



South Coast & Central Highlands

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Katamah Beachfront Resort (p162)
- ➔ Jake's Hotel (p162)
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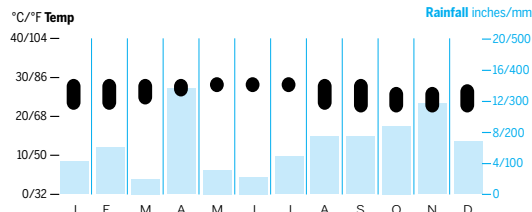
Why Go?

Cut off from the clamorous north coast by the natural bulwark of Cockpit Country and protected from resort development by local communities that seriously value their near-virgin beaches, southwest Jamaica feels like a clandestine paradise for the trickle of off-island visitors who make it this far. Its biggest present is Treasure Beach, an antidote to pretty much everything else in Jamaica you will have encountered so far with its cow-filled pastures, a soporific pace of life and semi-deserted scimitars of sand.

Rural St Elizabeth parish is often coined the breadbasket of Jamaica for the many crops that grow here, but fertile fields quickly give way to swamp around Black River and mountains around the lightly touristed, highland town of Mandeville. The region's most notable sights – the Black River, YS Falls and the Appleton Rum Estate – are usually visited by day-trippers on organized excursions from resorts in Negril and Montego Bay.

When to Go

Black River



Jan The Accompong Maroon Festival is a compelling celebration of Afro-Caribbean culture.

Dec–Apr It's high season for a reason: little chance of hurricanes or rain, and calmer seas.

Jun Come to Treasure Beach for the biannual Calabash International Literary Festival.

TREASURE BEACH & AROUND

The sun-kissed land southeast of Black River is sheltered from rain for most of the year by the Santa Cruz Mountains, so there is none of the lush greenery of the north coast. Instead, you'll find a thorny, surreally beautiful semidesert, a landscape almost East African in its scorched beauty. The region remains unsullied by resort-style tourism; bohemians and wealthy recluses alike come to Treasure Beach to slip into a lazy, no-frills tropical lifestyle almost impossible to achieve elsewhere on the island's coast.

Dividing the plains north to south is the aforementioned Santa Cruz range, a steep-faced chain that slopes to the sea and drops 520m at wonderfully scenic Lovers' Leap, while fishermen toil at Alligator Pond to feed diners with some of the freshest and tastiest catch in Jamaica.

Treasure Beach

Welcome to a unique part of Jamaica that gets all the facets of the quintessential Caribbean experience exactly right. Winding country lanes, a dearth of hustlers, a local population of poets and artists, sublime deserted beaches, no gimmicky resorts, and – above all – a proud, foresighted local community that promotes sustainability and harbors a bonhomous but mellow culture. Too good to be true? Not at all.

Treasure Beach is the generic name for four coves – Billy's Bay, Frenchman's Bay, Calabash Bay and Great Bay. It's said Scottish sailors were shipwrecked near Treasure Beach in the 19th century, accounting for the presence of fair skin, green eyes and reddish hair among the local population. The area's residents are known for their strong community spirit. Collectives such as the Treasure Beach Women's Group and the Treasure Beach Foundation bring locals and expats together to work on projects relating to housing, education and local culture.

Sights

Fishermen's Beach

BEACH

(Frenchman's Bay) This is the most centrally located beach running east from the Treasure Beach Hotel as far as Jack Spratt Beach. It's watched over by a landmark buttonwood tree that has long attracted the attention of poets, painters and wood-carvers who ply

their wares. It's a good place for sunning and swimming, and watching the sunset.

Jack Spratt Beach

BEACH

(Frenchman's Cove) At the western edge of Jake's Hotel, brightly painted wooden fishing boats are pulled up on the sand, and there is invariably a fisher or two on hand tending the nets. Good for swimming, as it's somewhat sheltered.

Calabash Bay Beach

BEACH

(Calabash Bay) The long, narrow arc of Calabash Bay Beach has a few beach shacks plying rum and – if you're lucky – some basic potluck cuisine (fish, mainly). Swimming is possible but can be choppy.

Old Wharf Beach

BEACH

This pristine brown-sand beach is the least visited of the Treasure Beach bunch. It's just east of Taino Cove, and OK for swimming as long as the sea isn't too rough.

Great Bay Beach

BEACH

(Great Bay) All the way down at the eastern 'bottom' of Treasure Beach, this is its least developed portion, where the main business remains a Fishermen's Co-op building. There are a couple of beachside shacks serving beer and cooking up fresh seafood. Swimming is possible.



Activities

With a long history (and a large population) of seafaring fishers, it's no wonder Treasure Beach is a great place from which to take to the sea, either for sightseeing or fishing. Cooking classes and yoga are organised at Jake's (p162), and spa treatments are available at Jake's and **Lotus House** (☎ 965-3820; Main Rd; massage US\$70-90).

Boat Trips

From Frenchman's Beach, boat captains **Dennis Abrahams** (☎ 435-3779; dennisabrahams@yahoo.com) and **Mr Nice Guy** (☎ 433-0252; besutherland@yahoo.com) run combined trips to the Black River Great Morass (p168) and Pelican Bar (p164) and can organise fishing outings. Other recommended captains include **Allan Daley** (☎ 366-7394, 423-3673), **Teddy Parchment** (☎ 854-5442) and **Joseph Brown** (☎ 847-1951, 376-9944). Expect to pay around US\$30 for a trip out to Pelican Bar and US\$50 for a combo trip to Black River, although bear in mind the shifting cost of petrol makes prices subject to change.