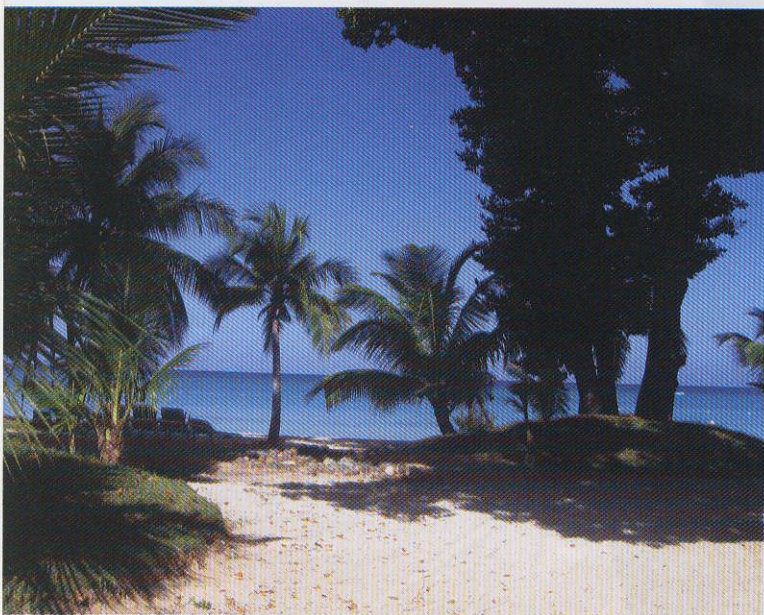


JAMAICA

By Roberta Naas

A State of Mind, Soul and Spirit

There are islands that draw the attention of the rich and famous, islands that are secluded and promise peace and solitude, and then there are islands that offer pristine white beaches, ultimate turquoise waters, smiling faces, reggae music and a state of mind that is Caribbean through and through. This is Jamaica, mon.



The pristine beaches, turquoise waters and lush jungles of Jamaica are the perfect destination for the ultimate Caribbean experience.

Jamaica is the island that pulses with life, buzzes with energy, and promises — and delivers — tropical beauty that is unparalleled. This one island moves from aqua waters to white sands to lush jungles and foliage, stunning waterfalls, rivers for rafting, mountains and coffee beans, elegant plantations and a culture and cuisine that are outstanding.

