

Port Antonio & Northeast Coast



Sleepy Portland parish is the least developed resort area in Jamaica, and the most rugged and scenic. Forested mountains with deep gorges and rushing rivers beckon hikers. Along the coast, the surf rolls into perfect beach-lined coves. Pocket-sized beaches line the shore.

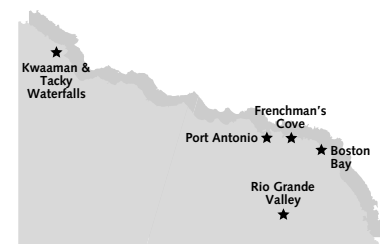
The beauty of Portland cannot be overstated. But the parish, long considered 'the next big thing' in Jamaican tourism, struggles to attract its rightful share of tourists. Several of the area's attractions have closed for want of visitors; others have been put on hold, awaiting 'redevelopment.' A new cruise-ship marina is underused. However, Portland remains a forward-thinking place. It's the first parish in Jamaica to adopt the Green Globe 21 program (www.greenglobe21.com) principles, which mandate sustainable environmental and social practices. The parish council will be first to tell you that, in Portland, the future is green.

The only town of any size is Port Antonio. With a lively market and an interesting collection of Georgian buildings mixed with tin-roofed shacks, 'Portie' is lively by day and peaceful by night. Inland are lush expanses of tropical rain forest and the Rio Grande Valley, one of Jamaica's best territories for hiking, bird-watching and other outdoor pursuits.

Hugging the coast to the southeast of Port Antonio is a succession of appealing communities: Fairy Hill is famous for its gentle beaches, Boston Bay for its burgeoning surf scene and famous jerk cuisine. Long Bay, with its dramatic setting and mellow vibe, has a countercultural appeal, making it irresistible for navelgazers and stargazers alike. Further off the beaten track you'll find unspoiled fishing villages where travelers can ease into a laid-back local lifestyle.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Port Antonio** Wander the streets in Jamaica's most picturesque town (p124)
- **Frenchman's Cove** Watch an afternoon disappear on a sublime white-sand beach next to a freshwater stream (p133)
- **Rio Grande Valley** Drift merrily merrily merrily merrily on a raft down the Rio Grande past the former banana plantations in this verdant valley (p139)
- **Kwaaman and Tacky Waterfalls** Contemplate these wonderful primordial falls from the pools below (p143)
- **Boston Bay** Stuff your face with fine Jamaican jerk and shred some waves with local surfers (p137)



■ AREA: 820 SQ KM

■ PORT ANTONIO DEC AVERAGE HIGH TEMPERATURE: 28°C

HISTORY

The last of Jamaica's lands to be officially settled, Portland parish was the last great stronghold of the Windward Maroons, who survive to this day in the Rio Grande Valley with many African-based traditions intact. In the late 19th century Portland's economy enjoyed a precipitous spike thanks to the United States' newfound appetite for the banana. The fruit cargo ships that sailed to and from Port Antonio served double duty as transport for some of Jamaica's first tourists, making 'Portie' the island's first destination resort. In recent years, Portland parish has led the nation in establishing 'green' tourism practices.

CLIMATE

Port Antonio enjoys a tropical climate with relatively high rainfall. The temperature hits an average of 33°C in summer and 28°C in winter. The evenings are cooled by wonderful breezes floating in off the mountains. The rainiest times are May/June and October/November.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Ken Jones Aerodrome, located about half an hour west of Port Antonio, receives charter flights but international passengers must rely on the airports in Montego Bay or Kingston. Minibus and route-taxi traffic is high in and out of Port Antonio, where it's a simple matter to find local transport to Ocho Rios, Kingston and beyond.

PORT ANTONIO

pop 13,000

Cupping an unruffled bay while backing into the sleepy Rio Grande Valley, Port Antonio is the perfect capital for Portland. The parish's only sizable town is largely untarnished by the duty-free, tourist orientation of Ocho Rios or Montego Bay, its streets, squares, quayside and market inviting leisurely strolls – invitations freely accepted by the town's dog and goat populaces. Wandering away from the bustle past the dilapidated houses lining the potholed streets of Titchfield Peninsula, it's very easy to think you've roamed onto the set of some quaint colonial ghost town.

Ironic, then, that the tentacles of Jamaican tourism first found purchase in Port

Antonio. The town came to prominence as the island's major banana port, and its prosperity began luring visitors at the turn of the 20th century. Celebrity visitors, led by cinematic and real-life swashbuckler Errol Flynn (p130), descended on the town in the 1930s. And when the tourist attentions moved on to the west of the island, Port Antonio went back to bananas.

Rumors of the town's development are rife. In 2004 a state-of-the-art marina was built with the aim of luring cruise ships, and while they have yet to appear, hope has not been abandoned. Plans for Navy Island, former home and playground of Flynn and his Hollywood guests, range from an ecological theme park to a casino, but nothing's made it to the blueprint stage. Talk of enlarging Ken Jones Aerodrome to receive international flights remains just that.

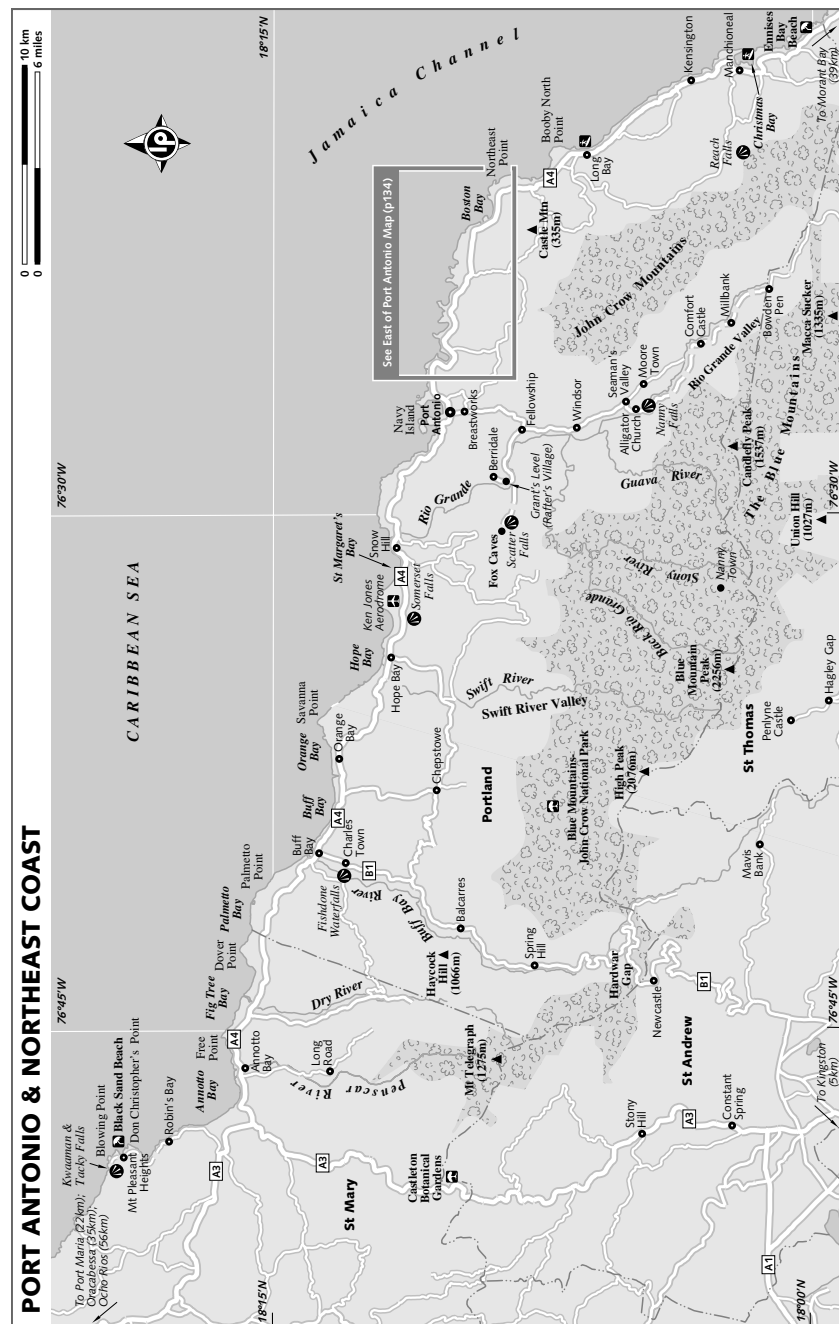
All of which will suit you just fine if you seek a low-key Jamaican port town and an ideal base for setting out to discover some of Portland's hidden treasures.

HISTORY

The Spanish christened the bay 'Puerto Anton' in the 16th century, but made no serious effort to settle. In 1723 the British laid out a rudimentary town on the peninsula and named it Titchfield; a fort was added in 1729. But rampant fevers in the swampy coastlands and constant raids by marauding Maroons deterred all but a few settlers.

