

Antigua and Barbuda



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1981
Population:	89,000 (2012)
GDP p.c. growth:	0.7% p.a. 1990–2012
UN HDI 2012:	world ranking 67
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT minus 4hr
Currency:	Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$)

Geography

Area:	443 sq km
Coastline:	153 km
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 (40 km north of Antigua) and Redonda (40 km 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

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 Boggy Peak among the volcanic rocks to the west rises to 402 metres. 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 per cent of the island, including the main town of Codrington.

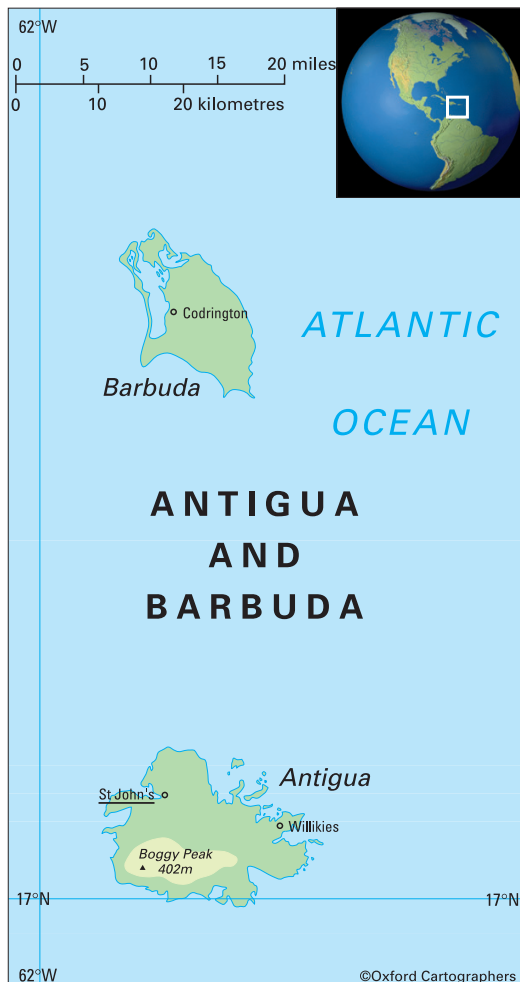
Environment: The most significant environmental issue is limited natural freshwater resources which is aggravated by clearing of trees to increase crop production, causing rainfall to run off quickly.

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 22 per cent of Antigua and Barbuda's land area and there was no significant loss of forest cover during 1990–2011.

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 frigate birds 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.

Main towns: St John's (capital, pop. 22,200 in 2010), All Saints (4,800), Liberta (3,100), Potters Village (3,100), Bolans (2,100) and English Harbour on Antigua; and Codrington on Barbuda.

Transport: There is a good road network of about 1,170 km, 33 per cent paved. St John's deep water harbour is a regional centre



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'.

for cargo and passengers and the country's main port. VC Bird International Airport is 8 km north-east of St John's; and an airstrip at Codrington, Barbuda, is suitable for light aircraft.

Society

KEY FACTS 2012

Population per sq km:	201
Life expectancy:	76 years
Net primary enrolment:	85%

Population: 89,000 (2012); some 2,000 on Barbuda; 30 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 1.7 per cent p.a. 1990–2012; birth rate 17 per 1,000 people (26 in 1970); life expectancy 76 years (67 in 1970). 91 per cent of the population is of African descent (2001 census).

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

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

Health: Public spending on health was four per cent of GDP in 2011. The country has a general hospital (220 beds), a private clinic, seven health centres and 17 associated clinics. Government finances visits by specialists in diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and glaucoma. A new hospital was built in the late 1990s. Some 98 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 91 per cent has access to adequate sanitation facilities (2011). Infant mortality was nine per 1,000 live births in 2012.

Education: Public spending on education was three per cent of GDP in 2009. There are 11 years of compulsory education starting at the age of five. Primary school comprises seven years and secondary five. Some 91 per cent 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 its main campuses in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 2.00:1 (2011).

Media: *Daily Observer* is published daily; *The Worker's Voice* (Antigua Labour Party and Antigua Trades and Labour Union) twice weekly.

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. Cable television is widely available.

Some 97 per cent of households have TV sets (2008). There are 207 personal computers per 1,000 people (2006).

