

JAMAICA JUBILATION 2022

The postcard-perfect beach at Jamaica Inn.

This weekend, the captivating island of Jamaica is celebrating its 60th anniversary of independence. Shortly after midnight on August 6, 1962, the Union Jack was replaced by the audacious black, green and gold Jamaican flag, a symbol of great hope for a new nation.

I traveled to Jamaica a few weeks ago to grab a glimpse of what this vibrant island has to offer for the traveler during this year of jubilation.

Montego Bay

My first stop was Montego Bay, and the bustling airport was a sure sign that summer travel had surpassed pre-Covid levels. I checked into the new "Eclipse" wing of the Half Moon Hotel, where the personalized welcomes were as warm as the Caribbean sun. It comes with everything you'd want in luxury accommodations: spacious suites loaded with 5-star amenities, a lush tropical garden, a shimmering turquoise beach just steps away, an infinity pool, several bars, and a choice of restaurants.

I tore myself away to soak up some nearby attractions, including Rose Hall Great House, a restored 19th-century sugar plantation house. Their chilling after-dark tour tells the story of the astonishing carryings-on of the early 1800s.

I enjoyed a mouthwatering Sunday lunch at the breathtaking Round Hill Hotel, where the service is second to none. Then it was off to the surrounding green hills to Animal Farm and Nature Reserve, an absolute delight for nature and wildlife lovers.

Art enthusiasts can explore the works of prominent Jamaican visual artist Ras Natango at his gallery in a botanic garden overlooking the Caribbean Sea. You can feed multi-colored hummingbirds who will perch on your extended finger as you grab a photo of this extraordinary encounter.

For the best local food, check out Pelican Grill in town, Scotchie's for spicy jerk meats and sides, or Spritz, a new seaside party spot with an array of classic Jamaican dishes in Ironshore, Montego Bay

Trelawny

Trelawny is the new buzz center on the Jamaican north coast. I stayed at Ocean Coral Spring Resort in Falmouth, a cruise ship port with several new nearby resorts. Excellence, Royalton Blue Waters, and Ocean Eden Bay offer spanking new, state-of-the-art extravagance.

The area is dripping with excellent attractions too. I did Martha Brae River Rafting with river tubing and zip line adventures, Glistering waters, a luminous lake, Swamp Safari Village, a crocodile sanctuary, and shopping for local fruits in season at the new Falmouth Market.

Ocho Rios

Ocho Rios is perfect for either quiet romantic hideaways or action-packed adventure. I stayed at the exquisite Jamaica Inn, a boutique hotel that has quietly welcomed celebrities, movie stars, and royalty for over five decades. All of the rooms overlook a postcard-perfect beach (pictured

above). Executive chef Maurice Henry and his team use local produce in their cooking to take you on an epicurean journey. They also take guests to the local market on Fridays and teach them how to cook Jamaican foods.

Dunns River Falls and Park, arguably one of the most visited attractions in the Caribbean with its cascading 600-ft. waterfall, was the first of many stops in the area.

White River, a few miles away, is packed with options, from river rafting to tubing and zip lines. Blue Hole in the surrounding countryside is perfect for swimming and diving. Taste of Jamaica, a farm and garden tour that showcases over 50 medicinal plants, is not to be missed. The experience ends with a delicious home-cooked outdoor meal.

The new Ian Flemming International Airport is an impressive and hassle-free port of entry for the Ocho Rios area with most of the amenities of the larger airports. Flights have already started coming in, and American Airlines has scheduled service from Miami for later this year.

Kingston

Kingston is Jamaica's cultural capital and the point of origin of many movements in dance, music, theater, cuisine, and art. My auberge there was the Altamont Court, a quiet and comfortable family-owned 58-room property on the quiet side of New Kingston. After the delight of your complimentary Jamaican breakfast, one can bask poolside and mingle with local and international guests in the evenings.



Reggae sensation Romain Virgo performing at the Appleton Rum Festival in Montego Bay.

JAMAICA

I wasted no time dashing off to the Bob Marley Museum and then to Gloria's at Port Royal for fish and bammy, a delicious local treat. I also sampled tasty treats at Sonia's and Susie's in the Half Way Tree area, The Mango Tree on Chelsea Avenue, Janga's Soundbar and Grill on Belmont Road, and Pushpa's Indian Restaurant in Liguanea. You can feast on roadside delicacies like land crabs, roast yam, roast corn and soup at the Crab Arcade at National Heroes Circle.

The downtown National Gallery is the island's largest trove of Jamaican art. The gallery's flagship "Kingston Biennial: Pressure" exhibition runs until December 31, 2022. Other nearby landmarks include Kingston Parish Church,

Coke Methodist Church, and the Simon Bolivar Cultural Center, which sits next to the legendary Ward Theatre at North Parade. While I was in Kingston, a point of interest was the ordination of the first male dreadlocked priest in the Anglican Church in the old capital of Spanish Town.

Theatrical productions have started again after a Covid lockdown. The National Dance Theatre Company (NDTC) is currently in season performance at the Little Theatre. There is a steady roster of nightclubs with reggae and dancehall parties every night of the week, including Usain Bolt's Tracks & Records and Ribble's.

Kingstonians are big lovers of sports, and visitors can often catch a track and field meet at the National Stadium, a game of cricket at Sabina Park, football at local clubs, and horse racing at Caymanas Park.

Sun worshippers can enjoy the balmy waters at one of the beaches at Hellshire, just 30 minutes from New Kingston. So no matter what part of the island you visit, a surprising package of tempting thrills awaits you. Jamaica...the heartbeat of the world! For more, go to www.visitjamaica.com.

—Dave Rodney
Award-winning Travel Writer
for the Caribbean Region

Trelawny is the new hot spot with shimmering sunsets at Ocean Coral Spring



Photos courtesy of Dave Rodney



The Crab Arcade in Kingston.