



JAMAICA'S HIDDEN TREASURE

Escape the all-inclusive resorts and head to serene **Treasure Beach**, where beachside seafood shacks, farm-to-table dinners, and world-class jerk chicken are the only distractions

BY SHANE MITCHELL

TREASURE BEACH, a rural community on Jamaica's remote southwest coast, isn't on the resort circuit, and it's content to stay that way. Fishermen row wooden dories along the reef; goats graze behind driftwood fences on the arid plains; children play soccer on the shore. A boho-chic crowd (one part Brooklyn, one part Euro holiday) bypasses Montego Bay and Negril for the biennial literary festival here. Visitors like yacating world-music stars and neo-beat poets spend their days traipsing between low-key beaches and kicked-back cafés and restaurants, where just-caught fish and made-to-order jerk barbecue are the attractions. After dark, dancehall queens and bingo sharks rule the rum bars, but the reggae is never too loud to drown out the surf. As Jamaicans like to say, it's a chill spot.



FISH AND TRIP

Play castaway with fisherman **Dennis Abrahams** [1], who can be hired for a half-day (or longer) picnic excursion. After cruising the shoreline from Treasure Beach, he'll pull his boat onto a deserted white sand beach along the 625-acre

Galleon Fish Sanctuary. Swim in the protected surf while he builds a driftwood fire, then marinates red snapper [2] in seawater and pineapple and mango juices pressed on the spot. A sea grape leaf doubles as a plate; lime is the only garnish necessary.



Fishermen in Parrotree Bay



LAZY DAYS

How do locals describe a typical week at Treasure Beach? "Sunday, Sunday, Sunday, Sunday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday," says **Jakes Hotel** [4] owner Sally Hanzell. Jakes's artsy bungalows have net-draped beds and outdoor showers steps from the surf. Time your trip to coincide with one of the monthly farm dinners, held under mango trees on an organic plot on the Pedro Plains, or ask for a private cooking class in one of the seaside dwellings.

FIRE IT UP

On special nights at **Jack Sprat Restaurant**, chef Dockery Lloyd lights up his "jerk pan" next to Calabash Bay's black sand beach. The menu at this brightly painted restaurant, plastered with reggae memorabilia, is heavy on fried seafood and, oddly, pizza, but its jerk [3]—Jamaica's hyperspiced barbecue—also draws an appreciative crowd. Lloyd loads a vinegar-based sauce with fiery Scotch bonnet peppers and bastes chicken and pork with it over the coals until the meat is succulent and slightly scorched. His secret ingredients? "Two shots of coconut rum and some honey to bring up the sweet taste."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES FISHER

PHOTOGRAPH: BOTTOM LEFT, COURTESY JAKES HOTEL



BEYOND THE SWIM-UP BAR

Barely more than a makeshift platform of driftwood and thatch, **Pelican Bar** [5] rises on pilings above an offshore reef in Parrotree Bay. Getting there involves a 30-minute ride with one of the local fishermen, who beach their dories at

Calabash Bay and are happy to pick up a fare. Once you arrive, grab a cold Red Stripe and stick around long enough to watch the birds skim across the pewter sea at sunset. If you're really lucky, owner Floyd Forbes may cook up a pot of lobster with rice in his tiny galley kitchen.



CATCH OF THE DAY

When Jamaicans return flush from overseas jobs, they dine at **Little Ochie** [6, 7] in Alligator Pond, a fishing village with a busy market where housewives bargain over grouper and lobster. The beachfront kitchen makes seafood to order a dozen ways; when they're offering jackfish fresh off the boat, skip everything else and order it jerk style. Mop up owner Evrol "Blackie" Christian's extraordinary sauce, redolent of grill smoke and dark soy, with "festival" rolls, golden pieces of unyeasted dough—comparable to hush puppies—that emerge from the fryer crunchy outside and soft and fluffy inside.



RURAL PURSUITS

St. Elizabeth's Parish is considered **Jamaica's breadbasket**. The red hills are patchworked with fields of pineapple, peanuts, and yams. Enlist Jack Sprat chef Dockery Lloyd for a tour of the best farms, or stop by the roadside stands along Calabash Bay to sample sweet melons and other crops.

FOR MORE INFO, SEE SOURCEBOOK ON PAGE 128.



JAMAICAN JOE

At the all-day breakfast joint **Smurf's Café**, Blue Mountain coffee beans [8] are roasted the old-fashioned way, in a cast-iron skillet. Proprietors Dawn and Venique Moxam prepare hand-rolled johnnycakes, fried plantains, and omelets stuffed with sautéed callaloo, a leafy cousin of spinach that grows in everyone's backyard. Ask for a side of ackee and saltfish, Jamaica's beloved dish of boiled fruit and dried cod.

Shane Mitchell reports on culinary travel when away from her upstate New York home.

