

# Jamaica – An Island of Endemics!

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

### Outline Itinerary

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>Day 1</b>     | <u>Fly Kingston and transfer lodge</u>           |
| <b>Day 2 - 7</b> | <u>Daily excursions from Galina Breeze Hotel</u> |
| <b>Day 8</b>     | <u>Depart Kingston</u>                           |
| <b>Day 9</b>     | <u>Arrive UK</u>                                 |

### Departs

February

### Focus

Birds and other wildlife

### Grading

A. Optional day walks only.

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code JAM02)

### Highlights

- A high chance to see all 28 Jamaican endemics.
- Visit the Blue and John Crow Mountains.
- A whole host of other species including a range of stunning American wood warblers.
- Caribbean climate and stunning scenery
- Fantastic photographic opportunities.
- Stay at an excellent lodge with wonderful views, grounds and swimming pool.
- White-tailed Tropicbirds likely



Red-billed Streamertail, Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo, Jamaican Tody



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## Introduction

Jamaica, the third largest of the islands that comprise the West Indies, is also one of the richest in wildlife with extensive tracts of surviving rainforest, particularly in the Blue Mountains just inland from the capital Kingston. Perhaps better known for the lively tourist developments, there is a much quieter, stunningly picturesque side to Jamaica amid the coffee plantations and forests of the mountains. During the week, we will have time to enrich ourselves into the many cultural aspects of Jamaica, actively engaging in working coconut and coffee plantations and the works that go on; visiting a number of cultural sites in-between journeys and enjoying the very best of this stunning island.

Although finding the endemic birds of Jamaica will be our main prerogative, we won't be able to ignore the incredible diversity of wildlife on offer. Butterflies, dragonflies and reptiles are perfectly abundant along the forest trails, open gardens and plantations and we will be sure to go out and find as much of these as possible. Of the 28 endemic birds on offer, the Jamaican Owl is most sought-after and much time will go into finding this beautiful species.

During the week we will venture out to the Blue and John Crow mountains where some key endemics not to be found elsewhere will be our target. A number of other locations will also be visited, but for those that would prefer to skip an activity or take an afternoon off you can do just that. Reading by the swimming pool or relaxing in a hammock are some of the options.



John Crow Mountains (Matt Eade)

## Itinerary

*NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.*

### Day 1

### Depart UK, travel to St Mary Parish

Today, we depart London Gatwick Airport on a direct flight to Kingston, arriving early evening. We will meet our driver and start the three-hour journey to the northern coastline, to our hotel, Galina Breeze. Situated alongside the coastline, we will soon be listening to the crashing of the waves against the rocky shore below and breathing in the wonderful sea air, something we will have to get used to for the exciting week ahead.

After being shown our rooms, we will settle down for dinner after what will have been a long day of travelling.

### Day 2

After yesterday's long flight, we shall have a relaxing start to the day, slowly getting used to the birds which visit the gardens here, including Jamaica's small inhabitant, the Vervain Hummingbird. Views over the sea may also reveal Cave Swallows or a distant White-tailed Tropicbird. The warm air though will be a welcome relief away from the depths of the British winter which we have left behind. Some may even opt for a pre-breakfast swim in the salt-water swimming pool on the premises.

After breakfast, we will take a short 20-minute drive to a walking trail, where our first proper birding of the trip will commence. Here, we can expect to come across a number of Jamaican endemics, from Jamaican Euphonias to the exotically-looking Jamaican Spindalis.

A light lunch will be had back at the hotel, where during the heat of the day, we can relax by the pool or catch up on the jetlag, before we embark on an optional afternoon excursion to visit some old ruins or undertake a coconut walk, where we will be able to see the pickers in action, before indulging ourselves in the pickings – a welcome sensation during the heat of the day.



Black-billed Streamertail



## Day 3

## Blue Mountains

After tea and coffee, today we will make an early start and head out at around 05:00 with a packed breakfast.

Our destination will be the Blue Mountains which lie approximately 2 hours' drive to the east and inland from where we will spend time at the Hardwar Gap area looking for more specialities of Jamaica. We will bird here by walking along a winding paved road and with significant areas of damp forest remaining here and with lush flower rich gardens this area has a great deal to offer. The Blue Mountains hold the islands highest point with Blue Mountain Peak at 2256m and during our time birding in the area we shall hopefully encounter endemics such as Jamaican Blackbird, Blue Mountain Vireo and, if we are lucky, the beautiful but elusive Crested Quail Dove. Rufous-throated Solitaire, Arrowhead Warbler, Jamaican Blackbird, Jamaican Elaenia and Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo are just a few of the other species we may encounter here. In fact, we could come away with almost 80% of the endemic species, so this is sure to be a fantastic day in the hills.

Packed lunch will be taken in a personal cooler and we shall enjoy this out in the field. We will break for a cup of Blue Mountain Coffee at some stage and have the opportunity to buy some of this famous coffee to take back home, as well as watching the coffee producing in action. The afternoon will be spent birding a little further up the road enjoying more of Jamaica's superb bird life before we journey back to Galina.

## Day 4

## Strawberry Fields

After a long day out in the field yesterday, today will see us undertake little travelling as we head to Strawberry Fields (forever). The walking starts on a rubby track where you pass stools owned by local villagers and children making their way to school. Yellow-faced and Black-faced Grassquits



Black-throated Blue Warbler

should be present as we make our way through the trees towards the lookout point. Here, Cave Swallows should be flying about and we may even chance upon a Belted Kingfisher hunting along the shoreline. We pass a sheltered bay which in the past has held both Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night Herons. At the lookout, White-tailed Tropicbirds will hopefully be encountered circling high above the ocean and staying

out of the way of numerous Magnificent Frigatebirds.

