

## St. Monica-St. George Parish Twinning Program – Jamaica Fun Facts



**NATIONAL FLAG:** Jamaica's flag has a diagonal gold cross dividing the flag into 2 black and 2 green triangles. "Hardships there are, but the land is green and the sun shineth" is the flag's theme. Black represents the adversities faced and overcome; green, the wealth of agricultural resources; and gold the sunlight over the island and future hopes.

**NATIONAL MOTTO:** "Out of Many, One People". This reflects Jamaica's rich racial heritage, descendants of people from around the world, including Africans, Asians, Europeans and Middle Easterners.

### Did You Know?

Kingston is built around the 7th largest natural harbour in the world? She is also home to other natural attractions including the Royal Botanical Gardens at Hope and Cinchona Gardens.

**NATIONAL COSTUME:** Jamaica's national costume mirrors the colorful nature of the people. It consists of a long layered skirt, white peasant blouse and a headdress, which are Madras bandana, a red plaid cotton. A straw hat decorated with tropical flowers may be worn instead.



**WHERE EXACTLY IS JAMAICA?** Jamaica is the 3rd largest island of the Greater Antilles of the West Indies. It is the largest English-speaking country in the Caribbean. Jamaica is 90 miles south of Cuba and about 600 miles from Florida. It is 146 miles long. For comparison, it is slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut.



**Kingston is the capital and largest city, and is also a large natural harbor and commercial seaport**

Jamaica has a mountainous terrain complemented by sandy beaches, coastal wetlands, great central plains, fertile agricultural lands, towering cliffs, magnificent waterfalls, and dense tropical forests. Almost half of the land area is more than 1,000 ft. above sea level. Its rugged mountain ranges are dominated by 7,402 ft. Blue Mountain Peak, in the eastern section of the island. This is the highest point in Jamaica and the entire West Indies.

Geographic Note: strategic location between Cayman Trench and Jamaica Channel, the main sea lanes for the Panama Canal.

### GENERAL FACTS:

- **Climate:** Tropical; hot, humid; Avg. 80°
- **Population:** 2,731,832 (as of July 2005)
- **Religions:** Protestant 61%; Roman Catholic 4%; other (inc. spiritual cults) 35%
- **Ethnic groups:** black 91%; East Indian 1.3%; white 0.2%; Chinese 0.2%; mixed 7.3%; other 0.1%
- **Language:** English, patois English
- **Government:** Constitutional parliamentary democracy
- **Labor Force:** 1.14 million
- **Population below poverty level:** 19.7%
- **People living with HIV/AIDS:** 22,000 (2003 est.)
- **Historical Overview:** Jamaica gained full independence within the British Commonwealth on 06-August-1962.
- **National Holiday:** Independence Day, 1<sup>st</sup> Monday in August

- **Agriculture products:** sugarcane, bananas, coffee, citrus, potatoes, vegetables, poultry, goats, milk, crusteans, mollusk
- **Exports:** alumina, bauxite, sugar, bananas, rum, yams, coffee, chemicals
- **Export partners:** US 29%; EU 22%; UK 10%; Canada 11%; China 6%
- **Imports – commodities:** machinery and transport equipment, construction materials, fuel, food, chemicals, fertilizers
- **Import partners:** US 40%; Trinidad and Tobago 10%; Germany 6%; Venezuela 5%; France 5%; Japan 4%
- **Labor force:** Services 60%; agriculture 21%; industry 19%
- **Internet users:** 600,000 (2002)
- **GDP (per capita):** \$4,100 (2004 est.)
- **Life expectancy:** male: 74.2 yrs; female: 78.5 yrs.
- **Inflation rate:** 12.4% (2004 est.)
- **Unemployment rate:** 15.4%
- **Literacy:** Male: 84%; female 92% (2003 est.)
- **Suffrage:** 18 yrs. of age; universal

**DANCE:** There is a well-known adage asserting proudly that the heart of the Jamaican people has never ceased to dance. Dancing is an integral part of everyday Jamaican life, a vital part of the Jamaican lifestyle. Jamaicans dance everywhere and for all occasions – for worship, cultural celebrations, formal events and social gatherings. If there’s music, everyone – old and young alike – moves to the infectious rhythmic beat.



Shaped by a mixture of European and African influences, Jamaican dance forms have evolved. From “jonkonnu” steps, to the post-Emancipation ‘bruckins’, to the ‘Jamaicanized’ traditional European dances, their heritage in dance reflects the evolution of Jamaican cultural identity.



