

Lifestyle

Caribbean Country

Country music stars show love for the beach.

By Jane R. Snyder • February 03, 2015



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There's something about the islands that country music stars just can't seem to get enough of. A beach track seems to be a mandatory addition to album releases these days—not that audiences are complaining. On the contrary, they are sending songs like Frankie Ballard's "Sunshine & Whiskey" and Jake Owen's "Beachin'" up the charts.

Today's country music superstars are carrying on the genre's established torch for the Caribbean by singing songs about the laid-back island lifestyle that dreams—and hit songs, as it turns out—are made of. Everyone from Kenny Chesney and Alan Jackson to Blake Shelton, Garth Brooks, and the Zac Brown Band has released an island-loving ode to tropical getaways.

In 2013, Luke Bryan, the reigning Country Music Association Entertainer of the Year, put out an entire album of tracks dedicated to beaches, bikinis, and boats. That same year, Grammy and CMA award-winner Joe Nichols reached No. 1 with his rocking, up-tempo single "Sunny And 75," a fun track that references bare feet covered in sand,

beach chairs, and the salt air. When asked why he thinks his fans embraced the track so readily, Nichols replies, *“Everyone loves the beach—the waves, sand, sunshine. Any time you head to one, you just know you’re gonna have a great time.”* Nichols, a beach-lover himself, wanted to record that track from the first time he heard it. *“I sure love singing,”* he says, *“but singing a beach song is almost like taking a minivacation on stage.”*



The CMA Entertainer of the Year brings his southern boy charm to Riviera Maya Mexico for a special “Crash My Playa” concert event in 2015.
© Image courtesy of: CMA Country Music Association

RCA Records Nashville artist Jake Owen has strong feelings about two of his No. 1 country hits. *“I think fans dig songs like ‘Beachin’ and ‘Barefoot Blue Jean Night’ because these tunes are fun and just make you feel reinvigorated.”*

When Kenny Chesney wants to kick back and recharge, the artist heads to the US Virgin Islands. The video for his hit song “No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems” opens with Chesney musing that the islands are the one place you can truly be as you are, a place, he says, *“where no shoes, no shirt, no problems isn’t a song title but a way of life.”*

Chesney often wears his creative hat while visiting St. John. He finds the island to be a perfect place to be still. Even if he’s rocking on a boat in the bay, he can be still enough to hear fresh lyrical ideas and bass-dominant, offbeat reggae rhythms bubbling up from his songwriter’s soul. Luckily for music lovers everywhere, Chesney is a good listener. He’s been hit with inspiration not just while on St. John, but also while boating off of St. Croix and while watching the sun set over St. Thomas.

Hit songwriter Jason Blume, who teaches the BMI Nashville Songwriters’ Workshop, offers up an explanation: *“The lure of soaking up the sun and enjoying the surf in paradise is a theme that many country artists have sung about.”*



The reigning king of Caribbean Country, Chesney includes an ode or two to the islands on most albums.
 © Image courtesy of: CMA Country Music Association

Of course, Jimmy Buffett's 'Margaritaville' is the ultimate example of blending calypso rhythms and steel drums with country music. Those rhythms—and steel drums—can also be heard in Alan Jackson's 'It's Five O'Clock Somewhere,' which Buffett joined in on."

Author of the best-selling *6 Steps to Songwriting Success*, Blume also shares a deep devotion to the tempo of island surroundings. *"A few times a year I create my own personal writing retreat. I've done some of my best work on a balcony overlooking turquoise water and golden sand, with a warm tropical breeze blowing. I find my creativity really flows in that setting."*

Given the steady stream of modern hits that make listeners yearn for an island escape, it should come as no surprise that country music and Caribbean panoramas have a long, harmonious history together. Country songwriters have been penning lyrics paying homage to crystal-clear waters, swaying coconut palms, and fruity beverages garnished with umbrellas for decades.

In 1966, Elvis Presley gave us "Drums of the Islands," and Marty Robbins went as far as dedicating a whole album of songs to the Caribbean concept with his *Island Woman* release, in 1964. Country Music Hall of Fame inductees Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers were so enchanted with Grand Cayman that, in the late eighties, they partnered with a group of fellow country music stars and invested in a local resort that included a state-

of-the-art recording studio. Even country music legends Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash cherished their Caribbean getaway, Cinnamon Hill, a former plantation house on Jamaica built in the seventeenth hundreds. The private estate, where frequent ghost sightings never troubled the Cash clan or their guests, is perched high above beautiful Montego Bay. In his candid autobiography, Johnny wrote: *“Jamaica has saved and renewed me more times than I can count.”*



The “I Can Drink to That All Night” singer has songs dedicated to the beach, baby, on his latest release.

