

THE CARIBBEAN ISLANDS

MAPS

1. What are the two main groups of islands?



The Caribbean Islands are divided into geographical groups. The Greater Antilles include the large islands of Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. The Lesser Antilles describe the small islands that curve in an arc from Puerto Rico South to Trinidad, near the coast of Venezuela.

The Lesser Antilles are divided into the Leeward Islands in the North and Windward Islands in the South.

North of the Greater Antilles lie the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands, a group of small, scattered islands that are technically in the Atlantic, but are usually considered part of the Caribbean.

2. Are the islands diverse? Which islands are the smallest and the largest?

The islands are as diverse as they are numerous. Many are mountainous. Others are flat as pancakes. Some are covered in tropical jungle. Others are arid desert. Some began as coral reefs, others as undersea volcanoes. The largest, Cuba, is more than 500 miles across while others, such as Moustique, are a mere specks on the map.

3. What are the capitals of the following islands?

Greater Antilles		Lesser Antilles	
Islands	Capital	Islands	Capital
Cuba		Grenada	
Jamaica		Trinidad & Tobago	
Haiti		Barbados	
Dominican Republic		Dominica	
Puerto Rico		Montserrat	

4. In which hemisphere are the Caribbean Islands located?



LANGUAGES

5. How many languages are spoken in the Caribbean? Which language was spoken first?

About the same size as the Mediterranean, the Caribbean Sea stretches almost 1,900 miles from Barbados to the Yucatan Peninsula, where the Mayan civilization flourished and reached its peak around the year 1,000.

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Starting around 400 BC the Caribbean's indigenous people, the Arawak Indians sailed here and dug out canoes from their ancestral home in the Orinoco region in Guyana and Venezuela. They were a peaceful people who enjoyed the Caribbean's tranquillity and rich fishing waters and who had no word for "war".

In the 13th century the vicious Carib Indians migrated from the Guyana region of South America and brought an end to the Arawaks' peaceful existence. The man eating Caribs annihilated the Arawaks in the Windward and Leeward Islands and were making raids on Haiti and Jamaica when Christopher Columbus came to the New World.

The arrival of the Spanish marked the beginning of a new order and the end of both the Arawaks and the Caribs.

6. Which language was spoken second?

Columbus landed in the New World on October 12th 1492 on an island in the Bahamas now called Watling Island. He called it San Salvador – or "Holy Savior" – in gratitude for his safe passage.

Following in Columbus's wake the Conquistadors came in large numbers exploring virtually all of the Caribbean Islands. Within thirty years most of the Arawak and Carib Indians had perished through forced labor, brutality and disease.

The Spanish were more interested in reaping mineral wealth than establishing colonies and their holdings in the Caribbean became way stations for fleets carrying gold and silver plundered from Mexico and Peru. The Caribbean was the natural route for fleets carrying this wealth back to Europe. This route became known as the Spanish Main.

The 16th and 17th centuries saw the era of pirates, those seafaring rogues who hit among the Caribbean's countless isles and preyed on the galleons sailing for Spain.

At the same time, the English, Dutch and French established sugar plantations worked by thousands of slaves brought from West Africa. The European demand for sweet tea made sugar as valuable in those years as oil is today.

SOME ENGLISH SPEAKING ISLANDS



1. Antigua & Montserrat, Antigua & Barbuda, S^t Kitts & Nevis

The British Leeward Islands once were all colonies¹, but today the only ones remaining under the crown are Antigua and Montserrat. Antigua and Barbuda, St Kitts and Nevis are independent states.

Antigua draws yachtsmen from all over the world to take part in the famous race week sailboat races held here because of the reliable, challenging trade winds.

2. The Bahamas

The Bahamas is an independent member of the British Commonwealth. And this British heritage is evident in Parliament Square, with its pink colonial buildings. Fascinating remnants of history remain in the dungeons of

¹ British colonies.

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Fort Charlotte, where convicts and pirates spent their final days. Fort Fincastle, built like the prow of a ship, commands the hill above the Queen's Staircase, a sixty-six step climb hewed² from the cliff by slaves and later named for Queen Victoria.

The Bahamas' economy depends heavily on tourism, and with its endless sun and white sand beaches the Bahamas lives up to its promises.

The clear, shallow waters along the Bahamas coral reefs are superb places for bonefishing, and not surprisingly fishermen come from all over the world to try their luck at stalking these powerful game fish. Local outfitters are experts at finding the best spots where they hide and feed in the flats. Bonefishing is particularly popular with fly fishermen because it requires stalking the fish in water too shallow for outboat motors. A long, pinpoint cast produces explosive action.

The riches of the sea provide an exceptional bounty for the dinner plate, and one tantalizing dish is conch³. Conch is so popular with the locals that its export is prohibited to preserve it as a mainstay of Bahamian cuisine.

Gambling is legal here. But while the casino is popular with visitors, banking and tourism are the mainstays of the Bahamian economy. Its status as a tax haven, and bank secrecy laws, have made the Bahamas an international financial center popular with offshore companies, trusts and individuals.

