

Jamaica

Despite its location almost smack in the center of the Caribbean Sea, the island of Jamaica doesn't blend easily with the rest of the Caribbean archipelago. Sure, it boasts the same addictive sunrises, sugary sands and pampered resort life as most of the other islands, but it is set apart historically and culturally.

Nowhere else in the Caribbean is the connection to Africa as keenly felt. Kingston was the major nexus in the New World for the barbaric triangular trade that brought slaves from Africa and carried off sugar and rum to Europe; and the Maroons (runaways who took to the hills of Cockpit Country and the Blue Mountains) safeguarded many of the African traditions – and introduced jerk seasoning to Jamaica's singular cuisine. Marcus Garvey founded the back-to-Africa movement of the 1910s and '20s; Rastafarianism took up the call a decade later, and reggae furnished the beat in the '60s and '70s. Little wonder many Jamaicans claim a stronger affinity for Africa than for neighboring Caribbean islands.

And less wonder that today's visitors will appreciate their trip to Jamaica all the more if they embrace the island's unique character. In addition to the inherent African-ness of its population, Jamaica boasts the world's best coffee, world-class reefs for diving, offbeat bush medicine hiking tours, congenial fishing villages, pristine waterfalls, cosmopolitan cities, wetlands harboring endangered crocodiles and manatees, unforgettable sunsets – in short, enough variety to comprise many different and utterly distinct vacations.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 11,391 sq km
- **Capital** Kingston
- **Country code** ☎ 876
- **Departure tax** US\$22 (usually included in ticket price)
- **Famous for** Reggae, Rastas, rum
- **Language** English, patois
- **Money** Jamaican dollar (J\$); J\$100 = US\$1.41 = €0.90 = UK£0.71
- **Official name** Jamaica
- **People** Jamaicans
- **Phrase** Everyt'ing irie? (a greeting that literally means 'everything alright?'); respect
- **Population** 2.7 million
- **Visa** Not required for residents of the EU, US, Commonwealth countries, Mexico, Japan and Israel. For other nationalities, see p256



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Long Bay, Negril** (p247) Hang loose or party hard on this 11km stretch of beach, where the fiery sunsets never fail to live up to their hype
- **Blue Mountain Peak** (p231) Set out before dawn for Jamaica's greatest – and most natural – high
- **Bob Marley Museum** (p225) Delve into the life of Jamaica's most revered contemporary hero at his former home and studio
- **Red Stripe Reggae Sumfest** (p242) Dance into the wee hours at Jamaica's world-class midsummer reggae festival
- **Black River Great Morass** (p251) Travel by boat deep into river country that's teeming with crocodiles

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Lounge around on the beach in Negril, explore the reefs, catch some live reggae, watch the sun set...and then do it again.
- **One Week** Add on a journey to the mellow, less-touristed town of Treasure Beach, taking in nearby YS Falls, Black River and the Appleton Rum Estate.
- **Two Weeks** Precede the above itineraries with an energetic visit to cosmopolitan Kingston (the heartbeat of Jamaica), followed by a jaunt into the high Blue Mountains.
- **Three Weeks** After Kingston and the Blue Mountains, press on to Portland parish for some rafting on the Rio Grande and surfing in Boston Bay. Continue with the one-week itinerary.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Jamaica is a year-round destination: coastal temperatures average 26°C (79°F) to 30°C (86°F) year-round. Temperatures fall with increasing altitude but even in the Blue Mountains average 18°C (64°F).

The rainy season extends from May to November, with peaks in May and June and in October and November. Rain usually falls for short periods (normally in the late afternoon), and it's quite possible to enjoy sunshine for most of your visit during these months. In Portland parish, however, it can rain for days on end.

The tourist high season runs from mid-December to mid-April, when hotel prices are

highest. Many hotels also charge peak-season rates during Christmas and Easter.

HISTORY

Columbus & the Spanish Wave

Jamaica's first tourist was none other than Christopher Columbus, who landed on the island in 1494. At the time there were perhaps 100,000 peaceful indigenous Arawaks, who had settled Jamaica around AD 700. Spanish settlers arrived from 1510 and quickly introduced two things that would profoundly shape the island's future: sugarcane production and slavery. By the end of the 16th century the Arawak population had been entirely wiped out, worn down by hard labor, ill-treatment and European diseases.

The English Invasion

In 1654 an ill-equipped and badly organized English contingent sailed to the Caribbean. After failing to take Hispaniola, the 'wicked army of common cheats, thieves and lewd persons' turned to weakly defended Jamaica. Despite the ongoing efforts of Spanish loyalists and guerilla-style campaigns of freed Spanish slaves (*cimarrones* – 'wild ones' – or Maroons), England took control of the island.

Slavery

New slaves kept on arriving, and bloody insurrections occurred with frightening frequency. The last and largest of the slave revolts in Jamaica was the 1831 Christmas Rebellion, inspired by Sam Sharpe, an educated slave who incited passive resistance. The rebellion turned violent, however, as up to 20,000 slaves razed plantations and murdered planters. When the slaves were tricked into laying down arms with a false promise of abolition – and then 400 were hanged and hundreds more whipped – there was a wave of revulsion in England, causing the British parliament to finally abolish slavery. See p244, for more.

The transition from a slave economy to one based on wage labor caused economic chaos, with most slaves rejecting the starvation wages offered on the estates and choosing to fend for themselves. Desperation over conditions and injustice finally boiled over in the Morant Bay Rebellion.

The Road to Independence

A banana-led economic recovery was halted by the Great Depression of the 1930s, and then

kick-started again by the exigencies of WWII, when the Caribbean islands supplied food and raw materials to Britain. Adult suffrage for all Jamaicans was introduced in 1944, and virtual autonomy from Britain was granted in 1947. Jamaica seceded from the short-lived West Indies Federation in 1962 after a referendum called for the island's full independence.

Post-independence politics have been dominated by the legacy of two cousins: Alexander Bustamante, who formed the first trade union in the Caribbean just prior to WWII and later formed the Jamaican Labor Party (JLP), and Norman Manley, whose People's National Party (PNP) was the first political party on the island when it was convened in 1938. Manley's son, Michael, led the PNP toward democratic socialism in the mid-1970s, causing a capital flight at a time when Jamaica could ill afford it. Bitterly opposed factions engaged in open urban warfare preceding the 1976 election, but the PNP won the election by a wide margin and Manley continued with his socialist agenda.

Coming to Terms

The US government was hostile to the socialist path Jamaica was taking and, when Manley began to develop close ties with Cuba, the CIA purportedly planned to topple the Jamaican government. Businesses pulled out, the economy went into sharp decline and the country lived virtually under siege. Almost 700 people were killed in the lead-up to the 1980 elections, which were won by the JLP's Edward Seaga. Seaga restored Jamaica's economic fortunes somewhat, severed ties with Cuba and courted Ronald Reagan's USA. Relatively peaceful elections in 1989 returned a reinvented 'mainstream realist' Manley to power; he retired in 1992, handing the reins to his deputy, Percival James Patterson, Jamaica's first black prime minister.

The Present & Future

In 2004 Hurricane Ivan bounced off Jamaica en route to the Cayman Islands, causing widespread damage. With great resilience, the island recovered from the devastation.

In 2007, Bruce Golding of the JLP was elected prime minister, ending 18 years of PNP rule. The Jamaica Golding inherits faces several battles, and most Jamaicans will tell you the greatest is crime (the 2007 murder rate was 17% higher than the previous year's). Illiteracy

is also a grave concern (according to Unesco, over 90% of 15-to-24-year-olds couldn't both read and write in 2004) as are threats to the environment through deforestation and overdevelopment. In the meantime, the Jamaican people face the future with resolve and a measure of good humor – they've endured so much worse in the past.

THE CULTURE

Although many of the tourists that descend on Jamaica for some fun in the sun nurture packaged visions of the locals who live beyond the walls of their all-inclusive resorts, Jamaicans are as diverse a people as the island's geography is varied. Far from being confined to the deadlocked, spliff-puffing Rastafarian vibing to reggae or the violent 'rude boy' (armed thug) of the ghetto, Jamaicans comprise many social and demographic strata.

To be sure, street-level Jamaica can be daunting at first. Poverty blights the towns, and tourists mean money. Nevertheless, with reasonable precaution, you'll soon fall under the spell of Jamaica's inimitable charms. Violence rarely impinges on foreigners; it is mostly restricted to drug wars and political gang feuds in the claustrophobic ghettos of Kingston, Spanish Town and sections of Montego Bay where you're highly unlikely ever to set foot.

What emerges is a panoply of communities: from the sleepy fishing hamlets that line all the coasts to the cosmopolitan business sector of the capital, from the bustling market towns to the autonomous Maroon hillside villages. And while you can of course meet Rastas happy to smoke ganja with you, you'll also encounter proud matriarchs presiding over the family-owned rum shop; dancehall

HOW MUCH?

- **Taxi from Montego Bay's airport to the 'Hip Strip'** US\$10
- **Guided snorkeling trip** US\$30
- **Rio Grande raft trip** US\$60
- **Meal of fresh fish in a touristy restaurant** US\$15
- **Meal of fresh fish in a local restaurant** US\$6

enthusiasts delighted to take you to the local sound-system party; bush medicine doctors who can explain the benefits of every local root, herb and flower; or students who know as much about your own country as you do.

You'll learn to greet strangers with the local salutation 'blessed,' and by the time you leave Jamaica, you'll realize you have been.

The nation's motto, 'Out of Many, One People,' reflects the diverse heritage of Jamaica. Tens of thousands of West Africans, plus large numbers of Irish, Germans and Welsh, arrived throughout the colonial period, along with Hispanic and Portuguese Jews and those whom Jamaicans call 'Syrians' (a term for all those of Levantine extraction). In 1838, following emancipation, Chinese and Indian indentured laborers arrived from Hong Kong and Panama.

Jamaica's population is currently estimated at a little over 2.7 million, of which about 750,000 live in Kingston. At least another two million live abroad, generally in the US, the UK or Canada. Some 91% of the population are classified as being of pure African descent; 7.3% are of Afro-European descent; the remainder are white (0.2%), East Indian and Middle Eastern (1.3%), and Afro-Chinese and Chinese (0.2%).

Jamaica professes to have the greatest number of churches per sq km in the world, with virtually every imaginable denomination represented. Although most foreigners associate the island with Rastafarianism, more than 80% of Jamaicans identify themselves as Christian.

Rastafarians, or Rastas, with their uncut, uncombed hair grown into long sun-bleached tangles known as 'dreadlocks' or 'dreads,' are as synonymous with the island as reggae. There are perhaps as many as 100,000 Rastafarians in Jamaica. A faith not a church, Rastafarianism has no official doctrine or dogmatic hierarchy and is composed of a core of social and spiritual tenets that are open to interpretation.

All adherents, however, accept that the African race is one of God's chosen – one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel descended from the Hebrews and displaced. Moreover, Africa is regarded as the black race's spiritual home to which it's destined to return, Haile Selassie, Ethiopian emperor from 1930 to 1975, is believed to be a divine being and the black messiah.

ARTS

Jamaica has evolved a powerful artistic and cultural expression rooted in African traditions, while quintessentially Jamaican styles have evolved across the spectrum of the arts. In addition, Jamaica's crafts industry supports tens of thousands of artisans, who offer a cornucopia of leatherwork, ceramics, shell art, beadwork, woodcarving and basket-weaving.

Cinema

Jamaica has produced some excellent films (often pronounced 'flims' in Jamaica), most notably cult classic *The Harder They Come* (1973), starring Jimmy Cliff as a 'rude boy' in Kingston's ghettos. *Rockers* (1978) is another music-propelled, socially poignant fable with a cast of reggae all-stars.

Rick Elgood's emotionally engaging 1997 film *Dancehall Queen* found an international audience for its tale of redemption for a struggling middle-aged street vendor, who escapes the mean streets of Kingston through the erotic intoxication of dancehall music. Jamaica's highest-grossing film of all time is Chris Browne's 2000 drama *Third World Cop*, in which old friends straddling both sides of the law must come to terms with each other.

Literature

Through the years Jamaican literature has been haunted by the ghosts of slave history and the ambiguities of Jamaica's relationship to Mother England. The classic novels tend to focus on survival in a grim colonial landscape and escape to Africa, which often proves to be even grimmer. Best known, perhaps, is Herbert de Lisser's classic *White Witch of Rose Hall*. This plantation-era tale – now an established part of Jamaican lore – tells of Annie Palmer, the wicked mistress of Rose Hall who supposedly murdered three husbands and several slave lovers. The truth is less lurid.

Perry Henzell's *Power Game* is a tale of power politics based on real events in the 1970s, told by the director of the movie *The Harder They Come*. The poignant novel of that name, written by Michael Thewell, recounts the story of a country boy who comes to Kingston, turns into a 'rude boy' and becomes fatally enmeshed in the savage drug culture. The mean streets of Kingston are also the setting for the gritty novels of Roger Mais, notably *The Hills Were Joyful Together*

and *Brother Man*. Orlando Patterson's *The Children of Sisyphus* mines the same bleak terrain from a Rastafarian perspective.

In recent years a number of Jamaican female writers have gained notice: they include Christine Craig (*Mint Tea*), Patricia Powell (*Me Dying Trial*), Michelle Cliff (*Abeng, Land of Look Behind*) and Vanessa Spence (*Roads Are Down*).

Music

Music is everywhere – and it's loud! The sheer creativity and productivity of Jamaican music has produced a profound effect around the world. As reggae continues to attract and influence a massive international audience, Jamaica's sound system-based dancehall culture continues to inform contemporary rap, rave and hip-hop cultures.

Reggae is the heartbeat of Jamaica, and it is as strongly identified with the island as R&B is with Detroit or jazz with New Orleans. But reggae is actually only one of several distinctly Jamaican sounds, and the nation's musical heritage runs much deeper. Inspired by the country's rich African folk heritage, music spans mento (a folk calypso), ska, rock-steady, 'roots' music and contemporary dancehall and ragga. Kingston is the 'Nashville of the Third World,' with recording studios pumping out as many as 500 new titles each month.

The legacy of reggae superstar Bob Marley continues to thrive, as witnessed in the month-long celebration held in Ethiopia in early 2005 marking the 60th anniversary of his birth. There's long been talk about elevating Marley to National Hero status, a mantle reserved only for the nation's most pivotal figures.

The term dancehall, although used to mean a sound-system venue, is also used specifically to refer to a kind of Caribbean rap music that focuses on earthly themes dear to the heart of young male Jamaicans, principally 'gal business,' gunplay and ganja. This is hardcore music, named for the loosely defined outdoor venues at which outlandishly named 'toasters' (rapper DJs) set up mobile discos with enormous speakers, and singers and DJs pumped-up with braggadocio perform live over instrumental rhythm tracks.

ENVIRONMENT

No less a world traveler than Columbus described Jamaica as 'the fairest isle that eyes beheld; mountainous...all full of valleys and

fields and plains.' Much of the coast is still fringed by coral reefs harboring an astonishing array of marine life. Visitors can forsake sandals for hiking boots and follow mountain trails, shower in remote waterfalls, and shoot birds through the lens of a camera. Several areas have been developed as ecotour destinations, most notably the Black River Great Morass, a swampland penetrated by boat.

The Rio Grande Valley is a premier destination for hiking. The Blue Mountains have been opened up in recent years; for a taste of these rugged heights try a climb up Blue Mountain Peak (2256m). Negril's Great Morass is being developed as an eco-attraction protecting fabulous birdlife and wetland ecosystems.

The Land

At 11,425 sq km (about equal to the US state of Connecticut, or 5% of the size of Great Britain) Jamaica is the third-largest island in the Caribbean and the largest of the English-speaking islands. It is one of the Greater Antilles, which make up the westernmost of the Caribbean islands.

Jamaica is rimmed by a narrow coastal plain except in the south, where broad flatlands cover extensive areas. Mountains form the island's spine, rising gradually from the west and culminating in the Blue Mountains in the east, which are capped by Blue Mountain Peak at 2256m. The island is cut by about 120 rivers, many of which are bone dry for much of the year but spring to life after heavy rains, causing great flooding.

Two-thirds of the island's surface is composed of soft, porous limestone (the compressed skeletons of coral, clams and other sea life), in places several kilometers thick and covered by thick red-clay soils rich in bauxite (the principal source of aluminum). Coastal mangrove and wetland preserves, montane cloud forests and other wild places are strewn across Jamaica. Most travelers stick to beach resorts, however. Those who do get close to nature are as yet poorly served by wildlife reserves.

Wildlife

The island has more than 255 bird species. Stilt-legged, snowy-white cattle egrets are ubiquitous, as are 'John crows' (turkey vultures), which are feared in Jamaica and are the subject of several folk songs and proverbs. *Patoo* (a West African word) is the Jamaican

name for the owl, which many islanders superstitiously regard as a harbinger of death. Jamaica has four of the 16 Caribbean species of hummingbird. The crown jewel of West Indian hummingbirds is the stream-ertail, the national bird, which is indigenous to Jamaica.

Coral reefs lie along the north shore, where the reef is almost continuous and much of it is within a few hundred meters of shore. Over 700 species of fish zip in and out of the exquisite reefs and swarm through the coral canyons: wrasses, parrotfish, snappers, bonito, kingfish, jewelfish and scores of others. Barracudas, giant groupers, tarpon and nurse sharks are frequently seen. Further out, the cobalt deeps are run by sailfish, marlin and manta rays. Last but not least, three species of endangered marine turtles – the green, hawksbill and loggerhead – lay eggs on Jamaica's beaches.

FOOD & DRINK

Dining in Jamaica ranges from wildly expensive restaurants to humble roadside stands where you can eat simple Jamaican fare for as little as US\$1. Most hotels incorporate Jamaican dishes in their menus. Food bought at grocery stores is usually expensive, as many of the canned and packaged goods are imported. Cheap fresh fruits, vegetables and spices sell at markets and roadside stalls islandwide.

Jamaica's homegrown cuisine is a fusion of many ethnic traditions and influences. The Arawaks brought callaloo (a spinach-like green), cassava (a root vegetable), corn, sweet potatoes and several tropical fruits to the island. The Spanish adopted native spices, which were later enhanced by spices brought by slaves from their African homelands. Immigrants from India brought hot and flavorful curries, often served with locally made mango chutney. Middle Eastern dishes and Chinese influences have also become part of the national menu. And basic roasts and stews followed the flag during three centuries of British rule, as did Yorkshire pudding, meat pies and hot cross buns.

Jamaica's most popular dish is jerk, a term that describes the process of cooking meats smothered in tongue-searing marinade. Jerk is best served hot off the coals wrapped in

paper. You normally order by the pound (US\$4-worth should fill you up).

Naturally, there's a strong emphasis on seafood. Snapper and parrotfish are two of the more popular species. A favorite is escoveitched fish, which is pickled in vinegar then fried and simmered with peppers and onions.

Many meals are accompanied by starchy vegetables ('breadkinds') such as plantains and yam, or other bread substitutes such as pancake-shaped cassava bread (*bammy*) and johnnycakes (delicious fried dumplings, an original Jamaican fast food).

No island produces a wider variety of rum than Jamaica, ranging from the clear and light white rums, flavored rums, brain-bashing overproof rums (rum over 151 proof) and the deep dark rums such as Myers to the rare amber nectar of the finest premium rums. Rum has come a long way since the rowdy days of the early 17th century when it was a foul, powerful concoction called 'kill devil' for its exorcist qualities. Red Stripe is the beer of Jamaica. Crisp and sweet, it's perfectly light and refreshing.

KINGSTON

pop 750,000

As Jamaica's one true city, Kingston is something of an island within the island. Its pace and pulse are alien to the rest of Jamaica, for which it's the governmental, commercial and cultural hub. Most visitors to the island skip it – the crime, traffic, crowds and shantytowns of the capital are simply too volatile to mix into the average vacationer's dream Jamaican cocktail. Give the capital more than a once-over, however, and you'll be hooked. Launching pad for some of the world's most electrifying music, the city by no means trades on its reputation, and its spirited clubs, bustling record stores and riotous street-system parties attest to the fact that the beat is alive and bumping.

