

Car Ferry: *see* **Ferry**

The Caribbean The Caribbean is comprised of many **islands** and countries that encompass 1.68 million km² of land that frame the Caribbean Sea, which is 2.64 million km² in area. The Caribbean consists of over 7000 islands, islets, **reefs** and **cays**, and is governed by 36 different nations. The Islands of the Caribbean are divided into the Greater Antilles, which include the larger, more northern, islands (Cuba, **Hispaniola** (made up of Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Jamaica and Puerto Rico) and the Lesser Antilles which include the smaller volcanic islands that make up the southern arc of the Caribbean. The Lesser Antilles are further divided into the **Leeward Islands** (from the US **Virgin Islands** to Guadeloupe) and the **Windward Islands** (from Dominica to Grenada).

Despite being located almost entirely (with the exception of most of the **Bahamas**) between the **Tropic of Cancer** and the **Equator**, there is a great deal of geographic diversity within the confines of what is known as the Antilles. For example, Aruba was at some point joined to the South American mainland, which is reflected by its fauna. The same can be said of Trinidad, which was connected to the mainland as recently as 8000 BP (years before the present). In contrast, Tobago, although politically part of Trinidad and Tobago, is ecologically closer to the rest of the Antilles than it is to South America. Though the Bahamas and **Bermuda** are actually situated in the North Atlantic, they are considered part of the Caribbean due to the cultural ties to the rest of the Caribbean nations. Although Bermuda is not considered part of the Caribbean from a geographic viewpoint, some include it as part of the 'Greater Caribbean'. Some other destinations that are geographically not strictly within the Caribbean are commonly included within Caribbean tour packages, such as all the coasts of the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico and even some locations within the North American waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The early inhabitants of the Caribbean basin were the Paleo-indians, mostly collectors and gatherers of food as well as hunters of big game, and did not practise agriculture or used stone tools. They first reached the Greater

Antilles from Central America about 7,000 BP and colonized Cuba and Hispaniola, but never settled in the Lesser Antilles. They were followed by Meso-indians (about 3,000 BP) who were more technologically sophisticated and reached the Greater Antilles from South America but did not settle in the Lesser Antilles (with the exception of St Thomas). They also lacked agricultural skills, being mostly gatherers and fishers. Only a few of them survived until the arrival of the Europeans.

Meso-indians were supplanted in the Caribbean basin by the Neo-Indians, comprising two distinct groups: the Arawaks and the Caribs. The Arawaks originated in South America. Arawaks were mostly farmers who sometimes lived in stable villages. By the time of **Columbus'** arrival in 1492, there were at least 74 Arawak tribes, ranging from South America to the Greater Antilles.

The Caribs came from the Orinoco region and followed the Arawaks' path of colonization. They colonized the Lesser Antilles about 1000 BP. By the time of Columbus, the Caribs could be found in what are today northern Brazil, Guyana, Venezuela and the Lesser Antilles, while the Arawaks dominated in the islands north of Venezuela, Trinidad and the Greater Antilles. The Caribs also practised agriculture but, because they tended to move more in pursuit of aggressive expansion, they depended on hunting, **fishing** and collecting more than did the Arawaks.

It is difficult to determine the population size of these indigenous people, with estimations raging from 50,000 up to 500,000 in the Antilles at the time of Columbus' arrival. The Native American populations declined drastically with the arrival of the Europeans. There is an emerging consensus that most of the deaths of Native Americans were the result of the introduction of Old World diseases.

The climate of the Caribbean varies little, with an average temperature of about 28°C (79°F) in July/August to 24°C (75°F) in January/February. The rainy season occurs during the summer months and the dry season occurs during the winter months. In addition to being subject to natural disasters such as earthquakes and volcanic events, the Caribbean is affected by **hurricanes** between June and November, with the peak of the hurricane season being in

September. Weather during peak tourist season (winter months) is typically ideal for water activities of all kinds, including fishing, **snorkelling** and **scuba-diving**. Many of the islands offer easy access to **coral reefs**, and often large hotels offer scuba certification for their guests.

Caribbean waters are clear and warm, with an average temperature of 24°C (75°F). The waters of the Caribbean are naturally nutrient poor; however, they are fed, via the passages in the Lesser Antilles, by both the Amazon and Orinoco rivers, with the inflow intensity for the top layers of water peaking during autumn and lowest during spring. The Caribbean Sea has low carbon productivity (< 150 g C/m/year), which means that, despite high biodiversity, commercial fishing was never a major industry in the area. Caribbean waters exit through the passage between the Yucatán Peninsula and Cuba, feeding the Gulf of Mexico, from which a major ocean current, the **Gulf Stream**, is formed.

Historically, agriculture was a basic source of income for almost every island in the Caribbean and was present in the form of large commercial plantations and small individual subsistence farms. Agricultural practices were difficult due to the ruggedness of many of the islands, with less than one-third of each island being suitable for the practice. In addition, there were numerous weather events such as floods, droughts and hurricanes that threatened crops. Over time, loss of land due to population increases, losses of farm labour and foreign competition have contributed to a drastic decline of agriculture in the Caribbean.

