

5 Things to do on the South Coast

{mosmodule phpinc=ttpopup.php,Jamaica's} south coast is worlds apart from the more popular beaches of the North Coast. The region is less travelled but no less spectacular than other parts of our beautiful island and is dotted with special surprises that reward you for veering off the beaten path.

Here are some suggestions to help get the most out of your south coast excursion:

LITTLE OCHIE Alligator Pond's shoreline is as much about work as play; here fishermen launch their boats to catch some of the island's best-regarded fish while women conduct the wholesale business of the catch. Weather-worn cookshops and bars line the sand's edge, supplying food staples such as curried goat, escoveitched fish served with a cold Red Stripe beer. One of the most popular and established is Little Ochie Seafood Restaurant.

The eatery is famous for its food, as much as for its beach. Patrons can enjoy over 75 freshly caught seafood dishes including curried or jerked shark, conch fritters, conch salad, jerk, curried, grilled or barbecued lobster, conch, eel, squid and seaweed soup, fried or steamed fish and festival and bammy to name a few. The lumber and thatched structures of his restaurant hug a silver sand beach where the sea breaks with playful ferocity along the shore giving it a tremendous atmosphere.

LOVER'S LEAP

Hovering about 1,700 feet above the Caribbean Sea, Lover's Leap offers a breathtakingly beautiful vista. The views are dramatic with clear visibility of Treasure Beach to the West and as far as Rocky Point to the East. Perhaps you are familiar with the legend behind the location, but here's a recap: Two 18th century lovers Mizzy and Tunkey were forced to make a run for it after their master "Chardley" took a liking to the girl and, in a bid to have her for himself, he arranged for her lover to be sold to another estate.

The pair fled to avoid being separated but were eventually chased to the edge of the cliff. Rather than face being caught and separated, the pair chose to end their lives by jumping together off the towering cliff into the sea below.

BLACK RIVER SAFARI

Set amidst massive banks that serve as a habitat for much of the South Coast's wildlife the Black River is Jamaica's longest navigable river. Its name refers to the darkness of the river bed which is lined with thick layers of decomposing vegetation. The Safari Cruise offers visitors the chance to discover the beauty of the South Coast with a boat tour up the river and through the Black River lower morass, Jamaica's largest wetland area. All this while searching for native crocodiles and experiencing the magic of the island's wildlife.

Sail six miles up the river and return, while listening to the running commentary given by your captain/tour guide on both Black River's ecology and a little of the area's history. The wetland vegetation is of special interest with three species of mangrove, Thatch palms, Royal palms and freshwater swamp forest dominating. Over 100 species of birds have been recorded in the morass and many are seen during the trip. **YS FALLS**

Famous for their jagged sky-high rocks with crystal clear torrents of water flowing over them for 120 feet, YS Falls is a stunning natural attraction. A tractor drawn jitney takes you through a working thoroughbred horse and cattle farm to the hidden valley, home to the spectacular 7-tiered cascading waterfall. YS Falls is a great place to relax with family and friends. The property features natural and manmade pools as well as a large lawn. The natural pools are fed by underground and above ground springs and are accessed by stairs alongside the river. You can zipline across the spread of the falls and enjoy river tubing when river conditions permit.

APPLETON ESTATE RUM TOUR

The South Coast is home to the island's most famous brand of rum, Appleton Estate. To appease the appetites of those curious as to what the process of rum-making entails there is the Appleton Estate Rum Tour. This historic tour of Jamaica offers a glimpse back in time to the beginning of a nation and covers much of the islands history from the very first use of the Appleton estate in the early 1600's through the entire history of slavery and settlement to modern times where they are now the largest manufacturer of premium rum.

The Appleton Estate has been blending rums since 1749 and the Rum Distillery is sited beside the Black River in one of the most beautiful valleys in Jamaica, south of Montego Bay. The guided tour gives visitors an inside look at the rum-making process. The Appleton Rum Tour includes: sampling the wet sugar out of the copper pot, demonstration of the rum aging and blending process, rum tasting in the Appleton Lounge and a complementary bottle of rum so that you can savour these award-winning rums after you tour the distillery.