

ANTIGUA & BARBUDA

An idyll for tourists, residents and astute investors



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Antigua and Barbuda: Paradise on Earth

The Caribbean island nation has positioned itself as an unbeatable destination for tourists, residents and astute investors

Antigua and Barbuda's economy is thriving, with the twin-island Caribbean idyll recording around 6.5 percent average annual growth in its gross domestic product since 2021.

This performance has been helped by a rapid post-COVID rebound of tourism, which contributes about 65 percent of the nation's GDP, as visitors flock back to experience its stunning beaches, seas, rainforests, colonial history and vibrant culture. "In the first quarter of 2023, our tourism numbers were 5 percent up on 2019, which was a record year. We also had a very good summer and 2024 is looking great," reveals Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation and Investment Charles Fernandez.



Charles Fernandez
Minister of Tourism,
Civil Aviation,
Transportation and
Investment

The country has invested in infrastructure to encourage the sector's expansion, he says: "Antigua's airport has been voted the best in the Caribbean for at least four years running and we've just completed a new airport in Barbuda. We've also done a tremendous amount of work at Antigua's cruise port." Investments have been made to make tourism and the wider economy more environmentally friendly too. "For example, we're opening a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant. We will be able to offer LNG power to ships and we will have a cleaner energy industry," states Fernandez.

International investors are demonstrating confidence in the tourism sector's future, with operators like Nikki and Royalton Resorts developing projects at the moment. "Antigua and Barbuda ranks second in the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States for investment inflows overall," he notes. "We have legislation that allows for incentives. The bigger an investment is, the more it's incentivized. Another attraction is the region's lowest crime rate. If investors or tourists are looking for a beautiful, safe, friendly Caribbean experience, Antigua and Barbuda encompasses all of these things."

The islands' impressive economic growth throughout a period of global challenges has been supported by its Citizenship by Investment Programme (CBIP), which is considered to be the most stable scheme of its type in the Caribbean and now accounts for around 20 percent of the nation's non-tax revenues. "In a time of considerable uncertainties, investors will naturally gravitate to trusted and consistently performing options. It is, therefore, no surprise that the rate of choice for the Antigua and Barbuda CBIP has been rising and the interest is global," explains Charmaine Quinland-Donovan,



Pristine turquoise seas surround the sun-drenched islands



Charmaine Quinland-Donovan
CEO, Citizenship by
Investment Unit

CEO of the nation's Citizenship by Investment Unit, which is responsible for managing a CBIP that incorporates the industry's highest standards of transparency and due diligence.

There are other reasons why the program is becoming increasingly popular among worldwide investors seeking a second citizenship. For instance, "The Antigua and Barbuda CBIP offers the most diverse options and the best value in the region," Quinland-Donovan states. In addition, the government ensures that the program evolves to meet changing demands. Recently, for example, its definition of family dependents that can be included in an application was expanded, making it the most inclusive CBIP globally.

The program currently contains four distinct pathways to citizenship. The first two are based on donations of either at least \$100,000 to the National Development Fund or \$150,000 to the country's University of the West Indies campus, with the latter path being particularly attractive for large families. The third route involves investment in a new or established business on the islands, while the final pathway "offers the opportunity to purchase luxury properties in paradise," she says.

"The Antigua and Barbuda Citizenship by Investment Programme offers the most diverse options and the best value in the region."

Charmaine Quinland-Donovan
CEO, Citizenship by Investment Unit

Other enticements for applicants include the country's strategic location, superb connectivity and excellent infrastructure. "Antigua and Barbuda provides unique offerings suitable for any astute investor regardless of their stage of life," says Quinland-Donovan. "Residents and visitors alike refer to our beautiful twin-island state as paradise on Earth on account of its safety, security, perennial sunshine, geographical features including white and pink sand beaches and turquoise waters, world-class education and healthcare, warm and welcoming people and diverse, delectable cuisine. The best choice for second citizenship is obvious."

Two stunningly beautiful islands

Best known for its friendly people and spectacular beaches, easily accessible Antigua and Barbuda offers perfect vacations to everyone

Antigua and Barbuda has become a bucket-list location for international tourists with diverse interests that range from relaxing in the sun to gastronomy, water and land sports, culture, history, nature and wellness practices.

"We offer unique experiences that capture people's imagination and they spread the word," explains Colin James, CEO of the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority (ABTA). "They tell others about the fantastic lobster they had here, or the sweetest Antiguan black pineapple or our 365 gorgeous beaches with pink or white sand. We have one beach in Barbuda, for example, that's 17 miles of unbroken sand. You feel like you're the only person to have walked there for years; it's so unspoiled and untouched."

