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25 September 2012

### The Hidden Side Revealed at Hotel Indigo

It is a Friday of December; as every other day of the year, the sun reigns on its throne in the Haitian sky. Unsurprisingly, the temperature is above 100 degrees Fahrenheit and anything that can do the job, from pieces of cardboard to school books, is transformed into a manual fan. My family decides to lessen our suffering from the heat by spending the weekend out of Port-au-Prince, the country's capital. We hit the road with our luggage, our dose of laugh and excitement, and no set destination. "En route for the adventure!" We should easily find a place to stay in Cote des Arcadins, a nearby suburb to the capital. We suddenly pass the well-known Hotel Indigo. My brother Karl-Eric, who had previously gone to the hotel with a group of friends, screams "Allons à Indigo!" (Let's go to Indigo). My parents, who wonder if our time in this hotel will be worth it and question the cost they will have to face eventually, decide to give it a try. Consequently we stayed there for a full week-end. Now reflecting on the experience, I am convinced that Hotel Indigo is a true Caribbean paradise and the best place to have a true taste of Haiti as this hotel depicts and embraces different aspects of Haitian culture.

Visitors often praise the people of Haiti for their sense of hospitality and their amiability. Likewise, we were greeted by a receptionist who welcomed us to Indigo with a charm and a sense of humor unlike that of those who have a generic and rehearsed line to receive their guests. Since my family was on an unplanned excursion, we had not made any reservation and there was no room available. Sending us away in the middle of the night (the time of our arrival) was not

an option for the receptionist, considering his willingness to help shelter my family. Although I no longer remember his name, the receptionist became my family's fast made friend took our case under his wing. While he was investigating his computer screen for possible options, he continuously reassured us that he would find a solution that suits our needs and that he would help us make arrangements in nearby hotels if it became necessary. Ultimately, we were able to find a room at Indigo, although we had to share beds. The receptionist seemed to rejoice more than my family in his successful plan for our accommodation. "What a great spirit", I thought to myself. What was the most surprising was the receptionist's willingness to ensure our pleasant stay at Cote des Arcadins, which earned him our appreciation.

My exploration of Indigo's environment confirmed to me that this hotel is a valuable portrait of Haitian culture. That is, the hotel is one of the few places in the country that fully depicts the culture that the people of Haiti have developed throughout the ages. My nickname for the hotel became "Hotel of the Caribbean". Never had I seen a marriage of colors—orange, red, blue, green, purple—as well arranged as that exposed on the walls of Hotel Indigo; these colors significantly contribute to the enrichment of the beauty of this hotel built in Gingerbread style. This type of architecture is no longer used in Haiti and consists of buildings made of wooden structures with special and refined consideration for the aesthetics. I recall being impressed before Indigo's high ceilings and chandeliers, in awe before its wooden majestic pillars and its captivating mosaic tiles, amazed before its spacious, open, and naturally ventilated rooms (natural air suffices to offer a pleasant stay to the visitors of the hotel). I often wonder if Indigo would have made it to the list of the world's wonders, had it been better known by the international community.

Another appealing characteristic of Hotel Indigo is the fact that it is a botanical garden in itself; the varieties of rare plants exhibited throughout the hotel are unique to Haiti. After a comfortable night at Indigo, visitors are greeted by the joyful sun of our land which illuminates the greenery of the surroundings. In this manner, the view from the balcony of my parents' room depicted the hotel's flamboyant landscape. My mother could not cease to admire the fine touch that the plants added to the hotel's design. She often recalls the beauty of the Haiti of her youth; that is, before the practicing of deforestation became a way of life. She found in Indigo the opportunity to pleasantly rejuvenate and immerse herself in joyful memories. It is these sights that confirm one is indeed on a Caribbean island, that one is in a part of the world where the atmosphere plays in favor of enchanted fauna and flora. It is these sights that signal one is in Haiti.

In order to offer a full package of Haitian experience, Indigo also serves traditional meals, unlike many other hotels in the country. Thereby, visitors do not need to be fed by locals in the streets to experience true Haitian cuisine. After resting, flooding their lungs with fresh country air, and exploring the Indigo, visitors gather to eat. My family and I took advantage of Indigo's buffet-style dinner. The choices were unlimited and brought water to our mouths. From "banan peze ak griyo" (fried plantain and fried pork) to our traditional rice and red beans, we had the entire range of Haitian cuisine before our eyes and under our tongues. Most interestingly, we had the option to directly address the chefs for the spicing and cooking of certain meals. Finally, we were to choose which juice would accompany our rich meals. Naturally-made lemonade, orange, pineapple, mango, cherry and watermelon juices—often portrayed in representations of the Caribbean—are found at Indigo. Back at the table, we all said "bon appétit!" to each other, before impatiently starting to savor our own culinary art.

The Indigo Hotel prides itself on providing and organizing events that reflect Haitian culture, proof of the hotel staff's value for their visitors' stay. Therefore, I was able to attend a private concert for the guests. The singer was Michael Benjamin, one of my favorite artists. Mikaben, as they commonly refer to him, sings Compas—a style of music inherent to Haitian culture. He sang three pieces of an album he was to release in the coming weeks. I enjoyed watching the guests—both Haitian and foreign—dance Compas and simply have a good time. Few hotels value the stay of their guests as much as Indigo, at a point to offer a taste of Haitian culture through social events.

Beyond the welcoming environment, the incomparable architecture, the Haitian food and related activities, is the factor that attracts visitors the most: the hotel's beach. This one is well maintained, clear, and calm under a windy atmosphere. One of the main leisure activities of Haitians is going to the beach. The ambiance on Indigo's beach is the same as that of beaches on the country side of Haiti. Merchants sell smoked conch and shrimp while marching along the coast to offer their products, coconut merchants walk around with their machetes to offer fresh coconut water to the guests, and visitors take short rides on hand made wooden canoes. Indigo's beautiful blue beach is definitely one of the most attractive aspects of the hotel.

While it is true that Hotel Indigo is relatively expensive when compared to other hotels, and that it is located about an hour away from the capital and the country's main airport, these disadvantages do not impede the hotel from embracing and offering the experience of Haitian culture. After having lived the said reality, my family returned home on Sunday afternoon, satisfied of its journey into its culture. Work, stress and the awful images of poverty we are exposed to every day obstruct us from enjoying many facets of our roots. The media relentlessly labels Haiti to the international community as a country overtaken by misery. For both groups, it

is rewarding to taste the true Haitian experience that Providence had designed, the Haiti that makes proof of human dignity, the Haiti of a rich and blooming culture, the Pearl of the Caribbean. Hotel Indigo marks one with long lasting memories. It defies the negative images of Haiti that many (including the country's own children) have developed to its regards by promoting the country and its people's values. Indigo Hotel ranks highly in my list of "must visit" places in Haiti in order not to let foreign visitors and Haitian citizens leave the country and live in it only with a negative impression.