

The Best of Jamaica

Most visitors already have a mental picture of Jamaica before they arrive: its boisterous culture of reggae and Rastafarianism; its white-sand beaches; and its lush foliage, rivers, mountains, and clear waterfalls. Jamaica's art and cuisine are also remarkable.

Yet Jamaica's appealing aspects have to be weighed against its poverty, crime, and racial tensions, the legacy of colonial rule and subsequent political upheavals.

So, should you go? By all means. Just be prudent and cautious. The island has fine hotels and savory food. It's well geared to couples who come to tie the knot or celebrate a honeymoon. And Jamaica boasts the best golf courses in the West Indies, some of the finest diving waters in the world, and good river rafting. In this chapter we lay out our favorite places and experiences.

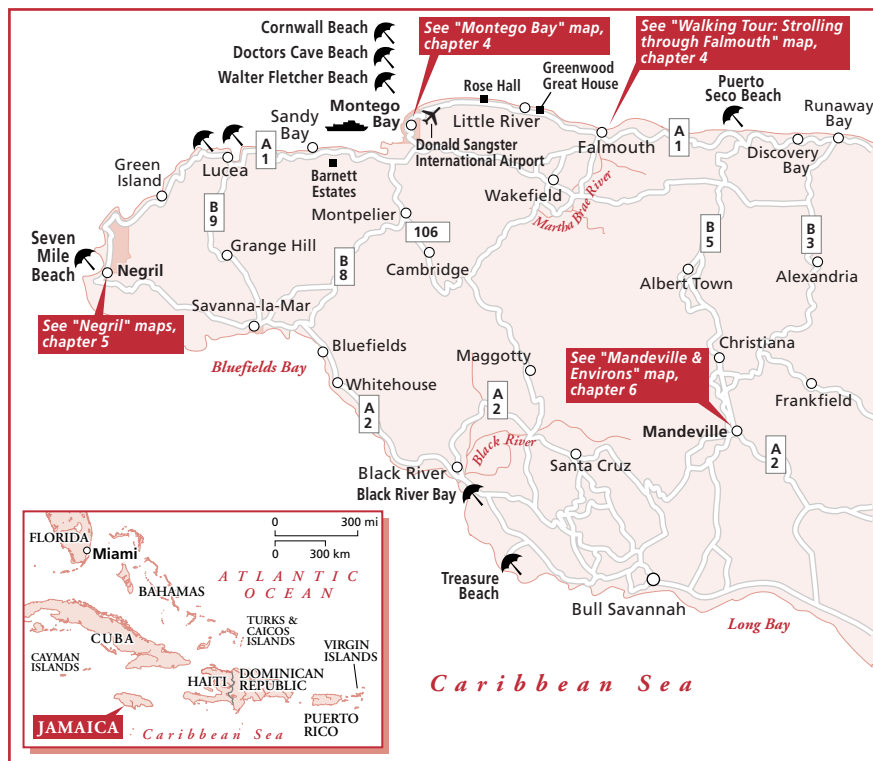
1 The Best Beaches

- **Doctors Cave Beach** (Montego Bay): This 8km (5-mile) stretch of white sand made "Mo Bay" a tourist destination. Waters are placid and crystal clear, and there are changing rooms and a beach bar. This one is a family favorite. See p. 88.
- **Cornwall Beach** (Montego Bay): Although it's often crowded, this beach is covered with soft, white, sugary sand. The water is clean and warm, and it's a good spot to take the family. But "higglers"—vendors—will aggressively hawk anything from jewelry to drugs. See p. 88.
- **Seven Mile Beach** (Negril): This beach stretches 11km (7 miles) along the west coast. These golden sands are fine for families, though there are several (sectioned-off) nudist patches where guests bare all. See p. 131.
- **Treasure Beach** (South Coast): Tired of fighting the crowds? Head for this beach on the dry, sunny South Coast. The undertow can be dangerous, so swimming is tricky. But crashing waves make it one of the most dramatic beachscapes in Jamaica. See p. 147.
- **Boston Bay Beach** (Port Antonio): It's known not only for its white sands and clear waters, but also for the great jerk-pork stands. This beach has the biggest waves in Jamaica, and you can rent surfboards and even get a lesson. See p. 208.

