

a day in™ St Maarten/St Martin



Factual and Background

In a Nutshell

Although the small island of St Martin only covers 37 square miles (96 square km) of land, it is split in two. The northern part of the island (St Martin), with its capital city Marigot, is French territory and as such is officially a French speaking country. The southern part of the island (St Maarten), with its capital Philipsburg, is part of the Netherlands and its official language is therefore Dutch. St Martin is smallest island in the world to be held jointly between two governments.

Whilst St Martin's politics may be confusing, on land you will notice little difference between the two countries. In reality most of the islanders speak English as their first language and there are no worries about border crossing either. The only distinct differences between the islands are cultural.


The islands' main attraction is the beautiful, white, sandy beaches surrounded by calm seas. And with consistent strong winds, St Martin is an ideal location to practice water sports, such as diving and surfing.

Visitor Information

St. Martin Tourist Bureau
Vineyard Office Park
33 Buncamper Road
Philipsburg
Tel: 599 5422 337

Climate

This tropical island is sunny and warm all year round. In winter the temperature ranges from 78°F (26°C) to 81°F (27°C). It is only slightly warmer in the summer, with average temperatures between 82°F (28°C) and 84°F (29°C).

The average annual rainfall on the island is 114 cm (45 inches). 

41,000 people live on the Dutch side of 

the island and 36,000 live on the French side.

Currency & Banking

Although the currency of Dutch St Maarten is the Netherlands Antilles florin or guilder (NAF) and the currency of French St Martin is the Euro, the US dollar is widely accepted on the island.

The banks on the Dutch side of the island are open weekdays from 08.30-15.30. The banks on the French side of the island are open weekdays from 08.30 to 13.30.

The main post office on the island can be found on Cannegieter Street in Philipsburg (Tel: 599 5422 298). But be warned, the postal service here is notoriously slow and it can take up to six weeks for mail to get through St Martin!

Shopping


St. Martin is a duty-free port. This means that no duty is paid on any item incoming or outgoing. Luxury items cost up to 50% less than in other countries, and it is not surprising that shoppers and cruise ships from around the world head here to buy jewellery, electronics, perfume, crystal, and other expensive goods.

Most of Dutch St. Maarten's shopping is concentrated along Front Street in Philipsburg. Boutiques stretch along the entire length of the street and prices are quoted in US dollars, saving shoppers the confusion of sorting out exchange rates.

Jewellery and native arts and crafts are amongst the more popular offerings and with many stores open until the early hours, there is always an opportunity to purchase your bargains. 

Need Help?

Police - fire - ambulance

For all emergencies:
911 

What's to see

As well as beautiful scenery and long white beaches, St Martin has a lot to offer. It is particularly interesting to watch out for the cultural differences between the Dutch part of the island and the French part. Take a visit to Marigot and Philipsburg and you will soon see the differences, as well as taste them.

The French part of the island is extremely French; the more patriotic inhabitants even celebrate Bastille Day! The Dutch part of the island is more laid back and friendly, with fantastic nightlife and 13 casinos within its 16 square miles (26 km).

Try these

Fort Louis

Marigot

This fort was built in 1767 to protect the small port town of Marigot from foreign invaders. It is the largest historical monument in St Martin, and was named after the king of France. Now the area is open to the public. You will find signs detailing the history of sight as well as fantastic panoramic views of the island and the Caribbean sea.

The Butterfly Farm

Marigot

Open: daily 09.00-15.00.

Visitors can walk amongst rare tropical butterflies in a garden environment complete with waterfalls and exotic flowers at this farm.

St Maarten's Park


Located on the Great Salt Pond just outside of Philipsburg.

Tel: 599 5432 030

www.stmaartenpark.com.

This park is committed to the conservation of Caribbean wildlife and is home to over 80 different species from the islands. The park has an aviary and a nocturnal exhibit.

Mount Concordia

If you are interested  in planes make sure you visit the Moho Beach where you will see low landing jumbo jets arriving on the island. There is nowhere else in the world where a jumbo jet will pass so close to your head.

At the top of this mountain, located right on the border between St. Martin and St. Maarten, the original treaty dividing the island in two was signed by the French and Dutch.

