

Overview of Jamaica

It's easy to wax lyrical about Jamaica. From the glorious glow of its sunsets and the alluring white sandy beaches to the lush green mountains and sparkling waterfalls, this island paradise is one of the world's great holiday destinations.

Historically, only the wealthy could enjoy the unspoilt tropical delights of the island. Today, the northern and western coastlines of the island are stacked with tourist resorts and all-inclusive hotels. Natural attractions have been commercialised to cope with the crowds, but somehow this has not diminished Jamaica. It still presents a magnificent kaleidoscope of colour and beauty that makes holidaymakers reluctant to leave and always vowing to return.

The name Jamaica originates from the original inhabitants of the area, the Arawak Indians, to whom Xaymaca meant 'land of wood and water'. Sadly, there's little left of native culture after years of Spanish and British rule. Independence came in 1962 to the Jamaican people, who are now a blend of different cultures and nationalities.

The Jamaican people are heavily reliant on tourism for their living, with Bob Marley's image and spirit particularly pervasive throughout the country. The clear waters and colourful reefs are perfect for scuba diving or snorkeling, while there are fascinating historical sites such as old plantations and Georgian architecture.

Everyone will be able to savour the spirit of Jamaica, which is as rich as the lilt of the local patois and the rhythms of the reggae music for which the island is famous.

Key Facts

Language:

The official language of Jamaica is English but a local patois is also spoken, which is a mixture of English, Spanish, and various African languages.

Passport/Visa:

All foreign visitors to Jamaica must hold proof of sufficient funds to cover their expenses while in the country, return or onward tickets, and the necessary travel documentation for their next destination. A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required to enter Jamaica if visitors are arriving from or have transited through an infected area. It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Currency:

The Jamaican dollar (JMD) is the local currency and is divided into 100 cents. The island is well supplied with ATMs, banks and bureaux de change, with banking hours usually running Monday to Thursday from 9am to 2pm, and Friday from 9am to 4pm. Cambio exchange offices are found throughout the country and often offer better exchange rates than banks, as do exchange bureaux at the airports and hotels. Travellers should retain receipts as proof of legal currency exchange. Major credit cards are widely accepted; cash is best taken in US dollars.

Electricity:

Electrical current is 110 volts, 50Hz. Flat two- and three-pin plugs are in use.

Travel to Jamaica

Overview

Jamaica has a fascinating and diverse range of attractions. Visitors can take in the sights of Spanish Town or visit the former home of Bob Marley. Across the bay lies Port Royal, a notorious pirate haven from the 17th century, once renowned as the 'richest and wickedest city in the world'. Boat trips to the coral reefs at Lime Cay leave from the port, while adventurous souls can also take a predawn hike up Blue Mountain for an unmissable sunrise.

Montego Bay is home to the clear turquoise waters of Doctor's Cove Beach. Visitors here can experience a true taste of local culture in the busy, noisy bustle of downtown life. Further east lies Ocho Rios, where Ian Fleming wrote his James Bond novels. This popular destination for cruise ships also lies close to Dolphin Cove, the incredible Dunn's River Falls and the Green Grotto Caves.

Tucked away on the east of the island is Port Antonio, the secluded retreat of the rich and famous. Navy Island boasts gold sands and its very own rainforest, while fans of the movie Blue Lagoon will find the actual site near Port Antonio.

To the west lies the beautiful town of Negril, with its famous Seven Mile Beach stretching up the coast. Perched up on the cliffs is Rick's Cafe, one of the top bars in the world, serving great food, rum cocktails and a truly homegrown reggae vibe.

Climate in Jamaica

Jamaica's climate is tropical with constant warm to hot temperatures all year round, though conditions are cooler in the higher, central areas. On the coast temperatures range from 72F (22C) and 88F (31C). Mornings and evenings are slightly chillier in the winter months but Jamaica is hot year-round. There are variations in climate according to region, with the east coast receiving substantially more rain than the rest of the country, and the south coast far less.

The wettest months are between May and November, when short sharp showers can be expected. The heaviest rains occur in September and October and the hurricane season runs from June to November. The country is also in the earthquake zone.

Due to its tropical climate Jamaica is a popular destination all year, but the best time to visit is between mid-December and mid-April, which is the peak tourist season. If visitors are travelling on a budget or want to avoid the crowds, they should consider coming in the rainy season, which has its own charms.

Health Notes when travelling to Jamaica

While generally safe, the tap water can cause stomach upsets and visitors are advised to drink bottled water. Mosquito-borne diseases, such as Zika, dengue fever and chikungunya have been confirmed. Private medical facilities are of a reasonable standard but can vary throughout the island, with facilities limited outside Kingston and Montego Bay. Medical treatment can be expensive so travel insurance is advised. If visitors require prescription medication, it's best to bring it with them, along with a signed and dated letter from their doctor naming the medication and explaining why they need it.

