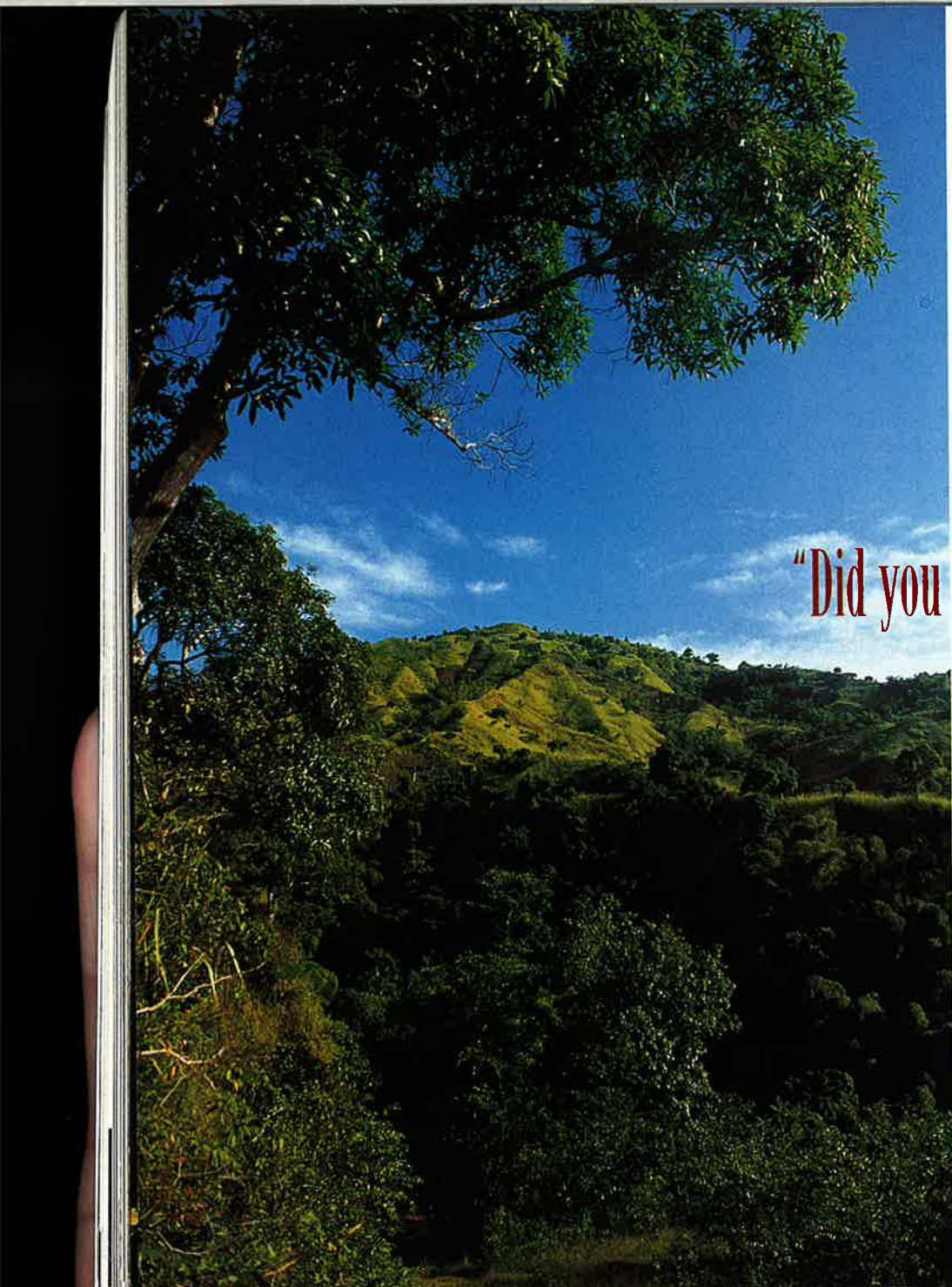




The Caribbean's largest English-speaking island, Jamaica is a feast of many flavors, and the familiar fare of rum, reggae, surf, and sand are merely the appetizers.

—  —
By Paul Martin
Photographs by Maggie Steber

High on Jamaica

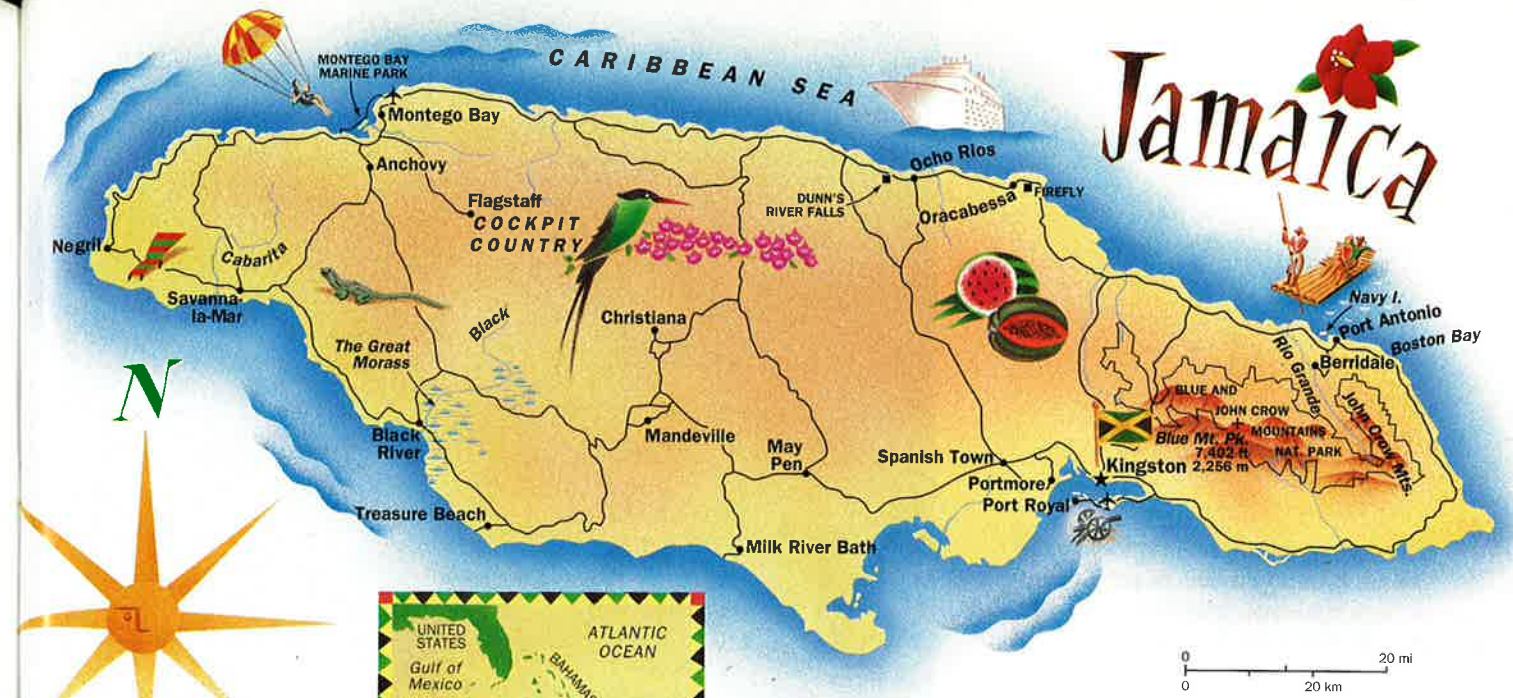


"Did you know that bananas sing?"

