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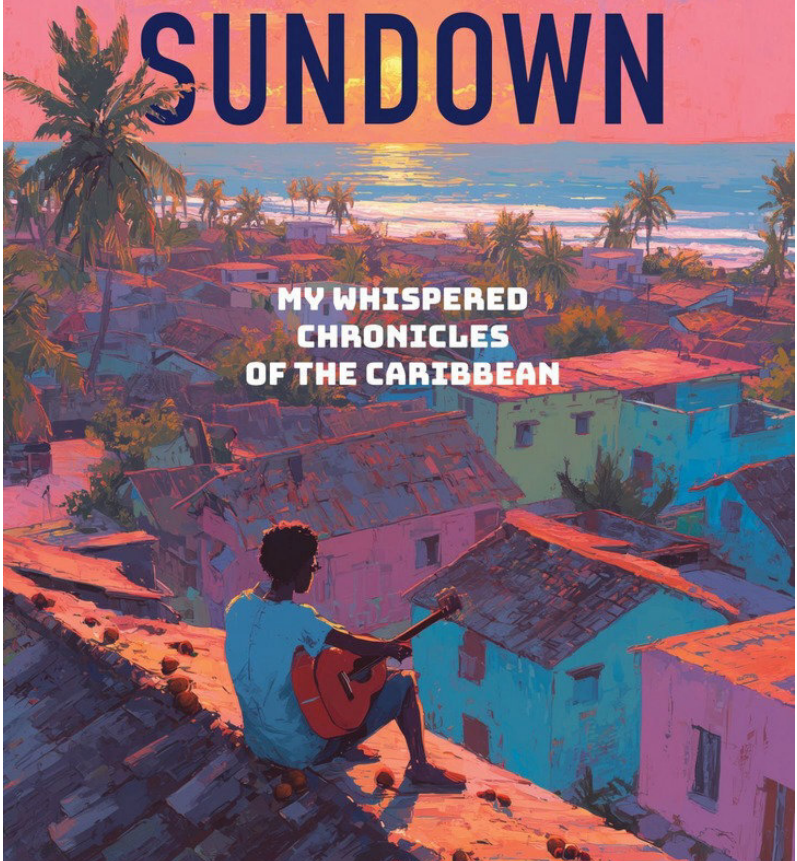
Vladimir Polenov

JAMDOWN SUNDOWN

MY WHISPERED CHRONICLES OF THE CARIBBEAN



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Аннотация

This book presents interesting facts, largely unknown in Russia, as well as intriguings reflections supplemented by the author`s personal impressions of Jamaica – a distant yet attractive in every way island nation that still hasn`t been visited by many Russian citizens.The reader will also be able to gain some insight into the specifics of work of Russian diplomats in the Caribbean region, which undoubtedly deserves attention not only from a tourist perspective.

Содержание

Jamdown Sundown
My whispered chronicles of the Caribbean

Vladimir Polenov

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Jamaica… When we say this word, we all involuntarily associate it with a tropical paradise, the gentle Caribbean Sea, the best coffee in the world, which is born in the unique microclimate of the Jamaican Blue Mountains, which owe their name to the fog of this color that surrounds them in the mornings, with excellent local rum – perhaps the most tangible today (at least to taste) reminder of the island as a former haven for pirates.

And, of course, the names that come to mind are Bob Marley (what would reggae music be without him!), Usain "Lightning" Bolt (multiple Olympic champion, the fastest man on earth), and perhaps Robertino Loretti, who almost 55 years ago performed the unforgettable "Ja-a-a-maika" that is still so sweet for all residents of the USSR (which, however, for some reason no

one knows on the island that was sung by the then very young Italian!).

Everyone who comes there – for business or pleasure – instantly shakes off all their worries and anxieties. Peace, relaxation, peace of mind, unhurried movements, activities and thoughts – this is what distinguishes the Jamaican, typically Caribbean rhythm of life from the tense, crazy, often senseless in their bustle everyday life of European countries, and even the United States, neighboring Jamaica.

The National Tourist Board describes the Caribbean island's appeal in a similar way: "Jamaica is more than just a tourist destination. It is"a special feeling, it's a set of impressions… Jamaica is a place where people come to get a positive charge, it's a force that allows the world to feel more in order by sharing its rhythms, energy and spirit with it."

It is probably no coincidence that in the current ranking of the 25 most popular tourist destinations in the world, according to the authoritative Internet portal "Tripadvisor", Jamaica is in 12th place (St. Petersburg, by the way, is in 14th place).

Wars and armed conflicts, which, unfortunately, are so "rich" in our modern world, seem very distant from there, from Jamaica, sometimes even unrealistic, although the World War II did not pass the Jamaicans by: many of them fought against Nazism, mainly as part of the British Air Force (Jamaica at that time was under the colonial rule of London, which was ordered to live long in 1962, but to this day the formal head of this

state remains (the King of Great Britain). Of course, there are not many veterans of that war left on the island now (according to some sources, no more than 150 people), but they are still held in high esteem there. The Russian embassy does not forget to invite them to its events on the occasion of May 9.

Many of the world's most famous Englishmen were passionately fond of Jamaica. Winston Churchill, after resigning as British Prime Minister, spent months living in a luxury suite at the Jamaica Inn in Ocho Rios, eagerly and with undeanible talent transferring the island's wondrous landscapes onto canvas.

Ian Fleming, who settled in Jamaica after the war (his father has been close with Churchill), was there when he began writing the first James Bond novel, "Casino Royale," in 1952 from his residence – now one of the island`s most exclusive hotels – GoldenEye near Oracabessa.

