

Ocho Rios & North Coast



Five hundred years after Christopher Columbus dropped anchor on the north-central coast, the region is booming with tourists. Ocho Rios, the main town in the area, is the island's second-busiest cruise-ship berth, disgorging almost half a million visitors each year to shop and catch glimpses of Dunn's River Falls (Jamaica's highest-grossing tourist attraction) and Dolphin Cove.

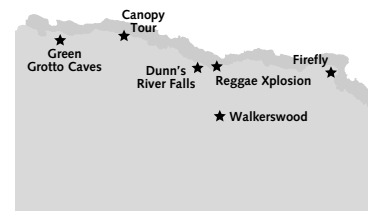
However, it's very easy to shake the pre-fab commercialism and enjoy some of the island's most enduring attractions. The town itself, backed by green hills and fronted by a wide, scalloped beach and a reef-sheltered harbor, boasts an excellent reggae museum, several fine botanic gardens looking out over the bay and an exuberant nightlife.

It's also a good base for exploring the area. Zigzagging inland through Fern Gully beneath a canopy of trees, you'll soon realize why St Ann's is known as 'the garden parish.' The bucolic, hilly terrain offers excellent vistas to pilgrims on the way to Nine Mile, the birthplace of Bob Marley, or foodies seeking Walkerswood and the mysteries of jerk sauce.

East of Ocho Rios, the quaint town of Oracabessa is home to Goldeneye, Ian Fleming's former home and now one of Jamaica's most elegant hotels. Further along the coast brings you to Firefly, Noel Coward's former home. Along the way, you can take in a working plantation, or enjoy some of Jamaica's best snorkeling and diving. West of Ocho Rios, along the well-paved road to Montego Bay, lies a succession of historic coastal towns like Runaway Bay, Discovery Bay and St Ann's Bay, where Columbus decamped.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Dunn's River Falls** Come early to avoid the teeming masses and climb one of the world's most famous waterfalls (p152).
- **Walkerswood** Discover the mysteries of jerk at this world-renowned producer of sauces, marinades and chutneys (p166).
- **Canopy tour** Make like Tarzan and zip from platform to platform in the Cranbrook Flower Forest (p171).
- **Firefly** Savor the jaw-dropping view from author Noel Coward's well-preserved former home (p163).
- **Reggae Xplosion** If you can't pay homage to Bob Marley's final resting place at Nine Mile, this excellent museum captures reggae in all its vitality (p149).



■ AREA: 1834 SQ KM

■ OCHO RIOS DEC DAILY HIGH TEMPERATURE: 26°C

HISTORY

The name Ocho Rios is a corruption of the Spanish term *chorreros*, which means, roughly, 'swift water.' The area was one of the last strongholds of Spanish dominion over the island, and the site of Spain's last stand in Jamaica can be found at Rio Nuevo, east of modern-day Ocho Rios. It was here that the British instituted huge sugar and pimento (allspice) plantations, crops that defined the region until the mid-20th century, when bauxite mining and tourism took over.

CLIMATE

The north central coast has some of the island's most predictable weather – that is, predictably hot and humid. Temperatures stay within a 16° to 30°C range throughout the year. The rainiest periods occur in May to June and September to October.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The majority of international air travelers fly into Donald Sangster International Airport in Montego Bay, while domestic charter passengers fly into Boscobel Aerodrome, 16km east of town. Ocho Rios is also Jamaica's second-busiest cruise-ship port. With its central-north-coast location, land travelers have no trouble finding transport to and from town via minibus or route taxi.

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 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 (street vendors) and would-be tour guides, 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. Yet 'Ochi's' beaches lack the splendor of MoBay's, it has nothing approaching the latter's downtown historic center, and the disembarkation dock here is so centrally located as to command the town's focus. 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.

Note, however, that the cruise ships are generally gone by nightfall and seldom dock on weekends. The hordes can be avoided with a little planning, and if you're looking for a good base for exploring the north coast and the scenic interior of St Ann's Parrish, 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.

HISTORY

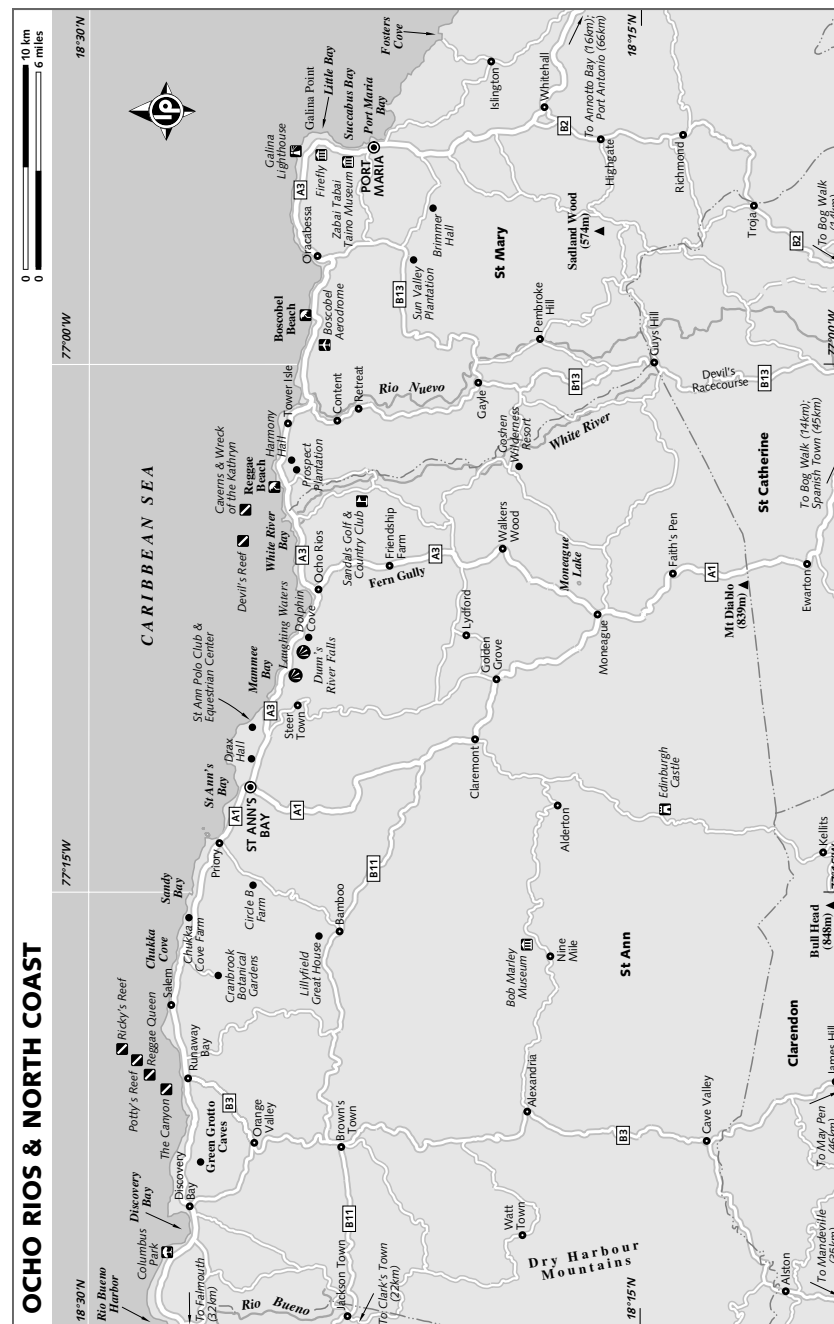
Although plantations developed during colonial times, Ocho Rios never evolved as a fruit-shipping port of any consequence. Things began to change in the 1940s when Reynolds Jamaica Mines built the deep-water Reynolds Pier west of town. An overhead conveyor belt still carries bauxite ore 10km from the Reynolds open-cast mines at Lydford, in the hills south of town.

Nonetheless, Ocho Rios was still just a quiet village in the 1960s when the Jamaican government formed the St Ann Development Council and then launched a systematic development. It dredged the harbor and built a small marina, reclaimed the shore, brought in sand for Turtle Beach, and built shopping complexes and housing schemes. By the early 1980s, Ocho Rios' character had been established: a meld of American-style fast-food franchises, nondescript shopping malls, an enclave of mediocre hotels in town, and more tasteful, upscale English-style hotels a discrete distance east. The construction of Island Village, a major shopping and entertainment complex (see p149) has spruced up 'Ochi.'

ORIENTATION

Greater Ocho Rios extends for 6km between Dunn's River Falls, 3km to the west of the town center, and Harmony Hall, 6km to the east.

The main coastal road, the A3, passes just south of the town center via a two-lane highway. West of the roundabout (traffic circle) at Milford Rd the A3 becomes DaCosta Dr; east of the roundabout it is known officially as the Ocho Rios Redevelopment Rd. South of the roundabout, Milford Rd is a trunk of the A3 that leads to Fern Gully and, eventually,



Kingston. The major thoroughfare downtown is Main St. Lined with hotels and shops, it runs in an S-curve along Turtle Bay. Main St and DaCosta Dr meet to the east at a clock tower that marks the center of town. Main St merges to its east and west ends with the A3, at Island Village and IRIE FM, respectively.

INFORMATION

Bookstores

Bookland (☎ 675-8791; novtraco@cwjamaica.com; Island Village) The largest selection of books, including a strong selection of Caribbean-themed titles.

Everybody's Bookshop (☎ 974-2932; Shop 44, Ocean Village Plaza) A smaller inventory of titles and stationary supplies.

Emergency

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

Internet Access

EZ Access Internet Café (☎ 974-7038; 67B Ocean Village Plaza; per 15min/30min/1hr US\$2/4/6) Located within a store called Sensations.

Internet Jungle (☎ 974-9906; Shop 13-15, Island Plaza; per 15min/30min/1hr US\$2.50/5/10, all day US\$20) Part of the Cable & Wireless office, this place provides the fastest and most reliable access.

Jerkin'@Taj (☎ 795-0862; per 15min/30min/1hr US\$2/4/8) You'll find it in Taj Mahal shopping center.

Laundry

Carib Laundromat (☎ 974-7631; Shop 6, Carib Arcade, Main St; load US\$5) Offers a wash-and-dry service.

Library

Public library (☎ 974-2588; Milford Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat; internet access 30min US\$1)

Medical Services

St Ann's Bay, about 11km west of Ocho Rios, has the nearest **hospital** (☎ 972-2272). A doctor's visit can be arranged by your hotel's front desk.

Island Radiology (☎ 790-0150; Evelyn St near One Love Park) X-ray and ultrasound diagnostics.

Ocho Rios Health Clinic (☎ 974-2691; Graham St; ☎ 8am-4:30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-4pm Fri) Expect long queues at this public clinic.

Ocho Rios Pharmacy (☎ 974-2398; Shop 27, Ocean Village Plaza)

Pinegrove Pharmacy (☎ 974-5586; Pinegrove Plaza)

Money

There are numerous banks. All have foreign-exchange facilities and ATMs. There are also ATM booths next to Island Grill and Mother's bakery.

CIBC Jamaica Banking Centre (☎ 974-2824; 29 Main St)

National Commercial Bank (☎ 974-2522; 40 Main St)

Scotiabank (☎ 974-2081; Main St)

Western Union (☎ 926-2454; Shop 3, Pier View Plaza; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Arranges urgent remittance of money.

Post

FedEx (☎ 795-3723; 17 Main St)

Post office (Main St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) Opposite the Ocho Rios Craft Park; you can send faxes and telegrams.

Telephone

There are payphones aplenty downtown. WorldTalk cards are available from most gift shops.

Cable & Wireless office (☎ 974-9906; Shop 13-15, Island Plaza) For faxes, telegrams and telephone service.

Call Direct Centre (☎ 974-7594; 74 Main St) Economical calls overseas.

Digicell (☎ 795-4974; 70 Main St) East of the clock tower, selling cell phones and phonecards.

Tourist Offices

TPDCo Tourist Information (TPDCo; ☎ 974-7705, 974-3866; Shop 3, Ocean Village, Main St; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Mon-Thu, to 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, but they are open only when cruise ships are in port.

Travel Agencies

International Travel Service (☎ 974-9246; Ocean Village Plaza)

Trafalgar Travel (☎ 974-5108; Shop 2, cnr DaCosta Dr & Graham St)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The biggest annoyance in Ocho Rios is the persistent entreaties of hustlers and would-be tour guides (see opposite), who are especially thick along Main St and around the clock tower and DaCosta Dr.

Otherwise, try to avoid the area immediately behind the produce market, south of the clock tower. Use caution at night anywhere, but particularly on James Ave, a poorly lit

street with several nightspots and a hang-out strip of ill repute.

SIGHTS Beaches

The main beach of Ocho Rios is the long crescent of **Turtle Beach** (adult/child US\$1/0.50; ☎ 6am-6pm), stretching east from the Turtle Towers condominiums to the Renaissance Jamaica Grande Resort. There are changing rooms, and palms for shade.

Island Village Beach (admission US\$3; ☎ 6am-6pm), located at the west end of Main St, is a peaceful, smaller beach that offers lockers (US\$5), towels (US\$5) and beach chairs and umbrellas (US\$5 apiece).

Both beaches offer a complete range of water sports (see p153).

Immediately west of Island Village Beach is **Columbus Foot**, a tiny fishermen's beach with colorful pirogues (fishing boats) and nets festooning shade trees.

Mahogany Beach, 1km east of the town center, is a small and charming beach.

Turtle River Park

Near Island Village on Main St, this welcome new **green space** (☎ 8am-6pm) in the middle of downtown represents a positive new trend in Jamaica's approach to urban development. The lushly gardened park with manicured lawns also provides a zone free from the hustle of the main drag.

Island Village

Since its 2002 opening, this self-contained **entertainment park** (☎ 974-8353/4/5/6; www.islandjamaica.com; ☎ 9am-midnight), at the junction of Main St and DaCosta Dr, has changed the face of Ocho Rios. The 2-hectare development, brainchild of resort and media visionary Chris Blackwell, claims to resemble a 'Jamaican coastal village.' It doesn't. Quibbles aside, you will find a peaceful beach, upscale craft shops, a cinema, Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville and Blue Runnings (both with bars and restaurants), a video-casino, Reggae Xplosion (see right) and a village green and amphitheater for live performances. The fences around the place reveal that this is not a public space, but rather a kind of daycare center for skittish, newly arrived cruise-ship passengers who lack the will – or the confidence – to explore the streets of Ocho Rios. Admission to the

village is free, but you will be charged to use the beach or visit Reggae Xplosion, and for some special events.

Reggae Xplosion

This impressive **museum** (☎ 675-8895; Island Village; admission US\$7; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) provides 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. It features posters, photographs and videos. Headphones let you listen to sounds of each era. There's even a makeshift artists' recording studio with Lee 'Scratch' Perry's original sound-gear. The entrance fee includes a guided tour.