2 The Best Watersports Outfitters

- **North Coast Marine Sports** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/953-2211): Offering the best scuba diving in Montego Bay, this staff of instructors knows some great spots to dive among coral reefs. See p. 90.
- **Negril Scuba Centre** (Negril; ☎ 800/818-2963 in the U.S., or 876/957-9641): This is the best-equipped dive facility in Negril, with a very professional staff. See p. 133.

Jamaica



- **Jamaica Dive Center** (Runaway Bay; ☎ 876/973-4845): Its slogan is “We Be Divin’,” and this outfitter takes you to some of the best dive sites

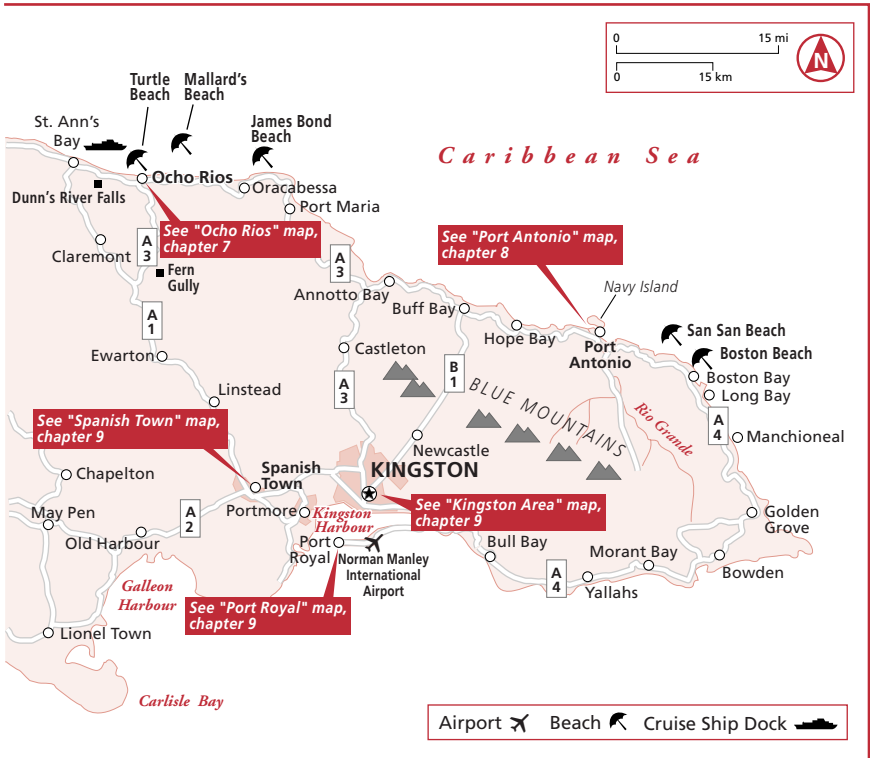
along the northern coast. Equipment can be rented on-site, and offerings range from one-tank dives to six-boat packages. See p. 188.

3 The Best Golf Courses

- **White Witch of Rose Hall Golf Course** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/518-0174): This is the newest Jamaican golf course and one of the most spectacular, set on 80 hectares (200 acres) of lush greenery. See p. 90.
- **Cinnamon Hill course at Rose Hall Resort & Country Club** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/953-2650): This has been called one of the top courses in the world. It’s a challenging seaside

and mountain course. The 14th hole passes a waterfall. See p. 90.

- **Tryall Club Jamaica** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/956-5660): Jamaica’s finest course, this site has hosted prestigious tournaments such as the Johnnie Walker Classic. Wind direction can change suddenly, making the challenging course even harder. See p. 90.



