

# TRAVEL

**FLIGHT CENTRE** *Unbeatable*

**Big White** 3 Nights + 2-Day Lift Pass  
 from **\$399** pp  
 INCLUDES ski-in, ski-out accom in the resort Village and 2-day lift ticket.  
 Conditions apply, see main ad for details.  
**1 866 967 5402**

**FLIGHT CENTRE** *Unbeatable*

**Las Vegas** Air + 4 Nights  
 from **\$299**  
 INCLUDES airfare, airport transfers and 3-star accom on the Strip. UPGRADE to 4-star accom from \$17 per night.  
 Conditions apply, see main ad for details.  
**1 866 967 5402**

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8 | 2012 | EDITOR CARALYN CAMPBELL 604.605.2784 | CACAMPBELL@SUNPROVINCE.COM

## CARIBBEAN



The beach at Half Moon Resort.

PHOTOS: JANE MUNDY/SPECIAL T

Treasure Beach is off the beaten path, but never far from tasty jerk chicken and a Red Stripe

I'd been to Jamaica a few decades ago, when we could barely afford the airfare. We did what most tourists do: stayed at all-inclusives in Ocho Rios, Montego Bay and Negril. At Rick's Café we drank too much rum and watched the sunset as maniacs dived off the cliffs.

This time I wanted to go the road less travelled but I also wanted to revisit Negril and Mo-Bay and experience the laid-back island life. I was also armed with binoculars and a new zoom lens: a passion for flora and fauna had usurped — but not replaced — rum and reggae.

After a two-hour taxi ride south (and a pit stop at Border for extremely tasty jerk chicken and requisite Red Stripe) along a two-lane road with scenery becoming more jungle-like, I arrived at Treasure Beach and Jakes Resort, a colony of 30 artsy-funky "cottages" dotted

about spacious grounds that includes a salt-water pool, two restaurants and dare I say, wireless Internet access. (I'd vowed not to go there.) Miss Yvonne, the manager, welcomed with ice-cold towels and fresh-squeezed watermelon juice. I noticed a sign in the lobby: "Support your local farmer." This was my kind of place.

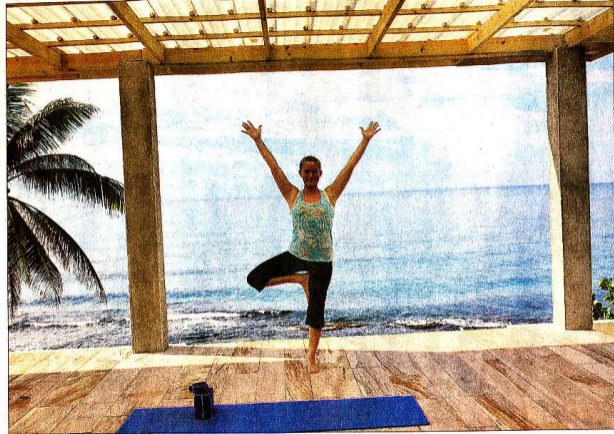
Octopussy — my oceanfront abode, immediately made me think of Gaudi. (Turns out that owner Jason Henzell's mother Sally was inspired by the artist when she designed the resort.) Damnation, why had I only booked three nights here? The word "enchanted" barely does it justice. The surf almost lapped at my outdoor bathtub, which was surrounded by walls studded with seashells and coloured glass. My roof deck with Casbah-style daybed and silk cushions was — pardon the cliché — jaw dropping.

In the not-too-distant past, Treasure Beach was a little fishing village and it has still

managed to avoid most tourist trappings. The next morning couldn't have been better planned. Jason's wife, Laura, just happens to be a yoga instructor (check out their yoga retreat packages). At 9 a.m. we met on the rooftop yoga deck with glistening sea as backdrop and one hour later, the long journey here washed away. I got into the groove.

