

Jamaica Trip Notes June 7-10, 2009



It is with mixed emotions that I try to figure out what are my trip headlines. Jamaica is at first fascinating and I'm glad I visited, and yet there is a rough side and sadness to what I saw, both for the Jamaicans and for the Americans that visit. It was a short visit but one full of contradictions.



- The beaches must rate as some of the best in the world. My hotel was on the noted 7-mile beach.
- The Jamaicans are the friendliest and most smiling I've ever encountered.
- They are hustlers -- always looking to make a dime.
- The crime rates as some of the highest in the world.
- Dismal living conditions abound with more living in shacks than I remember when living in Taiwan or Vietnam.
- Wealthy foreigners have built huge homes.
- Most Americans visit an all-inclusive resort, never leave it, and never see the island.
- The island is about 140 miles long and could be driven in a day.

I came for a wedding

Probably most come to be married, as did friends Sue Ann and Rafael, and the reason for my trip. When I found they were coming alone, I couldn't let total strangers be witnesses to their wedding, though they seemed willing and purposely hadn't invited friends. I had to convince Sue Ann to convince Rafael that I'd not be intrusive to their honeymoon. Next I had to convince the tourist office to book a single person, apparently an unusual occurrence, and even more so a single who didn't want an all-inclusive resort. Visiting with a partner (same price) and staying within a resort was encouraged (for safety.)



The wedding was held at "Couples Swept Away Resort" on the far western side of Jamaica in the town of Negril. This resort, as most in Negril, is set on the famous white-sanded 7-mile beach. "Couples" is one of the largest all-inclusive and high-end resorts with separate buildings, balconied suites, situated in a lush jungle setting complete with 6 restaurants, multiple pools, koi ponds, and everything one could wish for. It was a good choice for their wedding and an excellent choice for a honeymoon.

The ceremony was set within an oasis of tropical plants and flowers, in a grassy plain complete with a gazebo. They could have chosen a beach ceremony or other tropical settings. The tiki hut/gazebo

choice would have been mine too and offered a measure of shade. Weddings being common here, a wedding coordinator assisted and was constantly at hand. She'd arranged for a hair and make-up appointment earlier, showed up at Sue Ann's room well before the ceremony hour with a basket of flowers, corsages, boutonniere and a check list. Choreography, music, minister, photographer, marriage certificate and a thoughtful ceremony didn't take long, but long enough to be meaningful. I declined walking Sue Ann "down the aisle" knowing I'd cry and ruin her pictures and instead took hundreds of pictures with both her camera and mine. Under clear but slightly overcast skies, we finished with champagne and cake, with the timing perfect before the monsoons came around 4pm.

Sue Ann was lovely, glowing, and happy. Rafael was attentive and kind and I couldn't help but feel that both of them had made the right choice. After previous bad choice(s), (and who hasn't?), this marriage would be good for both of them.

You'd have thought I was getting married

Sue Ann probably didn't obsess as much as I did about what to wear. I'm not an Island person, I'm not a hot weather person, I don't go in the sun without lathering up, and I hardly know how to dress outside of marathon clothing or St John business wear. But I did want to be part of this foreign wedding.

A special friend who is a dress designer (Ouida) insisted that an "island dress" was the right choice so despite it being very un-Diana, I gladly accepted her kind choice and gift of a pale and bare dress. All that should be the end of the story, yes? Now it starts to get amusing. The fuss of finding a short bolero crocheted sweater and proper sandals was nothing compared to the alleged (by some) need to be TAN before being allowed in Jamaica. Being generally proud of remaining super pale, it never occurred to me to need a TAN but it did occur to Tom. He more than once suggested an air-brushed tan. I not only balked, I all but refused. When Ouida showed up with the dress and saw it on me, she highly recommended an air brushed TAN too. I accused the two of them of collusion. I continued to refuse to indulge. I held out for at least for a couple days.

The tan

It happened at 5pm on Saturday before leaving early Sunday morning. I stood in my all-together-nothing and got spray painted. I glowed. I had no lines. I didn't realize just how TAN I was until I saw how white my usual make-up appeared. What did this TAN cost?

