

DESTINATION REPORT

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YOUR TRAVEL SNAPSHOT: Destinations included in this guide

Jamaica

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INTRODUCTION

The popular image of Jamaica is emerald rain forests, waterfalls that tumble into cool, clear streams and glorious beaches that rival any in the Caribbean. The legendary "cool" of Jamaican culture is heard in its reggae music and by the dry wit of the young Jamaican men who pilot visitors down the Great River on bamboo rafts. You won't easily forget the throngs of competing taxi drivers who swarm outside the Crafts Market in Montego Bay.

Jamaica is one of the most beautiful and culturally rich islands in the Caribbean, with an economy that depends largely on tourism. Explore the countryside and mingle with the locals, as they are friendly and truly delighted to meet and greet tourists who visit their island. The physical beauty and vibrant culture of Jamaica are still its greatest assets, and the good cheer among its people makes for a memorable vacation.

GEOGRAPHY

Jamaica is the third-largest of the Caribbean islands—146 mi/234 km long and 51 mi/82 km wide—and the largest island in the English-speaking Caribbean. It lies some 90 mi/145 km south of Cuba. More than 100 rivers wind through the forested mountains of the island, and nearly half the island is more than 984 ft/300 m above sea level, so you can always see a hill or mountain, wherever you are. The largest city, Kingston, on the southeast side of the island, lies in the lee of the Blue Mountains. The northeast side of Jamaica receives trade winds and is extremely wet. By contrast, the southeast and south central coasts are arid, and cacti abound. The tourism industry is concentrated along the north coast, especially in Montego Bay and Ocho Rios, and in Negril, on the western tip of Jamaica.

HISTORY

Archaeological evidence suggests that the Tainos people settled in Jamaica as early as AD 650. (The island took its name from the Tainos word *xaymaca*, meaning "land of wood and water.")

Columbus first sighted the island in 1494, on his second voyage to the New World. Ever since, Jamaican life has been a stormy mix of political, racial and economic divisions. Although the Spanish never fully settled the island, their influence was far-reaching. Most notably, they carried diseases that killed many of the Taino people. In regards to vegetation, they introduced citrus fruits, bananas, plantains and sugarcane, and such livestock as cattle, pigs and horses. They also brought the first slaves from Africa.

The English invaded Jamaica in 1655 and gained complete control of the island by 1660. They then used Jamaica as a base to threaten Spanish interests in the Caribbean and Latin America. Jamaica's Port Royal became the premier headquarters of pirates in the Western Hemisphere until it was destroyed by an earthquake in 1692. The English also established great sugarcane plantations powered by slave labor.

Slavery, in turn, played a central role in the political instability of the island. Slaves freed in the final days of Spanish rule, along with those who had run away from their plantations, established communities in the wild mountain interior and became known as the Maroons. Skirmishes with British troops eventually escalated into two separate wars, which led to the eventual deportation of many Maroons.

Two slave rebellions, one in Morant Bay in 1760 and the Christmas Rebellion in St. James in 1831, combined with the growing antislavery movement in England, ended slavery in Jamaica. Chinese and East Indian indentured laborers were then brought to Jamaica, adding to the island's cultural mix.

The early decades of the 20th century were marked by agitation for independence and social unrest among sugar plantation workers. After gaining greater sovereignty in the 1950s, Jamaica won full independence from Great Britain in 1962. It remains a member of the British Commonwealth. The island's social tensions have helped fuel its most famous export—reggae music. A potent mix of politics, religion and danceable rhythms, reggae rose to international popularity in the 1970s on the shoulders of Bob Marley and other Jamaican performers.

In the 1970s, Jamaica veered toward socialism under charismatic premier Michael Manley. The resulting economic

crisis spawned social unrest. Abetted by corrupt political leaders, criminal gangs evolved; the drug trade and politically partisan violence associated with it threatened to destabilize the nation. The economy has been relatively stable in recent decades, thanks to the growth of tourism and effective leadership.

SNAPSHOT

Jamaica's foremost attractions include sunning on white-sand beaches, snorkeling, diving, listening to reggae music performed by local bands, partying, getting pampered at world-class resorts, horseback riding, river rafting, hiking, and visiting caves and historical sites.

