

# HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

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## Jamaican Me Jealous The 1970 Jamaica Caravan

As you read this, it is still winter and parts of our country are covered in snow, so now is a perfect time to review a warm and sunny, oft-forgotten, Airstream caravan to the "Island in the Sun". Yes, Virginia, they really did ship Airstreams to Jamaica!

Airstream Caravan #68 - Jamaica Winter 1970 was one of the last "never been done before" caravans to be offered by Airstream. In the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Airstream offered their "bread and butter" caravans to Canada and Mexico every year, but they also offered some sort of "exotic" caravan (e.g. Europe, Africa, Around-the-World) every few years to keep Airstream and the Wally Byam Caravan Club in the news. The 1970 Jamaica Caravan was one of these "exotic" caravans, yet it may have been the shortest ever offered, as the island of Jamaica is only 146 miles long and 35 miles wide. The itinerary showed 308 total towing miles with its longest and shortest travel days only 67 and 14 miles respectively.



Stops ranged from 2 to 5 nights at a location.

Though a Jamaica caravan had been considered for some time, the "event" that allowed it to take place was the 1968 completion of the Norwegian Caribbean Line (later Norwegian Cruise Line) ship *MS Starward*, with its stern car door and garage space large enough for travel trailers. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the *MS Starward* provided drive-on/drive-off service from Miami, FL to Jamaica.

The official announcements for the Jamaica Caravan first appeared in the November 1969 issues of the *Blue Beret* magazine and the *Caravanner* newspaper, with applications open only until November 29. The estimated caravan cost for two people, car, and Airstream, ranged from about \$800 to \$1200 depending upon the length of Airstream and type of cabin selected. Since the caravan was limited to 35 Airstreams, participants were selected from the applicants by an outside firm, ensuring no bias. The 35 selected families came from 15 different states.

JAMAICA "ISLAND IN THE SUN" CARAVAN #68 Rendezvous: Dodge Island Terminal, Miami, Florida — January 2-31, 1970		
Name _____		
Wife _____	Trailer No. _____	
Street _____		
City _____	State _____	
Phone _____	Number In Party _____	
Length of Airstream _____	Length of Car (Bumper to Bumper) _____	
The cost of transporting a 26 ft. Airstream and tow car round trip to Jamaica would be approximately:		
	Airstream, \$10 per ft.	\$260.00
	Car	\$200.00
		\$460.00
Staterooms round trip:		
Outside upper and lower per person	\$156.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outside 3/4 lower and upper per person	\$200.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outside 2 lower beds per person	\$240.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Miami wharfage tax	\$ 2.50	
Jamaica tax	\$ 2.50	
Kitty fee for month—not to exceed	\$50.00	
Insurance cost for period on Jamaica will be available later.		
If you pick out type of stateroom you wish plus the length of your Airstream, add or subtract \$10 per ft. from above, you can figure your total approximately.		
If you wish to go fill out reservation coupon and forward to this office at once. Deadline Nov. 29, 1969, 12 midnight. Attach check for \$500 to reservation coupon, balance will be collected at Miami. Make checks payable to "Norwegian Caribbean Lines." Final selection will be made by independent company, not connected with Airstream.		
<b>Please read story in this issue.</b>		
Mail checks and reservations to Airstream Wally Byam Caravans, 15939 Pismo Ave., Cerritos, Calif. 90701.		
For office use only: Bulletin Mailed _____ Itinerary Mailed _____		
LIMITED TO 35 AIRSTREAMS      NO PETS		

Participants assembled at Dodge Island, in the Port of Miami, on January 2, 1970 for loading and departure on January 3. The caravanners arrived in Kingston on January 6 to begin their 3½ week tour of this fascinating island, seeing 7400-foot high mountains, giant forests, fertile valleys, picturesque villages, and flowering countryside. They saw much more of this island paradise than the typical ship bound tourist. The island was English speaking and reflected a 300-year British influence, including driving on the opposite side of the road.

This caravan was led by Robert and Helen Smith, WBCCI #49. Robert was the past 1962-63 WBCCI International President, a veteran of dozens of caravans, and the then Director of Airstream Company Caravans.

On the way to Kingston, the ship overnights at Port Antonio on Jamaica's north shore for its non-caravan passengers to explore the city. Most caravanners chose to remain on the ship, review caravan literature, and await their caravan visit to the town later in the trip.

Upon arrival at the Kingston dock, the caravanners were greeted by a band playing Calypso music and a banner proclaiming "Welcome to Jamaica – Airstream Caravan".



Airstreams Loading and Aboard the MS Starward

Once unloading was complete, the caravanners received a police escort to the experimental farm of the Jamaica College of Agriculture in

nearby Spanish Town. There they parked in a broad green meadow surrounded by gardens of hibiscus and bougainvillea for their first night in their Airstreams on Jamaican soil. This camping spot was typical of what they would find, with few exceptions, all around Jamaica: grassy, green, level, no electric or sewer hookups, good water and dumping pits available when necessary. Nights were cool and dewy, and mornings were announced by roosters crowing.