- They give a senior discount. You can't make this stuff up! Seniors need tans? They also give Tuesday free tans to those laid off. \$32 to \$45 range for what is to last 5-7 days but in reality has either disappeared or streaked or worse, turned orange, by the 3rd day.
- The paint is a beet based dye that supposedly dries quickly. It stayed tacky through the evening. Had I believed the gal who sprayed me and not sat on a towel on my way home, my cream-colored leather car seats would have been similarly dyed.
- Showering is not allowed for 8 hours so I went to bed before that 1am shower-hour, still all sticky and tacky. In the morning my ritzy white sheets were covered not only with the bronze (that I felt deserved to stay on my skin), but that bronze on the white sheets was lined with green. A copper patina? Gross.
- For two nights the hotel sheets had to be changed. (I sweat.)
- My favorite white blouse looks like it was Jamaican tie-dyed with bronze streaks.

What comments did I get?

Ha ha ha, you're going to do what! Can I come to watch? (Kathy, at first, and she did.)

I don't believe you! (Maricar, in disbelief that I'd do such a thing.)

You look gorgeous! (Kathy, watching the initial painting process.)

I think I'll stick to sunning at the pool. (Kathy, after seeing the trouble.)
I wondered why you had orange feet. (Sue Ann, on wedding day.)
Salt water makes the tan come off. (Another guest in Jamaica as I was going in the surf.)
Mosquito repellent contains alcohol. Alcohol makes the tan streak. (Directions and fine print.)
Scrub with baking soda to remove crinkled look. (Directions and fine print.)
You'll probably do it again. (Kathy, before I went to smack her.)

I'll get more comments about being anywhere near water!



Some of you know that I not only don't swim, I don't get near a full bathtub. Sue Ann insisted and you can see by the pictures that she won.

Captive residents

Having decided that I really do like the all-inclusive resort idea for a honeymoon, and especially this resort, and having enjoyed a day within the resort with the newly married couple, I'm not impressed with those repeat attenders we met. I was amazed at the number of couples we met who were there for their 10th and even their 19th stay. (Honest!) There as totally captive with at the very most a short trip outside for a rafting trip or a rum tour, but never seeing more of Jamaica and in fact discouraged from leaving the premises. (They are even warned not to leave the premises for safety reasons but I'm pleased to report that Sue Ann and Rafael investigated the beachside activity no matter.) The multi-returnees we met, at the resort or on the plane/bus in and out, seem to fit a mode. I picture them: both exceedingly tan and glowing, having spent an inordinate amount of time getting so; the girl with an unreal looking chest flaunting it; the guy who clearly likes such decoration on his arm yet he has a paunch; both inebriated by noon; sitting at the bar or in a deck chair with a drink in hand; or they floating on a mattress in the ocean with another drink in hand; probably talking about their recent cruise or Disney trip. You won't see them in any museum.

Finding a culture tour



I am reminded how our travel needs differ. How our dreams of vacations differ. How we can't all like the same thing. It is clear that couples visiting for their 19th time have zero interest in local customs, culture or history. This attitude in Jamaica is obviously the norm because I could only dig up whitewater rafting tours, sunset catamaran tours, snorkeling tours with clothing listed as optional, shopping tours to the Little America-type mall, but I found great

difficulty in finding a way to see life on the island. After considerable negotiating, a local tour guide agreed to give it a try.

For most of one day we drove the one lane roads in his little mini-van to see as much as possible in the far one-third of the island. From the port city of Savanna-sur-Mer where a daily market exists, there is also



remains of the cargo port now closed. Goats roam the market. Vegetables are sold from stalls or street corners or out the backs of mini-trucks. Of off the back of a motor scooter. Row upon row of baptismal dresses can be found as Jamaica is in the Guinness World Book of Records as having the most churches (and maybe a bar on either side of that church per the tour guide.) Mamma's mind the shop and husbands nap. Close by are fishing vessels and more markets. Next to the long-ago closed dock exists ruins of a custom house with now a large spice shop operating from a corner that remains standing. Vegetables and fruits I'd never seen were offered and I suspect tobacco was not the only smoke that could be bought.



Inland on the way to the old orange groves, no longer a major commodity, were the sugar plantations as well as the weighing station and huge but ancient sugar processing factory. It was barely a month ago that sugar refinery closed for the season and the fields of cane are already waist deep in new cane. The worker's housing looked like our resettlement communities with hoards of men hawking whatever it is they hawk from the curb side but more of them simply milling around. Up higher in the hills are the supervisor's homes and farther inland yet are the famous coffee plantations (Blue Mountain Jamaican coffee.) Only in the market did I see tobacco and yet it's a major export as is coffee and sugar.



