

CAMILLE SPA

A Novel by Gregory Huffstutter

You cannot find it by calling your travel agent. You will see no mention of it in Condé Nast magazine. Its very existence is only whispered about in the tight circles of high society and the obscenely wealthy.

Camille Spa.

Rumored to be the most exclusive and extravagant vacation spot on the planet, Camille Spa is certainly the most expensive — with a nightly room rate of \$75,000 per person, per day.

"Camille Spa" follows seven vacationers as they visit this mythical Caribbean spa and discover its shocking, and occasionally deadly, secrets.

The tone of "Camille Spa" is often light and irreverent, but its themes are not. In the same genre as Carl Hiaasen's "Tourist Season," "Camille Spa" explores the political and economic dynamics of the U.S. Virgin Islands. While the immediate characters in the book are fictional, all the historical figures and events are grounded in fact.

"Camille Spa" is meant to be a beach book with a brain. It asks the reader to consider the following questions: What is your definition of Paradise? Does America deserve any culpability for turning a cluster of idyllic Caribbean islands into a tourism-based, aid-dependent, stratified society. And, more importantly, what if the native West Indians want their islands back?

The story begins in the Fall of 1994 by following a handful of future spa guests. MICKEY D., the internationally-known Rock & Roll singer, has built a career on crude lyrics and satyric escapades. He is on a quest to break a personal curse. Despite bedding over 4,000 women in his career, he cannot seem to get laid on April 19th. He orders his assistant to arrange a secluded spot for this year's attempt with the lovely MARCELLA, a Latina dancer who also models for hardware calendars.

After quickly flashing to a current spa guest — who swears his wife to silence about the conditions at Camille Spa — the narrative switches to KATYA HOLMSLEY, the blonde trophy wife of industrialist JACKSON HOLMSLEY THE THIRD. Katya hears of the spa from a society rival, and swears that she will be the first among her friends to book a reservation. After arm-twisting her stingy husband into paying for it, she finally secures a room from the spa's elusive booking director, FELIX.

On the helicopter ride to Camille Spa's private Caribbean island, the two couples are introduced to their fellow vacationers. There is SISTER GLORY, a televangelist in the tradition of Reverend Jim Bakker, and HAN DICKSON, the quirky founder of a software

company. Rounding out the group is RATKO PIJASEK, a smuggler who's pissed off one ex-client too many, and his shell-shocked macaw, NIKKI.

Landing at the spa, the vacationers meet the staff: SKIP, the spa director, BOMBA, an assistant who appears to speak every language but English, LUCIA the cook, VIRGINIA the masseuse, and AYE-AYE, the animal keeper.

The guests quickly figure out that, considering the million-dollar price tag, Camille Spa is hardly what they expected. There is no electricity, no phone lines, no bathrooms, and no way to get off the desolate island for two whole weeks.

After the guests voice their complaints, Skip explains the spa's philosophy: "We are modeled after the Caribbean of old, where communities lived in harmony with each other. In harmony with nature. Here you will find a simpler time, no TVs, no fax machines. Instead, only home-cooked meals, refreshing swims, beautiful stars. In short, the experience of the true Caribbean."

The next day, as they tour the small island of Camille Cay, Skip drops another bomb. In the spirit of community building, he breaks all the spa guests into food groups and assigns them to assist in cooking one meal per day. This causes an initial free-for-all, where guests go hungry, hoard food, and negotiate the sale of a single pineapple for \$600.

On the surface, Camille Spa appears to be a total scam. Yet the staff seems to be blissfully unaware that their accommodations are substandard. In comparison to the generally unpleasant guests, it is tempting to root for the staff as they go about their business, cheerfully giving the rich their comeuppance.

After a few days, many of the guests begin to get with the program. Mickey D. and Ratko have an adventure spear fishing, which gets cut short by the arrival of an eight-foot long reef shark. Katya, who can barely find her kitchen at home, decapitates a chicken in order to make shish kebabs. The women enjoy a fabulous mud bath, and make plans to do manicures.

While the guests are acclimating, it becomes clear that Skip, the spa director, has his own agenda. He is using the spa to bankroll the rebirth of the United People's Party — a radical political movement from the 1970's that advocated Virgin Island independence.

The twin story lines between the spa guests and the UPP's plans for revolution travel in opposite directions. As Skip becomes increasingly paranoid, the vacationers start making personal growth, thanks to the free time, manual labor, and lack of distractions at Camille Spa. Mickey D. comes to realize how empty and shallow his lifestyle has been, and looks to make a change. Marcella finally understands that Mickey D. is not her knight in shining armor, and that she is better off without him. Katya misses the passion in her marriage, and is ready to put her relationship with Jackson in jeopardy in order to get it back.

Jackson, on the other hand, has little interest in self-discoveries. He is more focused on finding a phone in order to call his office. His persistence and snooping starts to unravel Skip's plans — causing a chain of events that range from bird-napping to poisonous snake attacks to disappearing guests.

Eventually, Skip's assistant and long-time friend, Bomba, becomes the story's moral compass. Bomba must make a choice between his loyalty to the cause of Caribbean independence and the safety of everyone left on the island.