

Antigua and Barbuda



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1981
Population:	88,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	2.0% p.a. 1990–2009
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT minus 4hr
Currency:	Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$)

Geography

Area:	443 sq km
Coastline:	153km
Capital:	St John's

Antigua and Barbuda, at the north of the Leeward Islands in the Eastern Caribbean, is composed of three islands: Antigua, Barbuda (40km north of Antigua) and Redonda (40km south-west of Antigua). Antigua comprises six parishes: St George, St John, St Mary, St Paul, St Peter and St Philip.

Area: Antigua 280 sq km; Barbuda 161 sq km; Redonda 1.6 sq km

Main towns: St John's (capital, pop. 22,000 in 2009), All Saints (4,600), Liberta (3,000), Potters Village (2,900), Bolans (2,100) and English Harbour on Antigua; and Codrington on Barbuda.

Topography: With about 365 beaches on Antigua, further beaches of pink and white sand on Barbuda, coves that were once volcanic craters, and luxuriant palms, the country was an early proponent of sea-and-sun tourism. Antigua is generally composed of low-lying coral and limestone, although Bogy Peak among the volcanic rocks to the west rises to 402m. It has an indented coastline and a good harbour at English Harbour Town. There are a few springs; drought can be a problem. Barbuda is flat with a large lagoon on its west side. Redonda is a tiny rocky island, and is uninhabited.

Climate: Tropical and drier than most of the West Indies. The hot season, when most rain falls, is May to November. Hurricane Luis, the first hurricane in many decades, struck in mid-1995, causing particular damage to Barbuda where it flooded 75% of the island, including the main town of Codrington.

Environment: The most significant environmental issue is limited natural freshwater resources which is aggravated by clearing of trees to increase crop production, causing rainfall to run off quickly.

Vegetation: Little remains of Antigua's natural vegetation, as the island was formerly cleared for sugar planting. Unlike other islands in the Leeward group, it has little forest; mangoes, guavas, coconuts and bananas grow in the south-west. Barbuda is well wooded in the north-east, providing a haven for wildlife. Forest covers 21% of Antigua and Barbuda's land area.

did you know?

Sir Vivian Richards, born in St John's in 1952, was Wisden Leading Cricketer in the World in 1976, 1978 and 1980.

Jamaica Kincaid, born Elaine Potter Richardson in St John's in 1949, has been heralded as the 'most important West Indian woman writing today'.

Wildlife: More than 150 species of birds have been recorded. Barbuda is a game reserve with a variety of wildlife: deer, wild pigs, duck, guinea-fowl, and a large colony of frigatebirds in the mangrove lagoon. Redonda has become a haven for species such as the burrowing owl, which have been driven out of the other, inhabited, islands.

Transport: There is a good road network of about 1,170km, 33% paved. St John's deep water harbour is a regional centre for cargo and passengers and the country's main port. VC Bird International Airport is 8km north-east of St John's; and an airstrip at Codrington, Barbuda, is suitable for light aircraft.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 199
 Life expectancy: 75 years (est.)
 Net primary enrolment: 88%

Population: 88,000 (2009); 30% lives in urban areas; growth 1.6% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 16 per 1,000 people (est.; 26 in 1970); life expectancy 75 years (est.; 67 in 1970). 91% of the population is of African descent (2001 census).

Language: English; an English-based Creole is also spoken.

Religion: Mainly Christians (Anglicans 26%, Seventh Day Adventists 12%, Pentecostals 11%, Moravians 11%, Roman Catholics 10%, 2001 census).

Media: *Antigua Sun* and *Daily Observer* are dailies; *The Worker's Voice* (Antigua Labour Party) is published twice weekly, and *The Sunday Scoop* weekly (from September 2004).

Antigua and Barbuda Broadcasting Service provides public radio and TV services. Observer Radio was the country's first independent radio station, launched in 2001. Crusader Radio is owned by the United Progressive Party; some private radio and TV broadcasters have affiliations with the Antigua Labour Party. Cable television is widely available.

There are 207 personal computers (2006) and 742 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

Education: Public spending on education was 1.5% of GDP in 2007. There are 11 years of compulsory education starting at age five. Primary school comprises seven years and secondary five. Some 97% of pupils complete primary school (2007). The school year starts in September. The government administers the majority of the schools.

