

Antigua

A Beach for Each Day of the Year

Island Description

Sicilian donkeys and ruins of windmills dot the rolling landscape, free of urban clutter. Antigua (an-tee-GUH) is a rural island formed of coral and limestone with few inhabitants. The roads, although wide and straight, are dotted with potholes, which the taxi drivers happily dodge while passengers may feel they have been on Mr. Toad's wild ride! The island's highest point is Boggy Peak, 1,360 feet above sea level. Antigua's claim to fame is 365 white sand beaches. It is the largest Leeward Island, covering 108 square miles.

During his second voyage to the New World, Columbus bestowed on the island the name, "Santa Maria de la Antigua." Antigua contained no gold or natural spring water, but it did have ferocious Carib Indians, so the Spanish did not attempt to colonize. The first successful settlement was established by a group of English who came from nearby St. Kitts in 1632. Although the Caribs waged attacks to eject the British, the settlers held their ground and began to cultivate cash crops, such as tobacco, indigo and ginger. In 1674 Sir Christopher Codrington came from Barbados and established the first successful sugar plantation, called Betty's Hope after his daughter. Betty's Hope, with its unique twin windmills, was recently established as a non-profit trust.

Codrington's success encouraged others to begin sugar production and over 150 sugar mills were built on Antigua's flat landscape, all manned by slave labor. Although slavery was abolished in 1834, sugar remained the primary source of income here until the 20th century, when tourism took its place. Agriculture is also a part of the economy, with miles of countryside dedicated to a variety of crops. Indeed, Antigua's black pineapple is famous for its sweetness.

Barbuda, Antigua's sister island, is 27 miles northeast of Antigua, about 20 minutes by air. It is known for its pink sand beaches and the Frigate Bird Sanctuary, a birder's haven, but remains difficult to reach on a one-day excursion.

In Town

Currency

Legal tender in Antigua is the Eastern Caribbean (EC) dollar, which is tied to the US dollar at approximately EC \$2.65 to US \$1. The US dollar, credit cards and traveler's checks are accepted virtually everywhere, although exchange rates are better at banks than with local merchants.

There's a variety of banks near Heritage Quay on High Street. Banking hours are Monday-Thursday, 8 am to 1 pm, and Friday from 8 am to 4 pm (some banks close for lunch on Friday). An ATM is at the airport. The Bank of Antigua and Swiss American Bank, Ltd. have branches at Nelson's Dockyard.

Postage

As an independent country, Antigua issues its own postage. The post office on High Street in St. John's is a short walk to the left of the cruise port. The cost to mail a postcard is approximately US 30¢. (Remember US postage is not accepted on mail.) The post office has a Philatelic Bureau inside the building to the left, offering a wonderful assortment of collectible stamps.

Museums & Historical Sites

The **Museum of Antigua and Barbuda** is on the corner of Market and Long streets. It occupies the Old Court House, built in 1750 of stone quarried from Antigua's northeastern coast. Opened in 1985, the museum visually displays the story of Antigua from its geological birth, through political independence to the present day. It was designed with children in mind, and displays are hands-on.

Special exhibits include a wattle and daub house model, pottery, steel pans, touchable artifacts and utilitarian objects. One of the most prized possessions of the museum, exhibited by the front entrance, is the cricket bat used by island native Vivian Richards, the famous West Indies cricket team captain. Admission is free, but donations are encouraged. The museum is open Monday through Thursday from 8 am to 4 pm, Friday until 3 pm, and Saturday from 10 am to 2 pm. A museum gift shop contains books, postcards and local handicrafts.

Nelson's Dockyard National Park. (Also see *One-Day Itinerary*, page 133.) The most unusual historical landmark on Antigua is Nelson's Dockyard at English Harbour, one of the five best protected natural bays in the world. The British Royal Navy recognized the value of the area and established the headquarters for its entire Caribbean fleet here. During the 150 years of use by the navy, the British built an astounding complex of naval facilities and fortifications.

