

# Barbados



## KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1966
Population:	256,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	2.2% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 42
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT minus 4hr
Currency:	Barbados dollar (Bds\$)

## Geography

Area:	431 sq km
Coastline:	97km
Capital:	Bridgetown

Barbados, the most easterly of the Caribbean islands, lies south of St Lucia, east of St Vincent and the Grenadines, and north of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Main towns:** Bridgetown (capital and only seaport, pop. 93,300 in 2009), Speightstown (2,400), Bathsheba (1,600), Holetown (1,500) and Oistins (1,400); extensive spread of hotels and apartments along the coast.

**Topography:** Barbados is a comparatively flat island, rising in a series of terraced tablelands to Mount Hilaby at 336m. The north-east (Scotland area) is broken, eroded and rocky. The rest of the island is coral limestone crossed with deep river-bed gullies which fill with water during heavy rain. There are no permanent rivers. On the east coast, much of the shoreline is rocky, pounded by a strong surf; elsewhere, natural coral reefs surround turquoise seas and beaches of white sand.

**Climate:** Mild subtropical. In the December–June dry season cooling north-east trade winds blow steadily; the wet season is humid and hotter, but the climate is generally pleasant even then, thanks to sea-breezes. The island is on the southern edge of the West Indian hurricane zone.

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issues are pollution of coastal waters from waste disposal by ships; soil erosion; and the threatened contamination of the underground water supply by illegal disposal of solid waste.

**Vegetation:** Vestiges of indigenous forest cover 4% of the land area. Sugar cane and food crops predominate in rural areas. There is a rich diversity of tropical flowers and flowering trees.

**Wildlife:** Natural wildlife has largely been displaced by sugar cane but the Barbados Wildlife Reserve was established in 1985 in the Scotland district, its 1.6 hectares of mature mahogany trees being

## did you know?

Sir Garfield Sobers, born in Bridgetown in July 1936, was the Wisden Leading Cricketer in the World in 1958, 1960, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1968 and 1970, achieving 8,032 runs and 235 wickets in 93 Test matches.

Austin Ardinel Chesterfield Clarke, born in St James, Barbados, in July 1934, won the 2003 Commonwealth Writers' Prize with his tenth published novel, *The Polished Hoe*.

the home of the Barbados green monkey and the red-footed Barbados tortoise.

**Transport:** A good road network of 1,600km (virtually all paved) covers the entire island, with a trans-insular highway from Bridgetown to the east coast.

Bridgetown is a deep-water port with a cruiseship terminal and yacht harbour.

Grantley Adams International Airport is 13km east of Bridgetown.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 594  
Life expectancy: 78 years

**Population:** 256,000 (2009); 44% lives in urban areas; growth 0.2% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 11 per 1,000 people (22 in 1970); life expectancy 78 years (69 in 1970).

The population is 93% of African descent, 3% of European descent, and the rest of Asian or mixed descent (2000 census).

**Language:** English is the official and first language. An English-based Creole is also widely spoken.

**Religion:** Mainly Christians (Anglicans 28%, Pentecostals 19%, Methodists 5%, Roman Catholics 4%), with small Hindu, Muslim and Jewish communities.

**Media:** All the newspapers are privately owned. Dailies are *Barbados Advocate/Sunday Advocate* and *The Nation*, and weeklies, *Broad Street Journal* (business) and *Weekend Investigator*; *Caribbean Week* is a fortnightly.

CBC Radio, CBC TV (the only terrestrial television channel) and MCTV (a multichannel pay-TV service) are operated by the public Caribbean Broadcasting Company. Faith 102 FM is a religious radio station operated by Barbados Broadcasting Services.

There are 158 personal computers (2005) and 737 internet users (2008) per 1,000 people.

**Education:** Public spending on education was 6.6% of GDP in 2009. There are 12 years of compulsory education starting at age five. Primary school comprises seven years and secondary six. Computers are widely available to schools. Some 94% of pupils complete primary school (2007). The school year starts in September.

The University of the West Indies has a campus at Cave Hill, Barbados, as well as in Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. A UNESCO Chair in Educational Technologies was established in 1999 at the Barbados campus of the University of the West Indies. Other tertiary institutions include the Barbados Community College, with its Hospitality Institute, Samuel Jackson Prescod Polytechnic, and Erdiston College (offering teacher education). There is virtually no illiteracy among those aged 15–24.

