

South Coast & Central Highlands



Untrampled by the lockstep march of the resort-catered hordes, this region serves up an unspoilt Jamaica. The area is awash with natural splendor – majestic rivers, lugubrious swamps, gorgeous waterfalls, looming mountains, ominous cliffs, sandy beaches. It's one of the island's great ironies that a region so unsullied by mass tourism is so packed with sights and activities.

Atmospheric port town, Black River, is a gateway to the Great Morass, a swampy marsh and forest known as much for its thriving population of crocodiles as for its mangrove ecosystem. The surrounding coastal lands boast natural wonders such as the Font Hill Beach Park and Wildlife Sanctuary, Lover's Leap and one of Jamaica's loveliest waterfalls, YS Falls, and man-made attractions, like the Appleton Rum Estate and the Pelican Bar, an offshore restaurant perched on stilts. Yet the enduring appeal rests in the region's communities, from the hillside Maroon town of Accompong to the exceptionally hospitable beachside retreat of Treasure Beach to such vibrant fishing villages as Whitehouse and Alligator Pond.

The cool central highlands of Manchester parish are similarly disconnected from tourist trappings. You'll find rolling hills, bucolic valleys grazed by cattle in fields fringed by hedgerows and stone walls, and mountains where clouds drift through alpine forests of pine and oak. This is the breadbasket of the nation, supplying melons, peppers, scallions, carrots, tomatoes and corn to the entire island. Christiana and Mandeville, once the favored retreats of wealthy Jamaicans and Europeans, are prosperous communities providing a peaceful escape from the heat and hullabaloo of the coast.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Treasure Beach** Slow down the pace at this serene, laid-back fishing community known for offbeat hospitality (p267)
- **Black River Great Morass** Explore Jamaica's longest river (p253) by small watercraft: see crocodiles in their mangrove ecosystem, eat at a riverside shack and discover hidden swimming holes
- **Accompong** Heed the call of the ancient *abeng* horn at this well-preserved Maroon village (p257) on the cusp of scenic Cockpit Country
- **YS Falls & Appleton Rum Estate** Soar over this majestic waterfall (p256) on a zip line, then delve into the island's largest rum distillery (p258) before sampling its wares
- **Peter Tosh Monument** Pay your respects to the Steppin' Razor at this modest yet poignant memorial (opposite)
- **Little Ochi** Watch fishermen pull in with the daily catch, then savor it in a beachside hut at Jamaica's finest seafood restaurant (p273)



■ AREA: 2035 SQ KM

■ TREASURE BEACH DEC DAILY HIGH TEMPERATURE: 30°C

HISTORY

People here have always been somewhat different from other Jamaicans. Miskito Indians were brought out to Jamaica from Central America to help track Maroons in the 18th century and eventually were given land grants in St Elizabeth. The Miskitos, along with others including 19th-century Scottish castaways and German settlers, are responsible for the high percentage of mixed-race peoples around Treasure Beach.

Jamaica's cool central highlands – rising northeast of St Elizabeth – were popular from the 19th century through the mid-1900s as a vacation retreat, when Christiana and Mandeville became social centers for the wealthy.

CLIMATE

The area has distinct climates associated with the temperate uplands and the warmer plains. The latter have a relatively balmy, dry climate, while the highlands are moist and refreshingly springlike.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Route taxis and minibuses ply the coastal road but they only run infrequently, and to some areas only a few times per day. Service is much more reliable to and from Mandeville. The primary transportation centers for the region are Mandeville and Black River, where you can find long-distance transportation to Kingston, Negril and Montego Bay.

WHITEHOUSE & AROUND

The narrow coastal strip of southeastern Westmoreland parish is shadowed by the steep slopes of land known as Surinam Quarters. The sleepy fishing villages of Bluefields, Belmont and Whitehouse attract visitors for whom the sea means more than the boundaries of an all-inclusive. The peaceful beaches, with their colorful fishing boats drawn up on poles and nets hung out to dry, provide the perfect locale to exchange pleasantries with fisherfolk or disappear into a book for a day or two.

BLUEFIELDS

Bluefields was the site of Oristan, one of the first Spanish settlements in Jamaica,

founded in 1519. Bluefields Bay provided safe anchorage for Spanish explorers, British naval squadrons and pirates. In 1670, infamous buccaneer Henry Morgan set out from Bluefields Bay to sack Panama City. Today it's a profoundly quiet place popular with escape artists and offering a nice collection of accommodations.

Surinam Quarters, inland from Bluefields, is named for the colonists who settled here after the English traded Surinam to the Dutch in exchange for Nieuw Amsterdam (New York) in 1667. Scots also settled in the area after the Battle of Culloden in 1745, and you'll see many Scottish place names around.

For local information, visit the **Bluefields People's Community Association** (☎ 955-8793; www.bluefieldsjamaica.org.jm; Belmont Sq) in Belmont. Internet access is also available.

Sights

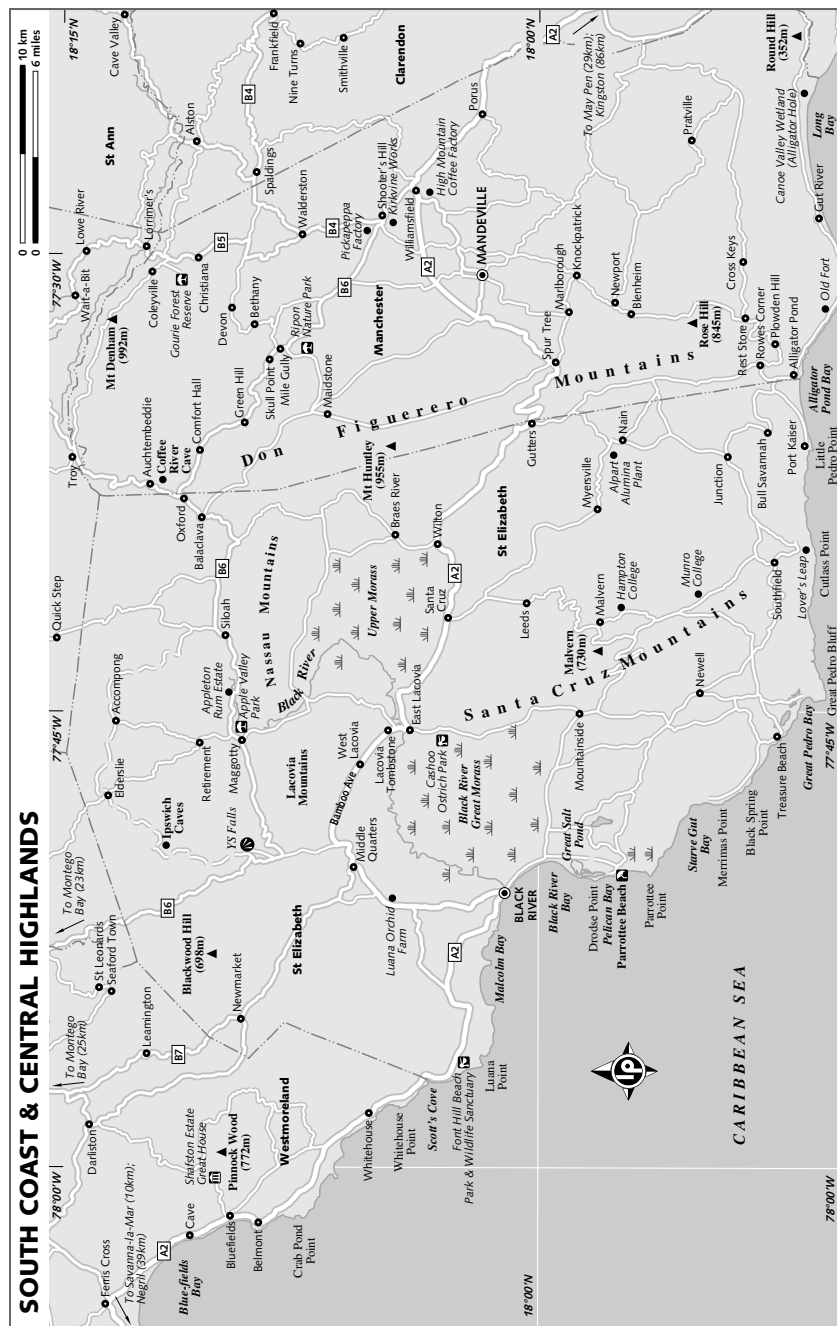
One kilometer south of Bluefields lies the tiny inlet of Belmont, birthplace of reggae superstar Peter Tosh, who was murdered in 1987. You can pay your respects at the **Peter Tosh Monument** (admission US\$5; ☎ 9am-5pm), a small mausoleum with a modest array of memorabilia. A casual place with few visitors, it's in stark contrast to the tourist maelstrom surrounding fellow Wailer Bob Marley's mausoleum in Nine Miles (see p175). Run by the Tosh family – his nonagenarian mother still lives on the property – the site also includes a gift shop selling cassettes and CDs as well as a small garden. In mid-October the annual **Peter Tosh Birthday Bash**, an informal local affair, features live roots reggae music played deep into the night.

Bluefields Beach Park (admission free; ☎ 8am-sunset), well signed from the A2, offers a relaxing stretch of sand and a nice collection of food stalls featuring locally caught fresh fish and plenty of Red Stripe. It can get crowded on weekends.

Tours

Travelers staying in the area can enjoy excellent day trips as well as excursions to regional attractions including YS Falls, the Black River Great Morass, Ipswich Caves and Alligator Pond. The following providers offer excellent customized trips; both of them offer German-language tours in addition to English.

Natural Mystic Tours (☎ 851-3962; www.geocities.com/naturalmysticja; Belmont; per person per day



US\$100) Unique, off-the-beaten-track tours including the popular 'Rastaman Hills' tour.

Shafston Tours (☎ 997-5076, 869-9212; www.shafston.com; Shafston Great House, Bluefields; day trips per person US\$25, minimum 6 people) A good choice for outdoor pursuits such as river kayaking (US\$50 per person) and hiking.

Sleeping & Eating

Catch the Vibes Guesthouse (☎ 851-3962; www.geocities.com/naturalmysticja/guesthouse; cottage s/d US\$20/25) Located on a hill in Belmont Village, this tiny well-priced cottage is set in a flower garden with a great view over the sea. There's a basic kitchen and the local beach is only a five-minute walk away. A cooking service and dominoes instruction are provided on request. Natural Mystic Tours (p247) is based here.

Sunset Cottage (☎ 955-8007; r US\$45) Located on the A2 in Bluefields, this simple, small immaculately kept hotel overlooking a rocky beach provides an excellent bargain for self-caterers. There are two rooms with two single beds and shared bathroom, one room with private bathroom, and a communal kitchen. There are also six apartments with kitchens and a cottage right on the sea. All units are cooled by fans and sea breezes, and there's a lovely gazebo perched over the water.

ourpick Shafston Estate Great House (☎ 997-5076, 869-9212; www.shafston.com; all-inclusive per person US\$50-85; ☎ ☎ ☎) Poised on a hilltop with exquisite coastal views stretching as far as Savanna-la-Mar, this wonderfully creaky great house is a budget traveler's dream. In the original manor house there are 10 atmospheric, spacious rooms ranging from basic to modest; a few have bathrooms. For even cheaper digs, there are 13 simple yet charming rooms in a newer block with screened windows and clean, tiled communal unisex showers and bathrooms. Relax in a hammock, laze on a sundeck next to the pool and Jacuzzi, or chill out at the congenial poolside bar. To get here from the A2, take the dirt road opposite Bluefields police station, then it's a precipitous 3km climb over bad roads. Alternatively, gracious owner Frank Lohmann can arrange for airport transfers.

Horizon Cottages (☎ 955-8823; esaumary@hotmail.com; cottage US\$110; ☎ ☎ ☎) One of the first hotels in the area, this cozy spot right on the waterfront of Bluefields Bay features two wooden cottages, the Sea Ranch and the Rasta Ranch, each tastefully appointed with local artwork

and featuring small kitchenettes and shared hot-water shower in the garden. The beach is private and kayaking is available.

For multiday rentals of exclusive and deluxe waterfront properties, contact **Sun Villas** (☎ in the USA 941-922-9191; www.sunvillas.com/south_coast.htm) or **Bluefields Villas** (☎ in the USA 202-232-4010; www.bluefieldsvillas.com). Both offer fully staffed, exquisitely furnished waterfront properties for between US\$3500 and US\$6300 per week in the high season.

Locally known for its crab backs, Dorrit's, a spacious roadside shack in Belmont, is the best place to eat in the area. It also does an excellent curried goat.

WHITEHOUSE

The small fishing village of Whitehouse is a great place to sample provincial coastal life. It stretches for about 2km along the A2, parallel to a series of beaches where motorized boats and pirogues are drawn up. The Whitehouse Fishing Cooperative supplies much of the island with wahoo, tuna, barracuda, bonito, snapper, kingfish, marlin and lobster taken on the Pedro Banks, about 130km out to sea.

The 2005 opening of the south coast's first large-scale all-inclusive resort was fiercely opposed by some local activists striving to preserve the region's unspoiled charm and traditional way of life. At last visit, however, the Sandals Whitehouse European Village & Spa was not doing particularly well and had not led to an influx of mass developments – for now.

