

Getting Started

Of course, Jamaican vacations are as varied as the island itself, and there are numerous ways to visit. You can leave little to chance by booking a week in an all-inclusive resort, or you can leave *everything* to chance, traveling from town to town by route taxi, and choosing your lodgings and the next destination as you go along.

You can lead a carefree lifestyle at a secluded retreat, enjoy the stylish luxury of a boutique hotel or stay in a brightly painted, candlelit shack with no electricity and a refreshing outdoor cool-water shower. You'll rarely have trouble finding suitable accommodation on any budget.

Good Jamaican cooking can be had for economical prices just about everywhere you go. The country's fertile soil produces excellent and plentiful vegetables and a seemingly endless array of tropical fruits. If you love fish and seafood you'll be in heaven. In the resort areas, you'll find cosmopolitan fare and some 'nouvelle' Jamaican chefs who are pushing the culinary envelope.

If you don't like reggae music (you can't escape it!), can't cope with poverty or power outages and hate being approached by hustlers, then Jamaica is definitely not for you. To savor Jamaica properly, to appreciate what it is that makes people passionate about the place, it pays to enjoy the idiosyncratic. To rest content here you have to 'get' Jamaica, to take the punches in your stride. If you can handle that, if you like travel with a raw edge, you'll love it.

WHEN TO GO

Jamaica is a year-round destination, though there are seasonal differences to consider. Weather-wise, temperature isn't an important factor: winter is usually warm by day and mild to cool by night, and summer months are hot. The rainy season extends from May to November, with peaks in May, June, October and November. Rain usually falls for short periods (normally in the late afternoon), and it's quite possible to enjoy sunshine for most of your visit during these months. However, note that in Portland parish, it can rain for days on end.

Tourism's high, or 'winter,' season runs from early-December to mid-April, when hotel prices are highest. Many hotels charge peak-season rates during Christmas and Easter.

See Climate Charts (p277) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- your passport: new regulations require visitors from the USA to carry one
- sunscreen: it's crazily expensive in Jamaica, and it's not widely available outside resort areas
- sports sandals: all-terrain all-weather sandals are essential footwear on beach and trail (but not at the disco, please!)
- hot-weather clothing: choose light, quick-dry fabrics to help you cope with Jamaica's sometimes unrelenting heat and humidity
- snorkeling gear: a pain to carry on the plane, but great to have on the beach (rentals are expensive and often of poor quality)
- a flashlight (torch) for those not-so-well-lit Jamaican streets, and the occasional cave
- an extra pair of sunglasses to wear at the sound-system jam.

COSTS & MONEY

How much you spend depends on your sense of style. Even hard-core budget travelers will need to spend at least US\$35 a day. Roadside stalls and budget restaurants sell patties for less than US\$1 and jerk pork and other local meals for as little as US\$2. A hand of bananas or half a dozen mangoes will cost about US\$1. More touristy restaurants, however, can be expensive, as many of the ingredients they use are imported: expect to pay at least US\$10 per person and, for the finest restaurants, as much as US\$60.

Car rentals begin at about US\$45 a day for the smallest vehicle. Public transport is inordinately cheap, although the tourist taxis can get very expensive (usually US\$8 minimum for even the shortest journey).

The budget accommodations cost US\$20 or more, even for spartan conditions. Midrange hotels range from about US\$60 to US\$150, while luxury resorts can charge US\$300 or more. All-inclusive hotels can offer tremendous bargains, as everything you consume or participate in is included in room rates.

To save money, visit in 'summer,' or low season (mid-April to mid-December), when hotel prices plummet and airfares are often reduced.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

There are numerous excellent books about Jamaica's eminently rich cultural, historical and natural landscape. See the History and Culture chapters for more book suggestions.

Several memoirs and novels by foreigners seek to capture the essence of life on the island. Swashbuckling Hollywood hero Errol Flynn, who lived in Jamaica for many years, recalls his colorful experiences in his autobiography *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*. Anthony Winckler's *Going Home to Teach* tells of the novelist's time in Jamaica as a teacher during an epoch of anti-white sentiment in the tension-filled late 1970s. Russell Banks' *The Book of Jamaica*

HOW MUCH?

