



# Negril & West Coast

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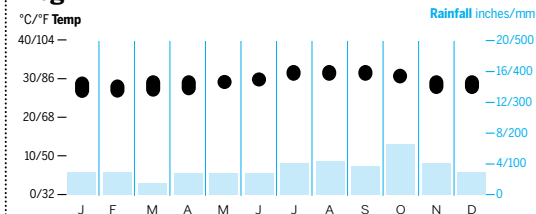
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## Why Go?

If you thought the north and east coasts of Jamaica were relaxed, head west to a land of long beaches and crimson sunsets where the pleasure-seeking resort of Negril shimmers like an independent republic of guilt-free sloth. Aside from producing sugarcane and surreptitiously growing Jamaica's best ganja, western Jamaica's *raison d'être* is almost exclusively touristic; elongated Negril and its hotel developments stretch for more than 10 miles along the entire western coast. In the quiet bucolic hinterland, little pockets of local life can still be glimpsed in places such as Lucea, a pretty coastal enclave bypassed by tourist traffic, wild and wet Mayfield Falls, and diminutive Little Bay, a nonresort that still feels like Negril, circa 1969. Few come to the west with a to-do list, electing instead to enjoy life in the true spirit of the hippies who founded Negril. Join them on a sun lounger and relax...*mon*.

## When to Go

### Negril



**Feb–Apr** Negril is at its most hedonistic during spring break.

**Apr–Jun** Accommodations prices halve during low season, yet it's less rainy here as the rest of Jamaica.

**Dec & Jan** Arguably the best weather – sunny, clear and dry – plus numerous music festivals.

## NEGRIL

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Stuck out on the island's western tip and graced with its finest and longest natural beach, Negril was first colonized by hippies in the early 1970s. Unsurprisingly, 40 years of development has left its mark – not all of it good: Negril is renowned for its hustlers. But it's not all hassle. A strong local business community, fueled by a desire to safeguard Negril's precious ecology, has kept the area from becoming a full-on circus. Consequently Negril remains a laid-back place of impromptu reggae concerts and psychedelic sunsets.

In both geography and character, Negril can be split neatly in two. To the north is the erroneously named Seven Mile Beach (it's a little more than 4 miles long). Further south, the West End is the original Negril of hippy-era legend. Here precipitous cliffs, up to 50ft high in places, plunge into the azure ocean. Negril 'town' is sandwiched between the two, on the edge of the West End.

### History

Only in 1959 was a road cut to Negril, launching the development of what was then a tiny fishing village. Electricity and telephones came later. The sleepy beach-front village soon became a popular holiday spot for Jamaicans. About the same time, hippies and backpackers from abroad began to appear. They roomed with local families or slept on the beach, partook of ganja and magic mushrooms, and generally gave Negril its laid-back reputation. In 1977 the first major resort – Negril Beach Village (later renamed Hedonism II) – opened its doors to a relatively affluent crowd seeking an uninhibited Club Med–style vacation. By the mid-1980s Negril was in the throes of a full-scale tourism boom that continues today.

This let-it-all-hang-out tradition still overflows during the March to April spring break, when US college kids swarm for wet T-shirt contests, drinking competitions and general party time.

Nonetheless, the resort has developed an active and environmentally conscious spirit under the guidance of expat residents, resulting in the creation of the Negril Marine Park within the Negril Environmental Protection Area. The park encompasses the shoreline, mangroves, offshore waters and coral reefs, and is divided into eight recreational zones. Some hotels have taken admirable steps toward implementing green policies, and it is

hoped that traveler preference for these resorts will lead to copying of environmentally friendly behavior across the beach.

## Sights

### ★ Seven Mile Beach

BEACH

(Negril Beach, Long Beach; Map p146) Seven Mile Beach was initially touted on tourism posters as 'seven miles of nothing but you and the sea.' True, sunbathers still lie half submerged in the gentle surf, and the sweet smell of ganja smoke continues to perfume the breeze, but otherwise the beach has changed a great deal. Today it's cluttered with restaurants, bars and nightspots, and every conceivable water sport is on offer. It is still beautiful to behold, but if you're looking for solitude, look elsewhere.

It's worth noting that the Seven Mile Beach is actually only 4 miles long.

### Long Bay Beach Park

BEACH

(Map p146; J\$200; ☀ 9:30am–5pm) Toward the north end of Seven Mile Beach, this beach is more peaceful and far less crowded than the sand further south. Here you'll find more sugary sand and picnic tables, plus changing rooms. But there's also coarse grass here, so it's not quite as picturesque.

### Bloody Bay Beach

BEACH

(Map p146) A splendid option in between two large all-inclusives, with no facilities and few people, save for a few savvy travelers and a smattering of locals enjoying some repose away from the hubbub. There's a jerk shack selling snacks and drinks if you need 'em.

### Kool Runnings

#### Adventure Park

AMUSEMENT PARK

(Map p146; ☎ 957-5400; www.koolrunnings.com; Norman Manley Blvd; ☀ 11am–6pm Tue–Sun; ♿) If you prefer your water fun doled out in a theme park, descend on this 2-hectare collection of different experiences, from riding on a bamboo raft and paintballing to canoeing, and even spinning in a human gyroscope. Separate entry fees for each experience.

## Activities

There's plenty to keep you busy in Negril, from sunset boat cruises and glass-bottom-boat outings to getting in the water with a snorkeling mask or beneath the waves with a scuba tank. Fishing, parasailing and kayaking are other watery pursuits. Most lodgings can also arrange tours to Jamaican attractions further afield.