Activities

You can hire a fishing boat to go **snorkeling** (per hr around US\$15). Better yet, hop aboard with local fishermen for a trip to the fishing banks (typically up to four people for about US\$20 per hour). Women should not go unaccompanied.

Sleeping & Eating

South Sea View Guest House (☎ 963-5172; info@southseaview.com; without/with air-con US\$70/80; ☎ ☎ ☎) At the far southeast end of South Sea Park, this is a modern villa with 12 rooms, each with a bathroom, king-size bed, cable TV, phone and hand-painted tropical murals. There's a rocky cove good for bathing. Proprietor Norman Forrester opened this place, the first guest house in Whitehouse, more than two decades ago. He will arrange for guests

to visit his 445-hectare fruit-and-vegetable farm at Cave Mountain in the high country overlooking Whitehouse.

Culoden Cove Villa (☎ 963-5344, 383-3872; lyons@cwjamaica.com; Little Culoden; per week US\$1895) One-and-a-half kilometers to the northwest of Whitehouse, this excellent rental was formerly the site of the Culoden Café. These days you must come and stay in order to get some of the place's popular cuisine. The bright and breezy three-bedroom house features an atmospheric bar, shady veranda, beach access and plenty of books. A cook and 24-hour security personnel are included in the price. Stays are for one-week minimum.

Sandals Whitehouse European Village & Spa (☎ 640-3000; www.sandals.com; 3 nights all-inclusive d US\$2350-3575; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) If your visions of Jamaica conjure up a quaint European village, this all-inclusive resort should hit the spot. It cost over US\$100 million to build this place around three villages conceived to look like towns in France, the Netherlands and Italy. The resort has 360 well-appointed rooms – all with beachfront views – in nine categories spread over 20 hectares. The all-inclusive promise is fulfilled by its eight restaurants and six bars, as well as a full range of land and water sports, the largest swimming pool in Jamaica, and a long sandy beach.

Ruby's 24/7 (☎ 963-5686; mains US\$3-6; ☎ 24hr) On the A2 in Whitehouse, Ruby's serves seafood and Jamaican fare on a shady patio.

Jimmyz Restaurant & Bar (☎ 390-3477; mains US\$2.50-5; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) On Fisherman's Beach in central Whitehouse, next to a pavilion where local fishermen sell their catch to wholesalers, this eatery is popular with old sea salts. The menu has fresh juices, including an exceedingly peppery ginger tonic, and dishes featuring steamed fish, chicken, 'sea puss' (octopus) and a particularly excellent spicy conch stew.

SCOTT'S COVE

About 8km east of Whitehouse, the A2 road sweeps around this deep little inlet marking the border of Westmoreland and St Elizabeth, where dozens of food and beer stalls line the shore. It's an excellent place to buy fried snapper and *bammy* – a pancake of fried cassava – with onions and peppers for a dollar or two, then take it for a picnic at Font Hill Beach, but there's nothing else to detain you.

FONT HILL BEACH PARK & WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Although this **wildlife reserve and beach park** (☎ 396-4133; adult/child US\$3/1.50; ☎ 9am-5pm), on almost 1300 hectares, east of Scott's Cove, is incongruously owned by the Petroleum Corporation of Jamaica, it has not tarnished its natural beauty...after realizing the oil it initially sought offshore didn't exist.

The sanctuary, which you can only visit accompanied by a guide, has scrubby acacia, logwood thickets and, closer to the shore, a maze of connected lagoons and swamps with a population of a couple of hundred crocodiles. The birding is fabulous, highlighted by a flock of bald plate pigeons as well as assorted black-billed whistling ducks, jacanas, herons and pelicans.

Two golden-sand beaches (connected by a trail) are fringed by a reef offering great snorkeling and bathing. Dolphins come into the cove, as do turtles for nesting season. Facilities include a small café and bar, changing rooms, picnic booths, volleyball, a boardwalk, an interpretive center and a marina. Horseback rides are also offered.

BLACK RIVER & AROUND

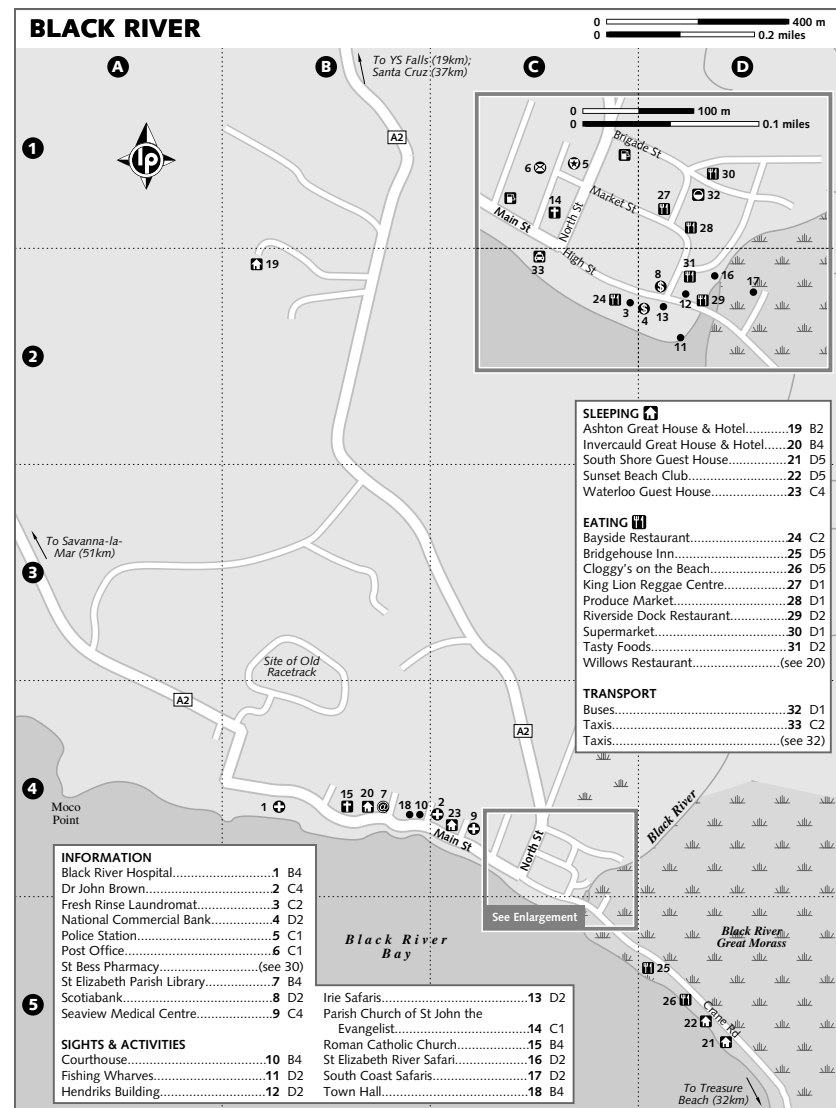
BLACK RIVER pop 4000

Though capital of St Elizabeth and the parish's largest town, Black River has a transient feel to it. Its namesake river, on whose western banks it rests, spirits day-trippers off to the Great Morass to see crocodiles and eat at waterside jerk shacks, and those who stay in town use it simply as a base for visiting such nearby attractions as YS Falls and the Appleton Rum Estate.

Grant it more than a drive-by glance, however, and you'll get a sense of its more exalted past. The town's Georgian architecture attests to its 19th-century prosperity, when Black River exported local logwood from which Prussian blue dye was extracted for textiles. Locals proudly point out the Waterloo Guest House, which in 1893 became the first house in Jamaica to have electricity installed. The racetrack and spa that brought the wealthy have not survived, however.

Information

Black River Hospital (☎ 965-2212; 45 Main St) This is 1km west of town.



Dr John Brown (☎ 965-2305; 48 Main St) Medical clinic.
Fresh Rinse Laundromat (☎ 634-2166; High St; per load US\$1) Self-service laundry.
National Commercial Bank (☎ 965-9027; 9 High St)
Police station (☎ 965-2232 or 119; North St)
Post office (☎ 965-2250) Immediately west of the police station.

St Bess Pharmacy (☎ 634-4526; 1A Brigade St; ☎ Mon-Sat)
St Elizabeth Parish Library (☎ 965-2270; Main St; internet access per 30 min US\$1)
Scotiabank (☎ 965-2251; 6 High St)
Seaview Medical Centre (☎ 965-2978; 46 High St; ☎ 24hr)

Sights

High St is lined with colonnaded, Georgian timber houses with gingerbread trim. At the east end is the **Hendricks Building** (2 High St), dating from 1813. Immediately east is an old **iron bridge**, a good spot for watching crocodiles waiting for tidbits thrown by tourists from the riverside berths. Trawlers lie at anchor immediately south of the bridge and here you can watch fish being hauled ashore onto the wharfs.

Foremost among the historic structures worth checking out is the yellow-brick **Parish Church of St John the Evangelist** (cnr Main & North Sts), built in 1837. The airy interior is graced by wooden porticoes and a stately balcony, while the graves around the back cemetery date from the 17th century. Two blocks west are the porticoed **courthouse** and the **town hall**, with lofty pillars, and beyond that a simple **Roman Catholic church**.

Two of the most impressive buildings are both hotels: the 1894 **Invercauld Great House & Hotel** and the **Waterloo Guest House**, both west on Main St and splendid examples of the Jamaican vernacular style, with their shady wooden verandas and gingerbread trim.

Tours

A number of companies in Black River offer Great Morass boat tours. **South Coast Safaris** (☎ 965-2513, 965-2086; tour US\$20, with lunch & visit to YS Falls US\$33; ☽ tours 9am, 11am, 12:30pm, 2pm & 3:30pm), on the east side of the bridge, offers 60- to 75-minute journeys aboard the *Safari Queen*. The trips leave from the old warehouse on the east bank of the river.

Similar tours and prices are offered by **St Elizabeth River Safari** (☎ 965-2374, 965-2229; ☽ tours 9am, 11am, 2pm & 3:30pm), behind the Hendricks Building; and **Irie Safaris** (☎ 965-2221; fax 965-2466; 12 High St; ☽ tours every 90 min 9am-4:30pm), wharfside from a jetty just east of the bus station.

For a less regimented (and a more authentic) experience, you can easily hire a guide to take you upriver by canoe or boat for about US\$15 to US\$25 round-trip. Ask near the bridge in town. Or, if you're continuing on to Treasure Beach, you can hire a boat there for a round-trip tour (UA\$60) that includes a stop at the Pelican Bar (p271) and a journey up the Black River.

Midday tours are best for spotting crocodiles; early and later tours are bet-

ter for birding. Take a shade hat and some mosquito repellent.

Sleeping

South Shore Guest House (☎ 965-2172; 33 Crane Rd; camping US\$12, r US\$21-46; (P) ☽) This 12-bedroom hotel has a breezy outdoor bar and restaurant. Rooms are spacious though basic, with utility furniture, fans, large bathrooms, and verandas fronting a narrow beach. It permits camping under shade trees on the lawn. Meals are prepared to order.

Sunset Beach Club (☎ 634-3839; 29 Crane Rd; s/d US\$18/25; (P) ☽) This funky budget place has loads of personality and privileged beach access. An old, cheerfully painted bus has been modified to provide two tiny bedrooms with bathrooms and fans. Another bus has three bedrooms with shared bathroom. They can get pretty hot, but the cold-water showers make amends. In the main house, which resembles a ramshackle ski lodge, there are more rooms with a shared bathroom. Meals are cooked on request.

Waterloo Guest House (☎ 965-2278; 44 High St; r US\$30-50; (P) ☽ ☼ ☽) Facing the shoreline and the photogenic hulk of a rusting ship, this rickety Georgian edifice offers real off-beat charm and a distinctive claim to fame: it was the first house in Jamaica to be wired for electricity. It probably hasn't changed much since. There are six meagerly furnished rooms with fans in the old house, plus 16 carpeted, more stylish rooms with cable TV and fridges in a modern annex. All have bathrooms with showers. There's a cheerful bar and restaurant serving seafood, chop suey and ice cream (mains US\$3 to US\$4.50; open for breakfast, lunch and dinner).

Ashton Great House & Hotel (☎ 965-2036; s US\$50, d US\$60-80, tr US\$95; (P) ☽ ☼ ☽) In a magnificent setting on a hill beside the A2 about 3km north of town, this large and atmospheric wooden house on more than 140 hectares once held dominion over a sprawling dairy farm. The spacious albeit modestly appointed rooms have phones, satellite TV and bathrooms. If there are few guests – a condition that seems to be the norm – the house can seem satisfyingly spooky at night, particularly as you sit on the grand balcony watching the bats flit by. There's a spacious pool with a children's section.

Invercauld Great House & Hotel (☎ 965-2750; 66 Main St; d US\$59-97, ste US\$85-155; (P) ☽ ☼ ☽ ☽)

Built more than a century ago by an affluent Scottish businessman during Black River's heyday, this impressive house has gable roofs, bay windows, valances and intricate fretwork. It has 20 rooms – varying in size and mood – furnished with period antiques and replicas. More modern units have 32 rooms and suites with kitchens, balconies and cable TV. The hotel has an airy dining room, a cozy bar, a tennis court and a small pool.

