Jamaica population

Table 9.3 Jamaica: facts and figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>east–west 250 km north–south 90 km</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area</strong></td>
<td>10 990 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population (2000):</strong></td>
<td>2 680 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(2004):</strong></td>
<td>2 672 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Density (2014):</strong></td>
<td>2930 050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>243 people/km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natural increase 1985–2000</strong></td>
<td>0.8%/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predicted NI (2000–2015)</strong></td>
<td>0.4%/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(2014)</strong></td>
<td>0.69%/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life expectancy (2014)</strong></td>
<td>73.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% urban (2010)</strong></td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% rural (2010)</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Jamaica population census 2001

Population distribution

Jamaica’s main settlements are all on or close to the coast. To a large extent this is explained by relief. The highest point on the island is Blue Mountain Peak (2256 metres) and the Blue Mountains certainly repel population. Figure 9.17 shows a large yellow area in the parishes of St Thomas and Portland where density is below 100 people/km², and this corresponds with the mountain range. Surrey is the county with the greatest variations in both density and relief. Surrey (St Andrew Parish) includes the city of Kingston (population 575 000) and its spreading suburbs, which appear on Figure 9.16 in brown representing over 300 people/km². This urban zone lies on the coastal plain between the mountains and the sea.

The other two main towns on the island, Portmore (102 000) and Spanish Town (127 300), lie close to Kingston, just to the west into Middlesex County. Portmore is coastal but Spanish Town lies about 10 km inland, but still on the coastal plain. At the opposite end of the island is the other large urban area, Montego Bay (90 500), in St James Parish, Cornwall. This is another coastal site.

Outside the cities, towns and areas of denser rural settlement lie either on the coastal plain or within valleys. St Ann’s Bay, Port Maria, Port Antonio, Port Morant and Savanna-la-Mar, with populations between 20 000 and 100 000 people, are all coastal. May Pen is at a key confluence in the Milk River Basin and Mandeville lies higher up this basin on the edge of the May Day Mountains at around 1000 metres above sea level. It is the highest larger settlement on the island.

Kingston/St Andrew is by far the most populous parish with a quarter of the whole Jamaican population in 2001 (Figure 9.18). St Catherine follows, not surprisingly as it includes both Spanish Town and Portmore. Clarendon is the third largest parish today in terms of population. Although May Pen, one of the smaller towns, is its largest settlement, Clarendon has a denser rural population well
inland in the Rio Minho valley. Manchester Parish includes Mandeville and the upper part of one branch of the Milk Valley, another relatively densely populated rural area. St James is the next most populated parish but only because Montego Bay is located there.

1. To what extent are the more densely populated parts of Jamaica on the lower-lying land? Why do you think this is so? What are the characteristics of coasts, coastal plains and river basins that attract the Jamaican population to live in these areas?

2. Explain the location of Kingston. Why should this site have led to the development of the largest settlement on Jamaica?

**Population growth 1950–2000**

Between 1950 and 2000, in just 50 years, Jamaica’s population rose from 1.4 million to almost 2.7 million. This is almost a doubling of the population – but the situation is not as simple as it might seem. Within that period there was a great deal of emigration from Jamaica, mostly to the UK. In the 1950s Jamaica was in Stage 2 of the DTM but since then it has developed through to the end of Stage 3. The DR has decreased significantly and BR is also dropping. A rate of natural increase of only 0.8 percent is low for a developing country and it is predicted to continue to fall (Figure 9.18).
The predicted population pyramid for 2025 (Figure 9.19b) shows a clear reduction in the birth rate as the base narrows. From the age of 24 downward each five-year group becomes smaller and smaller. This is a typical Stage 3 pyramid with a narrowing base. By 2050 (Figure 9.19c) the pattern shows a clearly ageing population, with much straighter sides. The consequences for Jamaica will be dramatic, as in the UK today! The next generation of young Jamaicans will have to do what the present equivalent generation are coping with today in developed countries: a smaller group will be paying higher taxes to maintain the elderly above them in the pyramid.

3 Describe the shape of each of the pyramids for Jamaica in Figure 9.19, noting the differences between them.

4 What are the main reasons for the suggested changes in shape of the pyramids between 2000 and 2050?

5 Describe Jamaica’s progress through the DTM Stages 2–4.

6 What economic and social factors have encouraged these changes?

**Changes in the urban and rural population, 1950–2000**

Figure 9.20 represents the change in the urban–rural balance of the population of Jamaica between 1950 and 2000. The total population has increased but the urban–rural balance shows a greater variation. In 1950 urban dwellers were less than one-third of the total population, but by 2000 urban residents were over half of Jamaica’s population. Urbanisation is a global trend and is linked with the economic development of a country. Primary industry (farming, mining etc.) tends to spread people out over an area but numbers employed in this sector in Jamaica have been falling. As people move into the developing tertiary sector they need to move to towns and cities to find work. Services based around tourism and serving the island community have expanded to employ 59 percent in 2001.
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and mining employ 19 percent of Jamaica’s working population.

![Graph showing urban-rural population balance in Jamaica, 1950-2000](image)

**Race and ethnicity in Jamaica**

Afro-descendants make up 90.9 percent of Jamaica’s population. There are also people from the Indian subcontinent, Chinese and Europeans. Indigenous peoples (the earlier inhabitants of the island) still make up a small proportion of the population. They are Tainos, Jamaica’s first inhabitants. They travelled by raft from Guyana about 700 BC, island-hopping up the Antilles to Jamaica. The name ‘Jamaica’ comes from their original name, *Yamayca*.

**Children in Jamaica**

Of the more than 2.9 million people living in Jamaica, 28 percent are children, but they account for more than 16.5% of people living below the poverty line (The CIA World Factbook, 2015). By 2000, enrolment in primary school was high – 95 percent for both boys and girls. However, by the end of primary school 30 percent of these children, mostly boys, still cannot read and write adequately. Only 3.6 percent of Jamaican 0–3 year-olds are lucky enough to attend a pre-school or a playgroup, which always gives a good start into primary school. About 38,516 children (6% in 2005) work and 2,500 are children are forced to live on the streets (these are mostly boys).

HIV and AIDS rates are quite high in Jamaica (1.7 percent of those aged 15–49 in 2005). Of the total affected, 8 percent are children under 10 years of age; 80 percent of these affected children are from poor households, and one in four will be abandoned by their parents.

**Women in Jamaica**

In 2015 women made up 9 percent of Members of the Jamaican Parliament, and held some government ministerial jobs.
Illiteracy rates (inability to read and write) are low: 9 percent for females over 15 years of age. Women make up 48 percent of the total workforce of 1 million, but there is a female unemployment rate of 22 percent. Of those in work, most are in the service sector (81 percent), with 10 percent in agriculture and 9 percent in manufacturing.

7 What are the factors that attract people to live in Jamaica’s urban areas? (Hint: Think about all aspects of work, education, health and other services.)

8 What effect will more women working (and in higher-level jobs) have on Jamaica’s birth rate? Give reasons for your answer.

9 How does your answer to activity 2 link with Jamaica’s progress through the DTM?