



“Enriching Our Heritage!”

CELEBRATING THE TAINO: HONOURING JAMAICA’S FIRST PEOPLE ON MAY 5

In exactly two months, the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT) celebrates Taino Day on May 5. It's a time to reflect on the legacy of Jamaica's first people—the Taino—who were here long before European contact, shaping aspects of our culture that still exist today. Yet, despite their profound influence, the Taino remain one of the most overlooked and underappreciated groups in Jamaica's history.

The Erasure of the Taino: A Forgotten Legacy

When the Spanish arrived in 1494, led by Christopher Columbus, they encountered a peaceful, resourceful, and highly skilled people. The Taino had thriving communities, advanced agricultural practices, and a well-established social structure. However, this harmonious existence was short-lived.

The Spanish conquest led to both physical and cultural genocide. The Taino were enslaved, exploited, and decimated by forced labour, disease, and violence. Within a few decades, their population had drastically declined, and their language, customs, and identity were nearly erased from Jamaica's history. The effects of colonialism and historical neglect have meant that, today, there are no memorials, monuments, or Taino heroes recognized in our national consciousness.

While Jamaica's Taino heritage was largely erased through colonialism, other Caribbean nations, such as the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, have retained a stronger connection to their Taino roots. In these countries, descendants proudly preserve their traditions through language, music, spirituality, and craftsmanship. Jamaica can learn from these nations by studying their efforts to revive and maintain Taino culture, incorporating elements such as traditional dances, ceremonial rituals, and craft-making into our own celebrations. By adopting some of these practices, we can enrich our observance of Taino Day and foster a deeper appreciation for the resilience of Jamaica's first people. Strengthening regional connections and sharing cultural knowledge can help reignite the spirit of the Taino in Jamaica, ensuring that their legacy continues to thrive.

Taino Influence in Jamaican Culture

Despite the systematic erasure, elements of Taino heritage still exist in our language, food, and traditions. Many Jamaican words, such as hurricane, hammock, cassava, barbecue, and canoe, originate from the Taino language. Their contributions to farming techniques, herbal medicine, and craftsmanship laid a foundation that shaped aspects of Jamaican life. Yet, how often do we acknowledge this heritage?

Taino Jamaicans Reconnecting with Their Roots

Many Jamaicans today are discovering their Taino ancestry through genealogy research, family oral histories, and DNA testing. This has led to a revival of interest in Taino culture, with some individuals and communities finding creative ways to celebrate their heritage. From handmade Taino-inspired crafts to recreating traditional foods, modern-day Taino Jamaicans are reclaiming their identity and ensuring that their ancestors' legacy is not forgotten.

How We Celebrate Taino Day

The Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT) is committed to honouring and educating the public about the Taino legacy. Every Taino Day (May 5), we recognize their contributions by hosting:

- Lectures and educational talks featuring historians, scholars and archaeologists, discussing rich Taino history.
- Artefact exhibits at Seville Heritage Park and Headquarters House, showcasing Taino tools, pottery, and carvings to bring their history to life.
- Visits to historical sites, including the Taino Village and burial ground at Seville Heritage Park,

TAINO SITES IN JAMAICA

1. Seville Heritage Park (St. Ann)

- One of the most significant Taino archaeological sites in Jamaica.
- Includes the remains of a Taino village and burial ground.
- Artifacts such as pottery, tools, and carvings have been uncovered here.

2. White Marl (St. Catherine)

- A major Taino settlement and ceremonial site.
- Excavations have revealed Taino pottery, tools, and burial sites.
- Located near Spanish Town, it highlights early indigenous life.

3. Mountain River Cave (St. Catherine)

- A Taino rock art site with well-preserved petroglyphs (carvings in stone).
- Provides insight into Taino spiritual and artistic expressions.
- Located in a remote, forested area, indicating its possible religious significance.

4. Two Sisters Cave (St. Catherine)

- A limestone cave system believed to have been used by the Taino.
- Contains Taino petroglyphs and artifacts.
- Thought to have been used for ceremonial or religious practices.

5. Green Grotto Caves (St. Ann)

- A natural cave system that may have served as a refuge for the Taino.
- Artefacts found here suggest Taino habitation before European arrival.

6. Canoe Valley (Manchester/St. Elizabeth border)

- Named after the Taino's expert canoe-building skills.
- A coastal area where many Taino artifacts and tools have been discovered.

7. Little River (St. Ann)

- Another significant Taino settlement site.
- Excavations have uncovered ceramic pieces, tools, and shell jewellery.

one of the most significant archaeological sites in Jamaica.

Exciting Ways to Celebrate Taino Culture

While lectures and exhibits are vital for educating the public, we also encourage fun and immersive ways that all Jamaicans can celebrate the Taino on May 5 and beyond:

- **Taino Food Festivals** – Showcasing cassava-based dishes, roasted meats, tropical fruits, and beverages made using traditional methods.
- **Taino Art & Craft Exhibitions** – Local artists can create pottery, carvings, and jewellery inspired by Taino motifs.
- **Storytelling Sessions** – Sharing myths and folktales passed down from Taino traditions.
- **Music and Dance Performances** – Featuring drum-based rhythms and recreations of Taino ceremonies.
- **Taino Costume Parades** – Encouraging participants to wear clothing inspired by Taino attire.
- **Interactive Archaeological Experiences** – Allowing people to engage with Taino artefacts and learn excavation techniques.

The Taino deserve to be acknowledged and recognized in Jamaica just as much as the other ethnic groups and nationalities who arrived after them and found them here. As the first inhabitants of our island, their contributions to our language, food, and way of life should be celebrated with the same pride and respect given to other cultural groups. Taino Day should be a truly national experience, embraced by schools, businesses, and communities across Jamaica. Schools can incorporate Taino history into their lessons and host cultural activities, businesses can support events or showcase Taino-inspired products, and communities can organize celebrations that highlight this important heritage. By actively participating, we ensure that the Taino legacy is not forgotten and that their place in Jamaica's history is rightfully restored. Let us unite in honoring Jamaica's first people and making Taino Day a meaningful national observance.

Join Us in Honouring the Taino

While history may have sought to erase them, we can ensure their memory lives on by learning, sharing, and advocating for their recognition. **Follow @jnhtofficial** for updates on Taino Day activities and other heritage events. For more information, contact us at **publicrelations@jnht.com**.

Let us stand together to preserve the legacy of Jamaica's first people and give the Taino the honour they deserve.

For further information contact:

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A few of the JNHT Taino artefacts dating from 650-1500 AD used in educational exhibits at schools across Jamaica



Students from Edna Manley School of Visual and Performing Arts demonstrate a Taino dance at Taino Day in 2024.



Seville Heritage Park Great House. Seville is the former site of a Taino village and has a Taino burial ground.