Travelers who appreciate warm tropical waters, magnificent scenery, food, earthy music and dance will enjoy Jamaica.

POTPOURRI

Rastafarianism, a religious and cultural movement that developed in Jamaica in the 1930s, had a great influence on the development of reggae, and many reggae lyrics espouse the Rastafarian religion and outlook. The "Rastas" wear their hair in dreadlocks and use marijuana extensively (locally called ganja or sinsemilla and considered to be a "holy herb"). They worship the late Emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie I (also named Ras Tafari) as their messiah.

Spelunkers are drawn to Jamaica's more than 400 caves. Many of them have dripstone formations, as well as large (but harmless) bat colonies. Some are open to the public.

Singer Harry Belafonte's *Banana Boat Song (Day-O)* was inspired by the chants of men and women as they loaded bananas onto boats at Boundbrook Wharf in Port Antonio.

Cinnamon Hill, on the North Coast Highway near Greenwood, was the birthplace of Edward Moulton Barrett, novelist Elizabeth Barrett Browning's father. More recently, it was the home of country singer Johnny Cash, who was very involved in charitable work on the island.

Jamaica has an excellent and long-standing "Meet the People" program. The Jamaican Tourist Board will arrange for you to meet (or even stay with) a Jamaican with a similar hobby or profession, who will often take you to places of interest. Give the board a few days' notice or register online prior to your trip.

A cult-film favorite, *The Harder They Come* (1973) helped bring reggae music to the attention of many outside Jamaica, and it made a star of singer Jimmy Cliff, who played the lead role. Shot on location in Kingston, the film provides an entertaining look at the Jamaican music business.

Hollywood film directors, drawn by Jamaica's beauty, have used it as a setting for many films, including *Cocktail*, *Blue Lagoon*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Island in the Sun*, *Dr. No*, *Live and Let Die*, *Return to Treasure Island*, *Mighty Quinn*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*.

Jamaica's athletes have won more than 50 Olympic medals over the years, including gold medals at the London and Beijing Olympics courtesy of the record-breaking speed of Usain Bolt. The most surprising sport is bobsledding: Despite the fact that the island has no ice or snow, its two-man bobsled team ranked 10th in the 1992 Winter Olympics.

Jamaicans call the speed bumps on the roads "sleeping policemen."

Jamaica has 635 mi/1,022 km of coastline, with a beach around every bend and nestled in every cove.

Couples can be married 24 hours after arriving in Jamaica if prior application has been made for a marriage license and notarized birth certificates have been produced. No blood tests required.

Jamaica is listed in *Guinness World Records* as having more churches per square mile/kilometer than any other country. Parish churches welcome tourists at Sunday morning Mass, but mind the strictly enforced dress code.

Jamaica's national motto, *Out of Many, One People*, reflects the island's rich and diverse racial heritage.

The first mango plants introduced into Jamaica were captured on the high seas on their way from India to the West Indies by Lord Rodney's ship H.M.S. *Flora* in 1782.

During the Maroon War, fought against the British, Maroon warriors used a bugle made from a cow's horn (called an Abeng) to alert each other of danger.

SIGHTSEEING

Jamaica is a treasure trove of natural wonders—from limestone-cave labyrinths to gushing waterfalls to mineral springs with curative powers. For the less adventurous, unique museums, historic sites and traditional rum distilleries celebrate the best of the island.

Between Long Mountain and St. Andrew Mountain, Hope Gardens is the largest botanical garden in the West Indies and boasts a kaleidoscope of flora and fauna. Hiking the 7-mi/11-km trek up to the Blue Mountain Peak—the highest on the island, rising to an altitude of 7,402 ft/2,295 m above sea level—is divine as the sun comes up and the aroma of coffee beans perfumes the morning air.

At YS Falls, a magnificent seven-tiered cascading waterfall awaits with an expansive wading pool fed by underground springs. In Runaway Bay, what may be the island's best-kept secret can be found in the Fire Hole, which is a saltwater spring bubbling with flammable natural gases that create floating flames when lit. The mystical firewater, officially called Windsor Spring, is believed to relieve symptoms of tired muscles and itchy insect bites.