Kingston divides neatly into downtown and uptown. The former is in a state of perpetual decay yet still boasts a scenic waterfront, Jamaica's greatest art museum and most of Kingston's historic buildings, complemented by a frenetic street life with street preachers and mix-tape hawkers vying for the attentions of the human parade.

Uptown holds the city's hotels, restaurants and nightlife, largely confined to the pocket of New Kingston. In addition to the city's most essential sight, the Bob Marley Museum, the capital's diplomatic and commercial status assures uptown a definite cosmopolitan suaveness – not to mention security.

Sadly, security *does* require mention – the threat of crime in Kingston can never be dismissed. Pockets of the west Kingston shantytowns are as dangerous as any place on the planet, and their volatility can spill over onto the downtown streets after dark. Be sure to follow safety directives, ask your hotel for guidance and keep your wits about you.

HISTORY

Kingston was founded in 1693 by survivors of the devastating earthquake that flattened nearby Port Royal. Though whacked repeatedly by more earthquakes and hurricanes, the port city prospered throughout the 18th century, becoming one of the most important trading centers in the western hemisphere and an important transshipment point for slaves destined for the Spanish colonies.

In 1872 Kingston supplanted Spanish Town as Jamaica's capital. In spite of an early-20th-century economic boom, the city's slow physical decline seemed assured as sprawling shantytowns put down roots around the old city's perimeter.

In 1907 a violent earthquake leveled much of the city, killing 800 people and rendering tens of thousands homeless. The aftermath witnessed a transformation as modern buildings replaced the ruins and damaged edifices were given new life.

In the 1960s the Urban Development Corporation reclaimed the waterfront. Several historic landmarks, including Victoria Market, were razed to make way for a complex of gleaming new structures, including the Bank of Jamaica and the Jamaica Conference Centre. About the same time, Kingston's nascent music industry was beginning to gather steam, lending international stature and fame to the city. This, in turn, fostered the growth of New Kingston, an uptown area of multistory office blocks, banks, restaurants, shops and hotels.

ORIENTATION

The city overlooks the seventh-largest natural harbor in the world, with the waterfront

on its southern border. It spreads out in a fan shape from the harbor and rises gently toward the foothills and spur ridges of the Blue Mountains.

Downtown, the historic area fanning north of the waterfront, is arranged on a grid system and forms the city center. Some 3km north, New Kingston, or 'uptown,' is defined by several major roads, including Knutsford Blvd, Half Way Tree Rd and Hope Rd.

INFORMATION

Bookstores

Bookland (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-4035; 53 Knutsford Blvd) A good selection on island history, folklore and culture.

Emergency

Police Headquarters (Map pp226-7; ☎ 922-9321; 11 East Queen St); **Half Way Tree** (Map pp224-5; 142 Maxfield Ave); **Cross Roads** (Map pp224-5; Brentford Rd)

Internet Access

Most upscale hotels along Knutsford Blvd provide in-room dial-up internet access and have business centers with internet service.

Café What's On (Map pp224-5; ☎ 929-4490; Devon House courtyard, Hope Rd; per 15min \$1) Adjacent to the historic Devon House, this is a pleasant place to get online.

Innovative Superstore (Map pp224-5; ☎ 978-3512; Sovereign Centre, 106 Hope Rd; per 30min US\$2.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Overly air-conditioned but efficient.

Laundry

Express Laundromat (Map pp224-5; ☎ 978-4319; 30 Lady Musgrave Rd)

Medical Services

Ambucare Ambulance Service (☎ 978-2327) Private service.

Bellevue Hospital (off Map pp224-5; ☎ 928-1380; 6-1/2 Windward Rd, Kingston 2) Public hospital, 24-hour emergency ward.

Kingston Public Hospital (Map pp226-7; ☎ 922-0210; North St) Downtown public hospital with emergency department.

Money

Uptown, you will find more than a dozen banks located along Knutsford Blvd. Most have foreign-exchange counters as well as 24-hour ATMs.

Scotiabank (Map pp226-7; ☎ 922-1000; cnr Duke & Port Royal Sts) Has its main foreign-exchange center immediately east of the Jamaica Conference Centre. There's another branch at 35 King St.

Western Union (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-2454, 888-991-2056; 7 Hillcrest Ave) Has about 20 agencies throughout Kingston.

Post

FedEx (Map pp224-5; ☎ 960-9192; 75 Knutsford Blvd)
Post office Main (Map pp226-7; ☎ 922-2120; 13 King St); New Kingston (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-6803; 115 Hope Rd)

Tourist Information

Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) Airport (☎ 924-8024); Headquarters (Map pp224-5; ☎ 929-9200; fax 929-9375; 64 Knutsford Blvd; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm Mon-Fri) The headquarters in New Kingston maintains a small research library.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The island averages just over four murders per day, and 75% of these occur in Kingston. Most of the murders are drug-related or politically inspired and occur in the shantytowns of West Kingston. Although the level of general violence and crime has escalated frighteningly in recent years, visitors can enjoy the city's sights and sounds in reasonable safety so long as a few commonsense guidelines are followed.

Avoid Kingston entirely during periods of tension, when localized violence can spontaneously erupt. If you're in town when street violence flares up, definitely avoid downtown, and adhere to any curfews that police may impose.

Stick to the main streets – if in doubt ask your hotel concierge or manager to point out the trouble areas. If you need a taxi, ask the front desk to call one from a service known to them, rather than flagging one down. Avoid West Kingston (especially Trench Town, Jones Town, Greenwich Town and Tivoli), particularly west of the Parade, downtown.

Foreigners, especially white tourists, will stand out from the crowd. Fortunately, visitors to Kingston are not hassled by hustlers and touts to anywhere near the degree they are in the north-coast resorts.

SIGHTS

Downtown

Some visitors – particularly those who've just arrived in Jamaica – find the intense urban environment of downtown Kingston a bit daunting. As long as you keep your eyes open and are selective in choosing your friends, a visit to the city's historic center can be enjoyed in relative safety.

KINGSTON IN...

Two Days

Visit the **Bob Marley Museum** (p225) and **Devon House** (below), tour the **National Gallery** (below), and take in a meal to remember at **Up on the Roof** (p229) or the **Red Bones Blues Café** (p229).

Four Days

Add on an excursion to **Port Royal** (p230) for a peek into Jamaica's distant past, and head into the Blue Mountains for Sunday brunch at **Strawberry Hill** (p231).

For several blocks, the waterfront is paralleled by the breeze-swept, 365m-long harbor-front **Ocean Blvd**, marked by the iconic **Negro Aroused statue** (Map pp226-7). Nearby, the **National Gallery** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 922-1561; www.galleryjamaica.com; Roy West Bldg, 12 Ocean Blvd; admission US\$1.50; ☎ 10am-4:30pm Tue-Thu, 10am-4pm Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) makes an impressive case for the vitality of Jamaican art with a coherent and moving collection of works by John Dunkley, Albert Huie, Edna Manley and other big names in the Jamaican artistic pantheon.

Half a block north, the **African Caribbean Heritage Centre** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 922-4793; Orange St; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Thu, 8:30am-3:30pm Fri) houses a library and a small yet informative gallery that is dedicated to the history of the Middle Passage and a socio-cultural exploration of the African Diaspora.

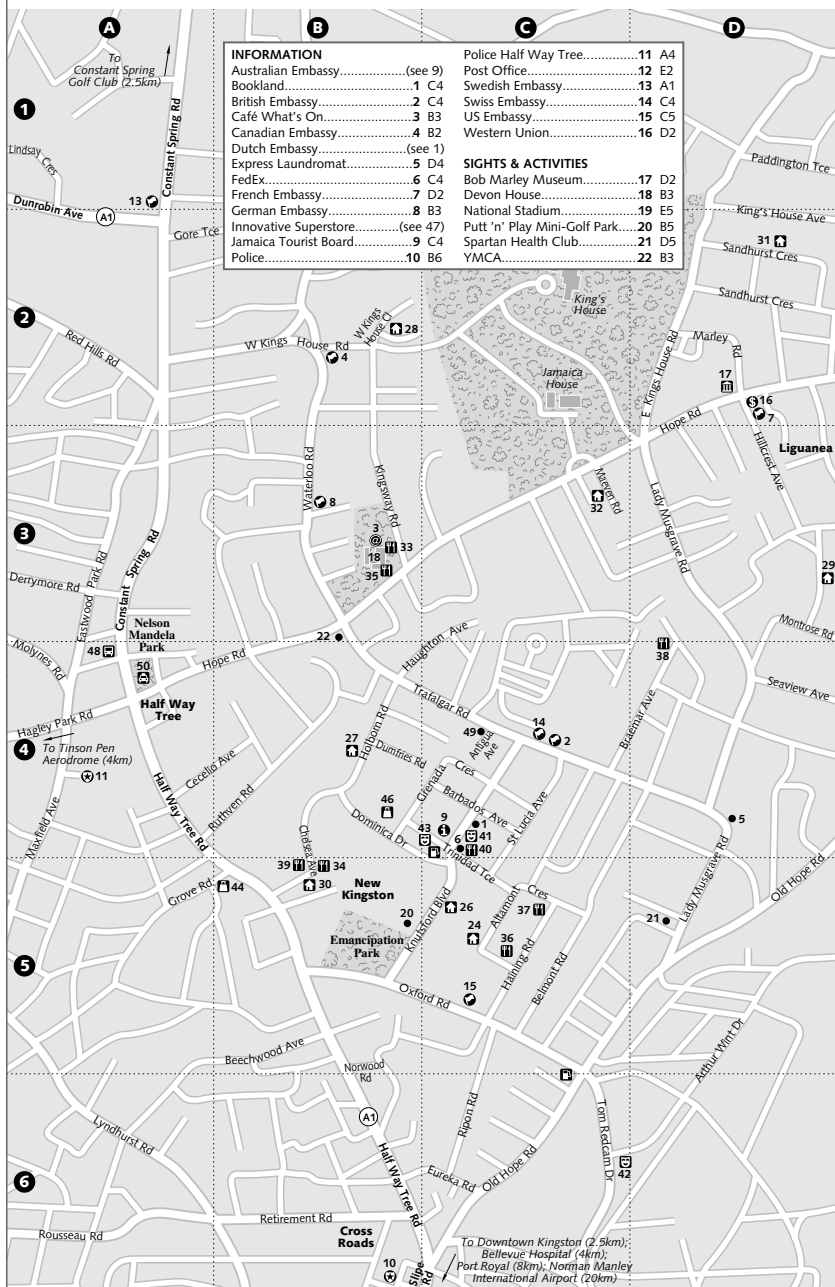
At the national mint and treasury is the small but fascinating **Museum of Coins & Notes** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 922-0750; cnr Nethersole Pl & Ocean Blvd; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri), displaying Jamaican currency through the centuries.

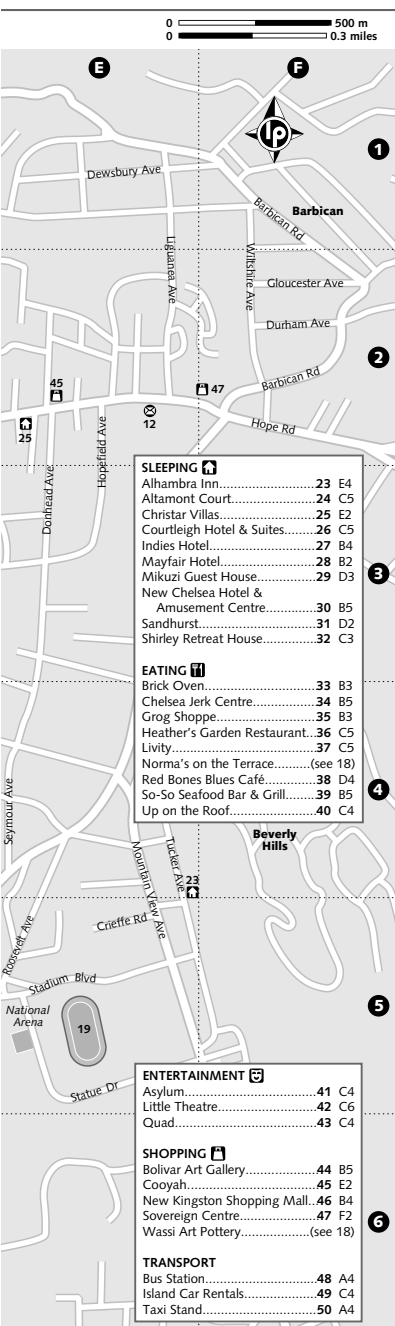
Just 800m up King St from the waterfront you reach the **Parade**, the streets surrounding William Grant Park at the bustling heart of the downtown mayhem. Notable buildings include the historic **Kingston Parish Church**, dating from 1699, and the stately **Ward Theatre** (Map pp226-7).

Uptown

The beautiful **Devon House** (Map pp224-5; ☎ 929-6602; 26 Hope Rd; admission US\$5; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat), built in 1881, is a classic Jamaican 'great house' that will delight antique lovers and history buffs. The shaded lawns attract couples on weekends. The former carriage house and courtyard are home to two of Jamaica's more

UPTOWN KINGSTON





famous restaurants, Norma's on the Terrace and Grog Shoppe. Admission includes a guided tour.

The most-visited site in Kingston is the **Bob Marley Museum** (Map pp224-5; ☎ 927-9152; 56 Hope Rd; adult/child/student US\$8.50/3.50/6.75; 🕒 9:30am-4pm Mon-Sat). An Ethiopian flag flutters above the gate of the red-brick manse that Marley turned into his Tuff Gong Recording Studios. Dominating the forecourt is a gaily colored statue of the musical legend. The hour-long tour offers fascinating insights into Marley's life. The highlight is his simple bedroom, left just as it was, with star-shaped guitar by the bedside. The former recording studio out back is now an exhibition hall and theater, where the tour closes with a fascinating film of his final days. No cameras or tape recorders are permitted.

ACTIVITIES

A favorite spot for runners is the well-kept **Emancipation Park** (Map pp224-5) in New Kingston, which has a 1.6km track; it's a social place used by Kingstonsians in large numbers at dawn and dusk.

Built in the 1920s and one of Jamaica's oldest courses, **Constant Spring Golf Club** (off Map pp224-5; ☎ 924-1610; 152 Constant Spring Rd) has a par-70 course and boasts a swimming pool and bar, as well as tennis, squash and badminton courts.

Spartan Health Club (Map pp224-5; ☎ 927-7575; 9 Lady Musgrave Rd; nonmembers US\$15) is a modern gym. You can have a swim at the **YMCA** (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-0801; 21 Hope Rd; pool use US\$2)

Putt 'n' Play Mini-Golf Park (Map pp224-5; ☎ 906-4814; 78 Knutsford Blvd; adult/child & senior US\$8/4; 🕒 5-11pm Mon-Thu, 5pm-midnight Fri, 11am-midnight Sat & Sun), next to the Liguanea Golf Club, is an 18-hole miniature golf course complete with miniature waterfalls, meandering streams, ponds, sand traps and natural obstacles.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

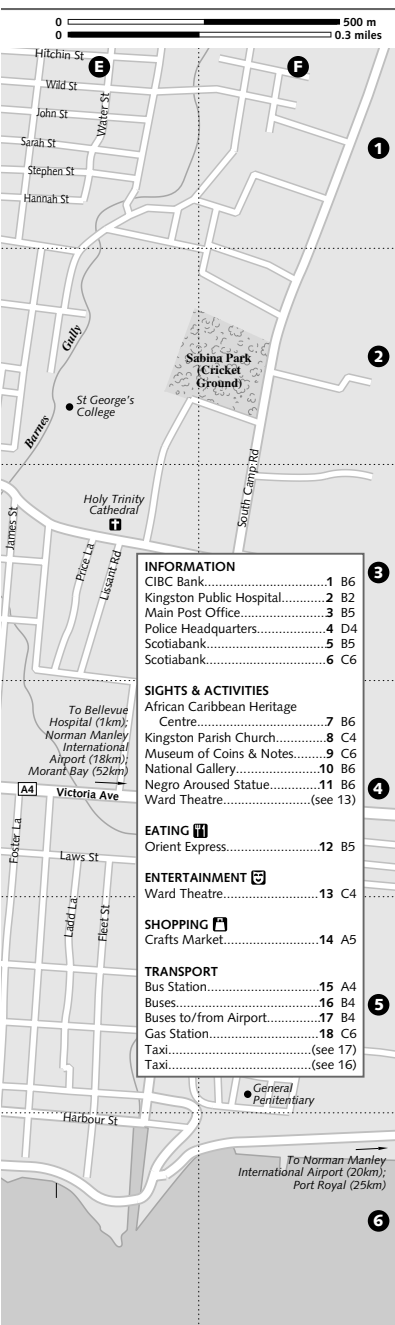
Carnival (www.jamaicacarnival.com) Kingston's week-long Easter Carnival brings costumed revelers into the streets in droves. There's reggae and calypso, of course, but soca is king. Carnival ends with the Road March, when the two camps parade through the streets in carnival costume.

Bob Marley Birthday Bash (☎ 927-9152; www.bobmarley.com) Brings reggae fans to the Bob Marley Museum on February 6.

Jamaica Coffee Festival (☎ 922-4200) Jamaica's world famous coffee is something to celebrate at this family-friendly festival in October.

DOWNTOWN KINGSTON





Fireworks on the Waterfront (☎ 922-4200) Ring in the New Year on the Kingston waterfront with 100,000 others (December 31).

SLEEPING

Most hotels are in uptown and New Kingston. The pickings are virtually nonexistent downtown. Rates are usually the same year-round.

Sandhurst (Map pp224-5; ☎ 927-8244; 70 Sandhurst Cres, Kingston 6; s US\$40, d US\$45-50, d with air-con US\$50;) This eccentric favorite in the quiet, residential, Liguanea neighborhood has spotlessly kept pale-blue rooms with black-and-white tile floors, utility furniture and an air of Miami in the 1960s. Some have TV and telephone and private veranda. A dining terrace has views toward the Blue Mountains.

Mayfair Hotel (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-1610; www.in-site.com/mayfair; 4 W Kings House Close; r US\$58-70, ste s/d US\$88/128;) A popular option with Jamaican travelers, this hotel sports a columned portico entrance that hints at grandeur within, but the 32 rooms in eight individual houses are fairly basic, with utility furniture and phone, though all are clean and well lit. Its best feature is the view toward the Blue Mountains. A buffet is hosted poolside on Wednesday and Saturday nights.

Indies Hotel (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-2952, 926-0989; www.indieshotel.com; 5 Holborn Rd; s/d/tr US\$58/64/77, d fan only US\$41;) Providing perhaps the best value in Kingston, this well-run operation is highly rated for its cheerful ambience and accommodating atmosphere. The 15 rooms each have TV and phone and overlook a garden patio complete with fishpond; take an upstairs room for sunlight. There's wi-fi.

New Chelsea Hotel & Amusement Centre (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-5803; fax 929-4746; 5 Chelsea Ave; r US\$60;) It's a stretch to call this basic option amusing, but it does provide an economical stay in New Kingston. Older rooms are dark; modern rooms in an annex are slightly better. All feature air-con, hot water and cable TV. A fifth night is free. It has a pool hall and an amusement center, plus a disco and a rooftop bar.

