

Jamaica – An Island of Endemics!

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Fly Kingston; overnight Kingston.
Day 2 – 3	Transfer Blue Mountains. Excursions from Strawberry Hill Hotel.
Day 4 – 7	Transfer north coast. Excursions from Goblin Hill Villas.
Day 8 – 9	Depart Kingston; arrive UK.

Departs

February

Focus

Birds and other wildlife

Grading

A. Optional day walks only.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code JAM02)

Highlights

- An excellent 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 beautiful scenery
- Fantastic photographic opportunities.



Jamaican Tody, Blue Mountains, Jamaican Lizard Cuckoo



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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, concentrating on two key birdwatching areas (Blue Mountains and the north coast, staying at two lovely accommodations), we are likely to come across all 28 of Jamaica's endemic bird species, usually with relative ease. Staying in the heart of the best birding locations, travel time in the vehicle will be reduced, ensuring there is time to relax at the hotels to appreciate the stunning views of this tropical island.

Although finding the endemic birds of Jamaica will be our main aim, we won't be able to ignore the incredible diversity of wildlife on offer. Butterflies, dragonflies and reptiles are abundant along the forest trails, open gardens and plantations and we will be sure to find as much as possible but at a relaxed pace through the week. Of the 28 endemic birds on offer, the Jamaican Owl and Crested Quail Dove are the most sought-after and much time will go into finding these special species and the local team know the very best locations. As well as the endemic birds, we can also expect to see a selection of wintering North American warblers which may include Black-and-white, Yellow-throated, Worm-eating, Cape May and Black-throated Blue Warblers along with American Redstart. Coastal and wetland birds range from Magnificent Frigatebird and Brown Pelican to White-tailed Tropicbird and Royal Tern. In total we can expect to see around 100-120 species.



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, overnight in Kingston

Today we depart London Gatwick Airport on a direct flight to Kingston, arriving in the early evening. From the airport we will transfer for around 45 minutes to our nearby overnight hotel. Dinner will be provided and we can have a good rest after our long journey, ready and fresh for our picturesque transfer to the Blue Mountains the following morning.

Day 2

Blue Mountains

The Blue Mountains hold the island's 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, stunning Jamaican Spindalis 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 from our two-night stay with almost 90% of the endemic species, so this is sure to be a fantastic period in the hills.

After breakfast in Kingston, we will get out birding in the Hellshire Hills and selected sites around Kingston where targets will include a locally restricted population of Bahama Mockingbird together with the spectacular Jamaican Mango, ever-vocal Loggerhead Kingbird, Stolid Flycatcher and Jamaican Vireo, before we slowly ascend the windy roads, passing lush gardens and damp rainforest, eventually arriving at the grounds of Strawberry Hill. Hosting expansive grounds, spa treatments, a swimming pool and 12 suites, we will explore this special place, encountering some of the endemic bird species as we go. An optional night birding outing will be on offer this evening after dinner for those who wish. Our primary target will be one of Jamaica's most enigmatic species, the Jamaican Owl. Elusive in its nature, we will require luck to find one, but with expert help we stand a good chance.



Strawberry Hill

Day 3

Blue Mountains

We will head out this morning into the Blue Mountains to enjoy the array of special birds to be found here. Those who wish can of course explore around the lodge grounds before we leave and

we will enjoy the trails here too. Species such as Jamaican Tody, Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo Ring-tailed Pigeon, Jamaican Euphonia, Jamaican Woodpecker, White-chinned Thrush, Rufous-tailed Flycatcher and the wonderful Red-billed Streamertail are among many species we hope to find today. In the afternoon we will visit a coffee farm and sample a cup of famous Blue Mountain Coffee. With afternoons a fairly relaxed affair, we will have time to appreciate our surroundings by either relaxing by the pool or exploring the hotel grounds, enjoying the birdlife and other avian delights such as White Admiral or Julia Heliconian butterflies.

Birdwatching in the Blue Mountains is usually along tarmac roads or tracks, but rarely along steep or muddy paths, so expect the terrain to be good for walking.



Red-billed Streamertail

Day 4

Blue Mountains to Goblin Hill

This morning we will enjoy more exciting Blue Mountain birding to try to find any species which may have eluded us so far and then we will move on to travel to the north coast and our next accommodation for four nights at Goblin Hill Villas. We will descend northwards toward the coastal road before turning east and making our way towards the coastal town of San San. Here at Goblin Hill, we will be overlooking the turquoise waters of San San Bay and the hotel has extensive grounds and a swimming pool. This is a perfect base to explore the area.

