Jamaica

Overview

- AIG Travel rates Jamaica as a HIGH threat location due to concerns associated with crime, corruption and, to a lesser extent, kidnapping.

Jamaica is a politically stable island nation located south of the island of Cuba, forming part of the Greater Antilles island chain in the Caribbean Sea. It is the fifth largest country in the Caribbean by landmass with a population of approximately 2.7 million inhabitants. Black Jamaicans account for more than 90 percent of the population; however, East Indian, Chinese and white individuals, along with a small number of other demographics, make up the remainder of the population. English is the official language, although a large majority of the population speaks a creole language known locally as Patois.

Jamaica is a popular vacation destination among foreign travelers; however, there are a number of security concerns in the country. Crime stemming from high poverty rates and extensive criminal activities, including criminal gang activity, poses the primary concern. In particular, internal rifts within gangs known locally as posses have contributed to an increase in already high murder rates. Jamaica’s 2017 per capita murder rates ranked among the top-five highest in the world. The prevalence of gangs has also led to moderate levels of kidnapping in Jamaica. Kidnap for ransom is typically carried out by highly sophisticated gangs and targets wealthy individuals, whereas express kidnapping is more opportunistic in nature and carried out by groups that are less organized. Civil unrest occasionally impacts Jamaica, and large demonstrations can occur with little to no notice. Such events are typically related to socio-economic issues in the country. Terrorism poses few risks for travelers in Jamaica; however, the lax immigration and customs laws may present an opportunity for transnational terror groups to carry out attacks on the island.

Infrastructure in the capital Kingston and in resort areas is satisfactory, but remains limited in more rural locations. The road network in Jamaica is extensive; however, poor maintenance has left many roadways, especially in more remote areas of the country, in a state of disrepair. Telecommunications and internet services are widely available in large cities but are severely limited outside major urban centers and resort areas.

Jamaica is often impacted by hurricanes during the North Atlantic hurricane season, which generally runs from June through November. Additionally, the country is affected by annual rainy seasons, which occur between April and June and again from September to November. Flooding and other associated issues frequently occur within these timeframes, especially in more remote areas of the country where emergency response capabilities are inadequate. The country also lies along a fault line, raising the possibility of future earthquakes.
Travel advisories and areas of concern
A state of emergency in the parish of St James – home to the popular tourist destination of Montego Bay – has been extended for three months until 2 August 2018. Prime Minister Andrew Holness first declared the state of emergency on 18 January, allowing for security forces to use special stop-and-search powers that have since reduced the number of murders in the area by 62 when compared with the corresponding period from 2017. Additionally, a state of emergency is in effect for St. Catherine North until July 2018.

Political conditions

Political

• The political environment in Jamaica is stable and poses a LOW threat as there are no major tensions that could affect this stability.

Jamaica is a democratic parliamentary monarchy with three branches of government: executive, legislative and judicial. The country obtained independence from the U.K. in 1962; however, the British monarch, currently Queen Elizabeth II, serves as the country’s head of state in a largely ceremonial role. The U.K.’s interests in Jamaica are represented through a hand-appointed governor-general, currently Patrick Allen who was appointed in 2009. While public support for fully separating from the U.K. has grown in recent years, it has not gained enough strength to push for full independence. Current Prime Minister Andrew Holness, a member of the Jamaican Labor Party (JLP), was elected in February 2016 and serves as the country’s head of government. Holness was elected on a platform promising to improve upon the failures of former Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller’s administration by increasing economic growth, decreasing unemployment and reducing crime.