Shirley Retreat House (Map pp224-5; ☎ 927-9208, 946-2678; 7 Maeven Rd, Kingston 10; r incl breakfast US\$65-75;) A pleasant option operated by the United Church of Jamaica, this unique place offers four simply furnished, well-lit rooms with hardwood floors, pleasant fabrics, fans, and private bathroom with hot water. Two rooms have small TVs, and one has air-con. Meals are cooked on request.

ourpick Mikuzi Guest House (Map pp224-5; ☎ 978-4859, cell 813-0098; www.mikuzijamaica.com; 5 Upper Montrose Rd; d/ste US\$80/125; 🏠 📺 📺) Not far from the Bob Marley Museum, this welcoming guesthouse offers 14 comfortable rooms, several with kitchenettes, in a handsome home. The guesthouse's two highest-priced suites are decked out with art and antiques, and are more like small apartments. There's also one cheaper room (US\$35). Few restaurants are nearby, however, so if you lack wheels you'll have to hoof it at mealtime. It offers wi-fi access.

Alhambra Inn (Map pp224-5; ☎ 978-9072; 1 Tucker Ave; r from US\$85-105; 🏠 📺 📺) Across from the National Stadium, this is an attractive, two-story property with 20 air-con rooms in Spanish style. It's designed to lure convention business and offers gracious furnishings, cable TV, wi-fi, phones and spacious bathrooms. Upstairs rooms have lofty ceilings and king-size beds. Facilities include a restaurant, two bars and a pool in the courtyard.

Christar Villas (Map pp224-5; ☎ 978-3933; www.christarvillashotel.com; 99A Hope Rd; r US\$93, studio US\$125, 2-bedroom ste US\$180-275; 🏠 📺 📺) Just east of the Bob Marley Museum, this is the pick of the self-catering options. You can choose from modern, pleasantly furnished studio apartments and one- and two-bedroom suites with satellite TVs, full kitchen and comfy beds. Upper-story suites tend to get hot. You can cool off in the pool, and there is a self-service laundry, a restaurant and a gym. Airport transfer is available on request.

Courtleigh Hotel & Suites (Map pp224-5; ☎ 929-9000; www.courtleigh.com; 85 Knutsford Blvd; s/d US\$115/125, ste US\$190-200, office ste US\$190, penthouse US\$145-435; 🏠 📺 📺) This is a splendid contemporary option with deluxe rooms and one-bedroom suites featuring four-post beds and tasteful mahogany furnishings, plus cable TV, direct-dial phone, hair dryer and a work desk. The suites have kitchenettes. There's a pool bar with live music on Friday, a small gym, and a coin-operated laundry. Rates include continental breakfast.

Altamont Court (Map pp224-5; ☎ 929-4497, 929-5931; www.altamontcourt.com; 1 Altamont Cres; r US\$125, ste US\$160; 🏠 📺 📺) Rather soulless though centrally located mid-size hotel with 55 modern, clean one-bedroom studios and suites – each equipped with phone, wi-fi, cable TV, safe, and basic furnishings. Facilities include the Mango Tree, an attractive restaurant of-

fering complimentary breakfast for guests, and a small pool with bar.

EATING & DRINKING

As in other matters, Kingston is Jamaica's capital of food; most of the notable eateries are found in uptown Kingston, where the culinary adventurer is spoiled for choice. Many offer alfresco dining in the cool evening air and terrific spreads for brunch on Sunday.

Brick Oven (Map pp224-5; ☎ 968-2153; 26 Hope Rd; patties US\$1; 🍷 lunch & dinner) While nearby Norma's and the Grog Shoppe get all the raves, those in the know swear by the patties served up in this small bakery just behind Devon House. Pastries and juices are also available at this excellent option for a picnic on the grounds.

Livity (Map pp224-5; ☎ 906-5618; 30 Haining Rd; mains US\$2-6; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The best vegetarian option in New Kingston, Livity serves up an array of veggie fajitas, soups, salads and tofu dishes. Service can be a little slow, but if you order one of the outstanding fruit juices and get an outdoor seat, the wait's easy to bear.

Chelsea Jerk Centre (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-6322; 7 Chelsea Ave; mains US\$3-10; 🍷 11am-midnight) Legendary for its mouth-searing jerk pork and chicken, this congenial jerk emporium draws the after-work crowd as well as uptown-based visitors grateful for a chance to get off the main drag.

So-So Seafood Bar & Grill (Map pp224-5; ☎ 968-2397; 4 Chelsea Ave; mains US\$5-12; 🍷 lunch & dinner) A casual place, known for its mellow after-work scene, which settles around the bar and two TV sets or sprawls into its outdoor patio. The seafood menu, divided into conch, shrimp, lobster and fish sections, belies the modesty of the restaurant's name.

Grog Shoppe (Map pp224-5; ☎ 968-2098; 26 Hope Rd; mains US\$8-28; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, brunch Sun) In an atmospheric brick edifice on the grounds of Devon House, this grand old Jamaican eatery serves dishes like ackee crepes, baked crab backs, and roast suckling pig with rice and peas. It's known for its Sunday brunch (US\$17). Come hungry.

Heather's Garden Restaurant (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-2826, 960-7739; 9 Haining Rd; mains US\$9-24; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Grab a table near the immense mango tree stretching through a hole in the roof and savor moderately priced fare ranging from Jamaican crab backs and Cajun-style blackened fish to cottage pie or seafood. The

bar scene gets increasingly raucous as the evening progresses.

our pick **Up on the Roof** (Map pp224-5; ☎ 929-8033; 73 Knutsford Blvd; mains US\$9-36; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Thu, dinner Sat) Above the bustle of New Kingston's main drag, this atmospheric rooftop terrace is popular with locals and a terrific starting point before a night on the town. The marlin salad and shrimp with garlic jerk mayo stand out in a menu of Jamaican standards. There's a sporadic calendar of jazz events and poetry readings; on Saturdays, the bar mixes cocktails until the last patron leaves.

our pick **Red Bones Blues Café** (Map pp224-5; ☎ 978-8262; 21 Braemar Ave; mains US\$20-40; ☎ 11am-1am Mon-Fri, from 7pm Sat) The in crowd is in at this former colonial house, now a beehive of cultural and culinary activity. Stellar dishes include chicken breast stuffed with callaloo and jerked cheddar in a white wine sauce, or the seafood trio of shrimp, mussels and salmon sautéed in a spicy coconut sauce served on a bed of pasta. Opt for patio dining overlooking the gardens or the handsome bar.

Norma's on the Terrace (Map pp224-5; ☎ 968-5488; 26 Hope Rd; mains US\$22-55; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, closed public holidays) This lovechild of Jamaica's leading food emissary Norma Shirley is Kingston's most celebrated restaurant. The seasonal menu explores Caribbean-fusion food with great finesse. Recent gems include the smoked pork loin in teriyaki sauce, red snapper encrusted in herbs in a thyme-and-caper sauce and an exquisite seafood lasagna. Even if a meal is beyond your budget, it's well worth having a drink on the candlelit terrace.

ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

Quad (Map pp224-5; ☎ 754-7823; 20-22 Trinidad Tce; admission US\$10) This complex comprises four clubs with distinct personalities: on the main floor is Christopher's Jazz Club, a tasteful jazz bar where the city's movers and shakers gather nightly. In the basement is Taboo, a naughty gentleman's club featuring pole dancers. On Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, two clubs open on the top floor: Voodoo Lounge, which draws an older, more urbane crowd, and Oxygen, which attracts a 20-something set ready to get sweaty until 4am. The US\$10 admission will get you into Christopher's, Voodoo Lounge and Oxygen; Taboo charges a separate US\$10 admission.

Asylum (Map pp224-5; ☎ 929-4386; 69 Knutsford Blvd) Still *the* happening scene, packing in crowds Tuesday through Sunday. Tuesday is ladies' night, with free admission until 11pm, and on Thursday the inimitable Stone Love sets up their legendary sound system.

Theater

Little Theatre (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-6129; 4 Tom Redcam Dr) Puts on plays, folk concerts, pantomimes and modern dance throughout the year. The main season is July through August, and a 'mini season' is held each December.

Ward Theatre (Map pp226-7; ☎ 922-0453; North Pde) This is home to the National Dance Theater Company, known for its rich repertoire, which combines Caribbean, African and Western dance styles.

Sports

Sabina Park (Map pp226-7; ☎ 967-0322; South Camp Rd) Renovated for the 2007 World Cup, this is *the* place for cricket in Jamaica. The 30,000-seat arena hosted its first test match in 1929 and has been a focal point for the sport ever since. Attending a match – particularly an international test – is a must.

National Stadium (Map pp224-5; ☎ 929-4970; Arthur Wint Dr) Hosts track-and-field events and matches by the Reggae Boyz, Jamaica's football (soccer) team that surprised the world by reaching the World Cup finals in 1998.

SHOPPING

Several modern shopping malls are concentrated on Constant Spring and Hope Rds. Two of Kingston's largest are **Sovereign Centre** (Map pp224-5; 106 Hope Rd) and **New Kingston Shopping Mall** (Map pp224-5; Dominica Dr).

In an old iron building on the waterfront, the **Crafts Market** (Map pp226-7; Pechon & Port Royal Sts; ☎ Mon-Sat) has dozens of stalls selling wickerwork, carvings, batiks, straw hats and other crafts. Watch your wallet!

Works by Jamaica's leading artists, fine books, antiques and maps can be found at **Bolivar Art Gallery** (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-8799; 1D Grove Rd). **Wassi Art Pottery** (Map pp224-5; ☎ 906-5016; Devon House, 26 Hope Rd) sells marvelous vases, planters, plates, bowls etc, each hand-painted and signed by the artist.

Cooyah (Map pp224-5; ☎ 978-9215; cooyahdesign@jamweb.net; 96 Hope Rd) is the place to go for licensed reggae T-shirts and assorted tops and dresses.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Norman Manley International Airport (KIN; off Map pp226-7; ☎ 924-8546; www.manley-airport.com.jm) handles international flights. Domestic flights land at **Tinson Pen Aerodrome** (off Map pp224-5; ☎ 924-8452; Marcus Garvey Dr) in west Kingston. See p257 for information on international flights, and p257 for domestic flights.

Bus

Buses, coasters and route taxis run between Kingston and every point on the island. They arrive and depart from the **bus station** (Map pp226-7; Beckford & Pechon Sts), five blocks west of the Parade; see below for details. The terminal adjoins Trench Town, and travelers should exercise caution when passing through.

A smaller number of buses arrive and depart from the preferable Half Way Tree junction, where it's a snap to jump a local bus into New Kingston.

Car

Island Car Rentals (☎ 929-5875, in the USA 866-978-5335, in Canada 416-628-8885; www.islandcarrentals.com; 17 Antigua Ave) has its main office in New Kingston, plus an outlet at Norman Manley International Airport. Other companies with offices at Norman Manley airport are **Avis** (☎ 924-8293; www.avis.com), **Budget** (☎ 759-1793; www.budget.com) and **Hertz** (☎ 924-8028; www.hertz.com).

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Norman Manley International Airport is located midway along the Palisadoes, about 27km southeast of downtown Kingston. The bus stop is opposite the airport police station. Bus 98 operates about every 30 minutes between the airport and the west side of the Parade (US\$1). Route taxis also operate between the airport and West Parade (US\$1.75).

A taxi between the airport and New Kingston will cost about US\$20. From Tinson

Pen Aerodrome a taxi costs about US\$8 to New Kingston, and a bus to the Parade, downtown, is about US\$0.25.

Bus

The main downtown termini for local buses is at North and South Parade and Half Way Tree junction. Kingston's **bus system** (JUTC; ☎ 749-3196; ☎ 5am-10pm) runs Mercedes-Benz and Volvo buses, including buses for the disabled; fares are US\$0.35 to US\$0.50.

Taxi

Taxis are numerous in Kingston except when it rains, which is when demand skyrockets. Use licensed cabs only (they have red PPV license plates). Taxis wait outside most major hotels. Taxi companies are listed in the Yellow Pages. Fares from New Kingston to downtown are about US\$10. There is a taxi stand uptown at the south side of Nelson Mandela Park.

AROUND KINGSTON

Port Royal is a dilapidated, ramshackle place of tropical lassitude, replete with important historical buildings collapsing into dust. Today's funky fishing hamlet was once the pirate capital of the Caribbean. Later, it was the hub of British naval power in the West Indies, but the remains give little hint of the town's former glory.

The English settled the isolated cay in 1656. They called it 'Cagway' or 'the Point' and built Fort Cromwell (which was renamed Fort Charles after the Restoration in 1660). Within two years, General William Brayne was able to report that 'there is the faire beginning of a town upon the poynt of this harbor.' A massive earthquake in 1692 put an end to Port Royal's ascension as survivors crossed the harbor to settle on the firmer ground of what would become Kingston.

The town has many fascinating historic sites, including old **Fort Charles** (☎ 967-8438; adult/

SERVICES FROM KINGSTON BUS STATION

Destination	One-way fare (US\$)	Distance (km)	Duration (hr)	Schedule
Montego Bay	8	191	4	Four daily
Ocho Rios	4	87	2	Four daily
Port Antonio	4	98	2	Four daily

child US\$5/2; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Good Friday, Christmas Day & New Year's Day) itself, a terrific **Maritime Museum** (Fort Charles) and the 1725 **St Peter's Church**. An excellent map called 'Port Royal: A Walking Tour' is included in *Port Royal* by Clinton V Black, which you can buy in the gift store of Morgan's Harbour Hotel.

Lime Cay, a picture-perfect uninhabited island with white sand and accessible snorkeling, is 15 minutes by boat from Port Royal. Boats run from Morgan's Harbour Hotel, or they can be obtained by asking local fishermen at the pier (US\$5). On weekends there are food stalls; at other times bring a picnic.

Morgan's Harbour Hotel (☎ 967-8075; www.morgansharbour.com; s/d US\$130/142, ste US\$197-206; 🍷 🍷) is an atmospheric though overpriced hotel within the grounds of the old naval dockyard. It has 63 spacious air-con rooms with terra-cotta tile floors and French doors opening onto balconies.

Bus 98 runs from the Parade in downtown Kingston several times daily (US\$1.25). A route taxi from the Parade in Kingston costs about US\$1.50; a licensed taxi costs about US\$35 one way. Morgan's Harbour Hotel offers free airport transfers to guests. Otherwise, it's about US\$15 for the five-minute taxi ride.

THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Looming majestically over the eastern half of the island, the Blue Mountains throw the rest of Jamaica into sharp relief. Barely an hour from Kingston, their slopes and crags are a world away from the capital's gritty streets. And where better to take a break from the beach than to rise 2000m above sea level and luxuriate in the cool of a fern forest?

Home to the celebrated Blue Mountain coffee, the region is a hiker's dream. For many, a trip to Jamaica would be incomplete without a ritual ascent of Blue Mountain Peak, from which you can get a superb panorama of the whole island (weather permitting).

The **Blue Mountains—John Crow National Park** covers the forest reserves of the Blue and John Crow Mountain Ranges. Many stalwart hikers make the journey here to scale **Blue Mountain Peak**, Jamaica's highest mountain at 2256m.

The ramshackle village of Hagley Gap is the gateway to Blue Mountain Peak. The road forks in the village, where a horrendously denuded dirt road for Penlyne Castle begins a precipitous ascent. **Penlyne Castle** is the base for the 11km, 915m ascent to the summit. Most hikers stay overnight at one of three simple lodges near Penlyne Castle before tackling the hike in the wee hours. The most popular is **Wildflower Lodge** (☎ 929-5395; r with shared/private bathroom US\$13/33, cottage US\$55), 360m east of the ridge crest at Penlyne Castle. **Guides** (half/full day US\$30/50) can be hired locally at Hagley Gap, Penlyne Castle or from the lodge.

our pick Strawberry Hill (☎ 944-8400; www.strawberryhillresort.com; r/ste/villa US\$595/695/895; 🍷 🍷 🍷) is a luxury retreat just north of Irish Town. Gaze at Kingston and the harbor 950m below from a deckchair by the infinity pool, or roam the bougainvillea-draped grounds. The Caribbean-style cottages range from well-appointed mahogany-accented studio suites, each with canopied four-poster beds, to a four-bedroom, two-story house built into the hillside. A sumptuous breakfast is included in the rates, as are transfers. Birding, hiking and other tours are offered and Strawberry Hill also hosts a calendar of special events throughout the year. No children are allowed.

The friendly **Jah B Guest House** (☎ 377-5206; farmhillcoffee@yahoo.com; dm/r US\$14/30; 🍷), run by a family of Bobo Rastas, has a basic but cozy wooden guesthouse providing several rooms with four bunks apiece, plus a shared shower and flush toilet; there are also four private rooms. Wi-fi access is available in the communal areas. Jah B himself cooks I-tal meals (about US\$8) amid a cloud of ganja smoke and a nonstop volley of friendly banter. His son Alex now runs the outfit and offers transfers from Kingston in his beat-up Land Rover and will guide you up Blue Mountain Peak for US\$55.

To get here from Kingston, simply follow Hope Rd uphill to Papine, a market square and bus station, where Gordon Town Rd leads into the mountains. At the Cooperage, the B1 (Mammee River Rd) forks left steeply uphill for Strawberry Hill and Newcastle. Gordon Town Rd continues straight from the Cooperage and winds east up the Hope River Valley to Gordon Town, then steeply to Mavis Bank and Hagley Gap. It is possible to catch an inexpensive route taxi from Papine.

NORTHERN JAMAICA

The northeast coast is Jamaica's windward corner, where surf rolls ashore into perfect beach-lined coves and waves chew at rocky headlands. Colonial-era edifices are relatively few, though beautiful pocket-size beaches line the shore. You'll also find several unspoiled fishing villages where budget travelers can ease into a laid-back local lifestyle.

Beautiful Portland parish, presided over by the sleepy town of Port Antonio, is the least developed resort area in Jamaica – a fact that endears it to many. Further west, the bustling port of Ocho Rios provides a convenient staging ground for excursions to some of Jamaica's most popular attractions, including the incomparable Dunn's River Falls.

PORT ANTONIO

pop 13,000

Cupping an unruffled bay and backing into the sleepy Rio Grande Valley, Port Antonio is the perfect capital for Portland. The parish's only sizeable town is largely untarnished by the duty-free, tourist-overfriendliness of Ocho Rios or Montego Bay, its streets, squares, quay-side and market inviting leisurely strolls – invitations that are freely accepted by the town's dog and goat populaces. It's an ideal base for exploring Portland's hidden treasures.

Information

D-Tech (☎ 993-4184; upstairs, 3 West St; internet access per 30min US\$1.25; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat)

Jamaica Tourist Board (☎ 993-3051; fax 993-2117; City Centre, Harbour St; ☎ 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Fri)

Operates a poorly stocked office that's barely worth a visit.

Port Antonio Hospital (☎ 993-2646; Nuttall Rd)

Above town on Naylor's Hill, south of West Harbour.

Portland Parish Library (☎ 993-2793; 1 Harbour St; internet access per 30min US\$1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Near the entrance to the marina.

Post office (☎ 993-2651) On the east side of the town square.

RBTT Bank (☎ 993-9755; 28 Harbour St)

Scotiabank (☎ 993-2523; 3 Harbour St)

www.portantoniójamaica.com This website is a good starting point for tourist information.

Sights

Port Antonio's heart is the main square at the junction of West and Harbour Sts. It's centered on a **clock tower** and backed by a handsome red-brick Georgian **courthouse** topped

by a cupola. From here walk 45m down West St to the junction of William St, where the smaller Port Antonio Sq has a cenotaph honoring Jamaicans who gave their lives in the two world wars.

On the west side of the square is the clamorous and colorful **Musgrave Market**. To the north is the imposing façade of the **Village of St George**, a beautiful three-story complex with an exquisitely frescoed exterior in Dutch style; inside, you'll find an assortment of high-end shops.

Fort George St leads to the Titchfield Peninsula, where you'll find several dozen Victorian-style gingerbread houses, notably **DeMontevin Lodge** (21 Fort George St), an ornate rust-red mansion. Continue north to the remains of **Fort George** at the tip of the peninsula, dating from 1729. Several George III-era cannons can still be seen mounted in their embrasures in 3m-thick walls.

