

Make It Jamaica. Again....

After you cross Cuba by air, Jamaica appears below, like a splash of camouflage in the clear Caribbean Sea. Close up, the limes and olive greens give way to the silver squares of metal roofs glinting in the sun and you can make out the vivid scrawl of clay-colored tracks running higgledy-piggledy between them, as if some wayward child had scribbled, undisciplined, across the face of a map.

Driving into town, the sights and sounds assault the senses. Your eyes are dazzled by dozens of flowers—bougainvillea, oleander, hibiscus. The road is lined with palms and in between you catch tantalizing glimpses of the sea, scattered with sailboats.

Scenes flash past. A naked boy fishes by the water's edge. A goat scampers in and out of vegetable stalls. A couple of motor-

ists, arms flailing, argue as a group of villagers push and shove around them, vainly trying to pry their cars apart.

You pass a record store and the heavy driving thump of reggae throbs through the open window. A DJ burbles, "Radio RJR. Sound of Jamaica. Sound of the Caribbean. Sound of the WORLD. Thousands of tons of music..."

Jamaica—11,425 square kilometres of mountains, rivers, beaches and rain forests—has always appealed to vacationing Canadians. Even during the disastrous years of Michael Manley's socialist government, when crime rates shot up, Canadians continued to come to this Caribbean hot spot.

Things stabilized considerably when Prime Minister Edward Seaga took over the

reigns of power in October 1980. Ever since then the tourist industry has been going great guns. Tourist traffic is up 42.7 per cent from last year, and this season an estimated 70,000 Canadians are expected to vacation on the island.

Jamaica is so popular because there's a lot more to see and do than on most Caribbean islands. Geographically, it's amazing diverse. Jamaica's rivers are ideal for rafting, her mountains wonderful for hiking. And there's an amazing choice of sports available to holidaymakers—windsurfing, swimming, scuba diving, snorkelling, sailing, riding, golfing, cycling to name but a few.

History buffs can explore the elegant Great Houses, former homes of the plantation owners who used to rule the island with

an iron hand.

Much of the activity centres around the resort towns of Ocho Rios and Montego Bay on the north coast, Negril on the west. All offer sea, sun and sand in abundance, but each town has a different feel to it. Ocho Rios is perfect for people with families, while Montego Bay, the largest and most established resort, offers the most variety. Negril is for those who want to enjoy a hedonistic lifestyle, the swinging singles syndrome.

The following is a brief breakdown of each area.

OCHO RIOS

Named by the Spanish, Las Chorreros (the waterfalls), this town's most famous landmark is Dunn's River Falls, probably the most photographed spot in the Caribbean. They tumble from a height of 600 feet in a series of gently-graded rocky steps and visitors can paddle up and down with the help of a guide.

On Thursday evenings the place gets lively. A "Jamaica Feast" is staged at the foot of the falls and by the light of flaming torches, diners can stuff themselves stupid on a banquet of pumpkin soup, barbecued chicken and roast suckling pig. The ticket is under \$30 U.S. and the price includes as much rum as you can knock back in an evening. The night terminates with a dazzling floor show complete with drummers, fire eaters and limbo dancers.

Ocho Rios has a good selection of hotels and restaurants. Eateries range from the Brigadoon, which specializes in seafood, to the Almond Tree, where visitors can try typically Jamaican dishes.

Next door to the Almond Tree is the Hibiscus Tree Lodge, a reasonably-priced hotel that is ideal for families on a budget. Rooms start at \$35 U.S. per night. Turtle Beach Towers (a condominium), Hotel Inter-Continental and Mallards Beach-Hyatt, are also popular with families. All have facilities for children. Villas cost \$700-\$1500 U.S. per week and some hotels have self-catering "efficiencies" for rent as well as regular rooms.

MONTEGO BAY

Montego Bay (or Mobay as most people call it), is still an industrial town, with busy, bustling streets. It's Jamaica's second largest city. Of the big three resorts, Mobay offers the largest-on-the-island selection of hotels and restaurants.

They are too numerous to list here, but they range from the prestigious Royal Caribbean Hotel to inexpensive guest houses like the Ocean View, Toby Inn and Wexford Court Hotel. The Half Moon Club is the classiest place in town, an exclusive resort hotel where visitors can play golf, tennis and squash as well as all the usual watersports.