Monica Zijdemans laughed as she drove her vintage Volvo through the rolling Trelawny hills, the wind whipping her dark hair. Deftly dodging potholes in the narrow road, the free-spirited Jamaican launched into her rendition of the sound that the leaves of banana trees make when the breeze blows through them just so. It resembled the eerie call of the humpback whale. "It's a real siren song," she said.

I'd met Monica only minutes earlier, while having lunch at the Hotel Villa Bella, the gracious old country inn that she runs outside the nearby town of Christiana. When she'd learned I was unfamiliar with this part of Manchester Parish, where she'd grown up—in the mountainous heart of Jamaica—she'd suggested a quick tour. Eventually we stopped at the 160-year-old Bethany Moravian Church, a simple gray stone building perched on a ridgetop. Shafts of sunlight pierced the gathering clouds as we looked across the surrounding hills. Monica smiled serenely. "This is my chapel in the sky."

Monica's offer to show off her homeland wasn't an unusual gesture. Everywhere I went during the three weeks I spent traveling around this Connecticut-size island, I met Jamaicans eager to point out sights that I shouldn't miss. And if I was directed to more than one "prettiest spot in the country," well, that was understandable. Any number of places might qualify. In its 146-mile length, Jamaica



manages to pack in a continent's worth of wonders: a spine of genuine mountains, world-class beaches, river-cut valleys and broad grassy plains, areas of swampland and semidesert, even a bizarrely eroded plateau region.

I found Jamaica—and Jamaicans—a continual fascination. Originally peopled by peace-loving Arawak Indians, "discovered" by Columbus in 1494, ruled by the Spanish for a century and a half and then by the British for the next 300 years, Jamaica is a land where history lies deep. Besides, how could you not be intrigued by a place where you can pet a crocodile, coax a hummingbird to sit on your finger, glide down a river on a bamboo raft, and walk up a waterfall?

So where to begin this lively ban-

quet? I started out in Kingston and circled the island counter-clockwise, with stays in the resort towns of Port Antonio, Ocho Rios, Montego Bay, Negril, and Mandeville, places as different as peas from pearls, yet every one of them claiming a portion of the island's colorful past, and each a great jumping-off point for explorations.

"Stay here or don't come back"

SIGN OUTSIDE A SMALL KINGSTON LODGING

"Kingston is wonderful. I love it."

"I wouldn't live in Kingston for love or money."

Those polar opinions were uttered by two Jamaicans that I met. That's how Kingston affects people. Some

love it. Some hate it—or perhaps, more accurately, they fear it. Memories linger about the 1976 and '80 elections, when Kingston's heart-of-darkness ghettos erupted into war zones. Today Jamaica's political parties no longer settle their differences Wild West fashion, and, while Kingston has more than its share of big city woes, travelers who bypass the capital miss out on a lot.

Kingston's superlative setting for one thing. The city spreads along the dry coastal plain of southeastern Jamaica, suspended like a mirage between the calm blue sweep of the world's seventh largest natural harbor and the green wall of the Blue Mountain range, which culminates in 7,402-foot Blue Mountain Peak.

Home to a third of the island's 2.4 million population, Kingston jumps with creative energy. Music, dance, theater, art—the island's best of each are here. So is some of the island's richest lore. In the fishing village of Port Royal, at the end of the sandy spit that encloses Kingston harbor, you can step into the 17th-century lair of buccaneer Henry Morgan, while in nearby Spanish Town—Jamaica's first capital—you can sit in the cool stillness of St. James Cathedral, which traces its lineage to the 1520s.

But perhaps the best reason to visit Kingston is Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park. Established in 1993 as Jamaica's first land national park (Montego Bay Marine Park opened the year before), these 193,260

PRECEDING PAGES: Kicking back in Jamaica's capital of laissez-faire—mellow Negril—Jill Benner of Oak Park, Michigan, gazes from the veranda of her elevated hut at Tensing Pen. Rippling hills of the Blue Mountains (above) dominate eastern Jamaica, a green antidote to the big-city bustle of nearby Kingston (map). Schoolgirls enjoy ice cream cones on the grounds of the capital's Devon House (opposite). In 1881, one of the Caribbean's first black millionaires built the mansion, now open to the public and furnished with period antiques.



Here on Jamaica's northeast coast, Port Antonio

acres preserve a green, quiet world just an hour northeast of the capital.

I gained my introduction to the Blue Mountains from Maya Lodge, a collection of cabins and campsites near the edge of the park run by Peter Bentley, a soft-spoken Jamaican dedicated to safeguarding his country's natural heritage. Peter underscored the new park's importance. "These mountains are the main watershed for the island, yet we've been losing over 5 percent of the forests yearly to logging and farming."

Peter and I were sitting on the lodge's thatch-roofed dining platform, enclosed by jungly vegetation. Birds screeched and chattered as I ate my breakfast of warm homemade breads served with sugary grapefruit and butter-soft papaya. Children were laughing and shouting in the village across the valley. I was fueling up for a hike that would afford me a glimpse of some of Jamaica's 3,000 species of

flowering plants, 250 species of birds, and 129 varieties of butterflies.

After breakfast, I set out with organic farmer and guide Willy Graham, a lanky, bearded man of upright bearing. Willy's gentle voice led me up the trail for four hours, advising me to "take it easy" as we billy-goated up steep slopes through plantings of

the area's famous Blue Mountain coffee. On dirt roads we passed women in Sunday finery and idling farmers imbibing morning tots of rum.

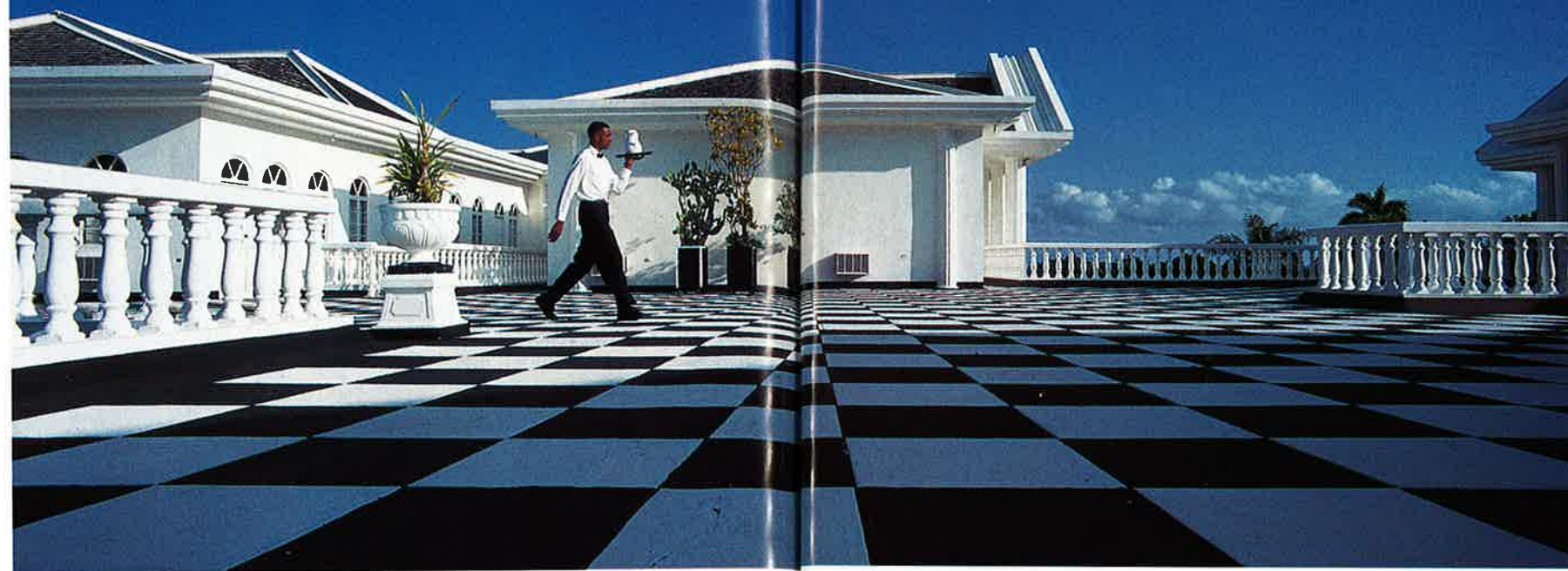
Fluted ridges rippled away in every direction, Kingston and the sea always in the distance. All manner of trees pressed in on us—jackfruit and breadfruit, mango and guava, pod-covered "woman's tongue" trees. Banks of wild ginger perfumed the air. A pair of slow-flapping white egrets hung like impressionist brushstrokes against the green hills.