**NATIONAL BIRD:** The indigenous streamer-tailed hummingbird or “doctor bird” is Jamaica’s national bird. It is called the “Doctor Bird” because of its long black tail resembling an old time doctor’s coat. The Doctor Bird’s feathers are the most iridescent and beautiful of all the hummingbirds on the island.

**NATIONAL FLOWER:** The flower of the lignum vitae tree or “Tree of Life” is Jamaica’s National Flower. It is a lavender-blue flower, which blossoms during spring and early summer. The tree is indigenous to Jamaica and grows best in the dry woodlands on the northern and southern coasts. Its wood is thought to have medicinal value. It is also widely used for the manufacture of furniture and to create beautiful art objects, sought after by locals as well as visitors.



**NATIONAL FRUIT AND DISH:** Although ackee is not indigenous to Jamaica, they have embraced it as their own, making it the national fruit, and a key ingredient of their national dish – ackee and salt fish, which is usually served for breakfast or brunch. A delicious fruit and a local favorite, it is also a part of the everyday diet. Ackee was brought from Africa, probably on a slave ship, and now grows extensively throughout the island. The unopened ackee is poisonous, but once the sun has dried out the noxious juices the ripe, yellow fruit is safe to eat, with a flavor and texture much like scrambled eggs.

**MUSIC:** Thumping, infectious and passionate sounds are the trademarks of Reggae, Jamaica’s most internationally recognized music. Everywhere you turn, hypnotic beats blare from car stereos or black boom boxes stacked high at nightclubs and street corners. Although this is Jamaica’s music, its origins are in the villages of Africa where forefathers mourned the passing of an ancestor, heralded the birth of a son or celebrated the end of a harvest with song and dance.



**ECONOMY OVERVIEW:** The Jamaican economy is heavily dependent on services, which now account for 60% of GDP. The country derives most of its foreign exchange from tourism, remittances, and bauxite/alumina. Global economic slowdown after terrorist attacks on 9/11 stunted economic growth; it rebounded some in ‘03-04 with brisk tourist seasons. They still face serious long-term problems: high-interest rates, increased foreign competition; a pressured, sometimes sliding, exchange rate; a sizable merchandise trade deficit; large-scale unemployment; and a growing internal debt, the result of government bailouts to ailing sectors. Ratio of debt to GDP is close to 150%. Inflation is expected to remain in double digits. Uncertain economic conditions have led to civil unrest, including gang violence fueled by the drug trade. The government faces the difficult task of fiscal discipline in order to maintain debt payments while simultaneously addressing a growing crime problem. Attempts at deficit control were derailed by Hurricane Ivan in September 2004, which cost significant government spending to repair the damage.

**RAS TAFRI (Political pressure group):** In the 1930s, Ras (Prince) Tafari, Crown Prince of Ethiopia, became a hero-Messiah to many black Jamaicans. By the time he was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie, he was the central figure in a new Jamaican religion.

The Rastafarian religion is one of several Jamaican religions which developed from myal and/or Christian practices and beliefs. At the core of the faith is the absolute belief in the divinity of Ras Tafari. A true Rastafarian desires nothing but the essentials of life, to stand proud, the right to wear his beard and to own and study his bible, especially the prophecies of the Old Testament. Rastafarians allow their hair to grow long and wear it in braids similar to Masai tribesmen. This is rooted in the biblical story of the power of Samson’s hair.

### Did You Know?

Ganja (marijuana) is considered a sacramental herb and is smoked ritually in defiance of Jamaica law.

**OBEAH:** is the practice of magic with religious overtones. To the practitioner, it is a means of controlling the supernatural world. Illegal in Jamaica, techniques were passed down in secret from one generation to another.

With obeah, duppies (ghosts) and other spirits can be made to act either in one’s favor or against one’s enemies, or to counteract spells placed by others. A skilled obeah man can hold a man’s spirit in the half-world between life and death, making the victim a zombie. Once controlled, a zombie can be sent on errands, the objectives of which may be to do good or to do evil.

Resources: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/jm.html>; <http://www.it4biz.com/omnibus/Ja/frmain01.htm>  
[http://www.visitjamaica.com/about\\_jamaica/history.aspx](http://www.visitjamaica.com/about_jamaica/history.aspx); [http://www.visitjamaica.com/about\\_jamaica/our\\_culture.aspx](http://www.visitjamaica.com/about_jamaica/our_culture.aspx)