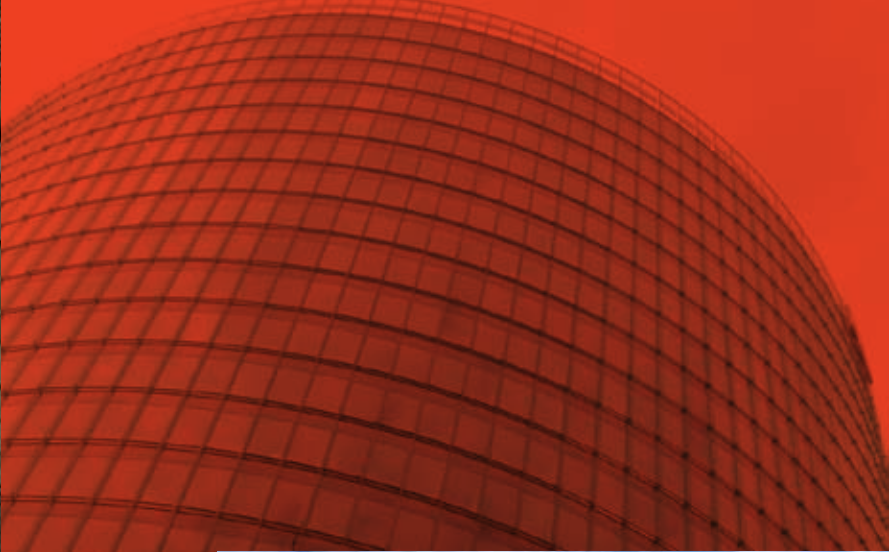


TRAVEL & RECREATION

Jamaica Berlin CONNECTION

Text/Photography: Rosemary Parkinson





My trip to Europe was to be Paris only to receive a Gold for Nyam Jamaica – Best World Cookbook Design – at the historic Palais Royale. But an invitation to Berlin could not be missed. Having never been to this city, I was ready for yet another one of my many adventures. I imagine that out of all the cities I have been to in Europe, Berlin is probably the most historic for me in a sense. As a teenager movies and books on The Third Reich horrified and fascinated me at the same time and Marlene Dietrich was the beauty I wanted to become, the life I wanted to lead.

The capital city of reunited Germany, a young city by European standards, Berlin was founded in the 13th century. In 1150, the German magnate Albert the Bear formally inherited the area known as Brandenburg within which Berlin is situated. It was Albert's grandsons Otto and Johann who founded what became the real city of Berlin in 1244 on the banks of the river Spree, hence the Berlin Bear appears not only in the Coat of Arms of Berlin but colourful statues of huge bears can be seen scattered around the city. Divided after the Second World War by a wall, a Russian barrier where families and friends were separated in the east for many hard years to come with the occupied forces manning the west; Bonn to the south had become the capital of Germany. In 1991, with the breakdown of 'communist' Russia and later the 'horror' wall, Berlin was once more restored to its former glory as capital. Buildings in the east that could not be restored were cleared creating chances for architects to use their creativity and hence a boom in construction. Historic buildings worth saving made way for restoration. Embassies were relocated and Berlin became a multi-national, multi-cultured city.

Berlin is green. Every householder practices recycling. Every street brandishes beautiful trees. Flowers abound. Parks and lakes seem to be on every corner. Canals with tour boats go through the city and its environs reminding one of Venice. Public transport is perfect and on time. In fact, it is now said that Berlin is the in-city with the rich and famous flocking there for partying in its various discos, rejuvenating in its huge spas or simply finding themselves riding around on bicycles looking for that special sidewalk café or restaurant. Theatres, musicals, art, museums of all types, cabaret and erotic shows, casinos and more...Berlin has it all. I even stood beneath the window where the famous photographs of Michael Jackson holding his son in the air were taken and on the steps where John Kennedy said "Ish bin ein Berliner" – repeated years later by our own Usain Bolt! I nicknamed Berlin the city of "pure freedom". Free is how I felt as I walked its streets, watched its people – the punks, the weird, the old and young with crazy hairstyles, tattoos and piercings. Free as I discov-



ered its open-air markets, floated through its stores of all types, shopped for delicious freshly baked breads, arrays of meats, vegetables and fruits at prices cheaper than at home. Of course, life is not as simple as this story, I worked my way through pages and pages of history wanting to understand this melee of past and modern life, the good and bad the city and its people went through - all extremely interesting and complicated as most history is but, one thing I admired is that Berliners just get on with it.