We'd started from the lodge at 1,700 feet elevation. At 3,000 feet we entered the park and its montane rain forest. Another thousand-foot climb took us up near Hardwar Gap, where Willy led the way along the Vinegar Hill Trail into a primordial thicket so dense with trees and ferns and mosses it reminded me of the profusion of life around a coral head.

Willy lightly ran a callused hand over the delicate green mosses enveloping a log. "Look, mon—how nice dey are. I love dem."

You could tell that he meant it.

clings to steep foothills like a Hollywood stage set.



Service is the byword at Jamaica's wide range of resorts, which includes the upscale Jamaica Palace (left) in Port Antonio, a town noted for the beauty of its twin harbors. Navy Island (opposite), once owned by actor Errol Flynn, sits between the harbors. In the mountains back of town, passengers on bamboo rafts (below) enter Lovers Lane on their two-hour float down the Rio Grande.

& Hotel east of town; lolling on the cliff-sheltered vest-pocket beach at Frenchman's Cove; and exploring the faux-Parthenon ruin known as the Folly, an abandoned turn-of-the-century mansion that was once home to a Tiffany heiress. But the pinnacle of a Port Antonio stay is a raft trip on the Rio Grande, which rises in the mountains behind the town.

"Dangerous Curve. Sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of St. Thomas"

SIGN ON THE HIGHWAY TO PORT ANTONIO

Mountains and sea. In Jamaica, you're never far from one, or both. For Port Antonio, a two-and-a-half-hour drive around the eastern end of the island from Kingston, mountains and sea are the defining features. Here on Jamaica's rainy northeast coast, where the Blue Mountains' lush windward slopes trail down to the sea, Port Antonio—with its Victorian gingerbread and air of genteel decline—clings to the steep foothills like a Hollywood stage set, on twin harbors worthy of a Winslow Homer painting.

You soon learn that the quiet, amiable capital of Portland Parish derives more than good looks from its setting. The mountains that enfold this town of 10,400 also isolate—make that *preserve*—it from Jamaica's tourism hustle. Just ensconce yourself over a rum punch some evening up on the hilltop veranda of the Bonnie View Hotel and you can take part in one of the most

active pursuits in town—watching the lights twinkle on below and the stars slowly delineate the sky from the sea.

Port Antonio hasn't always been out of the tourism mainstream. In the 1920s and '30s, it was a major port in the banana trade; banana freighters hauled vacationing North Americans here until a blight and hurricanes nearly wiped out the banana business.

Port Antonio was a favored hideaway for luminaries such as J.P. Morgan, William Randolph Hearst, and Clara Bow. In the 1940s, Errol Flynn sailed in on his yacht, fell in love with the place, and proceeded to buy 60-acre Navy Island, off the end of the peninsula that divides the town's twin harbors. You can stay on Flynn's fantasy island, now a private resort. I took in the harbor view from there, looking back at the little white town painted on the hillsides. I understood why Flynn chose to spend much of his later life here.

Port Antonio's low-key entertainments include fine dining at the bric-a-brac-filled DeMontevin Hotel or the swank, white-on-white Trident Villas



Getting by with a lot of help from her friends, a woman takes a giant step on the climb up Dunn's River Falls, a watery rite of passage outside Ocho Rios.

I set off one morning on a two-hour float down to the coast with Capt. Nathaniel Bell, a gray-haired river veteran. We drifted out onto the broad, shallow water aboard his skinny bamboo raft, between hills thick with spiky stalks of wild sugarcane, towering banyans dripping aerial shoots, and flamboyant poinciana trees, their blossoms reverberating deep orange against the greenery.

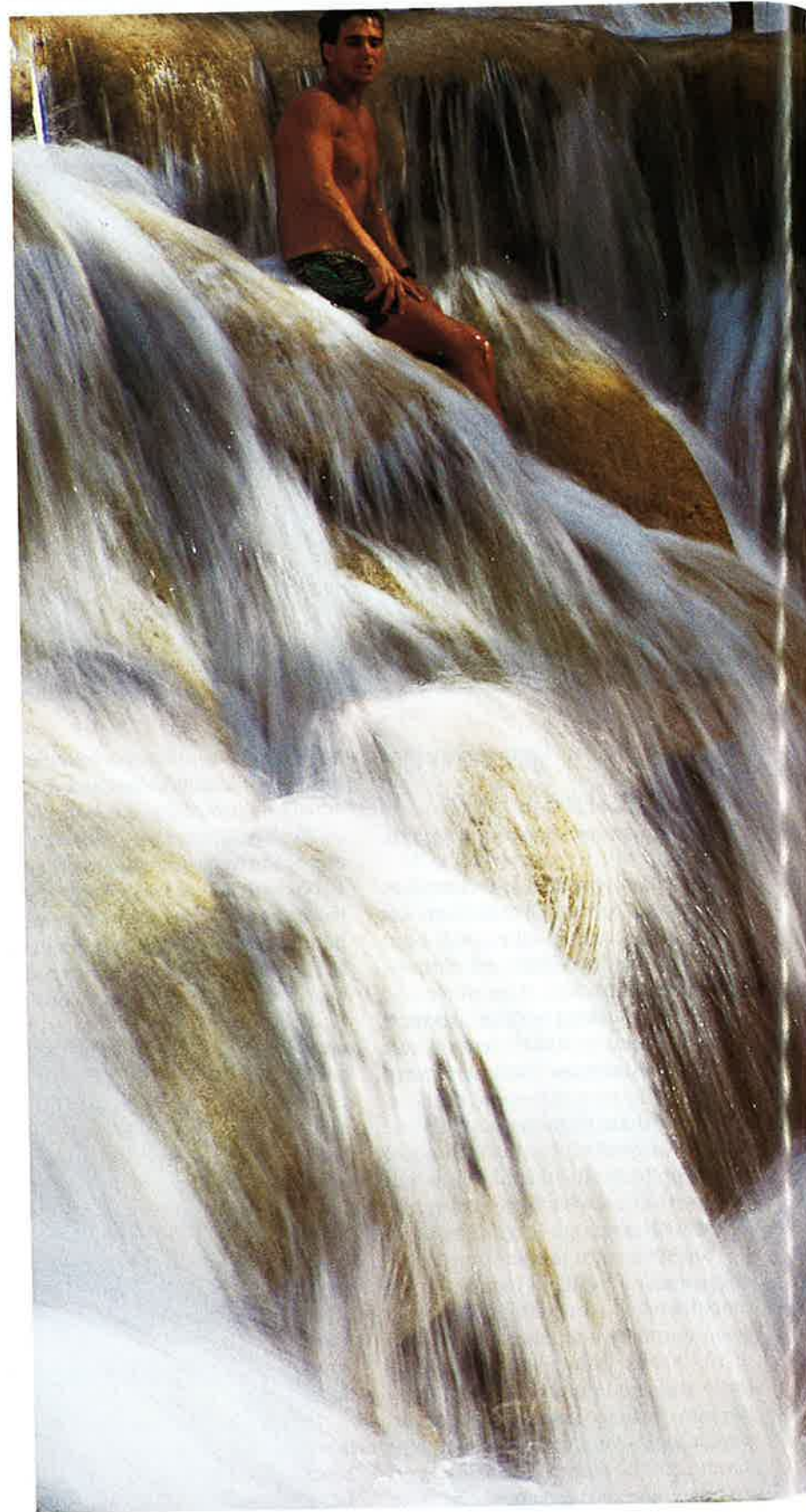
The pace we set was something just a bit slower than leisurely. Captain Bell nudged us along with his bamboo pole, expertly guiding the raft through occasional riffles. Floating vendors tempted me with cold Red Stripes, the Jamaican brew, and a bankside calypso band sounded a happy note. Lounging in my seat like some archduke of the waves, I came to the conclusion that if you can't relax on a Rio Grande raft trip then you're simply not cut out for relaxation.

