

IMAGINE...

... in nine hours time you could be relaxing on a hammock with a rum and ginger beer watching the sun descend into the sea on the horizon in a blaze of glory with the strains of Bob Marley playing in the background...

Cliffhouse review by Cherry Martin, Editor of Dockland Life Magazine.

If the nail scraping boredom of the all-inclusive resorts of the Caribbean is not your thing why not do it your own way and ensure total privacy and freedom by grabbing your close friends or family and spending a week at the Cliff House – I can guarantee it will leave you feeling happily relaxed and recharged.

Air Jamaica offer good deals flying into Montego Bay from Gatwick and after nine hours in the air we touched down onto Caribbean soil.

The warmth of the 32 degrees of sun hit us immediately once stepping off the plane and was a welcome change from the miserable 12 degrees we had left behind us at Gatwick.

We were met and quickly taken care of by O'Neil, villa manager of the Cliffhouse, who is on hand at all times to advise you on how to make the most out of your trip.

The Cliff House is a forty minute drive from the airport to Cousins Cove, a quiet little fishing village. This is situated halfway between the towns of Lucea and Green Island, both of which have a 'Super Plus' supermarket for you to purchase all of your holiday food and drink. Bear in mind that only Lucea has a cash point. Cousins Cove is truly picturesque and unspoilt Jamaica. Breathe deeply and the fresh air carries sea salt mixed with the strong scent of sugar canes growing on the hills into your lungs.

The villa itself...

When you first open the large double doors and step into the villa you are met with a massive lounge, kitchen and living room area which is more than enough space for everyone to be comfortable on large comfy hand crafted sofas to flop on.

The kitchen is very well equipped to an exceptionally high standard with every utensil and appliance known to man, including a dishwasher and American ice-making and chilled water supplying fridge. Tall ceilings and fans keep the house cool.

The house consists of four double rooms and one twin room, and three bathrooms (two en-suite) with shower facilities.

The layout of the rooms makes the house work equally well for families or couples, with all rooms being interconnected for ease of access (each door

can also be locked for privacy if required). Each bedroom is a good size with four poster beds covered by essential mosquito nets and has ample storage space of wardrobes and chests of drawers.

For peace of mind, the villa is fully gated and alarmed with outdoor lighting in all areas. All visitors must pass by O'Neil's house at the top of the long drive before gaining access to the villa.

My favourite area, however, was hanging out in the outdoor area. A high wooden roof covers the banquet style table with bamboo lights overhead. The sound system has been engineered to play out here and/or inside the villa and there is a large gas barbecue for cooking your fresh lobster on. The villa is set in 1.2 acres of lush tropical woodland and exploring it is a must. Fruit is in abundance here and you will discover ackee, breadfruit, limes, bananas, mango and coconut. Also hidden is a kids dream tree house.

Lazy days...

Days spent at the villa comprise of waking up at any time you please and swinging open the huge double doors to reveal the stunning ocean view and another day in the hot sun.

First decision of the day is where to enjoy your breakfast – on the verandah, by the pool or in the outdoor area. Take your snorkelling gear along as the villa is perched above a coral reef. Climbing down a small ladder will lead you to the home of many vibrantly coloured tropical fish and perfectly formed brain coral. We snorkelled every day whilst we were there and concluded that for water clarity the best time was first thing in the morning as often there will be an hour long tropical rain storm during the afternoon which shakes up the plant life in the water a bit. Make sure that you purchase a few disposable underwater cameras before you travel!

If lazing by the pool under a deep blue sky is your thing it can get even better by having a massage next to it... Alternatively if you can't sit still you can either ask O'Neil to give you his rates for driving you to some of the areas attractions or hire a jeep and cruise around the island at your leisure. Alternatively, if you just plan on staying in the area, taxis are by far the cheapest way around. Simply stand by the side of the road in the direction that you want to go and wait for one to pull over. Wedged in with five people in the back it is an experience in itself which only costs \$100J to the nearest town which is the equivalent of £1.

Owner of The Cliff House, re-knowned photographers, John Ross has made many friends in the Cousins Cove area all of which can make your stay special. If you're not in the mood for cooking, Yogi is the local legendary

chef and for \$7US per head will come and create an excellent dinner for you and your guests.

Not to be missed while you're out there...

Has it always been your dream to swim with dolphins? Well, a two hour drive around the coast will place you at Dunns River Falls where you can strike one dream off your wish list. For varying prices you can have a 'meet and kiss' in shallow water or for a little more you can swim with them in deep water.

Half Moon Beach is a ten minute drive from the Cliff House and is the most beautiful little private beach in the area. Instead of paying the \$3 entrance fee, buy a drink at the bar and receive 'respect.' You can spend hours floating around in the water which is crystal clear and shallow for a good way out. Take a snorkel with you and snorkel over to the nearby island and feel as though you own your own bit of the Caribbean.

Go and catch your dinner with a spot of early morning fishing with Byron in the ocean. Only a mile and half out from shore and we trawled around in a traditional fishing boat and caught a large tuna which Yogi then transformed into a lip smackingly good dinner.

Go waterfall climbing. One of Jamaica's many attractions is spending a day at one of the islands many waterfalls. For a small fee O'Neill will take you to Mayfield Falls where you can clamber around the rocks and enjoy another side of Jamaica's scenery.

If diving is your thing or if you've always wanted to learn, Patrick can walk you through your PADI course for \$200 and you start in the confines of the pool before moving out to the sea, where he will take you diving out past the reef.

Nearby Negril plays home to the main watersports area and for around \$30 US you can join a hotel for a day and have full use of all of their facilities. It is a wakeboarders paradise with glass top seas and Mastercrafts waiting for you to latch on behind them. Make sure that you take your own boards with you as the bindings out there are shot. Alternatively you can power up and down the beach on jetskis. Windsurfing equipment is available but very rarely used due to the lack of wind on this side of the island.

Fans of Norah Jones will find the inspiration for her song ‘The Prettiest Thing’ every night, as 11 miles out to sea there was a phenomenal electric storm which would last for about 40 minutes. Sit with a drink and gaze in awe at massive streaks of fork lightening fuse into the sea.

Nights at the villa can be as laid back or as raucous as you want; chilling out with a Red Stripe and playing cards or backgammon or hosting a party with the friends that you’ve made over there. Byron can deliver crates of drink for you if asked in advance.

Alternatively, you can travel into one of the many resort hotels along the beachfront in Negril for a meal. Annies on the beach offers a fabulous view of the sun setting over the sea whilst you dine. It has an extensive a la carte menu which you can study by candlelight and the coconut chicken is not to be missed.

So for a fantastic week away where your only issue is whether you prefer Yogi’s Jerk lobster to the garlic lobster definitely go and experience the gem that is The Cliff House.

A week at The Cliff House is excellent value costs £1500 for full hire of the villa and housekeeping. Christmas and New Year is priced at £2000 Visit www.cliffhousejamaica.com for more details.

FACT BOX:

If you are a British national you don’t generally need any specific vaccinations to travel to Jamaica, however it is worth checking with the Jamaican Tourist Board on www.visitjamaica.com before you travel as it is contingent on your previous travels within the last 6 months.

One of the things that really did hit me with this island was I was expecting to have total freedom of exploration with the villa and the jeep, however, sadly like so many of these islands it is just not safe to park up and walk around exploring. Make sure that if you do go exploring to take O’Neil with you.