

# 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

over to former slaves when the plantations went under, but was instead consolidated under the ownership of a few landowners. Consequently, the lot of most people only worsened. Many former slaves moved off the plantations and into shantytowns, while others crowded onto properties held by the church.

A military-related construction boom during WWII, and the development of a tourist industry during the postwar period, helped spur economic growth (although the shantytowns that remain along the outskirts of St John's are ample evidence that not everyone has benefited).

In 1967, after more than 300 years of colonial rule, Antigua achieved a measure of self-government as an Associated State of the UK. On November 1, 1981, it achieved full independence.

### Nest of Birds

Vere Cornwall (VC) Bird became the nation's first prime minister, and despite leading a government marred by political scandals, he held that position through four consecutive terms. He stepped down in 1994 to be succeeded by his son Lester.

Another son, Vere Bird Jr, received international attention in 1991 as the subject of a judicial inquiry that investigated his involvement in smuggling Israeli weapons to the Medellín drug cartel. As a consequence of the inquiry, Vere Bird Jr was pressured into resigning his cabinet post, but was allowed to keep his parliamentary position. A third son of VC Bird, Ivor, was convicted of cocaine smuggling in 1995.

Throughout the five-term family stranglehold on government, controversy continued to surround the Birds. In 1997, Prime Minister Lester Bird announced that a group of ecologically sensitive nearby islands (including Guiana Island) was being turned over to Malaysian developers to build a 1000-room hotel, an 18-hole golf course and a casino. This was met with widespread protest from environmentalists and remains mired in lawsuits. In 1999, VC Bird died, aged 89.

Finally, in March 2004, the Birds' reign of the 'aviary' (as Antigua had become known) ended. Their Antigua Labour Party (ALP) had held sway in government for a majority of the time following the first universal suffrage elections in 1951.

The United Progressive Party won a landslide victory and Baldwin Spencer became prime minister. In the years since, the government has struggled with the poverty found across much of the island. It has promoted tourism while at the same time edging politically closer to Cuba and Venezuela. It has also challenged the US ban on internet gambling sites and has had some success with the World Trade Organization. Many of these sites are based in Antigua.

### THE CULTURE

Away from the resorts, Antigua retains its traditional West Indian character, albeit with a strong British stamp. It's manifested in the gingerbread architecture found around the capital, the popularity of steel pan (steel band), calypso and reggae music, and in festivities, such as Carnival. English traditions also play an important role, as is evident in the national sport of cricket.

Many Barbudans originally come from or have spent time living on their sister island, Antigua, and favor the quieter pace of life on the more isolated Barbuda. In fact, many Barbudans working in tourism are happy with the trickle of tourists that the remote island attracts, and have been reluctant to court the kind of development Antigua has seen.

Approximately 90% of the 72,000 people who live on Antigua are of African descent. There are also small minority populations of British, Portuguese and Lebanese ancestry. The population of Barbuda is approximately 1250, with most of African descent.

Besides the Anglican Church, Antiguans belong to a host of religious denominations, which include Roman Catholic, Moravian, Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist, Lutheran and Jehovah's Witness. On Sundays, services at the more fundamentalist churches draw such crowds that roads are blocked and drivers pray for divine intervention.

### SPORTS

One of the best things Britain did for the West Indies was to introduce the local populace to cricket. It soon became the national passion of Antigua and is played everywhere – on beaches, in backyards or anywhere there's some flat, open ground. National and international games were long played at the fabled Antigua Recreation Ground in St John's.

However, important matches are now played at the new 20,000-seat Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, 4 miles east of St John's. It was built for the 2007 Cricket World Cup, but has caused controversy with such issues as cost over-runs.

Although the West Indies team has fallen from the dizzying heights of the 1970s and early '80s, the game is followed religiously, and the atmosphere at matches ripples with excitement. To see a match, ask around, as schedules change often, depending on the travel plans of various teams.

Viv Richards (King Viv or the 'Master-Blaster,' as he was known in his heyday), who hails from Antigua, is one of the most famous cricketers of the modern game. Known for his aggressive style of batting, he became captain of the West Indies team, and captained 27 wins in 50 tests between 1980 and 1991. These days, he does commentary for the BBC as well as some coaching.

Soccer and basketball are increasing in popularity, and national and club soccer games can produce much the same atmosphere as cricket.

## ARTS

Reggae and zouk (the latter means 'party,' and is a rhythmic music that originated in Martinique and Guadeloupe in the 1980s) are both popular on the island. You'll also hear calypso, a style of singing rooted in slave culture that was developed as a means of communication when slaves weren't allowed to speak, and soca, a rhythmic, more soulful style of calypso. By far the most popular musical style on Antigua is steel pan (also known as steel band or steel drum), the melodic percussion music that comes from tapping oil drums topped with specially made tin pans. Originally from Trinidad, the form has been adapted in Antigua, and has become an integral part of the annual Carnival and Christmas festivities.

Look for the band Burning Flames, a local legend that leads Carnival and is linked to the legendary soca master Arrow on nearby Montserrat.

## ENVIRONMENT

### The Land

Unlike its, at times, smoking neighbor to the southwest, Montserrat, Antigua is not dominated by a dramatic volcano. However, the

southwest corner is volcanic in origin and quite hilly, rising to 1319ft at Boggy Peak, the island's highest point. The rest of the island, which is predominantly of limestone and coral formation, is given to a more gently undulating terrain of open plains and scrubland.

Antigua's land area is 108 sq miles. The island is vaguely rounded in shape, averaging about 11 miles across. The deeply indented coastline is cut by numerous coves and bays, many lined with white-sand beaches.

Barbuda, 25 miles north of Antigua, is nearly as flat as the surrounding ocean. A low-lying coral island, Barbuda's highest point is a mere 145ft above sea level. The west side of Barbuda encompasses the expansive Codrington Lagoon, which is bound by a long, undeveloped barrier beach of blind-lying white sand.

## Wildlife

As a consequence of colonial-era deforestation for sugar production, most of Antigua's vegetation is dryland scrub. The island's marshes and salt ponds attract a fair number of stilts, egrets, ducks and pelicans, while hummingbirds are found in garden settings.

Guiana Island, off the northeast coast, has one of Antigua's largest remaining tracts of forest. It's the sole habitat for the tropical mockingbird, and supports the largest colony of nesting seabirds on Antigua. These include tropic birds, roseate terns, brown noddies and endangered whistling ducks. Unfortunately, Guiana Island and eight smaller adjacent islands are in the cross-hairs of resort developers and the battle to preserve them is ongoing. You can visit this still-magical area as part of kayak tours offered by Adventure Antigua; see p537 for details.

Barbuda's Codrington Lagoon has the largest frigate-bird colony in the Lesser Antilles. For more information on frigate birds, see p534.

## FOOD & DRINK

Antigua has a vast range of restaurants. Many are fairly renowned and standards are high. You can snack on savory local fare at simple places in St John's or splash out at a top-end resort with a top-name chef. Seafood is obviously the focus, and many people find the rock lobster, a hulking crustacean that has a succulent tail but no claws, actually affordable. (And you'll be forgiven if after a few rum

punches you're humming a tune by the B-52s while digging in.)

Look for various Creole and other spicy accents to many dishes. Okra plays an unappreciated supporting role in many of the piquant pork and goat stews. Also, try one of the locally grown black pineapples, which are quite sweet, rather small and, despite the name, not at all black. On Barbuda, your choices are very limited and run closer to true local fare.

Cavalier and English Harbour are two locally made rums, and Antigua Brewery produces its own bog-standard lager under the Wadadli label.

## ANTIGUA

Unlike its smooth-edged neighbors, Antigua looks like something that went 'splat' on the pavement. But oh if everything that went splat were this good. Its myriad craggy inlets and corrugated coasts hug scores of perfect little beaches, while the sheltered bays have provided refuge for boats, from Admiral Nelson to pirates to sun-scorched yachtsies.

There's a distinct English accent to this classic Caribbean island with its narrow roads punctuated by candy-colored villages. You can explore most everything quickly, although the world-class sites of historic English Harbour will steal hours from your day. Take the time to savor the sand and sea: the former bright white, the latter beguiling blue.

### Getting There & Away

For information on getting to/from Antigua, see p538.

Antigua is connected to Barbuda by air and ferry; for details see p539.

### Getting Around

#### BICYCLE

**Paradise Boat Sales** (☎ 460-7125; Jolly Harbour; www.paradiseboats.com) rents out mountain bikes from US\$15 per day with discounts for longer periods.

**Bike Plus** (☎ 462-2453; Independence Dr, St John's) rents out a range of bikes from US\$17.50 per day.

Some hotels also rent out bikes.

#### BUS

Antigua's buses are privately owned and are predominantly minivans, although there are

a few midsize buses. Fares cost EC\$1.50 to EC\$5. Buses from St John's to Falmouth and English Harbour are plentiful, cost around EC\$3 and take about 30 minutes. They start early and generally run until about 7pm. Rush hour is particularly bustling, with lots of buses between 4pm and 5pm. There are very few buses on Sunday.

The main bus station (West Bus Station) in St John's is opposite the public market. All destinations are allocated a number, and each bus displays a number that indicates where it's heading. Notices are posted about with destination numbers. Buses line up in a row and don't actually leave until they're full. So just find the bus you need, hop on, and hope it fills up and leaves before you melt.

Buses to the east side of the island leave from the East Bus Station, near the corner of Independence Ave and High St, and go to Piggots and Willikies. The numbering system doesn't apply here, so you'll need to ask around to find your bus.

There's no practical bus service to the airport, Dickenson Bay or other resort areas on the northern part of the island.