Jamaica has a history of political tension that dates back to independence; tensions include left-right ideological disputes as well as communal in-fighting between marginalized populations and the country’s predominantly white upper class. These issues have contributed to various social problems, including high levels of crime, elevated unemployment and growing debt, as more marginalized portions of the population often lack access to the privileges available to the upper classes. Two mainstream political parties have historically represented the population along these left-right ideological divides: the opposition People’s National Party (PNP) and the ruling JLP. The PNP and JLP have contrasting ideologies, making political cooperation difficult in the country. For example, the PNP advocates legislation that caters more to the lower and middle class populations by implementing policies aimed at reducing poverty and combating growing levels of inequality. The JLP is more representative of the upper class and pushes for the privatization of businesses and other policies that favor this demographic. As a result of this seeming division, the main and opposition groups have been unable to negotiate and the government has accomplished little in the past thirty years. In recent years, however, neither party’s economic platform has varied greatly from the other’s and both parties generally campaign on improving upon the economic failures of the other without discussing practical policy changes. Overall, the government’s inability to reach consensus has led to political and economic stagnation. Since the late 1980s growth has nearly stopped, with the economy averaging 1.3 percent growth within the last decade. The government has historically been unable to institute reforms necessary to reverse this slowdown, leading to high inequality, associated increases in crime and low living standards for most of the population.

Another contentious socio-political issue in Jamaica is LGBT rights. Former Prime Minister Simpson-Miller campaigned on increasing civil liberties for homosexual individuals during her mandate from 2012 – 2016. While public support for LGBT rights has somewhat increased in recent years, little progress has been made to increase civil liberties throughout the country. For example, homosexuality has not been decriminalized in Jamaica and LGBT individuals continue to experience hardship and even violence in both social and political spheres, largely due to the significant portion of the population that disapproves of LGBT individuals. Several international agencies have ranked Jamaica as one of the most dangerous countries in the western
hemisphere for LGBT individuals due to the large number of hate crimes committed against this group. For this reason Simpson-Miller lacked the support in the opposition as well as her own party to pass legal reforms necessary to give LGBT individuals full protections under the law. Moreover, the ruling JLP is outwardly against LGBT rights. As such, civil liberties for LGBT individuals are unlikely to increase under the current administration.

**Economy**

Jamaica’s economy relies heavily on tourism, as well as mining, agriculture and manufacturing services. Despite growing tourism revenue and abundant natural resources, economic growth has slowed significantly in the past few decades and government debt has risen substantially. Jamaica’s economic future is uncertain, with annual economic growth averaging about 1 percent for the past five years. Since the election of Prime Minister Holness the total government debt to percent of GDP decreased from 150 to 103 percent. Despite the decrease, Jamaica’s debt level remains high and the country has little money to stimulate the economy or train under-educated citizens with higher level job skills, which would attract greater foreign investment.

The government’s inability to provide basic services such as education, job training and welfare to its citizens has contributed to a poverty level of about 18 percent along with significant inequality. National privatization programs intended to free industry from governmental bureaucratic constraints have been instead contributed to increased inequality and lowered levels of social mobility. Recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans may benefit the economy though this outcome seems unlikely as Jamaica’s past agreements with the IMF have done little to improve the country’s financial situation.

**Corruption**

- **HIGH levels of corruption are present in Jamaica. Corruption is most apparent with the country’s security forces, which have often been accused of having ties to criminal organizations.**

Despite having passed the Corruption Prevention Act in 2001, Jamaica continues to display elevated levels of corruption in 2018. Corruption is mainly concentrated within the country’s security forces, although there are some signs of corruption among politicians.

Security forces are widely viewed as corrupt within Jamaica. Some citizens believe that police officers work in collusion with criminal elements to conduct illegal activity and abuse their positions as a means of identifying victims and carrying out crimes. Security forces are also known to solicit bribes from civilians, and this form of corruption is the most likely to affect civilians in Jamaica.

Several Jamaican politicians have been accused of accepting illegal funds, especially while campaigning. Additionally, public officials have been accused of granting government contracts on the basis of favoritism.

The judicial system in Jamaica is considered to be inefficient, with some trials being delayed for several years. It is believed that these setbacks are the result of bribery, in which criminals bribe justices delay proceedings.

Transparency International, a non-governmental organization that monitors global corruption, issued its annual Corruptions Perception Index (CPI) in 2017 and gave Jamaica a score of 44 (0 indicating the highest levels of perceived corruption), indicating that the country has moderate to high levels of corruption. Jamaica was rated 68th out of 180 countries in 2017, reflecting a slight improvement in corruption perception from 2016 when the country was ranked 83rd out of 176 countries assessed.

**Security issues**

**General crime**
Crime is a HIGH threat in Jamaica, with both petty and violent crime posing significant concerns; a growing gang presence, especially in Kingston, has contributed to serious levels of crime.