Dedicated to the reggae superstar, the Bob Marley Museum is in his original studio where he recorded many of his hit songs. A visit to the Seville Great House is a journey through time to the beginnings of the island's history. In Montego Bay, Rose Hall Great House was built in the 1770s with limestone brought from England and was the former home of the wicked Annie Palmer, also known as the White Witch of Rose Hall, who murdered her three husbands and remains one of Jamaica's favorite ghosts. Explore pirate history in Port Royal where the Archaeological Museum in the former Royal Navy Hospital showcases relics that have been recovered after centuries underwater.

The main casino in Jamaica is Treasure Hunt Gaming in Ocho Rios, open 24 hours daily. A few hotels also have slot machines and automated games on a smaller scale.

Unlike the north coast of Jamaica, which is the island's tourism powerhouse, the south coast features an off-the-beaten-path feel. The south coast represents a Jamaica from another time and place. The setting is more rural, the pace is more relaxed and the residents aren't focused on grabbing their piece of the tourism pie. The south coast makes it easy to connect with the locals. There's a pleasant give-and-take that is harder to achieve in the environs surrounding a gated resort.

RECREATION

Jamaica has a dozen golf courses; six are within easy driving distance of Montego Bay. The others are near the other main resort towns—Negril, Rio Bueno, Runaway Bay, Ocho Rios and Port Antonio (nine holes). There are also a couple of courses around Kingston and a nine-hole course in Mandeville, which was the first course to open in the Caribbean (phone 876-962-2403). For information on the island courses, phone 876-755-3593 or 876-969-6233. <http://thejga.com>.

Many properties have a gym as well as various watersports activities for guests. Tours may be arranged for activities such as hiking, horseback riding and nature tours.

Beaches abound, with many connected to the resorts. Smaller beaches dot the island and offer tourists their own sliver of Shangri-La. Exercise commonsense precautions when on a deserted beach, including leaving valuables at your hotel.

SPECTATOR SPORTS

Cricket is Jamaica's most popular spectator sport, with matches played throughout the island most weekends during the season. There are two stadiums on the island, the Trelawny Stadium at Greenfields near Montego Bay and the long-standing test ground in Kingston called Sabina Park. The Jamaica Cricket Association has been hosting international test matches at Sabina Park since 1929.

SHOPPING

Among the local items available for purchase are rum, Blue Mountain coffee, gemstone jewelry, shells, local art (everything from neo-expressionist to primitive), colorful clothing and fabric, preserves and spices, musical instruments, hand-carved mahogany items, local handicrafts, woven straw baskets, embroidery, leather goods and CDs of reggae music. Street stalls and markets are the best places to buy crafts directly from the artisans.

You can get Cuban cigars, but if you're a U.S. resident, be aware that they may be confiscated if you try to take them home. The sale of black and white coral is banned (for good reason—some of Jamaica's reefs have been heavily damaged). Turtles are also protected by law, so don't buy turtle products, such as tortoiseshell jewelry.

Duty-free shopping is available at most large hotels, at the Kingston and Montego Bay airports and in select stores in Ocho Rios, Kingston and Montego Bay (everything from watches and crystal to local liqueurs).

Shopping will put you in contact with vendors who are very eager to sell their goods to tourists. A simple and polite "No, thank you," is all it takes for the vendor to move on if you are not interested in their wares. Bargaining with vendors is a time-honored tradition, always conducted with humor and mutual respect. Never pay a street or market vendor the first asking price.

Shopping Hours: Monday-Friday 9 am-6 pm; Saturday 10 am-6 pm. During the busy season, some stores are open on Sunday but generally after noon.

DINING OVERVIEW

Jamaica is famous for "jerk," a barbecued chicken, pork, sausage or fish highly seasoned with pimento, pepper and other spices. It's common on the island and can be mouth-searingly spicy.

But there's more to Jamaica's cuisine: You'll find Indian curry, Lebanese chickpeas, pita bread (called Syrian bread locally) and Chinese food galore. Kingston, in particular, has several world-class restaurants serving nouvelle cuisine.