#### CAR

There are more than a dozen car-rental agencies on Antigua including all the major brands. Most have representatives crammed into one tiny office at the airport. Agencies in the following list rent out cars for around US\$50 a day, but can drop to as low as US\$40 in the off-season. Many of the companies also offer basic 4WDs for the same rates, or for US\$5 to US\$10 more. Shop online before arriving, for the best deals.

All but the newest rental cars are generally quite beat, mostly because of the poor road conditions. Your best bet (though by no means a sure thing) for getting a roadworthy car is to book with one of the international agencies. Most car-rental agencies will deliver cars to your hotel free of charge.

Rental companies include the following:

**Avis** (☎ 462-2840; www.avis.com)

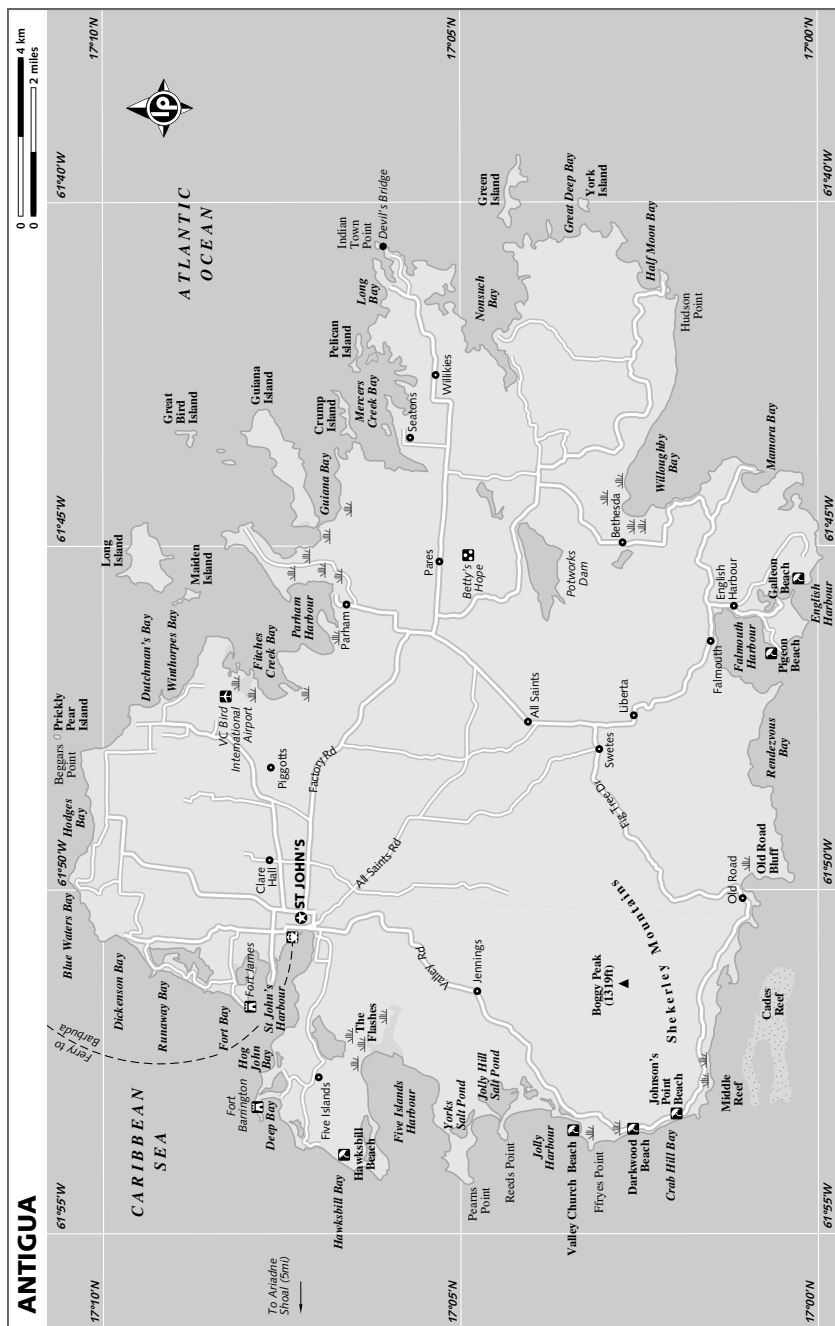
**Dollar** (☎ 462-0362; www.dollar.com)

**Hertz** (☎ 462-4114; www.hertz.com)

**Thrifty Rent-A-Car** (☎ 462-9532; www.thrifty.com)

Numerous gas stations are scattered around the island, including one just outside the airport terminal. Gas sells for around EC\$10 per gallon.

ANTIGUA & BARBUDA



ANTIGUA

CARIBBEAN SEA

ATLANTIC OCEAN

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61°40'W

61°45'W

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61°55'W

**TAXI**

Taxi fares are regulated by the government, but be sure to confirm the fare with the driver before riding away. Fares from the airport are US\$12 to St John's, US\$16 to Runaway or Dickenson Bays, US\$24 to Jolly Harbour and US\$31 to English Harbour. Fares are for up to four persons; a fifth person costs an additional 25%. Traveling around Antigua by taxi costs about US\$90 per car for a half-day tour that takes in Nelson's Dockyard and Shirley Heights.

In St John's there's a taxi stand opposite the Public Market, and taxi drivers also hang around Heritage Quay.

Taxis are identifiable by number plates beginning with 'H.'

**ST JOHN'S**

pop 36,000

Intriguingly shabby, St John's is worth a day's exploration. Good cafés, idiosyncratic shops, a grand cathedral, a cute little museum, a thriving market and more line the chaotic streets of the fairly compact center. There's a melange of buildings ranging from 19th-century survivors to modern-day horrors.

Almost half the island's residents live in and around St John's, which is busy during the day from Monday to Friday.

**Orientation**

Most of the town's group-tourist activity is centered on two harbor-front complexes – the modern Heritage Quay, where cruise-ship passengers disembark, and Redcliffe Quay, where a cluster of period stone buildings and wooden huts have been transformed into gift shops, watch-purveyors and cafés. Popeshead St is the main route to the north and the island's main resort area.

**Information****BOOKSTORES**

**Best of Books** (☎ 562-3198; St Mary's St; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Good selection of international titles and newspapers, and a children's book section.

**Map Shop** (☎ 461-4749; St Mary's St) Old and new maps plus a small, funky book selection.

**EMERGENCY**

**Police** (Newgate St) This is the main police station in town. The police headquarters (☎ 462-0125; American Rd) is on the eastern outskirts of St John's.

**INTERNET ACCESS**

**Kangaroo Express** (☎ 562-3895; Redcliffe St; per hr US\$12; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-7pm Sun) Surf, burn discs and print.

**MEDICAL SERVICES**

**Holberton Hospital** (☎ 462-0251; Hospital Rd) Located just off Queen Elizabeth Hwy. (A new facility, Mt St John's Medical Centre, is set to open in 2008. It's the grand-looking structure on a knoll off Queen Elizabeth Hwy just east of St John's.)

**Old Nox Pharmacy** (☎ 562-4721; St Mary's St; ☎ 8:30am-10pm) Small but useful selection of medicines.

**MONEY**

ATMs are easily found throughout St John's. **Royal Bank of Canada** (High St; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon & 2-4pm Fri)

**POST**

**Post office** (Long St; ☎ 8:15am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Thu, 8:15am-noon & 1-5pm Fri)

**TELEPHONE**

There is a row of pay phones along Temple St, south of St John's Anglican Cathedral.

**Cable & Wireless** (Thames St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Card phones can be found outside the building. Buy the cards inside.

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

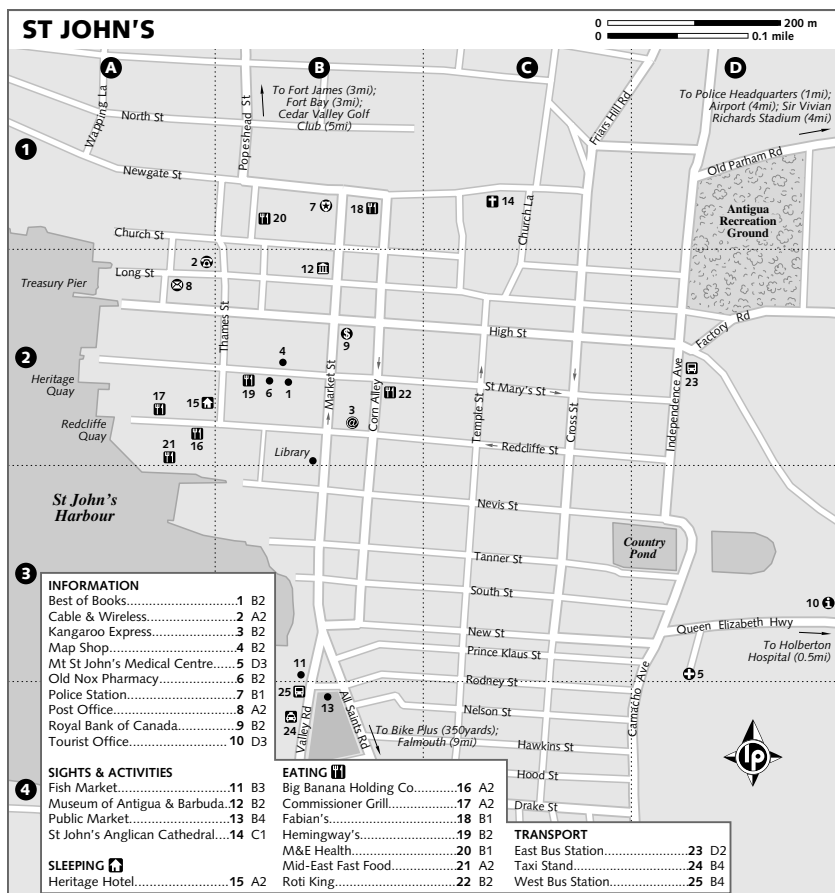
**Tourist office** (☎ 462-0480; www.antigua-barbuda.com; Ministry of Tourism, Queen Elizabeth Hwy; ☎ 8am-4:30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-3pm Fri) Buried in a government building housing bureaucracies.

