

# ANYWHERE ANYWHERE

4th March 2013



## LOCAL LOWDOWNS PORT ANTONIO, JAMAICA

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Jamaica is lush, vibrant and absurdly picturesque in so many parts, but the northeastern parish of Portland is something else. Helmed by the ramshackle capital of Port Antonio, this technicolour dreamland envelops you in a saturated tropical colour palette and seduces you with smokey jerk stands, idyllic surfing beaches and sleek modernist hotels. If you're planning a trip to the island, then be sure to visit its most intensely beautiful stretch of coastline with a little help from the guide below

### EAT

Port Antonio is home to Boston Bay, and Boston Bay is the home of jerk. Needless to say, the residents of Portland know how to grill a piece of marinated chicken (or pork, or lobster) to crispy-skinned perfection. Make a trip to the [Boston Bay Jerk Centre](#) – a fancy name for what is essentially a courtyard of jerk shacks – and try a little of everything. Want to cut straight to the chase? Jerk pork and roast sweet potato at the 'Gold Teeth' shack = all you need to know.

If eating meat out of foil parcels isn't your thing (blasphemy!) then are plenty of other dining options to be found elsewhere. For vegetarians and Ital enthusiasts, [Survival Beach Restaurant](#) on the outskirts of Port Antonio is a good place to pick up a plate of vegetables stewed in a fragrant coconut milk broth and dished up with the ubiquitous rice, peas, yam and boiled dumplings. For something more carnivorous, go for a plantain cheeseburger and homemade ginger beer at [Woody's Low Bridge Place](#) (dispensed with priceless free life advice from the supremely wise owner, Cherry).

If you feel like wearing a nice dress and sipping a cocktail, then make dinner reservations at one of Portland's main hotels. The [Bushbar](#) at [Geejam](#) hotel offers a simple but effective menu of Caribbean fare; [Mille Fleurs](#) at [Hotel Mockingbird](#) is a romantic place to eat modern Caribbean cuisine, and [Mike's Supper Club](#) at [Trident](#) provides a choice of pricey but delicious Jamaican and Japanese dishes (and thankfully avoids an ill-advised fusion of the two).

## SLEEP

Port Antonio might be one of the most unspoilt regions left in Jamaica but it still has an impressive range of guesthouses, boutique B&B's and luxury hotels (while staying mercifully devoid of the all-inclusive resorts that dominate so much of the island's coast). If you're on a budget, book in at [Great Hutts](#), a small cluster of simple but comfortable bamboo dwellings on a lush site right by Boston Bay, with rates starting at £40 a night. For a more upmarket take on the theme, [Kanopi House](#) offers a similar style of rustic 'treehouses' with luxe additions like Bose iPod docks and cotton waffle robes.

If you prefer accommodation of the private infinity pool/hot tub variety, then take your pick between [Geejam](#) and [Trident](#). Both are operated by the same ex-music industry exec owners, but the former is an intimate collection of secluded villas (complete with in-house music studio) hidden in the hills above San San bay, while the latter offers minimalist villas with a glamorous jetset vibe. If you're in the market for cool, calm luxury and seamless service then you can't go wrong with either.

## DRINK

Port Antonio is a quiet little slice of Jamaica, but there's still enough nightlife to satisfy an urge to bogle, butterfly or thunderclap. On Sundays, head to Boston Bay to join the entire neighbourhood in a post-church karaoke singalong/dance party/runfest that takes place in and around a handful of small local bars. Afterwards, follow the sound of the bass to the club up the road (you'll know it when you hear it) and vibes to Vybz Cartel with the town's younger residents.

Later in the week, head into Port Antonio itself for the appropriately named 'Roadblock Thursdays', when the streets are locked off and the sound systems turn up loud at a chaotic weekly outdoor party. On other evenings, Party (as it's dubbed by locals) is your most reliable source of nightlife, from the laidback rum and reggae shacks that line Folly Road to the all-out weekend bashment parties at the raucous [Roof Club](#).

## DO

Boston Bay has been home to the Jamaican surf scene since the 1960s, and offers bathwater-warm waves that will tantalise newbies and pros alike. Hire a board at the beach but be sure to establish the rate before you head into the water – unfortunately tourists tend to get ripped off. Keep an eye out for Charlie (you can't miss his mini surf shop/tent dwelling right on the beach) and Jay Jay – both good, honest guys who will do their best to help you out. For bigger swells, head down the coast to Long Bay, where waves are more consistent throughout the year.

Non-surfers can tour the plush faux-colonial grounds of "Trident Castle" <http://www.castleportantonio.com/> (built by a baroness in the 1980s) dive into the [Blue Lagoon](#) or try a gentle raft ride down the Rio Grande river, stopping for spicy crayfish and coconut fish stew at [Belinda's legendary cafe](#) on the way. If all that sounds much too strenuous, then stretch out at Winnifred's Beach and enjoy fresh fruit, grilled seafood and the pristine Caribbean sea.

## GETTING AROUND

Once a chic hangout for 1960's jetsetters, Port Antonio has stayed largely unspoilt in the years since. This is largely down to its slightly inconvenient location on the northeast coast of Jamaica – two hours' drive from Kingston airport and almost four hours from Montego Bay. For travellers who are keen to avoid the generic resorts nearer Jamaica's main entry points, the destination more than warrants the extra journey time (although it's worth asking your hotel to secure a reasonable transfer in advance, rather than risking the pricey cabs at the airport terminal).

Once there, you'll need to find further means for exploring the region's hilly terrain. Most hotels offer a cab service but the journeys easily rack up, for short journeys, just hop into a route taxi (shared cabs that run up and down the main roads all day – just check for the license on the windscreen) to get from A to B for 100 Jamaican Dollars – that's about \$1 USD or 60p GBP – a head.