- **Half Moon** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/953-2211): A top island course, Half Moon features well-manicured and interestingly shaped greens, but it's not as challenging as the one at Tryall. See p. 91.

- **Sandals Golf & Country Club** (Ocho Rios; ☎ 876/975-0119): This course is known for panoramic vistas, rolling terrain, and lush vegetation. Sandals guests play for free. See p. 175.

4 The Best Tennis Facilities

- **Half Moon** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/953-2211): This is Jamaica's best tennis—13 state-of-the-art courts, 7 of which are lit for night games. See p. 91.
- **Rose Hall Resort & Country Club** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/953-2650):

This resort has six hard-surface courts, all lit at night. Hotel guests play free. See p. 92.

- **Tryall Club Jamaica** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/956-5660): Tryall has nine superb hard-surface courts, three of which are lit for night play. See p. 91.

- **Sandals Grande Ocho Rios Beach & Villa Resort** (Ocho Rios; ☎ 876/974-1027): This resort offers both clay and hard-surface courts, all lit at

night. Twice-a-day clinics are offered for beginners as well as advanced players. See p. 175.

5 The Best Natural Attractions

- **Martha Brae's Rafters Village** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/952-0889): Martha Brae's Rafters Village offers the best river-rafting experience in and around this popular resort. You sit on a raised dais on bamboo logs and watch the river scenery unfold. See "Beaches, Golf & Other Outdoor Pursuits" in chapter 4.
- **The Black River** (South Coast): You can explore what feels like real Tarzan country, with mangrove trees and crocodiles in the wild, on an outing with **South Coast Safaris** (☎ 876/965-2513). Lots of wild things grow in these swamps, and birders delight in the bird life. See "The South Coast," in chapter 6.
- **Green Grotto Caves** (Discovery Bay; ☎ 876/973-2841). These limestone caves were once used to hide runaway slaves. They're a world of stalagmites and stalactites, with seemingly endless chambers and eerie Grotto Lake, which you can visit in a boat. See p. 178.
- **Somerset Falls** (Port Antonio): Waters from the Daniels River race down a deep gorge through a rainforest. Flowering vines, waterfalls, and foaming cascades form a lush backdrop. You can swim in the deep rock pools. See "Exploring the Area," in chapter 8.
- **Rafting on the Rio Grande** (Port Antonio; ☎ 876/993-5778): Shades of Errol Flynn, this is the grandest rafting experience in Jamaica. The rafts are propelled by bamboo poles. See "Beaches & Outdoor Pursuits," in chapter 8.
- **Exploring the Blue Mountains** (outside Kingston; ☎ 876/960-6685): This is one of the biggest, wildest, and greenest parks in the Caribbean, ideal for exploring. You must hike 5 to 6 hours through thick vegetation (hearing amazing birdsong on the way) to reach the summit. See "Exploring the Blue Mountains," in chapter 9.

6 The Best Honeymoon Resorts

- **Sandals** (Montego Bay, Negril, and Ocho Rios; ☎ 800/SANDALS in the U.S.): These three resorts pride themselves on fun, food, and drink, laid out in abundance and all paid for in advance—no tips or bills here. Staff members bring heroic amounts of community spirit and enthusiasm to weddings. All the properties are high quality, but Sandals Royal Caribbean at Montego Bay and Sandals Dunn's River at Ocho Rios are probably the best in the chain. See p. 79, 124, and 166.
- **Half Moon** (Montego Bay; ☎ 800/626-0592 or 876/953-2211): This resort offers honeymooners deluxe oceanview rooms and cottages fronting a near-perfect crescent-shaped beach. The resort offers lots of activities, too, such as aerobics, tennis, swimming, and, most definitely, golf. See p. 71.
- **Jake's** (Treasure Beach; ☎ 800/OUTPOST or 876/965-0635): Funky and idiosyncratic, this is a really offbeat choice for a honeymoon where no one will find you. Set on a remote rocky

beach, the place is small and personal. See p. 148.