Antigua State College in St John's provides technical and teacher education, GCE A-Level and first-year University of the West Indies courses. Antigua and Barbuda is a partner in the regional University of the West Indies, which has campuses in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Health: 91% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 95% have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2006). The country has a general hospital (220 beds), a private clinic, seven health centres and 17 associated clinics. Government finances visits by specialists in diabetics, heart disease, hypertension and glaucoma. A new hospital was built in the late 1990s. Infant mortality was 11 per 1,000 live births in 2009.

Communications: Country code 1 268; internet domain '.ag'. Mobile phone coverage is good.

There are 426 main telephone lines and 1,540 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, Labour Day (early May), CARICOM Day (early July), Carnival (Monday and Tuesday in early August), Independence Day (1 November), National Heroes' Day (9 December), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday, Easter Monday and Whit Monday.

Economy

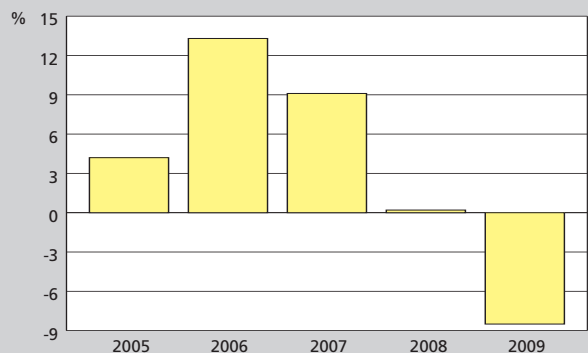
KEY FACTS 2009

GNI: US\$1.1bn
 GNI p.c.: US\$12,130
 GDP growth: 3.4% p.a. 2005–09
 Inflation: 3.3% p.a. 2005–09

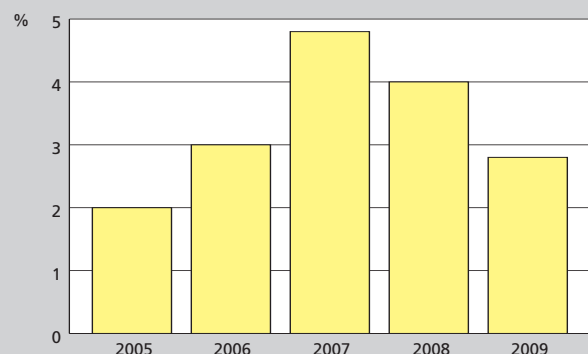
Overview: After three decades of prosperity as a tourist centre, foreign debt, dependence on a single industry and relatively low growth in the early 1990s led to recession, despite attempts in the 1980s to diversify. An economic reform programme was agreed in 1994. But in 1995 Hurricane Luis severely damaged tourism at the same time as expenditure was increased to finance the recovery, and the economy contracted by 5%.

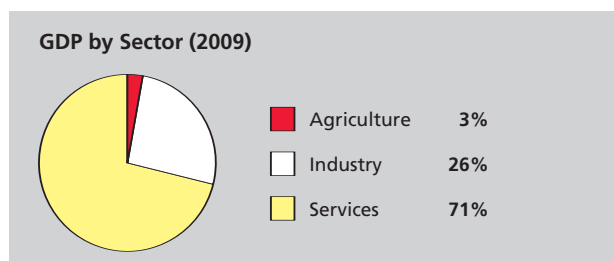
The government introduced a tougher economic programme in 1996. This aimed to reduce debt and stimulate the private sector,

Real Growth in GDP



Inflation





including offshore financial activities, by cutting public expenditure, improving tax collection, undertaking privatisations and encouraging tourism and manufacturing of electronic components and household appliances for export; and clothes, food and beverages, furniture, paint and paper for the domestic market. Manufacturing production grew by at least 4% p.a. during 2001–08.

The economy responded rapidly and there followed a period of good growth until 2000, when it slowed to 1.5% in 2001, due mainly to a fall in tourism. Growth recovered in 2003 to 5.2% and was vigorous until 2008 due mainly to increased construction activity in both public and private sectors. The economy remained vulnerable to natural disasters, shocks to tourist activity and volatile international oil prices, and from 2008 the global economic downturn and consequent sharp decline in tourism pushed the economy sharply into recession, shrinking by 8.5% in 2009.

Trade: Main exports are manufactured goods.

