

# JAMAICA

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## **OCHO RIOS AND RUNAWAY BAY**

Ocho Rios and Runaway Bay are located in the heart of the north-coast region defined by fern-clad cliffs and cascading waterfalls, not far from where Columbus first landed more than 500 years ago. Amazed by the island's beauty, the explorer declared: "It is the fairest island ever eyes beheld."

Today, visitors come from all over the world to make their own discoveries in this stimulating yet tranquil resort area, which combines the attractions of one of the Caribbean's most popular ports-of-call with the splendid scenery of the surrounding garden parish of St. Ann.

### **Sporting Activities**

From the open-air museum of Columbus Park in Discovery Bay to the sleepy settlement of Oracabessa, a dazzling sequence of brilliant-blue bays, charming fishing villages and sandy coves along the craggy coastline attracts sunbathers, swimmers and water sports enthusiasts.

Beyond the great resorts and golf courses of Runaway Bay, there's horseback riding and polo at Chukka Cove. Trail rides through neighboring plantations are also popular here. Further inland, fishing, boating, horseback riding and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) riding are included in an excursion to the Goshen Wilderness Resort, set amidst lush green hills.

In the Ocho Rios area, swimming with the dolphins is always fun at Dolphin Cove, where these extraordinary animals are trained and mingle happily with visitors. Easily able to jump the boundary into the open sea, they choose to remain on-site at

this well-staffed venue. Additional creatures at this attraction include sharks, ducks, turtles, iguana, snakes, goats and parrots. Craft items and Blue Mountain coffee may be purchased here. More items are offered in the Crafts Market, and luxury goods are available at the duty-free shops.

### **Natural Beauty**

One of the island's best-known natural attractions is Dunn's River Falls, a dramatic 600-foot (183-meter) drop of cascading water. A highlight of any trip to Ocho Rios is a careful climb up its limestone tiers, followed by a swim at the beach below.

Visitors are advised to climb with a staff guide.

The three-mile (five-kilometer) drive through vine-draped Fern Gully affords close-up views of 30-foot-tall (nine-meter) fern trees and other specimens unique to the island. Spectacular vistas of the coast and a profusion of indigenous plants, flowers and trees are offered at Shaw Park Gardens, while the Coyaba River Garden and Museum, in another leafy tropical setting, gives insight into Jamaica's indigenous Taino Amerindian culture.

Abundant crops of sugarcane, coffee and bananas have been harvested since the 18<sup>th</sup> century at Prospect Plantation, which today offers tours and horseback riding. Further east, Harmony Hall is a restored Victorian mansion with an art gallery that sells some of the finest art and craft items on the island. The Wassi Art factory is also well worth a visit, and offers the opportunity to watch pottery being thrown and painted; a large selection of pieces may be purchased in the display area.

### **Exploring the Environs**

At St. Ann's Bay, the Seville Great House & Heritage Park includes artifacts from the excavated colony of *Sevilla La Nueva* (New Seville) that was founded in 1509 by the son of Columbus.

The tiny village of Nine Miles is the birthplace of Bob Marley, and the site of his mausoleum. His birthday on February 6 is celebrated throughout the week each year, attracting hundreds of visitors to the island.

In the town of Oracabessa, and close to James Bond Beach, is Goldeneye, the former home of author Ian Fleming. It now operates as an exclusive villa resort.

Firefly is a must-see for Noel Coward fans. Built on a hilltop that was once a lookout point for the infamous buccaneer Henry Morgan, the house was Coward's favorite place for entertaining on a grand scale, and his invitations were highly coveted by his glamorous circle of celebrity friends. Now open to the public for tours and special functions, this is a wonderful place to stop for a nostalgic excursion and afternoon tea.

### **Nocturnal Adventures**

When night falls, a canoe trip up the torch-lit White River can be an exciting journey that includes a folklore show, dinner and open bar. An enjoyable alternative is the dinner theater performance at the Little Pub. Fine dining in exotic settings is excellent at restaurants like The Ruins and the Almond Tree. At Evita's, the menu features unique Jamaican-Italian specialties. Margaritaville stays open into the early morning.

### **Accommodations**

Accommodations are varied here, with opulent resorts known for their privacy and impeccable service, plus all-inclusive properties and several modestly priced hotels in fine waterfront locations. Jamaica's largest convention hotel is located here.

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