Goats are everywhere. On the side of the road, sometimes leashed but usually roaming loose. It makes no sense but I couldn't find local goat cheese or goat milk, but goat is on the menu everywhere. I'd intended to sample this meat that is said to resemble lamb but after taking pictures of all the cute little babies, I just couldn't. They were grazing on the side of highways (if you want to call the narrow 2-lane roads highways), in yards, and in the middle of the little 1-lane rutted back roads. We went through the village where most of the goats are procured and again they seemed to be running loose.

One village produced what I could only call a hut or a shed. They were smaller than trailers, similar size to an average shed, built of wood, and generally easily transportable to a piece of land where they'd be stacked on cinder blocks and called home. An upscale squatter might have an outhouse and I'm told that squatters are quite common and the appearance gave credence to that. A more upscale home would still be raised above-ground at least on cinder blocks but be made of concrete. There were plenty of walls and roofs made of pieces of tin that reminded me of Vietnam's flattened coke cans used for house construction.



Nestled in between were some quite large homes of concrete-painted bright pinks or blues and in most cases in a state of construction. Apparently it's like the Far East with no building codes and thus to build a portion of a house until one can afford the insides or another wing is not uncommon. I saw plenty of add-on upper stories.

The need for self-sufficiency is obvious with gardens of mango or plum trees, often a little selling stand on the roadway, and chickens (and the usual goats) running around. All roadways were lined with makeshift stands and people milling about apparently hawking wares. I'm fairly sure that much of the hawking was not of legal nature.



On my day of touring, I NEVER saw another white person, that is, until the end of the day when we stopped at the famous Rick's Café. Rick's is high on a cliff, not far from the far edge of Jamaica and the lighthouse, and is the subject of a tour in its self (and where I saw my first grape tree.) Walk through the entrance and it's nothing but whites except the staff and the entertainers. Sleek, muscled, highly fit Jamaican men jump from high cliffs in return for tips. Sometimes a white patron might take a dare and join in for the jump. (A tiny bikini-clad fit white gal jumped while I was there.) As the evening progresses, expensive drinks are consumed, the tips and the daring gets wilder and tourists will spend the entire afternoon and evening at Rick's. Prices are American and quoted in dollars. T-shirts with Rick's logo are \$26 instead of the local \$10 pricing. The sunsets from Rick's are spectacular, reminding me of Key West.



The fact that I never saw another white person while touring was the subject of much contemplation. Is it that tourists are coddled in a resort? (Again, it's ideal for a honeymoon.) Is it that there really is a safety issue? (Crime is high but apparently more surrounding the big cities and contained primarily to gangs.) Is it that there's simply not the infrastructure for touring? (Currently very true but which came first, the lack of demand or the lack of tour offers?) I am of the mind that these resorts are popular among the crowd that likes unlimited food and drink, unlimited beach time, unlimited being taken care of, and maybe also the very easy availability of marijuana. (Though illegal, seemingly tolerated.) They have no interest in culture or museums or history.



Cultural history

The British settled Jamaica, built sugar plantations and brought in African slaves. When the slaves had an uprising, they brought in Chinese. I wonder where these Chinese live now. At some point there were immigrants from India settled as we drove through an entire village said to exist for many generations. Somewhere around 1938 the labor uprising created the hero Bustamante who went on to become their prime minister. We went to a small park to his honor outside the sugar plantation called The Workers Park. The British system of government continues to exist as do parishes. Like in New Orleans, the language is a mixture of English, Spanish and French called Patois and most chattering I heard was almost recognizable, but very fast, and quite intermixed with different languages.

Social services

I'm told there basically are none, other than charities and churches. The government does not pay unemployment or social security or pensions. This seems to have the advantage that the locals will work at any and everything. They hustle. The streets are lined with people waiting to make a living. They might have a small bag of mangos to sell or trade, or



they might have a bit of illegal substance. My driver made numerous deliveries and pick-ups as we toured the island. He dropped laundry with a person on the side of the road. He pulled up to a makeshift garage to pay a bill. He seemed to know everyone and cell phone calls were exchanged, drops and pick-ups resulted, and greetings erupted in most villages as well as the sugar plantation, the stall for pasties, and the market parking lot. It was the same for my driver escort back to the airport. He knew everyone and exchanged something with many of those he encountered.



Marijuana is listed as illegal but I have the impression it's easily found. At my first restaurant the young gals sitting next to me (with bathing suits and tattoos) were approached by sellers. When walking back to my hotel, Sue Ann and Rafael often recognized the smell. There are signs reminding us that marijuana is illegal. Yet it seemingly openly persists. Is this a tourist calling card?

