

A Resilient Future for Kingston's Waterfront

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JAMAICA'S CAPITAL IS SHAPING A WATERFRONT THAT PROTECTS AGAINST FLOOD RISK, CELEBRATES CULTURE, AND ANCHORS THE CITY'S RENEWAL.



Kingston, Jamaica



670,000



Category of Climate Action:

- Coastal resilience & climate adaptation
- Urban renewal & infrastructure
- Tourism & economic development
- Nature-based solutions

Protecting a coastline that defines the capital

The 2.4 km waterfront in Downtown Kingston is one of the city's most valued public spaces – a cultural and civic landmark where residents gather, visitors stop to explore, and key institutions line the coast. Yet this stretch of shoreline faces growing pressure. Rising seas, stronger storms, and intense rainfall are placing people, infrastructure, and businesses at greater risk. Climate analysis for Kingston predicts up to 2.15 metres of sea-level rise by 2100, a decrease in average annual rainfall with more consecutive dry days, an increase in extreme rainfall days by 2050, and 1-1.4°C warming. Alongside climate change, everyday issues such as waste, water contamination and urban decay also call for action.

Beyond protection, the city leaders, communities, and partners of Kingston – including the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) – also see an opportunity for renewal. As the Downtown area is traditionally busy during working hours, but much quieter once offices close, leveraging a clear business case for investment could fast-track a safer, greener, and more vibrant waterfront. One that welcomes families, strengthens resilience, and sets a new tone for the capital.



Turning risk into a catalyst for renewal

Kingston's vision goes well beyond coastal defences. In partnership with residents, vendors and local businesses, city partners want to pair protection with renewal; integrating flood resilience, recreation, green space, waste management, and investment. To deliver this ambition, the city needed specialised studies and technical preparation to shape a clear investment plan. With a strong evidence base, a shared stakeholder framework and a clear financial case, the project could be a catalyst for change.



Building the blueprint for a climate-ready waterfront

Through the City Climate Finance Gap Fund, Kingston gained the expertise required to build a foundation for action.



Technical studies provided by WB-Gap Fund looked at solid waste and drainage flowing into the harbour and set out steps to improve water quality.

The team outlined options to run the site efficiently and all-electric, with LED lighting, efficient pumps, and better cooling. They also recommended on-site renewable power from rooftop solar and shade structures, backed by battery storage and a local microgrid for reliability.

Alongside these measures, the package set out nature-based solutions, such as trees and shade planting, rain gardens to slow and filter runoff, and permeable surfaces that let water soak in. Making sure flood management and public-realm upgrades work together.

Finally, the technical assistance proposed low-carbon design choices, including optimised concrete, reusing materials, and planting that increases shade and captures carbon. This support will strengthen not only the project design but also the capacity of the city and its partner, JSIF, to prepare complex urban resilience projects. City leaders now have the tools to demonstrate viability, attract investment, and present a shared vision that links climate adaptation with economic and social renewal.



**The greatest thing for us was the ability to have the expertise we needed.
That's really what it's about.**

— Omar Sweeney
Jamaican Social Investment Fund



Where resilience meets culture and community

For residents, a renewed waterfront will mean safe, welcoming public space that belongs to everyone. A place to walk, exercise, and enjoy the shoreline. Shade, planting, and cooling strategies will make outdoor areas more comfortable. Better drainage and waste controls will keep the harbour and streets cleaner. Lighting and access improvements will support evening and weekend use. And vendors and small businesses will benefit from increased activity, while visitors will experience Kingston as a capital that reflects Jamaica's culture and ambition.

For the city, the transformation will safeguard critical infrastructure, reduce climate risks, and provide a nucleus for wider urban renewal. Energy-efficient systems paired with on-site solar and storage can reduce operating costs and keep key public spaces powered during grid outages. The project will also strengthen Kingston's role as an investment and tourism hub. Opening the door for cruise tourism and creating jobs, all while embedding sustainability into the city's development.

Bringing Kingston's new waterfront to life

Kingston is now agreeing the blueprint for the main stretch of the waterfront with city partners, local communities, vendors and municipal and national agencies. Deciding what goes where, how the coast will be protected, and how people will move through the space. Bringing everyone to the table in this way helps make sure the plan reflects how people will actually use the area.

The city is also setting out how the space will be run day-to-day: a dedicated approach to maintenance, events, safety, and cleaning, alongside a partnership where local businesses will pool small contributions to keep the district clean, safe, and lively.

Together, these steps are helping Kingston turn a shared vision into real work on the ground. With this foundation, what comes next is clear: a well-managed, climate-ready waterfront that belongs to everyone.