The safe, family-oriented islands' most important asset for tourism is the local population, James enthuses: "We have some of the friendliest, most-engaging people on the planet—it's our people who make a vacation here special." Antigua and Barbuda boasts a wide variety of accommodation choices and many are Green Globe certified, which is unsurprising in a country so committed to sustainability. Illustrations of this commitment include reef regeneration initiatives and the award-winning ecological restoration of tiny

Redonda island, which was used for mining but is now a haven for birds and rare reptiles. "Antigua and Barbuda was also the first country in the Western Hemisphere to ban single-use plastic bags. The pristine beauty of the country is what really makes it attractive for visitors and we do whatever it takes to preserve that," he asserts.

As well as promoting Antigua and Barbuda as a destination, ABTA is responsible for ensuring it has adequate air and sea accessibility. Antigua is well served by direct flights from major North American cities among other locations and, if you arrive in the morning, by lunchtime "you can be on the beach having an amazing experience that you will remember for a lifetime," notes James. Cruise-ship visitors can have their feet in the sand even faster, as Antigua's cruise terminal that can now accommodate Oasis-class vessels is perfectly located at the heart of the island's seafront capital.

Thanks to ABTA's strong relationships with international travel partners and tour operators, coupled with the country's early implementation of robust protocols that enabled it to be the first Caribbean destination to reopen after the pandemic, the islands' tourism sector has fully rebounded from COVID. "Our target is for Antigua and Barbuda to be one of the best-known destinations globally," reveals James. "We would like to invite everyone to experience two of the most beautiful islands in the world."



Colin James
CEO, Antigua and
Barbuda Tourism
Authority

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ADVENTURE
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Deepwater Harbour is the subregion's biggest shipping center



ABPA has invested in state-of-the-art cargo and logistics facilities

Regional hub for marine transport and logistics

Antigua and Barbuda's world-class ports are the nation's gateway for international trade and tourism

Recent investments in port infrastructure have reinforced Antigua's position as the Eastern Caribbean's foremost transport and logistics hub. The most prominent is a \$100-million redevelopment of Deepwater Harbour in St. John's, which has added a new cruise-ship berth, cargo and logistics facilities and other amenities. The modern port is now the subregion's biggest shipping center and can host multiple large vessels. In this interview, Darwin Telemaque, CEO of Antigua and Barbuda Port Authority (ABPA), explains the contribution ports make to the economy.

Can you detail ABPA's main responsibilities and its significance?

ABPA manages and operates the ports in Antigua and Barbuda, including Deepwater Harbour, the nation's primary international gateway that handles cargo, passenger vessels and other maritime activities. The authority also facilitates international trade and cruise ship arrivals by overseeing customs and immigration procedures. ABPA is responsible for the maintenance and development of port infrastructure as well. Ensuring that our facilities and operations are efficient and up to international standards is essential for commerce and international connectivity. This is particularly important for an island nation that relies heavily on imports and exports. ABPA also contributes to Antigua and Barbuda's economic growth by attracting businesses and industries to our port areas, which involves land-use planning, zoning and infrastructure development that supports economic growth and job creation.

As a modern port authority, ABPA implements and adheres to environmental regulations and practices, with a focus on reducing the environmental impact of its operations, mitigating pollution and protecting local ecosystems. Ensuring safety and security in and around ports is another critical responsibility.



Darwin Telemaque
CEO, Antigua and Barbuda Port Authority

ABPA is collaborating on a project that will see the region's first terminal for liquefied natural gas (LNG) open in Antigua. What competitive benefits will this bring the nation?

It will create significant advantages. For example, the use of LNG as a more environmentally friendly fuel will enhance the country's image as a responsible and sustainable destination among eco-conscious tourists and industries seeking greener fuels. The terminal can also provide fueling services for LNG-powered vessels and LNG can be a cost-effective fuel as well, enabling us to offer cost savings to shipping companies. Therefore, Antigua and Barbuda's forward-looking investment in LNG gives the nation a competitive edge for attracting more cruise ships, cargo vessels and logistics providers to its ports. In addition, the construction of an LNG terminal can lead to infrastructure development in port areas and will create opportunities for real estate, industrial parks, related businesses and investors in LNG production, supply and infrastructure.

“With the support and engagement of international partners, we look forward to further developing our port facilities and operations to better serve Antigua and Barbuda.”

