

# Dominica



## KEY FACTS

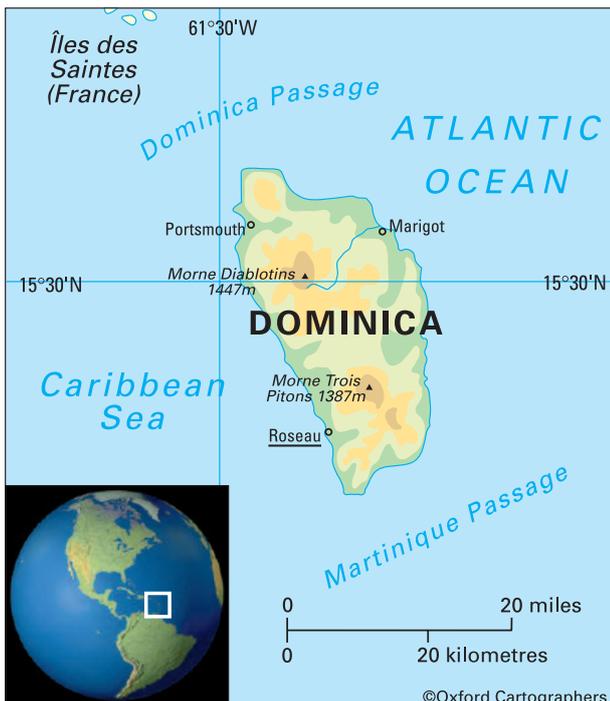
Joined Commonwealth:	1978
Population:	72,000 (2012)
GDP p.c. growth:	1.8% p.a. 1990–2012
UN HDI 2012:	world ranking 72
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT minus 4hr
Currency:	Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$)

## Geography

Area:	750 sq km
Coastline:	148 km
Capital:	Roseau

The Commonwealth of Dominica is one of the Windward Islands in the Eastern Caribbean, lying between Guadeloupe to the north and Martinique to the south.

**Topography:** A volcanic island 46 km in length, Dominica has a central mountain ridge running from Cape Melville in the north to the cliffs in the south. Morne Diablotin rises to 1,447 metres. There are numerous mountain streams and rivers, none of them navigable. The scenery is outstandingly beautiful, with waterfalls and luxuriantly wooded mountains. Most beaches are of black volcanic sand, with some of golden sand.



**Climate:** The climate is subtropical and hot, but cooled by sea breezes, with a rainy season in June–October, when hurricanes may occur. Rainfall is heavy, especially in mountain areas.

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issues are shortage of drinking water; deforestation; soil erosion; pollution of the coastal zone by chemicals used in farming and factories, and untreated sewage.

**Vegetation:** Dominica is known as the nature island of the Caribbean. Dense forest and woodland cover 59 per cent of the land area, with subtropical vegetation and orchids in the valleys. Tree ferns are indigenous to the island. Arable and cropped land extends to some 32 per cent of the total land area. The island has a fertile volcanic soil.

**Wildlife:** The forests have a wide range of bird species (at least three of them rare and endangered, 2012), including the brilliant Dominica parrot, or Sisserou, which is depicted on the national flag, various species of doves and the mountain whistler. There are three distinct vegetation and habitat zones determined by rainfall and elevation at defined levels around the mountains. The country has two marine reserves and several hectares of forest reserve.

**Main towns:** Roseau (capital, pop. 13,400 in 2010), Canefield (3,400), Portsmouth (3,300), Marigot (2,700), Salisbury (2,600), Atkinson (2,200), Berekua (2,000), St Joseph (1,900), Castle Bruce (1,900), Wesley (1,600) and Mahaut (1,200).

**Transport:** There are 1,510 km of roads, 50 per cent paved. Round-island network was completed in the late 1980s, despite the technical difficulties presented by Dominica's mountainous terrain and friable volcanic rock.

Banana boats and tourist cruiseships call at Roseau, at the deep-water harbour in Woodbridge Bay, and in Prince Rupert's Bay, Portsmouth.

The airports at Melville Hall, 64 km north-east of Roseau, and Canefield, 5 km north of Roseau, can accommodate only turbo-prop passenger aircraft. Tourists flying into Dominica must therefore generally come via the nearby island of Antigua.

## Did you know?

Dominica was the first state in the Americas to have a female Prime Minister. Dame Eugenia Charles served from 1980 to 1995.