A surprise was that despite high unemployment, limited income, and drugs easily available, crime seems to be primarily centered around gang warfare and not tourists. The people of Jamaica are so easy going, friendly and helpful that it would have been tempting to bicycle the villages. Well, were it not for the extreme hills and ratty ill-maintained roads that are oftentimes narrow beyond belief with unprotected cliffs.



Terrain and weather

The island being so small, there's loads of coastline. Some sandy and some rocky. The hills start immediately and rise up very close to the coast and go up to over 7,000 feet. The tides are never over 16' and their hurricanes rarely leave major damage. The 78" of rainfall a year cause temporary flooding which they deal with by putting houses on blocks or building in the hills which you see lined with housing. When the 'monsoon' came on the afternoon of the wedding, it lasted for about two hours and with the winds it left us chilled, but not for long. It's tropical and thus hot probably all year. Their sunsets are famous and must rival those of Key West. Which reminds me of the bugs. I rarely saw mosquitoes but something kept biting me despite the bug sprays. Some tourists insist they read that the little ants bite but I'm doubtful. There was something mysterious in the way the mosquitoes snuck up on me (but they always seek me out.)

My Last Supper

The best restaurant was clearly the last night at the Couples Resort called "Feathers" yet the French Nouvelle Cuisine was not as much to Rafael's liking. It was to mine. I'd eaten some odd foods in the days before. The first night I found a small Oceanside café and sampled fried breadfruit. During the island tour a small grocery store fixed me something called a pastie which is rather like a turnover of



mille foil dough filled with some kind of unidentifiable meat and the whole meal cost less than 50 cents. At the market I sampled various new fruits and changed my mind about eating goat. The night before the wedding I had my first jerk chicken, which is a heavily spiced Cajun style but grilled chicken, not knowing that it was part of a WSJ feature about a couple returning from Jamaica with

yellow fever caused by eating roadside jerk chicken. I drank their local beer called Red Stripe and saw it was so popular that shirts and hats are sold with the logo. On the beach I had coconut water and fish tacos.

Thus eating French nouvelle cuisine at the Couples Resort was even more of a treat. I was hungry. Poor Rafael must have gone home hungry. Here they are -- a happy couple with food probably the farthest thing from their mind.



All good trips come to an end

I'm in the first sunset picture on page one, a surprise horseback rider appeared on wedding night and is in the second picture, and the last picture above is Sue Ann and Rafael at sunset.



Itinerary

Sun Jun 7

10:00am Depart Newark EWR via CO#1896
12:41pm Arrive Montego Bay MBJ

Transfer to Negril about 1 ¼ to 1 ½ hour drive – see voucher

Hotel Rooms Negril
Norman Manley Blvd, Jamaica, West Moreland
Tele: 876 957 3500 Rooms Negril booking agent 800 467 8737
http://www.superclubs.com/brand_rooms/resort_negril/ (1)

Hotel: Sue Ann and Rafael Martinez at Couples Swept Away from Saturday 6/6 to 6/13.
Long Bay, Negril, Jamaica
Tele: 800 couples or 876 957 4040

Mon Jun 8

One day overview tour

Tues Jun 9

Noon Arrive at Couples Swept Away

1:00pm Wedding ceremony – casual

Water sports, water bicycle, hammock, snacks of coconut water, fish tacos, sweet potato chips.

6:30pm Dinner at Feather's

Wed Jun 10

Transfer to Montego Bay 1 ¼ to 1 ½ hour drive

2:05pm Depart Montego Bay MBJ via CO#865

5:35pm Arrive Houston IAH for plane change

7:15pm Depart Houston IAH via CO#310 (snack)

11:56pm Arrive EWR Newark

Facts:

Q. Will cell work? A. Yes – at about \$3 per minute to U.s.

Q. Weather?

Sun Jun 07 Scattered T-Storms 86°/76° 60 %

Mon Jun 08 Scattered T-Storms 86°/76° 60 %

Tue Jun 09 Scattered T-Storms 86°/77° 60 %

The average temperature ranges from 19 degrees Celsius (66 degrees Fahrenheit) to 32 degrees Celsius (99 degrees Fahrenheit) all year. May and June are wet months. June starts hurricane season.