**Sights & Activities****MUSEUM OF ANTIGUA & BARBUDA**

This community-run museum (☎ 462-1469; cnr Market & Long Sts; adult/child EC\$8/free; ☎ 8:30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) occupies the old courthouse, a stone building that dates from 1750. It has a heart-warming collection of displays on island history that appears to have been assembled by an especially keen group of students.

It has a touchable section with stone pestles and conch-shell tools, and modest displays on natural history, the colonial era and the struggle for emancipation. The most popular exhibit is the well-worn bat of former West Indies' cricket team captain Vivian Richards. The section on shipwrecks includes a fair bit of philosophical discussion.

Ask for the brochure showing the town's historical buildings.



## ST JOHN'S ANGLICAN CATHEDRAL

This twin-spired **cathedral** (btwn Newgate & Long Sts) is the town's dominant landmark and dominates the town as seen from the harbor. Conversely, its harbor views are sweeping. The original church dated back to 1681, but the current baroque-style stone structure was constructed in 1847, after a devastating earthquake.

The cathedral interior is unusual in that it's completely encased in pitch pine, creating a church-within-a-church effect that feels something like the inside of an old sailing ship. The interior can be viewed when the caretaker is around, which is usually until 5pm. The adjoining cemetery is a popular local picnic spot and de facto park.

## MARKETS

Even if you have no interest in self-catering, the large **Public Market** (Market St; ☎ 6am-6pm Mon-Sat) is a fine place for a stroll. Besides the iconic black pineapple and a plethora of fruits and vegetables, there are all manner of household and other items for sale. The bus station is just west and the entire area is a hive of activity during the day. Follow your nose to the **fish market** just north of the buses by the water.

## GOLF

**Cedar Valley Golf Club** (☎ 462-0161), a 10-minute drive north of St John's, has an 18-hole course with cart and club rentals.



## Festivals & Events

Antigua's renowned 10-day Carnival hits the streets of St John's from the end of July to early August; for more information, see p536.

## Sleeping

It's slim pickings for accommodations in St John's, but most visitors tend to favor beach resorts anyway.

**Heritage Hotel** (☎ 462-1247; [www.heritagedowntown.com](http://www.heritagedowntown.com); Thames St; r EC\$150-200; ♿ ♿) Split over two buildings, this modern hotel is popular with business travelers. A waterfront annex has 19 rooms with kitchens while the main building (with shops on the ground floor) has 25 standard rooms. All have high-speed internet.

## Eating

Although there are good choices by the harbor, wander the streets for more authentic fare.

**Mid-East Fast Food** (Redcliffe St; mains EC\$8-18; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) While seated at picnic tables in the shade, cool off with a fresh smoothie and enjoy a falafel, sharwarma or hummus in pita.

**Fabian's** (☎ 562-4605; meals from EC\$10-15; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) A big place by local standards, this locally popular restaurant has shady tables under trees on a side patio. Lunch plate specials are the thing; look for freshly caught fish or curried goat served with creamy fungi (the corneal porridge that's a regional staple).

**M&E Health** (☎ 562-4487; off Newgate St; mains EC\$12; ☎ breakfast & lunch) The decor is as simple as the healthy fare at this little café, which prominently features brown rice, soy milk and fish.

**Roti King** (St Mary's St; roti EC\$13; ☎ 8:30am-midnight, closed Sun) An old wooden house is now home to some of the best cheap food in St John's. Enjoy fresh banana bread with a roti that comes with a variety of fresh and spicy fillings such as chicken, beef, veggies or conch.

**Hemingway's** (St Mary's St; meals EC\$20-80; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Enjoy fine casual fare throughout the day at a table on the breezy 2nd-floor veranda at this popular restaurant and bar. Start the day with good banana pancakes and omelettes; later, choose from seafood, burgers and steaks. Service is cheery and the bar offers up a fine rum punch.

**Big Banana Holding Co** (Redcliffe St; pizza EC\$22-50; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This touristy warehouse-style pizzeria has shady seating outside and

high ceilings inside. For a snack, snatch a slice.

**Commissioner Grill** (Redcliffe St; mains EC\$30-85; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) An upscale local crowd feasts on regional specialties like marinated conch salad and salt cod with fungi. The mood is laid-back, but there's a patina of class in this vintage wooden shop house.

## Shopping

Heritage and Redcliffe Quays are lined with souvenir, jewelry and duty-free stores aimed at folks just off the gangplanks. Wander the streets of the center to sample a variety of shops peddling everything from kitchen sundries to flamboyant shoes that would do any Carnival queen proud.

## FORT JAMES

Fort James, a small stronghold at the north side of St John's Harbour, was first built in 1675, but most of the present structure dates from 1739. It still has a few of its original 36 cannons, a powder magazine and a fair portion of its walls intact. The site reeks of atmosphere: it's moodily rundown and is rarely the scene of crowds.

Fort Bay, a narrow strip of sand backed by trees that stretches north from the fort, is popular with islanders.

**Russell's** (☎ 462-5479; mains EC\$40-85; ☎ lunch & dinner) A pearl within the shell of the fort, Russell's is housed in the reconstructed old officers' quarters. Enjoy drinks and views across the walls and harbor from the wide wooden verandas. Many come for sunset, but live jazz on Sunday nights really packs 'em in. The menu includes garlic shrimp, lobster and steaks.

## RUNAWAY BAY

Runaway Bay is a simple strip of sand just south of popular Dickenson Bay. It was battered by 1995's Hurricane Luis and has never fully recovered. The inland road and the salt marshes are still lined with rubble. Several of the modest beachfront hotels are in decline. On the plus side, the beach is recovering and is seldom crowded – or even trod.

## DICKENSON BAY

The middle market of Antigua's holiday-makers find fun and refuge at this long crescent of white sand on the northwest coast. The swimming is good and during the day

there's no shortage of aquatic activities to lure punters off their loungers. At nightfall, as you enjoy a vivid sunset, classic beach bars serve rum punches by the bucketful.

The beach can get crowded, what with the vendors peddling junk, women hoping to braid hair and the hordes of funseekers from the massive Sandals resort that dominates the middle ground.

Still, the pervasive strains of clichéd reggae set the mood for a classic Caribbean beach vacation.

## Activities

**Tony's Water Sports** (☎ 462-6326) is typical of operators found on the larger beaches island-wide. It offers a range of boating activities, such as waterskiing (US\$40), parasailing (US\$60) and jet-skiing (US\$50). Tony will take groups of up to four people deep-sea fishing (per half-day US\$380) or snorkeling (per half-day US\$20).

**Windsurf Antigua** (☎ 461-9463) rents boards (per hour US\$25, per day US\$70) and offers lessons (from US\$55 for two hours). It also offers advice and deliver equipment islandwide.

## Sleeping

**ourpick Siboney Beach Resort** (☎ 462-0806; [www.siboneybeachclub.com](http://www.siboneybeachclub.com); units US\$170-325; 🏠 📺 🚿) Set in its own little rainforest on the beach, Siboney has a variety of rooms and apartments in three-story blocks. It's not fancy, but it is awfully nice and cheery. Most units have small kitchenettes, nicely updated bathrooms, wi-fi, and patios or balconies. Friendly touches include free beach chairs.

**Dickenson Bay Cottages** (☎ 462-4940; [www.dickensonbaycottages.com](http://www.dickensonbaycottages.com); 1-/2-bed apt from US\$170/325; 🏠 📺 🚿) A small, secluded complex of nicely furnished units ('cottages' is something of misnomer; don't expect a cute little hut at the end of a sandy path) in blocks set around a pool. The decor is vibrant. It's family friendly and a five-minute walk from the beach.

**Antigua Village** (☎ 462-2930; [www.antiguavillage.com](http://www.antiguavillage.com); studios from US\$295; 🏠 📺 🚿) This is a well-maintained beachside condominium complex, with 98 units spread around landscaped grounds. They're individually owned so the decor varies, but most are spacious with large balconies and fully equipped kitchens.

The price pecking order increases as you move from garden to pool to ocean views.

## Eating

**Chippy Antigua** (☎ 724-1166; beach road; mains EC\$25-40; 🕒 4-9pm Wed & Fri) It doesn't look like much. In fact, it looks like what it is: a snack truck parked on gravel by the side of the road. But what snacks! Meals really. Superb fish and chips, scampi, homemade pies and more are on offer. There's a full bar and you can enjoy it all at plastic tables under the stars.

**Pari's Pizza** (☎ 462-1501; mains EC\$30-80; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Besides the dish in the name of this houselike restaurant about five minutes up the hill from the beach, there are thick steaks and juicy ribs. It's almost opposite Dickenson Bay Cottages on the inland road. Take-out is available.

**Coconut Grove** (☎ 462-1538; mains EC\$50-90; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Situated on the beach at Siboney Beach Resort, this Creole restaurant is always worth booking for its changing menu of seafood. The rock lobster is a winner, the rum punch deceptively mellow and fresh-tasting (it kicks).

