

A tasty trek across Jamaica

I'd rather eat than cook. So when I heard that the Sandals Resorts in Jamaica were offering an exploration of Jamaica's rich culinary heritage I thought, "That's for me, and who cares about the calories."

I stayed in a Dutch-style village at the luxury-included Sandals Whitehouse European Village and Spa, in Westmoreland, on Jamaica's south side, 80 kilometres from the Montego Bay airport. The other villages were Italian and French. There were seven restaurants: Italian, Asian, Caribbean, Tex-Mex, Jamaican, International and a European patisserie.

Jeremy Jones, the general manager, introduced us to a classical turn-of-the-century great house/ plantation breakfast.

Yellow, fleshy ackee fruit resembling scrambled eggs was served with salt fish. Baked breadfruit, introduced to the West Indies by Capt. William Bligh of mutiny on the bounty fame, tasted like sweet potato. Escovitch fish marinated in a spicy vinegar was introduced by the Spanish Jews. There also were boiled green bananas, pepper steak, yams, warm banana bread and Jamaica's top-notch Blue Mountain coffee.

I have an appreciation of handmade pistachio ganache-filled chocolates since Chef Veejoruth Purmesseur's demonstration.

With numerous meals on the horizon, I booked a West Indian massage at the Red Lane Spa. Holding warm river stones in my hands, the full body massage with scented facial mist and sand exfoliation on my swollen feet quickly lulled me to sleep.

Chef Walter Staib, the enthusiastic culinary ambassador to Sandals Resorts, offered us a seven-course Jamaican food-and-wine pairing dinner in the courtyard.

His jerk-chicken-breast roti with the Traminer Riesling was served to the mayor of Chongqing in Szechuan province in China at the 2005 inauguration of the Yangtze river cruise ship Victoria Anna.

Miss Betty's West Indies Pepperpot callaloo soup in a half-coconut was served in July 2000 to the Parisians during French-American friendship week. It was paired with Australia's 2005 Annie Lane Clare Valley Riesling, with its lime, floral nose and mineral tones.

The Jamaican actor Harry Belafonte and the U.S. weatherman Al Roker had previously enjoyed the moist snapper dore matched with the Chateau St. Jean Merlot.

The next day we drove to Billy's Roadside Pepper Shrimp at Middle Quarters in St. Elizabeth, where huge saucepans of curried chicken and shrimp, pepper shrimp, brown stew and rice and peas (actually red kidney beans) were simmering over an open pimienta-wood fire.

Our lunch continued on the beach at Little Ochie, Alligator Pond, in Manchester near St. Elizabeth Parish. Evrol "Blackie" Christian's seafood restaurant is a series of thatch-roofed canoes built on stilts. Fish tea preceded great platters of my favourite jerk lobster, pepper conch, crab, calamari and fish and festival dumplings.

I took a pause from eating and checked out an artisan at the resort. Jacqueline Satchwell had crocheted berets in Rastafarian colours of black, red, yellow and green. Black is for Africa, the homeland, red for the blood of living things, yellow for gold and green for the earth.

A rustic stove-pot dinner awaited us at the Bluefield Beach Club. Pumpkin salad, manish water soup, kasava bammie bread, curried goat, jerk and corned pork and dessert of caramelized coconut drops went well with the Appleton Estate rums and Jamaican cigars.

At the reggae after-party, I futilely tried to dance off my recently acquired poundage.

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