

# Jamaica

Jamaica had been a Spanish colony, but came under British rule in 1655. Disease killed most of the Indians there, so Africans were imported to work on the sugar plantations. The descendants of these African slaves now make up more than ninety percent of the island's almost three million inhabitants. It is the third-largest island in the Caribbean (after Cuba and Hispaniola); Much of the island's culture centers on its musical scene, specifically reggae.

Jamaican foods are derived from many different cultures that settled there, including British, Dutch, French, Spanish, East Indian, West African, Portuguese, and Chinese.

Jerk is a style of preparing meat, native to Peru and the rest of the former Inca Empire, by cutting it into thin slices and letting it dry in the sun and wind. In Jamaica meats (traditionally pork and goat, but now including chicken, fish, beef, and sausage) are dry-rubbed with a fiery spice mixture called Jamaican jerk spice. The jerk is served with peas and rice, and warm festival bread. Jerk is one of the ultimate Jamaican dishes, dating back to the island's earliest days. The term jerk is said to come from the word charqui, a Spanish term borrowed from Quechua Indian for jerked or dried meat. It eventually became jerky in English. The practice of preserving and cooking meat over the flame was started by the Arawak Indians and then later seasoned up by the Maroons.

The “jerk” seasoning has three main ingredients: chili pepper, allspice, and thyme. Other spices and herbs (which may include cinnamon, ginger, cloves, garlic,

and onion—depending on the cook) are combined with these, applied to the food, and allowed to marinate. The food is grilled to tender perfection. Don't omit the chili pepper. This is a spicy hot food. It's not Jamaican “jerk” without the heat!

Traditional Jamaican jerk recipes are made on the grill. This is modified here to be broiled in your oven. You can also use this authentic spicy jerk rub on chicken, pork, fish, or vegetables.

## *Jamaican Jerk Chicken Skewers*

SERVES 12

*12 fresh chicken breast tenders  
1 cup Jamaican jerk marinade (or, for the adventurous, see below)*

### Authentic Jerk Rub

*Mix together:*

*½ cup ground allspice  
½+ cup packed brown sugar  
6 to 8 garlic cloves  
4 to 6 scotch bonnet peppers  
1 tbsp. ground thyme or 2 tbsp. thyme leaves  
2 bunches scallions (green onions)  
1 tsp. cinnamon  
½ tsp. nutmeg  
salt and pepper to taste  
2 tbsp. soy sauce to moisten*

12 bamboo skewers

### Pineapple Salsa

*Mix together:*

*2 cups fresh pineapple, finely chopped  
1 cup cucumber, finely chopped  
¼ cup red onion, chopped  
2 tbsp. fresh cilantro, chopped  
1 tbsp. rice vinegar*



St. Maarten Jamaica

Cooking Instructions—wash hands throughout the process.

1. Place chicken in large resealable plastic bag; add marinade. Refrigerate chicken at least 30 minutes, up to 4 hours. Soak skewers in water at least 30 minutes. Meanwhile, combine remaining ingredients in medium bowl to make salsa. Chill until serving time.
2. Preheat broiler or grill. Remove chicken from bag and discard marinade. Thread chicken onto skewers.
3. Broil skewers 4 inches from heat, turning once, 7 to 10 minutes or until done (internal temp 170°F). Serving Suggestion: Serve on skewers with pineapple salsa. Refrigerate leftovers.

NOTE: When handling these little red devil Scotch bonnet peppers, WEAR RUBBER GLOVES. These peppers are the hottest of peppers. The oils that coat them give off a hellacious sting. It can be dangerous to your eyes and nose and could cause redness or swelling. The good news is that it will wear off. Dab soap on the area without spreading the oil.



## *Festival Bread*

A favorite of Jamaica.

ONE LOAF SERVES 8 TO 10

*8 tbsp. butter*  
*¾ cup milk*  
*2 large eggs*  
*1 8-oz. can of cream-style corn*  
*1¼ cups water*  
*1 tsp. baking soda*  
*1 cup ground cornmeal*  
*10 oz. white sharp cheddar cheese, a ¼ cup coarsely grated with the remainder cut into ¼-inch cubes*  
*1 tsp. salt*  
*½ cup coarsely chopped fresh hot chilies, or 4-oz. can of whole, sweet red pimentos, roasted—½ coarsely chunked goes with baking soda; ½ cut into long strips adorns the top.*

In a small saucepan, melt 6 tbsp. butter over low heat. Do not brown. Preheat oven to 400°F. Put remaining 2 tbsp. butter into an 8-inch-diameter baking casserole; heat in oven no more than 4 to 5 minutes to avoid browning butter. Rotate and tilt casserole to coat inside. Set aside. In large mixing bowl, beat milk and eggs. Smoothly blend 1 cup white cornmeal, melted butter, corn, diced cheese, chilies, chopped red pimento, baking soda, salt. Mix thoroughly. It should have the consistency of southern corn bread, moderately runny. If it seems too runny work in 1 or 2 tbsp. white cornmeal. Give butter in casserole a final swizzle, then pour in batter, smoothing it level. Sprinkle grated cheese over top and decorate with pimento strips. Do not cover. Place casserole exactly in center of oven. Bake until a knife lightly pushed into the center comes out clean and dry, usually 40 to 50 minutes. Serve at once. Cut into fairly thin, pie-shaped wedges. (You can also let the bread cool to room temperature.) It stores well, tightly wrapped, in the refrigerator, but it is best not to serve it cold.