

Jamaica's Court System

Jamaica adheres to the English Common law system, drawing legal principles from statutes, case law, treaties, and authoritative publications like Halsbury's Laws of England. As an independent nation, Jamaica has developed robust homegrown jurisprudence which may be accessed for free on the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal's websites.

The jurisdiction is organized with parish courts overseeing cases within the parish borders and a twelve-mile radius from the border for criminal matters. In civil jurisdiction within parish courts, cases are limited to a monetary threshold of \$1,000,000. Amounts exceeding this limit are addressed in the Supreme Court or High Court, which serves as a trial court of first instance. Decisions from the Supreme Court are subject to appeal at the Court of Appeal of Jamaica, with the final appellate authority being the Privy Council in London, staffed by judges from the United Kingdom's Supreme Court.

The legal system operates on the principle of judicial precedent, guided by stare decisis, meaning "let the decision stand." Higher court decisions bind lower courts unless distinctions based on fact or law can be established.

Legal matters are categorized into three main areas:

1. Public Law: Governs the relationship between citizens and public authorities or entities exercising a public function.
2. Private Law: Grounded in contracts or obligations, encompassing torts where the law imposes duties concerning land, product liability, or interpersonal relationships (e.g., trespass or negligence).
3. Criminal Law: Pertains to offenses against the state, including crimes like murder, traffic violations, and enforcement of international treaties codified into law, such as copyright or trademark infringements.

Alternative dispute resolution, such as mediation and arbitration is also available in Jamaica. There is a roster of mediators in Jamaica at the Dispute Resolution Foundation and arbitrators are members of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators including members of this firm.