Paradise Peak

Rising from the center of St. Martin at a height of 1,400 feet (426 m) stands Pic Paradis, the highest point on the island. Climbing to the top, where there are two observation decks, provides a spectacular view of the island and the tropical forest below.

Colombier

Halfway between Marigot and Grand Case lies the picturesque setting of Colombier, a sumptuous green valley lush with tropical vegetation. It is one of the most beautiful and most peaceful spots in St. Martin, perfect for private walks and quiet relaxation. There is also a watermelon plantation here.

Grand Case

The sweeping curve of the beach at Grand Case near the northern tip of the island shelters a little fishing village that is famous not only for its fine foods but also for its distinctive style of architecture. Elaborate carvings and fretwork, in what is called a gingerbread style, adorn the fronts of the small wooden houses painted in pastel colours. Do not miss the Tuesday night festivities during high season on the Blvd de Grand-Case.

Shopping

The main shopping area on St Martin is found on Front Street in Dutch Philipsburg.

Clothes

The Boardwalk

Front Street, Philipsburg

This shop stocks a wide range of affordable, stylish dresses as well as the Pirana Joe clothing line.

Budget Nautique

Simpson Bay Yacht Club, Simpson Bay

Tel: 599 5442 866

For sports and casual clothes including the H2O and Slam labels.

Endless Summer

27 Front Street, Philipsburg

Tel: 599 5421 510

For designer swimming costumes and sunglasses by Ralph Lauren, Anne Klein and Sunflair.

HiHo

Welfare Road, Simpson Bay

Tel: 599 5442 152

For traditional Caribbean clothing made from cotton.

Jewellery

St Martin is well-known for its fantastic jewellery shops, offering an extensive range of high quality jewellery.

DK Gems

69A Front Street, Philipsburg

For Tacori pieces and an exclusive range of Kwiat diamonds.

Kay's Fine Jewellery

65A Front Street, Philipsburg

Sells white, blue, yellow, and black diamonds.

AMA Bella
42D Front Street, Philipsburg
For Misaki pearls in all shapes and colours.

There are four jewellery shops owned by the chain Joe's Jewellery International in Philipsburg. In these shops you can buy traditional jewellery as well as more unique pieces such as diamond tennis bracelets. You can also buy loose diamonds!

Gifts/Books

Shipwreck Shops
Front Street, Philipsburg
For local produce and gift ideas.

Guavaberry Emporium
Front Street, Philipsburg
One of St Martins' most famous drinks is the Guavaberry Liquor made on the island from wild Guavaberries. At this store you will find a wide range of Guavaberry products; some that you won't even believe! Guavaberry cologne anyone?

Belgian Chocolate Shop
109 Old Street, Philipsburg
For rich handmade chocolates.

Little Switzerland
52 Front Street, Philipsburg
For European perfumes, accessories, and china.

Shopping in other locations

You will also find a great wealth of shops in French **Marigot**, although this town is far smaller, only spanning four streets. Here you will find a new shopping centre built at the bottom of Fort Louis which houses many small designer boutiques.

The Marigot Market

On Wednesdays and Saturdays mornings, an open-air market is set up along the wharves on the Blvd. de France, offering a colourful array of homegrown produce, tropical fruits and spices, and freshly caught fish. It is a perfect opportunity for mingling, people watching, and sampling the food. Across from the market are the "Lolo's", featuring arts and crafts shops and local restaurants.

History & Economy

History

Artefacts have been found on the island dating back to 4000 BC. These Stone Age people are believed to have lived peacefully on the island until the Arawak Indians arrived in 800 AD.


The Arawaks lived on St Martin enjoying the fishing, hunting and farming opportunities on this fertile soil. However, in the 14th century a violent and cannibalistic tribe known as the Caribs invaded the island.

It was the Caribs who lived on the island when Christopher Columbus arrived in the Caribbean in 1493. Although he sighted and named the island, the Spanish did not immediately lay claim to the land and as such French and Dutch forces claimed it themselves. Later the Spanish decided that they wanted this land but the French and Dutch joined together to successfully defend the island.

In 1648 the French and the Dutch forces signed an accord and agreed to divide the island. However it was not until 1817 that the boundaries were eventually set. During this period the island divide had moved 16 times.