Jakes had arranged a boat day. Dreadlock Ted and his dog skippered us in his boat "Di Evil Tings" to Floyd and his quirky Pelican Bar. Talk about getting away from it all. "When I built this place as a hangout my friends thought it was silly and everyone else thought I was crazy," Floyd Forbes said, as he took a break from a game of dominoes. Floyd hauled wood on his fishing boat to this sandbar a quarter of a mile out to sea and the hangout soon attracted more than Floyd's fishing buddies.

CONTINUED ON 62



Yoga instructor Laura Henzell at Jakes Resort on Treasure Beach.



CONTINUED | FROM PAGE G1

# It's Jamaica, mon ... where you go to really get away

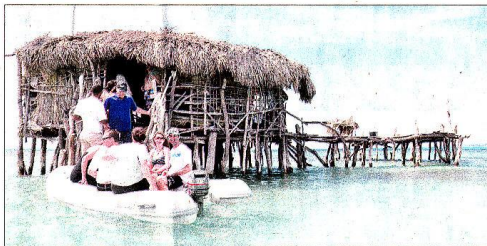
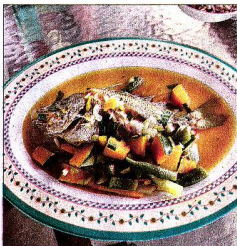
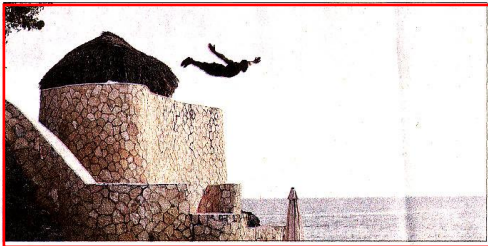
It went down in Hurricane Ivan but Jason Henzell and other local business owners chipped in — tourists were only deprived of Pelican Bar for a month.

We zipped over to Black River and Cloggy's for lunch: grunt fish and parrot fish on the menu today. And a basket of bammy bread made from cassava, rum cocktails and Red Stripes. We sleepily headed up the mangrove- and reed-banked Black River, and perked up with a few crocodile sightings (kayaks and canoes are not allowed.)

Back to that sign in Jakes lobby. Unlike many resorts that import food, Jakes restaurant uses produce from local farmers. I know this for a fact because I had the good fortune to join Jason — the unofficial ambassador to Treasure Beach — and Laura Henzell, the German Ambassador to Jamaica (really), and a few other guests at Farmer Dull's "farm to table" lunch the next day. Dull and his 19-year-old grandson grow a variety of vegetables and herbs for Jakes. "I mainly eat what I grow," said Dull, "although once a week I'll have goat or fish." We tucked into a bowl of refreshing gazpacho. His farm is perched 2,200 feet above sea level on the Santa Cruz mountain range. "On a clear day you can see to Negril," said Laura, "or you can watch the electrical storms across the plains below, like they're arguing back and forth."

Next up we were served roast beets with local honey vinaigrette atop the greenest greens. Dull showed me around, pointing out the drip irrigation system that runs through his orchard and feeds rows of herbs and lettuce. Platters of roast chicken and plantain were passed around the long table and I barely had room for the flourless chocolate cake. Everyone toasted and Dull looked very proud.

No trip to the south coast could be complete without a walking tour of Black River, the oldest town in the parish (province) of St. Elizabeth, which boasts more bars and churches than any other parish in Jamaica. "When the ladies are in church getting into the spirit the guys are in the bar getting spirit into them," said our guide Allison Morris, laughing. We walked through the centuries-old Parish church and bustling streets with vendors selling carrots and corn and bags of brilliant red sorrel flower for ice tea.



PHOTOS: JANE MUNDO/SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Clockwise from top left: A snorkelling guide swan-dives at The Caves, jerk chicken is served up at Border, a crowd motors to Pelican Bar, and grunt fish makes an appearance at Cloggy's.

