

Jamaica - OVERVIEW

Updated: June 19, 2014



Country Name Long Form: N/A



Government Type: Constitutional Parliamentary Democracy and a Commonwealth Realm

Languages Spoken: English, Patois

National Flag



Jamaica is a Tier II Country. Significant security measures are necessary.

	Overall Assessment	Political Violence	Crime	Terrorism	Travel Safety
Jamaica					
Key: (L) Low – (M) Medium – (H) High – (C)Critical					

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Political Violence is rated at LOW in Jamaica

Jamaica's political system is stable. However, the country's serious economic problems have exacerbated social problems and have become the subject of political debate. High unemployment – averaging 15.4 % -- rampant underemployment, growing debt and high interest rates are the most serious economic problems.

Protests and demonstrations can be unpredictable in time, place and intensity. Although protests and demonstrations are infrequent in Kingston, they do occur. Even protests and demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate into violence. There is no guarantee that a protest will not harm an innocent bystander. Activities observed during past protest include, but are limited to, using tear gas, rubber bullets, setting off fireworks, rock-throwing, tire burning, road blocks, bus/vehicle burning and some degree of physical violence between law enforcement and protestors.

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TERRORISM

Terrorism is assessed as LOW

There doesn't appear to be any extremist groups active in Jamaica. Law immigration controls, porous seas surrounding Jamaica and the ease in which fake Jamaican travel documents can be obtained make the country an attractive target for potential terrorists.

RULE OF LAW / CORRUPTION

The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2013 gave Jamaica a score of 38, indicating that the country has moderate levels of corruption. The CPI rates countries by the perceived levels of corruption in their public sector, with the least corrupt country receiving a maximum score of 100.

CRIME

Crime is assessed as CRITICAL

Crime is rated as critical due to the violence and frequency of criminal activity throughout Jamaica. Violent crime is a serious problem, particularly in Kingston. There is no evidence to indicate criminals and gang-related activities are specifically targeting U.S. citizens. Jamaican Foreign Service Nationals at Embassy Kingston are victims of crime far more frequently than their American employee colleagues. Crime may be as a result of several factors: poverty, retribution, drugs, gangs and politics.

Police are unable to patrol and protect most neighborhoods and as a result, burglaries are quite common. Most wealthy residents hire private armed guard forces to deter criminals.

Violent crimes do occasionally impact international visitors. But, most criminal activity is "Jamaican on Jamaican" violence, often involving organized criminal elements and gangs.

Organized crime and other criminal elements are prevalent and extremely active. Most criminal activity is gang related. The police are only able to resolve (make arrests) in 45% of homicides annually, and they only convict perpetrators in 7 % of the homicide cases. This leads both the public and police to doubt the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, leading to vigilantism, which only worsens the cycle of violence. Based on their past experiences, most civilians fear that, at best, the authorities cannot protect them from organized criminal elements and, at worst, are colluding with criminals, leading citizens to avoid giving evidence or witness testimonies.

KIDNAPPING

There is a moderate threat from kidnapping in Jamaica, with incidents occurring less frequently than in other Latin American countries. Although victims of kidnappings have generally been wealthy Jamaican citizens and their dependents, the risk to travelers cannot be discounted entirely. Victims of

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kidnappings are seldom held for long periods of time and are usually released unharmed after ransom demands have been met.

The number of reported express kidnappings has increased in recent times. This form of kidnapping involves victims being held at gunpoint and forced to withdraw money from ATMs. Express kidnapping gangs tend to operate in groups of two or three and generally work from a vehicle. Criminals often choose victims at random, although they are certainly attracted to any individuals displaying an indication of wealth. Express kidnappings tend to be initiated near outdoor ATMs, but these are also known to occur in taxis with rogue drivers. However, express kidnappings are generally opportunistic in nature and sensible security measures can substantially reduce the risk of falling victim to such a crime.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

The number for rape and/or sexual assaults is believed to be under-reported. Many crimes remain unreported for numerous reasons, including fear of retribution.

There is a special concern continues to be the number of sexual assaults perpetrated by hotel employees at resort hotels on the northern coast, and the need for forceful investigation and follow-up by the hotels and by police and other security officials.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Jamaica has a typical tropical climate with high temperature around the year at low altitudes. Rainfall occurs throughout the year with the majority of rainfall reported between May and September annually.

Jamaica is susceptible to the North Atlantic hurricane season which generally runs from June to November. The hurricane season occurs near simultaneously with the country's rainy season, which runs from May to October thus worsen the threat of flooding and landslides.

Earthquakes and low intensity tremors which cause little or no damage or casualties occur occasionally in Jamaica.

Jamaica is also considered to be high risk from tsunamis. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions as well as a number of other underwater explosions can result in a tsunami. Tsunamis can move at very high speeds and threaten any low-lying coastal areas.

STANDING TRAVEL ADVICE

- Visitors doing business in Jamaica should be aware that despite the warm climate, business attire is conventional business wear. Men should wear long or short sleeve shirts and a tie, while jackets are reserved for more formal occasions. Women are advised to wear conventional business suits for skirts and blouses.
- Outside business hours lightweight casual clothing is the norm.
- Stay in groups, travel in a caravan consisting of two or more vehicles, and stay on the main roads.
- Ensure that someone not traveling with you is aware of your itinerary.

