

Jammin' Jamaica

Sun, sea, sand, rum and reggae await on this idyllic Caribbean isle...



Enjoy the low-key elegance of Round Hill

One of the Caribbean's most westerly islands, Jamaica is also the third largest and offers a wealth of scenery, from its stunning Blue Mountains and tropical forested interior dotted with coffee and sugar plantations, to the picture-perfect beaches and modern tourist resorts of Montego Bay and Ocho Rios – both packed with restaurants, clubs and duty-free stores – on the island's northern coast. Away from the beach there's activities such as river rafting along the White River, zip-lining through the trees and hiking in the Fern Gully gorge. Add in exotic Caribbean food, rum and some great reggae and you're on to a holiday winner.

When should I go?

Music lovers should visit during the annual Jazz & Blues Festival (January 23-29 2011), when such legends as Diana Ross perform, while for those who prefer reggae, visit in mid-July for the Reggae Sumfest, where Usher, Shaggy and Chris Brown performed during OK!'s visit.

Where will I see a celeb?

The stars have been hanging out in Jamaica for decades – fans include Scarlett Johansson, Rihanna, Hilary Swank and Johnny Depp. Many films have been shot here, including Bond movies *Live And Let Die* and *Dr No*, which featured the famous scene when a bikini-clad Ursula Andress walks out of the ocean. More recently, Robin Williams and Mandy Moore filmed *License To Wed* at the Royal Plantation, while Kate Moss and Naomi Campbell like to hideaway in The Caves, a boutique hotel in Negril.

Where should I stay?

The island offers many types of hotel but two legendary grand institutions can be found within a few miles of Montego Bay. If you like to arrive at a five-star resort and never leave, then the Half Moon resort (www.halfmoon.com), that offers a myriad of sporting, pool and restaurant options and sits on a lovely bay, will be right up your street. The low-rise Caribbean colonial-style resort has been welcoming famous faces such as Prince Charles and Audrey Hepburn for years and, more recently, Beyoncé Knowles and TV's Anne Robinson. The 420 rooms, suites and villas (most come with private pool and butler) are scattered around the sprawling 395-acre beach-front resort. OK! stayed in one of the spacious suites and loved our four-poster bed, baby grand piano and huge bathroom complete with walk-in shower and a gigantic bathtub.



OK! had a huge villa complete with butler service at Half Moon

Round Hill (www.roundhilljamaica.com) is another hotel legend that has attracted the likes of Michael Douglas, Sir Paul McCartney and Ralph Lauren, who designed some of the furnishings. Celebrities love the privacy of this smaller, low-key but equally elegant affair. We loved our villa – that came with its own pool, butler, cook and awesome views over the bay – as well as the beautiful spa, a clutch of bars and glorious nightly buffets.

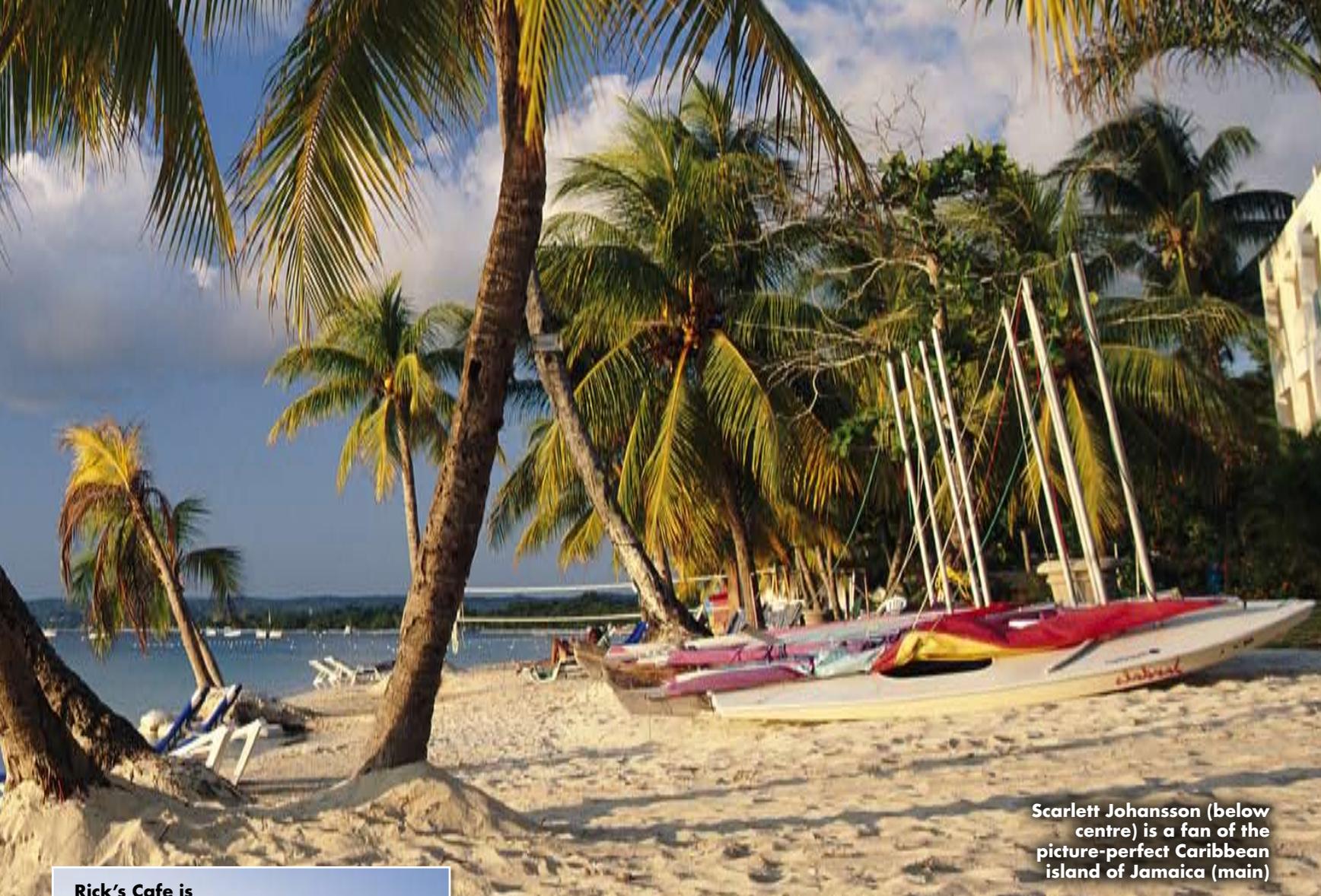
Where can I eat?