Eating

Tasty Foods (☎ 634-4027; Market St; mains US\$2.50-4; ☽ lunch & dinner) This barnlike eatery is strictly Jamaican and seriously cheap. Keep an open mind and sample the red peas and chicken foot, stew pork and, for the culinary adventurer, cow head. Dessert anyone?

Waterloo Guest House (☎ 965-2278; 44 High St; mains US\$3-5; ☽ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Has a modest restaurant with an inexpensive Jamaican menu, plus an earthy bar serving ice-cream sodas and milk shakes.

Bayside Restaurant (17 High St; mains US\$3-12; ☽ lunch & dinner) This self-proclaimed 'pastry and pub' is a local favorite, serving an eclectic menu of Jamaican and continental fare plus pastries. Bayside Jerk & BBQ Centre is at the rear, overhanging the sea.

Riverside Dock Restaurant (☎ 965-9486; High St; mains US\$4.50-8; ☽ 10am-9pm Mon-Fri, 1-9pm Sat & Sun) This midrange riverside eatery, recently renovated with a bright color scheme, serves well-prepared dishes including seafood kebabs, lobster, guava-jerked chicken and roast pork with apple sauce. Service can be slow. You can book excursions with South Coast Safaris (opposite), which operates a desk here.

Willows Restaurant (☎ 965-2750; Invercauld Great House & Hotel; mains US\$6-25; ☽ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The fanciest place around, serving up Jamaican and continental favorites in elegant surrounds.

Cloggy's on the Beach (☎ 634-2424; Crane Rd; mains US\$8-20; ☽ lunch & dinner) This beachside joint is an all-round pleaser with its relaxed vibe, great bar ambience and excellent chow. It occasionally throws well-attended beach sound-system parties; ask the bartender for the lowdown. The menu features shrimp, lobster, conch and steamed and stewed fish.

Bridgehouse Inn (☎ 965-2361; 14 Crane Rd; mains US\$8-15; ☽ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Serves seafood and Jamaican dishes such as curried goat, washed down with health drinks made from

beetroot juice and Irish moss. A variety of chicken dishes are also on offer.

There are stalls by the market and a bus station selling I-tal food. The best is **King Lion Reggae Centre** (☎ 965-9466; Market St), serving health foods and juices for under US\$3.

There's a supermarket in the Hendricks Building, and another one 100m north. You can buy fruit, vegetables and meats at the open-air **produce market** (Market St), but hygiene here is questionable.

Getting There & Away

From Black River, public vehicles go to and from Santa Cruz (US\$1.50), Savanna-la-Mar (US\$2), Montego Bay (US\$2.50) and Treasure Beach (US\$1.75). The transportation center is behind the market, just west of the river. Taxis arrive and depart from a lot at the junction of Main and North Sts.

BLACK RIVER GREAT MORASS

There are many rivers to cross in this 200-sq-km wetland extending inland from the mouth of the Black River. For its singular scenery and its excellent wildlife-viewing opportunities, this is one of Jamaica's most satisfying explorations.

The best way to get a feel for the morass is to explore it by small watercraft or tour boat; quick excursions are easily arranged in Black River, but if you are heading on to Treasure Beach, lengthier forays up the river can be arranged there. Along the way, with the right guide, you can eat at delightful riverside shacks and discover hidden swimming holes – but beware of the crocodiles! The morass forms Jamaica's most significant refuge for crocodiles, and an estimated population of 300 live in the swamps. Several have made a habit of hanging out near the bridge in town, waiting for their next meal of raw chicken parts dispensed from the tour operators who have a vested interest in keeping them around.

The waters are stained coffee-brown by tannins from decomposed vegetation in the Great Morass, a complex ecosystem and a vital preserve for more than 100 bird species, including cinnamon-colored jacanas, egrets, whistling ducks, water hens and seven species of heron.

Locals go out in dugout canoes, tending funnel-shaped bamboo shrimp pots in the traditional manner of their West African forebears. These interconnecting waterways are

WHAT A CROCI

Saltwater crocodiles were so once common around the entire coast of Jamaica that an early bill advocated an 'alligator' be on the young country's coat of arms. Around the turn of the 20th century, this abundance began to draw international big game hunters, and, unsurprisingly, the population was gradually decimated. Happily, since 1971, crocodile hunting has been outlawed on the island.

Called an 'alligator' in Jamaica, the American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) can now be found in a few protected areas along the island's south coast, most notably the Black River Great Morass, where it is estimated 300 patrol the waters, and Font Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, which is believed to be home to about 200. As long as these sanctuaries are protected, the alligators will be too, but the population will never return to its former numbers.

While the alligators can grow to an imposing 4m, they are relatively shy and eat mostly fish, deploying sharp, conical teeth well adapted for capturing slippery prey. They go for long periods without eating and can survive on less than 5kg of food a week. Unless they feel threatened, alligators leave visitors alone.

Early morning is a good time to see crocodiles, when they are sunning on the banks to replenish heat lost at night. A legacy of the dinosaur period, the crocodile maintains a body temperature of 25°C by alternating between shade, water and sun. They hunt at night and, when submerged, their beady eyes watch above the water.

navigable for about 30km upriver. Along the way, the mangroves suck water through long tendrils drooping into the water. Beyond the confluence of the YS, Middle Quarters and Black Rivers, the mangroves broaden into marshy meadows of tall sedges and reeds. Feisty game fish are plentiful, including snook and tarpon. On rare occasions, endangered manatees may even be seen near the river estuary.

For an excellent lunch experience, be sure to tell your guide that you want to visit **Sister Lou's River Stop** (☎ lunch), on the Salt Spring tributary, where delicious stuffed crab backs (US\$3.50) and pepper shrimp are served up. It's a great place to have a Red Stripe and watch the river drift by, or just watch local kids jump from a nearby bridge into the river.

MIDDLE QUARTERS

This small village on the A2, 13km north of Black River, is renowned for its women higglers (street vendors) who stand at the roadside selling delicious pepper shrimps – pronounced 'swimp' locally – cooked at the roadside grills. The shrimp are caught in traps made in centuries-old African tradition from split bamboo. US\$3 will buy a spicy bagful.

If you're really hungry, do as Jamaican truckers do and pull into **Howie's Healthy Eating** (☎ 378-8714; mains US\$2-6; ☎ 24hr), on the A2 at

the turnoff for YS Falls. Here all sorts of good Jamaican cooking is done in big pots bubbling over wood fires. Choose from a number of soups and stews, fried fish and, of course, huge helpings of 'swimp.'

For a quick dip, stop by **Bubbling Spring** (☎ 755-3165, 850-1606; child/adult US\$1/2; ☎ 8am-10pm), 1.5km south of Middle Quarters on the A2. Cool, slightly carbonated spring water is fed into long, shallow pools. Simple Jamaican fare is served.

At **Luana Orchid Farm** (☎ 361-8795), about 3km south of Middle Quarters, as many as 100,000 orchids are growing at various stages of development. It's not open as a tourist entity but visitors are welcome by prearrangement.

BAMBOO AVENUE

The soothing sound of a million leaves rustling in the wind is one of the quiet pleasures of this photogenic archway of towering bamboo. The 4km-long stretch of the A2 between Middle Quarters and Lacovia is shaded by dense 100-year-old stands of *Bambusa vulgaris*, the largest species of bamboo in Jamaica. Cool and pretty, Bamboo Avenue is the perfect place to stop for a coconut jelly, accompanied by a bag of pepper shrimp brought along from Middle Quarters. Several rest stops along the road, including the **TPDCo Travel Halt** (☎ 8:30am-5pm) with clean restrooms, offer coconuts, beer and snacks.

LACOVIA

This sprawling village extends for 3km east of Bamboo Avenue, and is divided into West Lacovia, Lacovia Tombstone and East Lacovia.

The only site of interest is the two side-by-side **tombstones** in the center of the junction in front of the Texaco gas station at Lacovia Tombstone. An unlikely legend says that the two young men who lie buried here killed each other in a tavern duel in 1738.

Carlyn Resorts (☎ 607-4826; East Lacovia; r US\$15-20; ☎) is a wood-and-stone two-story structure with nine rooms. It's a stretch to call it a resort, with its small and basic fan-cooled rooms, but they're clean and have bathrooms (though not hot water). There's a small restaurant.

CASHOO OSTRICH PARK

This **park** (☎ 966-2222; adult/child US\$3.50/2; ☎ 10am-4:30pm Tue-Sun), set on 40 hectares of farmland about 3km south of East Lacovia, has about two dozen African ostriches, as well as a large fruit orchard and herb garden and a petting zoo with an emu, donkeys, hens, ducks, geese and swans. There are also a kids' playground, bumper cars, swimming pool, badminton court, sand volleyball and a bar. You can saddle up for horseback rides (US\$2). If you wish to bring a picnic, you'd do well to stop by Middle Quarters for some pepper shrimp.

It's wise to call ahead before making your way to the park, as sometimes the gates are locked and the place is deserted during posted 'open' hours. To get there, from the A2 in Lacovia take the turnoff at the Old Lacovia Bridge and follow the signs 1.5km to the village of Slipe.

SANTA CRUZ

pop 5500

Santa Cruz is a bustling market town and the most important commercial center in south-west Jamaica. During the past few decades it has grown modestly wealthy on revenues from the local bauxite industry. Before that, Santa Cruz was a market center for horses and mules bred locally for the British army. A livestock market is still held on Saturday. While there's nothing in the town to detain you long, it's a good place to stop for money or a bite to eat.

Banks include **Scotiabank** (☎ 966-2230; 77 Main St) and **National Commercial Bank** (☎ 966-2204; 7 Coke Dr). **Dr Oliver Myers** (☎ 966-2106; 23 Coke Dr)

has a clinic near the **police station** (☎ 966-2289), 200m south of the town center on the road to Malvern.

Hind's Restaurant & Bakery (☎ 966-2234; Santa Cruz Plaza, Main St; mains US\$1-6; ☎ Mon-Sat) sells baked goods and is a clean, simple place to enjoy Jamaican fare such as brown stew and curried goat.

Paradise Patties (Shop 30, Beadles Plaza, Main St) sells veggie and beef patties for US\$0.50. **Fruity's** (Shop 27, Philip's Plaza, Main St) serves delicious ice-cream cones.

Santa Cruz is a main stop for buses, minibuses and route taxis going between Kingston, Mandeville and Black River. They arrive and depart from the transportation center on the A2, at the east end of Santa Cruz.

NASSAU MOUNTAINS & SOUTH COCKPIT COUNTRY

The plains of St Elizabeth are bordered to the north by a low, narrow range of deeply forested hills that merge into the rugged Cockpit Country. Few roads penetrate the hills, where the sparse population is mostly involved in subsistence farming.

Between the Nassau Mountains and the Cockpit Country is the wide Siloah Valley, carpeted with sugarcane.

The Cockpit Country is easily accessed from the south via the hamlet of Troy. See p258 for more details, including trails and information on hiring guides.

MAGGOTTY

pop 1200

This dusty regional center, located 11km north of Lacovia, is laid out on a bend of the Black River at the western end of the Siloah Valley. It was named by the missionary Rev John Hutch after his English birthplace.

South of town there's excellent hiking in Black River Gorge, which features a series of 28 roaring cascades with intermittent pools that are good for swimming.

Sights & Activities**APPLE VALLEY PARK**

Open only by appointment, this 169-hectare family **nature park** (☎ 963-9508; applevalleypark.com; adult/child Sat & Sun US\$6/5; ☎ 10am-5pm), east of

Maggotty, surrounds an 18th-century great house. It has two small lakes and offers fishing and a variety of touristy activities that appeal to Jamaicans. There are paddleboat rides, go-karts, and kayaking on the Black River. Much of the park is a forest reserve good for birding. The owners also operate a tractor-pulled jitney from the old train station in Maggotty. You can spend the night at Apple Valley Guesthouse (below).

CYCLING

Based at Apple Valley Park, **Manfred's Jamaican Mountain Bike Tours** (☎ in Canada 705-745-8210; tour US\$800) offers week-long tours of the south coast each week in January and February, with daily excursions geared to moderate riders. A support vehicle is provided. Over the week, you'll pedal 18km to 42km each day through glorious south-coast scenery to some of the region's most notable attractions, including YS Falls, Treasure Beach, Oxford Cave, Appleton Rum Estate and the Black River mangroves. Trips are offered in midwinter only and the cost excludes airfare but includes transfers, gratuity and accommodations. You can rent a bike (US\$25/100 per day/week).

RIVER KAYAKING

Shafston Tours (☎ 997-5076, 869-9212; www.shafston.com; river kayaking per person US\$50, minimum 6) offers kayaking tours on a pretty stretch of the Black River, which meanders through sugarcane fields and grassy bushland with some mild Class II rapids.

Sleeping & Eating

Apple Valley Guesthouse (per person camping/dm/d US\$4.50/10/18) Patrick and Lucille Lee, the Chinese-Jamaican couple who run Apple Valley, also have bunks and private rooms in the 18th-century red-roofed great house south of town. It has five bedrooms and four bathrooms, plus a lounge. Guests have kitchen privileges at the guest house, but there is also an open-air restaurant (dishes US\$2 to US\$8) serving traditional Jamaican dishes. If you catch carp, silver perch or red snapper yourself, Lucille will cook it for you (US\$2 per pound). Apple Valley Park is reached from behind the police station.

