

Port Royal

Beneath the water of Port Royal lies a sunken city more than 300 years old. Port Royal is possibly the most important underwater archaeological site in the Western Hemisphere.

Once known as the richest and wickedest city in the world Port Royal stretches back to Jamaica's indigenous inhabitants, the Tainos. It was first used by the Tainos as a fishing camp. When the Spaniards arrived in Jamaica in 1650, they used Port Royal for cleaning, refitting and caulking of their sailing vessels.

In 1655, England sent a fleet under the command of Admirals Penn and Venables to capture Hispaniola. The mission failed and Penn and Venables decided to move on to capture the less fortified and sparsely populated island of Jamaica. The strategic location and excellent natural harbour quickly proved it worth.

The British quickly constructed a fort along the harbour to strengthen the defences of the island. The town that developed around the fort, was named Port Royal in 1660. Even though Port Royal had Fort Charles and various other smaller forts for protection, the fear of Spanish attack still existed. As a result, the administration of the town invited pirates and buccaneers to settle in Port Royal. This was to ensure that a constant supply of ships and fighting men were always at hand.

The Caribbean was the frontier for Europe and the privateers and Buccaneers were the vanguards of the expansionist European countries such as England and Spain. During the 17th century, it was the virtual capital of Jamaica, and also a headquarters for buccaneers and pirates who brought in much

of the treasure they looted on the Spanish Main. Chief among the buccaneers was Henry Morgan who sacked Camaguey, Port Bello, Maracaibo and Panama. Morgan was later knighted and made Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica. He died at Port Royal in 1688.

The deep-water natural harbour protected ships at anchor and the port's proximity to Spanish shipping lanes and ports made it a pirate and privateers haven. Largely run and operated by pirates and buccaneers, the port became the busiest economic center in the Americas. Port Royal also became a trading center for slaves, sugar and raw materials such as wood. Many of these goods were plundered from ships and towns across the Americas. It was the mercantile industry of Port Royal that made it the wealthiest and most populous English town in the New World. The town supported Jewish, Quaker, Catholic and Anglican places of worship while having a brothel or a Tavern out of every four building.

On June 7th, 1692 an earthquake hit Port Royal, sinking sixty-six percent (33 acres) of it into the harbour and killing about two-fifths of its population. Approximately two thousand people died during the earthquake and another three thousand shortly thereafter from diseases and injuries.

After the earthquake, the city was quickly rebuilt in spite of the fact that the Council of Jamaica had purchased 240 acres of the Liguanea Plains in order to help the residents and as a means of replacing the many functions that took place in Port Royal. However, in 1703 fire destroyed the entire town and hurricanes in 1712, 1722 and 1726 ensured that the town

would never rise to its former glory. After these series of disasters most of the merchants migrated to Kingston, a safer site, reducing Port Royal standing as a major commerce port.

Many viewed the earthquake of 1692 as punishment from God to the city for its wickedness. Today, Port Royal is a quiet fishing village but one of the most important historical and archaeological site in Jamaica.