

# Jamaica



## KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1962
Population:	2,719,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	0.7% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 80
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT minus 5hr
Currency:	Jamaican dollar (J\$)

## Geography

Area:	10,991 sq km
Coastline:	1,020km
Capital:	Kingston

Jamaica, whose name comes from the Arawak *Xaymaca*, meaning 'Land of Wood and Water', lies south of Cuba and west of Haiti.

**Area:** The third largest island in the Caribbean, Jamaica has a land area of 10,991 sq km.

**Main towns:** Kingston (capital, pop. 578,400 in 2009), Spanish Town (158,500), Portmore (105,200), Montego Bay (80,400), Mandeville (48,300), May Pen (44,300), Old Harbour (28,100), Linstead (22,300), Savanna-la-Mar (19,400), Half Way Tree (18,200), Port Antonio (14,400), Bog Walk (13,900), Ewarton (13,800), St Ann's Bay (13,700), Constant Spring (12,600), Morant Bay (10,200), Hayes (9,800) and Ocho Rios (9,600).

**Topography:** Jamaica is the ridge of a submerged mountain range. The land rises to 2,256m at Blue Mountain Peak. The coastline is indented, with many good natural bays. Fine sandy beaches occur on the north and west coasts. Small fast-flowing rivers, prone to flash flooding, run in forested gullies.

**Climate:** Tropical at the coast (22–34°C), with fresh sea breezes; markedly cooler in the mountains. Rainfall ranges from 1,500mm p.a. in Kingston to 3,850mm p.a. in Port Antonio. Jamaica lies in the hurricane zone.

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issues are deforestation; pollution of coastal waters by industrial waste, sewage and oil spills; damage to coral reefs; and air pollution in Kingston due to vehicle emissions.

## did you know?

Patricia Francis of Jamaica was appointed to the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group in 2010; the group will make recommendations for reform in the Commonwealth, to be presented to Commonwealth leaders at CHOGM in Australia in October 2011.

Jamaicans hold four Commonwealth Games records and three world records.

Four Jamaican women have won Commonwealth Writers' Prizes: Olive Senior in 1987 (Best Book); Erna Brodber in 1989; Alecia McKenzie in 1993; and Vanessa Spence in 1994.

The Commonwealth Library Association has its secretariat at the Mona, Kingston, campus of the University of the West Indies.

**Vegetation:** Jamaica's luxuriant tropical and, at higher altitude, subtropical vegetation is probably the richest in the region. There are more than 3,000 flowering species, including 194 orchid-species, several cactus-species, of which seven are unique to Jamaica, and 12 native palm-species. Forest covers 31% of the total land area, having declined at 0.1% p.a. 2000–07. Arable land comprises 16% and permanent cropland 10% of the total land area.

**Wildlife:** Fauna include 30 bat species. There is also a rich variety of birdlife (of some 75 species recorded, 10 were threatened with extinction in 2008), turtles, non-poisonous snakes, lizards, crocodiles, 14 kinds of butterfly unique to Jamaica, and many moths and fireflies. Manatees live in the coastal waters. There are about 500 species of landshell, many of which are unique to Jamaica.

**Transport:** There are 22,060km of roads, 73% paved. There is no railway.

Main ports are Kingston, with dedicated wharves for bulk cargoes of petroleum, flour, cement, gypsum and lumber, and Montego Bay in the north-west; and the international airports are Norman Manley International, 17km south-east of Kingston, and Montego Bay International, 3km north of the city.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 247  
 Life expectancy: 72 years  
 Net primary enrolment: 97%

**Population:** 2,719,000 (2009); 52% lives in urban areas; growth 0.7% p.a. 1990–2009 but emigration (principally to the UK, Canada and the USA) has been significant for two generations; birth rate 19 per 1,000 people (35 in 1970); life expectancy 72 years (68 in 1970).

The population is predominantly of African descent (91% in 2001 census), with European-, East Indian- and Chinese-descended minorities, and some people of mixed descent (6%).

**Language:** English; an English-based Creole is widely spoken.

**Religion:** Mainly Christians (Church of God 24%, Seventh Day Adventists 11%, Pentecostals 10%, Baptists 7%, Anglicans 4%, Roman Catholics 3%), and there is also a significant Rastafarian community (2001 census).

