

A stylized graphic featuring a large, white, curved shape resembling a beach umbrella or a stylized letter 'e' at the top. Below it, several parallel, slanted lines represent waves. The background is a solid teal color.

BEACH BABYLON

IMOGEN
EDWARDS-JONES &
ANONYMOUS

TRANSWORLD
BOOKS

About the Book

How does it feel to live and work in one of the most beautiful and luxurious tropical island resorts in the world? Your office is a beach of pure white sand. Your daily commute is a stroll past an aquamarine sea. Your meetings involve champagne cocktails at sunset.

But how do you maintain this level of luxury when you're thousands of miles from anywhere? How do you keep the richest and most demanding people in the world supplied with call girls and vintage Dom Perignon? What happens when the sun refuses to shine? And where the hell do you find the energy every day to smile and smile and smile again?

With a cast of billionaires, celebrities, hangers-on and prostitutes, *Beach Babylon* takes you to a world where extreme luxury is the norm and where excess somehow isn't always enough ...

Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

Acknowledgements

Prologue

Monday a.m.

Monday p.m.

Monday Sunset

Tuesday a.m.

Tuesday p.m.

Tuesday Sunset

Wednesday a.m.

Wednesday p.m.

Wednesday Sunset

Thursday a.m.

Thursday p.m.

Thursday Sunset

Friday a.m.

Friday p.m.

Friday Sunset

Saturday a.m.

Saturday p.m.

Saturday Sunset

Sunday a.m.

Sunday p.m.

Sunday Sunset

About the Authors

Also by Imogen Edwards-Jones

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For KA

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Prologue

All of the following is true. Only the names have been changed to protect the guilty. All the anecdotes, the situations, the highs, the lows, the scams, the drugs, the excesses, the mark-ups and the insanity are as told to me by Anonymous - someone who has spent the last twenty years in the business managing some of the very best resorts in the world. Although the incidents are real and the celebrities play themselves, the resort itself has been fictionalized and the stories, narrated by Anonymous, have been condensed into one busy week in the resort. But everything else is as it should be. The rich drink the cocktails, the poor make them, and everyone else tries to make sure there's enough caviar and pink champagne to go around. It's just another week in one of the world's top resorts.

Monday a.m.

IT IS SIX o'clock in the bloody morning and I'm already hot. I am always bloody hot. Tropical-island paradises are all very well if you can lie back, half-naked, on a lounge and sip a long, cool drink while someone else buffs your sunglasses. But try and do anything else, like wear clothes and manage one of the top-ten luxury resorts in the world, and you sweat. My freshly laundered linen shirt is already sticking to my back and my linen trousers are creasing around my balls. I'm also not feeling that bright. I drank a whole bottle of Dom last night in an attempt to de-stress after the hell of last week and I have one of those dry-mouthed champagne headaches that sits like a sharp needle behind my right eye. What I really need is a lie-down in a cool room, followed by a full English. Instead I am standing here at the end of the jetty, looking out to sea, waiting for one of our eighteen boats to arrive.

Fortunately I am only meeting our new deputy manager, Ben, and I have known him for a while, ever since we worked on reception together in a posh hotel in Kensington some five years ago. I've come a long way since then. I have climbed the greasy service-industry pole with speed and aplomb and landed myself one of the best jobs in the hotel industry. And now my mate's on board.

Dawn is blushing pink over the horizon, there's a smell of salt and hot spices in the air and I can see the white hull of the *Hummingbird* cutting through the water. The crew are manning their stations, dressed in their white shorts and polo shirts; they look impressive even at this distance. I have to say I've been a bit naughty and blown \$600 by

sending one of our two fifty-five-foot Sunseeker yachts to the mainland to collect Ben. Normally these only collect VIP guests; staff usually have to hang around at the airport and wait to come across on our daily gas-guzzling ferry, but I wanted to impress the pants off him and bring him over in some sort of style. I can see him standing on deck, waving. He looks a little incongruous in his dark suit and leather shoes. He's wearing a token pair of *Miami Vice* reflector shades.