Darwin Telemaque, CEO, Antigua and Barbuda Port Authority

What are ABPA's main priorities for the future?

ABPA is committed to enhancing and fortifying our role as a vital gateway for our nation's trade and tourism sectors. Our priorities encompass modernizing and expanding our port infrastructure, rolling out a comprehensive decarbonization plan, fostering sustainable practices and strengthening our international collaborations. We understand that the wellbeing of our communities and the prosperity of our nation are closely linked to the success of our port operations. We are dedicated to creating opportunities, generating employment and supporting local businesses. With the support and engagement of international partners, we look forward to further developing our port facilities and operations to better serve Antigua and Barbuda. Together, we can create a more prosperous, sustainable and dynamic future for our region.

Reliable and affordable utility services

First-class telecommunications, electricity and water services provide the bedrock for economic growth in Antigua and Barbuda

“Antigua and Barbuda has been at the forefront in terms of considering the challenges that small island developing states (SIDS) are faced with,” declares Minister of Information, Communication Technologies, Utilities and Energy Melford Walter Fitzgerald Nicholas.

When it comes to fighting climate change, for example, “Antigua and Barbuda has been operating at a level way beyond its size in the international community,” he says. “For us, climate change is a real experience and we want to play a responsible role in this area.” In order to reduce reliance on heavy fuel oils in electricity generation, the government recently commissioned the region's first liquefied natural gas (LNG) power plant. “We're utilizing LNG as a transition fuel toward clean energy. Ultimately, we want to create a sustainable model with solar, complemented with wind energy. Any new tenders for generation would involve that type of renewable in the future,” reveals Nicholas.

Another challenge for SIDS that Antigua and Barbuda has addressed is establishing robust nationwide digital connectivity. “We have three major telecommunications operators, one of which is the state-owned Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA). Three years ago, it was given a mandate to provide fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) connections and digital fiber services are now accessible for everyone,” he explains. APUA's responsibilities encompass ensuring the country is supplied with first-class telecommunications, electricity and water utility services. “APUA is the bedrock of the economy and life in Antigua and Barbuda,” summarizes its former general manager, Esworth



Melford Walter Fitzgerald Nicholas
Minister of ICTs, Utilities and Energy

Martin. As such, “The completion of our FTTH infrastructure in 2022 was a milestone achievement. Recognizing that a significant component of the development of people in any country is access to reliable and affordable broadband services, we built out a fiber network that is now available to all homes and businesses in Antigua.”

Under its renowned inet brand, APUA offers not just excellent fixed broadband and voice telecom services to residents and companies, but it also operates a high-speed 4G LTE advanced mobile network with 100 percent islandwide data and voice coverage. The government agency's next priority in telecommunications is to finalize ongoing negotiations for the acquisition of its own subsea cable. “At present, we have to buy capacity from competitors. Having our own cable would allow for even greater penetration and affordability of broadband services throughout the island,” states Martin. “It will be a game changer for the development of our people and their access to information.”

APUA is equally focused on providing affordable, resilient, safe and sustainable electricity transmission, distribution and generation services. Following the completion of Antigua's pioneering LNG-fueled power plant in the near future, “Our priority for electricity is to ensure that, by 2032, we are able to realize the government's goal of full renewable energy penetration and reliance within our mix,” he says. “We've been championing Barbuda as a totally green island and economy. Power in Barbuda is now being generated by a hybrid plant that we commissioned and the goal is to get to 100 percent solar. In Antigua, we have about a 20 percent penetration of solar so far.”

The government agency's third priority is, “Making sure that we are in a position to provide World Health Organization-standard water to the people of this country 24/7. We will continue to pursue our resources to ensure we're able to meet the demand for 8 million gallons of water a day,” he comments. That goal poses a challenge in a country that has been suffering from sustained periods of drought. To manage this, “We've shifted our focus from surface and well water to our production of potable water. We've increased our investment in reverse osmosis plants, adding four facilities with 5 million gallons of daily capacity in the last six years. Another 3-million-gallon project will be realized next year and we have a mandate from the government to enter a build-own-operate-transfer agreement for an additional 4-million-gallon plant. That allows APUA to meet any growth in demand for the foreseeable future,” Martin asserts.



Esworth Martin
Former General Manager, Antigua Public Utilities Authority



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Caribbean pioneer in cleaner power

New investments in liquefied natural gas infrastructure boost sustainability in electricity generation

Antigua Power Company Limited (APCL) supplies around 80 percent of the country's electricity. Calid Hassad, APCL's general manager, describes how the company is shrinking the sector's carbon footprint.

