

JAMAICA & the USVI

NOT THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE



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Here's why this reporter attended the **Caribbean Tourism Organizations'** adventure travel seminar for agents in June: According to CTO statistics, "The rapidly developing tourism niche market [is] currently estimated at U.S. \$263 billion." Yes, billion. Add to that the income generated by other forms of experiential travel—activities focused on Caribbean history, heritage, music, gastronomy, photography, etc.—and pretty soon we're talkin' money.

How can travel agents better participate in this sector of the travel biz? Glad you asked. Let's look at booking experiential vacations at two destinations, where each of our picks is geared toward a different kind of client.

jamaica

HOTEL MOCKINGBIRD HILL, PORT ANTONIO

The gold standard for Jamaican eco-boutique hotels, this 10-room hideaway in the east offers views of the Blue Mountains and the sea. **Mockingbird Hill** offers free shuttles to Frenchman's Cove beach, but above all, its guests go birding, hiking, rafting, or scuba diving, and they explore waterfalls, visit the original Blue Lagoon, tour historic Charles Town, or visit hallowed music sites in Kingston. Back at the hotel there's a sustainable pool, wellness center, art gallery, award-winning restaurant, WiFi, and fab views. Serene, eco-chic Mockingbird Hill is committed to the proposition that "living green and living well can go hand in hand."

Mockingbird Hill is for nature-loving clients who will treasure its breeze-cooled rooms as respites from artificial air conditioning, TV and telephones. Rates start at \$230, but we recommend a *Superior Room* with a seating area (from \$285) or a *Deluxe* with a balcony (\$375). Clients should opt for the breakfast add-on, if not half-board. Mockingbird Hill also offers terrific naturalist packages and a unique 12-day Jamaican cooking package that, in addition to eight nights at the Bird, features three at **Green Castle Estate** plus recreation/excursions and some meals, from \$2,800 pp dbl. Since many clients can't break free for 12 days, ask for a 9-night version.

The meditation deck at Hotel Mockingbird Hill in Port Antonio in Jamaica.

COYABA BEACH RESORT & CLUB, MONTEGO BAY

Hotels in Montego Bay and Ocho Rios are so well served by outfitters like **Chukka** and **Island Routes** that even

huge all-inclusives now offer good, offsite activities. However, **Coyaba**, a member of **Great Small Hotels**, is a family-owned, 50-room classic with an authentic Old Caribbean ambiance. Its white pillars and clubby chairs evoke the days of Ian Fleming, and talking to the staffers, many of whom have worked there for decades, provides a glimpse into a more gracious era.

There's a white-sand beach, three restaurants, non-motorized watersports gear, tennis, a kids' playground, spa/fitness center, and (of course) complimentary afternoon tea and sunset cocktails. This hotel, therefore, pleases clients who want a traditional resort holiday while also wanting to go ziplining, bamboo rafting, tubing, trips to Dunn's River Falls (warning: it's crowded), sailing, horseback riding, or visit former plantations, a runaway-slave settlement, and a local school.

All rooms feature traditional chintz furnishings, balconies, TV and air conditioning. Rates start at \$204, but clients, especially those with children, should stay in a *Junior Suite* (from \$221). Breakfast and all-inclusive packages cost \$18.35/\$113.35 pp, with half off for children under 12. When booking by e-mail, supply your address and IATA number to earn 13 percent commission.

JAKE'S, TREASURE BEACH

Located on the underdeveloped south coast, **Jake's** is for cultural tourists, clients who want to bend elbows or bend it like Beckham with Jamaicans. To be sure, clients who just want to chill in the tropics can enjoy the pool, beach (the better beach is a short walk away), a restaurant that uses local ingredients, yoga instructors, media room, and 50 wondrously idiosyncratic rooms, 20 in cottages/villas, designed by artist/designer Sally Henzel. But there's more.

This resort is not an enclave; guests stroll or take bikes into the nearby village, nurse beers at friendly local bars, or play soccer (or tennis, or almost anything else) at the comprehensive public sports park developed by hotelier Jason Henzel. If they go fishing or take a nature tour (birds, crocodiles), they go with real fishermen in hand-built boats; when they visit a historic settlement or a waterfall, they ride with a local in his car.

Unlike **The Caves**, another hip, south-coast hideaway with which it's sometimes confused, Jake's is neither all-inclusive nor adults-only. Almost nobody rents a car; guests either take a car service from Montego Bay or a small plane from Mo'Bay to Jake's airstrip (about \$400 for a six-seater). Rooms start at \$95, but we recommend, at the very least, the *Deluxe One Bedroom* >>>