The Great Houses of Western Jamaica

In the heyday of Jamaica's sugar economy, the great house was the seat of authority on the sugar plantation. The size and profitability of the property and the wealth of the owner determined the size of the house.

These houses were usually two storey buildings with a base of brick, cut stone and mortar. The top floor was usually made of wood. Variations of this archetype included one-storey buildings constructed of wood, cut stone or Spanish walling or wattle and daub; or two-storey buildings made of brick, wood or cut stone.

The owner's former place of residence, which in many instances was England, was reflected in the architectural style of the Great House. Consequently, the Georgian Period (1720-1760) inspired many local constructions, from which the Jamaican Georgian (1760-1830) evolved. Important architectural features of the Great Houses included wide wrap-around verandas, jalousies, and sash windows to make the most of the Caribbean climate.

SEVILLE GREAT HOUSE

This Great House near St. Ann's Bay was built in 1745 for British Officer Richard Hemming. Seville is known to have had a cathedral, and sugar factory. Relics of these were unearthed in the 1950s by late archeologist Charles Cotter, and include exquisitely carved stones from the Church of Peter Martyr of Anghiera. There is the collection of artifacts on display in the Great House which depicts various aspects of the life of the Tainos, Africans and Europeans. At Seville Heritage Park, which overlooks the beautiful Caribbean Sea, are the relic of a water wheel used to operate the old sugar mill, the Overseer's House and a barbecue. For several years the Seville Great House has been the home of the annual Emancipation Jubilee. This major event on the cultural calendar is held on July 31 and commemorates the 1838 Emancipation Declaration with a festive all night vigil.

TRYALL GREAT HOUSE

Located on the main road between Hopewell and Sandy Bay, Hanover, The Tryall Great House once housed a sugar plantation, but is now part of the Tryall Club; a hot spot for vacation goers to play tennis, golf, and meet for beach events. Still to be found on the property, however, are nineteenth century grave stone fragments, the ruins of a sugar works including a huge cast-iron water wheel which still functions, an old cast-iron boiler and a beautiful brick structure chimney. Tours of the Tryall Great House can be arranged through the Tryall Club. Reservations are recommended for large groups.

ROSE HALL GREAT HOUSE

Rose Hall Great House, Jamaica is one of the most well known structures in Jamaica. It is located approximately 9.25 miles (15 km) east of Montego Bay. The Great House, which is also of Georgian architecture, is built of cut-stone on the first two levels and stucco on the third and uppermost level. The main entrance to the second level of the building consists of a cut-stone symmetrical grand staircase, which leads to a verandah on the seaward side of the building. The building also features sash windows, keystone, quoins and a hip roof. Rose Hall is home to the legendary White Witch,

Annee Palmer who killed several husbands and lovers. It is said that her ghost still walks the property. Tours of the Great House are offered every day between the hours of 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

GREENWOOD GREAT HOUSE

Built during an era of elegance and brutality in equal measure, the Greenwood Great House has retained the atmosphere of the 19th century and continues to capture the imagination of its visitors. The building was constructed by the Barrett family on over 84,000 acres of land worked by over 2,000 slaves. Along with breath-taking interior and lush tropical gardens, Greenwood has the largest and rarest collection of musical instruments and books on the island. The first daily tour of the Great House begins at 9:00 a.m.

GOOD HOPE GREAT HOUSE

Located just minutes outside of Falmouth, Trelawny, the Good Hope Great House was built around 1755 and is known for its high raftered ceilings along with pinewood and wild orange floors. Good Hope Estate was formed through a land grant, given to Colonel Thomas Williams. The estate consists of one thousand acres, bordering the Martha Brae River. The Good Hope Great House has been lovingly restored. The old cut stone buildings are now a spectacular 13 bedroom accommodation. The estate is also now the base from which several soft adventure tours are offered. Chukka Caribbean Adventures offers tours of the Great House from Tuesday to Friday.