Taxi from Montego Bay's Donald Sangster International Airport to the 'Hip Strip' US\$8

Guided snorkeling trip US\$30

Rio Grande raft trip US\$60

Fresh fish in a touristy restaurant US\$12

Fresh fish in a local restaurant US\$5

INTRODUCTION TO JAMAICA

Montego Bay Also called 'MoBay,' the principal gateway to Jamaica and the main tourist center, with several public beaches and a good choice of hotels and all-inclusive resorts. A fistful of interesting historic sites lies close at hand, as do bamboo-raft trips and, for hardy hikers, Cockpit Country.

Negril Jamaica's liveliest resort, with the longest (and one of the most stunning) beaches on the island. Live reggae shows, spectacular sunsets and a let-your-hair-down attitude make this a favorite of budget and college-age travelers. Negril is also renowned for scuba diving and water sports.

Ocho Rios Also called 'Ochi,' the main destination for cruise ships. The town itself is unappealing despite its two beaches, but it's a good base for exploring Dunn's River Falls, several botanical gardens and other attractions within a few minutes' drive.

Runaway Bay This is a secluded resort midway between MoBay and Ochi, famous for its coral reefs. It has nice beaches, but the one-street town itself has no appeal whatsoever, and tourist infrastructure – and nightlife – is minimal.

Port Antonio Secluded at the lush northeastern tip of Jamaica, a center for bamboo-raft trips and hiking in the Rio Grande Valley. Its highlights are its fully staffed, upscale villas and deluxe resorts tucked into coves east of town.

South Coast Appealing for its isolation and a lifestyle that still revolves around fishing. The best all-around destination is Treasure Beach, an in-vogue spot for travelers seeking an offbeat experience. Near at hand lie the Great Morass (a swamp area good for crocodile-spotting safaris), the YS Falls, Appleton Rum Estate and Lover's Leap.

Kingston The nation's bustling capital, more of a business locale than a tourism center. However, it is the center of island culture, with museums, art galleries, important historic buildings and a pulsing nightlife.

Blue Mountains Rising east of Kingston and offering an idyllic escape from the package-tour syndrome. The Blue Mountains-John Crow National Park has well-developed hiking trails.

Mandeville A historic agricultural and residential town in the cool upland interior. It appeals to visitors who shun the beach resorts in favor of birding, scenic mountain drives, hiking and interaction with local families.

TOP 10



MOST ATMOSPHERIC LODGING

The following hotels and guest houses, spanning all price ranges, share one key ingredient: ambience.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Strawberry Hill (p114) | 6 Richmond Hill Inn (p195) |
| 2 Jake's Place (p271) | 7 Zion Country (p139) |
| 3 River Lodge (p144) | 8 Banana Shout (p234) |
| 4 Shafston Estate Great House (p249) | 9 Caves (p235) |
| 5 Great Huts (p137) | 10 High Hope Estate (p169) |

OUTDOOR PURSUITS

If you've seen only the beaches, you haven't seen Jamaica. The following are your best bets for adventures in 'de bush.'

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Climbing Blue Mountain Peak (p119) | 6 Biking the hills of Negril (p226) |
| 2 Exploring the Black River Great Morass (p253) | 7 Rafting the Martha Brae (p205) |
| 3 Diving and snorkeling near Montego Bay (p189) | 8 Biking down from the high Blue Mountains (p113) |
| 4 Caving in the Cockpits (p213) | 9 Riding a horse into the sea (p153) |
| 5 Hiking in the Rio Grande Valley (p140) | 10 Fishing at Treasure Beach (p269) |

tells the story of an American expatriate college professor who delves into Jamaica and Maroon culture of Cockpit Country with unexpected results. A perceptive look at the rise of the island's tourist industry is afforded by Frank Fonda Taylor's *To Hell with Paradise*.

Understanding Jamaican Patois by Emilie Adams provides an understanding of English as it is spoken in Jamaica, and Cassidy and RB LePage's *Dictionary of Jamaican English* is the definitive lexicon on Jamaican patois.