Fleming remains a cult figure to this day: close to his former estate stands Jamaica`s third most important international airport, named after him (primarily serving private aviation), while the island boasts a sizeable public James Bond beach on its northeastern coast – respectably equipped for Jamaican standards.

The paradise island has many other notable features. For example, it was in this country that the world's first beauty Lisa Hannah (the third Jamaican to occupy the prestigious "throne" in 1993) was nominated almost 20 years later for the post of Minister of Culture and Youth Affairs in the government

of the People's National Party (now in opposition). Here, too, cabinet ministers past and present have included Rastafarians – followers of the Rastafari movement), easily identified by their iconic dreadlocks woven like felt (remember Bob Marley again).

Jamaica is also known for the fact that the main language there is not so much "classical" English, but its local dialect (in the perception of the proud inhabitants of the island, this is a full-fledged independent language) Patois. It is not very understandable for the uninitiated, but if you learn a couple of phrases in Patois and demonstrate this modest knowledge to the Jamaicans, then you can be sure that they have such knowledge the excitement about the "secret" will cause genuine delight and exclamations of praise.

Jamaicans are generally exceptionally friendly, smiling and welcoming by nature, always ready to help guests of the island, including those who do not know English. The signature style and philosophy of life of its inhabitants is "Jamaica – no problem." No problem, and that's it! This is a universal key phrase to the Jamaican soul, much like the common expression "ya man" or "ya mon" (philologists still debate the best way to convey the sounds of this equally unique island expression, meaning both agreement and affirmation without any specification or simply a statement of something in various contexts).

Of course, behind the outward carefree nature of Jamaican life lurk some rather pressing issues for the state and society, as is often the case. While in 2009 Jamaica held an honourable

third place in the so-called World Happiness Index, by 2016, it had slipped to 73rd – a change that, admittedly, was unsurprising. There are many reasons for this. These include an overwhelmingly high crime rate (Jamaica is among the top five countries with the highest number of murders – three a day, although they occur mainly in their own, criminal environment, bandits generally leave tourists alone – why harm the hand that feeds you?). And of course don`t forget the corruption – common not just in the "third world" countries – and domestic violence. Jamaicans have proven themselves to be the "kings" of the so-called lottery scams, having illegally swindled over a billion US dollars in recent years from disoriented elderly Americans who believed the telephone fairy tale about a "super win" in Jamaican state lottery, which, of course, does not exists. As the saying goes, there`s a black sheep in every flock.

But amid all this, Jamaica remains a captivating island for lovers of exoticism, warm seas, and magnificent beaches, as well as fans of Bob Marley and Usain Bolt, boasting its own unique character and remarkable, colourful people who are easily recognizable even beyond Jamaica`s shores.

We, Russians, are respected and loved there, guided by the universal foreign policy formula "we are friends to all and enemies to none," and remembering over 40 years of friendship and cooperation – though some sources claim this history as fat longer and more diverse. But more on that later.

One can only hope that those unfamiliar with Jamaica will,

upon reading this book, form their first impressions of the island and its inhabitants – and possibly feel inspired to embark on their own journey there. However, merely dreaming of Jamaica, I believe, can warm the soul on our long autumn and winter evenings, fostering a positive outlook and offering an escape into tropical fantasy.

"Jamaica, no problem!" Or, as the unforgettable Robertino Loretti sang: "Jamaica! Jamaica! Under your beautiful tropical skies, I want to live and die!"

Well, we've already lived our share there…

Part one:

Just the Facts

Keeper of the Waterfall

My first experience in Jamaica was as an ordinary passenger aboard a 16-deck cruise liner making leisurely touring the Caribbean islands with a stop in Caracas.

The "Star Princess" docked confidently at the port of Ocho Rios – one of Jamaica`s three main resort towns, not the largest but perhaps the coziest in the eyes of both tourists and locals. For staff of the Russian Embassy, Ocho Rios is the closest "beach" destination to the capital, Kingston (just over an hour's drive along a modern – toll – motorway built by the Chinese).

Incidentally, Ocho Rios was never actually crossed by those "eight rivers" that gave the charming town its Spanish name, near which Christopher Columbus is believed to have set foot on the island once again on June 20, 1503 (after its discovery in 1494).

It`s thought the settlement was originally named by its discoverer "Las Chorreras" (meaning "waterfalls", as it`s home to the island`s most famous cascades, Dunn's River). The English, who invaded Jamaica in 1655 and defeated two years

later the Spanish at the Battle of Las Chorreras, simply adapted the acoustically challenging word.

The very the name "Jamaica" is believed to derive from itself comes from "Xaymaka" ("land of wood and water") in the language of the Arawak Indians who inhabited the island before its discovery by Columbus. According to historians, the native inhabitants of Las Chorreras retained far from favourable memories of the Spanish visitors, who plundered mercilessly and abused the local population in every way, condemning them to slavery while also infecting them with diseases brought from Europe that proved fatal to the islanders. But that is another story, to be recounted later.

Today, Ocho Rios warmly welcomes tourists and cruise ship passengers from around the world. To further boost the appeal of Jamaica's northern coast, Usain Bolt, for instance, not so long ago, in September 2016, riding on the wave of his phenomenal success at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics, opened another restaurant in Ocho Rios (after Kingston) bearing his name, with a culinary-musical-sports theme and an ambition to expand this budding franchise not only across North America but also into Europe and the Middle East. Perhaps it might even reach Moscow, where Bolt famously triumphed in the 2013 World Athletics Championships…

But now, for us passengers aboard a cruise liner, the long-awaited moment had arrived – disembarking onto solid ground. Thousands of tourists from around the world poured out of the

ship`s cavernous belly onto the welcoming Jamaican shore, hungry for new impressions poured onto the hospitable Jamaican shore, hungry for new impressions of the island where there are "no problems."

