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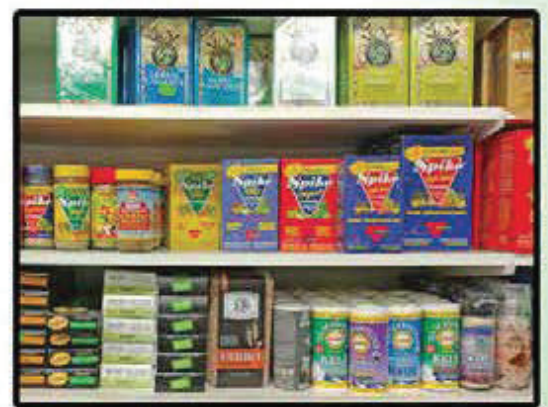
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contents

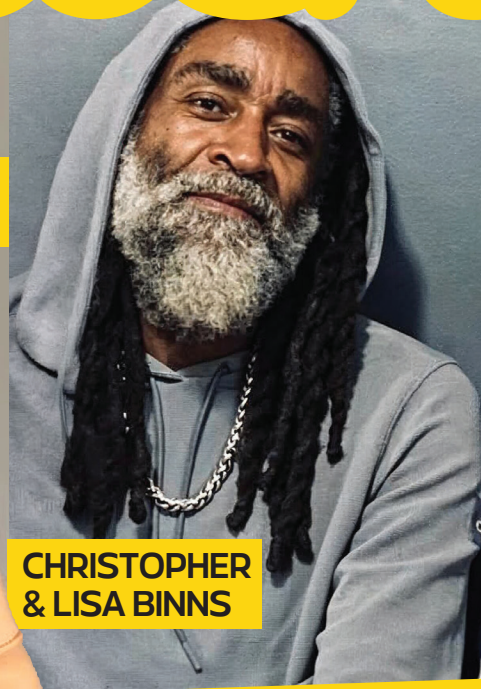
14-16

COVER STORY

THE ERA OF
QUIET LUXURY
& RESTORATIVE
TRAVEL



ASHLEY
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CHRISTOPHER
& LISA BINNS



06

PUBLISHER'S VIBE

Purposeful Thinking: A New Priority For Our Time

07

CULTURE

How Bad Bunny Brought the issue of Puerto Rico's Power Grid into world view



09
10

ENTERTAINMENT

Island to Everywhere: The Next-Gen Caribbean Sound taking over the world



Skippa



Keznamdi



Anika Berry



Ayetian



Young Bredda



17

LIFESTYLE

Treshana Gaskin Rooted in Heritage, Driven by purpose



19-20

HEALTH

Health insurance jargon can be frustrating and confusing. Here's how to navigate



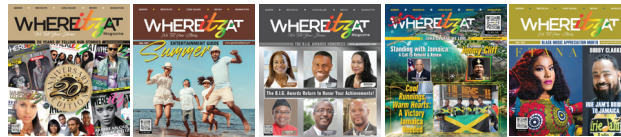
21

BUSINESS

The Quiet Strength of Roderick Barrett: Building Community Through Purpose and Flavor

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Purposeful Thinking

A New Priority for Our Time

By **DR. CLIVE WILLIAMS, BHIM** / Publisher / Editor-in-Chief

There comes a moment in the life of everyone, when survival is no longer enough, when existence must give way to intention, and reaction must give way to design. I believe we are at that moment now.

Across Black and Brown communities in America, we are facing an increasingly complex social and economic reality. The pressures are real. The disparities are measurable. The frustrations are justified. But in the midst of all that we face, I propose that we confront a deeper question, one that may very well determine our future:

ARE WE THINKING PURPOSEFULLY ABOUT THE LIVES WE ARE TRYING TO BUILD?

For too long, many of our decisions have been shaped by our circumstances rather than proactive clarity, by urgency rather than strategy. We have mastered the art of resilience, but resilience alone is not a roadmap to prosperity. If we are to truly move forward, we must embrace what I call **Purposeful Thinking**, a deliberate, disciplined, and forward-looking approach to how we live, decide, and act.

This idea is not new. In fact, it is rooted in some of the most powerful western philosophical traditions known to mankind.

The writer Robert Byrne once said, *“The purpose of life is a life of purpose.”* That simple statement carries profound weight. It reminds us that life is not merely something to be endured, it is something to be directed. Without purpose, life becomes a series of reactions. With purpose, it becomes a strategy.

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates pushed this even further when he declared, “An unexamined life is not worth living.” In other words, we must take the time to reflect, to question, and to understand the “why” behind our actions. **Purposeful Thinking** begins with examination of our habits, our priorities, and our direction.

No voice speaks more powerfully to this idea than Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor who endured unimaginable suffering yet emerged with a profound insight: that that human beings can endure almost anything if they have a reason, a meaning, something to hold onto. In his work on the search for meaning, Frankl teaches us that purpose is

not a luxury, it is a necessity; it is the anchor that keeps us grounded in the most turbulent times.

And then there is Ralph Waldo Emerson, who challenged us to recognize our own agency in shaping our lives. Emerson believed that each individual has a responsibility to pursue their purpose with courage and conviction, rather than conforming to the expectations of others.

Taken together, these thinkers offer us a powerful truth - **PURPOSE IS NOT ACCIDENTAL, IT IS INTENTIONAL.**

And that is precisely where our communities must now focus.

Purposeful Thinking requires us to ask different questions. Not just “*What are we going through?*” but “*What are we building?*” Not just “*Why is this happening to us?*” but “*What can we control, and how do we leverage it?*” It challenges us to shift from short-term reactions to long-term vision.

What does that look like in practice?

It means prioritizing education not just as a requirement, but as a strategy. It means approaching economics with intention, understanding the power of ownership, savings, and investment.

It means being disciplined in our choices, recognizing that every decision either moves us closer to or further away from our desired future.

And perhaps most importantly, it means thinking beyond ourselves, considering how our actions today will impact the next generation tomorrow.



This is not easy work. Purposeful Thinking demands accountability. It requires us to confront uncomfortable truths about where we are and what we must change. But it also offers something incredibly powerful: control.

When we think purposefully, we are no longer drifting, we are directing. We are no longer simply responding, we are creating.

Let me be clear, this is not about ignoring the systemic challenges that exist. Those challenges are real, and they must be addressed. But while we fight to change systems, we must also strengthen our thinking. Because systems may shape our environment but ***thinking shapes our decisions, and decisions shape our destiny.***

So, I offer this as both a challenge and an invitation.

Let us begin to think with purpose.

Let us examine our lives with honesty. Let us define what we truly want, not just for ourselves, but for our families and our communities, and then, let us align our actions with that vision, day by day, decision by decision.