The boat glides into the man-made harbour and moors up. The crew, like a well-oiled and well-drilled machine, throw down the ropes and help the tired-looking Ben down the gangplank.

'Ahoy!' he says as he lumbers towards me, getting back his land legs.

'Welcome to Alcatraz,' I smile, walking over to shake his clammy hand.

'Look at this fucking place,' he says, throwing his arms in the air. 'It's like fucking paradise!'

'It is, mate, it is,' I agree, smiling away as two of the crew walk past, carrying Ben's luggage. One of my front-of-house staff approaches with a small tray on which there's a cool, damp, tightly rolled hand towel and a chilled fruit-juice cocktail complete with straw and lotus flower.

Not that a drink and a quick rub-down are going to make much of a difference, because the bloke looks shit. But then again, most people look shit when they arrive here. It is something to do with the whole day they lose getting here. One of the problems of holidaying in the middle of nowhere and getting the true Robinson Crusoe experience is that it takes so bloody long to arrive you need a holiday to get over the flight. Even if you do fly First Class, or come on your own jet, which I have to say most of our guests do.

But poor Ben has come steerage and he has the bloated face and creased suit to prove it. At least this will be his last time travelling with the hoi polloi – one of the perks of being

a manager here is a Club Class ticket home. It wouldn't be good for the image of the hotel if one of the guests were to bust us travelling Economy Class. And this place is all about image. Image and artifice. Christ, half the island wasn't even here ten years ago. It's been added to and enlarged by brute force and concrete so many times that no one can quite remember where nature left off and man began.

I can tell Ben's impressed because he is quiet, trying to take it all in. We walk along the jetty and through reception. Unlike the fairly shitty desk-and-phone set-up we used to man together a few years ago, this place is an open Balinese pagoda with huge pillars, stone statues, bubbling water features and white marble floors. There are fat comfortable sofas, low tables laid with fans of meet-and-greet booklets, huge tropical floral displays in five-foot-high vases and ocean views whichever way you turn. We have a couple of stunning Thai girls on reception at the moment, plus three buggy drivers hanging around outside to take you wherever you want to go. Ben can't quite believe it. He walks very slowly behind me, gently muttering 'Wow' to himself at every new thing he encounters. Finally he finishes his drink, hands back his used towel and joins me on the other side of reception.

'I can't believe this place,' he says, shaking his head. 'How long have you been the manager here again?'

'Eighteen months.'

'But it's like you're running a small country,' he says.

'I know,' I say, nodding at one of the buggy drivers, who leaps into his golf cart and accelerates towards us.

'And you're the despot.'

'I'm not a despot,' I say, thinking I am more of the benevolent-dictator type.

'But you've changed the time here on the island,' he says, looking at his watch and comparing it with the large clock on the wall. 'You're an hour behind the mainland. What's that about?'

‘Making a statement,’ I say. The driver travels the three yards to the front of reception and gets out of the buggy, vacating the driving seat for me. I sit down and indicate for Ben to sit next to me.

‘What sort of statement?’

‘That this is our own place and we can do what we want. Although,’ I smile, ‘ever since our head office has moved to the UK it has slightly bugged things up. It means we have to stay late in the office to make conference calls to London, which is a little pissing-off. We did think about having summer and winter times on the island and then about taking the clocks back two hours to make it easier for ourselves. But then I realized that the sun would set at about four thirty, which is not the best time for a cocktail.’

‘No,’ he agrees. ‘I imagine that there might have been a few complaints from the guests.’

‘So,’ I say, rubbing my hands together. ‘A tour of the island? The morning meeting and then I’ll show you where you’re living?’

‘Sounds perfect to me.’

