

# Guyana



## KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1966
Population:	795,000 (2012)
GDP p.c. growth:	2.9% p.a. 1990–2012
UN HDI 2012:	world ranking 118
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT minus 4hr
Currency:	Guyana dollar (G\$)

## Geography

Area:	214,970 sq km
Coastline:	459 km
Capital:	Georgetown

The Co-operative Republic of Guyana lies in the north-east of South America, north of the equator. It is bordered by Suriname, Brazil and Venezuela and, to the north and east, extends to the North Atlantic Ocean. The country comprises ten regions.

**Topography:** Guyana has three distinct geographical zones. It has a narrow coastal belt, seldom more than 25 km wide and much of it 1–1.5 metres below sea level, where sugar and rice are grown and 90 per cent of the people live. In the far interior are high savannah

uplands; between these, thick, hilly tropical forest covers most of the land area. For the country as a whole forest covers 77 per cent of the land area. In the forest zone are found most of the country's resources of bauxite, diamonds, gold, manganese and other minerals. Guyana's massive rivers include the Demerara, Berbice, Essequibo and Corentyne; rapids, bars and other obstacles make navigation difficult. The Kaieteur Falls on the Potaro river have a 222 metres drop – five times the height of Niagara. The Amerindian name 'Guiana' (part of the country's former name) means 'Land of Many Waters'.

**Climate:** Guyana has a warm tropical climate with high rainfall and humidity. The rainy seasons are November–January and May–July with an average rainfall of 2,350 mm p.a. in the coastal region. Inland rainfall averages 1,520 mm p.a. North-east trade winds moderate coastal temperatures.

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issues are water pollution by sewage, and agricultural and industrial chemicals; and deforestation.

**Vegetation:** Guyana's tropical forest, covering 77 per cent of the land area, is among the most ecologically valuable and best preserved in the world. The environment is an issue of great political importance in Guyana. There is concern about climate change and sea-level rise, because the low-lying littoral plain relies on a system of dams, walls and drainage canals to prevent flooding from the sea or the huge rivers. Forest resources are also important; the country has taken a lead in advancing forestry conservation and sustainable development and there was no significant loss of forest cover during 1990–2011.

Under the Iwokrama Rainforest Programme, some 371,000ha, much of it virgin forest, have been set aside for preservation and scientific study of its ecology and for sustainable development of the parts inhabited by Amerindian tribes or migrant mining communities. The programme was launched by the Guyana Government and the Commonwealth Secretariat.



## Did you know?

Sir Shridath Ramphal of Guyana was Commonwealth Secretary-General 1975–90.

Guyanese writers have won the overall Best First Book award of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1991 (Pauline Melville) and in 2006 (Mark McWatt).

The Government of Guyana, at the 1989 CHOGM, offered to set aside about 360,000 hectares of pristine rainforest for research to demonstrate methods for conservation and sustainable use of forest resources and biodiversity: as a result, the Commonwealth's flagship Iwokrama Rainforest Programme was launched the following year.

The Commonwealth Youth Programme Caribbean Centre is based in Georgetown.

**Wildlife:** The tapir is the largest land mammal; cats include the jaguar and ocelot. Monkeys and deer are the most numerous species, and the caiman is the largest freshwater animal. The giant anaconda or water boa is also found in the rivers. The wealth of plant, animal and micro-organism species includes many so far unrecorded, whose properties are unknown to science. Ten species of mammals and 13 species of birds are thought to be endangered (2012).

**Main towns:** Georgetown (capital, pop. 141,300 in 2010), Linden (30,700), New Amsterdam (15,700), Anna Regina (13,800), Corriverton (10,600), Bartica (8,500), Rosignol, Skeldon and Vreed en Hoop. Georgetown is famous for its Dutch-inspired wooden architecture, street layout and drainage canals.

**Transport:** Surface travel in the interior of the country is hindered by dense forest, rapids on the rivers, and the generally undeveloped character of the interior. Thus, apart from in the coastal belt and on one inland route, most journeys are by air.

There are all-weather roads along the eastern part of the coast and some all-weather roads inland, including one across the country to the border with Brazil, and about seven per cent of the total network of 7,970 km is paved. There is no passenger rail service, although mining companies have private goods lines.

There are some 1,600 km of navigable river, 1,000 km of which are in areas of some economic activity. Passenger and cargo vessels travel up the Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice rivers, and also along the coast between the rivers. Apart from the Demerara, which has a road bridge, the other major rivers have to be crossed by ferries, which can take some hours for the wider rivers. At the Corentyne river ferry services link Guyana with Suriname.