**Media:** National dailies are *The Gleaner*, *Jamaica Observer* and *Daily Star* (evenings), and all have weekend editions. *Sunday Herald* is a weekly.

After the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation was privatised in 1997, many – mostly commercial – radio and TV broadcasters entered the field.

Some 70% of households have TV sets (2006). There are 67 personal computers (2005) and 582 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

**Education:** Public spending on education was 6.2% of GDP in 2008. There are six years of compulsory education starting at age six. Primary school comprises six years and secondary seven, with cycles of three and four years. The school year starts in September.

The regional University of the West Indies (established in 1946) has its principal campus at Mona, near Kingston, and other main campuses in Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago. In January 2009, the 44 other tertiary institutions in Jamaica registered with the University Council of Jamaica included the University of Technology, College of Agriculture, Science and Education, Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts, G C Foster College of Physical Education and Sports, Knox Community College and Northern Caribbean University (owned by the Seventh Day Adventists, located in Mandeville, a university since 1999). The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 222:100 (2008). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 95% (2008).

**Health:** There are more than 20 hospitals, mostly public, and many health centres. Hospital services and government medical care are subsidised, patients paying modest fees related to their income. Around 9% of the population has private health insurance. 94% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 83% in urban areas have adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Infant mortality was 26 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (56 in 1960). In 2009, 1.7% of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

**Communications:** Country code 1 876; internet domain '.jm'. There are internet cafes and kiosks in Kingston; elsewhere internet access is available at libraries and hotels.

There are 111 main telephone lines and 1,093 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

**Public holidays:** New Year's Day, Labour Day (23 May), Emancipation Day (1 August), Independence Day (6 August), National Heroes' Day (third Monday in October), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and Easter Monday.

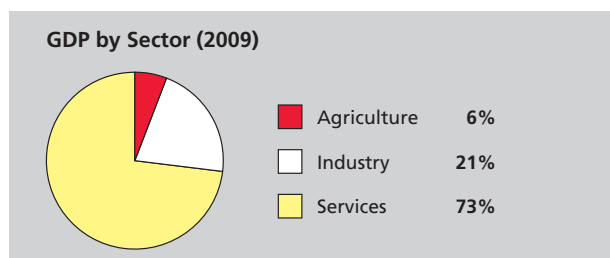
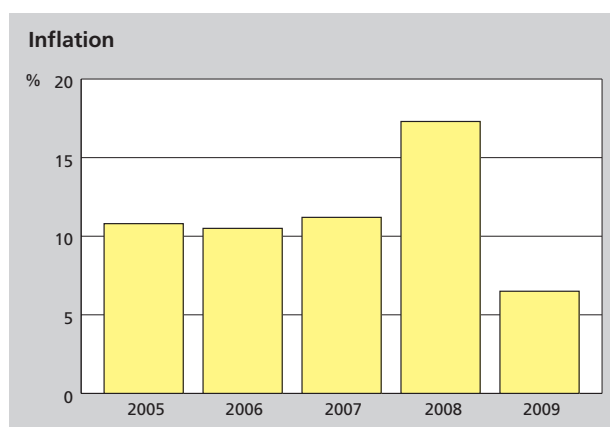
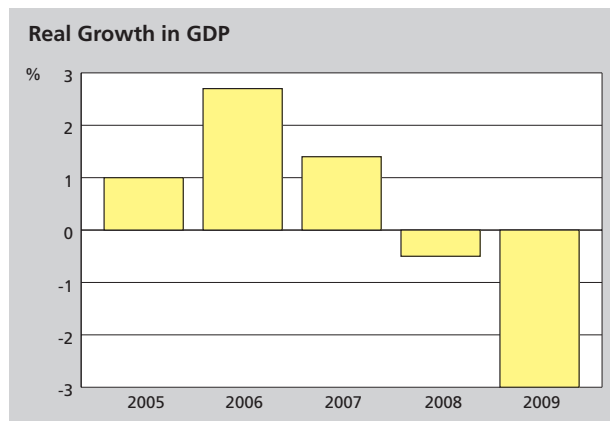
## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2009

GNI: US\$12.4bn  
 GNI p.c.: US\$4,590  
 GDP growth: 0.3% p.a. 2005–09  
 Inflation: 11.2% p.a. 2005–09

**Overview:** Jamaica has a relatively large and diversified economy. It grew strongly in the early years of independence, but then stagnated in the 1980s, burdened with persistent large fiscal and external deficits, due to heavy falls in the price of bauxite, fluctuations in the prices of agricultural commodities, and economic policies which left the country with high inflation, a fast devaluing currency, growing external debt and a large public sector containing many loss-making industries. Jamaica signed a series of agreements with the IMF, continuing into the 1990s and 2000s.

