



Jamaica is an island country situated in the Caribbean Sea. Spanning 10,990 square kilometres (4,240 sq mi) in area, it is the third-largest island of the Greater Antilles and the Caribbean (after Cuba and Hispaniola). Jamaica lies about 145 kilometres (90 mi) south of Cuba, and 191 kilometres (119 mi) west of Hispaniola.

Originally inhabited by the indigenous Arawak and Taíno peoples, the island came under Spanish rule following the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1494.

Many of the indigenous people were either killed or died of diseases to which they had no immunity, and the Spanish thus forcibly transplanted large numbers of African slaves to Jamaica as laborers. The island remained a possession of Spain until 1655, when England (later Great Britain) conquered it, renaming it Jamaica.



Some historians believe it was originally developed by Maroons, African slaves who escaped into the wilds of Jamaica when the British captured the island from Spain in 1655. Adapting to their new surroundings, the former slaves made use of the natural food sources available to them, creating the spicy sauce and slowly cooking the meat over a smoking wood fire. Other historians argue that jerking originated with the Amerindians in Jamaica from the Arawak and Taino tribes who intermingled with the Maroons.

The smoky taste of jerked meat is achieved using various cooking methods, including modern wood-burning ovens. The meat is normally chicken or pork, and the main ingredients of the spicy jerk marinade sauce are allspice and Scotch bonnet peppers. Jerk cooking is popular in Caribbean and West Indian communities throughout North America and Western Europe.