

Cockpit Country Jamaica: An Amazing Adventure of Limestone!

For the adventurous visitors to Jamaica, the Cockpit Country is a natural haven of unexplored flora, fauna and amazing limestone formation.

The Cockpit Country consists of approximately 1300 square km and is found mainly in Trelawny and St. James. It also crosses over into the parishes of St. Ann, St. Elizabeth and Manchester. Ever wondered why it is called the Cockpit Country? Well, in general, limestone cannot retain surface water or rain water. So, the water immediately seeps below ground through cracks and fissures, which over millions of years widens continually, until "pits" and valleys are formed. Hence, the resemblance to of "cockpits" gave birth to the name "Cockpit Country" by the British in the 17th century. Historically, in the 18th century, the Cockpit Country was a stronghold of the Maroons. The Maroons were led by Captain Cudjoe who had headquarters in a cockpit near Petty River. The Southern section of the Cockpit Country is known by the picturesque name "Land of Look Behind", which probably dates back to Maroon wars. Other names in the region, "Me No Sen Yu Come", and "Rest and Be Thankful" records the sentiment of a group of runaway slaves who had established themselves there.

Description of Cockpit Country Jamaica The landscape of the Cockpit Country has a quite unusual landscape. The cockpits are steep sided valleys that alternate with conical hillocks to form a peculiar type of terrain known as Karst topography. The conical shape of the hills comes from the effect of weathering. Although there is no surface water, streams and rivers flow underground. Also, please note that 59 per cent of Jamaica's fresh water is provided by the underground rivers which flow here. Other significant features of the area are sinkholes and caves. The rivers which are influences of the Cockpit Country are Black River, Martha Brae and Great River. The Cockpit Country receives high rainfall annually (1500mm to 2500mm), however, it is still considered "waterless" because limestone acts as a sponge: surface water is drained vertically and rapidly and each cockpit bottom ("sink") is drained by a sinkhole. Today, most of the Cockpit Country today still remains virtually uninhabited and difficult to access. Some of the areas have been cultivated by farmers from the surrounding areas. Much of the natural vegetation still remains, especially on the hillsides. Also, the Cockpit Country is being threatened by removal of trees for firewood, coal production, yam-stick harvesting, bauxite mining and clearing of land for cultivation.

Exploring the Cockpit Country of Jamaica To be frank, a tour of the Cockpit Country, although adventurous, can take you all day. And of course, it can be quite tiring journey. It is also a popular location for bird watching and exploration. The Cockpit Country must be explored with experienced cavers and local guides, and can be explored in a variety of ways. Other than not being claustrophobic, some of the basic stuff you will need for the Cockpit Country adventure includes: RopesFlashlightsSunscreenMosquito repellentComfortable hiking shoesLong PantsHelmets / HeadcoveringBackpack / Bag with water, food and personal suppliesCaving gearsCamera - Great site to take photos There is one road that crosses the region, from Clarks Town in the north to Albert Town in the south. You will find that there are various hiking trails starting at both the north and south of the area. Any of these trails will take you to a forest which is the home to the Jamaican boa, dozens of endemic birds, frogs, reptiles and insects. There are over 150 species of vascular plants, 100 of which can be found nowhere else in the world. The ultimate hike is from Troy in the south, to Windsor in the north. Well-known caves of the Cockpit Country are the Quashie's River Sink in the south and Windsor Cave in the North. Windsor Cave possesses thousands of bats, stalactites and stalagmites within massive caverns with names such as Big Room, Royal Flat and Squeeze Up. If you have a great appreciation of natural wonders and ecotourism you will find the Cockpit Country to be an exhilarating experience.