



# Jamaica

## KEY FACTS

**Joined Commonwealth:** 1962

**Population:** 2,784,000 (2013)

**GDP p.c. growth:** 0.5% p.a. 1990–2012

**UN HDI 2014:** World ranking 96

**Official language:** English

**Time:** GMT minus 5 hrs

**Currency:** Jamaican dollar (J\$)

## Geography

**Area:** 10,991 sq km

**Coastline:** 1,020 km

**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.

**Topography:** Jamaica is the ridge of a submerged mountain range. The land rises to 2,256 metres 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 1,500 mm p.a. in Kingston to 3,850 mm 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.

**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 per cent of the total land area, having declined at 0.1 per cent p.a. 1990–2010. Arable land comprises 11 per cent and permanent cropland nine per cent of the total land area.

**Wildlife:** Fauna include 30 bat species. There is also a rich variety of birdlife (of some 75 species recorded, ten were threatened with extinction in 2012), 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.

**Main towns:** Kingston (capital, pop. 584,627 in 2011), Portmore (182,153), Spanish Town (147,152), Montego Bay (110,115), May Pen (61,548), Mandeville (49,695), Old Harbour (28,912), Savanna-la-Mar (22,633), Ocho Rios (16,671), Port Antonio (14,816), Linstead (14,231), St Ann's Bay (11,173), Morant Bay (11,052), Hayes (10,639), Ewarton (9,753) and Bog Walk (9,431).

**Transport:** There are 22,120 km of roads, more than 70 per cent 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, 17 km south-east of Kingston, and Montego Bay International, 5 km north of the city.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2013

**Population per sq km:** 253

**Life expectancy:** 74 years

**Population:** 2,784,000 (2013); 54 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.7 per cent p.a. 1990–2013 but emigration (principally to the UK, Canada and the USA) has been significant for two generations; birth rate 18 per 1,000 people (35 in 1970); life expectancy 74 years (68 in 1970).

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

**Language:** English; an English-African Creole, Jamaican Patois, is widely spoken.

**Religion:** Mainly Christians (Church of God 19 per cent, Seventh Day Adventists 12 per cent, Pentecostals 11 per cent, Baptists seven



per cent, Anglicans three per cent, Roman Catholics two per cent), and there is also a significant Rastafarian community (2011 census).

**Health:** Public spending on health was three per cent of GDP in 2012. 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 nine per cent of the population has private health insurance. Some 93 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 80 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2012). Infant mortality was 14 per 1,000 live births in 2013 (56 in 1960). In 2013, 1.8 per cent of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

**Education:** Public spending on education was 6.1 per cent of GDP in 2012. There are six years of compulsory education starting at the age of six. Primary school comprises six years and secondary five. Some 95 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2009). The school year starts in September.

The regional University of the West Indies (UWI), established in 1946) has its principal campus at Mona, near Kingston, and other main campuses in Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago. The Norman Manley Law School (1973) is located on the Mona campus of UWI. Some 50 other tertiary institutions – public and private – registered with the University Council of Jamaica in 2011 include the Management Institute for National Development; 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 2.30:1 (2009). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 95 per cent (2010).

In 1974 Jamaica hosted the Sixth Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Kingston. Commonwealth Education Ministers meet every three years to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest.

**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, including Radio Jamaica and Television Jamaica.

Some 88 per cent of households have TV sets (2011). There are 327 personal computers per 1,000 people (2010).

**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.

For every 1,000 people there are 89 landlines, 1,004 mobile phone subscriptions and 378 internet users (2013).

**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 2013

**GNI:** US\$13.7bn

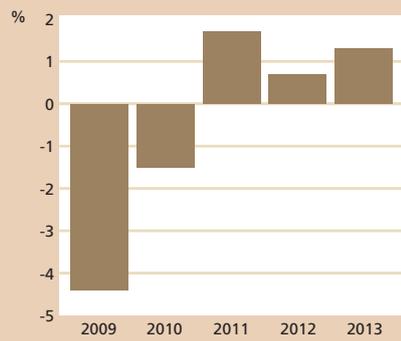
**GNI p.c.:** US\$5,220

**GDP growth:** -0.5% p.a. 2009–13

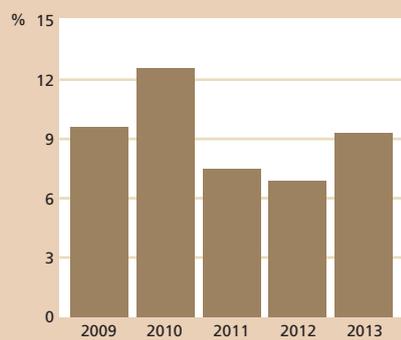
**Inflation:** 9.2% p.a. 2009–13

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 (bauxite and alumina make up the bulk of exports by value), fluctuations in the prices of agricultural commodities (sugar being the largest export after alumina and bauxite), and economic policies that left the country with high inflation, a fast devaluating currency, growing external debt

### Real growth in GDP



### Inflation

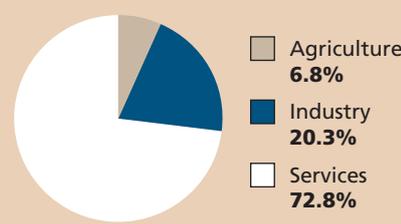


and a large public sector containing many loss-making industries. Jamaica signed a series of agreements with the IMF, continuing into the 1990s and 2000s.