At one point we came to a narrow channel formed by a cliff and a free-standing rock outcrop—Lovers Lane. "Errol Flynn, he name this place," said Captain Bell. "Supposed to kiss and make a wish." Since I was by myself, I had to settle for a wish.

"Caution: Sleeping Policemen Ahead"

SIGN AT DUNN'S RIVER FALLS NEAR OCHO RIOS

Looking at all the lime green and hot pink and shocking blue houses in Jamaica, you might think you've landed in a carnival. Well, I can tell you where its midway lies: on the perpetually car-and-pedestrian-choked main drag in Ocho Rios—Ochi to locals—a two-and-a-half-hour drive west of Port Antonio along the north coast.



Photograph: Bob Krist

I made my way down this gauntlet of craft shops, food stands, juke joints, and genial hustlers one balmy Saturday night. (You can walk it end to end in under an hour.) From sidewalk vendors' stalls, head-high banks of speakers poured out reggae at a volume fit to loosen the fillings in your teeth. Near the town clock tower I watched the crowd part for a pretty young Jamaican in a full-length evening dress of gold lamé, with matching hat and shoes.

That streetscape was pure Jamaica, a scene so exuberant as to border on the surreal—though after a time here, you wouldn't find yourself surprised if a snowy white unicorn suddenly stuck its head in at your window. Not in Ocho Rios anyway, Jamaica's prime cruise ship destination and eastern anchor of the north coast's industrial-strength-tourism duo (Ochi-Montego Bay). Things get wild when the almost daily Love Boats disgorge their quota of the 436,000 passengers that annually descend on this former fishing village of 5,800 souls.

At the sprawling, eclectic craft market behind Turtle Beach—the high-rise-rimmed semicircle of white sand next to the cruise ship pier—I plunged into the frenzied world of commerce along with an invading army of cash-wielding boat people. As I browsed among stalls offering pastel carved fish, bright oil paintings, and a surfeit of T-shirts, eager vendors solicited my business with assorted honorifics: "Over here, teacher," "Doctor, come look," "Hey, Kenny Rogers." Out west of town I joined the clamorous horde in a group assault on Dunn's River Falls, a slip-sloshing 600-foot climb up a stairstepping waterfall.

Despite its habitual buzz, Ocho Rios does offer quiet interludes. A half-hour east of town, I fell in love with Firefly, the mountaintop aerie of British playwright and composer Noël Coward. The music room of the modest white house contains two pianos, on which Coward and his showbiz guests played duets. In the bedroom is the antique four-poster where Coward died of a heart attack in 1973, at age 73. Standing in his private "room with a view," the open-air office where he wrote much of his later work, I looked out on an unsullied sweep of scalloped bays and forested headlands a thousand feet below. I was almost inspired to write a song myself.

In the hills directly above Ocho Rios I dawdled at Coyaba River Garden and Museum, three manicured acres that seem intended to prove the serenity of plants and moving water. The small museum here presents a capsule history of the island's occupation, from the Arawak Indians through the Spanish and British eras,

with their ugly legacies of slavery. I was fascinated by the Arawaks, who seemed to have spent a good deal of time at leisure. I felt an immediate affinity for those vanished islanders when I learned that they'd coined the words "hammock" and "barbecue."

Oh yes, I also learned that in Jamaica "sleeping policeman" is the name for a speed bump.

"Grace's One-Stop Beer Joint"

MAKESHIFT TAVERN SIGN NEAR MONTEGO BAY

When Columbus anchored off a particularly lovely crescent of sand on the north coast of Jamaica in 1494, he found only a scattering of Arawak villages. Five hundred years later, high-rise hotels and restaurants encrust the hills at Montego Bay, and some 43,500 Jamaicans scramble to make a living off the million-plus visitors who pass through the island's tourism capital every year.

When I arrived in MoBay, as locals



The entire bay—3,780 acres, extending along six miles of coast and out to a depth of 300 feet—is encompassed by the park, which was formed to preserve the too-perfect blue water (surely they dye it) and golden sands that have been attracting tourists since the turn of the century.

And there's more here to do than sauté yourself on the beach. If you have a day to spare, consider a trek inland into the wilds of Cockpit Country, southeast of MoBay. This eroded limestone plateau, with its cave-pocked valleys and hoodoo peaks, is home to the Maroons, descendants of slaves in the Spanish period.

Southwest of MoBay you can do something you've likely never done before: feed a hummingbird by hand. Each afternoon, a menagerie of wild birds flocks to Lisa Salmon's rock garden. I sat mesmerized as a doctor bird, a blur of iridescent green plumage with long tail streamers, lit

call it—an hour and a half west of Ocho Rios—I set out to find the Montego Bay Marine Park. At popular Doctor's Cave Beach, surrounded by legions of prostrate sun-worshippers and Jamaican gigolos promenading their wares, I discovered I was in it.



on my finger and sipped nectar with its needle-like tongue from a tiny bottle of sugar water. All I could feel were the bird's delicate claws; its weight was as insubstantial as a dandelion puff.

