

Becoming a Jamaican Citizen

I was born overseas to a Jamaican parent? Am I automatically a citizen of Jamaica?

The Jamaican diaspora is ever expanding as more and more Jamaicans settle elsewhere and establish families. The allure of our rich heritage and culture is often an inducement to some offspring of these Jamaicans to return to their roots and formally establish Jamaican citizenship. The Jamaica Constitution allows these persons to fulfil this desire as it makes provisions for the claim to citizenship by descent. Up to 1992, only the persons born overseas and out of wedlock to a Jamaican mother or in wedlock to a Jamaican father were entitled to claim citizenship by descent. An amendment was made to the Constitution in 1993 to provide for persons born out of wedlock to Jamaican fathers and in wedlock to Jamaican mothers. By a subsequent amendment made in 1999, improvements were made to these provisions so that more persons over several generations would now become eligible for a claim to citizenship by descent.

Qualification Sections 3A and 3C of the Jamaica Constitution 1962 now make provision for persons born overseas whose mother/father or grandmother/grandfather is or was a native of Jamaica to be entitled to a claim to citizenship by descent. This, however, is not automatic, as beneficiaries are required to provide proof of their lineage to a Jamaican.

How to establish Jamaican citizenship by descent To establish a claim to citizenship by descent, the claimant may submit a request in writing or complete a request form obtainable at the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency. The letter should state the address, name, date and place of birth of the person for whom a claim is to be established. Also to be included are the names and nationalities of the claimant's parents. For beneficiaries residing overseas, the request form may be obtained through the various Jamaican missions or the agency's website at www.pica.gov.jm. The request should be submitted to the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency, 25C Constant Spring Road in St Andrew. In addition, the claimant must provide the following original supporting documents:

- (i) The claimant's birth certificate;
- (ii) The claimant's father or mother's birth certificate or certificate of Jamaican citizenship;
- (iii) Two passport photographs of the claimant certified by a justice of the peace or notary public.

Persons residing overseas may submit their requests through the nearest Jamaica mission. Photocopies are accepted only if they are certified by a consular officer, notary public or a justice of the peace. Citizenship requests for which the supporting documents are in order will be processed within 30 working days of the receipt at the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency. There is no charge for the process at this time. At the end of the process, beneficiaries will be issued with a letter of certification to confirm their status as a citizen of Jamaica. They will, thereafter, be entitled to enjoy the basic rights and opportunities as an ordinary Jamaican, including the right to bear a Jamaican passport. Send all your questions, comments and suggestions on things related to passports, immigration and citizenship to editor@gleanerjm.com and the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency (PICA) will respond.