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TRAVEL

Living It Up In Jamaica

Jamaica isn't all rasta and ganja. The Caribbean island is dotted with sumptuous hotels and villas **BY AENGUS MULCAHY**

Probably best known for its laid back atmosphere and reggae sounds, Jamaica is the largest English-speaking Island in the Caribbean stretching 146 miles from east to west. Discovered by Columbus in 1494, the island was originally called Santiago but uses its Indian name of Jaymaca meaning 'Island of Springs'.

The island has a colourful history and was a target for many an invasion over the years. Today Jamaica is no longer under the grip of European colonialism and instead has become its own boss with a thriving tourist industry. The colonial history has made a lasting impression and can be seen in the sprawling country estates and marvellous big plantation houses scattered all over the island. In this century the Americans have become Jamaica's most frequent visitors and have built many of the beautiful villas dotted around the coastline.

Caribbean

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Bluefields Bay on the south west coast of the island (45 minute drive from Montego



lush green forests. Each comes with a private pool and beach. The interiors of the villas are classically designed with locally quarried pink marble or wooden floors, cut-stone walls, built-in mahogany armoires and hand-crafted curved top French doors that open out to a paradise blue Caribbean sea.

At the villas, a personal cook and butler combine to make sure you eat what you want, when you want it. Breakfast includes a tasty selection of fresh fruits - papaya, watermelon and orange along with smouldering blue mountain coffee. For lunch and dinner you can expect mouth-watering meals of lobster or chicken with splendidly made potato chips. You will also enjoy and perhaps host an evening cocktail party for the other guests which is a nice way to meet them.

The villas are suitable for family holidays (nannies are provided), couples or just friends to sharing. They serve as a great base on the island and when you want to go somewhere all you have to do is ask (drivers cost \$50-\$100 per day). The island itself offers a range of pastimes which include picnicking and birdwatching or more active sports like snorkelling and swimming to mention but a few. You can snorkel on the coast of your own beach or further out on the coral reef (boat hire costs \$25 per hour). There is also deep sea fishing for marlin or a trip to Bird Island to see the vast range of Jamaica's tropical birds.

The Y&S waterfalls situated in the middle of a 5,000 acre private estate look like a scene from Tarzan.

Refreshing

There are 50-foot high vines to swing off and the water is beautifully refreshing. The crocodile populated Black River is another worthwhile excursion. The Jamaicans themselves are extremely affable and friendly. Many of them have Irish ancestors as the Irish were sent there by the British to the sugar fields where they worked with the natives. Probably the most famous Irish person in Jamaica is Chris Blackwell, the son of Joe Blackwell from Newport, Co Mayo, who made his millions with Island Records. Blackwell owns many hotels in Jamaica most notably his new Strawberry Hill Hotel in the blue mountains on the east side of Jamaica. He is supposedly harder to meet than the prime minister. **BP**

Flights to Jamaica leave from Gatwick. The flight is ten hours long and prices are usually around the £500 mark. Details vacations@bluefieldsvillas.com.



Bay). Sitting 30 feet above the coastline at the bottom of a majestic mountainous back drop are the five Bluefields villas where the theme is comfort and in style. Each villa has its own two to three acreage of space separate by