**Health:** Barbados has a national health service and the general health profile and life expectancy of a developed country; the entire population uses an improved drinking water source and adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Infant mortality was 10 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (74 in 1960). In 2009, 1.4% of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

**Communications:** Country code 1 246; internet domain '.bb'. Mobile phone coverage is good on the island.

There are 530 main telephone lines and 1,317 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

**Public holidays:** New Year's Day, Errol Barrow Day (21 January), National Heroes' Day (28 April), Labour Day (early May), Emancipation Day (1 August), Kadooment Day (early August), Independence Day (30 November), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

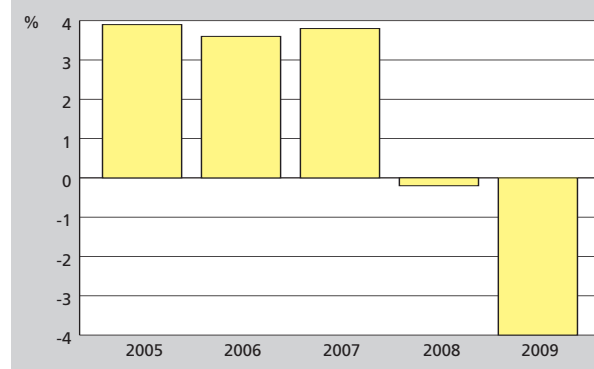
Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday, Easter Monday and Whit Monday.

## Economy

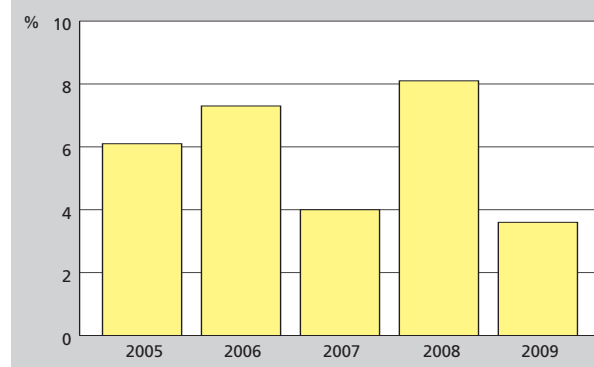
### KEY FACTS 2009

GDP: US\$3.6bn  
GDP p.c.: US\$14,042  
GDP growth: 3.3% p.a. 2004–08  
Inflation: 4.4% p.a. 2004–08

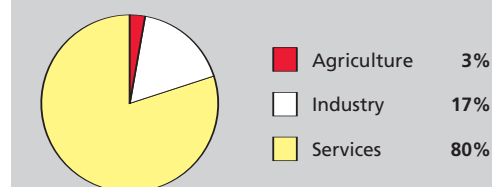
Real Growth in GDP



Inflation



GDP by Sector (2009)



**Overview:** Barbados has an exceptionally high 'quality of life' rating for a developing country. The economy, formerly a sugar monoculture, was developed over three decades to achieve a balance of growth and social development, and diversified into three main sectors: services, light industry and sugar. An offshore financial services sector, launched in 1985, has become the country's second biggest source of foreign exchange after tourism.

Despite its economic success, Barbados experienced little growth in the 1980s and a recession in the early 1990s, when sugar and tourism earnings slumped. It had to call on the IMF for economic adjustment support and the government introduced economic austerity measures. By 1993 the economy was recovering and from 1994 it continued to grow well throughout the 1990s and during 2000, driven by tourism and construction. Action against drug-trafficking since the 1990s has made security and defence a significant item of expenditure.

As a small and open economy Barbados lacks scope for further diversification and remains vulnerable to economic downturn in its trade partners. After 2000 the economy went into recession due to the downturn in the USA and Europe and resulting falls in tourist numbers. It picked up in 2003 and GDP grew at an average 3.9% p.a. in 2004–07, until 2008 when the world economic downturn again caused a sharp fall in tourism and pushed the economy into reverse.

**Trade:** Main exports are manufactured goods including electrical components, chemicals, rum and sugar.

## Constitution

<b>Status:</b>	<b>Monarchy under Queen Elizabeth II</b>
<b>Legislature:</b>	<b>Barbados Parliament</b>
<b>Independence:</b>	<b>30 November 1966</b>

Barbados is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy, recognising Queen Elizabeth II as head of state. She is represented by a governor-general appointed on the recommendation of the prime minister. There is a bicameral legislature and party system, based on universal adult suffrage.

