

St Lucia



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1979
Population:	172,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	1.1% p.a. 1990–2009
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT minus 4hr
Currency:	Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$)

Geography

Area:	616 sq km
Coastline:	158km
Capital:	Castries

St Lucia is part of the Windward Islands group, which form an arc jutting out from the Eastern Caribbean into the Atlantic. It lies south of Dominica and north of Barbados.

Main towns: Castries (capital, pop. 63,500 in 2009), Dennery (3,700), Laborie (3,400), Vieux Fort (3,000), Micoud (2,300) and Soufrière (1,500).

Topography: St Lucia is a pear-shaped mountainous island of volcanic origin, 43km long. In the centre of the island, Mt Gimie rises to 950m, while Gros Piton (798m) and Petit Piton (750m) lie to the west, rising sheer out of the sea. Sulphurous springs, steam and gases bubble out of a volcanic crater a few kilometres from Petit Piton. The mountains are intersected by short rivers, debouching in places into broad fertile valleys.

Climate: The hot tropical climate is moderated all year round by the north-east trade winds. The dry season is January to April, the rainy season May to November.

Environment: The most significant environmental issues are deforestation and soil erosion, particularly in the north of the island.

Vegetation: With its economy traditionally based on agriculture, about 30% of the land area is under cultivation. Elsewhere there is rainforest with exotic and varied plant-life, many with brilliant flowers. Forest covers about 28% of the land area.

Wildlife: This small island has rich birdlife including several unique species, for example the St Lucia oriole and the St Lucia black finch. The St Lucia parrot was the subject of a successful conservation programme established in 1978 which raised the population from some 150 birds to over 400. Native reptiles include the St Lucia tree lizard and the pygmy lizard.

Transport: There are 1,210km of roads, mainly unpaved. The main cross-island route runs from Castries in the north to Vieux Fort in the south.

did you know?

The country has more Nobel laureates per capita than any other country: poet and playwright Derek Walcott, born in Castries, St Lucia, on 23 January 1930, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992; and Sir Arthur Lewis became Nobel economics laureate in 1979.

St Lucia has the highest number of medical doctors per capita in the Commonwealth: 52 for every 10,000 people.

The main ports are Castries and Vieux Fort. A fast catamaran service operates between St Lucia, Martinique and Dominica. Several cruise lines call at the island.

Hewanorra International Airport lies 67km south of Castries and George F L Charles, 3km to the north-east.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 279
 Life expectancy: 74 years
 Net primary enrolment: 91%

Population: 172,000 (2009); 28% lives in urban areas; growth 1.1% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 18 per 1,000 people (41 in 1970); life expectancy 74 years (64 in 1970).

St Lucia’s population is mostly of mixed African and European descent.

Language: English is the official language; a French-based Creole is widely spoken.

Religion: Mainly Christians (Roman Catholics 68%, Seventh Day Adventists 9%, Pentecostals 6%, Rastafarians, Anglicans; 2001 census).

Media: There are no daily newspapers in St Lucia. The main newspapers are *The Voice* (three times weekly), *The Star* (three times weekly), *The Crusader*, *The Mirror* and *The Vanguard*.

St Lucia’s media are mostly privately owned; only the radio network, Radio Saint Lucia, is operated by the government.

There are 830 internet users per 1,000 people (2009).

Education: Public spending on education was 4.5% of GDP in 2009. There are 10 years of compulsory education starting at age five. Primary school comprises seven years and secondary five, with cycles of three and two years. The school year starts in September.

The Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, at Castries, offers a diverse range of courses and St Lucia shares in the regional University of the West Indies, which has campuses in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 225:100 (2008).

Health: The Victoria Hospital and the new Tapion Hospital provide a range of medical treatment, and the Golden Hope Hospital caters for psychiatric cases. There are cottage hospitals at Vieux Fort, Dennery and Soufrière, and more than 20 health centres. Nurses are trained in the nursing department of the Community College. 98% of the population uses an improved drinking water source (2009) and 89% adequate sanitation facilities (2006). Infant mortality was 19 per 1,000 live births in 2009.

Communications: Country code 1 758; internet domain ‘.lc’. Phonocard telephone booths, internet cafes and post offices are located throughout the island.