© Image courtesy of: CMA Country Music Association

“Where the Boat Leaves From,” a track on Zac Brown Band’s 2008 album *The Foundation*, could be the ultimate (if ultimately underappreciated) Caribbean country song for cruise enthusiasts. In fact, the lyrics may summarize the very sentiments that motivated you to come on your cruise vacation: *“There’s a place where the boat leaves from. It takes away all of your big problems. You got worries, you can drop them in the blue ocean. But you got to get away to where the boat leaves from.”*

That’s just the tip of the lyrical love country music stars pay to the island way of life in flip-flop-tapping tunes that should be on your Caribbean cruise playlist right now.



CARIBBEAN COUNTRY QUIZ

“TURN UP THE VOLUME!”

Jane R. Snyder

How closely have you been listening to your iPod or radio?

Match each lyric snippet with the country artist who sang it.

1. *Odds are, the cooler's too heavy
To tote down to the beach all by myself...*
2. *You and me on a beach chair
Yeah, I'm so there every time I look in your eyes
Kissing you and the salt air, I can taste it, I swear...*
3. *Get a head start a little sip of somethin'
Off and running here we go -- 1, 2, 3 here we go...*
4. *Want a towel on a chair in the sand by the sea
Want to look thru my shades and see you there with me...*
5. *There's nowhere to go when you got all day to get there
There's cold margaritas and hot Senoritas smiling
With long dark hair...*
6. *I ain't had a day off now in over a year
Our Jamaican vacation's gonna start right here.*
7. *The only place that I wanna be is where you are
'Cause any more than a heartbeat away is just too far...*
8. *So pick a place on the map we can get to fast
Where the white sandy beach meets water like glass...*
9. *I blew out my flip flop, stepped on a pop top,
Cut my heel, had to cruise on back home...*
10. *Whenever life don't go your way
Well, maybe it's time to take a nice long break...*
11. *We got 2-for-1s, we're at a Margarita bar, whatever
Happens happens, and there's a reggae band, full of
Dread heads, just sittin' in the corner laughin'...*
12. *He said I'm tellin' you, that science has proven
That heartaches are healed by the sea...*

- A. Easton Corbin
“ROLL WITH IT”
Writer(s): Johnny Earl Park, Tony Lane, David Cory Lee
- B. Blake Shelton
“SOME BEACH”
Writer(s): Rory Lee Feek, Paul Overstreet
- C. Alan Jackson
“IT’S FIVE O’CLOCK SOMEWHERE”
Writer(s): Jim "Moose" Brown, Donald Edmond Rollins
- D. Carrie Underwood
“ONE WAY TICKET”
Writer(s): Luke Robert Laird, Luke Laird, Josh Kear, Carrie Underwood
- E. Kenny Chesney
“NO SHIRT, NO SHOES, NO PROBLEM”
Writer(s): Casey Beathard
- F. Joe Nichols
“SUNNY AND 75”
Writer(s): Michael Dulaney, Jason Sellers, Paul Jenkins
- G. Keith Urban
“LONG HOT SUMMER”
Writer(s): Keith Lionel Urban, Gerald Edward Levert
- H. Little Big Town
“DAY DRINKING”

Writer(s): **Karen Fairchild**, Phillip Sweet, **Jimi Westbrook**,
Troy Verges, Barry George Dean
- I. Jake Owen
“BEACHIN”
Writer(s): Jaren Johnston, Jon Nite, Jimmy Robbins
- J. Jimmy Buffett
“MARGARITAVILLE”
Writer(s): Jimmy Buffett
- K. Luke Bryan
“IT’S A SHORE THING”
Writer(s): Luke Bryan, Cole Swindell, Michael Ray Carter
- L. Garth Brooks
“TWO PIÑA COLADAS”
Writer(s): Shawn Camp, Benita Hill, Sandy Manson

ANSWERS

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------|-----|----------------------|
| 1. | K - Luke Bryan | 7. | G - Keith Urban |
| 2. | F - Joe Nichols | 8. | A - Easton Corbin |
| 3. | H - Little Big Town | 9. | J - Jimmy Buffett |
| 4. | E - Kenny Chesney | 10. | D - Carrie Underwood |
| 5. | B - Blake Shelton | 11. | I - Jake Owen |
| 6. | C - Alan Jackson | 12. | L - Garth Brooks |



Published by Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines in *HORIZON 2015*