
I. THE COUNTRY

Location and Geography

Jamaica is in the Caribbean some 145 km south of Cuba and 885 km south of Miami. The capital, Kingston, is on the south coast. Flying time from Toronto to Kingston is roughly 3 hours and 45 minutes.

The island is 235 km long and 82 km wide at its extremities — about twice the size of Prince Edward Island. Most of the terrain is hilly or mountainous, with the Blue Mountains in the east reaching a height of 2 259 m. Coastal plains of various widths girdle most of the island and are the centre of the country's sugar and banana industries.

Climate

Jamaica has a remarkably equable climate with a temperature range throughout the year of no more than 6 to 8°C. Daytime highs in Kingston during the summer average 35°C and during the winter 30°C. Temperatures at higher elevations can be about 6°C cooler than on the coast.

Despite its small size, Jamaica has several distinct rainfall zones. The south coast is generally dry with Kingston having an annual rainfall of about 75 cm. Areas of the north coast, particularly the northeast, can experience an annual rainfall of more than 300 cm. There are two distinct rainy seasons: April-May and October-November. Winter in Jamaica is generally dry and sunny, which accounts for its popularity as a vacation destination.

Local Time

Jamaica uses Eastern Standard Time throughout the year. There is no Daylight Saving Time.

Population

Jamaica has a population of about 2.3 million; some 80 per cent of the population is of African descent, with Afro-Europeans accounting for a further 15 per cent and East Indians, Europeans and Chinese making up most of the balance.