Now that our Jamaican and Caribbean athletes have made such a mark on this incredibly exciting city where historic buildings stand side-by-side with amazingly creative modern ones, islanders might feel more apt to visit Berlin. Everyone speaks English. Everyone knows Jamaica for sure! Even before the IAAF Berlin 2009 at Olympia began, billboards everywhere had a larger-than-life Usain Bolt advertising the upcoming event. And yes! I did go to Berlin's Olympia stadion - a stadium that the infamous Hitler built, an aesthetic construction beyond its time, standing proud, tall, innovative, and where in 1936 Germany's first and only Olympics took place. And yes! I dressed in Jamaica wear, brandished the flag and lived to see the Jamaican athletes, women and men, eat up the competition. They did us more than proud!

Now, for those who know me, it only stood to reason I would start snooping around for some Caribbean spots. First of all, let me explain, that in the summer, it appears Berlin has more Beach Bars than the Caribbean. Set against the walls of the canals, with deck chairs and beds poised on real white sand, with Caribbean cocktails ga-



lore, Berlin definitely says "island". I even saw a Beach Bar, thatched roof, sand and all in the middle of a modern mall as well as a juice bar with freshly-squeezed juices called Jamaica, Trinidad etc. Right on the edge of one of Berlin's canals, on StralauerPlatz is YAAM. Whilst this spot stands for Young African Art Market, this is where Puma held a gathering for Usain Bolt and the press. It is also where on a Sunday, in particular, Caribbean people from all walks of life who live in Berlin go to 'lime' and catch up on 'ole' talk' with each other. There's food cooking and drinks galore. The atmosphere is picnic-like and there are no frills but it is a fun place once the sun is out.

Jamerica on Akazienstrasse 10823 Berlin is owned by Jamerican Dennis Turner.

Dennis first came to Berlin in 1985 from New York as a member of the US army having studied Politics and History at Pennsylvania University. According to him "I fell in love with a beautiful blonde and here I am." Seeing a much required niche, and with his aunt, Donna Scott from Kingston (who has been in Berlin some 29 years and is passionate about cooking traditional Jamaican





food) Dennis opened this eatery. He has not looked back since. With dishes like Ackee & Salfish, Escoveitch Fish, Curry Goat and Rice & Peas, it stands to reason that this place attracts other Jamaicans. Met Black Kappa – a rising star on the German Reggae scene with a record close to No. 1 (August charts) who says: “Dis food is de bess, reminds me of home.”

My next stop would be Jamaican Barbara Saltman’s Ya Man Restaurant. Again, top of the line Jamaican traditional cuisine and beastly cold Red Stripes. Situated at Gotzkowskystrasse 10555 Berlin, this little restaurant is colourful and full of life. Barbara can oft be seen dancing to the rhythms of reggae showing passersby her pride of being Jamaican, topped only by the Jamaican colours of the place itself and the large Jamaican flag flying high over the streets of Berlin.

And now I’ve saved de bess fi lass! Taking Jamaican cuisine up a notch at RosaCaleta, Muskauerstrasser, 10997 Berlin, are Jamaicans Kirk Henry and Troy Lopez. “I am strictly the business side” says Kirk, whilst Troy looks after the kitchen. With a fusion of French, German and Jamai-



can, the culinary pleasures that comes out of this kitchen are delightful mouthfuls. Only opened at the beginning of year, this restaurant is already making a note on the trendy Berlin scene. Even Puma had them cooking up a storm for their events during the games! Kirk lets you know one time how he feels about home: “I hate being away for Jamaica for long, must go back and just be there, even if it is just for

day!”. He worked in the fashion industry for years in New York but always knew he was destined to do something more meaningful in his life. He took the chance, got his long time friend hyped up, found the spot in the city he loved – Berlin – and the rest is history. He has found his niche and so his business partner and Chef Troy who has this to say: “I have practiced all my life to get my grandfa-



ther's taste happening. I grew up in Jamaica watching him corn and jerk. Cooking is remembering. Food brings back memories. My grandmother too, her cooking was divine, she made the best liver and onions ever. I use my knowledge of those Jamaican aromas from their kitchen and then I concoct fusions with it. I cook healthy and creative, that is my motto. RosaCaleta will be here for a long time, trust me. So come back to us any time."

