



Montego Bay & Northwest Coast

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Houseboat Grill (p122)
- ➔ Leroy's Beach Bar (p131)
- ➔ Marguerite's (p122)
- ➔ Water Square (p130)
- ➔ Far Out Fish Hut (p127)

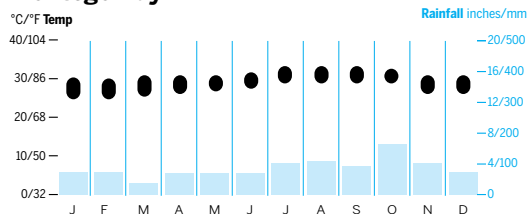
Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Polkerris B&B (p119)
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Why Go?

Home to the nation's largest airport and a busy Caribbean cruise terminal, Montego Bay is many people's first view of Jamaica before they get whisked off to the surrounding beaches, golf courses and all-inclusive resorts. So it's ironic that, barring MoBay's excellent dining scene, most of the area's attractions are found outside Jamaica's second city. The north coast is replete with plantation-era history, from its well-preserved plantation houses to the historic core of Falmouth. Inland, adventure beckons, from hiking and spelunking in Cockpit Country – a roadless wilderness of hidden caves and eerily silent hills that is disorientating, even to hardened locals – to rafting and zip-lining through the jungle. Filling in the gaps is a dense network of small towns and tiny villages that pulsate with the rawness and romance of everyday Jamaican life.

When to Go Montego Bay



Dec–Mar High season means high rates, but generally sunny, clear weather.

Jul Montego Bay rocks out to the island's biggest reggae party, Reggae Sumfest.

May–Jul Low season and generally hotter, rainier weather means big accommodations savings.

MONTEGO BAY

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Montego Bay has two distinct faces: there's the smooth tourist countenance that grins contentedly from the pages of a thousand glossy Caribbean brochures; and there's MoBay proper, a pretty gritty city, second only to Kingston in terms of status and chaos. Most of the big all-inclusive resorts are located well outside the urban core in the fancy suburb of Ironshore. Stay in the city, however, and you're faced with an entirely different proposition – a riot of cacophonous car horns and bustling humanity that offers an unscripted and uncensored slice of Jamaican life, warts and all.

The Hip Strip (aka Gloucester Ave), with its midrange hotels and ubiquitous souvenir shops flogging Bob Marley T-shirts, acts as a kind of decompression chamber between MoBay's two halves. You won't find many hipsters here, but in among the hustlers and smoky jerk restaurants there's a detectable Jamaican rhythm to the action on the street.

Sights

Hip Strip & the Beaches

Doctor's Cave Beach

BEACH

(Map p118; ☎ 876-952-2566; www.doctorscavebathingclub.com; adult/child US\$6/3; ☀ 8:30am-sunset) It may sound like a rocky hole inhabited by lab-coated troglodytes, but this is actually Montego Bay's most famous beach and the one with the most facilities. A pretty arc of sugary sand fronts a deep-blue gem studded with floating dive platforms and speckled with tourists sighing happily. Er, *lots* of tourists – and a fair few Jamaicans as well. The upside is an admission charge keeps out the beach hustlers, though it doesn't ensure that the beach is kept clean.

Founded as a bathing club in 1906, Doctor's Cave earned its name when English chiropractor Sir Herbert Barker claimed the waters here had healing properties. People flocked to Montego Bay, kick-starting a tourism evolution that would culminate in the appearance of *Homo Margaritavillus* decades later. There are lots of facilities on hand including a restaurant, a grill bar, an internet cafe and water sports, and lots of things to rent (beach chairs, towels, snorkeling gear).

Dead End Beach

BEACH

(Map p112; Kent Ave) A meet-the-locals affair just north of Gloucester Ave, this narrow strip is also known as Buccaneer Beach. The lack of space promotes togetherness; at high tide it's pretty accurate to drop the 'beach' from 'dead end'. There are no facilities here, but the lack of crowds makes the sunsets over the bay all the more gorgeous.

One Man Beach

BEACH

(Map p118; Gloucester Ave) With beachfront soccer and crowds of splashing locals, this crescent beach at the south boundary of Old Hospital Park is very popular but, sadly, rather litter-strewn.

Walter Fletcher Beach & Aquasol Theme Park

BEACH

(Map p112; ☎ 979-9447; Gloucester Ave; adult/child US\$6/5; ☀ 10am-10pm; ♿) While the theme-park moniker is pushing it (the kid-orientated facilities consist of some blow-up water slides and a go-cart circuit), this place on Walter Fletcher Beach, with its food stalls and local crowds, offers a decent spot to relax in a chilled-out local environment.

The beach is sandy and relatively clean and the water is safe for swimming, with some limited snorkeling possibilities. Food and drink comes courtesy of the on-site deck-bar with things heating up at sunset especially at weekends. Look out for billboards advertising sporadic live-music events.

Downtown

Church St is the most picturesque yet chaotic street in MoBay. Many of the most interesting buildings in town are clustered along it, from Jamaica's finest church to some grand 18th-century Georgian structures.

The highlight is **St James Parish Church** (Map p116; ☎ Rector 952-2775; Church St), regarded as the finest church on the island. It was built between 1775 and 1782 in the shape of a Greek cross, but was so damaged by the earthquake of March 1, 1957, that it had to be rebuilt.

The pretty **Town House** (Map p116; 16 Church St), fronted by a stately redbrick exterior, is buried under a cascade of bougainvillea and laburnum. The house dates from 1765, when it was the home of a wealthy merchant.