

ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

An economic powerhouse in the Caribbean

The federation's strategy to become the first sustainable island state is opening up numerous investment opportunities and making St. Kitts and Nevis even more attractive to tourists

The stunning twin-island nation of St. Kitts and Nevis in the Eastern Caribbean boasts an economy that has rebounded from COVID-19. Home to only around 50,000 people, the federation's gross domestic product is estimated to have expanded by 4% last year to reach around \$860 million and further gains of an average 3.6% are forecast in 2024 and 2025, according to government statistics.

"We expect our economy to recuperate to its 2019 level in 2024 and the prospects going forward look really good," says Prime Minister Terrance Drew. "All the major sectors of our economy grew in 2023, which is a major achievement considering we've been dealing with the post-COVID situation and other crises around the world."

As well as realizing a robust economic performance despite global challenges, the federation recorded a budget surplus amounting to 1% of GDP in 2023. The International Monetary Fund puts this down to the popularity of its attractive Citizenship by Investment Programme and the financial prudence of Drew's government, which was democratically elected in August 2022. "In this short time, we've achieved a significant amount of groundbreaking work, steering the country in a more prosperous direction and diversifying the economy so that it can be more resilient to shocks," he reveals.

Unsurprisingly, given the volcanic Caribbean islands' incredible natural beauty, tourism remains the largest contributor to the country's GDP, generating around 42% of the total. That sector's recovery from the pandemic was a notable driver of 2023's economic growth. Drew mentions one element that has boosted tourism recently: "We've improved airlift significantly. For example, from North America, we've added JetBlue, while Air Canada, American Airlines and United Airlines have all expanded their programs."

On top of that, investment in St. Kitts' Port Zante is attracting more cruise vessels, including the world's largest cruise ship — Royal Caribbean's Icon of the Seas — which made its inaugural docking at the port this January. Another factor is that the islands have become destinations for not just sea and sand, but also ecotourism and authentic, vibrant cultural experiences. "There are many other opportunities in tourism that we are now going to explore, such as sports tourism, health tourism and medical cannabis," he comments.

Additional drivers of the economy's ongoing growth include construction, real estate, public infrastructure projects, transportation, logistics, communication, financial and business services, and — increasingly — investments in large-scale renewable energy initiatives.

"We're on the cusp of developing geothermal energy as a major part of our economy. Geothermal energy is, we think, our oil and it gives us a strong opportunity to transform St. Kitts and Nevis and the wider region," Drew enthuses. Studies indicate that Nevis, the smaller of the two islands, could supply about 1 gigawatt of geothermal energy annually, which is over 20 times more than the country's current requirements. The



The lush green hills and sandy beaches of St. Kitts, with Nevis' volcanic peak in the distance

government has already secured \$17 million in financing for the exploitation of this resource and is currently seeking another \$20 million from partners in order to drill preliminary wells in 2025, which should generate 30 megawatts of energy. "Apart from geothermal, we want solar and wind to be part of our energy mix, and the government has just signed an agreement for the Caribbean's largest solar-battery-storage project, which is supposed to be completed in the next two years and will produce 30% of our energy needs," says Drew.

The number-one goal for his administration is to make the nation's energy system 100% renewable and domestically generated by 2030, he explains: "Green energy is the axle for the country's transformation and it will be a game changer. It means cheap energy for our people, for industries, for water desalination and for growing food, in addition to creating many jobs and protecting the environment." As well as satisfying St. Kitts and Nevis' own demands, the government intends to use the islands' future excess energy generation to power neighboring states and produce green fuels. "The potential is great and there are many opportunities for investors in this area," he asserts.

Green energy has a central role in Drew's wider ambition: "We intend to make St. Kitts and Nevis a sustainable island state and a model for others to follow in that regard. We have a solid strategy for this and are already achieving several critical aspects of that."

Denzil Lewellyn Douglas, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, Industry, Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Economic Development and Investment, elaborates on this strategy: "Since 2022, the government of St. Kitts and Nevis has been articulating its vision to transform our country into a sustainable island state by 2040, to take ownership of our own destiny and to pursue our sustainable development aspirations. This vision

Although it is one of the smallest countries by population in the western hemisphere, St. Kitts and Nevis is advancing robust foreign diplomatic and investment policies to meet this vision, he adds: "The government understands that, given our size and unique vulnerabilities as a small island developing state, we need support."

International investors are heading that call. By the end of 2022, the federation's foreign direct investment stock stood at \$1.7 billion and, last December, Douglas announced that there were new projects in the pipeline valued at over \$500 million: "2023 was spent reorienting the international community with St. Kitts and Nevis. It was saying to the rest of the world that, eighteen months ago we came in here and it's a new country, a new administration. We've been able to convince the rest of the world that something different is happening in St. Kitts and Nevis."

According to Drew, the government's strategy for St. Kitts and Nevis' future sustainability is opening up numerous opportunities for investors, which include renewable energy, all aspects of tourism, real estate, tech-based manufacturing, education, infrastructure, agribusiness and the islands' Citizenship by Investment Programme: "St. Kitts and Nevis offers an excellent choice for anybody, particularly people who believe in protecting the planet. They can be part of our vision to build the first sustainable island state in beautiful St. Kitts and Nevis."

