

# JAMAICA



## History

- The first wave of immigration to the United States began in the early 1900's. Seasonal farmers settled in Florida and others in New York.
- The second wave of immigration began in 1965 after the Immigration and Naturalization Services Act was passed.
- Travel back and forth to Jamaica is common.

**Health Concerns** HIV/AIDS, obesity, diabetes, and heart diseases

## Staple Foods

- Jamaican's are proud of their harvests of fresh fruits and vegetables. Feasts mean celebrating, usually a holiday. They embrace their slave ancestors' heritage and honor and remember by having lavish meals from their crops.
- Core Foods: fish, poultry, pork, beef, goat meat and starchy foods such as flour dumplings, rice, corn meal, potatoes, yams (many varieties), green bananas, plantains and breadfruit. Jamaican jerk spice, ginger, allspice, nutmeg, scotch bonnet peppers, scallions, thyme, garlic are generously used in cooking – Jamaicans like spicy foods.
- Sub-core foods: beans, avocados, cassava/yuccas, *calaloo*, okra, peas, carrots, beets, turnips, cabbage, pumpkins, cucumbers, tomatoes. There is a large variety of fruits such as mangoes, bananas, papaya, pineapples, other apples, naiseberries, cherries, melons, citrus fruits.
- A traditional Jamaican breakfast is usually a big meal; boiled green bananas or yam or fried plantains or dumplings or roasted breadfruit served with either ackee and salted fish, or *calaloo* (leafy green vegetable steamed) or fresh fish. Eggs, bacon and hard-dough bread are also breakfast foods.
- Sweetened condensed milk, coconut milk, coconut oil, excessive amounts of salt, sugar and eggs are typical of the Jamaican diet.

## Food Management

- Women generally buy and prepare meals; men are usually responsible for earning the money.
- In single mother's households the woman is the sole provider.
- Meals are usually served family style Jamaican's view family as the most important part of life and meal time is special to them.

## **Food Practices Related to Life Cycle and Major Celebrations**



### **Pregnancy and Infant Feeding**

- Pregnant women and new mothers generally get parenting advice from their mom, grandmother or some older woman. There are many strongly held beliefs around pregnancies and babies especially among the older generations. Pregnant women are frequently reminded to:
  - eat well because they are eating for two.
  - don't eat too much spicy foods or drink rum/alcohol while they are pregnant or breastfeeding because it gives both mothers and baby heart burn.
  - stay indoors with baby for a few weeks before venturing out in public.
- Generally breastfeed, but cereal and crushed-up table foods are given at an early age.
- Many do not go to a doctor for frequent prenatal or post-partum care. They may go for a few visits to a clinic or to a midwife.
- Home remedies (bush tea, special soups and herbal baths and oils) are used to cure illnesses.
- Although some of the younger generation are moving away from some of these traditions they are still largely a part of the Jamaican culture.

### **Funerals and Weddings**

- Jamaicans have lavish funerals out of respect for the deceased. Burials can run any where from a few days to a few weeks after the person dies. During this time people gather at the home of the deceased and sing, pray, play games, eat and drink. In the past, nine days after the death, everyone in the immediate family get together again and drink coffee, eat fish, and talk about the deceased. Today they have big meals to observe the 9<sup>th</sup> night.
- A traditional wedding meal is curried goat and rice served with a drink of rum punch. The wedding cake is a dark cake that has fruit that has been soaked in rum for about a year.
- A traditional holiday dinner is likely to include the following specialties:
  - Baked ham, oxtail, chicken, or curried goat, along with a sweet yam dish called *yampi* and rice and peas.
  - Jamaican fruitcake, made with fruits that are soaked for months in rum or port.
- Sorrel wine, made from the red fruit of the sorrel plant fermented to a sweet, red-colored drink spiced with ginger, pimento and cloves, and laced with white rum.

### **Holidays**

- Christmas: Turkey, ham or curried goat and rice and peas is eaten on Christmas Day. Dessert is usually plum pudding or Jamaican fruit cakes. Like the USA, Christmas trees are decorated and Santa Claus brings presents in homes that can afford this luxury. Popular Christmas activities are theater, dance, caroling, and going to church.

- *Jonkonnu*: Celebrated the day after Christmas (British Boxing Day). Traditionally, it was the only day the slaves had off, so they would celebrate by beating drums and other musical instruments while dancing in the streets. Even now, in some communities, people still wear costumes and masks and go to parades and carnivals. There is dancing, crafts, music, and food vendors selling sweets of all kinds, like peppermint sticks, and cakes.
- Easter: A serious and highly religious time for most Jamaicans. Good Friday is a sad day and most people go to Church and then go home for a quiet evening.
  - Foods that are traditionally eaten at Easter are hot cross buns or Jamaica Easter bun made with molasses, yeast, currants, raisins and candid peel. It is eaten with cheese.
  - Sunday is for celebrating and most children get Easter eggs and chocolate bunnies.
  - National dish is ackee and saltfish (codfish). The mature fruit grows in a red pod but the part that is eaten is yellow and looks a little like scrambled eggs when it is cooked. The ackee and salt-fish is Jamaica's national dish. It is served as a main course or side dish. If an unripe ackee is eaten, it may cause a sharp drop in blood pressure.



### **Communication**

- Typically reserved until they know and trust you; stand very close to one another when speaking
- When meeting for the first time a handshake is acceptable. For woman, once a relationship is established, a hug and kiss on the cheek is acceptable and common.
- It is important for Jamaicans to show respect to those of authority. They address people as Ms., Mrs., or Mr. followed by the surname until they know someone better.
- Eye contact should be used when speaking to someone, without staring. Avoiding eye contact is viewed as suspicious or rude.
- Many Jamaicans are aggressive when speaking, meaning they will talk over you. If you want to get information across you have to be a bit assertive. However, there are those who will not speak unless they are specifically asked to, they feel it's rude to speak when someone else is speaking. They are honest and will tell you what they think about something without "sugar coating it" – but do not take offense to this – this is just how they communicate.

Reviewed by Ricka Marsh, Director, WIC Learning Center, Framingham Massachusetts