



Official Name: **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**



PROFILE

Geography

Area: 340 sq. km. (130 sq. mi.); slightly less than twice the size of Washington, DC. The Grenadines include 32 islands, the largest of which are Bequia, Mustique, Canouan, and Union. Some of the smaller islands are privately owned.

Cities: *Capital*--Kingstown.

Terrain: Volcanic and mountainous, with the highest peak, Soufriere, rising to 1,219 meters (4,000 ft.).

Climate: Tropical.

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*--Vincentian.

Population (July 2009 est.): 104,574.

Annual population growth rate (2009 est.): -0.344%.

Ethnic groups: African descent (66%), mixed (19%), West Indian (6%), Carib Indian (2%), other (7%).

Religions: Anglican (47%), Methodist (28%), Roman Catholic (13%), other Protestant denominations, Seventh-day Adventist, and Hindu.

Language: English (official); some French Patois spoken.

Education (2004): *Adult literacy*--88.1%.

Health (2006): *Infant mortality rate*--17/1,000. *Life expectancy*--men 69 years; women 74 years.

Workforce (2006): 57,695.

Unemployment (2004): 12%.

Government

Type: Parliamentary democracy; independent sovereign state within the Commonwealth.

Independence: October 27, 1979.

Constitution: October 27, 1979.

Branches: *Executive*--governor general (representing Queen Elizabeth II, head of state), prime minister (head of government), cabinet. *Legislative*--unicameral legislature with 15-member elected House of Assembly and six-member appointed Senate.

Judicial--district courts, Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (High Court and Court of Appeals), final appeal to the Privy Council in London.

Subdivisions: Six parishes.

Political parties: Unity Labour Party (ULP, incumbent), New Democratic Party (NDP).

Suffrage: Universal at 18.

Economy

GDP (purchasing power parity, 2009 est.): \$1.55 billion.

GDP real growth rate (2009 est.): -6.5%.

Per capita GDP (2009 est.): \$18,100.

Inflation (consumer prices, 2007 est.): 6.1%.

Natural resources: Timber.

Agriculture: Mostly bananas.

Industry: Plastic products, food processing, cement, furniture, clothing, starch, and detergents.

Trade (2005): *Exports*--\$40 million (merchandise) and \$155 million (commercial services). *Major markets*--European Union (27.2%), Barbados (12.7%), Trinidad and Tobago (12.3%), Saint Lucia (10.9%), and the United States (9.2%). *Imports*--\$240 million (merchandise) and \$74 million (commercial services). *Major suppliers*--United States (33.3%), Trinidad and Tobago (23.6%), European Union (15.1%), Japan (4.2%), and Barbados (3.9%).

Official exchange rate: EC\$2.70 = U.S. \$1.

PEOPLE

Most Vincentians are the descendants of African slaves brought to the island to work on plantations. There also are a few white descendants of English colonists, as well as some East Indians, Carib Indians, and a sizable minority of mixed race. The country's official language is English, but a French patois may be heard on some of the Grenadine Islands.

HISTORY

Carib Indians aggressively prevented European settlement on St. Vincent until the 18th century. African slaves--whether shipwrecked or escaped from St. Lucia and Grenada and seeking refuge in St. Vincent--intermarried with the Caribs and became known as "black Caribs." Beginning in 1719, French settlers cultivated coffee, tobacco, indigo, cotton, and sugar on plantations worked by African slaves. In 1763, St. Vincent was ceded to Britain. Restored to French rule in 1779, St. Vincent was regained by the British under the Treaty of Versailles in 1783. Conflict between the British and the black Caribs continued until 1796, when General Abercrombie crushed a revolt fomented by the French radical Victor Hugues. More than 5,000 black Caribs were eventually deported to Roatan, an island off the coast of Honduras.

Slavery was abolished in 1834; the resulting labor shortages on the plantations attracted Portuguese immigrants in the 1840s and east Indians in the 1860s. Conditions remained harsh for both former slaves and immigrant agricultural workers, as depressed

world sugar prices kept the economy stagnant until the turn of the century.

From 1763 until independence, St. Vincent passed through various stages of colonial status under the British. A representative assembly was authorized in 1776, Crown Colony government installed in 1877, a legislative council created in 1925, and universal adult suffrage granted in 1951.

During this period, the British made several unsuccessful attempts to affiliate St. Vincent with other Windward Islands in order to govern the region through a unified administration. The most notable was the West Indies Federation, which collapsed in 1962. St. Vincent was granted associate statehood status in 1969, giving it complete control over its internal affairs. Following a referendum in 1979, St. Vincent and the Grenadines became the last of the Windward Islands to gain independence.

Natural disasters have plagued the country throughout the 20th century. In 1902, the La Soufriere volcano erupted, killing 2,000 people. Much farmland was damaged, and the economy deteriorated. In April 1979, La Soufriere erupted again. Although no one was killed, thousands had to be evacuated, and there was extensive agricultural damage. In 1980 and 1987, hurricanes devastated banana and coconut plantations; 1998 and 1999 also saw very active hurricane seasons, with Hurricane Lenny in 1999 causing extensive damage to the west coast of the island.

GOVERNMENT

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a parliamentary democracy within the Commonwealth of Nations. Queen Elizabeth II is head of state and is represented on the island by a governor general, an office with mostly ceremonial functions. Control of the government rests with the prime minister and the cabinet.

The parliament is a unicameral body, consisting of 15 elected members and six appointed senators. The governor general appoints senators, four on the advice of the prime minister and two on the advice of the leader of the opposition. The parliamentary term of office is five years, although the prime minister may call elections at any time.