At his appointment in 2004 the current Prime Minister, Roosevelt Skerrit, was the youngest head of government in the world, aged 31.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2012

Population per sq km:	96
Life expectancy:	76 years (est.)
Net primary enrolment:	92% (2010)

**Population:** 72,000 (2012); 67 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.0 per cent p.a. 1990–2012, due mainly to the emigration of young people; birth rate 16 per 1,000 people (est. 26 in 1970); life expectancy 76 years (est.)

The population is mostly of African and mixed African/European descent, with European, Syrian and Carib (2.9 per cent in 2001 census) minorities. There is a Carib reserve on part of the east of the island, referred to as the Carib Territory.

**Language:** The official language is English; a French-based Creole is spoken by most of the population.

**Religion:** Mainly Christians (Roman Catholics 61 per cent, Seventh Day Adventists six per cent, Pentecostals six per cent, Baptists four per cent, Methodists four per cent; 2001 census).

**Health:** Public spending on health was four per cent of GDP in 2011. The health system operates through local clinics, larger health centres, a polyclinic in Roseau, and the national referral hospital, the Princess Margaret Hospital. There is a smaller hospital at Portsmouth, and cottage hospitals at Marigot and Grand Bay. Infant mortality was 12 per 1,000 live births in 2012.

**Education:** Public spending on education was four per cent of GDP in 2010. There are 12 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 (2010). The school year starts in September.

Further education is provided at a teacher-training college; a nursing school; and at the regional University of the West Indies, which has a branch in Dominica and main campuses in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. The Dominica State College, a publicly funded institution, offers programmes leading to GCE A-Level, certificates, and associate degrees; and a large and diverse programme of continuing education for mature students.

**Media:** *The Chronicle* (founded in 1909), *The Sun*, *The Times* and *The Tropical Star* are all weekly.

The Dominica Broadcasting Corporation provides a public radio service, competing with several commercial or faith stations. There is no national TV service on the island but a private cable network covers part of the country.

**Communications:** Country code 1 767; internet domain '.dm'. The main post office is in Roseau.

There are 203 main telephone lines, 1,525 mobile phone subscriptions and 552 internet users per 1,000 people (2012).

**Public holidays:** New Year's Day, Labour Day (first Monday in May), August Monday (first Monday in August), National Day (3 November), Community Service Day (4 November), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Religious festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Carnival (two days in February/March), Good Friday, Easter Monday and Whit Monday.

## Economy

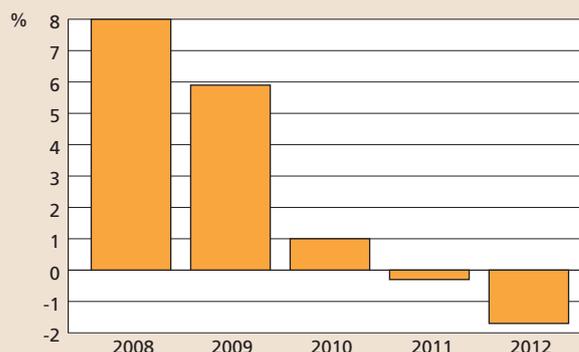
### KEY FACTS 2012

GNI:	US\$462m
GNI p.c.:	US\$6,440
GDP growth:	2.5% p.a. 2008–12
Inflation:	2.7% p.a. 2008–12

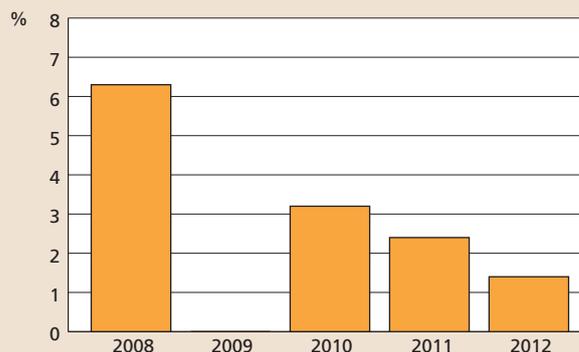
Dominica's economy is vulnerable. Much of the island is mountainous and less than 25 per cent of the country is under cultivation. Its location exposes it to tropical storms and hurricanes, which have caused severe damage to the crops making up the country's economic base, particularly to bananas. There were three severe hurricanes in the 1980s, and in 1995 Hurricanes Luis and Marilyn caused severe damage. The country is also vulnerable in its dependence on banana exports to the EU.

