

Inside Jamaica's Best Kept Secret: Welcome to Calabash



Kristin Braswell
CONTRIBUTOR

I write about the pulse of a person, place or thing through travel.

[FULL BIO >](#)

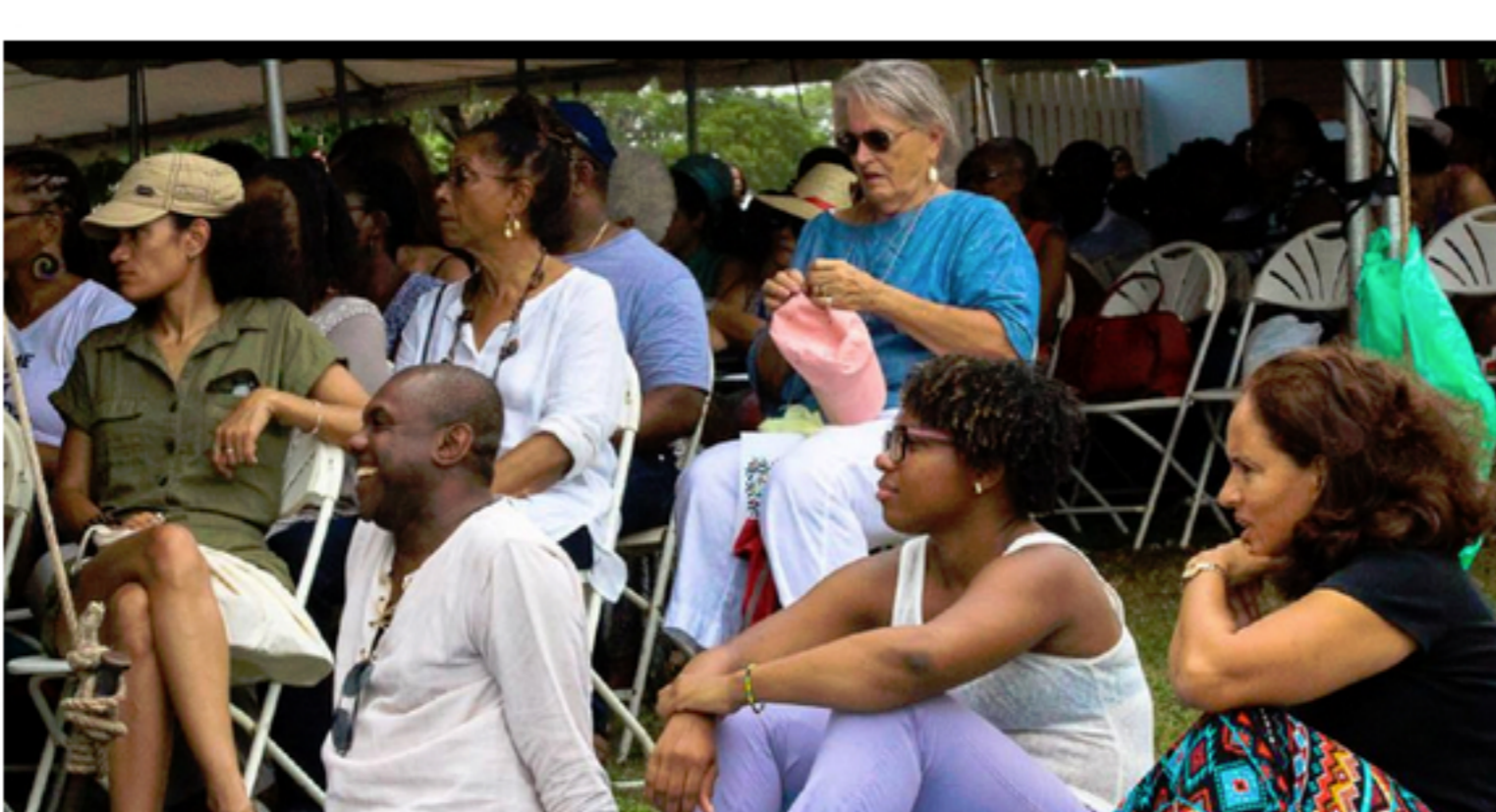
Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