The Legend of the Drunken Dutchman

Legend states that the division of the island was finally based upon a race to circumnavigate the island on foot. A Frenchman was to run north whilst a Dutchman was to run south. The point at which they met was to be the border. Locals claim that this race was to begin in Oyster Pond. It is claimed that the Dutchman had with him a flask of gin and stopped many times for a gin break. As such the Frenchman ran much further and the French have a much larger portion of the island.

 It is thought that Columbus initially spotted the island on 11th November 1493, which was the holy day of St Martin of Tours, and because of this the island was called St Martin.

Economy

It is estimated that tourism generates 85% of all employment on St Martin.

The island produces very few consumable goods but the

government is looking to find ways to diversify St
Martin's economy.

Art & Culture

Art Galleries

Le Saint-Geran Gallery

117 Front Street, Philipsburg

Tel: 599 5421 023

This art gallery displays work by artists who have lived on the island of St Martin.

Artists of the Island

Cinnamon Grove 36, Maho Reef

Phone: 599 5453 367

Exhibits local art work.

Frodes East African Art

Palapa Marina Villa

Tel: 599 5453 379

A selection of paintings and graphics from Africa are on display here.

Atelier des Tropismes

Grand Case

This gallery is run by three artists and exhibits local paintings, prints, and contemporary pieces of art.

Greenwith Galleries

33 Front Street, Philipsburg

Paintings, prints, posters, and pottery items by over 35 different artists can be seen here.

Museums

There are two main museums on the island charting the history of the Dutch and French sides of the island.

The Museum of Marigot can be found at the Residence Yacht Club in Marigot. For more information, call 590 294 836.

The St Maarten Museum is located at 7 Front street in Philipsburg. It is housed within an 18th century West Indian house which has recently been restored to its original form. It houses a collection of local folklore and

historical artefacts from the island.

Music

On arrival in St Martin you will discover that music plays an integral part in the culture of this island. The music here is an eclectic mixture of French, Dutch and Caribbean sounds. You'll find music in many bars and pubs around the island and often various artists come together sporadically to form one large orchestra.

If you have a chance, watch the local band, the Caribbean Happy Boys. This traditional island band is superb, despite all members being of retirement age! Their music is a mixture of merengue, calypso, bolero, polka and three-beat waltz.

Music concerts and events are also held at the following theatres:

Philipsburg Theatres
WJA Nisbeth Road 33
Tel: 599 5430 001

Sunset Theatre
Simpson Bay
Tel: 599 544 3630 / 599 544 3631

Recreation & Sport

Golf

There is an 18-hole golf course on the island which also offers a putting range and a driving range. The Mullet Bay Golf Course, at the Mullet Bay Resort near the airport, is open daily from 06.00 until 17.00 and has a shop on site which stocks any equipment you may require.

Water Sports

Surrounded by the beautiful blue Caribbean sea it is no surprise that there are many water sport opportunities on the island.


For windsurfing the Orient Beach and the Coconut Grove are fantastic, especially in the winter months when they are hit by the so-called "Christmas Winds". Strong southerly winds hit these beaches all year round.

The two main rental companies in this area are Le Galion Watersports (Tel: 590 873 709) and Wind Adventures (www.wind-adventures.com).

Kayaking is also a popular sport on St Martin and there are various safe kayaking areas around the coast. Many choose to explore Simpson Bay Lagoon, an enclosed salt-water lagoon with calm waters, which is particularly good for novices. For the more intrepid, kayak between Pinel Island and the main island! Tri-sport offers kayak rental on the island (Tel: 599 5454 384; www.trisportsxm.com).

You can also rent watercrafts such as jet skis and wet bikes on the island. You will find rental companies for these types of activities on the beaches of Greatbay, Orient Bay and Simpson Bay Lagoon.

The seas around St Martin are also renowned for their fantastic diving conditions. With water temperatures averaging 70°F (21°C) and visibility up to 121ft (37m), the waters are ideal for novices and experts alike. The best points for snorkelling are off Little Bay Beach, Dawn Beach and Maho Bay. There are

Just off the coast of  Great Bay you will find the wreck of the British ship HMS Proselyte, which sank in 1801. It is an ideal dive site as the ship rests upon a reef only a mile (1.6 km) off the coast.

many rental facilities throughout the island for certified divers and lessons are offered for beginners.

