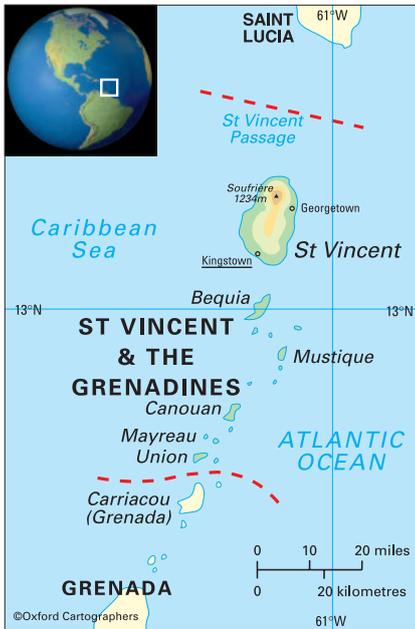




# St Vincent and the Grenadines



## KEY FACTS

**Joined Commonwealth:** 1979

**Population:** 109,000 (2013)

**GDP p.c. growth:** 2.5% p.a. 1990–2013

**UN HDI 2014:** World ranking 91

**Official language:** English

**Time:** GMT minus 4 hrs

**Currency:** Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$)

## Geography

**Area:** 389.3 sq km

**Coastline:** 84 km

**Capital:** Kingstown

St Vincent and the Grenadines, one of the Windward Island countries of the Eastern Caribbean, lies near the southern end of the Caribbean chain, about 97 km north of Grenada. The country comprises six parishes, one of these being Grenadines.

**Area:** Total land area 389.3 sq km: St Vincent 344 sq km, and the Grenadines 45.3 sq km.

**Topography:** The country comprises the island of St Vincent and the northern Grenadines, a series of 32 islands and cays, stretching south-west towards Grenada (the southern Grenadine islands are part of Grenada). The larger northern Grenadines are Bequia (pronounced Beck-way), Canouan,

Mayreau, Mustique, Isle D'Quatre and Union Island. St Vincent is volcanic in origin, and has an active volcano, La Soufrière, which erupted violently in 1812, and again in 1902. A mild eruption in 1971–72 created a volcanic dome in the crater lake, forming an island. This exploded in another eruption in 1979, blasting ash, steam and stones high into the air. A rugged mountain range runs from La Soufrière in the north to Mount St Andrew (750 metres) above the Kingstown Valley in the south. This mountainous backbone sends off lateral spurs which are intersected by wooded valleys and numerous streams. Many of the beaches of St Vincent are of black volcanic sand; there are some white-sand beaches. The Grenadines have been much celebrated for their beaches of fine white sand and clear waters.

**Climate:** Tropical, moderated by trade winds in June/July. The dry season is January–May, the rainy season May/June–September. There is significantly heavier rainfall in the mountainous interior. Tropical storms and hurricanes may occur June–November.

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issue is pollution of coasts and coastal waters by discharges from yachts and from industrial plants on shore.

**Vegetation:** The mountains of St Vincent support a luxuriant growth of tropical forest; coconuts and the more typical tropical coral island vegetation occur on the Grenadines and coastal fringes of St Vincent island. Forest covers 69 per cent of the land area, having increased at 0.4 per cent p.a. 1990–2010. The botanical gardens, founded in 1765, conserve rare species, including the mangosteen fruit tree, and a descendant from Captain Bligh's original breadfruit tree.

**Wildlife:** The Buccament Valley east of Layou is a tropical rainforest reserve, home to the endangered St Vincent parrot, as well as many other species such as the unique whistling warbler. Bequia's rich marine flora and fauna make it a popular resort for divers.

**Main towns:** Kingstown (capital, pop. 16,500 in 2010), Georgetown (1,400), Byera (1,200), Biabou (900) and Chateaubelair (630) on St Vincent; Port Elizabeth (770) on Bequia in the Grenadines.

**Transport:** There are 829 km of roads, 70 per cent paved. Cruiseships call at St Vincent.

A mail boat runs several times a week through the Grenadines and ferries operate between the islands.