With local meals, expect rice and peas (the "peas" are actually red kidney beans cooked with coconut milk), yams, dasheen, sweet potatoes, and flour or cornmeal dumplings as side dishes. Salted codfish, mackerel and herring are a legacy of slavery days. Salt fish and ackee, the island's traditional breakfast dish, combines salted cod with the unique ackee fruit, which tastes like slightly sweetened scrambled eggs. (It's poisonous if not properly prepared, so you may not want to try making it at home: Buy the canned form to be on the safe side.) Salt fish and ackee are often served with boiled green bananas, johnnycakes (fried flour dumplings) and *bammies* (cakes made from cassava).

Other local specialties include red pea soup, rundown (a delicious coconut-milk and mackerel dish), pepperpot soup (hot and spicy), callaloo (a spinachlike plant), grilled lobster and roasted breadfruit. Or try a Jamaican beef patty. It's Jamaica's take on fast food—inexpensive and delicious. (You can get patties made with vegetables, chicken or lobster instead of beef.) There are many delicious local fruits, including mangoes, *guineps*, sweetsops, naseberries, *otaheite* apples, *ortaniques* (an orange-tangerine hybrid unique to the island), bananas and water coconuts (all in season).

Escoveitch fish is a whole fried fish such as tilapia or red snapper filets, served with a relishlike sauce made with vinegar, scotch bonnet peppers, garlic, onions, thyme and pimento seeds. It is heated and drizzled over the fish, and sliced onions are added on top. Traditionally, this fish is served with *bammy* and can be ordered in restaurants and at roadside stands.

The ladies of Kingston gather each afternoon by National Heroes Circle to sell crab fresh from the sea. Be sure to pick up a slab of macaroni pie and a cob of buttered corn.

Try local beverages such as Ting (a grapefruit-flavored soft drink), Red Stripe and Real Rock beers, and Tia Maria liqueur. Drinks made from passion fruit, soursop, sugarcane and June plum are also tasty, as is a traditional Christmas drink called sorrel. The most refreshing drink of all is cold coconut water, which you can buy in bottles from most supermarkets or from roadside stalls where the coconuts are husked fresh. Unfortunately for coffee lovers, most of the coffee served in Jamaica is grown on the lowlands and is not the coveted Blue Mountain coffee. (You can purchase it in gift shops and supermarkets, however.)

There are many restaurants, bars and eateries around the island, and most hotels and resorts have at least one restaurant on the premises. Cuisine is varied: You can sample Jamaican, Caribbean, North American, Continental or Asian foods. Not all establishments accept credit cards, so it is wise to call ahead and confirm acceptable mode of payment. Many small local establishments only accept Jamaican dollars, so do have some on hand. Many others that do accept U.S. dollars charge steep exchange rates.

PERSONAL SAFETY

Jamaica has its share of problems with crime, poverty and illegal drugs. Visitors—especially those traveling independently—should be aware that they may be offered drugs and may find themselves receiving unwanted attention from con artists and extremely persistent peddlers of all sorts. Keep in mind that although marijuana may seem ubiquitous, it's not legal. A number of foreign nationals are in Jamaican jails on drug-related charges. The use of date-rape drugs is becoming more common at clubs and private parties. Don't accept drinks from people you don't know (tourists as well as locals), and keep an eye on your drink at all times.

The government has taken steps to improve conditions for travelers: Members of the Jamaica Defense Force are now a fixture around the cruise terminals and in the resort and tourist areas, where they assist the regular police in keeping vendors, drug pushers and thieves away from tourists. In addition, the penalties for crimes directed at travelers have been greatly increased. Nonetheless, many visitors will be most comfortable staying in a secure resort and venturing out in groups. Don't go off on tours with guides you don't know or who aren't recommended by a reliable authority, such as your hotel or the tourist board.

The Kingston area has been subjected to sporadic violence, including shootings, and public protests and demonstrations, though it is concentrated in specific neighborhoods not normally frequented by tourists. A curfew is often imposed in these areas. Ask knowledgeable hotel personnel about the safety of the specific areas you are planning to visit.

Also, auto accidents and similar incidents can spark a volatile response into which other community members are drawn. If this happens near you, depart the area quickly. New Kingston is the suburb most frequented by tourists and where the reputable hotels are located.

