

Jamaica rocks



One of the pools at the Sandals resort in Montego Bay, Jamaica. For more photos, see the Friday, March 14 edition of The Suburban Magazine at www.thesuburban.com

By **Melanie Reffes**
The Suburban

As any Montrealer worth her (or his) sea salt will tell you, escaping winter's wrath is a no-brainer. With plenty of flights from Montreal, Jamaica is the fan favourite when the snow is piling up at home. The second largest city after Kingston, Montego Bay not only invites with the holy trinity of the sun, surf and sand but is also the tourism epicentre with a tropical cornucopia of beds for heads and a myriad of activities under the sun. "We are blessed with a number of hidden gems which celebrate our culture and our people," said John Lynch, director of tourism. "Whether it is soaring through the tree tops, savouring the taste of our spicy jerk, horseback riding on the beach, rafting on one of our many rivers or enjoying a catamaran cruise."

One love

In the mountains of St. Ann, Nine Mile is action-central for tours of the cottage where reggae icon Bob Marley was born on Feb. 6, 1945. Rastafarian guides, some related to the Marley family, take folks inside the house to see the single bed that was immortalised in the lyrics of *Is This Love?* to Mount Zion Rock made famous in *Talking Blues*, and to the mausoleum where Marley is buried along with his guitar — which is either a red Fender Stratocaster or a Gibson Les Paul, depending on who you ask.

Sold by both Chukka Adventures and Island Routes, tours on the Zion Bus Line whisk reggae fans along winding roads while guides pour potent rum drinks. "This is one of our most popular tours as the views, the villages and the music transport our guests into the heart of Jamaica," said Daniel Melville, Chukka Caribbean's director marketing.

A natural high

Through picturesque coffee plantations and past cascading waterfalls, Blue Mountain Bicycle Tours take cyclists to the un-touristy side of Jamaica.

"A large percentage of our cyclists are Canadian," said Orlando Dawkins, marketing director. "We find them to be more adventurous, in tuned with community tourism and excellent riders."

Breathtakingly beautiful, tours cover a distance of 29 kilometres, although most of it is downhill and delightfully suitable for novice cyclists. "No longer is Jamaica viewed as just a stretch of white sandy beach; tourists are way more interested in satisfying their appetite for adventure and are demonstrating the desire to experience the splendour of Jamaica," adds Dawkins.

For the brave and the brazen, The Ultimate Coyaba Challenge involves a 45-minute bike ride, a walk down 177 steps that overlook the waterfall in the forest and a climb back up.

A watery world of fun, Kool Runnings is family-friendly with 10 water slides, lazy river ride that snakes through waterfalls and under bridges, a bungee trampoline and the Kool Tings gift shop. From Ocho Rios, Negril and Montego Bay, Horseback Ride 'N' Swim takes riders through the countryside atop a serene stallion. Passing the dramatic cliffs, the tour finishes with a trot into the warm waters of the Caribbean Sea.

Under the Covers

With a guestbook that includes Clark Gable and Queen Elizabeth II, Half Moon, A RockResort sits on a pair of half-moon shaped beaches dotted with palm trees that keep a steady beat with the breeze. Worth the splurge, Sugar Mill restaurant is delicious after a day at the equestrian centre, dolphin lagoon,

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A voice festival to bring the generations together

From March 21 to 23, a first-of-its-kind music festival will take place on the West Island celebrating the voices of diverse group of singers.

"I was looking for a venue to promote the art of singing," says Festival de la voix founder Kerry-Anne Kutz. "I wanted the festival to include young people and older people as singers. I also wanted to include concerts, master classes, an opportunity for an education in singing, and a competition for young singers."

The festival will kick off on Friday, March 21 at St. Columba-by-the-Lake Church (11 Rodney, Pointe Claire) with a show entitled The Stars of Tomorrow, which will showcase rising stars such as Sarah Rossy's indie group Shyre, Broadway singer Brandon Schwartz, operatic baritone Olivier Bergeron, blues singer Trevor Gilmore, coloratura Erin Johnston, jazz diva Megan Griffin, and Mathilde and Alexandre Bichut.

The morning of Saturday, March 22 will see the start of the voice competition, which will be followed by a gala concert featuring Rane Lee at 8 p.m. at St. Mark's Church, (865 Lakeshore, Dorval).

"Not only is she singing in the gala concert, she's also an adjudicator for the jazz and pop competition on Saturday," says Kutz of Lee.