E. T. Joshua International Airport is at Arnos Vale, 3 km south-east of Kingstown. There are small airports/airstrips on Bequia, Union Island, Canouan and Mustique. A new international airport is due to be opened at Argyle in the east of St Vincent in 2015.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2013

**Population per sq km:** 280

**Life expectancy:** 72 years

**Net primary enrolment:** 95% (2012)

**Population:** 109,000 (2013); 50 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.1 per cent p.a. 1990–2013, depressed over this period by emigration; birth rate 16 per 1,000 people (40 in 1970); life expectancy 72 years (63 in 1970).

The population is mostly of African or mixed descent, with Indian, European, and Carib minorities.

**Language:** English is the official language; an English-based Creole is widely spoken.

**Religion:** Mainly Christians (Anglicans 47 per cent, Methodists 28 per cent, Roman Catholics 13 per cent); with a small community of Hindus.

**Health:** Public spending on health was four per cent of GDP in 2012. As well as Kingstown General Hospital, there are district hospitals and health centres. Some 95 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source (2012). Infant mortality was 17 per 1,000 live births in 2013.

**Education:** Public spending on education was five per cent of GDP in 2010. There are 12 years of school education starting at the age of five. Primary school comprises seven years and secondary five, with cycles of three and two years. The school year starts in September.

Tertiary education is provided at the regional University of the West Indies, which has its main campuses in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

**Media:** *The Herald* is a daily paper. Weekly newspapers include *The News*, *Searchlight* and *The Vincentian*.

SVG Television and NBC Radio are the public service providers. There are several private radio stations.

There are 152 personal computers per 1,000 people (2005).

**Communications:** Country code 1 784; internet domain '.vc'. There are phonecard booths and internet cafes on most islands. The main post office is located in Kingstown, with branches throughout the country.

For every 1,000 people there are 174 landlines, 1,146 mobile phone subscriptions and 520 internet users (2013).

**Public holidays:** New Year's Day, National Heroes' Day (14 March), Labour Day (first Monday in May), Carnival (Monday and Tuesday in July), Emancipation Day (first Monday in August), Independence Day (27 October), Christmas Day and Boxing Day. Carnival continues for ten days leading up to Carnival Tuesday.

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

## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2013

**GNI:** US\$722m

**GNI p.c.:** US\$6,580

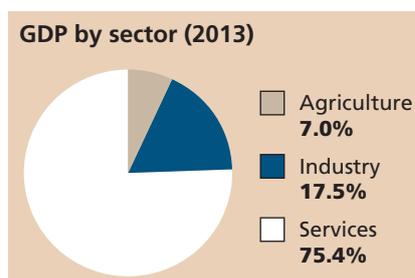
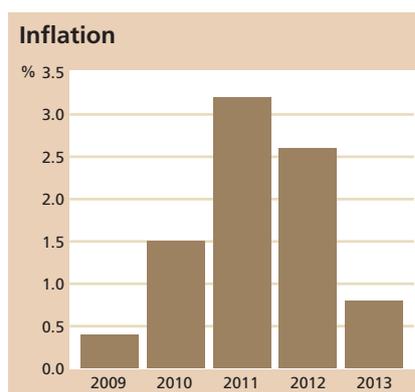
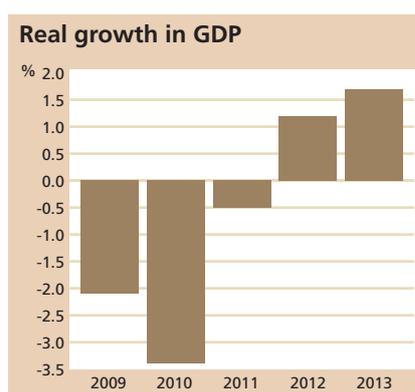
**GDP growth:** -0.6% p.a. 2009–13

**Inflation:** 1.7% p.a. 2009–13

St Vincent and the Grenadines has a relatively undeveloped economy, nevertheless providing a relatively high quality of life. It is vulnerable as the economic base is very small, and is heavily dependent on agriculture, especially bananas.

