

Bluefields: The story behind the name

Bluefields, in southern Westmoreland, was originally called Oristan by the Spaniards, who are thought to have established the town no later than 1519.

However, archaeological research shows that the Tainos had settled the area from around 750-1500 AD.

Recognising the strategic location, the Spaniards built a port, which allowed them to monitor ships going to and from the Spanish Main. After the British arrived in the mid-1600s, the area became known as Bluefields - originally spelt 'Blewfields'.

It is likely that Bluefields was named after Abraham Blauvelt, a Dutch pirate who frequented the area more than 300 years ago, using it to careen and repair vessels while eluding patrolling British warships.

As with the Spaniards, Bluefields became a popular port of call for the British, as slave ships frequented the area.

Land grants

From 1662-1719, the British authorities made 16 land grants in the Bluefields Bay area, and these lands were developed into plantation properties from 1700-1838. The most dominant plantations in the area included Bluefields Estate, Mount Edgecombe Estate and Shafston Estate, along with smaller estates in the area now referred to as Belmont.

In the post-emancipation period, alternatives to sugar developed in the area. These eventually included logwood production and cattle rearing, a lime juice factory and a pimento oil factory.

In the 1940s, a government public works initiative also helped to provide employment. Unfortunately, the logwood and pimento oil industries collapsed by the 1950s and the 1980s, respectively, and tragedy struck in June 1979 when flood waters destroyed bridges and houses, changed river courses, taking many lives.

However, by the 1990s, government and private sector initiatives led to Bluefields being branded as a community tourist destination, which now includes several guest houses. The all-inclusive Sandals Whitehouse Hotel is nearby.