If we do this consistently and collectively, we will begin to see a shift. Not just in outcomes, but in mindset. Not just in circumstances, but in trajectory.

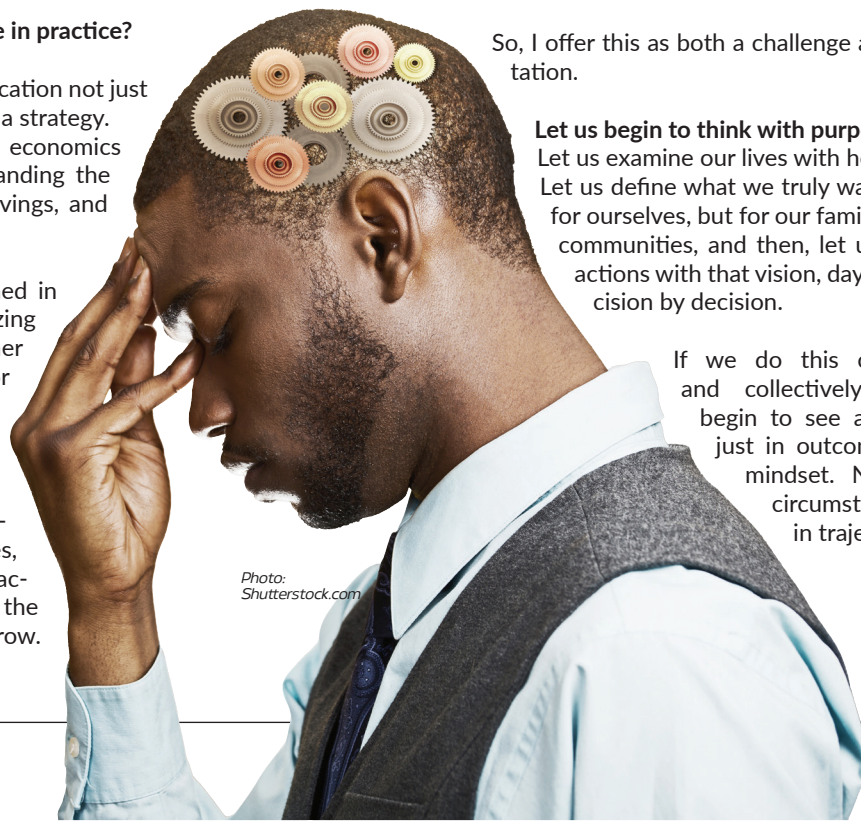


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culture

HOW BAD BUNNY BROUGHT THE ISSUE OF PUERTO RICO'S POWER GRID INTO WORLD VIEW



Written by Vishal Yashoda & Ashmi Guevara / This story was originally published on GlobalVoices.org

Super Bowl halftime shows are always a spectacle, but at Super Bowl LX, Puerto Rican artist Bad Bunny did something unusual: he crafted a compelling masterclass in energy communications by turning electricity infrastructure into perfectly timed choreography.

As he performed his song “El Apagón” (“The Blackout”), dancers dressed as line workers climbed utility poles while sparks flickered along power lines. For millions watching around the world, it was a striking visual moment. For Puerto Ricans, it reflected an everyday reality, a fragile electricity grid and recurring power outages that have — for years — shaped daily life on the island.

As Diana Hernández, professor and co-director of the Energy Opportunity Lab at Columbia University, later noted to Straight Arrow News, “For the public that might have forgotten, Bad Bunny climbing the poles gave voice and visibility to an unforgettable instance of being powerless in Puerto Rico in a very literal sense.”

Without once referring to terms like “climate change,” the performance illustrated a moment of energy communication that millions could immediately comprehend, not just locally but globally:

Because of the urgent

and far-reaching nature of the issue, climate science and the resulting communication about the situation are often linked to an increase in existential anxiety. Yet, programs like the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and children’s books by authors like New York-based writer Ian Hunt, aim to tackle the problem at a systemic level.

STRAINED GRID

Puerto Rico’s electricity system has faced repeated crises since Hurricane Maria devastated the island in 2017. The storm destroyed much of the grid and triggered the longest blackout in modern U.S. history, leaving some communities without power for nearly a year. Nearly nine years later, outages still remain a routine occurrence.

Federal data show that between 2021 and 2024, Puerto Rican customers experienced roughly 27 hours of electricity interruptions annually, excluding major storms — far higher than mainland U.S. averages. In 2024 alone, residents averaged more than 70 hours without power, including storm-related outages.

Meanwhile, electricity prices also remain among the highest in the United States, ranging from USD 0.24 to 0.49 per kilowatt-hour in recent years, significantly above mainland averages. These figures reflect

decades of underinvestment, ageing infrastructure, and a grid exposed to intensifying climate risks — but numbers alone cannot capture what a blackout means in lived terms: spoiled food, stalled dialysis machines, closed businesses, and children slouching under the flashlight to complete school homework.

DYING ENERGY SYSTEMS

Puerto Rico’s electricity system relies heavily on centralized fossil-fuel generation plants located in the south of the island. Electricity must travel long distances across mountainous terrain to reach major population centres in the north. These transmission corridors are particularly vulnerable to hurricanes, landslides, and extreme weather events.

Meanwhile, the American Society of Civil Engineers’ 2019 Puerto Rico Infrastructure Report Card gave the island’s energy system a grade of F, citing deteriorating equipment, insufficient redundancy, and limited resilience planning. Energy scholar Cecilio Ortiz García described the system bluntly: “The grid that Maria found was already on its knees.”

Climate change has since intensified the risks. Warmer ocean temperatures contribute to stronger storms, and subsequent hurricanes such as Fiona in 2022 again triggered widespread outages. In a system already weakened by decades of underinvestment, even smaller disturbances can trigger cascading failures for locals.



FOR MILLIONS, IT WAS A STRIKING VISUAL MOMENT; FOR PUERTO RICANS, IT REFLECTED AN EVERYDAY REALITY



Community-led initiatives have also emerged. In the mountain town of Adjuntas, the nonprofit Casa Pueblo has pioneered solar microgrids that allow neighbourhoods and businesses to continue operating even when the central grid fails. One local business owner described the change simply: “Now I have stability. I don’t run out of power, and I can continue to provide service.”

Engineers increasingly advocate what they call a “bottom-up grid” approach, building resilience through distributed energy systems that connect households, neighbourhoods, and eventually larger networks. For island regions vulnerable to hurricanes and extreme weather, distributed systems offer both decarbonisation and energy security.