I floor the buggy accelerator and set off down one of the numerous white-sand tracks that zigzag across the island. With 120 acres of lush tropical forest, the island has a ten-kilometre coastline, fifteen sandy beaches and some 20,000 coconut trees. Each of the guest suites is a minimum of 900 square feet of freestanding luxury villa. They have plasmas, surround sound, double beds, sitting areas, terraces, sunken baths and a shower both indoor and out, plus direct access to the beach and stunning sea views. Some have their own swimming pools. Others are built on stilts over the ocean. And some have their own swimming pools as well as being built over the ocean. Each villa has at least one host who is on call 24/7 to cater to the guests’ every whim and command. This is extreme luxury for the extremely discerning and comes at an exclusive price tag. We have six categories of room and prices range from \$1,500 to \$6,000

a night – and that's before you've had a glass of wine and cracked open a packet of Pringles, which despite being three dollars a half-tube in the minibar are always very popular. We have 140 villas, numbered from 100 to 240, and over 800 staff, which means the employee-to-guest grovel ratio is very high. So not only do we attract the rich and famous to our little tropical island, we also cater for the extremely high maintenance indeed.

I'm cutting through the undergrowth as quickly as I can. Part of me – OK, all of me – is showing off to Ben, proving I know this place like the back of my hand and that these shitty buggies can shift over 20mph with a good wind behind them and a Schumacher-in-waiting at the wheel. We speed past various groundsman clearing up fallen leaves and cutting back the rapacious undergrowth; they all pause and nod as the managerial cart goes by. I feel a bit like a feudal landlord; the effect is not lost on Ben.

'This is like a fantasy island,' he grins, a sheen of old-alcohol sweat breaking out across his cheeks.

I smile back at him, noting my infinitely more soigné reflection in his shades. 'On your left,' I say, 'is the gym.'

Ben looks over at the fabulously designed pavilion of fitness. Set right at the water's edge so you can jog off all that expense-account fat while staring at the ocean. Equipped with all the latest gadgets, Pilates and medicine balls, it is staffed by various international gym nuts, including Keith, a sixteen-stone brick-shit-house from South Africa. He is one of those rippling silent types who drink protein shakes and chug back the amino acids. He also cures his own biltong in the staff village.

'It looks empty in there,' says Ben, peering over the top of his shades.

'It's a bit early for guests,' I say. 'They tend not to surface until at least eight o'clock and don't go to the gym until after breakfast.'

We carry on winding our way through the lush forest. The sun is up now and you can already feel its heat as it penetrates the undergrowth to gently grill your skin. Spending all this time out here has made me very weary of exposing myself to its rays. I have lost count of the number of times I have seen grown men so scarlet and burnt they've been incapable of walking in to breakfast, having fallen asleep after a liquid lunch the day before. They end up with skin so red raw and hot you could sizzle a rasher of Danish on their nuked thighs.

'There's the spa,' I add, pointing through the palms. 'It doesn't look anything from the outside but inside it's fucking fantastic.'

'It looks pretty fucking fantastic from here,' says Ben, eyeing up the gaggle of Filipino and Thai women dressed in white uniforms walking into reception.

'We've got eighteen therapists, each doing six treatments a day, seven days a week, with one hour for lunch. The place is open twelve hours a day and still we get complaints that it is too difficult to get an appointment.'

'It must make money, then?' asks Ben.

'Sadly it's a franchise with some French company that trains the girls and sends them here. We only get 10 per cent of the profits, about \$120,000 a month. But the girls in there get the best tips.'

'I bet they do,' he says, licking his dry lips.

'About \$1,500 each, over and above their \$600 basic.'

'Shit. Really?'

'Who would have thought that a few creams, a rub and a lie-down could generate so much money?'

'Yeah,' agrees Ben, running his hands through his lank dark hair. 'I suppose it's all those high-maintenance Russian mafia birds.'

'Weirdly, we have almost as many blokes as women.'

'That's metrosexual millionaires for you.' He shrugs. 'It was nearly all birds, bitches and concubines where I was in

Mexico. I thought the place I was managing there was swish, but this is something else.'

I have to say it's good to have Ben here. Not only is it great to have someone who has the same language and sense of humour, someone from the old days, but it is also nice to have someone to show how far you've got. To share the spoils of all your hard work, to see what you've made of yourself. My girlfriend Kate is appreciative. But she didn't know me when I was full of caffeine and half-inched bottles of vodka, pulling double shifts to pay the rent. We met in the Four Seasons in Bali and fell in love over mohitos and shadow puppets in Ubud. We've been together two years; she followed me here, and after one week of unemployment she ended up running the island boutique.

