

Kingdom of the Netherlands: Caribbean Constituent Countries

The Kingdom of the Netherlands (Dutch: Koninkrijk der Nederlanden) consists of four “constituent countries” (Dutch: landen): The Netherlands (located in Europe), Aruba and Curaçao (islands in the Caribbean Sea), and Sint Maarten, part of an island which is shared with France (the French part of the island being known as Saint-Martin). Each “land” has its own government and parliament.

Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten, along with the Caribbean islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, were formerly known as the Netherlands Antilles (Dutch: Nederlandse Antillen). The Netherlands Antilles were dissolved in 2010, with Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten becoming constituent countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba becoming “public bodies” (Dutch: openbare lichamen), which are part of the country of the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, these administrative units are often referred to as special municipalities (Dutch: Bijzondere gemeenten). Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba are collectively known as BES or the Caribbean Netherlands (Dutch: Caribisch Nederland). While Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire, all located in the Leeward Antilles island chain, are sometimes known collectively as the ABC islands. Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius and Saba are located in the Leeward Islands.

This Factfile provides toponymic detail on the three Caribbean constituent countries: Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten. For the European country of the Netherlands (including the Caribbean Netherlands) see PCGN’s [Netherlands Toponymic Factfile](#).

Constituent Countries and Special Municipalities of the Kingdom of the Netherlands¹



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

¹<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/caribische-deel-van-het-koninkrijk/vraag-en-antwoord/waaruit-bestaat-het-koninkrijk-der-nederlanden>

Aruba

Country name	Aruba
Formal name	Country of Aruba
Name of citizen	Aruban
Official languages	Dutch (nld) and Papiamentu (pap) ²
Country name in official languages	Aruba (nld & pap)
State title in official language(s)	Land Aruba (nld), Pais Aruba (pap)
Script	Roman
ISO-3166 (alpha-2/alpha-3) & 3166-2 codes	AW/ABW or NL-AW
Capital	Oranjestad (eng, nld & pap) ³
Population/Area ⁴	112,309 (2019)/180km ²
Location	12°30'00"N 69°58'00"W

Introduction

In 1986, Aruba ceded from the Netherlands Antilles and became a constituent country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands and acquired the formal name the Country of Aruba. It is located in the Caribbean Sea 29 km north of Venezuela and 80 km northwest of Curaçao. The island's original population were Amerindian. It was initially colonised by the Spanish in the 1500s and later ceded to the Netherlands in 1636.

Administrative structure

Aruba is divided into 8 regions (nld: regio) for census purposes, but these have no administrative function. The regions are Oranjestad East (nld: Oranjestad-Oost), Oranjestad West (nld: Oranjestad-West), San Nicolas North (nld: San Nicolas-Noord), San Nicolas South (nld: San Nicolas-Zuid), Noord, Santa Cruz, Paradera and Savaneta. The regions are subdivided into zones. A map can be found here: https://cbs.aw/wp/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/GAC_Officiële-publicatie_2024.pdf. Aruba is listed in ISO 3166 as a subdivision of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (NL-AW). It also has a top-level ISO country code (AW/ABW).

Useful Resources

Aruba Central Bureau of Statistics: <https://cbs.aw/wp/>

Aruba Government: <https://www.gobierno.aw/>

Aruba Tourism Authority: <https://www.ata.aw/>; <https://www.aruba.com/us/organization/aruba-tourism-authority>

² ISO 639 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

³ Also known locally as Playa.

⁴ [https://www.government.nl/topics/caribbean-parts-of-the-kingdom/question-and-answer/what-are-the-different-parts-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands#:~:text=The%20Koninkrijk%20der%20Nederlanden%20\(Kingdom,Bonaire%2C%20Sint%20Eustatius%20and%20Saba.](https://www.government.nl/topics/caribbean-parts-of-the-kingdom/question-and-answer/what-are-the-different-parts-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands#:~:text=The%20Koninkrijk%20der%20Nederlanden%20(Kingdom,Bonaire%2C%20Sint%20Eustatius%20and%20Saba.)