Georgetown is the main port, and the international airport is CBJ International Airport, at Timehri, 40 km from Georgetown; larger towns and many mining companies have airports or landing strips.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2012

Population per sq km: 3.7

Life expectancy: 66 years

Net primary enrolment: 72%

**Population:** 795,000 (2012); distribution is very uneven, with high concentration of people along the coastal strip and many inland areas virtually uninhabited; 28 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.4 per cent p.a. 1990–2012, depressed over this period by emigration; birth rate 21 per 1,000 people (38 in 1970); life expectancy 66 years (60 in 1970).

The ethnic origins of the people are: 44 per cent Indian (resident mostly in agricultural areas); 30 per cent African (mostly in towns); 17 per cent of mixed descent; nine per cent Amerindian (mainly in the west and south, or on reserves; data from 2002 census).

**Language:** English is the official language, Guyana being the only English-speaking country in South America. An English-based Creole is widely used; Hindi, Urdu and Amerindian languages are also spoken.

**Religion:** Christians about 57 per cent (Pentecostals 17 per cent, Roman Catholics eight per cent, Anglicans seven per cent, Seventh Day Adventists five per cent), Hindus 28 per cent, Muslims seven per cent (2002 census).

**Health:** Public spending on health was five per cent of GDP in 2011. The Public Hospital at Georgetown is the national referral hospital; there are some 30 hospitals and many health centres throughout the country, with both public and private care available, the former usually free. Some 95 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 84 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2011). Infant mortality was 29 per 1,000 live births in 2012 (100 in 1960). In 2012, 1.3 per cent of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

**Education:** Public spending on education was three per cent of GDP in 2012. There are nine years of compulsory education starting at the age of six. Primary school comprises six years and secondary five, with cycles of three and two years. Some 83 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2008). The school year starts in September.

Tertiary institutions include the University of Guyana (established in 1963), which has law and medical schools, and campuses at Turkeyen, Georgetown, and Tain Corentyne, Berbice (in the east of the country); Cyril Potter College of Education, based at the Turkeyen campus of the university, with branches at Linden, New Amsterdam and Rose Hall; Guyana College of Agriculture; and Commonwealth Youth Programme Caribbean Centre at Georgetown (which trains youth workers from Commonwealth countries in the region). The University of Guyana also provides adult education programmes. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 2.40:1 (2011).

**Media:** The state-owned *Guyana Chronicle/Sunday Chronicle* and privately owned *Stabroek News* and *Kaieteur News* are dailies.

The National Communications Network provides public radio and TV services.

There are 38 personal computers per 1,000 people (2005).

**Communications:** Country code 592; internet domain '.gy'. Internet connections are slow but improving, and there are internet cafés in Georgetown. There are post offices in the urban areas.

There are 194 main telephone lines, 688 mobile phone subscriptions and 330 internet users per 1,000 people (2012).

**Public holidays:** New Year's Day, Republic Day (Mashramani, 23 February), Labour Day (1 May), Arrival Day (5 May), Independence Day (26 May), CARICOM Day (first Monday in July), Emancipation Day (first Monday in August), Christmas Day and Boxing Day. The Republic Day celebrations continue for about a week, though only one day is a public holiday.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Prophet's Birthday, Phagwah (Holi, March), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Deepavali (Diwali, October/November) and Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice).

## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2012

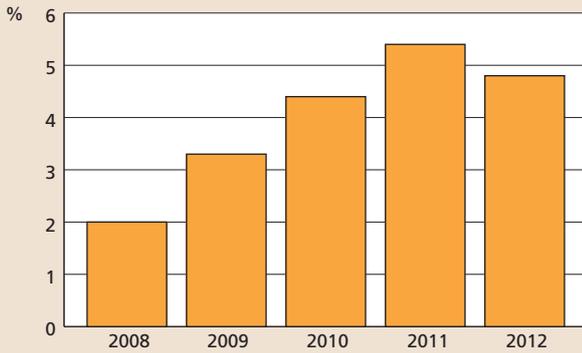
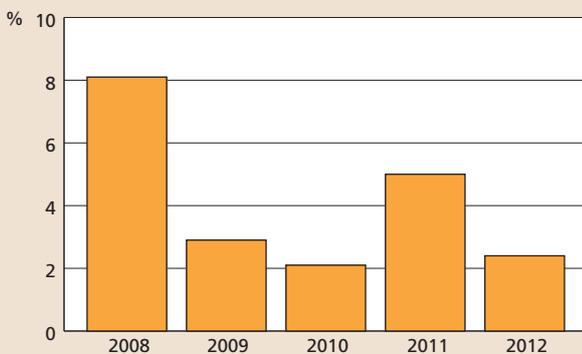
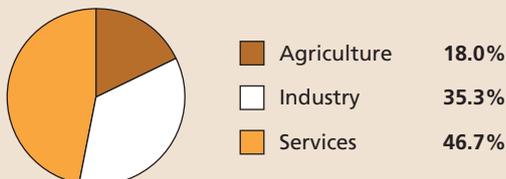
GNI: US\$2.7bn

