

Jamaica's Historic Districts

Jamaica has five historic districts: Spanish Town, Port Royal and The Palisadoes, Black River, Falmouth, and the Titchfield Peninsula

These have been designated and declared by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust, the government agency entrusted with the role of protecting and preserving Jamaica's tangible heritage. Living in a historic district means e.g. that in order to protect the historic integrity, permanent structures cannot be altered without the approval of the JNHT. While every aspect of a historic district in and of itself may not have significant historic value, historic districts usually have group value. This is particularly true where buildings taken as a whole make up an important architectural and historical unit. Spanish Town, in St. Catherine, the oldest, continuously inhabited town in Jamaica, was built in 1534 by the Spanish after Sevilla la Nueva (New Seville) was abandoned. It was the capital of Spanish Jamaica from 1534 to 1655. When the English captured the island in 1655, Spanish Town remained the capital of the island until 1872 when Kingston was declared the capital. Any casual drive or stroll through Spanish Town will take you back in time, as many of the beautiful buildings reminiscent of Spanish Jamaica, still stand. Port Royal, was described in the middle of the 17th century as 'the wickedest city on earth'. Prior to the catastrophic earthquake of 1692, Port Royal was the most important transshipment point in the New World, and a cultural mecca. In the 1692 earthquake close to two thirds of the town sank, and the underwater city is regarded by archaeologists as the most well preserved underwater city in the western hemisphere. Many important historical structures stand as a testimony to the town's rich history, namely, Fort Charles, the Giddy House, the Victoria and Albert Battery Complex and the Historic Naval Hospital. Black River in St. Elizabeth, was a busy seaport town during the 18th and 19th centuries. Its prosperity was linked to the highly lucrative logwood trade, exports of rum, pimento and cattle skin garnered from the nearby Holland, Vineyard and Fullerswood Estates. Several architectural styles are represented in black river: Georgian, Jamaican Georgian, British Colonial, Victorian and Jamaican Vernacular. These reflect the different periods in the history of the town's development. Many important historic sites and structures remain in the town. Falmouth in Trelawny was founded in 1790 at the height of the prosperity brought about from sugar cultivation. The town possesses a distinctive Georgian architectural feature that began around 1780 and was introduced to Falmouth by wealthy planters and merchants who lived there. These buildings bordered the main thoroughfare of the town and can still be seen today. Over time, the Jamaican Vernacular style of architecture was added. The Titchfield Peninsula in Portland has a number of historic buildings of varying architectural styles: Georgian, Jamaican Georgian and Jamaican Vernacular. Some structures are intimately connected with the United Fruit Company and points to the involvement of this multinational corporation with the history of the banana industry in the island.