

Escape winter with a sun-drenched trip even farther south—and just because it's high season doesn't mean you have to break the bank

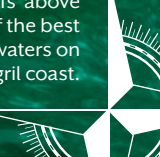
BY SARAH GREAVES-GABBADON

BUDGET  
CARIBBEAN  
GETAWAYS



**Negril,  
Jamaica**

Rockhouse's cottages are tucked into limestone cliffs above some of the best snorkeling waters on the Negril coast.





**FROM LEFT:** Fresh seafood almost always comes with a colorful side of fresh local vegetables. This visitor's about to make the jump at Rick's Cafe's cliff-top bar.



*Mix in mountainous terrain, white-sand beaches, liberal amounts of rum, and a lilting reggae sound track and you've found the formula for JAMAICA'S ENDURING APPEAL.*

## NEGRIL

JAMAICA

### GETTING THERE

Fly to Sangster International Airport in Montego Bay (MBJ), and take a shared bus about an hour to Negril. (Prices range from \$25 to \$30 one-way.)

### CURRENCY

Jamaican dollar, though many places will accept U.S. dollars

### ENTRY REQUIREMENT

Valid passport

Start with welcoming locals. Mix in the lush, mountainous terrain fringed with white-sand beaches. Add liberal amounts of rum. Combine with a lilting reggae sound track. And you've found the formula for Jamaica's enduring appeal—nowhere more evident than in Negril.

### Getting Around

If you're staying along the beachfront strip, you can walk almost anywhere you want to go. For trips into town or farther afield, book transport through your hotel.

It's around \$20 round-trip from the strip to the West End.

### Check In

While you can't beat the all-inclusive options in terms of convenience, going à la carte at boutique hotel Rockhouse ([rockhousehotel.com](http://rockhousehotel.com); rooms from \$180) has its perks, including a cluster of thatch-roof cottages, torchlit alfresco dining, and a dramatic cliff's-edge perch above the shimmering water.

### Best Beach

Sand-seekers flock to the strip, where bars, resorts, and strolling vendors preside. But for a break (albeit sans sand), head to the West End, where ladders in the rock face lead down to the clearest,

bluest sea, perfect for snorkeling or simply floating the day away.

### On the Itinerary

It's all about the sunset here, so don't miss the daily celebration—and a preshow of cliff divers—at legendary Rick's Cafe ([rickscafejamaica.com](http://rickscafejamaica.com)). Island Routes' South Coast River, Rum, and Falls Adventure ([islandroutes.com](http://islandroutes.com)) includes a tour of the Appleton Estate rum distillery, swimming in YS Falls, and a boat cruise along the alligator-infested Black River. It's pricey at \$168, but the round-trip taxi fare to Appleton Estate alone would set you back \$140.

### Local Flavor

Start the day with Jamaica's national

dish, ackee and saltfish (\$12)—a savory fruit sautéed with salted cod, onions, and peppers—at the beachfront IdleAwhile ([idleawhile.com](http://idleawhile.com)). Do not leave the island without tasting Jamaica's iconic beef patty from Hammond's Bakery (876/957-4734). On the strip, straddle a bench at Cosmo's Seafood Restaurant & Bar (876/957-4784), and enjoy a plate of conch with a side of the fried cassava bread called "bammy."

### Insider Intel

West End's The Hungry Lion (876/957-4486) pleases veggie palates with meatless main courses, seafood platters, banana fritters, and freshly squeezed juices.

DAVID HANSON



**Negril, Jamaica**  
Many locals fish the shallow reefs and deeper cliffs for lobster, red snapper, barracuda, and the invasive lionfish.



**Nassau, Bahamas**  
White-sand beaches abound in Nassau, such as secluded Orange Hill beach or Cabbage Beach (shown here) with its wide, palm-lined strand.