GNI p.c.: US\$3,410

GDP growth: 4.0% p.a. 2008–12

Inflation: 4.1% p.a. 2008–12

The economy is based on agriculture and mining, notably of gold and bauxite; the main cash crops are sugar and rice. After near

**Real Growth in GDP****Inflation****GDP by Sector (2012)**

collapse in 1982, it was resuscitated by strict implementation of IMF-backed economic reforms. By the mid-1990s, these reforms had had success in stabilising the currency, controlling inflation and increasing output and trade, and the economy was growing at an annual rate of more than six per cent in 1996 and 1997. Inflation peaked at 83 per cent in 1991, following substantial devaluations of the Guyana dollar, but was in single figures from the mid-1990s, though it remained relatively high until the late 2000s. Privatisation had led to new investment and creation of new jobs.

The reforms included extensive privatisation of state-owned operations, some of which – for example, the Sugar Corporation and Guyana Airways Corporation – are now under private management and/or ownership.

But the combination of drought, falling commodity prices and political uncertainty in 1998, caused growth to stall. The economy then grew very little during 1998–2005. From 2006 there were signs that the economic policies supported by the international financial institutions were beginning to bear fruit, until 2008 when collapsing world demand caused the economy to moderate,

recording two per cent growth in that year, before returning to growth of four to six per cent p.a. in 2009–14.

**Constitution**

<b>Status:</b>	<b>Republic with executive President</b>
<b>Legislature:</b>	<b>Parliament of Guyana</b>
<b>Independence:</b>	<b>26 May 1966</b>

Guyana is a republic, divided into administrative regions, with an executive President and parliamentary legislature. The 1980 constitution, amended in 2001, provides for an executive presidency and a unicameral legislature, the National Assembly, with 65 members directly elected by proportional representation: 40 at a national level and 25 at a regional level. The normal life of parliament is five years.

The leader of the majority party in the Assembly is President for the duration of the Assembly. The President appoints the Prime Minister and cabinet (which may include those from outside the Assembly), which is responsible to parliament.

**Politics**

<b>Last elections:</b>	<b>28 November 2011</b>
<b>Next elections:</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>Head of state:</b>	<b>President Donald Ramotar</b>
<b>Head of government:</b>	<b>the President</b>
<b>Ruling party:</b>	<b>People's Progressive Party–Civic coalition</b>
<b>Women MPs:</b>	<b>31%</b>

In the general election of March 2001, the first to be held under a new electoral system, the ruling People's Progressive Party (PPP)–Civic coalition won 35 seats (53 per cent of the vote). Bharrat Jagdeo retained the presidency and Desmond Hoyte of the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR, 27 seats and 42 per cent) continued to lead the opposition. Voter turnout was nearly 90 per cent. Although the election result was seen by international observers to reflect the will of the people, in the weeks following the elections opposition supporters continued to mount violent demonstrations expressing doubts about the accuracy of the poll.

These only began to be allayed when in April 2001 Jagdeo and Hoyte initiated a dialogue among parliamentarians and civil society on constitutional and electoral reform. However, this dialogue broke down in March 2002 over differences between PPP–Civic and PNCR on implementation of what had been agreed. The deadlock continued until late August 2002 when, at the government's request, the Commonwealth Secretary-General appointed a special envoy, former Governor-General of New Zealand Sir Paul Reeves, to facilitate resumption of the dialogue between the opposing parties. During 2003 constructive dialogue proceeded between Jagdeo and the new opposition leader, Robert Corbin, political tension eased, and opposition members returned to parliament. During 2004, the constructive dialogue process wavered and the opposition's parliamentary boycott was resumed for some time, before they returned to parliament on the basis of 'selective engagement'.