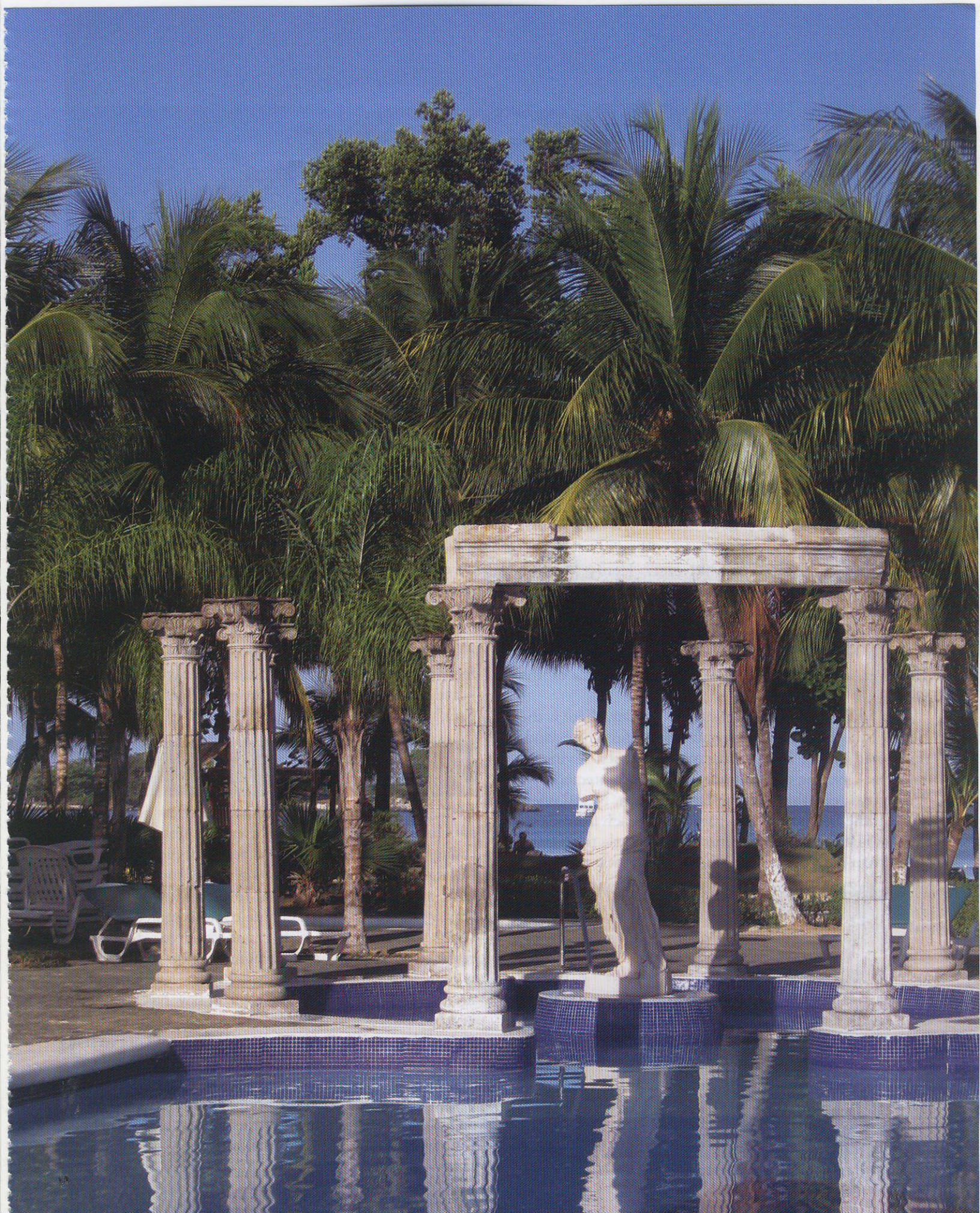
While many may have an imaginary image of Jamaica that conjures a loud reggae culture, Rasta men and poverty, the appealing aspects of this island far outweigh the tensions. The West Indies island is rich with fine hotels, wonderful diving waters, semitropical rainforests, savory food and great things to do for those who want to keep busy or those who want to relax and enjoy the tropics. In fact, Rastafarians are a Jamaican religious group who venerate the late Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie.

The capital is Kingston, outlined by the Blue Mountains — where the world's most expensive coffee is grown. Jamaica's longest river is the Black River, bordered by marshes and swamps that play home to reptiles and birds. Ocho Rios on the eastern tip is a tourist area, with much to do, including the famed Dunn's River Falls. Similarly, Montego Bay (Mo Bay) is a heavily tourist area.

But, at the arid western-most tip of the island lies Negril — where one can get away from the heady experience and find a different way of life. In the 1960s this sunny-shored area was popular for its nude bathing, ganja (marijuana) smoking and hippies-hangouts. However, during the early 1990s, it became the prime luxury resort area — because of its prime beaches. In Negril, the sunsets paint a picture every night creating a unique masterpiece of colors that the world's most revered painters would envy. Here, coral reefs are ablaze with fish that even the novice snorkeler can glimpse on a short trip.

Here, too, lies the Bloody Bay. No — not named bloody for the sharks — but named thanks to the inimitable history of Jamaica and its pirate past. In fact, in the

Opposite page, Hotel Riu Tropical Bay is located in Bloody Bay, one of Jamaica's most beautiful beaches. The hotel's grounds feature lush gardens and Roman-style fountains.





Hotel Riu Tropical Bay is a state-of-the-art resort located on one of Jamaica's most beautiful beaches.