The Senate has 21 members appointed by the governor-general, 12 on the advice of the prime minister, two on that of the leader of the opposition, and the remaining seven at the governor-general's discretion.

The House of Assembly has 30 directly elected members. Leaders of each house (president and deputy president of the Senate and speaker and deputy speaker of the assembly) are elected by the members of the respective houses.



## History

Prehistoric Barbados is believed to have been inhabited by cave-dwellers of the Siboney culture, from Florida. At an unknown later time, Arawaks arrived from South America. These latter were agriculturists, and excellent weavers and potters. They survived invasions and raids by the warlike Caribs (also from South America), which took place before the 1490s. By the early 1500s, Spanish and Portuguese sailors had sighted the island. It was invaded in 1518 by Spanish colonists from Hispaniola. No Spanish settlement was made, as there appeared to be no mineral resources, but the island acquired a Spanish name – *Barbados* (or 'bearded'), apparently a reference to local fig trees. By 1536 the island was deserted, either because the slavers had depopulated it or because the remaining inhabitants had fled.

In 1625 it was formally claimed for King James I of England. In 1627 English immigrants settled there and King Charles I granted a Barbados patent to Lord Carlisle; after 1660, this patent was surrendered to the Crown and a 4.5% duty on exports levied, which, bitterly resented, was levied until 1838. Between 1627 and 1640, the island was settled by British colonists, who brought with them indentured labour from Britain and some enslaved Africans, to produce tobacco, cotton and indigo. The introduction of sugar in the 1650s had led to the development of large plantations, and by 1685 the population was around 50,000, consisting mainly of African slaves.

By the end of the 18th century, Barbados had 745 plantations worked by more than 80,000 African and African-descended slaves. Harsh working conditions led to slave revolts in 1702 and 1816. Slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833–34.

Barbados had a house of assembly since 1639 but, due to the property qualifications for the franchise, this was dominated by

plantation owners until the franchise began to be widened in 1944. Universal adult suffrage followed in 1951, a full ministerial system in 1954, and cabinet government in 1958.

The Barbados Labour Party (BLP), which developed out of the trade unions, was set up under the leadership of Grantley Adams, and began working for economic improvement and the extension of political rights. The BLP, led first by Adams, and after 1958 by Dr Hugh Cummins, gained a majority in the House of Assembly between 1944 and 1961. In 1955 a split in the BLP led to the formation of the Democratic Labour Party (DLP), led by Errol Barrow, who won the 1962 elections.

Thus, by 1957, Barbados had virtual self-government under a democratic system, a status formally recognised in 1961. Barbados had been a member of the Federation of the West Indies, set up in 1958. When the Federation was dissolved in 1962, the Barbados Government announced its intention to seek independence separately. Arrangements were agreed at a constitutional conference in London, and Barbados became an independent sovereign state within the Commonwealth on 30 November 1966.

The DLP was in power from 1966 to 1976, and the BLP from 1976 to 1986, led by Tom Adams, Sir Grantley Adams's son. In 1986 the DLP, still led by Errol Barrow, won a decisive election victory, maintaining its majority in the 1991 elections. This was despite a breakaway movement by DLP dissidents who formed a new National Democratic Party (NDP) but failed to win any seats in the 1991 elections. Erskine Sandiford became prime minister in June 1987 after the death of Barrow.

The governor-general appoints as prime minister the parliamentarian who commands – in the governor-general's opinion – the largest support within the House of Assembly, and the prime minister heads the cabinet. Other ministers are appointed from either house by the governor-general as advised by the prime minister. The governor-general appoints the leader of the opposition – the MP who, in his/her judgement, leads the party commanding the support of the largest number of MPs in opposition to the government. The normal life of parliament is five years.

The constitution may be amended by act of parliament passed by both houses, except for entrenched clauses which require two-thirds majorities in both houses. These clauses relate to citizenship, rights and freedoms, the governor-generalship, composition of parliament and its sessions, prorogation and dissolution, general elections, senatorial appointments, executive authority, judicature, civil service and finance.

## Politics

<b>Last elections:</b>	January 2008
<b>Next elections:</b>	2013
<b>Head of state:</b>	Queen Elizabeth II, represented by governor-general, Sir Clifford Husbands (1996–)
<b>Head of government:</b>	Prime Minister Freundel Stuart
<b>Ruling party:</b>	Democratic Labour Party

The September 1994 general election, held following a no-confidence vote which went against Prime Minister Erskine Sandiford, led to the defeat of the Democratic Labour Party (DLP) and brought to power a Barbados Labour Party (BLP) government headed by Owen Arthur. The BLP won 19 seats (48.3% of the vote), the DLP eight and National Democratic Party one.