There are 238 main telephone lines and 1,022 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

Public holidays: New Year (two days), Independence Day (22 February), Labour Day (1 May), Carnival (two days in July), Emancipation Day (early August), Thanksgiving Day (early October), St Lucia Day (13 December), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

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

Economy

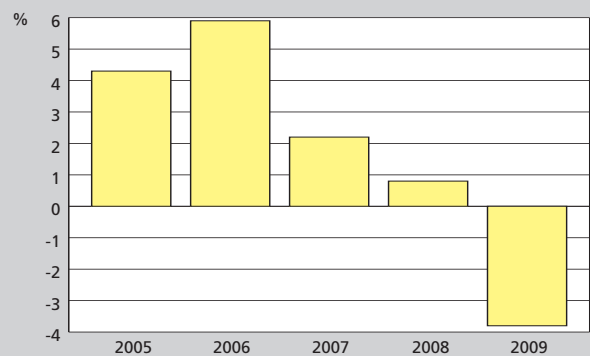
KEY FACTS 2009

GNI: US\$894m
 GNI p.c.: US\$5,190
 GDP growth: 1.8% p.a. 2005–09
 Inflation: 1.6% p.a. 2005–09

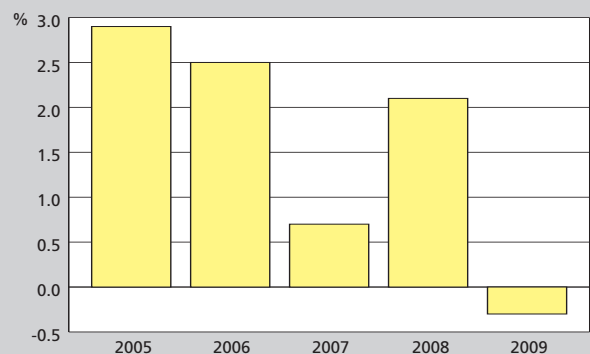
Overview: Although St Lucia’s per capita income is relatively high among developing countries, it has been disadvantaged by its economic dependence on bananas and by its small size, small population, limited physical and human resources, and the frequency of hurricanes.

It has nevertheless successfully exploited opportunities in tourism and small-scale industry, benefiting from trade preferences from the EU and USA, and creating a more diverse economy, with well

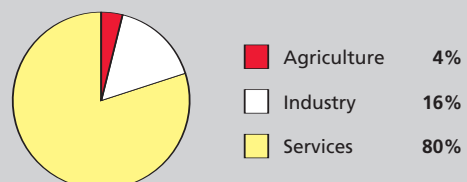
Real Growth in GDP



Inflation



GDP by Sector (2009)



developed manufacturing, and has substantially reduced its dependence on bananas, production and export prices of which have declined sharply. It has also encouraged development of an offshore financial services sector and a framework of sound regulation has been established.

After steady growth in the late 1990s, the economy stalled in 2000, and was in recession during 2000–02, shrinking by over 4% in 2001, due to the downturn in the USA and consequent fall in tourism and weakening of international markets for manufactures and bananas. In 2003 tourism recovered strongly, with more air services to the island and construction of a new resort. Tourism income was then hit in 2007 by the impact of Hurricane Dean in August – GDP growth moderating that year to 2.2% – and again in 2008–09 by the world economic downturn, causing growth to stall in 2008 (0.8%) and go into reverse in 2009 (–3.8%) and 2010 (–1%).

Trade: Main exports are bananas, coconuts, mangoes, citrus fruit, cocoa and spices.

Constitution

Status:	Monarchy under Queen Elizabeth II
Legislature:	Parliament
Independence:	22 February 1979

St Lucia is a constitutional monarchy with Queen Elizabeth II as head of state, represented by a governor-general. The legislature is bicameral, with the House of Assembly of 17 directly elected members and a Senate of 11 appointed members, six by the prime

minister (the leader of the largest party in the House of Assembly), three by the leader of the opposition and two by the governor-general. Parliament is elected for five years by universal adult suffrage.

Politics

Last elections:	December 2006
Next elections:	2011
Head of state:	Queen Elizabeth II, represented by governor-general, Dame Pearlette Louisy (1997–)
Head of government:	Prime Minister Stephenson King
Ruling party:	United Workers Party

In March 1996, at a United Workers Party (UWP) convention, John Compton lost the leadership, after 30 years, and was replaced as prime minister by Dr Vaughan Lewis.

An early general election in May 1997 resulted in a landslide victory for the St Lucia Labour Party (SLP), winning 16 of the 17 seats, with 61% of the votes, and SLP leader Dr Kenny Anthony became prime minister. Lewis resigned as leader of the UWP, having lost his seat.

In September 1997 the country's first woman governor-general, Dr Pearlette Louisy, was appointed, following the resignation of Sir George Mallet.

Despite a deteriorating economic climate, Anthony's administration received a vote of confidence in the December 2001 general election, when his SLP won 14 Assembly seats and the UWP 3.



History

St Lucia was named by Christopher Columbus, who sighted the island on St Lucy's day 1502. The island has been much fought over. At some time before Columbus's arrival, the Caribs ousted the Arawaks; and European powers contended with the Caribs and one another for control between 1660 and 1814; in that period the flag of St Lucia changed 14 times.