POP CULTURE AS CLIMATE COMMUNICATION

This is exactly what made Bad Bunny’s halftime show so critical. Climate communication often relies on statistics, policy debates, or projections about future risks. While important, those messages can feel abstract – but cultural storytelling works differently.

By placing “linieros” – the workers who repair Puerto Rico’s power lines – at the centre of a global performance, Bad Bunny made the island’s infrastructure and its failings visible. Transmission poles became stage props; blackouts became lyrics.

As Hernández observed, the moment represented “an ascension to power despite all the challenges, and really in many ways against all odds.” Millions watching the Super Bowl suddenly saw what was usually hidden: the physical systems that keep societies running, and the consequences when they fail.

INVESTMENT CHALLENGES

In 2021, Puerto Rico transferred management of its transmission and distribution network to LUMA Energy, a U.S.-Canadian consortium, in an attempt to modernise operations. However, the privatisation effort has been controversial.

Locals have protested frequent outages and rising electricity bills, while critics argue that improvements in reliability have been slow. Supporters counter that rebuilding an ageing grid requires time and sustained investment.

Financial constraints further complicate the situation. Puerto Rico’s public power utility, PREPA, carries billions of dollars in debt, making large infrastructure upgrades difficult to finance. Federal assistance has also fluctuated. In 2023, the U.S. Department of Energy launched a USD 1 billion Puerto Rico Energy Resilience Fund aimed at expanding rooftop solar and battery storage for vulnerable households, but later reporting indicated that portions of this funding were delayed or redirected.

Despite these challenges, a transformation is underway, and rooftop solar and battery storage have expanded rapidly across Puerto Rico. By mid-2025, the island had



installed more than one gigawatt of rooftop solar capacity, supplying a growing share of electricity demand.

Meanwhile, Puerto Rico’s energy future remains uncertain. Debates continue over privatisation, fossil-fuel dependence, renewable deployment, and how quickly the island can transition to a more resilient energy system, but the halftime show revealed something unexpected: infrastructure can capture cultural attention. The electricity grid – normally invisible to the public – briefly became the focus of a global conversation.

Puerto Rico’s grid crisis is not unique. Around the world, energy systems face mounting pressures from climate change, outdated infrastructure, and rising demand. The difference is that most grids do not get a Super Bowl moment. Bad Bunny did not lecture audiences about climate change or energy policy. Instead, he showed what vulnerability looks like – and sometimes, that’s the most powerful communication of all.

Island to Everywhere

The Next-Gen Caribbean Sound Taking Over The World

By Chris Godfrey

For decades, Caribbean music has shaped the global soundscape, often without receiving full credit.

From reggae's spiritual pulse to dancehall's raw storytelling and soca's euphoric energy, the islands have always been a source of rhythm, rebellion, and reinvention. But in 2026, something feels different. This isn't influence from the margins. This is domination from the center.

A new generation of Caribbean artists are emerging with a fearless approach to sound, blending traditional riddims with global genres like rage rap, R&B, Afrobeats, and electronic music. They're not asking for crossover moments; they're creating music that exists naturally across borders.

The result? Billboard recognition. Grammy wins. Viral global records. And most importantly, a shift in how Caribbean music is positioned, not as a niche, but as a driving force in contemporary culture.

Artists like Skippa, Ayetian, Keznamdi, Anika Berry, and Yung Bredda are at the forefront of this movement. Each represents a different corner of the Caribbean sonic spectrum, but together they tell a unified story: the islands are no longer influencing the world quietly, they're setting the tempo.

Ayetian

The Sound of Diaspora in Motion

Ayetian's music doesn't just represent a place, it represents a journey.

With roots spanning Jamaica and Haiti, his sound reflects the layered identity of the Caribbean diaspora. It's dancehall, but it's also kompa. It's melodic, but it carries an undercurrent of grit. It's local, yet unmistakably global.

This duality has become his signature.

Ayetian has quickly emerged as one of the most compelling new voices in Caribbean music, earning a spot on Billboard's "Artists to Watch" list and drawing attention for his genre-blending approach. His records often feel like conversations between cultures, merging rhythmic traditions with contemporary production that leans into R&B and Afrobeats influences.

"My sound is a bridge—Jamaica, Haiti, the world... it's all one story."

What makes Ayetian's rise particularly significant is his intentionality. Every element of his music, from

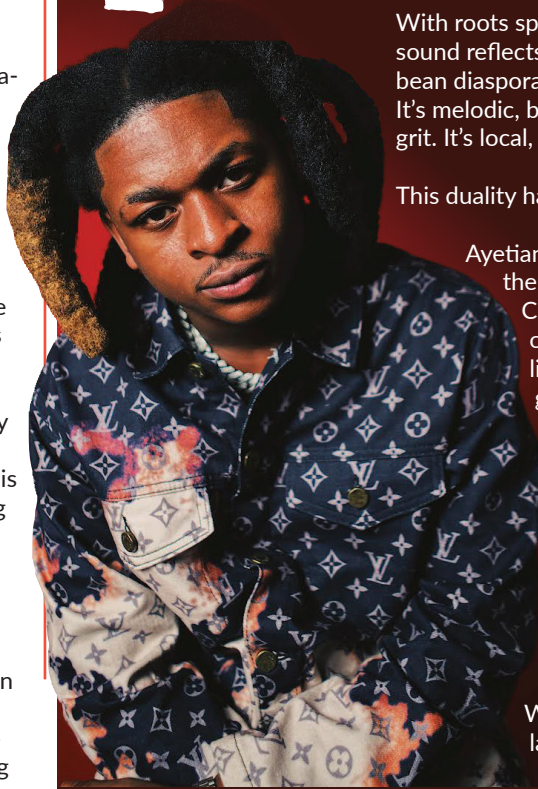
language to instrumentation, feels carefully constructed to reflect a broader narrative about identity, migration, and connection.

His vocal style moves fluidly between melodic phrasing and rhythmic delivery, allowing him to navigate multiple genres without losing cohesion. This versatility has made him especially appealing to international audiences, who are increasingly drawn to artists who blur boundaries.

Beyond the music, Ayetian's presence signals a shift in how Caribbean identity is expressed. He represents a generation that sees no contradiction in being both deeply rooted and globally influenced.

His growing fanbase across North America, Europe, and the Caribbean is proof that this approach resonates.

As the industry continues to embrace multicultural storytelling, Ayetian stands as a powerful example of what the future of Caribbean music looks and sounds like.



SKIPPA

Dancehall's Raw New Voice with Global Edge

Hailing from Jamaica, Skippa represents a new era of dancehall, one that is unfiltered, aggressive, and globally aware.

