

Facts about Suriname

Geographic Location

Suriname is situated on the continent of South America just North of the Equator. The country is bordered in the South by Brazil, in the North by the Atlantic Ocean, in the East by the French Overseas Department French Guyana and in the West by the former British colony Guyana.

Capital

On the West Bank of the broad Suriname River lies the Capital city Paramaribo. The name is supposedly derived from 'Pamurbo' - an indigenous village dating back to the seventeenth century.

Paramaribo is an extended city with few tall buildings. Its white-painted monumental buildings with a foundation of red brick distinguish the historic city center. In 2002, because of its historical importance, the UN Cultural Organization UNESCO placed the inner city of Paramaribo on the World Heritage List.

Name

In all three Guyanas, there once lived the indigenous people named 'Surinen'. From this word, the name Suriname is probably derived.

Surface Area

Suriname has a surface area of approximately 164,000 sq. kms. (about four times the size of Holland). A large part of the country is covered by unspoiled tropical rain forest.

Population

Suriname has approximately half a million inhabitants whose forefathers came from all over the world. The varied composition of the population dates back to the colonial period. The original inhabitants, the indigenous Amerindian people had to deal with European domination, with particular reference to Dutch dominance. Ever since 1650 the colonial rulers forced Africans into slavery and sent them to Suriname. Their descendants are known as Afro-Surinamers or Creoles. The Maroons are descendants of runaway slaves. After the abolition of slavery in 1863, contract laborers from India, Indonesia and China came to work on the Suriname plantations. During the colonial period Jews, Lebanese and Europeans immigrated to Suriname and long afterwards, Haitians, Brazilians, Chinese and Guyanese decided to make Suriname their home.

Language

The official language is Dutch, but Suriname recognizes about twenty other languages. The 'Lingua Franca', the colloquial language is Sranan Tongo, with words originally from Africa, English, Portuguese and Dutch. Sarnami is a Surinamese variant of Hindi that is freely spoken by the Hindustanis (Surinamese descendants of Indian immigrants). Javanese, Chinese, Maroons, as well as the indigenous people speak their original languages or a variation thereof.

Climate

Suriname has a humid, tropical climate with temperatures ranging from 23 degrees Celsius at night up to 37 degrees Celsius in the afternoons during some months of the year. There are dry and wet seasons.

Government

Suriname is a democratic republic headed by a President. The National Assembly has 51 Parliamentarians.

Currency

The Surinamese Dollar (SRD) is equal to 100 cents. Some hotels and large department stores accept foreign currency and credit cards. Foreign currency can safely be exchanged in commercial banks and cambios. Money transactions on the street are not advised. With some bank passes, one can acquire Suriname dollars at the automatic cash machines.

Electricity

Almost everywhere there is 110/127 volt 60 hertz. The larger hotels generally also have 220 volt connections.

Transport

The Suriname road network consists of asphalted as well as sand roads, with a total length of 9,000 kilometers. There is left-hand traffic. The National Transportation Company as well as private bus operators provide public bus transportation. In addition, there are several taxi companies and several places in Paramaribo also have cycles for hire. Foreign aircraft, in general, use the Johan Adolf Pengel International Airport located about 45 km. South of Paramaribo. From the local Zorg-en Hoop airport in Paramaribo, small aircraft and helicopters depart regularly to interior airstrips. Suriname's rivers are navigable.

Telecommunications

In the city of Paramaribo, along the coastal area and also in some interior villages, telephone booths are located. Calling cards can be bought at the Telephone company Telesur, post offices and in many neighborhood shops and super markets. You may also be 'called back' at any of the telephone booths; the number is painted on the roof. The international code for Suriname is: 00597. You can also call collect via 156 (U.S.A) and 157 (Holland). However, if you do that with a mobile telephone, the local telephone call costs will be deducted from your telephone card balance.

Usage of a foreign gsm cellular phone is possible, but is very expensive. If you desire to call using the local rate, you'll have to exchange your SIM card temporarily for a Surinamese calling card. It is therefore a practical idea to bring along a regional free (SIM-lock free cell phone). A SIM card costs \$35.00 US (including U.S.\$10.00 calling card at Telephone stores). Be sure to have some form of identification handy. Do you want to go online? Every area of Paramaribo has a few internet cafes. In some areas you can even enter cyberspace.

Entry Requirements

A valid passport is needed, and if required a valid visa. The Police administered Department for foreigners is located in the building of the Ministry of Public Works on the corner of the Mr. J. Lachmonstraat and the Dr. Ir. H.S. Adhinstraat. This office can be reached by telephone: 532109. A vaccination certificate against yellow fever and cholera is only required when you arrive from an infected area.

Accommodation

Paramaribo has various large hotels with well-appointed comfortable air-conditioned rooms. The quality of smaller hotels, pensions and guesthouses is passable. In addition, there is an increasing number of vacation houses and apartments. The western town of Nickerie also has hotels, pensions, guesthouses and vacation houses for rental. Elsewhere on the coastal area smaller hotels and guesthouses can be found. In the interior, the accommodation is somewhat simpler. Some villages have a simple guesthouse, but there are also tourist lodges in fascinating nature areas. Near the city you will also find several vacation park areas.

Cuisine

There is a wide variety of restaurants and eating houses. You can enjoy tasty Javanese, Chinese, Creolese, Hindi, Korean and Dutch food, or choose from the international menu.

Clothing

In the humid climate, light cotton clothing is highly recommended. Many visitors find it a good idea, to take a shower several times daily, then change into clean clothing.

Drinking water

In Paramaribo, tap water is clean and safe. Good quality bottled Surinamese natural water is also available everywhere.

Health

Suriname has modern hospitals, well-trained and skillful doctors and health care workers. Several pharmacies in the city and districts ensure regular and adequate supply of medicines. If you are planning to visit the deep interior, please seek advice in advance about the correct anti-malaria medicine. Up to date information can be obtained from the Bureau of Public Health, 22 Rode Kruislaan, Paramaribo.

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