

JAMAICA NATIONAL SYMBOLS

The National Flag



The Jamaica National Flag was first raised on Independence Day, August 6, 1962. It signifies the birth of our nation. The Flag brings to mind memories of past achievements and gives inspiration towards further success. It is flown on many triumphant occasions, showing the pride that Jamaicans have in their country and in the flag itself.

Design

A bipartisan committee of the Jamaica House of Representatives designed the Jamaican Flag which consists of a diagonal cross with four triangles placed side by side. The diagonal cross is gold; the top and bottom triangles are green; and the hoist and fly (side) triangles are black.

Symbolism

“The sun shineth, the land is green and the people are strong and creative” is the symbolism of the colours of the flag. Black depicts the strength and creativity of the people; Gold, the natural wealth and beauty of sunlight; and green, hope and agricultural resources.

Code for use of the Jamaican Flag

- The Jamaican flag should never be allowed to touch the ground or floor. It should not be flown or used only for decorative purposes on anything that is for temporary use and is likely to be discarded, except on state occasions.
- The flag should never be smaller than any other flag flown at the same time.
- When the flag becomes worn and must be replaced, it should be burnt privately and not used for any other purpose than that, for which it was designated.
- Do not place any other flag above or to the right of the Jamaican flag, except at foreign embassies, consulates and missions. (As seen from, say, a building looking outwards, i.e., the left when facing the building.)
- Do not raise any foreign flag publicly, unless the Jamaican flag is also flown, except at foreign embassies, consulates and missions.
- The flag shouldn't be draped over vehicles, except on military, police and state occasions.

The Coat of Arms



The Jamaican national motto is ‘Out of Many One People’, based on the population’s multiracial roots.

The motto is represented on the Coat of Arms, showing a male and female member of the Taino tribe standing on either side of a shield which bears a red cross with five golden pineapples.

The crest shows a Jamaican crocodile mounted on the Royal Helmet of the British Monarchy and mantling.

The Ackee



Description of the Ackee

“Carry me ackee go a Linstead Market, not a quattie wud sell” is a line in the popular Jamaican folk song ‘Linstead Market’. Ackee (*Blighia Sapida*) is the national fruit of Jamaica as well as a component of the national dish – ackee and codfish.

Although the ackee is not indigenous to Jamaica, it has remarkable historic associations. Originally, it was imported to the island from West Africa, probably on a slave ship. Now it grows here luxuriantly, producing large quantities of edible fruit each year.

The ackee tree grows up to 15.24m (50ft) under favourable conditions. It bears large red and yellow fruit 7.5 – 10 cm (3-4 in.) long. When ripe these fruits burst into sections revealing shiny black round seeds on top of a yellow aril which is partially edible.

There are two main types of ackee identified by the colour of the aril. That with a soft yellow aril is known as ‘butter’ and ‘cheese’ is hard and cream-coloured. Ackee contains a poison (hypoglycin) which is dissipated when it is properly harvested and cooked. The fruit should not be gathered until the pods open naturally. In addition, the aril must be properly cleaned of red fibre and the cooking water discarded.

The Meaning in the Name

Ackee is derived from the original name Ankye which comes from the Twi language of Ghana. The botanical name of the fruit – *Blighia Sapida* – was given in honour of Captain William Bligh of “Mutiny on the Bounty” fame, who in 1793 took plants of the fruit from Jamaica to England.

Captain Bligh also brought the first breadfruit to Jamaica. Before this, the ackee was unknown to science. In 1778, Dr. Thomas Clarke, one of the earliest propagators of the tree, introduced it to the eastern parishes.

Uses

Jamaica is the only place where the fruit is widely eaten. However, it has been introduced into most of the other Caribbean islands (for example, Trinidad, Grenada, Antigua and Barbados), Central America and Florida, where it is known by different names and does not thrive in economic quantities. Jamaican canned ackee is now exported and sold in markets patronized by expatriate Jamaicans.

Ackee is a very delicious fruit and when boiled and cooked with seasoning and salt fish or salt pork, it is considered one of Jamaica’s greatest delicacies.

The Doctor Bird



Description of the Doctor Bird

The doctor bird or swallow tail humming bird (*Trochilus Polytmus*), is one of the most outstanding of the 320 species of hummingbirds. It lives only in Jamaica.

These birds' beautiful feathers have no counterpart in the entire bird population and they produce iridescent colours characteristic only of that family. In addition to these beautiful feathers, the mature male has two long tails which stream behind him when he flies. For years the doctor bird has been immortalized in Jamaican folklore and song.

The Meaning in the Name

The origin of the name 'Docor-bird' is somewhat unsettled. It has been said that the name was given because the erect black crest and tails resemble the top hat and long tail coats doctors used to wear in the old days. Other schools of thought believe that it refers to the way the birds lance the flowers with their bills to extract nectar.

According to Frederic Cassidy the bird is an object of superstition. The Arawaks spread the belief that the bird had magical powers. They called it the 'God bird', believing it was the reincarnation of dead souls. This is manifested in a folk song which says: "Doctor Bud a cunny bud, hard bud fe dead". (It is a clever bird which cannot be easily killed).

Lignum Vitae



Description of the Lignum Vitae

The Lignum Vitae (*Guaiacum Officinale*) was found here by Christopher Columbus. The short, compact tree is native to continental tropical American and the West Indies. In Jamaica, it grows best in the dry woodland along the north and south coasts of the island.

The plant is extremely ornamental, producing an attractive blue flower and orange-yellow fruit, while its crown has an attractive rounded shape. The tree is one of the most useful in the world.

The Meaning in the Name

Its name, when translated from Latin, means "wood of life" – probably adopted because of its medicinal qualities.

Uses

The body, gum, bark, fruit, leaves and blossom all serve some useful purpose. In fact, the tree has been regarded for its medicinal properties. A gum (gum guaiac) obtained from its resin was once regarded as a purgative. It was exported to Europe from the early sixteenth century as a remedy (combined with mercury) for syphilis and has also been used as a remedy for gout.

The wood was once used as propeller shaft bearings in nearly all the ships sailing the 'Seven Seas'. Because of this, Lignum Vitae and Jamaica are closely associated in shipyards worldwide. It is a very heavy wood which will sink in water. Because of

its toughness it is used for items such as mortars, mallets, pulleys and batons carried by policemen. Sometimes it is used for furniture.

The Blue Mahoe



Description of the Blue Mahoe

The Blue Mahoe (*Hibiscus Elatus*) is the national tree of Jamaica. It is indigenous to the island and grows quite rapidly, often attaining 20m (66ft) or more in height. In wetter districts it will grow in a wide range of elevations, up to 1200m (4000 ft.) and is often used in reforestation.

The tree is quite attractive with its straight trunk, broad green leaves and hibiscus-like flowers. The attractive flower changes colour as it matures, going from bright yellow to orange red and finally to crimson.

The Meaning in the Name

The name mahoe is derived from a Carib Indian word. The 'blue' refers to blue-green streaks in the polished wood, giving it a distinctive appearance.

Uses

The Blue Mahoe is so beautiful and durable that it is widely used for cabinet making and also for making decorative objects such as picture frames, bowls and carving.

The inner bark of the tree is often referred to as 'Cuba bark' because it was formerly used for tying bundles of Havana cigars. Cuba is the only other place where the Blue Mahoe grows naturally.