Following peace with the Maroons in 1739, Titchfield expanded. Many settlers grew sustenance crops, including bananas. Enter the Yankee skipper Captain Lorenzo Dow Baker (1840–1908), a fruit-shipping magnate, who arrived here in 1871 and established the banana trade that created a boomtown overnight. Baker and his Boston Fruit Company went on to own 40 banana plantations from Port Antonio to Buff Bay, making Port Antonio the 'banana capital of the world.' Port Antonio grew so wealthy that, it is said, planters would light their cigars with US\$5 bills.

In the 1890s Baker began shipping tourists from the cold US northeast in his empty banana boats. Although Portland's banana bonanza was doomed in the 1930s by the onset of Panama disease, the arrival of movie star Errol Flynn and, later, numerous blue-bloods and Hollywood stars, gave new cachet to Port Antonio as a tourist resort.



PORTLAND & THE GREEN GLOBE

In adopting the Agenda 21 principles of Green Globe (which were codified at the Rio Earth Summit of 1992), Portland parish has undertaken a number of measures to ensure the greenness of its future. Among the projects of its 'sustainability strategy' are the reduction of greenhouse gases by planting more trees, conserving resources by using biodegradable pesticides and recycling paper, and improving drinking and surface water quality by instituting a water-control monitoring program. It's not easy being green.

In the 1960s a second brief heyday occurred when a luxurious resort went up overlooking Frenchman's Cove. This was followed by Prince Alfonso de Hohenlohe's equally exclusive Marbella Club at Dragon Bay. The regal resorts attracted the jet set crowd, and the coves east of town were colonized by the very rich, setting a trend that still continues.

Today, as in the past, all of the bananas exported from Jamaica depart from Port Antonio's dock. The loading of the fruit is now mechanized, so you will no longer see the tallyman tallying bananas or stevedores 'working all night on a drink of rum.'

ORIENTATION

The compact town center is nestled between twin harbors separated by the Titchfield Peninsula. A narrow channel separates the peninsula from Navy Island, less than a kilometer offshore, at the mouth of West Harbour. To the east is East Harbour bay.

W Palm Ave runs along West Harbour. Allan Ave (known as 'Folly Rd' to locals) runs along East Harbour. The town center lies at the base of the Titchfield Peninsula, where the two main drags meet at a right angle in front of the main plaza and courthouse. Fort George St runs from this junction uphill along the peninsula.

If you follow Summers Town Rd south from the town center it leads to Red Hassell Rd, which continues all the way to the Rio Grande Valley.

The clock tower in front of the courthouse has a city directory painted on it.

INFORMATION

Emergency

Police station (☎ 993-2527/46; Harbour St)

Resort Patrol Services (☎ 993-7482) Based in the police station, it patrols to guard the welfare of tourists.

Internet Access

D-Tech (☎ 993-4184; 3 West St, upstairs; per 30min US\$1.25; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat)

Don J's Computer Centre (☎ 715-5559; Village of St George, Fort George St; per hr US\$2.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Portland Parish Library (☎ 993-2793; 1 Fort George St; per 30min US\$1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

Internet Resources

Port Antonio (www.portantoniotravel.com) The official online visitor's guide.

Laundry

Ever Brite Laundry (☎ 715-1851; 20 Harbour St) Drop-off laundry service.

Medical Services

Agape Family Medical Clinic (☎ 993-2338; 32 Harbour St; ☎ 9am-4:30pm Mon-Sat) Has emergency service.

City Plaza Pharmacy (☎ 993-2620; City Centre Plaza, Harbour St)

Port Antonio Hospital (☎ 993-2646; Nuttall Rd; ☎ 24hr) Above the town on Naylor's Hill, south of West Harbour.

Square Gift Centre and Pharmacy (☎ 993-3629; 11 West St)

Money

CIBC Jamaica Banking Centre (☎ 993-2708; 3 West St)

FX Trader Cambio (☎ 993-3617; City Centre Plaza, Harbour St)

National Commercial Bank (☎ 993-9822; 5 West St)

RBTT Bank (☎ 993-9755; 28 Harbour St)

Scotiabank (☎ 993-2523; 3 Harbour St)

Post

Post office (☎ 993-2651; Harbour St) On the east side of the town square.

Telephone

There are public telephones near the clock tower.

Cable & Wireless Jamaica (☎ 993-2775; Harbour St) Overseas calls and phonecards.

Tourist Information

Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB; ☎ 993-3051; 2nd fl, City Centre Plaza, Harbour St; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Fri) Offers only a paucity of information.

Travel Agencies

Travel Experts (☎ 993-2645; City Centre Plaza, Harbour St)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Note that a few locals try to eke out a living by scamming tourists. Watch out for a scam involving a local DJ or musician offering for sale recorded discs containing original music – most often these are blank.

Guard your valuables when browsing Musgrave Market, and stick to the main streets if walking at night.

SIGHTS

Port Antonio's heart is the **town square**, at the corner of West St and Harbour St. It's centered on a clock tower and backed by a handsome red-brick Georgian courthouse topped by a cupola. About 50m down West St is the junction of William St, where the smaller **Port Antonio Square** has a **cenotaph** honoring Jamaicans who gave their lives in the two world wars.

On the west side is the clamorous and colorful **Musgrave Market**, supported by thick limestone columns. Following William St south to Harbour St, you can turn left to peek inside **Christ Church**, a red-brick Anglican building built in neo-Romanesque style around 1840 (much of the structure dates from 1903). The singular item of note is the brass lectern donated by Captain Lorenzo Dow Baker. Further down Harbour St is the **historic police station**.

On the north side of the town square is the imposing façade of the **Village of St George**, a beautiful three-story complex with an exquisite frescoed exterior in Dutch style.

Along the hilly Titchfield Peninsula – known locally as 'the Hill' – are several dozen Victorian-style gingerbread houses, notably **DeMontevin Lodge** (21 Fort George St), an ornate rust-red mansion, which is now a hotel. Many of the finest homes line King St, which runs down the center of the peninsula (parallel to Queen and Fort George Sts). The peninsula is now a National Heritage Trust Site and is slated to receive a restoration.

Further north at the tip of the peninsula are the **Fort George ruins**, dating from 1729. The parade ground and former barracks

today house **Titchfield School**, not open to the public. Beyond the school, several George III-era cannons can still be seen mounted in their embrasures in 3m-thick walls.

Navy Island

This lushly vegetated 25-hectare island is popular with local day-trippers on week-ends...or it was when the ferries ran.

In colonial days the British Navy used it to careen ships for repair and it built a small battery, plus jetties and warehouses. Nothing remains of the navy's presence. In the mid-20th century Errol Flynn bought the island. His former home became a hotel, which later fell into decay. In early 2002 the Port Authority and the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) jointly took over the island with a view to developing the jaded property as an upscale resort and ecological theme park.

Folly

This two-story, 60-room mansion on the peninsula east of East Harbour was built entirely of concrete in pseudo-Grecian style by a North American millionaire. It was in private use until 1936, when the roof collapsed. Sea water had been used in the construction, causing the iron reinforcing rods to rust.

Today the shell of the structure remains, held aloft by limestone columns. It makes a perfectly peculiar locale for a picnic.

Nearby stands the bright-orange **Folly Point Lighthouse**, built in 1888.

ACTIVITIES

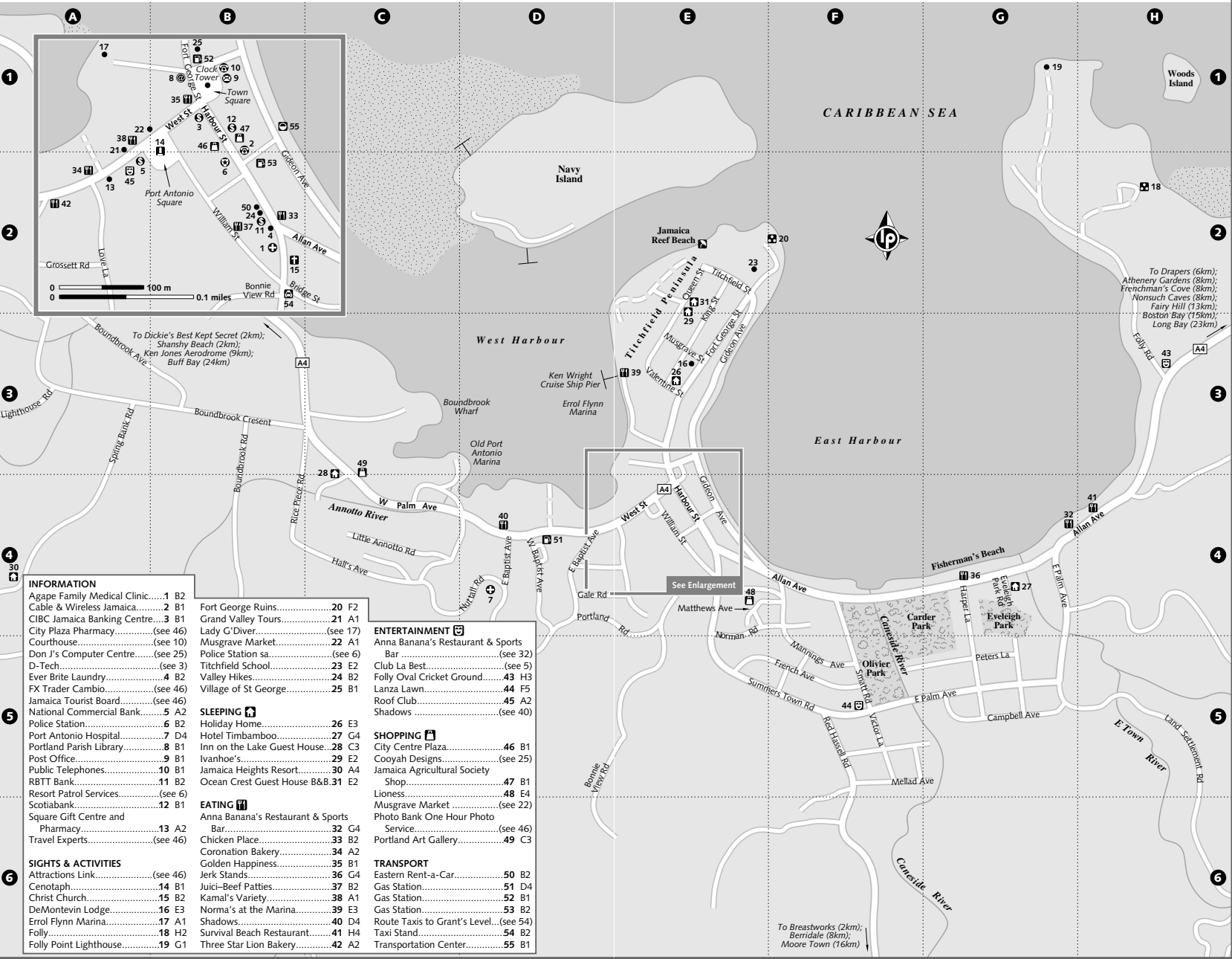
You can charter sport-fishing boats such as **La Nadine** (☎ 909-9552; caribbecapt@aol.com; half day US\$550-750, full day US\$800-1200) from Errol Flynn Marina in Port Antonio. **La Nadine** also does harbor tours (US\$25 per person, minimum of four people).

Located at the new marina, **Lady G'Diver** (☎ 844-8711, 995-0246; www.ladygdiver.com; 2-1/4-dive package US\$84/152; Errol Flynn Marina) is a full-service dive shop; dive boats leave at 11am and 2pm daily. It has a retail store, PADI instruction and equipment rentals.

TOURS

Port Antonio makes an excellent base from which to take excursions into the verdant forests of the Rio Grande Valley and into the Maroon country towns of Moore Town and Nanny Town.

PORT ANTONIO



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PORT ANTONIO & NORTHEAST COAST

PORT ANTONIO & NORTHEAST COAST

To Breastworks (2km); Berridale (8km); Moore Town (16km)

ERROL FLYNN

Errol Flynn (1909–59), the infamous Hollywood idol, arrived in Portland parish in 1946 when his yacht *Zacca* washed ashore in bad weather. Flynn fell in love with the area and made Port Antonio his playground and home (his acting career was by then washed up). In his autobiography, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, he described Port Antonio as 'more beautiful than any woman I've ever seen.'

Flynn bought the Titchfield Hotel and Navy Island, where he threw wild, extravagant parties. Locals tell exaggerated tales of Flynn's exploits: 'Remember de day 'im drove de Cadillac into de swimming pool?' Flynn's beguiling ways inevitably attracted the attention of other stars of stage and screen, like Clara Bow, Bette Davis and Ginger Rogers.

With his third wife, Patrice Wymore, Flynn later established a cattle ranch at Boston Estate. He also planned a lavish home at Comfort Castle and had grandiose plans to develop Port Antonio into a tourist resort. But heavy drinking and a profligate lifestyle added to his ill-health. He died in 1959 before his plans could be brought to fruition. The wild parties are no more, but his legend lives on.

Excellent trips are offered by **Grand Valley Tours** (☎ 993-4116, 858-7338; www.portantiojamaica.com/gvt.html; 12 West St) to Scatter Falls and Fox Caves as well as hikes to Moore Town, Nanny Falls, Nanny Town and along the White River Trail.

Guided hikes are offered by **Valley Hikes** (☎ 993-3881; 26 Harbour St) in the Rio Grande Valley, as well as Maroon culture tours, horseback riding, bird-watching and other trips.

The **Attractions Link** (☎ 993-2102, 394-3320; City Centre Plaza, Harbour St) offers Port Antonio high-lights tours to the Blue Mountains, Reach Falls and Nonsuch Caves.

From Drapers San Guest House, **Carla Gullotta** (☎ 993-7118; carla-51@cwjamaica.com) (p135) occasionally leads small contingents by minibus to some of the best reggae shows islandwide. She arranges tickets and will act as your intermediary at the show.

Tour coordination company **Jamaica Explorations** (☎ 993-7267; www.hotelmockingbirdhill.com/english/portantio/hiking.php) at Hotel Mocking Bird Hill (p136) aims to promote ecocultural tourism in Portland and the Blue Mountains. Tailor-made guided soft-adventure tours include walking, hiking and cultural excursions to the Maroon village of Charles Town.

Portland enthusiast Joanna Hart of **Port Antonio Tours** (☎ 831-8434, 859-3758; joahart@hotmail.com) offers custom tours by minivan.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The weeklong **Portland Jamboree** is held in mid-August, featuring a float parade, street dancing, food fair and live music.

The weeklong **Port Antonio International Marlin Tournament** (☎ 927-0145; rondq@mail.infochan.com) is held in early October.

SLEEPING

Happily, Port Antonio offers the best selection of budget hotels in Jamaica. If you're looking for luxury, however, the best accommodations are east of town.

Guest-house owners are served by the **Port Antonio Guest House Association** (☎ 993-7118; www.go-jam.com).

Budget

Holiday Home (☎ 993-2425, 993-2882; 12 King St; s/d/t US\$35/40/55) A charming hotel with nine rooms and a cheery communal lounge. They're basic yet spacious, and some have shared bathrooms with cold water, but they're all spic-and-span. Breakfasts are cooked to order.

Ivanhoe's (☎ 993-3043; 9 Queen St; r US\$30-60) Recently renovated, this gracious property has 12 well-lit rooms with fans, louvered windows and private bathrooms with hot water; some rooms have cable TV. The most expensive room has air-conditioning. It's well run, spotless and quiet, and has a breezy patio and homey TV lounge. Breakfast costs US\$5, and lunch and dinner are cooked to order. Be sure to ask for a room with a view out over the harbor.

Ocean Crest Guest House B&B (☎ 993-4024; 7 Queen St; r US\$35, d US\$70; ☺) Somewhat dark and a little loud, this B&B is a favorite with the backpacker crowd. The lounge has a large-screen TV. Four bright new deluxe rooms were recently unveiled on the top floor;

the balconies have a stunning view of Port Antonio and its picturesque bay.

Inn on the Lake Guest House (☎ 993-3468; onthe lake@cybervale.com; 17A W Palm Ave; r with/without air-con US\$55/50, cottage US\$120; ☺ ☺) No it's not on a lake, but this welcoming guesthouse offers six cozy rooms, each with its own outside entrance and cable TV, radio and hot water. There's also a two-bedroom cottage with kitchen.

Midrange

Jamaica Heights Resort (☎ 993-3305; www.jamaica heights.net; Spring Bank Rd; d US\$75-125, cottage US\$175; ☺ ☺) This is a splendid hilltop plantation home set amid lush gardens with incredible views of the town and bay. The columned verandas, whitewashed walls, dark hardwood floors, louvered windows, French doors and cool white-and-blue color scheme combine to provide a gracious environment. The six rooms and two cottages are tastefully furnished with white wicker and antiques, plus four-poster beds. A spa offers massage and treatments, and there's a beautiful plunge pool plus a nature trail.

Hotel Timbambao (☎ 993-2049; hoteltimbambao.com; 5 Everleigh Park Rd; s US\$50-70, 1-2-/3-bedroom ste US\$85/150/200; ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺) Offering rare comfort for a Port Antonio hotel so centrally located, the Timbambao has spacious, sunny rooms with modern furniture, carpeted floors and cable TV. Suites have sizable kitchens, while some rooms have balconies with views of the Blue Mountains. The hotel's sun deck is a great place to unwind.

Top End

Port Antonio has no top-end hotels, but to the east in nearby Fairy Hill are several exceptional choices – see p135.

The Port Antonio area has many luxurious villas, situated both on the water or in the hills with soaring views, where couples, families and small groups can spend a few days or more in style. Contact the **Jamaican Association of Villas & Apartments** (JAVA; ☎ 974-2508; www.villasinjamaica.com; PO Box 298, Ocho Rios).

EATING

Port Antonio has more than its share of cheap eateries offering economical Jamaican fare. On Allan Ave (Folly Rd), along the waterfront east of downtown, are a number of beachside jerk stands and simple eateries serving roasted

fish and seafood. For a more upscale experience, head to the new marina.