Substantial efforts have been made to attract investors through a range of tax, customs and other incentives, developing its equity markets, and encouraging joint ventures and privatisation, notably of hotels. The free-trade zones at Kingston, Montego Bay and Spanish Town allow duty-free importation, tax-free profits and free repatriation of export earnings. The USA, China (Hong Kong) and Taiwan have provided most investment in these zones. Tourism and



manufacturing are important industries. Investment and remittances from Jamaicans abroad make a significant contribution to GNI.

The financial sector was troubled from late 1994, with many banks and insurance companies suffering heavy losses and liquidity problems. The government set up the Financial Sector Adjustment Company (Finsac) in January 1997 to assist these banks and companies, providing funds in return for equity, and acquired substantial holdings in banks and insurance companies and related companies, bringing government expenditure on financial-sector rescues to more than US\$2.8bn by 2001, exacerbating the economic problems and saddling the country with a large external debt. From 2001, once it had restored these banks and companies to financial health, Finsac divested them.

Despite the reforms, for successive governments it proved very difficult to break out of the cycle of deficits, currency devaluations, very high inflation and falling living standards. Even in the latter 1990s, after reductions in the public sector and when inflation was in single figures, the economy continued to shrink or stagnate.

Three years of recession were followed in the 2000s by modest but steady growth, dipping in 2004 when, in September, the island was devastated by Hurricane Ivan. Hurricane Dean in August 2007 and heavy rains caused widespread damage to agriculture and disruption in mining activities. Then, as the world moved into recession in 2008, the Jamaican economy itself moved swiftly into reverse. With external debt rising and the economy contracting, in 2009 Jamaica once again sought the support of the IMF, agreeing a standby loan package in February 2010.

**Trade:** Exports of goods and services account for around 45% of GDP (2007). Main exports are alumina and bauxite (more than 50% of merchandise exports by value), sugar and bananas.

## Constitution

**Status:** Monarchy under Queen Elizabeth II  
**Legislature:** Houses of Parliament  
**Independence:** 6 August 1962

Jamaica is a constitutional monarchy with Queen Elizabeth II as head of state. She is represented by a governor-general appointed on the recommendation of the prime minister. The country is a parliamentary democracy with a bicameral legislature and party system, based on universal adult suffrage.

The 21 senators are appointed by the governor-general, 13 of them on the advice of the prime minister, and eight on the advice of the leader of the opposition. The House of Representatives has 60 directly elected members. The governor-general appoints the prime minister (the MP best able to lead the majority of the House) and leader of the opposition. The cabinet (prime minister and at least 11 ministers) has executive responsibility. Elections are held at intervals not exceeding five years.

The constitution may be amended by a simple majority of both houses except for the entrenched provisions (that can be amended only by two-thirds majority of both houses) and specially entrenched clauses (as above, plus ratification through referendum).

## Politics

**Last elections:** September 2007  
**Next elections:** 2012  
**Head of state:** Queen Elizabeth II, represented by governor-general, Dr Patrick Allen (2009–)  
**Head of government:** Prime Minister Andrew Holness  
**Ruling party:** Jamaica Labour Party

Due to ill health, Michael Manley retired as prime minister in March 1992 and was succeeded by P J Patterson, who led the People's National Party (PNP) to another victory at elections in March 1993. The PNP won 52 seats, the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) eight.

Jamaican politics was preoccupied with economic and security issues during the 1990s and this resulted in a high incidence of strikes, with all parties favouring economic liberalisation. The strict control on spending of the PNP government cost it popularity in the mid-1990s; however, the JLP also had problems. In late 1995, the party split, leading to the creation of a third party, the National Democratic Movement (NDM), headed by Bruce Golding, former chairman of the JLP.

New measures to combat electoral fraud were instituted in 1997, following complaints after the 1993 elections. By August 1997 a new electoral roll, replacing the 1991 list, had been drawn up under an Electoral Advisory Committee with equal representation of the JLP and PNP.