His rise has been fueled by a sound that feels both deeply rooted and radically forward. At its core, Skippa's music carries the DNA of traditional dancehall: gritty storytelling, street authenticity, and rhythmic command. But layered on top are sonic influenc-

es pulled from outside the Caribbean, distorted basslines, trap-inspired flows, and the high-octane intensity of rage rap.

This fusion has made him one of the most talked-about emerging artists in the region, earning him recognition on Billboard's coveted "Artists to Watch" list, an acknowledgment that signals his potential to break far beyond Jamaica's borders.

What sets Skippa apart is his refusal to sanitize his message. His delivery is sharp, often confrontational, and intentionally raw, mirroring the realities he represents. Yet, within that intensity is a calculated artistry that resonates with younger audiences navigating a similarly complex world.

"I'm not here to fit in—I'm here to shift the sound."

Skippa's growing catalog reflects a clear evolution. His early releases leaned heavily into traditional dancehall structures, but recent tracks show a willingness to experiment with pacing, production, and vocal texture. This adaptability has positioned him as a bridge between generations, connecting dancehall purists with a new global audience.

His performances carry the same energy. On stage, Skippa commands attention with a presence that feels both chaotic and controlled, a reflection of the sound he's helping to define.

As dancehall continues to expand its global footprint, Skippa stands at the edge of that movement, pushing it into new, uncharted territory.

Anika Berry:

Redefining Soca for A Global Audience

Soca has long been synonymous with celebration, but Anika Berry is expanding its purpose.

Emerging as one of the leading female voices in the genre, Berry represents a new wave of soca artists who are thinking beyond Carnival and into global longevity. Her music maintains the high-energy, percussive core that defines soca, but introduces a level of polish and versatility that allows it to travel.

Her rise has been marked by consistent releases that resonate both on the road and on streaming platforms, positioning her as a key figure in soca's international expansion.

"Soca isn't just a season, it's a sound that deserves to live all year."

Berry's approach reflects a broader shift within the genre. Where soca was once primarily tied to spe-

cific moments, Carnival, fetes and summer festivals, artists like her are pushing for year-round relevance.

Her vocal delivery balances power and melody, allowing her to move seamlessly between high-energy anthems and more radio-friendly tracks. This adaptability has helped her connect with audiences beyond the Caribbean, particularly in diaspora communities hungry for representation.

As a woman in a space that has historically been male-dominated, Berry's presence also carries significance. She's not just participating in the evolution of soca, she's helping to lead it.

Her growing influence signals a future where soca is not just exported, but fully integrated into the global music ecosystem.



Yung Bredda:

Pushing Soca into New Territory

If tradition defines the foundation of soca, Yung Bredda is focused on its evolution.

Known for his experimental approach, the Caribbean artist is part of a new class redefining what soca can sound like. His music blends traditional percussion with elements of hip-hop, electronic music, and global pop, creating a hybrid sound that feels both familiar and entirely new.

This willingness to push boundaries has made him a standout among younger audiences, who are less interested in genre purity and more drawn to sonic innovation.

"We grew up on everything, so why should our sound stay in one box?"

Yung Bredda's rise reflects a generational shift. Today's listeners are consuming music across platforms and cultures, and his sound mirrors that reality. His tracks are built for movement, but also for replay, structured in a way that translates from Carnival trucks to international playlists.

His performances capture that same energy. Whether in intimate venues or large festival settings, Yung Bredda brings a dynamic presence that keeps audiences engaged.

More importantly, his work represents a broader evolution within Caribbean music, one where experimentation is not only accepted, but expected.

As soca continues to expand its reach, artists like Yung Bredda are ensuring that it doesn't just grow, it transforms.

Keznamdi:

Carrying the Roots into the Future

"Reggae has always been global. I'm just continuing that conversation in a new language."

BLXXD & FYAH stands as a defining project, not just for Keznamdi, but for reggae's current evolution. The album balances introspection with urgency, addressing themes of identity, resistance, and spiritual grounding while maintaining a sonic richness that appeals across generations.

His Grammy win marked a significant moment for Caribbean music, reinforcing reggae's relevance in a rapidly shifting musical landscape.

Keznamdi's performances further underscore his artistry. Backed by live instrumentation, his shows carry an authenticity that contrasts sharply with the digital-heavy direction of much of today's music. It's a reminder of reggae's origins and its enduring power.

As new artists push boundaries, Keznamdi ensures that the foundation remains intact. His success demonstrates that innovation and tradition are not opposing forces, they're complementary.

In the story of Caribbean music's global rise, Keznamdi is both a guardian of its roots and a guide to its future.



In a landscape defined by experimentation, Keznamdi offers something equally powerful: continuity.

The Jamaican artist, who took home the 2026 Grammy Award for Best Reggae Album with BLXXD & FYAH, represents a lineage that stretches back to reggae's golden era while firmly planting itself in the present.

His music is rooted in the genre's traditional pillars, conscious lyrics, live instrumentation, and a deep sense of purpose. But Keznamdi's approach is anything but nostalgic. Instead, he reimagines reggae through a modern lens, incorporating contemporary production techniques and global influences that make his work accessible to a wider audience.

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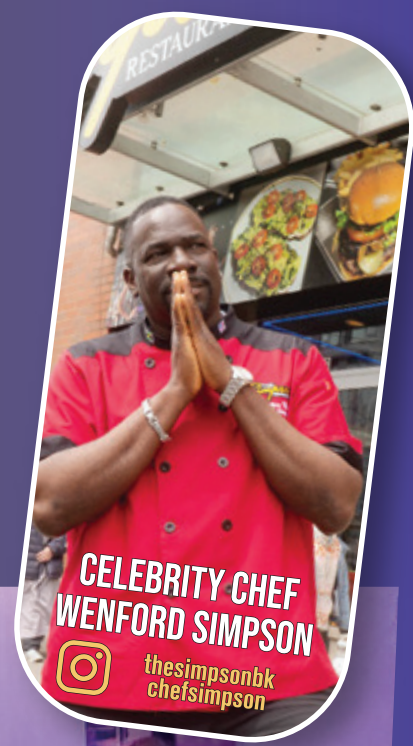


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cover story

THE ERA OF QUIET LUXURY & Restorative Travel

How the Caribbean is
Redefining
High-End Escape

By Chris Godfrey

IN 2026, luxury no longer announces itself, it whispers. Across the Caribbean, a new travel ethos is taking hold: one defined not by excess, but by intention. Travelers are trading crowded resorts and curated spectacle for what insiders are calling “quiet luxury”, low-density escapes rooted in nature, culture, and personal restoration.