In relatively peaceful elections in August 2006, President Jagdeo and the PPP–Civic coalition were returned to power, with 36 seats and 54.6 per cent of the votes, while the PNCR–One Guyana coalition took 22 seats and 34.0 per cent of the votes and the



The original Guiana was inhabited by semi-nomadic Amerindian tribes who lived by hunting and fishing – notably Arawaks and Caribs. It was divided by European powers into Spanish Guiana (Venezuela), Portuguese Guiana (Brazil), French Guiana, Dutch Guiana (Suriname) and British Guiana (Guyana). Colonial competition for territory began with the Spanish sighting in 1499. Probably temporary Spanish or Portuguese settlements were followed by Dutch settlement, first unsuccessfully at Pomeroy, and then (in 1627) under the protection of the Dutch West India Company on the Berbice river. Despite yielding from time to time to British, French and Portuguese invasions, the Dutch kept control until 1814, when the colonies of Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice were ceded to Britain. The Europeans imported African slaves to develop their plantations, first of tobacco and later sugar, and to labour on constructing the coastal drainage system and the elegant city of Georgetown. Some slaves escaped to the forest; these so-called ‘bush-blacks’ eked out a living by panning for gold, hunting and subsistence agriculture.

The British administration merged the three colonies into British Guiana in 1831, but retained the Dutch administrative, legislative and legal system, whereby the country was directed by a governor, advised by councils of plantation owners. After the abolition of slavery, Indian and smaller numbers of Portuguese, Chinese and Javanese indentured labourers were brought in to work the estates.

In 1928 a legislative council, with members appointed by the British Government, was established, but members were elected after extensions of the franchise in 1943 and 1945. The country was by this period among the most advanced of the British colonial territories in the region, and became the headquarters of several regional educational and political institutions. CARICOM still has its headquarters in Georgetown.

In 1953, a constitution with a bicameral legislature and ministerial system, based on elections under universal adult suffrage, was introduced. There was a general election, won by the People's Progressive Party (PPP), led by Dr Cheddi Jagan. The PPP had a large East Indian following, whereas the People's National Congress (PNC), a breakaway party formed in 1957, had its roots among Guyanese of African origin. Shortly after the 1953 elections, the UK suspended the constitution, decided to ‘mark time’ in the advance towards self-government, and administered the country with a government composed largely of nominated members.

When, in 1957, the UK did introduce elected members, the legislature voted for more representative government. The UK called a constitutional conference which was held in 1960 and provided for a new constitution with full internal self-government. In the elections held in August 1961 under this constitution, the PPP again gained the majority. The UK held further constitutional conferences in 1962 and 1963, to settle terms for independence, but ethnic divisions prevented the leaders of Guyana's three political parties from being able to reach consensus among themselves on the terms of a constitution; they then asked the UK to settle the matter.

The UK selected a form of proportional representation which was aimed at preventing domination by any single ethnic group. (It was also argued that, at this period of the ‘Cuba crisis’ with near-war between the USA and USSR, the UK was under pressure to avoid allowing a socialist government to come to power in Guyana.) Despite renewed disturbances, elections were held

under the PR system, and brought to power a coalition of the PNC led by Forbes Burnham and The United Force (TUF).

The new government finalised independence arrangements at a further constitutional conference, which was boycotted by the PPP. Guyana became independent and joined the Commonwealth in May 1966, and became a republic four years later.

The PNC led by Burnham was returned in 1968 elections and remained in power until 1992 (despite repeated electoral disputes). During the 1970s, 80 per cent of the economy was nationalised. These were years of considerable unrest and increasing economic difficulty, as debt rose and world prices for the major exports fell. The PPP, led by Dr Cheddi Jagan, remained in opposition. Executive presidency was introduced in 1980. In 1985 Burnham died and was replaced by Desmond Hoyte.

The elections due in 1990 were postponed twice, in part because the Commonwealth observer team invited by President Hoyte's administration reported irregularities in the voters' rolls and proposed that certain preparatory arrangements should be done again. When the elections were held, in October 1992, the PPP–Civic coalition, led by Jagan, won 53.5 per cent of the votes, giving it 28 seats; the PNC won 23, the TUF and the Working People's Alliance (WPA) one each. The Commonwealth observers described the elections as ‘a historic democratic process’ which expressed the people's genuine will. Jagan was sworn in as President.