East of town are two impressive plantation homes built in the late 1700s, when Jamaica was on its way to becoming the world's leading sugar producer. Stately Rose Hall Great House—a three-story Georgian edifice agleam with antique furniture and intricate woodwork—comes complete

From his north coast home, Firefly (below), longtime island resident Noël Coward loved to watch the sunset color the distant shores. To the west, in Ocho Rios's crafts markets, cruise ship passengers buy bright reminders of Jamaica (above). Sugar paid for the island's grand plantation house Rose Hall (left), built in the 1770s near Montego Bay.





Good times come first in hedonistic Negril: Sweet Spice Restaurant (above) serves a bounty of Jamaican fare, from lobster to curried goat. On Negril's seven-mile beach (opposite), sun-worshippers toast to their preferred hues.

with the ghost of former mistress Annie Palmer, the legendary "White Witch," a voodoo priestess who supposedly killed off three husbands and took a series of slaves as lovers.

Not far away is quaint, antique-crammed Greenwood Great House, built by the family of poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The rambling hill-top home, with its long second-floor veranda overlooking the sea, was among several great houses owned by the Barretts, one of Jamaica's richest families. I confess, as I gazed at all the



Day's end doesn't end Negril pleasures, be it a night in romantic surroundings (above) or a lively reggae beach party.

fine furnishings here, I found myself pondering the irony that, in a sense, Elizabeth's poetry was supported by the sweat of the family's 2,000 slaves, a legacy over which Elizabeth herself expressed great shame.

"Roy and Felix Serious Chicken"

NEGRIL RESTAURANT SIGN

In Negril—ten miles of oceanfront commerce in search of a town—people do take eating seriously, along with every other fleshly indulgence. After all, this loosely knit hamlet of 9,000, two and a half hours west of MoBay, is the home of the anything-goes resort, Hedonism II (aka the Human Zoo). In the 1960s and '70s, hippies descended on this western end of Jamaica in pursuit of the uninhibited life, drawn by cheap prices and the island's finest stretch of beach, seven faultless miles of white sand. Free spirits still gravitate to this most laid-back of Jamaican resort areas, where even the rules are relaxed.

The pursuits of Negril are uniformly body-oriented. You can

stuff yourself with seafood at unembellished eateries like Cosmo's or Sweet Spice Restaurant, where I dined on a first-rate conch steak. You can gyrate toward meltdown to the music of name reggae bands at Kaiser's Café or MXIII. At Rick's Café or LTU Pub, on the rocky cliffs south of the beach, you can embalm yourself with overproof rum while watching some of the gaudiest sunsets in the Caribbean. You can even improve your body at the Swept Away Resort's extravagantly equipped sports complex or at the Negril Yoga Centre.

But mostly in Negril, life's a beach. There's a place to suit every taste at the beachfront bazaar. Strung along the sand are any number of hotels, food stands, bars, dive shops, parasailing outfits, and craft emporiums, each fronting its own little parcel of beach, most public, some private (but no buildings taller than the highest palm tree—by law). I liked Runaways, a welcoming public beach with an open-air restaurant-bar and not overly insistent music.

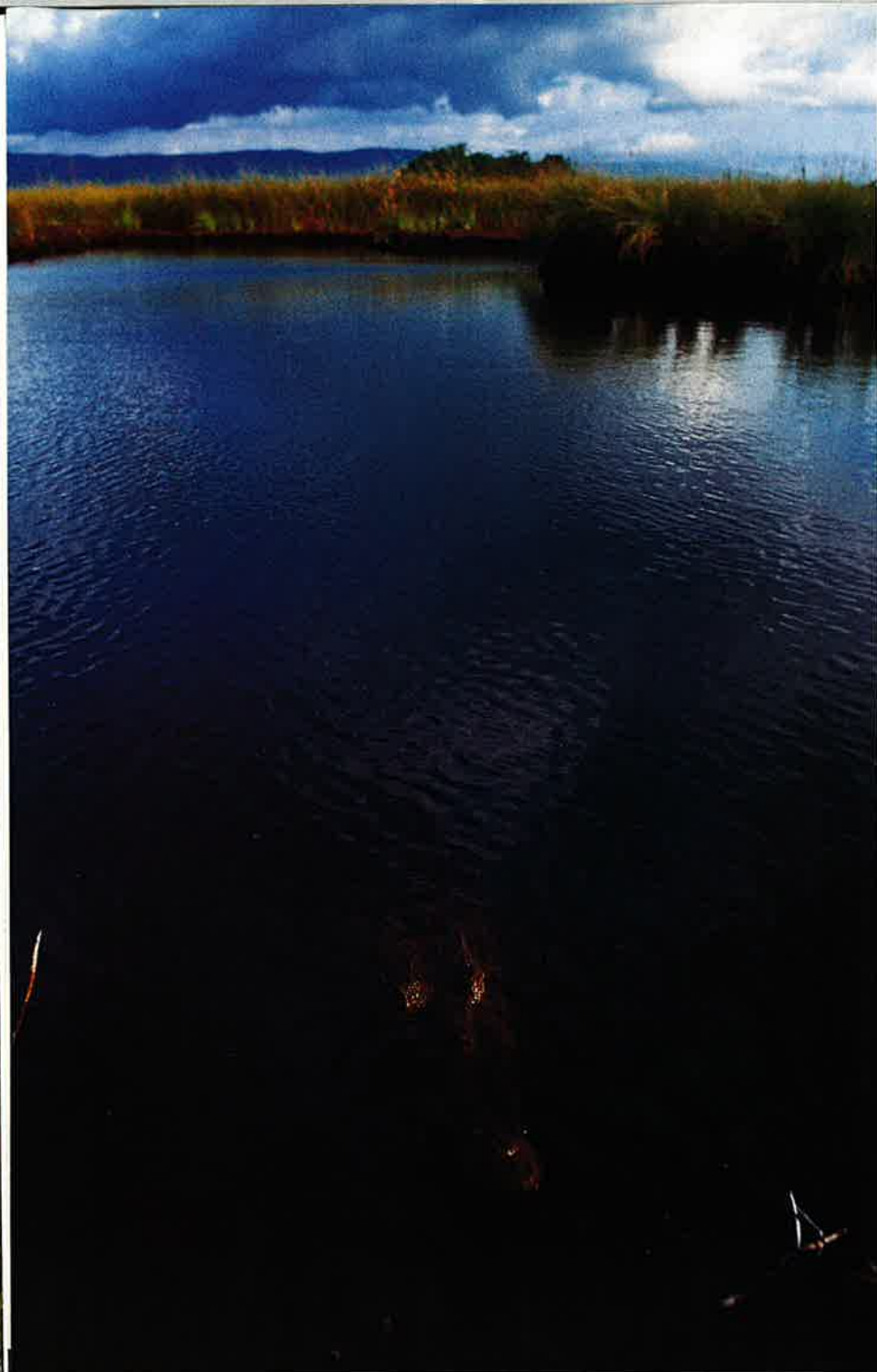
The morning I kicked off my flip-flops and eased onto a chaise longue, it wasn't too long before I noticed the six topless Italian girls clustered knee-deep in the gentle surf. The young women were gabbling in each others' faces and gesticulating wildly. Nearby, their sleek boyfriends—fiercely tanned and unremittingly handsome—were bounding about with paddles in their hands in pursuit of a small, lively ball.