Since the 1980s, successive governments have therefore introduced measures to diversify the economy, encouraging a shift from traditional crops (such as sugar, coffee and cocoa) to new crops (such as citrus, melons, pineapples and mangoes), and developing export-oriented small industries (notably garments and electronics

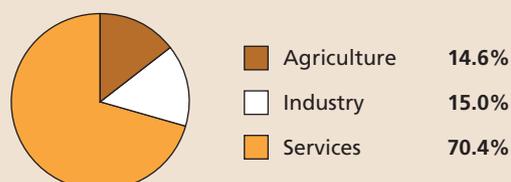
Real Growth in GDP



Inflation



GDP by Sector (2012)



assembly), taking advantage of such preferences as the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), which allows access to the US market.

They have also encouraged development of tourism and especially eco-tourism. The key to expansion of tourism was seen in the 1990s as the construction of a new airport with a runway long enough for long-haul jets from North America and Europe, but it proved impossible to secure financial backing for the project.

Between 1991 and 1997, Dominica received about US\$15 million in investment and acquired some 750 new citizens – mainly non-resident Taiwanese – under its ‘economic citizenship programme’ which allowed people to become citizens in return for a substantial investment in Dominica. In the latter 1990s, 200–300 Russians were granted economic citizenship.

The government also encouraged development of an offshore financial-services sector, including company and bank registration and internet gambling.

From the mid-1990s, there was a period of modest economic growth, but by 1999 the economy had stalled, moving into recession in 2000, and shrank by some nine per cent in 2001–03. The IMF agreed to financial support tied to tax increases and cuts in public expenditure and good growth resumed in 2004–05, driven by tourism, recovery in banana production and a booming construction sector. This growth continued through 2007, when Hurricane Dean caused widespread devastation, until 2009 when

the impact of the global recession was keenly felt, causing the economy to stall again in 2010–13.

## Constitution

<b>Status:</b>	<b>Republic</b>
<b>Legislature:</b>	<b>House of Assembly</b>
<b>Independence:</b>	<b>3 November 1978</b>

Dominica is a republic with a non-executive presidency and parliamentary democracy. It has a unicameral House of Assembly with 30 members plus the Speaker and Attorney-General. There are 21 directly elected members and nine senators appointed by the President, five on the advice of the Prime Minister, four on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition. Elections are held at least every five years, with universal suffrage for adults.

The President is nominated by the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition and elected by the House of Assembly for not more than two terms of five years. He or she appoints the Prime Minister, who consults the President in appointing other ministers. The President may dismiss the Prime Minister in the event of a non-confidence vote in the House of Assembly. Individual rights are guaranteed under the constitution.

Roseau (the capital) and the Carib Territory have a measure of self-government. The Caribs elect their chief.



## History

Throughout its history the fertile island of Dominica has attracted settlers and colonisers and has been the subject of the military, and often bloody, squabbles of European powers. At the time of Columbus's visit on a Sunday (*dies dominica*) in November 1493, the island was a stronghold of the Caribs from South America who were driving out the Arawaks. In 1627 the English took theoretical possession without settling, but by 1632 the island had become a *de facto* French colony; it remained so until 1759 when the English captured it. In 1660 the English and French agreed to leave the Caribs in undisturbed possession, but in fact French settlers went on arriving, bringing enslaved Africans with them. Dominica changed hands between the two European powers, passing back to France (1778) and again to England (1783). The French attempted to invade in 1795 and 1805 before eventually withdrawing, leaving Britain in possession.

In 1833 the island was linked to Antigua and the other Leeward Islands under a Governor-General at Antigua, but subsequently became part of the Federation of the Leeward Islands Colony (1871–1939) before becoming a unit of the Windward Islands group (1940–60). Dominica joined the West Indies Federation at its foundation in 1958 and remained a member until differences among larger members led to its dissolution in 1962.

Within Dominica, the formation of the Dominica Labour Party (DLP) from the People's National Movement and other groups in the early 1960s spurred local demand for greater autonomy in internal affairs. Edward LeBlanc became Chief Minister in 1961. Under his leadership, in 1967 Dominica became one of the West Indies Associated States, with full internal self-government, while the UK remained responsible for foreign policy and defence. At

LeBlanc's retirement in 1974, Patrick John succeeded as DLP leader and Premier. After winning a large majority at the 1975 elections, John pursued the course agreed by the Associated States to seek independence separately.

