



CAPOEIRA

Experience the Spirit of Brazil in Jamaica



Janeen Johnson
[Dry-Land Tourist](#)

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Photo from Janeen Johnson

Capoeira is an Afro- Brazilian Martial Art created by African Slaves somewhere around the 16th century. It is uncertain whether the slaves developed the art in Africa and took it to Brazil or they developed it while they were enslaved in Brazil. Despite the controversies surrounding the exact origin of its creation it is undoubtedly an art form that is deeply rooted in Brazilian history and culture. It combines music and dance with fighting skills. The practice of Capoeira was illegal and Capoeiristas would suffer harsh penalties if caught, so the music

and the dance elements of it help in disguising the fight aspect. It's a physically demanding sport that displays agility and gravity defying movements but although it appears fun and playful with little physical contact, the fighting skills are not to be underestimated. Today Capoeira is one of the main vehicles of spreading Brazilian culture. It is practiced in various countries all over the world including Jamaica.

For the past eight years, German National, Dennis Eckhart has been working tirelessly to spread the practice of Capoeira and Brazilian culture in Jamaica as there are many historical and cultural similarities between both countries. Grupo Cativoiro Capoeira Jamaica, the small but vibrant group led by Eckhart not only practices Capoeira they are also heavily involved in community based projects. Through their NGO Capoeira Alafia, they have been teaching the Martial Art to children in some of the poorer communities of Kingston and its environs in the hopes of offering an alternative to a life of crime and violence. The practice of Capoeira allows them to learn about their history whilst showing them a peaceful way to interact with their peers and to channel their energy into something positive. The organization also has an eco-project that aims to repurpose over 10,000 used tires to build roads and retaining walls in Harmony Hill, the future site of a Capoeira School. They also use the tires to teach the youths to make creative flower pots and garden accessories.

When in Jamaica it is possible to witness them performing in public places like the Emancipation Park in New Kingston or sometimes on a beach in Port Antonio. Classes are held on a weekly basis at their headquarters in Kingston. Even if you're athletically challenged like me you can try a class or two to spice up your normal fitness routine. You may surprise yourself. The group is very warm and welcoming and will appreciate any form of support that you can give so if you're one of those vacation do-gooders or adventure seeker you may want to get involved in one of their many projects or make a donation to their efforts. It's an excellent way to experience Jamaica, contribute to a worthy cause and get a taste of Brazil at the same time. For more information visit their website www.capoeirajamaica.org.

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