



*Welcome to Rott's Manor*

Pete & Mary Clukey

## Jamaica 2003 Trip Report

The weekend started a little bit rough for Mary. She had the 24hr stomach flu or mild food poisoning. Too many Pre-Christmas goodies were being passed around at work. But by Sunday, the day before our flight to Jamaica, Mary was up to eating chicken broth. She didn't feel up to driving on Sunday so Pete took the kids to the kennel.

On Monday December 22 we boarded the 8:50am flight on Air Jamaica from Atlanta to Montego Bay Jamaica. Now Air Jamaica boasts itself as the champagne flights to the Caribbean. And even that early in the morning champagne was being offered. For some reason Mary declined the offer of the bubbly.

We arrived in Montego Bay, Jamaica just before noon. We found our bus and had to wait outside for other flights to arrive before our bus was full enough to whisk us away on our 3 hour journey to Ocho Rios. The road was very rough in some places. Jamaica is in the middle of building a new highway from Montego Bay to Ocho Rios. For two very short distances we were actually able to ride on the new highway... nice. Prior to our arrival Jamaica had been experiencing some very heavy rain, and the road in places was a very deep puddle. The buses have snorkels.

After an hour of some pretty interesting and innovated driving demonstrations, we pulled up to a roadside Jerk stand. By now even Mary was hungry. And there was no time like the present to test out Mary's recovery, so she order  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound of the jerked pork and a diet coke. It was really good. And Mary's stomach held up just fine.

It was another hour and a half before we pulled up to [Sandals Ocho Rios](#). We were seated for check in and brought our complimentary drink. Then after just a little bit of paperwork, we were given a quick tour of the property as a staff member escorted us to our room.

After we settled in it was still too early for the dinner restaurants to be open, so we popped into the grill at the beach for some snacks.

On Tuesday December 23, we slept in and just hung around the resort. The only important thing on today's to do list was to line up our excursions for the week. Pete enjoyed the beach volleyball but was disappointed that the water activities were shut down due to what the resort considered rough water. To us it looked just about perfect. So, we went shopping at the resorts small but well stocked gift store. We had a resort credit for booking our vacation at a "Sandals Night" that our local tour agency was hosting.

On Christmas eve day, we headed out for our all day adventure with [Blue Mountain Bicycle Tours](#). The tour is advertised as providing breakfast & lunch. We found out from other guest that breakfast was really late, so we ate a big breakfast at the resort before we met up with the tour bus. This was another marathon bus ride. We drove through many towns and pulled off the road just outside the gates of the estate where all of the "007" James Bond movies were written. Our first real stop (well over an hour into the journey) was at a banana plantation. We were shown baby bananas and given a detail lesson on the growing of bananas in Jamaica. Our next stop (another hour) was a bathroom break at a store. We took that opportunity to buy some potato chips, chocolate, and diet coke... not knowing how much further it was to our "breakfast". Shortly after that, our bus began its' climb up the Blue Mountain. At one point our driver had to stop & get out to machete some fallen bushes out of the road. Finally we made it to the breakfast restaurant, where the food was good. We were issued helmets, elbow, & knee pads. Then back onto the bus for some more up hill riding to where the bikes are waiting for us. The bus pulled over where we were told that on a clear day we could look down the mountain and see Kingston. Today is not a clear day and we are above the clouds. After everyone picked out their bike (some 30 – 50 people), we started coasting down the mountain. This tour company tries really hard to take care of it's guest. As soon as we get into the cloud layer, where it is starting to get misty the tour company issues the rain gear. The tour company has guides spread throughout the herd of guest. Some are filming the adventure but most are just checking on the guest and pointing out each and every curve or rock in the road.... And reminding us to slow down this is a leisurely tour. A bit over an hour after our breakfast, we have coasted back to the restaurant where lunch is set

up for us. After lunch, we get back on the bikes and coast our way past some waterfalls to the final waterfall. The adventurous take a dip. Mary has not yet warmed up and doesn't want to be cold and wet on the ride back to the resort. We board our bus and start the trip back to resort. Traffic in Jamaica is an interesting thing, especially on Christmas eve when everyone and their brother are out celebrating & shopping. A good portion of the trip back was in the dark. That was probably a good thing since we couldn't really tell how fast the driver was going... but it took a lot less time to get back to the resort.