'Here we are, then,' I say to Ben, pulling up outside a rather unprepossessing line of wooden buildings. 'Here's where it all happens.'

'Oh, right,' says Ben, getting out of the buggy and stretching in the sun. He has managed to sweat right the way through his suit and already has salt stains under his arms. 'You would have thought with all the profit you lot are making they might have given you a nice set of offices.'

'Profit? Who said anything about profit?'

'What?' he says, looking a little stunned. 'You mean you don't make a profit here?'

'We have a \$55-million turnover and we still don't make a profit.' I smile. 'Welcome to the wonderful world of luxury resorts, mate. Shall we?' I pull open the heavy glass door and a cold blast of air-conditioning escapes. 'We've got some introductions to make.'

I usually call the morning meeting between eight and eight thirty, but today it is slightly earlier than usual so that everyone can have the opportunity to meet Ben and get to know him a little before the shit hits the collective fan. We walk past my office - through the glass I can see that my desk is already loaded with the endless amounts of paper I

have to sign off – and make our way down the corridor towards the meeting room. Inside is a long polished table surrounded by high-backed chairs. In front of each chair is a green blotter, a pad of paper, some freshly sharpened pencils and a bottle of imported mineral water. Looking around the table, taking in the slightly tanned faces, I can see that almost everyone is here already. It is a long list – the front-office manager, the financial controller, the resident manager, the director of human resources, the training manager, the head of housekeeping, the senior villa host, the IT manager, the purchasing manager, the sales manager, the spa manager, the bar manager, the chief engineer, the security manager, the reservations manager and, finally, the recreation manager. In fact, more managers than you can shake a fucking clipboard at.

Hilariously this is not some overzealous display of unity put on for Ben's benefit. All these people turn up to the morning meeting every day. The size and infrastructure of the island dictate that we all need to meet once a day, otherwise we'd be frantically driving around on our buggies, hoping to bump into each other in order to sort out what the hell was happening. This way at least we have so-called face-time before we all piss off to our various little empires.

The last person to arrive is Geri, the rather rotund spa manager who came to us from Liverpool via Soneva Fushi, or was it Gili? I can never remember. Anyway, she was poached by Dave, our recently departed deputy manager who flew to the Maldives on a minibreak for some R&R and a little industrial espionage, only to come back with Geri and a very good pastry chef. She walks into the room and immediately starts with some long-winded story that involves early-morning tears and tantrums and a fallout between the Shiatsu masseuse and a Thai manicurist in the spa.

'They're a breed apart, those girls,' she huffs, plonking herself down next to me. 'They're all so bloody sensitive.'

With everyone sitting down, I launch into a bit of a welcome speech for Ben. I tell them how we met in Kensington. How he always used to try and sleep his way through his shifts. And how, against all the odds, he became a big swinging dick in the Gulf of Mexico, turning some piece-of-shit loser resort around into a five-star destination-holiday hangout. I add that I hope he will be another steady hand at the tiller of this glittering six-star establishment. There is a polite ripple of applause as everyone welcomes him to the island. However, looking around the table, I can see that Bernard's long Gallic nose is already out of joint. He was rather hoping to be promoted after Dave was unceremoniously sacked for having his hand in the till and copies of the keys to the cellar, which contains over 9,000 bottles of rare and vintage wines, in his room. But head office and I had other plans.

Ben's welcome out of the way, we get down to business. Bernard goes through the logbook of yesterday's events. Sunday is my day off and as I am a bit of a control freak I tend to be a little nervous about Monday's logbook. Who knows what might have happened while my back was turned and I was swilling down some bubbles?

'So,' says Bernard, clearing his throat. 'We've got the German industrialist in villa 130 under house arrest.'

'What the fuck?' I say, leaping out of my chair.