Day 5 - 7

Goblin Hill

Over the next three days we will take birding outings to explore the area and also allow time to relax and explore the hotel grounds and our immediate surroundings. The itinerary will be kept flexible and at times depend on what we have seen previously.

On one morning we shall make an early start and drive to the foothills of the John Crow Mountains, to an area called Ecclesdown Road. Ecclesdown Road is a superb birding area and many endemics can be found here. The road loops around the eastern section of the John Crow Mountains and despite agricultural land encroaching on the forest, there is nonetheless an excellent section of the route that passes through wonderfully intact habitat. One of the star birds we will be looking for 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 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 and Yellow-billed Amazon, White-eyed Thrush, Jamaican Tody, Sad Flycatcher, Blue Mountain Vireo, impressively sized Chestnut-bellied Cuckoo and Jamaican Crow



are other key species for the area.

Wintering American warblers can be seen with patience and sharp eyes, especially if seeking out the ultra-elusive Swainson's Warbler and Ovenbird, which inhabit the dark understorey. More conspicuous are Black-throated Blue, Cape May and Prairie Warblers, along with American Redstart and Black-and-white Warbler. Lunch on one day will be enjoyed at a local Jerk Centre.

Dependent upon our successes at John Crow, we may make a return visit, either along Ecclesdown Road, or elsewhere in this productive corner of the island. Time will be spent birding in the various habitats, looking out for Jamaican Oriole, Jamaican Becard and Arrow-headed Warbler to name a few. At all times, we will return to the hotel in good time for some relaxation before dinner.

On another day, a short adventure down to the coast will provide us with plenty of variety, with Magnificent Frigatebird, Cabot's Tern, Laughing Gull and American Royal Tern in abundance, with waders possibly comprising, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Plover and Hudsonian Whimbrel. We will also travel further east along the coast to an excellent area to observe White-tailed Tropicbirds, a coastal lookout point giving us a good chance to observe these sublimely beautiful seabirds.

Further birdwatching around this part of the island will be dictated by what we have yet to see, so expect the itinerary to remain flexible, with some early starts to maximise the best time in the field and also time to relax at the hotel.

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. En 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 here on the coast, Brown Pelican, American Royal Tern, Cabot's Tern and Magnificent Frigatebird can be seen. We can also do a short drive-by of Bob Marley's house. If we have not already done so, we will also set aside time to visit the usually productive Botanical Gardens where sightings typically include roosting Northern Potoos, feeding Yellow-billed Amazons and Olive-throated Parakeet along with the minuscule but brazen Vervain Hummingbird.

Day 9

Arrive UK

Late morning we will arrive back at Gatwick South Terminal where we shall bid farewell to one another.

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, and all outings and walks are optional. This is not a fast-paced, dawn-to-dusk birding holiday with an eye on rushing around and ticking as many species as possible. It is a relaxed, but focused, birdwatching holiday in lovely surroundings. The daily start times will vary depending on planned birding outings and activities for the following day and we will have some early starts but also time to relax in the afternoons.

Both hotels have excellent grounds for birds and wildlife, so when we do have time at the hotels, those who wish to carry on seeing birds can do so.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

Weather during the British winter is usually very warm with high humidity. It should be noted that on most days, the sun will already be very hot by the time we get to birding sites, especially those that require longer time spent in the transport vehicle. Please therefore bring plenty of water and take precautions to guard against the sun. 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. Meals commence from dinner on Day 1 and finish with lunch on Day 8. Also included is one soft drink per meal – any extra or alcoholic will be chargeable.

Accommodations

To ensure we have as little time in the tour vehicle as possible, we have split this tour into two main sections. After our overnight stay in an airport hotel in Kingston, we move on to the Blue Mountains. Two nights at the luxurious Strawberry Hill Estate in the Blue Mountains will ensure we can find the majority of the endemic landbirds without venturing too far. Our next accommodation, the Goblin Hill Villas at San San along the north coast, ensures we are close to other key areas. We stay here for four nights.

Strawberry Hill Retreat

This mountain retreat is situated within the Blue Mountains. Featuring a pool, spa facilities, expansive grounds and stunning hill-top views. Two nights will be spent here. On site, there are 12 Georgian-style suites.



Goblin Hill Villas

Hosting 11 acres of lawns and gardens, a swimming pool and views of the Caribbean Ocean, this hotel is also in one of the remotest corners of Jamaica. Four nights will be spent here.



Extending Your Holiday

It is possible to extend your stay on Jamaica or visit another Caribbean island; should that be of interest, we would be delighted to assist with the arrangements. Please speak to operations manager Tom Mabbett if you would like further details: 01962 733051 or tom@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 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)



Jamaican Giant Anole (Andy Smith)