Horatio Nelson was the military commander in the Caribbean from 1784 to 1787. Unbending when it came to following the naval rule book, Nelson earned the animosity of the locals. Regulations stated that only the goods produced on British colonies could be carried as cargo on British ships. Island merchants, who earned their livelihood by importing and exporting goods from all over the West Indies, were severely hampered by Nelson's strict adherence to regulation. The situation got so bad that Nelson feared for his life and refused to sleep on land while in port. Nelson's tenure was short and he never lived in the Admiral's House on the park's grounds, which was built in 1855. Nelson's later fame in the battle of Trafalgar made him a hero.

Today, the dockyard is the best preserved example of a British naval yard in the Caribbean. Many restored structures are currently used for yachting businesses similar to those that originally occupied the buildings. English Harbour hosts Antigua Sailing Week at the end of every April – more than 120 racing yachts compete in the regatta. Admission to the dockyard is \$2.50 for adults; children under age 12 are free.

Shopping

Shops near the cruise port are open from 9 am to 5 pm, Monday-Saturday, and on Sunday if a cruise ship is in port. The only duty-free shopping is offered in Heritage Quay and Redcliffe Quay. Carry your boarding pass and picture identification to guarantee duty-free prices.

Heritage Quay

This is one of two duty-free shopping areas on Antigua containing the popular stores **Little Switzerland**, **Gucci**, **Benetton** and **Colombian Emeralds**.

Caribbean Trading Post is a uniquely Caribbean gift shop offering handicrafts and souvenirs perfect for gifts.

Island Arts sells a wide array of paintings, pottery, prints and wood carvings made or hand-painted by artist and filmmaker (*Star Wars*, *Superman*) Nick Mauley. The art is presented in a pleasing atmosphere.

The Land Shop is a manufacturer's outlet store featuring quality leather handbags, wallets, luggage and accessories all designed in Land's trademark colors, crafted from hand-cut cowhide with a five-year guarantee.

La Parfumerie imports exotic scents from around the world. Its great prices on perfume from France can be matched only on one of the French islands.

La Casa Habana sells tobacco products, including Cuban cigars. Please be aware that Cuban products are illegal in the US, so smoke your supply before heading through Customs!

Several clothing shops are also located in Heritage Quay, including: **Made by Krizia**, which features designer fashions and perfume for women; **Oshkosh B'Gosh** carries children's apparel, shoes and socks; **Tropic Wear** sells Levi's and Dockers clothing; **Sunseekers** sells swimwear in all sizes; **Beach Stuff** carries everything you may need at the beach; **Decibel's** is a women's designer wear store for day or evening. **Dalila** carries colorful Caribbean batik clothing and a large selection of handicrafts.

Redcliffe Quay

As you reach the end of Heritage Quay shopping area, turn right on Thames Street and walk one block to Redcliffe Street, the entrance to Redcliffe Quay. This area was once a slave compound, but a project beginning in the 1980s transformed the ruins into a unique shopping and dining area, retaining the original architecture and old-world ambience. Shops are situated on Redcliffe Street and in the interior courtyard, which is entered through an alleyway off the street. Redcliffe is the other duty-free shopping area on Antigua.

- ☆ **Island Woman** has exquisite designer dresses made from filmy layers of fine batik fabrics. The collection includes designer swimwear, original hand-painted clothing, soft leather sandals from Jamaica, handbags, hats and accessories. If you want an original wardrobe, this is the place to come.

One-Day Itinerary

Antigua claims to have 365 beaches, and we've selected two of the best for this one-day itinerary. Allow between six and seven hours for touring the island, visiting Nelson's Dockyard and relaxing in the warm Caribbean sun. Rather than battling the rough roads, hire a taxi for the trip to English Harbour and the surrounding historical sites. You can either make arrangements for a round-trip journey with one driver or take multiple taxis from each location.

The following list gives the driving times from the cruise ship pier to the sites and the approximate taxi fare for single trips from stop-to-stop. The total taxi fare if you use one cab for the entire trip is \$50, one to four people.