'It was the only option,' insists Bernard, shifting in his seat. 'Mohammed? Back me up on this ...' He looks around the table for support.

'How? Why?' I am looking from surly Bernard to surlier Mohammed, head of security. 'What the fuck happened?'

Bernard launches into a story about how this German got so pissed last night that he forced the lock on one of the buggies parked outside the main restaurant and drunk-drove it at great speed the length of the island. He was chased by security, crashed the buggy, then tried to run away from the scene of the crime. He didn't get very far as he was too drunk to run in a straight line and was detained

by two guards. He fought with the guards, hit one and was eventually overcome by another two. He was escorted back to his villa and told to sleep off the \$650 bottle of 1998 Philip Togni Cabernet Sauvignon he had consumed. This morning, while I was on the jetty meeting Ben, they had apparently approached the man and asked him to leave. At which point his wife had cried like a baby and asked to stay. The husband practically went down on his knees and begged, so they suggested that he wrote a letter binding him over to keep the peace.

‘And here it is,’ says Bernard, waving it in the air. ‘He has signed it and sworn that he will not leave his villa for the whole of his stay here.’

‘So let me get this right,’ I say, looking at the scrawled note. ‘He is paying \$2,500 a night to sit in his villa all day and not come out?’

‘That was the only way,’ says Bernard.

‘I know we have a no-violence policy,’ I nod. ‘But I can’t believe he agreed to it.’

‘His wife made him sign – she was desperate to stay. I don’t think she could cope with the embarrassment of going back early to Hamburg.’

‘Yeah,’ agrees Geri. ‘I mean, what would she say to the neighbours?’

‘I don’t think she is the sort of woman to have neighbours,’ says Bernard rather sniffily.

‘Anything else?’ I ask.

‘No, that’s it from last night,’ he replies.

‘Not too bad.’ I smile and rub my hands together. ‘Not too bad at all. So,’ I turn to our reservations manager, Garry, a handsome blond queen, appropriately from Queensland. ‘How’s occupancy and who’s coming?’

‘Right,’ he says, sitting up and smiling. Garry’s all eyes and teeth – and ears. He always has the best gossip. Give him a beer and he’ll tell you exactly who is doing what and to whom on the island. So he is the perfect person to be in

charge of VIPs and finding out who might be VIPs. 'Occupancy is running at 97 per cent, which is up 8 per cent on last year, and what we would normally expect around this time of year.'

Unlike a city hotel with a steady flow of businessmen, our occupancy rates vary enormously; and also, unlike city hotels, we can't cover our arses by double-booking rooms and overbooking suites, because we have nowhere to put extra guests and nowhere to bump them on to. We're an island in the middle of fucking nowhere, and when people finally get here, the least we can do is give them a cold towel and a bed. Having said that, our client list is also very seasonal. The rich, famous and connected tend to come here in the winter. High season is November until the end of March – with a fistfight for villas over the Christmas and New Year period and a gentle brawl for Easter and half-term. Low season is June to October, when the high-spend, high-end market gravitates towards their villas in the Med and their yachts in the south of France. Leaving us to cope with mainly Brits, who think they have made it but haven't quite. The room rates halve and so does the spending power of the clientele. They don't have money for the extras and complain at every turn. Thankfully, it is November and the lowlife has gone home. It's only high spenders from now on.

He continues, 'I've checked the list and Googled everyone. We've got three VIPs, two returnees and Liz Hurley's here to do a bikini shoot.'

'Liz Hurley?' sniffs Ben from the corner of the room. 'She's fucking hot.'

There's a general murmur of male approval around the table, followed by a five-minute discussion about just how hot La Hurley actually is. All the blokes are enthusiastic, it's just the women who dissent and I suspect that's sour grapes. I look across at Ben, who still looks uncomfortable in his suit but seems to have perked up no end. I have to say I am a little less impressed by the prospect of Liz Hurley. I

have seen so many beautiful women in various states of undress and total nakedness that it is going to take more than the million-dollar face of Estée Lauder to put lead in this hungover, jaded pencil. However, Garry's mention of Mr McCann, the owner of a TV channel in the States, is enough to get my juices flowing.

