

Believing he had reached the East Indies, Christopher Columbus named these islands the "Indies." From 1492 to 1500 Columbus made four voyages to the West Indies, naming many of the islands and claiming them for Spain. Spain used these islands as a base for the exploration and plunder of the New World. A century later, other nations arrived to prize Spain's treasure-laden galleons and contest the ownership of its colonies. Natives of the region were virtually wiped out by the Europeans. Those that did not succumb to Old World diseases died from overwork, beatings, and executions. Africans were brought to work the farms and plantations. Except in Cuba and Puerto Rico, the West Indies are mainly populated by pure or mixed blooded (mulatto) descendants of black slaves. Catholicism dominates the former Spanish and French colonies. Protestantism is practiced on islands controlled by the British, Dutch, Danes, and Americans. Residents of Haiti practice voodoo. Many of these islands gained their independence after World War II.

The West Indies archipelago contains over 7,000 mostly uninhabited islands, cays (small islands), coral reefs, and rocks, which form the northern and eastern boundaries of the Caribbean Sea. The islands fall into three groups. (1) The Bahamas are coral islands off the coast of Florida. (2) The Greater Antilles, which include the larger islands of Cuba, Hispaniola (shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Jamaica, and Puerto Rico, are the worn-down peaks of sunken mountains. (3) The Lesser Antilles are an arc of smaller volcanically formed islands. Trade winds, blowing from the east, keep the temperature of the tropical region comfortable. Agriculture flourishes in volcanic or alluvial soil. Sugar is king, followed by bananas. On most of these islands, tourism is the major industry.

ANTIGUA & BARBUDA
 Area: 172 sq mi (445 km²) Population: 83,500 Capital: St. John's, 25,100
 Government: Constitutional monarchy Language: English Religion: Protestant Exports: Sugar, cotton, rum, and light industry Antigua, the larger of the two islands, has 98% of the population

BAHAMAS
 Area: 5,382 sq mi (13,939 km²) Population: 270,000 Capital: Nassau, 140,000
 Government: Constitutional monarchy Language: English Religion: Protestant Exports: Tropical fruit, fish products, and petrochemicals Fifty miles (80 km) from Florida are the Bahamas, over 2,000 islands and coral reefs, only 29 of which are inhabited. Columbus may have landed in the new world on San Salvador Island. After the American Revolution, southern planters loyal to England fled to the Bahamas with their slaves. The country is still a haven, but now it's for foreign money.

BARBADOS
 Area: 166 sq mi (430 km²) Population: 275,000 Capital: Bridgetown, 8,500
 Government: Constitutional monarchy Language: English Religion: Mostly Protestant Exports: Sugar, molasses, rum, and fish Barbados, one of the world's most densely populated countries, is the most easterly of the islands Barbados has been called "England in the tropics." Residents speak with a British accent, play cricket, and drive on the left side of the road.

BRITISH TERRITORIES
 Area: 35 sq mi (91 km²) Population: 7,250 Capital: The Valley Bermuda 21 sq mi (53 km²)
 A group of islands north of the West Indies, about 850 mi (1,360 km) east of Charleston, South Carolina. Population: 75,000, capital: Hamilton. British Virgin Islands: 59 sq mi (153 km²) Population: 12,500, capital: Road Town. Cayman Islands: 100 sq mi (259 km²) Population: 19,250, Capital: Georgeown. Montserrat: 36 sq mi (93 km²) Population: 11,500, cap-

ital, Plymouth. Turks & Caicos Islands: 166 sq mi (430 km²) Population: 7,200 Capital: Cockburn Town

CUBA
 Area: 44,219 sq mi (114,527 km²) Population: 10,400,000 Capital: Havana, 1,940,000
 Government: One party socialist republic Language: Spanish Religion: Roman Catholic Exports: Sugar, tobacco, nickel, citrus, and fish Only 90 miles (144 km) from Florida is the largest island in the West Indies. Cuba grows the world's largest export crop of sugar and its famous tobacco. After seeing natives smoking cigars, Columbus brought tobacco to Europe. The majority of Cubans are of Spanish descent. Fidel Castro's communist regime (the only one in the western hemisphere) has eradicated the poverty, hunger, disease, and illiteracy that characterize so much of Latin America, but it has resisted all attempts to democratize the system. Over 700,000 Cubans have migrated to the US since the revolution. A long standing American trade embargo is a major reason for Cuba's dependence on Soviet aid.

DOMINICA
 Area: 295 sq mi (764 km²) Population: 81,000 Capital: Roseau, 8,400
 Government: Republic Language: English Religion: Mostly Roman Catholic Exports: Bananas and coconuts Dominica was named for Sunday (Domingo), the day that Columbus set foot on its soil. The extremely rugged terrain includes dense rain-forests filled with exotic wildlife. Several hundred Caribs—the only remaining Indians native to the Caribbean—live here on a small reservation. The Caribs were a fierce tribe who migrated to the West Indies from South America; the word "cannibal" is derived from their name.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
 Area: 19,750 sq mi (48,563 km²) Population: 6,750,000 Capital: Santo Domingo, 1,320,000
 Government: Republic Language: Spanish Exports: Roman Catholic Exports: Sugar, coffee, cocoa, food products, gold, and nickel Christopher Columbus is believed to be buried in the capital, Santo Domingo, the oldest European city in the western hemisphere. Its university was established in 1535. The city was the headquarters for the early Spanish exploration of Latin America. The nation occupies two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with Haiti (it was part of Haiti until 1844).