Taxi Chart

Nelson's Dockyard and sites	20 mins., \$20
Hawksbill Resort/Galley Bay	25 mins., \$18
St. John's	15 mins., \$12

What to Bring

Bring along a camera to capture one of the best panoramic views of English Harbour and Nelson's Dockyard from Shirley Heights. This is the island's most photographed site. Wear or bring a bathing suit if you want to spend time at the white sandy beaches and swim in the blue crystalline waters. Plan to have lunch at Hawksbill Beach Resort or Galley Bay. If asked politely, the hotel will usually allow passengers to borrow a towel for the beach to save you the trouble of bringing one from the ship.

Directions

Refer to the island map on page 135 and a map available from Nelson's Dockyard.

An Island Tour

Begin your journey from St. John's by 9 am to allow for plenty of time to explore. Hire a taxi just outside the cruise pier area to take you to **Nelson's Dockyard** at English Harbour.

At the main entrance, pick up a free map of the dockyard. You can hire the services of a guide (for just \$2.50 per person), who will explain the history and preservation efforts of the national park while you explore the grounds. We've allowed up to two hours for wandering around Nelson's Dockyard, one of the best working examples of colonial Naval history that has been preserved in the Caribbean.

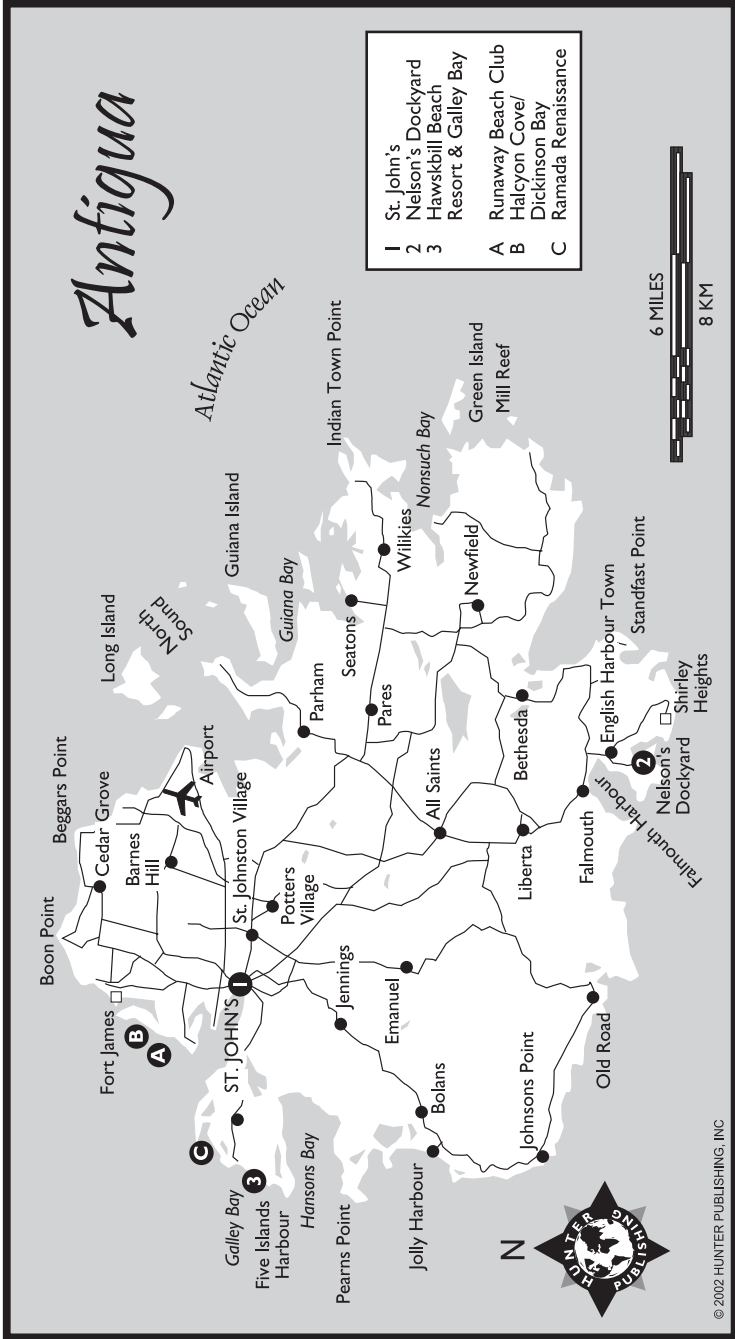
Pass through the **Market Place**, where vendors sell island crafts and T-shirts, to the Engineer's Office, which has been transformed into the **Admiral's Inn Hotel and Restaurant**. Take a walk through the lobby – it resembles an English pub – and try to visualize how the building might have looked when it was used as a pitch and tar storage area.