In March 1997 Jagan suffered a heart attack and died. Samuel Hinds, Prime Minister in Jagan's PPP–Civic government, became President and Janet Jagan, Jagan's US-born widow, was appointed Prime Minister and Vice-President. Mrs Jagan was one of the four founders of the PPP, and had served in two previous cabinets. In the December 1997 elections the PPP–Civic coalition claimed a decisive victory with 56 per cent of the officially counted votes. Mrs Jagan became Guyana's first woman President and appointed Hinds Prime Minister.

However, the opposition PNC refused to accept the declared results. Increasingly violent demonstrations followed and were only ended when, in January 1998, CARICOM brokered an agreement between the PPP–Civic and PNC. Under the Herdmanston Accord, CARICOM would undertake an audit of the election results, to be conducted by a team selected by the then CARICOM chair, Dr Keith Mitchell, the Prime Minister of Grenada. A broad-based Constitutional Reform Commission would be established, to report to the National Assembly within 18 months. And there would be new elections within 18 months after presentation of the report.

The CARICOM audit team reported that although the management of the count left much to be desired ‘the results of their recount varied only marginally from that of the final results declared by the Chief Elections Officer’. But the PNC remained dissatisfied and violent demonstrations broke out again. A settlement was finally reached at the CARICOM summit in Saint Lucia in July 1998, under which the PNC agreed to take their seats in the National Assembly.

President Janet Jagan resigned after suffering a mild heart attack in August 1999 and was succeeded by Finance Minister Bharrat Jagdeo.

The Constitutional Reform Commission's proposals were enacted in 2000. These included establishment of a permanent elections commission and new national identity cards.

newly constituted Alliance for Change – which enjoys support from East Indians and Afro-Guyanese – five seats and 8.1 per cent of the votes. Commonwealth observers present reported that the results reflected the wishes of the people.

Former Prime Minister and President Janet Jagan died in March 2009.

In the November 2011 elections PPP–Civic, led by Donald Ramotar, won 32 seats, receiving 48.6 per cent of the vote, one seat short of a parliamentary majority. The new coalition led by PNCR, A Partnership for National Unity, took 26 seats (40 per cent) and the Alliance for Change seven seats (10.3 per cent). Ramotar was sworn in as President. The Commonwealth observer team present found the elections to be well managed and generally peaceful.

## International relations

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

Guyana hosts the headquarters of the Caribbean Community in Georgetown.

## Traveller information

**Immigration and customs:** Passports must be valid at least until the date of departure. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals. If you are travelling on from Guyana, some countries will require you to have a yellow fever vaccination certificate.

**Travel within the country:** Traffic drives on the left. An international driving permit is recommended to drive in Guyana, although local driving permits are available for one month from the Licence and Revenue Office in Georgetown on presentation of a foreign driving licence. Seatbelts are compulsory.

Air services serve the interior. Guyana has extensive waterways and steamers connect with the interior; there is also a coast-hopping service from Georgetown. Taxis operate in the main towns. Most fares are standard but over longer distances a fare should be agreed before travel.

**Travel health:** Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, malaria, rabies, typhoid and yellow fever. The World Health Organization has recommended vaccination against yellow fever.

There were 157,000 tourist arrivals in 2011.

## Further information

Government Information Agency: [www.gina.gov.gy](http://www.gina.gov.gy)

Guyana Elections Commission: [www.gecom.org.gy](http://www.gecom.org.gy)

Bureau of Statistics: [www.statisticsguyana.gov.gy](http://www.statisticsguyana.gov.gy)

Bank of Guyana: [www.bankofguyana.org.gy](http://www.bankofguyana.org.gy)

Guyana Tourism Authority: [www.guyana-tourism.com](http://www.guyana-tourism.com)

CARICOM: [www.caricom.org](http://www.caricom.org)

Iwokrama Rainforest Programme: [www.iwokrama.org](http://www.iwokrama.org)

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

Commonwealth of Nations:

[www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Guyana](http://www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Guyana)

## Media

*Guyana Chronicle*: [guyanachronicle.com](http://guyanachronicle.com)

*Kaieteur News*: [www.kaieteurnews.com](http://www.kaieteurnews.com)

*Stabroek News*: [www.stabroeknews.com](http://www.stabroeknews.com)

National Communications Network: [www.ncnguyana.com](http://www.ncnguyana.com)

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