Could you introduce APCL's role as the government's power-generation partner?

The company began operating in 1996, after the government decentralized the sector and APCL won the bid to generate power for the island. Our relationship with the government and Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA) spans 27 years—it's a public-private partnership that everybody has seen the benefits of. We work closely with APUA, which controls transmission and distribution, because the more resilient, reliable, safer and cost effective the grid is, the better it is for everyone. This is an island with no international interconnections, so our plants need to be running 24/7, and we have achieved over 98 percent power reliability and availability, which we're very proud of.

How have APCL's services evolved and adapted to changing demands?

We started with 11 MW of generation capacity, we are at 77 MW currently and another 46 MW plant will come on stream this year. This will be a dual-fuel plant that mainly uses natural gas, which produces 40 percent less carbon emissions than our traditional fuels. We are also setting up a liquefied natural gas (LNG) receiving and regasification terminal on Antigua that will provide the gas for the new plant. This terminal project, Caribbean LNG, is a 50:50 partnership with the U.S. company Eagle LNG, which will supply the LNG and be involved in the terminal's operation. So, apart from



APCL's new liquefied natural gas terminal opens this year

reducing our carbon footprint, we are boosting energy security by bringing in LNG from the U.S., and we have the expertise of Eagle LNG on board.

The government has ambitious goals to make the country's electricity mix greener. How is APCL contributing to that policy?

APCL has taken a giant step to reduce the sector's carbon footprint by moving toward generation from gas. This is a pioneering project and we are the leader in this approach within the Eastern Caribbean. There has been a lot of talk about transitioning to gas, but it is Antigua and Barbuda that has taken the risks and is seeing the benefits of going in that direction first. In terms of renewable energy, Antigua and Barbuda has over 50 MW of installed capacity already, which is about 25 percent penetration. That's higher than in the U.S., China and many other countries. The government is moving forward toward its renewable energy targets with solar and wind, and APCL is supporting it on this 100 percent. That's why we have made sure that our power plants are able to support renewable energy installations by providing flexibility, balance and reliability to the national grid. Our engines react and respond very quickly to changing levels of solar and wind energy generation.



Innovative solutions to power Antigua
The gateway to clean energy in the Eastern Caribbean





The beachfront hotel offers kitchen-equipped suites and cottages



Buccaneer Beach Club's pool is surrounded by lush gardens

Embrace a vacation you will never forget

Experience Antigua in its purest form at Buccaneer Beach Club

Leonard Reynolds, resident manager of Buccaneer Beach Club, introduces an idyllic boutique hotel that lies within easy access of Antigua's airport.

How would you summarize Buccaneer Beach Club's stunning location?

Antigua's Dickenson Bay is renowned for its white sandy beaches, calm turquoise waters and spectacular sunsets. Buccaneer Beach Club, like a treasure chest discreetly buried in the sands of time, is perfectly nestled within the bay. It's a beacon for those seeking a blend of relaxation and unparalleled beauty.

Buccaneer Beach Club is known for its personalized services and its integration of local culture into guests' experiences. How do you achieve this?

From the moment guests arrive, they are enveloped in the warm embrace of our staff. This genuine hospitality sets the tone for an authentic island experience. Paired with a traditional Caribbean architectural style, the hotel's design is a kaleidoscope of vibrant colors, reflecting the islands' spirit, and our verdant garden lets guests become acquainted with native fauna. Recognizing that many cherishable moments are woven around shared meals, we offer an open

grilling and family area, allowing guests to enjoy outdoor cooking with loved ones. Also unique are our personalized grocery packs: guests send us their lists and we take care of the shopping. Furthermore, we ensure guests are introduced to authentic, tailored experiences, whether they wish to explore history, take a culinary journey, embark on a marine adventure, discover local crafts or bask in tranquility. Our goal is to ensure every guest, whether they're on a romantic getaway, family vacation or solo trip, can craft their perfect, unforgettable Caribbean adventure.



Leonard Reynolds
Resident Manager
Buccaneer Beach Club

How does the hotel maintain its competitive edge?

Buccaneer Beach Club evolves to meet modern travelers' expectations. We prioritize the continuous modernization of our interiors to reflect contemporary elegance alongside traditional Caribbean charm and we're always updating our technology to make stays more enjoyable. We're also dedicated to sustainability. A standout initiative is the construction of a groin on the beach outside our property, which is combating sand erosion so that Dickenson Bay's iconic sandy stretches continue to captivate visitors for years to come.