This shift is giving rise to a different kind of destination: private villas tucked into hill-sides, farm-to-table experiences that feel personal rather than performative, and wellness practices that are embedded in everyday life, not staged for social media. It’s not just about where you stay, it’s about how you feel when you leave.

At the center of this movement are a new class of cultural stewards, environmental advocates, and hospitality innovators shaping a Caribbean that is both elevated and grounded. Among them are Christopher and Lisa Binns of Jamaica’s Stush in the Bush, and Barbadian climate leader Ashley Lashley, voices redefining what luxury truly means in the region.



over sto



CHRISTOPHER & LISA BINNS

Where the Land Leads: The Soul of Quiet Luxury at Stush in the Bush



staged views—yet travelers from around the world make the pilgrimage to Stush in the Bush, seeking an experience that feels both elevated and deeply human.

What the Binns offer is not spectacle—it’s stillness. And in today’s evolving travel landscape, that has become one of the most coveted luxuries of all.

Stush in the Bush was never designed to compete with Jamaica’s resort industry. Instead, it emerged organically from the couple’s shared commitment to Ital living, sustainable agriculture, and conscious consumption. Their hillside property operates as a working farm, where nearly every ingredient served is grown, harvested, and prepared on-site. Guests are invited into an experience that is immersive rather than transactional—where meals are not rushed, and connection is not curated.

“Luxury, for us, is being able to sit, breathe, and eat from the earth without interruption.”

This philosophy sits at the heart of the Caribbean’s shift toward “quiet luxury”—a movement that prioritizes privacy, authenticity, and restoration over volume and visibility. At Stush, there are no crowds to navigate, no schedules to chase. Instead, there is space—to think, to reconnect, to simply be.

Christopher Binns, whose roots in farming run deep, has cultivated the land with a reverence that reflects both tradition and innovation. Breadfruit, callaloo, turmeric, and a rotating array of seasonal crops form the backbone of their menu. Lisa, a trained chef, transforms these ingredients into vibrant, plant-based dishes that challenge long-held assumptions about Caribbean cuisine.

Together, they have created a dining experience that feels

less like a service and more like a story unfolding in real time.

“People don’t just come here to eat,” Lisa explains. “They come here to feel something they’ve been missing.”

That “something” is increasingly rare in global travel, a sense of grounding that cannot be manufactured. As high-end travelers move away from crowded destinations and toward more intentional escapes, Stush in the Bush has become a symbol of what the future of Caribbean tourism could look like: low-impact, high-touch, and rooted in place.

But the Binns’ impact extends beyond hospitality. Their work intersects with broader conversations around sustainability, food sovereignty, and cultural preservation. By centering local agriculture and Ital traditions, they are not only feeding their guests—they are reshaping narratives around what Caribbean luxury can and should be.

In many ways, Stush in the Bush represents a quiet rebellion against excess. It challenges the idea that luxury must be loud, visible, or performative. Instead, it offers a more enduring proposition: that true luxury lies in access—to nature, to nourishment, and to oneself.

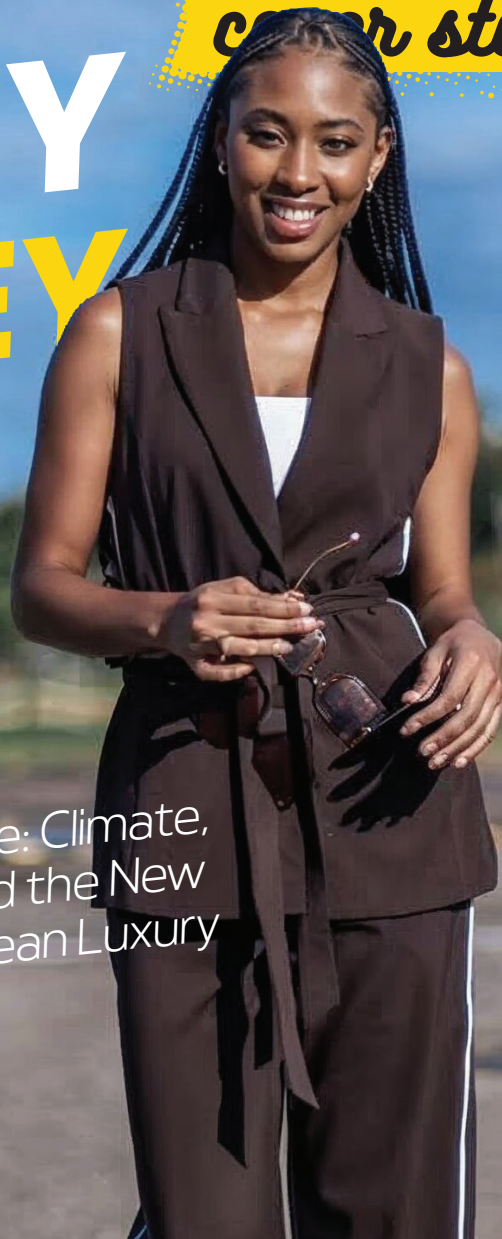
“The real richness is in the simplicity,” Christopher reflects. “Everything else is just noise.”

As the Caribbean continues to redefine high-end travel, voices like the Binns are leading the way, not by scaling up, but by staying grounded. In a world that often equates more with better, Stush in the Bush is a reminder that sometimes, less is exactly what we’ve been searching for.

In the hills of St. Ann, where the air feels cleaner and time moves with intention, Christopher and Lisa Binns have built something that defies the traditional definition of luxury. There are no marble lobbies, no infinity pools overlooking

ASHLEY LASHLEY

career story



Guarding the Future: Climate, Consciousness, and the New Currency of Caribbean Luxury

If quiet luxury is defined by pristine landscapes, unspoiled coastlines, and the ability to disconnect in peace, then Ashley Lashley is working to protect the very foundation on which that experience depends.

A Barbadian climate activist, former Miss World Barbados, and founder of the Ashley Lashley Foundation, Lashley has emerged as one of the Caribbean's most influential voices on sustainability and environmental justice. Her work underscores a critical reality: the future of Caribbean tourism is inseparable from the health of its ecosystems.

In an era where travelers are increasingly seeking restorative, nature-driven experiences, the region's environmental integrity has become its most valuable, and vulnerable asset.

"WE OFTEN MARKET THE CARIBBEAN AS PARADISE," LASHLEY SAYS. "BUT PARADISE REQUIRES PROTECTION."

Lashley's advocacy began at a young age, rooted in a deep connection to Barbados' coastlines and communities. Over time, her work has expanded to the global stage, where she represents the interests of Small Island Developing States

(SIDS), regions that contribute the least to climate change, yet face some of its most severe consequences.