Safety Notes when travelling to Jamaica

There are incidents of petty crime such as robbery, particularly in the capital city of Kingston and in Montego Bay. Tourists are advised to be cautious and take care of their belongings. It's best to avoid using buses at night and also to steer clear of any public demonstrations that may occur. Hurricane season runs from June to November. While it is rare for tropical storms to make landfall in Jamaica, visitors travelling at this time should monitor local and international weather updates for peace of mind.

Customs in Jamaica

Contrary to popular belief, smoking marijuana is illegal in Jamaica. Homosexuality is also prohibited by law and the country is notorious for its intolerance towards it.

Duty Free in Jamaica

Travellers to Jamaica over 18 years do not have to pay duty on 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 230g of other tobacco products; 1L alcoholic beverages and wine; and perfume up to 170ml. Prohibited items include products made from goatskin (e.g. drums, handbags and rugs).

Doing Business in Jamaica

Business in Jamaica is surprisingly formal, with proper titles used and suits and ties the norm despite the tropical climate. Introductions are usually made with a handshake and an exchange of business cards. Punctuality is key, and socialising is an important aspect of the business meeting. Business hours are usually from 8:30am to 4:30pm or 5pm on weekdays.

Communication in Jamaica

The international access code for Jamaica is +1, in common with the US, Canada and most of the Caribbean, followed by 876. WiFi is available in the main towns, restaurants and resorts; travellers can purchase local prepaid SIM cards for unlocked phones.

Tipping in Jamaica

Outside the all-inclusive resorts in Jamaica where tips are part of the package, visitors should tip 10 to 15 percent for taxis, personal services, room service and restaurants where a service charge is not already included in the bill. Parking attendants, bellboys and porters also expect a small tip.

Passport/Visa Note

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Entry Requirements

Entry requirements for Americans:

US citizens must have a passport to enter Jamaica that has to be valid upon their return to the USA. A visa is required for stays of over 90 days.

Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadian citizens require a passport valid for period of intended stay. No visa is required for stays of fewer than 90 days.

Entry requirements for UK nationals:

UK citizens must have a passport to enter Jamaica that has to be valid for the duration of their stay. A visa is required for stays of over 90 days.

Entry requirements for Australians:

Australian citizens must have a passport that is valid for the period of intended stay in Jamaica. No visa is required for stays of fewer than 90 days.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish citizens must have a passport that is valid for the period of intended stay in Jamaica. No visa is required for stays of up to 90 days.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

New Zealand citizens must have a passport that is valid for the period of intended stay in Jamaica. No visa is required for stays of fewer than 90 days.

Entry requirements for South Africans:

South African citizens must have a passport that is valid for the period of intended stay in Jamaica. A visa is required.

Tourist Offices

<http://www.visitjamaica.com>

Jamaica Embassies

In the United States:

Jamaican Embassy, Washington DC, United States: +1 202 452 0660.

In Canada:

Jamaican High Commission, Ottawa, Canada: +1 613 233 9311.

In the United Kingdom:

Jamaica High Commission, London, United Kingdom: +44 20 7823 9911.

In Australia:

Jamaican Embassy, Sydney +61 04 0220 5266.

In Ireland:

Jamaican Embassy, Brussels, Belgium (also responsible for Ireland): +32 2 230 1170.

In South Africa:

Jamaican High Commission, Pretoria, South Africa: +27 12 362 6667

Foreign Embassies in Jamaica

American Embassy

United States Embassy, Kingston: +1 876 702 6000.

Canadian Embassy

Canadian High Commission, Kingston: +1 876 926 1500.

British Embassy

British High Commission, Kingston: +1 876 936 0700

Australian Embassy

Australian High Commission, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago (also responsible for Jamaica): +1 868 822 5450.

Irish Embassy

Irish Embassy, Ottawa, Canada (also responsible for Jamaica): +1 613 233 6281.

New Zealand Embassy

New Zealand High Commission, Ottawa, Canada (also responsible for Jamaica): +1 613 238 5991.

South African Embassy

South African High Commission, Kingston: + 1 876 620 4840.

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Exchange rate for 1 JMD - Jamaican Dollar

