



Kingston, Blue Mountains & Southeast Coast

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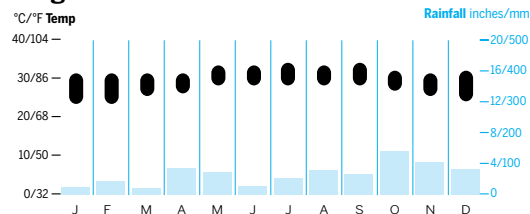
Why Go?

Kingston is Jamaica's beating heart, its raw energy contrasting sharply with the languor of resorts and villages elsewhere on the island. This is a city on the up and up, with a positive, go-ahead vibe. It's the launchpad for some of the world's most electrifying music, and sound systems still provide its essential soundtrack. The perfect mix of the undeniably local and refreshingly cosmopolitan, Kingston isn't to be missed.

Kingston is also the ideal base for exploring Jamaica's southeast corner. There are beaches within easy striking distance of the capital, but the island's story is really thrown into relief by the faded pirate glory of Port Royal and the grit of Spanish Town, while 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 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 670,323

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 noise and hustle. This is the island's cultural and economic heart, and a place named a Creative City of Music by Unesco in 2015. 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. 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.

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.

Modernization in the 1990s, the ongoing expansion of the port and other signs of cultural rejuvenation – not least the city's music scene – suggest that Kingston's prospects are finally on the up again.

Sights

Downtown



★ National Gallery of Jamaica GALLERY

(Map p48;  guided tours 922-1561; www.natgalja.org.jm; 12 Ocean Blvd; admission J\$400, 45min guided tours J\$3000;  10am-4:30pm Tue-Thu, to 4pm Fri, to 3pm Sat) The superlative collection of Jamaican art housed by the National Gallery is the finest on the island and should on no account be missed. As well as offering a distinctly Jamaican take on international artistic trends, the collection attests to the vitality of the country's artistic heritage as well as its present talent.

The collection is organized chronologically, introduced by Taino carvings and traditional 18th-century British landscapes, whose initial beauty belies the fact that their subjects include many slave plantations. Ten galleries represent the Jamaican school, from 1922 to the present. Highlights include the boldly modernist sculptures of Edna Manley, the vibrant 'intuitive' paintings of artists John Dunkley and David Pottinger, and revivalist bishop Mallica 'Kapo' Reynolds. Later galleries chart the course of 'Jamaican art for Jamaicans' up to the recent past, including abstract religious works by Carl Abrahams, Colin Garland's surrealist exercises, ethereal assemblages by David Boxer, and the work of realist Barrington Watson.

Temporary exhibition spaces frequently offer up the best of contemporary Jamaican art, as seen during the superb **biennial temporary exhibition** (www.natgalja.org.jm;  Dec-Mar) that takes place on alternate, even-numbered years between mid-December and March.

★ Liberty Hall MUSEUM

(Map p48;  948-8639; <http://libertyhall-ij.org.jm>; 76 King St; adult/child J\$400/200;  9am-5pm Mon-Fri) At the end of a tree-lined courtyard, decorated with cheerful mosaics and a mural depicting Marcus Garvey, stands Liberty Hall, the headquarters of Garvey's UNIA (United Negro Improvement Association) in the 1930s. The building now contains a quite excellent multimedia museum about the man and his work, which allows