For our seasoned group of five globetrotting friends, the first challenge was selecting one driver from the twenty-odd local "taxi" services – mostly co, pact limousines and minibuses, many dubiously licensed – someone who seemed even remotely trustworthy and personable.

After a few minutes of scrutinizing faces and visually assessing the vehicles offered to "wealthy foreigners", our choice fell on a young road warrior named Justin. He won us over with an exuberance that even by Jamaican standards was off the charts, coupled with what appeared to be a genuine – as we later confirmed – desire to showcase every nook and cranny of Ocho Rios and its surroundings, including its "secret" spots, within the short docking window.

Every time Justin pitched an excursion option at a reasonable price, and we responded with cautious, almost imperceptible nods, he`d throw his arms around us (Jamaicans place great emphasis on tactile connections in interpersonal interactions), as if to convey just how overjoyed he`d be if we chose him as a driver and guide for our tour. Of course, we chose him, at least in order to put an end to the drawn-out selection process.

First, we drove along the costal road to the "must-see" local attraction – the grand Rose Hall estate, located 15 km from

Montego Bay, Jamaica`s second-largest city and its de facto tourist capital, boasting the most developed resort infrastructure. Built in 1770 for a local plantation owner, Rose Hall now houses detailing the history of its wealthy slave-owning former residents.

But its fame stems from something else: legend has it that the house is still haunted by the ghost of the White Witch Annie Palmer, who during her lifetime allegedly poisoned three of her husbands using various, highly inventive methods, along with several enslaved people for good measure. For which she paid the ultimate price, accepting death at the hands of one of her tormented slaves named Takoo. However, no historical evidence supports this "horror story" – though it undoubtedly draws extra crowds of tourists to Rose Hall.

In my opinion, far more interesting is the nearby planter`s estate, Greenwood Great House, where descendants of its earliest owners still reside among splendidly preserved antique furniture and vintage music boxes. At one time, their ancestors held over 2,000 enslaved people. Surprisingly, local lore claims this is the only plantation estate in the area not burned down by rebelling slaves in retaliation.

In Montego Bay, which boasts Jamaica`s highest concentration of hotel accommodations, lies the country`s foremost international airport, named after Donald Sangster. It handles the majority of the island`s tourist influx – over two million visitors annually, predominantly from U.S., Canada and the UK. This fact guided our decision to propose establishing

an honorary Russian consulate there. The position was later assumed by Francis Tulloch – a well-known political and public figure in the country (in the past), lawyer and entrepreneur (in the present) and genuinely a refined, approachable gentleman who commands respect and trust.

This city, entirely tailored to affluent foreign visitors, retains charming Georgian-style stone buildings and wooden cottages. Here, one finds There are also countless souvenir shops along with a selection of restaurants, some aspiring to haute cuisine standards. Most importantly, Montego Bay offers no shortage of pristine beaches and top-tier resorts – or more modest hotels – for every budget and preference. Combined with its superb golf courses and vibrant nightlife, these attractions paint quite the complete picture.

But we didn't stay long in Montego Bay. Justin suggested returning to Ocho Rios, where, he claimed, "real fun" awaited us. First, the Dunn's River Falls, cascading nearly 200 meters into the sea, and Mystic Mountain Nature Park, whose summit can be reached via a zipline – which, in my estimation, caters more to thrill-seekers – soaring 700 meters above the see level.

Had we wished, we could`ve swum in Dolphin Cove alongside its docile inhabitants. But two of our group – inclined toward adrenaline (including our dauntless female companion) – opted for the zipline, while the remaining three descended toward the Little Dunn`s River Falls, still cascading into the Caribbean, albeit with milder force than its big "brother" – planning

to lounge there until returning to the ship.

A narrow, winding path unexpectedly led us to a patch of grassy shore strewn with pebbles, where a rudimentary shack stood midway toward the falls. In front sat a mythic old Rastaman, his dreadlocks tangled as if untouched for decades. Despite the hit, he had draped multiple layers of once-colourful Jamaican garb – now uniformly dulled to muddy brown – over himself like regal rags. A makeshift field kitchen sat nearby: a lopsided grill, a couple of chipped enamel pots, and battle-worn mugs bearing rust stains, plus other mismatched utensils harder to identify.

The old man tracked our movements warily as we approached the falls just meters from his hut. He gaze lingered while we debated wading into the waterfall`s chilly pool to begin climbing its slick stones – a canonical (though hazardous) tourist ritual. Wisely, we chose brevity over misadventure and soon retreated to relax beneath the shade of short yet lush shoreline trees.

The old man approached, clutching a coffee-smelling mug and inquired raspily:

– Where you be from?

"From the ship," we replied cheerfully, gesturing towards the enormous "Star Princess" gently swaying on the Caribbean waves to reinforce our point.

– No, which country? – the old man impatiently clarified his question. – Russia? Frost, Lada, Lenin… – everything that came to his mind at that moment.

"The rocks are slippery," our new acquaintance observed, completely unrelated to his previous sentence.

– We noticed…

"Need sandals," the old man continued, producing from behind his back with a broad gesture something resembling tattered flip-flops with tears in various places. Naturally, we wisely declined this offer, politely thanking him.