Curaçao

Country name	Curaçao
Formal name	Country of Curaçao
Name of citizen	Curaçaoan
Official language(s)	Dutch (nld), English (eng) and Papiamentu ⁵ (pap)
Country name in official languages	Curaçao (nld, eng), Kòrsou (pap)
State title in official languages	Land Curaçao (nld), Country of Curaçao (eng), Pais Kòrsou (pap)
Script	Roman
ISO-3166 (alpha-2/alpha-3) & 3166-2 codes	CW/CUW or NL-CW
Capital	Willemstad (eng & nld), Wélemstat (pap)
Population/Area⁶	158,665 (2019)/444 km ²
Location	12°10'00"N 68°58'00"W

Introduction

Curaçao is a constituent island country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It is located in the southern Caribbean Sea, about 65 km north of Venezuela. Curaçao includes the main island of Curaçao and the much smaller, uninhabited island of Klein Curaçao (nld)/Klein Kòrsou (pap), "Little Curaçao".

Curaçao was originally populated by Arawak and Caquetio Amerindians. The island became a Spanish colony after Alonso de Ojeda's 1499 expedition. The Dutch then colonized the island in 1634, and British forces occupied Curaçao twice during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars but returned the island to Dutch rule. All these peoples have left their mark on Curaçao's toponyms.

Administrative structure

Curaçao has no administrative subdivisions.

Useful Resources

Curaçao Government: <https://gobiernu.cw/>

Curaçao Tourist Board: <https://www.curacaotouristboard.com/> ; <https://www.curacao.com/en/>

Curaçao Central Bureau of Statistics: <https://www.cbs.cw/>

Interactive map of Curaçao: <https://showmecuracao.com/>

⁵ See footnote 9, re. use of spelling Papiamento versus Papiamentu.

⁶ See footnote 2.

Sint Maarten

Country name	Sint Maarten ⁷
Formal name	Country of Sint Maarten (rarely used, often just Sint Maarten)
Name of citizen	Sint Maartener
Official languages	Dutch (nld) and English (eng)
Country name in official languages	Sint Maarten
State title in official languages	Land Sint Maarten (rarely used)
Script	Roman
ISO-3166 (alpha-2/alpha-3) & 3166-2 codes	SX/SXM or NL-SX
Capital	Philipsburg
Population/Area ⁸	41,486 (2016) /34 km ²
Location	18°02'30"N 63°04'00"W

Introduction

St Martin, located at 18°01'N 63°03'W, is one of the southern islands of the Lesser Antilles, in the Caribbean Sea. The island was first inhabited by the Arawak people and was discovered by Christopher Columbus on behalf of Spain in 1493. Columbus sighted the island on November 11th, the holy day of St Martin of Tours, and so named the island after him. For the next 150 years, control of the island shifted between the Netherlands, England, France and Spain. The island is now divided into Sint Maarten (Dutch part) and Saint-Martin (French part). The union is upheld by the Treaty of Concordia signed in 1648. English is the mother-tongue of the entire island. In addition to the southern part of St Martin, the country of Sint Maarten comprises several small islands, including Cow and Calf, Pelikan (or Guana) Key, Hen and Chicks, Molly Beday and Snoopy Island.

Administrative structure - Sint Maarten has no administrative subdivisions.

Useful Resources

Sint Maarten Government: <https://www.sintmaartengov.org/Pages/default.aspx>

Tourist Bureau: <https://www.vacationstmaarten.com/>

Interactive map of Sint Maarten: <https://www.visitstmaarten.com/interactive-map/>

⁷ The island is called St Martin. It is divided into Sint Maarten (the Dutch part of the island) and Saint-Martin (the French part of the island, spelt with a hyphen). PCGN recommends the use of the Dutch name Sint Maarten for the Dutch part of the island to distinguish it from the French part.