Macmillan Caribbean (in the UK ☎ 1865 405841; www.macmillan-caribbean.com), a division of Macmillan Press, publishes a wide range of books about the Caribbean.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Afflicted Yard (<http://afflictedyard.com>) Edgy culture site with entertainment listings.

Dancehall Reggae (www.dancehallreggae.com) The place to go for the latest on the island's music scene.

Insiders Jamaica (www.insidersjamaica.com) Tourist-board site focusing on inns and villas in Jamaica.

Jamaica Gleaner (www.jamaica-gleaner.com) Best news source from the island's most reliable newspaper.

Jamaica National Heritage Trust (www.jnht.com) Excellent guide to Jamaica's history and heritage.

See p281 for information about getting online in Jamaica.

Jamaica Yellow Pages (www.jamaicayp.com) Handy online presentation of the Jamaican phone directory.

Jamaicans (www.jamaicans.com) Eclectic and informative site seeking to reflect the Jamaican experience.

LonelyPlanet.com (www.lonelyplanet.com) Succinct summaries on travel in Jamaica, plus the popular Thorn Tree bulletin board, travel news and a complete online store.

Visit Jamaica (www.visitjamaica.com) The tourist board's presentation of Jamaica to travelers, with plenty of destination, attractions and lodging information.

What's On Jamaica (www.whatsonjamaica.com) Calendar-based event and entertainment listings.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

NORTH COAST HOLIDAY

Two Weeks/Montego Bay to Ocho Rios

Start in **Montego Bay** (p178), a swirling vortex of tourism. Hit **Doctor's Cave Beach** (p187) for water sports, head downtown to historic **Sam Sharpe Square** (p184), and take to the hills to **Rocklands Bird Feeding Station** (p209).

Heading east, tour **Rose Hall** (p201), or the more authentic **Greenwood Great House** (p201). Take a walking tour of **Falmouth** (p202) for its crumbling Georgian buildings, a night-time boating expedition on the **Glistening Waters** (p205) or a rafting trip on the **Martha Brae River** (p205).

Between Falmouth and Ocho Rios are pretty landscapes and historical sites. Tour the **Green Grotto Caves** (p174), where the Spanish resistance and runaway slaves took refuge. Enjoy excellent scuba diving in **Runaway Bay** (p172). At **Chukka Cove** (p170), choose from tours including horseback rides into the sea.

In **St Ann's Bay**, where Christopher Columbus was marooned for a year, learn the history behind sites such as the **Maima Seville Great House & Heritage Park** (p168) and see the **Columbus and Marcus Garvey monuments** (p168).

In Ocho Rios, climb **Dunn's River Falls** (p152), learn about **reggae music** (p149) and check out the latest art exhibit at **Harmony Hall** (p153) before finishing the day with a sublime dinner in the hall's restaurant.

This 108km trip is perfect for sampling the most popular attractions and activities of the north central coast. You'll get your fill of fun, sun and sand, and there are kid-friendly attractions all along the way.



KINGSTON, BLUE MOUNTAINS & PORTLAND

Three Weeks/Kingston to Manchioneal

Touch down in **Kingston** (p67) for three days of sightseeing, excellent food and rip-roaring nightlife. Don't miss the **National Gallery** (p72) and the fascinating **downtown walking tour** (p82). Take in historic **Devon House** (p78) and lunch at one of Jamaica's famous restaurants, **Norma's on the Terrace** (p90). Whether or not you're a reggae fan, there's much to see at the **Bob Marley Museum** (p79). After hours, enjoy some of the liveliest **nightlife** (p90) in the Caribbean. For a captivating day trip, visit **Port Royal** (p97), the earthquake-shattered former haunt of pirates and privateers.

Those hills looming over the city are calling, so slip into the **Blue Mountains** (p111). Pamper your mind and body at **Strawberry Hill** (p114), one of Jamaica's most excellent hotels, or spend the night in an economical hut perched on the side of a mountain. Enjoy the breathtaking scenery and crisp mountain air from hiking trails in **Blue Mountains–John Crow National Park** (p115). See how the Caribbean's most prized coffee rises from humble beginnings at the **Old Tavern Coffee Estate** (p116). Make an early-morning ascent of **Blue Mountain Peak** (p119), Jamaica's highest mountain, or, if you are truly adventurous, whiz down from the highlands on a **bicycle tour** (p113).

