



Loop Destination: Don't say the "T" word in Treasure Beach

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A canoe indicating that you have arrived in Treasure Beach hangs at the entrance to the quiet village on Jamaica's South Coast.

"Welcome to Treasure Beach, the home of community tourism," it says, the words inscribed in black paint. The telltale signs of tourism are nowhere to be seen, however. No multistory mega resorts reside here, keeping tourists trapped in their carousel of Jamaica themed events enough to give truth to the boast that you were on the island but not enough to give you authentic Jamaica.

"We don't use the "T" word here," says Roger Chamberlain, a retired UWI performance arts lecturer who has lived in Treasure Beach for the last 30 years with his mother who moved to Jamaica to marry an artist. Her beau was murdered at sea at the hands of pirates but his art, shells and seaweed framed in glass lives on at Roger's guesthouse called Nuestra Casa.

"The community on the sign is right," he said, searching for the right word to describe Treasure Beach's contribution to the Jamaica's tourism quilt. "Visitors. We have visitors, not tourists. Here you can have the authentic experience," he said.

The bread basket of Jamaica, St Elizabeth is a farming parish, producing pineapples, watermelons, mangoes, sweet potatoes, cassava, pumpkin and sundry other produce readily available for retail from roadside vendors.

At Jake's Hotel, a colourful boutique hotel named after the family parrot, a produce stand smack in the middle of the lobby beckons visitors to purchase with a hand painted sign that says Support Your Local Farmers.

It is here at Jake's, owned by the offspring of famed director Perry Henzell (Harder they Come) that Treasure Beach springs to life every two years.

Justine, Henzell's daughter, together with authors Kwame Dawes and Colin Channer, are the minds behind the Calabash Literary Festival, the Caribbean's largest and longest running literary festival that has attracted the likes of Salman Rushdie and Zadie Smith and started the career of Man Booker Prize winner Marlon James.

The festival, for just one weekend, brings the who's who of Jamaica via bus and car despite the three hours ride from Kingston as well as authors from around the world.

The boost to the pockets of those who reside in Treasure Beach is tangible.

Guest houses, hotels and people's homes all benefit as rooms are booked up long in advance along the road which spans a collection of four coves that fall under the Treasure Beach umbrella.

Homeowners turn into hoteliers, drivers turn into taxi drivers and fishermen turn into tour guides, shuttling the curious along the Black River Safari to see crocodiles. They claim there are hundreds but one resident says no more than seven have ever been spotted including a 15 footer with a girth as wide as a car who once disappeared for seven years.

The Pelican Bar, a fragile looking wooden structure built on a spit in the middle of the sea, is also another attraction. Built by a fisherman baptised Deenezer Delroy Forbes but dubbed Floyd from a birth by a neighbour who thought he was tough like a boxer of the same name, Pelican Bar is a bar and gift shop combo where you can sip on cold brews and eat yellow tailed snapper caught fresh by Floyd's friends.

The bar has seen the likes of tennis celebs Serena and Venus among others.

Dawes acknowledges the boost the festival provides to Treasure Beach.

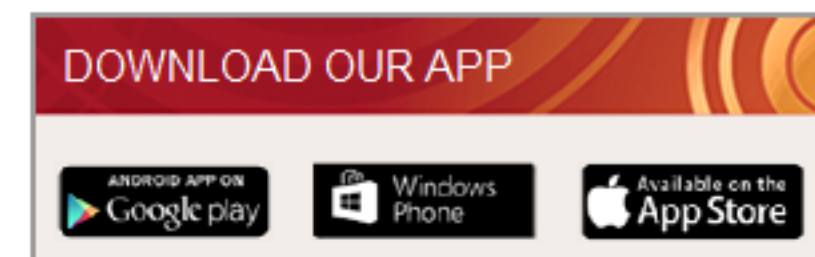
"That is why they welcome us and that is why we do it," he told Loop.

When the festival is over, Treasure Beach says farewell to its visitors and goes back to its quiet life.



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