⁸ [https://www.government.nl/topics/caribbean-parts-of-the-kingdom/question-and-answer/what-are-the-different-parts-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands#:~:text=The%20Koninkrijk%20der%20Nederlanden%20\(Kingdom,Bonaire%2C%20Sint%20Eustatius%20and%20Saba.](https://www.government.nl/topics/caribbean-parts-of-the-kingdom/question-and-answer/what-are-the-different-parts-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands#:~:text=The%20Koninkrijk%20der%20Nederlanden%20(Kingdom,Bonaire%2C%20Sint%20Eustatius%20and%20Saba.)

Geographical names policy & Sources

Where possible, names should be taken from official sources from the Netherlands or the constituent country. All diacritics and hyphens should be retained. Official mapping sources for the Dutch Caribbean are limited. In the absence of official sources, tourist maps can be a useful source. The spelling of names can be inconsistent.

ISO codes

Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten each have ISO 3166 country codes. They are also listed and coded as subdivisions of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. BQ/BES is a 3166 country code which applies collectively to the three special municipalities of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. These three entities are also listed and coded as subdivisions of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (ISO 3166 code: NL/NLD).

Entity	ISO 3166 country code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	ISO 3166-2 subdivision code under Kingdom of the Netherlands
Aruba	AW/ABW	NL-AW
Curaçao	CW/CUW	NL-CW
Sint Maarten	SX/SXM	NL-SX
Bonaire	BQ/BES	NL-BQ1
Saba	BQ/BES	NL-BQ2
Sint Eustatius	BQ/BES	NL-BQ3

Languages

Official Languages of the countries and special municipalities of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

- Aruba: Dutch and Papiamentu – English is widely used, including on government websites.
- Bonaire: Dutch and Papiamentu
- Curaçao: Dutch, Papiamentu and English – Spanish is also widely spoken. According to the 2001 census, Papiamentu was the first language of 81.2% of the population.
- Netherlands: Dutch is the national official language. Frisian, English and Papiamentu are regionally official in the areas where they are spoken.
- Saba: Dutch and English
- Sint Eustatius: Dutch and English
- Sint Maarten: Dutch and English - English is the everyday language of communication in Sint Maarten, and the first language of native Sint Maarteners. Most are bilingual, speaking Dutch as a second language.

Toponyms

Toponyms on the Dutch Caribbean islands may have their origins in Dutch, English, Papiamentu or Amerindian languages. Compound geographical names exist which combine words from different languages. For example, Tia Juanaweg (a street name in Bonaire that combines Spanish and Dutch) and Misa di Kwartier (the name of a church in Bonaire, which combines Papiamentu and Dutch).

Spellings of a name or name element may differ from island to island or even on the same island. E.g. Caya Cabaron (Aruba), but Kaya Limonita (Curaçao); and Esperansa (Saba), but Esperanzaweg (Saba).

Dutch

Dutch (nld) has official status in all the Dutch Caribbean countries and municipalities. It is a West Germanic language. Written in Roman script, it uses the same alphabet as English, plus the digraph 'ij'. The Dutch language is regulated by the Dutch Language Union (nld: Nederlandse Taalunie): <https://taalunie.org/>

English

English has official status in Curaçao, Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten. It is the mother tongue of the whole island of St Martin.

Papiamentu

Papiamentu, or Papiamentu⁹, (pap) is a Portuguese-based creole language, which has official status in Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. It is largely based on Portuguese as spoken in the 15th and 16th centuries and has been influenced considerably by Dutch and Venezuelan Spanish.

The Papiamentu alphabet has 27 letters – the 26 letters of the English alphabet plus 'ñ'. It also employs four digraphs (ch, dj, sh and zj).

Papiamentu has two standardised orthographies; one used on the island of Aruba and the other on the islands of Curaçao and Bonaire. The governments of Curaçao and Aruba formally standardised orthographic rules in 1976 and 1977. In 2009, Aruba's Department of Education published an Orthography of Papiamentu, but the principles outlined have yet to receive legislative endorsement.

