



A Culinary Tour of Jamaica

Going on this delicious journey will serve as your initiation to the island's flavour.

BY JANEEN JOHNSON



With new eats and treats popping up all around the island, Jamaica's profile continues to rise as a culinary destination. From Asian-inspired desserts to street food festivals, the scene has never been more vibrant.

Jamaica's diverse culinary landscape is most evident in Kingston. The capital city boasts a dizzying array of ritzy wine bars, trendy bistros and fine dining establishments like the new Steakhouse at Devon House, where foodies can enjoy a selection of dry-aged steaks and premium beef cuts. For a quick, no-frills lunch, try a patty from Devon House Bakery. Consider the curry goat or the seasonal lobster patty.

Those looking for an immersive experience should navigate the path of the Blue Mountain Culinary Trail, where coffee farms share what's behind the world's best brew — from bean to cup. Feast on delectable cuisine at unique eateries whilst in the area. Dessert and coffee at Café Blue's outdoor patio is highly recommended.

You could spend a lifetime in Jamaica visiting everything from jerk pits and colourful fruit stands to internationally acclaimed restaurants. To satisfy our sweet tooth and get a cultural lesson, visit the "Puddin' Man" in the North Coast town of Priory. Edgar Wallace is famous for his sweet potato pudding, but he also makes cornmeal pudding and toto — a Jamaican coconut cake. A dozen coal stoves line the outside of his red, green and gold shop. The pudding batter is placed in large Dutch pots and set to bake on the coal. The pots are covered, and then hot coal is shovelled on top as well to produce the moist and gooey treat. Wallace's traditional baking style introduces locals and foreigners to a slice of Jamaican culture.

A growing number of chefs and food entrepreneurs are on a mission to preserve that very heritage. At the root of the movement is an intimate relationship with the freshest products.

Hermosa Cove in Ocho Rios is home to The Broken Rudder Bar and Grille and Christopher's, a restaurant known for its traditional Jamaican fare with an international flair. Executive Chef Conroy Arnold is lauded for his passion for fresh ingredients and take on classic local cuisine. A stony path through the garden leads to the restaurant's oceanview verandah, where behind the grill, Chef Conroy prepares for the weekly barbeque. Homemade sausages, golden brown chicken and a crisp pig's head dangle from metal hooks, and pineapples, green plantains and scallions hang from both ends of the grill. "I'm just a cook" says the chef, who despite his Michelin-star restaurant experience cares little for titles.

"There's no rank here; it's a family effort," he says. Try the succulent jerk pork and chicken with roasted

vegetables or the pineapple kimchi. Some of the fruits and herbs are grown on the property, whilst the rest are sourced from local farms like Stush in the Bush.

Lisa and Chris Binns are the heart and soul behind Stush in the Bush, and they are key to the community of food entrepreneurs changing the face of Jamaican cuisine. Stush in the Bush offers an extraordinary culinary experience that includes a farm tour and beautifully made vegetarian dishes.

"The only rule is that you try everything," says Lisa, as she lays out a delicious spread that may include pumpkin hummus and sweet potato croquettes. The menu is based on whatever is in season and available on the farm. This is the epitome of sustainable living and a stellar example of what can happen when you nurture and invest in the land.

Luxury hotels like Round Hill are forging deeper connections with the land as well, as fruits and vegetables grown on property are used to supply the kitchen. This is in addition to the organic produce sourced from the One Love Learning Foundation.

Chef Martin Maginley describes the dishes at the resort as "lean clean caribbean cuisine." Round Hill's Sunday farm-to-table brunch highlights the best of the region's flavours.

From the mountains to the coasts you really need to travel the whole island to get a holistic sense of what it has to offer. Moby Dick in Kingston has been serving mouth-watering curry goat for over 30 years. The humble Woody's in Port Antonio serves up delicious beef and plantain burgers. Whilst Zimbali Retreats offers guests an exquisite farm-to-table experience just outside Negril.

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