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ISLANDS

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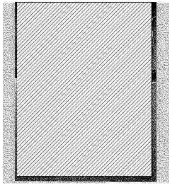
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NOVEMBER 2012 U.S. \$4.99

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Caribbean Stuff We Love (and loathe)

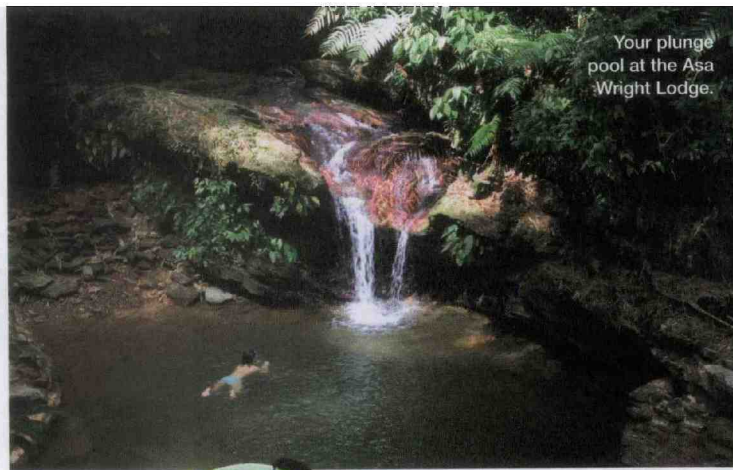
Bliss in the Air

BY ANN VANDERHOOF

The trail to our cottage winds through outrageous flowers with names like “sexy pinks” and “hot lips,” and we cross paths with cute pink-eared agoutis. (They look like the result of a tryst between a jackrabbit and a rat.) Long golden-tailed lizards lounge, and emerald hummingbirds fling past like flying jewels.

The Asa Wright Nature Centre & Lodge perches 1,200 breathtaking feet up in the mountains of Trinidad's Northern Range. Once a cocoa, coffee and citrus plantation, the property is an “it” destination for birding types, who flock here from around the world. Me? I can't tell a motmot from a macaw at 50 paces and don't have a life list of sightings to brag about over the lodge's traditional afternoon tea. That's about to change.

A stay here is all about nature,



Your plunge pool at the Asa Wright Lodge.

A NUTMEG TREE COMES INTO VIEW WITH TOUCANS FEEDING ON ITS FRUIT.



breathing in the serenity of untouched rainforest. One of the charming guides is happy to tell me the name of those handsome big boys with the outsized yellow beaks and brilliant matching tail feathers. (Crested oropendolas, if

FROM TOP: SUZY BENNETT/ALAMY; STOCK; OPPOSITE: ISTOCK

you're curious. Their impossibly long nests swing from trees only yards away.)

It's tempting to sit on the veranda of what was once the plantation's "great house" and watch the action from there. But hiking paths wind through stands of creaking bamboo; white-bearded manakins do love dances on the forest floor; and rare oilbirds cluster in dark caves.

This is no conventional resort. The "swimming pool" is a natural grotto with a waterfall. After-dark entertainment is a guided walk down the long drive in search of rainforest night life (no lounge lizards, just tarantulas and spectacled owls). And then it's early to bed so I can be back on the veranda at dawn. Sipping the rich coffee that's grown and roasted on the property, I watch the mist lift off the mountains and a wild nutmeg tree come into view, toucans feeding on its fruit. These I recognize without a problem: They look exactly like their cousins on the Froot Loops box.