'He's got a Grand Villa and a couple of Water Villas,' lists Garry, running his finger down his occupancy page. 'And he's coming in on his own jet this afternoon. He's expected at four on the mainland and has booked a private transfer. As he is a returning guest, he's said you don't have to meet him on the mainland.'

'Oh,' I say. 'How much was his bill last time?'

'Just under half a million US,' says Garry. 'His requests are simple. Duck-down pillows, Cristal in the minibar, and - oh,' he adds, looking up, 'he's bringing his own girls.'

'Girls?' asks Ben.

'Girls,' I nod.

'Oh, girls.' Ben nods back, finally twigging. 'Girls, girls.'

'Jesus Christ.' I roll my eyes and look at him. 'It must have been a very long flight.'

Monday p.m.

BEN WAS FORCED to sit in his stiff suit for another half-hour or so while I went through the rest of Garry's Googlings. I know it sounds mad to check out the guests at a resort that purports to be a get-away-from-it-all haven, where we don't expect people to dress for dinner, but you would be surprised how many times even the most incognito person resorts to the 'Do you know who I am?' line, just as soon as they can't get the wine they want, or a six p.m. massage. So instead of the staff simply shrugging and saying, 'No idea, Mr Gates,' everyone gets the once-over before they come here, so we don't miss a trick, or indeed the world's richest man. We also check to see if they have stayed with us before and go through their records, noting their little whims and foibles and marking down any problems and difficulties we had with them last time they were here. And nine times out of ten, the potentially difficult guest's name crops up again in the morning meeting. Leopards don't change their spots, no matter how loaded they are.

And neither, it appears, has Ben. Way back when we were louche boys on reception, he used to be doing the girl from housekeeping in various rooms at various slack times of day in the hotel. Any room that was vacant and inspected was fair game for a quick one. He's only been here a few hours and he is already flirting with Ingrid, the new, relatively sexy Danish girl in public relations. She is laughing and flicking her blonde hair and he is giving her the best smile a jet-lagged bloke can muster. She's impressed. I feel a sharp frisson of irritation, rapidly followed by dread. Maybe hiring Ben wasn't the best decision after all. I direct him to get on

my buggy and tell him we're off to the staff village to show him his accommodation. He gives Ingrid's arm a squeeze and I can tell it is only a matter of a few drinks down the staff bar before they're something for Garry to gossip about.

We drive along the sandy path that snakes past the main dining room and pool area, which, I have to say, is the *pièce de résistance* of the hotel. Linked by wooden slatted walkways, the main restaurant is perched on pillars and juts out into a bay of turquoise sea. Open to the elements, there are stunning views on the three sides. Next to it is the beach and three separate swimming pools. The first is a horizon lap-pool. Made of smooth black slate, it has fresh-water showers by the steps with two sunken granite sun decks at the other end. Another is a whirling, swirling mass of small pools and fountains and bubbling jacuzzi areas, while the third is a small shallow splashing area for children. There is a beach bar that pumps out rum and reggae, hundreds of white-towel-covered loungers and hot and cold running service to keep even the most demanding guests satisfied. Books and magazines are laid out on a few tables. There are iPods for general use, plus jugs of iced lemon water, circulating trays of sliced fruit and little china tasting spoons of ice cream. There are cold towels for your comfort and convenience and, of course, the bloke to buff your sunglasses. Little wonder, then, that once a guest has plonked himself in the sun here, it is hard for him to move.

Ben looks slightly overawed.

'No wonder this place has got six stars,' he says, pushing his *Miami Vice* shades up his sweaty nose. 'I have never seen anything like it.'

'Amazing, isn't it?' I reply, as I make a sharp left through the undergrowth into the staff village. 'And here is where everyone lives.'

When I say everyone, I obviously mean the staff, because the village itself is actually so well hidden in the middle of

the island that I'm sure most of the guests don't even know it exists.

