

## **Jamaica's Location and Physical Features**

Jamaica is an island in the Caribbean Sea, located 145 Kilometres (90 miles) south of Cuba and 190 Kilometres (118 miles) west of Haiti. It is approximately 234 Kilometres (145 miles) long and about 80 Kilometres (50 miles) wide.



### **Geographic Coordinates**

Jamaica lies at 18° North latitude and 77° West longitude.

### **Climate**

Jamaica has a tropical, hot, humid climate with a temperate interior. Warm trade winds bring rainfall throughout the year. The rainy season extends from May to October with the heaviest rainfall in those two months.

## Topography

Jamaica is the third largest island in the Caribbean. It is covered with mostly mountains with a narrow plain along the coastline. The highest peak is in the Blue Mountain Range, the highest point measuring 2,256 metres (7,402 ft) above sea level.



**Figure 3**

Figure 3 shows the elevation (or height) of the land in the island. The green areas depict the parts of the island that are relatively flat, while the yellow and orange areas illustrate the areas that are higher, like the various mountain ranges. The section in purple and white show the highest areas, the Blue Mountain range.

## Soils

About two-thirds of the country is covered with limestone, which is concentrated on the central and western parts of the island. The other third is covered by igneous, metamorphic rocks, shale and alluvium.

## Valleys

St. James	Queen of Spain Valley
Trelawny	Queen of Spain Valley
Hanover	Great River
Westmoreland	Dean
St. Catherine	Luidas Vale
St. Mary	St Thomas in the Vale
Portland	Rio Grande
St. Thomas	Plantain Garden

## Mountains

Nearly half the island is over 300 meters above sea level! The mountains in Jamaica stretch

Parish	Mountain
St. Thomas	Blue Mountains
Portland	John Crow and Blue Mountains
St. Andrew	Blue Mountains
St. Catherine	Juan de Bolas, Montpelier, Mount Diablo
St. Ann	Dry Harbour, Pedro
Clarendon	Mocho, Bull Head
St. Elizabeth	Cockpit Country, Santa Cruz Mountains
Trelawny	Cockpit Country
St. James	Cockpit Country
Hanover	Dolphin Head
Manchester	Don Figuerero Mountains, Carpenter Mountains, May Day Mountains

from one end of the island in the East to the other end in the West. Some people say that the mountains form a kind of backbone on the island. The mountains of the island can be broken up into three main groups.

The first group is in the eastern section composed primarily of the Blue Mountains (See figure 4). This group also has the **John Crow Mountains** and is the most easterly mountain range in the island. They run from north-west to south-east in the parish of Portland and divide the Rio Grande valley from the east coast of the island.

The second group or central region is formed chiefly of limestone and extends from Stony Hill in St. Andrew to the Cockpit country. The central range starts from Stony Hill and runs in a north westerly direction through Mammee Hill, Red Hills, Bog Walk, Guy's Hill, Mount Diablo and finally into the Cockpit country.

The third group is the western section with **Dolphin Head** as its centre (see figure 4).