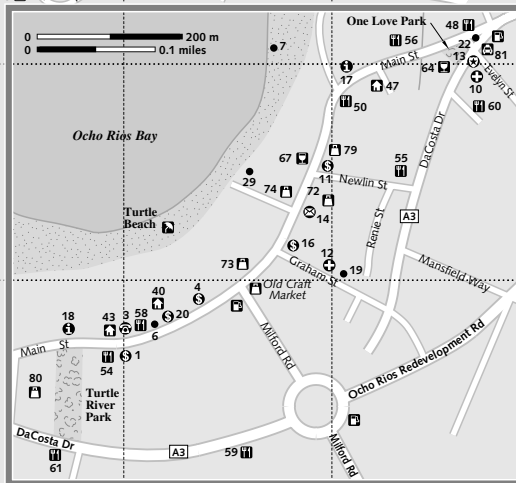
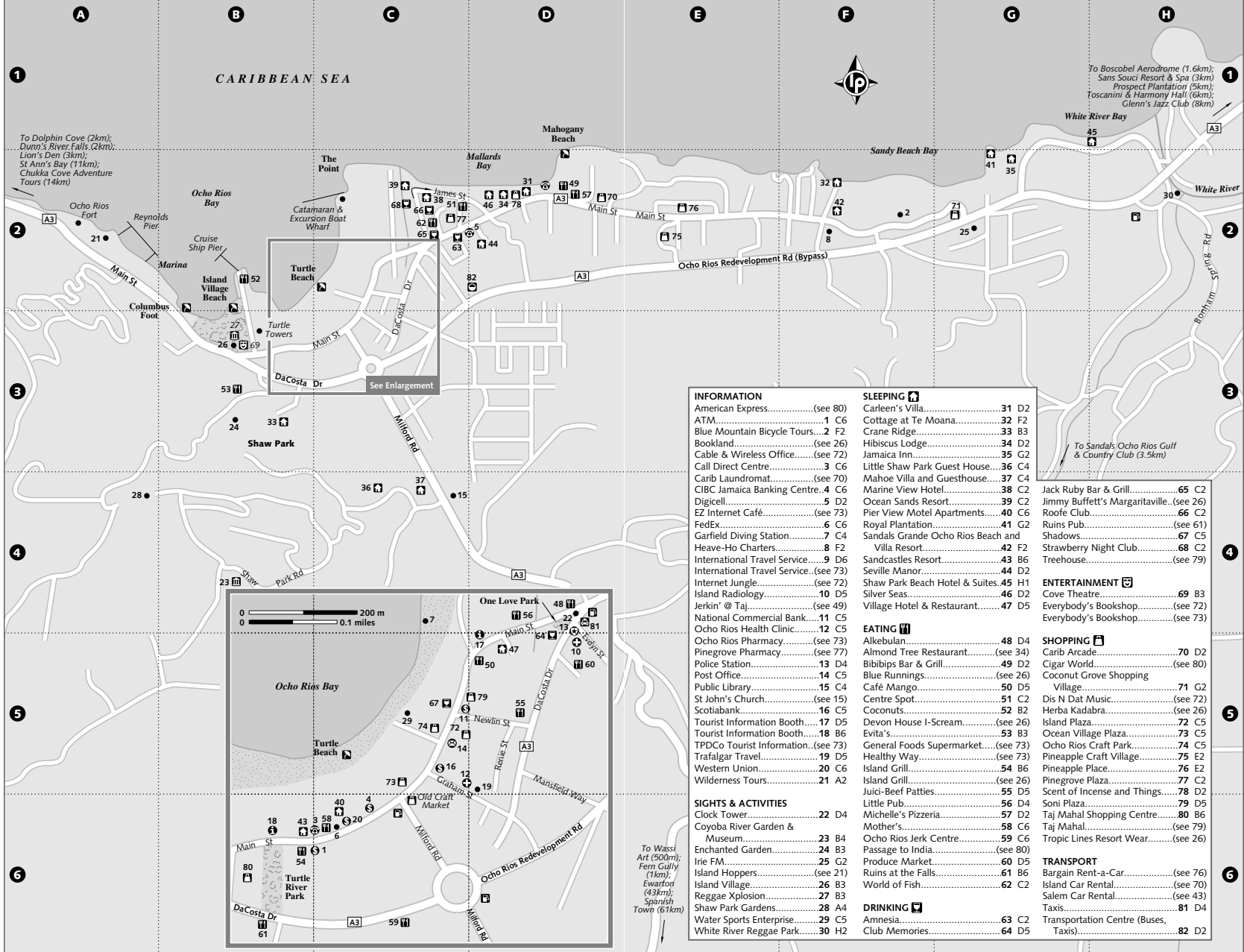
Gardens

With walk-ways and trails leading through lush gardens with streams, cascades and pools filled with carp, crayfish and turtles, **Coyaba River Garden** is a paradise. *Coyaba* is an Arawak word for 'heaven' or 'paradise.' The **Coyaba Museum** (☎ 974-6235; www.coyabagardens.com; Shaw Park Rd; admission US\$5; ☎ 8am-6pm) traces Jamaica's heritage from early Arawak days to independence. There's a gift store, vegetarian restaurant, waterfall and art gallery. Coyaba is just shy of 2km west of St John's Church (on the A3), not far from Shaw Park Gardens; follow the signs. Admission includes a 30-minute guided tour.

The **Shaw Park Gardens** (☎ 974-2723; shawparkbc@cwjamaica.com; Shaw Park Rd; admission US\$10; ☎ 8am-5pm) is a tropical fantasia of ferns and bromeliads, palms and exotic shrubs, spread out over 11 hectares 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. There's a bar and restaurant. The gardens are signed from opposite the public library on the A3.

The 8-hectare **Enchanted Gardens** (☎ 795-2750; Eden Bower Rd; admission US\$12; ☎ 8am-5pm) are an Edenlike setting featuring a lush landscaped park with 14 waterfalls, huge pools, a fruit orchard and separate fern, spice, cactus and lily gardens. It also has a walk-in aviary. Guided tours are offered.

OCHO RIOS



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OCHO RIOS & NORTH COAST

OCHO RIOS & NORTH COAST

Wassi Art

Family-owned **Wassi Art** (☎ 974-5044; www.wassiart.com; Bougainvillea Dr; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) employs over fifty artists to make its colorful, richly decorated terra-cotta pottery. It is named for the 'wass' wasp, or potter wasp, which makes a mud pot for each of her eggs and stuffs it with a caterpillar for food for her hatchlings. Free tours are offered, detailing the entire process including painting and firing. A store sells work (US\$5 to US\$5000). The owners will ship.

Wassi Art is in the Great Pond District, signed from Milford Rd (the A3), from where it's a convoluted (but signed) drive.

Dunn's River Falls

Widely held to be one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the world, these famous falls (☎ 974-2857; www.dunnriverfallsja.com; adult/child US\$15/12; ☎ 8:30am-4pm Sat-Tue, 7am-5pm Wed-Fri), on the A3, 3km west of town, are Jamaica's top-grossing tourist attraction.

As long as you're not expecting a peaceful communion with nature, a morning at Dunn's River Falls can be an enjoyable and invigorating experience. Join hands in a daisy chain at the bottom and clamber up the tiers of limestone that staircase 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 rain forest and a number of magnificent tree specimens.

Today, the place seems more like a man-made theme park than a natural wonder. The St Ann Development Company sees fit to spike the entrance fee every year or so, knowing full well that climbing the falls is a non-negotiable item on many visitors' to-do lists. As a result, you are likely to encounter great throngs of people.

You must buy a ticket at the roadside ticket booth, then follow the stairs down to the beach. The powerful current can sweep your feet from the slippery rocks, but your sure-footed guide (a tip is expected) will hold you by the hand and carry your camera. You climb at your own risk – yes, occasionally people hurt themselves. There's a first-aid station. You can always exit to the side at a convenient point if your nerves give out.

It's a 30-minute climb, and swimwear is essential. There are changing rooms, lockers (US\$5) and rubber booties for rent (US\$5). It's best to leave any valuables in

your hotel safe, as the lockers are reputed to be unsecure.

The facility now includes a mento yard for live music, an orchid garden, a children's playground, a crafts market, jerk stalls, a gazebo for weddings, snack bars and a restaurant. As you leave the complex, you are forced to walk through a maze-like craft market where the hard sell is laid on thick.

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). Avoid Easter.

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

Dolphin Cove

This popular cove (☎ 974-5335; www.dolphincovejamaica.com; admission US\$45, 'touch encounter' US\$67, 'swim encounter' US\$129, 'swim with dolphins' US\$195, 'swim, hold & feed the sharks' \$119; ☎ 8:30am-5:30pm), adjacent to Dunn's River Falls along the A3, allows you to swim with bottlenose dolphins.

Three dolphin packages are offered, notably 'Swim with Dolphins,' which grants you 30 minutes in the dolphin lagoon. Professional trainers direct the sociable dolphins, who display an almost goofy desire to please. For the most expensive experience, the thrill-seeker grabs the dorsal fins of two dolphins and is lifted from the water. Even more adventurous visitors can touch and feed sharks – under the Cove's watchful supervision. And if direct contact doesn't appeal, basic admission includes an aquarium and pools with tropical fish, sharks, stingrays and eels, as well as a mini zoo with exotic species to be experienced on a 'Jungle Trail.'

If the prices don't deter you from visiting, you should also consider the wellbeing of the dolphins. The **Jamaica Environmental Trust** (JET; www.jamentrust.org) opposes the display of captive marine mammals, as mortality rates increase during capture, transport and captivity. The trade and harvesting of wild dolphins also has an adverse impact on local populations (most of the ones on display in Jamaica were captured in Cuban waters). At the time of writing, JET has been trying to ensure proper governmental oversight of the facility and prevent another dolphinarium, proposed near Lucea.

Reservations are advisable in winter. Bring a towel and leave your jewelry at the hotel.

Prospect Plantation

If you've been wondering why St Ann is called 'the garden parish,' you'll find your answer at this beautiful old hilltop great house and 405-hectare working plantation (☎ 994-1058; A3; tours US\$32; ☎ tours 10:30am, 2pm & 3:30pm Mon-Sat), 5km east of town. On a pleasant, educational tour you'll travel by tractor-powered jitney through scenic grounds among banana, cassava, cocoa, coconut, coffee, pineapple and pimento. Three horseback tours are also offered (US\$58) through a gorgeous working plantation with excellent views of the sea and countryside. For US\$89, you can take the tour on a camel.

Both Minibuses and route taxis (US\$1 to US\$2) head east on the A3 toward Prospect Plantation from the Ocho Rios transportation center, south of the clock tower.

Harmony Hall

A beautiful great house by the A3 about 6km east of town, **Harmony Hall** (☎ 974-2870; www.harmonyhall.com; ☎ 10am-6pm, Tue-Sun) dates to 1886 when it was a Methodist manse that adjoined a pimento estate. The restored structure is made of cut stone, with a wooden upper story trimmed with gingerbread fretwork and a green shingled roof with a spire. Reborn as an arts-and-crafts showcase, it holds shows in the Front Gallery throughout the year; an exhibition season runs mid-November to Easter. The Back Gallery features fine arts and crafts. An acclaimed restaurant on the ground floor serves outstanding Italian fare (see p157).

ACTIVITIES

Golf

Tee up at **Sandals Golf & Country Club** (☎ 975-0119; Bonham Spring Rd; green fees US\$100; ☎ 7am-5pm), in the hills, 6km southeast of town and signed off the A3. One of the most scenic in Jamaica, this is a 6035m, par-71 course with a driving range, putting green, and clubhouse. Caddies (9/18 holes US\$12/17) are mandatory, and cart rental (9/18 holes US\$25/40) is recommended. Club rental (US\$25 to US\$45) and lessons (per hour US\$40) are also offered.

Water Sports

Virtually the entire shoreline east of Ocho Rios to Galina Point is fringed by a reef, and

it's great for **snorkeling** and **scuba diving**. One of the best sections is Devil's Reef, a pinnacle that drops more than 60m. Nurse sharks are abundant at Caverns, a shallow reef about 1km east of the White River estuary; it has many tunnels plus an ex-minesweeper, the *Kathryn*. You can arrange dives and snorkeling at the **Garfield Diving Station** (☎ 395-7023; 50 Main St, Turtle Beach; 1-tank dive US\$50, snorkeling tour US\$35). Most resorts have their own scuba facilities.

For an extensive range of water sports and touring opportunities, **Water Sports Enterprise** (☎ 974-2244; 50 Main St, Turtle Beach) offers activities including glass-bottom boat rides (US\$30), snorkeling at Marine Garden (US\$25) or Paradise Reef (US\$30), windsurfing (US\$30), sunfish sailing (US\$80), jet ski (US\$60/100 per half/full hour), scuba diving (1-/2-/4-tank dives US\$45/70/140) or lessons (US\$20), and parasailing (single/tandem US\$50/100). Beach chairs, umbrellas and lockers are available to rent (US\$5 each).

At **Island Village Beach** you can rent snorkeling gear (US\$10 per day), kayaks (single/double US\$8.50/10 per hour), windsurfing gear (US\$40 for 30 minutes) and Hobie-cats (US\$30 for 30 minutes).

Upscale hotels also offer water sports.

Sport-fishing boats are available for charter from the marina. For a chartered sunset cruise, try **Heave-Ho Charters** (☎ 974-5376; Main St; per person US\$40).

TOURS

The Ocho Rios area offers more organized outdoor adventure tours than any other Jamaican resort area. Most tours include transportation from area hotels.

There are several options for **horseback riding** tours. Prospect Plantation (left) offers guided tours (US\$58) through a gorgeous working plantation. **Hooves** (☎ 972-0905; www.hoovesjamaica.com; 61 Windsor Rd, St Ann's Bay; US\$55-125) offers guided horseback tours in three categories: beach, mountain and rain-forest trails. Reservations are required. The 'rain-forest honeymoon ride,' for experienced riders, is the most expensive (recent matrimony not required).

The most popular horseback adventure company, **Chukka Caribbean Adventure Tours** (☎ 972-2506; www.chukkaacaribbean.com/jamaica; US\$76) offers a three-hour horseback tour that passes through several old sugar plantations and finishes up on a private beach. The tour

culminates with a bareback ride into the sea. Chukka Caribbean also operates a number of other recommended tours (p170).

These tour providers offer hotel transfers:

Blue Mountain Bicycle Tours (☎ 974-7075; www.bmtoursja.com; bicycle tour adult/child US\$93/60; 121 Main St) Offers a downhill cycling tour in the Blue Mountains.

Calypso Rafting (☎ 974-2527; www.calypsorafting.com; PO Box 54, Ocho Rios; per raft US\$50, inner tube per person US\$20) Bamboo raft/inner tubing on the White River.

Island Hoppers (☎ 974-1285; helicopter@mail.infochan.com; 120 Main St; tours per person 20/30/60min US\$75/115/225, minimum 3 paid seats; charters per hr US\$720) Aerial tours by helicopter.

