



Understand Jamaica

JAMAICA TODAY.....248

Known for reggae rhythms and Rasta cool, but there's trouble in paradise. How is the average Jamaican coping?

HISTORY250

Taínos and Spaniards; abolitionists and pirate Jews; the slave traders and sugar fiefdoms: how Jamaica's turbulent past shaped its present.

JAMAICAN LIFE 261

Jamaica is an intriguing mix of influences: deep spirituality, deprecating humor, political upheaval, and a fiercely creative, competitive soul.

MUSIC268

Bob Marley's reggae revolution helped put the island on the international stage, but there's much more to Jamaica's soundscape.

NATURAL JAMAICA..... 273

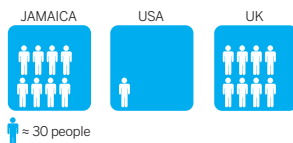
Narrow coastal plains and broad flatlands; jagged mountains pocked with caves cut by about 120 rivers; all pulsating with wildlife.

FOOD & DRINK..... 278

Jamaican cuisine combines the heft of a peasant's diet with the unique and colorful flavors of a cultural entrepôt.



population per sq km



Jamaica Today

Trouble in Paradise

Jamaicans tend to be passionate people. Their full-bore approach to life is what often attracts and sometimes intimidates visitors to their island. You will see this energy manifest itself in countless ways; in loud laughter, loud music, loud church revivals... What we're saying is 'quiet' is a relative term in Jamaica. And to be fair, it's hard to be subdued when you live on an island so beautiful it's been mistaken by explorers for Eden, where things like music and generosity and smiles that take in the eyes are commonplace.

Yet that same island is a troubled paradise. The easiest way to hear angry patois is to talk politics with a Jamaican; most, including deceptively laid-back Rastas, have well-crafted and informed opinions on current affairs in Jamaica, and even the optimistic ones have their gripes. Jamaica faces many challenges: 20% illiteracy, 35% teen pregnancy, almost half of young women reporting sexual violence or coercion and 1428 reported murders in 2010. Jamaica's citizens are patriotic, but the high hopes and promise they hold for their home are often balanced out by tension, even anxiety, over the future.

Reggae has long been one of the most identifiable elements of the Jamaican brand. Locals and outsiders have understandably tied its rhythms and beats to sun, sand and relaxation. But Bob Marley's timeless message of 'One Love' was topically addressed at factions that were gunning each other down in the streets of Kingston in the 1970s. The powerful message of hope reggae music imparts is rooted in deep national trauma.

Jamaica is a poor but not destitute island (it ranked 80th out of 168 on the 2010 UNDP's Human Development Index), yet at the time of writing, 85% of Jamaicans with a post high-school degree were expected to

» Population:
2.86 million

» GDP:
US\$23.93
billion

» GDP per
capita:
US\$8400

» Public debt:
123% of GDP

» Inflation rate:
13%

» Unemploy-
ment rate: 13%

Top Films

» **The Harder They Come** (1972)
A classic rags-to-rude bwai (rude boy) story of country boy turned Kingston criminal. One of the best soundtracks in film history.

» **Smile Orange** (1976) A
hilarious tale of a waiter hustling
tourists at Jamaican resorts.

» **Life and Debt** (2001) A
powerful documentary on the
impact of globalization on the
Jamaican economy.

Patois Proverbs

» **Chicken deh merry, hawk deh near** 'Danger stalks those having fun.' Remember when walking home at night!

» **Rockstone a riva bottom cyaan noh sun hot** 'You learn from experience.' Leave the resort!