As in other English-speaking Caribbean countries, the judiciary in St. Vincent is rooted in British common law. There are 11 courts in three magisterial districts. The Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, comprising a High Court and a Court of Appeals, is known in St. Vincent as the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Supreme Court. The court of last resort is the judicial committee of Her Majesty's Privy Council in London.

There is no local government in St. Vincent, and all six parishes are administered by the central government.

Principal Government Officials

Head of State--Queen Elizabeth II

Governor General--Frederick Ballantyne

Prime Minister--Ralph E. Gonsalves

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Commerce, and Trade--Sir Louis Straker

Ambassador to the United States and the OAS--La Celia Prince

Permanent Representative to the UN--Camillo Gonsalves

St. Vincent and the Grenadines maintains an embassy at 3216 New Mexico Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20016 (tel. 202-364-6730). St. Vincent also has a consul resident in New York.

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

The People's Political Party (PPP), founded in 1952 by Ebenezer Joshua, was the first major political party in St. Vincent. The PPP had its roots in the labor movement and was in the forefront of national policy prior to independence, winning elections from 1957 through 1966. With the development of a more conservative black middle class, however, the party began to lose support steadily, until it collapsed after a rout in the 1979 elections. The party dissolved itself in 1984.

Founded in 1955, the St. Vincent Labour Party (SVLP), under R. Milton Cato, gained the support of the middle class. With a conservative law-and-order message and a pro-Western foreign policy, the SVLP dominated politics from the mid-1960s until the mid-1980s. Following victories in the 1967 and 1974 elections, the SVLP led the island to independence, winning the first post-independence election in 1979. Expecting an easy victory for the SVLP in 1984, Cato called early elections. The results were surprising: with a record 89% voter turnout, James F. Mitchell's New Democratic Party (NDP) won nine seats in the House of Assembly.

Bolstered by a resurgent economy in the mid-1980s, Mitchell led his party to an unprecedented sweep of all 15 House of Assembly seats in the 1989 elections. The opposition emerged from the election weakened and fragmented but was able to win three seats during the February 1994 elections under a "unity" coalition. In 1998, Prime Minister Mitchell and the NDP were returned to power for an unprecedented fourth term but only with a slim margin of 8 seats to 7 seats for the Unity Labour Party (ULP). The NDP was able to accomplish a return to power while receiving a lesser share of the popular vote, approximately 45% to the ULP's 55%. In March 2001, the ULP, led by Ralph Gonsalves, assumed power after winning 12 of the 15 seats in Parliament.

In the December 2005 parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Gonsalves and the ULP retained their 12-3 majority over the NDP.

ECONOMY

Banana production employs upwards of 60% of the work force and accounts for 50% of merchandise exports in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, with an emphasis on the main island of St. Vincent. Such reliance on one crop has made the economy vulnerable to fluctuations in banana prices and reduced European Union trade preferences. To combat these vulnerabilities, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is focused on diversifying its economy away from reliance on bananas. Recently, there has been a parallel reduction in licit agriculture and a rise in marijuana cultivation, making St. Vincent and the Grenadines the largest marijuana producer in the Eastern Caribbean.

In contrast to developments on the main island, tourism in the Grenadines has grown to become a very important part of the economy, and the chief earner of foreign exchange for the country as a whole. The Grenadines have become a favorite of high-end tourism and the focus of new development in the country. Super-luxury resorts, yachting tourism, and a commitment by the government to rehabilitate and protect the Tobago Keys as a national park have all contributed to strong tourism returns in the Grenadines.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines' currency is the Eastern Caribbean Dollar (EC\$), a regional currency shared among members of the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU). The Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) issues the EC\$, manages monetary policy, and regulates and supervises commercial banking activities in its member countries. The ECCB has kept the EC\$ pegged at EC\$2.7=U.S. \$1.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a beneficiary of the U.S. Caribbean Basin Initiative that grants duty-free entry into the United States for many goods. St. Vincent and the Grenadines also belongs to the predominantly English-speaking Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) and the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME).

FOREIGN RELATIONS

St. Vincent and the Grenadines maintains close ties to the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, and is a member of regional political and economic organizations such as the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and CARICOM. St. Vincent and the Grenadines is also a member of the United Nations, the Commonwealth of Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Association of Caribbean States (ACS). St. Vincent and the Grenadines has chosen to recognize Taiwan instead of the People's Republic of China.

U.S.-ST. VINCENT RELATIONS

The United States and St. Vincent have solid bilateral relations. Both governments are concerned with eradicating local marijuana cultivation and combating the transshipment of narcotics. In 1995, the United States and St. Vincent signed a Maritime Law Enforcement Agreement. In 1996, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines signed an Extradition Treaty with the United States. In 1997, the two countries signed a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty.

The United States supports the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' efforts to expand its economic base and to provide a higher standard of living for its citizens. U.S. assistance is channeled primarily through multilateral agencies such as the World Bank. The United States has 27 **Peace Corps** volunteers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, working in business development, education, and health. The U.S. military also provides assistance through construction and humanitarian civic action projects.

A relatively small number of Americans--fewer than 1,000--reside on the islands.

The United States maintains no official presence in St. Vincent. The Ambassador and Embassy officers are resident in Barbados and frequently travel to St. Vincent.

Principal U.S. Embassy Officials

Ambassador--vacant

Deputy Chief of Mission--D. Brent Hardt

Political/Economic Chief--Ian Campbell

Consul General--Nicole Theriot

Regional Labor Attaché--Jake Aller

Commercial Affairs--Ian Campbell

Public Affairs Officer--John Roberts

Peace Corps Director--Margo Jean-Child (resident in St. Lucia)

The **U.S. Embassy** in Barbados is located in the Wildey Business Park, Wildey, St. Michael (tel: 246-436-4950; fax: 246-429-5246).

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](#).