Funnily enough I had heard about these two from Colin Hilton (Guilt Trip, Kingston) but thought he had said Paris not Berlin. What a stroke of luck that through another Jamaican girl, a friend of a friend, I landed up outside their place. The restaurant décor is perfect – trendy, simplistic, clean lines with ever-changing art on the walls. And the food? Well, let's talk food baby! Troy served me a dish

called "Country Come To Town" – Pork Fillet marinated in Scotch Bonnet and Ginger marinade with Sweet Potato and Scallion Gnocchi accompanied by Poached Red Beets and a Red Wine Reduction. Wow! Flavours galore with every bite. For dessert there was a Berry Crumble made from scratch. Too good to be true. Daily offerings such as Inside Out Jerk Pork with RosaCaleta Red Sauce (a pineapple and mango hot sauce) and Plantain Gratin; Guava Jerk Chicken Breast with Rosemary & Thyme with Roasted Sweet Potatoes; Turkey Breast Strips cooked Rundown style with five different kinds of onions flavored with Scotch Bonnet, Thyme and cooked in Coconut Milk served on a rice-flour Crepe topped with Chili Threads are just part of what Troy just invents daily. Am hungry. I want to go back to Berlin....not next year...NOW! **HG**



AD SPACE

Entertaining at home

...without breaking
the pocket!

Get-togethers with friends and family need not be put on hold because money is “tight”. Having fun is even more important now and there are ways to entertain without breaking your pocket. Eating out or having fancy dinner parties may be costly but simpler ways of entertaining can sometimes be even much more fun.

What to do

How about holding a game night or afternoon? Ask your guests to bring whatever board games they may have. Trivia games are ideal for these but so too are dominoes, cards and scrabble.

Hold a movie night. Depending on your guests, this could have a theme say, Oscar winning movies or movies starring Denzel Washington or Meryl Streep. Renting or borrowing these will cost much less than going to the cinema. Have intermissions and serve popcorn and hotdogs.

Have a comedy party where your friends are invited to come with jokes for a “stand up comedian” section. Make sure they are told that jokes should be appropriate and tasteful.

Hold a party where children are really the focus. Have a concert and encourage them to display their talents whether in singing, dancing, poetry etc. Avoid giving prizes as this might make some feel left out. Cheers and encouragement should do.

An “oldies” party for the “elders” and “mommies” can be good. Lots of oldies music and chatter or dance. A part of the evening could be devoted to trivia questions on singers, their music, year, etc. Prepare these ahead of time and place in a box and have participants pick for a turn. This could lead to some exciting discussions and reminiscing.

Pool with friends and hold a backyard cookout and have lots of music and games.

Making food affordable

Entertaining on a budget is a lot easier when you entertain at home. By choosing the right menu you can keep cost down while serving delicious food. Rice and pasta dishes, for example, are quite filling, affordable, easy to make and can be made in several tasty ways. One pot meals such as soups are also cost efficient – just serve up with some hot rolls. Stewed peas and rice or chili and spaghetti are also other good options. With real friends you don’t have to lay

out an extensive buffet with several fancy options. Finger foods may need time to make but can also be tasty and do not have to cost a lot.

Dessert does not have to cost a whole lot either. A big homemade potato, cornmeal or bread pudding will go a long way and this can be served with a little ice-cream topping if you wish. Using pretty plates and dishes will make your presentation even more impressive.

Serving alcohol can add significantly to entertaining costs but is not absolutely necessary. Store bought juices can also be expensive so why not make juices from fruits in season? A cold glass of lemonade is always quite refreshing!

Splurging is not necessary to have a good party. What makes a memorable party is not food but the camaraderie and good music when included. Food should still be sufficient and tasty however. Start by making a budget, making a guest list and creating a menu which you can afford. Buy in bulk as much as possible to cut cost. Decorate your tables and garnish your food to make everything more attractive.