The main export crop, bananas, was sold to the EU under its preferential arrangements, but since these ended in 2007, Caribbean banana producers have faced a tougher competitive environment, and small, less efficient producers have moved out of banana production. The government has encouraged diversification into tourism, manufacturing, offshore finance and call centres, and has promoted growth of the private sector.

Economic growth fluctuates with agricultural output and prices on world markets. The economy has, however, been prudently managed and inflation and debt have generally been relatively modest. By the mid-2000s, with new investment in tourism infrastructure, economic growth was strong – averaging 5.6 per cent p.a. 2004–08 – but in the face of the world economic downturn of 2008–09, slowed sharply in 2008 (1.4 per cent) and contracted in 2009 (by 2.1 per



cent) and 2010 (3.4 per cent), before a return to more modest growth in 2011–15.

## History

The country's first known inhabitants were Arawaks, who were later driven out by Caribs; the latter put up a strong resistance to European colonisation. Christopher Columbus sighted the principal island on 22 January 1498, and named it after the saint whose feast falls on that day. No immediate European immigration followed this discovery. In 1627 Charles I of England granted the island to Lord Carlisle, but no settlers arrived. Charles II granted it to Lord Willoughby in

1672; possession was disputed by the British, French and Spanish. All these claims were resisted by the Caribs. The Caribs did not, however, oppose the settlement of a shipload of enslaved Africans who escaped after a shipwreck in 1673, and in due course seem to have merged with the Carib community through intermarriage. In 1773, under an Anglo/Carib treaty, the Caribs were allowed to continue to live independently in the north of the island. France took the island in 1779, but restored it to Britain in 1783, under the Treaty of Versailles. In 1795–96, the Caribs rebelled, aided by the French in Martinique; when this had been crushed, the rebels were deported to the island of Roatan in the Bay of Honduras. A plantation economy, based on slave labour, developed, producing sugar, cotton, coffee and cocoa. But in 1812 La Soufrière erupted and devastated much of the island. After the emancipation of slaves by Britain in 1834, indentured labour from the East Indies and Portugal was brought in to remedy the labour shortage.

In the second half of the 19th century sugar slumped and the economy remained very depressed for the rest of the century. In the early 20th century, a series of natural disasters further damaged the society: with a severe hurricane, and a further eruption of La Soufrière in 1902 which devastated the northern half of the island and killed 2,000 people.

St Vincent and the Grenadines was a member of the Federation of the West Indies. After its dissolution in 1962, and the move of larger Caribbean countries to independence individually, the transition towards independence began in St Vincent. At first, the smaller Eastern Caribbean countries attempted to set up a federation of their own, but negotiations among them were unsuccessful. Universal adult suffrage had already been established (and the executive council became partly elective) in 1951. Internal self-government was achieved in 1969 and full independence in October 1979.

Elections held two months after independence in 1979 gave overwhelming victory to Milton Cato's St Vincent Labour Party (SVLP), the party which had campaigned most vigorously for independence.

## St Vincent and the Grenadines on the international stage

Natasha Mayers, born in 1979 in St Vincent, won the gold medal for the Women's 100 Metres in the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

Sophia Young-Malcolm, born in St Vincent in 1983, plays basketball professionally in the USA for the San Antonio Stars. Retired NBA basketball player Adonal Foyle was born in Canouan, Grenadines, in 1975.

The newly independent country faced a series of political difficulties with, first, an armed rebellion on Union Island by a Rastafarian minority led by Bumba Charles, and then protests early in the 1980s, which led to special 'public order' legislation. Cato called an early general election in mid-1984, but was defeated by James Fitz-Allen Mitchell's New Democratic Party (NDP), formed in 1975. Mitchell, then standing as an independent, had been Premier between 1972–74.

Mitchell's NDP came to power in 1984 advocating policies of closer economic and ultimately political union with the neighbouring Eastern Caribbean countries. The country had played an active part in the establishment of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States in 1981, which achieved several of the aims the countries had failed to achieve through the aborted plan for an East Caribbean Federation.

The NDP was returned to power at the 1989 elections, and at the 1994 elections, when it took 12 seats, the remaining three seats going to the SVLP and Movement for National Unity coalition, which later merged to become the Unity Labour Party (ULP). In the general election in June 1998 the NDP narrowly won a fourth successive election taking eight of the House of Assembly's 15 seats, with only 45 per cent of the votes cast.