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- Avoid hotels that do not have adequate security.
- Intercity travel after dark anywhere in should be avoided.
- It is preferable to stay in the main tourist destinations.
- Pay close attention to your surroundings, especially when walking.
- Official taxis are a suitable means of travel in daylight hours in urban areas. It is highly recommended that taxis be arranged through your hotel, or program office. Negotiate the price in advance.
- Women should be especially careful when traveling alone and avoid staying out late without a trusted male escort.
- Make sensible security precautions to mitigate the risk of petty crime, particularly pick pocketing and bag snatching.
- Carry a photocopy of your passport when traveling to avoid losing it in a robbery.
- Do not resist if you are being robbed and avoid eye contact and to not make any sudden movements. Victims have been killed when they resisted attack or refused to give up their money or other valuables.
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times and keep a low profile.
- Never leave your belongings unattended.
- Carry bags close to your body and make sure the fasteners are secure.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash or wearing expensive jewelry or valuables.
- Leave all important documents in a safe or safe deposit box at your hotel and only carry certified copies.
- Trust your instincts. If someone or something makes you uneasy, avoid the situation.

Important contact details:

International dialing code: +1876

International dialing prefix: 011

Victims of crime in should contact the following phone numbers for assistance:

POLICE: The local equivalent to the “911” emergency line in is 119

FIRE DEPARTMENT: 110

AMBULANCE: 110

Tourist Police: 926 8790/3

Note: Police, ambulance or fire department response may be unreliable in some parts of the country.

TRAVEL & ROAD SAFETY

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- Jamaica has a high standard of telecommunications infrastructure, including access to the internet as well as fixed-line and mobile phone services.
- Power supply in the country is good and cuts and blackouts are rare.
- Roads are often subject to poorly marked construction zones, pedestrians, bicyclists, and occasionally, livestock.
- The lack of pedestrian crosswalks requires special vigilance for all pedestrians.
- Public buses are often overcrowded and are frequently a venue of crime.
- If requesting use of a taxi, it should be licensed having red and white PP license plates or taxis recommended by their hotels and should not accept rides from strangers.
- There has been significant recent road infrastructural building and investment maintenance of infrastructure is often inadequate.

RECOMMENDED TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

- No use of ATMs after dark.
- No use of Taxis unless pre-arranged from trusted local company.
- No traveling into notoriously high-threat areas of Kingston, including but not limited to, Mountain View, Trench Town, Tivoli Gardens, Cassava Piece and Arnett Gardens, and Flankers, Canterbury, Norwood, Rose Heights, Clavers Street, and Hart Street in Montego Bay.
- No travel alone after dark.

HEALTH

Medical facilities are limited in Jamaica, particularly outside Kingston and Montego Bay. In general, state-owned hospitals and clinics are equipped to provide only basic medical assistance. There are a number of private clinics in Kingston and Montego Bay that offer a higher standard of care, but these are relatively expensive. Medical facilities and practitioners will often demand upfront cash payment before rendering any form of medical assistance.

- Tap water in Jamaica is generally safe to drink.
- It is highly recommended not to bathe or swim in rivers; however, the risk of contaminated water is greatly reduced in and near beach resorts.
- Pasteurized milk can normally be found in major cities, hotels and resorts. Unpasteurized milk should be boiled before consumption, or powdered or tinned milk should be used as an alternative.
- Food from street vendors should be avoided as this carries a higher risk of causing illness. Some type of fish may contain poisonous bio toxins even when cooked and clients are advised to buy fish from reputable vendors or restaurants only.

The following vaccinations are recommended or required if travelling to Jamaica:

- Hepatitis A (recommended)
- Hepatitis B (recommended)
- Polio (recommended)
- Typhoid (recommended)
- Yellow Fever (required for travelers arriving from a country where yellow fever is present)

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It is also important to ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for diseases including influenza, chickenpox (or varicella), polio, measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

Significant Diseases:

- **Malaria** – A life threatening parasitic disease transmitted by mosquitoes. Malaria is considered to be endemic in Jamaica's coastal plain lowlands, with the primary transmission period occurring between April and December.
- **Dengue Fever** – A life threatening parasitic disease transmitted by mosquitoes. It is prevalent throughout Jamaica, particularly during the rainy season (May to June and October to November).
- **Diarrhea** – An illness caused by a bacteria, virus or parasite. One of the most common causes is a bacterium known as E. coli, which is transmitted by ingesting contaminated food and liquids.
- **Leptospirosis** – A bacterial disease which affects both humans and animals. Outbreaks of the disease are most commonly reported in Jamaica during the Atlantic hurricane season (June to November).
- **HIV/AIDS** – A life threatening sexually transmitted disease. In recent years, infection rates have increased significantly in Jamaica's major urban centers.

HOSPITALS –

Andrews Memorial Hospital
27 Hope Road
Kingston 10
Tel: 926-7401-2 / 929-3821

Bellevue Hospital
161/2 Windward Road
Kingston 2
Tel: 926-1380-1 / 938-1562-3

Kingston Public Hospital
North Street
Kingston
Tel: 922-0210 / 0227-9

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Fax: 922-7793

US EMBASSY – CONSULATE LOCATIONS

United States Embassy Kingston

142 Old Hope Road

Kingston 6

Tel: +1 876 702 6000

Email: kingstonacs@state.gov

USF INTERNATIONAL HOTLINE

USF 24/7 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE LINE: 813-317-5815

AXA Assistance 24/7 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE LINE: 1-877-577-9504 / +1-203-399-5130 (Call collect from abroad)

ASSIST ID #: GLMN 04983932. <http://www.culturalinsurance.com/resources/>

* Information derived from CIA World Fact Book, US Department of State, OSAC, and Travel Guard. This travel overview summarizes some of the most important concerns; however, it does not negate the need for detailed trip planning.