OPPOSITE PAGE: GRACIELA CATTAROSSÌ; THIS PAGE: GRACIELA CATTAROSSÌ (3); BEDROOM: COURTESY NASSAU PARADISE ISLAND PROMOTION BOARD

## NASSAU

### BAHAMAS

#### GETTING THERE

Regular direct flights from many Southern cities, including Atlanta, Miami, and Charlotte, to Lynden Pindling International Airport (NAS)

#### CURRENCY

Bahamian dollar (pegged 1 to 1 to the U.S. dollar), though most places will accept U.S. dollars

#### ENTRY REQUIREMENT

Valid passport

Easily accessible but offering a foreign feel, the capital of our closest Caribbean neighbor has all you need for a quick beach break: glitzy casino resorts, fancy restaurants, duty-free “shoppportunities,” and the probability of finding a Goombay Smash—the potent national cocktail—wherever you go.

#### Getting Around

Cabs are easy to find, but Nassau’s buses (known as jitneys) are safe, reliable, and inexpensive. The public ferry runs hourly from downtown



over to Paradise Island and costs \$4 each way.

#### Check In

Rates at the Comfort Suites on Paradise Island ([comfortsuites.pi.com](http://comfortsuites.pi.com); rooms from \$279) include access to mega-resort Atlantis’ beach, 11 pools, and water park. Your kids (and your wallet) will thank you.

#### Best Beach

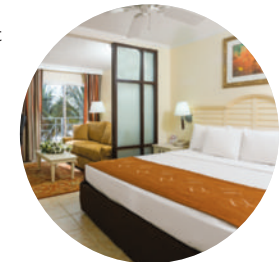
Spread your towel on the sands of Orange Hill beach on any weekday and you’ll likely have the long strand of sugary sand all to yourself.

#### On the Itinerary

Join the interactive tour at Graycliff Chocolatier ([graycliff.com](http://graycliff.com); \$50) to see how the organic chocolates are made, score samples, and then make your own bar of chocolate. Also



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Grilled spiny lobster at Bahamian Cookin’; a street scene; Comfort Suites; Arawak Cay



downtown, the Pirates of Nassau museum ([pirates-of-nassau.com](http://pirates-of-nassau.com); \$12) is a fun exhibition detailing the city’s history as a colonial-era center of piracy.

#### Local Flavor

Conch salad and a bottle of the local brew, Kalik, is a classic pairing that will run you around \$10 at Arawak Cay (known to locals as The Fish Fry). Satisfy your sweet tooth at Bahamian Cookin’ ([bahamiancookin.com](http://bahamiancookin.com)), where you can try a guava duff (\$4), a steamed jelly roll with guava sauce.

#### Insider Intel

Tour the 175,000-bottle wine cellar at Graycliff Hotel ([graycliff.com](http://graycliff.com)) free with the three-course \$30 lunch special.

## FIVE CARIBBEAN HOTELS UNDER \$250

### 1. COPPER & LUMBER STORE HOTEL

#### ANTIGUA

This 18th-century waterfront warehouse is perfectly located for sailing, and its 14 rooms exude colonial charm. [copperandlumberhotel.com](http://copperandlumberhotel.com); from \$195

### 2. CUNUCU RESIDENCE

#### ARUBA

In a residential neighborhood a few miles from Palm Beach, these apartments will suit independent families. [arubacunucuresidence.com](http://arubacunucuresidence.com); from \$1,062/wk (\$152/day)

### 3. HOTEL RIU NAIBOA

#### DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Stay at this all-inclusive resort in Punta Cana and score privileges at four other hotels in the complex. [riu.com](http://riu.com); from \$194, all-inclusive

### 4. SUNSHINE SUITES RESORT

#### GRAND CAYMAN

These spacious suites are perfect for families who don’t want to sacrifice their budget for beach proximity. [sunshinesuites.com](http://sunshinesuites.com); from \$220

### 5. BLUE HORIZONS GARDEN RESORT

#### GRENADA

Check in at these garden apartments and enjoy the sister hotel’s free beach and watersports. [grenadabluehorizons.com](http://grenadabluehorizons.com); from \$210