Poiciana Guest House (☎ 963-9676; r with shared/private bathroom US\$20/30) Behind the post office 100m south of Apple Valley Park is this delightful old house on a hill. It has six modestly

furnished rooms with bathrooms. There's hot water (when the heater works), a homey TV lounge and a communal kitchen. Additional rooms are in an annex. Meals are prepared. Enquire at the Happy Times Restaurant.

Valley Restaurant (☎ 963-9508; mains US\$3-6; ☎ 11am-9pm Sat & Sun, weekdays by reservation) Opposite the Apple Valley Park, this air-conditioned restaurant offers Jamaican dishes, including vegetarian options.

Happy Times Restaurant (☎ 963-9807; Shakespeare Plaza; mains US\$4; ☎ Mon-Sat) This place serves simple, well-prepared meals, including curried goat, snapper, curried chicken and brown-stew pork.

Getting There & Away

Public vehicles arrive and depart from opposite Shakespeare Plaza at the north end of Maggotty, connecting to Mandeville and Black River.

YS FALLS

Many rate this series of eight **cascades** (☎ 634-2454, 997-6360; www.ysfalls.com; adult/child US\$15/6; ☎ 9:30am-3:30pm Tue-Sun, closed last 2 weeks in Oct & public holidays), hemmed in by limestone cliffs and surrounded by forest, as being the most beautiful in all of Jamaica. The cascades fall 36m from top to bottom, separated by cool pools perfect for swimming. The falls take their name from the original landowners, ranchers John Yates and Richard Scott. Water-lovers can float down a bamboo-shaded stretch of river on inner tubes for US\$6, while the more adventurous can take a canopy zip line for US\$30.

A tractor-drawn jitney takes visitors to the cascades, where you'll find picnic grounds, a tree house and a rope swing over the pools. Be careful! The eddies are strong, especially after rains when the falls are torrential. A stone staircase and pathway follow the cascades upriver. There are no lockers, however, so you'll need to keep an eye on your stuff while you bathe.

Admission includes a guide. There's a gift store, and **Mikey's Grill** (dishes US\$2-4) serves fish and chicken dishes, plus burgers.

The falls are on the YS Estate, 5.5km north of the A2 (the turnoff is 1.5km east of Middle Quarters). The entrance is just north of the junction of the B6 toward Maggotty.

South Coast Safaris (☎ 965-2513, 965-2086) and **St Elizabeth River Safari** (☎ 965-2374, 965-2229) oper-

ate tours to YS Falls every half-hour between 9am and 3:30pm from Black River. You can also book tours with almost any company operating from Negril or Montego Bay.

Buses travel via YS Falls from Shakespeare Plaza in Maggotty. On the A2, buses, minibuses and route taxis will drop you at the junction to YS Falls, from where you can walk (it's about 3km) or catch an Ipswich-bound route taxi.

IPSWICH CAVES

These limestone caverns, about 8km north of YS Falls, are full of stalactites and stalagmites. The cave entrance is at Ipswich, an almost derelict hamlet on the railway line between Montego Bay and Kingston. At the entrance you can hire a guide to lead you into the chambers for a small fee (adult/child US\$2/US\$1). Natural Mystic Tours and Shafston Tours both lead excursions into the caves from Belmont and Bluefields respectively (see p247).

The turnoff is off the B6, about 3km north of YS Falls. You'll be glad of a 4WD.

ACCOMPONG

pop 1500

Six hundred meters above sea level, the village of Accompong, on the southwestern edge of Cockpit Country, is the sole remaining village in western Jamaica inhabited by descendants of the Maroons. It touts itself for that, but it's also a good base for exploring the region of Cockpit Country known as Me No Sen You No Come.

The village still enjoys aspects of quasi-autonomy and is headed by a 'colonel' (currently Sydney Peddie) elected by secret ballot for a period of five years. The colonel appoints and oversees a council, and it is considered proper etiquette to introduce yourself upon visiting (☎ 464-0651).

Local artisans still make *goombay* drums here. These – along with an array of medicinal herbs, calabashes and *abeng* horns – are for sale in the tiny red-and-green-painted **craft shop** as you enter town. The hand-carved *goombay* drum is box-shaped and covered with goatskin, and makes a wonderfully deep and resonant racket. A large one will set you back US\$150.

Sights & Activities

Accompong is centered on the tiny 'Parade Ground,' where the Presbyterian church looks over a small **monument** that honors Cudjoe, the Maroon leader (the statue next to it is

that of Leonard Parkinson, another Maroon freedom fighter). Opposite the monument, the **Accompong Community Centre & Museum** contains a motley miscellany of *goombay* drums, a musket, a sword, baskets and other artifacts from the Maroon era. Entry is included only as part of a community tour (US\$15), which takes in a Maroon burial ground, a small herbal garden and the Kindah Tree, a stately mango tree, where the elders of the community congregate and which is considered sacred. If the museum's closed, call Mark Wright (☎ 398-7688) for a quick whip round the village.

There are several tours offered, including a one-hour trek down to the **Peace Caves** (about US\$20), where Cudjoe signed the 1739 peace treaty with the British.

Festivals & Events

The traditional **Accompong Maroon Festival**, held each January 6, marks the signing of the 1739 peace treaty between war hero Captain Cudjoe of the Maroons with representatives of the King of England. The provisions of the treaty guaranteed the Maroons significant land holdings and personal freedom. In 2007 more than 15,000 visitors flocked to the small rural village for the festival, which features traditional dancing, drumming, mento bands and a wide variety of tonics and herbs. The festival culminates in a traditional march to the revered Kindah Tree, where a specially prepared Maroon dish of unsalted and unseasoned pork is consumed with yams, but a loud sound-system keeps the party going well into the night. For more information, call Maroon Attraction Tours (p258).

Sleeping & Eating

A&E (☎ 871-8848, 427-5438; r US\$18) In the basement of a small restaurant-bar on the road to the cemetery, this tiny inn offers three small, simple but clean rooms with bathrooms. There's a TV lounge and a cheerfully appointed bar that provides a colorful place to sup with locals.

Baboo's Garden (☎ 475-3046; www.baboosgarden.com; r US\$25) About a mile east of town, this new, solar-powered guest house features four thatched-roof bungalows whose balconies offer splendid views out over Cockpit Country. For US\$125, the American owner offers transport from MoBay to Treasure Beach with a one-night stopover here.

Getting There & Away

Route taxis run from Shakespeare Plaza in Maggoty (US\$2.50).

The route from Maggoty is well signed if you're driving, but the winding road is horribly potholed.

Maroon Attraction Tours (☎ 971-3900, 700-8805; 32 Church St, Montego Bay; tours US\$50) offers customized excursions from Montego Bay. Ask for Kenneth.

APPLETON RUM ESTATE

You can smell the yeasty odor of molasses wafting from the **Appleton sugar estate and rum factory** (☎ 963-9215; factory tour & rum tasting US\$12; ☹ Mon-Sat), well before you reach it, 1km northeast of Maggoty in the middle of the Siloah Valley. This is the largest distillery in Jamaica and the oldest: the factory has been blending the famous Appleton brand of rums since 1749. It is owned by J Wray & Nephew, Jamaica's largest rum producer.

The 45-minute tour of the factory details how molasses is extracted from sugarcane, then fermented, distilled and aged to produce rum, which you can taste in the 'John Wray Tavern.' Several dozen varieties – including the lethal Overproof – are available for sampling, and the well-stocked gift shop does brisk business with tipsy visitors who just can't get enough.

A motor-coach excursion, the Appleton Estate Rum Tour (US\$85) departs MoBay daily, and from Ocho Rios and Negril several times each week. Some tours also include a stop at YS Falls. Contact **Caribic Vacations** (☎ in Montego Bay 953-9878, in Negril 957-3309, in Ocho Rios 974-9106) or Jamaica Estate Tours Ltd at the Appleton Rum Estate itself.

QUICK STEP

This remote mountain hamlet 13km north of Siloah offers magnificent views over the portion of the Cockpit Country known as the District of Look Behind. It's eerie and extremely foreboding, a chaos of honey-combed limestone cliffs hewn into bizarre shapes and cockpits (with deep forested bowls up to 150m across).

North of Quick Step the road peters out. Hiking trails lead into the heart of the Cockpits, but you are well advised to hire a guide through the Southern Trelawny Environmental Agency (p212). One trail leads to Windsor Caves, a full day's hike.

It's easy to get lost and this is no place for that. *Don't attempt it alone!*

BALACLAVA

Balacava sits atop a ridge at the east end of the Siloah Valley. If you're climbing uphill from the west, it's worth resting at the ridge crest to take in the view of the valley laid out below, smothered in sugarcane, as flat and green as a billiard table.

An attractive Anglican church and the disused railway station are about the only buildings of interest.

TROY & AROUND

Three kilometers northeast of Balacava the B6 turns southeast for Mandeville; another road (the B10) leads north and climbs to Troy on the border with Trelawny parish. The latter is a spectacular drive as you climb up through a series of dramatic gorges, with the road clinging to the sheer face of the Cockpits.

Troy is the southeastern gateway to the Cockpit Country. It sits in a valley bottom and is surrounded by sugarcane fields. It is also a center for the cultivation of yams, which grow on tall runners. **St Silas church** is worth a look for its blue-tinted corrugated iron roof.

Auchtembeddie, 5km south of Troy, is a choice spot for spelunkers, who head to **Coffee River Cave**. It is totally undeveloped for tourism, but local guides will escort you for a negotiated fee.

A dirt road leads 3km north from Troy to Tyre, a hamlet on the edge of the Cockpits. Beyond Tyre the road fades into a bush-enfolded trail. From here you can hike to Windsor (about 24km); see p214. Don't attempt it alone, as there are several forks and it is easy to get lost.

To hire a guide, contact the Southern Trelawny Environmental Agency (p212) in Albert Town, 17km northeast of Troy.

CHRISTIANA & AROUND

Around Christiana you'd be forgiven for imagining yourself in the Pyrenees or the highlands of Costa Rica. The air is crisp, clouds drift through the vales, and pine trees add to the alpine setting.

This is an important center for growing Irish potatoes. Cacao, yams, and coffee pro-

duction are also important, and during picking season you can watch women with baskets moving among the rows, plucking cherry-red coffee berries.

CHRISTIANA

About 16km north of Mandeville at an elevation of 900m, the town of Christiana is the lovely heart of a richly farmed agricultural region of gently undulating hills and shallow vales.

The area was settled by German farmers during the 18th and 19th centuries. Moravian missionaries were also active during that era and a **Moravian church** commands the northern end of sinuous Main St. During the 19th century, Christiana became a hill-town resort popular with European dignitaries and Kingstonians escaping the heat of the plains.

Christiana is a fairly sleepy place (farmers go to bed early and get up around 4am or 5am), but if you're here on Thursday when the higglers come to sell their produce, the roads are so thick you can hardly drive through town. If you're in Christiana on a Thursday, stay through the evening for Higgler's Night.

Information

Christiana Health Centre (☎ 964-2749; Main St) Government-run; toward the south end of Main St.

Christiana Pharmacy (☎ 964-2424; Main St) Well stocked.

Dr Glen Norman Day (☎ 964-2361; Christiana Plaza) Clinic off Main St.

National Commercial Bank (☎ 964-2466; Main St)

Police station (☎ 964-2250; Main St)

Post office (☎ 964-2279; Main St) Next to the police station.

Scotiabank (☎ 964-2223; Main St)

Sights & Activities

CHRISTIANA BOTTOM

This beautiful riverside spot, in a valley bottom below the town, has a **waterfall** plus picnic spots framed by bamboo. Two **sinkholes** full of crystal-clear water offer refreshing dips. You can hike from the center of town, though the going at the lower reaches can be muddy and slippery. Take the road that leads east from the National Commercial Bank; it's 3km from here. Take the first left and then the second left.

GOURIE FOREST RESERVE

This forest reserve of pines, mahogany and mahoe growing atop and betwixt dramatic cockpits is 3km northwest of the town, near Coleyville. The park is laced with **hiking** trails. Gourie is most noteworthy for having Jamaica's longest cave system. Two **spelunking** routes have been explored. One of the routes is easy; the other is difficult and made more so by the presence of an icy river. Rubber-soled shoes are required and a guide is essential.

The **Forestry Department** (☎ 964-2065; Main St) rents two basic wooden cottages; you can get the keys from the caretaker at the reserve.

To get to Gourie from Christina, turn uphill (southwest) at the radio tower immediately south of the junction that leads west for Coleyville and Troy. Immediately take the left at a Y-fork, then right at the next Y-fork and follow the green wire fence.

Tours

Villa Bella Tours (☎ 964-2243; Hotel Villa Bella) offers excursions to the Oxford and Gourie Caves (US\$40 for three hours), Quashie River sink cave and bush hike (US\$55, minimum five persons), Lorimar Coffee Estate and the Moravian churches, plus bird-watching trips to the Cockpit Country.