nan BMD Bermudan Dollar	inf EUR Euro	inf USD U.S. Dollar	inf GBP U.K. Pound Sterling	inf JPY Japanese Yen	inf CAD Canadian Dollar
inf CHF Swiss Franc	inf AUD Australian Dollar	inf UAH Ukrainian Hryvnia	inf KZT Kazakhstani Tenge	inf LBP Lebanese Pound	inf LYD Libyan Dinar
inf BOB Bolivian Boliviano	nan NPR Nepalese Rupee	nan OMR Omani Rial	nan QAR Qatari Rial	inf SGD Singapore Dollar	inf SEK Swedish Krona
nan TTD Trinidad Tobago Dollar	nan VEF Venezuelan Bolivar	inf DOP Dominican Peso	nan HRK Croatian Kuna	inf MXN Mexican Peso	inf XOF West African CFA Franc
nan PGK Papua New Guinean kina	nan BSD Bahamian Dollar	nan FJD Fiji Dollar	nan HNL Honduran Lempira	inf DZD Algerian Dinar	nan MMK Myanma Kyat
nan BWP Botswana Pula	inf PEN Peruvian Nuevo Sol	inf CLP Chilean Peso	inf AMD Armenia Dram	inf CZK Czech Koruna	inf MDL Moldova Lei
inf ISK Icelandic Krona	inf UZS Uzbekistan Sum	inf ILS Israeli New Sheqel	inf JOD Jordanian Dinar	nan KWD Kuwaiti Dinar	inf UYU Uruguayan Peso
nan MUR Mauritian Rupee	nan NIO Nicaraguan Córdoba	inf NOK Norwegian Krone	inf PLN Polish Zloty	inf SAR Saudi Riyal	nan LKR Sri Lanka Rupee
inf THB Thai Baht	inf AED U.A.E Dirham	inf BRL Brazilian Real	inf RON Romanian New Leu	inf HKD Hong Kong Dollar	inf XAF Central African CFA Franc
inf VND Vietnamese Dong	inf ARS Argentine Peso	nan XCD East Caribbean Dollar	nan GTQ Guatemalan Quetzal	inf MAD Moroccan Dirham	nan BHD Bahrain Dinar
inf PAB Panamanian Balboa	inf AZN Azerbaijan Manat	inf COP Colombian Peso	inf KGS Kyrgyzstan Som	inf HUF Hungarian Forint	inf TJS Tajikistan Ruble
inf IDR Indonesian Rupiah	inf EGP Egyptian Pound	inf KRW South Korean Won	inf PYG Paraguayan Guaraní	inf MYR Malaysian Ringgit	inf CRC Costa Rican Colón
inf NZD New Zealand Dollar	inf PKR Pakistani Rupee	inf RUB Russian Rouble	inf ZAR South African Rand	inf TND Tunisian Dinar	nan BBD Barbadian Dollar
inf BGN Bulgarian Lev	inf TRY Turkish Lira	inf PHP Philippine Peso	inf TWD New Taiwan Dollar	inf NGN Nigerian Naira	nan XPF CFP Franc
nan GHS Ghanaian Cedi	nan ANG Neth. Antillean Guilder	nan BND Brunei Dollar	inf RSD Serbian Dinar	inf CNY Chinese Yuan	inf DKK Danish Krone
inf TMT New Turkmenistan Manat	inf INR Indian Rupee				

Port of Call - Montego Bay

Montego Bay or 'Mo Bay' is the second largest city in Jamaica and its most popular tourist destination. It's abuzz with shopping centres, a variety of inland tourist attractions and beach-side water activities set against Georgian colonial architecture. Montego Bay offers a great variety of attractions and there are many worthwhile daytrips and excursions out of the city. The most popular sights are a choice of championship golf courses, the haunted and eerie Rose Hall, and one of the best beaches on Jamaica, the Doctor's Cave Beach, with its celebrated crystal clear waters. The 'Hip Strip' is the most popular street for shopping and cocktails and is often the first stop for cruise passengers wanting to investigate the city. Most cruise ships berth at Montego Freeport Terminal which can accommodate four cruise liners at once. The docks have five berths, two of which are used exclusively for cruise liners and another two used for both cargo and cruise ships, giving the area a bit of an industrial feel. There is a cruise terminal building used exclusively by passengers.

Shopping in Montego Bay

Both Half Moon Shopping Centre and the City Centre have duty-free shops selling luxury items in Montego Bay. Multiple craft markets can also be found in downtown Mo Bay, selling an eclectic mix of goods, but expect to bargain hard.

Best Buy: Rum and coffee

Dining in Montego Bay

Margaritaville - An active beach-side sports bar with western food. Pier One - Lovely seafood restaurant on the pier serving both Jamaican and international cuisine. Sugar Mill Restaurant - Some Jamaican cuisine specialties in a formal setting.

Best Dish: Jerky

Port of Call - Ocho Rios

Ocho Rios is located on Jamaica's north coast, and it's the country's most popular cruise destination. It's a modern resort and cruise liner playground surrounded by breathtaking tropical mountain and beach scenery. The best and most popular sights just outside the city include the Dunn's River Falls, a series of waterfalls which empty out into the Caribbean Sea, and nearby Dolphin Cove, where dolphins swim with visitors in a natural setting. However, many visitors find that the glorious Ocho Rios beaches are more than enough to occupy them for several blissful days! Cruise ships either dock at Ocho Rios Bay cruise terminal located in the central part of town, or Reynolds Pier. When these are full, cruise liners anchor in the harbour and tender passengers into town. The cruise terminals are free of vendors and taxi solicitors.

Shopping in Ocho Rios

With at least six different shopping markets there is one around every corner in Ocho Rios. Items range from duty-free luxury goods to local crafts. Prices are usually highly inflated and tough bargaining is expected in the markets.

Best Buy: Coffee, rum, jerked meat

Dining in Ocho Rios

BiBiBips - Caribbean cuisine on an open-air veranda with live reggae music. The Ocho Rios Jerk Center - Very casual open air restaurant centred around all things jerk. Evita's - A Celebrity favourite with hilltop views and Italian food.

Best Dish: Jerked meat

Overview of the Attractions in Jamaica

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