I have a secret — one I hesitate to share because it's just so exceptional. The secret, still relatively unknown to many, is a book and Caribbean lover's dream. It is the briny sea echoing words of some of the world's largest literary giants, burgeoning writers and musicians, in a small town that most tourists rarely consider when booking a ticket to beloved Jamaica. The secret is **Calabash**. The place is Treasure Beach at **Jakes Hotel**, located two hours from Montego Bay on the rugged, unspoiled southern coast. Now in its 13th year, the free, biennial event is anticipated by the most loyal attendees, from Rastafarians to New York literati. It is a weekend of love and literature that seamlessly fuses a local Jamaican experience with a worldly feast of words.



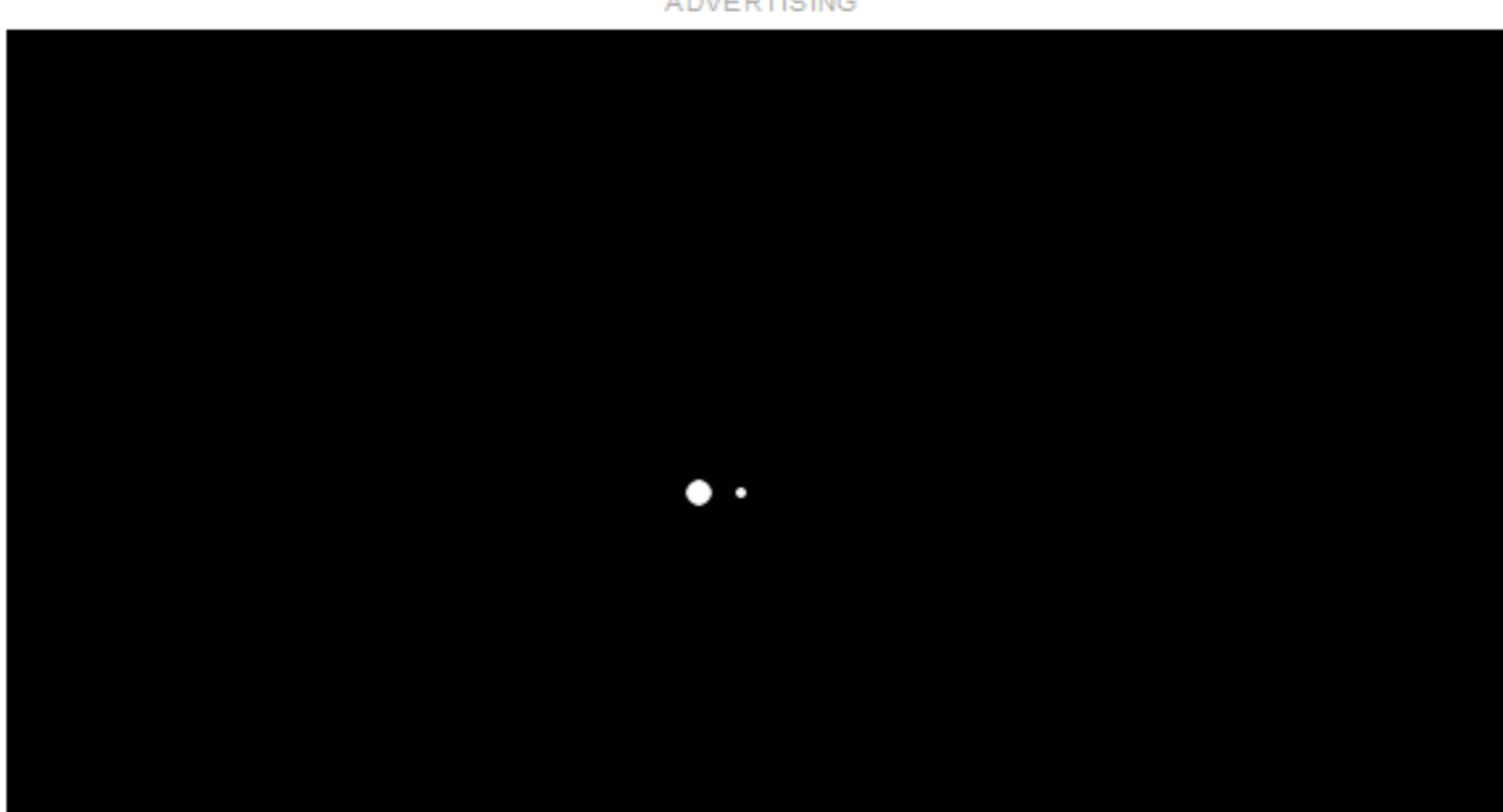
Poet Kei Miller reads at Calabash. Photo credit: Tanya Batson-Savage