Activities

Lady G'Diver (☎ 715-5957, 844-8711; ladygdiver@cwjamaica.com; 2 Somerstown Rd) is a full-service dive shop at Port Antonio Marina; dive boats leave at 11am and 2pm daily.

Grand Valley Tours (☎ 993-4116, 858-7338; www.portantoniójamaica.com/gvt; 12 West St) offers guided hikes in the Rio Grande Valley, plus horseback riding, bird-watching, caving and other trips of interest to ecotourists.

The **San San Golf Course & Bird Sanctuary** (☎ 993-7645; 9/18 holes US\$50/70; ☎ 8am-5pm), 13km east of town, is an 18-hole course laid out along valleys surrounded by rainforest. It has a club-house, a small pro shop and bistro dining.

Festivals & Events

Portland Jerk Festival (☎ 715-5465) A food festival in July for folks in love with the hot and spicy.

International Marlin Tournament (☎ 927-0145) Anglers rejoice at this time-honored fishing tournament in October.

Sleeping

Visitors to Port Antonio and environs enjoy some of the most economical lodging on the island. For a good overview, visit the website of **Port Antonio Guest House Association** (www.go-jam.com).

DeMontevin Lodge (☎ 993-2604; 21 Fort George St; r US\$30-140; ☎) This venerable Victorian guest-house boasts a homey ambience and a blend of modern kitsch and antiques reminiscent of

granny's parlor. The 13 simple bedrooms (six with private bathrooms) are timeworn, but as clean as a whistle. Behind the lodge is an ancillary building with small budget doubles.

Ocean Crest Guest House B&B (☎ 993-4024; 7 Queen St; s/d US\$35/70; ♿) Somewhat dark and a little loud, this B&B is a favorite with the backpacker crowd. The lounge has a large-screen TV. Four bright new deluxe rooms were recently unveiled on the top floor, with balconies and a stunning view of Port Antonio and its picturesque bay.

Hotel Timbamboo (☎ 993-2049; <http://hoteltimbamboo.com>; 5 Everleigh Park Rd; s US\$50-70, 1-2-/3-bedroom ste US\$85/150/200; ♿) The centrally located Timbamboo has spacious, sunny rooms with modern furniture, carpeted floors and cable TV. Suites have sizeable kitchens, while some rooms have balconies with views of the Blue Mountains. The hotel's sun deck is a great place to unwind. Common areas have wi-fi.

Jamaica Heights Resort (☎ 993-3305; www.jamaicaheights.net; Spring Bank Rd; d US\$75-125, cottages US\$175; ♿) This splendid hilltop plantation home is set amid lush gardens with incredible views. The six rooms and two cottages are tastefully furnished with white wicker and antiques, plus four-poster beds. A spa offers massage and treatments, and there's a beautiful plunge pool plus a nature trail.

Eating & Drinking

Norma's at the Marina (☎ 993-9510; Ken Wright Pier; mains \$11-20; ♿) lunch & dinner) Fronting a lovely white-sand beach, this quality restaurant can be a forlorn place – but some might find the solitude blissfully peaceful. Steaks, chops and fish prepared in the continental style are served at outdoor tables overlooking the Errol Flynn Marina.

Anna Bananas Restaurant & Sports Bar (☎ 715-6533; 7 Folly Rd; breakfast US\$4, seafood dinners US\$12-16; ♿) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Overlooking a small beach on the southern lip of the harbor, this breezy restaurant-bar specializes in jerk or barbecued chicken and pork and, for dinner, large plates of conch and lobster. The curried goat is particularly good. There are two pool tables, darts and friendly service.

ourpick Dicky's Best Kept Secret (☎ 809-6276; breakfast/dinner US\$12/25; ♿) breakfast & dinner) Almost too well kept a secret for its own good, Dicky's – an unsigned hut on the A4, less than 1km west of Port Antonio – offers enormous five-course meals in two small rooms perched over

the sea. Dicky and his wife promise to cook anything you want (provided they have the ingredients). Invariably, the meal begins with a palate-cleansing fruit plate followed by soup and a callaloo omelet. Dicky's has only a few tables, so reservations are essential.

Club La Best (5 West St; ♿) 9:30-till the last person leaves) The newest, liveliest spot in Port Antonio, La Best assumes a different identity depending on the evening. Dancehall throbs into the wee hours on Fridays; Sundays groove to a mellow blend of reggae and old-school R&B; ladies' nights are on Fridays; and periodic live shows occur on Saturdays.

Getting There & Around

Ken Jones Aerodrome (☎ 913-3173), 9.5km west of Port Antonio, accepts charter flights.

A **transportation center** (Gideon Ave) extends along the waterfront. Buses, coasters and route taxis leave regularly for Port Maria (where you change for Ocho Rios) and Kingston.

Eastern Rent-a-Car (☎ 993-3624, 993-2562; 16 West St) offers car rentals, while **JUTA** (☎ 993-2684) has taxi transfers from Montego Bay (US\$250) and Kingston (US\$225) airports.

AROUND PORT ANTONIO

Rio Grande Valley

The Rio Grande rushes down from the Blue Mountains through a deeply cut gorge to the sea. The region is popular for **hiking**, but trails are confusing and demanding and should not be attempted without a guide.

Rafting is also a big draw. Passengers make the three-hour, 9.5km journey on poled bamboo rafts from Grant's Level or Rafter's Village, just east of Berridale, all the way to St Margaret's Bay. En route, you'll pass through Lovers Lane, a moss-covered narrow stream where you're supposed to kiss and make a wish. Try **Rio Grande Experience Ltd** (☎ 913-5434; Berridale; per raft US\$60; ♿) 9am-5pm).

To enter the valley, take Red Hassell Rd south from Port Antonio to Fellowship.

Frenchman's Cove

This small cove, near the town of Drapers 8km east of Port Antonio, boasts one of the prettiest beaches for a long way. A stream winds lazily to a white-sand **beach** (admission US\$5; ♿) closed Tue) that shelves steeply into the water. Bring insect repellent. There's a snack bar and a secure parking lot. A route taxi from Port Antonio costs US\$1.

ourpick Drapers San Guest House (☎ 993-7118; www.go-jam.com/drapersan-e; Hwy A4, Drapers; s US\$27, d US\$48-52, all incl breakfast; 🏠) is an agreeable guest-house above Frenchman's Cove comprising two cottages with five doubles and one single room (two share a bathroom), all with fans and louvered windows. It has a lovely lounge and communal kitchen. A minimum two-night stay is required.

The trek up a winding dirt road to the romantic, 'eco-chic' 10-room property **Hotel Mocking Bird Hill** (☎ 993-7267; www.hotelmockingbirdhill.com; Mocking Bird Hill Rd; r US\$165-255, ste US\$305-450; 🏠 📶 🚶), in the hills above Frenchman's Cove, is well worth it. All rooms are lovingly appointed with well-chosen fabrics and modern art and appliances. Most boast ocean views from private balconies. Facilities include a Caribbean-bright lounge, wi-fi in common areas, and a sublime restaurant. Trails lead through the lush hillside gardens...fabulous for birding!

Blue Lagoon

The waters that launched Brooke Shields' movie career (and the site of a less-famous Jacques Cousteau dive), the Blue Lagoon, 11km east of Port Antonio, is by any measure one of the most beautiful spots in Jamaica. The 55m-deep 'Blue Hole' (as it is known locally) opens to the sea through a narrow funnel, but is fed by freshwater springs that come in at about 40m deep. Its color changes through every shade of jade and emerald during the day, and you're welcome to take a dip.

The lagoon is public property and accessible from the road. Tours may demand an entrance 'donation,' but J\$200 should assuage them. At last visit, the restaurant adjacent to the lagoon, which had closed following Hurricane Ivan, was under construction, and should be completed by the time you read this.

Fairy Hill & Winnifred Beach

The small clifftop hamlet of Fairy Hill is 13km east of Port Antonio. A dirt road leads steeply downhill to Winnifred Beach – up until recently a great place to hang with 'real' Jamaicans. The turn-off to the beach is opposite the Jamaica Crest Resort. You can catch a route taxi here from Port Antonio (US\$1.50).

Only a short ramble away from the now-closed Winnifred Beach, the economical **Mikuzi Vacation Cottages** (☎ 978-4859; www.mikuzi.com; Hwy

A4, Fairy Hill; 1-bedroom cottage US\$25-30, 2-bedroom cottage US\$75), set in pleasingly landscaped grounds, provides a perfect hideaway. Two tastefully appointed cottages and a small house are presided over by a warm and attentive caretaker. The cheaper garden cottage lacks a kitchen.

Boston Bay

The pocket-sized beach of Boston Bay, 14.5km east of Port Antonio, shelves into jewel-like turquoise waters. High surf rolls into the bay, making this perhaps the best **surfing** spot in Jamaica; surfboards in various states of decay are available for rent on the beach.

Boston Bay is known for highly spiced jerk chickens and pork sizzling away on smoky barbecue pits along the roadside. Some contend that jerk was invented here. Also on the scene is the Maroon Prophet, a roots bush doctor selling his handmade tonic and blood cleanser, made from roots and bushes according to tradition.

One of the most unusual accommodations in Jamaica, **Great Huts** (☎ 993-8888; www.greathuts.com; Boston Beach Lane; African-style tent per person US\$60-139, tree house US\$157; 🏠) perches on a scenic crag overlooking Boston Bay, it consists of nine tents or huts, each decorated with distinctive and imaginative Afrocentric design, and two spacious 'tree houses.' These two-story open-air structures have verandas, bamboo-walled bedrooms, Jacuzzi baths and kitchenettes. If you can tear yourself from your room, check out the Cliff Bar, featuring excellent pizzas and superlative views of the sea, and the hotel's own beach on the rocks below. Wi-fi is available in the common area.

A route taxi from Port Antonio will cost you US\$1.50.

Long Bay

Once Negril lost its patina of countercultural credibility, free spirits began looking to Long Bay to assume the mantle of Jamaica's hippest hideaway. Set in a dramatic 1.5km-wide bay, the hamlet appeals to budget travelers and surfers, and has drawn a number of expats who have put down roots and opened guest-houses. At the time of research, however, Long Bay was recovering from Hurricane Dean, whose impact (in August 2007) it felt more keenly than any other place on the island.

The fare to Long Bay from Port Antonio by route taxi is about US\$3.

OCHO RIOS

pop 16,500

Wrapped around a small bay with postcard-worthy snugness, Ocho Rios is a former fishing village that the Jamaica Tourist Board earmarked for tourism in the mid-1980s. Whatever character Ocho Rios had, it lost when the local nets were redirected from fish to the tourist dollar. Its streets today are lined with interchangeable duty-free shopping plazas and fast-food emporia, persistent higglers and a palpable air of waiting for something.

That something is cruise ships – after Montego Bay, this is the island's premier port of packaged call. When the floating resorts pull in, their human cargo streams into town to meet the local traffic in souvenirs untainted by memories; the full frontal hustle is on.

Yet if you're looking for a central base for exploring the north coast, this is it. A terrific reggae museum, a lively nightlife scene, a trio of serene hillside gardens and an abundance of fine hotels and guesthouses make Ochi a good place to pause.

Information

Bryan's Bookstores Ltd (☎ 795-0705; Shop 12-15, Island Plaza) Has a wide range of titles about Jamaica, including maps.

Cable & Wireless (☎ 974-9906; Shop 13-15, Island Plaza) Offers long-distance calling.

CIBC (☎ 974-2824; 29 Main St) Has foreign exchange facilities and ATM.

Internet Jungle (☎ 974-9906; Shop 13-15, Island Plaza; internet access per 15min/30min/1hr/all day US\$2.50/5/10/20) In the Cable & Wireless office.

Police station (☎ 974-2533) Off DaCosta Dr, just east of the clock tower.

Post office (Main St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) Opposite the Ocho Rios Craft Park.

St Ann's Bay Hospital (☎ 972-2272) In St Ann's Bay, about 11km west of Ocho Rios. Your hotel's front desk can arrange a doctor's visit.

Scotiabank (☎ 974-2081; Main St) Has foreign exchange facilities and an ATM.

Tourism Product Development Co (TPDCo; ☎ 974-7705, 974-3866; Shop 3, Ocean Village, Main St; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Mon-Thu, 8:30am-4pm Fri) Represents the Jamaica Tourist Board. While it doesn't offer much in the way of literature, staff will spend time helping you suss out Ochi's transportation, lodging and attractions options. TPDCo also operates two information booths on Main St when cruise ships are in port.

Dangers & Annoyances

Ocho Rios' biggest annoyance is the persistent entreaties of hustlers, who are especially thick around the clock tower and DaCosta Dr.

Avoid the area immediately behind the market south of the clock tower. Use caution at night anywhere, but particularly on James St, a poorly lit street with several nightspots and a hangout strip of ill repute.

Sights

To visit Jamaica and not climb **Dunn's River Falls** (☎ 974-2857; www.dunnriverfallsja.com; adult/child US\$15/12; ☎ 8:30am-4pm Sat-Tue, 7am-5pm Wed-Fri), on the A3, about 3km west of town, is like visiting Paris without seeing the Eiffel Tower. Join hands in a daisy chain at the bottom and clamber up the tiers of limestone that step 180m down to the beach in a series of cascades and pools. The water is refreshingly cool and the falls are shaded by a tall rainforest.

Swimwear is essential. There are changing rooms and lockers (US\$5) on the beach, as well as an orchid garden, children's playground, a crafts market, jerk stalls, snack bars and a restaurant. A warning: expect to be given the hard sell here by professional hustlers. Plan to arrive before 10am, when the tour buses arrive, or around 4pm after they depart. Also try to visit when the cruise ships aren't in town (usually Saturday to Tuesday).

Public minibuses and tourist taxis (US\$1) head west to Dunn's River Falls and beyond from Main St; it's simple to flag one down.

The main beach is the long crescent of Ocho Rios Bay Beach, locally known as **Turtle Beach** (adult/child US\$1/0.50; ☎ 6am-6pm), stretching east from Turtle Towers condominiums. There are changing rooms, water-sport concessionaires, and palms for shade. **Island Village Beach** (admission US\$3; ☎ 6am-6pm), at the west end of Main St, is a peaceful, smaller beach with a complete range of water sports. **Mahogany Beach**, 1km east of the town center, is a small and charming beach with no admission charge.

Reggae Xplosion (☎ 675-8895; Island Village; admission US\$7; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) offers an excellent presentation of the grand lineage of Jamaican music, from ancient African drumming to the futuristic digital rhythms of dancehall. The self-billed 'interactive reggae experience' is divided into mento, ska, reggae, dancehall and other sections, including one commemorating Bob Marley.

Shaw Park Gardens (☎ 974-2723; Shaw Park Rd; admission US\$10; 🕒 8am-5pm) is a tropical fantasia of ferns and bromeliads, palms and exotic shrubs, spread out over 10 hectares and centered on an 18th-century great house. Trails and wooden steps lead past waterfalls that tumble in terraces down the hillside. A viewing platform offers a bird's-eye vantage over Ocho Rios. It has a bar and a restaurant. The gardens are signed from opposite the public library on the A3.

Activities

Virtually the entire shoreline east of Ocho Rios to Galina Point is fringed by a reef, and it's great for diving and snorkeling. You can arrange dives and snorkeling at most resorts or at **Watersports Enterprise** (☎ 974-2244; Turtle Beach; 1-2-/4-tank dive US\$45/70/140).

If you're after a round of golf, head to **Sandals Ocho Rios Golf & Country Club** (☎ 975-0119; Bonham Spring Rd; green fees US\$100; 🕒 7am-5pm), 6.5km southeast of town, signed from the A3.

Tours

Chukka Caribbean Adventure Tours (☎ 927-2506; www.chukcacaribbean.com/jamaica; tours US\$50-100) offers an invigorating menu of quality excursions including horseback ride 'n' swim, river tubing, 4WD safari, the Zion Bus Line Tour to Nine Mile and a forest canopy tour.

Hooves (☎ 972-0905; www.hoovesjamaica.com; tours US\$55-100) leads several interesting horseback tours, including Heritage Beach Trail, Bush Doctor Mountain Trail and Rainforest River Trail.

Blue Mountain Bicycle Tours (☎ 974-7075; www.bmtoursja.com; adult/child US\$89/65) leads excellent full-day biking tours from Ocho Rios to the Blue Mountains, featuring a hair-raising mountain descent and a dip at a waterfall.

Festivals & Events

Carnival (www.jamaicacarnival.com) Street parties and soca music all night long in March and April.

Ocho Rios Jazz Festival (☎ 927-3544; www.ochoriosjazz.com) Top names in jazz, under the stars in June.

Hi Pro High Goal Family Tournament (☎ 952-4370; shane@tobyresorts.com; St Ann Polo Club) Features Jamaica's best polo families in an August competition.

Sleeping

Ocho Rios and environs offers everything from simple guesthouses to opulent resorts.

Mahoe Villa and Guesthouse (☎ 974-6613; 11 Shaw Park Rd; r with shared bathroom US\$20-30, r with private bathroom US\$40-75) If you've been looking high and low for a decent US\$20 room, this is it. On the road to Shaw Park Garden is this brilliantly priced guesthouse with 11 spic-and-span, fan-cooled rooms of varying size. The large house has polished wood floors and is replete with original works of art. It also has a communal kitchen, cable TV, and several hammocks strung up in the yard.

Ocean Sands Resort (☎ 974-2605; www.caribbeancoast.com/nhotels/oceansands; 14 James St; s/d US\$50/70; 🍷 🍷) This attractive property has an oceanfront setting and its own pocket-size beach, with coral, at your doorstep. A tiny restaurant sits at the end of a wooden wharf. The 35 pleasant rooms have French doors that open onto private balconies. Rates include breakfast.

Little Shaw Park Guest House (☎ 974-2177; www.littleshawparkguesthouse.com; 21 Shaw Park Rd; r/apt US\$50/60; 🍷) Providing a restful retreat, this trim place is set among 0.6 hectares of beautifully tended lawns and bougainvillea with a gazebo and hammocks. There's a room in the owner's house, plus seven spacious (though dark) cabins boasting homey decor. Also on offer are well-lit studio apartments with kitchens, cable TV and hot water. Meals are available by request.

Crane Ridge (☎ 974-8050, 866-277-6374; www.crane-ridge.net; 17 DaCosta Dr; ste US\$110, deluxe 1-2-bedroom ste US\$168/240; 🍷 🍷) Offering a breezy hilltop location on the west side of town, this modern, all-suite resort features 119 suites in six three-story structures. Some rooms have loft bedrooms. An airy restaurant on stilts looms over a large pool. There's a shuttle service to the hotel's private beach and to Shaw Park Gardens and Dunn's River Falls.

our pick Cottage at Te Moana (☎ 974-2870; www.harmonyhall.com; cabin US\$120; 🍷) With its small cliff-top garden overhanging a reef, this exquisite exclusive rental offers a delightful alternative to Ochi's resort hotels. The cliff-top bedroom is reached via an external staircase and has a king-size bed and ceiling fan, and a magnificent artist's aesthetic. Steps lead down to a coral cove good for snorkeling, and kayaks are available.

Hibiscus Lodge (☎ 974-2676; www.hibiscusjamaica.com; 83 Main St; r US\$140-152; 🍷 🍷 🍷) A well-run hotel perched on a breezy cliff-top setting amid lush grounds, this hotel offers spacious but

modestly furnished rooms. There's a small clifftop pool, wi-fi, an atmospheric bar, plus a fine restaurant.

Sandcastles Resort (☎ 974-5626; www.sandcastlesochorios.com; 120 Main St; r/stc US\$149/230; ♿ ♿) A large centrally located option that's a beach-ball's throw from Turtle Beach, this well-refurbished resort has bright studios and one- and two-bedroom suites in various configurations. All have cable TV and modern furnishings. There's also a sports bar, and wi-fi access is available in common areas.