The threat from crime in Jamaica is rated as high with risks of both petty and violent crime impacting individuals throughout the country. The security situation is deteriorating and violent crime continues to escalate due to the growing presence of gangs, primarily in the capital Kingston. Petty crime is more likely to impact civilians, as violent crime is usually aimed at those affiliated with gangs. Petty crime, including pick-pocketing, bag-snatching and the theft of unattended items, is the most prevalent risk for individuals in country. These incidents are generally opportunistic in nature, although those perceived as affluent may be targeted at moderately higher rates. Opportunistic crimes are common in large cities such as Kingston and can also impact northern coastal resort areas of Jamaica, where a heightened security presence helps minimize violent crime.

Violent crime is a serious concern throughout Jamaica due to the growing presence of gangs. The threat of violence is most extreme in the capital Kingston, due to increasingly pervasive gangs known as “posses.” While no area of the capital is immune to gang activity, these groups operate most extensively in south and west Kingston. Some of the most prominent gangs in Jamaica include Shower Posse, Spangler Posse, Dunkirk Boys Posse, Tel Aviv Posse and Waterhouse Posse. The operations of these groups have contributed to elevated homicide rates; in 2017 there were a reported 1616 murders, one of the highest on record. Most victims of violent crime are affiliated with local gangs, but civilians and travelers have been targeted in the past. Armed robberies occur frequently in large cities including Kingston and usually target wealthy locals as well as tourists, who are perceived to be rich. Additionally, robberies from residences and hotels are a pertinent threat, especially in Kingston.

A state of emergency in the parish of St James – home to the popular tourist destination of Montego Bay – has been extended for three months until 2 August 2018. Prime Minister Andrew Holness first declared the state of emergency on 18 January, allowing for security forces to use special stop-and-search powers that have since reduced the number of murders in the area by 62 when compared with the corresponding period from 2017. The homicide rate rose by 25 percent in 2017 due to extensive gang activity throughout the country which threatened the tourism industry. Individuals are advised to anticipate heightened security presence in the parish and to adhere to the advice of authorities. Moreover, a state of emergency remains in effect in St. Catherine North until July and is likely to be extended. The state of emergency in St. Catherine focuses on the Spanish Town, Linstead and Bog Walk areas of the parish. In Montego Bay the increased security measures will target the areas of Flankers, Canterbury, Norwood, Clavers Street and Hart Street. The state of emergency allows the national military to support local authorities with ongoing security operations.

Sexual assault and rape are of significant concern throughout the country, perpetrated by both gangs and individuals. Of particular concern is the increase in sexual assault committed against female tourists in northern resort towns; these crimes are often committed by resort staff. Also notable is the significant rise in sexual assault in urban areas, particular against young women, though men are sometimes victimized as well. These crimes are underreported, particularly in major cities, due to fear of reprisal.

There is a strong social stigma against homosexuality in Jamaica and hate crimes against LGBT individuals have been reported in the past. Those that are openly sympathetic to homosexuals can also be targeted for hate crimes. Several international groups have rated Jamaica as the most dangerous country in the western hemisphere for gay and lesbian individuals. This homosexual stigma is stronger in more rural areas of the country but is also a notable threat in larger cities. Many incidents of LGBT-related discrimination and violence are believed to go unreported, as authorities are often accused of not investigating such crimes seriously.

Security forces in Jamaica are not generally trusted by the population. Some individuals view them as
inadequate and believe them unable to solve crime, while others believe many security officers have ties to local gangs, helping them carry out criminal activities. This distrust has led to a deteriorating security situation and increased crime in Jamaica.

**Terrorism**

- **There is a LOW risk of terrorism in Jamaica, as there are no known domestic or transnational terror cells operating in the country.**

The risk posed by terrorism in Jamaica is considered low. There are no known terrorist groups operating in the country and there are no recognized threats stemming from any regional or international terrorist group. However, Jamaica lacks adequate border security and has lax immigration controls. These facts combined with the easy availability of counterfeit Jamaican travel documents, leaves the country vulnerable should a terrorist threat ever arise.