3. Barbados

To the East of St Lucia lies Barbados, the former British island known for its rum and history of sugar plantations. It is the most densely populated Caribbean island and probably more than any other feels like a bit of England in the tropics. Its Atlantic coastline is very rugged with rough seas while its Caribbean side is blessed with beautiful white sand beaches.

4. Cayman Islands

The Cayman Islands, located just below Cuba, are the first choice for many Caribbean divers. The Caymans are little more than three coral reefs poking above the surface, surrounded by more coral reefs, and their waters are filled with an abundance of marine life, from multicolored fish to exotic coral formations.

5. Dominica

Dominica is a large, undeveloped island of mountains and dense rainforests, so rich that it contains many plants found in few other places in the world. It offers fabulous hiking trails through unspoiled jungle.

Rivers and waterfalls tumble from the mountains to the sea. Legend says there are 365 rivers here, one for each day of the year.

Hot springs and geothermal lakes complete the picture of the region's most untamed island.

6. Grenada

At the end of the Grenadines, as though saving the best for last, lies a jewel of an island – Grenada. Grenada is the Southernmost of the Windward Islands, and it achieved dubious fame in 1983 when the US army invaded to unseat a revolutionary government that had taken power in a bloody coup. Today the political problems are resolved and the island is going about the business of daily life, which is slow and easy.

Grenada is extremely fertile, or as the local say: "Drop a seed anywhere and it will grow." Agriculture remains the focus of the island and tourism barely ranks as a second industry.

The center of the island is a jungle of flowering plants, from oleander⁴ to hibiscus. Grenada is called the spice island because it produces more spices per square mile than any other place on earth, from cloves⁵ and ginger⁶ to a third of the world's nutmeg⁷.

² *Taillé (dans la roche).*

³ A large seashell.

⁴ *Laurier rose.*

⁵ *Clous de girofle.*

⁶ *Gingembre.*

⁷ *Noix de muscade (épice).*

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7. Jamaica

Jamaica is a place of dramatic landscape, perfect beaches and vibrant culture. The whole romantic and tragic history of the region was played out here: first, with the coming of the Arawaks, followed by the Spanish, the pirates and the British, who brought the plantation system from Barbados.

Jamaica produced the sound of reggae music, made famous by musicians such as Jimmy Cliff, Peter Tosh and Bob Marley.

8. St Lucia

St Lucia too is a rich, fertile island, densely covered in rainforest. It was originally settled by the French, but was taken by the British in 1803. Today, it is an independent nation with English the official language. But the influence of the French endures, reflected in the island's fine Creole cuisine and lilting⁸ patois spoken by the local population.

St Lucia has one of the Caribbean's most striking natural sites: the Pitons, two half-mile high, jungle-covered volcanic peaks that rise dramatically from the sea.

Nearby, Marigo Bay is a popular sight for moviemakers, including the setting for *Dr. Dolittle*⁹, appropriately marked by a resort named after the animal-loving veterinarian. Marigo Bay is a great place for water sports, from windsurfing to sailing.

9. St Vincent and the Grenadines

The last of the British Windward Islands are St Vincent and the Grenadines, which compete with the Virgin Islands as the finest yachting region in the Caribbean.

St Vincent is a beautiful, sleepy island just beginning to be discovered by tourists, and the Grenadines, so called because they lead to Grenada, are tiny specks with names like Bequia, Moustique, Canouan, and Petit St Vincent.

10. Trinidad & Tobago

Nowhere is Calypso more pervasive than in its birthplace on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago. Here in Trinidad West-African slaves mixed their rhythms with those of the Spanish colonizers to create the Afro-Caribbean blend that is synonymous with dancing and improvisation. Calypso is *impromptu* story telling and social commentary set to infectious rhythms.

The people of Trinidad's irrepressible urge to make music is probably best reflected in the steel drum. Originally fashioned from discarded oil barrels, the steel drum is now one of the most popular instruments in the Caribbean. Their sound is unmistakable and the steel band is an important part of everyday life.

11. US Virgin Islands

The US Virgin islands were purchased in 1917 from Denmark to help protect the Panama Canal. Today, St Thomas is thoroughly developed, but it still retains its natural beauty. It has fine white beaches, great sport fishing and diving, and excellent restaurants. It is the most populous of the three US Virgin Islands, which include St Croix and St John, and is geared toward crew-ship passengers. In the high season, as many as five ships a day put into port at Charlotte Amalie, and the local streets take on a carnival atmosphere.

Neighboring St John provides a completely different experience of the islands, offering a welcomed rest from the hurly-burly of St Thomas. St John sees very few tourists because its development has been closely controlled.

NOW, ON YOUR OWN!

Say which Caribbean island you would like to go to and why (100-200 words).

- Explain why people speak English there (history of the island).
- Give a short presentation of the political, economic and cultural landscape (Is the island independent, for example?).
- Define what kind of tourist attractions or activities appeal to you (Express your likes with gerunds).
- Compare your favorite island with the others.

⁸ Rythmé.

⁹ *Doctor Dolittle* (1998), comedy, starring Eddy Murphy, about a Doctor who finds out that he can understand what animals are saying, and the animals find out that he understands.