Budget

Golden Happiness (☎ 993-4524; cnr Fort George & West Sts; mains US\$4-6; ☺ lunch & dinner) Here you'll find reasonable quality Chinese food, including a vast menu of chop sueys and sweet-and-sour dishes. The dining room is spartan, but it's a good place to take in the hustle and bustle of West St – or to order take-out.

Survival Beach Restaurant (☎ 384-4730; 24 Allan Ave; mains US\$5-10; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) In addition to the usual local fare, natural juices and the best jelly coconut in town, this choice shack serves a tasty dish made with coconut milk, pumpkin, Irish potato, garlic, scallion, thyme, okra, string beans and three kinds of peas, served with sides of cabbage and callaloo. Just ask for the vital I-tal stew (US\$5). Tip from Oliver the owner: call in advance.

Shadows (☎ 993-3823; 40 W Palm Ave; mains US\$6-24; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With tables surrounding a comfortable outdoor bar set back from the street, this casual place serves good Jamaican and Chinese. The seafood specials are always a hit.

Juici-Beef Patties Chicken Place Coronation Bakery (William St) is a good spot for cheap patties. (☎ 993-4984; 29 Harbour St; mains US\$3-5; ☺ lunch & dinner) serves good for fried chicken. (☎ 993-2710; 18 West St) is known for its doughnutlike pastries called 'holey bulla' and other desserts. For fresh, oven-baked bread, try **Three Star Lion Bakery** (☎ 993-3007; 27 West St).

If self-catering, **Kamal's Variety** (☎ 993-2756; 12 West St) is a well-stocked grocery store with a currency exchange desk offering competitive rates.

Midrange & Top End

Anna Banana's Restaurant & Sports Bar (☎ 715-6533; 7 Allan Ave; breakfast US\$4, seafood dinners US\$12-16; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Overlooking a small beach on the southern lip of the harbor, this breezy restaurant-bar specializes in hearty Jamaican breakfasts, jerk or barbecued chicken and pork and, for dinner, large plates of conch and lobster prepared the local way. The curried goat is particularly good. There are two pool tables, darts and friendly, accommodating service.

our pick **Dickie's Best Kept Secret** (☎ 809-6276; breakfast/dinner US\$12/25; ☺ breakfast & dinner) Almost too well kept a secret for its own good, Dickie's

is an unsigned hut on the A4, less than 2km west of Port Antonio that offers enormous five-course meals in two small rooms perched over the sea. Dickie and his wife Joy promise to cook anything you want (provided they can get the ingredients). Invariably, the meal begins with a palate-cleansing fruit plate followed by soup and a callaloo omelette. Just when you think you can't eat another bite, the main course – typically garlic lobster or fresh fish – arrives. Dickie's has only a few tables, so reservations are essential. The owners serve no alcohol, but you may bring your own.

Norma's at the Marina (☎ 993-9510; Ken Wright Cruise Ship Pier; mains \$11-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) Fronting a lovely white-sand beach, this quality restaurant can be a forlorn place – but some might find the solitude blissfully peaceful. Steaks, chops and fish prepared in the continental style are served at outdoor tables overlooking the Errol Flynn Marina.

ENTERTAINMENT

Roof Club (11 West St; weekend entry US\$5; ☎ late Thu-Sun) This is Port Antonio's infamous hang-loose, rough-around-the-edges reggae bar. Young men and women move from partner to partner. You're fair game for any stranger who wants to try to extract a drink from you. It's relatively dead midweek, when entry is free. But on weekends it hops with Crazy Saturdays, as well as on Thursday – 'Ladies Nite.'

Club La Best (5 West St; ☎ 9:30-till the last person leaves) The newest, liveliest spot in Port Antonio. La Best assumes a different identity depending on the evening. Fridays are dancehall and ladies' nights, Sundays groove to a mellow blend of reggae and old-school R&B, and periodic live shows occur Saturdays.

Shanshy Beach (☎ 815-7411; general admission free, events US\$3; ☎ 8am-2am) This pretty but badly maintained stretch of sand 2km west of Port Antonio has a big, bad sound system. An area DJ collective called Big Bad Trouble International spins for theme nights including the After Work Jam on Friday featuring dancehall music; Cranked Saturdays with hip-hop, R&B and reggae; and Talent Explosion Sundays featuring local flair. Signs reading 'No Gun Salute' forbid the carrying of concealed weapons. There's a restaurant and bar.

Shadows (☎ 993-3823; 40 W Palm Ave) A less rowdy option than most, this place plays vintage music on Tuesday and Sunday. Other nights it can verge on comatose.

Anna Banana's Restaurant & Sports Bar (☎ 715-6533; 7 Allan Ave) This beachside bar is the place to go for darts, pool and a rum punch. Friday heats up with the help of local DJs.

Lanza Lawn (nr Smatt & Summers Town Rds; admission US\$5; ☎ Tue, Thu & Fri) This popular venue goes nuts on Crazy Fridays as local DJs trade grooves and pass the mic. Sister P (see below) invites the public to nyahbinghi drumming sessions here on Tuesday and Thursday nights.

You can watch cricket at the **Folly Oval Cricket Ground** (Allan Ave), on the east side of East Harbour.

SHOPPING

Musgrave Market (West St) This has a craft market on its north side. Look for a stand called 'Rock Bottom' selling well-made crafts and reggae-inspired duds.

Portland Art Gallery (☎ 882-7732; 2 West Palm Ave) A simple gallery and studio staffed by Hopeton Cargill, a Port Antonio realist painter. He's delighted to act as an ambassador for the local art scene.

Cooyah Designs (☎ 993-4207; 2nd fl, Village of St George, Fort George St) This shop specializes in 'roots wear' clothing with original designs.

Lioness (☎ 715-3529; 10 Matthews Ave) A small shop that sells clothing, drumming CDs, crafts and art. It's run by Sister P, a woman regarded by many to be the heart and soul of the community. Sister P also organizes the Fi Wi Sinting festival (p142).

Jamaica Agricultural Society shop (☎ 993-3743; 11 Harbour St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) This organization has been championing the cause of the small farmer in Jamaica since 1895. Here you can buy local honey, spices and Blue Mountain coffee at a fair price.

The **City Centre Plaza** (Harbour St) has a number of shops including **Photo Bank One Hour Photo Service** (☎ 993-2716; City Centre Plaza, Harbour St).

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Ken Jones Aerodrome (☎ 913-3173), 9km west of Port Antonio, was no longer receiving flights from Air Jamaica Express at last visit. These days the only incoming flights are private planes and chartered flights of International Airlink and TimAir (see p197).

Most upscale hotels offer free transfers to and from the Ken Jones Aerodrome for guests. There's no shuttle-bus service, although you

can flag down any minibus or route taxi passing along the A4. A tourist taxi will cost about US\$10.

Boat

The **Errol Flynn Marina at Port Antonio** (☎ 993-3209, 715-6044; www.themarinaatportantonio.com) offers customs clearance for private vessels.

Car

There's an office in town for **Eastern Rent-a-Car** (☎ 993-3624; 16 Harbour St) and gas stations on W Palm Ave, Fort George St and Harbour St.

Public Transportation

There's a **transportation center** (Gideon Ave) that extends along the waterfront. Buses, minibuses and route taxis leave regularly for Annotto Bay, Port Maria (where you change for Ocho Rios) and Kingston.

Taxi

Taxi transfers from the Montego Bay and Kingston airports, are offered by **JUTA** (Port Antonio ☎ 993-2684; Kingston ☎ 979-0778; Montego Bay ☎ 952-0813) and **Island Car Rentals** (Kingston ☎ 926-8861; Norman Manley International Airport ☎ 924-8075; Donald Sangster International Airport ☎ 952-5771).

For licensed taxis, call **JUTA/Port Antonio Cab Drivers' Co-op** (☎ 993-2684). Taxis hang out by hotels. They can also be found pretty easily in town, notably along Gideon Ave and the intersection of Bridge St and Summers Town Rd. Licensed taxis to Port Antonio cost about US\$100 from Kingston and US\$230 from Montego Bay.

EAST OF PORT ANTONIO

PORT ANTONIO TO FAIRY HILL

Beyond the turnoff for Folly the A4 meanders east of Port Antonio through the coastal villages of Drapers, Frenchman's Cove and Fairy Hill. This is where most visitors to Port Antonio, and indeed to Portland, will find accommodations and explore the nearby Rio Grande Valley, Nonsuch Caves, Blue Lagoon as well as the luxuriate sands of Frenchman's Cove, San San Beach and Winnifred Beach.

While the hotels and restaurants of Drapers, Frenchman's Cove and Fairy Hill will accommodate most budgets and tastes, be sure to venture into the local commun-

ities, small as they are. Portlanders are among the most gracious of all Jamaicans, and their acquaintance enhances any visit to their parish.

Information

In the little hamlet of Drapers is a small **post office** (Hwy A4; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), and a **police station** (☎ 993-7315) just east of Frenchman's Cove.