Orthography and Vocabulary for Papiamentu

- Ortografia i Lista di palabra Papiamentu (Curaçao, 2009): https://uoc.spin-cdn.com/media/buki_di_oro/20200214_2009_buki_di_oro_papiamentu_rs.pdf (Known as 'Buki di Oro' (Gold Book))
- Ortografia de Papiamentu (Aruba, 2009): https://papiamentu.aw/pages/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/150520_papiamentu-ortografia-version-april-2009.pdf (known as the 'Buki Blauw' (Blue Book))
- Regla di Gramática di Papiamentu (Aruba, 2008): https://papiamentu.aw/pages/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/p.aw_PDF_regla_Gramatica.pdf
- Vocabulario di Papiamentu (Aruba, 2009): https://papiamentu.aw/pages/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Paw_2009_Vocabulario_di_Papiamentu.pdf

⁹ The language name is spelt *Papiamentu* in Aruba, and *Papiamentu* in Bonaire and Curaçao, this spelling difference reflecting the dialectal differences and differing orthographic approaches.

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings¹⁰):

The following letter-diacritic combinations may be found in geographical names in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Dutch uses the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Character	Unicode encoding	Character	Unicode encoding
Â	00C2	â	00E2
Ç	00C7	ç	00E7
È	00C8	è	00E8
É	00C9	é	00E9
Ë	00CB	ë	00EB
IJ	0132	ij	0133
Ö	00D6	ö	00F6
Ú	00DA	ú	00FA
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC
Û	00DB	û	00FB

Papiamentu uses the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Character	Unicode encoding	Character	Unicode encoding
Á	00C1	á	00E1
È	00C8	è	00E8
É	00C9	é	00E9
Í	00CD	í	00ED
Ñ	00F1	ñ	00D1
Ò	00D2	ò	00F2
Ó	00D3	ó	00F3
Ú	00DA	ú	00FA
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC

Other Significant Locations

Dutch	Papiamentu	Conventional/English Name	Location	Feature Type
Caribische Zee	Karibe/Caribe	Caribbean Sea	15°N 75°W	Sea
Mount Flagstaff	-	Mount Flagstaff	18°03'49"N 63°03'18"W	Peak (highest point in Sint Maarten)
Jamanota	Ceru Jamanota	Jamanota	12°29'15"N 69°56'26"W	Peak (highest point on Aruba)

¹⁰ See www.unicode.org

Dutch	Papiamentu	Conventional/English Name	Location	Feature Type
Sint Christoffelberg	Seru San Kristóf	-	12°20'00"N 69°08'00"W	Peak (highest point in Curaçao)
Benedenwindse Antillen	-	Leeward Antilles	12°11'10"N 68°59'22"W	Archipelago
Mount Scenery	-	Mount Scenery	17°38'06"N 63°14'21"W	Peak (on Saba; highest point in the Kingdom of the Netherlands)
Benedenwindse Eilanden	-	Leeward Islands	16°N 61°W	Archipelago
Kleine Antillen	Antia Menor	Lesser Antilles	14°N 61°W	Archipelago

Useful references

- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on languages)
- Government of the Netherlands – Caribbean Netherlands (eng): [https://www.government.nl/topics/caribbean-parts-of-the-kingdom/question-and-answer/what-are-the-different-parts-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands#:~:text=The%20Koninkrijk%20der%20Nederlanden%20\(Kingdom,Bonaire%2C%20Sint%20Eustatius%20and%20Saba](https://www.government.nl/topics/caribbean-parts-of-the-kingdom/question-and-answer/what-are-the-different-parts-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands#:~:text=The%20Koninkrijk%20der%20Nederlanden%20(Kingdom,Bonaire%2C%20Sint%20Eustatius%20and%20Saba)
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#home>
- Kingdom of the Netherlands (nld): <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/caribische-deel-van-het-koninkrijk/vraag-en-antwoord/waaruit-bestaat-het-koninkrijk-der-nederlanden>
- Netherlands Ministry of Defence (maps and boundaries data): <https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/hydrografie/maritieme-zones-en-zeegrenzen/zeegrenzen-caribisch-deel-van-het-koninkrijk>
- Omniglot: www.omniglot.com (for information on languages and scripts)
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: <https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/welcome.html>

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