**Jamaica**

**Location**

Jamaica is the third largest island and one of thirteen independent nations in the Caribbean region. It is located in the Atlantic Standard time zone, which means that in the summer it’s one hour behind Eastern Standard Time, and in winter, it’s on Eastern Standard Time. Jamaica does not observe daylight savings time. It is 146 miles long from east to west and 51 miles from north to south at its widest point. Jamaica’s closest neighbor to the north is Cuba, to the northeast is Haiti, and to the west are the Cayman Islands. The closest country to the south is Colombia, which is in South America. The capital of Jamaica is Kingston.

**Geography**

Since Jamaica is not all that big, its geography is limited. The island is volcanic in origin. Jamaica features a mountain ridge that peaks at Blue Mountain, which is 7,402 feet high. It has many white-sand beaches and is surrounded by beautiful clear, blue ocean.

**Climate**

The climate is generally tropical and warm, with the humidity relieved by ocean breezes especially on the small islands like Jamaica. Fierce hurricanes bring high winds and rains in late summer and fall. Typically sunny year-round, Jamaica’s rainy months are May, June, September, and October. In the summer, the temperature averages about 79 to 81 degrees and in the winter about 74 to 76 degrees. Year-round, the temperatures are usually 5 to 10 degrees cooler in the mountain area.

**Population**

The population of Jamaica is approximately 2.5 million. The annual rate of growth is about 1.4%. The majority of the people in Jamaica are younger than fifty. Half of the population is nineteen
years old or younger and less than 8% are older than sixty-five. Over half of the population of Jamaica lives in urban areas. This has increased since the early 1940’s when the urban population was only 8%.

**The People and The Language**

Jamaica is made up of 92% black African decent because of the early slave trade, only 3.2% are Caucasian, and 1% African-Chinese. The people of Jamaica have emerged from a historical process in which peoples of all the continents were brought together within a well-defined social hierarchy. The vast majority is of African descent, but there are well-established, but small Indian, Chinese, Arab, and European communities as well. Jamaican culture is a particular synthesis of all these cultures. Popular culture is heavily influenced by the African heritage, while formal behavior is unmistakably British in style. It is arguable that the popular speech of Jamaicans is a distinct language from English, it was derived from English, which has been the official language for over 300 years. The influence of the USA is becoming more evident, reflecting the closer ties with that society.

**Religion**

The official religion of Jamaica is Christianity and its various denominations. However, some Jamaicans, very small numbers, practice Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism. The best-known religion in Jamaica is Rastafarianism. It centers on the divinity of the late Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia. Many Rastafarians have dreadlocks and wear crocheted tams (hats). Rastafarianism mandates vegetarianism as a strict code of peace. The best-known facet of the religion is smoking of ganja or marijuana. The reason for the traditions is the Bible; they take their cue from several Bible verses.

**Currency**

Goods and services are usually purchased in Jamaican dollars, but prices are sometimes posted in U.S. dollars, and then converted. Even though it is not legal tender, U.S., British, and Canadian
currency is widely accepted as well as credit cards. One JMD (Jamaican dollar) is currently (2003) equal to 0.0186047 USD (US dollar) and 1 USD is equal to 53.7500 JMD.

Food

Jamaican food is very spicy and colorful. Popular local dishes are made from saltfish, pigeon peas, coconut, chili peppers, and cornmeal. The types of dishes include rice, peas, jerk chicken, fish, pork, curried goat, and roasted yams. They also eat banana fritters, salads, fresh fruits, and many exotic desserts. The water in Jamaica is safe to drink since it is purified and filtered. Drinking alcoholic beverages and getting drunk in Jamaica is not popular, in fact, it is frowned upon. The legal drinking age is only sixteen years old, but you rarely see young people under the age of twenty-five drinking.

Agriculture

Many of the Caribbean islanders are poor, including Jamaica. They grow cash crops for export, which include spices, tropical fruits such as bananas, mangoes, and limes, sugarcane, and cotton. Many of the inhabitants fish and grow their own food. They make handmade crafts for sale at the open markets. Their creations include straw, clay, fabric, shell, wood, and come in an array of bright colors. Manufacturing is very limited. The major industry in Jamaica is tourism with its white sandy beaches and beautiful oceans.

History

In pre-Colombian Jamaica, there were two groups of people the Arawak speaking people and the Caribs. The Spanish eliminated both of these groups of people after Columbus arrived in 1494. The Spanish occupied Jamaica from 1494 to 1655. They used Jamaica as a base for supporting the conquest of the Americas. In 1655 the British captured the Spanish colony on Jamaica and took over until 1838. The Europeans brought with them the slave economy. They imported slaves to work on the sugar plantations. Plantation slavery was based on the Triangular trade among England (manufactured
goods), Africa (slaves), and the Caribbean (sugar), which itself was the basis for what later became the international economy. In 1838, the slaves were finally emancipated and the plantations had to begin paying wages to its workers. After the Emancipation in 1838, many ex-slaves settled down as small farmers in the mountains. During this time, there were many disputes over land, which took place until 1938. In 1938, the national movement and decolonization began until 1962. During this time, there were many political changes and transformation of the structure of the Jamaican economy. There was a lot of migration to the U.S. and England after WWII. From 1962 until 1989, Jamaica has endured three decades of political independence, the first from 1962-1972, the second from 1972-1980, and the last from 1980-1989. Jamaica has now become a more wealthy country and is contributing in every aspect of human activity.

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