

## A taste of paradise

Lydia Bell finds an unspoilt part of Jamaica where a chic Bohemian hotel leaves you happily laid back

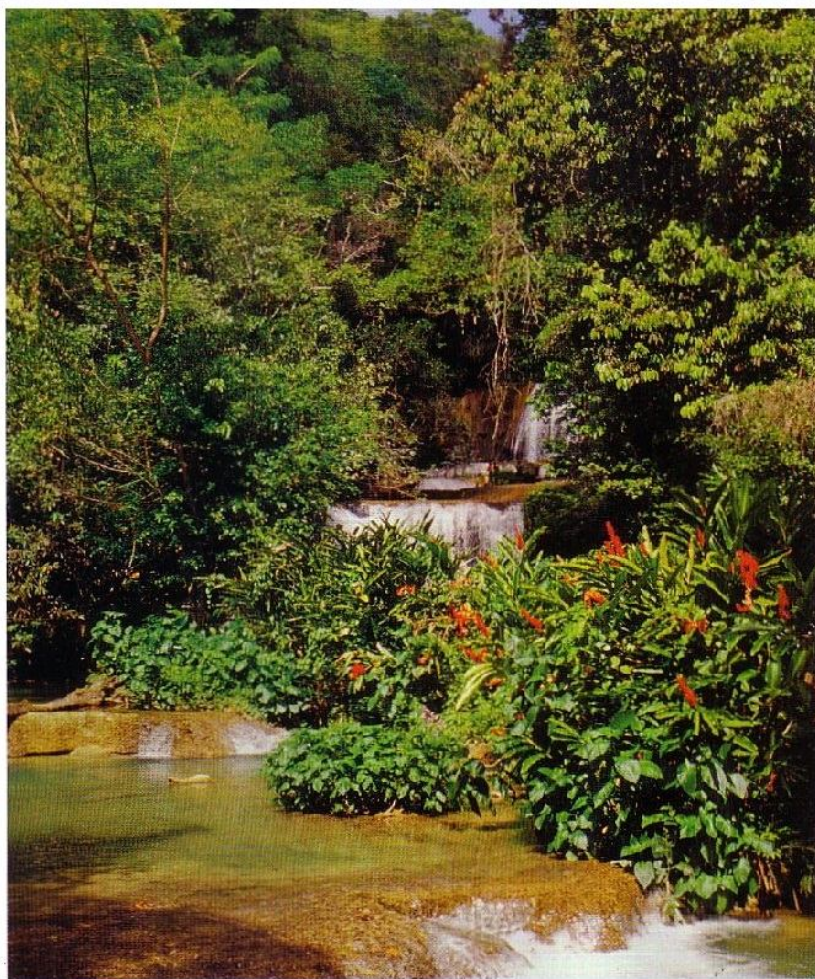
**I**N 1929, Lionel Densham, an English yacht captain, sent a telegram to his brother, Basil: 'Jamaica is wonderful STOP. Bring polo sticks and fishing rods STOP.' Basil dutifully stocked up on the required sporting items and made his way to Jamaica and fell in love with the place. So says his grandson Jason Henzell, who is showing me around the modest cottage Basil built for his family in 1941 for holidays in Treasure Beach on Jamaica's south coast. 'There was no one else living here at the time, apart from an exiled Russian count, who had built a *dacha*,' he says.

Here is not the coconut palm and white sand of the Caribbean of the brochures. The landscape consists of dry, rolling savannah backed by the Santa Cruz mountains, dark-sand rocky beaches and wild seas. But this rugged, untameable beauty has been this area's saving grace—it's a patch of Jamaica that has been left to the farmers, fishermen and now a band of in-the-know internationals. It's still rustic, sleepy and ludicrously laid back. Everyone smiles copiously and has manners to shame a Londoner.

Jason is the co-owner (with his mother, Sally) of Jake's, the Bohemian gem of Treasure Beach, a collection of 31 beach shacks—shacks in the chicest sense, that is. Mine, in gardens filled with acacia, cacti, bougainvillea, ackee and palms, has a verandah built into the rocks, a roof terrace for sundowners and , and an outdoor bath and shower hidden by a wall built out of driftwood, bottles and shells. Sally, a theatre designer with a taste for the wild and whimsical, did all the rooms.

It's hard to write about Treasure Beach without coming back to Jake's, because this is a hotel where local politics are decided, where local people club together, where writers, artists and musicians are welcomed—at the Calabash Literary Festival, for example, which happens every year in May.

There's no air-conditioning in many of



While staying in Jake's (left) quirky, Bohemian 'shacks', don't forget to take a trip to the YS Falls (above), a breathtaking series of waterfalls for swimming and swinging from ropes

the rooms—the breeze takes care of that—and there is no guarantee of a television—you have the ocean thrashing against the sea to lull you to sleep. There is a simple laidback restaurant and an unflashy saltwater pool. At Dougie's Bar, the venerable Dougie himself is loveable and peaceable. At the beach-shack restaurant next door, Jack Sprats, there is nothing wrong with the world when you can get all the seafood (or pizza) you'd want, cooked any way you'd want, washed down with Red Stripe and reggae. It backs onto the dark-sand beach; at night, fairy lights beckon you in to where locals play dominoes.

The best thing about Treasure Beach is that there is even more to it than Jake's.

Nearby is the beautiful YS Falls, a breathtaking series of waterfalls where you can swim and swing from ropes. The meadow-filled estate, dotted with chubby Jamaica Red Poll cattle, has its own jerk shack. Then there is the molasses-scented 260-year-old Appleton Estate, the rum distillery blessed with the most lavishly beautiful position in the Caribbean, near the Black River, surrounded by cane fields and mountains. And don't miss a boat trip to the Black River in the Great Morass, to see the crocodiles.

Rates from £60 per room per night at Jake's, based on two people sharing. Visit [www.islandoutpost.com](http://www.islandoutpost.com) or telephone UK Reservations on 01895 422476