Q. Time zone? A. Jamaica doesn't use DST thus they are one hour earlier than EDT. 5pm NJ is 4pm Jamaica.

Q. Currency exchange rate?

- A. 1 US Dollar = 90.00000 Jamaican Dollar
1 Jamaican Dollar (JMD) = 0.01111 US Dollar (USD)

Very few places were big enough to take credit cards. Dollars were most desired.

Q. What is the electrical current? A. 110 V, 50 Hz same as U.S.

(1) Rooms Negril - This 57-room hotel faces the Caribbean right on Negril's seven-mile beach, famed for its powdery white sand and spectacular sunsets. ROOMS is a convenient base to such popular Negril haunts as Rick's Café and Alfred's, as well as within walking distance to local restaurants, boutiques, and gift shops.

The hotel features ocean front and spacious family rooms, plus a swimming pool, on site restaurant and bar, fitness center and Internet café.

The first Rooms was opened in December 2004, with 97 units clustered around a bar and pool, and meeting space for those who want to combine business with pleasure. Nestled on the beautiful beach in Ocho Rios, on Jamaica's North Coast, the new value-priced affiliate has quickly won its own place in the sun.

• Air Conditioning; • Satellite T.V.; • Direct Dial Telephone; • Internet (at additional cost); • Safety Deposit Box; • Iron and Ironing Board; • Hair Dryer; • CD Clock Radio; • Coffee Maker

Continental breakfast is included and served from 7:00am to 9:30am. Full American breakfast, lunch and dinner are available at our on-site restaurant. A variety of restaurants from fast food to gourmet are located within walking distance of the hotel. Rooms Negril also features a full service bar that's open from 10:00am to 11:00pm. Soft drinks, juices and water are available 24 hours from strategically located vending machines

Fitness Center -Exercycles, Stairmasters, Multi Station and weights are available for use free of cost.

Internet Cafe/Access Located in the lobby. Rates are as follows:

- \$7.00 15 minutes
- \$12.00 30 minutes
- \$18.0060 minutes

From Ellen:

Well, I've had some experiences on my first trip to Jamaica that have scared me pretty badly. But on my second trip, I had NO problems. I was driving around the island in a rental car and talking to people everywhere. For the most part, Jamaican people are gentle, friendly, nice people. But there is an element that's very scary. Admittedly, on my second trip I did not go to Reach Falls or Port Antonio, where the incidents happened before.

In the center of the island is an area they call Cockpit Country. It's very rough terrain, and it became the stronghold of some runaway slaves who holed up there in the 17th and 18th centuries and repulsed all attempts by the British to run them out. They are dangerous enough that the map is labeled "Do Not Enter" around the areas where they live. In the paper while I was there, there was an article about the gang fights in Spanish Town over the taxi cab stands. People were being shot. It was purely a gang war, but if you happened to be in Spanish Town, you might catch a stray bullet. I can't imagine that it would happen anywhere else on the Island. There are areas near where I live here in Santa Monica where gangs shoot gang members. I just don't go there.

Jamaica has a very violent history. The slave owners in Jamaica were the worst on the planet. If you go there and visit any of the plantation houses, you'll read about it. We're talking about sick cruelty. The slaves who ended up in Cockpit Country got no education, lived in poverty off the land, and made money by returning their own kind to the authorities. They also developed a "religion" that makes use of voodoo and drugs. They call themselves Rastafarians and they talk a language that is almost unintelligible to me. It's become the "in" slang of black males in the Caribbean. On the island of Dominica I hired a bird guide who was a "hail fellow well met" He drove my rental car through the villages on the way to the highlands, and the blacks along the road were grabbing his hand and doing male bonding (as men do) and he and they were all speaking this "gibberish". It's definitely an in-group language.

On my first trip to Jamaica, I stayed at an AAA recommended hotel in Kingston. When the Dutch woman owner found out I was planning to drive around by myself, she almost had a heart attack. She sat down at my table in the dining room, and made me promise that I would not talk to ANYONE! Well, as luck would have it, I got lost a mile from the hotel and had to decide if I was going to sit there till I died, or ask someone for directions. (The map was absolutely no help). Well, I did the sensible thing and asked a fruit vender. He was very helpful. And during that day I must have talked to 20 people. The driving patterns in Kingston are impossible. You have to be born there to know your way around. The maps are useless in Kingston. All of the people I talked to were nice, and glad to be helpful. But I couldn't help but notice the contrasts between rich and poor were enormous, and shacks where people were hungry were one block from gated palatial homes with armed guards. This is not the setting for stable society. The reason for the presence of international wealth was the complete lack of taxes in Jamaica. That was also the reason for the abominable condition of the roads. Fortunately, that has changed. There is now a reasonable tax, businesses are flourishing, and the roads are being upgraded. But I gather Kingston still has a high crime rate.

