

ATTRACTIONS & HISTORY

AN ISLAND GEM SPARKLES ANEW: ST. KITTS PRESERVES ITS PAST, PERFECTS ITS PRESENT AND LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

Had Christopher Columbus decided to explore this verdant island in 1493, he would have found an abundant land of rain forests, flowing streams of fresh water, dramatic mountains and soil enriched by the flow from a long since dormant volcano. His ships, then on their second voyage to the New World, could have easily docked in one of several fine harbours or landed on a stunning beach of black, white or golden sand. The fabled explorer might not have received a warm welcome from the inhabitants – the Kalinago tribe. Columbus sailed past St. Kitts, but not before naming it, according to legend, for himself and his patron saint, Christopher. English sailors rechristened the island Kitt – an archaic abbreviation for Christopher, and the island became known as St. Kitts.

Part of the West Indies, St. Kitts was first settled by the Arawak and Carib Indians who migrated from South America. These indigenous people left their mark with ancient rock carvings depicting life in this fertile and idyllic land.

One of the earliest Caribbean colonies, St. Kitts and its sister island, Nevis, passed through Spanish, French and finally English hands. From 1624 to 1713, the English and French shared the island. The colonial powers vied for St. Kitts' wealth of sugar cane and strategic position as a gateway to the West Indies. After more than two centuries of British rule, the two islands finally became the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, achieving independence in 1983.

Were Columbus to return, he would find much of St. Kitts' ecosystem unchanged. The pristine beaches, clear waters, dense rain forests and exotic wildlife remain, luring a growing number of visitors to this unique Caribbean isle. Spectacular beauty, a colorful history and an abundance of attractions, activities and accommodations appear to be propelling St. Kitts to the forefront of Caribbean tourism.

Ecotourism

St. Kitts and neighboring Nevis enjoy an enviable reputation as two of the Caribbean's leading destinations for ecotourism. Unspoiled ecosystems span virgin coral reefs, rocky coastlines, rare oceanic rain forests, dormant volcanoes and exotic flora and fauna, and widely varied, alluring topography. Gorgeous wildflowers, butterflies and unusual birds are among the unique species that populate this ecological gem. The government of St. Kitts is committed to preserving both these unique resources and the island's very special cultural heritage that combines Indian, African and European influences.

Colonial Past

St. Kitts' turbulent Colonial history is preserved in old sugar plantations, in the charming architecture of the capital city of Basseterre, and at the Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

With St. Kitts firmly in British hands, the English took steps to defend its wealth and strategic position. The Brimstone Hill Fortress was built on an 800-foot-high bluff overlooking the sea and fashioned from the abundant lava rock surrounding it. The Fortress took shape around 1690, and is exceptionally important both architecturally and historically. Set on 38 acres of National Parklands, the Fortress is carefully preserved. Where British soldiers once scanned the sea for hostile ships, today's visitors enjoy an amazing view of St. Kitts' luxuriant hills and forests and gaze across the Caribbean Sea to the neighboring islands of Nevis, St. Eustatius, Saba and St. Barts.

Caribelle Batik

The artisans of Caribelle Batik practice an art more than 2,500 years old. Using Sea Island cotton grown on St. Kitts, they produce intricate, handmade batik fabrics unique to the island. The shop and factory are located on the landscaped grounds of Romney Manor, once the estate of William Jefferson, the great-great-grandfather of Thomas Jefferson.

Basseterre

With its backdrop of green hills, harbour views and gracious Georgian architecture, Basseterre is one of the Caribbean's most charming capitals. Known for its parks, monuments and gardens, Basseterre features wonderful duty-free shops stocked with luxury goods and lively bars and restaurants, ranging from casual cafes to fine dining establishments.

What Lies Beneath – and Above

Much of St. Kitts' colorful past and natural wonders lie beneath its blue seas. Between 1493 and 1825, more than 400 vessels sank off St. Kitts' coast, but most of these shipwrecks still await discovery. These sunken vessels and dazzling coral reefs, teeming with marine life, beckon divers. St. Kitts straddles both the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea – its waters are ideal for deep-sea fishing, windsurfing, kayaking and sailing.

On land, visitors can play golf, take to the tennis courts, ride a horse through the rain forest or make a splash in the surf. Take a hike or bike up the slopes of Mt. Liamuiga. Set sail on a day trip to Nevis or one of the other neighboring islands. Rejuvenate at a classic spa, then roll the dice at the island's casino.

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Christophe Harbour – An Incomparable Resort for St. Kitts

Launching in 2011, Christophe Harbour will be a luxury resort that will propel St. Kitts to the forefront of high-end tourism in the Caribbean. Christophe Harbour Company, a joint venture between Kiawah Development Partners (KDP) and HT St. Kitts Holdings, is the manager of the master development company for Christophe Harbour. Christophe Harbour Company, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, and several prominent real estate, golf design, architecture, environmental, and engineering companies have joined forces to create an incomparable master-planned resort. Christophe Harbour, located on the more than 2,500-acre southeastern peninsula of St. Kitts, is planned to include a mega-yacht harbour as well as an impressive collection of restaurants, shops, boutiques, five-star hotels, oceanfront and hillside homesites, villas, and a must-play Tom Fazio championship golf course. For more information on Christophe Harbour, please visit www.christopheharbour.com.

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