Sights

TRIDENT CASTLE

Just 3km east of Port Antonio, the road circles around the deep Turtle Crawl Bay. Squatting atop the western headland is a magnificent gleaming-white castle built in the 1980s by Baroness Elisabeth Siglindy Stephan von Stephanie Thyssen. This is Trident Castle, part of the Trident Hotel & Villas resort. The architect, Earl Levy, eventually took over the property after a tiff with the baroness.

At the time of writing the castle was for sale.

FRENCHMAN'S COVE

This small cove, just east of Drapers, 8km from Port Antonio, boasts one of the prettiest **beaches** (admission US\$5; ☎ Wed-Mon) for miles. A stream winds lazily to a white-sand beach that shelves steeply into the water. Bring insect repellent. There's a snack bar serving jerk chicken and fish (US\$7 to US\$9), alfresco showers, bathrooms and a secure parking lot.

SAN SAN BEACH

San San (☎ 993-7300; entrance US\$5; ☎ 10am-4pm) is a private beach used by residents of the villas on Alligator Head, and by guests of Goblin Hill, Fern Hill and Jamaica Palace hotels. Passersby, however, can gain access. It has a bar and restaurant, snorkeling equipment (US\$10 per day) and kayaks (US\$25 per hour).

BLUE LAGOON

The waters that launched Brooke Shields' movie career (and the site of a less-famous Jacques Cousteau dive), the Blue Lagoon is by any measure one of the most beautiful spots in Jamaica. The 55m-deep 'Blue Hole' (as it is known locally) opens to the sea through a narrow funnel, but is fed by freshwater springs that come in at about 40m deep. Its

classical property overlooking Turtle Crawl Bay. Artworks dot the property, while the cavernous 24 rooms and 55 suites boast king-sized beds, crystal chandeliers, period antiques and Georgian bay windows. In the landscaped grounds is a 35m-long pool shaped like the island of Jamaica. Rates include tax and service charge.

Hotel Mocking Bird Hill (☎ 993-7267; www.hotelmockingbirdhill.com; Mocking Bird Hill Rd; r US\$165-255, ste US\$305-450; 📶) The trek up a winding dirt road to this romantic, 'eco-chic' 10-room property in the hills above Frenchman's Cove is well worth it. All rooms are lovingly appointed with well-chosen fabrics and modern art and appliances. Most boast ocean views from private balconies. Facilities include a Caribbean-bright lounge and a bar, the Gallery Carriacou plus a variety of health and wellness services, including massage. Meals at Mille Fleurs are sublime. Trails lead through the lush hillside gardens...fabulous for bird-watching!

San Wood Villas (☎ 995-5788, 993-7302; rose@geejam.com; off Hwy A4, San San Bay; d without/with meals US\$400/600; 📶 📺 📺 📺) Home of Gee Jam recording studios, this sprawling, well-conceived 'rock-and-roll hotel' offers classy cabins, suites in a fabulously decorated house, and a large studio with a kitchenette that resembles a Caribbean-styled New York City loft. Lodging is offered intermittently for much of the year, when the place is not occupied by visiting luminaries like No Doubt, Keith Richards and India.Arie. Of course there's an attractive pool, exercise room and hot tub, as well as spa services and yoga. Meals are served as part of a meal plan. The owner, Jon Baker, is a music industry veteran with a taste for hip-hop and reggae. He is choosy about accepting guests, preferring 'characters' with a 'good story.' Advance reservations required.

Blue Lagoon Villas (☎ 993-8491, in the USA 800-237-3237; www.bluelagoonvillas.com; Hwy A4; 2/3 bedroom villas per week US\$7500/8500, 4-bedroom villa US\$9500-12,500; 📶 📺 📺 📺) Immediately west of Blue Lagoon and facing Monkey Island, these oft-photographed, flamboyantly priced villas provide a stunning setting and real luxury. Each two- to four-bedroom villa is exquisitely furnished and staffed with a housekeeper/cook and houseman. Sea kayaks are provided. They are rented solely by the week, and rates include airport transfers.

Eating & Drinking

This stretch of road has many accommodations but few independent restaurants. Most folks eat at their hotels – which generally have restaurants open to nonguests – or are catered to by the staff of their villa.

Your Place (Hwy A4, Drapers; mains US\$2-7; 📶 lunch & dinner) This roadside newcomer has a small indoor dining area and an outdoor patio, both of which are great for enjoying its chicken (barbecue or stewed) or fish dishes. Be sure to order a side of festival (a fried biscuit shaped like a sausage), which is particularly good here.

Woody's Place (☎ 993-7888; Hwy A4, Drapers; mains US\$3-9; 📶 lunch & dinner) This pleasant spot – with an outdoor patio and an indoor counter that doubles as a local meeting place – prepares tremendous hotdogs and burgers, grilled cheese and Jamaican dinners to order. Vegetarians are catered for by a veggie burger heaped with stewed callaloo.

ourpick Mille Fleurs (☎ 993-7267; Hotel Mocking Bird Hill; Mocking Bird Hill Rd; 3-course dinner US\$45; 📶 7am-10pm) Come for a rum punch at the bar whose balcony offers great views of Port Antonio across the bay, then go downstairs to this candlelit gourmet restaurant for one of the best meals on the island. Nouvelle-Jamaican specialties from a changing menu invariably including a homemade pasta dish. A three-course dinner, which has a vegetarian option, ends with a trolley of regional liqueurs. The special Mille Fleurs continental breakfast costs US\$18.50. Reservations required.

San San Tropez (☎ 993-7213; Hwy A4, San San Bay; mains US\$12-25; 📶 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This is the place to go for great Italian seafood and pizzas. The menu is vast, and there's a large wine list.

Shopping

Gallery Carriacou (☎ 993-7267; Hotel Mocking Bird Hill; 📶 10am-5pm Thu-Tue) boasts a fabulous array of paintings, ceramics, sculptures and other quality works of fine art by local artists. It also hosts workshops and cultural events. En route, you might call in at **Philip Henry's Art Bus** (☎ 993-3162; Hwy A4), roadside at Turtle Crawl Bay, to check out his array of woodcarving and assorted crafts.

In Drapers you'll find the roadside gallery of renowned self-taught artist **R Stewart** (Hwy A4), who more than likely will be working on his latest canvas at the edge of the

road. His whimsical, masterful depictions of Jamaican life regularly inspire impulse buys from passersby.

Getting There & Away

Buses run infrequently between Port Antonio and Boston Bay and to other points beyond. Minibuses and route taxis (US\$1 to US\$2.50) run more frequent services.

Derron's Rent-a-Car (☎ 993-7111; Hwy A4) has an outlet in Drapers.

BOSTON BAY

Boston Bay, 2.5km east of Fairy Hill, is a pocket-sized beach shelving into jewellike turquoise waters. High surf rolls into the bay and locals spend much of their time surfing (you can rent boards on the beach). Few dispute its reputation as the best surfing spot in Jamaica.

Alongside its surfing hot spot status, Boston is equally as famous for the highly spiced jerk chicken and pork sizzling on many smoky barbecue pits along the roadside. Today, jerk has garnered a worldwide fan base but until the 1950s was virtually unknown outside this area. The practice of marinating meat with jerk seasoning was first developed centuries ago not far from here by the Maroons, and the modest shacks at Boston Bay were among the first to invite attention.

Sweet Harmony Guest House (☎ 993-8779; fax 993-3178; Hwy A4; r US\$50-60) offers three clean rooms with double beds and mosquito nets, wall fans and shower-baths with cold water only. There's a pleasant sunny veranda, where guests while away the hours and days. Meals are available by arrangement. You'll find it about 400m inland from the A4, just east of the beach.

ourpick Great Huts (☎ 993-8888; www.greathuts.com; Boston Beach Lane; African-style tent per person US\$60-139, tree house US\$157) This is a notable exception to the general rule that accommodations in Boston Bay are simple. Perched on a scenic crag overlooking Boston Bay, it has nine tents or huts, each decorated with distinctive and imaginative Afrocentric design, and two spacious 'tree houses.' These two-story open-air structures have verandas, bamboo-walled bedrooms, Jacuzzi baths and kitchenettes. Alfresco showers are enhanced by the squawking of a small aviary of parrots. If you can tear yourself from your room, the Cliff

Bar, featuring excellent pizzas and superlative views of the sea, and the hotel's own beach on the rocks below will demand attention.

Cozy Corner First & Last (☎ 993-8450; Hwy A4; d US\$20) is a quiet private home with two simple but nicely appointed rooms with fans, TV and hot water. It's just south of Boston Bay, on the roadside about 200m from the shore. There's a small bar, but for food you're on your own.

ourpick Boston Jerk Centre (Boston Beach Lane; 200g chicken US\$4) is the best place to get jerked. A series of open-air stalls, the jerk center is popular with locals as well as tour groups. Get there early, as food tends to be sold out by mid-afternoon. (For more information about jerk, see p45).

A frequent habitué of the beach is the Maroon Prophet, a roots bush doctor selling his handmade tonic and blood cleanser made from roots and 'bush' according to tradition. Other roots tonic specialists sell their bitter brews here as well.