Constitution

Status:	Monarchy under Queen Elizabeth II
Legislature:	Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda
Independence:	1 November 1981

Agreed at independence in 1981. The country is a constitutional monarchy which recognises Queen Elizabeth II as head of state. She is represented by a governor-general appointed on the advice of the prime minister. Government is by parliamentary democracy with a bicameral legislature. There is a directly elected lower House of Representatives of 17 members for a term of not more than five years and an upper Senate of 17 members appointed by the governor-general, one at his/her own discretion, 11 on the prime minister's recommendation (including one inhabitant of Barbuda), four on that of the leader of the opposition, one on the recommendation of the Barbuda Council. The latter is responsible for local government on Barbuda, and consists of nine directly elected members. The constitution guarantees individual rights and freedoms.

Politics

Last elections:	March 2009
Next elections:	2014
Head of state:	Queen Elizabeth II, represented by governor-general, Louise Lake-Tack (2007–)
Head of government:	Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer
Ruling party:	United Progressive Party

The Antigua Labour Party (ALP) had won almost every election since 1960, its position enhanced by divisions within the opposition.

However, during the late 1980s divisions also appeared in the ALP, precipitated by allegations of financial misdealing in 1986, and of armaments sales in 1990, both involving senior government ministers. These matters led to ongoing parliamentary controversy.

This reached crisis point in 1991 with a number of cabinet resignations and in early 1992 there were strikes and demonstrations calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Vere C Bird. In April 1992 three opposition parties merged to form the United Progressive Party (UPP). There was then an ALP leadership election in May 1992 resulting in a dead heat between Lester Bird (son of Vere Bird Sr) and John St Luce. Vere Bird Sr remained in office until a further round of leadership elections in September 1993 gave the party leadership to Lester Bird who became prime minister while Vere Bird Jr (another son of Vere Bird Sr) was elected ALP Chairman.

The ALP won its fifth consecutive election victory, and its third since independence, in March 1994, with a reduced but still substantial majority: 11 of the 17 seats and 54.4% of the votes. Five seats went to the UPP led by Baldwin Spencer, and one to the Barbuda People's Movement (BPM).

Elections for the Barbuda Council in March 1997 gave all seats to the BPM, defeating the New Barbuda Development Movement, an offshoot of the ALP. The BPM then held all nine seats.

The ALP led by Lester Bird won the general election in March 1999 (in the presence of a Commonwealth observer group), gaining 12 of the 17 seats – one more than in 1994 – but with a slightly reduced share of 53% of the popular vote. The UPP took four seats, with 44% of the votes, and the BPM one seat. The extra seat gave the government a two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives.

Vere Bird Sr, who led the country to independence in 1981, and was prime minister until he retired from active politics before the 1994 general election, died in June 1999 at the age of 89.

At the request of the prime minister, a two-person Commonwealth expert group visited the country in July 2000, to consult the people and review the 'operations of the arrangements' between Antigua and Barbuda as established at a constitutional conference at Lancaster House, London, in 1980. In November 2000, at St John's, Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon presented the group's report and recommendations to the government, saying that implementation of these recommendations would bring an end to long-standing discord between the islands of Antigua and Barbuda.

In April 2003 the Electoral Office of Jamaica was engaged to compile a new voters' list and collect photos and fingerprints to be used on identity cards, in preparation for the next general election. This work and the election itself in March 2004 were observed by a Commonwealth expert team. The UPP won the contest with 55% of the votes and 12 seats, and Baldwin Spencer became prime minister, ending a 28-year run of power for the ALP and the Bird family.

In March 2009, the UPP, led by Spencer, was returned to power with a reduced majority, winning nine of the 17 seats and 51% of the votes. The ALP took seven seats (47%), and the BPM one (1%). During the election campaign, the UPP had promised to sell off shares of state-owned corporations to the public, while the main opposition ALP had said that it would introduce tax cuts. Turnout was 80%.

International relations

Antigua and Barbuda is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Association of Caribbean States, Caribbean Community, Non-Aligned Movement, Organization of American States, Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: Local people are conservative and visitors must not wear beachwear in towns or villages.

It is illegal for anyone, including children, to wear camouflage clothing. All drug offences carry severe penalties.

Handshaking is the usual form of greeting among the islanders. Dress is informal and a lightweight suit is customary for business meetings. Business cards are expected from foreign business people. A large number of hotels offer conference facilities. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1200 and 1300–1630.

Immigration and Customs: Passports must be valid for six months from the date of arrival and visas are required by some nationals. Visitors should check with their local Antigua and Barbuda high commission or embassy for visa requirements.