Up the beach to the north, white hulls and Day-Glo sails tacked in the indigo water off Booby Cay, named for the seabirds that nest there. In that same direction was the tony Grand

*Free spirits descended on this western end of Jamaica
in pursuit of the uninhibited life, drawn by
cheap prices and the island's finest stretch of beach,
seven faultless miles of white sand.*



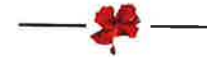
Photograph: Jan Butchofsky (right)



Eerie visage of an American crocodile looms from the tannin-stained waters of the Black River, on the southwest coast. Jamaica's longest watercourse, the Black River combines with numerous tributaries to form the 7,000-acre Great Morass, scheduled to be set aside as a national park that will protect the habitats of crocodiles and many species of fish and birdlife. In the mountain town of Mandeville, a short distance to the east, the residential area of Ingleside (right) preserves the habitat of Jamaica's upper crust.



*Soon, nine feet of crocodilian winsomeness
was dog-paddling alongside the boat, looking up with a
cold-eyed stare for a hoped-for treat.*



"Slow Men At Work"

ROAD REPAIR SIGN OUTSIDE MANDEVILLE

Sometimes in Jamaica you might perceive that there really are slow men at work. At my hotel in the town of Black River on the little-developed south coast, an hour and a half from Negril, I scored a trifecta of delays—a prolonged electrical outage, an omelette 40 minutes in the making, and a shower that emitted not a stream, not a trickle, but a slow, IV-like drip. Jamaicans have an unruffled outlook on such minor setbacks. "No problem, mon," they say, "soon come," meaning, stay calm, it's gonna happen eventually.

I was passing through Black River on the way to Mandeville, my final stop. Before I left Black River I took in one of the island's prime nature attractions, a boat safari into the 7,000-acre Great Morass wetland, where Jamaica's third national park is in the offing. Heading up the Black River, our tour boat motored past banks of mangroves alive with herons and egrets. Our passing set the birds into flight. For a few magical seconds, a broad-winged egret raced its white reflection down the dark mirror of water alongside us.

With effervescent Michael Fray at the helm, we pulled into a leafy cove, home to Charlie, an American crocodile. About 300 crocs live in the wetland. Michael began calling Charlie's name. Soon, nine feet of crocodilian winsomeness was dog-paddling alongside the boat, looking up with a cold-eyed stare for a hoped-for treat. Michael reached down and patted the croc's head. These animals are non-

aggressive, Michael assured us, though I noticed a white feather stuck to the tip of Charlie's narrow snout, traces of an earlier meal he'd managed on his own.

An hour east of Black River, in the heart of Manchester Parish, lies a comely enclave of English traditions. Even its name is beautiful: Mandeville. This city of 34,500 sits at a cool 2,000 feet, well in from the seacoast. No beaches, no convoys of tourists. Just a lofty green world of gentle pursuits—flower shows, afternoon teas, birding, golf. British colonists once escaped from the heat of the coast to this elegant old hill town. Now wealthy retirees flock here. Agriculture and bauxite mining pump up the economy, leaving the city ghetto-free, a rarity in Jamaica.

What do I recall about Mandeville? The immaculate white mansions of Ingleside residential area, looking out over hills that roll on forever in the clear air. Mrs. Carmen Stephenson, a demure local gardening standout whose laughter is as gentle as her prizewinning orchids are showy. The patriarch of Marshall's Pen Great House, Arthur Sutton, a trim, erudite, 94-year-old nature and history enthusiast who could coach Alistair Cooke on urbane civility—and who can trace his Jamaican roots to the island's first child born to English parents, in 1655.

I also remember Christiana, a trading town 12 miles north of Mandeville and another thousand feet up, just about dead center in Jamaica. It was near there that I spent the last afternoon and evening of my travels, at Monica Zijdemans' Hotel Villa Bella. I napped in the flower-filled hillside

garden that afternoon, beneath an arching poinciana. Awakening to a fresh glass of homemade ginger beer, I looked across a small valley at a chattering stream of youngsters making their way down a steep hill from their ridgetop school. The steady file of brown uniforms zigzagged down the switchback road like so many copper coins rolling down a slot.

As I watched, I could feel the pang of my imminent departure creeping over me. After my first trip to Jamaica, a few years back, I actually suffered withdrawal symptoms. When I got home, I changed my brand of beer to Red Stripe, and I listened to reggae every night for a month. I didn't want to lose the mellow feeling.

Jamaica is hard to let go of because its images stamp themselves so indelibly on the mind. I close my eyes now and I see a statuesque mahogany-skinned woman walking along a green country lane, a market basket of pink anthuriums balanced atop her head.

For me, Jamaica is a fragment of Bob Marley heard through the open window of a passing car, and the clean, delicate scent of ginger blossoms after a rain. It's the morning sun boiling up out of the Caribbean like a bright red lobster hoisted dripping from its pot, and a chorus of tree frogs tuning up as another long, slow, velvety night settles in.

Jamaica is a catchy tune I can't get out of my head. Jamaica is . . . well, the perfect image eludes me. But then, no problem, mon. Soon come. □

Paul Martin is TRAVELER's managing editor. Maggie Steber's recent book, *Dancing on Fire: Photographs from Haiti*, was published by Aperture.

Jamaica TravelWise

Planning your trip

Entering Jamaica For visits of up to six months, citizens of the United States and Canada need either a passport or two pieces of identification (one with photo).

The Jamaican dollar is the basic unit of currency. Many prices are quoted in U.S. dollars, and U.S. currency is accepted at many hotels and shops. As of press time, \$1 U.S. = J\$31 (J\$1 = \$.03 U.S.). For the current rate of exchange, call your bank or the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB). Prices below are in U.S. dollars.

NOTE: All telephone area codes are 809, unless otherwise indicated, and addresses should include Jamaica, West Indies.

When to go Temperatures vary little by season, ranging from 80° to 90°F year-round with high humidity tempered by trade winds and mountain breezes; the island's interior can be 10 to 20 degrees cooler. Daily tropical showers are most common in spring (May-June) and fall (Sept.-Oct.). High tourist season is from mid-Dec. to mid-Apr.

How to get there

By plane Kingston's Norman Manley International Airport is convenient to both Mandeville and Port Antonio. Montego Bay's Sangster International Airport is convenient to Negril and Ocho Rios. Trans Jamaica Airlines (952-5401) operates internal flights serving Kingston, Montego Bay, Negril, Ocho Rios, and Port Antonio.

Getting around

By bus Public Passenger Vehicles—buses and minivans with red license plates and the initials PPV—have destinations marked on the windows. The buses are cheap, but crowded and unpredictable. Contact the Jamaica Tourist Board for schedules and fare information.

By car Although car rental is expensive, averaging \$60 per day, this is the best way to see the island, if you can tolerate the narrow roads and driving on the left. Major roads, marked A for primary and B for secondary, are paved but usually only two lanes. Ask about road conditions in the mountains, particularly during the rainy seasons. Rural roads are often unmarked.

By taxi Cabs are often unmetered, so negotiate a fare before getting in, and don't be surprised if the driver picks up more passengers en route. For safety, use only licensed taxis with PPV plates or with the Jamaican Union of Travellers Association's "tourism" designation. Pick up a fare table with suggested rates from the JTB.

Travel tips

All-inclusive resorts Self-contained resorts, where one fee covers lodging, food and drink, and all activities, are very popular. Although they offer a pampered, hassle-free vacation, their insular nature inhibits guests from seeing the country and from interacting with ordinary Jamaicans. You owe it to yourself to get outside the resort and plunge into the sometimes gritty, always colorful world of the real Jamaica.