Wilderness Tours (☎ 969-6653; www.wildernessatv.com; Reynolds Pier, Main St; tours per person US\$59-80) All-terrain vehicle tours into the mountains and through the forest.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Jamaican Carnival (www.jamaicacarnival.com, www.bacchanaljamaica.com), held island-wide over Easter, is celebrated in a big way in Ocho Rios. At Chukka Cove (p170) a riotous all-night party featuring soca music called Bacchanal is held; other venues throughout the area also stage events. See p83 for more information.

The **Ocho Rios Jazz Festival** takes place in June. Check out p17 of the Events Calendar for more information.

The **Harmony Hall Anniversary Crafts Fair** is held every November. See p153 for details on Harmony Hall.

SLEEPING

Lodging options in and around Ocho Rios include simple guest houses, a smattering of good midrange options and a large number of resorts. Options also include self-catering condominium resorts and fully staffed villas. If you choose one of the options on James Ave, exercise caution at night.

The accommodations below extend westward to Dunn's River Falls and eastward to Harmony Hall.

Villas of varying ranges of opulence are represented by **Sun Villas** (in the USA ☎ 888-625-6007; www.sunvillas.com) and **Jamaican Association of Villas & Apartments** (JAVA; ☎ 974-2508; www.villasinjamaica.com). See p277 for more information on renting villas.

Budget

Mahoe Villa and Guesthouse (☎ 974-6613; 11 Shaw Park Rd; r without bath US\$20-30, r with bath US\$40, r with bath & Jacuzzi US\$75; (P)) If you've been looking high and low for a decent US\$20 room, this is it. On the road to Shaw Park Gardens is this brilliantly priced guest house 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. There's a communal kitchen, cable TV, and several hammocks strung up in the yard.

Marine View Hotel (☎ 974-5753; www.marineviewhotel.com; 9 James Ave; s/d US\$30/70; (P)) This no-frills place has 25 nondescript rooms. And while there's not much ambience, its central location makes amends for this. Top-floor rooms offer a glimpse (barely) of the sea. Superior rooms have air-con; deluxe rooms also have TV. There's a good-value restaurant, a game room and an outdoor pool.

Carleen's Villa (☎ 974-5431; 85A Main St; r US\$40; (P)) A serviceable budget option, popular with European backpackers, located east of the town center toward Mahogany Beach. Rooms, some of which are a tad gloomy, are fan-cooled and have cable TV. A stairway leads to a communal terrace overlooking the sea, perfect for a spontaneous frolic; there are terrific snorkeling opportunities a short swim away. Food is prepared for groups.

Little Shaw Park Guest House (☎ 974-2177; www.littleshawparkguesthouse.com; 21 Shaw Park Rd; r US\$50, apt US\$60; (P)) Providing a restful retreat, this trim place is set among 0.6 hectares of beautifully tended lawns, bougainvillea, and has a gazebo and hammocks. There's a room in the owner's house and seven spacious (though dark) cabins with homey decor. Also on offer are well-lit studio apartments with kitchens, cable TV and hot water. Meals are available by request. This is also your only opportunity for camping (US\$20) in Ocho Rios.

Ocean Sands Resort (☎ 974-2605; oceansands@yahoo.com; 14 James Ave; s/d US\$50/70; (P)) This attractive property offers 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.

Pier View Motel Apartments (☎ 974-2607; 19 Main St; d US\$60-75, apt US\$80, ste US\$99; (P)) Also centrally located, this budget option offers studios and a range of modestly furnished

rooms and apartments, all with fans, refrigerator and cable TV; there are also suites with air-con – lacking kitchen – that sleep up to four.

Midrange

Village Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 974-9193; www.geocities.com/villagehotel; 54 Main St; r US\$81, apt US\$95, with balcony/Jacuzzi US\$100/135, ste US\$140-220; (P)) This modern charmer offers four carpeted rooms featuring contemporary decor, cable TVs, and phones. It also has one- and three-bedroom suites with kitchenettes. A courtyard restaurant serves complementary breakfast to guests and also does Jamaican dishes. There's a spa and gym.

Silver Seas (☎ 974-2755; 66 James Ave; r US\$100; (P)) A bit worn around the edges, but atmospheric. The rooms are clean and well kept, and each has a large, private patio with a stellar ocean view. You'll find it hidden away behind Pengrove Plaza.

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; (P)) 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; (P)) With its small cliff-top garden overhanging a reef, this exquisite reclusive 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. It has a fully equipped kitchen and separate living area, plus a veranda with hammock chairs. Steps lead down to a coral cove good for snorkeling, and kayaks are available. There's a three-night stay minimum.

Hibiscus Lodge (☎ 974-2676; www.hibiscusjamaica.com; 83 Main St; r US\$140-152; (P)) A good-value option close to the town center that overlooks a coral reef, where the snorkeling is superb. A stairway descends alongside a cliff overhang, past a large coop of cooing doves, and down to a private sunning deck, perfect for a spontaneous jump in the sea day or night. A small gallery of contemporary Jamaican art complements the main building nicely. The rooms are all modestly

furnished; the deluxe ones are worth the extra expense for their large private balconies; ones near the street can be quite loud, however. There's also a breezy bar and the Almond Tree (p157), a fine restaurant.

Sandcastles Resort (☎ 974-5626; www.sandcastlesochorios.com; 120 Main St; r/ste US\$149/230; (P)) 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, plus modern furnishings. It has a sports bar.

Seville Manor (☎ 795-2901; 84 Main St; r US\$55, apt US\$64) This small charmer tucked off Main St has 28 rooms with rich, modern furnishings and a cozy ambience. It has a restaurant and bar.

Top End

Jamaica Inn (☎ 974-2514, 877-470-6975; www.jamaicainn.com; ste/cottages US\$550-860/1340-1760; (P)) Winston Churchill's favorite hotel, this exquisite family-run 'inn', tucked in a private cove, exudes patrician refinement. The 45 suites are a soothing combination of whites and Wedgwood blues, with mahogany beds, Edwardian furnishings and colonial-theme prints. The West Wing veranda suites hang over the sea (East Wing rooms nudge up to the beach). There's a croquet lawn, game room, library and a bar with a warm clubby feel. Men are required to wear jackets for dinner (plus a tie in winter) and women's dress code is in accordance. Water sports include scuba diving, and guests have access to the facilities at Shaw Park Beach Hotel (p156). Rates include breakfast and dinner; children under 14 are not admitted.

Royal Plantation (☎ 974-5601; www.royalplantation.com; ste US\$605-1245; (P)) While luxury can be found across Jamaica, its lap is surely on this 8-acre spot nestled around two private beaches. From the neo-classical lobby decked in Victorian furnishings to the C Bar (Jamaica's only caviar and champagne bar) to the orchids that grace the garden areas to the pillow menu for your room, the Royal Plantation goes the extra mile. All 74 rooms face the sea and feature marble bathrooms, and there are three gourmet restaurants, notably Le Papillon, an intimate French boîte with a dress code. An array of water sports is on offer, while the cigar-rolling displays and an artist in

residency program help make this one of the most unique hotels on the island.

All-Inclusives

Please see p275 for general information about all-inclusive resorts in Jamaica. The following prices are all for three nights, all-inclusive.

Shaw Park Beach Hotel & Suites (☎ 974-2552-4, 800-377-1126; www.shawparkbeachhotel.com; Cutlass Bay; d US\$846-939, ste US\$1860; 🏠 📺 📺) This old favorite reopened in 2005 as an adults-only all-inclusive resort. Its thatch-roofed ocean-front units are spread along a wide golden-sand beach in a private cove. Choose from 33 standard, 60 superior and 12 two-bedroom suites, all with cable TV, and private balcony or terrace (ask for a tiled room; they're cooler). Features include an oval pool, two tennis courts, game room and disco, plus water sports and floor shows.

Sans Souci Resort & Spa (☎ 994-1544, in North America ☎ 800-448-7702; www.couples.com; d US\$1500-2250; 🏠 📺 📺 📺 📺) On the A3 east of town, this sophisticated resort has a sublime setting in a secluded cove backed by lime-green lawns. All 148 suites feature king-size beds, CD player, cable TV, direct-dial phones and 24-hour room service. Some have Jacuzzis. One of the two beaches is for nude bathing. The resort has a volleyball court, jogging track and fitness center plus full-service spa. A huge range of water sports are offered, including scuba lessons, as are tennis and activities that include reggae dance classes.

Sandals Grande Ocho Rios Beach & Villa Resort (☎ 974-1027, in North America ☎ 877-726-3257; www.sandals.com/main/ochorios; d US\$1650-3900; 🏠 📺 📺 📺 📺) This newly renovated confection, the result of a recent merging of Sandals Ocho Rios and Beaches Grande Sport Villa Golf Resort & Spa, is conceived as an all-inclusive 'Garden of Eden' for couples (including those of the same-sex variety). With 17 categories encompassing 529 rooms, suites and villas, this resort offers a mind-boggling array of accommodations. There are one-bedroom suites overlooking the ocean, private villas nestled in the hillside, and secluded cottages. If money is no object, the suites at the highest level include a personal butler. Rates include all meals, transfers and use of the Sandals Golf & Country Club (p153). Children are not permitted.

EATING

Ocho Rios has a good range of international cuisine and several economical Jamaican restaurants; many places are open late. After dark, you'll find many smoking oil-drum barbecues along the roadside, particularly in the area surrounding the clock tower.

Budget

Centre Spot (☎ 323-0042; 75E Main St; meals US\$2.50-4; 🏠 📺 📺) This unassuming hole-in-the-wall place whips up local favorites such as curried goat; specials include the ever-popular cow head (no explanation supplied). For breakfast, if you're hungry consider the porridge – a cup of the cornmeal or peanut variety really sticks to your ribs.

Island Grill (☎ 974-3160; Main St, Island Village; US\$2-8; 🏠 📺 8am-11pm) Branch of the ubiquitous chain is good for take-out jerk dishes.

Alkebulan (☎ 375-7939; 63 Main St; meals US\$3-7; 🏠 📺 7am-10pm Mon-Sat) A healthy choice for vegetarians and Rastafarians, this eatery near the clock tower serves I-tal food such as peanut porridge, curry beans, veggie-ball stew and a range of roots tonics and juices.

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 and shrimp. In keeping with the Jamaican capacity for making juice from just about anything that grows, sweet nectars of June plum, ginger and soursop are served.

Healthy Way (☎ 974-9229; Ocean Village Plaza; meals US\$4-6; 🏠 📺 breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) A vegetarian kitchen and health-food store selling herbs, teas, juices and supplements, plus hearty chow such as a delicious tofu cheeseburger, wheat peas and large fruit plates to go.

Lion's Den (☎ 848-4413; A3; meals US\$4-9; 🏠 📺 breakfast, lunch & dinner) West of town between Dolphin Cove and Dunn's River Falls, this place looks like a tourist trap but it is worth a stop for the excellent, well-priced Jamaican fare and unique, artistic decor. The dining room resembles a Rastafarian chapel with hand-carved columns and wicker 'tree limbs' reaching to the ceiling. Outside on the patio, under a shady canopy of trees, you can spy on the goings-on at Dolphin Cove (bring binoculars). The menu boasts local specialties such as roast fish (US\$6).

Scotchie's (☎ 794-9457; Jack's Hall Fair Ground; US\$4-10; 🏠 📺 lunch & dinner) This roadside offshoot of

the superlative jerk center in Montego Bay lies adjacent to an Epping Gas station just west of Dunn's River Falls, where its pork, chicken and sausage water the mouths of locals and visitors alike.

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

Ocho Rios Jerk Centre (☎ 974-2549; DaCosta Dr; US\$3-7; 🏠 📺 lunch & dinner) Good for sizzling jerk chicken and pork. Fish is also available.

Mother's (Main St; 🏠 📺 24hr), with several outlets, and **Juice-Bee Patties** (1 Newlin St) are fast-food eateries serving patties and pastries (US\$1).

For ice cream, head to **Devon House I-Scream** (Island Village; per scoop US\$1.25).

There's a **General Foods Supermarket** (☎ 974-2510; Ocean Village Plaza) and smaller grocery stores scattered along Main St. You can buy fresh produce at the produce market on the south side of DaCosta Dr near the clock tower.

Midrange

Café Mango (☎ 974-7416; 12 Main St; mains US\$5-15; 🏠 📺 9am-10pm) This place offers airy dining and a large menu offering spicy hot chicken wings, other finger foods, burgers and pizzas.

Blue Runnings (☎ 675-8794; Island Village; mains US\$6-14; 🏠 📺 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, from 11am Sun) On the periphery of Island Village is this pleasant place with a shady, peaceful patio. Jamaican fare such as jerk pork or chicken, steamed fish and a wholesome vegetarian platter (US\$6) is served by day; in the evening the darkened, candlelit tables make for a romantic place to imbibe the local poison.

Bibibips 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, burgers, jerk and barbecue dishes that don't quite live up to their pricing.

our pick **Coconuts** (☎ 795-0064; Fisherman's Point; US\$7-25; 🏠 📺 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Whether you stop in for a 'ménage à trios' plate (coconut shrimp, conch and chicken samosas), have a jerk chicken quesadilla or dig into a steak, the terrace at Coconuts 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 (see p158).

Little Pub (☎ 795-1831; 59 Main St; mains US\$8-14; 🏠 📺 8am-midnight) Totally touristy yet enjoyable, Little Pub serves good American breakfasts. An eclectic lunch and dinner menu is strong on steak and seafood at modest prices. It has an all-you-can-eat-and-drink buffet on Friday nights (US\$20).

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.

Top End

Almond Tree Restaurant (☎ 974-2813; Hibiscus Lodge, 83 Main St; mains US\$8-25; 🏠 📺 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Providing a splendid perch for a sunset dinner, this cliff-top spot features a dining pavilion stair-stepping down the cliffside. Candlelit dinners are served alfresco. The menu ranges from seafood and continental fare to steadfast Jamaican dishes.

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 such appetizers as prosciutto with papaya or marinated marlin and mains like lobster pasta, or shrimp sautéed with garlic and Appleton rum. Leave room for desserts such as strawberry tart or apple and plum strudel. Treat yourself!

Evita's (☎ 974-2333; Eden Bower Rd; mains US\$12-18; 🏠 📺 lunch & dinner) This charmer sits high above Ochi in a romantically decorated 1860s house. It is an airy setting with exquisite views. The Italian-Jamaican menu includes jerk spaghetti and the trademark 'Lasagna Rastafari.' Recommended are the smoked marlin

carpaccio and wickedly good herb-crusted lamb chops. If you're lucky the gregarious proprietor Eva will stop by your table and give your shoulder a squeeze.

ENTERTAINMENT

There's a healthy bar scene and a decent choice of nightspots, but in general Ochi after hours lacks the verve of Negril or the authenticity of Kingston. Nonetheless, it's not hard to find a good party atmosphere *somewhere* on any night of the week.