The elderly Rastaman seemed to be not at all upset about having lost the opportunity to earn some extra cash from Russian tourists, who are seen there, understandably, not as often as Americans or Englishmen.

– That's how I live, – the local old-timer mentioned, once more without any connection to what had been said before. – 20 years in one place, next to the waterfall. And I can't live without him. And he can't live without me…

– Where will he go if, for example, you ever move from here? – one of us asked naively.

– No, I won't be here and he won't be here, – the old man solemnly proclaimed with insistent confidence. – He and I are firmly connected: I am his keeper. I decided so once, 20 years ago, and since then I have been here…

Of course, one could have chuckled to oneself upon hearing these speeches. But we remained quite serious. Jamaica, after all, is a mystical island with unique landscapes, waterfalls of unique beauty, and cheerful inhabitants, who seem to be always slightly

"on edge".

Few people know today that there, on the island, a subspecies of black magic called voodoo is still practiced in some places – the so-called Obeism, which in slavery times was, among other things, an instrument of revenge by slaves on white rulers, and is now officially banned (but politicians have long been flirting with the idea of lifting this ban or at least weakening it). The Keeper of the Waterfall – there was, as it seemed to us, something typically Jamaican, Caribbean, in other words, unreal-real.

Well, how could it be otherwise, because the waterfalls on the island are a generous gift of nature, first of all for tourists. Because the locals, of course, would not think of fanatically overcoming in rubber slippers, measuring out almost 600 steps, the basalt cliffs and falling vertical streams of Dunn's River Falls, and even paying a lot of money for it, by Jamaican standards.

While we were pondering this, the old man, having seen off with his eyes a group of Jamaican children rushing towards the natural bathing pool at the foot of "our" small waterfall, turned around and headed towards his shack. Without letting go of the cigarette from his mouth, he climbed heavily onto a battered hammock stretched between the trees surrounding the hut and froze in a half-reclining position. His face, furrowed with deep wrinkles, gradually acquired an even more philosophical expression, detached from current reality, and seemed to freeze for the nearest haven't been wearing this mask for half an hour.

By the way, some researchers claim that the hammock

was invented in Jamaica. But as far as I know, there is no unambiguously confirmed historical evidence on this matter. Historians agree that the word hammock itself came to the world from the language of the Arawak Indians who inhabited the Caribbean, including, as noted above, Jamaica. So there is some scope for imagination in this regard…

It was time for us to tear ourselves away from contemplating the bright pictures of the waterfalls and seaside and get ready for the return journey to the ship. The "taxi driver" Justin, having driven up to us, had already picked up our friends along the way, deeply impressed by the "Tarzan tour" over the Jamaican jungle, and with a playful, exaggeratedly broad gesture invited us into the car.

This was my very first acquaintance with Jamaica. At that time I did not yet know that three and a half years later I would find myself there again in a completely different, non-tourist capacity and not for one, but for a whole 1450 days.

James Bond's "Father's" Favourite Island

One of the most expensive hotels in Jamaica (though, in my opinion, not the coolest) is the aforementioned "GoldenEye" in Oracabessa. On its grounds is a five-room villa (also rented to wealthy guests) where the creator of James Bond, who bought a 15-acre plot on the island's north coast in 1946, found refuge whenever he wanted to escape London.

In this house were written, beginning in 1952, all 14 Fleming`s novels about the British super agent. In 1995, "Golden Eye" gave the name to the 17th film about James Bond, who was played by Pierce Brosnan – in my opinion, the most suitable actor for this role after Sean Connery. Film fans could see "James Bond Beach", located not far from Fleming's residence, in the first of the "Bond" films – "Dr. No".

Matthew Parker, the author of a book published in the UK in 2014 about the Jamaican period of the life and work of the "father" of agent 007, says, Ian Fleming always enjoyed the view of a small beach behind his villa, the opportunity to catch fish or lobsters for breakfast right there in the sea, challenging barracudas, moray eels and sharks, the privilege of feeling there, literally, at home.

The writer's hospitality in Jamaica was eagerly used at various times by his colleagues in the literary "workshop", including Noël Coward, who eventually became a neighbor of Ian Fleming on

the island, Truman Capote – another fan of Jamaica, as well as the once famous movie screen hero-lover, Hollywood actor Errol Flynn, who also bought a land plot in the eastern part of the island ("Navy Island").

"GoldenEye" even became a kind of temporary "visiting" headquarters for the government in London at the time of the Suez Crisis during the month-long visit of the British Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden in 1956.

Few people know that after the death of Fleming in 1976, the "GoldenEye" villa was owned by the king of reggae Bob Marley for a year, and in 1980, after it was bought by local multimillionaire Chris Blackwell, it became part of a hotel complex, which operates and is popular to this day.

As Parker testifies, "Jamaica made Fleming a different man from the man he had been in Britain. In the six years between the building of 'GoldenEye' and the writing of his first book, he studied Jamaica as thoroughly as he had explored the sea and coral reefs near his home."

It is possibly true that Fleming and "GoldenEye" contributed greatly to the fact that the blessed island – "the oldest and most romantic of the former British colonial possessions" – discovered the tourist industry and began to make good money from it.

Christopher Columbus, as we already know, was the first of its overseas visitors. For the famous navigator, if we are to believe the entry in the ship's log, Jamaica seemed "the most beautiful of the islands ever seen before. It seems that the land here touches

the sky!"