Outside the building is a walkway leading to the remnants of the **Boat House**. The giant stone pillars that once held up the Boat House are an amazing display of craftsmanship. Notice the man-made trough, where the ships would sail into the building to have work done on their masts. It is our hope that one day the dockyard will reconstruct the full Boat House.

Walk along the main street toward the **Admiral's House** on the right. Built in 1855, the house was originally constructed as a residence for the naval officer in charge and the storekeeper, although Admiral Nelson (or any other commanding admiral) never lived here. The ground-floor museum displays some interesting yachting mementos and naval relics used during the time of Lord Nelson's command. Yachting trophies won by local teams in the yearly sailing regatta are on display. A gift shop to the left of the building has a superb collection of souvenirs of the dockyard and surrounding sites on Antigua.

Next door to the Admiral's House is the large **Copper and Lumber Store**, a magnificent example of Georgian architecture that has been converted into a hotel and restaurant. The two large circular cisterns here were built over 200 years ago and still hold water today. Very little restoration has been needed on these structures because they were so expertly constructed by English tradesmen.

On the right side of the Copper and Lumber Store is the two-level **Officers' Quarters**. The upper level contains a Tea Shop Restaurant and Limey's Bar, Lord Nelson's Gallery, Art Center and Dockyard Photo Shop. The galleries have a wide assortment of paintings and prints from local artists, which make excellent gifts. The lower level contains the Customs and Immigration office, as well as the port authority office, where modern sailors entering English Harbour report for clearance.



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One of the most intriguing sites in the dockyard is the **Capstan House**. Capstans were devices used to turn the ships on their side so repair work could be done to their undersides. Only the capstans themselves have been restored, but you can still imagine the amount of work required to turn one of the large sailing ships onto its side. From this vantage point, you can see the next stop on the itinerary, the Clarence House, situated across the harbor up on the hill.

Leave the dockyard and take a taxi to the **Clarence House**, where a guide explains the history of past occupants (give your guide a tip). Spend about 20 minutes here and be sure to take a photo looking back at Nelson's Dockyard and the harbor.

The next stop is the recently built **Dow's Hill Interpretation Center**, offering a 30-minute multimedia presentation describing the history of Antigua and the British occupation of English Harbour.

The final historical site is **Shirley Heights**, where the most magnificent view of the entire Nelson's Dockyard National Park and English Harbour can be seen. The current structure was once used as a signal station where message flags were flown to warn troops at the dockyard of approaching ships. The Old Lookout Building has been restored and now contains a small restaurant and bar where you can enjoy a refreshing drink. Outside on the patio there is always a group of sweet (but persistent) ladies selling hand-strung beaded necklaces at very low prices.

The taxi ride to **Shirley Heights** passes old structures once used by British troops, which are now used for weekly musical gatherings by locals and visitors. The views of the Antiguan coastline and English Harbour are spectacular and make the trip from St. John's worthwhile.

When you are ready to head for the beach, decide whether you want privacy and relaxation or watersports and activities. **Hawksbill Beach Resort** has four beaches and you can usually find a peaceful spot. **Galley Bay** is a separate area offering a wide sandy beach with activities for sports enthusiasts and ocean lovers. Either trip will take approximately 20-25 minutes by cab from the English Harbour area. While crossing the countryside, be on the lookout for Sicilian donkeys, which inhabit most of the island. (Also see *Beaches*, page 127, for detailed descriptions of the two beaches.)

Allow up to three hours for lunch and relaxing on the beach, preparing to leave by 4 pm. A 15-minute taxi ride back to St. John's will allow you an hour or more for shopping in Redcliffe Quay or Heritage Quay before your ship departs.