A shiny SUV pulled up beside us on the main drag and the driver beeped his horn. It was Floyd. "I have to pick up more beer — everyone at Pelican Bar drank me dry yesterday," he said, grinning. The tour ended with Alison playing the organ back at the church. We sing English hymns infused with our own choruses and sometimes people bring steel drums," she said. "Sometimes it really rocks."

Sadly it was time to leave tranquil town, but my binoculars were about to see the light of day. Halfway to Negril, my driver (arranged by Jakes for just \$70) stopped at the community of Bluefields, where I hooked up with Wolde and Veda at Reliable Adventures Jamaica (RAJ). We got out of their SUV a short drive up the mountain and within seconds spotted a parakeet and yellow-billed parrot. RAJ typically takes birders on a hiking and nature walk up Bluefields Mountain. "We also teach the beginners how to use their binoculars," Veda said as she

adjusted mine.

"Nerd birders start at sunrise, hike up 2,300 feet and then we drive them back down the mountain," she added. Not me. I'm happy to have spotted 10 resident birds within an hour. It's midday and I'm thinking about cool clear water at the Caves Resort.

I shy away from all-inclusive hotels but The Caves is an exception — it's exclusive. With only 12 thatched roof cabins perched atop limestone cliffs, an Aveda spa and a very good restaurant, there is no reason to leave. Upon arrival I was served a watermelon, ginger and rum cocktail, and then Randall escorted me to the outdoor restaurant for a kingfish filet (perfectly grilled), a mound of callaloo (like spinach only better) and a Red Stripe.

The Caves employs 50, and accommodates up to 30 guests. That's service. "This is our 12th trip to Jamaica and I could have gone anywhere to celebrate my 50th, but I love it here," said Anna Birston from Thunder Bay, Ont. "It took a few days to get my nerve, but once I stepped off the edge, there was no going back," she added. Just about everyone here takes the 20-foot cliff dive — there are several plunge-points to choose from. You

can also book a candlelit supper in a Batmanesque cave and show up wearing your hotel robe. "Didn't you get the memo under your door?" asked Pat Gilligan, winking. "Everyone is supposed to dress in robes tomorrow night." That's another thing about small inclusions: you make instant friends. I booked a private snorkelling tour with Paul Grant next morning. As we sliced through a school of needlefish, Paul pointed out moray eels nestled in the reef and stingrays hiding on the sandy bottom. We swam into several caves and emerged for fruit bat sightings. "I've seen sea turtles mating here, barracuda and tiger sharks," said Paul. OK, I'd had enough.

I did leave once during my stay, to drive down memory lane and visit Firefly (hardly recognized it) and 3 Dives for jerk chicken. Owner Lloyd Myrie grows his own chickens, and he also does the deed — you know what I mean. "My jerk chicken is best because of the spices," he said. "Put onion, scallion, thyme, garlic, pimento and allspice in the blender with water to make a paste, slice the chicken and marinate it for 24 hours. Then you grill it over pimento wood from the allspice tree." I incurred, it was damn good. But if 3 Dives opens at noon, the chicken isn't ready until 2 p.m. Jamaica time.

Anna can vouch for me, I almost did the cliff dive. But I didn't want to chance limping into the regal Ritz-Carlton at Montego Bay. As I sipped a welcome glass of champagne in the lobby and gazed past the salt water pool to a stretch of white sand, I asked if hurricane Sandy — that hit the U.S. just a week previously — had wreaked

any damage here.

"We kept our fingers crossed for a day or two and then it was business as usual," said Craig Thomas, director of sales and marketing and self-proclaimed American. In fact, the only damage was pointed out to me during a horticultural tour of the palatial grounds (a must if you're interested in food and gardening); some plants were damaged by the sea water and had already been replaced.

There are several dining options to choose from so Thomas decided for me. He suggested that I check out the Reggae Jerk Centre — buffet on the beach. Live reggae music guided my way, and with shrimp and red snapper grilled to order and how can on-the-coast taste so sweet? It didn't disappoint. Neither did the traditional breakfast of akai, dumplings and beans.