Indeed, the island has many remarkable, specific and unique features. For example, three thousand species of flowers bloom here. There are more than 200 species of orchids alone, 73 of which grow only in Jamaica. There are also more than 1,000 species of different trees, 500 species of ferns, and the famous "Fern Gully" – a three-mile-long road running from north to south along a winding dry riverbed. As for sugar cane, bananas, mangoes, bamboo, breadfruit, trees and even coconut palms, which are common in Jamaica, as in almost every tropical island, are all crops brought by the colonizers. Before they arrived, the Arawak Indians grew mainly maize and sweet potatoes for food.

Jamaica is home to the world's third-largest beautiful butterfly, the swallowtail, and the second smallest bird on the planet, the pygmy hummingbird (with a total body length of 6—7 cm, including the beak). And the pennant-tailed hummingbird, the symbol of Jamaica, is endemic, it means that it is not found anywhere except this island. There are also 21 endemic species of frogs. As for snakes, only five species of them remain in Jamaica from the former diversity (all of them are completely safe for humans), the rest were entirely destroyed by mongooses, brought to the island by the British in 1872 to protect sugar plantations from rats. If there is anyone to be afraid of here, it is crocodiles. Certainly, they live in only two places in Jamaica, are actively fed by the organizers of tourist routes and are lazy

and satiated enough to cause any trouble to visitors. But caution when dealing with them still, of course, does not hurt!

In addition to its impressive nature, Jamaica is also famous for being the first country in the Western Hemisphere to have a railway network (though it has not been operating for almost a decade due to its unprofitability). This happened only 18 years after the first railway appeared in Great Britain. And the local Falmouth got its water supply pipe earlier than in New York.

The island had such a well-established telephone connection that the largest American communications company, as we would now say, AT&T simply copied it. Jamaica was the first of the British colonies to establish a postal service in 1688 (although since then, apparently, little has changed in this department, since mail, including within Kingston, takes an unimaginably long time to reach addressees, often disappears en route or ends up with the wrong person). At the same time, in 1994, Jamaica became the first Caribbean country with its own web page, and with information technology, in general, everything is in order there (in particular, a very cheap, especially by Russian standards, and, in general, quite high-quality and reliable mobile telephone connection has been established).

To complete the picture, it is worth adding that the island was also the first of the Caribbean states to gain independence in 1962, retaining to this day its membership in the British Commonwealth of Nations and the Queen (now King) of Great Britain as the formal head of state (although in recent years,

the issue of getting rid of this last attribute of the colonial heritage has been discussed from time to time in political circles in Kingston).

And, of course, it is impossible not to mention the fact that in 1988 Jamaica was the first tropical country to take part with its national bobsled team in the Winter Olympics in Calgary, although without much success. But they certainly captivated fans and TV viewers in many countries around the world. Even Hollywood was impressed by this story, resulting in a movie hit in 1993 called Cool Runnings, which made the Jamaican "Winter" Olympians famous. We will also return to this later.

The island's inhabitants, who have always been open to the world and have formed their own distinctive culture, are still mostly stuck in their own language environment, especially if they do not belong to the middle and upper classes of Jamaican society. "Colonial" English serves them primarily for external communication and, of course, to ensure mutual understanding with tourists.

The aforementioned Patois, or Jamaican Creole as linguists characterize it, emerged in the 17th century when black slaves from West and Central Africa, taken to the Caribbean, were forced to become acquainted with the English language. Accordingly, Patois contains elements of both "classical" British English and West African languages. Patois is taught in schools as a native language along with English, reggae performers sing in it, and literary works written in "Jamaican" are published.

As Wilhelm von Humboldt pointed out, the internal form of language is an expression of the national or folk spirit, the basis for expressing ethnic identity and the way in which national mentality is formed. In my opinion, this is entirely applicable to Jamaicans. Don't be surprised if, when asked how you are, a Jamaican cheerfully answers, "Mi kuul maan, mi chat Patwah" ("I am fine, and I speak Patois").

The national motto of Jamaica, inscribed on its coat of arms, is "out of many, one people", reflecting the diversity of national and racial groups of the island's population – Africans, Chinese, Indians, people from Syria and Lebanon, and, of course, the British, as well as, for example, Germans.

The latter arrived in Jamaica between 1835 and 1850, at which time they founded Seaford Town, a "German village," in the central part of the island. The name was given to it by a local planter, Lord Seaford, who found suitable workers in northwestern Germany. This is how 350 Germans unexpectedly ended up in Jamaica, many of whom, however, soon died of malaria or yellow fever. At that time, the Germans, of course, did not have vaccines or pills for these tropical diseases.

For many decades, the surviving Teutons tried to prevent mixed marriages. But time took its toll, customs changed, and the villagers stopped monitoring the "purity of the race." Since then, one can often meet blue-eyed, blond Jamaicans there, who, with their appearance, understandably, stand out somewhat from

the general dark-skinned and dark-haired mass of local residents. However, this does not bother them at all. The "German village," where none of its inhabitants speak the language of their ancestors from Europe, is is also located far from the sandy beaches of the northern part of the island. Tourists, including those from Germany, practically never show up there, and only once a year the German Embassy organize cultural events there to give the Jamaican elite and diplomatic corps the opportunity to experience the local exotica "with a German accent."

When we visited Seaford Town one Sunday afternoon out of curiosity, we were unable to get into the local museum, which reflects the village's Germanic roots. The provost of the Roman Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart, founded by the first German settlers and very similar in its architecture to the North German "Kirchen" (restored to its original form after it was half destroyed by a hurricane in 1912), a Pole by origin, greeted us warmly at his "object".

