

JAMAICA

Contact:
Phone: 1-877-JTB-NEWS
E-mail: JTBnews@ruderfinn.com

PORT ANTONIO

Nestled between twin harbors on the island's northeast curve, where mist-shrouded mountains drop down to the sea, Port Antonio glows with the green hues of palms and ferns, laced with the brilliant reds and yellows of its tropical flora. Certain species of orchids are unique to this region. For Errol Flynn, who sailed in on his yacht and then decided to make a second home here, this area was *heaven on earth*, a description echoed by subsequent visitors who have found that this corner of Jamaica lures them back year after year. Flynn's widow, Patrice Wymore, remained in Jamaica, and continues to live here today.

Orchids, bananas and palm trees grow in profusion here. Waterfalls drop into fern-edged pools. And some of the island's most elegant villas and charming small hotels are tucked on hillsides overlooking secluded azure coves.

A Magnet for Celebrities

The capital of Portland Parish, Port Antonio was Jamaica's most important center for banana growth and export in the late 1800's. One of the island's first hotels, the Titchfield Hotel, was built in the early 1900's, quickly attracting the rich and famous of the day, among them Rudyard Kipling, Randolph Hearst and J.P. Morgan, Jr.

Architecture and Archaeology

Architectural landmarks here include the ruins of Folly, a mansion reputed to be unwisely built of concrete and seawater, and Fort George, an 18th-century British stronghold whose cannons are still trained out to sea. In the Nonsuch Caves, where rare fossils and Taino relics have been found, ancient stalagmites and stalactites set a dramatic scene.

Lazy or Active

Life moves at a slower pace here than it does elsewhere on the island, so there is more time to enjoy swimming, snorkeling and scuba diving in the shimmering Blue Lagoon, which is fed by freshwater springs and said to reach a depth of 200 feet (60 meters). A popular activity is Rio Grande rafting, a two-hour river cruise on a bamboo raft built for two. A trip to Somerset Falls on the Daniels River offers a refreshing dip in exhilarating waters in a gorge of natural rock, and the rewards of a good on-site restaurant.

Beach life is very laid-back along this part of the coastline, and Frenchman's Cove is a favorite spot with sunbathers. The waves at Boston Beach are often high enough for surfing. Active vacationers enjoy horseback riding trips through the Rio Grande Valley, available through Valley Hikes, an award-winning eco-tour organization that also offers excursions to the historic Maroon settlement of Moore Town.

The waters around Port Antonio offer some of the best deep-sea fishing off the coast of Jamaica, with marlin, tuna, kingfish and dolphin in abundance. The annual International Marlin Tournament is held here in October.

Inviting little shops can be found all over town, and Musgrave Market is filled with local craft items.

Growth of Ecotourism

The extraordinary natural beauty of Port Antonio attracts nature lovers and travelers in search of a rustic retreat, far from the brouhaha of 21st-century business pressures.

This is a region where bananas and bamboo plants grow along the roadside, and environmental awareness supports flourishing ecotourism.

A Ferry Ride

Navy Island, set between Port Antonio's two harbors and reached by ferry, was once owned by Errol Flynn and renowned for wild Hollywood parties.

Accommodations

The choice of lodgings runs from opulent resort properties to colorful rural cottages in lush garden settings, with appeal for every pocket. Options include several villa properties.

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