

SIMPLE RULES FOR A GREAT INDIAN FAMILY VACATION IN JAMAICA

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1. Include more than one family with similar profiles and ages, so men can bond while wives hang around and children are busy having fun at the resort, on the beach and in the water.
2. Value = Benefits Minus Cost. To maximize the value of your vacation you must maximize benefits and minimize cost. To accomplish this, take a Guju with you on your vacation team, to negotiate everything to minimize cost. Having Guju in your group is like getting a certification that you did not pay too much for anything. Maximizing benefits is the responsibility of each family.
3. Pick a relaxing place like Jamaica, where everyone is laid back and exceptionally friendly and polite. The country's motto: *Relax, Mon! You are on vacashun!* The weather is wonderful and the skies are light blue. Clear ocean waters go from light green to turquoise to deep blue, and the temperature is just right. It is the friendliest paradise on earth.
4. Pick an all-inclusive package so there are no debates about where to go for breakfast, lunch or dinner. It brings infinite choices and infinite options for arguments down to a few. Besides, it turns out to also be the minimum cost option.
5. Do take and wear your swimming trunks. It looks cool while you sit in the shade of a palm tree while pasty white Caucasians toast themselves in the bright sun.
6. Step occasionally in the turquoise water—waist deep, max. You enter the water only to take pictures of your children who are swimming and wading in cool waters; in other words, having a splash.
7. Swimsuits are optional for women. If you have one and you insist on wearing one (Karma! Karma!) do bring along a light dress/tunic to wear on top, to protect your delicate skin from the sun and the roving eyes of Caucasian women who wish their skin was your color, so they did not have to tempt skin cancer or even worse, leathery sun-beaten skin.
8. Listen to reggae music, especially Bob Marley, while on the island. Bob Marley's music really fits the island, its moods, its people and culture. The throbbing reggae beat is the rhythm of existence. We have Om, they have Rasta rhythm. The combination is deadly. Sitting on the edge of the bay, Marley playing in your iPod, pumped into your ears, you merge with the blue sky, floating light clouds, while tiny waves lap on the shore to the rhythm of the rolling, growling reggae rhythm. Enchanted by the ambience and the music, you hardly notice that the waters have grown darker, the breeze has turned colder and a few stars are visible on this partly cloudy evening. Reggae music rumbles on, the waves still lap on the shore, and you don't have a care.
9. Carry a first aid kit to overcome allergies and minor injuries. When all fails, try brandy and bitters. That cocktail is a cure-all.
10. Get Sammy as your driver. He is a Rastafarian with dreadlocks in his Rasta cap. Knowledge of Patois the local language is not necessary, as long as you

- understand *Yeah, Mon! Relax, Mon!* and *No Problem!* However, it is important to understand Jamaican Time—it is in the Not-in-a-Hurry time zone. *Relax, Mon!*
11. Vegetarians are encouraged to load up on breakfast because that will be your last big meal of the day. Jamaica and vegetarianism don't mix. However, it is a great place for pescetarians. Foodies should focus on the outstanding local seafood.
 12. Be humble when you encounter Jamaican chilies and peppers. They are incredibly hot and small dabs can destroy your taste buds and your intestinal tracts. Yes, Indians can handle hot peppers but Scotch Bonnet peppers are scorching hot that make Thai Peppers seem like Jalapenos.
 13. *Rum Maro Rum!* If you have a brother-in-law who savors his rum, this is the place to raise a toast to his health. I do have such a brother-in-law who loves rum and he must be very healthy by now. Consuming Jamaican Rum mixed with local fruit juices, served by friendly hands and smiles, on a Montego Bay sunny beach can be memorable.
 14. Look out for historical markers for spots that are more than 500 years old. We come from a land that has a ten thousand year old history and living in one where we have fifty-year-old historical buildings, with gift shops. There was no gift shop at Discovery Bay, where Christopher Columbus landed in 1476.
 15. Encourage your children to be fearless. It was wonderful to see our girls holding to the cords of an inflated tube, bouncing and flying low on the water, pulled by a speeding boat. It was controlled Bond movie action. Then there was the time they went parasailing, which they described as peaceful, tranquil, beautiful. Of course, dads sat in boats and took pictures while moms sat in the shade of palm trees and sipped Wednesday Specials, and watched this remote action.
 16. Join the kids in some adventurous activities. Climbing waterfalls can be an exhilarating and a very wet experience. The water is cold but refreshing. The rushing water's force and its foam that hides rocks to step on, makes each step an uncertain one. But, with shoes that have traction and clothes that dry quickly (swimwear) none of these impediments are insurmountable, especially when Big Daddy and Rafael, our guides, can give a helping hand. When muscle strength and agility could not overcome gravity, slippery surfaces, vertical gradients and opposing water-borne forces, Mr. D's and Rafael's strong helping hands give that yank that hauls you up one more step. Climbing up a few-hundred feet of this vertical sheer made amateurs like me feel as if Mt. Everest was now within reach. Do get a DVD of the adventure but only after the Gujus negotiate with the videographer.
 17. Be adventurous with the kids. Let Berton, a former spear-fisherman, take you sailing from the turquoise waters of the shores to the deep blue sea a few miles away. Seated in a fiberglass catamaran with colorful plastic/polyester sails does not take away from the serenity of the boat silently cutting through the waters, aided by a mild east-west wind. While I, a non-swimmer, clutched the catamaran's cords till my knuckles were frozen in place, Berton effortlessly took us out four miles out where the waters were a hundred and fifty feet deep and brought us back safely, chatting all the way. I could not help wonder if, thirty years from today, he would be the new old man confronting the unforgiving sea. "Respect," he said often. "Respect the sea."

18. Do visit the local tourist shops that are operated almost exclusively by Sindhis, except one at the airport where the shop owner was a Tamilian from Chennai. Sammy took us on a “Shoppers Tour” but the Gujus abandoned us, so we had to negotiate on our own with Sindhis in Hindi. They don’t see Indian tourists very often and were thrilled to lead us lambs to the slaughter. Luckily, being an Indian has its advantages and they gave us substantial (or so we thought) discounts for non-Marley souvenirs. This pleased us some but deep down we knew that the Gujus could have squeezed out some more blood from these stones.
19. Start early in the day and go for appetite arousing walks along golf cart pathways on nearby courses. Cut across fairways only if you are lost and can’t make it to the hotel that you see in the distance. Under no circumstances should you walk on greens and please do not pick up golf balls that are in the rough to admire them. They are not like errant tennis balls that fly out of tennis courts. Most golfers cannot stay on the fairway; they will soon descend in the area to search for their lost balls. Coming back to appetite arousing walks—they help eke out greater value (remember benefits minus cost?) from the all-inclusive-package.
20. Follow the rules of the island—*Yeah, Mon! Relax, Mon! Jamaican Time! Respect! No Problem! Reggae Music! Rum!*—and lead a *khushee* life. No wonder Jamaicans smile all the time. ***Irie, Jamaica!***