

LATE HOLIDAYS

What Better Place to Celebrate than Jamaica?

by Susan De Leon

It's only natural that there's no place on earth you'll find a greater concentration of annual reggae festivals than in Jamaica between Christmas and New Year. Most are all-night affairs featuring the island's most famous and beloved artists alongside the hottest up-and-coming hopefuls. Some are more tourist-friendly than others.

Some advice from veteran festival goer Laurie O'Brien: "Go early, even if the show starts late – there *will* be a traffic jam out front and long lines for tickets later on. Try to get good directions before you head out. Some of these shows are in the middle of nowhere and streetlights and road signs are few and far between in the Jamaican countryside. Shows always run out of food and drink by the time 3 a.m. rolls around, which is



rough if you're not used to the heat and humidity. Water is a necessity 24/7 so always bring extra water and wear comfortable shoes because you are on your feet for hours. The ground is usually filled with dirt and garbage so watch where you're walking!"

Jam Jam is unique in that there are no bands backing the artists – it's just a few DJs up on stage putting on the CDs that the artists bring. In a way, it's more energetic because you have artist after artist

Here is a quick rundown of the major shows:

DEC. 24
Island Explosion,
May Pen

DEC. 26
Guinness Sting,
Portmore
(best known for its annual clash between Beenie Man and Bounty Killer... bottles will probably fly)

Magnum,
Black River
Pepsi Teen Splash,
Oracabessa

DEC. 31
Coco Tea's Jam
Jam,
Clarendon
Sizzla's Camp Fire,
Spanish Town

JAN. 1
Anthony B's
Trelawny Family
Fun Day,
Trelawny

performing with no long set changes in between. Coco Tea appears on stage occasionally to speak or sing along with another artist. Very positive vibes flowing for the New Year! Most of the artists were there by 2 a.m. – all the Marleys, Yellowman, Fantan Mojah, Turbulance – and all seemed to be enjoying the show. Capleton definitely excited the crowd the most.

Trelawny Family Fun Day at the Hague Agricultural Showground on the north coast stands out from the rest and reflects Anthony B's passion for education as the pathway to a better Jamaica. Proceeds of the show benefit the William Knibb Memorial High School in Trelawny, the parish of his birth and one of the most peaceful and crime-free parishes in Jamaica, making the show attractive to worldwide, as well as local, fans. There are many charming small resorts on the north coast as you head west to Montego Bay, or east to Ocho Rios, that provide easy access to the site.



Anthony B, Perfect and Anthony O'Brien By Laurie O'Brien

Gates open at 3 p.m. for the family fun part of the day with Bounce-a-Bouts, Ferris Wheel and Merry-Go-Round rides, face painting, DJ/singing contests and treats for the children. Adults can buy tickets early in the day to accompany their children, then leave to take them home to bed and be back in plenty of time for the "big people's" show which starts late, runs through to early morning, and is historically closed by the King of the Dancehall, Beenie Man. Last Christmas, the crowd's biggest forward was claimed by an unannounced appearance from Capleton, who took the stage without introduction and soon had everyone's cell phones lit up blue and held high. Other highlights included Sizzla's rendition of "Rise to the Occasion" and Perfect's "Hand Cart Bwoy." Whenever there was a lull, Mr. B took to the stage and performed from his extensive repertoire, starting with "Fire Pon Rome" and "Raid the Barn" to his latest hits "Suffering Man," "Nuh Fraid a Nobody" and "Reggae Gone Pon Top."

So when the day-after-Thanksgiving spews the message to consume, consume, consume, maybe you'll choose to escape the commercialized insanity that pretends to be a holiday and treat yourself to a real holiday celebrating some of the best reggae on the planet on "the rock that the builder refused" that is the beautiful island of Jamaica. ☆

Susan De Leon has been involved with reggae for many years, as a radio DJ at WRUV-FM Burlington, VT, as promoter of the Vermont Reggae Festival and, more recently, as manager of the Itals. She also works as assistant to Anthony B and is the publishing administrator for a half dozen reggae artists and producers. She lives in Hollywood, FL where you can find everything Jamaican, 24-hours a day.



If you just can't make it to JA...

try some treats for the ears and a colorful and delicious Christmas punch, high in antioxidants and anti-inflammatory ingredients.

Sorrel Christmas Punch Recipe

1 pound sorrel (or 3 oz. dried sorrel blossoms)
2-4 oz. fresh ginger
2 quarts water
sugar to taste
red wine and/or rum
8-12 pimento grains (whole allspice)

Wash sorrel thoroughly, using the fingers to lift it from the water. Put into stainless steel container. Scrape and wash ginger. Grate or slice thinly and add to the sorrel. Add pimento grains. Boil water and pour over sorrel. Allow to stand 4-6 hours. Strain. Sweeten to taste and add rum and/or red wine to taste. Gets better with age. Serve cold. Note: Dried sorrel can be found in Caribbean markets or online.



Reggae Christmas Albums



There's something for everyone – roots, dancehall, lover's rock, Christmas carols or steel drums. If there's one thing all Jamaicans love it's Christmas music, and there, are plenty of reggae choices out there although my favorite has to be Jacob Miller's *Natty Christmas*. A few other compilations to check out:

- A Ras Reggae Christmas
- Reggae Christmas from Studio One
- Christmas Greetings from Studio One
- Natty and Nice
- VP's Christmas Album
- Yard Style Christmas
- Trojan Christmas Box Set
- Sly & Robbie Present Taxi Christmas
- Dancehall Christmas
- Reggae Christmas Hits by John Holt
- Very, Very Yellow Christmas by Yellowman
- Carlene Davis' Christmas Reggae Rock