

Jamaican

Eco-Adventures

By Miriam Porter

From trekking through waterfalls to catching speed on a bobsled through the rainforest, Jamaica is luring travellers with eco-friendly adventures.

With my waving hand outstretched, hoping our friendly Jamaican guide Orlando would help pull me over the slippery rocks, and with cool rushing water splashing me in the face, I couldn't stop laughing. Half an hour earlier at the beach before starting the trek up Dunn's River Falls, our group was instructed to hold hands and walk toward the rushing water. We were strangers united through sweaty palms and nervous smiles. We took our first cautious steps up the rocks like toddlers walking for the first time.

I am a city girl at heart, but when travelling, I try to find eco-friendly adventures and this fulfilled my need for the great outdoors. The flowing falls of Dunn's River are located near Ocho Rios and are one of Jamaica's national treasures. They extend across more than 600 feet and are the only waterfalls like this in the Caribbean islands. They are constantly regenerating from deposits of travertine rock and the calcium carbonate from the river's precipitation, similarly to thermal springs like those found in limestone caves.

Originally called *Las Chorreras* by the Spaniards, it appropriately translates to mean "the waterfalls or springs." It's believed the falls are the site of a famous battle fought between the Spanish and English for island ownership in 1657 – the battle of *Las Chorreras*.

At that moment, with my toes gripping the smooth rocks, all I care about is not falling. But hey, if young children are doing it (and they were), surely, I could too. So, I trek onwards and upwards and smile at each photographer along the way snapping photos to sell me later (there is no pressure to purchase). I pass natural river pools and rest in one at the halfway point. Some guests called it quits at the 'escape routes' along the way but I am determined to finish the climb in my battle against the flowing waters.

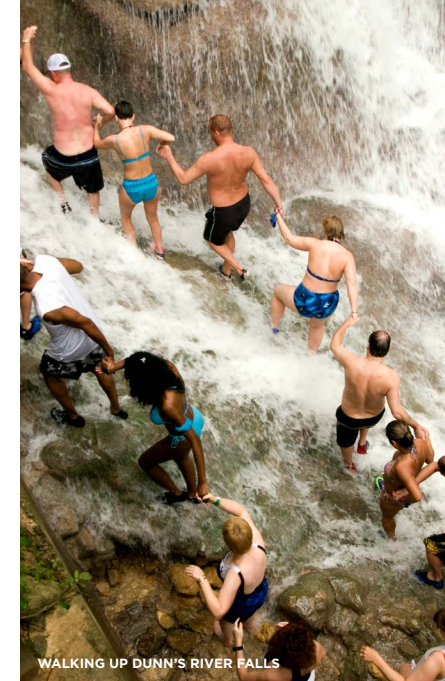
This is definitely a day of firsts as hours earlier I had driven a bobsled through the rainforest. Yes, that's right, a bobsled. I visited Rainforest Adventures and was strapped into a gravity-driven, Jamaican-inspired bobsled. At first, I hesitantly crept along using my manual brake way too often, but as my confidence grew, I raced down the track at lightning speed. Not sure if I was sweating from the heat or my nerves, the wind quickly dried my face as I whipped by trees, grinning all the way.

To get to this thrilling ride, you must first soar high over the island at 700 feet above sea level in the Sky Explorer – a canopy ride resembling a ski lift, except instead of snow, there are tropical fruit trees and singing birds. At the top, I was excited to find a hummingbird garden designed to attract free flying birds in their natural environment. The educational pavilion includes hummingbird facts and photos, and we were advised to step lightly on the earth while hiking and learning about Jamaica's ecosystem. The plants, animals, birds, and insects along these trails depend on each other for survival.