Jamaica has places on the island that are beautiful beyond anything I've ever seen anywhere else. Just takes my breath away. But I was so scared by my hotel owner I was pretty on edge during the whole first trip. That wasn't true on the second trip and I had no problems. I was involved in an auto incident that was solved on the spot. (Driving through the town of St. Mary's, the narrow main thru fare was exceeding narrow and was the route used by all the truckers. In Jamaica, they drive on the left side of the road and I'm not used to estimating how much space I need with the driver's seat on the wrong side of the car. The clearance between trucks passing and parked cars was inches – and I misjudged. I heard metal scrape metal, couldn't stop, so never saw the vehicle. But I pulled over and parked at my first opportunity, and waited. A young black man came up and said, "What are you going to do about my car?" I said, "What would you like me to do about your car?" He said, "Fix it"

I said, "How much would that cost?" He did some calculations and came up with approximately \$100, but calculated in Jamaican money". I handed him \$100 and he said, "What's this?" I said, "That's 4200 what-ers (Jamaican money) in American dollars. He said, "Oh." Then he tried to up the price. I said, "Look, this will fix your car. You know that so don't try to bargain with me." He looked sheepish and said, "Ok, Ok". And I drove on. I also put a long scratch on the side of the rental car. When I returned the rental car, they didn't see the scratch. I showed it to them and asked them to have it fixed and charge my credit card. It only cost \$50. They were so grateful that I was honest enough to show them, they told me they'd try to find the cheapest way to have it fixed, and they did.

The incidents at Reach Falls and Port Antonio had to do with trying to extort small bits of money and with bad energy. I think I've told you about these.

One of the officers of a company I did business with for many years, moved to the Bay Islands off Honduras. He and his wife were very happy there. When I told him I was looking for a place to live in the Caribbean, he invited me to visit. Unfortunately, I didn't take him up on that invitation immediately, and within a year, he had a heart attack and died. But he gave me a breakdown of what the house cost to build, and what his monthly budget was. It was shockingly low. But he employed a full time security guard who lived on the property, and even so, his patio furniture was stolen (which he didn't think is a big deal) My friend, Austin Patterson has lived on the Island of St. Kitts, and now lives on St. Vincent. Crime on both islands affected him. When I was in Dominica, my backpack was stolen out of my rental vehicle. The Caribbean islands have many poor people living there and their ethics allow them to steal and to try to extort money from you if they can get away with it.

I find that if I'm not afraid and I treat people as equals, they respond in kind. I could write a long letter about the pleasant interactions I had with many people on both trips to Jamaica. They gave me licks of their Ice cream cones, stopped in the pouring rain to give me directions, walked me to places when I needed directions. On Dominica, a young black man jumped in my car and informed me he was going to the next village. Seems it was the norm for passing cars to serve as taxi services in that part of the island, and after I recovered from the shock, he and I had a very pleasant ride. But if I lived there, I would have to have some kind of security. On the other hand, I had a serial burglar here in this apartment that was getting in through an unsecured window and he probably got away with about \$2000 worth of items before I discovered how he was getting in. The night after I secured that window, he tried to enter again, and broke that window. Clearly he had been in the apartment when I was asleep. In my previous apartment, one of the security guards employed by the management company was systematically burglarizing everybody. They hired an off-duty police officer, who caught him. He was in my apartment at least 3 times.

Yes, there is crime on Jamaica. But you probably wouldn't go to Kingston or Spanish Town. I've never been to Negril so I have no comment about it.

In the 50s, Round Hill, a ritzy resort at Montego Bay, Jamaica, was the hot spot for international socialites, who would arrive with trunks full of evening clothes because everybody dressed for dinner and "everybody" was there to see and be seen. I believe Ralph Lauren has a house at Round Hill even now. But, of course, the formality is all gone. The hoi-polloi is everywhere and the butcher, baker and candlestick maker is strutting around acting entitled. (Maybe that's one reason I was treated so well – because I was not acting like I was entitled. I was gracious, lavish with praise, and deferred to the locals. Worked well.)

I can't argue with the article, but I'd say the problems are localized, and your attitude has something to do with it. That's not a full-proof recipe, but I think it's realistic. When I was there, I encountered a very successful business woman who ran a beautiful hotel near Port Antonio. I really wanted to talk to her more about how she has coped with the crime over the years (She had been there 40 years).