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

### GDP by sector (2013)



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\$2.8 billion 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, shrinking substantially over 2008–10. 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. There was then a modest recovery, with growth of 1.7 per cent in 2011, and at least one per cent p.a. in 2013–15. This modest real growth in the 2010s was accompanied by inflation of more than seven per cent p.a.; it was 9.3 per cent in 2013 and an estimated 8.8 per cent in 2014.

## 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.

Due to ill health, Prime Minister Michael Manley retired in March 1992 and was succeeded by P. J. Patterson, who led the PNP to another victory at elections in March 1993. The PNP won 52 seats, the 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. In late 1995 the JLP split, leading to the creation of a third party, the National Democratic Movement, headed by Bruce Golding, former chairman of the JLP.

Patterson and the PNP were returned in the general election in December 1997. 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 per cent of the votes the PNP took 50 of the 60 seats in the lower house, while the JLP received 39 per cent of the votes and took ten seats.

## Constitution

**Status:** Monarchy under Queen Elizabeth II

**Legislature:** 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 63 directly elected members. The Governor-General appoints the Prime Minister (the MP best able to lead the majority of the House of Representatives) 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:** 29 December 2011

**Next elections:** 2016

**Head of state:** Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Governor-General, Sir Patrick Linton Allen (2009–)

**Head of government:** Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller

**Ruling party:** People's National Party

**Women MPs:** 13%

After a violent campaign, the general election in October 2002 was largely free of violence. In a closer-fought contest than in 1997, the

## Jamaica on the international stage

Jamaicans hold four Commonwealth Games records and three world records, with the charismatic sprinter Usain Bolt, born in 1986 in Trelawny, currently the world's fastest man.

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.

Jamaica is also known for its music, with Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff, Lee 'Scratch' Perry and Desmond Dekker among its most well-known musicians internationally. Bob Marley's *One Love* was voted Song of the Millennium by Britain's BBC and he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1994. When he died in 1981, at the age of just 36, he was given a state funeral with Prime Minister Edward Seaga delivering the eulogy.

People's National Party (PNP) won an unprecedented fourth successive victory with 34 seats and 52.2 per cent of the votes and P. J. Patterson was returned as Prime Minister. The Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) took the remaining 26 seats.

Following his return to the JLP in 2002 (he had left the JLP in 1995 to found and lead the National Democratic Movement), 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 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 32 seats and 50.1 per cent of votes, while PNP took 28 seats and 49.8 per cent. There was a 60 per cent 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.

The PNP won the early general election of December 2011, securing 42 of the 63 elective seats (increased from 60 since the 2007 election) and 53.0 per cent of the vote; the JLP took the balance of 21 seats and 46.3

per cent. Only some 53 per cent of the registered voters cast their vote. PNP leader Portia Simpson Miller was sworn in as Prime Minister for a second time.

## 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

**Immigration and customs:** Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date

of departure. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals. Prohibited imports include coffee and honey.

**Travel within the country:** Driving is on the left. Car hire is available to those aged at least 25 and in possession of a foreign driver's licence. Seat belts are compulsory and motorcyclists must wear helmets.

Scheduled flights operate between resort areas. A bus service connects Kingston and Montego Bay. Taxis and minibuses are widely available, some operated by the Jamaica Tourist Board, whose 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.

**Travel health:** Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever, diphtheria, hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

There were 2,008,000 tourist arrivals in 2013.

## Further information

Jamaica Information Service:	<a href="http://www.jis.gov.jm">www.jis.gov.jm</a>
Electoral Commission of Jamaica:	<a href="http://www.eoj.com.jm">www.eoj.com.jm</a>
Parliament:	<a href="http://www.japarliament.gov.jm">www.japarliament.gov.jm</a>
Statistical Institute of Jamaica:	<a href="http://www.statinja.gov.jm/">www.statinja.gov.jm/</a>
Bank of Jamaica:	<a href="http://www.boj.org.jm">www.boj.org.jm</a>
Jamaica Tourist Board:	<a href="http://www.visitjamaica.com">www.visitjamaica.com</a>
International Seabed Authority:	<a href="http://www.isa.org.jm">www.isa.org.jm</a>
Commonwealth Secretariat:	<a href="http://www.thecommonwealth.org">www.thecommonwealth.org</a>
Commonwealth of Nations:	<a href="http://www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Jamaica">www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Jamaica</a>

### Media

<i>Jamaica Observer</i> :	<a href="http://www.jamaicaobserver.com">www.jamaicaobserver.com</a>
<i>The Gleaner</i> :	<a href="http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com">www.jamaica-gleaner.com</a>
Radio Jamaica:	<a href="http://www.radiojamaica.com">www.radiojamaica.com</a>
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