

# Men's Journal

## The New Frontiers

In its purest form, adventure is about getting there first. But these days, more often than not, thousands of others have beaten you to even the most remote corners of the world. So what would it feel like to be a trailblazer? It's not too late to find out. There's still undiscovered land out there -- more of it than you'd think. And though we can't send you back in time to be the one who rediscovers Machu Picchu or does the first descent of the Grand Canyon, we can point you toward the untouched mountain ranges and frothing rivers that are on the cusp of exploration today.

### Tropical Treasure Hunt

*Think you know every island outpost in the Caribbean? Think again.*

"Are you sure you're tough?" my guide Peter Green asked from behind the wheel of his car, negotiating a blind turn and grazing the edge of a jungle-covered cliff on the island of Dominica. We were on our way to the Boiling Lake hike, an eight-mile out-and-back that wends through the southern part of the island. Oh please, I thought. This is the Caribbean. How tough can it be?

Two hours later, my glutes were on fire as I high-stepped up steep ridges, switchback after switchback, chasing after Green, who clipped a brutal pace. By the time we descended into the Valley of Desolation, pockmarked with bubbling mud pots and stinking steam vents that lead to, yes, a simmering volcanic lake, my legs were unsteady from the exertion.

Before coming to Dominica, located between Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Lesser Antilles, my impression of Caribbean travel consisted of American couples with matching T-shirts and a taste for piña colodas baking on the beach. That was not this. More than half of the 290-square-mile island is overgrown with tropical forests, leaving most of its 70,000 English- and Creole-speaking residents to occupy hamlets along the coast. Dominica's interior also claims four volcanic mountains over 4,000 feet, a dozen major waterfalls, 365 rivers and streams, three national parks, and 150 miles of trails. Neither of the two small airports can accommodate hulking 747s; as a result, the island hosts not a single hotel chain. A golf course? Forget about it.

The oft-repeated story here is that it's the only Caribbean island Christopher Columbus would still recognize if he returned today. And this wilder version of paradise is only now starting to catch on with travelers. Eco-lodges are popping up, the department of tourism has trained some 300 local guides over the past four years to help travelers negotiate the



wild interior, and 2006 will see the opening of the Waitukubuli National Trail. This 115-mile epic will cross the island, tracing the footpaths of the Maroons, slaves who escaped the cocoa plantations of the French and the British.

Usually gray or milky white, today the Boiling Lake was the color of coal, and we were glad to see it at full simmer; a few weeks earlier it had cooled and drained, with the potential to spew toxic gas. Scientists had warned against lollygagging near the edge, so I didn't get a respite until the descent, when Green and I veered off the path to a pool surrounded by vines and fed by a waterfall. Volcanic activity may be dangerous, but it also often produces my favorite natural wonder, hot springs.

Back at Jungle Bay Resort & Spa, the island's newest lodging located in the remote southeastern part of the island, I kicked back on the balcony of my own personal birdhouse. Owner Samuel Raphael is a native Dominican, and he's spent the past five years getting his 55-acre digs off the ground -- literally. Mounted on stilts, the 35 hardwood bungalows are tucked into the treetops, and mine had hummingbirds and a perfect view of the sea. Raphael was putting the finishing touches on amenities such as a yoga studio, beachside bar, spa, and a second restaurant, but Jungle Bay already made a great jumping-off point for hiking trips: I trekked to Sari-Sari Falls and Victoria Falls by boulder-picking my way up the White River.

When I was ready for a less taxing activity, I checked out the diving. There are at least 20 sites in the Soufrière/Scotts Head Marine Reserve, located in a bay formed by a submerged caldera. We descended the extinct crater's inner wall past a bizarre menagerie of sponges: giant barrels, yellow tube, green rope, and black ball. Once we reached an easy 60 feet, my dive master pointed downward, and I got my first good look at why this site is called L'Abym, or the Abyss. Below us, the wall dropped another 1,440 feet into Caribbean waters the color of pen ink. A great barracuda eyed us from a few feet away. The whole effect was fantastically creepy. Minutes later I saw an endangered hawksbill turtle, and then another. Even more thrilling was the simple fact that I was exerting almost no energy at all.

**For the rest of "New Frontiers" pick up a copy of the September 2005 issue.**

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