Mount Nevis, 985 metres) which is usually capped with white clouds. The almost circular island of Nevis to the south-east has beaches of silver sand and volcanic sand except for the south-eastern peninsula, which has beaches of golden sand. The larger island, St Kitts, is 37 km long, with a central mountain range broken by ravines and a spacious fertile valley running down to the capital Basseterre. The highest point is Mount Liamuiga (1,156 metres). The beaches are mostly of black volcanic sand except for the south-eastern peninsula, which has beaches of golden sand. The almost circular island of Nevis to the south-east has beaches of silver sand and coconut groves, and rises to a central peak (Mount Nevis, 985 metres) which is usually capped with white clouds.

Climate: Tropical, cooled by the north-east trade winds. There is no distinct rainy season. The heat is not searing; the highest recorded temperature is 33°C. Hurricanes may occur June–November.

Vegetation: The lower mountain slopes of St Kitts, particularly to the north, are arable and used for growing sugar cane. Uncultivated lowland slopes are covered in tropical woodland and exotic fruits. The higher slopes provide short grass for pastureage. Tropical rainforest or dense bushy cover occurs on the central range; unusually, the forested area is increasing in size. Nevis, where much of the land is cultivated by peasant farmers growing vegetables and coconuts, has a large coconut forest on the west side. Forest covers 42 per cent of the total land area of St Kitts and Nevis and there was no significant loss of forest cover during 1990–2012.

Wildlife: Before the arrival of Europeans the only land-animals were small rodents and reptiles. The French introduced the green vervet monkey to the islands, and mongooses and deer later followed. Birdlife includes pelicans and frigate birds on the coast, hummingbirds in the forested areas and quails and pigeons in the mountains.

Main towns: Basseterre (capital, pop. 13,400 in 2010), St Paul’s (1,300), Saddlers (1,000), Middle Island (900), Tabernacle (840), Mansion (830), Cayon (810) and Sandy Point (790) on St Kitts; Charlestown (2,200) on Nevis.

Transport: There are good road networks on St Kitts and Nevis, 43 per cent paved. A regular passenger ferry service operates between Basseterre and Charlestown, taking 40 minutes. Basseterre has a deep-water port, with berthing facilities for круiseships and cargo vessels. There is a smaller port at Sandy Point. Nevis has a 126-metre pier at Charlestown. There is also a smaller port at Newcastle.

The Robert Llewellyn Bradshaw International Airport at Golden Rock, St Kitts (3 km from Basseterre), receives direct flights from the USA and Canada, while flights to other continents generally go via Antigua. The Nevis airfield is at Newcastle.

Nevis:

KEY FACTS 2013

Population per sq km: 206

Net primary enrolment: 81% (2012)

Population: 54,000 (2013); some 12,000 on Nevis; 32 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 1.2 per cent p.a. 1990–2013; birth rate 14 per 1,000 people (est. 26 in 1970); life expectancy 75 years (est.)

The population is mainly of mixed African and European descent, with a UK-descended minority.

Language: English is the official language; an English-based Creole is widely spoken.

Religion: Mainly Christians (Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Moravians and others).

Health: Public spending on health was two per cent of GDP in 2012. There are general hospitals at Basseterre in St Kitts and Charlestown in Nevis, and many health clinics. Some 98 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source (2012). Infant mortality was eight per 1,000 live births in 2013.

Education: There are 12 years of compulsory education starting at the age of five, offered by state, private and church schools. Primary school comprises seven years and secondary five, with cycles of three and two years. Some 74 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2009). The school year starts in September.

St Kitts and Nevis participates in the regional University of the West Indies, which has its main campuses in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 2.10:1 (2008).

Media: The main political parties publish newspapers. Newspapers include Sun St Kitts/Nevis (daily), The Democrat (weekly of People’s Action Movement), The Labour Spokesman (bi-weekly of St Kitts-Nevis Trades and Labour Union), and St Kitts and Nevis Observer (weekly).