Royal Plantation (☎ 974-5601; www.royalplantation.com; r US\$605-1245; ♿ ♿ ♿) While luxury can be found across Jamaica, its lap is surely on this 3-hectare spot nestled around two private beaches. From the Neoclassical lobby decked in Victorian furnishings to the C Bar (Jamaica's only caviar and champagne bar), the Royal Plantation goes the extra mile. All 74 rooms face the sea and feature marble bathrooms, and there are three gourmet restaurants. An array of water sports is available, while cigar-rolling displays and an artist in residency program help make this one of the most unique hotels on the island.

Eating

As a major resort, Ochi offers a satisfying variety of restaurants from simple but hearty vegetarian fare to haute cuisine. The following restaurants are all within walking distance of downtown.

World of Fish (☎ 974-1863; 3 James Ave; US\$3-8; ☞ 11am-1am) Popular with locals, this casual and economical eatery serves fresh seafood, including lobster, shrimp and conch. In keeping with the Jamaican capacity for making juice from just about anything that grows, sweet nectars of june plum, ginger and sour-sop are served.

Michelle's Pizzeria (☎ 974-4322; Pineapple Hotel, Main St; US\$6-8; ☞ lunch & dinner) In addition to four styles of pizza (including a 'Hawaiian' with pineapple), this casual spot serves an array of pastas and hero sandwiches to be eaten on a small patio.

Bibibis Bar & Grill (☎ 974-8759; 93 Main St; mains US\$6-28; ☞ 10am-midnight) This popular, touristy oceanfront bar and restaurant with a porch overlooking Mahogany Beach serves up a range of seafood, jerk and barbecue dishes that don't quite live up to their pricing.

Coconuts (☎ 975-0064; Fisherman's Point; US\$7-25; ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Whether you stop in

for a *ménage à trois* plate (coconut shrimp, conch and chicken samosas) or have a jerk chicken quesadilla, the terrace here invariably keeps you here longer than you intended. And why not? The view of the bay is stellar, and the drink specials ease you into the evening, when Coconuts becomes a lively bar.

Passage to India (☎ 795-3182; Soni's Plaza, 50 Main St; US\$9-25; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun, lunch Mon) On the rooftop of a duty-free shopping center, Passage to India offers respite from the crowds below in addition to very good northern Indian fare. The naan is crisp, the curries sharp, and the menu divided into extensive chicken, mutton, seafood and vegetarian sections. Tandoori options are also on offer.

our pick Toscanini (☎ 975-4785; Harmony Hall; mains US\$10-24; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) One of the finest restaurants on the island, this roadside spot is run by two gracious Italians who mix local ingredients into recipes from the motherland. The daily menu ranges widely, encompassing appetizers such as prosciutto with papaya or marinated marlin, and mains such as lobster pasta, or shrimp sautéed with garlic and Appleton rum. Leave room for desserts such as strawberry tart or apple and plum strudel. Go on, treat yourself!

Ruins at the Falls (☎ 974-8888; 17 DaCosta Dr; lunch buffet US\$14, mains US\$9-24; ☞ breakfast & lunch) Set amid a tropical garden with a lovely bridal-veil waterfall and pools, this Jamaican-Chinese restaurant has one-of-a-kind ambience. The all-inclusive lunchtime buffet features beverages, live entertainment and a garden tour.

Drinking

Coconuts (☎ 975-0064; Fisherman's Point) The potent cocktails and omnipotent US\$20 all-you-can drink hard liquor special make the terrace here an excellent vintage point for watching the cruise ships pull out from the dock across the street.

Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville (☎ 675-8800; Island Village; nightclub admission US\$10-20) This ostentatious behemoth offers a boozey good time with its three bars, rooftop whirlpool tub and an endlessly entertaining water slide.

Ruins Pub (☎ 974-9712; 17 DaCosta Dr) This classy joint offers a peaceful environment for enjoying a quiet drink.

Entertainment

Amnesia (☎ 974-2633; 70 Main St; admission US\$5; ☹ Wed-Sun) A classic Jamaican dancehall, this remains the happening scene. Theme nights include an oldies jam on Sunday, ladies' night on Thursday and an after-work party on Friday. This is all leading up to Saturday's dress-to-impress all-night dance marathon.

Little Pub (☎ 795-1831; 59 Main St) This touristy pub is an old favorite, with sports TV and the occasional eclectic floor show to amuse you while you sit at the bar. A resident band plays here six nights per week. The entertainment schedule changes night by night, and includes an Afro-Caribbean musical, karaoke, and a weekly cabaret on Friday.

Roofe Club (☎ 974-1042; 7 James Ave; admission US\$3) The gritty Roofe sends earth-shattering music across the roofs of town; it's the place to get down and dirty with the latest dancehall moves.

Shopping

Shopping is big business in Ocho Rios. There is a wide variety of duty-free shops located on Main St.

Wassi Art (☎ 974-5044; www.wassart.com; Bougainvillea Dr; ☹ closed Sun) Here you'll witness scores of rising and established Jamaican masters creating exquisite works of art. To get here, take Milford Rd (A3) and watch for the signs.

Island Village (cnr Main St & DaCosta Dr) Has more than a dozen pleasant stores with carefully chosen merchandise. These include several beachwear shops, duty-free stores, an outlet for film and photography needs, and upscale outlets for quality paintings, carvings and crafts.

Getting There & Away

Boscobel Aerodrome (☎ 975-3101) is 16km east of town. No international service lands here; see p257 for domestic-flight details.

Buses, coasters and route taxis arrive at and depart Ocho Rios from the **Transportation Center** (Evelyn St); direct services to Montego Bay and Port Antonio operate throughout the day. For a route taxi to Kingston, take the short ride to Fern Gully bus yard and transfer there. If you're coming from the east, you will be deposited at the taxi stand near One Love Park, up the hill from the harbor.

JUTA (☎ 974-2292) is the main taxi agency catering to tourists. A licensed taxi costs about US\$90 per person between Montego Bay and

Ocho Rios, and about US\$80 between Ocho Rios and Kingston (US\$100 to the airport).

Car rental rates are cheaper in Ocho Rios than elsewhere on the island, averaging US\$50/300 for the day/week.

Island Car Rentals (☎ 974-2334; www.islandcarrentals.com; Main St)

Salem Car Rentals (☎ 974-0786; www.salemcarrentals.com; 7 Sand Castles Complex)

Getting Around

Ocho Rios has no bus service within town. Coasters and route taxis ply Main St and the coast road (US\$1 for short hauls; US\$4 to Boscobel Aerodrome).

Government-established licensed taxi fares from downtown include Dunn's River US\$25, Firefly US\$65, Prospect Plantation US\$32 and Shaw Park Gardens US\$22.

AROUND OCHO RIOS

Nine Mile

Despite its totally out-of-the-way location 64.5km south of Ocho Rios, the village of Nine Mile is firmly on the tourist map for pilgrimages to Bob Marley's birth site and resting place. At the **Nine Mile Museum** (☎ 999-7003; http://ninemilejamaica.com; admission US\$15; ☹ 8am-5:30pm), Rastafarian guides given to sudden outbursts of song lead pilgrims to the hut – now festooned with devotional graffiti – where the reggae god spent his early years. Another highlight is the Rasta-colored 'rock pillow' on which he laid his head when seeking inspiration. Marley's body lies buried along with his guitar in a 2.5m-tall oblong marble mausoleum inside a tiny church of traditional Ethiopian design.

Getting to Nine Mile is no simple matter. The site is extremely secluded, but all cab drivers know the route (haggle hard for a reasonable fare; US\$75 is common). A far easier way to visit is via 'Zion Bus Line' tour, run by **Chukka Caribbean Adventure Tours** (☎ 927-2506; www.chukkacaribbean.com/jamaica), which departs from Ocho Rios.

If you are driving, be sure to pull up right outside the museum compound and honk your horn to get someone to open the gate. The alternative is to park on the street and pay any number of locals to watch the vehicle.

Firefly

About 32km east of Ocho Rios, **Firefly** (☎ 997-7201, 994-0920; admission US\$10; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

was the home of Sir Noël Coward, the English playwright, songwriter, actor and wit. The cottage, set amid wide lawns high on a hill with tremendous views of the coastline below, is a museum, looking just as it did on Sunday February 28, 1965, the day the Queen Mother visited. Coward lies buried beneath a plain white marble slab on the wide lawns where he entertained so many illustrious stars of stage and screen. Firefly is well signed along three different routes from the A3.

MONTEGO BAY & AROUND

Montego Bay is the second-largest city on the island and Jamaica's most important tourist resort. The region boasts a greater concentration of well-preserved colonial houses than any other, some of which are working plantations that offer guided tours. Several championship golf courses, horse stables and the island's best shopping add to the region's appeal.

MONTEGO BAY

pop 110,000

A bustling town with a turbulent history, a thriving port and a hopping 'hip strip,' Montego Bay (MoBay) is Jamaica's most charged city. While spring-breakers from the US descend on MoBay each year for bouts of ritualized raucousness, being host to the island's busiest airport and cruise-ship port assures the town a steady stream of visitors, many of whom pop down from North America for long weekends.

Many never make it off Gloucester Av, which has attained the wince-inducing title of 'hip strip.' Most of the hotels, restaurants, bars and souvenir emporia line this parade, which runs parallel to the beach; everything is here – and a loose confederacy of hustlers patrols the strip ready to offer guidance (and other services) should you find it all overwhelming. Despite its gaudiness, the strip boasts some of the best eating options on the island.

Street life of another, more genuine, order courses through downtown, which features a selection of decaying Georgian buildings that hint at earlier prosperity and the excellent Museum of St James, which bears poignant testament to the city's brutal slave history.

Information

Cornwall Regional Hospital (☎ 952-5100; Mt Salem Rd) Has a 24-hour emergency room.

Cyber Café (☎ 971-8907; Gloucester Ave; per 15min/hr US\$27.50; ☎ 8am-8:30pm) At Doctor's Cave Beach, with a wireless network serving the beach.

Exchange bureau (☎ 24hr) In the arrival hall at Sangster International Airport.

Fire (☎ 952-2311)

FX Trader (☎ 952-3171; 37 Gloucester Ave) At the Pelican restaurant; one of a number of money exchange bureaus downtown.

Jamaica Tourist Board Airport (☎ 952-3009); Cornwall Beach (☎ 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat); Gloucester Ave (☎ 952-4425; fax 952-3587) Opening hours are variable.

Official Visitors Guide (www.montego-bay-jamaica.com) An up-to-date online resource for info on MoBay and environs.

Post office Gloucester Ave (☎ 979-5137; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri); Downtown (☎ 952-7016; Fort St)

Sangster's Bookshop (☎ 952-0319; 2 St James St) The largest bookstore in town, albeit only modestly stocked.

Dangers & Annoyances

Montego Bay has a reputation for harassment of tourists by hustlers. Visitors can expect to be approached in none-too-subtle terms by locals offering their services, and the barrage of young men selling drugs is a wearying constant. Uniformed members of the Montego Bay Resort Patrol police the strip. Downtown is not patrolled; it's safe to walk in the historic center during daylight hours but stick to the main streets and stay alert.

Sights

The bustling, cobbled **Sam Sharpe Sq** is named for national hero the Right Excellent Samuel Sharpe (1801–32), the leader of the 1831 Christmas Rebellion (see the boxed text, p244). At the square's northwest corner is the **National Heroes Monument**, an impressive bronze statue of Paul Bogle and Sam Sharpe, Bible in hand, speaking to three admirers. Also on the northwest corner is the **Cage**, a tiny cut-stone and brick building built in 1806 as a lockup, now a small souvenir shop.

At the southwest corner is the copper-domed **Civic Centre**, a handsome colonial-style cut-stone building on the site of the ruined colonial courthouse. It contains the small yet highly informative **Museum of St James** (☎ 971-9417; admission US\$3; ☎ 9:30am-4:30pm Tue-Thu, 9:30am-3:30pm Fri, 10:30am-2:30pm Sat) with relics and other

MONTEGO BAY

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exhibits tracing the history of St James Parish from Arawak days through the slave rebellions to the more recent past.

Many of the most interesting buildings in town are clustered along Church St. The highlight is **St James Parish Church** (☎ 952-2775; Church St), regarded as the finest church on the island. You can view the beautiful interior, which contains a stunning stained-glass window behind the altar and a number of notable marble monuments.

Activities

Doctor's Cave Beach (☎ 952-2566; adult/child US\$5/2.50; ☎ 8:30am-6pm) is Montego Bay's most excellent beach. It can get obscenely crowded during the winter months, so arrive early to stake out your turf. Facilities include a food court, grill bar, internet café and water sports, plus changing rooms. You can rent shade umbrellas and inflatable air mattresses (lilos) for US\$5, snorkel gear for US\$5 and chairs for US\$4.

Walter Fletcher Beach, located at the south end of Gloucester Ave, is the venue for the **Aquasol Theme Park** (☎ 940-1344; adult/child US\$5/3; ☎ 9am-10pm), which has netball, volleyball, tennis courts, water sports, the MoBay 500 go-cart track and Voyage Sports Bar & Grill. It rents out lockers, beach mats, and chairs and umbrellas. Reggae parties are a regularly scheduled attraction.

Nature-lovers won't want to miss the **Montego Bay Marine Park** for its coral reefs, rich flora and fauna, and shoreline mangroves. The park extends from the eastern end of Sangster International Airport westward (almost 9.5km) to the Great River, encompassing the mangroves of **Bogue Lagoon**. You can set out with a guide to spot herons, egrets, pelicans and waterfowl, while below, in the tannin-stained waters, juvenile barracudas, tarpon, snapper, crabs and lobsters swim and crawl. Authority is vested in the **Montego Bay Marine Park Trust** (MBMPT; ☎ 971-8082; www.montego-bay-jamaica.com/mbmp; Pier 1, off Howard Cooke Dr), which maintains a meager **resource centre** (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) with a library on the vital ecosystem.

Here you will also find first-rate diving and snorkeling with a variety of sites. These range from teeming patch reefs to awe-inspiring walls that begin in as little as 11m of water. **Resort Divers** (☎ 953-9699, 940-1183; www.resortdivers.com; Holiday Inn, Rose Hall Rd; 4-/5-dive package US\$140/180, certification US\$395) offers dives and certification courses, and rents out equipment.

The waters off of Jamaica's north coast offer spectacular **game fishing**. Beyond the north-shore reefs, the ocean floor plummets for thousands of meters. Deep-water game fish use the abyss – known as 'Marlin Alley' – as a migratory freeway. Half- and full-day charters can be booked through hotels, at Pier 1 Marina, or from **Rhapsody Cruises** (☎ 979-0102; Shop 204, Chatwick Plaza).

Rhapsody also offers three-hour **chartered cruises** (US\$60; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm) with an open bar and a snorkeling stop in the marine park. A bus will pick you up at your hotel.

Montego Bay is world-renowned for **golf**; three championship courses are east of town in Ironshore. Jamaica's two most famous courses, **Tryall Golf Course** (☎ 956-5660) and the **White Witch Golf Course** (☎ 953-2800) at the Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall, are world-class links that lure enthusiasts from all over the world.

Festivals & Events

Montego Bay's most celebrated annual events are its two high-profile music festivals.

Air Jamaica Jazz & Blues Festival (☎ 888-359-2475, 800-523-5585; www.airjamaica.com; 1-night pass US\$75-80, 2-/3-day pass US\$150/225) Brings internationally acclaimed acts to Cinnamon Hill near Rose Hall in late January for three nights of music under the stars.

Spring Break In March and April, thousands of American college students descend on MoBay for all-night bacchanalia.

Red Stripe Reggae Sumfest (☎ 953-4573; www.reggaesumfest.com; weekend/event pass US\$52/160) Jamaica's premier reggae festival typically includes more than 50 world-class reggae artists. Held in July, it starts with a beach party on Walter Fletcher Beach, followed by four theme nights, including a 'street jam' on Gloucester Ave.

Montego Bay Marlin Tournament Big fish, big party in September.

Sleeping

Montego Bay boasts the largest number of guest rooms of any resort area in Jamaica. Most of the Bay's hotels are clustered along Gloucester Ave; deluxe resorts nestle on their own beaches east of town at Ironshore and Mahoe Bay.

Linkage Guest House (☎ 952-4546, 979-0308; 32 Church St; s US\$18-25, d US\$25) Located downtown far away from the strip is this backpackers favorite offering 15 rooms in an old wooden house. They're simple but clean and have fans, louvered windows, and hot water in the shared

bathrooms. Meals are served. The owners also offer Maroon heritage tours (US\$50).

Caribic House (☎ 979-6073; fax 979-0322; 69 Gloucester Ave; standard s US\$45-59, d US\$51-69; 🏠) This compact no-frills option across the street from Doctor's Cave Beach (and right above the Jamaica Bobsled Café) is a favorite of the budget-minded. It has 17 basic rooms with fridges and large bathrooms, including one 'superior' room with kitchen, dining room and three beds.

ourpick Knightwick House (☎ 952-2988; tapas 45@hotmail.com; Corniche Rd; s US\$45, d US\$65-70; 🏠) Behind and above the Coral Cliff Hotel, this wonderful B&B is close to the action without being submerged by it. Run by a charming couple, the colonial structure – boasting terra-cotta floors, wrought-iron railings and abundant artwork – has three modest yet appealingly furnished bedrooms with one, two and three beds. All are well-lit and airy, and each has a balcony.

Buccaneer Beach (☎ 952-6489; fax 979-2580; 7 Kent Ave; s/d US\$69/89; 🏠 🏠) A small, modest property with a homey feel. Rooms have tile floors, phone, cable TV and safety box, plus large balconies. There's a plunge pool in each of the front and back courtyards, plus a piano bar with large-screen TV. Its reclusive location at the end of Kent Ave is a five-minute walk from Gloucester Ave.

ourpick Richmond Hill Inn (☎ 952-3859; www.richmond-hill-inn.com; Union St; s/d US\$85/115, ste US\$189; 🏠 🏠) Gazing out over the town and the bay, this charming hotel, built of limestone and molasses and chock-full of antiques, is far removed from the Montego Bay bustle. The rooms have cable TV and modest furnishings. It's noted for its restaurant, which has attracted many of the great and famous. There's also a six-person penthouse suite (US\$450).

Altamont West (☎ 952-9087; www.altamontwest hotel.com; 33 Gloucester Ave; s/d US\$90/120, ste US\$280-420; 🏠 🏠) For guests who can't rouse themselves to cross the street for Walter Fletcher Beach, this MoBay newcomer offers a sundeck as well as an outdoor pool. Rooms are modern and gold-accented and come with cable TV, wi-fi, radio and hairdryers. Children under 12 stay for free.

Gloucestershire Hotel (☎ 952-4420, in North America 877-574-8497, in the UK 0800-169-7103; www.gloucestershire.com; Gloucester Ave; s US\$110-125, d US\$115-130, ste US\$125-130; 🏠 🏠 🏠) A faded, service-oriented 95-

room hotel across the street from Doctor's Cave Beach, this MoBay veteran nestled against the cliff offers rooms with direct-dial phones, safes, wi-fi, satellite TV and a pastel decor that could use some attention. Most rooms feature a balcony. It has a pool deck with Jacuzzi, a restaurant and a helpful tour desk.

Royal Decameron Montego Beach Resort (☎ 952-4340, 888-790-5264; 2 Gloucester Ave; d all-inclusive US\$130; 🏠 🏠 🏠) This resort gets high marks in the all-inclusive section. A welcoming low-rise beachfront resort, it has 128 rooms with lively tropical decor and its own private beach overlooked by a competent restaurant. Rooms all have ocean views and balconies. The range of activities include tennis, golf and water sports. Offers wi-fi.