FRENCH TERRITORIES
 The French Antilles include Guadeloupe. A group of 8 islands, 685 sq mi (1,774 km²) Population: 335,000, capital: Basse Terre. Martinique: 426 sq mi (1,103 km²) Population: 330,000, capital: Fort de France

GRENADA
 Area: 133 sq mi (344 km²) Population: 120,000 Capital: St. George's, 7,700
 Government: Constitutional monarchy Language: English, French patois Religion: Roman Catholic, Protestant Exports: Bananas, nutmeg, mace, and sugar Grenada, the "isle of Spice," made headlines in 1983 when the US invaded the island and overthrew the Marxist government, which it feared was an agent of communist expansion in Latin America.

HAITI
 Area: 10,715 sq mi (27,752 km²) Population: 5,800,000 Capital: Port Au Prince, 530,000
 Government: Republic Language: Haitian Creole, French Religion: Voodoo, Roman Catholic Exports: Coffee, sugar, and cocoa Haiti, formerly the Spanish colony of Hispaniola, was seized by French pirates and later became a French possession in 1804, plantation slaves revolted and Haiti became the Caribbean's first independent state and the world's first black republic. Corrupt and oppressive dictators (two of the more recent were father and son, "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier) have made Haiti the poorest and most illiterate nation in the western hemisphere.

JAMAICA
 Area: 4,244 sq mi (10,992 km²) Population: 2,480,000 Capital: Kingston, 650,000
 Government: Constitutional monarchy Language: English, Bajan

Mostly Protestant Exports: Bananas, sugar, bananas, coffee, rum, and tobacco Once the most important sugar and slave center in the Americas, Jamaica is now one of the world's leading producers of bauxite (alu-
 ore). Heavy rainfall is responsible for the dense forests, rushing river cascading waterfalls, Jamaica's scenic beauty and carefree life. The city which tourists find so attractive mask the island's underlying pove-

NETHERLANDS ANTILLES
 The Dutch possessions consist of two groups of islands. (1) Closest to the coast of South America is Aruba (will be independent in 1996), 75 sq mi (193 km²) Population: 67,100, capital: Oranjestad. Bonaire: 111 sq mi (288 km²) Population: 9,700, capital: Krakerhoek. Curaçao: 171 sq mi (444 km²) Population: 300,000, capital: Willemstad. Aruba and Curaçao have huge refining facilities. Venezuelan oil (2) East of Puerto Rico are Saba, St. Eustatius, and the eastern part of St. Martin; tiny islands with a total area of 26 sq mi (68 km²).

PUERTO RICO
 Area: 3,435 sq mi (8,897 km²) Population: 3,750,000 Capital: San Juan, 450,000
 Government: Self governing commonwealth of the US Language: Spanish, English Religion: Roman Catholic Exports: Pharmaceutical chemicals, light industry, sugar, bananas, and coffee The US acquired Puerto Rico from Spain following the Spanish-American War of 1898 and investments have made Puerto Rico the region's most industrialized island. Most Puerto Ricans are of Spanish descent. They are US citizens and cannot vote in presidential elections. Statehood is a controversial issue.

ST. KITTS & NEVIS
 Area: 101 sq mi (262 km²) Population: 47,000 Capital: Basseterre
 Government: Constitutional monarchy Language: English Religion: Protestant Exports: Sugar, cotton, and vegetables St. Kitts, Nevis is a nation lying east of Puerto Rico. The majority live on St. Kitts (also called Christopher). It was once the base for British operations in the Caribbean.

ST. LUCIA
 Area: 237 sq mi (614 km²) Population: 132,000 Capital: Castries
 Government: Constitutional monarchy Language: English Religion: Catholic Exports: Bananas, coconuts, and light industry The French pattern which is also spoken is a reminder of the island's history, it is between British and French ownership before independence in 1979.

ST. VINCENT & GRENADINES
 Area: 150 sq mi (389 km²) Population: 132,000 Capital: Kingstown
 Government: Constitutional monarchy Language: English, French Religion: Protestant, Roman Catholic Exports: Bananas, coconuts, and arrow-wood St. Vincent and 100 islands of the Grenadine chain make up this island.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
 Area: 1,990 sq mi (5,154 km²) Population: 1,240,000 Capital: Port of Spain, 64,000
 Government: Republic Language: English Religion: Roman Catholic, Protestant Exports: Oil products, asphalt, sugar, and rum The world's largest deposit of natural gas (11 km) away Pich Lake is the world's largest deposit of natural gas. Calypso music, which began in Trinidad, is often played and sung to beat of empty oil drums. Forty percent of the population are real and descended from 19th century immigrants from India. Tobago has 5% population.

VIRGIN ISLANDS (US)
 Area: 132 sq mi (342 km²) Population: 110,000 Capital: Charlotte, 12,500
 Government: Self governing territory Language: English Religion: Protestant Exports: Refined petroleum products, light industry, and tourism. The Virgin Islands were so named by Columbus because of their pretty beauty. In 1917, the US purchased these Virgin Islands which were then by Denmark. St. John (Cruz) is the largest and most industrialized island. St. John is mostly a national park. St. Thomas is the tourist's favorite