Island Village (right) has a range of entertainment options on offer in the one spot, and includes the raucous Margaritaville. Many all-inclusive resorts sell night passes permitting full access to meals, drinks and entertainment.

Bars

Coconuts (☎ 795-0064; Fisherman's Point) The potent cocktails and omnipotent US\$20 all-you-can drink hard liquor special make the terrace here an excellent vantage point for watching the cruise ships pull out from the dock across the street.

Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville (☎ 675-8800; Island Village; admission charged for special events; ☎ 10am-10pm) This corporate franchise has turned getting drunk into big business. As with its counterparts in Montego Bay and Negril, the music is too loud and the drinks are too expensive, but some people find the orchestrated good-time vibe to be irresistible. The menu aims for the lowest common denominator with selections including the artery-clogging 'Cheeseburger in Paradise' and Caesar salads, pizzas and sandwiches.

James Ave, dubbed 'Reggae Strip,' has several discos and 'entertainment centers.' Use caution around here at night.

Here are some other places that are worth checking out:

Jack Ruby Bar & Grill (☎ 795-0768; 1 Main St) Live bands and sound-system parties in the rear courtyard.

Treehouse (in Soni's Plaza, 50 Main St) Cocktail bar located in a shopping center that tends to fill with tourists.

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

Nightclubs

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.

Strawberry Night Club (James Ave; admission US\$5) Attempting to compete with Amnesia is this somewhat subdued local haunt featuring video slots and a pool table downstairs. The scene is hit-or-miss.

Club Memories (☎ 974-2667; cnr DaCosta Dr & Main St) Whatever its memories, the club various from night to night based on the evening's theme. Thursday is 'Ladies Nite,' and Sunday is oldies night. Happy hour is from 7pm to 9pm Friday. There's a dress code.

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

Cinemas

For the latest Hollywood releases try **Cove Theatre** (☎ 675-8886; Island Village; admission US\$7).

Live Music

The touristy venue **Little Pub** (☎ 795-1831; 59 Main St) is an old favorite, replete 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 live-entertainment schedule changes night by night, and includes an Afro-Caribbean musical, karaoke, and a weekly cabaret on Friday.

Near Tower Isle, **Glenn's Jazz Club** (☎ 975-4360; Tower Cloisters Condominium Hotel), on the A3 east of town, features live (albeit wan and listless) jazz.

Also on the A3 east of town, the **White River Reggae Park** (☎ 929-4089) infrequently hosts sound systems. Also look for posters around town advertising live music or sound systems at Reggae Beach (p160)

At Island Village, the **Village Green** (Island Village) hosts two live shows each week for the tourist crowds.

Little Pub and most top-end hotels have live music and cabaret shows.

SHOPPING

Excellent pottery and ceramics are available at Wassi Art (see p152), where you can watch it being made.

The **Island Village** (cnr Main St & DaCosta Dr) has over a dozen pleasant stores with carefully

chosen merchandise. These include several beachwear shops, duty-free stores, an outlet for film and photography needs, and some upscale outlets for quality paintings, carvings and crafts. Shops include Herba Kadabra for spices, healing herbs and potions; Rum, Roast & Royal, which specializes in rums, coffees and cigars; and Tropic Lines Resort Wear – get that tacky flower-print shirt you've been admiring.

For incense, oils and a variety of herbs, try out **Scent of Incense and Things** (☎ 795-0047; 79 Main St). **Island Plaza** (Main St) is a good place to shop for cell phones and assorted gizmos.

Six kilometers east of town, **Harmony Hall** (☎ 975-4222; www.harmonyhall.com; ☎ Tue-Sun) has the best quality art. It's renowned for its Christmas, Easter and mid-November craft fairs, and regular exhibitions.

For Cuban cigars, try **Cigar World** (☎ 974-6317; 25 Taj Mahal Shopping Centre).

For craft stalls, **Ocho Rios Craft Park** (Main St) and **Dunn's River Craft Park** (Dunn's River Falls) both have dozens, as do **Pineapple Place** (Main St), to the east of town, and **Coconut Grove Shopping Village** (Main St), which is opposite Beaches Royal Plantation Golf Resort & Spa. Fern Gully (p166), to the south of Ocho Rios, is lined with stalls where artists sell their paintings and carvings at prices marginally lower than you'll find elsewhere.

Soni Plaza and Ocean Village Plaza, both on Main St, host duty-free stores, including **Taj Mahal** (☎ 974-6455), which offers a vast array of watches and jewelry.

For music tapes and CDs, try **Dis N Dat Music** (☎ 795-2775; Island Plaza) and **Vibes Music Shack** (Ocean Village Plaza). The latter has more obscure sounds.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Boscobel Aerodrome (☎ 975-3101) is at Boscobel, about 16km east of town. No international services land here.

Air Jamaica Express (☎ 726-1344, 888-359-2475) serves Ocho Rios with scheduled flights to and from Montego Bay (US\$66) and Tinson Pen Aerodrome (US\$64) in Kingston.

Boscobel Aerodrome is also served by two air-charter companies. **International Air Link** (☎ 940-6660, 940-0195; www.intlairlink.com) serves Montego Bay (seat/charter US\$87/244), Negril (US\$122/364) and Kingston (US\$180/554). **TimAir** (☎ 952-2516;

www.timair.net) flies on demand to Montego Bay (US\$133/364).

Public Transportation

Buses, minibuses and route taxis arrive and depart Ocho Rios at the **transportation centre** (Evelyn St). If you are coming from the east, you will be deposited at the taxi stand near One Love Park, up the hill from the harbor.

Buses operate throughout the day between Ocho Rios and Montego Bay (US\$4), plus Kingston (US\$4) and smaller towns along the way. Minibuses and route taxis are almost as cheap and more comfortable. It's a two-hour ride from either Montego Bay or Kingston.

If you are heading to Port Antonio by bus, you will have to change buses at St Mary (US\$1.50).

Taxi

JUTA (☎ 974-2292) is the main taxi agency catering to tourists. A licensed taxi will cost about US\$90 between Ocho Rios and Montego Bay, and about US\$80 between Ocho Rios and Kingston (US\$100 to the international airport at Kingston).

Island Car Rentals (☎ 974-2666, 888-991-4255; www.islandcarrentals.com; Shop 2, Carib Arcade) offers chauffeured transfers to and from Kingston or Montego Bay.

GETTING AROUND

There is no shuttle service from the airport to downtown. Local buses (US\$0.75) and minibuses and route taxis (US\$1.50) pass by. A tourist taxi will cost about US\$20.

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

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

Island Car Rentals (see above) is the most reputable company. Also try, **Budget** (☎ 974-1288; 15 Milford Rd), **Bargain Rent-a-Car** (☎ 974-8047; Shop 1A Pineapple Place Shopping Center, Main St) or **Salem Car Rental** (☎ 974-0786; www.salemcarrentals.com; Shop 7, Sandcastles Resort).

Government-established taxi fares from downtown are Dunn's River Falls US\$25, Firefly US\$65, Prospect Plantation US\$32, Sandals Golf & Country Club US\$28 and Shaw Park Gardens US\$22.

EAST OF OCHO RIOS

While the signal of **IRIE FM** (Hwy A3) carries all over the island, the limits of Ocho Rios are immediately apparent once you pass the radio station's studios at the town's eastern edge. The seaside resorts quickly give way to isolated villas and fishing villages like Port Maria as the coastal road winds its way east along cliffs and bluffs. The sense of leaving tourist Jamaica behind is enhanced by the drop-off in road quality. At last visit, intermittent repairs slowed the road between Oracabessa and Port Antonio.

Drawn by the coastal beauty and unspoiled character, two of Jamaica's most famous visitors, author Noel Coward and James Bond creator Ian Fleming, made their homes in the area. While Coward settled in Firefly, with its spectacular view down on the coastline, Fleming found refuge at Goldeneye, now one of the island's most elegant hotels.

REGGAE BEACH TO BOSCOBEL BEACH

East of Ocho Rios, habitations begin thinning out along the A3. Several beaches lie hidden below the cliffs; notable among them is Tower Isle, 8km east of Ocho Rios.

Jamaica Beach, between Tower Isle and Rio Nuevo, is renowned for its dive sites offshore.

Reggae Beach

Located east of Harmony Hall on the A3, this vibe-filled yellow **sand beach** (admission US\$5; ☎ 9am-5pm) is popular with locals and savvy travelers alike. It's the perfect place to while away an afternoon imbibing roots tonic under shady almond trees. Kayaks are available for rent, and jerk chicken and fish are readily available. Raucous sound-system parties are held here now and then; you'll see posters plastered all over Ocho Rios.

Tower Isle & Rio Nuevo

The Rio Nuevo meets the ocean about 8km east of Ocho Rios. In 1658, the bluff west of the river's mouth was the site where English forces fought their decisive battle against the Spanish, sending them scampering off to Cuba with their collective tail between their legs. A plaque placed here records the events:

On this ground on June 17, 1658, was fought the battle of Rio Nuevo to decide whether Jamaica would be Spanish or English. On one side were the Jamaicans of both black and white races, whose ancestors had come to Jamaica from Africa and Spain 150 years before. The Spanish forces lost the battle and the island. The Spanish whites fled to Cuba but the black people took to the mountains and fought a long and bloody guerrilla war against the English. This site is dedicated to them all.

Tower Isle, on the coast about 1km from Rio Nuevo, is notable mainly for the ostentatious presence of the all-inclusive resort, Couples Ocho Rios.

Boscobel Beach

This beach, 6km east of Rio Nuevo, is a hamlet dominated by Boscobel Beach Spa Resort & Golf Club. The Boscobel airstrip is located here.

Further east find fishing hamlets nestled in turquoise lagoons protected by coral reefs.

Sleeping

Skip's Place (☎ 975-7010, cell 467-4319; Stewart Town; d US\$25-50, 2-bedroom cottage US\$100, cottage sleeping 6 US\$150) One kilometer west of Boscobel Beach, this friendly haven for budget travelers offers 16 modest rooms of varying sizes, cooled by cross-ventilation and featuring basic furnishings. Owners Skip and Patricia Walters also rent out a three-bedroom flat with kitchen. Skip, an avid fisherman, offers boat rides and fishing excursions; your daily catch will likely end up on the dinner table that night. Meals are served to order in a small restaurant. There's no sign on the road. The turnover is just west of Breezes at the bottom of a small hill; look for the shack decorated with a portrait of Haile Selassie.

Hunter's Rest (☎ 975-5490; www.aileensgardenweddings.com; Tower Isle; s/d US\$55/75; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎) On the main road, just across from the Rio Nuevo battle site, is this small, welcoming guesthouse offering six simple, clean rooms with cable TV and kitchenettes with fridges. There's an unheralded beach a five-minute walk away.

Chrisanns Beach Resort (☎ 975-4467; www.chrisannsresort.com; Tower Isle; studio US\$105, r US\$115-120,

1-2-/3-bedroom ste US\$147/170/260; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎) Also in Tower Isle is this well-run resort, offering pleasant suites with full kitchens, cable TV and room safes. The economical rates charged for multiple-bedroom suites make this a great value for groups, but the property is a mite small and can get crowded. There's a tiny beach and swimming cove.

Sea Palms (☎ 975-4400; www.seapalms-jamaica.com; 1-2-/3-/4-bedroom apt per week US\$1000/1800/2800/3900; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) At Tower Isle, these handsomely appointed, spacious waterfront apartments have fully equipped kitchens, cable TV and private patios or balconies as well as personal maid and cook service. You can rent by the week. There's a small cove for swimming and an attractive pool set among manicured lawns.

This stretch of coast also features two all-inclusive resorts:

Beaches Boscobel Resort & Golf Club (☎ 974-7777, in North America ☎ 888-232-2437; www.beaches.com; 3 nights all-inclusive d US\$1725-1975; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The Sandals chain recently spent US\$18 million to create one of the best family-friendly resorts in Jamaica. Kids will find plenty to do: there's a state-of-the-art video-games center, a pool with a gigantic water slide, a fully equipped and staffed day-care center, a teen disco and even a petting zoo. Accommodations range from suites designed for families to honeymoon-style beach sanctuaries. There are adults-only areas, plus five bars, four tennis courts, a gym, volleyball, water sports and Olympic-size pool, plus complimentary golf at Sandals Golf & Country Club (p153).

Couples Ocho Rios (☎ 975-4271, in the USA ☎ 800-268-7537, in the UK ☎ 1582 794 420; www.couples.com; Tower Isle; 3 nights all-inclusive d US\$1900-2050; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This all-inclusive, upscale resort is strictly for couples. The 212 rooms were refurbished in chic contemporary vogue – classy! – and have four-poster king-size beds, satellite TV, CD players and balconies. Suites feature oversized Jacuzzis. A complete array of sports and water sports are offered. There are four restaurants. A small island is reserved for nude bathing and weddings.

Eating

Skip's Place (☎ 975-7010; dishes from US\$5; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Enjoying a breezy clifftop setting, 1km west of Boscobel Beach, this unassuming

joint serves just-caught seafood and lovingly prepared Jamaican dishes.

Cliff View (☎ 975-4417; Tower Isle; mains US\$6-17; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Just west of the Rio Nuevo is this popular upscale restaurant serving seafood, continental, and Jamaican dishes.

Colette's Café (btwn Tower Isle & Rio Nuevo) is a twee little roadside shop where Colette and her mom serve simple Jamaican fare, patties, ice cream and bottled coconut water.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses and route taxis traveling between Ocho Rios and Oracabessa serve Rio Nuevo and Tower Isle.

ORACABESSA

pop 10,000

Taking its name from the Spanish *oro cabeza* (golden head) Oracabessa, 21km east of Ocho Rios, is a small one-street, one-storey village with a vague aura of a Wild West town. The street itself is lined with Caribbean vernacular architecture, its wooden houses trimmed with fretwork. This was a major port for shipping bananas in the 19th-century, yet while the boom era has passed, the town itself is far from derelict.

Below Oracabessa is the marina (formerly a banana-loading port), in the lee of a tombolo on whose western flank pirogues and fishing boats bob at anchor.

Information

A **Scotiabank** (☎ 975-3203; Main St) with ATM is in the town center, as is the **post office** (Main St). The private **Oracabessa Medical Centre** (☎ 975-3304; Vermont Ave; ☎ 7:30am-2:30pm Mon & Tue, 7am-12:30pm Wed-Sat) is opposite the Esso gas station at the east end of town; and the **Oracabessa Health Centre** (☎ 726-1625; Main St; ☎ 8:30-4:30pm Mon-Fri) is opposite the police station. The **Oracabessa Pharmacy** (☎ 975-3241; Main St) is in Edwards Plaza.

Get online at **Jee's Business Centre** (☎ 726-0686; Nix-Nax Plaza; per hr US\$3.50) or at the **library** (☎ 975-3293; Main St; per hr US\$1.65).