"Meet the People" Program This is one of

the best and most memorable ways to meet Jamaicans. The JTB or your hotel can put you in touch with a resident who shares your interests.

Hustlers On the streets and beaches in tourist areas, be prepared to be accosted by people eager to sell you everything from private tours to dope. Usually a firm "no thanks" is sufficient to dissuade unwanted solicitations. Keep in mind that real values on craft items can be had from honest sidewalk hawkers, called "higglers," who sell their handmade wares from booths in town markets.

Patois The musical language many Jamaicans speak evolved from the Creole English that slaves used, a mixture of Portuguese, African languages, and Spanish—and, in this century, Rastafarian terms. Memorable words in patois include: *hanggarang* (noise), *boomooonooos* (the greatest), *duppy* (a ghost), *gravidishas* (greedy), *irie* (groovy), *nyam* (to eat), *putta-putta* (mud), and *riddim* (rhythm).

Rastafarianism This indigenous religion flowered from the black pride movement founded in 1914 by Jamaican Marcus Garvey. Garvey's "back-to-Africa" cause and his interpretations of the Old Testament led to the belief that Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie (precoronation title Ras Tafari) was the black messiah. True Rastafarians are peace-loving, intensely spiritual people. Out of their nonviolent protests against oppression came reggae music.

Safety Most Jamaicans are friendly, law-abiding people, but the island's pervasive poverty leads some to crime. Theft and robbery are concerns, mostly in urban areas, and especially so in Kingston. Don't walk the streets at night or flash large sums of money. Store valuables in hotel safes, and lock your car.

Things to see and do

All sites mentioned below, including beaches with facilities, charge admission and are open daily, unless otherwise indicated. Major resort towns have a JTB office for more information.



Bobby Dread keeps Jamaica's reggae flame burning at the Risky Business bar in Negril.

Black River Jamaica's longest river forms an extensive wetland that is home to mangroves, crocodiles, and over a hundred species of birds. The author's boat tour was through South Coast Safaris, Ltd., 1 Crane Rd., Black River; 965-2513 or 965-0220 (evenings), fax 965-2086.

Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park Encompasses a ridge of 6,000- to 7,000-foot peaks dominating the eastern interior of the island between Kingston and Port Antonio. Contact the park in care of the Jamaica Conservation Development Trust, 95 Dunbarton Ave., Kingston 10; or call or fax 977-8044. A private clearinghouse for park services is Peter Bentley's **Maya Lodge** (Sense Adventures, P.O. Box 216, Kingston 7; 927-2097, fax 929-6967) on Jacks Hill. Bentley operates a touring company for outdoor activities, as well as campsites (\$5) and cabins (\$20 for one person, \$30 for two). Ask about rates for overnight hikes to 7,402-foot Blue Mountain Peak, the country's highest. Hiring a hiking guide (\$27.50 full day, \$20 half day) is highly recommended.

Kingston The island's political and cultural capital and the birthplace of reggae. Many attractions are located uptown along Hope Road, including government buildings and **Devon House** (26 Hope Rd., 929-7029; house closed Mon.; enter grounds free), an 1881 great house with period furnishings and adjacent shops for fine island arts and crafts. Nearby are the **Bob Marley Museum** (56 Hope Rd., 927-9152; closed Sun.) in the late artist's home, and **Hope Botanical Gardens** (Old Hope Rd., 927-1257; free), the largest in the West Indies. For Jamaica art, head downtown to the **National Gallery** (12 Ocean Blvd., 922-1561; closed weekends). On the waterfront is the **Crafts Market** (Port Royal St.; admission free), offering one of the island's largest collections of local handiwork. From Victoria Pier, catch a ferry to **Port Royal** at the tip of the Palisadoes peninsula across the harbor, where you can tour **Fort Charles** (closed Sun.), built to protect the British colony in 1656. Off Route A1, 12 miles east of Kingston, is **Spanish Town**, Jamaica's first capital under the Spanish. Its landmark **Cathedral of St. James** dates from the 1520s. Examples of Georgian architecture reflect the later British influence.

Mandeville Genteel town in the center of the country on Route A2, amid rolling hills. Diana McIntyre-Pike, manager of the Astra Country Inn and Restaurant (62 Ward Ave.), runs **Countrystyle** (962-3725), a "community tourism" program wherein travelers meet locals as they go about their daily lives. Worth seeing are **Mrs. Stephenson's Garden** and **Marshall's Pen Great House** on a cattle farm.

Montego Bay The tourist capital of Jamaica and major city on the island's north coast, as well as an up-and-coming cruise ship port. Newly created **Montego Bay Marine Park** protects 3,780 acres of mangroves, sea grass beds, coral reefs, and six miles of beach for responsible public use; fishing and water sports are permitted in designated areas. Hotels line these beaches, including **Doctor's Cave Beach**, famous for its fine, white sand. East of town, off Route A1, are two historic plantation houses, **Rose Hall** (953-2323) and **Greenwood** (953-1077). Inland, south of town, is **Rocklands Bird Feeding Station** (off Route B8 near Anchovy, 952-2009); feedings of a variety of native wild birds are held after 2 p.m. To the east is the mysterious **Cockpit Country**, where runaway and freed former Spanish slaves, opponents of British rule, hid in the highlands that are still inhabited by their descendants. The author

visited the region with Maroon Attraction Tours, 32 Church St., Montego Bay; 979-0308 or 952-2723 (after 7 p.m.), fax 952-6203.

Negril A seven-mile stretch of beach—without high-rises—on Jamaica's western tip, devoted to pure relaxation and physical indulgence. Numerous bars and nightclubs, along with specialty (even clothing-optional) all-inclusive resorts, mean you can party all night in an atmosphere where anything goes. If you're tired of lolling on the sand, take a boat to **Booby Cay**, a coral island.

Ocho Rios Beachy hub of resorts where cruise ship day-trippers wander in the colorful main street market and bask on popular

Turtle Beach (free). Two miles west of Route A1 is 600-foot **Dunn's River Falls** (974-2857). You can see more of the jungly hillsides at

Coyaba River Garden and Museum (974-4568) in Shaw Park. On a thousand-foot plateau near Oracabessa, 20 miles east of Ochi, is **Firefly** (997-7201), Noël Coward's home. On the way, you'll pass the turnoff for 900-acre **Prospect Plantation** (974-2058), a working agricultural farm that you can tour on horseback (except Sun.) or by jitney.

Port Antonio Coastal resort hideaway in the lush foothills of the Blue Mountains overlooking twin harbors and **Navy Island**, a secluded resort formerly owned by Errol Flynn and reached by ferry. Head east on Route A4 from the harbor to **Folly**, an abandoned estate at the tip of a peninsula with expansive views of the harbor and rocky northern coast. Farther east on Route A4, you'll find lavish hotels and enchanting beaches like **Frenchman's Cove**. About six miles south of town are Berridale and Grants Level, starting points for rafting on the **Rio Grande**. The two- to three-hour trips on two-person bamboo rafts (\$40 per raft) are nonstrenuous and relaxing. The author rafted with Rio Grande Attractions, Rafters' Rest, P.O. Box 128, Port Antonio; 993-2778, fax 993-2871.