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

There are 372 main telephone lines, 1,430 mobile phone subscriptions and 590 internet users per 1,000 people (2012).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, Labour Day (early May), 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

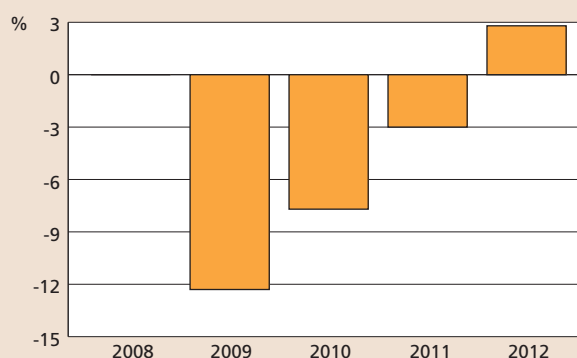
KEY FACTS 2012

GNI:	US\$1.1bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$12,480
GDP growth:	-4.2% p.a. 2008–12
Inflation:	3.0% p.a. 2008–12

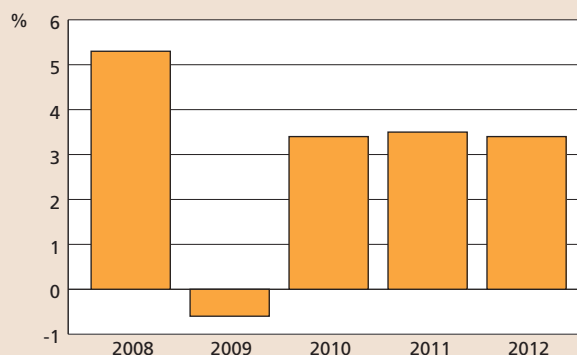
After three decades of prosperity as a tourist centre, foreign debt, dependence on a single industry and relatively low growth in the early 1990s led to recession, despite attempts in the 1980s to diversify. An economic reform programme was agreed in 1994. But in 1995 Hurricane Luis severely damaged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

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

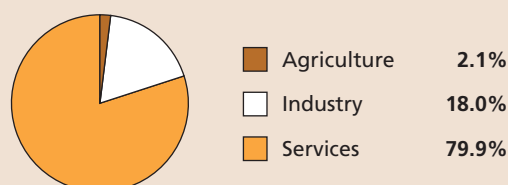
Real Growth in GDP



Inflation



GDP by Sector (2012)



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 four per cent p.a. during 2001–08.

The economy responded and there followed a period of good growth until 2000, when it slowed, due mainly to a fall in tourism. Growth recovered in 2003 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 12.3 per cent in 2009, 7.7 per cent in 2010 and 3.0 per cent in 2011, recovering in 2012 (2.8 per cent) and 2013 (about two per cent).

Constitution

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

The constitution was 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 (plus Speaker and Attorney-General) 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:	12 June 2014
Next elections:	2019
Head of state:	Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Governor-General, Dr Sir Rodney Williams (2014–)
Head of government:	Prime Minister Gaston Browne
Ruling party:	Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party
Women MPs:	11% (previous House)

History



The first inhabitants were the Siboney, who can be dated back to 2400 BCE. Arawaks settled subsequently, around the 1st century CE. 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.

The ALP remained in power during the 1980s, its position enhanced by divisions within the opposition. However, by 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.

In April 1992 three opposition parties merged to form the United Progressive Party (UPP). In September 1993, on the retirement of Vere Bird, his son Lester Bird became Prime Minister. In March 1994 the ALP won its fifth consecutive election victory, securing 11 of the 17 seats in the House; the UPP led by Baldwin Spencer took five and the Barbuda People's Movement one.

The Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party (ABLP) led by Lester Bird won its sixth consecutive general election in March 1999 (in the presence of a Commonwealth observer group), gaining 12 of the 17 seats with 53 per cent of the votes cast. The United Progressive Party (UPP) took four seats, with 44 per cent of the votes, and the Barbuda People's Movement (BPM) one seat.

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, was observed by a Commonwealth expert team. The UPP won the contest with 55 per cent of the votes and 12 seats, and Baldwin Spencer became Prime Minister, ending a 28-year run of power for the ABLP 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 per cent of the votes. The ABLP took seven seats (47 per cent), and the BPM one (one per cent). Turnout was 80 per cent.

In the parliamentary elections held on 12 June 2014, the ABLP won 14 of the 17 seats in the House of Representatives, decisively ousting the UPP government (three seats). Turnout was 90 per cent. ABLP leader Gaston Browne was sworn in as Prime Minister on 13 June.

On 14 August 2014, following the retirement of Dame Louise Lake-Tack, Dr Sir Rodney Williams was sworn in as Governor-General.

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, Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, Organization of American States, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

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Traveller information

Immigration and Customs: Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of departure. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals.

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 foreign driving licence.

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. There are daily flights between Antigua and Barbuda and journey time is around 20 minutes.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever, hepatitis B and schistosomiasis (bilharzia).

There were 247,000 tourist arrivals in 2012.

Further information

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

Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission: www.abec.gov.ag

Statistics Division: www.ab.gov.ag/article_details.php?id=65

Eastern Caribbean Central Bank: www.eccb-centralbank.org

Department of Tourism: www.antigua-barbuda.org

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

Commonwealth of Nations:
www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Antigua_and_Barbuda

Media

Daily Observer: www.antiguaobserver.com

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