

# DOMINICA



**Official name:** Commonwealth of Dominica

**Form of government:** multiparty republic with one legislative house (House of Assembly [321])

**Head of state President:** Charles Angelo Savarin

**Head of gov't Prime Minister:** Roosevelt Skerrit

**Capital:** Roseau

**Official language:** English

**Official religion:** none

**Monetary unit:** Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$)

**Population:** (2016 est.) 72,200

**Total area (sq mi)** 290

**Urban-rural pop.:**

Urban: (2015) 69.5%

Rural: (2015) 30.5%

**Life expectancy:**

Male: (2015) 73.8

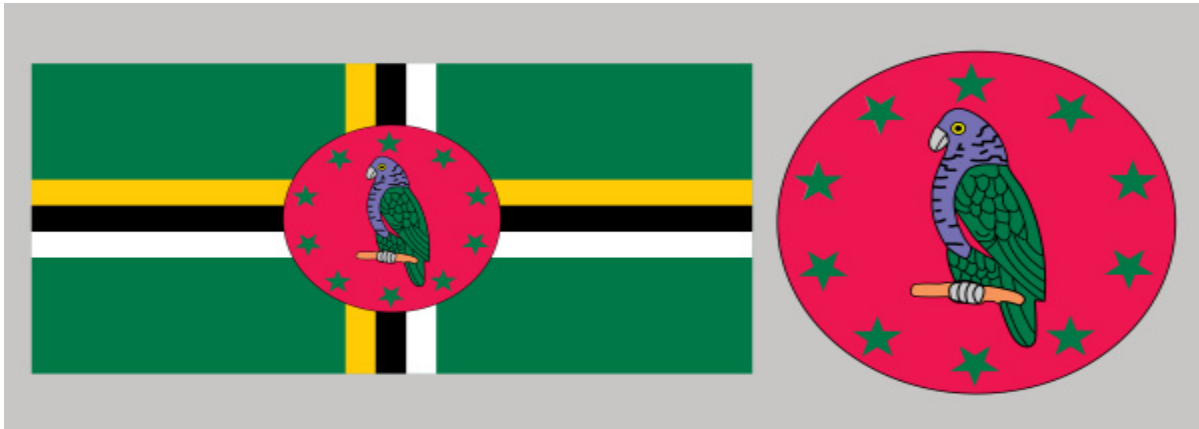
Female: (2015) 79.9

**GNI per capita:** (U.S.\$) 6,800

## INTRODUCTION

This island country of the Lesser Antilles in the eastern Caribbean Sea lies between the French islands of Guadeloupe to the north and Martinique to the south. The country has been a member of the Commonwealth since independence in 1978.

The island is 29 miles (47 km) long and has a maximum breadth of 16 miles (26 km). Dominica's great natural beauty, especially its spectacular mountainous topography, has impressed generations of nature lovers.



## LAND and CLIMATE

Its main physical feature is a high, forest-covered mountain range that runs from north to south. Dominica is the most heavily forested island of the Lesser Antilles. A plain breaks the mountain range at about the center of the chain, and all the rivers all drain the plain. These and the many other rivers and streams are mostly unusable by boats larger than canoes.

There are volcanoes on the island, and, though they are probably now extinct, a number of thermal springs and Boiling Lake in the south are signs of continuing volcanic activity. The island soil is rich, and there is dense tropical plant growth. Dominica has a warm year-round tropical climate with temperatures that range from 78° F (26° C) to 90° F (32° C). Rainfall is very heavy, averaging as much as 250 inches in the mountains and from about 60 inches to 145 inches along the coast.

Animal life on the island includes numerous species of birds, including two parrots found only in Dominica, the iguana, opossum, agouti, boa constrictor, and many species of bat.