Sandals Montego Bay (☎ 952-5510; www.sandals.com; N Kent Ave; d all-inclusive US\$590-1550; 🏠 🏠 🏠) This place takes up 8 hectares of splendid beachfront north of the airport and is a superb all-inclusive, couples-only resort for rekindling that honeymoon sparkle while snorkeling, sailing and sunning to your heart's content. It has 245 rooms and suites in 10 categories, all with vibrant plantation-style furniture. There are four pools, four whirlpools, five restaurants, four bars and top-notch entertainment. Wi-fi access is available in common areas.

Eating

Montego Bay has the most cosmopolitan cuisine scene in Jamaica, with everything from roadside jerk chicken to nouvelle Jamaican dining. Most restaurants double as bars, encouraging guests to make a night of it.

BUDGET

Pork Pit (☎ 952-1046; 27 Gloucester Ave; meals US\$4-8; 🏠 lunch & dinner) Searing tongues for decades, this jumping jerk joint is MoBay's best. Eat at open-air picnic tables shaded by a gargantuan silk-cotton tree that the chef reckons to be 300 years old. Finger-lickin' jerk chicken, pork, fish and shrimp are ordered by the pound, with yams, festival (sausage-shaped fried biscuit) and sweet potatoes as sides.

Nyam 'n' Jam (☎ 952-1922; 17 Harbour St; mains US\$5-9; 🏠 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This local fave has real-deal Jamaican fare and daily specials including standards such as jerk meat, and callaloo and salt fish, but also more esoteric choices such as cow mouth, cow foot and oxtail.

PREACHING RESISTANCE

The week-long Christmas Rebellion that began on December 27, 1831, was the most serious slave revolt to rock colonial Jamaica. Its impact and the public outcry over the terrible retribution that followed were catalysts for the British Parliament passing the Abolition Bill in 1834.

The instigator of the revolt was Samuel Sharpe (1801–32), the slave of a Montego Bay solicitor. A deacon of Montego Bay's Burchell Baptist Church, Sharpe used his forum to encourage passive rebellion.

In 1831 Sharpe counseled slaves to refuse to work during the Christmas holidays. Word of the secret, passive rebellion spread throughout St James and neighboring parishes. The rebellion turned into a violent conflict when the Kensington Estate was set on fire. Soon, plantations and great houses throughout northwest Jamaica were ablaze, and Sharpe's noble plan was usurped by wholesale violence. Fourteen colonists were murdered before authorities suppressed the revolt. Swift and cruel retribution followed.

More than 1000 slaves were killed. Day after day for six weeks following the revolt's suppression, magistrates of the Montego Bay Courthouse handed down death sentences to scores of slaves, who were hanged two at a time, among them 'Daddy' Sam Sharpe. He was later proclaimed a national hero.

Pelican (☎ 952-3171; Gloucester Ave; mains US\$6-12; ☎ 7am-11:30pm) You shouldn't be fooled by the roadside-diner appearance of this good-value local favorite. Its menu of Jamaican dishes is simply outstanding; a highlight is red snapper in parchment paper, cooked in wine and béchamel sauce. Other dishes include stew peas with rice and stuffed conch with rice and peas, but the Pelican also serves sirloin steaks and seafood. The Sunday buffet is US\$12.

El Campay Gallo (☎ 531-0637; 47 Gloucester Ave; mains US\$7-14; ☎ lunch & dinner) You'll be warmly welcomed as if you're one of the family. This exuberant family-run place serves traditional Cuban dishes such as *empanadillas* (meat-filled pastry) and potent cocktails. If you're lucky, the owner will display his considerable talent as a jazz violinist.

our pick Native Restaurant & Bar (☎ 979-2769; mains US\$8-25; 29 Gloucester Ave; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) An excellent place to learn about Jamaican cuisine – try 'goat in a boat' (curried goat in a pineapple half) or 'yard man fish' (whole fish escoveitched or steamed). If you're really hungry, consider the 'Boonoonoonoos' sampler (composed of ackee and salt fish, jerk chicken, curried goat, escoveitched fish, plantains and pineapple) – it's like taking a crash course in Jamaican food.

Marguerite's (☎ 952-4777; Gloucester Ave; meals US\$12-33; ☎ dinner) Adjoining Margaritaville, Marguerite's is a great place to watch the sunset over cocktails, followed by dinner on the restaurant's elegant cliff-top patio. The pricey

menu edges toward nouvelle Jamaican, but also includes sirloin steak and a seafood platter (US\$33).

Town House by the Sea (☎ 952-2660; Gloucester Ave; mains US\$14-35; ☎ lunch & dinner) This elegant dining room overlooking the beach takes food seriously, so come seriously hungry. If you've been craving snails – and who hasn't? – you'll find escargot with a Jamaican twist. Equally rich is the stuffed lobster, red snapper or filet mignon. If you're merely peckish, choose from the pasta, curry and Jamaican dishes. The smoked marlin is one of the best on the island.

our pick Houseboat Grill (☎ 979-8845; houseboat@cwjamaica.com; Southern Cross Blvd; meals US\$15-30; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) Anchored in Bogue Bay at Montego Bay Freeport is Houseboat Grill, one of Jamaica's top-notch restaurants, which offers a changing menu of eclectic Caribbean fusion cuisine that includes dishes such as spicy conch fritters with a rémoulade dipping sauce or honey-soy glazed grilled tenderloin of beef with Chinese oyster sauce. You can dine inside, or reclusively out on the sundeck. Reservations are recommended on weekends.

Drinking

Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville (☎ 952-4777; Gloucester Ave; admission after 10pm US\$5) This wildly popular place claims to have 'put the hip into the Hip Strip'...who woulda think that anything to do with Jimmy Buffett could obtain a cachet of cool? Four open-air bars, 15 big-screen TVs,

and dance floors on decks overhanging the water offer plenty of diversion.

MoBay Proper (☎ 940-1233; Fort St) Attracting a young local crowd, this exuberant bar serves libations on the terrace and has decent Jamaican cooking. The pool table generates considerable heat, while dominoes are the rage with an older crowd out on the patio. On Friday night there's a fish fry and vintage reggae.

Jamaican Bobsled Café (☎ 952-1448; 69 Gloucester Ave; ☹ 10am-2am) This watering hole makes a good-natured attempt to capitalize on everybody's favorite fish-out-of-water story – the Jamaican bobsled team immortalized in the film *Cool Runnings*, which is in a perpetual loop on a corner screen.

Entertainment

Blue Beat Jazz & Blues Bar (☎ 952-4777; Gloucester Ave) Montego Bay's first martini jazz and blues bar offers sophisticated entertainment and Asian-Caribbean fusion cuisine. It's next to Marguerite's restaurant.

Coral Cliff Gaming Lounge (☎ 952-4130; Gloucester Ave; ☹ 24hr) This medium-size gamblers' haunt has over 100 video-slot machines, big-screen TVs and free drinks, with fashion shows, cabarets and/or live jazz nightly.

Shopping

MoBay's streets spill over with stalls selling wooden carvings, straw items, jewelry, ganja pipes, T-shirts and other touristy items.

Craft Market (Harbour St) For the largest selection of the above items, head to this downtown market, which extends for three blocks between Barnett and Market Sts.

Tafara Products (☎ 952-3899; 36 Church St) An African/Rastafarian cultural center selling books, arts and crafts, and natural foods.

Gallery of West Indian Art (☎ 952-4547; www.galleryofwestindianart.com; 11 Fairfield Rd) In the suburb of Catherine Hall, this is a quality gallery that sells arts and crafts from around the Caribbean including Cuban canvases, hand-painted wooden animals, masks and handmade jewelry.

Getting There & Around

Donald Sangster International Airport (MBJ; ☎ 979-1034, 979-1035; www.mbjairport.com) is about 3km north of Montego Bay. For info regarding international flights, see p257; for domestic flights, see p257.

Buses, coasters and route taxis arrive and depart from the **transportation station** (Barnett St), at the south end of St James St.

Montego Bay Metro Line (☎ 952-5500; 19A Union St) links MoBay with suburbs and outlying towns; the fare is US\$0.50.

Taxi stands are on Gloucester Ave opposite Doctor's Cave Beach, downtown at the junction of Market and Strand Sts, and by the transportation station. The fare from the airport to Gloucester Ave is US\$8.

These rental car companies have offices at Donald Sangster:

Avis (☎ 952-0762; www.avis.com)

Budget (☎ 952-3838; www.budget.com)

Dollar (953-9100; www.dollar.com)

Hertz (☎ 979-0438; www.hertz.com)

Island Car Rentals (☎ 952-5771; www.islandcarrentals.com)

AROUND MONTEGO BAY

Rose Hall Great House

This **mansion** (☎ 953-2323; adult/under 12yr US\$20/10; ☹ 9am-6pm), with its commanding hilltop position 3.2km east of Ironshore, is the most famous great house in Jamaica. Most of the attraction is the legend of Annie Palmer, the 'White Witch of Rose Hall,' a multiple murderer said to haunt the house. Her bedroom upstairs is decorated in crimson silk brocades. The cellars now house an old-English-style pub and a well-stocked gift shop. There's also a snack bar.

To get to Rose Hall, take a charter taxi (US\$25), or a route taxi from the Barnett St Transportation Station in Montego Bay (US\$2) and walk 1.6km up from the main road. Alternatively, you can arrange a tour at any hotel.

Greenwood Great House

This marvelous **estate** (☎ 953-1077; www.greenwoodgreathouse.com; admission US\$14; ☹ 9am-6pm) sits high on a hill 8km east of Rose Hall, and is a far more intimate property. Construction began on the two-story stone-and-timber structure in 1780 by the Honorable Richard Barrett, whose family arrived in Jamaica in the 1660s and amassed a fortune from its sugar plantations.

Remarkably, Greenwood survived the slave rebellion of Christmas 1831 unscathed. Among the highlights is the rare collection of musical instruments, containing a barrel organ and two polyphones, which the guide is

happy to bring to life. The view from the front balcony down to the sea is quite stunning.

Buses traveling between Montego Bay and Falmouth will drop you off anywhere along the A1; ask to be let off across from the Total gas station on the sea side of the road and take the road up the hill. It's a good 20-minute slog to the top.

Falmouth

Few other towns in Jamaica have retained their original architecture to the same degree as Falmouth, which has a faded Georgian splendor. The city, 37km east of Montego Bay, has been the capital of Trelawny parish since 1790. On weekends, farmers come from miles around to sell their produce, recalling the days when Falmouth was Jamaica's major port for the export of rum, molasses and sugar.

Route taxis leave for Falmouth from the Barnett St Transportation Station in Montego Bay (US\$2) several times each day.

Martha Brae

Most visitors come to this small village, 3km due south of Falmouth, for the exhilarating 1½-hour **rafting** trip on the Martha Brae River. Long bamboo rafts poled by a skilled guide cruise down the river and stop at 'Tarzan's Corner' for a swing and swim in a calm pool. Trips begin from Rafter's Village, about 1.5km south of Martha Brae. A raft trip costs US\$60 per raft (one or two people). Contact **River Raft Ltd** (☎ 952-0889; www.jamaicarrafting.com). Remember to tip your raft guide.

Route taxis make the 10-minute ride from Falmouth to Martha Brae during daylight hours on a continuous basis (US\$0.75). There are also regular buses.

Rocklands Bird Feeding Station

You don't have to be a bird nerd to love **Rocklands** (☎ 952-2009; admission US\$10; ☎ 9am-5pm), where hummingbirds, saffron finches and many other birds come to feed from your hand. You can visit through a hotel-sponsored tour, or by private cab or rental car. The 800m road leading to the sanctuary is rough. The turn-off from the B8 is 180m south of the signed turn-off for Lethe.

NEGRIL & THE WEST

If the popular tourist image of Jamaica is sun, beach life, rum, sun, sea, sun, scuba diving and sunsets, chances are the popular tourist is thinking of Negril – or thinking in particular of Jamaica's longest swathe of sugary white-sand beach at Long Bay (also known as Seven Mile Beach). It also boasts superb coral reefs that make for excellent scuba diving, and a large swamp area – the Great Morass – that is an ecotour haven.

NEGRIL

pop 4400

In the 1970s Negril lured hippies with its offbeat beach-life to a countercultural Shangri-la where anything went. To some extent, anything still goes here, except the innocent – they left long ago.

To be sure, the gorgeous 11km-long swathe of sand that is the beach at Long Bay is still kissed by the serene waters into which the sun melts evening after evening in a riot of color that will transfix even the most jaded. And the easily accessible coral reefs offer some of the best diving in the Caribbean. At night, an array of rustic beachside music clubs keep the reggae beat going without the watered-down-for-tourist schmaltz that so often mars the hot spots of Montego Bay and Ocho Rios.

Yet these undeniable attractions have done just that: attract. In the last three decades, Negril has exploded as a tourist venue, and today the beach can barely be seen from Norman Manley Blvd for the intervening phalanx of beachside resorts. And with tourism comes the local hustle – you're very likely to watch the sunset in the cloying company of a ganja dealer or an aspiring tour-guide-cum-escort.

Orientation

Negril is divided in two by the South Negril River, with Long Bay to the north and West End to the south. The apex is Negril Village, which lies immediately south of the river and is centered on a small roundabout – Negril Sq – from which Norman Manley Blvd leads north, West End Rd leads south and Sheffield Rd goes east and becomes the A2, which leads to Savanna-la-Mar, 31km away.

Information

Easy Rock Internet Café (☎ 957-0671; West End Rd; per hr US\$5) The most pleasant and personable place to surf the digital wave.

Jamaica Tourist Board/TPDCo (☎ 957-4803, 957-9314; Times Sq Plaza; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Negril Beach Medical Center (☎ 957-4888; fax 957-4347; Norman Manley Blvd; ☎ 9am-5pm, doctors on call 24hr)

Police station (☎ 957-4268; Sheffield Rd)

Post office (☎ 957-9654; West End Rd) Between A Fi Wi Plaza and King's Plaza.

Scotiabank (☎ 957-4236) About 45m west of Negril Plaza; has foreign exchange service and an ATM.

Top Spot (☎ 957-4542) In Sunshine Village, is well stocked with international publications.

Sights & Activities

The blindingly white, world-famous 11km-long beach of **Long Bay** is Negril's main claim to fame. The beach draws gigolos and hustlers offering everything from sex to aloe massages and, always, 'sensi' (drugs). 'Pssst! Bredda, you want ganja? Negril de place to get high, mon!' Tourist police now patrol the beach, but by law all Jamaican beaches must permit public access, so the hustlers are free to roam. Water-sports concessions line the beach. By night, this section is laden with the blast of reggae from disco bars.

Booby Cay is a small and lovely island 800m offshore from Rutland Point in Long Bay. The island is named for the seabirds that nest there, but the beautiful coral beach is the main draw. Water-sports concessionaires can arrange boats for about US\$25 round trip.

Five kilometers south of Negril Village, the gleaming-white, 20m-tall **Negril Lighthouse** (West End Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-sunset) illuminates the westernmost point of Jamaica. Wilson Johnson, the superintendent, will gladly lead the way up the 103 stairs for a bird's-eye view of the coast.

The waters off Negril are usually mirror-calm – ideal for all kinds of **water sports**. Numerous concessions along the beach rent out jet skis (about US\$40 for 30 minutes), plus sea kayaks, sailboards and Sunfish (about US\$20 per hour). They also offer waterskiing (US\$25 for 30 minutes) and banana-boat rides (using an inflatable banana-shaped raft towed by a speedboat; US\$15).

Negril offers extensive offshore reefs and cliffs with grottoes. The shallow reefs are perfect for **diving** and **snorkeling**. Visibility often

exceeds 30m and seas are dependably calm. Most dives are in 10.5m to 22.5m of water. Expect to pay about US\$5 an hour for masks and fins from concession stands on the beach. Try one of the branches of the **Negril Scuba Centre** (www.negrilscuba.com; 1-/2-tank dive US\$40/70; Mariner's Negril Beach Club ☎ 957-4425, 957-9641; Norman Manley Blvd; Negril Escape Resort & Spa ☎ 957-0392; West End Rd; Sunset @ the Palms ☎ 383-9533; Bloody Bay Beach).

Negril's waters are teeming with tuna, blue marlin, wahoo and sailfish and provide excellent action for sport-fishing enthusiasts. **Stanley's Deep Sea Fishing** (☎ 957-0667; deepsea fishing@cwjamaica.com) offers custom fishing trip charters (up to four people for a half/full day costs US\$400/800).

The Negril Hills provide excellent terrain for rip-roaring mountain biking. **Rusty's X-Cellent Adventures** (☎ 957-0155; rustynegril@hotmail.com) offers guided bike tours; it's US\$25 if you have your own bike, or US\$35 if you want to borrow one of the company's.

Negril Hills Golf Club (☎ 957-4638; Sheffield Rd), about 5km east of Negril, has a delightful setting by the Great Morass swampland. And should your ball land in the water, best leave it as a souvenir for one of the resident crocodiles.

Festivals & Events

Negril Music Festival (☎ 968-9356) A beach bash in mid-March featuring leading Jamaican and international reggae stars, calypso artists and other musicians.

Spring Break Jamaica Beachfest Negril is thronged for this mid-April exercise in Bacchanalian excess.

Negril Jerk Fest (☎ 782-9990) Jerk chefs come from far and wide to face off at Three Dives Jerk Centre in November.

Sleeping

As with Montego Bay, Negril boasts a stunning array of accommodations. Budget travelers are particularly spoiled for choice with scores of places charging less than US\$75 per night and many half that sum. Many hotels enjoy a beach location, but up on the cliffs of the West End are Negril's most remarkable digs.

LONG BAY

Westport Cottages (☎ 957-4736, 307-5466; s/d US\$15/20) This offbeat place is popular with the laid-back backpacking crowd (amiable owner Joseph Mathews says it is approved for 'smoke-friendly heartical people'). Joseph

has 17 very rustic huts with well-kept outside toilet and cold shower, plus mosquito nets and fans. Newer rooms to the rear are preferred. A well-equipped communal kitchen is available; bicycles (US\$5 per day) and snorkeling equipment are provided.

Negril Yoga Centre (☎ 957-4397; www.negrilyoga.com; Norman Manley Blvd; d US\$46-75; 🏠) The eight rustic yet quite atmospheric rooms and cottages – most with refrigerators and fans – surround an open-air, thatched, wood-floored yoga center set in a garden. Options range from a two-story, Thai-style wooden cabin to an adobe farmer's cottage; all are pleasingly if modestly furnished. Yoga classes are offered (guests/nonguests US\$10/15), as is massage (US\$60). There's a communal kitchen.

our pick Rondel Village (☎ 957-4413; www.rondelvillage.com; d US\$95-150, 1-/2-bedroom villa US\$210/245; 🏠 📺 🚿) A highly affable and efficient hotel graced by walkways lined with an array of indigenous fruit trees, the family-owned Village offers well-appointed studios and beachfront rooms clustered around a small pool and Jacuzzi. You can also choose octagonal one- and two-bedroom villas that sleep up to six and feature marble floors, French doors, satellite TV, DVD players fully equipped kitchenettes and Jacuzzis.

Negril Tree House (☎ 957-4287; www.negril-treehouse.com; r US\$150-170, ste US\$275-350; 🏠 📺 🚿) This unpretentious resort is a favorite for its 16 octagonal bungalows and oceanfront villas nudging pleasingly up to the beach. Each has a TV and a safe. More elegant one- and two-bedroom suites each feature kitchenette, king-size bed and a Murphy bed in the lounge, which opens onto a wide veranda. The beachside bar is popular. Water sports are offered, and the resort has a tour desk, gift store, masseuse and manicurist. Wi-fi is available in the common areas.

