

1.0 ABOUT ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA



Photograph 1: Overview of St. John's

Geography

The twin island nation of Antigua and Barbuda is located in the Eastern Caribbean, about 1,200 miles southeast of Miami, Florida, USA, and forms part of the group of islands called the Leeward Islands. Antigua, the mainland, is located at 17°N and 61°W. St. John's, the capital of Antigua and the main center of Government, is located on the northwestern side of the island. It is home to the island's main seaport and airport. Barbuda, the sister isle, is located 25 miles to the north of Antigua. The capital of Barbuda is Codrington. The uninhabited island of Redonda is located west of the mainland. Antigua is approximately 108 sq. miles (280 sq. km) while Barbuda is about 62 sq. miles (160 sq. km). The islet of Redonda is 0.6 sq. miles (1.6 sq. km).

Climate

The climate is tropical and mild. Temperatures range from 24°C (76°F) to 30°C (86°F). August and September are usually the hottest months while January and February are the coolest months. The average rainfall is approximately 42 inches per year. Rainfall is heaviest during the summer. The cool trade winds and low humidity aid the overall pleasant year-round climate.

History and Culture

Christopher Columbus was the first European to discover Antigua in 1493, and named the island Antigua, after the Santa Maria La Antigua church in Seville, Spain. The British were the first Europeans to establish a settlement in 1632 and, except for a brief period when the French occupied the settlement, Antigua remained a British colony until 1967. The economy, like other Caribbean islands, was until recently, devoted to sugar production. Slave labour was imported from Africa until 1838, when slavery was abolished. Antigua and Barbuda gained independence on November 1, 1981.

Ethnic Diversity

The population is mostly of African descent. However, there are many persons of British, Portuguese, American, Chinese, Spanish, Lebanese, Syrian, German and Italian origin. A number of retired North Americans and Europeans permanently reside on the island.

Language

English is the official language used in Antigua and Barbuda. French and Spanish are taught in most high schools.

Living Standard

Literacy in Antigua and Barbuda (90%) is one of the highest in the Eastern Caribbean and so is the standard of living. Even with the existence of a national minimum wage, most employers pay higher wages. As a result, there is a high rate of car and house ownership. Unemployment is very low. There is also a large percentage of skilled immigrant workers from Dominica, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Jamaica and other Caribbean islands. This pool of skilled workers will be enhanced with the advent of the Caribbean Single Market Economy (CSME).

Government

Antigua and Barbuda is an independent Nation that has preserved the British tradition of parliamentary democracy upon which the constitution is based. Following the Westminster Model, Antigua is governed by a Parliament consisting of two houses, the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The Lower House or House of Representatives is made up of 19 members – 17 members elected for a five year term in single seat constituencies, 1 Attorney General and 1 Speaker of the House. General Elections are held once every five years. The Upper House or Senate is made up of 17 members appointed by the Governor General (mainly on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition).

Role of the Governor General and Prime Minister

Queen Elizabeth, as Head of the British Commonwealth, is represented in Antigua and Barbuda by the Governor General who acts on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. The Governor General is Sir James B. Carlisle (since 1993).

The Prime Minister has traditionally been the leader of the ruling party, elected by party members. The Prime Minister of the country is the Honourable Baldwin Spenser, leader of the UPP ruling party.