From rising sea levels to coral reef degradation, the threats are both immediate and long-term. And as the Caribbean positions itself as a leader in eco-conscious travel, these challenges cannot be ignored.

"SUSTAINABILITY IS NO LONGER A NICHE CONVERSATION," LASHLEY EMPHASIZES. "IT'S THE BASELINE FOR SURVIVAL, AND FOR GROWTH."

Her voice has resonated in international forums, including the United Nations, where she advocates for climate financing, youth engagement, and policy reform. But her impact is equally powerful at the grassroots level. Through her foundation, Lashley has spearheaded initiatives focused on environmental education, community resilience, and youth empowerment, ensuring that the next generation is equipped to lead.

This dual approach, global influence paired with local action, positions her as a key figure in shaping the Caribbean's tourism future.

As developers and hospitality brands lean into the aesthetics

of quiet luxury, secluded villas, eco-resorts, immersive nature experiences, Lashley's work raises an essential question: Who is protecting the environments that make these experiences possible?

Her presence in this narrative shifts the conversation from consumption to stewardship.

"TRUE LUXURY ISN'T JUST ABOUT ACCESS," SHE NOTES. "IT'S ABOUT RESPONSIBILITY, ABOUT LEAVING A PLACE BETTER THAN YOU FOUND IT."

That mindset is beginning to take hold across the region, influencing how properties are built, how experiences are curated, and how travelers engage with their surroundings. Low-density development, renewable energy integration, and community-centered tourism are no longer optional, they are becoming defining features of high-end Caribbean travel.

Lashley stands at the intersection of these



changes, advocating for a model of tourism that is both aspirational and accountable.

In many ways, she represents the future of the Caribbean's global identity, one that balances beauty with purpose, and luxury with longevity.

"WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO REDEFINE WHAT THE CARIBBEAN REPRESENTS," LASHLEY SAYS. "NOT JUST AS A DESTINATION, BUT AS A LEADER."

As the era of quiet luxury continues to unfold, it is voices like Ashley Lashley's that ensure the movement is not only sustainable, but meaningful. Because in the end, the true measure of luxury is not just how a place makes you feel,

Treshana Gaskin

Rooted in Heritage, Driven by Purpose

By Nickie Robinson

Rooted in heritage and driven by intention, her story reflects the quiet power of culture shaping both identity and ambition. Brooklyn-based hairstylist Treshana Gaskin, professionally known as Shana, has built a career centered on intention, versatility, and a deep commitment to healthy hair. With more than ten years in the beauty industry, her path has been defined by patience and discipline—spending years assisting established stylists, refining her skills behind the scenes, before earning her license in 2019 and stepping fully into her own.

Growing up in a Guyanese household laid a foundation that continues to influence not only who she is as a woman, but how she shows up as a creative. As a first-generation American, she witnessed firsthand the shift her parents made—from lives defined by limitation to one centered on possibility. Their journey to America was not simply about survival, but about expansion, and that perspective became deeply embedded in her own outlook on life. Opportunity was never something to take lightly; it was something to honor. That awareness instilled resilience and gratitude in her personal life, and a sense of ambition in her creative pursuits. She understands that her path is built on sacrifice, and that truth continues to push her to think beyond what feels comfortable or expected.

The influence of her upbringing is not always found in grand gestures, but in the small, consistent traditions that still shape her daily life. Morning tea, monthly spiritual baths, and routine cleanses were not just habits—they were practices rooted in care, discipline, and protection. Even something as simple as never sharing combs or always keeping “vex money” as a backup plan reflects a deeper philosophy of self-preservation and independence. These rituals, though subtle, taught her to be mindful of her energy, her body, and her boundaries. Today, those same principles show up in her work ethic, reinforcing a sense of intentionality in everything she does.

As someone of Guyanese descent, she recognizes that her culture is often misunderstood or overlooked within the beauty industry. Guyana’s identity—South American by geography and Caribbean in culture—is not always clearly defined in mainstream spaces. As a result, the diversity of textures, traditions, and experiences within her culture is often grouped into broader categories, rather than being understood on its own terms. While awareness is slowly growing, she believes there is still space for deeper education and visibility.



lifestyle

That awareness influences how she approaches her brand and the experience she creates for her clients. Her connection to her heritage is expressed through intention, particularly in her appreciation for natural elements and holistic practices. Drawn to herbs and plant-based remedies, she envisions a future where those traditions could be incorporated into her own product line. At its core, her brand is about intentional beauty—prioritizing protection, care, and the honoring of what is natural before attempting to alter it.

Her relationship with hair began in a way that many can relate to—through routine and discipline rather than artistry. Growing up, hair was less about elaborate styling and more about presentation. It was expected to be neat, brushed, and maintained, especially for school. Looking “put together” was seen as a reflection of respect, and that mindset has stayed with her over time. Weekly braiding became a regular part of her routine, often done by her grandmother when her mother felt less confident in her technique. The styles themselves were simple and practical, but they carried a deeper significance.

It was not until she experienced teasing about her hair that something shifted. Feeling like she was falling behind compared to her peers sparked a desire to learn and take control. That moment, though challenging at the time, became a turning point. It pushed her toward developing her own skills, building both confidence and independence. What began as a response to insecurity eventually became a foundation for her craft.

While she did not grow up with formal lessons in traditional haircare, there were still unspoken practices that shaped her understanding. One of the most impactful was the idea of protection—specifically, being mindful of who has access to your hair. Even without being framed as a ritual, that boundary carried weight and stayed with her. Over time, her approach to hair evolved through personal experience rather than environmental factors. Navigating different spaces—home, school, and salon environments—taught her that no single method works for everyone. This realization is what informs her individualized approach today, where she prioritizes understanding each client’s unique texture and needs rather than applying a one-size-fits-all mindset.

Her journey into the beauty industry was shaped less by cultural barriers and more by the mindset instilled in her from a young age. Growing up in a Caribbean household often meant equating productivity with worth. Rest was not always seen as valuable, and being idle could be mistaken for laziness. That perspective, rooted in generations of survival and economic hardship, influenced how she approached her work. She learned early on to keep moving, to keep building, and to stay active.

At times, that mentality created an internal pressure to constantly prove herself. It was not necessarily about



external expectations, but an internalized belief that she needed to outwork any obstacle in front of her. While there is strength in that drive, there is also a need to unlearn the idea that rest is something to fear. Slowing down once felt uncomfortable, even risky, but it became a necessary part of her growth.

Without a clear blueprint to follow, she knew she would have to carve her own path. Her parents’ lives looked different at her age, and she did not have the same structure or timeline to guide her decisions. Instead, she navigated

life independently—learning how to manage herself financially, emotionally, and spiritually. That independence became the foundation of her hustle, while also strengthening her resilience.

