

Barbados

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Description:

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Barbados is still very British. In fact, the island is commonly referred to as "Little England." Afternoon teatime is observed in some circles, cricket is the national passion and polo is played all winter. Many villages, streets, monuments and parks in Barbados are named after locations in the U.K., as well. And Bajans (BAY-juns), as they call themselves, often possess a bit of English reserve, putting emphasis on good manners.

What's more, British aristocrats have wintered in Barbados for decades, and the island reflects their influence in many ways. The resorts are luxurious, and the restaurants provide fine dining. Even duty-free shops are often more upscale than those on other Caribbean islands.

In recent years, the culture has seen an increase in American influence and more appreciation of African roots as well, resulting in a revitalized discourse on Barbadian identity, particularly in the arts. Barbados is generally conservative, and prides itself on being Christian.

Though efficient is a word that is not used often in the Caribbean, it fits Barbados better than many other islands. It's been catering to visitors for decades and has one of the most fully developed tourism infrastructures in the region.

Although Barbados lacks rain forests, mountainous terrain and world-class reef systems, the island's natural beauty and scenic variety are magnificent. You'll find dramatic natural caves, rocky cliffs with blowholes by the sea, miles/kilometers of sugarcane fields and some remote scenic beaches. Those seeking a week of relaxation on beautiful beaches, perhaps with a little nightlife and history mixed in, will likely be pleased with what Barbados has to offer.

Another plus is the people of Barbados. Bajans are some of the best-educated people in the Caribbean (Barbados boasts a literacy rate of 99%), and they enjoy conversing on a wide range of subjects. This quality even spills over into entertainment: The island's calypso music always has something to say and often deals with Barbados politics.

English is the official language, but a dialect with its own syntax, special meanings and some African words is also spoken. Though it may seem like a cross between bad English and gibberish, it is remarkably expressive and is often used even by the highly educated for emphasis or comic effect.

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