



## Official Name: Netherlands Antilles



### PROFILE

#### Geography

Area: 960 sq. km. (597 sq. mi.); more than five times the size of Washington, DC; five islands divided geographically into the Windward Islands (northern) group (Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten) and the Leeward Islands (southern) group (Bonaire and Curaçao).

Cities: *Capital*--Willemstad (metropolitan).

Islands: Curaçao (pop. 141,766) Sint Maarten (40,917), Bonaire (12,877), Sint Eustatius (2,768), Saba (1,601).

Terrain: Generally hilly, volcanic interiors.

Climate: Tropical; ameliorated by northeast trade winds.

#### People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*--Dutch.

Population (2009): 199,929.

Annual population growth rate (2009): 0.73%.

Ethnic groups: Mixed black 85%, other 15% (mixed Latin American, white, East Asian).

Religions: Roman Catholic (72%), Pentecostal (4.9%), Protestant (3.5%), Seventh-Day Adventist (3.1%), Jehovah's Witness (1.7%), other Christian (4.2%), Jewish (1.3%), other (1.2%), none (5.2%).

Languages: Dutch (official), Papiamentu predominates, English is widely spoken, Spanish.

Education: *Literacy*--96.7% Curaçao; 96.3% Netherlands Antilles (2003).

Health: *Infant mortality rate*--6.1 deaths/1,000 live births; 62.6 live births per 1,000 women 15 to 44 years old. *Life expectancy*--

female, 79.9 yrs.; male, 72.8 yrs.

Work force (95,000; 2009): *Agriculture*--1%; *industry*--15%; *services*--84%.

## **Government**

Type: Parliamentary.

Independence: Part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Constitution: December 1954, Statute of the Realm of the Netherlands, as amended.

Branches: *Executive*--monarch represented by a governor-general (chief of state), prime minister (head of government), Cabinet.

*Legislative*--unicameral parliament. *Judicial*--Joint High Court of Justice appointed by the monarch.

Subdivisions are by island: Saba, Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Curaçao.

Suffrage: Universal at 18.

Political parties:

*Bonaire*: Democratic Alliance of Bonaire or PDB; Patriotic Union of Bonaire or UPB; Lista di Kambio.

*Curacao*: Democratic Party of Curacao or DP; Lista di Kambio (combined list of MAN, Forsa Korsou and Niun Paso Atras); Party for the Restructured Antilles or PAR; People's National Party or PNP; Pueblo Soberano or Sovereign Party; Workers' Liberation Front or FOL; Movement for Solution for Isla or MSI; Party for Emancipation or PPE.

*Saba*: Saba Labor Party; Windward Islands People's Movement or WIPM.

*Sint Eustatius*: Democratic Party of Sint Eustatius or DP-St. E; Progressive Labor Party.

*Sint Maarten*: Democratic Party of Sint Maarten or DP-St. M; National Alliance or NA; People's Progressive Alliance or PPA.

*Note*--political parties are indigenous to each island.

## **Economy**

GDP (2009 est.): \$4.04 billion.

Real growth rate (2009 est.): 0.7%.

GDP per capita (2007 est.): \$19,000.

Natural resources: Beaches and offshore diving sites.

Tourism/services (84% of GDP): Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire.

Industry (15% of GDP): *Types*--petroleum refining (Curaçao), petroleum transshipment facilities (Curaçao and Bonaire), light manufacturing (Curaçao).

Agriculture (1% of GDP): *Products*--aloes, sorghum, peanuts, vegetables, tropical fruit.

Trade: *Exports* (\$3.71 billion)--petroleum products. *Major markets*--U.S. 18.9%, Mexico 13.3%, Panama 11.4%, Singapore 6.9%, Haiti 6.6%, The Bahamas 5.3%. *Imports* (\$15.74 billion)--machinery and electrical equipment, crude oil (for refining and re-export), chemicals, foodstuffs. *Major suppliers*--Venezuela 59.1%, U.S. 17.7%, Brazil 7.1%.

Exchange rate (2005): U.S.\$1=1.78 ANG (fixed).

