

JAMAICA

Out of Many, One People - A Journey Through History

● The First Peoples (c. 600-1494)

Long before European contact, Jamaica was home to the **Taíno** and earlier **Ciboney** peoples, Arawak-speaking groups who migrated from South America. They lived in organized villages, farmed cassava, fished, and crafted pottery and zemí carvings representing their spiritual beliefs. The name "**Xaymaca**" - meaning "land of wood and water" - was given by the Taíno and survives today as Jamaica. An estimated 60,000 Taíno inhabited the island when the Spanish arrived.

● Spanish Colonization (1494-1655)

Christopher Columbus claimed Jamaica for Spain in 1494 on his second voyage. The Spanish established the capital at **Sevilla la Nueva** (later moved to Spanish Town). Under colonial rule, the Taíno were enslaved, forced into labor on plantations and in gold mines, and devastated by European diseases. Within decades, the indigenous population was nearly wiped out. To replace the lost labor force, Spain began importing enslaved Africans to Jamaica - the beginning of a forced migration that would shape the island's destiny forever.

● British Rule & the Sugar Era (1655-1838)

In 1655, English forces under **Admiral Penn and General Venables** seized Jamaica from Spain. The island became a prized British colony and one of the world's largest **sugar-producing** economies. Enslaved Africans were brought across the Atlantic in staggering numbers to work brutal plantations. Resistance was fierce - the **Maroons**, communities of escaped Africans who fled to the mountainous interior, waged guerrilla wars and secured treaties with the British in 1739. Jamaica also became a base for privateers and buccaneers, including the infamous **Henry Morgan**. Port Royal, once called "the wickedest city on earth," was largely destroyed by an earthquake in 1692.

1494	1655	1834	1865	1944	1962
Columbus arrives; Taíno society disrupted	British capture Jamaica from Spain	Emancipation begins; slavery abolished	Morant Bay Rebellion led by Paul Bogle	First universal-sufficiency elections	Independence on August 6

● Emancipation & Rebellion (1834-1865)

Slavery was formally abolished in the British Empire on **August 1, 1834**, with full freedom coming in 1838. Formerly enslaved Jamaicans sought land, wages, and political voice but faced severe inequality. In 1865, the **Morant Bay Rebellion** erupted, led by Baptist deacon **Paul Bogle** and supported by **George William Gordon**. The uprising was brutally suppressed - hundreds were killed and both leaders executed - but it forced the British government to abolish the old colonial assembly and establish direct Crown Colony rule, accelerating reforms in governance and public education.

● The Road to Independence (1938-1962)

The labor uprisings of **1938** gave birth to modern Jamaican politics. **Sir Alexander Bustamante** founded the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and **Norman Manley** founded the People's National Party (PNP) - the two political forces that still dominate today. Jamaica gained universal adult suffrage in 1944 and a new constitution in 1953 granting self-government. After a brief membership in the West Indies Federation (1958-1962), Jamaica voted to withdraw. On **August 6, 1962**, Jamaica became a fully independent nation within the Commonwealth, with **Sir Alexander Bustamante** as its first Prime Minister.

● Independence & Modern Jamaica (1962-Present)

Since independence, Jamaica has built a vibrant democracy and a globally influential culture. The island produced **reggae music**, popularized worldwide by **Bob Marley** and the Wailers, and gave the world ska, rocksteady, and dancehall. Jamaican athletes - led by sprint legend **Usain Bolt** - have dominated track and field. The Rastafari movement, rooted in spiritual resistance and Pan-African identity, emerged in the 1930s and became a cultural force. Economically, Jamaica relies on tourism, agriculture, bauxite mining, and remittances. Through economic challenges, crime, and natural disasters, the Jamaican people have shown extraordinary resilience, creativity, and pride - truly living up to the national motto: "**Out of Many, One People.**"

Jamaican Cultural Legacy

Reggae & Ska

Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff -
music that traveled the globe

Track & Field

Usain Bolt, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce - the
sprint capital of the world

Cuisine

Jerk chicken, ackee & saltfish - flavors born
of the island

"Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery - none but ourselves can free our minds." - Bob Marley

Jamaica · Land of Wood and Water · Independent August 6, 1962