



# ROAM WITH THE REAL PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN



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Photo from Janeen Johnson

I'm perhaps one of the few persons in the world that had never seen any of the Pirates of the Caribbean movies, well that was until last weekend when I willed myself to watch the first three installments of the show. I finally understood the hype but was unable to fathom why an avid moviegoer and huge Johnny Depp fan like me had ignored it all these years. All the plundering pirates, Captain Jack Black with his rum obsession and the cliché Jamaican accent of Calypso the obeah priestess, got me wondering if this was how life was in the real Port Royal.

The movie isn't a far stretch from the reality of how the Jamaican city came to prominence. The Caribbean was predominantly controlled by Spain so England wanting to gain a trading base in the Americas and increase her colonies launched an attack on Hispaniola (the island that comprises the Dominican Republic and Haiti). The attack failed but in an effort not to return to England empty handed the English invaded Jamaica, which was also under Spanish control but proved to be a much easier conquest than Hispaniola. In 1655 they settled in Port Royal and built forts to protect their new acquisition. Its geographical location proved to be an asset not only from a military standpoint but also economically as large ships could easily enter the harbor to load and unload its cargo, be it sugar, raw materials or slaves. With the emergence of a very lucrative port the British grew increasingly fearful that Spain would try to reclaim her old territory so they invited Brethrens of the Coast (a fancy term for pirates) to settle in Port Royal.

The pirates attacked Spanish Vessels at sea then squandered the spoils of their plundering in Port Royal. Piracy not only made the colony wealthy, it thwarted the efforts of Spain to reclaim her colony as it depleted the resources of the Spanish Monarchy. It continued to thrive for over thirty years until an earthquake in 1692 and the tsunami that ensued sunk parts of the city, burying treasure and killing almost a half of the city's population. Attempts were made to rebuild but in 1907 another devastating earthquake took its toll on the city. Port Royal would never be restored to its former glory.

Visiting Port Royal today it's hard to conceive that the quiet fishing village was once the playground of Pirates such as Blackbeard and Henry Morgan. In its heyday it was dubbed the "Richest and Wickedest City of the World" because with wealth and piracy came lawlessness, prostitution, murder and all manner of wrongdoings. Port Royal is now a humble community that takes pride in their 0 % crime rate. Jamaicans go to relax and eat seafood by the water, or occasionally enjoy Pirate themed all inclusive parties. The architecture of the remaining buildings, the deserted town square and the cannons of the old Fort Charles are silent testimonies of the rich historical past of the town. Unlike Captain Jack Sparrow and his friends, the real pirates of the Caribbean were unable to repeatedly cheat death but they remain fascinating pieces of history and tales of many legends. So, take a trip to the real Port Royal, have a swim, walk the same streets as Henry Morgan, eat fish, drink rum and awaken your pirate fantasies. Savvy?



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