

Information about the Caribbean

- In the **Caribbean Sea**, the **West Indies** consists of two main groups of islands: the **Greater Antilles** (Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola [Haiti/Dominican Republic], and Puerto Rico) to the north and the **Lesser Antilles** to the east and south.
- The Caribbean (explored by Christopher Columbus in 1492) was named after the **Carib** people, a tribe that inhabited some islands of the Lesser Antilles. The Caribbean is made up of volcanic islands, coral reefs, ocean ridges, trenches, and basins. The Caribbean is known for its fair weather, but from late July through October, hurricanes also develop.
- **Spain, England, France, and Holland** all explored and settled the West Indies. Many of the **native populations** such as the **Arawaks** of the Greater Antilles were either wiped out by disease or merged into the population. Later, as agriculture like sugar cane developed, **slaves from Africa** were brought to the islands as workers. The population of the Caribbean Islands and its rim countries is a mixture of **European, African, and Native peoples**.
 - **The Bahamas**, located off Florida's coast, is composed of about 700 islands, is a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations, and became independent in 1973. The capital is **Nassau**.
 - **Cuba** is the largest island in the Greater Antilles. It was a Spanish colony until 1898. Cuba is 750 miles long and 125 miles wide. Its capital is **Havana**. Cuba's official language is Spanish. Sugar is the major export crop, but potatoes, rice, sweet potatoes, eggs, tobacco and citrus are produced and exported.
 - **Jamaica** is the third largest island (146 miles long) in the Caribbean, and **Kingston** is the capital. ~~Most Jamaicans are of African origin. The official language is English, but many speak a Creole dialect.~~ Jamaica was settled by the Spanish, who ruled the island until 1655, when the British took control. Jamaica achieved full independence in 1962 and is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.
 - **Haiti** lies on the western third of the island of Hispaniola and is the Western Hemisphere's second-oldest independent country and the world's oldest black republic. **Port-au-Prince** is the capital. The French colonized the western end of the island and brought slaves from Africa to work the rich sugar cane trade. The French Revolution (1789) inspired a slave rebellion in 1791 and the island became independent in 1804. In 1844 the Spanish-speaking eastern part of the island broke away from Haiti and established the Dominican Republic. Haiti's official languages are French and Creole.
 - **Puerto Rico** is a possession of the United States, and its capital is **San Juan**. Juan Ponce de Leon claimed Puerto Rico for Spain in 1508, and it remained Spanish until the United States took over in 1898. Puerto Rico's population is almost entirely Hispanic. There are about 2.7 million Puerto Ricans living on the U.S. mainland, many in New York State. Spanish is the major language, although English is a required second language.
 - **The Grenadine Islands** (about 600 small islands) stretch from **St. Vincent** in the north to **Granada** in the south. Several of the other islands include Carriacou and Bequia.
 - **Trinidad and Tobago**, famous for steel bands, calypso, and carnival, is an independent nation located just 7 miles north of Venezuela. A member of the Commonwealth of Nations, it is composed of the islands of Trinidad and Tobago. The capital city is **Port of Spain**. Explored by Christopher Columbus in 1498, the islands were under the influence of the Spanish, British, Carib Indians, Dutch and French before the British once again acquired them in 1814.