The government provides national commercial radio and TV services, ZIZ Radio and ZIZ Television; and there are several private radio stations, and private TV channels are available via cable.
**Communications:** Country code 1 869; internet domain ‘kn’. Mobile phone coverage extends over most of both islands. There are internet cafes in the main towns and a general post office on both St Kitts (located in Basseterre) and Nevis (in Charlestown).

For every 1,000 people there are 354 landlines, 1,421 mobile phone subscriptions and 800 internet users (2013).

**Public holidays:** New Year/Carnival (two/three days), Labour Day (first Monday in May), August Monday (first Monday in August), August Tuesday (first Tuesday in August), National Heroes’ Day (16 September), Independence Day (19 September), Christmas Day and Boxing Day. Carnival begins on 24 December and ends on 2 January.

Religious festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday, Easter Monday and Whit Monday.

**Economy**

**KEY FACTS 2013**

**GNI:** US$724m

**GNI p.c.:** US$13,460

**GDP growth:** -0.9% p.a. 2009–13

**Inflation:** 2.3% p.a. 2009–13

St Kitts and Nevis was virtually a sugar monocrop economy until the late 1970s, when the government backed a drive into small-scale industrialisation. Tourism has become the largest source of foreign exchange. From 1984 a small offshore sector on Nevis grew rapidly, with around 18,000 companies registered by 1999, and in 2005 St Kitts established a registry of ships and companies registered by 1999, and in 2005.

The two islands, together with Anguilla, assumed the status of association with the UK in 1967, a situation which the Anguillans rejected from the outset, with rebellion beginning in 1967. In 1971, the UK and the other islands agreed that Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands, as a single colony and from 1871 as part of the Leeward Islands Federation.

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The country, as the Federation of St Christopher and Nevis, had internal self-government from 1976, and achieved independence on 19 September 1983, choosing to remain a constitutional monarchy with Queen Elizabeth II as head of state.

The St Kitts–Nevis Labour Party (SKNLP) held power from 1967 until defeat in 1980 by a coalition of the People’s Action Movement (PAM) and Nevis Reformation Party (NRP), and PAM’s Dr Kennedy Alphonse Simmonds became Prime Minister. Simmonds was re-elected in 1984, 1989 and 1993, when the PAM and SKNLP each won four seats, and the PAM formed a governing alliance with the NRP. The PAM formed a governing alliance with the NRP, though the SKNLP had received 54 per cent of the vote and NRP was itself losing support to the other main Nevis party, the Concerned Citizens’ Movement (CCM).

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Foreign debt rose rapidly from the mid-1990s, in large measure due to the consequences of five hurricanes in five years. After strong growth in 2000, the economy hardly grew in 2001–03, reflecting the downturn in the USA and consequent fall in tourism, but there was investment in new tourist resorts and golf courses, and the economy picked up in 2004. It then maintained growth of five per cent p.a. over 2004–08, slowing from 2008 with the onset of the world economic downturn in that year, shrinking by 5.6 per cent in 2009 and 3.2 per cent in 2010. After a pause in 2011–12, good growth returned from 2013, continuing into 2015.

**History**

The islands were originally settled from South America, and had Amerindian populations at the time of the first European landings. St Christopher (St Kitts) was sighted by Christopher Columbus on his second voyage in 1493. It was colonised by the English under Sir Thomas Warner in 1623 and during the following centuries sugar was grown on plantations worked by enslaved Africans. Already in 1624, however, another part of the island was colonised by the French (who also used slaves on their estates) and the two powers fought over the island during the 17th and 18th centuries until St Kitts was ceded to Britain by the Treaty of Versailles (1783). Nevis was settled by the English in 1628. It, too, was subject to attack, from the French and Spanish, in the 17th and 18th centuries, with less damage, however, to its economy. From 1816 the islands were administered, along with Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands, as a single colony and from 1871 as part of the Leeward Islands Federation.