When it comes to building her clientele, she does not attribute it to a single cultural lesson, but rather to lived experience. The uncertain seasons, the moments of isolation, and the times she had to rely on faith without clear answers all played a role in shaping her. Those experiences cultivated empathy, and that empathy is what allows her to connect deeply with the people who sit in her chair. For her, client relationships are not transactional—they are rooted in understanding.

Representation, she believes, plays a crucial role in expanding what feels possible. For women of Guyanese descent, visibility in the beauty industry is about more than recognition—it is about affirmation. Seeing someone who shares your background succeed can shift your perception of what is attainable. It creates space where there once may have been doubt. For cultures that are not always clearly represented, that visibility carries even greater significance.

With that comes a sense of responsibility. She is intentional about educating her clients on textured hair and multicultural haircare, understanding that knowledge is a form of protection. When people learn about their hair—its density, porosity, and behavior—they begin to see it differently. What was once labeled as “difficult” becomes something to appreciate and understand. Education replaces frustration with confidence, and that transformation is just as important as the final style.

She celebrates her heritage not through grand statements, but through consistency and honesty. By sharing her story, her upbringing, and her journey, she allows her culture to exist naturally within her work. She does not separate who she is from what she does. Instead, she uses her platform to reflect both, creating space for others to feel seen in the process. Sometimes, celebration is not loud—it is simply present, steady, and unapologetically real.

Her story is a reminder that beauty is not just about appearance—it is about history, discipline, and identity woven together over time. Every tradition, every challenge, and every lesson contributes to a larger narrative—one that honors where she comes from while intentionally shaping where she is going.

HEALTH INSURANCE JARGON CAN BE FRUSTRATING AND CONFUSING



HERE'S HOW TO NAVIGATE IT

Photo by Shutterstock.com/wavebreakmedia

By **Jamie Hartmann-Boyce**

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Originally published by The Conversation

Since the Affordable Care Act subsidies expired at the end of 2025, Americans have undoubtedly been encountering a great deal of confusing information surrounding health care costs and insurance plans.

From five-figure deductibles to premiums higher than people's mortgages, costs are rising across the board.

With this comes difficult decisions around health care plan enrollment. No one can know exactly what their health care needs will be in any given year, so people are forced to hedge their bets in choosing plans.

What plan you pick has a huge impact on what you will end up paying.

However, many Americans don't understand key health insurance terms. For example, people who've completed fewer levels of education and people without health

insurance are less likely to understand the jargon. This can get in the way of picking the right plans.

As scholars of health policy, evidence-based health care and health economics, we believe understanding these terms can help you pick what plan might be the best for you.

Frequently encountered health insurance terms

The first of these is your health insurance premium. This is the amount you pay each month for having health insurance coverage, whether or not you use any services. Premiums can be expensive, but they are predictable. Once your premium is set for the year, it won't change.

What's much harder to predict is how much of each medical bill you will have to pay yourself, known as out-of-pocket costs. These are sometimes also referred to as "patient cost-sharing" or "copays." These typically come in three

forms: deductibles, coinsurance and copayments.

A deductible is how much you need to spend on your health care in a given year before your insurance starts covering any costs. Under plans with a deductible, you pay the full cost of health care services first – essentially as if you did not have health insurance – until your total spending reaches the deductible amount. Once you reach that threshold, your insurance will start paying for your additional medical costs.

But in most plans, even once you hit your deductible, your insurance will still not cover the full cost of your care. You will continue to pay a portion of the bill through coinsurance, which is the percentage of the cost of care that you are responsible for paying. For example, if your coinsurance rate is 20% and you receive care that costs US\$500, you would pay \$100 (20% of \$500).

DEMYSTIFYING Insurance Terms



Coinsurance

Flexible Spending Account

Network

Out-of-Pocket Max

Premium

Health Savings Account

Preauthorization

Deductible

Formulary

Copayment

What often makes coinsurance confusing is that while the coinsurance rate – the percentage – is usually listed on your health insurance card, you still need to know the total cost of your care to calculate how much you will owe. That cost is difficult to know in advance because reliable health care prices are difficult to find and health care needs – and the services required to treat them – can be unpredictable.

Then there are copayments. This is a fixed amount you pay for a health care encounter, such as \$20 for a primary care visit or \$150 for an emergency department visit. In everyday language, people sometimes use copay to refer to any amount a patient pays out of pocket. Technically, however, a copayment refers only to a fixed fee paid for a health care service.

Whether through deductibles, coinsurance or copayments, these out-of-pocket amounts can add up quickly. To protect patients, especially those who need a lot of care and could otherwise face devastating medical bills, federal regulations require health insurers to limit how much patients can be asked to pay out of pocket each year for covered services.

This amount is called the out-of-pocket maximum. This is sometimes also called the out-of-pocket cap or out-of-pocket limit. Once your total out-of-pocket spending reaches that limit, your insurance must pay 100% of the cost of additional covered services for the rest of the year.

ADDITIONAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

These insurance rules can become even more complicated.

Many plans have multiple different deductible amounts, coinsurance rates, copayments and even out-of-pocket maximums, depending on several factors. For example, in family plans, each person may have their own deductible or out-of-pocket maximum, but there may also be thresholds and limits that apply to the family as a whole. Cost-sharing can also vary by the type of care you receive. For instance, inpatient hospital care may be subject to a different set of cost-sharing rules than outpatient care.

Another important factor is whether your health care provider has a contract with your insurance company. Providers who have such a contract are called in-network providers. Those who do not are called out-of-network providers. Some insurance plans further divide in-network providers into tiers.

Providers in Tier 1 are the most preferred by the insurance plan, often because they agreed to provide services at relatively lower prices. Other in-network providers may be placed in Tier 2. Costs to you tend to be lowest for services from Tier 1 providers, higher for services from Tier 2 providers and highest for services from out-of-network providers. Some insurance plans may not cover out-of-network care at all.

There are often trade-offs between these elements – low premiums look great on the face of it, but any money you save by paying lower premiums is often offset by significant out-of-pocket costs, limited options for in-network providers, or both.

The problem, of course, is that it's impossible to predict how much health care you might need. If you could some-

how know you weren't going to need much health care in the following year, then a low-premium, high-deductible plan would make sense.

If, on the other hand, you knew you were going to receive a catastrophic diagnosis or be in a life-altering car accident, you would want to opt for a plan that might include higher premiums but lower copays.

