

Ocho Rios

Introduction - Jamaicans refer to it fondly as Ochee. The second-most important tourist town on the north coast, it offers the island's best shopping, plenty of regional attractions, varied nightlife and fairly good beaches. It sits on the edge of the jungle in a sheltered bay with a mountainous backdrop—truly lovely. Ocho Rios is Jamaica's most visited cruise-ship port, and many noncruisers frequent the all-inclusive resorts in the area. As it continues to develop, residents are encouraged to take more pride in their city and property, with regular maintenance and decorative plantings.

History - In 1494, Christopher Columbus landed about 8 mi/12 km west of today's Ocho Rios in a bay he named Santa Gloria (he was stranded at the same site nine years later, when his worm-infested ships sank). The Spanish initiated their first settlement—Sevilla la Nueva—on the site in 1509.

In the 17th century, local Spanish governor Don Christobel Arnaldo de Yssasi refused to give up control of the area to the British after they gained control of the island in 1655. Bloody battles ensued at Dunn's River in 1657, Rio Nuevo in 1658 and Shaw Park in 1659. Yssasi fled the island in a dugout canoe in April 1660.

The British farmed pimento, lumber and cattle, but Ocho Rios never developed into a major fruit-shipping port like other towns. It remained little more than a small town with a fishing harbor until the 20th century, when tourism and bauxite became mainstays of the local economy. In 1923, Shaw Park great house, located on a struggling citrus plantation, became Jamaica's first exclusive hotel. By 1948, it was joined by similar establishments, including Sans Souci and Silver Seas. Meanwhile, chemical analysis revealed that the local soil contained high levels of bauxite, the chief raw material used to produce aluminum.



Following this discovery, the bauxite mining industry took off, thanks to the efforts of foreign investors, Reynolds and Kaiser. This led to dredging and expanding the harbor, which served both the bauxite export and the cruise-ship industries.

The contemporary look of Ocho Rios was initiated in the 1960s, when the St. Ann Development Council sponsored tourism development, including shopping malls. As one of Jamaica's foremost tourist resorts, Ocho Rios has recently taken steps to further upgrade its facilities to meet the demands of 21st-century travelers.



Sights - Dunn's River Falls, with its series of cascades

that can be climbed; Fern Gulley, a narrow gorge lined with ferns; Shaw Park Gardens, with 25 acres/10 hectares of tropical gardens; Cranbrook Flower Forest, where the well-tended tropical gardens are superbly laid out and accessed along manicured trails; the natural stalactites and stalagmites at Green Grotto Caves.