I note that Errol Flynn's widow, Patrice Wymore, stayed in Jamaica and runs a plantation there. Noel Coward and his partner lived on top of the hill outside of Port Antonio for years. People do live there by choice.

Jamaica is a visual paradise, not a social paradise. But its beauty calls me.

From Diana to Ellen asking about crime in Jamaica: How do I check the real story? I asked Google and got this. Doesn't sound good but not awful either.

Jamaica - Crime and Tourism

(Sep 3/2007) - The author of this page, RS Stewart, would like to again make it clear that the following advisory is based on personal opinion, rooted in the context of our occasional tourism activity, and does not represent the official position of the JCO caving membership. All who read it, and object to it, should direct their anger toward Mr. Stewart (info@jamaicancaves.org) and not the JCO generally.

(Jul 23/2006) - This page is addressed to visitors to Jamaica. Residents will already be very familiar with much of what is discussed (and do not need to be told again), but for the sake of those who are less familiar, we're going to be appropriately honest. If any Jamaican nationals take offence, so it goes.

We have kept the internal links to this page limited on the website since it was first posted in November of 2005, and as of July 23, 2006, there are no internal links to it whatsoever (just from the footnotes, which are only linked-to from this page). That is, you cannot get here from the home page of this site. If you have found it, it's by way of a search engine, and it's because you're concerned about Jamaican crime. Accordingly, we do not consider ourselves responsible for helping to promote a negative image of the country - people will not be reading this unless there is some degree of worry in the first place.

The reason why we have posted this advisory is that we believe that visitors to Jamaica (including those who might hire JCO guides) have the right to know what they're getting into. It's entirely possible for tourists to have a splendid time in Jamaica without being a prisoner of an all-inclusive resort, but this will only happen if there's a heads-up on what can be expected. The following advisory is the heads-up.

Crime and Tourism - The Statistics:

It is often said by Jamaican government sources that Jamaica has one of the lowest crime rates for tourists in the Caribbean. This is arguable, but not entirely wrong. It is true that there are few reported crimes committed against tourists in Jamaica. However, the reasons for this are often obscured. The factors follow below.

Most visitors to Jamaica seldom leave the resorts, and when they do, it is in buses supplied by the resorts, with guides supplied by the resorts, with visits restricted to one of the few Jamaican "tourist attractions". These are usually Dunn's River Falls, Martha Brae River Rafting, Fern Gully, Green Grotto Caves, etc. Otherwise, few tourists take it upon themselves to hire a car and explore on their own (this kind of activity is discouraged by the resorts, with warnings of various possible dangers).

Many of the visitors to Jamaica who are included in the statistics are arriving on cruise ships (an ever increasing percentage of recorded tourist arrivals). They visit Jamaica for a few hours, and then return to the boat. The only parts of Montego Bay, Runaway Bay, etc, that they visit are

tightly controlled by the police.

The few tourists who venture into the hills and valleys of the island are very experienced, and know what to be on guard against.

The reality is that there are few crimes committed against tourists in Jamaica because most of them never venture beyond the tourist compound, or Dunn's River Falls, or the craft-markets located close to where the boat is docked. Those few, thick-skinned, brave souls who do are very careful. There is an exception to this scenario - Negril.

Negril acquired a reputation several decades ago of being a very laid-back, peaceful part of the island. This was before the coast road was put in from Lucea, when it was relatively isolated. It has changed greatly since then. Nevertheless, for those who are after cocaine, ganja, or rent-a-dreads (for the white, overweight, middle-aged women who can't get laid at home), this is the place to be. There are few actual "compounds" - the beach is public and most of the hotels front directly on it. Meeting or buying your entertainment of choice involves an easy walk of 50 metres from the buffet to a patio chair. Lots of tourists like it, and if that's your idea of a vacation, go for it. But don't expect it to be problem free - Negril has one of the highest rates of crimes against tourists in Jamaica, some of them violent. Of course, there are many old-hands who have been visiting Negril for years and managed to survive, so if you keep your wits about you, it's entirely possible to have a good time.

At any rate, the crimes that most tourists are likely to be victims of are not violent in nature (although this does happen), but thefts. Of course, if you report this, it won't make it into the statistics anyway, so it won't alter what is claimed by the Ja government about crime against tourists.