When I experienced Calabash two years ago, I knew that every year I would return. Ask anyone about the event and they will agree — there is really nothing quite like it. This year's event, called "Fruuishaan," included spirited readings in an open air tent from Booker Award Marlon James (*A Brief History of Seven Killings*), poet Jessica Care Moore (*Sunlight Through Bullet Holes*), Geoff Dyer (*White Sands*), and Chigoze Obioma (*The Fisherman*), to name a few.



Attendees enjoy Calabash Festival. Photo credit: Tanya Batson-Savage

ADVERTISING



Read in vited by Teads

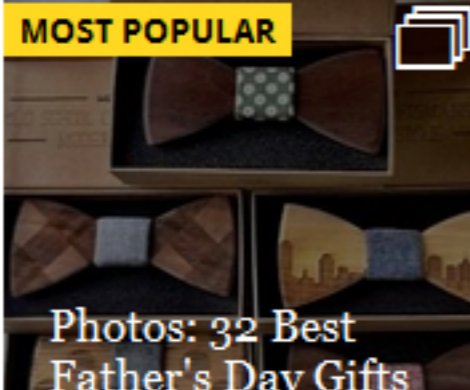
"We used to call it the greatest little festival in the greatest little district in the greatest little country in the world, but we should scrap that and just call it the greatest festival in the world," said award-winning Jamaican poet Kei Miller before his reading. For those both new and returning to the festival, Miller's proclamation was met with deafening applause.



Poet and performance artist Jessica Care Moore reads to a full house at Calabash Literary Festival.

Recommended by Forbes

MOST POPULAR



Photos: 32 Best Father's Day Gifts From Shark Tank

TRENDING ON FACEBOOK



Exclusive: How AMD's 'The Uprising' Ad Campaign Will Incite A Radeon Rebel...

ForbesBrandVoice



IBMVoice: How To Create Continuous Disruption Via The Cloud

Producer-Director Justine Henzell and authors Kwame Dawes and Colin Channer are the creators of Calabash Festival. Their goal was to create an event for book lovers without pretension or fuss. They succeeded. Forget VIP treatment, a single demographic or snoozing audience. Calabash comes alive because of its vibes: literary fueled days, proper jerk chicken lunches, and the booming sounds of roots reggae at night. Attendees line up after readings to purchase books to be signed by attending authors. Visitors and writers share Red Stripes and conversation.



