

The Taínos:



- were the earliest known inhabitants of Jamaica
- came from the Orinoco Valley in South America and migrated from Venezuela and Guyana, arriving in Jamaica around AD 500
- settled mainly in the plains, near rivers and by the sea in places like White Marl, St. Catherine; Seville, St. Ann; Jacks Hill, St. Andrew and Botany Bay, St. Thomas
- were governed by a cacique – their spiritual and political leader
- ate iguanas, shell fish, coneys, cassava, yam and fruits including pineapple, mammee apple, naseberry and guava. Their main dish was pepperpot, a meat and vegetable stew
- spoke an Arawakan language and were relatives to the Arawaks of South America
- were hunters, farmers, fishermen, traders and potters
- flattened their foreheads, as a sign of beauty
- generally wore no clothing
- first encountered the Spanish in Jamaica on May 5, 1494, in St. Ann, on Christopher Columbus' second voyage to the West Indies
- were forced into labour gangs and sometimes tortured by the Spanish, from whom they contracted diseases to which they had no immunity. Some fled to the hills and cohabited with the Africans, thereby creating the Maroons. Within 50 years of Spanish occupation, the Jamaican Taínos were virtually extinct.



Taíno preparing casabe (bammy)



Taíno hunting with bow and spear