He explained that the museum is located in the school premises, occupying one of the classrooms, and the educational institution is, naturally, closed on Sundays. The museum displays household items of the first settlers, as well as paintings and drawings. In the future, in order to attract tourists, it is planned to expand the exhibition, relying on the help of sponsors – wealthy people from this village, who have lived mainly, in the U.S. and Canada and come to visit here from time to time. The German Embassy in Kingston also contributed to the

improvement of Seaford Town, paying, for example, for the construction of public toilets there, intended primarily for use by future crowds of tourists…

Searching for the school directors, organized by the holy father, came to no results, and all that was left for us was to stroll through the sleepy village, surrounded by green hills. Its streets were deserted, from somewhere far away came the dog barking, occasionally replaced by the crowing of a cock. Idyll, in a word…

The role of Jamaica and its place in the big world, which is not limited to the horizons of the island-born literary character in the person of agent 007, can be discussed at length. You already know some of it from previous pages. But it is worth remembering that Jamaica was once the first country to impose economic sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa. The "backwater" Kingston became the headquarters of an authoritative specialized organization of the UN system – the International Seabed Authority, in which Russia also actively works (the author of these lines even had the opportunity to be the first Russian representative to serve as the President of the Assembly – the highest body of the ISA. In July 2025, at the kind invitation of the ISA General Secretary, I attended the 30th-anniversary Assembly session in Kingston). Jamaica was also the first country to sign an agreement to create the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The island with a population of less than 3 million people can boast the largest number of Olympic medals and top awards at world

championships after the United States with a population of more than 300 million people.

As was indicated, for example, in an extensive article in the Canadian Toronto Star in one of the June 2013 issues (in Canada there is a considerable diaspora of people from the island), Jamaican workers helped build the Panama Canal, jobbed on sugar plantations in Cuba, harvested apples in the U.S. and Canada, and even helped speed up the post-war recovery of UK by actively participating in the establishment of public transportation and health care there. Jamaicans have served in cabinets in Canada and the U.S. (four-star general and former Secretary of State Colin Powell comes from the island), and in parliament in UK.

However, the list does not end there. Jamaica ranks third worldwide in the number of major Miss World titles won after Venezuela, India and UK. The golf club in Jamaican (not English!) Manchester, founded in 1865, is the oldest in the entire Western Hemisphere. According to the Guinness Book of Records, Jamaica ranks first in the world (!) in the number of churches per square mile. There is even a suggestion that the island holds the world record for the number of bars. In any case, it was there that the world's first commercial rum production was established. So, Jamaica is doing just fine with bars.

In fact, the Jamaicans themselves are not too happy with the way the Jamaican "brand" is treated abroad, which, as I think, is clear from the above-mentioned merits of the islanders, has

a very significant and unique sound. A classic example, in their understanding, is the drink “Jamaican Energy”, produced and widely sold in Croatia, of course, without any licenses, using the successes of Usain Bolt and his fellow Olympic athletes as marketing, a kind of Jamaican favorite non-alcoholic “hit” – ting (a grapefruit-based lemonade), which goes well with rum. In Kingston, they remember how hard it was for them to get ting into the US market, where it was not allowed for a long time, including the argument that “ting” was too consonant with “tang” – a fruit-flavored drink, often sold in powder form.

I can tell you from personal experience that tang is a far cry from ting! So when you come to the island, buy and drink Jamaican!

Pirates of the Caribbean

In general, Jamaicans do not like to remember the pirate past of their island. Especially since they immediately have unpleasant reminiscences of the earthquake of 1692, which took 5 thousand lives and completely destroyed Port Royal – the main refuge of filibusters on the southern coast of the island and a once flourishing port city nearby Kingston.

Today, Port Royal is a quiet, trash-strewn place, where the main historical attraction is the island's oldest Fort Charles. (originally Fort Cromwell), built by the English in 1656 in the shape of a ship, at that time almost completely surrounded by water. The fort is the only one of the six such fortifications in Port Royal, which, although damaged during the earthquake, was restored in 1699. There is a small maritime museum on the fort grounds, which includes the office and apartment of Horatio Nelson, the famous British naval commander and vice-admiral, who arrived in Jamaica in 1777 at the age of 19 and was appointed commandant of the fort two years later.

Nowadays (information for gourmets) Port Royal is also famous for its very good (though not fancy) restaurant with fish dishes and seafood "Gloria`s". In fact, there are two of them under the same name, each located on two floors, open to all winds, with a view of the sea. The only thing you need to remember before going to "Gloria`s" is that you can't show

up hungry, since the wait for a dish after ordering is usually 1—1.5 hours. For me, this was, as far as I remember, the first, by no means pretentious, but well-known to guests, including those from abroad, restaurant whose cuisine I got acquainted with on the island. Despite the long wait, I was not disappointed – the lobster, skillfully grilled with Jamaican spices and skillfully cut, was amazing in taste.

I don't know whether and how often the Caribbean pirates indulged themselves in lobsters, but they could afford it, since they "earned" quite well by robbing the Spanish both at sea and on land. In fact, the "successes" of the pirates prompted the British to take them into their service as soldiers of fortune to protect their new possessions in the Caribbean that had been recaptured from the Spanish and to strengthen their own military force. Some researchers believe that it was thanks to the pirates who fought for the British crown that Jamaica remained in its possession, and did not suffer the fate of being one of the Spanish-speaking islands in the Caribbean.

The pirates who settled in Port Royal, led by the notorious Henry Morgan, were so successful in robbing heavily laden Spanish galleys sailing between Europe and the colonial possessions of the New World that Port Royal quickly became the most lively and "sinful," as the Catholic Church rightly believed, port city in the entire American region.