After unsuccessful early attempts by the Spanish to take control, possession of the island was disputed, often bloodily, by the French and British. A small English group made a failed attempt to settle in 1605; another English colony, started in 1638, was annihilated by the Caribs three years later.

The Caribs resisted French settlement with equal vigour, until a peace treaty (1660) with them permitted settlement, and ensured the safety of some French settlers from Martinique who had arrived during the preceding decade. The British made further attempts to gain control, and the island changed hands again and again, and was a focus for Anglo-French hostilities during the Napoleonic Wars. The British ultimately took possession under the Treaty of Paris in 1814, and St Lucia became a Crown colony.

A prosperous plantation economy developed; it was based on sugar, and worked by enslaved Africans until Britain abolished slavery in 1834.

The island was a member of the Windward Islands Federation until 1959. In 1959, St Lucia joined the West Indies Federation,

under which it was proposed that the British Caribbean countries should proceed to independence as a federation. Disagreements among the larger members led to dissolution of the federation in 1962, and the larger members proceeded alone to independence.

In 1967, St Lucia received a new constitution, giving full internal self-government under universal franchise, as one of the states of the Federated States of the Antilles. In February 1979, it became independent, as a constitutional monarchy and member of the Commonwealth, with John Compton of the United Workers Party (UWP) as its first prime minister.

In the first elections after independence in 1979, the UWP, which had held power since self-government and led the independence negotiations, lost to the St Lucia Labour Party (SLP). The SLP adopted a policy of close collaboration with Grenada, which had recently undergone a revolution led by Maurice Bishop, and was aligned with Cuba and North Korea. These were new political directions for the Eastern Caribbean.

Allegations of corruption resulted in an early general election in 1982, when the UWP was returned with a large majority. It also won in 1987 and was re-elected in 1992 with an 11:6 majority. Compton adopted IMF adjustment measures and returned the country to operation of a market economy. He also pursued the integration of the Eastern Caribbean countries through the OECS.

Anthony stood for a third term in the December 2006 general election which was won by the opposition UWP with 11 seats while the SLP took six. UWP leader Sir John Compton, who had since 1964 served as head of government for a total of 29 years, became prime minister.

Following the death of Sir John Compton at the age of 82 in September 2007, Stephenson King, who had been acting for Compton during his illness, was sworn in as prime minister.

International relations

St Lucia 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.

St Lucia hosts the headquarters of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: It is an offence for anyone, including children, to dress in camouflage clothing. Visitors should ask before taking photographs of local people or their property. There are severe penalties for all drug-related crimes.

The Roman Catholic Church has a strong presence in St Lucia and the island has a fairly conservative culture. Visitors should dress modestly away from the beach. Casual clothing is generally acceptable.

Business visits and meetings may be conducted in English or French. Conference facilities are available in some of the island's hotels. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1630, Sat 0830–1230.

Immigration and customs: A valid passport is required by all those arriving into the country. New arrivals must also present a return or onward ticket and show they have sufficient funds for their stay. Airport departure tax must be paid when leaving St Lucia.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required by all those arriving from infected countries.

Firearms, pornographic material and flowers and plants are prohibited imports.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left and visitors will need to purchase a local driving permit, which can be obtained from car hire firms or police stations on presentation of a national driving licence. Some of the mountainous roads can be extremely steep with hairpin bends.

Boat charters are easily available at Castries, Marigot Bay and Rodney Bay, and several ferry lines connect St Lucia with Martinique.

There are regular minibus services that connect rural areas with the capital. Visitors may also catch one of the privately owned 14-seater minivans at marked bus stops or by flagging one down along the three major bus routes on the coastal road.

Taxis can be hailed in towns and have fixed fares for standard journeys, though all fares should be agreed on before starting out. Some taxi drivers offer a full-island tour for a little extra.

Travel health: Visitors must ensure they have comprehensive health insurance that includes medical evacuation. Health facilities are good but costs are high.

Dengue fever can occur, and visitors should protect themselves from mosquito bites by using insect repellent and wearing suitable clothing, especially in the evenings and during the rainy season when the dengue fever mosquito is most prevalent. Care should be taken when hiking near streams or ditches as the poisonous lancehead snake thrives along the island's coastline.

Tap water is generally considered safe to drink; bottled water is widely available.

Money: Major credit cards are widely accepted and ATMs are available in Castries, Rodney Bay, Soufrière and Vieux Fort. Travellers cheques in US dollars will ensure a better exchange rate. Banking hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1400 (some banks stay open until 1700 on Friday).

There were 278,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

Further information

Government of St Lucia: www.stlucia.gov.lc

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

Click here to find out more about the
2011 Commonwealth Yearbook



Click here to find out more about
St Lucia

