

Ocho Rios - A bona fide tourist town

The town of Ocho Rios in St Ann started out as a little sleepy fishing village. That village is still quite popular, and crowded with shops and shacks.

But Ocho Rios has grown way beyond that to be one of three main Jamaican cruise ship ports, surrounded by high-rise hotels and other exquisite properties. The name Ocho Rios means eight rivers, but there are actually only three major rivers in its vicinity. However, there are many streams and small rivers along the eastern and western main roads that lead into the town, and which add to the allure of this north-coast tourist destination. It's not hard to see why Ocho Rios has evolved into a rural tourist Mecca. The low-lying area is sandwiched by the coast and the hills, giving it the rustic charm for which it's known, and which has not been significantly overshadowed by the erection of concrete and steel structures. The shopping centres and malls, hotels, guest houses, villas, condominiums, gaming lodges, restaurants and other eateries actually complement the look and feel of this resort town. Apart from the hotel beachfronts, there are two other popular beaches in Ocho Rios. Fisherman's Beach, located at Fisherman's point, is free to the public, and is the most unpretentious of the two. There is a pool of crystal-clear spring water, which is said to have healing properties, in one section. The Ocho Rios Bay Beach, also known as 'Turtle Beach', is operated and managed by the Urban Development Corporation, which charges affordable entry fees. That beach is well kept, and is just a fantastic place to laze the day away, while looking at the distant forested hills, dotted in parts by Sky Castle Luxury Condominiums. A trip to Ocho Rios cannot be complete without a visit to the internationally renowned Dunn's River Falls and Park, perhaps Jamaica's most well-known natural attraction. A climb up the 600-foot trail of pools and rapids, and sparkling and thundering water is a must-do. The ultra-cool river rushes down to a beach where the fun continues, and where there are lovely views of the Jamaican coastline. Not far from Dunn's River is Mystic Mountain that offers a variety of rides through and above a lush rainforest. The panoramic view of Ocho Rios and the sea from the Rainforest Sky Explorer is not for the faint-hearted. Yet, the most enchanting place in Ocho Rios and its proximities is Fern Gully, one of the main arteries into the town. On both sides of the narrow, winding road, there are many species of fern and trees that rise majestically into the sky, forming canopies in part, as they compete with one another for sunlight. At various spots, there is a variety of craft and artwork, some seriously exaggerated and grotesque, for sale. Ocho Rios is a perfect composite of rural and urban tourism, a favourite of natives and foreigners, a tourist Mecca that everyone should visit at least once. Hospitality Jamaica