They say, for example, that tipsy young filibusters gave women in the port huge sums of money just wanted them

to simply bare themselves before them. The "business acumen" of the pirates and corsairs contributed to the growth of the city's prosperity. There trade in stolen treasures, sugar, timber and other natural resources flourished, and the portside "tavern" infrastructure developed accordingly. The slave trade and smuggling of goods from Europe began to occupy an increasingly important place in the "economy" of Port Royal.

The image of perhaps the most famous pirate of the Caribbean – Henry Morgan – is inextricably linked with Jamaica (these days, for example, a hotel located near Port Royal bears his name; many are familiar with the rum "Henry Morgan", which, in my opinion, is significantly inferior in quality to the famous Jamaican "Appleton").

Morgan, who first appeared in Jamaica in 1662 and by that time had earned the reputation of a desperate cutthroat, quickly stole so much goods that he could afford to buy his own ship, and at the age of 29 he became its captain. Impressed by the fighting qualities of Morgan the Governor-General of Jamaica made him admiral of the Jamaican fleet, giving the "pirate king" 10 ships and 500 crew members under his command. And at 34 years old, he already had 35 ships and 2,000 sailors under him.

Henry Morgan's most outstanding battle was considered to be his campaign against Panama City in 1671, which, however, cost him his freedom with extradition to London in April 1672, since the pirate commander essentially ignored the peace treaty concluded shortly before between England and Spain. The pirate

also had to give up a considerable part of the stolen treasures, which went to the British crown in exchange for his pardon. Ultimately, when the fragile Anglo-Spanish peace was broken two years later, Charles II knighted Henry Morgan and sent him back to Jamaica, this time as lieutenant governor.

There he lived out the rest of his life as a planter in wealth, honor and respect. When Henry Morgan died in 1688 at the age of 52, the guns of the warships in the port fired in his honour, the body of the deceased was laid out for farewell in the residence of the Governor-General, and then placed on a gun carriage and thus, with a large concourse of the population, was delivered to the place of rest. Sir Henry Morgan was buried, of course, in Port Royal, but his grave has not survived, since it was apparently washed out to sea by the tsunami generated by the earthquake, like many other burials in the coastal part of the island.

Jamaican history knows furthermore other "outstanding" pirates: Edward Teach, nicknamed Blackbeard (who is said to have served as the prototype for the pirate Flint in R.L. Stevenson's novel "Treasure Island"), Jack Rackham (better known as Calico Jack, since he preferred to wear clothes made of printed calico), and Charles Vane, who were rampant in the Caribbean Sea in the first third of the 18th century.

All of them came to a bad end in one way or another, being executed by hanging by the British authorities on the island. Calico Jack's lifeless body, imprisoned in an iron cage, was put

on public display on a sandbank near Port Royal (now called Rackham's Cay) as a deterrent to his fellow pirates.

Calico Jack became famous off the coast of Jamaica for his extreme cruelty, especially his atrocities against merchant ships and fishing schooners and their crews. But he entered the world history of piracy, first of all, as the author and designer of the "Jolly Roger" – a pirate flag with a skull and crossed swords under it on a black background (there were, as is known, other, more frightening modifications, where the swords "in harmony" with the skull were replaced by bones).

Jack's crew – and this is also a historical fact – included two women – Mary Read and Anne Bonny, who hid their female gender under male pirate attire until the very end of their "career". Both were, as they say, extremely cruel and ruthless and were ready to fight their enemies to the death. But they, too, were eventually captured by the British law enforcement agencies of that time, and only pregnancy saved them both from the death penalty..

There is much to be said about Jamaica's pirate past (much has been written on the subject, including by the infamous Daniel Defoe), most closely linked to Port Royal, which is worth visiting, especially since the former filibuster "main base" is just a few minutes' drive from Norman Manley International Airport in Kingston.

You'll probably now automatically think of Jamaica when you hear that somewhere someone is celebrating "International Pirate

Day" (September 19) – so much for our tolerant world. As they say, a couple of years ago this cheerful holiday reached Moscow, and it is annually paid tribute to in one of the capital's beer bars.

Today, the Caribbean Sea is free of piracy. But piracy, as we know, has not been eradicated to this day in other parts of the world. Regional conflicts, civil wars and poverty give birth to new generations of buccaneers. So those who enjoy sea voyages far from the big ocean "roads" should really be careful.

Thank God, this warning does not apply to Jamaica. Therefore, we will remember the pirates who ruled here only in a historical context.

The Long Road to Accompong

When we decided to visit the maroons in the village of Accompong, truly lost in the mountains in the southwestern part of Jamaica, where, in order to get there, you need not only patience, stress resistance, but also an SUV instead of a limousine, we consoled ourselves with the illusion that we would be perhaps the first Russians who would literally and figuratively find the way there.

It turned out not to be: back in 1977, when visitors from our country were rare on the island and a visa regime was in effect, a correspondent from the magazine "Around the World," which is still popular among domestic travel and adventure enthusiasts, visited the island. The journalist's detailed story about the Jamaican "mountain freemen" introduced then mostly "travel banned" Soviet people to the descendants of runaway slaves (there are currently about 7,000 of them on the island, of whom about 600 live in Accompong, named after the "ruler of heaven", worshiped by the first Maroons), who retained their administrative autonomy and distinctive culture for centuries.