Figure 4

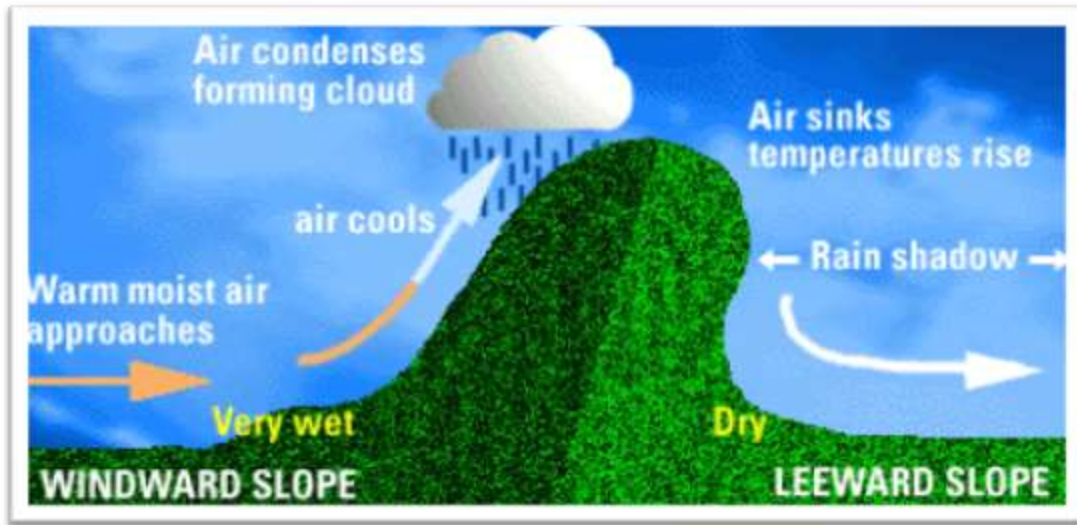


Figure 6 Mountains account for the distribution of rainfall

The North Eastern side of the island (Portland) where the Blue Mountains are located usually gets much more rain than the South (Kingston, St. Andrew and St. Thomas) side because it is on the Windward side of the Blue Mountains, or the side that the Trade winds meet land first. As these winds approach land having passed over the warm sea they contain a lot of moisture in the form of water vapour. When these winds approach the windward side mountains, they are forced to rise, cooling as they do so, forming clouds. The water vapour in the clouds cool to the point that they become water droplets and fall as rain. Usually by the time they move over the mountain there is no moisture left so the leeward side get very little to no rain.

## Rivers

Parish	Name of River
St. Thomas	The Plantain Garden River, the Yallahs River, the Morant River
St. Mary	The Wag Water, the Dry River, the Rio Nuevo, the White River
St. Ann	The Roaring River, Dunns River, the Llandoverly River, the Rio Bueno
St. Elizabeth	The Black River
Trelawny	The Martha Brae River, Hectors River
St. James	The Great River, the Montego River
Westmoreland	The Cabaritta River
Hanover	The Great River
Clarendon	The Milk River, the Rio Minho
St. Catherine	The Rio Cobre, the Ferry River
St. Andrew	The Hope River, the Cane River
Portland	The Rio Grande, the Swift River, the Buff Bay River, the Spanish River

Jamaica has a lot of limestone rock which is porous, that is, easily worn away by water. This results in a lot of holes in the rock (like sink holes) and therefore a lot of underground rivers. The Cave River and Hectors River are examples. There are some areas, like the parish of St.

Ann, that has mostly limestone rock. As a result of this, there are no rivers above ground; most of the rivers are underground. When the area receives a lot of rainfall, underground reservoirs become full and sometimes rise to the surface as lakes. For example the Moneague Lake near Moneague last rose in 1970 and disappeared in 1971.

The **Wag Water** rises in the mountains of St. Andrew and flows through the parish of St. Mary, entering the sea west of Annotto Bay.

The **Hope River** rises in the hills near Newcastle and enters the sea about 10 kilometres (6 miles) east of Kingston. Both the Wag Water and the Hope River supply Kingston with water.

The **Milk River** supplies a system of canals for the irrigation of the plains of Vere in Clarendon.

The **Rio Minho** is the longest river in Jamaica. It flows southwest, reaching the Caribbean Sea at Carlisle Bay. The town of May Pen, Clarendon, lies on the banks of the river.

The **Plantain Garden River** in St. Thomas is the only important river which does not north or



south. It flowing south in its upper course, then it turns east upon meeting the coastal range of hills. It then flows east through the Plantain Garden River Valley and enters the sea at Holland Bay.

The **Black River** is one of Jamaica's longest rivers. It is 73 kilometres (44 miles) long, and for 28 kilometres (17 miles) from its mouth it can be used by small vessels. It is called the Black River because of the darkness of the river bed that has been lined with thick layers of decomposing



vegetation. It begins as an underground stream in the Cockpit Country and emerges north of Siloah, in St. Elizabeth, on the southern border of the Cockpits. The river flows into the Upper Morass where the waters merge with those of the Smith River and other smaller tributaries. It has thick vegetation and is easily explored by canoe.





The rivers of Portland, which have their source in the Blue Mountains, flow very swiftly, and can be very destructive in time of heavy rainfall. **The Rio Grande**, rising on the northern slopes of the Blue Mountains, is a large river which has its course through some of the wildest and most beautiful scenery in

the island. Rio Grande is the birthplace of river rafting in Jamaica. The original use of these rafts was to transport bananas from the inland plantations to the harbour at Port Antonio. The pursuit was popularised by Errol Flynn who used to challenge his guests to moonlight rafting races along the Rio Grande. Rafting on this river has become, in recent years, a popular sporting pastime. Other main rivers of Portland are the Swift, Spanish, and Buff Bay.