Boston Bay is 15km east of Port Antonio; buses (about US\$1) and minibuses and route taxis (US\$2.50) will get you there or back.

LONG BAY

Heading east from Boston, the road hugs the coast and passes through 8km of striking scenery. Waves chew at rocky headlands as magnificent frigate birds circle overhead like juvenile pterodactyls. Your destination is Long Bay, in one of the most dramatic settings in all of Jamaica. The 1.5km-wide bay has rose-colored sand, deep turquoise waters and breezes pushing the waves forcefully ashore. Canoes are drawn up on the beach, with fishing nets drying beside them.

Long Bay appeals to budget travelers as well as surfers, and has drawn a large number of expats who have put down roots and opened guesthouses. The lifestyle here is laid-back and rootsy, something like Negril felt 30 years ago.

There's a dangerous undertow, so avoid swimming, but surfers love the waves. Surfboards are often available for rent on the beach (per half-day US\$10), as are boogie boards (US\$2.50).

The **public library** (☎ 913-7957; Hwy A4; per 30min US\$1; 📶 Mon-Sat) offers internet access.

Sleeping

Likkle Paradise (☎ 913-7702; r US\$30) Up an unnamed lane just south of the library, this friendly place offers two clean rooms with

HURRICANE DEAN

On August 20, 2007, Hurricane Dean slammed its way through the Caribbean, the eye passing the southern coast of Jamaica without causing any of the havoc that was feared. Yet though the storm essentially passed Jamaica by, its winds stirred the sea to pound the east coast, and Long Bay was badly hit.

Comparatively speaking, the damage wasn't that bad. The palms on Long Bay beach were toppled, and at last visit a small forest of stumps lined the sands. But they should grow back quickly. Similarly, many of the hotels and cafés were forced to close and took the opportunity to upgrade with a new coat of paint.

As Jamaicans are fond of saying: 'an' so it go.' Translation: it goes with the territory.

private bathrooms and a quiet patio overlooking a small lawn and garden. Guests enjoy full kitchen privileges; the owner lives upstairs.

Rose Garden Guest House (☎ 913-7311, 382-3277; Rose Garden Rd; r US\$30-40, 4-bed apt US\$50) Located at the southern end of town, this simple guest house provides good value, particularly for groups. On the top floor, from which guests enjoy a bird's-eye view of the sea, there are two tiny bedrooms, a loft and a kitchenette. There's an additional bedroom with two beds and communal kitchen downstairs, and a kid-sized dunk pool in the garden.

Yahimba (☎ 382-6384, 402-4101; www.yahimba.com; Hwy A4; cabana US\$75) Situated right on the beach next to Cool Runnings Beach Bar & Grill, these brightly painted African-style cabanas were badly hit by the hurricane. After being temporarily out of commission, the hotel is finally up and running. The location, smack bang in the middle of the public beach, may not afford a lot of privacy – or, for that matter, security – but those mesmerized by the waves pouring in may not notice.

Rose Hill Cottage (☎ 913-7452; Rose Garden Rd; cottage US\$40-90) This private cottage is offered by Peter-Paul Zahl, a seasoned German author who has long called Jamaica home. Perched above the main road and affording tremendous views of the beach, the self-contained cottage has a small bedroom, sleeping loft, living area and kitchen. There are plenty of German-language books lying about. Your host, who inhabits a house a stone's throw

away, has an insouciant air and the gift of the gab. The cottage is self-catering, but a delicious Caribbean dinner is offered nightly.

Villa Seascape (☎ 913-7762; Hwy A4; d/villa US\$60/120; (P)) At this well-maintained guest-house the sea licks the walls of the veranda. Two adjacent buildings contain three modest, nicely furnished rooms with fans. In each, two rooms share a bathroom. Breakfast is included; other meals are prepared to order.

Hotel Jamaican Colors (☎ 913-7716, 893-5185; www.hoteljamaicancolors.com; Hwy A4; 1-/2-/3-bedroom cottage US\$59/65/95, house US\$100-195; (P) (A)) This spiffy hotel located on the cliffs 2km south of Long Bay offers 12 comfortable and immaculate cottages. Each has a modern bathroom and comfortable double bed draped with mosquito netting. Also on the premises is a family-friendly house with two bedrooms, loft and kitchenette. There's an open-air restaurant featuring the proprietor's astonishing sand collection, displayed on the wall in labeled test tubes. The hotel has an inviting pool and large Jacuzzi bath. The French hosts also arrange excursions to area attractions and dispense information of interest to surfers.

Eating

The following restaurants are all located on the beach.

Sweet Daddy's (☎ 913-7475; meals US\$3.50-12) A local favorite serving fresh fish, lobster and hearty breakfasts. The cook and proprietor says that she 'takes good care of vegetarians.'

Cool Runnings Beach Bar & Grill (☎ 387-9305; meals US\$4-7; ☎ lunch & dinner) This beach bar and restaurant is a good first stop; the proprietor represents local guest houses and can help you find accommodations. The food is well prepared and tasty – everything is made from scratch, including a wickedly rich mayonnaise. One of the signature dishes is a lovely coconut cream fish (US\$8). On Saturday night there's a beach party playing old roots reggae and R&B.

Chill-Out (☎ 913-7171; meals US\$4-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) Just down the beach from Cool Runnings, this is another popular thatched beachfront eatery and bar. Try the steamed fish and vegetables liberally seasoned with allspice (US\$9). Sound-system parties are frequently held in the evenings.

Numerous rustic beachside shacks sell inexpensive Jamaican fare (US\$2 to US\$6) and

double as no-frills 'rum shops' with music at night.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses and route taxis run between Port Antonio and Long Bay (US\$2.50).

MANCHIONEAL

pop 2200

A sleepy fishing village 11km southeast of Long Bay, Manchioneal is set in a deep, scalloped bay with calm turquoise waters and a wide, shallow beach where colorful pirogues are drawn up. It's a center for lobster fishing and the surf is killer – July is said to be the best month.

Just as Boston Bay is famous for its jerk pork and chicken, Manchioneal is a culinary destination for roast fish or conch in foil, which you can purchase from small shacks on the beach. There are plenty of jerk stalls and rum shops, some serving steamed fish, fish tea, roast conch and so on.

Three kilometers southeast of Manchioneal, **Ennises Bay Beach** is a great place to spend a lost afternoon shooting the breeze with local Rastafarians. There's a refreshment stand and lovely views of the John Crow Mountains.

Three kilometers north of Manchioneal, **Christmas River Heartical Roots Corner** (☎ 993-6138, 437-3742; r US\$30), is celebrated by surfers who come to set up camp in a thatched, no-frills Arawak-style octagonal cabin with two beds. Sizable waves pour into Christmas Bay, serving to beguile and occasionally thrill those traveling with a board (the proprietor may be persuaded to loan one). There's an outdoor bathroom and shower, and a second small cottage with a single bed. Bring mosquito repellent! The owners' pals – full of bravura – hang at a bar serving simple meals to order.

our pick Zion Country (☎ 993-0435; www.zioncountry.com; s/d US\$40/50) Hit hard by Hurricane Dean, this place atop the shoreline cliffs, about 2km south of the Hwy A4 turnoff for Reach Falls, has bounced back admirably. An excellent backpacker and ecotourist haven, it holds four appealing hillside log-and-bamboo cottages sharing two bathrooms, with hammocks on the veranda and three showers. There is a bar and small restaurant set in a lush garden. A private beach, which has been replanted after the hurricane, receives year-round visits from manatees.

Zion Country offers some excellent tours, including a good-value three-day excursion into the Blue Mountains, including an ascent of the peak (US\$270 for two people). There's a Kingston highlights tour (US\$170 for two people), and van transfers are offered to Kingston (US\$110 one way) and Montego Bay (US\$220 one way).

Bryan's Restaurant (☎ 993-6518; Main St; meals US\$2-5) This rooftop eatery offers simple but delicious Jamaican fare, served on a sunny veranda. Pay for your meal at the B&L Supermarket on the 1st floor before heading up the stairs.

For masks and other fine woodwork, Winsome Shaw operates a **crafts' stall** (☎ 335-6057) on the road to Reach Falls.

REACH FALLS

All of Jamaica's tumbling cascades are refreshing, but this waterfall is downright rejuvenating. This peaceful spot is surrounded by virgin rain forest, and features a series of cascades tumbling over limestone tiers from one hollowed, jade-colored pool to another.

Unfortunately Jamaica's UDC took over the falls (☎ 8:30am-4:30pm Wed-Sun; adult/child US\$10/5) and while the ensuing clean-up makes it more tourist-friendly than before, the prices are prohibitive for the community and the guides are not the locals who used to earn their living from tours. At last visit the Mandingo Cave, the crown jewel of the falls, was off limits while it got the clean-up treatment from the UDC.

To get here, you can catch any of the minibuses and route taxis that run between Kingston and Port Antonio via Morant Bay; get off in Manchioneal, then walk or hitchhike 3km uphill to Reach Falls (the turnoff is signed, 1km south of Manchioneal). A charter taxi from Port Antonio costs about US\$50 roundtrip.