I park the buggy next to the giant sewage works that occupies the middle of the staff village, along with the generators and the reverse-osmosis plant that takes thousands of gallons of seawater and converts them into drinking water. As I turn I see the look on Ben's face. To say that he appears disappointed is an understatement.

'Is this it?' he asks.

'What do you mean?' I say, looking around the place. I am so used to it I suppose I have ceased to notice quite what it looks like.

'Where are the sea views?' he asks.

'Sea views?' I start to laugh. 'You don't think we're going to waste a sea view on staff, do you?'

'Do you mean I have come all this way and escaped the noise of the city to sleep next to a generator and inhale the gentle aroma of other people's shit?'

'It doesn't smell of shit,' I say, breathing in. Actually, come to think about it, it does a bit. 'It's only the direction of the wind. You'll get used to it.'

'Yeah, right,' he says. 'I'll look forward to that.'

'Honestly, mate.' I slap him on the back. 'Things aren't that bad. It's only because you are tired. Look,' I say, trying to sound optimistic, 'your room isn't bad.'

Truth is, he has the best accommodation in the place. As the highest-ranking manager after me, he has a small wooden house complete with sitting room, kitchen, bedroom and veranda. He has a TV and I have pinched him a DVD player from the stockroom, just to make him feel a little more at home. Granted the place is tiny and the view is of the carpentry area, where they are currently refurbishing twenty of our nine hundred sunbeds; but if he only knew what the rest of the staff accommodation was like he'd be thanking his promotional stars.

Everyone else has to share and it depends on how low down the pecking order you are as to how many you share with. Kitchen cleaners, gardeners and villa cleaners are housed six to a room. The village was not originally built to cope with this many staff, but we found after we opened some ten years ago that we needed around eight hundred staff to keep the show on the road. So we put bunk beds in the rooms and hoped for the best. Next up are the waiters, who are four to a room. The villa hosts are in twins, sharing their bathroom with another twin. Supervisors have single bedrooms, sharing their bathroom with one other person. Department heads, such as the guys at the morning meetings, are in single accommodation with a small patio and their own bathroom, and only executives like Ben have the sitting room, the kitchen, the veranda and the bathroom to themselves. Anyway, staff accommodation has always been shit. I am not sure exactly what he was expecting.

‘It’s like a fucking kibbutz,’ says Ben, watching a buggy pull up outside his villa with his suitcases. ‘I mean, look at all the washing hanging out and the vague attempts people have made to personalize their space with a few plants. It’s like a South American slum, and let me tell you,’ he mutters, ‘I have seen plenty of them.’

‘It’s only because you need to get used to it,’ I say. ‘There’s the team bar down there.’ I point to an area with a pool table, a large TV for football and various tables and chairs gathered around a wooden bar covered in flags of all the twenty-seven different nationalities that we have in the village. ‘That’s a riot in the evening. The drinks are cheap and there is different food every night for a dollar. Monday night is pizza night, Tuesday is burgers, Wednesday is hot dogs, and so on. Every couple of weeks or so everyone gets fresh crab from the mainland.’

Ben just looks at me. His white face is puffy and sweaty; his mouth is curling with sarcasm. ‘Fuck me sideways,’ he says. ‘It sounds fantastic.’

‘The staff restaurant is nice,’ I say. ‘There are salads and things like that. There’s a shop for toothpaste and chocolate ...’

‘Right,’ he says.

‘And you can have mates to stay and they can eat in the canteen for around eight dollars a meal.’

‘Why would I want to do that?’ he asks.

‘I don’t know,’ I reply. ‘I am only saying.’

We walk along together, making a tour of the village. Ben kicks bits of rubbish with his leather-soled shoes. Perhaps I should have warned him. I am feeling racked with guilt now. It is such a responsibility employing a mate. You want them to have a good time, and enjoy working here, and at the same time you want them to be the best person at their job. Judging by the way Ben’s reacting I don’t think he is going to do either.

There’s a wailing noise coming from the loudspeaker attached to the side of one of the buildings.

‘Jesus!’ Ben jumps. ‘What the fuck is that?’