To keep the parties going, arrange with your friends to rotate holding get-togethers. These could be “potluck” parties where each person brings an item. One person has to organize this to avoid repeats. Another way to do this is for the host to provide the food with guest bringing liquor and dessert. Have fun! **HHG**





Jamaican Sorrel

Text: Janice Lindsay

It would not be surprising if there are those among us (Jamaicans) who are of the view that sorrel is indigenous to the island. And who could blame you? Every aspect of its processing, from planting to harvesting to brewing is undertaken with a flair that is distinctly Jamaican. To emphasize the point I will share with you my scattered childhood memories of this mystifying plant, memories which I suspect are synonymous with that of thousands of Jamaicans.

Officially known as the Roselle plant (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) Sorrel which is believed to be native to India and Malaysia has been bearing fruit in Jamaica for some time, with three known varieties – the “traditional red” reaped in the first and last quarter of the year, a “blood red” variety which bears all year round and a “white/green sorrel”, reaped in De-

cember. It is a curious-looking perennial herb – usually rising to about 60 cm in height- yet beautiful as a result of the mix of colours it carries when in bloom. You can enjoy its appetizing drink any time of year and in many different forms as we will soon learn as a result of recent research among local and overseas scientists. But more importantly Sorrel – its preparation and consumption- is a distinctive cultural experience and tradition that is deeply rooted in the Jamaican Christmas festive season.

How, when and where does “the experience” all begin? Depending on how much of a head-starter you are in coordinating Christmas activities in your household, and importantly your ingenious access to the sorrel plant, preparation may begin late spring to early summer. I was always fascinated with the keenness with which my Grandparents

approached Christmas, in particular, sorrel preparation. I can recall trudging one summer holiday to my Grandfather’s farm in the hills of Portland to watch him plant sorrel seeds. I remember his hearty laughter as he pointed out how much my sisters, cousins and I loved sorrel and soon we would once again be enjoying the juices of his labour. That seemed to make him extremely happy as he moved through the field whistling his favourite ‘digging’ tunes. On my part I was only too pleased to know that someone was already putting things in gear for my favourite time of the year!

Fast forward to December just about the time when we were getting ready for the Christmas break from school, and true to form my Grandfather’s labour was in evidence from the cellar of our family home to the large kitchen my Grandmother protected as her personal sanctuary. During Christmas however she was only too willing to welcome just about everyone to languish in the kitchen- but with an intended purpose! My grandmother got into the thick of things and made it tradition to extract what I was used to call the “red-heads” - the calyces - from the plant. It was a prickly and tedious affair based on what I saw, but the adults didn’t seem to mind because it was the experience that mattered most. Our closest neighbours, my Great-grandmother, Aunts and Uncles all dutifully reported for “the experience” and occasionally my Grandmother would “shew” us away when we got too close to “the pickings”, trying recklessly to touch the funnily shaped “heads” that were being taken from the plants. Ole’ time Christmas stories would unfold with much fan-fare and drama. As children we enjoyed this exchange, even though we would have heard bits and pieces of these very stories on other occasions. There was something simply special hearing my Great-grandmother talking about her childhood Christmases her small frame hunched over expertly picking the sorrel. My Aunt demonstrated far less expertise and occasionally mumbled about the pricks, but this was quickly forgotten the minute my Uncles began earnest plans for the annual family Christmas party. As I recall it the conversations always seemed to come full circle to “the experience” at hand as it always became apparent that sorrel was to be the beverage of choice for all the season’s festivities, and as such the huge bundles in waiting needed to be done to accommodate the long list of “beneficiaries”. A de-

lightful banter, competitive and often daring, would persist among the group about which household would produce the “sweetest” sorrel for the season. Bets were laid, and recipes were flying across the room for those who could be provoked into going more than the extra mile with certain ingredients.

After the picking ended the “red loot” was shared and many retreated to their respective kitchens to begin the brewing process. This is the part where it got all the more engaging for us children. The smells were unbelievably intoxicating, causing our eyes to water, and our lips and tongues to work over-time! There was a huge pot that would come out only once per year, and it was specifically for sorrel brewing with a few other smaller pots to carry the load. Water was left on to boil and was then poured over the sorrel, but even this was a concentrated process. Years later I learnt that you get better results if the water barely covers the sorrel. In other words, don’t stretch the red stuff – it’s a recipe for losing the richness of the calyces. The unmistakable waft of ginger permeated the air as the spice was grated and added to the mixture. Other assortments of spices including dried pimento berries, a favourite in many households and cinnamon leaves were added. After all the pots are laden with hot water, sorrel and spices, they are covered and left undisturbed over-night.

