

Antigua & Barbuda

On Antigua, life is a beach. It may seem like a cliché, but this improbably shaped splotch of land is ringed with beaches of the finest white sand, made all the more dramatic by the azure waters, which are so clear they'll bring a tear to your eye or a giggle to your holiday-hungry throat.

And if life on Antigua is a beach, its isolated neighbor Barbuda is a beach. The pair couldn't be any more different. While the first looks like something nasty under a microscope, the latter is just one smooth, sandy low-rise amidst the reef-filled waters. Birds, especially the huffing and puffing frigates, greatly outnumber people.

Back on Antigua, there are lots of people, many famous. Guitar-picker Eric Clapton, rag-trader Giorgio Armani, huckster scribe Ken Follett and taste-maker for the masses Oprah all have winter homes here. Some of the Caribbean's most exclusive resorts shelter in the myriad bays and inlets. But mere mortals thrive here as well. Visitors of every budget will find a beach they can – almost – call their own.

Meanwhile, the locals take the visiting mobs with a dash of grace that always has the backing of an English stiff upper lip should the situation get too dire. The island's British roots are on display in many ways, but especially when there's a good cricket test match on. Memories of the old empire, however, are far removed from the island's beat, which has some of the liveliest steel-drum music in the islands.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** Antigua: 108 sq miles; Barbuda: 62 sq miles
- **Capital** Antigua: St John's; Barbuda: Codrington
- **Country code** ☎ 268
- **Departure tax** Antigua: US\$20; Barbuda: none
- **Famous for** Antigua: cricket; Barbuda: frigate bird
- **Language** English
- **Money** Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$); EC\$1 = US\$0.38 = €0.24 = UK£0.19
- **Official name** Antigua and Barbuda
- **People** Antiguan, Barbudans
- **Phrase** No big ting
- **Population** Antigua: 72,000; Barbuda: 1250
- **Visa** Not required for US, EU or Commonwealth visitors; see p538



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Nelson's Dockyard** (p529) Visit the restored 18th-century British naval base; it makes for a fascinating excursion
- **Hawksbill Bay** (p527) Enjoy a string of four stunning beaches where you may just doff it all
- **Codrington Lagoon** (p533) Visit the Caribbean's largest rookery, home to thousands of frigate birds
- **Fig Tree Drive** (p528) Stop at a fruit stand under the dense canopy to sample an island treat: a black pineapple
- **St John's** (p523) Join the hubbub of a classic West Indian town and savor the flavors of the market

ITINERARIES

- **Three or Four Days** Spend a day wandering St John's, taking in the museum, cathedral and market. Head south along the coast, sampling beaches, and then across Fig Tree Dr to Falmouth Harbour and Nelson's Dockyard. Spend the next day or two roaming the rugged east coast, Devil's Bridge, and the fabulous beaches at Half Moon and Nonsuch Bays. Consider a kayak nature trip.
- **One Week** Do everything above and then force yourself to spend another day searching out your favorite beach. After that, make a two-day trip to Barbuda to relax on isolated sandy shores and for some incredible bird-watching.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

There's really no bad time to go to Antigua and Barbuda. The heat of the Caribbean summer is matched by hot low-season deals at the resorts.

In January and February, the coolest months, the daily high temperature averages 81°F (27°C), while the nightly low tempera-

ture averages 72°F (22°C). In July and August, the hottest months, the high averages 86°F (30°C) and the low 77°F (25°C).

Antigua is relatively dry, averaging about 45in of rain annually. The wettest months are September to November, when measurable precipitation occurs, on average, eight days each month. February to April is the driest period, with an average of three rainy days each month.

HISTORY

Early Times to the 17th Century

The first permanent residents in the area are thought to have been migrating Arawaks, who called today's Antigua 'Wadadli,' a name still commonly used today. They first established agricultural communities about 4000 years ago. Around AD 1200 the Arawaks were forced out by invading Caribs, who used the islands as bases for their forays in the region, but apparently didn't settle them.

Columbus sighted Antigua in 1493 and named it after a church in Seville, Spain. In 1632 the British colonized Antigua, establishing a settlement at Parham, on the east side of the island. The settlers started planting indigo and tobacco, but a glut in the supply of those crops soon drove down prices, leaving growers looking for something new.

In 1674 Sir Christopher Codrington arrived on Antigua and established the first sugar plantation, Betty's Hope. By the end of the century, a plantation economy had developed, huge numbers of slaves were imported, and the central valleys were deforested and planted with cane. To feed the slaves, Codrington leased the island of Barbuda from the British Crown and planted it with food crops.

Nelson & Co

As Antigua prospered, the British built numerous fortifications around the island, turning it into one of their most secure bases in the Caribbean. Today's Nelson's Dockyard (see p529) was continually expanded and improved throughout the 18th century. Other forts included Fort James (see p525) near St John's.

The military couldn't secure the economy, however, and in the early 1800s the sugar market began to bottom out. With the abolition of slavery in 1834, the plantations went into a steady decline. Unlike on some other Caribbean islands, the land was not turned

HOW MUCH?

- **Rum punch on the beach** US\$5
- **Round-trip between Antigua and Barbuda by air** US\$200
- **Beachside double room** US\$300
- **Short local bus ride** EC\$1.50
- **Tasty rock lobster dinner** EC\$80