Start the day with an alfresco beachside breakfast grazing from the buffet at Half Moon's Seagrape Terrace. At night put on your glad rags to dine at Sugar Mill, the resort's upscale candlelit restaurant. With views of the ruins of the old water wheel, OK! feasted on shrimp skewers, spicy jerk chicken and rum and raisin cream, which came with a gourmet twist.

Over at Round Hill, OK! loved the gargantuan buffets with different themed nights – our favourite dishes were the Indian curries, herb-encrusted lamb and jerk chicken. The restaurant is all-white with beautiful Adirondack-style chairs, plus the terrace bar is a wonderful place for sunset cocktails.

Elsewhere, head to Rick's Cafe in Negril, a legendary waterfront spot offering fabulous sunset views, fresh-fruit daquiris and a party vibe.





Scarlett Johansson (below centre) is a fan of the picture-perfect Caribbean island of Jamaica (main)

Rick's Cafe is great for cocktails at sunset



Where can I spa?

The biggest spa in Jamaica, the Fern Tree Spa, is a gigantic 68,000sqft pampering haven located within the Half Moon resort. Set in lush gardens within a walled garden, the spa is made up of several wooden pavilions with stone terraces. **OK!** loved the dipping waterfall pool, exotic plants and huge carved stone bathtubs. **OK!** opted for an indulgent pedicure that included a bush tea bath, exfoliation and a coconut and honey mask. The spa specialises in Caribbean herbal remedies and the mouthwatering menu features treatments made with coffee, coconut and local spices.

Where can I shop?

If you're a fan of flash bling, Tropicana in the Times Square mall in Negril is the place to flex your Amex card, and there's also a Patek Philippe watch boutique. In Montego Bay you can explore the duty-free Shoppes At Rose Hall, offering designer clothes,

jewellery (Jewel & Times and Casa de Oro), perfumes and souvenirs. The Half Moon resort has its own upmarket Shopping Village, where you can buy jewellery, watches and La Perla lingerie. While you're here, admire the memorabilia and watch a film dedicated to the island's most famous musician at the Bob Marley Experience. The Crafts Market on Harbour Street in Montego Bay is another popular tourist haunt.

What sights must I see?

Fancy swimming with dolphins? Well if you're staying at Half Moon, the resort has its very own Dolphin Lagoon, where the friendly, velvety smooth creatures will splash around with you. The best bit? Riding around holding onto their fins, just like you see on TV! There's also a championship golf course, as well as plenty of tennis courts, lots of water sports (including pedalos) and an equestrian centre.

For watery thrills and spills, kids will love the flumes and slides at the Kool Runnings Water Park – named after the island's bobsleigh team – in Negril.

For the more adventurous there's zip-lining through the rainforest at Mystic Mountain, or hiking up the slippery boulders to reach the top of the Dunn's River Falls, a cascading waterfall that drops 600ft. It gets very busy so it's best go early or late and remember to wear shoes you don't mind getting soaked!



Swim with dolphins at Half Moon

How can I get there?

Virgin Holidays (0844 557 3859; www.virginholidays.co.uk) offer a seven-night package, including return flights with Virgin Atlantic from Gatwick to Jamaica and hotel transfers, staying at the five-star Half Moon Montego Bay from £1,389pp. Hip Hotels (0844 573 2460; www.vhiphotels.co.uk) offer a similar seven-night package, with return flights and transfers, staying at the Round Hill Hotel & Villas from £1,255pp. Prices are based on two adults sharing an ocean-front room, tax and fuel charges. Prices are based on departures in October 2010. **OK!**

REPORT BY ROWENA CARR-ALLINSON
 EDITED BY ANNABEL MACKIE, **OK!** TRAVEL EDITOR
 PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY, PHOTOLIBRARY.COM, REX

Where is Jamaica?



FOR TOURIST INFORMATION, SEE WWW.VISITJAMAICA.COM OR BUY THE ROUGH GUIDE JAMAICA, £13.99, OR THE NEW FROMMER'S CARIBBEAN 2011, £16.99, BOTH AVAILABLE ONLINE AT WWW.STANFORDS.CO.UK.