

Jamaica Off The Beaten Path

This beautiful little island has a treasure trove of unique offerings and experiences that a lot of persons who come on an 'all inclusive' package miss out on.

Enjoy the year-round sun on a hiking trip through ...more [+]the Blue Mountains, take a helicopter over the uncharted hills of Cockpit Country, lie on the rose-colored sand or surf in the turquoise waters at Long Bay, and discover a 600-foot waterfall that crashes into the deep sea of Ocho Rios, abundant in world-class reef. So to help you out, this is a list of places that you must visit on your next stop in Jamaica.

DEVON HOUSE - Kingston

The story of this historic Mansion is an intriguing one. The house was built in 1881 by George Steibel the son of a housekeeper and Jamaica's first black millionaire. Now imagine its 1881 and Jamaica is still under British Colonial rule and racial equality was a dirty phrase. Mr. Steibel goes abroad, makes his fortune, returns and builds his house smack in the middle of "Millionaires Corner" as it was called then, due to the elaborately designed houses. He basically spat in the face of the establishment and as the story goes, one particular Lady was so upset about having to see the house on her morning ride that she had another road cut for her - which is now known as Lady Musgrave Road.

The history and beauty of Devon house is one of the main reasons to visit. It is located in the heart of Kingston a few minutes away from the Business District and from the bustling city centre - Half-Way Tree. There are also a number of shopping and dining options available at the location.

FAITH'S PEN - St. Ann

This little spot is located on the main road from Spanish Town to Ocho Rios (called Ochi by locals). After a winding and sometimes long drive (don't get stuck behind a truck!) through Mount Rosser, Faith's Pen is like a Mecca. It is a perfectly positioned lay-by for travelers to stretch their legs, chill and enjoy a meal on their way to or from Ochi. There are approximately 30 vendor stalls organized in numbered huts offering a wide array of Jamaican dishes. You can get jerk pork and chicken, roast or fried fish, ackee and saltfish, roast or fried breadfruit, festival, bammy, boiled or roasted corn on the cob, soup and so on. I'm hungry after writing that.

Be prepared to spend at least half an hour trying to make a decision and another half hour licking your fingers. You can get everything to go, so you get your on and still arrive at your destination in time.

LITTLE OCHI- St Elizabeth

Little Ochi is nowhere near Ocho Rios, I should probably label the destination to visit as Alligator Pond, on the south coast of the Island but most people that visit that area, go with one place in mind, Little Ochi. This little restaurant offers one of the best, most rustic dining experiences with diners being able to have all of their seafood cravings indulged right on the beach. I should say for those that have seafood allergies you should probably quickly scroll to the next destination.

Fish, lobster, conch, oysters and most other seafood fare you may want they can accommodate you - you can get your

shrimp boiled, fried, jerked, roasted, sautéed and so on. There are no fine dining rules of etiquette so you'll be excused if you lick your plate after eating a five star fare.

DUNN'S RIVER FALLS - St Ann

The Dunn's River Fall is the perfect spot to have fun working off the excess or lazing around basking yourself in the sun with a Rum. Dunn's river is on the island's north coast just outside of Ocho Rios and is a natural phenomenon. The first time you hear the rushing of the falls you get a rush of adrenaline like no other. The website of the Jamaica Tourist Board describes the attraction as follows:

Dunn's River Falls is unique. Described as a living and growing phenomenon, it continuously regenerates itself from deposits of travertine rock, the result of precipitation of calcium carbonate from the river, as it flows over the falls. The small dome-shaped cataracts are usually associated with thermal spring activity found in limestone caves. This, combined with its location near to the sea, gives Dunn's River the distinction of being the only one of its kind in the Caribbean, if not the world.

Visitors are able to climb the fall with a guide or on their own. If it is your first time I suggest you go with a guide as they would be able to show you the footholds. Also, ensure you rent a rubber shoe; your feet will thank you. I can guarantee that this will be an experience you will never forget. The power and beauty of the fall is like no other, along your climb there are little pools where you can relax. Cool, clear water, beautiful foliage and when you get to the top of the fall where it is a little quieter you can actually hear the birds chirp. You cannot leave Jamaica without visiting Dunn's River Falls.

MARTHA BRAE - Trelawny

You are now ready for a relaxing, romantic and scenic experience and bamboo rafting along the Martha Brae River will satisfy all of the above. The Martha Brae is a 20 mile (32 km) long river located on the northwest coast of Jamaica and like a lot of things in Jamaica it has its own legend.

The story goes that Spanish Treasure hunters, lured by tales of Arawak gold captured an Arawak Indian witch hoping to have her lead them to the treasure (the Arawaks were the first inhabitants of the Island). Pretending to be complacent, the witch led them into a cave and then suddenly disappeared. Frightened, the Spaniards ran out of the cave but then the river engulfed them and the river is said to be named after this Arawak witch.

Now centuries later, visitors have the opportunity to glide along this beautiful and picturesque river atop a bamboo raft. The journey covers over 3 miles and will have you reminiscing of times past when sugar was king and the rafts were used to transport this cargo to merchants in the harbor.

ACCOMPONG - St. Elizabeth

If you want to truly connect with Jamaica you must visit Accompong. The settlement was founded in 1739 after the Maroons signed a peace treaty with the British and is perched high in the mountains of St. Elizabeth in western Jamaica. Accompong is actually an independent nation state within the nation of Jamaica.

The history of the Maroons and the establishment of the settlement of Accompong cannot be summarized in a few lines. There are several good websites that would help you to better understand the daring acts of defiance and bravery that helped the Maroons defeat the English and gain freedom from slavery. A visit to Accompong will give you a first hand view of Jamaican history and culture.

NEGRIL'S SEVEN MILE BEACH - Westmoreland

Seven miles of white sand beach with the most incredible, heart stopping sunsets imaginable. Negril offers a wide array of entertainment options; if you want a disco, a great restaurant, fire eaters or some quiet time on the beach you will be accommodated. The area offers prime snorkeling and diving opportunities and for those who are adrenaline junkies how about jumping off a 40 foot cliff into the ocean? It will certainly wake you up.

For a relaxing time on white sand beaches, Negril is the place to be.

ROSE HALL GREAT HOUSE - St James

The story of Rose Hall is one filled with mystery, intrigue, deaths, ghosts and black magic. The house was built in 1770 and for fifty years the house and its estates seemed to exist as normal until its owner John Rose Palmer brought home his beautiful English bride named Annie Palmer. During her time as mistress of Rose Hall Annie or "The White Witch of Rose Hall" as she was better known, actively practiced voodoo and developed a reputation far and wide for her ruthlessness. She is said to have killed her first husband John Palmer, two other husbands and countless slave lovers. Annie was found dead in her bedroom at The Great House in 1831 with speculation as to the circumstances of her death.

Rose Hall like any great house worth its salt is said to be haunted the spirit of Annie Palmer and many a visitor have claimed to see her ghost roaming the corridors. For an interesting and scary experience Rose Hall is a must visit.

BLUE MOUNTAIN PEAK- St Andrew

Do you want a bird's eye view of Jamaica? Then the Blue Mountain peak is the perfect spot. Rising above an elevation of 7,000ft, both the North and South coasts of the island can be seen at the summit. Visitors can arrange for a hike or bicycle tour which passes through tropical rainforests and coffee plantations with dramatic mountain views. Your muscles may protest the next day but the experience is worth it, experience the beauty of Jamaica firsthand.