

# Culture of jamaica

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The first settlers of Jamaica called the land "Xaymaca" which means "Land of springs" (Pillai, 2013). It is said that this is where the name of the country came from. Jamaica is known for many things like its beaches, wildlife, and reggae music. Jamaica has a mix of people from different races, religions, and countries so its culture is varied. Christopher Columbus discovered Jamaica in 1494, but people have inhabited the island for thousands of years before.

The Arawaks and Tainos are said to be the first tribes to settle on the island, between 4000 B. C. AND 1000 B. C. (Pillai, 2013). From 1494 to 1655, Jamaica was a Spanish colony. It was a British colony from 1655 to 1962. Jamaica was granted a new constitution in 1944 and gained universal suffrage. The country gained independence August 6, 1962 (Purcell, 2013). The population of Jamaica is 2,909,714 (FindTheData, 2013). 16.5% of the population lives below the poverty line. Africans make up most of the Jamaican population. After Africans, many of the Jamaicans are multiracial and from Indian or Chinese descent (Pillai, 2013).

English is the official language of Jamaica (Purcell, 2013). Jamaican Patois is the de facto national language of Jamaica, which is a Creole language (Pillai, 2013). It is the most commonly spoken language in the country. Many religions are practiced in Jamaica. Tainos, the first settlers, worshipped forces of nature like plants and animals. They believed in the God Yucahu and Goddess Atabey. They also worshipped good and evil spirits to prevent natural disasters (Pillai, 2013). Christianity made its way to the island with the colonizers. About 80% of Jamaicans are Christians.

Rastafari developed in the 1920s in Jamaica. It is a "blend of Old Testament Christian faith, mystic beliefs, and African fundamentalist ideology." The Rastas keep their hair long in dreadlocks, reject western society, and use marijuana spiritually (Pillai, 2013). Jamaicans have certain traditions and beliefs. A common birth rite is to bury the umbilical cord of a newborn baby, and usually a tree is planted over it, signifying that they are always connected to their birth place. Funerals are an important ritual to the Jamaicans. A big funeral is a sign of a good life (Purcell, 2013).

Nine Night is a Jamaican ceremony or funeral where friends and family sing, dance, and drink for eight nights then sing farewell songs on the ninth night. They rearrange the room of the deceased so their spirit will not recognize it and return. A last meal is set out under the silk-cotton tree, a hiding place for the spirits, for the deceased spirit (Pillai, 2013). Jamaican weddings are big, lavish, and family-oriented. Both families of the bride and groom meet before the wedding and friends start sending gifts like eggs for the cake (Pillai, 2013). Jamaican foods are usually hot and spicy.

Their strong spices and herbs make their dishes popular around the world. The national dish is the Ackee and Saltfish. Spicy Jerk pork and Jerk chicken are very popular Jamaican cuisines. The national drink is Jamaican rum (Pillai, 2013). Rice is a ceremonial food. Curried goat meat is the main meal at parties, weddings, and funerals (Purcell, 2013). Jamaican attire is a combination of European and African style. Jamaican women wear brightly colored outfits of a skirt, top, and headscarf. Men wear brightly colored western-style clothes with short sleeves. Due to the humid weather, Jamaicans don't wear heavy clothing; they prefer cotton clothing.

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Rastafarians wear clothes made of natural fibers. These clothes are always in their sacred colors of red, yellow, and green. " According to the Rastafarians, Red signifies the blood of the black people, Yellow stands for the gold that was stolen from Africa, and Green symbolizes the lost African lands" (Pillai, 2013). They also wear a tam or hat to go over their dreadlocks. The official currency of Jamaica is the Jamaican dollar (FindTheData, 2013).

Manufacturing and services are the main sources of economy. Service includes tourism, which is a great contributor to the economy.

Jamaica's main trade allies are the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the Caribbean Economic Community. Major imports are consumer goods, construction hardware, electrical and telecommunication equipment, food, fuel, machinery, and transportation equipment. Jamaica's major exports are bauxite and alumina, apparel, sugar, bananas, coffee, citrus and citrus products, rum, cocoa, and labor (Purcell, 2013). Jamaica's gross domestic product (GDP) is \$25, 620, 000, 000. Their GDP per capita is \$8, 900, which is also the world average. Jamaica has a high inflation rate of 6. 9%.

They also have a high unemployment rate of 14% (FindTheData, 2013). The country is in a bad economic situation. Jamaica has a bicameral parliamentary legislative system. They are a member of the British Commonwealth. The British monarch, the governor general, the prime minister and deputy prime minister, and the cabinet make up the executive branch. The Senate and the sixty members elected to the House of Representatives make up the legislative branch. The Judicial branch is the

Supreme Court and lower courts. The main political parties are the People's National Party and the Jamaica Labor Party (Purcell, 2013).

Sociologists would need to know about Jamaican custom to know what not to say or do around Jamaicans to not offend them. They would need to know some of Jamaican history which would let them know that there was much slavery and oppression during the colonial period. Jamaicans might get offended if this subject is brought up in the wrong manner. It would be wise for sociologists to know that the Jamaican Patois language is a symbol of defiance from European cultural authority (Purcell, 2013). Their Jamaican identity is very important to them. Their identity includes many things like their religion traditions and customs.