



# MELIA BRACO VILLAGE

TRELAWNEY, JAMAICA

By: Kelly Magyarics

Some Caribbean resorts eschew local flavor in favor of a feel more familiar to their international clientele. Not so at this all-inclusive property forty-five minutes east of Montego Bay. Designed to be reminiscent of an old colonial village (the nearby town of Falmouth, to be exact), its Georgian architecture, latticed-balconies and town square fountain give off a true Jamaican vibe.

The resort's 232 rooms and suites are split into two sections: beachfront and garden view Colonial-style villas on one side and more exclusive accommodations and amenities on the Level side. All rooms include a complimentary minibar stocked daily and offer room service twenty-four hours a day. A private beach awaits a mere few steps away, with lounge chairs, cabana beds, palm trees and palapas. On the Level side, rooms are either beachfront (if they are situated on the first floor) or oceanfront (on the second); for more living space, select a Romance or Royal Suite. The Level also features a separate check-in area, beachfront lounge with a full bar, snacks and light meals refreshed three times daily, and an exclusive pool, beach and Jacuzzi. A private concierge is assigned to each Level guest, who is available to answer questions, book experiences and help with requests large or small any time of day or night.

Lounge, relax and take a dip in the resort's pool, which provides a swim-up / walk-up bar and adjacent whirlpool all overlooking gorgeous turquoise water. Feel like doing more than working on your tan? Take out one of the Catamarans or ocean kayaks. Or grab a few friends and a waterproof speaker bar and float on an oversized beach pillow.

Six restaurants feature something for everyone (Golden Sand, is exclusive to Level guests), but unlike other resorts where you have to play the reservation game as soon as you check-in to snag a table at the more popular restaurants, all of Melia Braco Village's dining spots have enough space to accommodate everyone even when the property is at 100% capacity--with tables left over. Start the day with ackee and saltfish at The Market Place, or have one of the chefs whip up an omelet or fruit smoothie. For lunch, follow the trail of savory smoke to O'Grille, where juicy and spicy jerk chicken is grilled daily on a steel drum and served along with flaky meat patties--both are perfect washed down with an ice cold Red Stripe. Several tempting dinner options are available, including teppanyaki and sushi at Nikkei, pastas and wood-fired pizza at Rasta Pasta, and steak and seafood at 876 Prime. The latter (named for the country's area code) is the resort's signature, upscale option, with crystal chandeliers, mirrored walls and white leather chairs; menu standouts include

lobster bisque, Jamaican grilled lobster and rib eye steak.

Of course, no beach resort would be worth its salt without a place to partake in some fun, tropical drinks. In addition to the swim-up bar and the Level lounge, Jigger is an airy spot overlooking the pool for a pina colada or the colorful Bob Marley--a layered, blended drink with mango and strawberry daiquiris. Late night, discotheque Shaker serves up cocktails with a pulsating beat.

If you need a little break from all that blue sky, Yhi Spa is just the oasis you crave. Since Jamaica is known for its amazing Blue Mountain Coffee, you'll want to book an Island Vibe treatment, where ground coffee beans are mixed with Shea butter and sea salt for an exfoliating, rejuvenating and skin tightening scrub, followed by a coffee oil massage--making the entire room smell like a bowl of sweet coffee ice cream.

Melia Braco Village embodies Jamaican culture at its core, from the Friday night street festival that overtakes the resort's town square, to the authentic local snacks like plantain chips found in the rooms. Jamaicans are fond of using the term "full joy" rather than "enjoy," and that pretty much sums up what you'll be feeling during a stay here. It's irie, mon. ■