## **PEOPLE AND HISTORY**

### **Curaçao**

The Arawaks are recognized as the first human civilization to inhabit the Netherlands Antilles. A Spanish expedition led by Alonso de Ojeda claimed the island of Curaçao for Spain in 1499 and it remained under Spanish rule until the Dutch took control in 1634. Curaçao was a strategically important point for Dutch military advances against the Spanish and as the center of the Caribbean slave trade. Curaçao became the seat of the Netherlands Antilles Government in 1954.

### **Bonaire**

With origins similar to Curaçao, Bonaire was captured by the Dutch in 1634, and was a granary for the Dutch East Indian Company until 1791, when the government reclaimed control.

### **Sint Eustatius**

The first settlement in Sint Eustatius was established in 1636 and changed hands between the Dutch, French, and Spanish 22 times in its history. In the 18th century the island became a duty-free port for overburdened colonizers shipping back to the homeland, which propelled it into a major port with rapid population growth that lost momentum after the American-British peace treaty in 1783.

### **Saba**

Columbus was the first to sight Saba, but it was the Dutch who colonized the island in 1640 with a party from Sint Eustatius. Because of its difficult terrain, the island's growth progressed slowly, and it remains the least populated island in the Dutch Kingdom.

### **Sint Maarten**

The Dutch were the first to colonize Sint Maarten in 1631, but within 2 years the Spanish invaded and evacuated the settlers. The Dutch failed in an attempt to regain the island in 1644, but 4 years later the Spanish abandoned the island of their own accord. In 1648 the island was divided between the Dutch and the French; however, complete control of the island was seized numerous times in a series of conflicts. The British became involved as well, taking power for 6-year and 10-year stints. Finally, in 1817, the current partition line between Dutch and French was established. The island flourished under a slave-based plantation economy and the exportation of salt until abolition of slavery in 1863.

### **Unification**

In 1845 the Dutch Windward islands united with Curaçao, Bonaire, and Aruba in a political unit. The islands' economy remained weak until the 20th century, when oil was discovered in Venezuela's Lake Maracaibo and a refinery was established on Curaçao. In addition, during the same period, an offshore financial sector was created to serve Dutch business interests. Since 1954, the federation of the Netherlands Antilles (Curaçao, Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten), which is a constituent part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, has been semi-autonomous in most internal affairs. The Kingdom retains authority over foreign affairs, defense, final judicial review, and "Kingdom matters" including human rights and good governance. Aruba was part of this federation until January 1, 1986, when it gained a separate status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

About 85% of Curacao's population is of African derivation. The remaining 15% is made up of various races and nationalities, including Dutch, Portuguese, North Americans, natives from other Caribbean islands, Latin Americans, Sephardic Jews, Lebanese, and Asians. Roman Catholicism predominates, but several other religions are represented, which include Anglican, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, Mormon, Baptist, Islam, and Hindu. The Jewish community is the oldest in the Western Hemisphere, dating back to 1634. While faltering economic conditions caused the Netherlands Antilles to experience high rates of migration by citizens to the Netherlands from 1998-2002, this trend has largely been reversed in recent years.

### **GOVERNMENT**

Current political relations between the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba stem from 1954 and are based on the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a voluntary arrangement between the Netherlands, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles. At the time, the Charter represented an end to colonial relations and the acceptance of a new legal system in which each

nation would look after their own interests independently, look after their common interests on the basis of equality and provide each other with mutual assistance. In 1975, Suriname left the Kingdom's political alliance. Since 1986, Aruba has had separate status within the Kingdom and is no longer part of the Netherlands Antilles. The Netherlands Antilles enjoys semi-autonomy on most internal matters and defers to the Kingdom of the Netherlands in matters of defense, foreign policy, final judicial review, human rights, and good governance.

The Antilles is governed by a popularly elected unicameral "Staten" (parliament) of 22 members. It chooses a prime minister (called minister president) and a Council of Ministers, consisting of six to eight other ministers. A governor, who serves a 6-year term, represents the monarch of the Netherlands. Local government is assigned authority independently on each island. Under the direction of a Kingdom-appointed island governor, these local governments have an Executive Council made up of commissioners who head the separate governmental departments.