Today, the Caribbean economy is based heavily on tourism and is the second most desired destination for North American vacationers. By 1998 it was estimated that this industry provided about 3 million jobs in the region, generating about US\$38 billion in economic activity, which constitutes about 35% of the region's GDP. The largest influx of tourists is made up of those travelling on cruise ships. The cruise ship sector is growing at more than 15% per year. About 46% of tourists come from the USA, followed by Europe (26%), other Caribbean countries (7%) and Canada (5%). The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 had a big impact on this activity, with a reduction of up to 20% of tourism in the months following those events, despite heavy discounts offered

by local hotels and airlines. However, the industry has bounced back and the whole sector can be considered 'back on its feet'. According to the **Caribbean Tourism Organization**, there will be 31.5 million tourists by 2010, which represents an average yearly increase of 4.5%.

The history of tourism in the Caribbean has always been influenced by political events. Back in the 1950s, Cuba and Haiti were the top Caribbean destinations promoted by an industry that took off after WWII. Caribbean tourism was aimed at adults interested in fulfilling the 'Four S's': sun, sea, sand and sex. Soon tourism became the second largest source of revenue for Cuba after sugar production, and the 1955 law that permitted the installation of casinos attracted further foreign investment in the island.

After the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the US economic embargo imposed in 1963, tourism into the island declined drastically. Something similar occurred in Haiti, although for different causes: political turmoil, crime and fear of AIDS. Today tourist destinations have diversified greatly, with no country attracting more than 12% of all Caribbean visitors to the region. The origin of visitors has also diversified, with Americans visiting mostly Puerto Rico and the Bahamas while Europeans and Canadians prefer the more southern islands.

When travelling to the Caribbean, tourists must obtain and carry proper passport identification. The top two destinations for travellers are the Bahamas and Jamaica; however, Barbados, Antigua/Barbuda and Haiti also receive a great number of tourists each year. These countries and others throughout the Caribbean have an extensive tourist industry boasting expensive resorts that offer luxury accommodations and a wide variety of outdoor activities, including **deep sea fishing**, snorkelling and diving, while others are still struggling to build the infrastructure necessary to support the industry, such as St Vincent and the Grenadines. **Marine mammal**-watching tours are becoming more prevalent on some of the more visited islands, while other, smaller islands struggle to move from marine exploitation, in the form of **whaling**, to **whale watching**, after seeing the success of their neighbouring countries.

Many Caribbean countries have summer carnivals and street festivals that welcome tourists. In addition, there are usually plenty of

activities to satisfy the tourist's desire for night life such as local bars and live music.

Weddings are popular events among tourists. There are many wedding services throughout the Caribbean that offer planning services to help tourists with their arrangements.

As with any source of income, there are pros and cons of building an economy based on tourism. Proponents of tourism claim that foreign exchange is gained, jobs are created and local revenue is increased. In addition, those that support a high level of tourism claim that it brings a renewed interest in preserving the Caribbean culture and history, by keeping local craft trades alive and rebuilding historic areas. Critics propose that the negative **impacts** of tourism have outweighed any benefits, by claiming that although foreign exchange has increased, the distribution of those earnings is low. In the Bahamas, for example, only 15 cents of each US dollar spent by the tourists remain in the island, due to the fact that most tourists prepay their trip in another country. Thus, much of the revenue stays in the hands of tourist operations, which are owned by foreigners, with local people employed in low-paid service jobs.

To overcome these problems, countries like Jamaica and the Dominican Republic are building large resorts, so that a greater percentage of the money spent by the tourists stays locally. However, that is not an easy option, given that such projects require large investments, and capital is rarely available locally. In order to keep more hard currency locally, some Caribbean governments have attempted to impose taxes on tourists. These attempts have met with strong opposition by **tour operators**, which, combined with the strong competition from nearby locations, has proved a failure.

Other strategies to keep tourists' money locally seem to work better. These include the development of **ecotourism** and the offering of cultural experience, through the renovation of historic sites and buildings.

Some claim that the influx of luxury goods has caused a change in local culture to a more materialistic society. In addition, there has been concern over environmental damage caused by the tourism industry such as pollution, beach erosion, due to the removal of sand for construction, depletion of seafood resources, as well as coral reef degradation.

More recently, an alternative has been proposed and implemented in some places: sustainable tourism. Spearheaded by The Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST), a non-profit organization chartered in 1997, they have developed collaborative environmental activities within the hotel and tourism sector, developed in order to promote an effective management of natural resources within a framework of sustainable development.

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Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA)

The Caribbean Hotel Association is an organization that has been in existence since 1959 to promote tourism in the region of the **Caribbean**. It was established originally under the name Caribbean Tourism Association, to bring together members of the hospitality industry in the Caribbean so that they could have a forum to address common issues affecting their businesses. Its members include hotels, airlines, restaurant suppliers, advertising agencies, public relation agencies and **travel agents**. The organization changed its name to the Caribbean Hotel Association in 1962, becoming focused largely on marketing the Caribbean region, using the region's tropical beauty and natural **resources**. In recent years the organization has added industrial development to its focus, to increase the Caribbean's marketability, and have developed a variety of programmes to accomplish this goal. Some of these programmes include the Caribbean Marketplace, the Caribbean Gold Book and the Caribbean Hotel Association Reservation Management Systems (CHARMS). CHARMS proved to be one of the more successful programmes, generating almost US\$7 million for the organization's 849 member hotels, accounting for approximately 125,476 rooms, ranging from guesthouses to resorts in the year 2000.

Today, CHA is trying to enhance the development of the industry by focusing also on product improvement. They have done this by establishing the Caribbean Hospitality Training Institute, the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism and the Caribbean Culinary Federation to improve the quality of hotels, by addressing training, development and management of hotel products in order to increase their competitiveness.