

Greetings Jamaican Style

If yuh coming to JA, try to understand how Jamaicans sometimes greet each other.

Watch two Jamaicans greeting each other and you think war is about to erupt. Endearing phrases like 'ol dawg what a way yuh look good' or 'jaise -aise, yuh couldn't call me?'. Then they hug and laugh. Foreigners look on, totally puzzled. Sometimes the string of colourful expletives Jamaicans use to greet each other would make a sailor blush, and if you are not sufficiently au fait with the culture, you may think that somebody's gonna get hurt. But the bad words, excitement and animal names are just part of the passion that makes us Jamaican. Furthermore, the linguists will tell you that there are no bad words. People will run into their good friends, who they love dearly and call them names like 'ol teef', or 'saskwash', or 'jrankro'. Some of these may be the person's nickname, or a reflection of something which happened once. The psychologists however will tell you that these so-called negative terms, are used as terms of endearment because of the strong comfort zone that one greeter has with the other. Below is Chat-Bout's list of regular Jamaican greetings. General

Bless – Whether it be 'bless', or a variation such as 'bless up' or 'blessings', or 'highly blessed'. Jamaicans generally greet each other in a way that says that they wish the other person peace, abundance and rest in all they do.

Respek – This greeting has been around for ages, and is used to show deference to everyone: family, friends, strangers and passers-by alike. It says exactly what it means: respect.

Cool/Cool Nuh/Easy – This phrase is usually used when there is a measure of familiarity between the speaker and the person being greeted. Old friends, for example, will meet, 'ding off a fist', and say, 'cool nuh' or 'easy' as they chill together. 'Yes' or 'Yes, Yes' or 'Yes I' or any variation of the word yes ('yeah' and 'yeah man' included) accompanied with a nod shows that the speaker recognizes the person being greeted. This greeting is sometimes used when someone is in haste or on the go.

Family – Everybody in Jamaica is connected somehow. We are all related, or so you would be led to believe when you hear this greeting. Anyone can get branded as 'family' as this greeting is generally used without bias, literally and figuratively.

For Women Empress – Used mainly by Rastafarians to show respect for Jamaica's 'royal' women, 'empress' can be used by both genders as a general greeting term for women.

Princess – Same as applies for empress, except the woman being greeted is usually younger. A man very often refers to his daughters and his young girlfriend as 'princess'.

Love/Babes/B – Anyone can get this greeting in Jamaica, from the very old to the very young. 'Baby' is not just a term showing endearment or affection. Over the years it has become standardised as a regular greeting phrase for women, especially when the speaker (usually a male) considers the woman he is greeting attractive. When women use this phrase among themselves, they usually already have established a friendship or some measure of familiarity.

Dawta / laata – A young good-looking woman whose time is being solicited by some street-guy might get branded as a 'dawta'. It's not a term of hatred or disrespect. It simply means the speaker admires the person he is addressing. It is also one of the ways in which a man addresses his special lady, if she is young that is.

Uku – a greeting reserved for sexy, nubile young women, those who like to expose their tight firm bodies. This greeting is usually loaded with sexual energy.

For Men King/Boss – Again coming from a Rastafarian heritage, Jamaican men sometimes greet each other as 'king' or 'boss'. It is used in a variety of situations: literally, as in the workplace or a school setting where someone has seniority or authority over the speaker, or figuratively among friends and relatives.

Lion/ Lion Paw – This greeting is very popular among the Rastafarian population, and is usually accompanied by the intertwining of fingers on a raised open hand.

For Elders Mummy/Mama/ auntie – are terms of respect that show the matriarchal distinction used by most Jamaican men or women to greet a woman who looks like she could be a mother, or just a nice woman, not the hotty hotty type, but a nice Jamaican woman.

Daddy/Dadda/Dads/ Faada/ Uncle – Similar to the use of 'mummy/mama' above, this term shows deference to an elderly community patriarch. Very often when someone is hustling you or begging something you pass by. Elder – It sounds funny, but it is true. A younger person may refer to a senior as 'elder', again out of deference for that person's age and seniority. This is especially true of that person exercises direct authority over the younger individual. Do you have more greetings that you would like to add to this list? Send your suggestions to chat-bout@chat-bout.net or make your comments below. And look out for Part 2 of this article: Jamaican Greeting Taboos.