WEST END

Blue Cave Castle (☎ 957-4845; www.bluecavecastle.com; s/d US\$75/120; 🏠) Providing perhaps the best view of Long Bay from the West End, this atmospheric, all-stone concoction attracts nudists, travel junkies and freethinkers. The 14 bedrooms are cavellike, but in a good way. Each is equipped with a CD player, ceiling fan and refrigerator; tower rooms open to the sea and superior rooms include air-con and cable TV. Stairs from the castle lead down to a blue cave.

Xtabi (☎ 957-0120; www.xtabi-negril.com; r US\$83-90, cottages US\$210, extra person US\$25; 🏠 📺 🚿) This chic and casual hotel bills itself as 'the meeting place of the gods.' Its clientele is decidedly human, but the setting is truly divine. You can choose from rooms, simple garden cottages or quaint octagonal seafront bungalows perched atop the cliff. The bar is lively and the restaurant appealing. It has sunning platforms built into the cliff. Children under the age of 15 stay free. Massage is offered (US\$40 per hour).

Catcha Falling Star (☎ 957-0390; www.catchajamaica.com; 1-/2-bedroom cottage US\$135/250; 🏠) In the inimitable West End style, these pleasant fan-cooled cottages – including several with two bedrooms – sit on the cliffs. Each is named for an astrological sign and comes with microwave oven, fridge, bar and double beds draped in mosquito netting. A tiered cliff affords easy access to the sea, where clothing-optional bathing can be enjoyed in a private cove. Popular masseuse Oya Oezcan offers her services here (US\$70 per hour).

our pick Rockhouse (☎ 957-4373; www.rockhousehotel.com; r/studio/villa US\$150/175/325; 🏠 📺 🚿) One of the West End's most beautiful and well-run hotels, with 13 thatched rondavels (two are 'premium villas') of pine and stone, plus 15 studios dramatically clinging to the cliffside above a small cove. Each cabin has a ceiling fan, refrigerator, safe, minibar, alfresco shower and wraparound veranda. Catwalks lead over the rocks to an open-sided, multilevel dining pavilion (with one of the best restaurants around) overhanging the ocean. A dramatically designed pool sits atop the cliffs.

Eating & Drinking

Negril has plenty of upscale, elegant restaurants and just as many economical local-flavored joints serving vegetarian food, pasta, seafood and jerk chicken for a song.

LONG BAY

Bourbon Beach (☎ 957-4405; mains US\$2-7) Though it's best known for its live reggae concerts, those in the know swear by its jerk chicken. The sauce is thick and pastelike, and well-complemented by a Red Stripe as you wait for a show.

Jamaica Tamboo (☎ 957-4282; Jamaica Tamboo; mains US\$6-24; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Near Kuyaba, this is a bamboo-and-thatch two-story res-

restaurant (lit by brass lanterns at night) with a varied menu that includes a breakfast of 'pigs in a blanket' (pancakes and sausage) and a fruit platter with ice cream. It also has snack foods such as deep-fried lobster nibbles, sandwiches and pizzas.

our pick **Lobster House** (☎ 957-4293; Sunrise Club; mains US\$8-22; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Renowned for its pink gnocchi in a parmesan cream and its signature lobster dishes, this congenial outdoor spot also has a brick oven that's brought it the status of best pizzeria in town – if you need proof, try the Queen Aragosta pizza with lobster tails. Many, however, come for a cup of what is arguably the best espresso on the island, made from the proprietor's vintage 1961 Faema espresso machine.

Norma's on the Beach at Sea Splash (☎ 957-4041; Sea Splash Resort; mains US\$13-28; ☺ dinner) This Negril branch of Norma Shirley's celebrated Jamaican culinary empire seems to have escaped the hype surrounding her Kingston flagship, but the 'new world Caribbean' food at this stylish beach restaurant is just as adventurous. Expect to find the likes of lobster, Cornish game hen, jerk chicken and pasta as well as tricolored 'rasta pasta.'

WEST END

our pick **3 Dives Jerk Centre** (☎ 957-0845; quarter/half chicken US\$4/7; ☺ noon-midnight) It's no small tribute to 3 Dives that its jerk overshadows its reputation for lengthy waits (sometimes over an hour). Fortunately, the chefs are more than happy to let you peek into the kitchen, where there's bound to be a pile of super-hot Scotch bonnet peppers threatening to spontaneously combust, and you can sip cheap Red Stripe on the cliffs at the end of a small garden. This is the site of the annual Negril Jerk Festival.

Royal Kitchen Vegetarian Café (☎ 775-0386; West End Rd; mains US\$4-7; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This welcoming roadside I-tal eatery is popular with local Rastafarians and those who come to collect their pearls of wisdom. The fare – strictly vegetarian – is served on simple tables where you are sure to make friends with inquisitive passersby. The juices are especially good.

Hungry Lion (☎ 957-4486; mains US\$12-30; ☺ dinner) Renovated in late 2007, this bright-painted spot serves intricate fare from a changing menu of largely fish and vegetarian dishes, like vegetarian shepherd's pie or que-

sadillas stuffed with shrimp and cheese. The alfresco rooftop dining room is tastefully decorated with earth tones and original art. The music is trance-like, and the bar serves an extensive menu of cocktails and juices.

Rockhouse Restaurant & Bar (☎ 957-4373; mains US\$15-30; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Lamplit at night, this pricey yet relaxed cliffside spot boasts outstanding nouvelle Jamaican treats such as vegetable tempura with lime and ginger, specialty pastas and daily specials like watermelon spare ribs and blackened mahimahi with mango chutney. At the very least, stop by for a sinful bananas Foster.

Entertainment

Negril's reggae concerts are legendary, with performances every night in peak season, when there's sure to be some big talent in town. A handful of venues offer weekly jams, and they have a rotation system so that they all get a piece of the action. Big-name acts usually perform at **MXIII** (West End Rd) in the West End, and at **Roots Bamboo** (☎ 957-4479; ☺ Wed & Sun) on Long Bay. You'll see shows advertised on billboards and hear about them from megaphone-equipped cars.

The **Jungle** (☎ 957-4005; ☺ 4pm-late) is a classic nightclub on Long Bay Beach, with a thronged and sweaty dance floor downstairs and a pleasant deck with pool tables.

Getting There & Away

Negril Aerodrome is at Bloody Bay, about 11km north of Negril Village. See p257 for information on domestic charters.

Dozens of coasters and route taxis run between Negril and Montego Bay. The two-hour journey costs about US\$6. You may need to change vehicles in Lucea. Be prepared for a hair-raising ride. Minibuses and route taxis also leave for Negril from Donald Sangster International Airport in Montego Bay (the price is negotiable, but expect to pay about US\$10).

A licensed taxi between Montego Bay and Negril will cost about US\$60.

Getting Around

Negril stretches along more than 16km of shoreline, and it can be a withering walk. Coasters and route taxis cruise Norman Manley Blvd and West End Rd. You can flag them down anywhere. The fare between any two points should never be more than about

US\$2. Tourist taxis display a red license plate. Fares run about US\$3 per 3km.

Some rental options:

Jus Jeep (☎ 957-0094; fax 957-0429; West End Rd)

Vernon's Car Rentals (☎ 957-9724, 957-4354; fax 957-4057) At Fun Holiday Beach Resort and Shop 22, Negril Plaza.

AROUND NEGRIL

No, the name **Great Morass** doesn't refer to the legions of drunken college students who descend on Negril for spring break. This virtually impenetrable 3km-wide swamp of mangroves stretches 16km from the South Negril River to Orange Bay. The swamp is the island's second-largest freshwater wetland system and forms a refuge for endangered waterfowl. American crocodiles still cling to life here and are occasionally seen at the mouth of the Orange River.

The easiest way to get a sense of the Great Morass is at the **Royal Palm Reserve** (☎ 957-3115; www.royalpalmreserve.com; adult/child US\$10/5; ☒ 9am-6pm). Wooden boardwalks make a 1.5km loop. Three distinct swamp forest types are present: the royal palm forest, buttonwood forest and bull thatch forest – home to butterflies galore as well as doctorbirds, herons, egrets, endangered black parakeets, Jamaica woodpeckers and countless other birds. Two observation towers provide views over the tangled mangroves.

If you're driving, take Sheffield Rd east of the roundabout for 10 minutes and turn left after the golf course. Otherwise, **Caribic Vacations** (☎ 957-3309; Norman Manley Blvd, Negril) and other local tour operators run trips to the reserve. To explore the Great Morass outside the Royal Palm Reserve, negotiate with villag-

ers who have boats moored along the South Negril River (just northeast of Negril Village), or with fishermen at Norman Manley Sea Park, at the north end of Bloody Bay. It should cost approximately US\$35 for two hours.

SOUTHERN JAMAICA

Untrampled by the lockstep march of the resort-catered hordes, the southern coast serves up an irresistible slice of the unspoiled Jamaica. The area is awash with natural splendor – majestic rivers, lugubrious swamps, gorgeous waterfalls, looming mountains, ominous cliffs and 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.

TREASURE BEACH

Treasure Beach is the generic name given to four coves – Billy's Bay, Frenchman's Bay, Calabash Bay and Great Pedro Bay – with rocky headlands separating lonesome, coral-colored sand beaches. Calabash Bay is backed by the Great Pedro Ponds, which is a good spot for birding.

You'll be hard-pressed to find a more authentically charming and relaxing place in Jamaica. The sense of remoteness, the easy pace and the graciousness of the local farmers and fisherfolk attract travelers seeking an away-from-it-all, cares-to-the-wind lifestyle. Many have settled here – much to local pride.

It's said that Scottish sailors were shipwrecked near Treasure Beach in the 19th century, accounting for the preponderance of fair skin, green eyes and reddish hair.

CALICO JACK'S LAST STAND

Before you park yourself on the sand at Bloody Bay, consider the plight of '**Calico**' Jack Rackham, a pirate who dallied a little too long on the beach. In 1720, Calico Jack, so named for his fondness for calico underwear, and his buccaneers paused in Bloody Bay after a particularly satisfying plundering spree. He and his band of merry men got a little too merry on the local rum, and in the course of their beach party were taken unaware by the British Navy, which overwhelmed them after a struggle worthy of the bay's name.

After the battle, the British were shocked to find that two of Calico Jack's cohorts were actually women: Mary Read and Anne Bonny, who had been his mistress. Rackham was executed and his body suspended in an iron suit on what is now called Rackham Cay, at the harbor entrance at Port Royal, as an example to other pirates. The lives of Read and Bonny were spared because they were pregnant, although Read died in jail.

For more details on Read and Bonny, see p361.

Information

The nearest bank is in Southfield, 16km east of Treasure Beach.

Jake's Place (☎ in the USA 965-3000, 800-688-7678, in the UK 020-7440-4360; www.jakeshotel.com) is an unofficial tourist information source. Here you can book boat rides along the coast and into the Great Morass, plus fishing trips and mountain-bike tours (US\$30 to US\$35 per person). Also visit **TreasureBeach.Net** (www.treasurebeach.net), a good starting point for information.

The post office is on a hillside beside the **police station** (☎ 965-0163), between Calabash Bay and Pedro Cross.

Sleeping & Eating

Ital Rest (☎ 863-3481, 421-8909; r US\$40) An atmospheric out-of-the-way place with two exquisite (if rustic), clean, all-wood thatched cabins with showers, toilets and solar electricity. An upstairs room in the house has a sundeck. Kitchen facilities are shared.

Calabash House (☎ 382-6384; www.calabashhouse.com; r/cottage US\$75/275; ♿) A highly congenial spot run by an American expat, the Calabash House offers airy rooms with private bathrooms each adorned with its own distinctive mosaic as well as secluded beachside cottages with hammocks.

ourpick Jake's Place (☎ in the USA 965-3000, 800-688-7678, in the UK 020-7440-4360; www.jakeshotel.com; r US\$95-195, cottages US\$195-325; ♿) The most glistening gem in Treasure Beach's chest, this rainbow-colored retreat 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, and exquisite handmade beds. The gorgeous pool – lamplit at night – is shaded by a spreading tree. Wi-fi is available in common areas.

ourpick Jack Sprat Café (mains US\$6-12; ☎ 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, crab cakes, smoked marlin and lobster as well as excellent jerk or garlic shrimp.

Pelican Bar (☎ 354-4218; Caribbean Sea; ☎ morning-sunset) 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). 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.

Getting There & Around

There is no direct service to Treasure Beach from Montego Bay, Negril or Kingston. Take a coaster or route taxi to Black River (US\$3), then connect to Treasure Beach (US\$1.75).

Jake's Place (☎ in the USA 965-3000, 800-688-7678, in the UK 020-7440-4360; www.jakeshotel.com) arranges transfers from MoBay for US\$100 (up to four people), car and motorcycle rental, and transfers by taxi.

BLACK RIVER

Though capital of St Elizabeth and the parish's largest town, Black River has a transient feel to it. Most visitors who come here are less interested in the town than in exploring what is beyond. Its namesake river, on whose western banks it rests, spirits day-trippers off to the southern half of the **Great Morass** to see crocodiles and eat at waterside jerk shacks.

The waters, stained by tannins and dark as molasses, are a complex ecosystem and a vital preserve for more than 100 bird species. The morass also forms Jamaica's most significant refuge for crocodiles; about 300 live in the swamps. Locals take to the waters in dugout canoes, tending funnel-shaped shrimp pots made of bamboo in the traditional manner of their West African forebears.

A number of companies in Black River offer Great Morass boat tours. **South Coast Safaris** (☎ 965-2513, 965-2086; 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.

You can also hire a guide to take you upriver in his canoe or boat for about US\$15 to US\$25, round trip. Ask near the bridge in town.

Midday tours are best for spotting crocodiles; early and later tours are better for birding. Take a shade hat and mosquito repellent.

YS FALLS

Among Jamaica's most spectacular falls, this series of eight **cascades** (☎ 997-6055; adult/child US\$15/6; ☎ 9:30am-3:30pm Tue-Sun, closed last 2 weeks Oct) fall 36.5m and are separated by cool pools that are perfect for swimming. The falls are hemmed in by limestone cliffs and are surrounded by towering forest.

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

Buses travel via YS Falls from the Shakespeare Plaza in Maggotty. On the A2, buses, coasters and route taxis will drop you at the junction to YS Falls, from where you can walk (it's about 3.2km) or catch an Ipswich-bound route taxi.

APPLETON RUM ESTATE

You can smell the yeasty odor of molasses wafting from the **Appleton Rum Estate** (☎ 963-9215; factory tour & rum tasting US\$12; ☎ Mon-Sat), well before you reach it, 1km northeast of Maggotty in the middle of the Siloah Valley. The largest distillery in Jamaica, it has been blending the famous Appleton brand of rums since 1749.

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 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. Contact **Caribic Vacations** (☎ Montego Bay 953-9878, Negril 957-3309, Ocho Rios 974-9106) or Jamaica Estate Tours Ltd at the Appleton Rum Estate itself.

DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATIONS

From the lazy, beach-oriented playgrounds of the resort centers to the offbeat, atmospheric towns of the western and southern coasts, Jamaica offers a compelling range of accommodations for every budget and style. If you're traveling on a shoestring, head to a simple guesthouse; in the midrange category there's a

wide range of choice in appealing small hotels, many with splendid gardens, sea views or both. If traveling with your family or a group, consider one of the hundreds of villas available to rent across the island. And if you've decided to splurge on something sumptuous, Jamaica's luxury hotels rank among the finest in the world.

For worse or worse, Jamaica was the spawning ground for the all-inclusive resort. At chains like **Sandals** (www.sandals.com), **Couples** (www.couples.com) and **SuperClubs** (www.superclubs.com), guests pay a set price and (theoretically) pay nothing more once setting foot inside the resort.

Jamaica boasts hundreds of private houses for rent, from modest cottages to lavish beachfront estates. These arrangements are very cost-effective if you're traveling with family or a group of friends. Many include a cook and maid. Rates start as low as US\$400 per week for budget units with minimal facilities. More-upscale villas begin at about US\$850 weekly and can run to US\$10,000 or more for a sumptuous multibedroom estate. **Holiday Solutions** (www.rentjamaica.com) lists scores of economical short-term accommodations, or try **Jamaican Association of Villas & Apartments (JAVA)**; ☎ 974-2508; www.villasinjamaica.com).

Rates quoted are for the high season (mid-December to April), unless otherwise noted. At other times rates can be 20% to 60% lower.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkeling

Jamaica's shores are as beautiful below the surface as they are above. Waters offer tremendous visibility and temperatures of around 27°C year-round, and treasures range from shallow reefs, caverns and trenches to walls and drop-offs just a few hundred meters offshore.

Most diving occurs in and around the Montego Bay and Negril marine parks, in proximity to a wide range of licensed dive operators offering rental equipment and group dives. The main draws around Montego Bay are the Point, a dive wall renowned for its dense corals, fish, sharks and rays, and Airport Reef, which boasts masses of coral canyons, caves and tunnels, and even a DC-3 wreck. See p242 for operators.

Around Negril, the caves off the West End have tunnels and the occasional hawksbill turtle. Among the area's highlights are the Throne, a cave with sponges, plentiful corals,

PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers & Magazines** The *Jamaica Gleaner* is the most respected newspaper; its rival is the *Jamaica Observer*.
- **Radio & TV** There are 30 radio stations and seven TV channels; most hotels have satellite.
- **Electricity** The voltage used is 110V, 50Hz. Sockets are usually two- or three-pin – the US standard.
- **Video Systems** NTSC is the system used in Jamaica.
- **Weights & Measures** Jamaica is still transitioning from imperial to metric; distances are measured in kilometers, and gas in liters, but coffee is strictly by the pound.

nurse sharks, octopuses, barracuda and sting-rays; Deep Plane, which holds the remains of a Cessna airplane lying at 21m underwater; and Sands Club Reef, which lies in 10m of water in the middle of Long Bay. See p247 for more information.

Visitors to the north coast will find excellent diving along the reef that is aligned with the shoreline between Ocho Rios and Galina Point; see p236 for more.

By law, all dives in Jamaican waters must be guided, and dives are restricted to a depth of 30m. (See p54 for ways to protect the reef.) If you spend enough time in the water, you're practically guaranteed to see parrotfish, angel-fish, turtles, eels and the odd barracuda.

Dives cost US\$50/80 for one-/two-tank dives. A snorkeling excursion, which generally includes equipment and a boat trip, costs US\$25 to US\$50. 'Resort courses' for beginners (also called 'Discover Scuba') are offered at most major resorts (about US\$80), which also offer Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) or National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) certification courses (US\$350 to US\$400) and advanced courses.

Fishing

Jamaica's waters are a pelagic playpen for schools of blue and white marlin, dolphin fish, wahoo, tuna and dozens of other species. Deepwater game fish run year-round

through the deep Cayman Trench that begins just 3.2km from shore.

Charters can be arranged for around US\$400/600 per half/full day through hotels or directly through operators in Montego Bay, Negril, Ocho Rios and Port Antonio. A charter includes captain, tackle, bait and crew. Most charter boats require a 50% deposit.

For a more 'rootsy' experience, local fishermen will take you out in 'canoes' (narrow longboats with outboards) using hand lines.

Golf

Jamaica has 12 championship golf courses – more than any other Caribbean island. All courses rent out clubs and have carts. Most require that you hire a caddy – an extremely wise investment, as they know the layout of the course intimately.

The two most famous courses can be found near Montego Bay (p242). For those enticed by scenic links, try the Negril Hills Golf Club (p247). For more information on the island's links, contact the **Jamaica Golf Association** (☎ 925-2325; www.jamaicagolfassociation.com; Constant Spring Golf Club, PO Box 743, Kingston 8).

Surfing

Although Jamaica is little known as a surfing destination and board rentals on the island can be difficult to come by, the east coast is starting to attract surfers for its respectable waves coming in from the Atlantic. Boston Bay, 14.5km east of Port Antonio, is a well-known spot, as is Long Bay, 16km further south. The southeast coast, including the Palisadoes Peninsula, also gets good surf.

