

JAMAICA

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MONTEGO BAY

Located on Jamaica's northwest coast, Montego Bay positions itself as the "complete resort," where white-sand beaches are edged by flowering trees, and palm-dotted hills make a lush backdrop to long stretches of rolling meadowland. Called *el golfo de buen tiempo* (meaning *the gulf of good weather*) by Christopher Columbus, it became the main shipping port for lard, or *manteca* in Spanish, and earned the title of *Bahia de Manteca* (*Lard Bay*). Later, sugar and bananas took over as the primary exports shipped from this seaport.

Often referred to as *Mo-Bay*, Montego Bay has grown and flourished, becoming the country's premier tourist destination and the second-largest city. It offers more guestrooms than any other part of the island. The range is enormous, and includes five-star hotels offering European-plan rates (exclusive of meals), large hotel properties with sophisticated convention facilities, high-action all-inclusive resorts, small inns, guesthouses and some of the most luxurious private villas in the Caribbean. Many of the larger properties offer a wide range of on-site activities.

Cultural Attractions

There are many excellent art galleries to explore, among them the Gallery of West Indian Art and the Bay Gallery. Historic landmark buildings include St. James Parish Church, built between 1775 and 1782, and The Cage, a temporary lockup dating from the 19th century that once held runaway slaves and unruly seamen, and now operates as a small museum.

Fascinating stories surround the legendary plantation Great Houses that dot the countryside. The most famous is Rose Hall, haunted by the ghost of the notorious Annie Palmer, who murdered three husbands before meeting a gory death at the hand of her slave lover.

A large collection of photographs exhibited in the gift shop at Rose Hall represents ghostly sightings by modern-day visitors. Greenwood Great House, built by a cousin of poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning more than two centuries ago, is another beautifully maintained great house and features an intriguing collection of rare musical instruments.

Taking the Cure

Early in the 20th century, Doctor's Cave Beach developed a reputation for the remarkable healing powers of the ocean at this coastal point. Travelers came great distances to bathe in the waters here, which some believe are able to cure a wide range of ailments. Its popularity is still enormous with locals, who subscribe to a special membership for beach privileges. Members of the public are welcome to use this beach for a small entry fee, payable at the gate.

Sporting Choices

Five 18-hole championship golf courses are beautifully situated along this coastline, and offer exciting degrees of challenge. They are: the Cinnamon Hill Golf Club at the Rose Hall Resort & Country Club; the Half Moon Golf Club; SuperClubs Golf Club at Ironshore; Tryall Golf Club; and the White Witch Course at the Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall.

Scuba diving is spectacular in the protected waters of Montego Bay Marine Park, with 10 square miles (26 square kilometers) of coral reefs teeming with exotic fish. Deep-sea fishermen in search of the prized blue marlin can rent boats and crew from several charter companies. Yachting has a serious following here, and the Montego Bay Yacht Club is a popular meeting place.

Several parks are great for families, including Aquasol Theme Park, featuring banana boating, parasailing and a water slide; Blue Hole Nature Park, with its plantation tour, swimming pool and picnic area; and Animal Farm, Jamaica's newest animal sanctuary, where visitors can explore the natural habitat of exotic birds and learn the benefits of solar electricity.

Chukka Blue Adventure in Sandy Bay keeps a large stable of 125 horses, and riding tours cover mountain terrain before heading for the beach for a trek through the water. Jeep tours go through the rain forest of Montpelier; mountain biking, river tubing and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) tours are also extremely popular here.

Shopping is another big sport in this area, and the Crafts Market on Harbour Street is a hot favorite, with vendors selling straw baskets, handmade leather goods, wall hangings, batiks and carvings of wood and bone. Nearby duty-free shops overflow with luxury items ranging from Scottish cashmere, china and glassware to perfume, cigars and liquor.

Fun Excursions

Visitors can hand-feed hummingbirds, grassquits and dozens more colorful species at the Rocklands Bird Feeding Station in Anchovy. Or they can venture further afield: from Montego Bay, excursions depart for almost every place on the island, including the uncharted limestone hills of Cockpit Country, where the fabled Maroons, descendants of slaves who escaped from the Spanish, still live in the town of Accompong.

Falmouth, an 18th-century town on the coast, near Ocho Rios, features well-preserved Georgian houses. Rafting trips begin here, carrying visitors along the Martha Brae River, named for an Arawak Indian girl said to have had supernatural powers. Nearby, horseback riding is offered at Good Hope Plantation, where miles of trails wind through rolling countryside.

Hot Action, Fun Dining

Home to the annual Air Jamaica Jazz & Blues Festival in January and the Red Stripe Reggae Sumfest Festival in July, Montego Bay is a particularly lively part of the island. Popular weekly theme events attract both locals and visitors to the bars and eateries of Gloucester Avenue, known as the *Hip Strip*, where music, dancing, food and drink are offered in an upbeat street-festival setting. Margaritaville is a special favorite here, offering lots of outdoor seating as well as an intimately sized indoor bar area and a cozy dining room. By day, children and adults alike enjoy the thrill of a great sea-chute that dives from the deck straight down into the waves, challenging and fun, scary and irresistible.

From reggae to rock, clubs throughout the area provide visitors with an endless variety of nighttime action. Restaurants are equally varied, ranging from the spicy jerked pork and chicken of the casual Pork Pit and the relaxed beach atmosphere of Time N' Place near Falmouth, to the classic elegance of Round Hill Resort's seaside terrace restaurant, just a few miles west, serving creative Jamaican-influenced cuisine. Sunset cruises make a great ending to the day.

Accommodations

Montego Bay is famed for its great resort properties, all with sophisticated facilities and many with dynamic entertainment programs each evening. An attractive range of small hotels and inns offers charm and personalized service with great warmth.

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