



# RAE TOWN

The Old Hits Party Capital of the World



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Photo from Janeen Johnson

Street dances are a common part of Jamaica's nightlife culture. On any given night of the week you can find a party or two. With names like Hot Mondays, Boasty Tuesdays, Bembe, Weddy Weddy , Dutti Fridaze, one can only conclude that Jamaicans are unique if nothing else. You can expect Dancehall and Reggae music blasting from loud speakers while vendors sell anything from chewing gum and peanuts to cranberry water and Jerk Chicken. Crazy fashion choices like a full leather or animal printed body suit with furry knee high boots, never mind it being the middle of

summer in a tropical country. Scantly clad women on the ground or on a table dancing on their heads wouldn't be out of place either even if those said women happened to be Asian. For many tourists a Street dance in Jamaica is a big culture shock especially when their knowledge of Jamaica is limited to Bob Marley.

If Street dances sound a bit too wild for your taste then there is Rae Town Sundays. Rae Town is an inner-city community located near Downtown Kingston. Despite its not so desirable location, the weekly Old Hits party attracts hundreds of patrons both locally and internationally. Of all the street dances it has enjoyed the most longevity as Rae Town Sundays have been a fixture on the calendars of many Kingstonians since the 1980s. It is the only place in Jamaica where you can find people well over fifty dancing up a storm for hours from Sunday night into early Monday morning. The music is a mixture of pre 90's Reggae hits, R&B and Pop songs of the same era. Imagine a party where you can hear a Bob Marley song followed by Madonna's "Like a Virgin" and Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give you Up. When you think you've heard it all the selector starts spinning, Michael Jackson's "Billy Jean" while men in their late fifties throw down fancy footwork in the middle of a street doing the moonwalk and their best MJ impersonations only slowing down or stopping for the occasional car that may drive through or the peanut vendor cycling with freshly roasted peanuts still hot from the oven like contraption attached to his bicycle.

Then to change the pace, Celine Dion ballads echo from the Sound System and the MJ impersonators now grab the nearest lady whether age sixty or twenty and engage in a very slow dance that can only be described as one word, Jamaican. Women without dance partners are hardly to be pitied as it is totally ok to hug yourself while rocking sideways with your eyes closed screaming a Gladys Knight song into the open sky. In those moments whether you're dancing or just observing you'll be totally unperturbed by the fact that it's 3am Monday and you have to be up in a few hours.

A friend of mine from the UK describes Rae Town as the single most unique experience that he has had in Jamaica and that there is nowhere like it. Your tourist brochure will never tell you about Rae Town but it is incomparable to any other Jamaican party you're likely to attend. When in Kingston on a Sunday night just arrange with a cab driver to take you there and back to your hotel. Midnight is a good time to go and you can party until well after 3 am, so roll in, buy a few Red Stripe Beers then bust out your best MJ move.

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