The **James Bond Oracabessa Fishing Tournament** (☎ 975-3663) is held in October.

Sights

BEACHES

James Bond Beach (☎ 975-3665; jbb@islandjamaica.com; adult/child US\$5/3; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) is today the setting for concerts and special events.

FLEMING...IAN FLEMING

Ian Fleming, inventor of legendary superspy James Bond, first came to Jamaica in 1942 while serving for British Naval Intelligence. In 1946 he bought a house on the shore at Oracabessa and named it 'Goldeneye,' and he wintered here every year until his death in 1964.

It was here that Fleming conceived his secret agent 007, the creation of whom the author attributes to living in Jamaica. 'Would these books have been born if I had not been living in the gorgeous vacuum of a Jamaican holiday? I doubt it,' he wrote in *Ian Fleming Introduces Jamaica*. All 14 of Fleming's James Bond novels were written here, and five were set in Jamaica.

In the same book, he related, 'I was looking for a name for my hero – nothing like Peregrine Carruthers or Standfast Maltravers – and I found it, on the cover of one of my Jamaican bibles, *Birds of the West Indies* by James Bond, an ornithological classic.'

The house is now part of Goldeneye hotel and can be rented (see opposite).

It has toilets, showers and changing rooms, and water sports that include jet-ski safaris (US\$55) and glass-bottom boat rides (US\$25). The beach provides an excellent setting for infrequent music events; if one is on the horizon you'll see posters plastered about. A small bar and restaurant provides refreshment.

Adjacent to the Bond beach is **Fisherman's Beach**, a rooisy alternative where one can enjoy simple I-tal and seafood fare and the occasional sound-system party.

SUN VALLEY PLANTATION

This working **plantation** (☎ 995-3075, 446-2026; tour incl snack US\$12; ☎ 9am-2pm) and botanical farm is at Crescent on the B13, some 5km south of Oracabessa and 8km west of Port Maria. Owners Lorna and Nolly Binns offer enjoyable garden tours in a plantation setting beside the Crescent River. You can opt to visit the groves of coconuts and other tropical fruits and medicinal herbs.

Sleeping

Nix-Nax (☎ 975-3364; dm US\$10-25) Located to the northeast of the town center at the school crossing, this inimitable hostelry offers dorm-style beds, private rooms with shared bath, and one cheerful top-floor room with veranda and private bath. There's no hot water, phones or TV; self-catered meals can be prepared in the two communal kitchens. Also on the site is a Montessori-style preschool (making for lively afternoons when school is in session), and a holistic healing center. Your host, Domenica, a Harlem transplant who has run the guesthouse for more than 20 years, prides herself on flexible arrangements for travelers, saying that it's 'good place for the broke and busted.'

Paradise Jamaica (☎ 792-4386, 975-3428; paradisejamaica.com; Gibraltar; r US\$27.50-37.50; P ☎) This attractive colonial-style guesthouse, located on the main road in Gibraltar 3km west of Oracabessa, offers simple, bargain-priced rooms in an old house affording grand sea views. Breakfast is included in the rates; dinner is by arrangement. Self-catered meals can be prepared in a communal kitchen or on an outdoor barbecue.

Tamarind Great House (☎ 995-3252; Crescent Estate; d US\$65-85; P ☎) This place is a gem, and a bargain to boot. Nestled atop a hill 6km south of Oracabessa, this 'plantation guesthouse' is run by delightful English hosts Gillian and Barry Chambers. The setting is sublime, with lush valleys and mountains all around. At night the surrounding hills resonate with the sounds of innumerable birds and insects: a welcome change from the sound systems rattling the windows everywhere else. The house boasts gleaming wood floors cut from a single tree and offbeat antiques including a mysterious iron lung. The 10 large bedrooms, reached by a wide staircase, each open to a vast veranda. There's a TV lounge and an elegant dining room. The excellent restaurant serves stick-to-your-ribs breakfasts (US\$12) and full-course dinners (US\$35) on the veranda.

Tamarind is 1.5km south of Sun Valley Plantation. From the minibus and taxi stand at Oracabessa, take Jack's River Rd. It's a long 6km from the main road. Keep a keen eye out for the directional signs along the way. The road is rough. The proprietors appreciate advance reservations.

Golden Seas Beach Resort (☎ 975-3251; www.goldenseas.com; s US\$94-121, d US\$110-137, studio US\$136-152, ste US\$160-175; P ☎) On the A3, 1km

west of Oracabessa, is this attractive hotel of cut stone, with 79 comfortable if uninspired rooms with cable TVs, phones and patios that overlook a pool with swim-up bar. The hotel offers water sports, tennis clinics, a spa and gym, cabaret shows and an excellent resident band. Meals are provided both à la carte and through an all-inclusive plan (per person per day US\$50).

our pick Goldeneye (☎ 975-3354, 800-688-7678, in the UK ☎ 020-7440-4360; www.goldeneyehotel.com; 1-/2-bedroom villa US\$895/1095, entire complex US\$6000-8500) If this looks like the type of place James Bond might have retired to, it's possibly because his creator Ian Fleming used to live here. There are eight villas, including Fleming's abode (spectacular decor, highlighted by Balinese fabrics), sprinkled across expansive grounds on a quaint cove. Additional waterfront cottages, built of wood and stone and painted in autumnal colors, have ceiling fans, a kitchen, a TV room and pampering yet discreet stewards. There's a communal entertainment room where 007 movies are shown, but the coup de grâce is the hotel's secluded, private island with its own beach and water sports. Organized excursions, a tennis court and swimming pool seem a little banal after that. Located on the A3 immediately east of Oracabessa.

Eating & Drinking

Jah Willy's Calabash Inn (☎ 369-3617; ☎ lunch & dinner) Off Waterfront Rd, this is a cool place to hang for a game of dominoes or volleyball with the locals. Willy serves seafood and jerk for US\$2 and less.

Dor's Fish Pot (☎ 726-0372; Racecourse; ☎ lunch & dinner) On the A3, 1km east of town, is this lively yet rustic jerk and seafood eatery atop the breezy cliffs.

Tamarind Great House (☎ 995-3252; tamarind@go-jamaica.com; Crescent Estate; 3-course meal US\$40; ☎ dinner) This is the place to head for a full-course English-style gourmet meal. Reservations are required.

La Shanka Tavern (Main St) Opposite the market, this lively rum shop is good for a spirited game of dominoes.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses and route taxis pass through en route between Ocho Rios and Port Antonio, and between Ocho Rios and Kingston.

FIREFLY

Set amid wide lawns high atop a hill 5km east of Oracabessa and 5km west of Port Maria, **Firefly** (☎ 997-7201, 994-0920; admission US\$10; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) was the home of Sir Noel Coward, the English playwright, songwriter, actor and wit (see the boxed text, p164). When he died in 1973, Coward left the estate to his partner Graham Payn, who gifted it to the nation. Today the house is a museum, looking just as it did on Sunday, February 28, 1965, the day the Queen Mother visited.

Your guide will lead you to Coward's art studio, where he was schooled in oil painting by Winston Churchill. The studio displays Coward's original paintings and photographs of himself and a coterie of famous friends. The upper lounge features a glassless window that offers one of the most stunning coastal vistas in all Jamaica. The view takes in Port Maria Bay and the coastline further west. Contrary to popular opinion, Coward didn't write his famous song *A Room with a View* here (it was written in Hawaii in 1928). His bedroom features his mahogany four-poster bed and closets still stuffed with his Hawaiian shirts and silk PJs.

Coward lies buried beneath a plain white marble slab on the wide lawns where he entertained many illustrious stars of stage and screen. A statue of the man gazing out at his favorite view graces the lawn and a stone hut that once served as a lookout for the pirate Henry Morgan is now a gift store, bar and restaurant. Musical and theatrical performances are hosted and a Moonlick party with live jazz band is held on weekends closest to the full moon.

Firefly is well signed along three different routes from the A3.

GALINA POINT & LITTLE BAY

Five kilometers east of Oracabessa, the A3 winds around the promontory of Galina Point. A 12m-high concrete lighthouse marks the headland. South of Galina you'll pass Noël Coward's first house, **Blue Harbour** (p164) squatting atop 'the double bend,' where the road and shoreline take a 90-degree turn and open to a view of Cabarita Island. The road drops steeply from Blue Harbour to Cocomo Beach in Little Bay.

The beach is unappealing, despite being popular in the '50s and '60s with Coward and co, but the snorkeling is good about

NOEL COWARD'S PEENY-WALLY

The multitalented Sir Noel Coward first visited Jamaica in 1944 on a two-week holiday. He found peace of mind here and dubbed his dream island 'Dr Jamaica.' Four years later he rented Ian Fleming's estate, Goldeneye, at Oracabessa, while he hunted for a site to build his own home. He found an incredible view over Little Bay near Galina, 6km east of Oracabessa.

In 1948 Coward bought the eight-acre estate and set to work building Coward's Folly, a three-story villa with two guest cottages. He named his home Blue Harbour. He had a swimming pool built at the sea's edge and invited his many notable friends, a virtual 'Who's Who' of the rich and famous.

The swarm of visitors, however, eventually drove Coward to find another retreat.

While painting with his lover Graham Payn at a place called Lookout (so-named because the pirate Henry Morgan had a stone hut built atop the hill to keep an eye out for Spanish galleons), Coward was struck by the impressive solitude and incredible view. The duo lingered until nightfall, when fireflies (or 'peeny-wallies' in the Jamaican dialect) appeared. Within two weeks Coward had bought the land, and eight years later he had a house built, big enough for only himself. He named it Firefly.

Coward lived a remarkably modest lifestyle in Jamaica; he set up the now-defunct Designs for Living shop in Port Maria, the profits from which went to train local children in arts and crafts. Coward himself recorded his love of the island and islanders on canvas, in bright, splashy colors.

Coward had spent 30 years in Jamaica when he suffered a heart attack at the age of 73. He is buried on the lawns of Firefly beneath a marble slab that reads simply: 'Sir Noel Coward/Born 16 December 1899/Died 26 March 1973.'

50m out (check with locals about current swimming conditions).

The **Zabai Tabai Taino Museum** (☎ 994-9391; 12 Hudson St; admission free), on the main road, is an offbeat museum celebrating the Taino culture. Many of the artifacts were dug up on the owner's property, which has a cave with what are purportedly Taino paintings that glow translucent in winter. The museum has no set hours.

Minibuses and route taxis pass through en route between Ocho Rios and Port Antonio, and between Ocho Rios and Kingston.

Sleeping & Eating

Belretiro Inn (☎ 994-0035; r US\$13-35; 🏠) Signed off the A3, this inn has 12 modestly furnished rooms with private baths and cold water. It has a seawater swimming pool and a bar.

Little Bay Inn (☎ 994-2721, 373-5871; r US\$20-25; 🏠) On the main road just at the turnoff for Firefly, this modest new hotel offers 10 simple, fan-cooled rooms with double beds and private bath. There's a small restaurant and jerk center.

Caribbean Pearl (☎ 994-2731; caribbeanpearl@cwjamaica.com; r US\$45-75; 🏠) On the A3, this attractive place rests on a breezy hilltop at the southern end of Little Bay. It is run to

an excellent standard. The elegant, intimate villa-style hotel has eight rooms that are furnished with hardwoods and white wicker. Mosquito nets drape over the beds. Wide windows open to shady verandas where you can relax.

Hotel Casa Maria (☎ 725-0156, in North America ☎ 509-547-7065; nwas@cw.com; r US\$50-60; 🏠) Next to the Caribbean Pearl, this is an option if all else fails. The 20-room hotel has lost its panache since Noel Coward and his celebrated guests frequented the bar in the 1950s and 1960s. The fan-cooled rooms are pleasantly, though modestly, furnished. Cheaper rooms have garden views; superior rooms have private balconies with ocean views.

Tradewinds Resort (☎ 994-0420; r incl breakfast US\$55-65; 🏠 🍷 🍷) Further along from Hotel Casa Maria is this modern, motel-style resort, cascading down the windswept cliffs to a rocky shore. It has 14 modestly furnished rooms and a cottage suite, all with their own splendid views, white tiles, small TVs, phones and remote-control air-con. There's a small lap pool and a restaurant.

Blue Harbour (☎ 725-0289, in the USA ☎ 505-586-1244; www.blueharb.com; r per person US\$100; 🏠) Once owned by Noel Coward and visited by Marlene Dietrich, Katharine Hepburn,

Errol Flynn and Winston Churchill, this is a rather offbeat hotel offering delicious seclusion. Villa Grande, the main building, has four upstairs bedrooms with a combination of antiques and dowdy utility furniture, plus cable TV. Meals are served on a wide veranda with bay views. Villa Rose has four spacious rooms with basic furnishings and decor. Villa Chica is where Marlene Dietrich went to be left alone; it's smaller and very private, with more pleasing, tropical decor. Blue Harbour comes fully staffed with cook and housekeeper. There's a saltwater pool. Rates include three meals.

Mystic Cliff Villas (☎ 994-0135; www.mystic-cliff.com; d US\$250; 🏠 🍷) Nine years in the making, this dramatic property is the lovechild of Everton and Cecilia McKenzie; at last visit they were proudly putting the finishing touches on their singular creation in anticipation of welcoming the first guests. On a craggy clifftop, the McKenzies have created a striking environment featuring dramatic terraces, elevated walkways, a secluded swimming cove, several small sea caves, the On the Rocks gazebo bar and a saltwater 'infinity' pool.

On offer are six villas spread between the three tastefully appointed cottages and the commanding main house. Each has an ocean view plus large bedroom and bathroom and private patio or balcony. Also offered are jeep tours and rentals. You'll find the villas on the small road adjacent to the western edge of the Tradewinds Resort. Rates include airport transfers, maid and cook service and full breakfast.

PORT MARIA

pop 8000

Gazing down from the lawn at Firefly, you might think Port Maria is a quaint fishing village nestled around a deep turquoise and aquamarine bay with mountains rising behind. When you arrive, it's soon apparent that there's nothing particularly alluring about this capital St Mary parish.

Fishing pirogues can be seen on **Pagee Beach**, lining the shore. You can hire a guide and boat to go fishing or to take you to Cabarita Island. The beach is safe for swimming. It is also the most westerly spot for surfing along the north coast, with long peelers. The rocks are sharp, however; local surfers advise surfing in front of the point

closest to town. The action is best in the morning before the trade winds kick in.

St Mary's Parish Church, at the extreme west end of town, was built in 1861 in quintessential English style. Facing it is the **old courthouse**, destroyed in 1988 by fire but since partially restored and today housing a **Civic Centre**. A monument in front commemorates 'Tacky of the Easter Rebellion,' in honor of the hero of that 1760 revolt.

Remains of **Fort Haldane** can be seen on a bluff beside the A3, 1km north of town.

You can get online at **St Mary Parish Library** (☎ 994-2213; Claude Stuart Park; per 30min US\$1.15).