"She's really interested in the festival. She's taken a lot of time to think about how



In addition to performing at the Voice festival Saturday gala, Rane Lee will also act as an adjudicator for the jazz and pop competition.

to help us put it together."

The Gala concert will also feature tenor Luc Menard; Les voix de Montréal — a mass choir made up of singers from all over Montreal conducted by Margo Keenan; and (sopranos) Kutz, Susanna Eyton-Jones, Sonia Castiglione and Sheila Faour Warren.

Sunday will wrap up with a concert featuring the winners of the competition at 4

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Robert Trent Jones Sr.-designed 18-hole championship golf course and the Fern Tree Spa where therapists use the Jamaican aphrodisiac called "ram goat dash along" in many of their massages.

If you think you've stepped onto a movie set upon entering Round Hill, you're right on the money. The film How Stella Got Her Groove Back was filmed at the resort that sits on a pineapple and coconut plantation overlooking the sea.

The granddaddy of the all-inclusive vacation, there are seven Sandals and Beaches Resorts in Jamaica.

In Montego Bay, Sandals Royal Caribbean is closest to the Sangster International Airport, Sandals Carlyle is on the Hip Strip and Sandals Montego Bay fronts the largest private white sand



The Tryall Club in Montego Bay boasts a world-class golf course.

beach on the north coast.

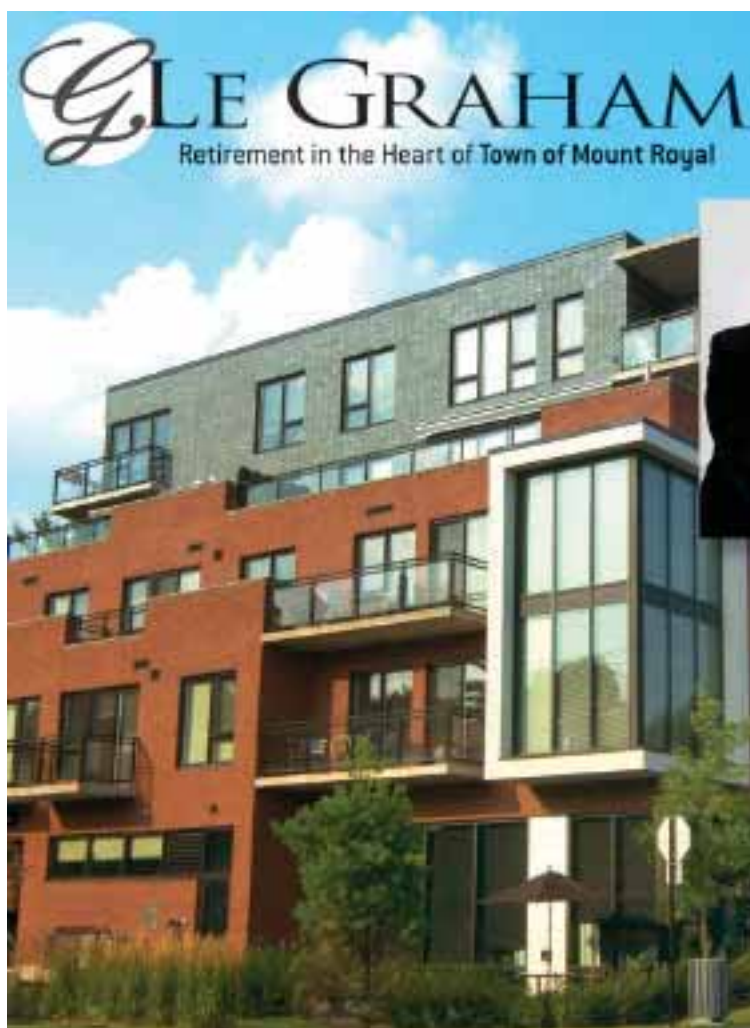
Built by Sunwing, Royalton White Sands is new in Trelawny with 352-rooms, five restaurants and free calls to the Canada.

Ideal for grown-ups, Jewel Paradise Cove Beach Resort is a new all-inclusive with smoothie bars, Radiant Spa and tours to nearby Dunn's River Falls. www.jewelresorts.com.

Window seat

Air Canada flies weekly direct nonstop from Montreal to Montego Bay. For an extra special treat while you wait for the flight home, Club MoBay at the Sangster International Airport offers gratis Wi-Fi, spa and an array of Jamaican snacks.

WestJet and Transat fly direct nonstop from Montreal.



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