The ruling PNP won a resounding victory in the general election in December 1997, and Patterson continued in office as prime minister. The poll had been relatively peaceful and the international team of observers led by former US President Jimmy Carter judged it free and fair. With 56% of the votes the PNP took 50 of the 60 seats in the House of Representatives, while the JLP received 39% of the votes and took ten seats.

The government pressed ahead with economic reforms, raising taxes and containing public expenditure, in the face of building public protests. On the announcement in April 1999 of increases in taxes on petrol, motor vehicles, cigarettes and alcohol there was an

outbreak of violence, initially in the capital but spreading throughout the country.

After a violent campaign, the general election in October 2002 was largely free of violence. In a closer-fought contest than in 1997, the PNP won an unprecedented fourth successive victory with 34 seats and 52% of the votes and Patterson was returned as prime minister. The JLP took the remaining 26 seats.

In September 2003, Patterson said that he wanted Jamaica to become a republic before 2007 when his government's term of office was due to end. Following his return to the JLP in 2002, in 2005 Bruce Golding succeeded the party's veteran leader Edward Seaga as party leader; Seaga had been leader in government and opposition for 31 years.

Professor Kenneth Hall succeeded Sir Howard Felix Cooke as governor-general in February 2006 and Portia Simpson Miller



## History

Little is known about the island's early history, except that there are many traces of Arawak habitation, and that Arawaks, agriculturists who made good-quality textiles and pottery, were living there when Christopher Columbus landed on 14 May 1494, on his second American voyage of exploration. He named the island Santiago (Saint-James). However, the name was never adopted and it kept its Arawak name *Xaymaca*, of which 'Jamaica' is a corruption. Lacking gold, Jamaica was used mainly as a staging post in the scramble for the wealth of the Americas.

The Spanish arrival was a disaster to the indigenous peoples, great numbers of whom were sent to Spain as slaves, others used as slaves on site, and many killed by the invaders, despite the efforts of Spanish Christian missionaries to prevent these outrages. There were no Arawaks left on the island by 1665, but there were enslaved Africans replacing them.

In 1645 the British captured Jamaica from the Spaniards, whose former slaves refused to surrender, took to the mountains and repelled all attempts to subjugate them. These people came to be known as Maroons (from the Spanish *cimarron*, meaning 'wild', a word applied to escaped slaves). Between 1660 and 1670 pirates used Jamaica as a place of resort.

In 1670 Spain formally ceded the island to Britain. Two years later the Royal Africa Company, a slave-trading enterprise, was formed. The company used Jamaica as its chief market, and the island became a centre of slave trading in the West Indies. Nonetheless, the battles of the Maroons to retain their freedom succeeded when, in 1740, the British authorities recognised their rights to freedom and ownership of property.

Settlers, using slave labour, developed sugar, cocoa, indigo and later coffee estates. The island was very prosperous by the time of the Napoleonic wars (1792–1814), exporting sugar and coffee; but after the wars sugar prices dropped, and the slave trade was abolished in 1807. After the emancipation of slaves in 1834, the plantations were worked by indentured Indian and Chinese labourers. Sugar prices fell again in 1846. Jamaica's worsening economic situation caused widespread suffering and discontent.

In October 1865, a political protest at Morant Bay organised by G W Gordon developed into an uprising during which the local magistrate and 18 other Europeans were killed. The governor, E J Eyre, declared martial law and launched a punitive campaign of ruthless severity, with several executions without trial, including the hanging of Gordon, who had not instigated any violence. The reaction in Britain was astonished outrage. Eyre was removed from office and Jamaica placed under Crown colony rule (1866). The banana industry was established in the second half of the 19th century, on big estates and smallholdings. In the early 20th century, Jamaicans worked on banana plantations in Central America and Cuba, and in the construction of the Panama Canal.

Jamaica's first colonial constitution gave considerable power to settlers. The governor's council included senior figures such as the bishop and chief justice, but the representative assembly was controlled by white settlers. After the imposition of direct Crown colony rule in 1866, settlers lost their power and the governor was advised only by the mainly nominated privy council. With amendments, this constitution was retained until 1944.

In 1938, the People's National Party (PNP), led by Norman Manley, was formed to campaign for independence. The Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), led by Sir Alexander Bustamante, was founded in 1943.