**ourpick Papa Zouk** (☎ 464-6044; Hilda Davis Dr, Gambles Terrace; mains EC\$50-100; 🕒 dinner Mon-Sat) Modestly billing itself as a 'rum shop' is as accurate as calling it a 'snack bar.' This casual bistro turns out some of the most sophisticated seafood dishes on the island. The menu always reflects what's fresh and you can specify your preparation. Platters with Creole flavors are excellent for sharing. There are 200 kinds of rum behind the bar; the staff mix a mean P'tit Punch, an addictive concoction with marinated rum. Given the above and the inland location, take a cab.

## NORTH SHORE

The northern part of the island between Dickenson Bay and the airport has posh residential areas, a golf course, time-share condos and all-inclusive resorts. If you're not staying here, there's little reason to visit, although the best route between Dickenson Bay and the airport passes along the coast.

Off the coast on Long Island, **Jumby Bay** (☎ 462-6000; [www.jumbybayresort.com](http://www.jumbybayresort.com); r from US\$1250; 🏠 📺 🚿) regularly wins plaudits as one of the best resorts in the Caribbean. The 51 rooms and villas all have water views from their perfect spot on the otherwise unin-

habited island. Rates are for two people and include meals and drinks. Luxuries abound and the silky-smooth service includes niceties such as 24-hour room service and wi-fi. Access is by the resort's boat.

**Le Bistro** (☎ 462-3881; mains EC\$80-140; ☎ dinner, closed Mon) is a little beacon amid the scrubland that not only draws the Hodges Bay swells, but gourmands from across the island. Chef-owner Patrick Gauducheau leads a talented team preparing elegant island fare such as linguini tossed with lobster. Presentations are exquisite, service immaculate. Book.

## FIVE ISLANDS

This peninsula west of St John's is linked to the island by a single road, which passes through the low-key village of Five Islands. The coast is a series of coves and beaches, dotted with numerous resorts.

**Deep Bay** is a pleasant little bay with a sandy beach and protected waters. The Royal Antiguan Hotel sits above the beach, and there's a fair amount of resort activity, but it's a good-sized strand and a nice swimming spot.

The coral-encrusted wreck of the **Andes** lies in the middle of Deep Bay with its mast poking up above the water. Approximately 100 years have passed since this bark caught fire and went down, complete with a load of pitch from Trinidad. The waters are shallow enough around the wreck to be snorkeled, but divers tend to bypass it because ooze still kicks up pretty easily from the bottom.

The remains of **Fort Barrington**, which once protected the southern entrance of St John's Harbour, are atop the promontory that juts out at the northern end of the bay. Although the fort was originally constructed in the mid-17th century, most of the present fortifications date from 1779. To hike up to the fort, simply begin walking north along the beach at Deep Bay; the trail takes about 10 minutes.

A salt pond separates Deep Bay from smaller Hog John Bay, where there's a beach, a couple of hotels and views of St John's.

Near the south end of the peninsula, located on Hawksbill Bay, the well-established **Hawksbill Beach Resort** (☎ 462-0301; www.hawksbill.com; r all inclusive from US\$400; ☎ ☎ ☎), situated on 37 acres, offers 111 rooms (all nonsmoking), cottages or apartments, and tends to attract more mature guests as well as Brits

who appreciate the 'no shorts' rules at night. Rooms are airy, some with pitched ceilings and traditional decor.

Hawksbill Bay has a string of four lovely beaches; away from the eponymous resort, one section of Hawksbill Beach is reserved for nudists.

## JOLLY HARBOUR

Jolly Harbour is a busy marina and dockside condominium village on Antigua's west coast. Facilities include a pharmacy, internet place, boat rentals and charters, and a handful of restaurants and bars. There's also a dive shop, **Jolly Dive** (☎ 462-8305; www.jollydive.com; Jolly Harbour).

South of the marina development, the coast road parallels **Valley Church Beach**, a mostly undeveloped yet accessible strip of sand and palms where you can have a religious experience at the cute little beach bar.

**Jolly Harbour Golf Course** (☎ 480-6950) has an 18-hole course with cart and club rentals.

**Cocobay Resort** (☎ 562-2400; www.cocobayresort.com; all-inclusive per person from US\$200; ☎ ☎ ☎), a 49-unit development on a hillside south of Jolly Harbour, is a stylish retreat that eschews the usual resort paradigms. Creole garden cottages in pale Mediterranean colors have terracotta-tiled floors and earthy dark-wood furnishings. The picture-postcard infinity pool is only steps away from lovely Valley Church Beach.

A classic sailor's open-air bar, the **Deck** (☎ 462-6550; mains EC\$25-50; ☎ lunch & dinner) crawls with seamen and wannabe pirates during cocktail hour. Actually, the boaters here are off yachts so it's not like you'll be shanghaied if you drop by – unless you want to be. Mop up the booze with good grub that includes fine burgers.

The Epicurean market sells sandwiches, liquor, groceries and British newspapers.

## JOLLY HARBOUR TO JOHNSON'S POINT BEACH

Heading south on the coastal road you'll pass one of Antigua's best beaches, **Darkwood Beach**, a wide swath of white sand and turquoise water that makes for a great swimming and snorkeling spot. There are some changing rooms, a few deck chairs, and a little beachside hut that serves tasty club sandwiches or barbecued fish during the day.

As you drive south look for a sign on a small house on the hill side of the road that

reads 'The Nature of Things Museum.' Run by the feisty Winston Hazzard, inside you'll find over 250 types of sea shells and other flotsam. Admission costs US\$2 and includes lectures on the environment, the behavior of tourists and many other topics. Hazzard offers fascinating 2½-hour nature walks up Boggy Peak (US\$30) and will negotiate trips out onto the salt.

## FIG TREE DRIVE

After Johnson's Point Beach, the road passes pineapple patches, tall century plants, and pastures with grazing cattle and donkeys. High hills lie on the inland side of the road, topped by the 1319ft **Boggy Peak**, the island's highest point.

**Old Road**, a village with both a fair amount of poverty and two swank lodges, Curtain Bluff and Carlisle Bay, marks the start of Fig Tree Dr. From here, the terrain gets lush as the road winds through patches of rainforest. The narrow 5-mile-long road is lined with bananas (called 'figs' in Antigua), coconut palms and big old mango trees. A recent paving makes it one of the better roads on the island and your biggest hazard will be driving too fast. Numerous roadside stands sell fruit, including baseball-sized black pineapples and fresh juices. Fig Tree Dr ends at the village of Swetes.

On the way to Falmouth Harbour you pass through the village of Liberta and by the **St Barnabus Anglican Chapel**, an attractive greenstone-and-brick church built in 1842.

## FALMOUTH HARBOUR

Large, protected and oh so picturesque, horse-shoe-shaped Falmouth Harbour has two main centers of activity: the north side of the harbor, where the small village of Falmouth is located, and the more visitor-oriented east side of the harbor, which has most of the restaurants. The east side is within easy walking distance of Nelson's Dockyard.

Compared to the flash afloat, the marina is pretty low-key. There is wi-fi throughout and the bulletin boards are among the best for looking for passage or jobs afloat. **Lord Jim's Locker** (☎ 460-6910; Marina) has a good selection of books and maps.

## Sights

On the main road in Falmouth's center is **St Paul's Anglican Church**, Antigua's first church.

As one of the island's oldest buildings, dating from 1676, the church once doubled as Antigua's courthouse. You can get a sense of its history by poking around the overgrown churchyard, which has some interesting and quite readable colonial-era gravestones. Charles Pitt, the brother of the English prime minister William Pitt, was buried here in 1780.

## Sleeping & Eating

There are several restaurants, bars and cafés close to the marina at the east side of Falmouth Harbour.

**Zanzibar** (☎ 463-7838; www.zanzibarantigua.com; r US\$40-85, cottage US\$100-200; ☑) A great-value place near the marina, Zanzibar has six basic rooms that share bathrooms, and two very attractive cottages, one with a private beach and harbor views. Offers wi-fi access.

**Catamaran Hotel & Marina** (☎ 460-1036; www.catamaran-antigua.com; r US\$150-210; ☑ ☑) On a little beach at the north side of Falmouth Harbour, this simple 16-room hotel is a good deal. The deluxe rooms on the 2nd floor have bathtubs and four-poster queen-size beds, and there are four ground-level units with kitchenettes.

**Last Lemming** (☎ 460-6910; meals EC\$20-40; ☑ 10am-late) The kind of waterfront bar yachties dream of, this big, open place has a pool table, live music many nights, generous plates of hearty chow and stiff drinks. It's the perfect place to find out what's up afloat.

**Pasta Rite Ya** (☎ 764-2819; mains EC\$20-50; ☑ lunch & dinner) A simple but tasty waterfront Italian joint in an old house. Watch your mates swab the poop deck while you feast on big bowls of spaghetti with meatballs and other iconic treats.

**Abacadabra** (☎ 460-1732; mains EC\$30-60; ☑ 5pm-late) It's magic! It's all things to all people: a 17th-century building where you can delight in seafood, a sand dance floor, a chilled out lounge area and more. Near the Nelson's Dockyard parking area. If you still have energy, stay for the open-air disco after 11pm.

## ENGLISH HARBOUR

English Harbour is the one must-see attraction on Antigua. It's the site of Nelson's Dockyard, a restored 18th-century British naval base named for English captain Lord Horatio Nelson, who spent the early years

of his career here. Strolling the cobblestones it's not too hard to imagine you can hear the lashings of the whip and other old British naval traditions. Fortunately, no maggoty rolls are sold.

Two hilltop forts flank the entrance to the harbor, which is separated from Falmouth Harbour by a slender neck of land that, at its narrowest, is just a few hundred yards wide. The Nelson's Dockyard entrance is a five-minute walk from the Falmouth Harbour marina, so you can park once and visit both.

## Information

The following are all inside Nelson's Dockyard.