Their history began in the 16th century, when the Spaniards, who had taken possession of Jamaica (called Santiago for a time, but the name did not stick) in 1509, brought the first African slaves to the island a few years later to work on sugar cane, tobacco and cocoa plantations. In 1655, the black slaves (at that

time the number of those who chose freedom was approximately 1,500 people) had to flee to the inaccessible mountains for the first time, but not from their Spanish masters, who themselves were forced to take refuge in Cuba from the English who had landed on the island, near the current capital of Kingston, following the orders of Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland. The first slave rebellion on the Sutton plantation in St. James dates back to 1690. Almost from this time, the Jamaicans began their struggle for independence until 1962, when Jamaica finally gained it.

It is quite interesting that the first slaves brought there by the British were not Africans, but… Irish. Thus, in 1656, Cromwell ordered the "shipment" of 2,000 children from poor Irish families to Jamaica in order to sell them there to the first British settlers. Until the 18th century, Irish slaves coexisted on the island in parallel with their African comrades in misfortune. Moreover, according to researchers of this topic, slave owners treated the European "commodity", numbering hundreds of thousands of people, was much worse off than the people from Africa, and was valued much less. Thus, an African in the Caribbean slave markets was asked for 50 pounds sterling, and an Irishman – no more than 5.

But let's return to the Maroons. The British rulers, of course, were not happy with the fact that someone on the island refused to obey them and was hiding in the wild jungle and mountain

wilderness. But all attempts by the British expeditionary corps to reach the rebels ended in failure. Not only the military valor of the Maroons, their well-mastered skills in conducting guerrilla warfare, but also the well-organized work of their reconnaissance groups, which promptly recorded the approach of army units to the areas where the "resistance fighters" were located, played a role here.

As a result, the British had to sign peace treaties with two groups of Maroons in 1739—1740 (January 6 became a memorable date for those events). These documents guaranteed their safe residence in five main traditional places of deployment and fairly broad independent administrative rights. In return, however, the Maroons were obliged to no longer accept runaway slaves into their ranks and even had to participate, along with the colonizers, in their capture. For each slave returned to the owner, they were entitled to a "fee", which, of course, did not contribute to strengthening the relations of the "mountain freemen" with their enslaved fellow tribesmen. Today, the "special" rights of the Maroons are still in effect, with the exception of participation in slave hunting, of course.

In truth, the Maroons receive virtually no support from the state. 90% of men are employed in agriculture, their wives, as a rule, do not work and take care of the household and children. Unemployment (16%) and illiteracy among the population are high in Accompong. Their living conditions are therefore the simplest and quite difficult.

At the head of the Maroons in each of their settlements is a "colonel", who heads a council of 14 of the most respected citizens, where all issues of life and everyday life of the community are discussed and decided. At the same time, the colonel is, despite the collective nature of local self-government, an absolute authority. They say that the Maroons had colonels who did not hesitate to use obeism – black magic, in order to force individual rebels from their "area of responsibility" to submit to the authority of the community leader.

Obviously in such relatively small and homogeneous communities, everyone knows each other. There is practically no crime there, unlike in most of Jamaica. Certainly sometimes, as the residents told us, minor offenses, mainly thefts, do happen. But the criminal is quickly found, and then, of course, he will no longer live among the Maroons.

Colonel F. Williams (a retired police officer), dressed in a multi-colored, tunic-like "dress" suit, the head of the Maroon community in Accompong (he was re-elected in 2015 for another five-year term), personally led us around the village, showed us a kind of club where the council meets and community meetings are held, the local primary school, where funny-looking children with big round eyes diligently listened to the teachers' explanations, casting a curious glance at the "newcomers from the big world," and we, despite our curiosity, still tried not to disrupt the educational process too much.

Historians, describing the life and daily routine of this special

caste of former slaves and their descendants, noted that the Maroons, who practiced polygamy in the old days, supposedly did not care much about their children. But such an attitude, if it existed, apparently remained in the distant past. We were able to see this for ourselves during the few hours we spent in Accompong.

F. Williams and other members of the council, who invited us to dinner at their club (the meal consisted of a variety of delicious dishes, which women brought from their homes within a radius of several hundred meters and placed before us like a magic tablecloth), talked a lot about the role of education in ensuring the future of the community and its well-being. The Colonel asked that we should possibly take influence on the authorities in Kingston to allocate one of the scholarships annually granted as our country's support for studying at Russian universities, for a young man or woman from Accompong. Even there, far from the Jamaican capital, according to F. Williams, it is well known what great practical benefit professionals who received higher education in our country in the specialties most in demand in their homeland, have brought to Jamaica over the decades.

It is important, that all our interlocutors on the island, starting with the government leaders, regardless of which of the two main parties, it was formed, noted that Jamaicans who studied in the Soviet Union or, in modern times, in Russia, all returned to the island and worked there, often occupying high positions in various spheres of economics, health care and science, in the

civil service, in political and public structures.

As we were told, there were times when Jamaicans who studied in the USSR and then returned to work in the acquired profession were ordered by the authorities on the island to report to the police station every week, as if they were going to criminals who had served prison terms. In the Western world, to which Jamaica conditionally considers itself, at that time, as it is well known, they feared the ideological influence of the Soviet Union on the local minds, the "infiltration" of alien ideas into bourgeois society that "corrupted" it.

Therefore, to this day, there is a great demand on the island for education in Russia. Over the decades, a kind of dynasty of "Russian Jamaicans" has even formed, in which father or mother or even both parents studied in our country, and the children followed in their footsteps and also study in Russian universities.

Of course, we couldn't refuse the hospitable Maroons, who gathered us at a common table in the "club", in their desire to introduce us the traditional food of the freedom-loving mountain dwellers (later we will talk about Jamaican cuisine in general, but now we will mention a couple of typical dishes "as a starter").

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.