Descend from the Blue Mountains to **Portland parish** (p123), on the prettiest stretch of the north coast. Walk the atmospheric streets of **Port Antonio** (p124), taking lodging in one of the many intimate spots to the east of town in **Drapers** or **Fairy Hill**. Make a foray into the gorgeous **Rio Grande Valley** (p139) for river rafting or hiking. **East of Port Antonio** (p133), you'll find appealing communities with stellar beaches and attractive places to stay. Don't miss **Boston Bay** (p137) for jerk and surf, or **Manchioneal** (p137), a terrific base for visiting Reach Falls.

On this whirlwind adventure you'll experience the extremes of the city, mountains and sea, with an appealing mix of cosmopolitan pursuits, breathtaking high-mountain scenery and classic beach-bumming on stretches of white sand.



ROADS LESS TRAVELED

A TASTE OF COCKPIT COUNTRY

One Week/Falmouth to Albert Town

Explore the once-grand port of **Falmouth** (p202), then leave the coast behind. Spend an afternoon rafting on the **Martha Brae** (p205) or at **Good Hope Estate** (p213), a beautiful great house and working plantation. Enjoy horseback riding, lunch on the terrace and tremendous views.

On narrow roads, travel through cane fields as you start your ascent to **Windsor** (p214). Check into a modest lodge and take a well-earned rest. Wake to the sound of birds, and head off to explore **Windsor Caves** (p214) with a Rastafarian guide, or pay a visit to the **Windsor Great House** (p214) to learn about its environmental protection and bird-banding efforts.

Get ready for some challenging but rewarding **hiking** (p213). From Windsor or Albert Town, you can hire a guide and walk the old military trail connecting Windsor (in the north) with Troy (in the south)...but be ready for some gnarly trails.

Exhausted and exhilarated, head east to Clark's Town, then to **Albert Town** (p215), passing through prime sugarcane country. This part of the journey is less about destinations and activities, and more about just soaking up the scenery. In Albert Town coordinate a **homestay** (p212) with the Southern Trelawny Environmental Agency.

Return to the north coast or continue south to Mandeville or the south coast. It's possible to get around on this tour via route taxi, but you'll get the most out of it by renting a 4WD vehicle.



This wild and woolly 52km back-country tour suits a temperament that loves mountains, caves and trails at least as much as beaches. You'll be traveling through Jamaica's most rugged country and into its richest ecosystems. Allow one week or longer, depending on how deep you want to go.

EXPLORE THE SOUTHWEST

Two Weeks/Negril to Alligator Pond

Let your hair down – or get it braided – in **Negril** (p217) for a few days, until you've had your fill of peach-colored sunsets and rockin' reggae.

Starting out early, head to **Roaring River Park** (p244) near Savanna-la-Mar for a day of incredible scenery and soaking in turquoise mineral pools. Spend the night in a rustic cottage, or head further down the coast to **Bluefields** (p247), where you'll find comfortable guest houses, an exceptional great house to stay in, and the **mausoleum of reggae star Peter Tosh** (p247).

After a good night's slumber, linger on one of the quiet fishing beaches or continue on to **Black River** (p250), a sleepy port town with interesting historic buildings and vintage hotels. This is the gateway for boat travel into the mangrove swamps of the **Black River Great Morass** (p253), a gorgeous wetlands where crocodile sightings are common.

In the morning head north to **Middle Quarters** (p254) for an unforgettable lunch of pepper shrimp at a crossroads eatery and an afternoon at the lovely **YS Falls** (p256). Wet your whistle at the **Appleton Rum Estate** (p258), then head south to **Treasure Beach** (p267). Check into a hospitable guest house or idiosyncratic boutique hotel and stay awhile in the welcoming embrace of this tight-knit community. Be sure to take a boat trip to one of the planet's coolest watering holes, the **Pelican Bar** (p271), perched on stilts on a sandbar 1km out to sea.