- **Jamaica Inn** (Ocho Rios; ☎ 800/834-4608 in the U.S., or 876/974-2514): Winston Churchill slept in a suite here; if you can't afford that suite, plenty of other classy rooms are just fine for honeymooners. The resort opens onto a private cove with powdery champagne-colored sand and maintains a British colonial aura of formality. See p. 158.
- **Couples Sans Souci** (Ocho Rios; ☎ 800/268-7537 in the U.S., or 876/994-1206): Sink into one of the whirlpool tubs in the elegant marble bathrooms here—with your newly acquired spouse, of course—and the day is yours. This is a far classier joint than the Sandals properties. An on-site spa and clothing-optional beach are also alluring for many couples. See p. 164.
- **Sandals Grande Ocho Rios Beach & Villa Resort** (Ocho Rios; ☎ 800/

SANDALS or 876/974-5691): The honeymoon villas at this stately, plantation-style spa and resort are perfect private retreats for newlyweds. Each has a private attendant and pool. Guests are pampered with massages, pedicures, and manicures. The resort is all-inclusive, with a range of sports facilities. See p. 167.

- **Breezes Runaway Bay** (Runaway Bay; ☎ 800/GO-SUPER or 876/973-4820): Ten kilometers (6 miles) west of Ocho Rios, this all-inclusive hotel re-creates the South Seas on Jamaican soil. It's stylish, with luxurious accommodations and good food. Activities include reggae classes. See p. 186.
- **Blue Lagoon Villas** (Port Antonio; ☎ 800/237-3237 or 876/993-8491): A favorite with movie stars visiting "off the record," this pocket of posh is pure luxury: Each plush villa comes with a dedicated chef, housekeeper, and butler. Break out your wallet. See p. 196.

7 The Best Family-Friendly Resorts

- **Coyaba** (Mahoe Bay, Little River, Montego Bay; ☎ 877/232-3224 in the U.S., or 876/953-9150): With a graceful British colonial atmosphere, this small all-inclusive resort offers children 11 and under a 50% discount. The oceanfront location is intimate and inviting, with a lovely strip of sandy beach. A nanny service keeps little ones fed and entertained. See p. 74.
- **FDR Pebbles** (Trelawny, near Montego Bay; ☎ 888/FDR-KIDS or 876/617-2500): This new hotel caters mainly to families with one or two children, though larger groups can be accommodated. The resort offers a host of activities, and you're even assigned a staff member to assist with housekeeping and babysitting. See p. 79.
- **Beaches Negril** (Negril; ☎ 800/BEACHES in the U.S., or 876/957-9270): Opened in 1997, this is the family-oriented wing of the Sandals chain. A roster of child and teen activities awaits youngsters on grounds studded with palms and sea grapes, adjacent to a sandy beach. The resort even has a restaurant for "children only." See p. 118.
- **Beaches Boscobel Resort & Golf Club** (Boscobel Beach; ☎ 888/BEACHES or 876/975-7777): On a sandy beach 16km (10 miles) east of Ocho Rios, this property is geared to families more than any other hotel on the north shore. See p. 163.
- **Franklyn D. Resort** (Runaway Bay; ☎ 888/FDR-KIDS in the U.S., or 876/973-4592): At this family

favorite on the North Coast, all meals and activities are included in the price; you're housed in Mediterranean-style villas; and a personal attendant takes care of cooking,

cleaning, and child care. Lots of programs keep the kids entertained. A Kiddies' Centre features everything from computers to arts and crafts. See p. 186.