Visitors staying longer than 24 hours must pay an airport departure tax. Visitors should make a copy of their passport photopage and relevant visa stamp, and keep their passport safe at all times.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required by those travelling from an infected area.

Travel within the country: Driving is on the left and visitors must purchase a local driving licence before hiring a car; these can be bought from the car hire company on production of a national driving licence. The national speed limits are 65kph on highways and 32kph in built-up areas. Most roads are well maintained, although care should be taken as stray cattle, goats and dogs may wander onto the roads; pedestrians also walk on the roads because there are no pavements.

There are local bus networks but services are infrequent. Taxis are widely available and have standardised rates. Additionally, many taxi drivers will agree to take visitors on sightseeing trips.

Local boats are available for excursions, and visitors can take the Barbuda Express ferry to and from St John's five days a week; journey time is 90 minutes. Carib Aviation has daily flights to Barbuda and journey time is around 20 minutes.

Travel health: Visitors are advised to take out comprehensive health insurance, which includes medical evacuation by air. Dengue fever is endemic and is spread by day-biting mosquitoes; visitors will need to take insect repellent and suitable clothing to avoid being bitten.

Tuberculosis and Hepatitis B vaccinations are sometimes recommended. All current vaccination requirements should be checked before travel.



History

The first inhabitants were the Siboney, who can be dated back to 2400 BC. Arawaks settled subsequently, around the 1st century AD. The Caribs arrived later, but abandoned Antigua around the 16th century, due to the shortage of fresh water. Christopher Columbus sighted the larger island in 1493, and named it after a church in Seville, Santa Maria de la Antigua. After unsuccessful attempts at colonisation by the Spaniards and French, Antigua was colonised by Sir Thomas Warner in 1632 and formally became a British colony in 1667. Britain annexed Barbuda in 1628; in 1680 Charles II granted the island to the Codrington family, who held it until 1860, in which year it was annexed to Antigua.

Sugar succeeded tobacco as the chief crop and led to the importation of enslaved Africans to work on the highly profitable estates. After the abolition of the slave trade (1807), the Codringtons established a big 'slave-farm' on Barbuda, where children were bred to supply the region's unpaid labour force, until slaves were emancipated in 1834. As the only Caribbean island under British rule to possess a good harbour, Antigua was the dockyard for the British West Indies, used by the Royal Navy from 1725 until 1854.

Demand for self-determination developed in parallel with a concern to create political and economic linkages with other small Caribbean countries. The labour movement became the main focus of political development, and gathered strength during the

economically troubled mid-years of the 20th century. Vere C Bird formed the country's first trade union in 1939, and later became leader of the Antigua Labour Party (ALP).

The first elections under universal adult suffrage took place in 1951, and were won by the ALP. The country joined the West Indies Federation at formation in 1958; this arrangement replaced the earlier Leeward Islands federal grouping of which Antigua and Barbuda had been part. The West Indies Federation collapsed in 1962 – too late to revive the old Leeward Islands federation, since most of the eligible Eastern Caribbean countries were in the process of moving towards independence.

Under the West Indies Act 1967, Antigua became an associated state with internal self-government, the UK retaining control of foreign affairs and defence. Vere Bird Sr became the first premier, but the ALP was ousted at the next elections in 1971 by the Progressive Labour Movement (PLM), led by George Walters. Both parties had their roots in the labour movement; the main difference at that time was that the PLM was campaigning for early independence, while the ALP wanted stronger economic foundations to be developed first.

The ALP returned to power at the 1976 elections. Following the ALP's victory, Bird led the country to full independence on 1 November 1981. Antigua and Barbuda joined the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States at its formation in 1981.

If taking prescription drugs, visitors should ensure they are kept in their original containers, clearly labelled to avoid any misunderstandings.

Mains water is normally chlorinated and bottled water is advised for the first few weeks of stay. Milk is pasteurised.

Money: Pounds sterling and US dollars can be exchanged at hotels and in the larger shops. American Express, Diners Club, Mastercard and Visa are widely accepted. ATMs are available in the major resorts and there are international banks in St John's. Travellers cheques can be exchanged at international banks, hotels and the

larger stores. Visitors are advised to take travellers cheques in US dollars to avoid additional charges. Banking hours are Mon–Thur 0800–1500, Fri 0800–1300 and 1500–1700; some banks open until mid-day on Saturday.

There were 234,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

Further information

Government of Antigua and Barbuda: www.ab.gov.ag

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

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