**Bank of Antigua** (📞 9am-1pm Mon-Thu, 9am-noon & 2-4pm Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Just 100ft past the entrance; has an ATM.

**Post office** (📞 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) At the entrance to Nelson's Dockyard.

## Sights & Activities

### NELSON'S DOCKYARD

This historic **dockyard** ([www.nationalparksantigua.com](http://www.nationalparksantigua.com); adult/12yr EC\$13/free; 📞 9am-5pm) is Antigua's most popular tourist sight, as well as the island's main port of entry for yachts. Try to ignore the frequent flocks of day trippers as you walk among the palm-flanked Georgian buildings. The dockyard, which dates from 1745, was abandoned in 1889 following a decline in Antigua's economic and strategic importance to the British Crown.

Restoration work began in the 1950s, and this former royal naval base now has a new life closely paralleling its old one – that of an active dockyard. And it's the only working Georgian marina in the western hemisphere. The handsome old brick-and-stone buildings have been converted into yachting and tourist-related facilities. The boat home and joiners' loft are nicely restored and it's easy to imagine a British frigate being prepared to sail out and blast a few French or pirate ships.

The dockyard is English Harbour's main center of activity. With all occupying old naval buildings there's a small market selling tourist tat, a handful of restaurants, inns and numerous boating facilities. There's also a dive shop, **Dockyard Divers** (📞 460-1178; [www.dockyard-divers.com](http://www.dockyard-divers.com); PO Box 184, Nelson's Dockyard). Take time to stop at the interpretive plaques that explain the history of the various buildings.

On entering, pick up the free map that shows the dockyard sights and businesses. A water taxi from the dockyard across the harbor to Galleon Beach costs US\$10, round-trip.

The dockyard's small **museum** occupies a former officers' house and features a collection of nautical memorabilia. Displays in a room devoted to Lord Nelson examine the 'irritation, lust, piety and jealousy' he felt for the (married) Lady Emma Hamilton.

### FORT BERKLEY

A pleasant 10-minute stroll starting behind the Copper & Lumber Store Hotel leads to the site of this small fort, which overlooks the western entrance of English Harbour. Dating from 1704, it served as the harbor's first line of defense. You'll find intact walls, a powder magazine, a small guardhouse and a solitary cannon, the last of 25 cannons that once lined the fortress walls. There's also a fine harbor view at the top. Walk another 20 minutes up over the ridge and you reach secluded **Pigeon Point Beach**.

### SHIRLEY HEIGHTS

With its scattered 18th-century fort ruins and wonderful hilltop views, Shirley Heights is a fun place to explore. A bit over a mile up Shirley Heights Rd you'll reach **Dow's Hill Interpretation Centre** (admission EC\$13, free with Nelson's Dockyard ticket; 📞 9am-5pm), which features a viewpoint, and a missable audiovisual presentation on island history and culture.

For the best views and main concentration of ruins, continue past the museum; the road will fork after about 0.5 miles. The left fork leads shortly to **Blockhouse Hill**, where you'll find remains of the Officers' Quarters dating from 1787 and a clear view of sheltered Mamora Bay to the east.

The right fork leads to **Fort Shirley**, which has more ruins, including one that has been turned into a casual restaurant and bar. There's a sweeping view of English Harbour from the rear of the restaurant, while from the top of Signal Hill (487ft), just a minute's walk from the parking lot, you can see Montserrat 28 miles to the southwest and Guadeloupe 40 miles to the south. It's a perfect spot to watch the sun go down.

On Sundays, the fort hosts wildly popular barbecues that rock with steel drum bands and reggae. After dark, the dancing cranks up several notches.

## Sleeping

All the accommodations reviewed here have wi-fi.

**Admiral's Inn** (☎ 460-1027; r US\$100-180; 🏠 📺) Built as a warehouse in 1788, the inn has 14 rooms with open-beam ceilings above the restaurant. The rooms vary in size and decor, and some are quite small. Room No 6 is larger and a good choice, while No 3 is a quiet corner room with a fine harbor view. Some rooms have air-con, none have tubs.

**Copper & Lumber Store Hotel** (☎ 460-1058; www.copperandlumberhotel.com; r US\$195-325; 🏠) This beautifully restored hotel was built in the 1780s to store the copper and lumber needed for ship repairs. It now has 14 studios and suites, all with kitchens and ceiling fans, and some with antique furnishings. Rooms surround a lush courtyard and there's a good, vintage-feeling bar.

**Inn at English Harbour** (☎ 460-1014; www.theinn.ag; r from US\$500; 🏠 📺 📺) With great views of the bay, this small beach resort on the southeast side of English Harbour looks like a cozy English lodge. Its 34 refined, airy rooms and suites have big balconies and baths, and are furnished with Thai-style teak beds. Activities include kayaking, cycling, tennis and sailing.

## Eating

**Dockyard Bakery** (🍷 breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Located behind the museum at Nelson's Dockyard, the baked goods here will draw you in like a sailor to rum. Sandwiches are best enjoyed under the 300-year-old sandbox tree out front.

**HQ** (☎ 562-2563; mains EC\$50-100; 🍷 11am-late) Although the building dates from pre-acronym times, the name of this bar and restaurant describes its historic function. From the 2nd-floor tables on wide wooden verandas, diners can enjoy fine French fare while masts move like metronomes in the distance. On many nights there's live music.

**Admiral's Inn** (dinner mains EC\$60-90; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) The changing chalkboard menu usually features salads, burgers and seafood at lunchtime, with more-elaborate dishes like lobster thermidor for dinner. The dining room reeks with history, and tables outside overlook the harbor.

## HALF MOON & NONSUCH BAYS

Half Moon Bay, on the southeastern side of the island, is an undeveloped crescent-shaped

bay with yet another beautiful white-sand beach and turquoise waters.

Just north of Half Moon Bay at Nonsuch Bay, **Harmony Hall** (☎ 460-4120; www.harmonyhallantigua.com; s/d US\$180/200; 🏠 📺) is set amid the sturdy stone structures of an old sugar mill. Local art is sprinkled about the complex like sugar and you'll have plenty of solitude to enjoy it as the inn is quite remote. Regular boats take guests out to uninhabited Green Island. The candlelit open-air **restaurant** (mains EC\$30-80; 🍷 dinner Fri & Sat) is known for its creative takes on Mediterranean fare.

## LONG BAY

On the east side of Antigua, Long Bay has clear-blue waters and a gorgeous white-sand beach that's reef-protected and good for snorkeling. Two exclusive resorts bookend the beach. Other than a few private homes and a couple of beach bars, there's little else in the neighborhood. If you have a car, this is a good place for a beachy day trip away from the hustle and bustle of Dickenson Bay.

## Devil's Bridge

A modest coastal sea arch, Devil's Bridge is at Indian Town Point, an area thought to be the site of an early Arawak settlement. To get here, turn east onto the paved road a third of a mile before the Long Bay Hotel turn-off. After a mile the road ends at a roundabout; from there the arch is a minute's walk to the east. Dramatic waves add excitement as they sometimes break over the rocks and erupt through blowholes.

On the east end of Long Bay, the 25-room, family-run **Long Bay Hotel** (☎ 463-2005; www.longbayhotel.com; r US\$300-600; 🏠) has Creole-style rooms and cottages with wicker furnishings and sea views. It's almost all-inclusive: rates are for two people and include breakfast and dinner. Most activities are free; there's also wi-fi access. This is a good spot for a worry-free escape without the horrors of a huge package-tour resort.

## BETTY'S HOPE

Just southeast of the village of Pares, **Betty's Hope** (☎ 462-4930; admission US\$2; 🍷 10am-4pm Tue-Sat) was the island's first sugar plantation, built by Christopher Codrington in 1674 and named in honor of his daughter Betty. Ruins of two old stone windmills, a still house (distillery) and a few other stone structures remain on

the site, which is now under the jurisdiction of the Museum of Antigua & Barbuda. One of the mills has been painstakingly restored and returned to working condition. Although operated only on special occasions, the windmill sails remain up most of the year. Displays document Antigua's sugar industry.

## BARBUDA

Desert island. The mere phrase conjures up images of isolation, beaches, palm trees and the ephemeral concept of 'getting away from it all.' Barbuda may well be the model for the iconic desert isle.

A mere 25 miles north of Antigua, Barbuda remains one of the Eastern Caribbean's least-visited places. Other than its teeming frigate-bird colony and its beautiful beaches, most of which are best accessed by private boat, there's just not much here. And that's perhaps its greatest appeal.

The only village, Codrington, is home to most residents and is the site of the island's strip of an airport. Other than a small resort or two and a couple of guesthouses, there's

not much here for tourists; locals and visitors in the know like it this way. In fact this very isolation has been the death of a couple of high-end resorts that had opened to much acclaim.

It's a tight-knit place, most of the 1250 islanders share half a dozen surnames and can trace their lineage to a small group of slaves brought to Barbuda by the Codrington brothers Christopher and John. They leased the island in 1685 from the British Crown and used it to grow food for Antigua's sugarcane workers. The family also quietly salvaged untold riches from ships that had run afoul of the surrounding reef.

During the 18th century, the Codrington family managed to keep their lease, which was negotiated at an annual rental payment of 'one fattened sheep,' for nearly two centuries. Their legacy remains well beyond the town's name – from the communal land-use policies that still govern Barbuda to the introduced goats, sheep and feral donkeys that range freely (to the detriment of the island flora).

Besides having the Caribbean's largest colony of frigate birds, Barbuda hosts tropical

### GROWING UP BARBUDAN

Asha Frank, 19, spent most of her life growing up on Barbuda. Like many people her age on small and thinly populated islands, she left – at age 15 – so she could have the kind of formal education impossible at home. Being a kid on a desert island would seem like a dream for many (especially those growing up someplace where a familiar parental refrain is: 'Have you shoveled the walk yet?'). Asha talks about growing up on tropical Barbuda.