RIO GRANDE VALLEY

The Rio Grande rushes down from 900m in the Blue Mountains and has carved a huge gorge that forms a deep V-shaped wedge between the Blue Mountains to the west and the John Crow Mountains to the east.

Red Hassell Rd runs south from Port Antonio and enters the Rio Grande Valley at Fellowship.

Activities

HIKING

Popular hikes include those to White Valley, known for its large population of giant swallowtail butterflies; to Dry River Falls; and to Scatter Falls and Fox Caves.

Other hikes are demanding, with muddy, overgrown trails and small rivers that require fording. Don't attempt to hike off the beaten path without a guide. The Corn Puss Gap trail is particularly difficult, as is the wild path from Windsor to Nanny Town.

Scatter Falls & Fox Caves

An excellent and easy hike takes you to Scatter Falls and Fox Caves, reached by crossing the Rio Grande on a bamboo raft at Berridale, then hiking for 30 minutes through a series of hamlets and banana groves. The falls tumble through a curtain of ferns into a pool where you can take a refreshing dip. There are changing rooms nearby as well as toilets, a campground, a bamboo-and-thatch bar, and a kitchen that serves a hot lunch – though this must be ordered in advance through Grand Valley Tours (see p130).

A steep, 15-minute hike from the falls leads to the caves, which have some intriguing formations, some of which resemble Rasta dreads. The roof is pitted with hollows in which tiny bats dangle, and you can see where the falls emanate from the caves.

As the path is unsigned and you'll be passing through private property, it's imperative that you visit accompanied by a guide.

Nanny Town

This former village stronghold belonging to the Windward Maroons is perched on the brink of a precipitous spur on the northeastern flank of Blue Mountain Peak, about 16km southwest of Moore Town as the crow flies. It is named for an 18th-century Ashanti warrior priestess and Maroon leader, now a national hero (see opposite). In 1734 English troops captured and destroyed Nanny Town.

It's a tough 16km hike from Windsor, 5km north of Moore Town. Grand Valley Tours has a three-day guided hike. There are numerous side trails, and it's easy to get lost if you attempt to hike on your own.

Organized Hikes

Grand Valley Tours (p130) offers a series of guided hikes that include simple walks

to places like Scatter Falls and Fox Caves (US\$35 to US\$40), challenging hikes, such as the trip to Nanny Town (US\$200), and overnight hikes, where you sleep either in a tent or in rustic lodgings with bunk beds. Prices depend on the number of people. Grande Valley also offers 'bush' camping, mountain-biking tours (US\$45) and horseback rides (US\$40). At the end of each excursion, you'll be well fed, often with local cuisine prepared in a private home.

Valley Hikes (p130) is also recommended for guided hikes into the Rio Grande Valley, plus Maroon culture tours, horseback riding, bird-watching and other trips.

RAFTING

Errol Flynn supposedly initiated rafting on the Rio Grande during the 1940s, when moonlight raft trips were considered the ultimate activity among the fashionable.

Today paying passengers make the 11km journey of one to three hours (depending on water level) from Grant's Level (Rafter's Village), about 2km south of Berridale, to Rafter's Rest at St Margaret's Bay. When the moon is full, unforgettable moonlight trips are offered. These are less regimented; your guide will be happy to pull over on a moon-drenched riverbank so that you can canoe with your sweetie or just open the ice chests to release the beer.

Reserve at **Rio Grande Experience Ltd** (☎ 913-5434, 993-5778; Berridale; per raft US\$60, double for full-moon rides; ☎ 8:30am-4pm). You can buy tickets at Rafter's Village at Grant's Level if you don't have reservations.

Hotel pickups are offered, or you can have your car driven to Rafter's Rest to await your return (US\$15). The drivers are insured, but make clear to them that you expect them to drive slowly and safely.

A route taxi from Port Antonio to Grant's Level costs about US\$2; they depart from the corner of Bridge St and Summers Town Rd. Licensed taxis cost about US\$20 roundtrip.

ATHENRY GARDENS & NONSUCH CAVES

Athery Gardens, high in the hills southeast of Port Antonio, is a former coconut plantation and agricultural research center, now a lush garden that boasts many exotic and native species. The highlight is bat-filled **Nonsuch Caves** (☎ 919-6656, 779-7144; admis-

sion US\$7.50; ☎ 9am-4pm), 14 separate chambers full of stalagmites and stalactites.

The caves and garden are about 11km southeast of Port Antonio via Red Hassell Rd. After 3km along Red Hassell Rd there's a Y-fork at Breastworks. The right fork leads to Berridale and the Rio Grande; take the left for Nonsuch.

You can also reach Nonsuch Caves from Drapers via the same road that circles back to Port Antonio.

MOORE TOWN

This one-street village, 16km south of Port Antonio, stretches uphill for several hundred meters along the Wildcane River. Today it looks like any other Jamaican village, but is important as the former base of the Windward Maroons. The village was founded in 1739 following the signing of a peace treaty granting the Maroons their independence. Moore Town is still run semi-autonomously by a council of 24 elected members headed by a 'colonel.' The locals attempt to keep alive their lore and legends, and still bring out their *abengs* (goat horns) and talking drums on occasion.

Visitors expressing interest in the fascinating history of the Windward Maroons will be warmly welcomed. On arrival, it's considered polite to pay respects to Colonel Wallace Sterling (☎ 898-5714). If he's not about, you may be approached by one of his emissaries and asked for a small donation. Trails lead from Moore Town, including one to **Nanny Falls**, about 45 minutes away.

Grand Valley Tours (p130) leads trips, including a 'Moonlight at Moore Town' community tour that aims to connect visitors to the spirit of the Maroons.

Moore Town's sole site of interest is **Bump Grave**, at the southern, uppermost end of town. Topped by a flagpole flying the Maroon and Jamaican flags, the oblong stone and plaque mark the grave of national hero Nanny of the Maroons. There's a gate around the grave, but it can be opened for a small donation.

Moore Town is unsigned and lies in a hollow to the left of a Y-junction at Seaman's Valley; the road to the right continues via Alligator Church through the Upper Rio Grande Valley. In Moore Town the road dead-ends in the village.

Minibuses and route taxis operate to Moore Town from Port Antonio (about US\$1.50

each way). A minibus from Port Antonio runs in early morning and again in early afternoon (US\$1).

UPPER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

The road to the right of the Y-junction at Seaman's Valley leads via Alligator Church to Bowden Pen, 16km or so up the river valley. The paved road ends at Alligator Church. Beyond here, the dirt road is extremely rough and narrow and you'll need a 4WD.

The ranger station for Blue Mountains-John Crow National Park is at **Millbank**, 3km before Bowden Pen, near the summit ridge of the John Crow Mountains, which parallels the valley like a great castle wall. A trail leads to the **White River Falls**, a series of seven cascades. It's a tough trek through the rain forest.

A short distance above Bowden Pen the track begins rising more precipitously and the vegetation closes in. Don't push too far, for there is nowhere to turn your vehicle back. You can continue on foot across the Corn Puss Gap.

Valley Hikes (p130) and Grand Valley Tours (p130) offer tours; the latter operates a campsite just beyond Millbank. You must arrange with the company in advance. Both companies can also arrange lodging in private homes in the area.

A minibus from Port Antonio goes as far as Millbank, as do route taxis (US\$2).

WEST OF PORT ANTONIO

PORT ANTONIO TO HOPE BAY

There's nothing inspirational about Hope Bay, which has a somewhat sad, gray beach. A loop drive, however, can be made from here up the Swift River Valley, where plantations grow cacao.

Both route taxis (US\$1.50) and minibuses (US\$1) pass Somerset Falls and Hope Bay between Annotto Bay and Port Antonio.

Sights

Somerset Falls (☎ 993-3115, 995-3354; Hwy A4; adult/child US\$7/3; ☎ 9am-5pm), 14km west of Port Antonio, is hidden in a deep gorge about 3km east of Hope Bay. The Daniels River cascades down through a lush garden of ferns, heliconias, lilies and crotons. Visitors have to negotiate some steep, twisty steps.

The recently renovated site has a restaurant, bar, jerk pit, ice-cream shop and massage therapy space. Yet further in the falls themselves are mercifully unspoiled. They're also less touristy than those at Dunn's River given Portland's more low key tourist status.

The entrance fee includes a guided tour through a grotto by boat to the Hidden Fall which tumbles 10m into a jade-colored grotto. Bring a swimsuit to enjoy a large swimming area.

Sleeping & Eating

Rio Vista Resort & Villas (☎ 993-5444; fax 993-5445; www.riovistajamaica.com; Rafter's Rest; r US\$65-95, ste US\$70-105, 1-/2-bedroom villa US\$135/175; (P) (♿) (♿)) Atop a ridge near the turnoff for Rafter's Rest on the Rio Grande, 6km west of Port Antonio, this is a superb option. This handsome modern house, built into the remains of an old plantation home, has an enviable setting high above the Rio Grande, with mountains behind – you'll find it hard to concentrate on breakfast from the patio. Five genteel villas have lofty ceilings and polished wood floors; three have two bedrooms and kitchen plus TV lounge. All units feature a kitchen, cable TV, ceiling fans and a housekeeper. Airport transfers and car rentals are available.