In general, typical commonsense precautions will go a long way toward staying safe: Handbags should be zipped and held close to the body, and men should carry their wallets in their front pants pocket. Use the hotel safe for your valuables. Report any loss or theft of passports or other important documents to your national embassy or consulate, and be sure you have the contact information for the embassy or consulate before you travel to Jamaica.

For more information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency.

HEALTH

You can drink the tap water in cities, but it is always safer to drink bottled water. The food in the resorts, restaurants and hotels that cater to tourists is as safe as on mainland North America. Local restaurant and market food is generally safe if it's freshly prepared and served hot.

Consult with your physician about precautions if you plan to go outside the main tourist areas. A hepatitis A vaccination is recommended by many health agencies. Don't forget sunglasses, sunscreen, a hat and insect repellent (the mosquitoes can be vicious, but they don't carry malaria).

You'll find hospital facilities in each major Jamaican town. Doctors are available 24 hours daily in Kingston and the principal resort areas, and doctors or registered nurses are on call at most hotels. However, be sure that you have international medical insurance coverage, including emergency medical evacuation. Otherwise you may be required to pay in cash, which can be expensive.

In an emergency, phone 110 for medical help or 119 for police.

Main hospitals include Cornwall Regional Hospital (phone 876-952-5100) and MoBay Hope Medical Centre (phone 876-953-3649), both in Montego Bay; as well as Kingston Public Hospital (phone 876-922-0210) and University Hospital of the West Indies (phone 876-927-1620) in Kingston.

Secondary hospitals include St. Ann's Hospital in Ocho Rios (phone 876-972-2272), Port Antonio Hospital (phone 876-993-2646) and Savanna-La-Mar Hospital near Negril (phone 876-955-2533).

For more information, contact your country's health-advisory agency.

DOS & DON'TS

Do try to get a taste of Jamaican music, especially reggae, which developed in the late 1960s. Bob Marley is the all-time great of reggae. Other big names include Marley's son Ziggy, Third World, Jimmy Cliff, and Toots and the Maytals. Ska, a dance music that was a precursor to reggae, is best heard performed by the Skatalites. Dub and dance hall are more modern reggae styles typified by such performers as Beenie Man & Bounty Killer, Sean Paul, Mutabaruka (a dub poet) and Buju Banton.

Do try jerk chicken or pork, but have a cold Red Stripe or Real Rock beer ready to wash it down—it's very spicy.

Don't wear camouflage clothing in Jamaica—it's illegal unless you're a member of the military, and you could face a hefty fine.

Do remember that nothing happens terribly fast in Jamaica, so relax, adopt the island mantra—"no problem, mon"—and remember that you're on vacation.

Do try to attend a performance of the National Dance Theatre Company or any of the local dance troupes in season in Kingston—they are excellent.

Do sign up for a bike tour of the Blue Mountains before sunrise.

Do sample freshly caught seafood at Bluefields Beach.

Do listen to new reggae tunes and old favorites inside Tuff Gong Recording Studios in Kingston.

Don't touch or stand on coral as it is extremely sensitive and can be destroyed by a simple touch.

Do have ready the name and address of the place you are staying your first night. Immigration officials will ask for that information when you arrive.

Geostats

Passport/Visa Requirements: All U.S. citizens must have a passport when traveling by air to or from Bermuda, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America and Mexico. Citizens of Canada, Mexico and the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda also must have a passport or other designated secure document to enter the U.S. Passports are required for land crossings at the Canadian and Mexican borders with the U.S. and for cruise passengers returning to the U.S. from Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada or Bermuda. Reconfirm travel-document requirements with your carrier prior to departure.

Population: 2,715,000.

Languages: English, Jamaican patois.

Predominant Religions: Christian (Protestant, Roman Catholic), Rastafarian.

Time Zone: 5 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (-5 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is not observed.

Voltage Requirements: 110 volts. 220-volt systems exist in some larger properties.

Telephone Codes: 876, area code;

Currency Exchange

The unit of currency is the Jamaica dollar (J\$). The U.S. dollar is commonly accepted throughout the island, except for street purchases, as are most major credit cards. When you exchange currency, keep your receipt so that you can reconvert your cash on departure.

Six commercial banks operate in Jamaica, and branches are located in all the major towns but generally not in smaller towns or villages. Bank opening hours are 9 am-2 pm Monday-Thursday (till 4 pm on Friday).