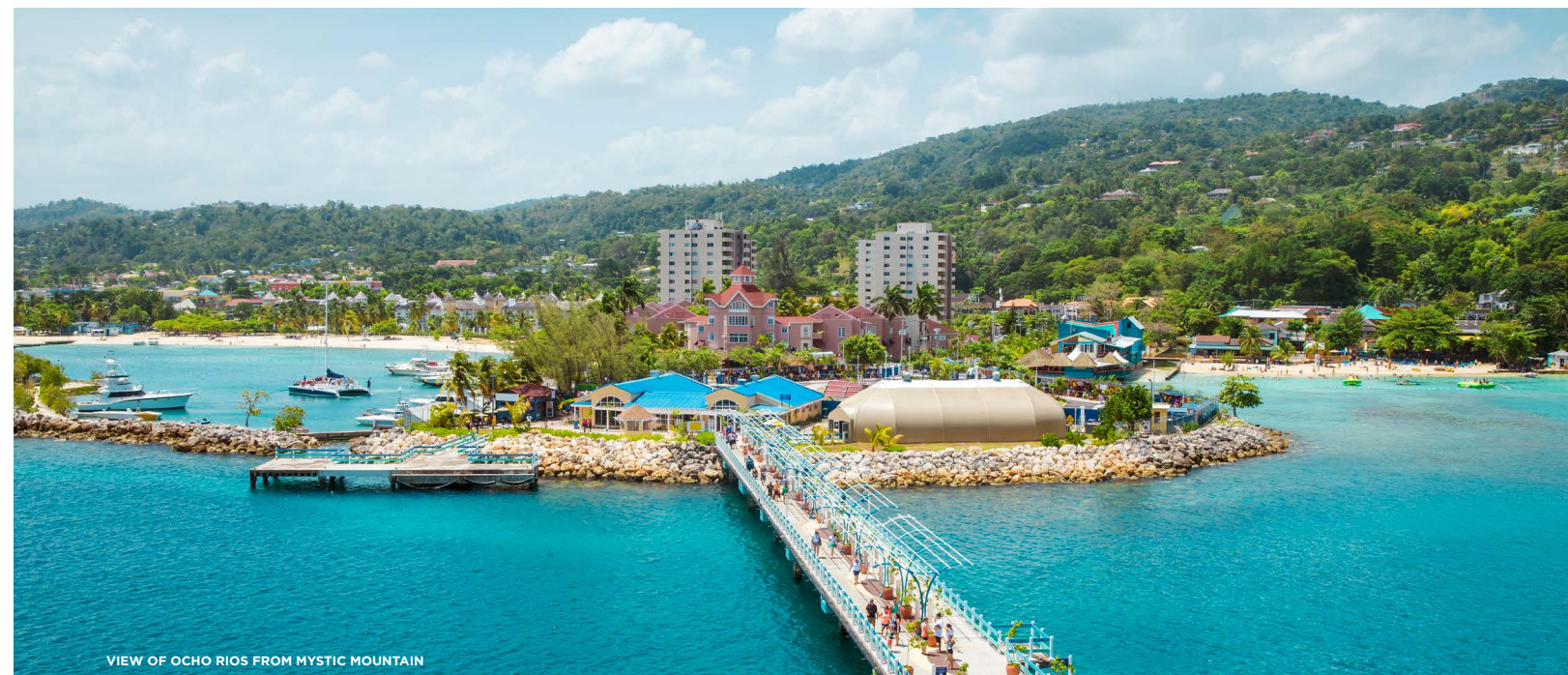
Back at Meliá Braco Village, my resort in Rio Bueno, I continue my nature-themed day at its famous Jamaican fruit cart. With an entire coconut in one hand and freshly sliced pineapple, mango and soursop in the other, I look out at the ocean reflecting on my accomplishments. I am often told to live in the moment and to stop thinking about endless to-do lists, laundry piles, deadlines, and responsibilities – but we all know it's easier said than done. However, spending time in nature doing activities requiring my entire concentration forced me not to worry about what I can't control, to be present, and enjoy life. And as our smiling guide taught me that morning, everything is definitely *irie* in Jamaica.



DUNN'S RIVER FALLS



WALKING UP DUNN'S RIVER FALLS



VIEW OF OCHO RIOS FROM MYSTIC MOUNTAIN



MELIÁ FRUIT CART © MIRIAM PORTER



MIRIAM ON THE BOBSLED © MIRIAM PORTER

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