

# Spice it up in Jamaica

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How do you like to vacation? Are you adventurous? A history buff? Culinary tasting-fiend? And then, there are the all inclusive lovers: Beach all day and swim-up bar 'til the sun goes down.

While I don't have the right formula for your next holiday, I like my vacations the way I like my food prepared: A main ingredient showcased in different ways so I can experience a new sensation with each bite. On a recent trip to Jamaica, this is exactly what happened.

## The main event

I'm a runners' runner. I've run two marathons and five half-marathons, so even though I didn't sufficiently train to run the Reggae Half Marathon in Negril, I wasn't too nervous about it — until the pre-race Rasta Pasta party, that is.

The party is where runners fuel up on pasta the night before the race. Feeding off the energy of others, I could feel butterflies in my stomach. Good thing there was a cool youth calypso band churning out pop hits to keep us entertained.

On race day, our wake up call was at 3 a.m. Walking to the bus in darkness, it was hard to believe I'd be running in a few hours. The air was humid, and other than a few torch-lit spots, the only flickers of light were created by stars. Cars with boom-boxes strapped on top lined the streets and blasted Bob Marley and '80s tunes.

Not far into the race, I was exhausted. With another 15 km until the finish, the spectacular sunrise helped boost my energy to keep going.

On my left, the crystal clear and



popped a vast area of hills and flatlands blanketed in lush green. Locals making their way to work walked along the road beside us. Each gave us a quick smile or nod as we huffed and puffed past with one goal in mind: To finish the race. Knowing that fresh coconut water and Red Stripe beer were waiting at the finish line helped me do just that.

## The main course

With my muscles now relaxed, the athlete in me was ready for the foodie to take over this holiday — and it did.

"I'll have another one please," I proclaimed with enthusiasm while slurping the last gulp of a Drunken Coconut cocktail at Pushcart restaurant in Negril.

Sampling warm doughy seafood fritters, spicy curried-goat and grilled pepper-shrimp, I was making up for the calories previously burned in a hurry.

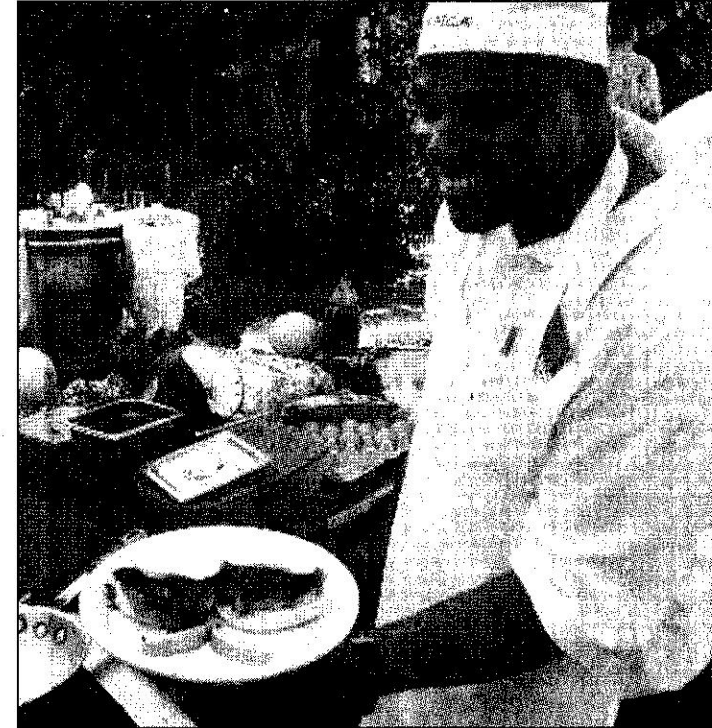
can imagine how busy we were as we made our way from the Middle Quarters—an area in the hills just north of Negril — to the South Coast.

The Middle Quarters area is famous for one thing: Pepper-shrimp.

Caught in the Black River, the shrimp are boiled with spicy-hot scotch bonnet peppers and sold by "higglers" at outdoor stalls. Honey bananas, sweetsop (sugar apple), peanuts, green oranges, coconut, pineapples and mangoes dangle in your face from the stalls, so clearly you have to try these, too.

## South coast chillin'

My food coma ensured I was a little groggy when we arrived at Treasure Beach in St. Elizabeth parish on the island's South Coast. The area felt like a completely different Jamaica than the one I was in a few hours ago. Dirt roads



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Left: Hanging out at the bar — a makeshift affair made of palm fronds and driftwood. Right: A smiling Chef Dockery Lloyd serves a breakfast of poached eggs, saltfish and callalou outdoors at Jake's Hotel.

side and rolling farmland on the other.

Life is slowed waaay down here. The mega-resorts of Negril are absent. There is one small coffee shop, no hustle-bustle.

After easing into my day with yoga and then a mug of Blue Mountain coffee at Jake's Hotel and Driftwood Spa, I couldn't wait to try my hand at making Jamaica's national dish — saltfish and ackee with fried breadfruit, dumplings and plantains. Head chef Dockery Lloyd's huge smile made the dish, which resembles scrambled eggs, taste even more delicious.

Next on my to-do list was a boat

constructed on a sandbar in the middle of the sea. The 20-minute boat ride went by quickly thanks to a pod of playful dolphins frolicking nearby.

The interior of the bar, decorated with flags of visitors from different countries and sports memorabilia, added novelty. A few beers, an island storm and a sunset later, and we were ready to head back to shore.

On the way back, it was pitch dark and the waves were huge. It made me feel like I was taking part in a great secret adventure.

Later, as I bid farewell to Jamaica, I couldn't have imaged



## ISLAND ESSENTIALS

### MUST DO

■ **YS Falls:** Seven cascading waterfalls offer family friendly fun with zip-lining and tubing. See [ysfalls.com](http://ysfalls.com).

■ **Reggae Marathon:** Don't wait to sign up for next year's race. Registration is open now at [reggaemarathon.com](http://reggaemarathon.com).

### GREAT EATS

■ **Rick's Cafe:** Sunsets don't get better than the ones you will see here. If you're feeling adventurous, try cliff-jumping from the very top. See [rickscafejamaica.com](http://rickscafejamaica.com).

■ **Scotchies:** Montego Bay's must-taste jerk shack is busy, but lines move fast. An outdoor barbecue is run by a few men who know how to handle the heat. Jerk chicken and pork are the best bets for good eats.

■ **Pushcart, Negril:** This cliffside, open-air bistro is casual but world-class. Have the Drunken Coconut! It's made with two different coconut rums that mature in the raw coconut's own water for maximum daze-effect. See [rockhousehotel.com/eat/pushcart](http://rockhousehotel.com/eat/pushcart).

### WHERE TO STAY

■ **Grand Palladium Jamaica Resort and Spa, Montego Bay:** The massive resort has the largest pools in Jamaica and many 24 hour snacking options. See [grandpalladiumjamaicaresort.com](http://grandpalladiumjamaicaresort.com).

■ **Jake's Hotel and Driftwood Spa, Treasure Beach:** To experience a rustic and completely non-mega resort vibe, where you're treated like family,