## San Juan, Puerto Rico

Take in the dramatic view of Old San Juan from the ramparts of El Morro, a waterfront fort. Below right: The cobblestone streets of Old San Juan



# SAN JUAN

## PUERTO RICO

### GETTING THERE

Regular direct flights from many Southern cities, including Atlanta, Houston, and Charlotte, to San Juan Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport (SJU)

### CURRENCY

U.S. dollars

### ENTRY REQUIREMENT

No passport required for U.S. citizens

Although it's only a 3½-hour flight from Atlanta, Puerto Rico's diverse culture makes it feel much farther away. Luxury high-rise hotels line San Juan's sandy coast. The dynamic dining scene reflects the city's multicultural roots. And strains of salsa carried on Caribbean breezes convey the island's joyful personality.

### Getting Around

Metered cabs are plentiful in the resort areas, but most of the drivers will quote a flat fee (\$19 from the

airport to Old San Juan), which often works to your advantage. If you're staying in the historic district, just hoof it, but bring comfy shoes to navigate the famous cobblestones.

### Check In

In Old San Juan, the 32-room CasaBlanca Hotel ([hotelcasablanca.pr.com](http://hotelcasablanca.pr.com); rooms from \$189) features eclectic, souk-inspired style.

### Best Beach

The *balnearios* (public beaches) at Isla Verde, El Escambrón, and Ocean Park draw sun-seekers in droves, but for a chilled-out, family-friendly vibe and the calmest waters, head to Playita del Condado, next to the Condado Plaza Hilton.

### On the Itinerary

El Morro ([nps.gov/saju](http://nps.gov/saju)), San Juan's famous waterfront fort, is an absolute must-see. In Condado, the farmers' market Mercado Urbano at Plaza Ventana al Mar features local fried snacks and crafts. In Cataño, Casa Bacardi's free tour includes a rum cocktail sampling ([casabacardi.org](http://casabacardi.org)).

### Local Flavor

Try *mofongo*, a local dish of mashed fried plantains stuffed with pork, chicken, or seafood, at Old San

Juan's Café el Punto (787/646-4943). Celebrity chef Wilo Benet's "pikaderas" (small plates) are all around \$15 at Pikayo ([wilobenet.com](http://wilobenet.com)). Sip the best red sangría (\$10) in the city at Casa Lola ([casalolarestaurant.com](http://casalolarestaurant.com)).

### Insider Intel

There's no sign outside Jose Enrique's eponymous restaurant ([joseenriquepr.com](http://joseenriquepr.com)), but you'll know it by the crowd on the porch. Order the signature Naturola cocktail and consider your \$9 well spent. 🍹

FROM TOP: DAVID HILLEGAS; DAVID MADISON/GETTY IMAGES

## WHAT TO PACK

You don't have to spend a bundle to be a standout on the island. This weekend wardrobe lets you travel light.

By Stephanie Granada



No. 1

No. 2

No. 3

No. 4

No. 5

No. 6

No. 7

### FIGURE FLATTERING

Ruffles provide extra coverage, and unlike an itty-bitty bikini, this red number stays in place.

1. La Blanca Core Solid One Piece Lingerie Strap Tank, \$109; [everythingbutwater.com](http://everythingbutwater.com)
2. Goorin Brothers Malibu fedora, \$50; [zappos.com](http://zappos.com)
3. Periwinkle Bead Strands, \$44; [baublebar.com](http://baublebar.com)
4. Alia Beach Cover-Up, \$89; [lillypultizer.com](http://lillypultizer.com)
5. Worlds Fair Ruffle Bandeau Bikini, \$22.99 (top), \$19.99 (bottom); [target.com](http://target.com)
6. Ariel Raffia Clutch, \$95; [shopmarysol.com](http://shopmarysol.com)
7. Gesso Sandal, \$69; [francosarto.com](http://francosarto.com)