

## ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA



**HISTORY:** Antigua was first inhabited by the Siboney ("stone people"), whose settlements date at least to 2400 BC. The Arawaks--who originated in Venezuela and gradually migrated up the chain of islands now called the Lesser Antilles--succeeded the Siboney. The warlike Carib people drove the Arawaks from neighboring islands but apparently did not settle on either Antigua or Barbuda.

Christopher Columbus landed on the islands in 1493, naming the larger one "Santa Maria de la Antigua." The English colonized the islands in 1632. Sir Christopher Codrington established the first large sugar estate in Antigua in 1674, and leased Barbuda to raise provisions for his plantations. Barbuda's only town is named after him. Codrington and others brought slaves from Africa's west coast to work the plantations.

Antiguan slaves were emancipated in 1834, but remained economically dependent on the plantation owners. Economic opportunities for the new freedmen were limited by a lack of surplus farming land, no access to credit, and an economy built on agriculture rather than manufacturing. Poor labor conditions persisted until 1939, which saw the birth of the trade union movement in Antigua and Barbuda.

The Antigua Trades and Labour Union became the political vehicle for Vere Cornwall Bird, who was elected as the Labour Union's president in 1943. The Antigua Labour Party (ALP), formed by Bird and other trade unionists, first ran candidates in the 1946 elections and became the majority party in 1951, beginning a long history of electoral victories.

Bird and the ALP were voted out of office in the 1971 general elections that swept the progressive labor movement into power, but returned to office in 1976, winning renewed mandates in every subsequent election under Vere Bird's leadership until 1994 and also under the leadership of his son, Lester Bird, until 2004.

In March 2004 the ALP lost power in national elections that gave the United Progressive Party (UPP) 13 of the 17 seats in Parliament. In the March 2009 elections, the ALP lost again to the Baldwin Spencer-led UPP, which won a slim majority, taking 9 of the 17 seats in Parliament.

**FOREIGN RELATIONS:** Antigua and Barbuda maintains diplomatic relations with the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the People's Republic of China, as well as with many Latin American countries and neighboring Eastern Caribbean states. It is a member of the United Nations, the Commonwealth of Nations, the Organization of American States, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, and the Eastern Caribbean's Regional Security System (RSS). Unlike some of its neighbors in the Eastern Caribbean, Antigua and Barbuda has withheld recognition of Taiwan and has established relations with the People's Republic of China.

**U.S.-ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA RELATIONS:** The United States has maintained friendly relations with Antigua and Barbuda since its independence. The United States has supported the Government of Antigua and Barbuda's effort to expand its economic base and to improve its citizens' standard of living. However, concerns over the lack of adequate regulation of the financial services sector prompted the U.S. Government to issue a financial advisory for Antigua and Barbuda in 1999. The advisory was lifted in 2001, but the U.S. Government continues to monitor the Government of Antigua and Barbuda's regulation of financial services. The United States also has been active in supporting post-hurricane disaster assistance and rehabilitation through the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and the Peace Corps. U.S. assistance is primarily channeled through multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), as well as through the USAID office in Bridgetown, Barbados. In addition, Antigua and Barbuda receives counter-narcotics assistance and benefits from U.S. military exercise-related and humanitarian civic assistance construction projects.

Antigua and Barbuda is strategically situated in the Leeward Islands near maritime transport lanes of major importance to the United States. Antigua has long hosted a U.S. military presence. The United States Air Force operates a satellite tracking station under a lease agreement with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda.

Antigua and Barbuda's location close to the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico makes it an attractive transshipment point for narcotics traffickers. To address these problems, the United States and Antigua and Barbuda have signed a series of counter-narcotic and counter-crime treaties and agreements, including a maritime law enforcement agreement (1995), subsequently amended to include over flight and order-to-land provisions (1996); a bilateral extradition treaty (1996); and a mutual legal assistance treaty (1996).

In 2005, Antigua and Barbuda had 239,804 stay-over visitors, with nearly 28% of Antigua and Barbuda's visitors coming from the United States. It is estimated that 4,500 Americans reside in the country.

The United States maintains no official presence in Antigua. The Ambassador and Embassy officers are resident in Barbados and travel to Antigua frequently. However, a U.S. consular agent resident in Antigua assists U.S. citizens in Antigua and Barbuda.

**GOVERNING JUSTLY AND DEMOCRATICALLY:** As head of state, Queen Elizabeth II is represented in Antigua and Barbuda by a governor general who acts on the advice of the prime minister and the cabinet. Antigua and Barbuda has a bicameral legislature: a 17-member Senate appointed by the governor general--mainly on the advice of the prime minister and the leader of the opposition--and a 17-member popularly elected House of Representatives. The prime minister is the leader of the majority party in the House and conducts affairs of state with the cabinet. The prime minister and the cabinet are responsible to the Parliament. Elections must be held at least every 5 years but may be called by the prime minister at any time. National elections were last held on March 12, 2009.

Constitutional safeguards include freedom of speech, press, worship, movement, and association. Antigua and Barbuda is a member of the eastern Caribbean court system. Jurisprudence is based on English common law.

**ECONOMIC GROWTH:** Antigua and Barbuda's service-based economy grew by 3.8% in 2007, experiencing its third consecutive year of strong growth. Construction, banking and insurance, communications, and wholesale and retail trade sectors were the main contributors to economic growth, which was driven by a construction boom in hotels and housing, as well as projects related to the 2007 Cricket World Cup. The tourism and hospitality sector has largely recovered after the decrease in tourism following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. It posted a strong performance in 2004, and in 2005 the sector was estimated at 50% of GDP.

To lessen its vulnerability to natural disasters and economic shocks, Antigua has sought to diversify its economy by encouraging growth in transportation, communications, Internet gambling, and financial services.

Antigua and Barbuda's currency is the Eastern Caribbean Dollar (EC\$), a regional currency shared among members of the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU). The Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) issues the EC\$, manages monetary policy, and regulates and supervises commercial banking activities in its member countries. The ECCB has kept the EC\$ pegged at EC\$2.7=U.S. \$1.

Antigua and Barbuda is a beneficiary of the U.S. Caribbean Basin Initiative that grants duty-free entry into the United States for many goods. In 2005, 7.7% of its total exports went to the United States, and 48.9% of its total imports came from the United States. Antigua and Barbuda also belongs to the predominantly English-speaking Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) and the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME).