St Kitts & Nevis

Near-perfect packages – that’s how you might think of St Kitts and Nevis after a visit. The two-island nation combines beaches with the beauty of the mountains, plenty of activities to engage your body and some rich history to engage your mind. The legacies of the sugar industry have been recycled into pleasant plantation estates good for lunch or just a stay. And the local culture is almost a Caribbean cliché: mellow, friendly, familiar and with a pulsing soca beat.

But if the pair offer much that’s similar, they also differ in the details. St Kitts is the larger and feels that way, from the hustle of intriguing Basseterre to the resort enclave of Frigate Bay. You could spend a few days exploring all of its beaches, with their cool bars, water activities and pure vacation vibe. Circling the main part of the island, there’s plenty to see: the languid charms of the plantations and the astonishing bulk of Brimstone Fortress.

Nevis is a neater package. It has one volcanic mountain rather than a range and its one main road is a circle that takes you around the island in under two hours. There’s a handful of beaches with the usual fun, and Charleston, the charming main town, can be walked end to end in 15 minutes. History here centers on the big names of Horatio Nelson and Alexander Hamilton. Nature walks take you into the verdant upper reaches of the peak.

Even if you just stay on one island, frequent ferry service means that you can easily enjoy both.

**FAST FACTS**

- **Area** St Kitts: 68 sq miles; Nevis: 36 sq miles
- **Capital** St Kitts: Basseterre; Nevis: Charlestown
- **Country code** 869
- **Departure tax** St Kitts: US$22; Nevis: US$21
- **Famous for** Languid days, historic plantation inns
- **Language** English with a Creole or patois accent
- **Money** Eastern Caribbean dollar (ECS); ECS1 = US$0.38 = €0.24 = UK£0.19
- **Official name** Federation of St Christopher & Nevis
- **People** Kittitians, Nevisians
- **Phrase** Menono (I don’t know); get dat do (get that done)
- **Population** 46,000 (35,000 on St Kitts; 11,000 on Nevis)
- **Visa** Not required for most nationalities; see p515
HIGHLIGHTS

- Brimstone Hill Fortress (p505) Explore the only Unesco World Heritage site in the Leeward Islands
- Plantation lunches Take a long lunch at a plantation estate while touring either island, even if you don’t stay at one
- Basseterre (p499) Explore the intriguing, shambolic and surprising vibrant capital of St Kitts
- Frigate Bay Beach (p502) Enjoy the mood – fun-filled by day, rum-fueled at night
- Nevis hikes (p511) Surmount the volcano, sample wild fruit, spot a monkey and more

ITINERARIES

- Two Days On either island, spend your first day at the beach (Frigate Bay on St Kitts, Pinney’s on Nevis) then spend your second day circling the island and exploring the capital.
- Four Days Do the two-day highlights for both islands.
- One Week Split your time between the two islands. Add in a lot more beach time as the extra days let you explore the sandy shores at will, looking for a favorite. Consider a night or two at a plantation inn.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

There’s really no bad time to go to St Kitts and Nevis. The hot Caribbean summer contrasts with cool low-season deals at the resorts.

Winter days average a temperature of 81°F (27°C) while summers shoot up to a still respectable 86°F (30°C).

Annual rainfall averages 55in and is fairly consistent throughout the year. The driest months are February to June, and the hurricane (and rainy) season is July to November, although even during this period the weather can be gorgeous.

High-season rates start from around mid-December and go to mid-April. The best time to visit, price- and weather-wise, is November and early December.

HISTORY

The island known today as St Kitts was called Liamiuga (Fertile Island) by the aggressive Carib people, who arrived about 1300 AD and chased out the peaceable agrarian bands who’d been in the area for hundreds of years. When Columbus sighted the island on his second voyage to the New World, in 1493, he named it St Christopher after his patron saint, later shortened to 'St Kitts.'

Columbus used the Spanish word for ‘snow,’ nieves, to name Nevis, presumably because the clouds shrouding its mountain reminded him of a snowcapped peak. Native Caribs knew the island as Oualie (Land of Beautiful Waters).

St Kitts and Nevis are the oldest British colonies in the Caribbean. Sir Thomas Warner founded a colony way back in 1623, only to be joined soon after by the French, a move the British only tolerated long enough to massacre the native Caribs. In one day, 2000 Caribs were slaughtered, causing blood to run for days at the site now known as Bloody Point.

A century and a half of Franco-British battles culminated locally in 1782, when a force of 8000 French troops laid siege to the important British stronghold at Brimstone Hill (p505) on St Kitts. Although they won this battle, they lost the war and the 1783 Treaty of Paris brought the island firmly under British control. During this era sugar plantations thrived on the islands.

Nevis had a colonial history similar to St Kitts. In 1628 Warner sent a party of about 100 colonists to establish a British settlement on the west coast of the island. Although the original settlement, near Cotton Ground, fell to an earthquake in 1680, Nevis eventually developed one of the most affluent plantation societies in the Eastern Caribbean. As on St Kitts, most of the island’s wealth was built upon the labor of African slaves who toiled in the island’s sugarcane fields.

By the late 18th century, Nevis, buoyed by the attraction of its thermal baths, had become a major retreat for Britain’s rich and famous.

In 1816 the British linked St Kitts and Nevis with Anguilla and the Virgin Islands as a sin-

HOW MUCH?

- Cold Carib beer EC$5
- Exotic fruits growing wild Free
- Two-tank dive US$85
- Visit to Alexander Hamilton’s birthplace US$5
- Night in a historic plantation inn US$200+