In 1944, an executive council, with half its members elected by universal adult franchise, was established. In 1953, ministers from the council took over most portfolios, and Bustamante became chief minister. Manley followed, in 1955. When Jamaica joined the Federation of the West Indies in 1958, it had full internal self-government with a legislative council (senate) and legislative assembly (holding real power).

On independence in 1962 Bustamante was prime minister. With bauxite in demand, tourism flourishing and a revival in bananas, Jamaica's economy boomed.

In 1972, the PNP, led by Norman Manley's son, Michael, won the elections, and remained in office until 1980, when the JLP under Edward Seaga came to power. The PNP, again under the leadership of Michael Manley, won the elections of 1989.

succeeded Patterson as prime minister when he retired after 14 consecutive years in office in March 2006.

In the September 2007 general election, the opposition JLP, led by Golding, won a narrow victory with 33 seats and 50.1% of votes, while PNP took 27 seats and 49.8%. There was a 60% turnout.

Dr Patrick Allen succeeded Sir Kenneth Hall as governor-general on his retirement in February 2009.

On 25 September 2011 Bruce Golding announced his retirement as JLP leader and prime minister. In early October 2011 the JLP chose education minister Andrew Holness as its new leader and Holness was sworn in as prime minister on 23 October. At 39 he was the country's youngest ever prime minister.

## International relations

Jamaica is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Association of Caribbean States, Caribbean Community, Non-Aligned Movement, Organization of American States, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Jamaica hosts the headquarters of the International Seabed Authority, the autonomous international organisation established in 1994 under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

## Traveller information

**Local laws and conventions:** As the birthplace of musician Bob Marley, reggae is at the heart of the island's music, which visitors will hear playing everywhere.

There are harsh penalties for drug offences, including those involving ganja, or marijuana. Smoking ganja is illegal. Possession of even small quantities of illegal drugs can lead to imprisonment. Visitors must ensure they pack their own luggage and never carry packages through customs for a third party.

Handshaking is the usual form of greeting. Business culture is respectful and polite. Punctuality is important and business cards are expected. If bringing in goods other than non-commercial samples, business travellers must clear this with the office of the Trade Administrator before entering the country. Business hours are Mon–Fri 0830–1700.

**Immigration and customs:** Passports need to be valid for at least six months from the date of arrival. Citizens of the EU, USA, Australia and Canada do not currently require visas to enter the country.

Lone parents should carry documentation showing parental responsibility for any accompanying children.

A yellow fever certificate will be required from all those arriving from infected countries.

Prohibited imports include indecent or obscene material such as prints, paintings, films, lithographs, books, cards or written communications. Publications relating to divination, magic or mysticism are also banned.

**Travel within the country:** Driving is on the left-hand side. Car hire is available for those aged over 25 at the airport and in all the major towns. Seatbelts are compulsory and motorcyclists must wear helmets.

Visitors are advised to use Jamaican Tourist Board (JTB) taxis and minibuses for getting around, sightseeing and airport transfers. JTB drivers have photo ID and display a blue sticker on their front windscreen. Most taxis have meters but for longer journeys it is best to agree a price before starting out. There is a reliable bus service connecting Kingston and Montego Bay. Outside the main towns and resorts bus services are variable.

Air Jamaica Express runs flights between resort areas. Water taxis, yachts and short cruises are offered by numerous tourist operators.

The railway only carries cargo.

**Travel health:** Medical treatment can be expensive and comprehensive travel insurance that includes medical evacuation is advised.

Visitors will need protection against dengue fever and should have insect repellent and suitable clothing to discourage mosquito bites. Hepatitis A, diphtheria and tetanus are also present, and vaccine requirements should be checked well before departure.

Mains water is safe in tourist areas and bottled water is widely available.

**Money:** Local laws require all transactions to be made in Jamaican dollars. Currency can be exchanged at airports, hotels and bureaux. It is important to keep all receipts, as black market exchange is illegal. American Express, Diners Club, Mastercard and Visa are widely accepted, and most Jamaican ATMs accept international bank cards. Many resort areas have 24-hour ATMs. Banking hours are Mon–Thur 0900–1400, Fri 0900–1200 and 1400–1700.

There were 1,831,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

## Further information

Government of Jamaica Portal: [www.jamaica.gov.jm](http://www.jamaica.gov.jm)

Commonwealth Secretariat: [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)

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