Buccaneers Room (☎ 993-5444; Rio Vista Resort & Villas; breakfast US\$5-10, dinner US\$12-28) This acclaimed restaurant serves beautifully conceived Jamaican fare prepared with hand-picked herbs and produce from the capacious grounds of the Rio Vista Resort. The coffee that's served here is also grown on-site.

Shopping

Sundial (☎ /fax 913-0443; sundial@aol.com; Main St, Hope Bay) A colorful store that strives to bring you 'natural and traditional healing remedies from the laboratory of the Most High for what might be ailing you.' On the shelves you'll find booklets, videos and tonics produced from old Maroon recipes with ingredients including African eyebright, woodroot, manback and koromantee.

ORANGE BAY

The road between Hope Bay and Orange Bay takes an inland route and is wonderfully scenic with dense jungle foliage, open forests of towering palms and hillsides cov-

ered with tropical plants boasting leaves the size of elephant ears. You'll pass by huge stands of bamboo up on the ridge and expansive plantations of banana. Along the way there are simple roadside stands that sell produce, pepper shrimp and simple fare. You'll also pass **Pon Di Corner**, an excellent jerk center and rest stop covered with vivid mural paintings.

At Orange Bay the road rejoins the coast. Of interest is the picturesque old **rail station** that served the Kingston-Annotto Bay line until it ceased operation in 1983. The building now houses a video store as well as the daughter of the former stationmaster. Across the street is **Marsha's Pub**, which hosts sound-system parties in the evenings, rattling windows for miles around.

Almond Lodge (☎ 385-4139, 372-7929; d US\$30-40; (P)), a roadside lodge with plenty of personality, offers several simple but clean fan-cooled rooms and bathrooms with no hot water, each containing one double bed. There's a pebble and black-sand beach which you are likely to have all to yourself, and a small restaurant and bar with pool table. The bar occasionally hosts parties.

BUFF BAY

pop 11,000

This is a small, neatly laid-out town in the midst of a major banana-producing area, with several colonial-era buildings of modest interest, centered on the Anglican church.

The post office is 100m east of the church. Buff Bay also has a small **hospital** (☎ 996-1478), and the **police station** (☎ 996-1497) is at the east end of town.

Fishdone Waterfalls is a beautiful spot on a private coffee plantation near Buff Bay. The falls are surrounded by rain forest, and there are trails for hiking.

Growing in popularity and importance is the annual culture festival **Fi Wi Sinting** (☎ 715-3529; www.fiwisinting.com; admission US\$5) which celebrates the African heritage of Jamaican music, dance, song, storytelling and food. It's held the third weekend of February at **Nature's Way**, 5km east of Buff Bay. An African marketplace offers robes, batiks and jewelry, and performances are staged throughout the day. In a moving ritual, the official celebration comes to a close when libation is poured in remembrance of those who survived the 'middle passage,' a term designating the passage of

slaves to Jamaica from Africa. A boat covered in flowers is released into the sea. The festival provides a rare opportunity to witness Kumina drumming, a tradition with direct ties to Africa, believed to be a form of communication with the dead. A Kumina drum circle keeps a sizable crowd dancing deep into the night.

For a snack or meal, head to **Kildare Villa Great House** (☎ 996-1240; Main St), at the eastern end of town. It's a colonial structure operating a well-stocked gift store selling patties and desserts. The Jamaican seafood restaurant upstairs offers patio dining and serves such fare as ackee, saltfish and brown stew chicken (US\$7), and staples such as fried chicken and curried goat (US\$4 to US\$12). There's a grocery store attached.

Located on the coastal side of the road to Orange Bay, **Blueberry Hill Jerk Centre** (US\$2-7) has developed a well-deserved reputation for its pork and chicken, drenched in a punishing jerk sauce

BUFF BAY RIVER VALLEY

The B1 heads south from the town center and climbs 32km through the valley of the Buff Bay River to Hardwar Gap, at an elevation of 1370m, before dropping down to Kingston. Note that during the rainy season, the road is sometimes put out of commission by landslides, so check conditions before setting out.

ANNOTTO BAY

This erstwhile banana port is a downtrodden one-street town that springs to life for the Saturday market. Depressing shanties line the waterfront. The paltry remains of **Fort George**, and some gingerbread colonial-era structures with columned walkways, stand on Main St. The most intriguing is the venerable yellow-and-red brick **Baptist chapel**, built in 'village baroque' style in 1894, with cut-glass windows and curious biblical exhortations engraved at cornice height.

Three kilometers west of town is the junction of the A4 with the A3.

The town has a small **hospital** (☎ 996-2222), a **police station** (☎ 996-9169; Main St) and a **National Commercial Bank** (☎ 996-2213; Main St). The **Annotto Bay Branch Library** (☎ 996-2508; Hwy A4; per 30min US\$1.25) offers internet access.

Nestled on the banks of the Penscar River at Long Road, **River Edge** (☎ 944-2673; riveredge99@

hotmail.com; camping per person US\$7, dm/apt per person US\$20/35), about 13km inland from Annotto Bay. Primarily a campsite, it also has basically furnished dorm rooms and one simple studio apartment with kitchenette and private bathroom with hot water. You can camp on the lawns (tents are rented). Meals are by request.

The best place to eat in Annotto Bay is the **Human Service Station** (US\$2-5), at the side of the road to Buff Bay as you're leaving town. It serves fish stews as well as chicken, many of whom can be seen roaming around the yard.

ROBIN'S BAY

Midway to Port Maria from Annotto Bay, on the A3, you'll pass a turnoff to the north that hugs a lonesome shoreline with gray-sand beaches backed by lagoons. After 4km you'll emerge in **Mt Pleasant Heights**, a fishing village nestled atop Don Christopher's Point, named for the Spanish guerrilla leader Don Cristobal Arnaldo de Ysassi, who led the resistance against the 1655 British invasion, culminating in the Battle of Rio Nuevo (see p160).

The paved road ends at Robin's Bay (known as Strawberry Fields in the 1970s, when it was a free-love haven for American hippies). There are persistent rumors about pirate's treasure still hidden away in the area's sea caves.

You can also reach Robin's Bay from Port Maria by a hiking trail that leads along one of the few stretches of Jamaican coastline that remains pristine. Locals can lead you to remote **Black Sand Beach**, and the **Kwaaman and Tacky Waterfalls**. In refreshing contrast to Jamaica's more famous – and thus more visited – waterfalls, Kwaaman and Tacky are so pristine and isolated that, if you stumbled across them wandering up the coast from Robin's Bay, you might be tempted to claim them as your own. Kwaaman Waterfall is a 32m cascade that tumbles into a clear pool you can swim in. Gazing up from the water at the contorted rockface behind the falls, you'll be able to make out what appears to be dreadlocks formed in the rock by the continual flow of water over centuries. Tacky Falls lacks the dreads but is equally worth the visit, particularly if the weather's calm and you can take a boat ride from Robin's Bay.

Creating an eyesore at the far end of Robin's Bay, the chintzy, ostentatious **Robin's Bay Village & Beach Resort** (☎ 361-2144, 361-2188; fax 968-0958;

s US\$60-70, d US\$65-75, cottage s/d US\$85/95, 3-bedroom ste US\$430; (P) (📶) (📺) is a large, recently built hotel in want of guests. There are 43 rooms with standard amenities including phone and satellite TV; most are fan-cooled, but those in the superior category have air-conditioning. The huge two-story penthouse suites have polished-wood floors and full kitchen with formal dining room.

our pick **River Lodge** (📞 995-3003, in Germany 089-74-999-797; www.river-lodge.com; s/d US\$50/80, d cottages US\$90-100) is a truly atmospheric option that has sprouted up from the ruins of a centuries-old Spanish pirate fort, established by longtime Jamaica resident Brigitta Fuchslocher. The rooms – which probably once were barracks for buccaneers – have white bleached-stone walls and blood-red floors, and are lit by skylights. The bathrooms (cold water only) are festooned with climbing ivy; the bathroom in the upstairs 'tower' room is alfresco. Meals are a social affair, served in a small thatched restaurant; rates include breakfast and dinner.

Also offered are two splendid cottages with privileged sea views, located less than 1km from the lodge. One is an octagonal bamboo hut with private bathroom and fridge, the other is a Moorish-style cottage with kitchenette and a delightful hearth on the patio, perfect for roasting fish. There's a romantic rooftop veranda.

River Lodge also coordinates local excursions, including a boat trip with local fishermen (US\$20). The complex is now complemented by the aptly named Natural Vibes bar. Overlooking the sea it offers a menu largely devoted to seafood and there's a nightly bonfire and several hammocks.

Any one of the public vehicles that travel between Ocho Rios and Annotto Bay or Port Antonio will let you off at the junction to Robin's Bay on the A3. It's then a 6km walk to Robin's Bay. With good timing, you can connect with bus JR16A, which operates between Kingston and Robin's Bay, or with the few route taxis that run to Robin's Bay from the A3.