From Treasure Beach, visit **Lover's Leap** (p273) for an astonishing view of the coastlands. Continue along the coast to the fishing village of **Alligator Pond** (p273). Far from packaged tourism, here you can enjoy traditional village life and unspoiled scenery at its best. You'll also enjoy a delicious seafood feast at a truly extraordinary beachside restaurant, **Little Ochie** (p274).

This 152km, two-week tour has it all. Start with a few days of maximum repose in Negril, then slip into the less touristy, wide-open lands of the southwestern coast. You'll pass through fishing villages and a quiet port town, travel by boat into the Great Morass, enjoy celebrated waterfalls and get to know the locals.



TAILORED TRIPS

HONORING THE ANCESTORS

Black history is *the* history of Jamaica. This itinerary will shed light on the horrors of slavery, as well as the resistance and triumph of African slaves.

Start in **Montego Bay** (p178), taking time to visit the **Museum of St James** (p184). With great poignancy, it details how Sam Sharpe counseled fellow slaves to refuse to work at Christmas in 1831, sparking the Christmas Rebellion.

Traveling east, visit the port town of **Falmouth** (p202), where human beings were once offloaded from ships and sold at auction. Traveling up into the hills, visit the beautiful **Good Hope Estate** (p213), remembering that many of the stately buildings here were built by slave labor.

Climb further into Cockpit Country to **Accompong**, where the Leeward Maroons, a band of runaway slaves led by Cujo, fought so effectively against the British in a protracted insurgency. See the nearby **Peace Cave**, where the 1739 treaty granting the Maroons autonomy was signed.

On the coast again, move into Portland parish and up into the **Rio Grande Valley** (p139), home to the Windward Maroons. Their leader Nanny's contribution is honored in **Moore Town** (p141).

Travel around the eastern tip of Jamaica to **Morant Bay** (p121), where National Hero Paul Bogle led the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865.

Conclude your trip in Kingston at **National Heroes Park** (p75), where you can pay your respects at the grave of Black-consciousness leader Marcus Garvey.

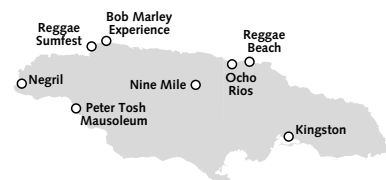


IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF A LION

Begin your Bob Marley pilgrimage where it all started, in **Kingston** (p67). Visit the **Bob Marley Museum** (p79), where he lived and recorded at the height of his career, and the 'government yard in Trench Town' (p76), where he lived as a child. Visit **Tuff Gong Recording Studios** (p77), started by Marley and now run by his son Ziggy. Browse record stores and dub-plate studios on **Orange St** (p93). If you've got the stamina, check out a **sound-system party** (see the boxed text, p92).

Hit the road for **Ocho Rios** (p146), stopping at **Reggae Beach** (p160) on the way; if you're in luck there may be a show that night. In Ochi follow the trajectory of reggae music at the **Reggae Xplosion** (p149) museum. Head into the hills on a pilgrimage to **Nine Mile** (p175), Bob Marley's birthplace and final resting place.

East of Montego Bay, visit the **Bob Marley Experience** (p200) for Jamaica's best collection of reggae t-shirts and a documentary film. If you've timed it right, enjoy the world's best reggae festival, **Reggae Sumfest** (p18). Hightail it to **Negril** (p239), where smokin' live reggae is featured nearly every night. Finally, weave your way down to Belmont in Westmoreland to pay respects to Marley's fellow Wailer at the **Peter Tosh Mausoleum** (p247).



Destination Jamaica

Despite its location almost smack in the center of the Caribbean Sea, the island of Jamaica doesn't blend in easily with the rest of the Caribbean archipelago. To be sure, it boasts the same addictive sun rays, sugary sands and pampered resort-life as most of the other islands, but it is also set apart historically and culturally.

Nowhere else in the Caribbean is the connection to Africa as keenly felt. Kingston was the major nexus in the New World for the barbaric triangular trade that brought slaves from Africa and carried sugar and rum to Europe, and the Maroons (runaways who took to the hills of Cockpit Country and the Blue Mountains) safeguarded many of the African traditions – and introduced jerk seasoning to Jamaica's singular cuisine. St Ann's Bay's Marcus Garvey founded the back-to-Africa movement of the 1910s and '20s; Rastafarianism took up the call a decade later, and reggae furnished the beat in the 1960s and '70s. Little wonder many Jamaicans claim a stronger affinity for Africa than for neighboring Caribbean islands.