Afterwards, we can pop into Annotto Bay to see what the various creeks and coastal patches have on offer. Out on the pontoons, American Royal Terns, Cabot's Terns and Laughing Gulls rest, while around the Palm Trees, Antillean Palm Swifts can be seen whizzing around at speed! The river channels in and around town can be excellent for wading birds on their wintering grounds: Least Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and Semipalmated Plovers can show very well indeed, and we may even come across a Collared Dove or two, to increase the species list. After our packed lunch, we will make our way back to the hotel for a relaxed afternoon.

## Day 5

## John Crow Mountains

We shall make an early start again today leaving at around 05:00 with a packed breakfast. Today we shall drive to the foothills of the John Crow Mountains, to an area called Ecclesdown Road. Ecclesdown Road is a superb birding area and has good numbers of endemics. The road loops around the eastern section of the John Crow Mountains and despite agricultural land encroaching on the forest there is nonetheless a great section of the route that passes through wonderfully intact habitat.

One of the star birds we are looking for today is the Black-billed Streamertail. It is endemic to a small area of Jamaica and one that we are unlikely to see anywhere else. At the foot of the John



Crested Quail-dove

Crow Mountains lies the wettest forest on the island and the most endemic-rich area in the Caribbean. We have the chance here again to see the difficult Crested Quail-Dove and the scarce Jamaican Blackbird though the birding in general is varied with lots to be found, Black-billed Amazon, Yellow-billed Amazon and Jamaican Crow are three other key species for the area.

Today we shall enjoy lunch at a local Jerk Centre at Boston and for the remainder of the day we shall spend time bird watching in the various habitats, looking out for Jamaican Oriole, Jamaican Becard and Arrow-headed Warbler to name a few. We shall return to our hotel for dinner and to run through our sightings for the day.

## Day 6

If we are yet to have found the Yellow-billed Parrot, our driver will know an excellent location in which to find this species, and from here, we will continue westwards along the northern coastline (passing the James Bond Hotel and Ian Fleming Airport) to an area of conserved forest, off the beaten track for many tour groups. This happens to be an excellent location for Jamaican Crow! A

small lake here may hold Blue-winged Teal, Jacana and other waterbirds. A small creek runs parallel with the road on the approach which looks superb for a host of North American wood-warblers, particularly Northern Waterthrush.

Activity wanes during the heat of the day, so a visit to a local Jerk chicken restaurant may well tempt us away from the birding, as well as a refreshing beverage along the beachfront, before retiring back to the hotel. One species we may have failed to see thus far could be the Northern Potoo, therefore, tonight, we shall go out in search of this incredible nocturnal species – armed with red light torches, we stand a good chance of finding a potoo atop a dead tree of electricity pole.

## Day 7

If it is necessary to re-visit any sites then today is the day to do this and we shall choose an area of the northern coastline to visit, hopefully catching up with anything we may have missed out on during the week.

Close to Annotto bay, a productive lake is just a short walk from the beach which often holds American Coot, Common Gallinule, Ruddy Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, both Least and Pied-billed Grebes and the lake margins often hold Green Heron, Spotted Sandpiper and Northern Jacana so this site is often worth a repeat visit!

Some may choose to go for a swim in the sea here, as the rocks provide shelter for a well-earned dip – although with the sea being so warm, it may not be as refreshing as one would like!

If the weather is fine, our packed lunch could even be taken on the beach.



Northern Potoo

During one of the evenings this week, dinner under the stars will be had next to some wonderful ruins, along with some great music!

## Day 8

## Fly UK

Today, we will have to leave for the airport and will have time for a final pre-breakfast walk and some birding around the grounds.

Before we depart for the airport, time can be spent packing, relaxing or birding around the gardens or trails before we must set off to Kingston to catch our flight home. On route to the airport, time allowing, we can make a short stop in Kingston. Some may like to have a look at the local market and nearby to here on the coast Brown Pelican, Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern and Magnificent Frigatebird can be seen. We can also do a short drive-by Bob Marley's house.

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## Tour Grading & Focus

Grade A. To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit and mobile as we will be spending time each day on foot. It is by no means a strenuous or difficult tour though, and all outings and walks are optional. This is not a hard-core birding holiday from dawn to dusk with an eye on rushing around and ticking as many species as possible. It is a relaxed, but focused, birdwatching holiday in lovely surroundings. We certainly hope over the week to see a great majority if not all Jamaican endemics though (in 2022, all endemics were found).

## Weather, Clothing & Equipment

Weather during February and March can be very warm with high humidity. Rain is always a possibility at any time being a rainforest habitat but soon passes so not to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment. A shower is often very welcome! Binoculars are strongly recommended for this tour.

## What's Included

All accommodation and meals are included.

All the rooms are very comfortable and are en-suite. There is a villa on the premises and upgrading to this for the week will be £350 per person if double occupancy (£750 for single occupancy).

## Extending Your Holiday

It is possible to both extend your stay on Jamaica, and visit another Caribbean Island; should that be of interest, we would be delighted to assist with the arrangements. Please speak to operations manager Matt Eade if you would like further details; 01962 733051 or [matt@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:matt@naturetrek.co.uk).

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk) or alternatively complete and post the booking



form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements at the time of booking.

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Jamaican Owl (Matt Eade - 2022 tour)