GAMBLES AND TRADE-OFFS

If everyone knew all the medical care they needed could be provided by any general doctor, they might not care much about what or who was in-network. But if they knew they were going to need specialist surgery for a rare type of tumor, for example, offered at only one center out of state, they would want to consider what counts as in-network – or the costs of going out of network – in substantially more detail.

In many other countries, people don't face the same burden. In nations with universal health coverage, understanding health insurance jargon isn't a matter of financial survival. Because coverage is guaranteed, people do not have to agonize every year over choosing a health plan based on countless variables.

But until meaningful change comes about in the U.S., the best many Americans can do is understand health insurance jargon so they can choose plans that work best for them.

THE QUIET STRENGTH OF RHODERICK BARRETT:

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH PURPOSE AND FLAVOR

By Cliff Stone



vision found its fullest expression in May 2022, when Truths Restaurant & Lounge opened its doors in Laurelton.

The road to that opening was not without its challenges, navigating the complexities of community board approvals tested his patience and resolve, but for Rhod, perseverance is second nature. When the doors finally opened, the reception affirmed what he had always believed, that the community was ready, not just for another restaurant, but for a space to party with a purpose.

Truths is more than a dining establishment, it is a cultural hub, a gathering place, and a living expression of community. Step inside, and you are immediately enveloped by an atmosphere that is vibrant yet welcoming, alive with Caribbean rhythms, warm hospitality, and the unmistakable aroma of jerk spices rising from perfectly grilled chicken. Plates of jerk chicken, oxtail slow braised to tender perfection, and curry goat infused with rich island spices arrive with intention, each dish telling a story of heritage and home.

This approach is no accident, Rhod's academic foundation from South Carolina State University, where he studied Business Management and Administration, provided a part of the framework. But it is his life experience that supplies the soul. Every detail, from the menu to the mood, reflects a philosophy centered on connection, celebration, and respect. Guests can savor escovitch fish, delicately topped with pickled vegetables, indulge in rice and peas paired with sweet plantains, and return time, and again for flavors that feel both nostalgic and new.

His mission extends far beyond serving exceptional food, Rhod envisions Truths Restaurant as a platform for empowerment. He speaks passionately about his dream to create a culinary training space for young people, a place where they can learn not only the art of food preparation, but also the discipline and professionalism of the hospitality industry. In his eyes, the kitchen is more than a workplace; it is a classroom, a mentorship space, and a gateway to opportunity.

IN a world often dominated by noise and spectacle, Rhoderick "Rhod" Barrett stands apart, a man whose presence is defined not by volume, but by substance. He is the embodiment of a timeless principle; speak softly but carry a powerful impact. And in Southeast Queens, that impact is felt every day through Truths Restaurant & Lounge.

To understand Rhod is to understand a life rooted in discipline, service, and cultural pride. A retired detective of the Nassau County Police Department, and a former Captain in the United States Army, his journey reflects a deep commitment to protecting and uplifting others. These experiences did more than shape his career, they forged his leadership style; calm, deliberate, and grounded in integrity.

Yet beyond the uniform and badge lies another dimension of Rhod's identity, one equally powerful, though American-born, his Jamaican heritage runs deep, influencing his worldview, his values, and his vision for community. That



This forward-thinking approach is part of what makes Rhoderick Barrett such a compelling figure. He is not content with success measured solely in profits. Instead, he seeks to have impact, measured in lives touched, opportunities created, and communities strengthened.

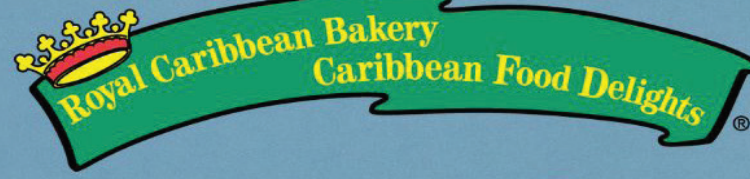
Patrons of Truths often speak of the energy that defines the space. It is upbeat without being overwhelming, lively yet grounded. Whether it's a night out with friends, a celebration over rum-glazed wings, or a quiet evening enjoying a carefully prepared meal, the experience carries a sense of authenticity that cannot be manufactured. It reflects the man behind it, steady, thoughtful, and deeply invested in the people he serves.

Rhod Barrett is, in many ways, a bridge, connecting cultures, generations, and aspirations. He brings together the discipline of military service, the analytical rigor of law enforcement, the entrepreneurial insight of business education, and the rich traditions of Caribbean heritage. The result is not just a successful establishment, but a model for what community-centered business can and should be.

In an era where many chase visibility, Rhod chooses value. He builds quietly, leads purposefully, and serves consistently. And in doing so, he reminds us that true influence does not demand attention, it earns respect.

At Truths Restaurant & Lounge, that respect is evident in every plate served, every laugh shared, and every life touched. For Rhod Barrett, this is more than a business. It is a legacy in motion, one rooted in service, flavored with culture, and destined to uplift all who walk through its doors.

For more information go to www.truth-lounge.com or visit them at 229-15 Merrick Blvd., Jamaica, NY or call (718) 413-2021.



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Soup

Sm - \$2.50 Med. - \$3.50 Lg. - \$6.50

Monday Chicken
Tuesday Red Peas & Chicken
Wednesday Chicken
Thursday Cow Foot & Chicken
Friday Chicken
Saturday Goat Head & Chicken

Chicken Soup
Sm - \$2 Med. - \$3 Lg. - \$6



MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY	
Sm.	Lg.	Sm.	Lg.	Sm.	Lg.
Oxtail	\$8.99 \$9.99	Oxtail	\$8.99 \$9.99	Oxtail	\$8.99 \$9.99
Jerk Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Jerk Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Jerk Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99
Br. Stew Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Br. Stew Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Br. Stew Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99
Fried Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Fried Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Fried Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99
Curry Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Curry Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Curry Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99
Curry Goat	\$7.99 \$8.99	Curry Goat	\$7.99 \$8.99	Curry Goat	\$7.99 \$8.99
				Cowfoot	\$7.99 \$8.99
THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
Sm.	Lg.	Sm.	Lg.	Sm.	Lg.
Oxtail	\$8.99 \$9.99	Oxtail	\$8.99 \$9.99	Oxtail	\$8.99 \$9.99
Jerk Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Jerk Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Jerk Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99
Br. Stew Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Br. Stew Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Br. Stew Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99
Fried Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Fried Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Fried Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99
Curry Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Curry Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99	Curry Ch.	\$6.99 \$7.99
Curry Goat	\$7.99 \$8.99	Curry Goat	\$7.99 \$8.99	Curry Goat	\$7.99 \$8.99
		Stew Peas	\$8.99 \$9.99	Escov. Fish	\$9.99
				Br. Stew Fish	\$13.99
				Steam Fish	\$13.99



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