‘It’s the imam calling the staff to prayer in the mosque,’ I say.

‘What? You’ve got a mosque?’

‘That’s right. Fully functioning. It’s behind you.’

‘That’ll come in handy,’ he says, not bothering to look up, kicking an empty Diet Sprite can across the track, ‘when I fucking convert. Honestly,’ he adds, putting his hands in his suit pocket and sighing loudly, ‘it’s no wonder you have problems recruiting and keeping staff.’

Well, he’s not wrong there. People are always pissing off halfway through their contracts. It usually happens at around ten months. It’s almost as if they reach some sort of tipping point where they can’t stand living in paradise any more. There’s too much sun, sea and bloody sand; they just have to make a run for it. If you last two years here you should get given a medal. I’m only eighteen months in and I have to say I’m feeling it.

You can't go to the movies. You can't go to a restaurant, apart from the three that are on the island. You can't drive a car. God, do I miss driving. The speed, the smell, the sound of the engine. You can't go to the pub. You can't get a pint. You can't eat anything that doesn't come presented in a fucking gourmet tower. All I want is a Guinness and a packet of pork scratchings. I want to go somewhere where I'm anonymous, where no one wants to ask my opinion on something, somewhere where I can sit quietly, gently sipping my pint, watching West Ham get relegated. It's not much to ask, is it?

All you can do here is work, go to your room or get shit-faced in the team bar. Everyone does it. They get pissed almost every night. Hans, the six-foot-three German dive instructor, refers to the team bar as his sitting room and is in there every night until either it closes at eleven or he falls over. Whichever happens first. Mind you, he is the only member of staff here to have broken the five-year barrier so he is a little bit strange.

They either drink or they shag. There is a huge amount of sex going on. And for some reason the Japanese sushi chef seems to be getting most of it. I don't know whether it is the long hair or the knives, but Yoshiji seems to get the girls going no matter where they're from. I have lost count of the number of weeping females I have had in my office, complaining how he's broken their heart. Another thing I have noticed is that everyone who turns up here with a steady boyfriend back home always seems to ditch him within the first month of being here. Relationships don't seem to last the long distance and the weird time zones.

But strangely, when it comes to sex in the staff village, there's an international divide as well. The Indians and the Sri Lankans stick together. The Thai girls hang out with the Filipinos, exchanging giggles and manicures and pedicures under the trees. The locals are not allowed to drink with or be in the same room as a member of the opposite sex,

unless they are married, which kind of limits their fun. Meanwhile, the Westerners all sleep with each other. So in fact the only person who has truly international relations is Yoshiji.

It's no wonder then that we have a drug problem in the village. You would've thought because we are an island in the middle of nowhere that we would be immune to the vagaries of modern-day living. But apparently not. I know that some guests choose to bring cocaine in on their private jets or have supplies of the stuff in their super yachts that we moor offshore. However, none of this filters down to the staff, so we turn a blind eye. Just so long as we don't see the mirrors and notes, there is nothing much we can do about it. But it's not coke in the staff village. It's smack. Or brown sugar as they call it here.

There's always been a bit of a heroin problem on the mainland, in the very poor areas in and around the capital, just like any other metropolitan city, I suppose. But we have only just recently started to get it here. We've always had hash hanging around and I am of the opinion that there is nothing wrong with a few spliffs after a hard day at the coalface of the hospitality industry. It only ever makes you want to snooze and eat a bit more. But one of the gardeners reported a drug deal going on on one of the beaches the other day. It was three thirty p.m., which I thought was a little extreme. At first I didn't believe it, however when the culprits came into my office and claimed that they were simply buying and selling a CD, but couldn't agree on the band, I knew something was up. The guy from the watersports centre said it was Robbie Williams. The waiter couldn't think of any music he might like to listen to, and just stared at me like a moron when I asked him. It turned out that the boat boys were bringing the stuff across in the resort catamarans and flogging it in the village.

I don't know why I was surprised. It is always the boat boys who have the drugs. Go to any resort anywhere in the