The best place to spend the night in downtown Port Maria is **Sunrise Apartments** (☎ 871-3960; 37 Warners St; r US\$50; 🏠), offering four clean and comfortable fan-cooled apartments with kitchenettes and dining areas. There's a laundry room and secure parking.

For a good meal, head to **Almond Tree Club & Restaurant** (☎ 994-2379; 56 Warners St; mains US\$3.50-5; 🍷) breakfast, lunch & dinner), offering typical authentic Jamaican dishes, fried chicken, chop suey and, for breakfast, a selection of porridges. For a quick snack, **Juici Beef Patties** (Stennet St; patties US\$0.40), on the southeast side of the town square, sells beef and veggie patties. Wash them down with bottled coconut water.

You can catch buses or minibuses to Port Maria from Ocho Rios and Kingston.

BRIMMER HALL

This 2000-acre working **plantation** (☎ 994-2309; tours US\$18; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, tours 11:30am, 1:30pm & 3pm), near Bailey's Vale, 10km southwest of Port Maria, grows bananas, coconuts, sugarcane, pineapple and citrus for export. It's centered on a wooden great house with an impressive interior furnished with oriental rugs and antique furniture, and even an original suit of armor. One-hour plantation tours by canopied jitney cost US\$15. It is signed from the A3.

SOUTH OF OCHO RIOS

The A3 winds through sweeping pastoral country on its way south. At Moneague, the road meets up with the A1 from St Ann's Bay, continues over Mt Diablo and drops dramatically to Kingston.

FERN GULLY

Passing through this lush **gorge** is one of the prime attractions of Ocho Rios. Milford Rd (the A3) zigzags uphill through the 5km canyon of an old watercourse that was planted with hundreds of different fern species around 1880. Today, the trees form a canopy overhead, filtering subaqueous light, while crafts vendors ply their wares at the side of the road. Over the years, exhaust from traffic has harmed the ferns, and there's been talk of closing the gully altogether and making it a national park.

WALKERSWOOD

As you climb from Fern Gully on the A3, the forest canopy opens up at this village up in the cool hills of St Ann parish. Its main claim to fame is the tongue-searing **Walkerswood** jerk sauce, now available all over the world. Nobody with even a passing interest in the art of jerk should pass up the opportunity to visit the plant (☎ 917-2318; www.walkerswood.com; 8am-4:30pm Mon-Sat; adult/child US\$15/7.50), where its marinades and seasonings are produced. Walkerswood began as a local farmer's co-op dedicated to providing irrigation and jobs for the community. Today, close to 200 people work full-time at the environmentally conscious plant.

After a complimentary drink, the tour takes you through a herb garden complete with Mother Thyme, who explains all the spices that go in to making jerk. The history of jerking, a process the Maroons discovered in the 17th century, is revealed. A quick tour of the factory and a sampling of Walkerswood's various products, from the blazing scotch bonnet pepper sauce to the tangy sorrel chutney to the savory guava jam, round out the tour. There's a small restaurant and gift shop on the premises.

In the cooler hills near Lydford, **Murphy Hill** (☎ 927-1003, 469-4968; Spring Mountain Rd; r US\$25-30), 5km west of Walkerswood, has a relaxing, quiet guesthouse with clean rooms and genuine antiques. There's a small restaurant. The **grounds** (admission US\$2; ☎ 10am-7pm) are also open to the public, with a swimming pool popular with Jamaicans escaping the heat of the lowlands. It has fabulous views.

The craft shop **Art Beat** (☎ 917-2154) is owned by Nancy Burke, alias Inanci. She sells jewelry, carnival and *duppy* (ghost) masks, painted rocks, and other intriguing creations. Her

shop is on the main square in Walkerswood, facing the post office.

GOSHEN WILDERNESS RESORT

A sign outside this lakeside '**wilderness resort**' (☎ 974-4613, 974-5189; Goshen; adult/child US\$32/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), 6km east of Walkerswood, happily proclaims: 'You catch it, we cook it.' Its prime attraction is 42 large ponds stocked with tilapia just waiting for you to yank them out of the water.

Attractions include an aviary, a petting zoo, volleyball, paddleboats and kayaks, nature trails and horseback rides (per hour US\$40). A one-hour ATV tour of the plantation and nearby hills costs US\$45; there's a longer tour to Spanish Bridge and a lovely swimming spot on the White River (US\$80). A fishing package (adult/child US\$21/14) includes a drink, tackle and a guide. The chef will prepare your fish with bammy (pancake-shaped cassava bread) and festival (a fried biscuit shaped like a sausage), but burgers, hot dogs and jerk dishes are also available at the thatched restaurant and bar.

To get here from Ocho Rios, take the turn-off from the A3 at the White River estuary. Eventually you'll reach a three-way road junction called Goshen. Turn east (left when coming from Ocho Rios) down the deteriorated road. The Wilderness Resort is 1km beyond the gates for Goshen great house – marked 'Goshen.' If you don't have a car, ask at the transportation center in Ocho Rios for minibuses heading to Goshen.

MONEAGUE

This small crossroads town, at the junction of the A3 and the A1, 19km south of Ochi, was favored during the 19th century as a hill resort, and before that as a staging post on the journey between Spanish Town and the north coast. The Moneague Training Camp of the Jamaica Defense Force is here, with two **Saracen armored cars** at the gateway.

Café Aubergine (☎ 973-0527; mains US\$12-28; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Also called Moneague Tavern, this restaurant is in a 250-year-old tavern 1km south of town. Tasteful art, china and real silverware abound. The menu is written on parchment and consists of Mediterranean-influenced Jamaican nouvelle cuisine, such as crayfish Provençal, chicken in coconut curry sauce, and roast lamb Provençal. Leave room for the chocolate gâteau. The café hosts

an Oktoberfest Party with German fare. Reservations are required.

FAITH'S PEN

South of Moneague, the A1 climbs steadily to Faith's Pen, 27km south of Ocho Rios. It's a destination for the taste buds, a place where competitive roadside cooks try to outdo each other with good-natured culinary bravado. The road is lined with stalls selling citrus fruits and dozens of stands where you can sample jerk and try oddities such as cow-cod soup, a concoction made of bull's testes – reputed to be an aphrodisiac – best washed down with 'roots' wine. If this sounds a tad unappetizing, there's plenty of equally remarkable fare to choose from.

The road continues up the pine-forested slopes of Mt Diablo (839m). At 686m the A1 crests the mountain chain and begins its steep, winding descent to Ewarton and the lush Rosser Valley, beautiful when seen from these heights. The summit of Mt Diablo marks the boundary between the parishes of St Ann to the north and St Catherine to the south.

WEST OF OCHO RIOS

Sadly, the best of the many beaches along this stretch of coast have been snapped up by resorts both ritzy and gaudy. The Dry Harbour Mountains, rising steeply inland, offer recommended scenic drives.

MAMMEE BAY

A favorite with Jamaican beachgoers, Mammee Bay – 5.5km west of Ocho Rios and 4km east of St Ann's Bay – has several little beaches, some hidden away. Much of the beachfront is a private residential estate, but access is offered to the public beaches. Locals flock to Fisherman's Beach, where jet skis can be rented.

At **Laughing Waters** – also called Roaring River – 1km east of Mammee Bay and 1km west of Dunn's River Falls, a river appears from rocks amid a shallow ravine about 3km from the sea and spills to a charming little beach. This is where Ursula Andress famously appeared, dripping with brine, in the James Bond movie *Dr No* (the beach is known as 'James Bond Beach'). Look for the large fenced-in electrical power structure beside the A3. Follow the river to the beach. Public access to the falls is by foot.

The **St Ann Polo Club & Equestrian Centre** (☎ 972-2762; Mammee Bay; lessons per hr US\$15) offers horseback lessons, and hosts the **Hi-Pro Family Polo Tournament & International Horse Show** in August.

Sleeping

Rose Garden Hotel (☎ 972-2825; r US\$80, r for 4 people US\$100; ☎ ☎) About 500m east of the Sandals resort, this small hotel has 24 studio suites with kitchenette, private bathroom with hot water, TV and balcony. The rooms are modestly furnished and uninspiring, but they're clean and have lots of light. There's a sundeck, plus a dining room. The rates include breakfast.

Cannon Villas & Silver Palms (☎ 927-1852; www.silvercannon.com; villas & cottages US\$360, studio US\$210, 1-1/2-/3-bedroom apt US\$210/240/360; ☎ ☎) At Old Fort Bay, on the east side of Mammee Bay, this secluded property is a good choice for groups and families. There are villas and apartments, each with a living and dining area, satellite TV, fully equipped kitchen and a patio. It also has modern three-bedroom townhouses (Silver Palms), plus one- and two-bedroom apartments fronting a pool and Jacuzzi. A housekeeper is provided.

Sandals Dunn's River Golf Resort & Spa (☎ 972-1610; in North America ☎ 877-726-3257; 3 nights all-inclusive d US\$1135-1725, ste US\$2160-2495; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A popular, upscale, all-inclusive couples-only resort. A dramatic curving staircase and gleaming marble columns in the lobby recreate the opulence of an Italian palazzo, reflected in the ritzy Roman-style full-service spa. The 250 rooms come in eight categories, all in Sandals' plantation style. The resort boasts a huge swimming pool with cascading waterfall, plus a second pool, three Jacuzzis (two are big enough for 40 people each), a pitch'n'putt course, a tour desk, four specialty restaurants, a video-game room, a billiards room and a theater and disco.

Villas of varying ranges of opulence are represented by **Sun Villas** (in North America ☎ 888-625-6007; www.sunvillas.com) and **Jamaican Association of Villas & Apartments** (JAVA; ☎ 974-2508; www.villasinjamaica.com; PO Box 298, Ocho Rios).

ST ANN'S BAY

pop 12,000

This small market town and parish capital, 11km west of Ocho Rios, rises up the hillside above the bay. Check out the several well-preserved old buildings in Caribbean vernacular style, especially along Braco St.

Christopher Columbus landed here in 1494 during his second voyage to the Americas and christened the bay Santa Gloria. He might well have considered renaming it something less pleasant when, during his fateful fourth and final voyage in 1503, he was forced to abandon his ships in the bay. Columbus and his crew were stranded for more than a year before finally being rescued (see the boxed text, p170).

In 1509 the Spaniards built the first Spanish settlement on the island about 700m west of St Ann's Bay, at Sevilla la Nueva. The site was abandoned within four decades and it was later developed as a sugar estate by a British planter. Other planters established sugar estates nearby, and the town grew and prospered as a bustling seaport with forts on opposite sides of the bay.

Marcus Garvey, founder of the Black Nationalist movement, was born here and is honored each August 17 with a parade.

Shoppers can browse the arts and crafts market, beside the A1 opposite Braco St.

Buses, minibuses and route taxis travel between Montego Bay and Ocho Rios and call at St Ann's.

Information

Cable & Wireless office (☎ 972-9701; 11 King St; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) International calls and faxes.

Library (☎ 972-2660; 2 King St; internet access per 30 min US\$1) One hundred meters east of Braco St.

National Commercial Bank (☎ 972-0722; 19 Main St) Has a 24-hour ATM.

Pine Grove Pharmacy (☎ 972-0334; 55 Main St)

Police station (☎ 972-2211; cnr Main & Braco Sts)

Post office (☎ 972-2307; Main St) Just east of Braco St.

Quick Stop Laundromat (Wharf St)

St Ann's Bay Public General Hospital (☎ 972-2272) At the far west end of Main St, with an emergency clinic. Several doctors' clinics are concentrated west of the town center on Main St.

Scotiabank (☎ 972-2531; 18 Braco St) 24-hour ATM.

Votech Educational Centre (☎ 794-8812; Main St; internet access per 30min US\$1) International calls and faxes, and internet services.

Sights

MAIMA SEVILLE GREAT HOUSE & HERITAGE PARK

This historical **park**, less than 1km west of present-day St Ann's, marks the site of the

first Spanish capital on the island – Sevilla la Nueva – and one of the first Spanish settlements in the New World. Traces of the original Spanish buildings, including a church and a **sugar mill**, are visible, accessed via a grassy track leading to the ocean from the A1

This was also the site of an Arawak village. In 1982 Sevilla la Nueva was declared a Site of the Americas by the Organization of American States, which funds ongoing excavations by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust.

When the English captured Jamaica from the Spanish, the land on which Sevilla la Nueva had been built was granted to Richard Hemming, an officer in Oliver Cromwell's army. Hemming's descendants developed the property as a sugar estate that's now owned by the Jamaica National Trust Commission. The property is dominated by the Seville Great House, built in 1745 by Hemming's grandson. Explore the decrepit 'English Industrial Works' that include the ruins of a sugar mill, copra kiln, waterwheel and boiling house, plus the Hemming tombs.

The original great house, duly restored, contains a **museum** (☎ 972-2191; www.jnht.com/st_ann/seville_grhse.htm; admission adults/children US\$5/2; ☎ 9am-5pm) depicting the history of the site from Arawak times through the era of slavery and the colonial period.

More Spanish **ruins** stand by the shore just east of the mouth of the Church River.

There are **horseback tours** (US\$70 inc lunch; 9am & 2pm) from on the property that end with a jaunt into the sea. A nature tour with a local bush doctor will enlighten you about tropical fruits.

OTHER SIGHTS

The grassy forecourt of the parish library on King St is dominated by the **Marcus Garvey Statue**, with the hero portrayed larger than life in gray bronze (see the boxed text, p32).

Westward along Main St you'll pass the **courthouse**, at the corner of Market St. It was erected in elegant cut limestone and red brick in 1866 with a pedimented porch bearing the scales of justice. Visitors are welcome to observe the court when it's in session. Across the way is the **market**, topped by a clock tower, which gets busy on Fridays and Saturdays. One hundred meters further west lies quaint **St Ann's Bay Baptist Church** (☎ 972-0408).

Nearby, on Hospital Rd just off Main St, is the warehouse of **Seville Pottery** (☎ 972-9517), which makes superb ceramics, including exquisite blue-glazed bottles.

At the west end of Main St stands the **Columbus Monument**, topped by a bronze figure of the explorer dolled up as a Spanish grandee.

One hundred meters up the hill from the Columbus Monument is the exquisite church **Our Lady of Perpetual Help**, built in contemporary Spanish design by an Irish priest in 1939, with stones recovered from the ruins of Sevilla la Nueva. Inside, great beams support the organ loft. This is one of the few Catholic churches in all of Jamaica.

Festivals & Events

A festival of traditional music and dance, **Jamaica Night**, is held at Maima Seville Great House in April. An **emancipation celebration** is held on the grounds every July 29 to August 1, and a **National Mento Yard** celebrates the Jamaican heritage in October.

