



Jamaica

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Why Go?

Jamaica, at first blush, is the Caribbean island many know best thanks to its relentless exposure – is there a soul who's never listened to Bob Marley? – and dreadlocks, dancehall and beaches.

But did you know there are Chinese Jamaicans and Jewish Jamaicans and white Jamaicans who speak patois as fluently as downtown Kingston yardies? Jamaica, perhaps more than any other Caribbean nation, also keeps one foot (and much of its cultural heart) rooted in Africa.

Understand the above and you can better appreciate the good, red Jamaican soil; the respect Jamaicans have for life and nature; and the meaning 'One Love' has in a place like the Kingston ghettos. To know Jamaica, experience it. As locals say, 'Rock-stone a river naah know sun hot'. That's patois for 'experience brings knowledge,' and so much more so on an island that can express such simple proverbs so beautifully.

Best Beaches

- » Frenchman's Beach (p554)
- » Long Bay, Portland (p538)
- » Doctor's Cave (p545)
- » Long Bay, Negril (p551)
- » Frenchman's Cove (p537)

Best Places to Stay

- » Nuestra Casa Guest House (p554)
- » Kanopi House (p538)
- » Time N' Place (p551)
- » Idler's Rest (p556)
- » Blue House (p540)

When to Go

Jamaica has a pleasant tropical climate year-round – 26°C (79°F) to 30°C (86°F) – but there are definite dry and wet seasons. From December to April-ish, you can expect sun and clear skies. From June to September, there are frequent short bursts of heavy rain, but far fewer crowds. The exceptions are the northeast, like Port Antonio, where it's rainy year-round; and the southwest coast, where it's almost always dry. The island is crazy crowded during Christmas and the weeks surrounding it, as well as during the US Spring Break (late March to early April).

Itineraries

THREE DAYS

Hit the sand in Montego Bay for a day, then take a raft trip down the Martha Brae, a swim in the Glistening Waters and a walk around historic Falmouth.

ONE WEEK

Head straight to Treasure Beach and explore around the South Coast in areas like Black River and YS Falls, interspersed with relaxing on the beach.

TWO WEEKS

After the one-week itinerary, head to Portland parish for some rafting on the Rio Grande and surfing in Boston Bay.

THREE WEEKS

Follow the two-week itinerary, then visit cosmopolitan Kingston (the heartbeat of Jamaica), followed by a jaunt into the high Blue Mountains.

GETTING TO NEIGHBORING ISLANDS

There is no ferry service to other islands from Jamaica. Montego Bay and Kingston have international airports and daily flights to Nassau, Grand Cayman, Antigua, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, Guadeloupe, Grenada, Haiti and other islands. Flights are usually a little more expensive from Kingston, but check online, as deals are occasionally offered.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Jerk** Jamaica's most well-known dish, jerk is actually a cooking method: smother food in a tongue-searing marinade, then smoke over a wood fire.
- » **Seafood** Snapper and parrotfish are popular. A favorite dish is escoveitched fish – pickled in vinegar then fried and simmered with peppers and onions.
- » **Breadkinds** A catchall term for starchy sides, from plantains and yam to pancake-shaped cassava bread (bammy) and johnnycakes (fried dumplings).
- » **Saltfish & Ackee** Jamaica's national dish, and a delicious breakfast besides. Ackee is a fleshy, somewhat bland fruit; saltfish is, well, salted fish. When mixed together they're delicious, somewhat resembling scrambled eggs.
- » **Brown stew** Not a soup, brown stew is another popular method of cooking that involves simmering meat, fish or vegetables in savory-sweet sauce.
- » **Patties** Baked shells filled with spicy beef, vegetables and whatever else folks desire. Cheap and filling.
- » **Rum** Clear and light white rums, flavored rums, brain-bashing overproof rums (rum over 151 proof), deep dark rums, and the rare amber nectar of the finest premium rums.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Jamaican dollar (J\$); US dollars (US\$) widely accepted
- » **Language** English, patois
- » **Money** ATMs in Montego Bay, Kingston, Mandeville and Port Antonio; some in Negril; thin on the ground elsewhere
- » **Visas** See p564

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 11,391 sq km
- » **Population** 2.7 million
- » **Capital** Kingston
- » **Telephone country code** 876
- » **Emergency** Ambulance/fire/police 011/110/119

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** US\$75
- » **Two-course evening meal** J\$800 (local places), US\$25 (tourist places)
- » **Museum entrance** J\$500
- » **Beer** J\$250
- » **City transport ticket** J\$80

Resources

- » **Dancehall Reggae** (www.dancehallreggae.com) The latest on the music scene
- » **Jamaica Gleaner** (www.jamaica-gleaner.com) Reliable newspaper
- » **Visit Jamaica** (www.visitjamaica.com) The tourist board's attractions and lodging information