

SUMMER 2021

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# travel world

INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

*Travel is Back!*



The Magazine Written by North American Travel Journalists Association Members





Measuring 146-miles long the island of Jamaica is home to 14 parishes

Couples Tower Isle



# License to Chill:

# A WEEKEND IN JAMAICA

Celebrated as the birthplace of reggae and highly regarded for its full-bodied rums and flavorsome cuisine, Jamaica is a destination that lends itself equally to cultural pursuits as it does to relaxing under swaying palms on a picture-perfect beach. Some might have remained hesitant to travel internationally, but anyone seeking a carefree week of sunshine and cocktails or day trips with a dash of history a short hop from North America make the Caribbean's third largest (and some say liveliest) island an easy weekend escape. Under two hours flight time from Miami, even taking a normally dreaded Red Eye from San Diego with a connection via Charlotte, North Carolina landed us in Montego Bay around noon and our hotel, Couples Tower Isle in Ocho Rios, two hours later.

The beach at Couples Tower Isle in Ocho Rios



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Sunset at Couples Tower Isle in Ocho Rios







A bamboo rafting trip on the Great River in the hills of Hanover with Chukka Caribbean



Hampden Estate Great House in Trelawney Parish



Rum production techniques are unchanged since the 18th century at Hampden Estate



A guided tour at Hampden Estates in the parish of Trelawney

Jamaica might be famed for its picturesque stretches of sand, but with lush interiors, lagoons and rolling hills to explore, we planned to pack as much into three days as possible. Dunn's River Falls is standard for many first timers, but a day exploring capital city Kingston taking in the Bob Marley Museum, National Gallery of Jamaica, and walking tour of The Kingston Midtown Arts District is undoubtedly time well spent. Coffee enthusiasts will love the farm tour at Craighton Estate, located outside of the Blue Mountain State Park, but when it came to easing into things on day one, it was hard to argue with a guided float along the Great River on a traditional bamboo raft, with a glass of Prosecco in hand. An excursion with Chukka Caribbean from Lethe Village, a former banana plantation outside of Montego Bay in the hills of Hanover, certainly made for a pleasant way to spend our first morning before swinging back into nearby Trelawney Parish for an under-the-radar rum-tasting experience at Hampden Estate.

Located in the Queen of Spain valley near Cockpit Country and established in 1753 by the Stirling family, production processes at this old-world distillery and working factory remain true to 18th-century pot distillation techniques. The scenic and winding country drive to the estate grounds rewarded us with a rum punch welcome drink, an informative talk on the history of Jamaica and rum production before a hardhat distillery tour that included a peek inside the original open vat fermentation house. Regarded by many as the "grand cru of Jamaican rum," thanks to diverse flora and fauna plus limestone aquifers in the region, Hampden's high-flavor profile product is high in ester, which adds a fruitiness to the aromas of sweet caramel and molasses. While slaves and Maroons (escaped Africans who formed inland communities, of which four official towns are still in existence today) burned many of the great houses across Jamaica during the Christmas Rebellion in 1831, Hampden's owners were known to pay their workers and treat them kindly, and as a result, their home was spared. Although sadly not open to the public, today Hampden's great house is used for special events by the current owners whose flock of resident peacocks, including feisty patriarch Edward, adds to the grounds' romantic ambiance.



Hampden Estate in Cockpit Country is one of the oldest sugar estates in Jamaica



Hampden's high-flavor rums ooze aromas of sweet caramel and molasses

Another fine example of colonial-era architecture worth looking at on our drive back to Ocho Rios was Rose Hall Great House. Fully restored in the 1960s, the Georgian-era property outside of Montego Bay provided a fascinating snapshot of Jamaican history intertwined with tales of the European bourgeoisie and 'White Witch' Annie Palmer that delighted and scared in equal measure. Born in Haiti, the vicious plantation mistress is said to have moved to Jamaica in search of a wealthy husband. After dabbling in witchcraft and dispatching with not one but two spouses, plus several slaves, legend states that Palmer now haunts the grounds with visitors leaving trinkets at what is purported to be her tomb.



The tomb of 'White Witch' Annie Palmer at Rose Hall Great House

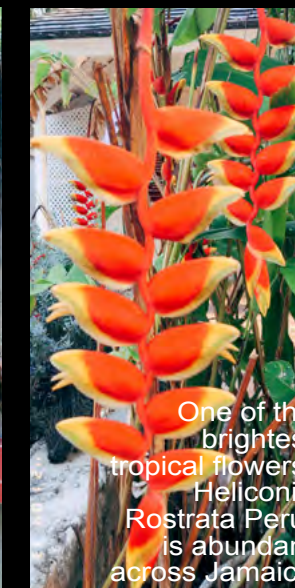


Trinkets and tokens at the tomb of Annie Palmer Rose Hall Great House

Whether the secluded charms of Port Antonio, hedonistic resorts in Negril, or reggae clubs of Kingston appeals, Jamaica really has something for every traveler's taste. And while the pandemic might have put pause to what was predicted to be a record-breaking year for tourism last year, thanks to well-implemented safety protocols, on-site testing at hotels, and easy-to-navigate entry requirements courtesy of Visit Jamaica making travel there low-stress, Jamaica as a can't miss getaway destination is back. Sitting on the beach at Couples Tower Isle on our final morning, my partner and I both agreed we were leaving wishing that we could have seen more while simultaneously looking at dates to figure out when we could return.



Abraham, the scarlett macaw at Couples Tower Isle Resort



One of the brightest tropical flowers, Heliconia Rostrata Peru, is abundant across Jamaica



The Rose Hall Great House outside of Montego Bay



Rose Hall Great House



Rose Hall Great House is a lovingly restored Georgian-era plantation house with a rich history



Twilight colors at Couples Tower Isle Resort in Ocho Rios