Sir Henry Forde's Constitutional Commission's much-delayed report was published in December 1998. Its main proposals were to introduce more checks and balances on the government, to create the institutional structures to ensure politicians behave with greater probity, and to replace the British monarch as the head of state by a ceremonial president.

In the general election of January 1999, the BLP had a strong endorsement of their management of the economy and a mandate for their proposals for constitutional change. They gained 26 seats, with 65% of the votes, while the DLP took only two. Owen Arthur began his second term of office as prime minister.

During 1999 and 2000 the new government pressed on with the proposed changes to the constitution, adding further issues to the agenda for public debate, for example limiting the number of terms a prime minister may serve, equal rights for women, and the independence of the judiciary. However, the debate proceeded slowly.

In 2001, David Thompson, DLP leader in the 1994 and 1999 general elections, was succeeded by Clyde Mascoll.

Arthur and the BLP were once again given a strong endorsement in the May 2003 elections, though with 23 seats to the DLP's seven, not as strong as in 1999. The BLP still had the two-thirds majority needed to enact constitutional amendments, although

constitutional issues, such as replacing the British monarch as the head of state by a ceremonial president, had not been prominent in the election campaign. But in 2005 the UK Privy Council was replaced as the final court of appeal by the Trinidad and Tobago-based Caribbean Court of Justice.

Thompson returned to head the DLP in 2006 following the defection of Mascoll to the BLP. The DLP went on to win the general election in January 2008 ending the BLP's 13 years in government; the DLP taking 20 of the 30 contested seats and BLP 10. Thompson was sworn in as prime minister.

Prime Minister David Thompson died on 23 October 2010. He was succeeded by Deputy PM and Attorney-General Freundel Stuart.

## International relations

Barbados 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, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

## Traveller information

**Local laws and conventions:** There are severe penalties for all those caught possessing or dealing in illegal drugs.

The wearing of camouflage or military clothing, even by children, is illegal.

Casual dress is widely accepted, though visitors must cover up their swimwear when away from beach areas. Handshaking is the usual form of greeting.

Many of the larger hotels have excellent conference facilities, equipped to handle international conferences and trade shows. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1600.

**Immigration and customs:** Passports must be valid for the intended length of stay. Visa requirements differ for each country and should be checked well in advance of travel.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate will be requested from those arriving from infected countries.

**Travel within the country:** Traffic drives on the left and car hire is available with a local driving permit. These can be purchased from car hire firms, the Ministry of Transport, or local police stations on production of a national driving licence.

The national speed limits are 40kph, 60kph and 80kph. The road network is good on most of the island.

An efficient, frequent and inexpensive bus service connects all major points on the island.

Taxis are widely available in Bridgetown as well as elsewhere on the island. Fares are government controlled but it is advisable to check the price of the journey before stepping into a taxi. Visitors can pay with US dollars as well as with local currency.

Mini-vans operate in much the same way as buses and are a fast and efficient means of getting around. There are no fixed schedules, but they can be flagged down anywhere on the island.

**Travel health:** Barbados has very good medical facilities. The country has a reciprocal health agreement with the UK, which allows British citizens access to free hospital treatment. Comprehensive medical insurance is advised for all other nationals.

Hepatitis B is present on Barbados and vaccination is sometimes advised. There is a low risk of dengue fever.

Those with asthma and hay fever may find that their symptoms are exacerbated during the sugar cane harvesting period.

**Money:** Local currency is the Barbados dollar. Commercial banks provide the best exchange rates and ATMs are available all over the island. The major credit cards are accepted in most resort areas, and travellers cheques can be cashed at any bank or at most of the larger hotels. Visitors are advised to take travellers cheques in US dollars or pounds sterling to avoid additional exchange charges. Banking hours are Mon–Thur 0800–1500 and Fri 0800–1700.

There were 519,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

## Further information

Barbados Integrated Government Portal: [www.gov.bb](http://www.gov.bb)

Government of Barbados Information Network:  
[www.barbados.gov.bb](http://www.barbados.gov.bb)

Commonwealth Secretariat: [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)

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