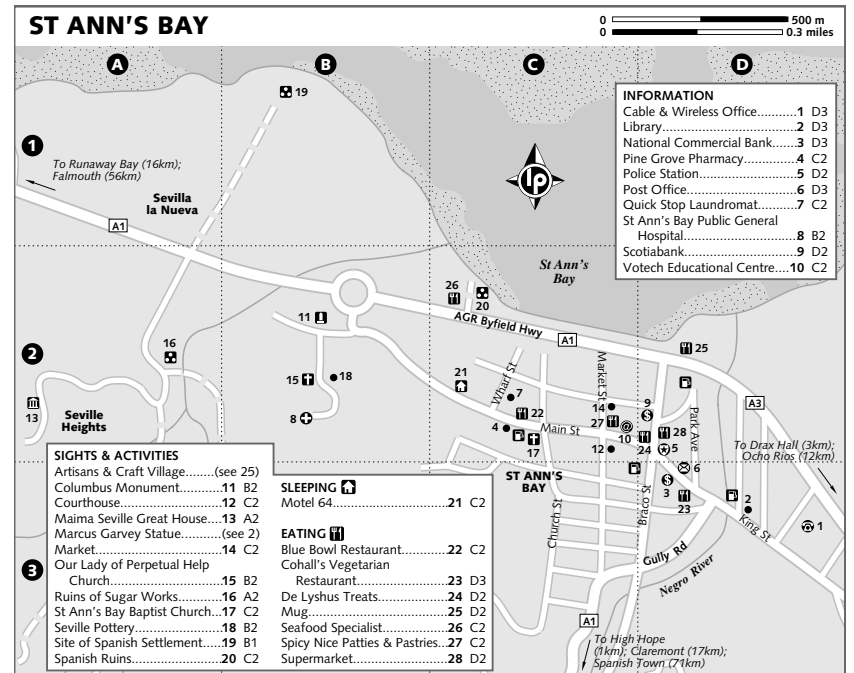
The **St Ann Family Fun Day and Kite Festival** (☎ 972-9607) is held each Easter Monday at

Drax Hall, on the A3 immediately east of St Ann's Bay.

Sleeping & Eating

Motel 64 (☎ 972-2308; Main St; r US\$18) This very basic downtown motel offers 14 small rooms with only minimal furnishings, but they are clean and have fans and private showers.

ourpick High Hope Estate (☎ 972-2277; www.highhopeestate.com; all-inclusive d per person per day/week US\$110-180; P ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Set amid 16 hectares of manicured gardens, lawns and woodland high in the hills above St Ann's Bay, this quirky yet chic Venetian-style villa built in 1961 resembles a location from a Fellini film. Each of its seven rooms, decorated with antiques, has a minibar and mini-library of books; three have wonderful ocean views and verandas. There's a well-stocked library, and you're welcome to peruse and play the original owners' collection of vinyl records. A pool is inset in a sundeck. Rates include breakfast and afternoon 'high tea.' Other meals, lovingly prepared with ingredients hand-picked from the property's fruit trees and garden, are available on request. To get here, take



COLUMBUS MAROONED

As any experienced island traveler will tell you, in Jamaica the best-laid plans can veer wildly astray. Such was the case with Jamaica's first European tourist, Christopher Columbus. In 1503, on his fourth voyage to the New World – and his second trip to Jamaica – the explorer's two remaining ships were pummeled by a storm. Leaking badly, the ships managed to make land on Jamaica's north-central coast near modern-day St Ann's Bay. With one of his worm-eaten ships nearly submerged and all the rigging gone, Columbus and his downtrodden crew dug in and tried to make friendly with the locals.

Fortunately they were able to come to agreeable terms with the Arawaks living nearby in a village called Aguacadiba. Diego Mendez, the de facto operations manager for Columbus, wrote of the welcome hospitality they had received. And so began the short-lived honeymoon between the European interlopers and Jamaica's indigenous people.

Now that they could depend on all-inclusive service, Columbus turned to other matters. He sent Mendez off in a canoe to Hispaniola to fetch help – that's another story! – and sank dejectedly into a period of idleness. Predictably, his Arawak friends soon tired of their obligation to the moody explorer, who was derelict in paying his bills.

To frighten them back into submission, Columbus performed a disingenuous parlor trick by consulting his trusty almanac and 'predicting' that their vengeful God would express his consternation with a sign of anger in the sky. When night fell, a lunar eclipse caused the moon to have an eerie 'bloody' quality and the Arawaks fell into a panic. The next morning room service resumed, and Columbus and his men survived for 12 more months until help arrived from Santo Domingo.

Church St south (uphill) three blocks from downtown St Ann's and continue uphill for about 1.5km.

Seafood Specialist (☎ 794-8870; cnr Jail Lane & A1; mains US\$2-6; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Though rustic, it serves wholesome local fare such as brown stew, plus excellent steamed or fried fish with yams and rice and peas, washed down with natural juices.

Cohall's Vegetarian Restaurant (☎ 794-8537; 18 Musgrave St; mains US\$2-6; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A health-food restaurant and store selling soups, patties, gluten, beans, carrot juice and fruit drinks.

Mug (☎ 972-1018; mains US\$4-12; 🍴 lunch & dinner) The Mug is 300m east of the Seafood Specialist, beside the A1, and it serves seafood, including fish-and-chips and lobster. It has a popular barbecue on Wednesdays – 'Mug Night' – when it stays open until 1am.

Clean, modern **De Lyshus Treats** (☎ 972-2317; Main St) serves inexpensive Jamaican fare, as does **Blue Bowl Restaurant & Lounge** (Main St), two blocks west. **Spicy Nice Patties & Pastries** (22 Main St; patties US\$0.30) sells patties, and there is also a supermarket on Braco St.

PRIORY & AROUND

Priory, about 1.5km west of St Ann's Bay, has a small beach with water sports and several hotels.

You can turn inland and head into the hills for views down the coast. Here you'll find **Lillyfield Coffee Museum**, at Lillyfield Great House, about 5 miles east of Brown's Town.

Sights & Activities

CHUKKA COVE FARM

This former polo field west of Priory is now the home of **Chukka Caribbean Adventures** (☎ 972-2506; www.chukkacaribbean.com), which offers an ever-growing list of guided excursions and adventures. The trips are sometimes a mite crowded, but the quality of service and expertise of the guides is high. Most of the offerings can be booked through a hotel including transfer; rates quoted below are for those arriving on their own steam.

The most popular excursion is the three-hour **Horseback Ride 'n Swim** (US\$76), offered twice daily at 9am and 2pm. The waterfront ride culminates with an exciting bareback trot into the sea. Bring sunscreen, towel and a swimsuit.

Chukka's other tours include these ones: **Canopy Tour** (2hrs; US\$88) Sail through the canopy from platform to platform on a zip line in the Cranbrook Flower Forest.

Jeep Safari (3½hrs; adult/child US\$66/53) A tour by jeep to Coyaba River Garden and through mountain scenery.

Mountain to Sea Bike Adventure (3hours; adult/child US\$60/48) An exceptional bike ride from the mountains of St Ann's Bay to a cove for swimming and snorkeling.

River Tubing Safari (1½hrs; adult/child US\$66/48) A family-friendly float three miles down the White River.

River Kayak Safari (1¼ hr; adult/child US\$66/48) Paddle down the White River.

Zion Bus Line (5hrs; US\$73) This is the easiest way to visit Nine Mile, the birthplace and final resting place of Bob Marley.

The farm also hosts a popular Easter Sunday carnival, when crowds flock from as far afield as Kingston.

CIRCLE B FARM

This working **plantation** (☎ 913-4511; tours US\$12, with lunch US\$25; 🍴 10am-5pm) at Lewis, near Richmond Hill, about 1.5km south of the A1, has tours that demonstrate the raising of avocados, bananas, coconuts and vegetables. The farm is reached via a turnoff 1km west of Sevilla la Nueva at Priory, 3km west of St Ann's Bay. Also on site is a guest house; see below.

CRANBROOK FLOWER FOREST

This 130-acre **botanical garden** (☎ 995-3097; www.cranbrookff.com; adult/child US\$10/5; 🌅 9am-sunset) is a treat, crafted in the lush valley that carves up into the hills south of Laughlands, about 5km west of Priory; it's signed off the A1, a kilometer and a half west of Chukka Cove. The garden is built around a colonial-era building and includes theme gardens, a hothouse orchid display, pools, and lush lawns (with croquet) fringed by banks of anthuriums and other tropical flowers.

Guided nature walks (about 90 minutes) lead to the river, reflecting giant tree ferns, spectacular torch ginger, heliconia and other exotic species. Volleyball, river tubing and horseback rides are available.

Sleeping

Circle B Farm Guest House (☎ 913-4511; dm US\$20, r US\$50) In the middle of the Circle B Plantation is this simple backpacker's lodge offering several dorm-style rooms, each with three single beds. There's a communal kitchen and lounge and one private room with kitchenette. Meals are not offered; if you lack wheels you may want to consider bringing food to prepare.

H'Evans Scent (☎ 427-4866; www.hevansscent.com; Free Hill; r per person US\$80; 🍴 ☒ 🚰) In the tiny hill town of Free Hill, 10km south of Priory, this evolving ecotourism experiment is the brainchild of Derek Evans, better known in

the UK as fitness celebrity Mr Motivator. The sprawling hilltop property is lavishly gardened and has many nooks and crannies designed specifically for blissful repose. Rooms are brightly painted in lime green, yellow and orange, and each has two twin beds, a CD player and mosquito nets, and there's also a one-bedroom suite with a lounge and fridge. On the property are diversions such as zip wire rides, and, blessedly far away, an ATV track. Meals are provided in the extensively decorated main house. Be sure to visit the herb garden and learn from the bush doctor all the health-giving benefits of the local plants.

Seacrest Beach Hotel (☎ 972-1594; www.seacrestresorts.com; 12 Richmond Estate; r US\$85-110, ste US\$120, 2-bedroom villa US\$170; 🍴 ☒ 🚰) Off the A1 in Priory – look for a giant rusty anchor next to picturesque ruins – is this compact and friendly property. Bougainvillea spills over whitewashed walls onto a tiled sundeck, giving the place a distinctly Mediterranean feel. Rooms have TV, phone and private balcony overlooking a beach. Car-rental discounts are offered with your room.

Columbus Beach Cottages (☎ 972-1516, 972-1847; Richmond Estate; 1/2-bedroom apt US\$60/100; ☒) Just down the road from the Seacrest is this seaside lodging that doubles as a marine laboratory for Hofstra University in New York. It's a pleasant place conjuring up memories of summer camp. Students mill about, and there's a resident marine biologist. Guests have opportunities to get involved in the research. The apartments sleep three and have no frills; most are fan-cooled but a couple have air-con. Each is equipped with a serviceable kitchen. As for swimming, some visitors are put off by the seaweed growing along the rocky shore, but others are undaunted. There's a gazebo over the ocean, perfect for sunset reflection.

RUNAWAY BAY

This bay (16km west of St Ann's) has a modicum of hotels and tourist facilities, though the place is far from sophisticated. Divers, however, find much to celebrate. This one-street village stretches along the A1 for 3km, merging with Salem to the east. Several small beaches are supposedly public, although most are the backyards for a few all-inclusive resorts. If you're hankering for a dip in the big blue, head to the white-sand **Cardiff Hall Public Beach** (admission free; 🌅 7am-sunset), opposite the gas station. There

is also a somewhat twee **fisherman's beach** in Salem, east of Runaway Bay, where the occasional sound-system party is staged on the weekend.

Information

Dr Patrick Wheatle (☎ 973-7761; Main St, Salem)

Medical clinic.

Johnny's Pharmacy (☎ 973-6071; Main St, Salem)

Next door to Dr Patrick Wheatle.

Nu Innovations (☎ 973-6775; Northern Shopping Complex, Salem; per 30min US\$1.25) Internet access.

Police (☎ 110, 973-3433)

Post office (☎ 973-2477) On the main road in Runaway Bay.

Runaway Self-Service Launderette (☎ 973-6535; Rose Plaza, Salem)

Scotiabank (Main St, Salem) ATM outlet.

Activities

SCUBA DIVING & WATER SPORTS

Runaway Bay has excellent diving. There's a wreck in shallow water in front of Club Ambiance, plus two cars and a plane offshore from Club Caribbean. A reef complex called Ricky's Reef is renowned for its sponges. More experienced divers might try the eponymous Canyon. Here, too, is the Reggae Queen, a 30m-long sunken tugboat. Potty Reef will have you flush with excitement; divers can't resist having their photo taken sitting on, er, King Neptune's throne.

Diving company **Reef Divers** (☎ 973-4400; Club Ambiance, Main Rd, Runaway Bay) offers one/two tank dives (US\$42/75) and certification programs (from US\$120).

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The 6294m course at **Breezes Golf Club** (☎ 973-7319; day pass US\$80; ☎ 6:30am-9pm) is par-72, with several elevated tees and a putting green. There's a pro shop and, upstairs, a classy restaurant and sports bar. Caddies are mandatory (US\$15 for 18 holes, or US\$10 for nine holes). Guests staying at Breezes and Hedonism III play for free.

South of Runaway Bay, **Dover Raceway** (☎ 975-2127) is the setting for auto and motorcycle races. Races are held once every other month, April to December.

Sleeping

HOTELS

Salem Resort (☎ 973-4256; r with fan/air-con/kitchen US\$35/45/55; ☎ ☎ ☎) This family-run resort

in Salem offers 24 rooms, each modestly furnished with queen-sized beds, satellite TVs and phones. There are two bars and a restaurant.

Tamarind Tree Resort Hotel (☎ 973-2628; tamarindtree@cwjamaica.com; r US\$40-45, 3-bedroom cottage US\$135; ☎ ☎ ☎) A 25-room hotel on the A1, 100m from the beach. All the rooms have phone and cable TV and are pleasantly furnished; most have small balconies. The bar next door makes a racket late into the night. The hotel also offers three large and pleasing cottages, and a simple restaurant.

Piper's Cove Resort (☎ 973-7156; www.piperscoveresort.com; r US\$95; ☎ ☎ ☎) This exceedingly attractive and well-run hotel offers a peaceful environment and personal, thoughtful service that you could never get at an all-inclusive resort. There are 14 spacious one-bedroom suites with kitchens spread between four Spanish-style villas with gracious plantation-style rattan furnishings, cable TV and private balconies. Meals – provided on request – can be had on an airy poolside pavilion. Childcare and laundry services are available.

Runaway Bay Heart Hotel (☎ 973-6671; www.runawayheart.com.jm; d US\$90-95, tr US\$110-115, 2-bedroom ste US\$180; ☎ ☎ ☎) With a breezy hillside setting, this plantation-style manor has 56 spacious, tropically furnished, well-lit rooms with satellite TVs and coastal vistas. The service is excellent, as well it should be: next door is the hotel training school. The hotel overlooks the SuperClubs Golf Club, to which hotel guests enjoy special rates. A shuttle runs to Cardiff Hall Beach. Amenities include a fitness center and an elegant restaurant.