Festivals & Events

On Christmas Eve the streets here have traditionally been closed and farming families have poured in for a centuries-old Jonkanoo celebration called **Grand Market Night**, with men on stilts and general festivity in the streets. The festivities are sometimes cancelled; call Sherryl McDowell or Audrey Brown at Hotel Villa Bella (☎ 964-2243) for updates.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Villa Bella (☎ 964-2243; rUS\$60-85) The Villa Bella is a charming and cozy old country inn perched on a hill at Sedburgh, at the south end of town. This former grande dame retains its original mahogany floors (now somewhat squeaky) and 1940s furniture. The 15 recently renovated, exquisitely decorated rooms have cable TV and deep bathtub-showers. Rooms in the annex are smaller. Gracious and efficient service recalls the days when Christiana was a center for 'old-style tourism.' Facilities include a reading room and TV lounge. The hotel also offers one of the best and most reasonably priced dining experiences on the

INTERNET ACCESS

Worldwide Technologies & Internet Cafe & Mailboxes Limited (☎ 961-1829; Suite 10, Central Plaza; per 30 min US\$3) Internet is also available at the library.

LAUNDRY

Mandeville Fabricare (☎ 962-2471; 30 Hargreaves Ave; per load US\$1; ☎ 8am-5pm)

LIBRARIES

Manchester Parish Library (☎ 962-2972; 34 Hargreaves Ave; internet per half hr US\$1; ☎ 9:30am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat)

MEDICAL SERVICES

The two hospitals have emergency services. Although they are adjacent to each other, the entrances are on opposite sides of the racecourse.

Fontana Pharmacy (☎ 962-3129; Manchester Shopping Plaza)

Hargreaves Memorial Hospital (☎ 962-2040; Caledonia Rd) Privately run.

Mandeville Hospital (☎ 962-2067; 32 Hargreaves Ave)

MONEY

Scotiabank (☎ 962-1083; cnr Ward Ave & Caledonia Rd)

Western Union (☎ 962-1037; Brumalia Town Centre, Perth St) Receive or send money by remittance.

POST

Post office (☎ 962-2339; South Racecourse)

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Jamaica Tourist Board does not have an office in Mandeville.

Visitor Information Service (☎ 962-3725; 62 Ward Ave) The best information source is at the Astra Country Inn.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

The following agencies arrange domestic and international flight reservations:

Global Travel Service (☎ 962-2630; Manchester Shopping Plaza, 18 Caledonia Rd)

Sterling Travel (☎ 962-2203; Caledonia Plaza, Caledonia Rd)

Sights**Cecil Charlton Park**

This tiny English-style 'green', also known as Mandeville Sq, lends a charming village feel to the town center. On the north side is the **Mandeville Courthouse**, of cut limestone with a horseshoe staircase and a raised portico supported by Doric columns. The **Rectory**, the

oldest home in town, adjoins the courthouse. Both it and the courthouse were completed in 1820.

On the south side is a **produce market**, and a **cenotaph** commemorating Jamaica's dead from the two world wars.

St Mark's Church, on the south side of Cecil Charlton Park, was established in 1819. The timber clerestory is impressive, as is the churchyard.

BLOOMFIELD GREAT HOUSE

This immaculate **historic home** (☎ 962-7130; bloomfield.g.h@cwjamaica.com; 8 Perth Rd; ☎ noon-10pm Tue-Sat) stands atop a hill southwest of the town center. The two-story structure built in traditional Caribbean vernacular gleams after a fine renovation. It is about 170 years old (the exact date is uncertain) and began life as the center of a coffee estate and, later, a citrus plantation. It's now one of Jamaica's finest art galleries and a premier restaurant (see p265).

The **art galleries** feature works by many of Jamaica's leading artists, as well as an international repertoire. There are five arts-and-crafts studios and stores in the arcade downstairs.

The entrance is 200m south of Manchester College, on the opposite side of the road at the crossroads.

HUNTINGTON SUMMIT

The extravagant **Huntingdon Summit mansion** (☎ 962-2274; George's Valley Rd; admission free, donations accepted; ☎ by appointment) in May Day, about 3km southeast of the town center, forms the yang to Bloomfield Great House's yin. The octagonal home is of palatial proportions, with wraparound plate-glass windows and artificial cascades that tumble into a swimming pool, from where waters feed into a pond in the lounge. The ostentatious furnishings reflect the catholic tastes of its owner, Cecil Charlton, a millionaire farmer, politician and self-promoter who served as the mayor of Mandeville during the 1970s and 1980s.

To get here, take Manchester Rd south to the T-junction; turn right onto Newport Rd then left onto May Day Rd, and left again after 1km onto George's Valley Rd (you can't miss the big green gates on the left). An appointment and a permit are required to visit; call ahead of time to book.

COMMUNITY TOURISM

You won't be long in the Mandeville area before you hear about 'community tourism,' an attempt to create opportunities for locals wishing to participate more fully in Jamaica's tourism industry, while fostering a deeper connection for visitors with the people of communities they might otherwise just pass through.

The dynamo behind the movement is Diana McIntyre-Pike, co-owner and manager of the Astra Country Inn and director of **Countrystyle Community Tours** (☎ 962-7758, 488-7207; www.countrystylecommunitytourism.com), a company geared towards providing alternatives to 'sea and sand' vacations. McIntyre-Pike helped to form the Central & South Tourism Committee, which sponsors special-interest tours, community guides, skills training and assistance with tourism development at the local level. She also runs the Countrystyle Institute for Sustainable Tourism, offering courses from community guide training to environmental waste management. 'Whatever development takes place, it must complement our lifestyle, not change our way of life,' she says.

The following tours were conceived to provide experience and insights that capture the 'real Jamaica.' Each day-tour includes lunch and refreshment:

- **Roots Jamaica** (US\$50) introduces you to Jamaican hospitality. Spend a day in a country village, receive a community welcome and be entertained in a private home while sampling local food. Visit churches and community centers and listen as elders relate tales of the past.
- **Taste of Jamaica** (US\$50) entails a day of village-hopping and learning to cook Jamaican cuisine in a natural setting with the community. Learn the old-time way of making bammy from cassava, taste sugarcane and plantain tarts, and sample fruits including naseberry, star apples and ortaniques. There's traditional coffee-making, a visit to Middle Quarters for some pepper shrimp, and the tour concludes with a meal at Little Ochie restaurant (p274) in Alligator Pond.
- **Jamaica Naturally** (US\$50) unfurls nature at its best in six villages of the central and south areas of Jamaica. Along the way you'll enjoy the scenic splendor of Resource Village, Gut River, Alligator Pond, Bamboo Avenue, YS Falls, Black River and a dramatic conclusion at Lover's Leap.

In addition, Countrystyle offers 'community experience packages' for lengthier stays. Among them is a three-day all-inclusive package (including choice of one of the above day tours) for US\$1000 (US\$1200 per couple) and a seven-day B&B package (including all three tours) for US\$1050 (US\$2000 per couple).

Countrystyle Community Tours is affiliated with **Unique Jamaica** (www.uniquejamaica.com), a nationwide initiative to bring the values of community tourism to an ever-widening audience.

MARSHALL'S PEN

This impressive stone-and-timber **great house** (☎ 904-5454; admission US\$10; ☎ by appointment), built in 1795, stands among beautifully landscaped gardens on a former coffee plantation turned cattle-breeding property on the northwest side of town.

The 120-hectare property is owned by Jamaica's leading ornithologist, Robert Sutton, and Anne Sutton, an environmental scientist. Robert can trace his ancestry to the first child born to English parents in Jamaica in 1655.

The Suttons' home has wood-paneled rooms brimming with antiques, leather-bound books, artwork and many other museum-quality pieces. You can tour the mini-museum by appointment only.

Marshall's Pen is splendid for birding: more than 100 species have been recorded here, including 25 of the 27 species endemic to Jamaica. It's a treat to don rubber boots and binoculars and set out with the Suttons and their several dogs swarming happily at your heels. Robert is coauthor with Audrey Downer of *Birds of Jamaica: A Photographic Field Guide*. Visiting in early morning or late afternoon is best.

To get to the property, take Oriole Close off Winston Jones Hwy, about 5km northwest of the town center (there's a sign for 'Somerset Quarries' at the junction). Turn left on Nightingale Dr and then, after about 100m, right on Mike Town Rd; the estate entrance – an unmarked stone gateway

– is about 400m further on the right. Take insect repellent.

Countrystyle Community Tours (see p263) offers tours by appointment.

MRS STEPHENSON'S GARDEN

This well-manicured garden (☎ 962-2909; fax 961-1486; 25 New Green Rd; admission US\$2; 🚗 by appointment) has been planned and planted, and pruned and mulched, by a stalwart who is a real artist. Carmen Stephenson's garden is a riot of color, a drunkenness of scents, difficult to dampen in even the wettest of weather. Keen amateur gardeners descend year-round to admire the layout or gasp at the collection that includes orchids and or-taniques. Casual visitors are welcome during daylight hours.

Activities

For golf, check out the **Manchester Club** (☎ 962-2403; mosquito_j@hotmail.com), the oldest golf club in the Caribbean. Located off Brumalia Rd, northwest of the town center, it has a nine-hole golf course that was laid out in the 1860s. A round costs US\$25 and caddies are compulsory (US\$15). The club also has three night-lit tennis courts and squash courts (both US\$5 per hour).

Tours

Kariba Holidays & Leisure Tours (☎ 961-3829, 962-8006; Kariba Kariba Guest House, Winston Jones Hwy) offers tours locally and further afield.

Countrystyle Community Tours (☎ 962-7758; Astra Country Inn, 62 Ward Ave) has a 'Marvelous Mandeville' tour (per person US\$60 full day, including lunch and transfers). It also offers tours further afield and specialist guides (see the boxed text, p263).

Festivals & Events

Manchester Horticultural Society Show (☎ 962-2909) is held in late May at Mrs Stephenson's Garden (above).

Manchester Golf Week is held in late July at the Manchester Club; contact the **Jamaica Golf Association** (☎ 975-4287) for details. The **Jamaica Horse Show** is held in July, and **Tennis Week** in August, both at the Manchester Club.

Sleeping

Glenrock Hotel (☎ 961-3279; glenrock@cwjamaica.com; 3 Greenvale Rd; s US\$46, d US\$53-60, ste US\$65-75; 📞 📺) In the process of a prolonged renovation at

last visit, this congenial place has seven older (and cheaper) rooms with fans and louvered windows, plus bathrooms with hot water. Suites have king-size beds, cable TV, phones and kitchens with refrigerators.

Astra Country Inn (☎ 962-7758; 62 Ward Ave; r US\$47-56, ste US\$120; 📞) On the western outskirts of town, this former nursing home contains 20 rooms (some with king-size beds) with cable TVs, including suites with kitchenettes. The Astra is home to an English-style pub, a pleasant dining room serving tasty Jamaican cuisine and the offices of Countrystyle Community Tours (p263), who will enhance your stay in Mandeville immeasurably.

Kariba Kariba Guest House (☎ 962-8006; 39 New Green Rd; r incl breakfast US\$50) North of the town center, this beautiful fieldstone home run by a friendly English-Jamaican couple has five spacious rooms with balconies that share a bathroom. It has handsome tile and hardwood floors and a large lounge. Dinner and lunch cost US\$5 each. The owner can point out nature trails and also leads customized excursions that give a good sense of rural Jamaican culture.

Fleur Flats Resorts (☎ 962-1053, in Canada 416-445-0209, in the USA 305-252-0873, in the UK 020-7964-0047; 10 Coke Dr; 1-/2-bedroom apt US\$60/80) The spacious fully furnished apartments sleep up to four people in comfort. Rooms have TVs and phones. This family-oriented resort is a 20-minute walk from the town center.

Mandeville Flats (☎ 961-8439; mandeville.com/standard; 7 Hillview Dr, Balvenie Heights; s US\$64-93, d US\$75-93; 📞 📺 📺) With deeply satisfying views over Mandeville's surrounding undulating hillsides, this bright and gleaming small hotel offers 12 clean fan-cooled rooms. Each is done up in bright colors and has a TV. One has a kitchenette and can be combined with another to form a family suite. Breakfast is included; dinners are by arrangement.

Golf View Hotel (☎ 962-4477; www.thegolfviewhotel.com; 51/2 Caledonia Rd; s US\$70-90, d US\$75-95; 1-/2-bedroom ste US\$110; 📞 📺 📺) This rambling, conference-oriented property with 60-odd rooms is centered on a small pool in a concrete courtyard. Rooms have contemporary decor, tile floors, fans, cable TVs, louvered windows and tub showers. Spacious suites have walk-in showers and four-poster beds.

Mandeville Hotel (☎ 962-2460; www.mandevillehoteljamaica.com; Hotel St; r \$88-93, ste US\$110-135, apt \$195-255; 📞 📺 📺) The town's oldest hotel has been

operating since 1875, yet an unimaginative 1970s renovation has cost it its character. It has 60 rooms of varying standards; all have cable TV and phone. Rooms to the rear are a bit dowdy. Spacious suites boast four-poster beds. Self-contained units with kitchenettes are also available. The restaurant overlooks a pool and is joined by a pub that gets rather crowded.