Crime and Tourism - The Reality:

The threats to tourists in Jamaica follow in ascending order of importance:

Harassment: Outside of the resorts, regular harassment can be expected to varying degrees. If you are white, and driving around, expect to hear regular yells of "White man!", "White bwoy!", "Joe!", "Jakes!", etc, in most districts, whether urban or rural (this does not apply to Kingston and the corporate area, where the population is more mixed - it primarily applies to the western half of the island). Ignore all of this and keep on driving - you'll get used to hearing it eventually, and it will then be less irritating. When walking or bicycling (and we do not recommend this), things can be more intense. You will be approached by people who are very insistent that you stop and talk with them. If you do not, you will be accused of disrespecting them, and berated in an intimidating way. If you do stop, tremendous pressure will be put on you to give them something (money). You cannot win either way. Keep in mind that they are unlikely to chop you, so don't fear for your life, but it's not particularly enjoyable having to put up with that crap. Bottom-line: don't walk - drive.

Theft: In Jamaica, if it is not locked-up, or nailed-down, it is liable to be stolen. This does not just apply to tourists and their touristy things, but to farmers, shop-keepers, and environmental NGO's. It is a rare person, whether tourist or resident, who has not had something stolen in Jamaica (having your car broken into is a given, unless you, or an employee, keep a close eye on it). You must always be on guard for this. Even if you are very careful, the thieves will get to you eventually. When it does happen, don't blame yourself for having slipped-up - consider it as inevitable.

Road-blockages: Obstructing roads with debris, burning tyres, etc, has become a popular

pastime in Jamaica over the last few years. This can happen for almost any reason, from an increase in electricity rates to a local case of food poisoning. It is unpredictable and liable to happen on any main road at any time. This would only be a matter of inconvenience if it were not for the riff-raff who take the opportunity to rob those whose cars have been brought to a halt by it. Although the resort bus drivers are careful to bypass the disturbances (they're keeping tabs on things with cell phones), it makes travel on the highways dicey for tourists and residents alike.

Stray bullets: Jamaica has many people running around with guns who have no problem using them. The murder rate in Jamaica is currently jockeying for top position with Colombia and South Africa, with Jamaica pulling ahead. In past years, the gunfire primarily occurred in Kingston and Spanish Town, but it's now spreading out. St James (Montego Bay parish) has seen increasing levels of violent crime (murder), as well as all other parishes. At this time, the chance that you will catch a stray bullet (meant for someone else) while standing on a main street in many of the tourist centres of Jamaica is not zero. Fortunately, there are fewer gunmen in the bush than in urban areas, so the further you get from town in Jamaica, the better.

Homophobia: If you are gay, don't even consider stepping foot on the island. Not only is it illegal to be homosexual in Jamaica, some Jamaicans believe that gays should be killed. The primary musical genre, Dancehall, is replete with songs that encourage this [4], [5], [6]. This belief is often acted upon, such as with the recent murder of Steve Harvey.

Rape: There are many single female visitors who come to Jamaica for sex, using the hired services of the many *rent-a-dreads* who congregate around the resort areas. Unfortunately, because of this, most single white women who come to the island are now regarded as being there only for that reason, and will be harassed accordingly. In Jamaica, "No means no" is not recognized amongst some segments of the male population and harassment can lead to worse things. If you are a single female, be very careful about whom you let become your friend, no matter how good the patter. [For those women who are hiring the male prostitutes, it must be noted that the island has a very high incidence of HIV, and as you already know, condoms are not popular in Jamaica.]

Murder: As noted above, Jamaica is one of the most murderous countries on the planet. Tourists are not generally exposed to this risk (much of it is tribal politics in Kingston), but it cannot be disregarded. To be clear on this: Your chance of being intentionally murdered while being a tourist in Jamaica is relatively low, but not as low as visiting Cuba, or Costa Rica, or a hundred other countries. If personal safety is the main concern with regard to your vacation, go somewhere else.

Crime and Tourism - What to do:

It's possible to visit Jamaica successfully, without being cooped-up in a resort, if you're an experienced traveler, have your wits about you, are cognizant of the risks, and can tolerate the harassment. However, if you're a generally naive sort of person, and head out into the hills alone expecting to travel through paradise, harsh cold reality may soon intervene. If you can handle it, no problem. If you're not sure, forget about it.

Those who don't entirely trust their own abilities to deal with the real Jamaica can still get off the beaten track by linking with the right people, such as Accompong Town, Miss Lilly in Coxheath, et al. The Jamaican Caves Organization