Getting Around

Local Tours

Saint Martin Activities

www.saint-martin-activities.com

For island tours lasting between four and six hours.

Saint Maarten Sightseeing Tours

C/O Maho Plaza Init 24


Tel: 599 545 5514


For sightseeing tours and excursions on the island.

Buses

On St Martin privately owned buses, known as **jitneys**, run throughout the island. These generally hold up to 12 passengers.

There are no designated bus stops here so simply flag down the buses on the street.

 The jitneys are brightly decorated and the drivers often play loud local music throughout the journey.

 The nearby islands can be accessed easily from Princess Juliana International Airport. It is possible to travel to Puerto Rico, Anguilla, St Bart's, Guadeloupe, St Eustatius, Saba, Montserrat, St Kitts, St Thomas and Nevis. Contact the airport on 599 5452 060.

Sea Trips

There are various boat trips available around St Martin, as well as to the neighbouring islands. These are run by various companies and leave regularly from Bobby's Marina, Great Bay Marina and Little Pier in Philipsburg.

Car Hire & Limousines

Car hire is available on the island:

Avis Car Rental
Tel: 599 5452 847

Paradise Island Car Rental
Tel: 590 871 267

Sunshine Car Rental
Tel: 599 5452 685

St Martin's Limo Company also offer a limo service. The limo can be rented per hour, per evening or per day. For more information or to book, call 590 6908 852 60.

Local taxis

Many small taxi firms operate on the island, including:

Arnell
Tel: 059 0875 146

Menta
Tel: 059 0873 237

Benjamin
Tel: 059 0877 160

Eating Out

Local specialities

Traditional Creole food is served on St Martin. Creole food is traditionally cooked in one pot and contains ingredients such as salt-cod, okra, callaloo, and coconut, as well as Caribbean alcohol such as rum.

For a taste of the Caribbean try these restaurants:

L'Arhawk
Sur Le Front De Mer, Marigot
Tel: 059 0879 967

Midtown Café
Rue de la République, Marigot
Tel: 059 0871 979

L'Oiseau Rare
Sur Le Front De Mer, Marigot
Tel: 059 0875 638

Fast food & quick bites

L'Escargot Restaurant
96 Front Street, Philipsburg
Tel: 599 5422 483
This restaurant serves light lunches and afternoon teas, as well as larger main dishes.

Harbour View Restaurant
89 Front Street, Philipsburg
Tel: 599 5425 200
This restaurant offers casual dining in the middle of Philipsburg's shopping centre. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Joes Grill and Ribs
Simpson Bay
Tel: 599 5579 954
This restaurant serves large portions at affordable

prices. The food is predominantly American and they offer a children's menu. Takeaway food is also available.


Formal

Antoine Restaurant

119 Front Street, Philipsburg

Tel: 599 5422 964

This restaurant serves French food with an Italian twist. From the dining room there are also fantastic views across the bay.

The New York Times 
rated the Antoine
Restaurants' Lobster
Thermidor the best on the
island.

Le Bec Fin

25 Bill Folly Road

Tel: 599 5443 930

To reach this restaurant you must walk through a flower-filled courtyard and up a set of stairs. There are some fantastic views from the dining room across Great Bay. Fresh fish dishes are served here.

The Boathouse Restaurant

Airport Road, Simpson Bay

Tel: 599 5445 409

This nautical-themed restaurant serves seafood as well as salads, pasta and burgers.

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A Linguistic Note

A Day In™ Guides are designed to meet the needs of a global audience. Modern tourists from Brisbane, Cincinnati, Edinburgh, and Los Angeles have English as their common language but each has a special way of spelling words and even a few grammatical idiosyncrasies. No single document can hope to cope with all these differences so the A Day In™ Guides have been deliberately written in what one might call a mid-Atlantic English. They use American, British and Australian spellings interchangeably and without worrying too much when or how. We hope that this approach will not offend any of the world's English-speakers and that you will tolerate the word 'center' as readily as 'centre' and 'favorite' as well as 'favourite'.

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