

## If it can work for some, it can work for all!

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Dominican Mani tells me he would not miss a Buffet at Jungle Bay for nothing! - PHOTOS BY ROSEMARY PARKINSON

**THE AGRO-TOURISM** Workshop (Oct. 3-5) in St. Kitts and Nevis hosted by various connected bodies - IICA, CDE and CTA - attended by people from many Caribbean islands, not only listened to Lead Papers but, embarked on serious discussions (sometimes heated!) and sharing of ideas (amazing ones!) with regards to the role of Agriculture in Tourism and vice versa to alleviate (I would like to say annihilate) some of the massive imports of foods (sometimes very much second-class ones!) into our lands. We heard success stories such as Nevis and the Four Seasons Hotel, The Shanklands Rainforest Resort in Guyana (owned by Jamaicans). We saw firsthand how our sad Botanical Gardens can be revitalised. We learned about wellness and natural healing. Food Festivals. Slow Foods and much more. Although matters discussed were précised into a paper and presented to invited Caribbean Ministers of Agriculture during (also) Agricultural Week in St. Kitts, each of us, I believe, became committed to play a part in bringing the message back to our respective islands, either by action or interaction - or we in the Caribbean might find ourselves eating 'iffie' foods from foreign morning, noon and night! Me? I rather live in hut and grow mi own if that is to be the future.

I am in renewal and showered with enthusiasm. Over the next few weeks, I want to share this. I did not return home after all but am enjoying investigating models of Agri-Tourism in other islands. I now know we will make it as a Caribbean force - we just have to work closely together, communicating and sharing. Hope of our integration is up to us. We have to demand it. It is the only solution to our many problems. Simple.

### DOMINICA

Dominica comes first - land of some 365 pristine rivers that move through primordial forests - still home to indigenous flora and fauna like no other island. I was met by friend Bobby Frederick, immediately taken to his work in progress - Gingerette Nature Sanctuary. I immersed my body in the healing waters of large gushing river running through his property, the overhanging lush vegetation - a glimpse of heaven. Slept for hours in a hammock guarded by the loving arms of verdant mountains before hitting Roseau to enjoy fried fish and many, many Akras, retiring to wake in time for Saturday's vibrant market and a trip to the interior for Jungle Bay Resort and Spa

in Delices, where Blue Neck Hummingbirds endemic to Dominica and Martinique flit about wooden cabins perched on the mountainsides overlooking the Atlantic Ocean - as I was to learn the hard way! About the cabins and the mountains that is.

Having studied the trekking abilities of his guests in detail, Sam Raphael, the owner of Jungle Bay, does his own sorting of guests - The Swiss go to the top cabins, the Germans to a second level below, the English next and his Caribbean people remain where steps are not required into heaven fi 'im know we and exercise! I had, however, been mistakenly described as a German and was relegated to climbing Mount Everest 'till me near dead with breathlessness! At dinner that night, on seeing my bent-over body protecting damaged lungs and discovering that I was in the wrong area according to ethnicity, Sam did nothing about moving me. I now know why.

Dinner was celestial. Ginger Pumpkin Soup, followed by a fresh salad of lettuce, green whole beans and raw beetroot drizzled with garlic dressing. Appetiser was several thick slices of Aubergine (Eggplant) interspersed with thin ones of Tomato and covered in a light Dominican barbecue spicy sauce. Entrée was Shrimp in Creole Sauce, rice and veggies, plantain in coconut. Dessert - Banana Cake with coconut filling.

And then the climb of Mount HoLoLo again. Lost in the dark. Swore a Dominican Mountain Beast of the Forest would nyam me for supper. On finally reaching my abode in the skies, fell to the king-sized bed 'till morn - windows and doors open to the sea breezes and forest's sounds. Waking in 'the Himalayas' breathing the purest oxygen known to man, I did not venture to breakfast - had myself a cup of coffee (tut!tut! not Dominican or Jamaican) in bed, relaxed, read, bathed in the semi-outdoor shower big enough to water the world, basking in beauty and serenity - my only interruption, Sam wanting to know if I was still alive. I was invigoratingly so. People like Sam know what they do.

## **ENSURING HAPPINESS**

Sunday lunch was a buffet of local foods. Slices of Avocados. Roast Plantain. Roast Breadfruit. Chicken in Coconut Milk. Curried Fish and Fish Fiesta. Tofu in white Sauce. Green Rice. Breadfruit Salad with organic beets just to name of a few from the array of island deliciousness leaving space to mention the Green Banana Pie and Plantain in Shredded Coconut that had my taste buds in a tizz. Chef Joanne Hilaire who, with no trepidation whatsoever, mingles with the crowd ensuring general happiness, serving a guest if necessary, managed a moment of chat with me. The restaurant, kitchen - the whole hotel actually works as a team. Whatever is required to get done, is done - no fuss. Born in Petite Savann to a low-income family, she undertook cooking from an early age. This love of Dominica's fare and her own initiative of experimentation brought her to Jungle Bay as Head Chef. The story evolves further - not from Sam whose knowledge on the likes of mountain goats by virtue of place of birth is second to none - but from Joanne, seconded by my friend Bobby.

Before the ground was broken here, nearby villages were contacted and the interaction begun. Artisans to build the hotel, training programmes for required staff, understandings of the demand necessary from farmers made known and helped to be implemented. By the time this unbelievable undertaking named Jungle Bay opened, staff trained and ready to please the every whim of their guests moved right along with the flow with 98% of the required ingredients for the restaurant being provided by the farmers in the area. This innovative move has bettered the quality of life for all those in the surrounding areas - their transformation apparent in the faithful, pleasant, happy and satisfying service given to the hotel by those employed there and the hospitality received by the guests who visit.

This is how things sort of worked in the past. The time has come to bring in the old and get rid of the new for as I see it - the new ain't working for us! and by the way let not a soul tell you our

indigenous foods do not please the palate of our visitors - I saw them rushing for seconds at the Buffet whilst I myself did the same.

Jungle Bay is the model for Agri-Tourism in Dominica and anyone who loves eco-tourism as I do, will find much to enjoy at this hotel. But Sam, nex' time - me want to go de Swiss Alps way but with day to night room service!

The Lord works in mysterious ways. Next week is Barbados!