**Civil unrest**

- **Protests and demonstrations are a MODERATE concern as they can occur with little to no warning and frequently deteriorate into violent clashes with security forces.**

Jamaica is prone to bouts of widespread unrest, generally inspired by economic and/or social issues in the country. These protests are mostly spontaneous in nature and frequently occur in downtown Kingston near government buildings. Demonstrators often set up makeshift roadblocks, which can result in significant travel delays and disruptions.

Strikes by government workers may also occur in the country. The last such incident occurred in September 2016 when workers with the National Water Commission held a strike over wage disputes. The strike resulted in minor water supply interruptions in Kingston.

At times, citizens protest arbitrary killings committed by security forces; these actions are most prominent in poorer areas of the city where gang violence is common, as security forces in these areas frequently clash with and oftentimes kill people they presume to be affiliated with gangs. West Kingston has the heaviest gang presence, and following large protests, police occasionally implement curfews in this neighborhood as a means of suppressing civil unrest.

Jamaican security forces are known to employ heavy-handed tactics with demonstrators throughout the country. Security forces often fire tear gas, rubber bullets and even live ammunition, sometimes turning peaceful protests into riots as demonstrators respond with aggression. Violence associated with civil unrest has been known to harm innocent bystanders.

**Kidnapping**

- **Kidnapping poses a MODERATE threat in Jamaica and have increased in recent years. Both kidnap for ransom and express kidnapping are concerns in Jamaica.**

Kidnapping is one of the most underreported crimes in Jamaica primarily due to fear of retaliation, as kidnappers are often affiliated with powerful gangs. While the rates of most other violent crimes are rising in Jamaica, kidnapping rates continue to decline in recent years.

Kidnapping is committed throughout the country, with most instances reported in large cities such as Kingston. Kidnap for ransom is typically conducted by high-profile gangs that target wealthy business executives and their dependents. These groups are highly sophisticated and have different factions that are
responsible for a multitude of tasks, including gathering intelligence on their victims for many weeks prior to abduction, conducting the physical act of kidnapping victims, demanding ransoms and performing exchanges with victims’ families. Unlike most other forms of crime, kidnap for ransom is carried out almost exclusively in wealthier areas, due to the types of victims that are usually targeted.

Express kidnappings are typically carried out by less sophisticated criminal gangs. Express kidnappings involve the temporary abduction of a victim, who is forced to withdraw money from ATMs either until funds run out or credit/debit cards have reached their maximum withdrawal limits. This type of kidnapping offers a quicker cash return, although payouts are typically much lower than can be achieved by kidnap for ransom. These crimes are opportunistic and do not solely target the rich; however, those that appear to be wealthy are more likely to be targeted. Express kidnappings are usually conducted by groups of two or three criminals, who sometimes work in collusion with rogue taxi drivers that deliver victims to these groups.

Travel logistics

Entering the country

Entry Requirements

- All individuals traveling to Jamaica require a passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the intended date of departure.
- Individuals also require a return or onward airline ticket and evidence of sufficient funds to finance their stay.
- Upon check-in at the airport or during the flight to the country a Jamaican Immigration entry card will be issued to each passenger; this entry card is required to depart from Jamaica.
- Individuals arriving from a country where yellow fever is present require proof of vaccination against yellow fever.
- Citizens from EU countries, as well as from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Israel, do not require visas to travel to the country. Nationals of the U.K., Ireland, U.S. and Canada may stay for six months without a visa. Additionally, citizens of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Commonwealth countries (except Sri Lanka and Pakistan) may stay for three months. Nationals of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, Greece, Japan, Portugal and Spain may stay for 30 days without a visa.
- All other nationals will require visas prior to travel to Jamaica; individuals are advised to contact their closest Jamaican embassy or consulate prior to travel to the country.

Political/Safety Risks

AIG Travel rates Jamaica as a HIGH threat location due to concerns associated with crime, corruption and, to a lesser extent, kidnapping.

