

HEAD TO THE MOUNTAINS

Journey towards the center of Jamaica from any direction and your view will be crowned by emerald peaks.

Climbing quickly towards to the sky, these roughly hewed towers are the wellsprings of much of Jamaica's natural beauty and action-packed history. From our magnificent waterfalls and giant butterflies to our world famous coffee and jerk pork, Jamaica's remote interior hills have incubated and continue to sustain much of what makes Jamaica unique.

With no predators or poisonous flora and fauna to worry about, our mountain ranges are a gift to the nature lover. There is something for every level of fitness: gentle walks through cool eucalyptus orchards and coffee farms as well as formidable treks against sudden slopes and valleys. Christopher Columbus compared Jamaica's terrain to a crumpled piece of paper thrown across a desk. A mess of folds, dips, cracks and summits make for a dynamic maze of wood and water.

Our celebrated showpiece, the Blue Mountain Range is inexhaustible. Sprawling over some 200,000 acres the range's remoteness and altitude has made it one the world's richest regions for rare tropical species. The Blue Mountain Range is the territory of the world's second largest butterfly, the Giant Swallowtail, fluorescent moss, ferns, orchids, berries and many more of Jamaica's over 3,000 plant and animal species. The Blue Mountain Range merges with the John Crow Mountain Range for Jamaica's largest national park.

Most visitors to the Blue and John Crow Mountain Range are in pursuit of Jamaica's highest point, Blue Mountain Peak. The tradition is to hike through the night and make it to the top in time for sunrise. Standing at the 2,556m summit, amidst a sea of lesser peaks and soft clouds, watching the island awake to the touch of pink sun rays is a moving experience. On a clear day, hikers are rewarded with a 360 degree panorama of Columbus' 'fairest isle'; an unobstructed 234km view of Jamaica's entire coastline. It is even possible to view the coast of Cuba, 145 km to the north.

Another worthwhile hiking adventure can be enjoyed to the west of the island in the Cockpit Country. Straddling the parishes of St. James, Trelawny and St. Elizabeth, the Cockpit Country's otherworldly appearance is only matched by the fascinating events of its past. Like an inverted egg carton, the region is a cluster of jagged mounds of rocks. Its foreboding peaks resembled chicken heads to early explorers, earning the area the name Cockpit. The region is, in fact, a remarkable example of Karst topography. Its austere surface of dry rocks and humble tufts of shrub mask the torrents of water coursing underfoot; fed by the filtering limestone of the area.

Humid and formidable, The Cockpit Country made the ideal stronghold for an independent group of African descendants who resisted European control in colonial Jamaica. Where British soldiers feared to venture, the maroon's thrived in a closely knit community called Accompong. The area's inaccessibility preserved one of the New World's oldest hybrid cultures, but also served as protection for the hundreds of species of unique flora and fauna which originated or retreated to the area. The Cockpit Country covers 1,300 km² and has the highest number of endemic Jamaican plants.

Over 75% of our island's surface is above 1000 feet and wherever there is a mountain, there is a hiking opportunity. Along with the Blue and John Crow Mountain Range and the Cockpit Country, experienced guides and hiking tours are offered to many picturesque spots, including: Rio Grande Valley and Dolphin Mountain. Hiking with an experienced guide is the first rule of thumb when exploring our hilly interior.

Jamaica's high mountain springs are some of the few places remaining in the world where untreated water is safe to drink but you will need to pack water and refreshment for the journey. Insect repellent and sunscreen are also highly recommended.