

# **Barbados**

## **Location**

The country of Barbados is located off the coast of South and Central America and northeast of Venezuela. It is positioned east of the island of St. Vincent in the Windward Island chain making it the easternmost Caribbean island. The island can be found at 13 degrees north latitude and 59 degrees west latitude. Barbados is situated with the Caribbean Sea on the west and the North Atlantic Ocean on the north and east side.

## **Geography**

Covering a total of 431 square kilometers, Barbados is two and a half times as large as Washington D.C. It is 21 miles long and 14 miles across at its widest point. It is mostly flat with a central highland region. The highest point is Mount Hillaby at 336 meters. This dramatically rugged area comprises about one sixth of the island and meets the Atlantic in the northeast of the island. This is a clay area with jutting rocky spikes and ridges. Barbados has 97 kilometers of coastline beaches which encircle its narrow coastal plains. The beaches on the Caribbean side (west) are comprised of white sand while the beaches on the east and north, the Atlantic Ocean side, are more rugged. The country has five rivers, the longest of which is the Constitution River. The other four rivers are shown unnamed on maps. Aside from the five rivers, Barbados has no other internal bodies of water.

## **Climate**

Barbados has a moderate tropical climate. There is ample rainfall during the rainy season which lasts from June to October. On average, the country receives 1422

millimeters of rain a year with the central region receiving the greatest amount.

Barbados also has infrequent hurricanes.

## **History**

Barbados was originally inhabited by Arawak Indians; however, the island was abandoned sometime before the arrival of the first British settlers in 1627. Captain John Powell first claimed the island for England in 1625, and then, two years later, his brother, Captain Henry Powell arrived with 80 settlers and 10 slaves. The colonists formed the first English settlement, Jamestown, on the western coast which is now the location of Holetown. The nation remained under British control until 1966, when they gained their complete independence.

The country was heavily dependent on slave labor to work the sugar plantations until 1834, when slavery was abolished. Economically, Barbados relied heavily on sugar, rum, and molasses production through the twentieth century. However, in the 1960's, tourism and manufacturing surpassed the sugar industry for economic importance.

## **Important Dates**

Important dates on Barbados's calendar are: November 30<sup>th</sup> – Independence Day, December 25<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Day, January 1<sup>st</sup> – New Years Day, January 21<sup>st</sup> – Errol Barrow Day, April 28<sup>th</sup> – National Heroes Day, May 1<sup>st</sup> – Labor Day, August 2<sup>nd</sup> – Kadooment Day, and October 24<sup>th</sup> – United Nations Day.

## **Population**

The population of Barbados is estimated at 277,264 people (July 2003). Of those people, 90 percent are of African decent, 4 percent Caucasian, and 6 percent Asian or

mixed. Of the population, 21.2 percent are between the ages of 0 and fourteen, 70 percent are between 15 and 64 years old, 8.8 percent are 65 years and older. The population growth rate is 0.38 percent, and the average life expectancy is 72 years.

## **Currency**

The national currency of Barbados is the Barbadian dollar. The U.S. exchange rate for the Barbadian dollar is: 1 U.S.\$ = 1.98 Bds\$..

## **Education**

The Barbados Government pays the cost of education of Barbadian students at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. This strong emphasis on education has resulted in a literacy rate estimated at about 98% - one of the highest in the world. There are 74 government primary schools, as well as 30 private primary schools. Secondary education is provided for children aged 11 to 18 years. Most Government secondary schools (of which there are 23) are co-educational. There are also ten private secondary schools. One can also pursue a college education in Barbados at one of the three colleges located on the island. There is also the Barbados Hospitality Institute, where students can learn about all aspects of the hospitality industry.

## **Language**

English is the official language of Barbados, however there are many different dialects spoken.

## **Religion**

Most inhabitants of Barbados are practicing Christians. Of the population, 67 percent are Protestant, 4 percent are Roman Catholic, 17 percent are agnostic, and 12 percent are of another religion.

## **Agriculture**

Due to the increase in tourism in Barbados, cultivated lands are progressively being lost to non-agricultural uses. Despite this, agriculture accounted for four percent of the gross domestic product in 1997 and employed 5.1 percent of the labor force. The major products of Barbados are cotton, sugar, vegetables, cut flowers, pork, chicken, sheep, and bananas.

## **Trade**

The majority of Barbados's exports are comprised of sugar, molasses, rum, chemicals, electrical components, and clothing. Tourism is also a quickly growing industry in the country. Barbados also imports a good amount of product from other countries, such as consumer goods, machinery, food stuffs, construction materials, fuel, and electrical components.

## **Landmarks**

The most prominent landmark in Barbados is the Gun Hill Signal Station. Built in 1818 and located in what is now known as the parish of St. George, the station provides a wonderful view of the entire island. In 1868, an officer stationed there carved a lion out a single block of stone. The lion still stands as a guard to the station. It was recently restored by the Barbados National Trust and now houses a collection of military memorabilia. There are also many festivals to take in while visiting Barbados, as well as many scenic views to enjoy.

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