8 The Best Places to Get Away from It All

- **Rockhouse** (Negril; ☎ 876/957-4373): It's like living on the west coast of Africa. You stay in a thatch-roofed villa in Negril's West End and sleep in an old-fashioned bed under mosquito netting. It's a splendid getaway if you don't mind climbing down ladders carved into the sea cliffs. Open-air showers cool you off—and let you put on a show for the fish. See p. 117.
- **Treasure Beach Hotel** (South Coast; ☎ 800/526-2422 or 876/965-0110): On a lush hillside above a sandy South Coast beach, no one will ever find you at this place. It hardly competes with Jamaica's megaresorts, but it does offer tranquillity and a laid-back feel. Bedrooms are in a series of outlying cottages, all offering complete privacy. It's cheap, too. See p. 149.
- **Noël Coward's Blue Harbour** (Port Maria; ☎ 876/725-0289 or 505/586-1244): This 1950s retreat is

where the playwright and composer entertained the rich and famous of his day. Today it's rented whole or in part to paying guests who appreciate its funky nostalgia. See p. 161.

- **Hotel Mocking Bird Hill** (Port Antonio; ☎ 876/993-7267): One of our favorite retreats in all of Jamaica lies outside this resort, a comfortable and well-maintained inn that offers the epitome of Jamaican hospitality, and at an affordable price. The retreat is both artsy and ecologically sensitive. See p. 198.
- **Strawberry Hill** (Blue Mountains; ☎ 800/OUTPOST or 876/944-8400): This highland retreat has been called "a home-away-from-home for five-star Robinson Crusoes." Perched 930m (3,100 ft.) above the sea, it's our favorite lodging in eastern Jamaica. Set in a well-planted garden, the cottage complex is a memorable and lush retreat. See p. 246.

9 The Best All-Inclusives

- **Sandals Montego Bay** (Montego Bay; ☎ 800/SANDALS in the U.S., or 876/952-5510): This is a honeymoon haven despite a nearby airport of zooming jets. Everything's included, even the notorious toga parties; this place is for couples who want to have a good time. Guests tend to be extroverted and gregarious, and eat and drink their money's worth. We think it's outclassed by better resorts at Ocho Rios, but many vacationers seem to prefer this location. See p. 79.
- **Breezes Montego Bay** (Montego Bay; ☎ 877/467-8737 or 876/940-1150): This five-story SuperClub complex calls itself "a sandbox for your inner child" and is the only major hotel built on Doctors Cave Beach. From intimate cabins to lavish suites, you can live it up in various styles and price ranges. See p. 78.
- **Royal Plantation Spa & Golf Resort** (Ocho Rios; ☎ 888/48-ROYAL or 876/974-5601): Less than 3km (2 miles) east of Ocho Rios, the

main house of this recently renovated all-inclusive resort evokes an antebellum Southern mansion. Among its luxurious touches is the finest hotel spa on the North Coast. See p. 165.

- **Couples Ocho Rios** (Ocho Rios; ☎ 800/268-7537 in the U.S., or 876/975-4271): “Any man and woman in love” are pampered and coddled here; the resort even offers its own private island where couples can bask in the buff. It’s more upscale and, we think, classier than either of the Sandals resorts in the Ocho Rios area. Accommodations are top quality, and the food is among the best in the area: Four restaurants serve widely varied cuisine. See p. 163.
- **Sandals Grande Ocho Rios Beach & Villa Resort** (Ocho Rios; ☎ 800/

SANDALS in the U.S., or 876/974-5691): This 18-hectare (45-acre) resort is one of the top all-inclusives in the Ocho Rios area. The lodgings consist of one-, two-, and three-bedroom villas, each with its own pool and fully equipped kitchen. The dining choices are the best of any of the competing resorts. It’s not directly on the beach, but it offers a beauty spa and a health-and-fitness center. See p. 166.

- **Hedonism III** (Runaway Bay; ☎ 877/GO-SUPER or 876/973-4100): Serene and isolated, this all-inclusive is the most fun-oriented hotel on the North Coast. It rents rooms to both singles and couples over age 15. There are two good beaches: one where you can wear your suit, and another that’s *au naturel*. See p. 187.