And less wonder that today's visitors will appreciate their trip to Jamaica all the more if they embrace the island's unique character. In addition to the inherent 'African-ness' of its population, Jamaica boasts the world's best coffee, world-class reefs for diving, offbeat bush-medicine hiking tours, congenial fishing villages, pristine waterfalls, cosmopolitan cities, wetlands harboring endangered crocodiles and manatees, unforgettable sunsets – in short, enough variety to comprise many utterly distinct vacations.

As Jamaica's largest industry, tourism reveals a great deal about the forces at play here. Some of the country's biggest assets – its glorious beaches and waterfalls, for example – are facing serious challenges of survival. Sewage pours into the coastal waters of all the major resort towns while the concerns of local communities are often ignored. Profits hightail it out of the country to feed the bottom line of foreign consortia. Many hotel workers live in degrading conditions, but are still expected to smile for guests; quite a few will tell you that they are lucky to have a low-paying job at all. As more and more tourists come, the resort towns sink deeper into urban blight. This is more than irony; it's a potent recipe for social unrest and the accelerated decline of Jamaica's most important industry. The government continues to offer reactionary 'solutions' to tourism's woes, while at the same time approving ever more large-scale resorts. Fortunately, sustainable tourism is beginning to make inroads, and while the impact is still very small, there are grounds for guarded optimism.

In 2007, public discontent with the status quo swept the People's National Party out of power after 18 years of rule. However, new Prime Minister Bruce Golding's Jamaica Labour Party does not present a stark contrast to its predecessor; the PNP and JLP are no longer the ideological opposites they were in the 1970s, when the former pledged fidelity to Castro and the latter professed love of Reagan. Jamaicans tend to see politics as a localized arena, in which issues like the repaving of roads are more emotive than, say, the repaying of International Monetary Fund loans. And while polls repeatedly show that crime is the country's biggest concern, there's little serious effort to address the social ills that cause it, and no popular movement to bring them to the fore.

Behind this backdrop of governmental neglect and popular resignation is a country infused with pride in its unique history, stunning landscape and influential culture. All this is the 'real Jamaica'.

FAST FACTS

Population: 2,780,200
 Area: 10,992 sq km
 Length of coastline: 1022km
 GDP (per head): US\$4600
 Inflation: 5.8%
 Unemployment: 11.3%
 Average annual rainfall: 78in
 Number of orchid species found only on the island: 73 (there are more than 200 overall)
 Amount of rum produced annually: 50 million liters

On the Road



RICHARD KOSS *Coordinating Author*

My love affair with jerk seasoning took me to Walkerswood (p166), where one of the best versions is produced. Here I am pounding its ingredients with a pestle and growing hungrier by the moment. I like this photo because you can see my car, which spent the previous day in a repair shop in St Ann's Bay.

MY FAVORITE TRIP

I'd kick off in Kingston (p67), taking in the Bob Marley Museum and a sound-system jam, then spend a few recuperative days hiking in the Blue Mountains (p111). Descending, I'd make my way north to Robin's Bay (p143), the most

unspoiled part of the island, to follow a trail with a bush-medicine doctor. From there, I'd head for Portland, basing myself in Boston Bay (p137), where – when not savoring the island's best jerk chicken – I'd go rafting on the Rio Grande and caving in the river's valley. On the way back to Kingston, I'd make the trek out to the Morant Point Lighthouse (p122), the island's easternmost point.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ever since he first saw *The Harder They Come*, Richard dreamed of becoming a 'rude boy.' And although the prospect of life as a Jamaican gangster lost its appeal over time, Richard's infatuation with the island and all things Jamaican grew. A collector of vintage reggae, an aficionado of rum and an ardent lover of jerk (some might call him a jerk lover), he leapt at the opportunity to cover Jamaica. A native New Yorker, Richard has also worked on Lonely Planet's *New England* and *Caribbean Islands* guides.



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