The slave heritage of Jamaica

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE THIRD LARGEST CARIBBEAN ISLAND

By Mohammed Reza Amirinia

CATEGORY: TRAVEL DESTINATIONS



ROSE HALL	THE WHITE WITCH	CROYDON PLANTATION	GOOD HOPE
Built in 1770	*Legend of Anne Palmer*	*In the Catadupa Mountains*	*Zip Lining*

MORE THAN EXPECTED

The slave heritage of Jamaica

The jazz and reggae festival that I so enjoyed

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an open party with a big stage

My five-day tour of Jamaica, coinciding with the Jazz and Blues festival, proved to be more than expected. It opened up a small window for me to explore the cultural heritage of the third largest Caribbean Island. Jamaica is well known for reggae music, but the largest annual musical event on the Island carries the name of Jazz and Blues to attract a larger international audience to boost the country's economy and tourism.

As I mentioned in my previous story, the three-night celebration was not just about Jazz and Blues as there was a diverse lineup of artists and variety of music to please different tastes from young to old. The stadium, which accommodates 30,000 people on a large football pitch, turned into an open party with a big stage surrounded by two huge screens. The marketplace is a fun place for everyone, selling clothing, bags, paintings and crafts. There are food booths at one end, a stand selling helicopter rides and luxury booths offering drinks and food to wealthy Jamaicans with VIP passes on the other side.

I

THE CROYDON PLANTATION



the landscape around Croydon

I was amazed at the security and the discipline of the crowd. Everybody seemed very knowledgeable and real music fans. The cleaners were constantly tidying up the field to keep the place clean.

Jamaican people are very kind, friendly and approachable. Most of them were very natural in front of the camera, posing with self-invented figures like professional models. I met Maxi Priest a Jamaican Reggae musician and many other music lovers who were there to listen to the blissful sounds of renowned artists.

My first excursion to the Croydon plantation in the foothills of the Catadupa Mountains in St. James, 25 miles south of Montego Bay, was an educational and fun visit to the highlands after a long drive on twisty narrow roads. We arrived in a large area of farmland, bordered by a vast green forest, devoted to growing coffee, bananas, coconuts, pineapples, ginger, oranges and many other exotic fruits. Our guide Alicia explained the history of the place and introduced us to many different plants, offering samples of fresh fruits and natural juices. The 131 acres of land at an elevation of 800 feet, which used to be a vast sugar plantation dating back to the days of slavery, is now a beautiful landscape with breathtaking views. The display of a variety of flowers and nicely shaped bushes create peace and tranquility for visitors. At the end of the tour, the visitors were served with a delightful Jamaican style cuisine including Jerk chicken, rice, beans, spinach and potatoes.

II

ROSE HALL



tools to trap slaves on exhibition in Rose Hall

A highlight of my visit to this stunning island was the tour of the 18th century Rose Hall plantation house that was restored in 1960, returning it back into its unique glory. The house, built in 1770 in Georgian style, is decorated in mahogany woods with silk wallpapers printed with flowers, palms and birds, illuminated with chandeliers, featuring ornate antiques and luxurious furniture. It is one of the few houses remaining after many were burned down during a slave rebellion and revealed to me the life style of the owners who lived in luxury at the expense of the deprived and oppressed children of Africa.

The depth of the atrocity, torture and cruelty against other humans, guilty of being black, is beyond words. The tour took me back in time to when a Mr. Palmer, an Englishman, established his sugarcane business by suppressing slaves who were forcefully transported from Western Africa.

III

THE WHITE WITCH OF ROSE HALL



Rose Hall

Our Jamaican guide, Tisha who spoke English with a sing-song accent, told us the history of the plantation house and dreadful stories of slavery. The shocking stories of Anne, John Palmer's wife who murdered her husband and eventually was killed by one of her slave lovers, overshadow the story of the house. The locals who called her the white witch of Rose Hall believe that her soul is still haunting the house, but some believe that it is all fiction.

IV

CHUKKA GOOD HOPE



a vast green forest

Jamaica's vast plantations with endless forests create a natural setting for adventure games. Chukka Good Hope provides safe and enjoyable adventure tours such as ATVs, Dune Buggy rides and Zip Lining. I enjoyed driving a Dune Buggy in bumpy countryside through woods and plantations watching splendid views of mountains. I had never done Zip Lining before and was not sure whether I should. But when I saw an 80-year-old woman doing it, I did not hesitate despite my anxiety. It was a great experience to be geared up in heavy duty harness, zipping through the branches of trees in the jungle under the constant supervision of skilled guides, going from one post to another with excitement. Jungle river floating, lying back in a tube is another adventure to experience the mysterious wonders of the Jamaican waterways through the forest. The silent mood of the jungle and calmness of the river thrilled me as I watched high-rise trees and listened to the sound of birds in an unspoiled setting.

Visitors can taste local produce and also enjoy the leisure area, accessing the swimming pool and the playground for children and watching aboriginal birds.

V

GREAT HOUSE



Great House

The Great House on the Good Hope Estate is a change to this in high hills in 2000-acre grounds with lavish plants and trees. The 18th century restored mansion belonged to John Tharp, one of the most famous planters in Jamaica. The house is decorated with epoch antiques and artwork. The picturesque view from the house over the beautifully preserved plantation is touching and an unforgettable memory.

My last day in Jamaica before flying back home in the evening started with a visit to Mystic Mountain, riding a chairlift SkyExplorer 700 feet above the treetops of the Jamaican Rainforest in Ocho Rios. I descended slowly through the heart of a seaside jungle viewing the ocean and nearby resorts. It gives a great overview of this part of Jamaica.

I continued my exploration of the wonders of Jamaica by visiting Dolphin Cove with its sea life and birdcages. I watched with amusement incredible show jumping by dolphins and another show by local Jamaican men feeding sharks in the pools. Visiting iconic Dunn River Falls concluded my adventurous day.

VI

MONTEGO BAY CULTURAL CENTRE



some of the cheery guides at Great House

If you wish to find out more about Jamaican history visit the downtown Montego Bay Cultural Centre, by Sam Sharpe square. The formerly historical Montego Bay Court House and Civic Centre houses, a Museum, an Art Gallery and a hall for the performances, and a gift shop.

The original structure was opened in 1810, and considered as an outstanding architectural design in the city. The building was not just a court house, while cases were heard in the rooms downstairs, plays and balls were performed upstairs. One of the most famous cases was that of Sam Sharpe, who became the hero of the revolts in 1831, and consequently was hanged in the square. His role in the uprising had great influence and contribution to the liberation of Jamaica.

Jamaica has many inspiring attractions for those wishing to explore its cultural heritage and traditions. I would love to go back and meet the children of Africa and hear the story of a nation whose ancestors landed in a Caribbean Island far from their true homeland.



a beautiful landscape with breath-taking views

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