### **Principal Government Officials**

Governor General--Frits M. d. I. S. Goedgedrag  
Prime Minister--Emily S. de Jongh-Elhage  
Deputy Prime Minister--Ersilia T.M. de Lannooy  
Minister of Constitutional and Interior Affairs--Roland E. Duncan  
Minister of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports--Omayra V.E. Leeflang  
Minister of Finance--Ersilia T.M. de Lannooy  
Minister of General Affairs and Foreign Relations--Emily S. de Jongh-Elhage  
Minister of Economic Affairs and Labor--Elvis Tjin Asjoe  
Minister of Public Health and Social Development--Omayra V.E. Leeflang  
Minister of Justice--Magali M. Jacoba  
Minister of Transportation and Telecommunication--Patrick G. Illidge  
Minister Plenipotentiary to The Hague--Marcel van der Plank  
Minister Plenipotentiary to Washington, DC--Ann Groot-Phillips  
Director, Bank of the Netherlands Antilles--Emsley D. Tromp  
Attorney General--Dick A. Piar

### **POLITICAL CONDITIONS**

In the parliamentary elections of January 22, 2010, the governing Party for the Restructured Antilles (PAR) increased from five to six seats in parliament and retained its leading position. A PAR-led coalition government was formed with support from the People's National Party (PNP), St. Maarten's National Alliance (NA), Bonaire's Patriotic Union of Bonaire (UPB), Saba's Windward Islands People's Movement (WIPM), and Sint Eustatius's Democratic Party (DP). The opposition List for Change (Lista di Kambio - LdK) preserved its five parliamentary seats. The pro-independence opposition Sovereign Party (PS) entered parliament with two new seats. Coalition partner Workers' Liberation Front Party (FOL) lost the two parliamentary seats it had won in 2006, and support for the National Party (PNP) was cut in half from two seats to one.

Curacao continues to be a politically split island with a small edge favoring the Antilles dissolution process and current relations with Kingdom of the Netherlands partners. The government is preparing the Antilles for dissolution and pledged to keep the formation process of the new Kingdom political entities on course. St. Maarten and Curacao have opted for an autonomous status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands similar to Aruba's status. Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Bonaire have opted for closer ties (municipality-like) to the Netherlands. These entities are currently scheduled to emerge in October 2010, which will require new

island elections in summer 2010. The target date for implementing these changes is October 10, 2010, but it is unclear if the target will be met.

Drug smuggling continues to be an issue for the Netherlands Antilles, but has been significantly reduced through intensive cooperation among Dutch and Antillean law enforcement authorities.

## **ECONOMY**

Tourism and the financial services sector have been the mainstays of the Netherlands Antilles' economy since the 1970s. The Central Bank reported that the economy of the Netherlands Antilles fared relatively well during the first half of 2009 amidst the global recession. Debt relief played an important role in this outcome, contributing to surpluses in the fiscal accounts and the current account of the balance of payments. The economy of the Netherlands Antilles continued to grow but at a slower pace. Real GDP growth in the second quarter of 2009 was estimated at 0.7% compared to 2.1% in 2008's second quarter. The construction, wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels, and financial services sectors were primarily accountable for the contraction in the private sector. The slowdown in economic growth was attributable entirely to a contraction in private spending that resulted from a decline in investment. Private consumption growth slowed significantly but remained positive. The contraction in private spending was offset by an increase in government spending and in net foreign demand. The increase in net foreign demand resulted from a stronger decline in imports than in exports, related partly to the decline in oil prices. Lower oil prices also accounted for the further decline in the inflation rate. The annual quarterly inflation rate moderated to 1.7% and the 12-month average inflation rate to 4.8%. The unemployment rate in Curacao fell to 9.7% in 2009.

A decline in stay-over tourism contributed to fewer activities in the restaurants and hotels and wholesale and retail trade sectors. St. Maarten and Bonaire accounted for the decline, while Curacao still noted a small growth. This diverging development can be explained by the more diversified market structure of Curacao's tourism industry; St. Maarten and Bonaire rely relatively heavily on the U.S. market. By contrast, cruise tourism continued to grow, supported by Curacao and Bonaire, while St. Maarten saw a decline in the number of cruise visitors. Overall, the islands enjoy a high per capita income and a well-developed infrastructure compared with other countries in the region.