Cash machines are located in the main shopping areas and in some of the larger gas stations. Most cash machines issue local currency, however some, in the main tourist areas, also dispense U.S. dollars. Cash is required at gas stations, markets and in many small stores.

Currency exchange bureaus are known as *cambios* and are located in the main tourist areas.

Taxes

Room tax is 8.25%; a 10% service charge is typical. Departure tax is US\$27, included in most airline tickets.

A 15% government general consumption tax (GCT) is applied to most goods and some services, including car rental, restaurants, entertainment and retail sales. Although this tax is included in the prices listed in most shops, note that in restaurants GCT is generally added to the bill.

Tipping

Most hotels and restaurants will include a 10%-15% service charge on your bill. A 10%-20% tip is considered normal.

Weather

Our favorite time (and everyone else's) is November-April—Jamaica can be very crowded then. The temperature is fairly stable year-round, so it's possible to visit in other months as well.

Winter coastal-area day temperatures are in the 70s-80s F/23-32 C. June-September is usually in the 80s-90s F/30-35 C. Nights tend to be 5-10 F/3-5 C degrees cooler everywhere.

Temperatures in the hills and mountains are usually cooler than on the coasts—take a sweater for nights. Kingston, on the leeward (southern) side of the island, is drier, hotter and generally more uncomfortable than the windward (northern) shore. Always be prepared for rain showers in the Blue Mountains. The hottest time is July-October, when the humidity, heat and hurricane possibilities are the highest. Most rain falls May-October, but even then, it generally comes in brief showers and seldom ruins anyone's vacation. Hurricane season is June-November.

What to Wear

Lightweight tropical clothing is preferable, with a shawl or light jacket for cool evenings. Beachwear is appropriate only at the beach. You should wear a cover-up when strolling in town (men, too).

Even the most casual restaurants expect shoes and a shirt, except those on the beach, where button-down and barefoot is the rule. Appropriate dinner dress is Caribbean chic. Formal resort restaurants require men to wear a jacket and tie.

Be sure to take comfortable walking shoes for sightseeing. If a visit to a church is on the itinerary, be respectful of the modest dress-code requirements.

Telephone

Most hotels provide local and international call service. Pay phones are not highly visible and use only phone cards, available in stores and some hotels. If you are calling a number outside a parish, dial 1 before the number; otherwise it is seven-digit dialing. Cell phone coverage is good, and there are several providers.

GSM cell phones equipped with tri-band or world-roaming service will work throughout much of the coastal region. Service averages about US\$1.50-\$2 per minute, so prepaid SIM cards are more economical for making local calls.

Most hotels offer direct-dial telephone services with a substantial service charge added. Pay phones are available in most communities; however, calls from town to town are long-distance.

To dial Jamaica from the U.S., dial 1 plus the area code (876).

Internet Access

Internet access is readily available in the bigger resorts. There are Internet cafes at which ADSL access is available for a fee. Wireless access is also available in many areas, including the two major airports. Access is free in the Kingston airport but incurs a fee in the Montego Bay airport.

Mail & Package Services

Mail takes about two weeks to arrive at destinations throughout North America. For bigger packages, a carrier service is highly recommended. Because of expensive and slow air-shipping service, most travelers opt to carry their souvenirs home rather than ship them. Many hotels sell stamps and will mail letters for guests.

Newspapers & Magazines

Newspapers in Jamaica include *The Jamaica Observer*, *The Gleaner*, *The North Coast Times* and *The Western Mirror*. The established guide is *Destination Jamaica*. *Jamaica Tourist* newspaper is published quarterly and is widely available throughout the island.

Information is readily available from the Tourism Product Development Co. and the Jamaica Tourist Board offices in resort towns.

Transportation

Those who plan to travel around the island can rent a car (which can be expensive), hire a driver (also expensive), take minibuses (cheap but difficult) or take full- and half-day sightseeing tours. Licensed taxis are the best option for local transportation. Guests at all-inclusive resorts generally have their transfers to and from the airport taken care of but often have to pay extra for sightseeing excursions away from the resort.