Eating

Tweeties Café (☎ 962-3426; 2 Perth Rd; breakfast US\$2-4; 📞 breakfast & lunch) Tweeties offers cheap breakfasts, as well as fish and chips, pizza and sandwiches in Brumalia Town Centre.

International Chinese Restaurant (☎ 962-1252; 117 Manchester Rd; mains US\$5-25; 📞 lunch & dinner) Filling portions of above-average Chinese fare are on offer at this casual spot.

New Den (☎ 962-3603; 35 Caledonia Rd; mains US\$5-25; 📞 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) In the former home of a colonial family with an affinity for wickerwork, this refined Jamaican eatery serves up excellent fish and chips as well as curried or barbecued chicken. If you're especially hungry, try the mixed grill, which lets you pick any three grilled meat or fish dishes on the menu.

Country Fresh (☎ 962-7758; Astra Country Inn, 62 Ward Ave; mains US\$7-15; 📞 breakfast, lunch & dinner) With an emphasis on the authentic, this hotel-based restaurant grows much of its produce in a private garden. A set meal is offered; lunch and dinner can be made to order. Sandwiches and snacks cost US\$2.

Manchester Arms Pub & Restaurant (☎ 962-9764; mains US\$7-18; Mandeville Hotel, Hotel St; 📞 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A broad menu of Jamaican and continental dishes is served here. It has a poolside barbecue each Wednesday night. Jamaican night is held on the last Wednesday of every month, with Jamaican food and entertainment, including a live mento band.

Bloomfield Great House Restaurant & Bar (☎ 962-7130; 8 Perth Rd; mains US\$10-30; 📞 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) One of Jamaica's pre-eminent restaurants, this exemplifies the best of Caribbean fusion cuisine. Grab a seat on the veranda and sample the creative menu, which changes regularly and includes such house-made pastas as callaloo fettuccine, jumbo shrimp stuffed with jalapeno pepper and filet mignon. The lunch menu offers Caesar salad, pizza, fish and chips, and lighter fare. A Sunday champagne brunch is offered, as are free pick-up and

drop-off from central Mandeville hotels. At the very least, drop by for a drink in the mahogany bar.

You can buy one half of the famous 'fish and bammy' at Clem Bloomfield's **Bammy Factory** (☎ 963-8636; 40 Greenvale Rd). **Flakey Crust** (11A Manchester Rd) sells fresh-baked breads, pastries and patties. **Devon House I-Scream** (Main St) has an outlet in Mandeville.

There are a dozen or so fast-food joints around town. A food court to the rear of the Manchester Shopping Plaza features **Indies Pizza** (☎ 961-1676; Shop 47); **Gee's Café** (☎ 962-2606; Shop 42), recommended for its Jamaican breakfasts; and the **Real Things Health Food Store** (☎ 962-5664). **Mother's** (Manchester Rd; patties US\$0.40) is a good place to buy cheap patties and baked goods.

Fresh produce can be found at the market on the south side of Cecil Charlton Park, but hygiene is an issue.

Drinking & Entertainment

Mandeville is relatively devoid of an active nightlife. Locals have a humorous phrase to describe the town: 'newlyweds and nearly dead.'

Link (☎ 964-8799; 80 Caledonia Ave) This is a popular neighborhood bar where you're sure to make some friends. Entertaining karaoke nights are held on Thursday and Saturday, and on Sunday a DJ spins vintage reggae and American R&B.

Eclipse (☎ 962-2660; 33 Ward Ave; admission US\$5) The only nightclub of note, it has live music out back and a disco inside. Friday is 'Ladies Nite,' with free entry.

Dicky's Sports Bar (Ward Ave; 📞 4.30pm-midnight Mon-Thu, 4.30pm until last person leaves Fri-Sun) A classic Jamaican haunt with pool tables and the occasional sound-system party.

Mystic Sports Bar (Caledonia Rd) This sometimes-lively spot has pool tables.

The Manchester Arms (left) is a quiet English-style pub that's open late, while Bloomfield Great House (p262) has live musical entertainment on Friday night.

Shopping

SWA Craft Centre (☎ 962-0694; 7 N Racecourse) Behind the Manchester Shopping Plaza, this place trains young women to make a living from crochet, embroidery, weaving and so on. Its most appealing item is the famous 'banana patch' Rastafarian doll.

Getting There & Around

The airline **Timair** (☎ 952-2516; www.timair.com) serves the Mandeville airstrip, south of town, from MoBay.

Mandeville has direct bus, minibus and route-taxi services from virtually every major town in Jamaica. Most buses, and many minibuses and route taxis, depart and arrive from the transportation center, off Main St. Others depart and arrive near the market on the main square. Sample fares are US\$3.50 to Kingston, US\$5 to Savanna-la-Mar and US\$6.50 to Montego Bay.

There is no local bus system. You'll find taxis near the market on Cecil Charlton Park. Otherwise, call **United Taxi Service** (☎ 961-3333; Manchester Shopping Centre).

Hemisphere Car Rental (☎ 962-1921; 51 Manchester Rd) rents cars.

GUTTERS & SPUR TREE HILL

Gutters, 16km east of Santa Cruz, sits astride the border of Manchester and St Elizabeth parishes at the foot of Spur Tree Hill. From here, the A2 road begins a long, steep switch-back climb up the Don Figuerero Mountains to Mandeville.

At the top of the hill you can look out over the Essex Valley and the Santa Cruz Mountains. The valley floor is dominated by the Alpart alumina factory at Nain, 8km to the southeast, and aglitter at night.

You can admire the view midway up the hill at any of several roadside shacks.

WILLIAMSFIELD

In the village of Williamsfield, 300m below and northeast of Mandeville, at the base of the Winston Jones Hwy (A2), you can take a free tour of the **High Mountain Coffee Factory** (☎ 963-4211; Winston Jones Hwy; ☒ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, tours by appointment). Here, coffee, herbal teas and liqueurs are produced by the Jamaica Standard Products Co under the three labels. It's adjacent to the old train station just west of the roundabout. The factory is tiny and the tour more of interest to coffee fanatics, but it has a tasting room and store.

The **High Mountain 10K Road Race** (☎ 963-4211), Jamaica's largest bicycle road race, is held here every January.

SHOOTER'S HILL

Shooter's Hill begins 3km northwest of Williamsfield and climbs steadily and steeply

(430m in elevation) to Christiana. A lookout point midway offers splendid views. On the west side of the road, atop a hillock, is the Moravian-built **Mizpah Church** topped by a four-faced German clock.

Kirkvine Works, an alumina-processing plant at the base of Shooter's Hill, is owned and operated by Windalco. You can arrange free weekday tours in Mandeville through Astra Country Inn (p264), or through Mr J Neil at the **Kirkvine Works office** (☎ 961-7503, 962-3141). A day's notice is usually required. There's a strict dress code: long pants are required and feet must be covered (no sandals).

The **Pickapeppa Factory** (☎ 962-2928, 962-2809; www.pickapeppa.com; adult/child US\$9/3), on the B6 at the foot of Shooter's Hill, offers 30-minute tours by appointment. The factory produces Jamaica's sinus-searing world-famous sauce, which graces most tables on the island. There's not much to see, other than workers stirring giant pots of simmering scallions and other vegetables.

MILE GULLY & AROUND

This village sprawls along a valley that runs northwest from Mandeville in the lee of the forested north face of the Don Figuerero Mountains. The B6 leads northwest from Shooter's Hill, winding, dipping and rising past lime-green pastures dotted with guango and silk-cotton trees and crisscrossed with stone walls and hedgerows.

The valley is pitted with caves, including **Oxford Caves**, near Mile Gully.

About 1km west of Mile Gully, at **Skull Point**, is a venerable blue-and-white 19th-century police station and courthouse at the junction for Bethany.

Ripon Nature Park (admission US\$3), dating to 1730, in Mile Gully, produces citrus, flowers, coffee and cocoa and is being developed into a bird sanctuary, wild garden and ecopark by Derek O'Connor, owner of **Kariba Holidays & Leisure Tours** (☎ 962-8006) in Mandeville. The 5-hectare garden has more than 500 endemic species, including orchids. A palm-lined driveway leads to the vast and varied garden, accessible by trails and open for picnics. Fruit trees include giant plums. The hillsides are carpeted in ferns, and feature benches for quiet contemplation. Meditate among the fern-carpeted hillsides or check out the new hummingbird and butterfly garden, then cool off in the pool. A children's

play park and horseback riding round out the activities.

The Bethany road climbs sharply and delivers you at the **Bethany Moravian Church** – a simple gray stone building dating to 1835, dramatically perched four-square midway up the hill with fantastic valley views. The church is rather dour close up, but the simple interior boasts a resplendent organ.

Another beautiful church – **St Simon's Anglican Church** – sits on a hillside amid meadows at Comfort Hall, 6km west of Mile Gully, with huge spreading trees festooned with old man's beard.

To the south of the B6, perched atop the Don Figuerero Mountains, at Maidstone, is **Nazareth Moravian Church**. One of the best-planned postemancipation 'free villages,' Maidstone was founded in 1840.

The annual **Emancipation Day Fair** is celebrated at Maidstone on August 1, with mento bands, Jonkanoo celebrations, and maypole and quadrille dancing.

Getting There & Away

Coasters and route taxis operate on the B6 between Mandeville and Maggotty via Mile Gully.

If you're driving from Mandeville, the B6 continues west about 8km to Green Hill and a T-junction. About 1.5km north (to the right) of the junction, en route to Balaclava, is a *very dangerous* spot: you'll climb a short hill that tempts you to accelerate. Unfortunately there's an unmarked railway crossing on the crest and a hairpin bend *immediately* after. Drive slowly!

TREASURE BEACH & AROUND

The coastal strip southeast of Black River is sheltered from rains for most of the year by the Santa Cruz Mountains, so there is none of the lush greenery of the north coast to be found here. Instead, you'll find acacia trees and cactus towering up to 9m. The region remains unsullied by tourism. Here one can slip into the kind of lazy, no-frills tropical lifestyle almost impossible to achieve elsewhere on the island's coast.

Dividing the plains north to south are the Santa Cruz Mountains, a steep-faced chain

that slopes to the sea and drops 520m at Lover's Leap. The plains are hemmed in to the west by a range of hills called Surinam Quarters, whose scarp faces fall sharply to the coast; to the north by the Nassau Mountains and the Cockpit Country; and to the east by the Don Figuerero Mountains, a wedge-shaped upland plateau dominating Manchester parish. The base of the west-facing escarpment of the Don Figuereros forms the boundary between St Elizabeth and Manchester. Northeast of the Don Figuereros, the Mocho Mountains rise to Christiana and crest at Mt Denham (992m).

TREASURE BEACH

If Treasure Beach were any more laid-back it would risk floating off into the sea. With rocky headlands separating lonely, coral-colored sand beaches, the area is noted for its healthy supply of relaxed guesthouses and stylish boutique hotels. The sense of remoteness, easy pace, and graciousness of the local farmers and fisherfolk attract foreign travelers seeking an away-from-it-all, cares-to-the-wind lifestyle. Many have chosen to settle here – much to local pride.

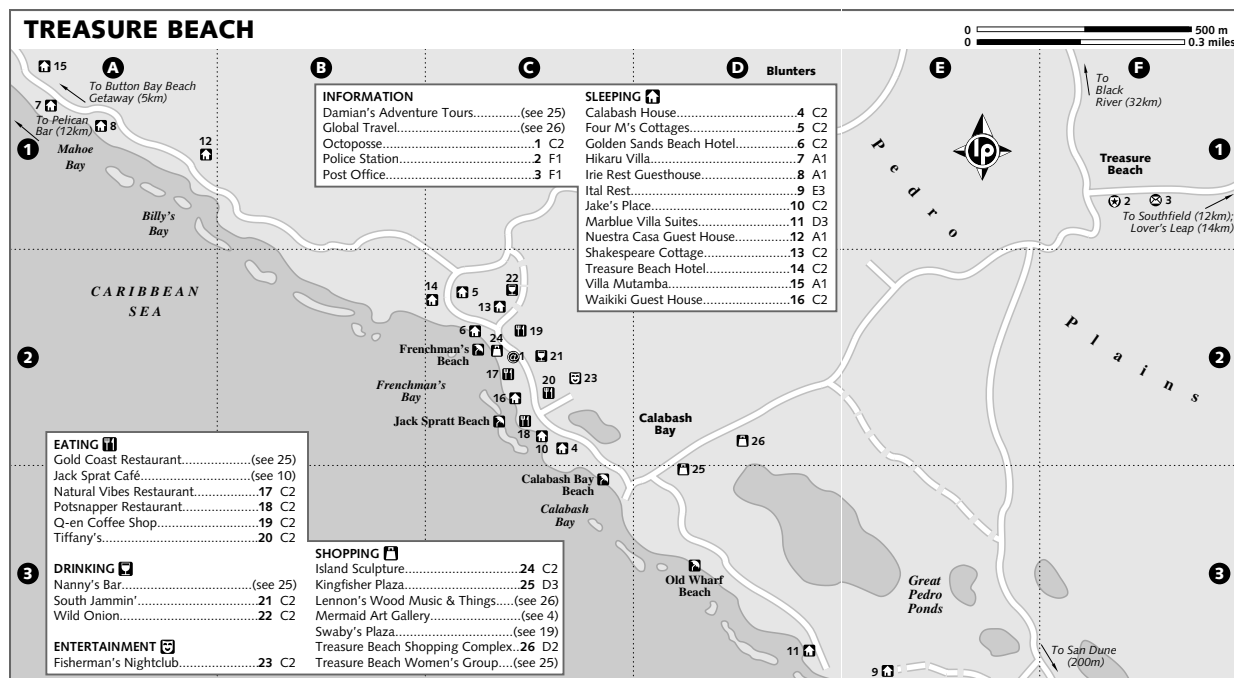
Treasure Beach is the generic name for four coves – Billy's Bay, Frenchman's Bay, Calabash Bay and Great Pedro Bay. It's said that Scottish sailors were shipwrecked near Treasure Beach in the 19th century, accounting for the presence of fair skin, green eyes and reddish hair.

