



Half Moon boasts 17 dreamy villas that have been extravagantly renovated over the years. Built on 400 acres, the resort has 51 pools, 13 tennis courts, an equestrian centre, a dolphin lagoon and a spa.

# Gilding Jamaica

Bob Marley's hometown is real-estate paradise for jet-setters

BY OLIVIA STREN

Jamaica No Problem has long been toured with magenta-shouldered, Marley-worshipping masses looking for a fast cocktail of sun-rum-and-reggae. But the ya mon island is trying to doff its rep as playground to the plebian. Glamorati bound for more classically decadent destinations (say, Mustique, where there are about as many palm fronds as there are platinum cards) may want to reroute their Learjets to Jamaica's flourishing Gold Coast. (Note to the be-jetted: Montego Bay airport now claims an LAM private jet centre.)

The area's venerable leisure capital is Half Moon, a resort named after its beach's crescent-shaped curve. The property (perched on what was once a loading dock for sugar shipments) was founded in 1954 by 17 American, British and Bermudian entrepreneurs. (Among those early settlers: Donald Deskey, designer of New York's Radio City Music Hall and Harvey Firestone Jr., of the tire-and-rubber empire.) They had come to vacation on the island, were besotted with its northern

shores, and colonized the curling, sandy ribbon (dubbed it Half Moon) with 17 white-washed villas to match the breeze-frothed shores. The cloud-white resort, eminently civilized and gleaming under periwinkle skies, has played host to royalty both literal (Queen Elizabeth, Prince Philip) and political (John and Jacqueline Kennedy vacationed here for a month before his inauguration; curiously, a copy of Jackie Kennedy's hand-written will, penned on Half Moon stationary, still hangs in the lobby).

After a slew of multi-million-dollar facelifts and additions, the resort now spreads over 400 frangipani-scented acres, mapped with 51 swimming pools, 13 flood-lit tennis courts, an equestrian centre, a kids' centre, a dolphin lagoon and a new spa, Fern Tree. The 68,000-square-foot grooming ground, with its tile-work, private gardens and spouting fountains, feels like a diminutive Alhambra. (Although, here, you can enjoy massages that involve getting splashed in Jamaican rum or exfoliated in a toothsome potion of Jamaican sugar, coffee and coconut.)

But despite its various changes,

the resort retains its gentle majesty of yore: An open-air lobby, with its grand pillars, tropical wood furnishings and drowsy ceiling fans, feels like the sort of place as well suited to wearing a tuxedo as drinking gin and Ting.

Should you wish to own your own sliver of the Moon, the resort is now building the Colony. Slated to open in 2010, the luxed-out development will feature 30 three-, four- or five-bedroom villas, each fashioned like mini-plantation homes with broad, sunshiny verandahs, open-air interior courtyards and Jamaican mahogany furnishings. Since the Colony is divined as a luxury resort property (as opposed to a residential property) its spoiled denizens will have access to all of Half Moon's amenities. Colony-zers will also be cosseted with a formidable staff: a butler, cook, housekeeper, laundress and gardener. And should the residents not care to take to any of the resort's 51 pools, the villas (price tags start at US\$2.4-million) will claim their own private pools. In other words: Colony, No Problem.

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