By mid-afternoon the following day the activities resumed. The brew was strained revealing a rich bright textured dark-red almost purple mixture. My grandfather would precipitously present himself at this time when it involved adding the Jamaican white rum, believed to be the “spirit” that distinguishes the Jamaican sorrel drink. Laughter would persist when he and my Grandmother playfully fussed about the quantity to douse in the mixture. Of course there was always a solution to this “spirited” debate. The sorrel for the children would be mixed separately from that of the adults and those who could not manage the vim of the rum. However, a word of caution to those who are not experts at preparing the drink - it is best to follow a recipe that provides recommended quantities of ingredients to be used, especially rum, wine and sweetening agents such as sugar or even syrup. Of course not all the mixture is sweetened at once. Rum or wine is added to the mixture and then poured into glass bottles. The afternoon when the first “sweetening”

took place, however, dinner would be a treat as tall glasses of the “red stuff” flowed freely and everyone enjoyed the token samples of what was to come throughout December into January.

Served with Christmas pudding, children did not need to be coerced into taking a drink of sorrel; neither did parents find themselves having to preach about its nutritional value. The research into the sorrel plant has been extensive in recent years, and its nutritional and medicinal value is widely documented. Among the early facts known about the plant is that it is rich in Vitamin C, calcium and other minerals and antioxidants. Dietitian and Nutritionist Rosalee Brown in a Gleaner Column of December, 2008 notes, “the plant’s medicinal value has been respected for centuries in Africa and Mexico where teas made from the calyces are traditional folk medicine treatments for a variety of ailments including high blood pressure.” Jamaicanteas.com further states, “Researchers in Britain are...testing the plant’s effect on hypertension. At the Mexican Institute of Social Security, ‘sorrel water’ was linked to a significant decline in cholesterol and triglyceride levels in the blood and also to protect against heart disease...It is also a good habit to consume sorrel water daily to decrease the risk of heart disease.” But perhaps the most impacting scientific research linked to sorrel is related to cancer, which according to the Cancer Registry at the University of the West Indies, is among the leading causes of death in Jamaica and the Caribbean. The Scientific Research Council (SRC) which has been leading the development of the sorrel industry in Jamaica is keen on highlighting the health benefits of the plant, particularly the benefits of a group of compounds present in sorrel called Flavonoids. According to the SRC, “Flavonoids not only give its deep red colour but are now being recognized as a powerful antioxidant which scavenges the body of free radicals that can cause deadly diseases if they are not removed from the body. It is also believed that the FLAVONOIDS present in sorrel may be a useful deterrent against certain types of cancer...” The SRC is also reporting that recent studies conducted by the Northern Caribbean University (NCU) revealed that sorrel could kill certain types of cancer cells. Sorrel is also said to be effective against fever, chronic bronchitis, stomach cramps and nausea.

With the growing body of research comes even more innovative by-products of the sorrel plant which are in part responsible for the year round availability of the delicacy many can’t seem to get enough of. The Jamaican product line, Caribbean Dreams now carries the Jamaican Sorrel and Ginger tea which is fast becoming a favourite at brunches and tea time, while the cold beverage counter-part from another local entity Tru-Juice is popular in shops, supermarkets, fast food establishments and restaurants. Sorrel chutney is also very popular, and the plant is used to create the sweet and savoury including jellies, sauces, an assortment of desserts and soups.

My Grandparents left behind an unforgettable experience that remains a tangible part of my family’s Christmas. As adults our Christmases do not include the prickly preparation process, but everything else remains as I remembered in my early childhood. The numbers are not as many, but the presence of people is a constant. The stories remain over the brewing process, and sharing the finished product is a given. Of course the smells and the taste complete what continues to be a treasured tradition. As you try your hand at this special HHG Magazine sorrel recipe be reminded, Jamaican Sorrel is more than a drink, it is a truly ‘spirited’ traditional experience – for your family enjoyment! **HHG**



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