## PEOPLE

Most of the people are of African descent, but there are also some Europeans, Syrians, and Carib Indians. The Caribs are descendants of the early inhabitants of the island. English is the official language, but a dialect of French is commonly spoken. A large percentage of the people are Roman

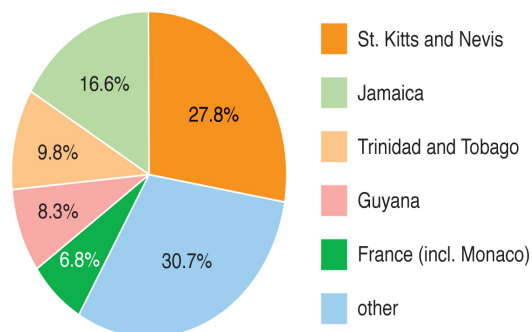
Catholic. There are also groups of Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, and Methodists.

Primary education is compulsory and free in government-run schools. There are many secondary schools, a teacher-training college, a medical school, a nursing school, and a branch of the University of the West Indies. Literacy is estimated at nearly 90 percent.

## ECONOMY

Dominica is one of the poorest of the Caribbean nations. Agriculture is a mainstay of the economy, and it was negatively affected by a number of damaging hurricanes in the final decades of the 20th century. Bananas are the country's main agricultural product and major export. Grapefruit, coconuts, limes, oranges, and vegetables are produced.

Major export destinations (2013)



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Pumice, which is mined, is the most important commercial mineral resource on the island. There is some livestock raised on the island and a small commercial fishing industry. In addition to bananas, exports include coconut-based soaps and perfumes and cosmetics.

Since the 1990s, tourism has become one of its major industries. Tourists are attracted to Dominica for the island's rich tropical environment, mild climate, and unspoiled wilderness. There are some 485 miles (780 kilometers) of roads, about half of which are paved.

## **HISTORY**

The Arawak Indians were early inhabitants of the island. They were later driven out by the Caribs, who inhabited the island when Christopher Columbus sighted it on Sunday, Nov. 3, 1493, and named it Dominica, from the Latin dies dominica, "the Lord's day."

Because of its steep coastal cliffs, Dominica was one of the last islands to be explored by Europeans. The French were the first to colonize the island in 1632. The Carib Indians, French, and British later fought for control of the island. It was awarded to Britain in 1783, but endured French attacks until 1805. Dominica has been under the control of various governments, but in 1978, it finally became fully independent (from Britain) as the Commonwealth of Dominica.



Hurricane David (the secondly deadliest hurricane) severely damaged the island in August 1979. The storm not only largely destroyed the banana crop, the island's economic mainstay, but it also carried away most of the island's topsoil and virtually wiped out the

country's agricultural base. The following year, Hurricane Allen set the economy back further.

In 1980 Eugenia Charles became the Caribbean's first female prime minister, under the party she initially created, the Dominica Freedom Party (DFP). Despite a few coup attempts, Charles' presidency was marked with advances toward recovery, with considerable decreases in unemployment and inflation. The DFP stayed in power until 1995.

In September 1995 Hurricane Luis destroyed nearly all of the island's banana plantations.

In 2004 Roosevelt Skerrit became president and at age 31, was at the time the world's youngest head of government. Under his leadership Dominica increased its international alliances.

In late August 2015, Dominica suffered serious damage from Tropical Storm Erika. High winds and heavy rains caused flooding and landslides, destroying buildings and killing more than two dozen people. Several communities were devastated, and Prime Minister Skerrit said the storm had set back Dominica's development process by 20 years.

**Fun Fact:** Dominica was the last island to be formed in the Caribbean.

**Fun Fact:** Dominica is the only Caribbean island with a remaining population of pre-Columbian Carib Indians. More than 2,000 Caribs, properly known as the Kalinago, inhabit a 3,700 acre territory on the northwestern side of the island.

**Fun Fact:** Dominica is often known as "The Nature Island of the Caribbean" due to its spectacular, lush, and varied flora and fauna, which are protected by an extensive natural park system.

**Fun Fact:** Dominica's Boiling Lake is situated in the Morne Trois Pitons National Park. With approximately 60 meters (200 feet) to 75 meters (250 feet) across, it is the second largest hot spring in the world.