On Christmas day, we donned our river shoes and went on a 10am tour of Dunn's River Waterfall. This waterfall was featured in one of the James Bond movies. After a bit of confusion while our guide looked for our video-photographer, we made our way to the beach. Once there, the group of 30+ people all joined hands, making a human chain. Using this human chain we climbed our way up the waterfall. At one point our guide had us sliding down a fall into a deeper pool. Even Mary took the plunge. When we finished climbing the falls, we ordered the video from our video-photographer. Next we had to navigate our way through the flea market to get to the bus. This is more difficult than climbing the falls.

The rest of Christmas day we spent at our resort, mostly on the beach. Mary read her book under a shady tree while Pete took full advantage of the included water-sports. He played with the windsurfer, catamaran, and the sunfish sailboat. He did finally get Mary to leave her book to go snorkeling. Sandals Resorts include snorkeling & scuba diving in the vacation package. The previous day's rough surf made for less than ideal visibility but it was still pretty nice to be snorkeling in the Caribbean on Christmas day!

The morning after Christmas, Mary dragged Pete out for an adventurous horseback ride with [Chukka Cove](#). To get to the horses it was back onto a bus for another 30-40 minute ride. Once at the polo stables, we had to sign the usual waiver before the trail boss gave his talk. Then one at a time the trail boss called over the guest to the steps to get on the horse (that's right you don't even have to hoist yourself up on the horse). Then he instructs you to start forming a walking line around the riding arena. Once Mary was on her horse one of the trail guides could see that she had experience and he tried to get her to go to the front of the line. Mary prefers to be in the back of the pack. It's safer. From there it is very unlikely that another horse will run up on you or kick you or bite at you.

Once everyone was mounted up, we began our walking ride through the pasture, then down a private road past an old sugar mill, until finally we were riding on the beach. After a short ride on the beach, we were taken to a building where one at a time with the help of the tour guides we were helped off of our horses. Again, Jamaica tour companies try to take very good care of their guest. While we enjoyed the scenery and changed into swimsuits, the tour guides switched the tack on a few of the horses from saddles to bareback pads. We were issued flotation belts and about 6 guest at a time were mounted up (using stairs again) for an ocean swim on the horses. Pete & Mary were in the first group to go out. A trail guide leads the horses into the surf until they are swimming. After about six passes down the beach, the guide leads the horses back in. Once we got off our horses, our guide said that there were only two more guest who were interested in swimming so he asked if we wanted to go again. Sure!!! This time he made Mary mount up without the stairs... he said, "you know how". We had a blast.

The rest of the day we spent at our resort, mostly on the beach. Mary read her book under a shady tree while Pete played with the water-sports equipment.

Saturday December 27, our last full day in Jamaica. We spent the whole day at our resort. We started the morning of with a glass bottom boat ride offered by our resort. That was a great way to see the coast around our resort. After that, we still had some resort credit to use up in the gift store. So we went crazy shopping. Then after lunch we were back on the beach. Mary read her book under a shady tree while Pete played with the windsurfer. At 3pm we had another scheduled snorkeling trip. Today was a little clearer than our previous trip and the boat took us to a different location.

On the morning of our last day in Jamaica, Sunday December 28th, the surf was again rough, shutting down the water sports. Our flight isn't until almost 6pm. But we have to board the bus just after lunch for the journey back to the airport. With the water activities cancelled, we decide to explore the gardens around the resort. The country's long tailed humming bird fascinated Mary. She was determined to get some good video of one. So we camped out by our favorite hot tub were they were reported to frequent. The humming bird was less than cooperative. We did see them way up in the top of some trees. They would come down only briefly and usually so quickly that Mary couldn't get the camera

ready. But finally with some patience, Mary thinks she got the shots she wanted.

Too soon it was time to check out. The really nice thing about Air Jamaica and Sandals is that you can check your bags right at the resort. No line at the airport. This was the icing on the cake.

Sandals... we'll be back.