The following day started with committee assignments for the caravanners. It was also a short drive to Market Day in Spanish Town to restock their refrigerators that had to be turned off before leaving Miami. This was their first experience on Jamaica roadways without a police escort, where the necessity of driving on the left side of the road took a while to sink in. That evening, they received their official welcome to Jamaica in camp from the Mayor of Spanish Town.

Over the next couple of days, the caravanners explored Jamaica's largest city of Kingston and nearby Port Royal.

Though the streets were often crowded with people, cars, and wandering animals, the caravanners were amazed by the friendliness and courtesy of all the people they met.



Camp at Spanish Town



Mayor of Spanish Town Addresses Caravanners

On moving day, the 30-mile road to Mandeville went along a narrow coastal plain, past dairy lands and sugar plantations, before climbing into the mountains. In no time, all 35 rigs were parked in another jewel-like setting. The following day after attending church services in a nearby United Church, some caravanners invited new friends to come visit their Airstream homes, and an afternoon "open house" became that day's major activity. The day ended with Mandeville civic clubs and fraternal groups banding together to cater supper for the caravanners, followed by a Calypso band and dancing.

The next day the twisty road down the mountain to Black River provided some breathtaking views of the green valley far below, followed by a short run along the coast on a boulevard flanked on both sides by bamboo trees. At their campsite in Black River, they were welcomed by the mayor and Chamber of Commerce before squads of locals, including uniformed school children, came to check out their Airstreams. Later a party was thrown for the caravanners at the nearby Community Hall and everyone danced to the Calypso music. The next day the caravanners were treated to a power boat ride up the Black River past marshy farmland and avenues of mangrove and mahogany, with a backdrop of mountains. Here they also had their first chance to sample Jamaican sand beaches and local seafood.

The next travel day, heading west along the shoreline and then north across the peninsula, each small village brought masses of smiling, waving locals who were prepared in advance for the passing of the line of silver Airstreams. In Lucea, they were camped a stone's throw from



Limbo Demonstration at Dunn's River Falls near Ocho Rios

a beautiful white sand beach and again received a round of official welcomes, music, and dancing. The next morning a Jamaican came to camp bearing gifts, in the form of baseballs and softballs for each caravan family, with an invitation to visit the factory that made them. Some caravanners chose to enjoy the beach at Lucea and some drove 30 miles westward to Negril to check out the pristine 7-mile long white sand beach there.

On the next travel day, the caravan travelled past Montego Bay to Falmouth, where the caravanners had an opportunity to go snorkeling above the nearby coral reefs. A ride on the Governor's personal railcar provided a chance to see parts of the nearby mountains that are not accessible by road, accompanied, of course, by a Calypso band. Stops along the 80-mile rail trip brought the opportunities to learn how bananas, coconuts, and breadfruit are grown, order sport shirts and dresses in flamboyant Jamaican printed fabrics, visit a rum distillery, and visit the cathedral-like chapel of a natural cave where black slaves plotted and eventually won their freedom.

Their next travel day took them to their final campsite in a pasture near Ocho Rios, along the way passing the beach where Columbus landed

on May 4, 1494. Ocho Rios takes its name from the eight rivers that converge within a few miles. One of these, cascades down a 600-foot series of rocks and plunges at Dunn's River Falls.

Since there was no caravan stop at Port Antonio, busses were chartered to take the caravanners there, so that they could raft down the Rio Grand River, a must for Jamaican visitors.

Their last travel day was the longest at 67 miles, but also the easiest, as they reversed their route back to Montego Bay. Their final night

in their Airstreams in Jamaica was on the pier waiting to board the MS Starward the following morning. That afternoon brought one last chance for a dip in the blue Caribbean waters.

Upon boarding the MS Starward on January 29, some caravanners were surprised to find their staterooms in the officer's quarters; a result of the ship being overbooked and the officers vacating their staterooms so they could be used by passengers for the trip back to Miami. This courtesy was typical of what the caravanners experienced all over Jamaica.

The MS Starward docked in Miami on January 31, and by noon on February 1 each caravanner had departed for home or for their next adventure and the Jamaica Caravan was officially over. Though a repeat Jamaica caravan sounded promising, it never occurred.

Like many of the other exotic caravans offered by Airstream, the Jamaica Caravan was in the right place at the right time. The completion of the MS Starward in 1968 opened the window of opportunity, but the mid-1970s conversion of its garage space to additional cabins closed that window. We can be inspired by this caravan to make some Airstream journeys of our own and hope that maybe someday another exotic Airstream caravan will be offered.