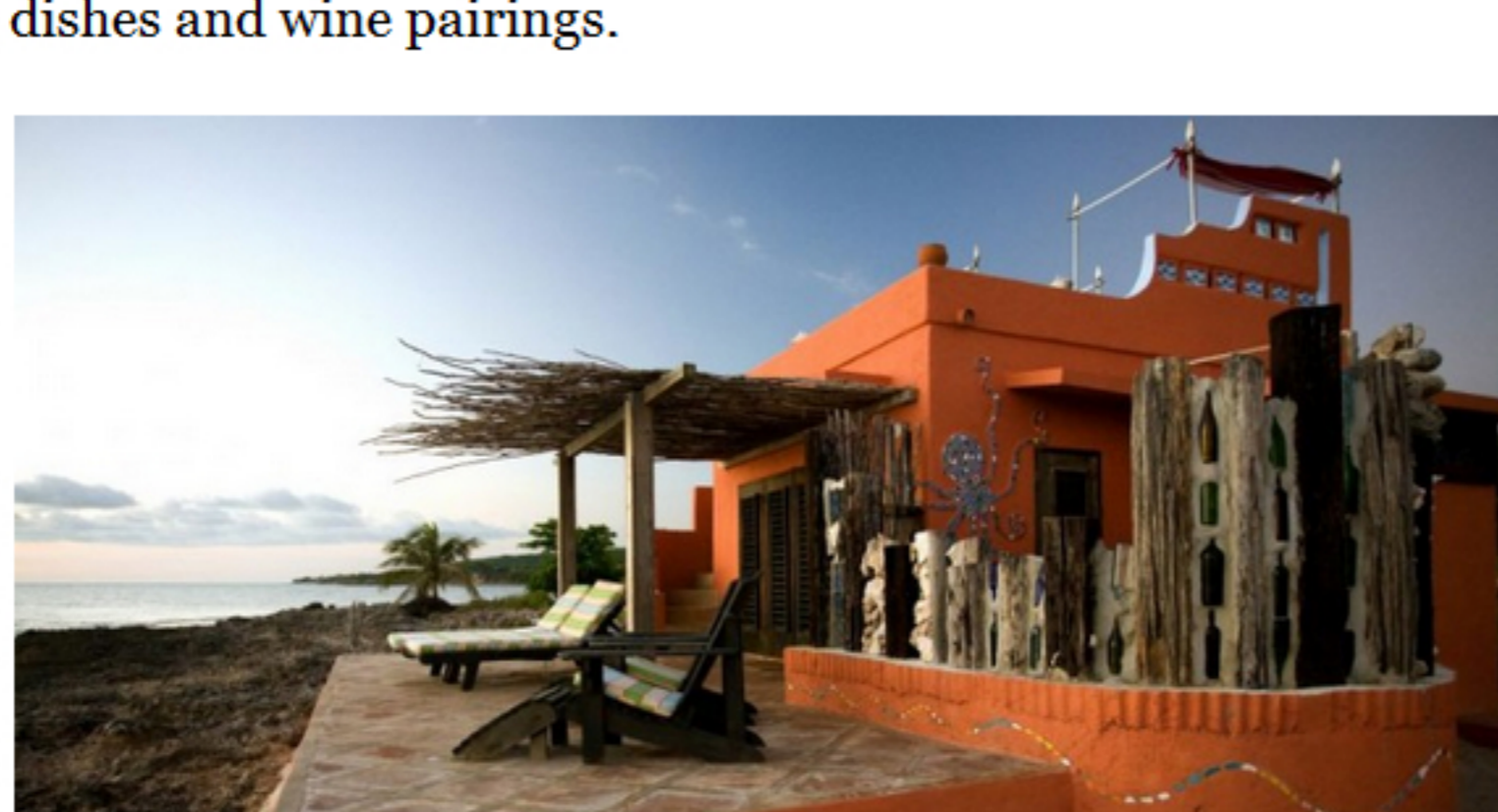
An attendee at Calabash enjoys a novel near the sea.

Beyond the festival, Treasure Beach is well worth a visit. Located in Calabash Bay, Jakes Hotel is dotted with colorful cottages along the ocean that vibrate with accents from repurposed and recycled materials. It's the ideal place to read a book and meditate on the crashing waves while enjoying a rum punch from Dougie's Bar.



The sleepy fishing village of Treasure Beach, Jamaica.

Jakes is also a family affair. Designed by Sally Henzell, who married filmmaker Perry Henzell (*The Harder They Come*), the 50-room boutique hotel was created in the early 90s. Today, the Henzell family works closely to maintain the artistic vision and love for their native Jamaica. Ecotourism is not only welcomed but critical to the property's ethos. Treasure Beach is full of small farmers and fisherman who share their bounty with the hotel. Once a month, Jake's hosts a farm-to-table **dinner** that includes family-style organic dishes and wine pairings.



There is no hierarchy between staff and visitors. This is part of Jake's magic. It's Jamaica without the tourist traffic or parasailing above all-inclusive hotels. A singular, unforgettable place.

And a secret just too good not to share.

[Comment on this story](#)

SHARE: [Email](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Google+](#)

[Print](#)

[Report Corrections](#)

[Reprints & Permissions](#)

SEE ALSO

- [FREE RESTAURANT COUPONS](#) >
- [ALIEN ENCOUNTERS](#) >
- [BEST KEPT SECRETS](#) >
- [WATCH TV ONLINE](#) >