As I said, I'm not a fan of all-inclusives and how they are designed to keep you on the property. The Ritz had the opposite effect: It's not an all-in, and I didn't feel the urge to leave. But by day two, it was time for a few excursions, (think hike after those dumplings and rum cocktails) and time to haul out the binoculars again.

Rockland bird sanctuary is adorable. And you don't need binoculars because the hummingbirds perch on your hand as you feed them. All kinds of handmade feeding cups hang from flora planted on three acres specifically to attract birds. Two hummingbirds rush by within inches of my head — you hear their buzzing wings before you see them.

I'd worked up an appetite after all that fluttering so we pulled into Scotchies, arguably serving up the best jerk chicken in the world. Half a chicken with a side of festival — deep fried dough — will set you back \$7.50. "The chicken is so fresh and the balance of spices, just the right amount of Scotch bonnet, is perfect," said Shaun Verespej, a chef from Austin, Texas. The chicken is pink inside, something no chef back home could get away with. Everything comes wrapped in tin foil, on Styrofoam plates with plastic cutlery.

I also learned how to do a few things, besides the right way to use my binoculars. After a quick lesson from the dolphin trainers at Half Moon resort, a stone's throw from the Ritz, I swam with the dolphins (You have to be a guest of Half Moon or the Ritz-Carlton to participate).

Thanks to the hummingbirds and dolphins I felt like a kid again — middle age be damned! And Jamaica is so laid back that likely took a few years off too. Yeah, mon!

## If you go:

Air Canada offers decent rates — I flew executive class in November for less than the cost of a round trip economy to Europe.

Jakes Hotel, Treasure Beach: [www.jakes-shotel.com](http://www.jakes-shotel.com)

Caves, Negril: [www.islandoutpost.com/the-caves](http://www.islandoutpost.com/the-caves)

The Ritz-Carlton, Montego Bay: [www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/RoseHallaJamaica](http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/RoseHallaJamaica)

Half Moon Resort, Montego Bay: <http://halfmoon.rockresorts.com>



## Cabo San Lucas or Manzanillo

7 nights All Inclusive  
From **\$599\*** Conditions Apply  
Select January Departure Dates  
Save up to \$1000 per couple! **1-866-773-1811**

**PARK'N'FLY**  
**AIRPORT PARKING**  
PREMIUM "STRESS-FREE" VALET PARKING  
For less than Airport Terminal parking rates!

SAVE \$5 per day  
**\$1295\***

Plan your Winter Getaway to Fiji, Tahiti or the Cook Islands!

## AUCKLAND TO SYDNEY RETURN CAD \$1,480

INCLUDES ALL TAXES

Vancouver to Brisbane return **\$1647** including taxes  
Vancouver to Fiji return **\$1646** including taxes  
Vancouver to Auckland return **\$1843** including taxes

\*\*\*OVER 40 YEARS SOUTH PACIFIC EXPERIENCE\*\*\*

**2 Week Middle Earth NZ Package \$3445pp** Twin Share

Enjoy the fabulous landscapes famously filmed as Middle Earth. Package includes return airfare from Vancouver to Auckland, airfare taxes, 12 nights accommodation, tour of Hobbiton, tour of film sets, car rental, interisland ferry, Glenorchy tour and more!

Downunder TRAVEL  
(604) 742-0777  
1-877-346-0777  
contact@downunder-travel.com  
8102 - 1907 West 4th Ave., Vancouver • www.downunder-travel.com

MEMBER OF RITZ

## Mauí Condos

Book for 2013 & Save up to 25%!  
20 Properties Including  
Sugar Beach • Kahana Reef • Maui Vista  
Call us on Maui today!  
**800.822.4409**  
[www.MauiCondo.com](http://www.MauiCondo.com)