#### What's the best thing about growing up on Barbuda?

The freedom. When I was a child there were no restrictions about where I played because it is such a safe place. I'd go fishing with friends or catch donkeys and ride them around the village. The young boys and girls are incredibly fit because they have so much exercise and good food.

#### What's bad about being a kid there?

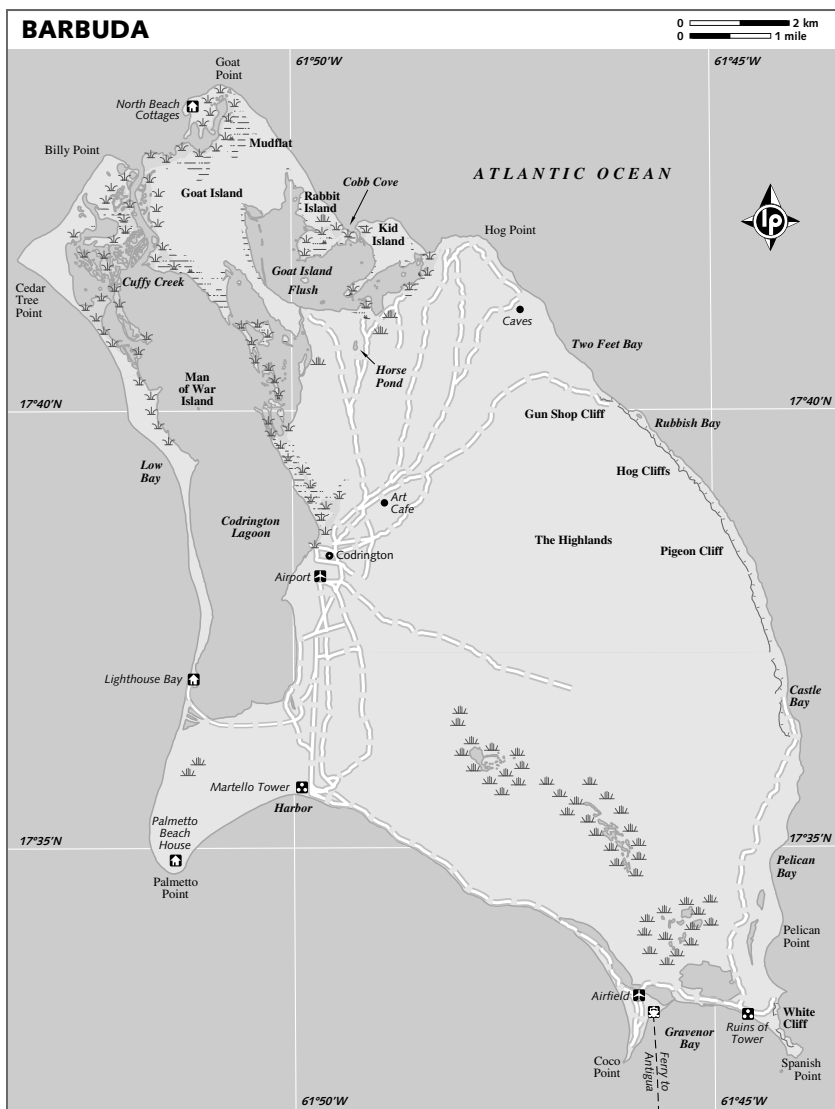
There are not many bad things about Barbuda, although when you're a teenager it can be a bit boring and feel isolated. There are not many things for 16- to 20-year-olds to do other than the odd party and horse races. Hurricanes are a threat to the island, particularly during August and September and there are often long periods of drought. However, this only makes you appreciate things that are abundant elsewhere.

#### What do you tell your friends in England about your home?

Who wouldn't want to say they grew up in the Caribbean? Barbuda is different to all the other islands. Many people have never heard of it and often mistake it for Bermuda or Barbados. It has an untouched beauty; there are not many tourists. A lot of people come back in summer and it's almost like a reunion.

#### You're now at university studying history and Caribbean studies. What's next?

I live in London; it is a very impersonal place where you can easily be forgotten. In Barbuda it is like one big family and there are good manners and respect for everyone. I will definitely go back to live in the future because it is the only place I would call my true home.



mockingbirds, warblers, pelicans, ibis, oystercatchers, herons and numerous kinds of ducks. The island also has wild boar and white-tailed deer, both of which are legally hunted.

### Getting There & Away

Many people visit Barbuda as part of a day trip by air (the ferry schedules can be hell

on day trips). Note that the early arrival and late departure give you *plenty* of time to see everything. Bring a book for those contemplative hours while you await your flight back to Antigua.

For information on getting to Barbuda from Antigua (there's no service from any other island) by air or scheduled ferry, see p539.



## Getting Around

Barbuda has no public transportation, but distances are too great and the dusty dirt roads too hot to make walking a practical means of exploring. Barbuda also has a reputation for tours that fail to materialize, drivers that don't show up at the airport or some other missing link. Confirm all reservations.

You should be able to arrange to hire someone to drive you around for about US\$20 per hour – inquire at your lodgings. Some drivers may meet the morning plane. Among the several locals who will drive you, try the owner of the Green Door Tavern, **Byron Askie** (☎ 460-0164). He also rents out a car for US\$50 per day. **Eric Burton** (☎ 460-0465) has a 32-seater bus for hire; both men will act as driver and tour guide, if needed. Other locals also organise tours; see p537 for details.

## CODRINGTON

The town of Codrington – a modest, low-key place – is on the inland side of Codrington Lagoon, a hefty 3.5 miles north of the nearest beach.

The town begins at the airport – simply walk north from there and you'll be in the center of it.

Codrington is home to Barbuda's post office, its bank and its police station, as well as to a government house that dates from 1743. In keeping with local norms, there are few signs and the concept of regular opening hours is elusive.

**Nedds Guest House** (☎ 460-0059, 724-7490; r US\$50-135) is above a grocery store near the airport. Run by Mcarthur Nedd, it has four rooms with fans and private bath, and a communal kitchen. An enclosed yard crawls with over 100 turtles, which often seem to move to the beat of the gospel singers at the nearby Pentecostal church.

Located in a newish building, **Palm Tree Guest House** (☎ 784-4331, 779-1074; r US\$65-130; 🚿) has seven rooms and is slightly away from the center of town. Rooms have satellite TV and those at the top end have kitchens.

You can't make a joke about what's behind the door at the **Green Door Tavern** (☎ 783-7243; 🕒 7am-late) as it's almost always open. Local fare is on offer, including crowd-pleasers like ling-fish, liver, tripe and on Saturdays, goat water. A popular drink is made from sea moss.

Artist Claire Frank creates her colorful works on silk at **Art Cafe** (☎ 460-0434), a studio-

gallery-café. Hours are variable but it's always worth stopping by its typically rural setting to see who's about, whether it be human, donkey or goat. All the drivers know her. Here you'll find coffee and tea plus great conversation.

## CODRINGTON LAGOON

The expansive, brackish estuary of Codrington Lagoon, which runs along Barbuda's west coast, is an intriguing destination for bird-watchers. Up to 5000 frigate birds (p534) nest in the lagoon's scrubby mangroves – with as many as a dozen birds roosting on a single bush. Because of this density, the birds' nesting sites are all abuzz with squawking, and the sight of all those blood-red inflating throat pouches is mesmerizing.

The most popular time to visit the rookery is during the mating season, from September to April (December is peak time). While the male frigate birds line up in the bushes, arch their heads back and puff out their pouches with an air of machismo as part of the elaborate courtship rituals, the females take to the sky. When one spots a suitor that impresses her, she'll land and initiate a mating ritual. After mating, a nest is built from twigs that the male gathers. The female lays a single egg that both birds incubate in turn. It takes about seven weeks for the chick to hatch, and nearly six months for it to learn to fly and finally leave the nest.

And should you tire of frigates, there are about 170 other species of birds that call the lagoon home.

### WHEN YOU REALLY WANT TO GET AWAY...

On a remote bit of sand in the far north of Barbuda, **North Beach Cottages** (☎ 726-6355; [www.antiguanice.com/north\\_beach\\_cottages/index.html](http://www.antiguanice.com/north_beach_cottages/index.html); d from US\$400) has three simple but comfortable bungalows right on the beach. Aside from the odd squawk of a frigate bird, the crash of a coconut or the blissful sound of the surf, there's little to disturb you here. Run by locals, the cottages can only be reached by boat. Rates include all meals, of which lobster is a prominent feature. Drinks include fresh rum punch on tap – wahoo! There's a two-night minimum and you pay in advance.

The nesting site is in the upper lagoon area known as Man of War Island and can be reached only by boat. A couple of boats can take visitors out to the rookery, but arrangements generally need to be made a day in advance. If you're staying on Barbuda, you can arrange it through your guesthouse – the cost is about US\$60 per boat for up to four people, and the ride to the reserve takes about 40 minutes. For those visiting Barbuda for the day, there are day tours that include the rookery (see p537).

## WEST & SOUTH COASTS

The west coast of Barbuda is lined with magnificent white-sand **beaches** and turquoise waters. From Palmetto Point northward there's a beautiful pinkish strand that extends 11 miles, most of it lining the narrow barrier of land separating Codrington Lagoon from the ocean. Because of its isolation, however, the beach remains the domain of a few lone boaters and a shuttered boutique hotel. More-accessible beaches are found along the coast south of the harbor, with one of the finest sweeps along the stretch between the two resorts.