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An already great tourism offering is getting even better

Investments in hospitality and infrastructure maintain the country's competitive position in the sector

Charles Fernandez, Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation and Investment explains why Antigua and Barbuda is primed to see an uptick in tourist numbers.

Antigua and Barbuda's tourism sector has fully recovered from the pandemic. What is the picture looking like for 2024 and how is the government working to diversify Antigua and Barbuda's tourism offering?

The numbers we've seen for 2024 tourism bookings so far are great. We're in a good place and it should, all things being equal, be a very good year for Antigua and Barbuda. We're confident that we're going to see an uptick and we have plans in place to increase tourist arrivals further as well. In yachting, for instance, we have tried to arrange more regattas. We're also working very hard to establish more tours on the islands, as visitors increasingly want to have local experiences when they are here. As an illustration, in 2023 we held our first Restaurant Week on Antigua, in which community-based restaurants participated. We're able to do things like that because the island has the lowest crime rate in the region, so we have no problem encouraging visitors to get out and savor the local cuisine.

"Guests traveling on private aircraft can land in Barbuda and, within 10 minutes, they can be on the beach. If they land in Antigua, it might take them 20 minutes—that's all."

Charles Fernandez, Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation and Investment

We are also looking at wellness and medical tourism, which we have legislation in place for, and sports tourism. This year, for instance, we will host the T20 World Cup cricket competition. Business travel is another growing area: as an illustration, the International Conference on Small Island Developing States 2024 that is likely to attract 5,000 visitors is being held in St. John's.

Antigua and Barbuda has gained global recognition as an award-winning tourist destination with a diverse range of accommodation to suit all travelers. What are some of the newer hotel and resort developments visitors can look forward to staying in when they next travel here?

During the pandemic, the government put in place incentives for the construction of some hotel properties. As a result of hospitality companies taking up that opportunity, our offering was fresh when the country reopened to tourists and several other properties are now coming on line, with



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most of them being high-end projects. For example, we were able to open Jolly Beach in 2022, Nikki Beach will start this year and the Royalton Chic will come on stream in February. A number of other properties are in the process of being refurbished. Within 24 months, we expect that we could have added possibly 1,000 additional rooms.

We intend to ensure that we are investing more now on training for our hotel and hospitality employees—the global industry is so competitive that we must guarantee that our people are up to the mark in terms of service.

What efforts are being made to expand the twin islands' accessibility for tourists?

We've just completed a new airport in Barbuda, which will make us one of the few island nations in the Caribbean with two international airports.

Guests traveling on private aircraft can land in Barbuda and, within 10 minutes, they can be on the beach. If they land in Antigua, it might take them 20 minutes—that's all. In terms of international travel, we have flights from operators such as American Airlines, United Airlines, JetBlue, Air Canada, WestJet, British Airways and Virgin, as well as various inter-regional airlines, and we've been speaking to more airlines about attracting them in.

We've also done a tremendous amount of work at Antigua's cruise port. We've finished a fifth berth there and are now completing dredging work to accommodate Oasis-class vessels, which will be a game changer for us. Because we're opening a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant in Antigua, we will be able to offer LNG power to cruise ships that come—by 2025, all cruise ships must transition to LNG from heavy fuels. In addition, we're going to build out the land side of the port's fifth pier to create more shops, kiosks and restaurants. As Antigua and Barbuda welcomes more visitors, it's important to continue to enhance our tourism product.



Antigua and Barbuda has 2 state-of-the-art international airports



Antigua's cruise port now has a 5th berth and can accommodate Oasis-class liners



1,000 new hotel rooms, mostly high-end, should come on line within the next 2 years

The Caribbean's best option for second citizenship

The Antigua and Barbuda Citizenship by Investment Programme offers unparalleled attractions for global investors

Charmaine Quinland-Donovan, CEO of the Citizenship by Investment Unit (CIU), highlights the advantages of the Antigua and Barbuda Citizenship by Investment Programme (CBIP).

Global interest in the respected and trusted Antigua and Barbuda CBIP has risen sharply in recent years. How has this benefited the nation?

The result has been increased non-tax revenues, which the government continues to pump into the economy in essential areas. Financial support has been provided to the national housing effort, urban development and various social programs, including for pensioners, health and education. Investments under the program have also sparked construction activity.

Can you provide an overview of the CBIP?