The 'head' (or beginning) of the **Martha Brae River** is at Windsor in the interior of Trelawny, flowing towards the east of Falmouth. This is probably Jamaica's most well known waterway for two reasons: (1) Its location (near to Montego Bay). It is a featured tourist attraction and popular for its 30 foot bamboo rafts and (2) An ancient folk legend. As the story goes, an old Taino Indian witch was believed to know the whereabouts of a large stash of gold. In the time of the Spanish, treasure hunters captured the witch in order to lead them to the metal. Pretending to comply, she led them into a cave and then suddenly disappeared. Frightened, the Spaniards rushed out of the cave only to find that the witch had diverted the river to where the treasure seekers were. The Spaniards drowned.



With its tributaries rising in the Above Rocks district in St. Andrew, the **Rio Cobre** runs through



St. Catherine, and is used for providing irrigation and drinking water and provides electricity for the capital and surrounding towns like Linstead,

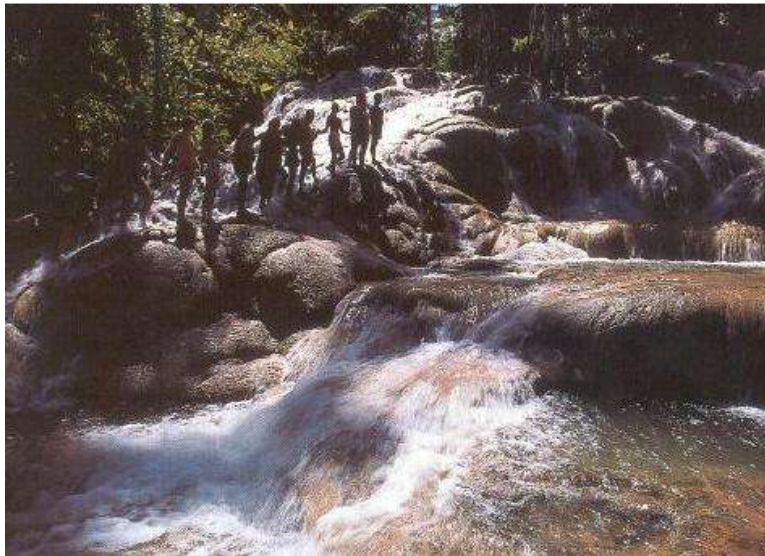
Riversdale, Old Harbour, and the urban sections of Kingston and St. Andrew. The famous **Flat Bridge** lies over a section of the Rio Cobre. This bridge was built by the Spaniards and is considered one of the strongest in the West Indies. When the river is in spate, vehicular traffic is unable to cross the Flat Bridge and has to be diverted through Barry or Sligoville.

The legend that surrounds the Rio Cobre is that a mermaid lives at the bottom of the river and on moonlit nights she comes up and sits on a huge stone and combs her long black hair with a silver comb. The story also says if the comb drops out of the mermaid's hand and anyone finds it they will become wealthy. The Jamaica Public Service Company built a **hydro electric** plant on the banks of the Rio Cobre that supplied electricity to a great part of St. Catherine, but unfortunately the plant was destroyed by a hurricane.

## Jamaica's Waterfalls

Jamaica's waterfalls are formed mostly by rivers flowing over the side of a cliff or over rocks.

There are a number of cascading waterfalls that visitors and local can climb up and enjoy.



**Dunn's River Falls** is the most popular and internationally known waterfall in Jamaica. It is located just outside of Ocho Rios, these 600-foot waterfalls attract large crowds year round. The scenery is beautiful, and visitors are encouraged to climb the waterfall with guides.



Somerset Falls lies just outside of Port Antonio, near Hope Bay. These beautiful falls are in a natural, green setting, with unusual plants and flowers.



Reach Falls is a short drive away from Port Antonio. Recognized as one of the most beautiful natural waterfalls of Jamaica, Reach Falls is a series of cascades that tumble over limestone tiers from one jade-coloured pool to the next.



The Y.S. Falls is located by the Black River, on a papaya plantation. "YS" is the name of the estate and river near to Middle Quarters, St. Elizabeth.