- The political environment in Jamaica is stable and poses a LOW threat as there are no major tensions that could affect this stability.
- HIGH levels of corruption are present in Jamaica. Corruption is most apparent with the country’s security forces, which have often been accused of having ties to criminal organizations.
- Crime is a serious threat in Jamaica, with both petty and violent crime posing significant concerns. Growing gang presence, especially in Kingston, has contributed to HIGH levels of crime.
- There is a LOW risk of terrorism in Jamaica, as there are no known domestic or transnational terror cells operating in the country.
- Protests and demonstrations are a MODERATE concern as they can occur with little to no warning and frequently deteriorate into violent clashes with security forces.
Kidnapping poses a MODERATE threat in Jamaica. Both kidnap for ransom and express kidnapping are concerns in Jamaica.

**Infrastructure**

Infrastructure concerns are MODERATE in Jamaica. While infrastructure throughout the country is extensive, access to these amenities varies greatly and they tend to be poorly maintained in more remote areas of the country.

- Transport infrastructure in Jamaica is extensive and infrastructural investments/expansion is currently underway; however, much of the country's infrastructure is old and rundown, especially in more rural areas of the country.
- No rail service exists in the country; however, public transportation, including buses, taxi and ferry services are available but can vary in standards.
- Jamaica has a high standard of telecommunications infrastructure in large cities such as Kingston, including access to the internet as well as fixed-line and mobile phone services. Internet cafes are widely available in most urban centers, and most major hotels offer internet services. These services are severely limited outside cities and resort areas.
- Power supply in the country is good, and cuts and blackouts are rare. The last unscheduled outage occurred in August 2016.

**Air travel**

Jamaica offers two primary international airports in the country. Norman Manley International Airport (MKJP/KIN) is located about 11 mi (17 km) outside of Kingston's city center. Sangster International Airport (MKJS/MBJ) is the most commonly used airport and is situated 2 mi (3 km) from Montego Bay. Both airports are well equipped and maintain with numerous services, including currency exchange services, tourist information booths, restaurants and duty-free shopping. Coach, bus and taxis as well as express shuttles operate from both facilities.

Car rental agencies and information desks are available along with taxi service desks upon exiting customs. Caution should be exercised while driving to airports due to poor road conditions. When traveling to the airport, individuals should not use Mountain View Avenue and Windward Road, both of which are located in Kingston, due to the increased crime threat on these routes.

While Sangster International Airport is the primary hub for the international flights, it also serves numerous domestic destinations, connecting Montego Bay to most Jamaican cities, including the capital Kingston as well as Negril and Ocho Rios. These flights are usually limited, however, as services to these destinations are only offered approximately once per day. Norman Manley International Airport handles most flights to the country's interior and usually offers a more varied schedule than Sangster International Airport.

**Getting around**

The most efficient way to travel around cities is by taxi; however, air travel is recommended for long distance travel as road conditions vary greatly in more rural areas. Pre-arranged transportation services through a vetted service provider is the recommended form of overland transportation for visitors to the country.
• **Road** – The country's highways and main roads are generally in good condition, although poor maintenance has resulted in an increasing number of potholes. Secondary roads vary in condition and many are in a severe state of disrepair. Many rural roads are not paved. In addition, landslides are common during the rainy seasons (May to June and September to November), and often cause widespread travel delays and disruptions. Roads in large urban centers can be overcrowded and narrow, and driving standards are often erratic due to a disregard for traffic laws and road safety. Jamaica has a very high accident rate due to these concerns.

• **Self-Driving** - Individuals wanting to rent a car require a credit card under the name of the renter and are required to pay a deposit, depending on the kind of insurance and vehicle hired. A valid passport or ID and an international driver's license are also required when renting a car. The minimum age for driving in Jamaica is 17; however, individuals often have to be 25 or older in order to hire a vehicle. When drivers between the ages of 17 and 25 are allowed to hire cars they are often charged higher rates due to higher perceived risk. Drivers in Jamaica drive on the left side of the road similar to other Commonwealth nations.

• **Bus** - The bus network within Jamaican cities as well as those that connect urban centers is extensive. Buses are often overcrowded, leading to frequently reported incidents of bag-snatching, pick-pocketing and the theft of unattended items. Drivers do not tend to adhere to schedules; rather, they depart when they considered buses to be at capacity. Several public buses lack basic accommodations such as air conditioning; however, private minibuses, which are more expensive, generally offer these features. Minibuses are referred to locally as ‘coasters’ and serve virtually all of Jamaica. They can be identified by their red license plates with the letters ‘PPV.’ Overall, bus transport in Jamaica is considered to be unsafe and is not recommended.