The Antigua and Barbuda CBIP offers the most diverse options and the best value in the region. The government has done an excellent job of being responsive to industry needs. One recent enhancement is an expansion in the definition of dependents, which allows more family members to be part of an application, making our CBIP the most inclusive in the industry.

“Antigua and Barbuda has consistently attracted luxurious real estate investments that provide top value to their owners.”

Charmaine Quinland-Donovan
CEO, Citizenship by Investment Unit

There are four pathways to citizenship, two are donation options and two offer return-on-investment opportunities through real estate or business. In terms of donations, the National Development Fund option entails a minimum investment of \$100,000, while the University of the West Indies option is geared to large families with a minimum investment of \$150,000. There are three paths to owning real estate: outright purchase at a minimum of \$200,000, co-ownership at a threshold of \$400,000 with each applicant investing at least \$200,000, and single ownership at a minimum of \$400,000. The fourth option allows an investor to start a business, acquire an existing one or invest in the expansion of an existing one at a minimum of \$1.5 million. For joint investments under this option, the minimum threshold is \$5 million with a minimum injection of \$400,000 for each investor.

How does Antigua and Barbuda work to ensure due diligence and transparency in its CBIP processes?



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Antigua and Barbuda has always been a strong proponent of transparency and integrity in the industry, which is demonstrated in the way its program is administered. Additionally, regular bilateral meetings are held with representatives of the U.S. and the U.K. as they seek to ensure that our program design and administration meet expected standards that promote border security for all concerned.

Why are the islands an ideal choice for those seeking a new home?

From decades of offering high-end luxury tourism services, coupled with strict structural requirements due the country's location on the hurricane belt, Antigua and Barbuda has consistently attracted luxurious real estate investments that provide top value to their owners. Currently, for example, the multi-million dollar Peace Love and Happiness project that will transform the landscape of Barbuda is at an advanced stage of completion. The Moon Gate project overlooking picturesque Half Moon Bay in Antigua is also near completion and other major projects are expected to get underway within the next 12 months.

What are your ambitions as the CEO of the CIU?

My main goal is to lead the Antigua and Barbuda CBIP to its rightful place as the number-one second-citizenship program. Our interest is in attracting serious investors who are not only willing to make financial investments but investments of their skills and talents toward the country's development. This will be achieved through our continued attention and responsiveness to our clients' needs, the improvement of technology relating to application processing and ongoing focus on customer service delivery. With the country's unique advantages of location, connectivity, infrastructure to support investments and wealth of investment opportunities, these enhancements will be the perfect companions to propel us to our goal.



The most diverse, inclusive and best-value citizenship by investment program



Four pathways to citizenship covering donation options and investments in real estate or a business



Simple, quick and transparent application process



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Among the world's most desirable tourist destinations

The Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority is dedicated to growing the beautiful island nation's tourism sector sustainably



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The country has everything in place to become one of the best-known global travel destinations, according to Colin James, CEO of the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority (ABTA).

Can you provide an overview of ABTA's mission?

Our job is to boost tourism arrivals into Antigua and Barbuda and to ensure there is adequate airlift and sealift. We have a team of about 30 people based in Antigua and some of our main source markets. We have four main markets: the U.S., the U.K. and Europe, Canada and the Caribbean. The U.S. represents 40 percent of all visitors and we have direct airlift from New York, Miami, Atlanta, Charlotte, North Carolina and Newark, New Jersey.

Antigua and Barbuda's tourism sector recovered faster from the pandemic than many others. How was this achieved?

We were the first in the Caribbean to reopen in June 2020. All stakeholders had strong protocols in place, which allowed us to open up safely. In addition, ABTA works closely on its business-to-business strategy with tour operator and travel partners, with whom we have forged strong relationships. This helped us to position the destination front and center in people's minds, and we made sure that we were 'top of mind' by devising very creative campaigns that caught the attention of the traveling public. Therefore, as people started traveling again after the pandemic, Antigua and Barbuda was able to take advantage of the upsurge. In 2022 we recovered 88 percent of the business that we had in 2019, which was our best year with over 300,000 stay-over visitors and more than 700,000 via sea. 2023 was about on par with 2019.

"The U.S. represents 40 percent of all visitors and we have direct airlift from New York, Miami, Atlanta, Charlotte, North Carolina and Newark, New Jersey."

Colin James, CEO, Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority

Is the cruise sector important for Antigua and Barbuda?