Following public protests at the raising of MPs' remuneration and pensions, in May 2000, through the offices of OECS and CARICOM, the government agreed with the ULP that there would be a general election by end March 2001. In August 2000, Mitchell stepped down from the presidency of the ruling NDP and was replaced by Finance Minister Arnhim Eustace, who became Prime Minister in October.

## Constitution

**Status:** Monarchy under Queen Elizabeth II

**Legislature:** Parliament of St Vincent and the Grenadines

**Independence:** 27 October 1979

St Vincent and the Grenadines is a constitutional monarchy and representative democracy, with Queen Elizabeth II as head of state, represented by a Governor-General. The legislature is unicameral, with a House of Assembly of 23 members comprising 15 members elected at least every five years by universal adult suffrage (plus Speaker and Attorney-General) and six senators appointed by the Governor-General (four on the advice of the Prime Minister and two on that of the Leader of the Opposition). The leader of the majority party in the House of Assembly becomes Prime Minister and selects and heads a cabinet.

## Politics

**Last elections:** 9 December 2015

**Next elections:** 2020

**Head of state:** Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Governor-General, Sir Frederick Ballantyne (2002–)

**Head of government:** Prime Minister Dr Ralph Everard Gonsalves

**Ruling party:** Unity Labour Party

**Women MPs:** 13%

The March 2001 general election was won by the Unity Labour Party (ULP) with 12 seats, ending almost 17 years of New Democratic Party (NDP; three seats) government and ULP leader Dr Ralph Gonsalves became Prime Minister.

In February 2005 the Constitutional Review

Commission proposed far-reaching reforms including replacement of the British monarch as head of state by an indirectly elected President, establishment of a non-partisan 'council of elders' to advise on public appointments and issues of the day, and reconstituting the legislature to include representatives of civil society as well as directly elected and appointed members.

In the December 2005 general election the ULP was returned, again winning 12 seats, and Gonsalves continued as Prime Minister.

The ULP won a third consecutive general election in December 2010, with eight seats; Gonsalves was returned as Prime Minister. The NDP, led by Arnhim Eustace, secured the remaining seven seats. Turnout was 62 per cent.

Ralph Gonsalves and the ULP were returned in the general election of 9 December 2015, winning eight seats, while the remaining seven were taken by the NDP. Turnout was 73 per cent. Commonwealth observers, led by Commissioner of the Mozambique Electoral Commission Paulo Cuinica, declared the election 'generally peaceful and relatively well conducted'.

## International relations

St Vincent and the Grenadines 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.

## Traveller information

**Immigration and customs:** Passports must be valid for the duration of the stay. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals. Prohibited imports include animals, plants and seeds, except where licences have been obtained from the authorities in advance.

**Travel within the country:** Traffic drives on the left. Visitors wishing to drive will need to obtain a driving permit.

Small planes can be chartered for travel between islands. Bus and minibus services operate between towns. Taxis are widely available and charge government-fixed rates.

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

There were 72,000 tourist arrivals in 2013.

## Further information

Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines:

[www.gov.vc](http://www.gov.vc)

Parliament of St Vincent and the Grenadines:

[www.assembly.gov.vc](http://www.assembly.gov.vc)

Statistical Office:

[stats.gov.vc](http://stats.gov.vc)

Eastern Caribbean Central Bank: St Vincent and the Grenadines

[www.eccb-centralbank.org](http://www.eccb-centralbank.org)

Tourism Authority:

[discoversvg.com](http://discoversvg.com)

Commonwealth Secretariat:

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

Commonwealth of Nations:

[www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/St\\_Vincent\\_and\\_the\\_Grenadines](http://www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/St_Vincent_and_the_Grenadines)

### Media

**Searchlight:**

[searchlight.vc](http://searchlight.vc)

**The Vincentian:**

[www.thevincentian.com](http://www.thevincentian.com)

**NBC Radio:**

[www.nbcsvg.com](http://www.nbcsvg.com)

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