Air

Jamaica has two international airports, both of which have been upgraded to include a wide variety of shopping and restaurant options as well as increased security. Montego Bay's Sir Donald Sangster International Airport (MBJ) is located 2 mi/3 km north of downtown. Phone 876-952-3124. <http://www.mbjairport.com>.

Kingston's Norman Manley International Airport (KIN) is located 11 mi/18 km south of the city. Phone 876-924-8452. <http://www.nmia.aero>.

International Airlink offers daily flights between major Jamaican towns. Taxis and rental cars are available at both international airports.

The domestic airport in Kingston is Tinson Pen Airport (KTP), located west of the city. It has scheduled local service to Montego Bay and Ocho Rios.

Bus

Buses (usually minivans) provide transportation between cities in Jamaica. Prices are very reasonable, but expect cramped quarters, a loose schedule and daredevil driving: The buses usually only depart after they've taken on a full load. Though they're by no means a luxurious way to get around, the buses will put you into contact with Jamaicans, and they can be fun if not always comfortable. Unless you're an adventurous or well-seasoned traveler, you may want to use other modes of transport.

Car

The minimum age for renting and driving a car is 21. Some companies require drivers to be 25 years old. The maximum age for renting a car ranges 65-70, depending on the car rental company.

Rental cars tend to be expensive compared with prices in the U.S., and there's a 15% government tax. You must have a valid driver's license. Definitely reserve in advance during peak season, but that may not be enough to guarantee wheels: Supplies can run short. Make sure that the license number on your contract matches the one on your car—there have been incidents of plate switching.

Seat belts are compulsory, and children younger than 3 must be placed in child seats, which are available for rent.

Driving is on the left. Roundabouts at major intersections can be confusing: Yield to all traffic coming from your

right. Local drivers are aggressive and freewheeling, with little regard for official speed limits. (You will also have to watch for poorly marked construction zones, pedestrians, bicyclists and livestock.) Coast roads are generally good, but potholes lie in wait. Interior roads can't be counted on—even if they are shown on maps. Exceptions are the main roads west through Mandeville and north across the island to Ocho Rios, which are always maintained. Service stations are open daily. Most accept only cash, though some accept credit and debit cards.

Be cautious at street corners and traffic lights, where beggars, peddlers and windshield washers will approach you. Be sure the windows and doors are locked to avoid possible robbery or carjacking.

Unlike on other Caribbean islands, there is no need to purchase a local driver's license when driving in Jamaica. Visitors from North America can use their country's license for up to three months per visit. Jamaica also recognizes valid International Driver's Licenses. The speed limit is 50 mph/80 kph for the open road and 30 mph/50 kph in built-up areas, towns and villages. On the highways, the speed limit is 65 mph/110 kph.

The island has a network of around 11,700 mi/18,700 km of roads, of which approximately 8,200 mi/13,100 km are paved. A road improvement and expansion plan is under way. Highways have been built from Kingston west toward Mandeville and north over the mountains to Ocho Rios and from Montego Bay to Ocho Rios.

Car parking in Kingston, Montego Bay and other busy cities can be limited, and you need to be wary about where and how you park, as double parking is common. Public car parks charge a flat rate.

Ship

The Falmouth Cruise Ship terminal recently opened in the 18th-century commercial capital. It is now one of the largest cruise-ship piers in the Caribbean.

Jamaica welcomes more than 1 million cruise-ship passengers a year, which almost matches the number of visitors that arrive by plane. The busiest port of call is Ocho Rios, which attracts 70% of cruise-ship passengers.

Montego Bay has two cruise-ship berths in Freeport, where another two berths can also be used for cruise ships. In Port Antonio, a marina has been completed. Currently only small luxury ships can use Port Antonio as a port of call, but further expansion to accommodate larger vessels is on the drawing board.

Taxi

Taxis are the most efficient way to get around most towns and can be hired for longer trips and tours. Before you get in, make sure the vehicle is a licensed, insured taxi: These have red-and-white plates with the letters PP (private passenger) before the numbers. Among the more reputable cabs are those operated by the Jamaica Union of Travellers Association (JUTA). Other cabs, known as "robots," may also offer you a ride. They are illegal operators, and most have no insurance—it's best to avoid them.