The area's residents are also known for their strong community spirit. Collectives like the Treasure Beach Women's Group and the Treasure Beach Foundation bring locals and expats together for effective projects relating to housing, education and local culture. There's a burgeoning cultural scene here, with artists, poets and other luminaries continuing to put down roots. Along with the Calabash Literary Festival, they continue to shape and guide a national literary dialogue.

With all the buzz that 'quiet' Treasure Beach is generating, it's no surprise that developers are hungrily buying up land, and it can be only a matter of time before the first major resorts appear. A citizens' committee meets each month to regulate impending development. But for the time being, it's just you and the sea.

Information

Jake's Place (p271) is an unofficial tourist information source. On the internet, a good starting point is www.treasurebeach.net.



The nearest bank is in Southfield, 16km east of Treasure Beach. The post office is on a hillside beside the police station.

Dr Valerie M Elliott (☎ 607-9074; 📧 7am-10pm Mon, Tue & Fri) Available on call.

Global Travel (☎ 965-0547; Treasure Beach Shopping Complex) Plane reservations and regional tours.

Octoposse (☎ 367-7501; per 30 min US\$3; 📧 7am-10pm Mon, Tue & Fri) Internet access.

Police station (☎ 965-0163) Between Calabash Bay and Pedro Cross.

Activities

The Treasure Beach region boasts many different ways to enjoy the outdoor activities, including gratifying beaches and excellent hiking. You will be able to wander for hours on the many footpaths that traverse their way over hill and dale and along the sea. Calabash Bay is backed by the Great Pedro Ponds, which are good spots for birding.

Bicycles can be rented at Jake's Place (see p271) and also at the **Q-en Coffee Shop** (☎ 326-9008; per 24hr US\$7). Jake's also rents out kayaks.

For bicycle, hiking, kayak or snorkeling tours, see opposite.

BEACHES

Four almost-empty fishing beaches beckon, all within easy walking distance of the accommodations around Calabash Bay. Water sports haven't yet caught on, although the waves are good for body-surfing. Beware! There is sometimes a vicious undertow at all area beaches. Ask a local where the safest swimming spots are.

The most visited is the folksy **Jack Spratt Beach**, at the western edge of Jake's Place. Large and brightly painted wooden fishing boats are pulled up on the sand, and there is invariably a fisherman or two on hand tending the nets. This is the safest beach for swimming. Nearby the Jack Spratt Café (p272) sells beer and excellent food at pleasant outdoor tables.

The next beach to the west is **Frenchman's Beach**, watched over by a landmark 'buttonwood' tree that has long attracted the attention of poets, painters and woodcarvers who ply their wares. This is also a great

place to arrange trips to the Pelican Bar or Black River.

In the opposite direction from Jake's there's **Calabash Bay Beach**, with a few cook and rum shops and a sandy beach, and **Old Wharf Beach**, the most private of the bunch.

BOATING & FISHING

With a long and proud history of seafaring fishermen, it's no wonder that Treasure Beach is a great place from which to take to the sea. The best time to book a trip is during the early morning or late afternoon; the winds

tend to pick up during the middle of the day. On bright moonlit evenings it is possible to take to the silvery waters for an enchanting tour of the coast.

Popular boating excursions include the Pelican Bar (p271), Black River Great Morass (p253), and Sunny Island and Little Ochie, both near Alligator Pond (p273). From Frenchman's Beach, boat captain and fisher **Dennis Abrahams** (☎ 435-3779, 965-3084; per person US\$20, minimum 4; 📧 5pm) offers a sunset cruise by motorboat to Great Pedro Bluff and Billy's Bay, as well as fishing and on-demand trips to the Pelican Bar and Black River Great Morass. Other recommended captains include **Allan Daley** (☎ 423-3673, 366-7394) and **Teddy Parchment** (☎ 854-5442), who both offer customized four-hour boat tours for about US\$30 per person (minimum four people).

Everyone with a boat in Treasure Beach is involved in some way with the pursuit of fishing, and it's easy to talk someone into taking you out to pull a trap or drop a line. Or you can book a fishing trip at Jake's (US\$40 per hour for up to six people), which includes rods and bait. Fish frequently caught include grouper, kingfish and snapper; most restaurants are happy to prepare them for the night's dinner.

Tours

At Jake's Place (p271), the friendly staff are more than happy to arrange excursions and activities throughout the area. Julie Kolipulos offers day-long walking tours (US\$30). At Jake's, a man calling himself simply **Andy** (☎ 438-1311; bicycle/kayak rental per day US\$25/35) rents bicycles and kayaks and leads tours (from US\$50).

Damian's Adventure Tours (☎ 965-3101, 965-3101; sandyboy9@yahoo.com; Kingfisher Plaza) offers

SCRUBS & RUBS IN TREASURE BEACH

Treasure Beach's fresh air and its soaring scenery provide a perfect environment for some rejuvenating body work, and visitors can enjoy the services of two excellent – and very different – practitioners. **Joshua Lee Stein** (☎ 965-0583, 965-0635; per hr US\$60) offers massage at Jake's Place, but he also does the rounds of area hotels and guesthouses on his tricycle with folding massage table in tow. He gives discounts to students and seniors. For something different, **Shirley Genus** (☎ 421-8903, 863-3481; treatment US\$80) offers a traditional Jamaican herbal steam bath and massage at Ital Rest (p270). Here, weary travelers can get the road rubbed out of them with a healing 'vibeful' massage in a hut filled with aromatic steam emanating from a herbal cauldron bubbling with fever grass, mint, eucalyptus and pimento (allspice).

TREASURE BEACH FOUNDATION

The **Treasure Beach Foundation** (☎ 965-3000; www.breds.org) – or Breds (short for brethren) – is dedicated to fostering heritage pride, sports, health and education among the community. Work includes restoring decrepit housing, sponsorship of both a soccer team and a basketball team, and the introduction of a computer lab at the local school.

Donations are welcome. Contact Jake's Place (opposite) for more information.

mountain biking locally, as well as hiking, snorkeling and overnight camping trips.

Festivals & Events

Treasure Beach Off-Road Triathlon (☎ 965-0635)

Held in early May and sponsored by Breds.

Calabash International Literary Festival (☎ 922-4200; www.calabashfestival.org) A daring, acclaimed literary festival in late May at Jake's, drawing literary voices from near and far.

New Year's Eve Bonfire Party At Fisherman's Beach, this boisterous party is an institution.

Sleeping

Treasure Beach boasts one world-famous hotel and many restful guest houses that are as personable as the friendly folk who run them. There's a good selection of truly affordable lodging, making this one of the most economical places in Jamaica for an extended stay.

Speaking of sticking around, the area also features a great selection of spacious villas, many of them fully staffed. Some in this category provide bona-fide luxury and considerable style, while others are more modest and practical, providing good value for groups or families. Details of a variety of these can be found at www.treasurebeach.net and www.jamaica escapes.com.

BUDGET

Shakespeare Cottage (☎ 965-0120; r US\$20-30) Two hundred meters east of the Treasure Beach Hotel, this choice budget option has five rooms with fans and bathrooms with cold water only. There's a communal kitchen.

Waikiki Guest House (☎ 965-3660, 345-9669; r/cottage/house US\$20/35/50) An excellent budget option facing Frenchman's Beach, this cozy place has six rooms, each with fans and private

cool-water bath; prices are negotiable. Waikiki also has a one-bedroom cottage, two two-story cottages and a small house with three bedrooms and kitchen.

Irie Rest Guesthouse (☎ 965-0034; Billy's Bay Way; d US\$30; P ☎ ☎) Another excellent budget choice, on offer here are six rooms with bathrooms and both fans and air-con. There are private patios, internet access and meals prepared to order. One room can sleep four (extra people are charged US\$10). It's a five-minute walk to the beach.

Iral Rest (☎ 421-8909, 863-3481; r US\$40) Four hundred meters inland from Great Bay is this atmospheric, out-of-the-way place with two exquisite all-wood thatched cabins with cool-water showers and toilets but no electricity. At night the breezy candle-lit rooms are very romantic. An upstairs room in the house has a sundeck. Kitchen facilities are shared and meals are available by request. It also has a small thatched bar and a fantastic herbal steam bath (p269).

Four M's Cottages (☎ 965-0131; camping US\$10, s/d/tr US\$40/60/80; ☎) About 400m from the beach, this modern house has six rooms of varying size with hot-water bathrooms. Windows are screened and there are mosquito nets over some beds. Guests enjoy spending time in the kitchen with gracious host Effie Campbell. There are also good camping spots beneath shady trees.

Nuestra Casa Guest House (☎ 965-0152, 965-3565; www.billysbay.com; d US\$50) This gem at Billy's Bay is run by Lillian Brooks, a delightful English lady, and her son Roger, a burly chap with a sense of humor. A wide veranda has rockers, and a rooftop sundeck is shaded by umbrellas. The reclusive three-bedroom house is tastefully decorated. Two rooms share a bathroom; a third has its own. All have lofty wooden ceilings. It's a tremendous bargain at these rates, which decrease for longer stays. Breakfasts are prepared by arrangement.

MIDRANGE

Golden Sands Beach Hotel (☎ 965-0167; golden.sands.guesthouse@yahoo.com; r US\$45-50, cottages US\$60-80; ☎) With a seaside location some consider the best spot in Treasure Beach, this old favorite offers 20 modestly furnished rooms with bathrooms. Rooms vary; some have ceiling fans, others boast sea views, and one has hot water and air-con. There are also one- and three-bedroom cottages with air-con and TV.

Button Bay Beach Getaway (☎ 965-3873; www.buttonbayjamaica.com; s/d villa US\$60/120; P ☎ ☎ ☎) An outstanding, secluded option 20 minutes east of Treasure Beach, the Button Bay Beach Getaway is nestled cozily around its own private cove with an intimate outdoor pool. Rooms are modern yet comfortable with mesmerizing sea or mountain views from balconies or private terraces. There's a large villa laden with artwork available for families. Kayaking and a wide array of tours are available.

Calabash House (☎ 382-6384; www.calabashhouse.com; r/cottage US\$75/275; P ☎) A highly congenial spot run by an American expat, Calabash House offers airy rooms with bathrooms, each adorned with its own distinctive mosaic, as well as secluded beachside cottages with hammocks. The Mermaid Art Gallery fronts the hotel, which hosts several art workshops throughout the year as well as a literary festival in late May.

San Dune (☎ 377-7724; Great Bay; 1-2/3-4/5-6 people US\$100/150/200; ☎) A pleasing blend of old and new, this property surrounded by 12 hectares of farmland includes a 100-year-old cottage with fanciful lacy fretwork and four bedrooms, kitchen and veranda, and a new two-bedroom cottage with similar amenities. The owner, Maisie Campbell, just happens to be Jamaica's biggest scallion and onion farmer.

Treasure Beach Hotel (☎ 965-0110; s US\$99, d US\$107-145; P ☎ ☎) This rambling property dotted with palms and nestled on a hillside overlooking the beach has 36 rooms including 16 spacious, deluxe oceanfront suites that have king-size four-poster beds, cable TVs, tile floors and patios. There are two swimming pools, a whirlpool, and a volleyball court; sailing and snorkeling are also offered. The Yabba Restaurant is on the premises.

Villa Mutamba (☎ 920-8194, 387-4112; www.villa.mutamba.com; d per week US\$700) This exquisite villa overlooking Billy's Bay was built in 2004 by the great dub poet Mutabaruka. The place is infused with an exquisite, rootsy sensibility. It has a wildly romantic master bedroom, a loft suitable for kids and, most winningly, a balcony affording 180-degree views of Treasure Beach. To get to the house – it's located on the side of a steep hill – you must climb a formidable flight of stairs to reach the cliff-top setting.