## **FOREIGN RELATIONS**

The Netherlands Antilles conducts foreign affairs primarily through the Dutch Government. The Netherlands Antilles continues to strengthen its relations with other Caribbean governments. It has been granted observer status at the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and in December 1998 signed an agreement with the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) that made the Netherlands Antilles an associate member.

## **U.S.-NETHERLANDS ANTILLES RELATIONS**

The United States maintains positive relations with the Netherlands Antilles and works cooperatively to combat narco-trafficking and trafficking in persons.

### **Principal U.S. Officials**

Consul General--**Timothy J. Dunn**

Vice Consul--Winifred L. Hofstetter

Management Officer--Donald Feeney

The **U.S. Consulate General** for Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles is located at J.B. Gorsiraweg #1, Willemstad, Curaçao; tel.

599-9-461-3066, fax: 599-9-461-6489; Monday-Friday, 8:00 am-5:00 pm. Email: [acsuracao@state.gov](mailto:acsuracao@state.gov)

#### **Other Contact Information**

U.S. Department of Commerce  
International Trade Administration  
Trade Information Center  
14th and Constitution, NW  
Washington, DC 20230  
Tel: 1-800-USA-TRADE

#### **TRAVEL AND BUSINESS INFORMATION**

The U.S. Department of State's Consular Information Program advises Americans traveling and residing abroad through Country Specific Information, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings. **Country Specific Information** exists for all countries and includes information on entry and exit requirements, currency regulations, health conditions, safety and security, crime, political disturbances, and the addresses of the U.S. embassies and consulates abroad. **Travel Alerts** are issued to disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats and other relatively short-term conditions overseas that pose significant risks to the security of American travelers. **Travel Warnings** are issued when the State Department recommends that Americans avoid travel to a certain country because the situation is dangerous or unstable.

For the latest security information, Americans living and traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs Internet web site at <http://www.travel.state.gov>, where the current **Worldwide Caution**, **Travel Alerts**, and **Travel Warnings** can be found. **Consular Affairs Publications**, which contain information on obtaining passports and planning a safe trip abroad, are also available at <http://www.travel.state.gov>. For additional information on international travel, see <http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Travel/International.shtml>.

The Department of State encourages all U.S. citizens traveling or residing abroad to register via the **State Department's travel registration** website or at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. Registration will make your presence and whereabouts known in case it is necessary to contact you in an emergency and will enable you to receive up-to-date information on security conditions.

Emergency information concerning Americans traveling abroad may be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the U.S. and Canada or the regular toll line 1-202-501-4444 for callers outside the U.S. and Canada.

The **National Passport Information Center** (NPIC) is the U.S. Department of State's single, centralized public contact center for U.S. passport information. Telephone: 1-877-4-USA-PPT (1-877-487-2778); TDD/TTY: 1-888-874-7793. Passport information is available 24 hours, 7 days a week. You may speak with a representative Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., Eastern Time, excluding federal holidays.

Travelers can check the latest health information with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia. A hotline at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) and a web site at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx> give the most recent health advisories, immunization recommendations or requirements, and advice on food and drinking water safety for regions and countries. The CDC publication "Health Information for International Travel" can be found at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/contentYellowBook.aspx>.

### **Further Electronic Information**

**Department of State Web Site.** Available on the Internet at <http://www.state.gov>, the Department of State web site provides timely, global access to official U.S. foreign policy information, including **Background Notes** and **daily press briefings** along with the directory of **key officers** of Foreign Service posts and more. The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) provides security information and regional news that impact U.S. companies working abroad through its website <http://www.osac.gov>

**Export.gov** provides a portal to all export-related assistance and market information offered by the federal government and provides trade leads, free export counseling, help with the export process, and more.

**STAT-USA/Internet**, a service of the U.S. Department of Commerce, provides authoritative economic, business, and international trade information from the Federal government. The site includes current and historical trade-related releases, international market research, trade opportunities, and country analysis and provides access to the **National Trade Data Bank**.

