Jamaica...A Destination of Memorable Experiences

As we approach the festive season, fraught with frigid temperatures, Jamaica offers visitors a great escape and the ideal winter getaway.

A contagious joie de vivre makes this destination a natural choice for holiday season celebrations. With a variety of upbeat festivals, inspired events and delicious cuisine, visitors of all ages can enjoy a variety of experiences while sharing the holiday cheer.

Jamaican Holiday Traditions

Among Jamaica’s best-known celebrations of Christmas are Grand Market and Jonkonnu. The Grand Market (or Gran' Market) is a community fair that features food, street dancing, crafts and music. Markets all over the island are set up with vendor stalls selling toys, clothes, balloons and sweets of all kinds, including pinda (an African word for peanut) cakes, grater cakes and peppermint sticks.

Traditionally on Christmas Eve, some markets are decorated with streamers, balloons and large accordion-style bells. This fun event is an irresistible magnet, drawing residents to town for a celebration that continues all day and night. Shops and market stalls open until late (or early next morning) with music all night.

Jonkonnu is a traditional Christmas celebration in which revelers parade through the streets dressed in dazzling masquerade, continuing a custom brought over by enslaved Africans who were transplanted to Jamaica. Jonkonnu bands include a mix of traditional and modern characters, varying across the island. They include: Cow Head or Horse Head, King, Queen (wearing a veil), Devil, Pitchy-Patchy, Red Indians, Belly Woman (a character dressed to look enormously pregnant), and Policeman, a mock officer of the law to keep the motley crew and crowd in check.

Jamaican Holiday Cuisine

Dining in Jamaica over the holidays is a festive experience filled with delectable delights. A traditional dinner is likely to include the following specialties:

§ Baked ham, roast beef, chicken, oxtail or curried goat, accompanied by a sweet yam called yampi and Gungo (pigeon) rice and peas.

§ Jamaican fruitcake, made with fruits that are soaked for months in rum or port, with a final dousing at the Christmas table.

§ Sorrel wine, created from the red fruit of the sorrel plant fermented to a sweetened, red-colored drink spiced with ginger, cloves and pimento, and laced with white rum.