TOP END

ourpick Jake's Place (☎ in the USA 965-3000, 800-688-7678, in the UK 020-7440-4360; www.islandoutpost.com/jakes; r US\$95-195, cottages US\$195-325; P ☎ ☎ ☎) The most glistening gem in Treasure Beach's chest, this rainbow-colored retreat, run with panache by Jason Henzell wins the award for the 'chicest shack' between Negril and Kingston. There are 13 single rooms (many perched over the sea), four two-bedroom cottages, a three-bedroom villa (rooms can be rented separately) like a mini-Moroccan *ksar*, and a one-up/one-down house that features an exterior spiral staircase, terra-cotta tile floors, tile and glass-brick walk-in showers and exquisite handmade beds. The decor follows Greek and Islamic motifs: onion-dome curves, blood-red floors, and walls and rough-hewn doors inset with colored bottles and glass beads. Many beds are metal-frame antiques. Wi-fi is available. The exquisite pool – lamplit at night – is shaded by a spreading tree. Jake's has two restaurants. Local bands perform, moonlight poetry readings are hosted, and Jason arranges tours and activities (see p269).

ourpick Marblue Villa Suites (☎ 840-5772, 848-0001; www.marblue.com; domicil/veranda ste US\$159/299; P ☎ ☎ ☎) One of Jamaica's most stylish small hotels this well-run and welcoming boutique hotel pampers its guests with thoughtful service and considerable streamlined luxury. Five one-bedroom villa suites are appointed with furniture designed by the owners, architect Axel and Andrea Wichterich. Each veranda suite features living areas that open to spectacular views of the sea. The three 'domicil' rooms provide good value. The Blue Parrot Tiki Lounge, weekly barbecues, two dramatic pools and superb cuisine round out the offerings.

Hikaru Villa (☎ 965-0442, in the USA 860-247-0759; www.villahikaru.com; villa per week US\$2195; ☎ ☎) This is a sumptuous, fully staffed beachfront villa with private tennis court and croquet lawn. There are four screened, fan-cooled bedrooms opening to a wide shaded patio that catches the near-constant sea breeze. Inside is a living room and dining area that seats eight. Just below the patio is a sheltered sunning terrace. Rates quoted here are for up to four people (add 10% for each extra person up to eight).

Eating

ourpick Pelican Bar (☎ 354-4218; Caribbean Sea; ☎) morning-sunset; mains US\$5-15) Built on a submerged sandbar 1km out to sea, this thatch-roofed

eatery on stilts provides Jamaica's – and perhaps the planet's – most enjoyable spot for a drink. Getting there is half the fun: hire a local boat captain (you can book passage from Jake's for US\$30). The clientele is a mix of enchanted travelers and repeat-business fishermen who while away the hours playing dominoes, talking on their cell phones, checking the cricket scores or exchanging pleasantries with the self-satisfied owner. In between Red Stripes, or perhaps before your meal of lobster, shrimp or fish, feel free to slip into the salubrious waters for a dip.

Gold Coast Restaurant (Kingfisher Plaza; meals US\$2.50-4; ☎ Mon-Sat) There's always a sweet-smelling pot on the stove at this favorite local eatery. No-nonsense budget meals, ranging from curried conch to spicy shrimp, are served.

Natural Vibes Restaurant (mains US\$3.50-12; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This unassuming spot offers bargain prices on local favorites such as lobster, chicken chop suey and beef stew. It's a good spot for a hearty Jamaican breakfast.

Tiffany's (☎ 965-0300; mains US\$4-12; ☎ noon-10pm Tue-Sat) On the main road, this friendly restaurant offers comfortable ambience, rooftop dining and an eclectic menu that includes burgers, T-bone steaks, curried goat and salads.

Potsnapper Restaurant (☎ 393-0377; mains US\$5-15; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With a steady supply of fresh fish from the morning's catch, this pleasant roadside eatery serves ackee and saltfish and porridge for breakfast, and seafood, pizza, curried goat and pepper steak for lunch and dinner.

Jake's Place (mains US\$5-20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Despite the easily distracted service, this atmospheric spot serves excellent fare in an open-sided wooden restaurant with low lighting and hip music. You can also dine poolside on the patio out back. The menu changes daily, but typical dishes include pumpkin soup, baked lamb, stuffed crab and chocolate cake. Filling lunches include vegetarian treats such as lima-bean soup.

our pick **Jack Sprat Café** (mains US\$5-18; ☎ 7am-midnight) An excellent barefoot beachside eatery affiliated with Jake's, this appealing joint features vintage reggae posters and an old jukebox as well as a lively bar scene that spills onto the tree-shaded patio. Jack Sprat warms to any crowd or time of day, and offers a diverse menu of sandwiches, salads, crabcakes, smoked marlin and lobster as well as excellent jerk or garlicky shrimp. A superb array of pizzas

is available at night, and every meal should end with some of the superb ice cream.

Q-en Coffee Shop (☎ 326-9008; Swaby's Plaza) This small grocery store is also a good spot for Jamaican breakfasts.

Drinking & Entertainment

At night, Treasure Beach appears like a sleepy place – don't be fooled. Treasure Beach's hotspots party late into the night until the last person leaves. The **Fisherman's Nightclub** (☎ 379-9780), up a dirt road behind Tiffany's, is the oldest nightclub in town and the domain of local youth (mostly male) skanking to sounds from a selector (DJ); a pool hall and bar are at the back. On weekends, Wild Onion in Frenchman's Cove attracts a mix of locals and visitors with its spacious dance floor and pool tables. **South Jammin'** (☎ 965-0136) draws locals for darts, billiards and dominoes. Its dinner menu includes steamed fish, pepper steak, curried goat and lasagna. **Nanny's Bar** (Kingfisher Plaza) is a local haunt with a pool table; it stays open until the last person leaves. Jake's Place is the place to be for its infamous poolside cocktail hour. And of course, Jack Sprat Café is always lively and hosts small concerts, poetry readings and once-weekly outdoor movies.

For something quite different, allow one of the drivers from Jake's to take you on a country bar crawl. Over the course of a few hours you will visit local zinc-roofed rum shops and mingle with the community over overproof rum and dominoes.

Shopping

One of the best craft stores is on the front lawn at Jake's Place (p271).

Mermaid Art Gallery (☎ 382-6384) Part of the Calabash House hotel, this recently opened gallery specializes in excellent local woodwork and tie-dyed clothing.

Island Sculpture (☎ 831-6612) Opposite Swaby's Plaza, here a local called 'LT' crafts precious lignum vitae into abstract animal and mystical forms.

Lennon's Wood Music & Things (☎ 965-0476; Treasure Beach Shopping Complex) This shop sells music CDs.

Treasure Beach Women's Group (☎ 965-0748; treasurebeach@cwjamaica.com; Kingfisher Plaza) A wide range of gifts is sold here, including batiks, crafts made from calabash shells and other natural materials, swimwear, sandals and coffee.

Getting There & Around

There is no direct service to Treasure Beach from Montego Bay, Negril or Kingston. Take a minibus or route taxi to Black River (US\$3), then connect to Treasure Beach (US\$1.75). There are only three daily buses from Black River to Treasure Beach. It's best to enquire at the transportation yard the day before your desired departure. From Negril, you will have to transfer at Savanna-la-Mar to continue on to Black River.

Jake's Place and the more expensive hotels and villas arrange transfers from MoBay for US\$100 (up to four people), car and motorcycle rental, and transfers by taxi.

Bicycles are rented by Andy at Jake's (see p269) and by the **Q-en Coffee Shop** (☎ 326-9008; per 24hr US\$6.50).

MALVERN

Straddling the Santa Cruz Mountains at a refreshing 730m, this hamlet is a looping 24km drive northeast from Treasure Beach. Years ago Malvern was favored as a summer resort for its temperate climate. Today it's an agricultural and educational center.

In the 18th century these uplands became an important center for coffee cultivation. Sugar estates were absent and the harsh plantation system never took hold. Following emancipation, newly freed slaves settled as independent farmers and continued to grow coffee. In later years citrus farms became important, and cattle now grow fat on the lush pastures. Bauxite mining near Mandeville and Santa Cruz has brought further, much-evident prosperity to the region.

Malvern is dominated by the cream-colored **Hampton College** (it's a girls' school founded in 1858), about 1km south of Malvern Sq, the village center. **Munro College**, a boys' school founded in 1856, is 6km further south.

Mikarabee (☎ 966-5537, in the UK ☎ 01908-261888; www.mikarabee.com; per week US\$2500; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) is a luxury villa with world-class views and spacious bedrooms. It has a game room, satellite TV, modern kitchen and fully equipped office. There's a graceful swimming pool and the services of a staff. To get there, go 3km toward the village of Retirement, and follow the road toward Elgin.

LOVER'S LEAP

You need a head for heights to stand by the cliff at **Lover's Leap** (☎ 965-6634; admission US\$3;

☎ 10am-6pm), 1.5km southeast of Southfield, where the Santa Cruz Mountains plunge over 500m into the ocean. The headland is tipped by a red-and-white-hooped solar-powered **lighthouse**.

Far below, waves crash ashore on jagged rocks and wash onto **Cutlass Beach**. You can hike with a guide (US\$20 per group): it's a stiff one-hour down. With luck you may see wild mountain goats.

Lover's Leap is named for two young slaves who supposedly committed suicide here in 1747. Legend says the woman was lusted after by her owner, who arranged for her lover to be sold to another estate. When the couple heard of the plot, they fled and were eventually cornered at the cliffs, where they chose to plunge to their deaths.

A children's play area, souvenir shop, small museum and restaurant are atop the cliff.

On the road to the site, **Lover's Leap Guesthouse** (☎ 965-6004; ☎ ☎) offers well-appointed rooms (US\$30 to US\$50), some with Jacuzzis, and has a small restaurant serving simple meals and snacks.

ALLIGATOR POND

Alligator Pond, hidden at the foot of a valley between two steep spurs of the Santa Cruz and Don Figuerero Mountains, is about as far from packaged tourism as you can get. Although Kingstonians crowd in on weekends, this large fishing village remains undiscovered by foreign travelers and offers a genuine offbeat Jamaican experience.

The hamlet is set behind a deep-blue bay backed by dunes. The main street is smothered in wind-blown sand. Each morning, local women gather on the dark-sand beach to haggle over the catch delivered by fishermen, whose colorful old pirogues line the long shore. Local youths surf wooden planks.

The **Sandy Cays**, about 32km offshore, are lined with white-sand beaches. The snorkeling and scuba diving are good at **Alligator Reef**, about a 20-minute boat ride from shore.

Venus Sunset Lounge & Accommodation (☎ 965-4508; r US\$25), 2km east of Alligator Pond, has four simply furnished rooms with fans, shared bathroom and cold water. It has a thatched bar and basic restaurant overlooking a tiny beach.

A better option is the **Sea-Riv Hotel** (☎ 962-7265; r US\$25-40; ☎ ☎), on the black-sand beach next to the mouth of a river. There are 18

appealing, fan-cooled rooms. The resort offers water sports and many in-the-know guides.

our pick **Little Ochie** (☎ 965-4449; www.littleochie.com; mains US\$7-15; ☎ 7am until last guest leaves) is the place to eat in Alligator Pond – if not the entire southeast coast. Since 1989 Evrol 'Blackie' Christian has been running this seafood mecca on the beach with such verve and style that it was only a matter of time until it became famous. The place has tremendous atmosphere, with thatched tables and chairs on the beach, including some built into thatched-roof old boats raised on stilts. Watch the fishermen pull up on the beach with their catch before you go inside to place your order – name your fish and exactly how you want it cooked. Specialties include fish tea, curried conch, roast fish, lobster prepared seven different ways, and aphrodisiac tonics such as 'Stallion Punch.' Try the steamed snapper simmering in creamy sauces of fresh vegetables served with oven-hot bammy or the sumptuous jerk lobster and shrimp dishes. You'll never want to leave.

Minibuses and route taxis operate between Alligator Pond and the Beckford St transportation center in Kingston (about US\$10), and from Mandeville via Gutters (about US\$5).

LONG BAY

Long Bay, to the east of Alligator Pond, is a near-pristine spot. Virtually the entire 24km shoreline, which is hemmed in by mountains, is composed of mangroves and reeds that make up the Long Bay Morass – a nirvana for birders. There are crocodiles, too, and the swamp is a last refuge for endangered manatees.

Given boardwalks and an interpretive center, the morass could be an ecotourist mecca. The area begs for national-park status to head off the developers. The cattle that have invaded the wetlands have introduced exotic species of flora, and locals continue to kill marine turtles that come ashore to lay eggs.

The area is uninhabited, with the exception of a meager facility at **Gut River**, 10km east of Alligator Pond. Here a mineral spring emerges from a deep cleft and feeds a pond where the occasional flash reveals mullet and big crabs 6m down. The pool grows more shallow toward its mouth, where the water is trapped behind a sand spit that hides a lonely red-sand beach. On Sunday people crowd in for a 'bashment (dancehall show) on the beach,' with ear-splitting reggae. When they leave, garbage is strewn everywhere and nobody bothers to clean it up.

God's Well is a sinkhole that drops to a cave at about 50m. Scuba divers occasionally test the waters (God's Well is for experienced divers only – the first diver to tackle it died). Believe it or not, divers have even been known to do the 'Suicide Run,' a 3km swim to the ocean through the seemingly impenetrable swamps. Yes, the chance of bumping into a crocodile is very real, but locals advise: 'Dem alligators no problem, mon... Dem coward. 'Im see you come close, mon, 'im swim fast, fast can go!'

Long Bay extends to Alligator Hole, also known as the Canoe Valley Wetland (see p109), where you can swim with manatees.

A taxi from Alligator Pond costs about US\$10 round-trip. A minibus travels to Gut River from Mandeville on weekends.