



Kingston, Blue Mountains & Southeast Coast

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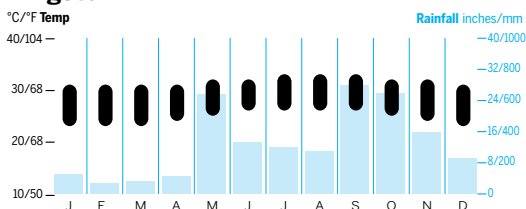
Why Go?

Kingston is Jamaica undiluted and unadulterated, its raw energy contrasting sharply with the languor of resorts and villages elsewhere on the island. The launching pad for some of the world's most electrifying music, spirited clubs and riotous street-system parties attest that the beat is still alive and bumping. Kingston's cosmopolitan makeup has given rise to fine international dining but its dynamic galleries and museums remain unapologetically Jamaican.

Kingston is the ideal base for exploring Jamaica's south-east corner. The region offers the breadth of the Jamaican experience – while there are beaches in easy striking distance of the capital, the island's history is thrown into relief by the faded pirate glory of Port Royal and the grit of Spanish Town, and the majestic, forest-covered Blue Mountains allow you to escape into nature and hike old Maroon trails or taste a gourmet cup at a working coffee plantation.

When to Go

Kingston



Feb Carnival and Reggae month offer plenty of chances for music and partying.

Nov–Apr Best time for sightseeing; in December the island's choice lineup of stars appears at Sting.

Dec–Mar & Jul–Sep Best time for surfing (there are few waves outside these seasons).

KINGSTON

POP 662,400

Squeezed between the Blue Mountains and the world's seventh-largest natural harbor, Kingston simultaneously impresses you with its setting and overwhelms you with its size, noise and traffic. This is the island's cultural and economic heart, a lively crucible of music and politics. Like a plate of spicy jerk washed down with a cold Red Stripe beer, a visit to Kingston is essential to taste the rich excitement of modern Jamaica.

Kingston is a city of two halves. Downtown is home to historic buildings, the courts, banks, street markets and one of the Caribbean's greatest art museums. Centered around Parade, it has a shabby charm and runs down to a bay-side park. To the west lie the ghettos of Trench Town and Tivoli Gardens, where many houses don't have running water and the rule of law can sometimes be thin at best.

By contrast, Uptown holds the city's best hotels and restaurants, largely confined to New Kingston, with its cluster of tall buildings around Emancipation Park. In addition to two of the city's most essential sights, the Bob Marley Museum and Devon House, its diplomatic and commercial status assures Uptown a definite cosmopolitan suaveness. Further out, in the foothills, are Kingston's most exclusive neighborhoods, with expansive views over the capital.

Uptown and Downtown seldom mix, but taken together they form a compelling and

sometimes chaotic whole. Kingston is certainly never boring – we encourage you to jump right in.

History

When the English captured Jamaica in 1655, Kingston was known as Hog Crawle, little more than a site for raising pigs. It took an earthquake that leveled nearby Port Royal in 1692 to spur the town planners into action and turn Kingston into a going concern.

In the 18th century, Kingston became one of the busiest ports in the western hemisphere, and a key trans-shipment point for the slave trade. By 1872, it became the colony's official capital.

In 1907 an earthquake leveled much of the city, sending Kingston's wealthier elements uptown. Downtown became a breeding ground both for the new Rastafarian movement, and labor unions and political parties alike.

In the 1960s the port was expanded and attempts were made to spruce up the waterfront. But as cruise ships docked in Kingston Harbour, the boom also drew in the rural poor, swelling the shantytowns.

Unemployment soared, and with it came crime. The fractious 1970s spawned politically sponsored criminal enterprises whose trigger-happy networks still trouble the city. Commerce began to leave Downtown for New Kingston, and the middle class edged away as well.

KINGSTON IN...

Two Days

Visit the **Bob Marley Museum** to see where Jamaica's favorite son rested his natty dreads, and the **National Gallery of Jamaica** for a crash course in Jamaican art; tour beautiful colonial manse **Devon House**; eat a meal to remember at the **Red Bones Blues Café** or try **Andy's** for the best jerk in town. At night, hit the town for some sweaty after-hours excitement at the **Famous** or **Quad**.

Four Days

Go to **Port Royal** for a peek into Jamaica's pirate past, and catch a boat to the tiny island of **Lime Cay** for sun worship. Soak in some history by taking a stroll around Downtown Kingston and see what influenced the young Bob Marley at the **Trench Town Culture Yard & Village**, or see what his son Ziggy's up to at **Tuff Gong Recording Studios**. Attend a **sound-system party** at Weddy Weddy Wednesdays or Rae Town's Oldies Night (Sunday).

One Week

Head to **Hellshire Beach Recreation Area** for a Kingstonian beach experience; or head up into the **Blue Mountains** to commune with nature and maybe trek the tallest peak in Jamaica.