The **harbor** has a customs office and a sand-loading operation – Barbuda's sands are used to bolster some of Antigua's resort beaches. To the northwest of the harbor is the 56ft-high **Martello Tower**, a former fortified lookout station that from a distance looks like an old sugar mill. About 0.5 miles north of Coco Point is a nice white-sand strand with near-shore coral formations that provide good snorkeling.

The pristine waters of **Gravenor Bay**, between Coco and Spanish Points, are a favored yacht anchorage with reef formations and excellent snorkeling. Near the center of the bay

is an old, deteriorating pier, while the ruins of a small **tower** lie about 0.5 miles away to the east.

Archaeologists believe that the uninhabited peninsula leading to **Spanish Point** was once the site of a major Arawak settlement. A dirt track connects both ends of the bay, and another leads northward from the east side of the salt pond.

**Lighthouse Bay** (☎ 866-875-1383; [www.lighthousebayresort.com](http://www.lighthousebayresort.com); d from US\$1150; ♿ 📶 🚶) hopes to break the jinx that has bedeviled other upscale properties on Barbuda. Located on a thin bit of sand that divides the sea from Codrington Lagoon, the new nine-room, all-inclusive property has water views in all directions. It's a compact site and appeals to folks hoping to catch fish and/or pretty much do nothing. Offers wi-fi access.

## CAVES

To get under the skin of Barbuda, so to speak, explore some caves about five miles northeast of Codrington. Note that rain can flood out access. **Dark Cave** is an expansive underground cavern with pools of deep water, while another cave near Two Feet Bay contains the faded drawings of Arawaks.

# DIRECTORY

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Other than a couple of budget guesthouses in St John's and a handful scattered around the island, Antigua is mainly home to resort-type complexes, many of them offering all-inclusive packages. Some, such as Jumby Bay (see p526), are considered among the best in the Caribbean. There are a few good-value, moderate-range places around the island,

## FRIGATE BIRDS

Frigate birds skim the water's surface for fish, but because their feathers lack the water-resistant oils common to other seabirds, they cannot dive into water. Also known as the man-of-war bird, the frigate bird has evolved into an aerial pirate that supplements its own fishing efforts by harassing other seabirds until they release their catch, which the frigate bird then swoops up in mid-flight.

While awkward on the ground, the frigate bird, with its distinctive forked tail and 6ft wingspan, is beautifully graceful in flight. It has the lightest weight-to-wingspan ratio of any bird and can soar at great heights for hours on end – making it possible for the bird to feed along the coast of distant islands and return home to roost at sunset without having landed anywhere other than its nesting site.

## PRACTICALITIES

- **Newspapers & Magazines** The daily *Antigua Sun* and *Daily Observer* offer contrasting takes on local events.
- **Radio** Catch hourly news and weather on Gem radio, at 93.9FM, or the *Daily Observer's* radio station, 91.1FM.
- **Video Systems** NTSC is the standard video system.
- **Electricity** The current used mostly is 220V, but some places use 110V, 60 cycles; check first. North American two-pin sockets are common.
- **Weights & Measures** The imperial system is used here.

with prices from about US\$100 for a double in summer and closer to US\$150 in winter. Still, most of Antigua's accommodations easily charge double these prices.

If you plan on traveling in late summer, keep in mind that many of Antigua's hotels close for September, and some extend that a few weeks in either direction.

In addition to the rates given throughout this chapter, an 8.5% government tax and a 10% to 15% service charge are added to all accommodations bills. Check whether they are included in prices quoted when making reservations. Listed rates fall by almost half outside of peak season (December to April).

Barbuda has only a handful of places to stay.

## ACTIVITIES

See p537 for information on tours around the islands.

### Beaches & Swimming

Antigua's tourist office spouts that the island has 365 beaches, 'one for each day of the year.' While we dare you to fact-check that, the island certainly doesn't lack lovely strands. Most of Antigua's beaches have white or light golden sands with turquoise water – many are protected by coral reefs and all are officially public. You can find nice sandy stretches all around the island, and generally, wherever there's a resort, there's a beach. Prime beaches on the west coast include the adjacent Dickenson and Runaway beaches, Deep Bay and Hawksbill Beach to the west of St John's, and the less populated Darkwood Beach and Johnson's Point Beach to the south. On the east coast, Half Moon Bay and Long Bay are top contenders. Visitors based in the English Harbour area can make their way to Galleon Beach and the clear waters of se-

cluded Pigeon Beach. The far ends of some public beaches, including the north side of Dickenson, are favored by topless bathers, and nude bathing is practiced along a section of Hawksbill Beach.

### Diving

Antigua has some excellent diving, with coral canyons, wall drops and sea caves hosting a range of marine creatures, including turtles, sharks, barracuda and colorful reef fish. Popular diving sites include the 2-mile-long Cades Reef, whose clear, calm waters have an abundance of fish, and numerous soft and hard corals. Part of it is now protected as an underwater park. Ariadne Shoal offers reefs teeming with large fish, lobsters and nurse sharks. A fun spot for both divers and snorkelers is the wreck of the *Jettias*, a 310ft steamer that sank in 1917 and now provides a habitat for reef fish and coral. The deepest end of the wreck is in about 30ft of water, while the shallowest part comes up almost to the surface.

Barbuda has scores of shipwrecks along its surrounding reef. In fact the Codringtons gained their fortune through salvage rights. Many of the sites are seldom visited; organize the complex logistics through an Antigua dive shop.

The going rate is about US\$60 for a one-tank dive, US\$90 for a two-tank dive and US\$90 for a night dive. Nondivers who want to view the underwater world but don't want to overly commit can opt for a half-day resort course that culminates with a reef dive (around US\$110). Rates include the rental of tanks and weights, but you'll have to pay an extra US\$10 to US\$20 for a regulator, buoyancy compensating device (BCD), snorkel, mask and fins. Most resorts have a shop they are linked with but don't feel you

have to use it. Dive shops will pick up and drop off across the island.

There are dive shops in Jolly Harbour (p527) and English Harbour (p529).

## Golf

There are golf courses at Jolly Harbour (p527) and near St John's (p524).

## Hiking

The historical society, which operates the Museum of Antigua & Barbuda (p523), sponsors a culturally or environmentally oriented hike once a month. Walks average about 90 minutes and typically visit old estates or interesting landscapes. These field trips are free, but donations are welcome. Check with the museum for details.

## Other Water Activities

Dickenson Bay has operators offering a range of boating activities (including water-skiing and parasailing), deep-sea fishing and windsurfing; see p526 for details.

## BOOKS

Antigua's best-known writer is Jamaica Kincaid, who has authored a number of novels and essays including *A Small Place* (1988), which gives a scathing account of the negative effects of tourism and government corruption on Antigua. Other works by Kincaid include the novel *Annie John*, which recounts growing up in Antigua, and *Mr Potter*, a beautiful tale about the meaning of family centered on one man who lives and dies on Antigua.

Harvard lecturer Robert Coram penned an incendiary investigation, *Caribbean Time Bomb* (1993), into corruption on Antigua and Vere Cornwall Bird's involvement with the US government.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Businesses are open 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday and often on Saturdays until about 2pm. Shops are open until 6pm or 7pm weekdays and until late Saturday afternoon. Touristy places will be open later and if not already open on Sunday will become so if a cruise ship is in port.

Restaurants are good until 9pm or 10pm, bars somewhat later. But this is not an island on which to party until dawn – unless you have your own boat.

## CHILDREN

Reefs protect the beaches making for gentle swimming conditions, while most of the many resorts have programs for kids.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Besides the usual regional cautions, note that St John's has some tough neighborhoods, which you'll easily sense before you've gone too far. In addition, stay alert in general when walking the streets, although street crime usually involves locals only.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

**UK** (☎ 462-0008/9; britishc@candw.ag; Price Waterhouse Centre, 11 Old Parham Rd, St John's)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

**Antigua Sailing Week** ([www.sailingweek.com](http://www.sailingweek.com)) A major, week-long yachting event that begins on the last Sunday in April. It's the largest regatta in the Caribbean and generally attracts about 200 boats from a few dozen countries. In addition to a series of five boat races, there are rum parties and a formal ball, with most activities taking place at Nelson's Dockyard and Falmouth Harbour, where the majority of boats are anchored.

**Caribana Festival** Held in May, this is Barbuda's own Carnival, but it's by no means the grand affair of Antigua's Carnival.

**Carnival** Antigua's big annual festival is held from the end of July and culminates in a parade on the first Tuesday in August. Calypso music, steel bands, masqueraders, floats and 'jump-ups' (nighttime street parties) are all part of the celebrations.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

While there is no real gay scene on Antigua, there is no overt discrimination either.

## HOLIDAYS

Public holidays in Antigua and Barbuda:

**New Year's Day** January 1

**Good Friday** late March/early April

**Easter Monday** late March/early April

**Labour Day** first Monday in May

**Whit Monday** eighth Monday after Easter

**Carnival Monday & Tuesday** first Monday and Tuesday in August

**Antigua and Barbuda Independence Day** November 1

**VC Bird Day** December 9

**Christmas Day** December 25

**Boxing Day** December 26

## INTERNET ACCESS

St John's has internet cafés and most hotels offer wi-fi and computers in the lobby.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

An excellent resource for Barbuda is the community-run [www.barbudaful.net](http://www.barbudaful.net).

## MEDICAL SERVICES

Antigua has good hospital facilities, see p523; Barbuda has quite basic service.

## MONEY

The currency of Antigua and Barbuda is the Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$), and the official exchange rate is EC\$2.72 to US\$1.

US dollars are widely accepted. However, unless rates are posted in US dollars, as is the norm with accommodations, it usually works out better to use EC dollars.