10 The Best Restaurants

- **Day-O Plantation Restaurant** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/952-1825): On the site of the 19th-century Barnett Plantation—a house that sugar built—this fine restaurant, serving a refined international and Jamaican cuisine, is often a venue for singing and other entertainment. Jamaican spices and herbs permeate all dishes. See p. 82.
- **Sugar Mill Restaurant** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/953-2314): Located at Half Moon, this is the top restaurant in Montego Bay. The chef’s smoked marlin is without equal, and he makes the island’s best Jamaican-style bouillabaisse. Guests dine by candlelight indoors or on an open terrace. See p. 85.
- **Norma’s on the Beach at Sea Splash** (Negril; ☎ 876/957-4041): Widely acclaimed as Jamaica’s finest woman chef, Kingston’s Norma Shirley has brought her recipes to Negril’s Sea

Splash Resort. The Jamaican and international food here is the finest on Seven Mile Beach, and Norma gets the best produce from local vendors. See p. 125.

- **Rockhouse Restaurant** (Negril; ☎ 876/957-4373): Perched above a rocky inlet, this restaurant serves terrific cuisine, such as smoked marlin and peppered pork with yams. See p. 126.
- **Bloomfield Great House** (Mandeville; ☎ 876/962-7130): Once part of a coffee plantation, this restaurant today serves one of the island’s best-orchestrated menus—everything from smoked marlin with black caviar to the best pasta dishes in this part of Jamaica. See p. 154.
- **Evita’s Italian Restaurant** (Ocho Rios; ☎ 876/974-2333): Evita (actually Eva Myers) is a local culinary star, devoting at least half her menu to pastas. Her recipes range from the

north to the south of Italy. Try snapper stuffed with crabmeat or lobster and scampi in buttery white-cream sauce—all washed down with a good Italian wine. See p. 170.

- **Mille Fleurs** (Port Antonio; ☎ 876/993-7267): In the Hotel Mocking Bird Hill, this restaurant is terraced and perched 180m (600 ft.) above sea level with panoramic views. People come here for the delectable food, which has been praised by *Gourmet* magazine. Opt for coconut-and-garlic soup or the fish with a spicy mango-and-shrimp sauce. See p. 205.
- **Redbones the Blues Café** (Kingston; ☎ 876/978-6091): In a former Spanish colonial house, one of the most elegant restaurants on the island is the setting for a refined Jamaican cuisine of artful preparation and

unexpected flavors. Ever had shrimp, lobster, and salmon in a creamy coconut sauce? See p. 230.

- **Norma's on the Terrace** (Kingston; ☎ 876/968-5488): Kingston's Norma Shirley, the island's foremost female restaurateur, serves up a nouvelle Jamaican cuisine without equal in the area. Try such Jamaican specialties as chowder with crabmeat, shrimp, conch, and lobster, or grilled smoked pork loin in a teriyaki-and-ginger sauce. See p. 230.
- **Strawberry Hill** (Kingston; ☎ 876/944-8400): This is one of the best modern Jamaican restaurants, tucked in the Blue Mountains. Even if you don't stay at this exclusive resort, try grilled fish with jerk mango or grilled shrimp with fresh cilantro in its restaurant. See p. 246.

11 The Best Romantic Experiences

- **YS Falls** (Black River): The best place to escape for a romantic picnic is along the coast east of Negril. Three kilometers (2 miles) north of the port of Black River, in a "Me Tarzan, You Jane" setting, you can actually swing from an overhead vine or a jungle rope into cooling ponds made by the waterfall. See p. 145.
- **Bloomfield Great House** (Mandeville; ☎ 876/962-7130): If you should ever grow nostalgic for the Jamaica that used to be, plan a dinner at this historic house set on 2 hectares (5 acres) of beautiful landscaping. After a drink on the old-fashioned veranda, enjoy an elegantly presented and good-tasting meal in a colonial setting of long ago. See p. 154.
- **Goldeneye** (Oracabessa; ☎ 800/688-7678 or 876/975-3354): An intimate and romantic retreat east of Ocho Rios, this is our favorite spot in Jamaica for a tryst with your own

"secret agent." This is where then-owner Ian Fleming created the character 007, James Bond. Rock stars and other celebs often seek it out. See p. 164.