On 3 November 1978, Dominica achieved independence as a republic within the Commonwealth, and took the name of Commonwealth of Dominica. John became its first Prime Minister, and Frederick Degazon the non-executive President.

In 1979 the DLP government collapsed and Oliver Seraphine of the Committee for National Salvation (CNS) was invited to form an interim government and prepare the way for elections within six months. The elections in July 1980 were won by the Dominica Freedom Party (DFP) led by Eugenia Charles (who became the first woman Prime Minister in the region), winning 17 of the 21 seats. Patrick John, who had led the country to independence, and Seraphine lost their seats.

There were two coup attempts early in the 1980s allegedly organised by factions of the Defence Force sympathetic to the John regime. In 1985, John was himself convicted of involvement in one such attempt, and sentenced to 12 years imprisonment; the following year the former commander of the Defence Force was hanged for murdering a police officer during a coup attempt.

Eugenia Charles led the DFP to victory in the 1990 general election, but, in June 1995, shortly after her retirement from politics, the DFP lost its majority. The United Workers Party (UWP) emerged as election victor with 11 seats; the DFP and the DLP each won five. Edison James, leader of the UWP, was invited by the President to form a government.

## Politics

Last elections:	18 December 2009
Next elections:	2014
Head of state:	President Charles Savarin (2013–)
Head of government:	Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit
Ruling party:	Dominica Labour Party
Women MPs:	13%

The economy continued to dominate the political agenda. The government's top priority in the run-up to the 2000 elections had been to secure financial backing for its new airport project – the key to expansion of the tourism industry, which was set to become crucial as, inevitably, the international banana market became more competitive.

In the January 2000 general election, the Dominica Labour Party (DLP – ten seats) narrowly defeated the United Workers Party (UWP) (nine seats). The DLP formed a coalition with the Dominica Freedom Party (DFP – two seats) and Roosevelt (Rosie) Douglas became Prime Minister. Following his sudden death in October 2000, he was succeeded by Communications and Works Minister Pierre Charles.

In October 2003 Dr Nicholas Liverpool was elected President by the House of Assembly for a five-year term. In January 2004 Charles died suddenly and Roosevelt Skerrit was sworn in as Prime Minister.

In the general election in May 2005, the DLP took 12 seats, the UWP eight and independents one. DFP failed to win any seats and was unable to continue as coalition partner with DLP in government.

In December 2009, in an election that was called early, the DLP won 18 seats – with 61.2 per cent of the vote – and the UWP the balance of three (34.9 per cent). In early January 2010 Skerrit announced his new cabinet, in which he was Finance and Foreign Affairs Minister.

Following the resignation of President Nicholas Liverpool, the House of Assembly elected Eliud Williams as his successor on 17 September 2012.

On 30 September 2013 Charles Savarin was elected President by the House of Assembly for a five-year term.

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## International relations

Dominica is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Association of Caribbean States, Caribbean Community, Non-Aligned Movement, Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, Organization of American States, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

## Traveller information

**Immigration and customs:** Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of departure. Visas are not generally required by Commonwealth nationals. Prohibited imports include certain plant material including avocados, bananas, coconuts and coffee; and animal products.

**Travel within the country:** Driving is on the left. An international driving permit is recommended, though a foreign driving licence can be used to obtain a temporary visitor's permit for drivers between the ages of 25 and 65.

Bus services connect towns and villages. Taxi rates are set by law and drivers do not expect to be tipped.

**Travel health:** Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever and hepatitis B.

There were 78,000 tourist arrivals in 2012.

## Further information

Dominica Government: [www.dominica.gov.dm](http://www.dominica.gov.dm)

Electoral Office: [electoraloffice.gov.dm](http://electoraloffice.gov.dm)

House of Assembly: [houseofassembly.gov.dm](http://houseofassembly.gov.dm)

Eastern Caribbean Central Bank: [www.eccb-centralbank.org](http://www.eccb-centralbank.org)

Discover Dominica Authority: [www.dominica.dm](http://www.dominica.dm)

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

Commonwealth of Nations:  
[www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Dominica](http://www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Dominica)

## Media

Dominica Broadcasting Corporation: [news.dbradio.net](http://news.dbradio.net)

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