• **Taxi** - There are two types of taxis that are common throughout Jamaica. Route taxis, identifiable by their red license plates, pick up multiple groups of passengers and travel along a set route. Route taxis are usually Toyota Corolla station wagons or similar vehicles. Drivers typically pack their vehicles full, and they are often overcrowded. There are concerns regarding drivers working in collusion with criminal elements to conduct illegal activities, namely express kidnapping.

• **Water** – Montego Bay and Ocho Rios are both ports of call for several large cruise ships and private luxury yachts. There are numerous smaller ports and yacht clubs where smaller yachts can be docked. Security is generally heightened in these areas due to a heavy tourist presence, but instances of petty crime continue to occur near ports.

**Culture**

• 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 or skirts and blouses.

• Outside business hours, lightweight casual clothing is the norm.

• Apart from common courtesy, no special customs exist that need be followed.

• English is the official language but the unofficial lingo is Patois, which is derived from Creole English and includes African, Portuguese and Spanish terms as well as Rastafarian slang.

• Relations between same-sex couples, especially men, are banned in Jamaica. Though rarely enforced, penalties can be harsh and may include lengthy jail sentences. Additionally, hate crimes are often committed against homosexuals. Therefore, open displays of affection between same-sex couples should be limited.

• It is common for men to engage in catcalling women. It is frowned upon for women to travel alone, especially at night.

**Important Dates 2018**

• 1 January – New Year’s Day
• 2 January – New Year’s Day observed
• 14 February – Ash Wednesday
Health concerns

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. English-speaking medical facilities and personnel are available in the country. Pharmacies are generally limited to Kingston and Montego Bay. Ambulance services are limited in availability and quality of emergency care in remote areas. Hospitalization can be very expensive and comprehensive health insurance is recommended.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that the Zika virus is a risk in Jamaica. As a Zika infection in a pregnant woman can cause serious birth defects, the CDC recommends that pregnant women do not travel to Jamaica.

Jamaica has experienced malaria outbreaks in the past, including in Kingston; individuals are advised to consult a medical practitioner about taking anti-malarial medication. Dengue fever outbreaks have also occurred and have affected Kingston. Chikungunya virus, another mosquito-borne illness, was detected on the island in 2014. Vaccinations are recommended against hepatitis A, hepatitis B, polio, typhoid and yellow fever. 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. Travelers are advised to take basic food and water precautions, such as only eating well-cooked food and drinking bottled water.

Natural hazards

Jamaica has a tropical climate with high temperatures year-round at low altitudes. Rainfall occurs throughout the year with the majority of rainfall reported during the rainy seasons, which occur annually from May to June and again from September to November.

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, thus exacerbating the threat of flooding and landslides. Local officials are generally well prepared for approaching storms and issue warnings and implement emergency procedures ahead of time. The last notable storm to affect Jamaica was Hurricane Matthew in September 2016.

Due to its location along a geographic fault line, earthquakes occur occasionally in Jamaica. While the majority of seismic events are small-scale, larger earthquakes have occurred in the past and can cause significant damage. The last damaging earthquake to strike Jamaica occurred in 2005, when several structures collapsed, resulting in the entrapment of dozens of individuals; however, no deaths were reported.

Jamaica is considered to be at high risk from tsunamis. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions can result in
tsunamis, which can move at very high speeds and threaten any low-lying coastal areas.