Surfing Association of Jamaica/Jamnesia Surf Club (☎ 750-0103; www.geocities.com/jamnesiasurfcub; PO Box 167, Kingston 2) provides general information about surfing in Jamaica, and operates a surf camp at Bull Bay, located 13km east of Kingston.

Jah Mek Yah (☎ 435-8806, in the US 954-594-9619; www.theliqidaddiction.com/jaspots.html; Morant Bay, St Thomas) is a surf lodge in Jamaica's unspoiled eastern corner offering relaxed, rootsy surf packages.

BUSINESS HOURS

The following are standard hours for Jamaica; exceptions are noted in reviews.

Bars ☎ until the last guest leaves

Businesses ☎ 8:30am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday

Restaurants ☺ breakfast dawn to 11am, lunch noon to 2pm, dinner 5:30pm to 11pm

Shops ☺ 8am or 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, to noon Saturday

CHILDREN

Some all-inclusive resorts cater specifically to families and have an impressive range of amenities for children. Most hotels also offer free accommodations or reduced rates for children staying in their parents' room. Many hotels provide a babysitter or nanny by advance request.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

If you don't like reggae music (you can't escape it!), can't cope with poverty or power outages, and hate being hustled, Jamaica is definitely not for you. Moreover, if you prize efficient service, this place is liable to drive you nuts. To savor Jamaica properly, to appreciate what makes people passionate about the place, it pays to take things in stride and try to 'get' Jamaica. If you can handle that, and if you like travel with a raw edge, you'll love it.

Jamaica has the highest murder rate for any country not in the throes of war (the nation had a record 1574 murders in 2007, a 17% rise on the previous year), and Kingston and Spanish Town have the worst reputations in the Caribbean for violent crime. Although the vast majority of violent crimes occur in ghettos far from tourist centers, visitors are sometimes the victims of robbery and scams. Crime against tourists has dropped in recent years, however, and the overwhelming majority of visitors enjoy their vacations without incident.

Drugs – particularly ganja (marijuana) – are readily available in Jamaica, and you're almost certain to be approached by hustlers selling them. Possession and use of drugs in Jamaica is strictly illegal and penalties are severe. Roadblocks and random searches of cars are common. If you *do* buy drugs in Jamaica, don't be foolish enough to take any out of the country. If you get caught in possession, you will *not* be getting on your plane home, however small the amount. A night (or a lengthy sentence) in a crowded-to-bursting Jamaican lock-up is dangerous to your health!

The traveler's biggest problem in Jamaica is the vast army of hustlers who harass visitors, notably in and around major tourist centers. Hustlers walk the streets looking for potential

buyers of crafts, jewelry or drugs, or to wash cars, give aloe vera massages or offer any of a thousand varieties of services. If you as much as glance in their direction, they'll attempt to reel you in like a flounder.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

More than 40 countries have official diplomatic representation in Jamaica. Except for a couple of Montego Bay consulates, all are located in Kingston. If your country isn't represented in this list, check 'Embassies & High Commissions' in the yellow pages of the Greater Kingston telephone directory.

Australia (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-3550, 926-3551; 64 Knutsford Blvd, Kingston 5)

Canada High Commission (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-1500; 3 West Kings House Rd, Kingston); Consulate (Map pp240-1; ☎ 952-6198; 29 Gloucester Ave, Montego Bay)

France (Map pp224-5; ☎ 978-0210; 13 Hillcrest Ave, Kingston 6)

Germany (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-6728; 10 Waterloo Rd, Kingston 10)

Netherlands (Map pp224-5; ☎ 926-2026; 53 Knutsford Blvd, Kingston 5)

Sweden (Map pp224-5; ☎ 941-3761; Unit 3, 69 Constant Spring Rd, Kingston 10)

Switzerland (Map pp224-5; ☎ 978-7857; 22 Trafalgar Rd, Kingston 10)

UK High Commission (Map pp224-5; ☎ 510-0700, 926-9050; bhckingston@cwjamaica.com; 28 Trafalgar Rd, Kingston); Consulate (☎ 912-6859, Montego Bay)

US Embassy (Map pp224-5; ☎ 929-4850, after hr 926-6440; kingstonacs@state.gov; Life of Jamaica Bldg, 16 Oxford Rd, Kingston); Consulate (Map pp240-1; ☎ 952-0160, 952-5050; usconagency.mobay@cwjamaica.com; St James Plaza, 2nd fl, Gloucester Ave, Montego Bay)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Throughout the year you'll find festivals in various towns around Jamaica celebrating anything from jazz to jerk. Kingston is the place for New Year's Eve fireworks. See the Festivals & Events sections for each destination in this chapter for details. Other notable events include the following:

A Fi Wi Sinting (☎ 715-3529; www.fiwisinting.com; Buff Bay) A festival in late February featuring traditional music, song, dance and a marketplace.

Trelawny Yam Festival (☎ 610-0818; Albert Town) Yam-balancing races, the crowning of the Yam King and Queen – how can you resist? Held in late March.

Carnival (www.jamaicacarnival.com; Kingston & Ocho Rios) Street parties and soca music all night long in March-April.

Calabash International Literary Festival (☎ 922-4200; www.calabashfestival.org; Treasure Beach) This highly innovative literary festival in late May draws voices from near and far.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Jamaica is an adamantly homophobic nation. Sexual acts between men are prohibited by law and punishable by up to 10 years in prison and hard labor. Some reggae dancehall lyrics by big-name stars seem intent on instigating violence against gays. Law enforcement in most cases looks the other way, and gay-bashing incidents are almost never prosecuted.

Most Jamaican gays are still in the closet. Nonetheless, many hoteliers are tolerant of gay visitors, and you should not be put off from visiting the island. Just don't expect to be able to display your sexuality openly without an adverse reaction.

Purple Roofs (www.purple.roofs.com/caribbean/jamaica.html) lists gay-friendly accommodations in Jamaica.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays:

New Year's Day January 1

Bob Marley Day February 6

Ash Wednesday Six weeks before Easter

Good Friday, Easter Monday March/April

Labour Day May 23

Emancipation Day August 1

Independence Day August 6

National Heroes' Day October 19

Christmas Day December 25

Boxing Day December 26

INTERNET ACCESS

Although wi-fi has made its first appearances in Jamaican hotels, in-room, dial-up access for laptop computers is still sporadic. Even some of the most upscale establishments only offer access in communal lobby, bar or pool areas. Most town libraries now offer internet access (US\$1 for 30 minutes), though you may find there's only one or two terminals and waits can be long. Most towns also have at least one commercial entity where you can get online.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Afflicted Yard (<http://afflictedyard.com>) Edgy culture site with entertainment listings.

Dancehall Reggae (www.dancehallreggae.com) The place to go for the latest on the island's music scene.

Jamaica Gleaner (www.jamaica-gleaner.com) Best news source from the island's most reliable newspaper.

Jamaica National Heritage Trust (www.jnht.com) Excellent guide to Jamaica's history and heritage.

Jamaica Yellow Pages (www.jamaicayp.com) Handy online presentation of the Jamaican phone directory.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Succinct summaries on travel in Jamaica, plus the popular Thorn Tree bulletin board, travel news and a complete online store.

Visit Jamaica (www.visitjamaica.com) The tourist board's presentation of Jamaica to travelers, with plenty of destination, attractions and lodging information.

What's On Jamaica (www.whatsonjamaica.com) Calendar-based event and entertainment listings.

LANGUAGE

Officially, English is the spoken language. In reality, Jamaica is a bilingual country, and English is far more widely understood than spoken. The unofficial lingo is patois (*pa-twah*), a musical dialect with a staccato rhythm and cadence, laced with salty idioms and wonderfully and wittily compressed proverbs.

Patois evolved from Creole English and a twisted alchemy of the mother tongue peppered with African, Portuguese and Spanish terms and, in the last century, Rastafarian slang. Linguists agree that it is more than simplified pidgin English, and it has its own identifiable syntax.

Patois is deepest in rural areas, where many people do not know much standard English. Although it is mostly the lingua franca of the poor, all sectors of Jamaica understand patois, and even polite, educated Jamaicans lapse into patois at unguarded moments.

Most Jamaicans vary the degree of their patois depending on who they're speaking to.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Acceptable health care is available in most major cities and larger towns throughout Jamaica, but may be hard to locate in rural areas. To find a good local doctor, your best bet is to ask the management of the hotel where you are staying or to contact your embassy in Kingston or Montego Bay.

Many doctors expect payment in cash, regardless of whether or not you have travel health insurance. If you do develop a life-threatening medical problem, you'll probably want to be evacuated to a country with state-of-the-art medical care. Since this may cost tens of thousands of dollars, be sure you have insurance to cover this before you depart.

Many pharmacies are well supplied, but important medications may not be consistently available. Be sure to bring along adequate supplies of all prescriptions.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Jamaican dollar, the 'jay,' which uses the same symbol as the US dollar (\$). Jamaican currency is issued in bank notes of J\$50, J\$100, J\$500 and J\$1000. The official rate of exchange fluctuates daily. Prices for hotels and valuable items are usually quoted in US dollars, which are widely accepted.

Commercial banks have branches throughout the island. Those in major towns maintain a foreign exchange booth. Traveler's checks are widely accepted in Jamaica, although some hotels, restaurants and exchange bureaus charge a hefty fee for cashing them. Most city bank branches throughout Jamaica now have 24-hour ATMs linked to international networks such as Cirrus or Plus. In more remote areas, look for ATMs at gas stations.

TELEPHONE

Jamaica's country code is ☎ 876. To call Jamaica from the US, dial ☎ 1-876 + the seven-digit local number. From elsewhere, dial your country's international dialing code, then ☎ 876 and the local number.

For calls within the same parish in Jamaica, just dial the local number. Between parishes, dial ☎ 1 + the local number. We have included only the seven-digit local number in Jamaica listings in this chapter.

Jamaica has a fully automated, digital telephone system operated by **Cable & Wireless Jamaica** (☎ 888-225-5295; www.cwjamaica.com), which has offices islandwide where you can make direct calls.

Major hotels have direct-dial calling; elsewhere you may need to go through the hotel operator, or call from the front desk. Hotels add a 15% government tax, plus a service charge, often at ridiculous rates.

Cell Phones

You can bring your own cellular phone into Jamaica (GSM or CDMA), but if your phone is locked by a specific carrier, don't bother. Another option is to purchase an inexpensive cellular phone (from US\$35) at a **Digicel** (☎ 888-344-4235; www.digiceljamaica.com) or **bMobile** (☎ 888-225-5295; www.cwmobile.com/jamaica) outlet

and purchase a prepaid phone card. These are sold in denominations of up to J\$1000, and you'll find them at many gas stations and stationery shops.

Phone Cards

Public phones require a prepaid phone card, available from Cable & Wireless Jamaica offices, retail stores, hotels, banks, and other outlets displaying the 'Phonecards on Sale' sign. The card is available in denominations of J\$20 to J\$500. For international calls, you can also buy WorldTalk calling cards, good for use on any phone, including public call boxes and cellular phones.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Jamaica Tourist Board** (JTB; www.visitjamaica.com) has offices in key cities around the world, where you can request maps and literature, including hotel brochures; however, they do not serve as reservation agencies.

In Jamaica, the JTB has offices in Kingston (p223), Montego Bay (p239) and Port Antonio (p232).

VISAS

For stays of six months or less, no visas are required for citizens of the EU, the US, Commonwealth countries, Mexico, Japan and Israel. Nationals of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Greece and Japan don't need a visa for stays of up to 30 days.

All other nationals require visas (nationals of most countries can obtain a visa on arrival, provided they are holding valid onward or return tickets and evidence of sufficient funds).

TRANSPORTATION

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Entering Jamaica

All visitors must arrive with a valid passport. US citizens must show a valid US passport when traveling from the Caribbean in order to re-enter the US (see the boxed text, p830).

Immigration formalities require every person to show a return or ongoing airline ticket when arriving in Jamaica.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- **Ambulance** ☎ 011
- **Fire** ☎ 110
- **Police** ☎ 119

Air

The majority of international visitors to Jamaica arrive at Montego Bay's **Donald Sangster International Airport** (MBJ; ☎ 979-1034, 979-1035; www.mbjairport.com). In Kingston, **Norman Manley International Airport** (KIN; ☎ 924-8452, 888-247-7678; www.manley-airport.com.jm), around 11km southeast of downtown, handles international flights. The following airlines serve these airports:

KINGSTON

Air Jamaica (☎ 888-359-2475; www.airjamaica.com) Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Curaçao, Fort Lauderdale, Grand Cayman, Havana, London, Miami, New York, Orlando, Philadelphia, Toronto

American Airlines (☎ 800-433-7300; www.aa.com) Boston, Fort Worth, Miami, New York

British Airways (www.ba.com) London, Miami

Continental Airlines (☎ 800-523-3273; www.continental.com) Newark

Delta (☎ 800-221-1212; www.delta.com) New York

MONTEGO BAY

Air Canada (☎ 888-247-2262; www.aircanada.com) Toronto

Air Jamaica (☎ 888-359-2475; www.airjamaica.com) Atlanta, Baltimore, Barbados, Bonaire, Chicago, Curaçao, Fort Lauderdale, Grenada, London, Miami, Nassau, New York, Orlando, Philadelphia, St Lucia, Toronto

American Airlines (☎ 800-433-7300; www.aa.com) Boston, Fort Worth, Miami, New York

British Airways (☎ 800-247-9297; www.ba.com) Miami

Continental Airlines (☎ 800-523-3273; www.continental.com) Newark

Delta (☎ 800-221-1212; www.delta.com) Atlanta

Northwest (☎ 800-225-2525; www.nwa.com) Detroit, Minneapolis

US Airways (☎ 800-428-4322; www.usair.com) Charlotte, Philadelphia

Virgin Atlantic (☎ 800-821-5438; www.virgin-atlantic.com) London

Sea

Jamaica is a popular destination on the cruising roster, mainly for passenger liners but also for private yachters.

If all you're after is a one-day taste of Jamaica, then consider arriving by cruise ship. Port visits usually take the form of one-day stopovers at either Ocho Rios or Montego Bay. See p830 for more information on cruises.

Many yachters make the trip to Jamaica from North America. Upon arrival in Jamaica, you *must* clear customs and immigration at Montego Bay, Kingston, Ocho Rios or Port Antonio.

In addition, you'll need to clear customs at *each* port of call.

GETTING AROUND**Air**

There are four domestic airports: **Tinson Pen Aerodrome** (☎ 924-8452; Marcus Garvey Dr) in Kingston, **Boscobel Aerodrome** (☎ 975-3101) near Ocho Rios, Negril Aerodrome and Ken Jones Aerodrome at Port Antonio. Montego Bay's **Donald Sangster International Airport** (MBJ; ☎ 979-1034, 979-1035; www.mbjairport.com) has a domestic terminal adjacent to the international terminal.

Air Jamaica Express (☎ 922-4661, in the USA 800-523-5585; www.airjamaica.com/express.asp) Operates a scheduled service between Kingston, Montego Bay and Ocho Rios on a daily basis.

TimAir (www.timair.net) Montego Bay (☎ 952-2516, 979-1114); Negril (☎ 957-5374) This air taxi service serves Montego Bay, Negril, Ocho Rios, Port Antonio, Kingston and Mandeville.

Bicycle

Mountain bikes and 'beach cruisers' can be rented at most major resorts (US\$15 to US\$30 per day). However, road conditions are hazardous, and Jamaican drivers are not very considerate to cyclists. For serious touring, bring your own mountain or multipurpose bike. You'll need sturdy wheels to handle the potholed roads.

Bus

Traveling by public transportation could be the best – *or worst!* – adventure of your trip to Jamaica. The island's extensive transportation network links virtually every village and comprises several options that range from standard public buses to 'coasters' and 'route taxis.' These depart from and arrive at each town's transportation station, which is usually near the main market. Locals can direct you to

the appropriate vehicle, which should have its destination marked above the front window (for buses) or on its side.

COASTER

'Coasters' (private minibuses) have traditionally been the workhorses of Jamaica's regional public transportation system. All major towns and virtually every village in the country is served.

Licensed minibuses display red license plates with the initials PPV (public passenger vehicle) or have a Jamaican Union of Travelers Association (JUTA) insignia. JUTA buses are exclusively for tourists. They usually depart their point of origin when they're full, often overflowing, with people hanging from the open doors. Guard your luggage carefully against theft.

PUBLIC BUS

Kingston and Montego Bay have modern municipal bus systems. Throughout the island, bus stops are located at most road intersections along the routes, but you can usually flag down a bus anywhere (except in major cities, where they only pause at designated stops). When you want to get off, shout 'One stop!' The conductor will usually echo your request with, 'Let off!' The following fares apply to public buses: Kingston metropolitan region US\$1; Montego Bay licensed area US\$0.50; and rural areas US\$0.25 flat rate, plus US\$0.05 per kilometer.

ROUTE TAXI

These communal taxis are the most universal mode of public transportation, reaching every part of the country. They operate like coasters (and cost about the same), picking up as many people as they can squeeze in along their specified routes. A 30-minute ride typically costs about US\$2; a one-hour ride costs about US\$3.

Most are white Toyota Corolla station wagons marked by red license plates. They should have 'Route Taxi' marked on the front door, and they are not to be confused with identical licensed taxis, which charge more.

Car

Despite the hazards of driving, exploring by rental car can be a joy. There are some fabulously scenic journeys, and with your own wheels you can get as far off the beaten track

as you wish, discovering the magic of Jamaican culture beyond the pale of the touristy areas.

A paved coastal highway circles the entire island; in the southern parishes it runs about 32km inland. Main roads cross the central mountain chains, north to south, linking all of the main towns. A web of minor roads, country lanes and dirt tracks provides access to more-remote areas.

DRIVER'S LICENSE

To drive in Jamaica, you must have a valid International Driver's License (IDL) or a current license for your home country or state, valid for up to six months. You can obtain an IDL by applying with your current license to any Automobile Association office.

FUEL & SPARE PARTS

Many gas stations close after 7pm or so. In rural areas, stations usually close on Sunday. At time of research, gasoline cost about US\$3 per liter.

RENTAL

Several major international car-rental companies operate in Jamaica, along with dozens of local firms. Rates begin at about US\$45 per day and can run as high as US\$125, depending on the vehicle. Some companies include unlimited mileage, while others set a limit and charge a fee for excess kilometers driven. Most firms require a deposit of at least US\$500, but will accept a credit card imprint. Renters must be 21 years of age (some companies will rent only to those 25 years of age or older).

There are rental companies in large towns, including Kingston (p230), Montego Bay (p245), Ocho Rios (p238) and Negril (p250).

ROAD CONDITIONS

The main roads are usually in reasonable condition, despite numerous potholes. Many secondary roads (B-roads) are in appalling condition and are best tackled with a 4WD. Most roads are narrow, with frequent bends.

ROAD HAZARDS

Driving in Jamaica is dangerous. Licenses can be bought without taking a driving test, and the roads are governed by an infatuation with speed completely incongruous with the rest of Jamaican life. Look out for people along the roads or animals that might dash in front of you, and pay extra attention at roundabouts,

where driving on the left is not always adhered to. Pedestrians should beware of the many drivers who would as soon hit you as slow down.

ROAD RULES

Always drive on the left. Remember: 'Keep left, and you'll always be right.' Here's another local saying worth memorizing: 'De left side is de right side; de right side is suicide!'

The speed limit is 30mph (about 50km/h) in towns and 50mph (around 80km/h) on highways. Jamaica has a compulsory seatbelt law for passengers in the front seat.

Taxi

Fares are expensive, but you can share the cost with other passengers. Meters are generally not used. It is possible to negotiate a fare that is less than the stated price; agree on a fare before getting into a taxi. Rates are posted at some hotels. Only use taxis with red license plates bearing a PPV designation.

Don't be misled by drivers who may want to take you somewhere other than where you want to go. Some drivers receive incentives from establishments for delivering customers.