

How to have an Eco-Holiday in Jamaica

Home to many great eco-friendly attractions, Jamaica is fast becoming one of the top green destinations in the world by reducing its carbon footprint.

With World Environmental Day just around the corner on the 5th of June (2013), what better time to discuss the countless eco-friendly events, attractions and hotels that Jamaica has to offer? Here are some ways that you can give a little bit back to the environment when you visit.

How to Explore the Island - The Green Way

By Foot The Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park is a paradise for walkers and hikers of all abilities as well as being a beautiful World Heritage Site. If you're visiting the northern side of the park, try the eco-award-winning hike round the Rio Grande Valley, or conquer the 7,400 foot Blue Mountain peak. If you prefer something less strenuous, there are plenty of shorter paths through local villages and farms along the foot of the mountain. Fancy a quick rest? Lime Tree farm is a great sustainable stop off point in the area that serves Blue Mountain Coffee and tasty snacks from its freshly grown produce.

In The Water Jamaica's rivers are just waiting to be explored; paddle through green rainforests on a kayak or enjoy the exciting rapids with some white water rafting. River tubing and bamboo rafting are better suited to tourists looking to float down the lazy rivers and admire the canopy of beautiful scenery. All of these activities are available from Montego Bay, Ocho Rios and Falmouth.

On Wheels There are some great tourist attractions to explore and cycling is one of the best ways to access them without worrying about your carbon footprint! The Jamaica Cycling Federation strives to promote lower carbon emissions and make the whole island more accessible to locals and visitors. With lots of funding towards new roads and cycling tracks, it really is the perfect way to explore the mountainous terrain, sweeping valleys and rural coastline. Avid cyclists will enjoy the stunning views along the Blue Mountain Trail.

Eco-Friendly Attractions Home to the Rainforest Bob Sled Ride as well as several other exciting attractions, the adventure park of Mystic Mountain is eco-built and eco-powered. Tourists will be able to explore the undamaged eco-system of the rainforest from the sky lift or jump in the bob sled ride for a more adrenaline-fuelled experience. With on-site restaurants serving sustainably sourced produce, Mystic Mountain is the ultimate green attraction. There are numerous natural waterfalls and springs dotted around the island. Visit Dunn's River Fall near Ocho Rios to watch water cascade from heights of 300 meters for a truly spectacular photo opportunity. Visitors can climb to the top of the miraculous waterfall or admire the views from the natural pool at the bottom. If you're on the south of the island, the seven tiered waterfalls of YS Fall is another prime photo opportunity not to be missed. Large pools fed by underground springs make a tempting place for a quick dip to cool down.

Other attractions around the island include the Green Castle Estate in Robin Bay which offers an eco-experience to visitors who can explore the undisturbed countryside and learn more about Jamaica's history.

Events to Promote Eco-Friendliness Festivals are normally considered bad for the environment, but not this one! The Green for Life Festival helps to promote eco-living, biodiversity and natural produce as well as allowing visitors to enjoy the local music of Jamaica. This annual event, hosted by Earthbound Jamaica, will take place on the 22nd of June (2013).

Green Exposition in Kingston is a major environmental exposition featuring environmentally friendly products, practices and services. The three day event which starts on World Environmental Day is held by the Jamaica Conservative and Development Trust. Other environmentally friendly events put on by the trust include World Water Day Walkathon and Misty Bliss.

Eco-Friendly Places to Stay From creating renewable energy and buying only local produce to recycling waste and saving water, many hotels strive to meet the eco-credentials of the Travelife Sustainability award. The Couples Sans Souci in Ocho Rios and the Grand Pineapple Beach in Negril are just two of the hotels that have gained a gold award for their eco-friendliness and well-managed impact to the surrounding environment.

Flying as Eco as Possible Travel has a significant impact on the environment but there are a number of ways in which holiday makers can cut their emissions, even when it comes to flying. Firstly, research the airline you book with. The size of a plane and the number of first and business class seating has a significant impact on fuel consumption, as the footprint of a first/business class passenger is on average 5.5 times greater than that of an economy passenger, so it's worth looking out for airlines with smaller business class sections. Additionally, improvements in technology and the design of some planes are aiming to reduce their energy consumption further, so do your research and look out for newer fleets of planes which will benefit from more efficient modern systems. Much like starting the engine of a car, aeroplanes use a large amount of fuel at the start of journeys, during taxiing and take-off, so try to avoid regular short-haul flights and save up for one long-haul holiday instead; also consider alternatives to flying wherever possible. And lastly, pack lightly - after all, extra weight means extra fuel consumption!

by Aimee Avory-Adams