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In an early general election in 1995, after 15 years in opposition, the SKNLP was elected to office with an overwhelming majority of seven seats to the PAM’s one. The CCM retained its two seats in Nevis and the NRP
one. Labour Party leader Dr Denzil Douglas became Prime Minister.

In the elections in March 2000 the SKNLP won all eight St Kitts seats, while in Nevis the CCM retained two and the NRP one.

**Nevis**

On Nevis, discontent with the federation grew through the latter 1980s, with increasing calls for separation, and strikes among sugar and other agricultural workers. Elections in Nevis in 1992 then ousted the NRP, replacing it with the CCM.

At the Nevis Island Assembly elections in February 1997, three seats were won by the CCM and two by the NRP. CCM leader Vance Amory retaining the premiership. In October 1997, the five members of the Nevis Assembly voted to secede from the federation, triggering a referendum on Nevis which was held in August 1998. Only 62 per cent of the voters of Nevis backed secession, which fell short of the required two-thirds majority. Prime Minister Denzil Douglas promised to work for greater autonomy for Nevis.

In the September 2001 Nevis Island Assembly elections, the CCM won four seats and the NRP one, and Amory was returned as Premier. An unsuccessful attempt at triggering a referendum on Nevis was initiated in June 2003.

**Politics**

**Last elections:** 16 February 2015

**Next elections:** 2020

**Head of state:** Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Governor-General Samuel Weymouth Tapley Seaton QC

**Head of government:** Prime Minister Dr Timothy Sylvester Harris

**Ruling party:** Team Unity coalition

**Women MPs:** 14%

Dr Denzil Douglas and the St Kitts-Nevis Labour Party (SKNLP) were returned to power in the general election of October 2004, which was observed by a Commonwealth expert team. The ruling party took seven of the St Kitts seats, and the People’s Action Movement (PAM) one. The Nevis seats were again divided between the Concerned Citizens’ Movement (CCM; two seats) and the Nevis Reformation Party (NRP; one).

In January 2010 the SKNLP won its fourth consecutive general election, taking six seats in St Kitts and 47 per cent of the national vote; and Douglas was returned as Prime Minister. The remaining seats were again divided between PAM (two in St Kitts; 32 per cent), CCM (two in Nevis; 11 per cent) and NRP (one in Nevis; ten per cent). Turnout was 84 per cent. The election was observed by a Commonwealth expert team.

Governor-General Sir Cuthbert Sebastian retired on 1 January 2013, from the office he had held since 1996, and was succeeded by Sir Edmund Lawrence on 2 January 2013.

**International relations**

St Kitts and Nevis is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, Association of Caribbean States, Caribbean Community, Non-Aligned Movement, Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, Organization of American States, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

**Traveller information**

**Immigration and customs:** Passports must be valid for at least six months from the date of departure. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals.

**Further information**

**Government of St Christopher and Nevis:**
- Eastern Caribbean Central Bank: www.eccb-centralbank.org
- St Kitts Tourism Authority: www.skittstourism.kn
- Commonwealth Secretariat: www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/St_Kitts_and_Nevis
- Commonwealth of Nations: www.commonwealth.org

**Media**
- St Kitts and Nevis Observer: www.thestkittsnevisobserver.com
- The Labour Spokesman: www.labourspokesman.com
- Voice of Nevis: www.vonradio.com
- Winn FM: www.winnfm.com
- ZIZ Radio and Television: www.zizonline.com
- SKNList: www.sknlist.com
Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left. A temporary driving licence must be purchased before visitors can drive on the islands, available at car hire firms and police stations, on production of a foreign driving licence.

There are regular passenger ferries between St Kitts and Nevis, journey time about 40 minutes. The bus network provides a regular but unscheduled service. Taxis have set rates.

Travel health: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever and hepatitis B.

There were 107,000 tourist arrivals in 2013.