Money

- **Currency** - The currency in use is the Jamaican dollar (JMD), which is divided into 100 cents. The Jamaican dollar is represented by numerous banknotes and coins. Banknotes currently in circulation include the frequently used 50, 100, 500 and 1,000 dollars as well as the infrequently used 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 5,000 dollars. Additionally, coins represent 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 cents as well as 1, 5, 10 and 20 dollars.
- **Foreign exchange** - Foreign currency can be exchanged at banks, hotels and currency exchange bureaus.
- **ATMs / Credit Cards** - ATMs are available in large cities in Jamaica. To avoid falling victim to ATM crime, clients are advised to only use these facilities during business hours and in commercial shopping areas. Most hotels, restaurants and tourist-oriented institutions, as well as some shops in Jamaica accept credit cards. The most widely accepted credit cards are Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Diners Club.
- **Tipping** - A tip of 10 percent for hotel staff, waiters, taxi drivers and tour guides is considered the norm. Some restaurants automatically add a 10 to 15 percent service charge to the bill. Taxi drivers do not expect tips, but they are appreciated.
- **Business hours** - Business hours are generally Monday to Friday: 08:30 to 16:30. Banking hours are generally Monday to Friday: 08:30 to 14:30.

Contact Information
International dialing code: +1 876
International dialing prefix: 00
Police: 119
Ambulance: 110
Fire: 110

Cultural factors

Etiquette and norms

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 or skirts and blouses.

Outside business hours, lightweight casual clothing is the norm. Apart from common courtesy no special customs exist that need be followed. English is the official language but the unofficial lingo is Patois, which is derived from Creole English and includes African, Portuguese and Spanish terms as well as Rastafarian slang.

Dos and donts

Relations between same-sex couples, especially men, are banned in Jamaica. Though rarely enforced, penalties can be harsh and may include lengthy jail sentences. Additionally, hate crimes are often committed against homosexuals. Therefore, open displays of affection between same-sex couples should be limited.

It is common for men to engage in degrading behavior toward women, such as catcalling. It is frowned upon for women to travel alone, especially at night.
Useful information

- Public holidays
- Weather forecast
- Maps
- Jamaica Observer
- Come to Jamaica

- Electricity: 110 volts, 50 Hz;

Contact details

Important contact details

- International dialing code: +1 876
- International dialing prefix: 011

Emergency numbers

- Police: 119
- Ambulance: 110
- Fire: 110

Embassies

There is currently no Australian diplomatic representation in Jamaica. Australian nationals seeking consular assistance while in the country are advised to contact the Australian High Commission in Trinidad and Tobago.

Australian High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago
18 Herbert Street
St Clair
Port of Spain
Trinidad and Tobago
Health advisory

Health infrastructure

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. English-speaking medical facilities and personnel are available in the country. Pharmacies are generally limited to Kingston and Montego Bay.

Pre-travel recommendations
The following vaccinations are recommended or required for individuals traveling to Jamaica:

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

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

Individuals are advised to visit a doctor or clinic that specializes in travel-related medicine at least four to six weeks prior to arrival in Jamaica. This should allow the necessary time for any vaccinations prescribed by the doctor to take effect.

Comprehensive medical insurance, including provision for medical repatriation or evacuation, is strongly recommended. Individuals are also advised to take an appropriate supply of any prescription medication; this should be accompanied by a written doctor's instruction, explaining the need for the medication and justifying the quantities required.

**Significant diseases**

The following are some of the more significant diseases that might affect individuals in the country:

- **Malaria** is 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** is an infectious disease carried by mosquitoes. It is prevalent throughout Jamaica, particularly during the rainy seasons, which occur annually from May to June and again from September to November.
- **Leptospirosis** is a bacterial disease that 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** is a life-threatening sexually transmitted disease. In recent years, infection rates have increased significantly in Jamaica's major urban centers.
- **Diarrhea** is common among travelers and can be caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites. One of the most common causes is a bacterium known as E.coli, which is transmitted by ingesting contaminated food and liquids.

**Food and water safety**

Tap water is generally safe to drink in Jamaica; however, it is recommended that travelers drink filtered or bottled water. It is not recommended to bathe or swim in rivers; however, the risk of contaminated water is greatly reduced in and near beach resorts. Unpasteurized milk should be avoided. Powdered or tinned milk should be used as an alternative if pasteurized milk is not available. Food from street vendors should be avoided as this carries a higher risk of causing illness. Some types of fish may contain poisonous biotoxins even when cooked and clients are advised to buy fish from reputable vendors or restaurants only.

**Emergency response**

The number for an ambulance is 110. There are several private ambulance services which provide a moderate to high level of care. Government ambulances are generally inadequate and response times can vary greatly across the island.