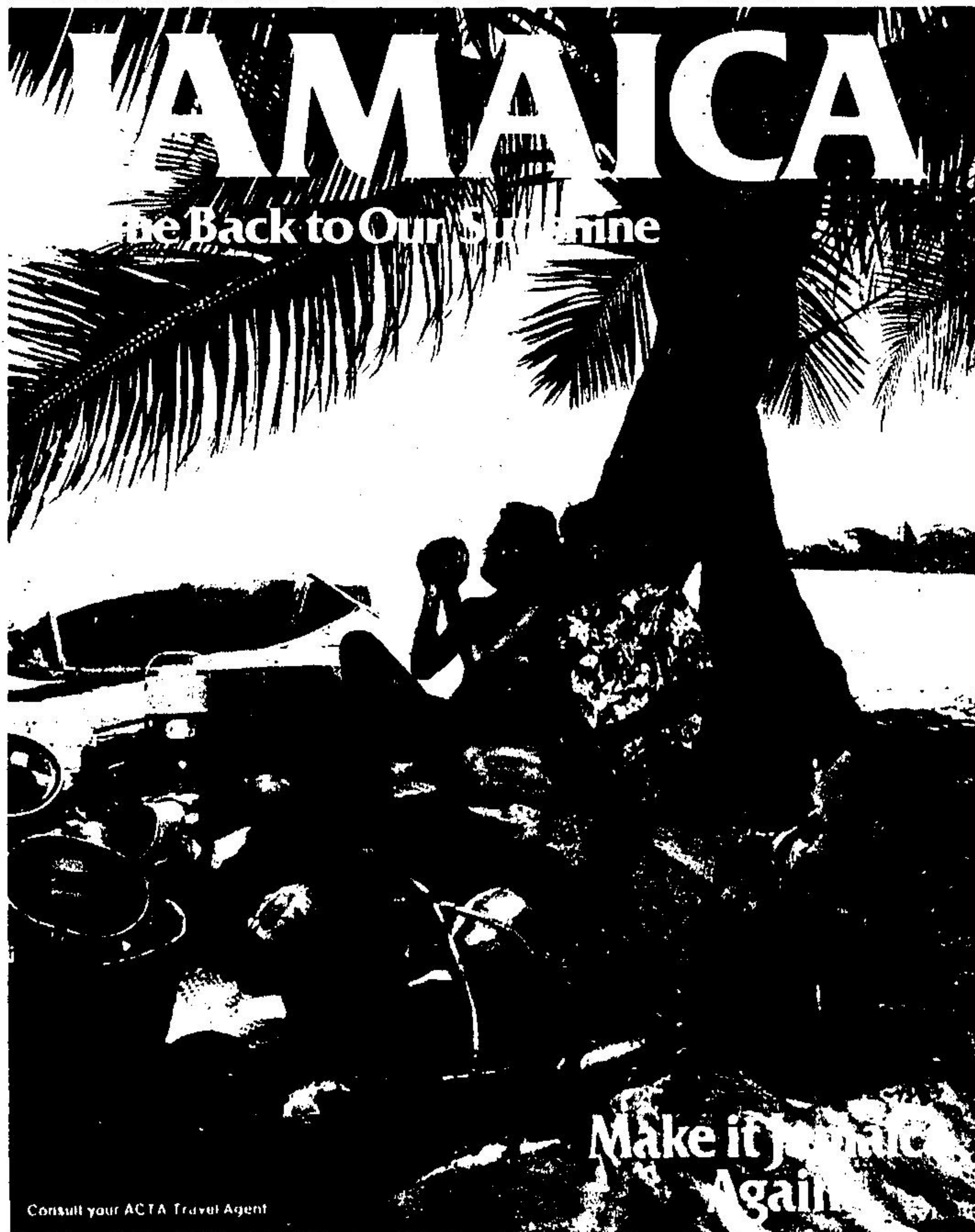
NEGRIL

Things were sort of quiet around Negril until it was discovered by long-hairs in the '60s. Word soon spread that it was a great place to trade a little ganja and commune with nature, and before long, the quiet fishing village was transformed into a nirvana for pot-smoking hippies.

Vacationers let it all hang out at resorts like the Sundowner Hotel, the Negril Beach Hotel and Hedonism II. Hedonism II, which was formerly known as Negril Beach Village, has recently been revamped to the tune of \$1 million and this resort offers Club Med style all-inclusive holidays (food, flight, accommodation and as much booze as you can drink) for around \$1,000 (one week).

This season there's an astonishing selection of packaged tours available.

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