- **The Blue Lagoon** (Port Antonio; ☎ 876/993-7791): Another beauty spot, this is where teenage Brooke Shields swam nude in the film of the same name. You can have the same experience in an enchanted pool fed by a natural amphitheater. The water, 56m (186 ft.) deep at its deepest point, is said to have aphrodisiac powers—which you'll have to determine for yourself. See p. 196.
- **Reach Falls** (Manchioneal): East of Port Antonio, this is one of the oft-photographed beauty spots of the Caribbean. Visitors enter a virgin rainforest for a cooling dip and perhaps some nude intimacy under the watery cascades. See p. 216.

12 The Best Shopping Buys

- **Art:** Its paintings may never rival those of the finest Haitian artists, but Jamaica is at least the second-best center for art in the Caribbean. Prices are still reasonable, too, even when the artist has a certain renown. Although paintings are sold all over the island, the finest art is found in Kingston at either the **Frame Centre Gallery** or the **Mutual Life Gallery**, the two leading display showcases for the best of the island's artistic talent. See "Shopping," in chapter 9.
- **Handicrafts:** Crafts come in many forms, ranging from alabaster and woodcarvings to weavings. But quality is highly variable. The finest assortment of crafts is at **Harmony**

Hall outside Ocho Rios on the North Coast. See p. 178.

- **Fashions:** Many artisans in Jamaica produce quality resort wear; Jamaican women are known as good seamstresses, and they often make quite passable copies of the works of top designers at a fraction of the original's price.
- **Jewelry and Watches:** Some watches at various outlets in Jamaica sell for 20% to 40% off stateside prices. Be sure to buy from a reliable dealer, not vendors hustling gold so-called Rolex watches. Jamaican gemstones include coral agate and black coral, and many fashionable pieces are made from these stones; quality handmade necklaces are sold nearly everywhere.

13 The Best After-Dark Fun

- **Margueritaville Sports Bar & Grill** (Montego Bay; ☎ 876/952-4777): If you're macho, or at least grow hair on your chest, head for the most popular sports bar in Jamaica. Overlooking the sea, across from the Coral Cliff Hotel, this hangout also serves the best margaritas on the island and features the best sports broadcasts on satellite TV. See p. 86.
- **Time 'n' Place** (Falmouth, east of Montego Bay; ☎ 876/954-4371): A raffish beach bar built of driftwood, this place looks as though it might blow away in the next storm. The setting is so authentic that many fashion magazines, including *Vogue*, have used it for background shots. The bartender makes the island's best daiquiris. See p. 99.
- **Hedonism II** (Negril; ☎ 876/957-5200): For the hottest night at this resort, don your toga and head for the most notorious all-inclusive resort in Jamaica, a place known for its wild and raunchy parties. If you

aren't already a guest, you'll have to purchase a night pass for \$75, entitling you to all the food and drink you can consume. See p. 122.

- **Roof Club** (Port Antonio; no phone). On the north coast of Jamaica you'll find no more authentic and animated local dive than this raunchy joint. Visitors come to see "the real" Jamaica after dark. It's for locals, not tourists. The secondhand *ganga* smoke alone will make you high, and the sounds of reggae blasting at ear-splitting levels. It's not for everyone, and not for the faint-of-heart, but a lot of fun for some adventurous visitors. See p. 221.
- **Mingles** (Kingston; ☎ 876/929-9000): In the Courtleigh Hotel, this is one of the best places—and the safest—to be after dark in the capital of Jamaica. Filled with Jamaican youth, it is both a bar and a dance club, with uniformed bartenders and the constant beat of reggae, pop, and soca. See p. 238.