17th century, the notorious privateer, Henry Morgan, presided over Jamaica's Port Royal — known as the “wickedest city on earth.” At any rate, a great battle was fought centuries ago, between two pirates on this bay — it was a bloody fight — hence, the name of the bay. However, these are the most beautiful waters of the island.

In addition to the stunning Bloody Bay, there is the Seven Mile Beach with the most beautiful white sands and some of the best snorkeling and scuba diving in Jamaica. Opening onto a tranquil lagoon protected by a great coral reef, this is prime land and sea. Negril offers some of the best hotels with panoramic beach front views and yet is still quiet and serene. There is little to do here, other than soak up the sun, and enjoy the water.



Wind surfing, sailing, snorkeling and scuba diving, and kayaking are popular activities in the waters of Bloody Bay.

A great diversion, in addition to snorkeling, which is a must for any family, is a visit to Rick's Café. The best way to do both is to take the Sunset snorkeling cruise and stop at Rick's Café. While they do offer drinks and food there, one doesn't go to eat — one goes to cliff jump. The cliffs here are amazing — and one can jump into clear deep blue seas from heights as low as 10 feet, to 25, 40 feet and yes, 150 feet, though it seems only the locals are brave enough to dare that height. The sunsets from Rick's Café are also amazingly beautiful.

Riu Tropical Bay

In Negril, families can elect to stay at a host of all-inclusive hotels (a best bet, since there are not a lot of area restaurants). One of the most beautiful picks, however, lies right on Bloody Bay and is a serene top-notch hotel with a lot to offer: the Riu Tropical Bay. The resort attracts an international clientele and is geared more for adults than families with small children. The sister resort, Riu Negril — a 15-minute walk up the beach — is geared for families with small children and has a children's clubhouse, but Riu Tropical Bay has the nicer beach. Families can stay here and use the facilities there if they choose. Families with teenagers should opt to stay at Riu Tropical Bay.

The Riu Tropical Bay has a stunning Mediterranean décor. The open-air lobby features a beautiful chandelier and a huge staircase down to the gardens and two pools (one with a swim-up bar) for those who — for some reason — don't want to go into the stunning Caribbean Sea!!!!

The entire grounds features statues, Roman-style fountains, and naturally, lush flowers, plants and palm trees. Immaculately kept, the grounds are beautiful.



The Hotel Riu Tropical Bay's stunning open-air lobby welcomes guests from around the world.

"We are proud to be Jamaican, and we want everything to be perfect for our guests," says Edgar Sosa, manager of the 417-room hotel.

The beaches are full of chairs and there is never difficulty finding a place in the sun or shade, to sit. Rooms have Mediterranean décor, with mahogany furniture and yellow sun-drenched painted walls.

Food is fabulous here. The buffet dining is a delightful surprise — thanks to the creative Subdirector Production Luis Rijo who is in charge of the restaurants. There are several different themed nights, including a Jamaican night, and a Mexican night at the buffet. Additionally, there are four fine-dining à la carte restaurants.

Pool side at the Hotel Riu Tropical Bay provides the perfect spot to relax and soak up the sun.

Restaurants include the Sir Anthony for seafood, Hakuchi for Japanese, the Steak House and D'Angelo, casual terrace dining. For lunch, in addition to the buffet and an outdoor terrace buffet, there is a fabulous jerk hut for chicken jerk that is mouth-watering. The lines there are long — but worth it — no Jamaican experience is complete without jerk.

Water sports include kayaks, snorkeling gear, hobie cat sailboats (but be sure you can sail — or you may get stuck out there!), pedal boats, and windsurfers. There are also a host of motorized water sports, snorkeling and scuba diving excursions at an extra cost. Land sports include organized volleyball, soccer, tennis, bocce ball, ping pong and a host of other things. Massages can be had right on the water's edge, but if you're there for rest and relaxation, nothing beats getting up early, taking a long walk on this very long pristine beach, soaking up the sun, floating in the Caribbean and shedding the stress of business life. Forget the internet access. Leave the cell phones in the room safe, grab a dirty banana, or whatever your choice of drink is, and soak up the spirit that is Jamaica. ☺