None of the taxis are metered, so always agree on a fare, the currency to be used and the length of trip before getting in. It is common for drivers to drop you off at an attraction and return for you later. They are reliable about returning, but don't pay the full fare until the return trip. A tip of 10%-15% is appreciated for good service.

For More Information

Tourist Offices

Jamaica: Jamaican Tourist Board, 64 Knutsford Blvd., Kingston 5. Phone 876-929-9200.
<http://www.visitjamaica.com>. There is also an office in Montego Bay.

Canada: Jamaican Tourist Board, 303 Eglinton Ave. E., Suite 200, Toronto, ON M4P 1L3. Phone 416-482-7850.

U.S.: Jamaican Tourist Board, 5201 Blue Lagoon Drive, Suite 670, Miami, Florida 33126. Phone 305-665-0557.

Toll-free 800-233-4582. There are also offices in Chicago and Los Angeles.

Jamaica Embassies

Canada: Jamaica High Commission, 151 Slater St., Suite 1000, Ottawa, ON K1P 5H9. Phone 613-233-9311. <http://www.jhcottawa.ca>. There are consulates in Montreal, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto and Vancouver.

U.S.: Embassy of Jamaica, 1520 New Hampshire Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Phone 202-452-0660. <http://www.embassyofjamaica.org>. There are also consulates in Chicago, Miami and New York.

Foreign Embassies serving Jamaica

Canada: Canadian High Commission, 3 W. Kings House Road, Kingston 10. Phone 876-926-1500. There is also a consulate in Montego Bay.

U.S.: U.S. Embassy, 142 Old Hope Road, Kingston 6. Phone 976-702-6000. <http://kingston.usembassy.gov>. There is also a consular agency in Montego Bay. Phone 876-952-0160.

Additional Reading

The Harder They Come by Michael Thelwell (Grove Press). A novel that expands upon the story related in the popular film, it chronicles the rise and fall of an aspiring Jamaican singer who becomes an outlaw.

Jamaica Farewell by Morris Cargill. Recollections of growing up in Jamaica in the 1920s and 1930s, with insight into the political and economic history of the island.

Reggae Bloodlines: In Search of the Music and Culture of Jamaica by Stephen T. Davis and Peter Simon (Anchor Press/Doubleday).

The Power Game by Perry Henzell (Hastings House). Based on true-life events, this sordid tale of ambition, corruption, betrayal and violence in 1970s Jamaica is essential reading for understanding the undercurrents of island politics.

From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her Island by Lorna Goodison (Amistad). This poignant history of the author's Jamaican ancestry is a heartwarming tale of the early days of Lucea, near Montego Bay.

Slipstream by Rachel Manley (Key Porter Books). Authored by the daughter of the charismatic Prime Minister Michael Manley.

Calendar

Music and other cultural activities are a big part of Jamaica's annual celebrations. Bob Marley Week takes place in early February and includes symposia and lectures around the island. Also in early February is the Air Jamaica Jazz and Blues Festival in Montego Bay.

Jamaica's Carnival starts on Easter Sunday (in March or April) and lasts one week. It includes parades, dances, reggae and calypso bands, flamboyant costumes, parties and children's parades. The party is especially vibrant in Negril. A dance-hall-music phenomenon called *passa-passa* heats up West Kingston Wednesday nights with nonstop dancing in the streets till the wee hours.

The annual Calabash International Literary Festival, held in May in Treasure Beach, brings together an extraordinary mix of new and celebrated writers from around the world for the most anticipated literary event in the Caribbean. <http://www.calabashfestival.org>.

The Ocho Rios Jazz Festival takes place in early June. Despite the name, it includes concerts in Montego Bay and Kingston in addition to Ocho Rios. Local and international jazz artists take part. In early August, Reggae Sumfest is held in Montego Bay, one of the island's largest showcases for local music and the largest reggae music festival in the world. Jamaica Independence Day is celebrated on 6 August.

In mid-September, two large marlin tournaments are held: the Montego Bay Yacht Club Marlin Tournament and the Falmouth Marlin Tournament. They attract anglers from Jamaica and abroad. Also in September is the Miss Jamaica World Beauty Pageant in Kingston.

For events listings, check <http://www.whatsonjamaica.com>.