

Bajan Dialect

Although English is our official language in Barbados, you will hear a very distinctive "Bajan" dialect spoken among Barbadians.

This Bajan dialect is rich in the heritage of both our African and British ancestors with West African words such as "wunna" and "unna", which means "you all", an Irish-inflected phrases colouring our speech.

We also speak at a speed that may be daunting when combined with the accent and the colloquialisms. Do not be afraid to ask us to slow down if we go too fast.

After hearing Bajan a few times, you'll start to get the hang of it. Here are a few phrases, words and sayings that you may frequently hear.

"Cuh-Dear" is an expression you will come across frequently. It is an exclamation that emphasises mild dismay or empathy. The closest English equivalent is "awww".

Common (adv) as in commoner. One of the many leftovers of our British colonial heritage and is used to refer to persons considered lacking in manners and upper-class social skills.

Do fa do. What goes around, comes around.

Duncey/dumpsey (adv). Means stupid or unintelligent, This is taken from the Dunce cap of early 18th Century school legend.

To Flam (v) to flirt or the object of such flirtations

Wuh is dah? What is that?

Whey you gine? Where are you going?

Whu she say? What did she say?

Duh is more in de mortar dan de pestle. There is more to the issue than appears on the surface.

De tongue dat buy you does sell you. The same person that flatters you, may betray you later.

Yuh can' be poor and show poor. Poverty is no excuse for shabbiness.

The sea en' got nuh back door. The sea can be an unsafe place.

Water does run, but blood does clod. Blood is thicker than water.

Wha mout seh, han' can' do. It's not always easy to back one's boast with actions.

Studiation beat eddication. Common sense is better than formal education.

Girl, yuh like liquor bile over. Means a girl is so beautiful she looks like sugar-cane liquor which has boiled over the rim of the container.

Keep those phrases close to hand or pick up a copy of one of the many books on the subject. They may be of use during your visit to our shores.

Excerpted from Barbadian Dialect... by Frank A Collymore; De Mortar Pestle compiled by G. Addinton Forde, and Bajan Proverbs by Margot Blackman.