

Easter then and now

Easter is one of the principal holidays of the year, when Jamaicans enjoy a long four days weekend and if you lucky half day on Holy Thursday.

For Christians, Good Friday is a day of sober worship, followed by the quiet of Holy Saturday, and then the rejoicing and wearing of new clothes on Easter Sunday, and the popular entertainments of Easter Monday. In many communities, Good Friday was set aside as a day on which no work was done, no food cooked or fires lit, and if you have servants or maids, they would get the day off. Everybody had to attend service from noon till 3pm (the period of the crucifixion of Christ according to the Bible). The main food that you could carry was Easter bun and cheese, which you could pinch and eat discreetly in church during long service. Those who went to the beach over the Easter holiday were viewed with disapproval by religious Jamaicans through nowadays many treat the entire long weekend as a worldly holiday – a time for carnival and partying. Before Jamaicans had created their own Easter traditions, the irreligious pirates and planters of white 17th century Jamaica held holidays on the two great festivals, Christmas and Easter. Easter was one of the few times that some churches opened their doors for the year. Easter falls during crop time when the sugar cane is reaped and factories operate at full blast, so time off would have been out of the question. The holiday probably did not become generally known among the slaves as Easter until well into the missionary era in Jamaica, perhaps by the beginning of the 19th century.