

The Sound of Jamaica B1



This small Caribbean nation is a musical paradise. It is the home of reggae and ska music, and the musical legend Bob Marley.



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The majority of Jamaicans are of African origin, descendants of slaves the Spanish and British brought to work on sugar plantations. Slavery became illegal in 1838 but the black population of the British colony were very poor. They had to work for the white plantation owners.

Music and dancing were entertainment, but also a way to express frustration with the situation. The black population had competitions to write songs called "Mento" that were sometimes comical and often political.

In the 1950s, the colonial British radio stations didn't play Mento or the rhythm and blues songs from the U.S.A. that people wanted to hear. So some enterprising young people created "sound systems": DJs took music to people in the streets, with big amplifiers. The sound systems became very popular street dances. There was a lot of competition between the DJs to have the music people wanted to hear. Music studios produced special mixes for DJs, and they started "toasting": speaking rhythmically to the music. It was the beginning of rap music.



**A DJ, El Figo Barker,
in front of his sound system in 1984.**

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Bob Marley in his studio in 1978.

Reggae

Reggae emerged at the end of the 1960s as rebel music: the songs were protests about the injustice of slavery and colonisation. There were many reggae artists but Bob Marley was the one whose music inspired people around the world.

Marley spent his teenage years in the late 1950s in Trenchtown, a very poor, violent part of Kingston, the Jamaican capital. He became interested in Pan-Africanism, a political movement that encouraged descendants of slaves to return to Africa. And he became Rastafarian: part of a Pan-African religion

whose followers are strict vegetarians and don't cut their hair.

In 1973, Bob Marley and the Wailers became the first reggae group to be international stars. For the next eight years, Marley's songs about injustice, revolution and peace were successes all over the world. Marley died of cancer in 1981, but songs like "Get Up, Stand Up", "Redemption Song", "No Woman No Cry", "Buffalo Soldier" and "One Love" continue to inspire people today. ■



Passport: Jamaica



- **Population:** 3 million
- **Prime Minister:** Andrew Holness
- **Languages:** English and patois
- **Geography:** Jamaica is the third biggest island in the Caribbean. It is 244 km long. The climate is tropical – it is 29 C most of the time. But it is temperate in the mountains.
- **Capital:** Kingston
- **Currency:** the Jamaican dollar
- **History**
 - The original inhabitants were Tainos, from South America, 2,500 years ago.
 - **In 1494**, Christopher Columbus "discovered" Jamaica and it became a Spanish colony. The Tainos were killed by the colonists or European diseases.
 - **In 1655**, the British attacked Jamaica and it became a British colony.
 - **Pirates:** Jamaica at this time was the home of many famous pirates.
 - **Sugar:** The British colonists created sugar cane plantations and imported African slaves to work in them.



- **Emancipation:** There were many slave rebellions before slavery became illegal in 1838.
- Jamaica became an independent country in 1962
- It is a developing country. The main industries are tourism and mining. Jamaica produces coffee, sugar, rum and spices.