

## The seven great 'wonders' of Portland ... and you wonder why!

The parish of Portland is awesome with its abundance of natural beauty. Its mesmerising vistas will make your jaw drop, for nature is really showing off in that eastern place.

But you cannot help but embrace Portland, the place where tourism in the Caribbean, as we know it, started. And it boomed, and boomed, becoming the playground of the world's rich and famous, and those not so. Among the luxuriant vegetation they lived a lush life, until the boom busted. **TITCHFIELD HILL** One of the places in which upscale social life thrived was on one of the headlands that frame Port Antonio's twin harbours. This peninsula was the local home to many notable overseas personalities. It was also a destination for visitors who stayed at its many hotels and guest houses. Before that, it was Fort George, built by the British to counteract Spanish invasions, which never happened. Titchfield High School now occupies the fort. The most famous hotel, The Titchfield, built by then banana exporter, Lorenzo Dow Baker, was once owned by Hollywood star, Errol Flynn. Its foundations are still on Titchfield Hill, as the place is now called. But The Titchfield is not the only place in ruins or decay. The once affluent neighbourhood is now a mere shadow of its glory days. And you wonder why. **NAVY ISLAND** The centrepiece of Port Antonio's serene harbour is Navy Island, once known as Lynch's Island. It cuts a pretty picture from afar. Up close it is no less idyllic. It beckons you to its shore, and the thick foliage that hides the fact that it was once abuzz with naval and tourist activities. A former Errol Flynn property, it is now owned by the Port Authority of Jamaica, which doesn't seem to have any immediate developmental plans for it. And you wonder why. **PORT ANTONIO HARBOUR** Port Antonio's twin harbours used to have visits upon visits from cruise ships. But for years now, it has lost its cruise ship-destination status. The argument is that the harbours are too small for modern-day mega liners. The death of the cruise-ship business has contributed significantly to the decline of tourist traffic in the parish. But what about dredging the harbour? Is it possible? If it is, then you wonder why not. **ERROL FLYNN MARINA** The harbour has an old marina, and a new one was open in 2002. Four years later, it was renamed the Errol Flynn Marina, which was supposed to attract luxury yachts, etc, from all over the world, and spearhead the revival of tourism. Yet, people from the world over are asking what has become of this epitome of picturesque scenery. The revival is stillborn, and the closed shops are its graves. And you wonder why. **DRAGON BAY RESORT HOTEL** The former owners of Dragon Bay Hotel closed it several years ago because they were incurring massive losses because of low visitor arrivals. Deplorable infrastructure, and the poor state of Port Antonio and its environs were the reasons attributed to the decline in the number of stopover visitors. After the closure, it was reported that the property was bought by a certain tourism mogul, and there was a newspaper report that the 99-room resort would "become the Caribbean's most exquisite spa resort". Well, as it stands, it seems like it's the Caribbean's most exquisite waste. And you wonder why. **BLUE LAGOON** Hands down, Portland's Blue Lagoon is enchanting, known the world over for its deep aquamarine waters, it is a swimmer's and diver's paradise. Over the years, its beauty has been marred by ugly ownership and rights controversies. Battle lines were drawn, and up to now, certain areas around it are regarded private property upon which there should be no trespass, despite its decrepit state. The dilapidated restaurant and bar are quite a blight in the beauty, and seem like they will collapse into the calm waters sometime soon. For years, there have been talks about its restoration, and in 2011, the then minister of youth and culture, Olivia Grange, signed a Blue Lagoon Preservation Notice which "allows the Jamaica National Heritage Trust to carry out further research to ensure that future development options reflect plans to sustain the integrity of the lagoon". What has happened since then? Not much. Portland is truly a wonderful place full of great wonders, greatly neglected, and you wonder whether the stakeholders, government and private interests, the Ministry of Tourism, the Tourism Enhancement Fund, the Tourism Product Development Company, and the Urban Development Corporation are for real. To Portland they dare not go for they do not want to behold the unsightly scars on its pretty face, and to perish in its ruts, the sixth wonder of Portland's tourism world. Source: Hospitality Jamaica