Cruises are a really big area for us. Our cruise terminal is in the capital, so when passengers disembark, they can really experience the destination. We have worked with our cruise-line partners and Global Ports Holding that manages our cruise port facilities to grow the business. Antigua and Barbuda has upgraded these facilities to ensure that we can take advantage of larger ships and St. John's should see its first Oasis-class ship docking soon.

What is the nation doing to maintain its pristine environments?


Quite a bit! From reef planting to transforming our third island, Redonda. Its ecology had been devastated by mining, goats and rodents, and the transformation is amazing: so many seabirds have come back to nest, there's now a colony of Frigates, our national bird, and unique species of reptile. This project has won many awards and demonstrates how a country can really impact the environment in a positive way. Antigua and Barbuda has also banned single-use plastic bags, egg cartons, Styrofoam products, plus plastic cups, plates and utensils. Another example is Antigua's green corridor. It's in the area of the island with rainforest and the hotels there engage in many environmentally friendly practices, such as the reuse of gray water and farm-to-table initiatives. Everything helps toward making sure that our environment is protected and our country practices tourism in a way that's sustainable for generations to come.

The country's tourism workforce is among the world's most welcoming. How much emphasis do you put on training?

What makes a vacation in Antigua and Barbuda unique is the people that you interact with and we have invested in that. Institutes like the Antigua and Barbuda Hospitality and Training Institute, which is accredited to Monroe College in the U.S., and the University of the West Indies campus in Antigua help us to build capacity and train people who want to be a part of all aspects of the hospitality industry.

What are some of your top priorities as CEO of ABTA going forward?

Antigua and Barbuda is known for its friendly people, its excellent accommodation, its spectacular beaches and its easy access from international metropolises. We're a beautiful country that's small, safe and family-oriented. It's important for us to maintain this and—even as we attract new opportunities in tourism or other sectors of the economy—that we continue to position ourselves as a great place with great people where visitors have a great time.

 Tourism contributes around 65% of Antigua and Barbuda's GDP

 Total visitor expenditure in 2022 was estimated to be \$692 million

 ABTA's goal is for tourism's annual contribution to the economy to be about \$1 billion by 2025

A focus on fostering education, creativity and sport

Antigua and Barbuda's government is investing in all levels of education, while supporting the country's vibrant cultural and sporting talent



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Daryll Matthew, Minister of Education, Sport and Creative Industries, reveals some of his ministry's current priorities.

How is Antigua and Barbuda's government investing to bolster education?

We have free education at all levels from early childhood to post-secondary, and education at the University of the West Indies at Five Islands in Antigua and Barbuda is heavily subsidized. It is ranked in the top 5 percent of universities worldwide and a student can get a degree there for about \$2,000. Although it was an expensive undertaking, it was important to establish the campus here and to ensure that any student who wants to go to university can do so without money being a barrier to entry.

The campus started with approximately 150 students five years ago, it now has about 1,000 and the projections are for it to have around 10,000 in the next 15 years. The government has acquired significant amounts of land and signed off on a facility with the Saudi Development Fund for \$80 million to build out the campus, which we believe will become a model in the Caribbean.

"Antigua and Barbuda continues to be one of the safest, most desirable places in the Caribbean and I would invite readers to visit and perhaps to find a home here."

Daryll Matthew, Minister of Education, Sport and Creative Industries

We have also been doing a lot of infrastructural work for our secondary and post-secondary education systems and tremendous amounts of work to improve our primary school infrastructure. We have opened a huge early childhood center as well and have plans for another five, which will be free of cost to citizens and residents. In addition, last year we commissioned a massive expansion of our technical and vocational training institute where we teach skills in areas such as plumbing, electrical work, nail technology, masonry and automotive repairs. We want people to recognize that technical vocational training is just as important for economic growth as degree programs and we need these skills for society to function well too. As we seek to close the circle of education, we have commissioned a study to determine the best way forward for providing education to people living with disabilities.

How important are Antigua and Barbuda's creative sectors within the economy?


My ministry contains a festivals department, the primary role of which is to plan and execute our annual carnival activities that have a budget of about \$4.5 million. Our carnival sector is important because, apart from letting us have a great time, it has a huge economic multiplier effect between April and August. We have festivals and parties taking place almost every weekend during that period. For our main carnival at the end of July and beginning of August, we have an influx of tourists wanting to experience an authentic Caribbean carnival and it is the peak period for our artisans to display their crafts and for our calypso and soca artists. It's important for the ministry to pay attention to our carnival sector to ensure it remains appealing to tourists and residents. When visitors come here, we want them to appreciate the great street party, but also that a lot of thought, time and talent goes into this expression of Antiguan and Barbudan.

