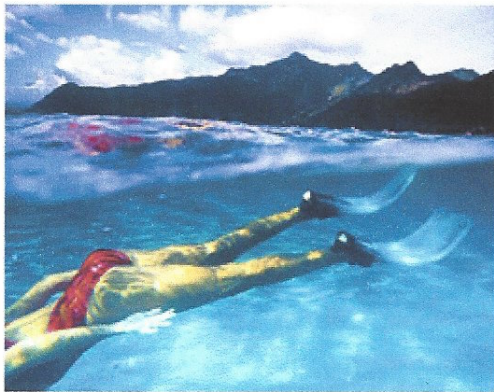


THE "IT" LIST

By CHARLES RUNNETTE

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DOMINICA



If Cancún is the Caribbean's Britney Spears—all shiny surfaces, easy pleasure, and something of a mess—then Dominica is Fiona Apple: intense, idiosyncratic, and a little rough around the edges—but still sexy. With the highest mountains in the eastern Caribbean, black-sand beaches, and a primeval rain forest perfect for hiking, there's nothing average about these natural assets. You've got to work for them, though. The interior roads are narrow and windy, only one of the 365 rivers and streams is navigable: and many a foot trail vanishes into nothingness. A guide will ensure your arrival at such evocatively named spots as Boiling Pit, Valley of Desolation, White River, and Emerald Pool. These are real

places, not locations from *Lord of the Rings*: a lake gurgling with gray-blue water, a geyser-filled vale, a sulfuric river, and a sparkling waterfall grotto hidden in the green forest. Hit me baby one more time? Take in the lush 17,000-acre expanse of Morne Trois Pitons National Park. Or the excellent reefs, which include a submerged volcanic crater in Soufrière Marine Park. In December 2004, Green Globe 21, an organization that bestows ecotourism awards, typically on single hotels or sites, decided the whole country was worthy of designation. And there are some great new ecolodges here, the best of which may be the newish (March 2005) and slightly crunchy Jungle Bay, a series of spacious, light-filled cottages on stilts with open-air showers and a yoga studio, all of it constructed from reclaimed volcanic rock and wood. Recycled trash: Even Ms. Spears can appreciate that.

Jungle Bay

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Dominica Tourist Board

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