VILLAS

The **Jamaica Association of Villas & Apartments** (JAVA; ☎ 974-2508, 800-845-5276; www.villasinjamaica.com) offers fully-staffed beachside and hill-top villas, including **Hummingbird Hill** (per week US\$7000; ☎ ☎ ☎), a five-bedroom mansion situated on spacious, beautifully landscaped grounds and **Bean Bird Cottage** (per week US\$1436), a cozy love-nest set at the water's edge.

ALL-INCLUSIVES

Royal Decameron Club Caribbean (☎ 973-4802; www.decameron.com; 3 nights all-inclusive s cottage US\$375-465, d US\$570-750, ste US\$390-510; ☎ ☎ ☎) In Salem, this good-value all-inclusive has 20 rooms and 20 one-bedroom suites on 12 acres. The highlights are the pleasingly austere 135

conical, African-style thatched-roof cottage rooms. Some have lofts that are much enjoyed by the kiddies. The rooms are spacious, with king-size beds and wooden cathedral ceilings. There's plenty of activity at the disco and three bars. The Beach Jetty bar has swings and a singing bartender. There's a well-kept 300m-long beach. Activities include a full range of water sports, a PADI dive center and party cruises.

Breezes Runaway Bay (☎ 973-4820, in the USA ☎ 800-467-8737, in the UK ☎ 01749-677200; www.superclubs.com; Runaway Bay; 3 nights all-inclusive d US\$505-627; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This is the only place in Jamaica – so far – to offer an underwater wedding. The 238-room, 27-acre all-inclusive resort run by SuperClubs fronts the best beach in Runaway Bay and appeals to a mass market. Bedrooms overlook lush gardens and pool. A nude section has its own Jacuzzi (one of three on site). Facilities include scuba diving and a trapeze, plus well-stocked stores, a nightclub and disco, and a choice of restaurants. The price includes golf at the golf club.

Hedonism III (☎ 973-4100, in the USA ☎ 800-467-8737, in the UK ☎ 01749-677200; www.superclubs.com; 3 nights all-inclusive US\$1100-2000; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) SuperClubs' latest all-inclusive resort for uninhibited adults is a bootylicious 10-acre property with 225 rooms, some of them 'swim-up.' Each boasts king-size beds, cable TVs (with adult viewing), lively tropical fabrics and large Jacuzzi tubs. As the porter might explain with a well-practiced wink, the mirrored ceilings 'make things look bigger.' The two beaches, alas, are unimpressive. Activity centers on three pools, including a nude pool-and-Jacuzzi where X-rated antics regularly occur. A see-through waterslide coils down from the Octopussy disco. The complex is segregated into 'nude' and 'prude' sections with separate but equal facilities; in the nude division being naked is obligatory. There are far more single men than women guests; a third female in a group stays free ('a threesome is a freesome').

Franklyn D Resort (☎ 973-4592, in North America ☎ 800-337-5437, in the UK ☎ 020-8795-1718; www.fdrholidays.com; 3 nights all-inclusive d US\$1800-2100, child 6-15 US\$30, child less than 6 free; ☎ ☎ ☎) This Spanish hacienda-style, all-inclusive family resort has 67 smartly decorated suites, including some two- and three-bedroom apartments. Children find plenty to do in the several kid-friendly facilities. A 'Girl Friday' is assigned

to each suite to look after the kids. The resort has three restaurants and a bar, plus an ocean-front spa and waterslide, and a state-of-the-art computer/business center.

Eating

Nana Kofi Vegetarian Restaurant (☎ 973-4266; mains US\$2-6; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) About 100m west of the gas station, it specializes in health food and vegetarian cuisine. Typical dishes include chick-pea soup, vegetarian patties and veggie burgers.

Tek It Easy (A1; mains US\$3-7; ☎ lunch & dinner) At this economical rooftop haunt, Jamaican fare – primarily chicken and fish – competes for attention alongside the freely flowing overproof rum. There's karaoke every Tuesday night.

Blue Pearl (☎ 973-1678; A1; mains US\$3-8; ☎ lunch & dinner) Serving Jamaican favorites such as curried goat and escoviteched fish in a cliff-top garden, this casual eatery is a good place to sample local fare prepared with gusto.

Seafood Giant (☎ 973-4801; mains US\$3-16; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) At the west end of Runaway Bay, it serves such dishes as jackfish with spinach roasted in foil or fried with bammy, plantain, rice and peas; or otherwise order curried, creole or braised garlic shrimp. The filling meals are excellent value. However, if you pick your own fish, you'll be charged 'according to size.'

Cardiff Hall Restaurant (☎ 973-2671; Runaway Bay Heart Hotel; mains US\$7-17; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This cheerful restaurant serves well-made Jamaican and continental fare. Reservations are essential.

Rising Sun (☎ 973-7908; mains US\$6-18; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Next to the gas station, this Swiss-run eatery is recommended for smoked marlin appetizer, pizzas and curried shrimp.

In Salem, there's a **Devon House I-Scream** (A1) and **L&M Grocery** (☎ 973-7292; Main St).

Entertainment

Most fun-hungry visitors make the short journey to Ocho Rios for their after-hours kicks or settle for what's on at their resort; subsequently, local entertainment options are few. The usual charmless go-go clubs include the **19th Hole Club** (☎ 973-5766; Salem Plaza), which also has pool tables and live music. Also here is Club Encore, one of the nicer bars among the less-than-inspiring options, and Slick's Tappa Top 8 Ball Sports Bar, with pool tables.

For a more touristy option, try the shows at Club Caribbean or the **Safari Disco** (Club Ambiance, Main Rd), which has special attractions on weekends. You can buy a night pass to many area resorts (US\$45 to US\$75) granting unlimited booze, food and entertainment.

Getting There & Around

Buses, minibuses and route taxis traveling the A1 between Montego Bay (1½ hours; US\$2 to US\$3) and Ocho Rios (40 minutes; US\$1 to US\$1.50) stop in Runaway Bay. Public transport arrives and departs from the square in front of Patty Place, catercorner to the post office.

In Salem, **Salem Car Rentals** (☎ 973-4167; www.salemcarrentals.com) and **Caribbean Car Rentals** (☎ 973-3539) are located on the main road.

DISCOVERY BAY

This wide flask-shaped bay, 8km west of Runaway Bay and 8km east of Rio Bueno, is a popular resort spot for locals drawn to its Puerto Seco Beach. The town itself has only marginal appeal.

Resembling a kind of giant nipple, the Kaiser Bauxite Company's Port Rhoades bauxite-loading facility dominates the town (it was used for the headquarters of Dr No – Crab Cay – in the James Bond movie, *Dr No*). Large freighters are fed by conveyor belts from a huge storage dome that looks like a rusty pumpkin. You can follow the road signed 'Port Rhoades' uphill 1km to a lookout point offering fantastic views over the bay (there is a pair of high-power, pay-per-view binoculars). Note the metal likeness of Anancy, the folkloric spider, in the playground of the Kaiser's Sports Club, en route.

Locals believe this to be the location where Christopher Columbus first landed on Jamaican soil in 1494, though others say it was at Rio Bueno (p207).

Information

There's a cambio and supermarket at Columbus Plaza, on Discovery Bay Rd, which heads south from the A1 at the Texaco station.

D/Bay Laundromat (☎ 670-0381; Discovery Bay Rd) Opposite Columbus Plaza.

Judrich Pharmacy (☎ 973-9073; Main St) On the A1 in the center of town.

Kaiser Medical Clinic (☎ 973-3568; ☎ 8am-4:30pm

Mon-Fri) Just off the A1, immediately east of Port Rhoades Rd; it's signed at the turnoff for Kaiser, west of town.

National Commercial Bank (A1) Operates an ATM in the shopping complex next to the Texaco on the A1.

Pow Wow's (☎ 973-9866; Columbus Plaza) Offers currency exchange.

Sights

PUERTO SECO BEACH

The eastern side of the bay is rimmed with white-sand beaches. With its soft sand and limpid waters, **Puerto Seco Beach** (☎ 973-2660; adult/child US\$4/2; ☎ 8am-5pm), in the center of town, is a real charmer. Open to the public, it sports rustic eateries and bars and a fun park with a waterslide for kids not interested in sun-tanning. On weekends and holidays the beach is teeming, but during the week the place is often deserted. You can rent fishing boats, sea bikes and jet skis.

COLUMBUS PARK

This open-air roadside **museum** (admission free) sits atop the bluff on the west side of the bay. Highlighted by a mural depicting Columbus's arrival in Jamaica, the eclectic museum features such memorabilia as anchors, cannons, nautical bells, sugar-boiling coppers and an old waterwheel in working condition that creaks and clanks as it turns. There's also a diminutive locomotive formerly used to haul sugar at Innswood Estate.

GREEN GROTTO CAVES

This impressive system of **caves and tunnels** (☎ 973-2841; www.greengrottoesja.com; adult/child US\$20/10; ☎ 9am-4pm), 3km east of Discovery Bay, extends for about 16km. The steps lead down into the impressive chambers, where statuesque dripstone formations are illuminated by floodlights. Pre-Columbian Arawaks left their artwork on the walls. Much later, the caves were used as a hideout by the Spanish during the English takeover of the island in 1655. Runaway slaves in the 18th century also took refuge here, and between the two world wars, the caves were used by smugglers running arms to Cuba. The highlight is Green Grotto, a glistening subterranean lake 36m down. The entrance fee includes fruit punch and a guided one-hour tour. Your guide will attempt to amaze you by tapping stalactites to produce eerie sounds.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodationer (☎ 973-2559, 973-2499; Main St; d/tr US\$30/42; ☎) This somewhat scruffy place in the center of town needs a coat of paint but is otherwise a decent choice for budget travelers. Rooms are equipped with fridges and cable TV and king-size beds. There's a communal kitchen and shady patio.

On the east side of town, two open-air jerk centers compete for customers. **Mackie's Jerk Centre & Bar** (☎ 973-9450; mains US\$2-8; ☎ lunch & dinner) serves particularly good pork and chicken and stages an entertaining dominoes tournament on Tuesday nights. **Ultimate Jerk Centre** (☎ 973-2054; mains US\$2-8; ☎ lunch & dinner), opposite Green Grotto Caves, is another old favorite. The curried goat stew is particularly good.

Cheap eats can also be had at the roadside stalls lining Main St, selling jerk chicken, bummy and more.

Getting There & Around

Buses, minibuses and route taxis ply the A1 between Montego Bay and Ocho Rios and stop in Discovery Bay, notably at the junction of the A1 and the road to Brown's Town.

DRY HARBOUR MOUNTAINS

Paved roads lead south from Discovery Bay, Runaway Bay and St Ann's Bay and ascend into the Dry Harbour Mountains. In this off-the-beaten-track area, the badly potholed roads twist and turn through scenic countryside as they rise to the island's backbone.

Only two main roads run east-west. The lower, the 'Great Interior Rd' (the B11), parallels the coast about 11km inland. It begins at Rock, 2km east of Falmouth, and weaves east to Clarendon.

BROWN'S TOWN

pop 8000

Brown's Town is a lively market town 11km south of Runaway Bay. Many noble houses on the hillsides hint at its relative prosperity. The town is at its most bustling during market days (Wednesday, Friday and Saturday), when the cast-iron **Victoria Market** (nr Main St & Brown's Town Rd) overflows with higglers (street vendors).

Irish estate-owner Hamilton Brown (1776–1843) financed the building of **St Mark's Anglican Church** (☎ 975-2641; nr Main St & Brown's Town Rd) in Victorian Gothic style (allegedly, he also arranged for the Baptist church to be burned down so that blacks would have nowhere to worship). Note the fine cut-stone **courthouse** (Brown's Town Rd) with neoclassical columned portico; and **St Hilda's School** (☎ 975-2218; St Christopher's Rd), a grand Teutonic Anglican-run structure on the hill immediately east of town; the girls wear lavender uniforms.

You can buy patties and pastries at **Spicy's Patties & Pastries** (☎ 975-2544; Top Rd), on the north side of the Victoria Market, which sells fresh produce at stalls that also spill along Main St. Several modest restaurants along the commercial corridor sell hearty Jamaican fare for US\$2 to US\$8.

Public transport arrives and departs from the east end of Top Rd, a block off Main St. Minibuses and route taxis (US\$3) operate between Brown's Town and Kingston via Clarendon and Moneague, and more than a dozen ply the Ocho Rios route via Discovery Bay and Runaway Bay.

NINE MILE

The small community where the 'King of Reggae' was born on February 6, 1945, is set dramatically in the midst of the Cockpits. Despite its isolated location 60km south of Ocho Rios, the village of Nine Mile is decidedly on beaten path for pilgrimages to Bob Marley's birth site and resting place. At the **Nine Mile Museum** (☎ 999-7003; ninemilejamaica.com; admission US\$15; ☎ 9am-5pm), Rastafarian guides given to impromptu singing of Marley's songs lead pilgrims to the hut – now festooned with devotional graffiti – where the reggae god spent his early years before moving to Kingston and where you'll see the single bed he sang of in 'Is This Love.' Another highlight is the Rasta-colored 'rock pillow' on which lay 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.

Each year on February 6, this place has traditionally been the site of Bob Marley's birthday celebration, when fans from around the world make the trek to play and hear music throughout the night. (In 2005, the celebration was held in Ethiopia in honor of the 60th anniversary of Marley's birth.) Bob's widow, Rita,

periodically expresses disdain at how her husband's legacy has been turned into a tourism 'product,' and though she has spoken of exhuming him for burial in Africa, the prospect grows increasingly unlikely each year.

The **museum restaurant** (US\$5-7) serves I-tal dishes in a rootsy bar. Club Marcus, opposite the museum, is a lively bar serving snacks.

The museum shop sells Marley paraphernalia of every description. The guides and abundant hangers-on have an annoying habit of hitting you up for extra money. Give them a J\$100 (about US\$1.60) bill and you're likely to receive a contemptuous stare for being a skinflint! Don't be suckered.

Getting to Nine Mile is no simple matter. It's extremely secluded, but cab drivers in Ocho Rios know the route (haggle hard for a reasonable fare; US\$75 is common). Minibuses and route taxis operate between Brown's Town, Alexandria and Claremont, stopping in Nine Mile. An easier way to visit is via the 'Zion Bus Line' tour offered by **Chukka Caribbean Adventures** (☎ 972-2506; www.chukkacaribbean.com; US\$65), which departs from Ocho Rios.

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

CAVE VALLEY

This tiny village sits on the border of St Ann and Clarendon parishes, 13km south of Alexandria, at the north end of Vera Ma Hollis Savanna, a 11km-long valley. During the early years of the British occupation in the late 17th century, the region was a center for the Maroons. The British built a barracks here during the First Maroon War in the 1730s.

The Cave River rises in the mountains near Coleyville, 16km west of Cave Valley, where in the dry season you can see the **Cave River Sinks**, two holes into which the river disappears to reemerge 21km north near Stewart Town.

The road through the Cave River Valley eventually reaches Spaldings, Christiana and Mandeville.

Route taxis running between Brown's Town and May Pen pass through.