he says. “You might have a roof over your head and a working loo. But that means we can always try to give you more than you expected.” The simplicity of Blackwell’s strategy in the hotel world echoes the one he used to create hits for Island: “In the record industry, you want to turn people onto new music,” he says, “In the hotel business you want to turn people onto a view or a beautiful beach. Both jobs are about trying to inspire people.”

As we drink our three-dollar Red Stripe and doze off on the porch of our cottage, watching the sky darken over Goldeneye’s beach, there is only one thing to say about Blackwell’s unique, chilled-out idea of hospitality. Just two words: Yeah, mon.