Credit cards are widely accepted. Ask if there is a surcharge for using a credit card.

A 10% service charge is added to most restaurant bills, in which case no tipping is necessary.

## TELEPHONE

Antigua and Barbuda's area code is ☎ 268. To call from North America, dial ☎ 1-268, followed by the local number. From elsewhere, dial your country's international access code + ☎ 268 + the local phone number. We've included only the seven-digit local number in the listings in this chapter.

Phone calling cards are widely available. Local cell phones use the GSM system.

Avoid credit-card phones, as they charge a rapacious US\$2 per minute or more locally, US\$4 to other Caribbean islands or the US, and up to US\$8 elsewhere.

For directory assistance, dial ☎ 411.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Antigua & Barbuda Department of Tourism** ([www.antigua-barbuda.org](http://www.antigua-barbuda.org)) operates a somewhat useful website. Information is also available from the tourist office in St John's (see p523). Otherwise, once you are on Antigua, you'll find the usual plethora of brochures. *Life in*

*Antigua & Barbuda* is a weighty annual tome that will excite those whose idea of porn is lavish spreads of yachts and expensive watches.

## TOURS

### Antigua

Numerous companies offer tours of Antigua by land and sea, many timed for the convenience of cruise-ship passengers. The following are recommended for their ecological bent, which gets far beyond gift shops and beachy rum drinks.

**Adventure Antigua** (☎ 726 6355; [www.adventureantigua.com](http://www.adventureantigua.com)) is run by Eli Fuller, a third-generation local. Many rave about his Eco-Tour (US\$90) which takes in the still-unspoiled small islands of the north coast, including the aptly named Great Bird Island. The full day includes nature walks, snorkeling and a vast amount of insider info on the flora and fauna of the islands. A second tour, the Xtreme Circumnav (US\$153), features a speedboat and is aimed at the Hummer set.

**Paddles** (☎ 463-1944; [www.antiguapaddles.com](http://www.antiguapaddles.com); Seatons; adult/child US\$55/45) gives a no-brainer hint of its tour type in its name. Guests explore the mangroves and shallows of the sparsely populated east coast via kayaks. The half-day trips include a motorboat shuttle, eco-explorations under your own paddle-power, snorkeling and the de rigueur time on a deserted beach.

### Barbuda

Besides the drivers listed previously (p533), several other locals will arrange outings on Barbuda. **George 'Prophet' Burton** (☎ 772-1209) has a minibus and offers a full-day tour with drinks and food for US\$60 per person, a bargain. He can also make arrangements for divers who wish to explore the largely unexplored reefs.

Guesthouse-owner **Mcarthur Nedd** (☎ 724-7490) offers tours by van and boat. Another innkeeper, **Lynton Thomas** (☎ 773-9957) arranges day-long tours that meet flights for US\$75 per person.

The helpful owner of the Art Café, **Claire Frank** (☎ 460-0434; ☎ 9am-5pm), can arrange tours, with advance notice.

## TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

International resorts generally have good accommodations for people with disabilities. Otherwise, much of Antigua is something of a challenge. The must-see sights

### EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- **Ambulance** ☎ 462-0251
- **Police** ☎ 462-0125

at English Harbour are set on wide, flat grounds, although individual buildings may be inaccessible.

## VISAS

Visas are not required by most nationalities for stays of less than six months.

## WOMEN TRAVELERS

Women won't find anything especially concerning about a visit to these islands.

## WORK

Short of turning something up in the yacht harbors – and you'll see plenty of posts on bulletin boards by sailors with *lots* of experience – there's little work here. Unemployment is high.

# TRANSPORTATION

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Entering Antigua & Barbuda

All visitors need a valid passport (US citizens see the boxed text, p830) and a round-trip or onward ticket, though immigration officials seem to be more interested in where you plan to stay. On arrival, you'll be given an immigration form to complete.

### Air

**VC Bird International Airport** (ANU; ☎ 462-0358) is about 5 miles from St John's center. It has an ATM, a **bureau de change** (☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri), a dozen car-rental companies and a post office. For those departing, it has a rudimentary café, a minute bookstore and paid wi-fi once you're past security.

Those arriving during peak afternoon hours should note that the immigration situation here is among the worst in the region. Waits of up to two hours are common and the staff are unlikely to present you with a warm welcome. Locals complain bitterly and all have horror stories such as the officer who rejects forms for having been filled out with the wrong shade of blue ink. The pernickety hassles can extend to your efforts to *leave* the island. Watch your shade of ink and handwriting skills!

The following airlines serve Antigua from these cities (some services are seasonal and only weekly):

**Air Canada** (☎ 800-744-2472; www.aircanada.com) Toronto

**American/American Eagle** (☎ 800-433-7300; www.aa.com) San Juan

**BMI** (☎ 800-788-0555; www.flybmi.com) Manchester

**British Airways** (☎ 800-247-9297; www.britishairways.com) London

**Carib Aviation** (☎ 481-2401/2/3; www.carib-aviation.com) Dominica, Guadeloupe, St Lucia

**Caribbean Airlines** (formerly BWIA; ☎ 800-744-2225; www.caribbean-airlines.com) Barbados, Kingston, Jamaica, Trinidad

**Continental** (☎ 800-231-0856; www.continental.com) Newark

**Delta** (☎ 800-221-1212; www.delta.com) Atlanta

**LIAT** (☎ 462-0700; www.liat.com) Anguilla, Barbados, Dominica, San Juan, St Thomas, St Vincent, St-Marten/Sint Maarten, Trinidad

**US Airways** (☎ 800-622-1015; www.usairways.com) Charlotte, Philadelphia

**Virgin Atlantic** (☎ 800-744-7477; www.virgin-atlantic.com) London

**Winair** (☎ 462-2522; www.fly-winair.com) Montserrat, St-Marten/Sint Maarten

## Sea

### CRUISE SHIP

Antigua is a major port of call for cruise ships. The island's cruise-ship terminal, at Heritage Quay in St John's Harbour, has a duty-free shopping center, and is within easy walking distance of St John's main sights. Cruise ships also anchor near Falmouth Harbor and taxi their passengers into the harbor for the day. See p830 for further details about cruise ship travel throughout the Caribbean.

### FERRY

There is a sometime ferry service between Antigua and Montserrat. However, it is more off than on, much to the displeasure of locals who can't afford the high airfares. Check locally to see if it is running.

### YACHT

Antigua's many fine, protected ports make it one of the major yachting centers of the Caribbean. A favorite place to clear customs is at Nelson's Dockyard in English Harbour. Other ports of entry are Falmouth Harbour, Jolly Harbour, St John's Harbour, and Crabbs Marina in Parham Harbour. If you're going on to Barbuda, ask for a cruising permit, which will allow you to visit that island without further formalities.

Antigua has many protected harbors and bays, and fine anchorages are found all around the island. Full-service marinas are at English Harbour, Falmouth Harbour, Jolly Harbour and Parham Harbour. Boaters can make reservations at many restaurants around Falmouth Harbour and English Harbour via VHF channel 68.

Barbuda's reefs, which extend several miles from shore, are thought to have claimed a good 200 ships since colonial times – a rather impressive number, considering that Barbuda has never been a major port. Some reefs remain poorly charted, and the challenge of navigating through them is one reason Barbuda remains well off the beaten path. If you're sailing to the island, bring everything you'll need in advance, because there are no yachting facilities on Barbuda.

## GETTING AROUND

See p537 for information on tours.

### Air

Unless you charter a plane or helicopter, your only option for getting to Barbuda by air is with **Carib Aviation** (☎ 481-2401/2/3; www.carib-aviation.com), which has 20-minute flights to/from Antigua to Barbuda most early mornings and late afternoons. Round-trip fares average US\$200.

### Boat

The **Barbuda Express** (☎ 560-7989; www.antiguaferries.com; fare one-way/return EC\$80/140) operates a rather quixotic service between St John's and Barbuda. On some days there are two round-trips, on others there is no service. The trip takes 90 minutes and is a civilized way to reach Barbuda, especially given the flight challenges (see above). However, there are reports that the ferry's posted schedule is not always followed so confirm everything one or more times in advance. This is especially important if you're hoping to use it for a day trip.

### Bicycle

Check with your hotel, many rent out a bike or two to guests.

### Bus

There is no public transport on Barbuda, but Antigua has a privately owned system of mini-vans and mid-sized buses. Fares cost from EC\$1.50 to EC\$5.

## Car & Motorcycle

### DRIVER'S LICENSE

When you arrive, you'll need to buy a local driving permit, available from car-rental agencies. It costs US\$20 and is valid for three months.

### RENTAL

Antigua has numerous car-rental agencies, including all the major brands. On Barbuda, some locals rent out vehicles.

### ROAD CONDITIONS

Antigua's roads range from smooth to rough to deadly. You'll be cruising along when suddenly a hubcap-popping pothole appears. If you plan to get off the beaten track (especially in the east), it's best to hire a 4WD.

Be aware of goats darting across the road and of narrow roads in built-up areas, which can also be crowded with children after school finishes.

Finding your way around Antigua can prove difficult at times. The island is randomly dotted with green road signs pointing you in the right direction, but they peter out the further away you get from the main centers. Private signs pointing the way to restaurants, hotels and a few other tourist spots are far more frequent. Beyond that, locals are always happy to offer advice – at times an adventure in itself.

### ROAD RULES

Driving is on the left-hand side. The speed limit is generally 20mph in villages and 40mph in rural areas.

### Taxi

Taxis on Antigua have number plates beginning with 'H.' Fares are regulated by the government, but check the fare with the driver before riding away.

On Barbuda, you should be able to arrange to hire someone to drive you around.

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