Places to eat and stay

Recommended by Jonathan Runge, author of *Rum & Reggae: The Insider's Guide to the Caribbean* (Villard Books, 1993). Restaurant prices indicate the average cost of a three-course meal, including a nonalcoholic beverage, tax, and tip. (See "Foods of the Region" in this issue for a discussion of jerk, a popular Jamaican dish.) Lodging prices indicate the cost of a double room. To rent a private villa, complete with personal maid to cook and clean, contact the Jamaica Association of Villas and Apartments (JAVA), Pineapple Place, Box 298, Ocho Rios; 974-2508, fax 974-2967.

Restaurants

ALMOND TREE 83 Main St., Ocho Rios; 974-2813. Tucked into the heart of town at the Hibiscus Lodge and overlooking the sea, this casually elegant establishment features international cuisine with Jamaican touches. Two levels surround an almond tree; swinging chairs in the bar. Try pumpkin soup, roast suckling pig, plantation rice. AE, DC, MC, V. \$35-70.

BOSTON BAY JERK STANDS Boston Bay (nine miles east of Port Antonio on Route A4);

no phone. The spiritual and actual home of jerk (Jamaican spicy flavored cooking), these stands are renowned for a five-alarm jerk that will make you cry. But there's plenty of Red Stripe beer around to put out the fire. Seating at picnic tables. No credit cards. \$6-10.

COSMO'S Norman Manley Blvd., Negril; 957-4330. Popular with locals and in-the-know travelers. Eat at the bar, or choose a table near



The humblest Jamaican sign can herald terrific cooking.

the beach. Conch chowder and "escovitched" fish (cooked in foil with onion, vinegar, hot pepper, and salad oil) are specialties. MC, V. \$8-15.

DEMONTEVIN HOTEL 21 Fort George St., Port Antonio; 993-2604. Don't let the vinyl-covered furniture distract you—the local-style Jamaican cooking is excellent. The curried goat is a must, as is the pumpkin soup. Reservations required. AE, \$30.

GEORGIAN HOUSE 2 Orange St., Montego Bay; 952-0632. Beautifully restored Georgian brick building in the old colonial section of town. Elegant rooms with mahogany floors and brass chandeliers.

Traditional continental cuisine with Jamaican touches. Baked bananas in coconut cream are a revelation. Reservations required. AE, CB, DC, DIS, MC, V. \$35-70.

MILLE FLEURS In Hotel Mocking Bird Hill, Port Antonio; 993-3370. Perched on the veranda of the hotel up in the hills overlooking Port Antonio, this restaurant uses only local produce for its Jamaican cuisine. Homemade breads and vegetarian dishes are specialties. MC, V. \$30.

PARADISE YARD CAFÉ Sheffield Rd., Negril; 957-4006. Home of the original "rasta pasta," this café serves red and green pasta called dreadlocks with such Jamaican traditions as ackee and peppers. Also vegetarian fare plus seafood, curried chicken, quesadillas, and enchiladas. Casual is an understatement. MC, V. \$20.

PORK PIT 27 Gloucester Ave., Montego Bay; 952-1046. A MoBay landmark offering an excellent introduction to the world of jerk. Chicken and pork are the two choices, mild or hot (beginners should stick to mild). Deliciously sweet yams and festival (cornmeal fritters). Picnic tables are the decor; greasy fingers the style. MC, V. \$5.

RUNAWAYS BEACH BAR AND GRILL Norman Manley Blvd., Negril; 957-9180. Located right on the beach with tables offering views of famous Negril sunsets, Runaways is a favorite among Jamaicans. Excellent food cooked local style: Specialties include grilled lobster, crab cakes, and blackened snapper. Burgers at lunch. MC, V. \$8-15.

Lodgings

DOCTOR'S CAVE BEACH HOTEL Gloucester Ave. (P.O. Box 94), Montego Bay; 952-4355. Centrally located and across the street from MoBay's most popular beach, this is an affordable alternative for those who wish to stay in town. The 90 rooms are comfortable and air-conditioned. Gardens and pool in back offer respite from MoBay's hustle. Olympic-size

pool, gym, Jacuzzi. AE, DC, MC, V. \$115.

ROUND HILL HOTEL AND VILLAS P.O. Box 64, Hopewell; 952-5150 or 800-972-2159. Ten miles west of MoBay on its own 98-acre peninsula, this is one of the poshest places to stay in Jamaica. Celebrity-heavy guest list has included Queen Elizabeth and Princess Grace, and Andy Warhol and Paul McCartney. Ralph Lauren owns a villa here, which probably explains the old, clubby decor and ambience (he decorated the bar). The 110 rooms and villas (many with pools) are staffed by more than 250 people, many of whom have worked here for more than 30 years. Fabulous dining room. AE, DC, MC, V. \$190-690.

SEA-GEM Norman Manley Blvd., Negril; 957-4318. Those on a tight budget should try this row of simple, comfortable gingerbread cottages on the beach, owned and operated by the friendly Williams family. 15 rooms. AE, MC, V. \$35-65.

STRAWBERRY HILL Irish Town; 944-8400 or 800-OUTPOST. Sprawled on a 26-acre hilltop 3,100 feet above sea level in the Blue Mountains, this new 12-villa, 18-room hotel is the place to stay in the Kingston area and overlooks the city. Built by Island Records owner Chris Blackwell in traditional 1800s Jamaican architectural style, the rooms are stunning and fully equipped, down to the heated closets that keep your clothes crisp and dry. The restaurant is one of the best on the island—nouvelle Jamaican cuisine and spectacular views. Tiny plunge pool for the entire resort is the major negative. (Larger pool under construction.) AE, MC, V. \$175-775, including continental breakfast.

SWEPT AWAY Norman Manley Blvd. (P.O. Box 77), Negril; 957-4061 or 800-545-7937. All-inclusive resort for couples only—the best of the bunch. Superb sports and health complex: Olympic-size pool, full gym, tennis, squash, yoga, steam rooms, Jacuzzis. 134 rooms. AE, DC, MC, V. \$395-570, including all meals and activities.

TENSING PEN West End Rd., Negril; 957-4417. One of the most peaceful and private places to stay in Negril. A rocky bluff faces sunsets; guests dive into turquoise water from a variety of platforms. Ten thatch huts on stilts are simple yet elegant, with rocking chairs on verandas overlooking the water. Communal kitchen, but restaurants abound in the area. MC, V. \$90-275.

TRIDENT VILLAS & HOTEL P.O. Box 119, Port Antonio; 993-2602 or 800-237-3237. One of the grande dames of Jamaica hotels, Trident's decidedly British air is apparent everywhere. Tea served daily at 4:30 p.m.; waiters wear white gloves. The 26 rooms and villas set on 17 rocky waterfront acres are wonderfully Old World and spacious. AE, MC, V. \$220-350.

WYNDHAM KINGSTON 77 Knutsford Blvd., Kingston; 926-5430 or 800-WYNDHAM. Big, full-service hotel with 300 rooms right in town, perfect for checking out such cultural attractions as the National Gallery and the Bob Marley Museum. Large pool, tennis, gym, restaurants. AE, DC, MC, V. \$164-205.

For more information

In the U.S., contact the Jamaica Tourist Board at 801 Second Ave., 20th Floor, New York, NY 10017; 212-856-9727 or 800-223-4JTB. The JTB operates regional offices in other major U.S. cities and in Toronto, Ontario (416-482-7850). From the U.S. or Canada, call 800-JAMAICA.

Please note that this information can change.