Does the government promote sport in Antigua and Barbuda?

We have invested heavily in sports, particularly cricket, where we have built up several facilities and are home to the headquarters of West Indies cricket. As one of the smallest countries in the world, we have a small talent pool. But yet, we have developed four of the greatest cricketers of all time, with Viv Richards being foremost among them. We have produced phenomenal athletes despite our diminutive size.

Do you have a final message for readers?

Antigua and Barbuda has attributes that anyone would want in their country of residence. I have traveled extensively and I always want to come home, because, for me, quality of life means being able to get up in the morning, going to the beach, sitting in a deckchair with my feet in the water and enjoying the sunrise. Antigua and Barbuda continues to be one of the safest, most desirable places in the Caribbean and I would like to invite readers to visit and perhaps to find a home here.

 Education up to post-secondary level is free in Antigua and Barbuda

 The University of the West Indies ranks in the top 5% of universities worldwide

 A major expansion of the university's Antigua and Barbuda campus will provide space for about 10,000 students

Moving forward to a digital and sustainable future

Significant strides have been taken toward digitalizing public services and instigating the country's transition to greener power

Minister of Information, Communication Technologies, Utilities and Energy Melford Walter Fitzgerald Nicholas provides an insight into the government's strategies for digitalization and energy.

How is the government encouraging innovation in communication technologies?

In the telecommunications space, we have legislation pending to revamp our whole legal and regulatory framework to foster innovation, competition and better economic use of our telecommunications facilities. I would expect that to be enacted in the second quarter of this year. In the meantime, other innovations are taking place, such as the implementation of mobile number portability.

The government itself is also going through a digital transformation process. Antigua and Barbuda has always prided itself on being in the right position to attract foreign direct investment and one of the areas we focus a lot on is ease of doing business with the government. We think the ICT space really lends itself toward the government becoming more accessible and easy to do business with for both local and international audiences.

“Antigua and Barbuda is a great place for leisure and doing business. Tourism remains the mainstay of our economy, but there are investment opportunities in many more sectors.”

Melford Walter Fitzgerald Nicholas, Minister of Information, Communication Technologies, Utilities and Energy

We've made some significant strides in this area and most of our public services and registries are now digitalized. The next step is to create a truly citizen-centric experience with a single online portal through which people can access all of these services. That is our aim and we hope to optimize this initiative within the next two years.

What is the government's policy for transitioning to cleaner energy?

The government has been outsourcing energy generation to the private sector for around 25 years. Recently, the generation of an additional 40 MW of power went to tender and we settled on transitioning from heavy fuels to liquefied natural gas (LNG). The LNG facility lends itself to significant economic diversification for us, as Antigua and Barbuda has also scaled up its investments in the cruise tourism sector and LNG is the fuel that the marine community has chosen to move to.



Purely from a standpoint of the country's energy network, however, LNG is a transitional stop for Antigua and Barbuda. The opportunities for us are in wind and solar energy. We have also begun to look at wave and tidal energy as a proposition—we have a lot of nautical space and if those technologies become viable, we could consider them.




Does Antigua and Barbuda have a role in the global fight against climate change?

Antigua and Barbuda has been at the forefront in terms of considering the challenges that small island developing states (SIDS) are faced with. In 2017, we really felt the impact of climate change when Barbuda was severely ravaged by the first recorded category 5++ hurricane, which devastated that island. We want to play a responsible role in this area and many of the things that we have lent our voices to on the international stage would indicate that we are committed to that.

We are utilizing our diplomatic engagements at all levels to bear influence on the fact that special consideration is required for SIDS. Antigua and Barbuda certainly wants to achieve its decarbonization targets to help in global climate change initiatives, but we don't want the country to go broke in the process of getting there. Without the support of the international community to help us bridge the financing gap with funding that should come from carbon credits, there's going to be a disconnect.

In your opinion, is the country an attractive location for investors?

Antigua and Barbuda is a great place for leisure and for doing business. Tourism remains the mainstay of our economy, but there are investment opportunities in many more sectors. Our excellent information and communication technology infrastructure and the digital transformation of government services make it that much easier to do business.

-  Fiber-optic connections are available to 100% of homes and businesses in Antigua
-  Most government services for citizens and investors are digitalized
-  Around 25% of Antigua and Barbuda's electricity is already generated from renewable sources





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