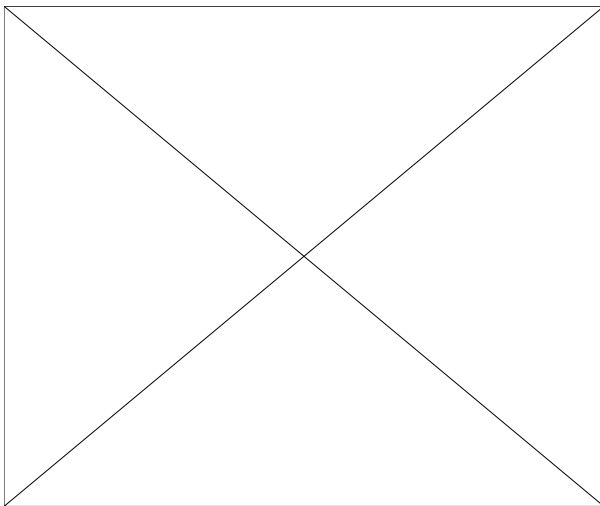


John Pringle

John Pringle, who has died aged 81, played a central role in the creation of Jamaica as a holiday destination, initially as founder of one of the great post-war hotels, Round Hill, and then as the country's first director of tourism.

Pringle's grandfather, who had begun as a doctor in Scotland, eventually amassed 100,000 acres of Jamaica's plantations. Yet the collapse of sugar prices, and the fondness of Pringle's father for the racetrack, meant that by the 1930s his mother had to make shift by running a fashionable hotel in Montego Bay.

This, and the open house his father kept for friends such as the Duke of Sutherland and the jockey Steve Donoghue, served as Pringle's model when, aged 26, he began to plan his own establishment on the island's north shore. He envisaged it as a village resort of 25 cottages served by a central hotel, all overlooking the Caribbean. It was a model widely copied afterwards, for instance by the Aga Khan on Sardinia.



Pringle proposed to sell the cottages to individual stakeholders, thus raising the money for their construction. His first stroke of luck was to find himself next to Noël Coward on a flight to New York. Pringle pestered him with photographs until, in desperation, Coward grasped his knee and said: "If you'll only stop boring me, I'll buy one of your effing cottages." The next day, Pringle sold a second to Adele Astaire.

Opened by Coward in 1953, Round Hill would play host to President Kennedy and Grace Kelly, Alfred Hitchcock and Paul Newman, Princess Margaret and Clark Gable. Cole Porter sang in the bar, while Rodgers and Hammerstein worked on *The Sound of Music* there.

Over it all presided Pringle, less the owner of a hotel than the giver of a very good party, albeit one who was partial to ribald anecdotes. Typical was the one which began: "My dear, have I told you about the time Errol Flynn and I burned down a

whorehouse in Trinidad?"

Once Pringle had to rescue a terrified French aristocrat who had planned to pass a week there with his mistress, only to discover his brother-in-law was in the neighbouring cottage. When Rex Harrison accused Pringle's beach manager of swiping a signet ring, Pringle promptly ejected the actor, and for good measure rang the newspapers with the story. "I adore personal publicity," he would remark disarmingly.

Yet his success came as much from hard work as from commercial acumen. For 10 years Pringle rose at 5am to supervise each breakfast tray, believing that the first impression of the day is the most telling. He employed only American barmen ("English ones fumble around, like men in a chemist's shop") and even told the maids to clean the tops of toothpaste tubes in the bathrooms.

Though Round Hill was a success, Pringle was only a part-owner and did not make his fortune from it. Indeed, in 1962 his doctor feared that Pringle was working himself so hard that he sent him for a year to Switzerland as a rest cure ("so dull, like immersing yourself in a glass of milk"). From there, he was summoned home to become the first director of tourism for Jamaica.

In four years Pringle transformed the fortunes of an industry in the doldrums, tripling tourist revenue from \$30 million to \$100 million. He believed in the creative potential of white and black Jamaicans alike, and was instrumental in establishing an image of the country abroad that was not simply about beaches.

For a time he was Jamaica's youngest MP, and close to his childhood friend Michael Manley, leader of the leftist PNP; but unlike Manley he believed the best way to empower Jamaica was by bringing in money from outside, rather than by implementing social change. Pringle's ideas did, however, influence his cousin Chris Blackwell, whose Island Records label was to bring the country's music to a global audience.

John Kenneth McKenzie Pringle was born at Claremont, Jamaica, on October 4 1925. He proved averse to education, and claimed to have been ejected from school after being identified in a strip club by his college tie.

In 1943 he was commissioned into the 7th Hussars and then served briefly as the most junior of the Duke of Windsor's equerries in Nassau. He soon fell under the Duchess's spell, testing shades of face powder for her by chalking them on the expensively refurbished walls of Government House. The Duke he found "a spoilt, sad little man", and their relationship had to survive a difficult first night when Pringle forgot the names of all the guests assembled to meet the Governor.

After the war Pringle worked for the cosmetics empress Elizabeth Arden. She was, he recalled, "enormously rich and completely mad. The most fearful language. Shouting her head off at salesmen, yards of chiffon flying everywhere." In 1948 he married Liz Benn, one of the world's leading models.

Pringle's infectious enthusiasm prompted the advertising agency DDB to make him their European chairman in 1967. He tripled the firm's profits in a decade, while also

working as an ambassador-at-large for Jamaica. He later moved into film and television as a producer. In the 1990s he advised Blackwell on his hotels in Jamaica, such as Strawberry Hill, and in Florida. It was characteristic of Pringle's sense of priorities that at the Tides, Miami, he should install a telescope in each bedroom, for scanning the beach.

John Pringle was a complex man, capable of both shrewd opportunism and great generosity, as long as he was not being bored. He could be prickly yet open-minded, childishly naughty (though never malicious) and entertainingly outrageous, a trait encouraged in recent years by the slow onset of Alzheimer's Disease. He also had superb taste, shown to advantage in his house at Compton Bassett, Wiltshire, and in his fondness for Doug Hayward's tailoring.

Pringle was appointed CBE in 1965, and also held the Order of Jamaica. In 2004 he and Round Hill appeared on a set of the nation's stamps. He died on December 12.

He and his wife had divorced, but remained close. His daughter survives him.