

6th August 2012

Go for gold!

The Jamaicans may be running lightning-fast across the Olympic finishing line, but a trip to their island home is a laid-back and unhurried affair...

Rum cocktails, palm-fringed beaches and dancing to a reggae beat beneath the stars, Jamaica has long been a holiday hotspot. The island's north coast is busy with hotels and a magnet for tourists from across the globe, but those in the know head to Treasure Beach on the south coast instead. With a sprinkling of hotels, unspoilt beaches, attractions galore and fewer people to share them with, this secret paradise is an all-round winner...

BEACHES GALORE

When it comes to golden swathes of sand, they're lined up along the coastline around the resort of Treasure Beach. And they never get crowded. The four biggest and best are Calabash Bay and Frenchman's Bay right in the heart of the resort, with the super-long, sweeping Fort Charles and horseshoe-shaped Great Pedro a short drive or bike ride away.

ROMANTIC VIEW

For a panoramic view of the south coast's rugged headland, visit the legendary Lovers' Leap look-out point. Just east of Treasure Beach, it's a mesmerising vista with a bitter-sweet story attached. Back in the 1700s, slaves and lovers Tunkey and Mizzy were about to be sent to different plantations, never to see each other again. They ran away and jumped

1600ft from this cliff top to their death, hand in hand, so they could be together in heaven if not on earth.

BEST BUYS

Treasure beach has a handful of bespoke shops, perfect for gifts and souvenirs. The store at Jack Sprat's café has great T-shirts, while Callaloo boutique sells handmade cushions, dresses, bags, jewellery and pottery in contemporary Caribbean designs. For Blue Mountain coffee, produced on the island, and the most sought-after in the world, head to the store at Jake's (below). Wait until you get to the airport to stock up on rum - it's around half the price you'd pay in the UK

GREAT DAY OUT

It may be known for its gorgeous beaches but Jamaica actually means 'land of wood and water.' The interior is a mass of lush green foliage with a web of rivers and waterfalls running through it. Hidden behind woodland and framed by flaming-red ginger lilies, you'll find YS Falls, arguably

the most beautiful cascade in the country. You can laze on the lawn and admire the crystal-clear torrent, take a cooling dip in the pool at its base, or follow a nature trail to the summit. Afterwards head to nearby Appleton Rum distillery for the tour and tempting taste-test of Jamaica's finest firewater!

CROCODILE SAFARI

Sign up for a cruise along the Black River and you'll find that those things that look like logs floating harmlessly in the water are actually crocodiles! They're said to be a friendly bunch and local boat captains stroke them. You even get a chance to swim in the warm water alongside them - if you dare!

ISLAND FLAVOURS

Jamaica has one of the most exciting cuisines in the Caribbean and you'll find some of the best food in the south. The day's catch, together with exotic fruits and local vegetables, are always on the menu. Jake's Place serves a fantastic ackee and saltfish (left), a savoury mix of salted cod, peppers and onions plus ackee, a creamy yellow vegetable. Try it with fried plantain - a local banana. Next door at Jack Sprat's, the oven-baked pizza is delicious topped with spicy jerk sausage. Along the coast at Little Ochi café, try the seafood feast, with lobster and red snapper fried, curried or blackened.

BOOZE CRUISE

Pack your snorkel and take a boat trip to the quirky Pelican Bar. A local chap called Floyd had a dream that he should build a bar surrounded by ocean, and so he did. Lying a mile offshore, it's fashioned from bamboo cane and stands on stilts. Go for a swim around the shallow sand banks while the barman prepares your barbecued fish served with a cool Jamaican Red Stripe beer.



Take a trip to Usain Bolt's homeland



Jake's Hotel



Doubloon Villa

BEST FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILIES

For high-quality self-catering, Doubloon Villa in the heart of Treasure Beach sleeps up to eight people in four ensuite bedrooms, has steps leading to Calabash Bay beach and a large pool and terrace. Seven nights costs from £335 per person based on eight sharing. Transfers cost from £45 per person. Flights to Montego Bay with Virgin cost from £700 per person. Call 01543 480612, doubloonvilla.com

WHERE TO STAY

BEST FOR ROMANTICS
Quality 3-star hotel Jake's sits at the centre of Treasure Beach and is the hub of the action. Edged by tropical gardens, its collection of cottages has an arty feel. Book one of the two-storey Octopussy apartments. They have Arabian-style roof terraces and indoor-outdoor bathrooms. Seven nights, room only, costs from £1,199 per person based on two sharing, including Gatwick flights and transfers. Call 0844 573 2460, vhiphotels.co.uk

BEST FOR COUPLES

If you prefer to go all-inclusive, the 5-star Sandals Whitehouse European Village and Spa, on a secluded beach west of Treasure Beach, offers plenty of activities from karaoke to windsurfing. Seven nights costs from £1,595 per person with Gatwick flights and transfers based on two adults sharing. Call 0844 557 3859, virginholidays.co.uk

For more about Jamaica, where to eat and what to see, try Frommer's Jamaica Day By Day, £8.99. Includes foldaway map



Sandals resort



YS Falls