TERRANCE DREW
PRIME MINISTER

"Geothermal energy is, we think, our oil and it gives us a strong opportunity to transform St. Kitts and Nevis and the wider region."

is buttressed by seven pillars: green energy transition, food security, economic diversification, sustainable industries, the orange economy, COVID recovery and social protection. Every pillar of this strategic agenda has an international and multi-lateral dimension that capitalizes on the geopolitical change that currently drives the international political economy, in order to invite interests, innovations and investments toward sustainable nation building."

New government is facilitating the country's transformation

Terrance Drew's administration is focused on green and inclusive economic and social development for St. Kitts and Nevis

Terrance Drew was elected as Prime Minister of the twin-island federation of St. Kitts and Nevis in August 2022. In this interview, he highlights some of his government's achievements to date and discusses a few of the ongoing priorities for his administration.

Can you give us an overview of the key milestones you've reached since you took office?

We've accomplished several critical things. For example, we have the highest number of women ever in the federal government's cabinet and in our parliament. Our commitment to gender equality can also be seen in our appointments to boards of government entities and within the civil service. We've shattered the glass ceiling.

Another accomplishment is education: we made education free from preschool to college level and we've distributed tablets and laptops to each student from primary-school to high-school level, ensuring each child is equipped with the necessary tools to excel. In addition, we have passed good-governance laws in parliament and we have enacted them. These deal with integrity in public life, transparency, freedom of information and so forth.

A further thing that we have achieved was an agreement between St. Kitts and Nevis that has made the geothermal energy resources on the island of Nevis an asset of the whole federation. Because of that agreement, we're now on the cusp of starting to drill for energy that, unlike solar and wind, is a constant source of renewable energy that doesn't depend on the weather.

We were also able to put together our vision to become a sustainable island state by 2040, which we've presented to the world at multiple fora, including the UN Climate Change Conference COP28, where I shared a stage with Vice President Kamala Harris. During her speech, she mentioned me and St. Kitts and Nevis by name, because we're working together on pursuing how small island states like ours can develop models to deal with the scourge and effects of climate change.

I would also like to highlight our repositioning of the economy, letting it respond to the



Terrance Drew
Prime Minister

needs of our people. For instance, we're launching a financial education program for all children, which is being supported by the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank. We're opening bank accounts for our children and giving them and their parents the opportunity to buy shares in local or public companies. Dividends will add to their savings and give them opportunities to invest further so that they can create a financial profile long before they're 18 years of age. That gives them an opportunity for economic independence.

We have invested heavily in water as well. Because of climate change, we have droughts and the increase in sea levels means that salty water is intruding into our wells. We have been able to devise a plan, which includes desalination, partnering with hotels and drilling for water to help resolve the matter.

Can you explain how you want to transform education in St. Kitts and Nevis?

We want to make education relevant. Relevant means that, once people are educated to deal with the transformational advancements of life, they're equipped to deal with their life situation and the situation where they live. We want to teach courses that can help them to enhance themselves in the country, while also transforming it. That is critically important to



Basseterre, the colorful capital of St. Kitts and Nevis

us. We also want to make sure that everyone has access to education and ensure that education is not just focused on academia, but that it can focus on vocational training and other aspects as well.

For example, we want to transition to 100% green energy by 2030 based on our solar, wind and geothermal resources, and we're going to need people who are technicians in this space. So we're opening up the largest solar-energy-certified technical course in the whole of the Caribbean, even though we are the smallest country in the region, at the Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College in St. Kitts.

TERRANCE DREW
PRIME MINISTER

"St. Kitts and Nevis is an outstanding destination for people who want to invest and live here."

Another vital example is our financial education program. We are going to put a financial syllabus on our children's tablets and laptops. We intend, by the time they leave school, that they will be sound in financial education from a personal level, all the way up to investments. This can be easily taught; it's just that it never really was. We have to make sure that the education we give to our people is relevant, will help them in their lives, it responds to the changing world and that it will really help us to build out our vision of being a sustainable island state.

In 2023, a US government delegation led by Anna Morris, the Department of Treasury's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Global Affairs, attended a meeting in St. Kitts and Nevis, to discuss the establishment of a risk management framework for citizenship by investment (CBI) schemes in the Caribbean, which was attended by all countries in the region that have such programs. What was the outcome of this meeting for St. Kitts and Nevis?

That was a very important meeting and we welcome the US to be a part of the discussions in this area — we want to make sure that what we're doing safeguards all involved. St. Kitts and Nevis has already accomplished all the points raised in the meeting, plus more. We have also made significant additional changes ourselves to tighten the program, especially its security apparatus, so that nobody can abuse it.

The program has been good to St. Kitts and Nevis in terms of helping our investment and development. Therefore, just like anything else, we have to make sure that we keep strengthening, progressing and advancing the program so that we engender confidence in our partners.

The St. Kitts and Nevis CBI Programme is stable and strong, and we look forward to it becoming even stronger. St. Kitts and Nevis is an outstanding destination for people who want to invest and live here. Our people are friendly, the country is advancing and developing, and we're very close to North America. While you enjoy paradise, you're connected to the rest of the world. So come to St. Kitts and Nevis!

The island of St. Kitts is ready for international investment

The federation's largest island offers extensive potential to investors in a diverse range of economic sectors, with investment-ready projects available in green energy and agritech

Home to over two-thirds of the country's total population, the island of St. Kitts has experienced strong growth in foreign direct investments in recent years and that is forecast to continue as the government implements its strategy to transform the nation into a sustainable island state.

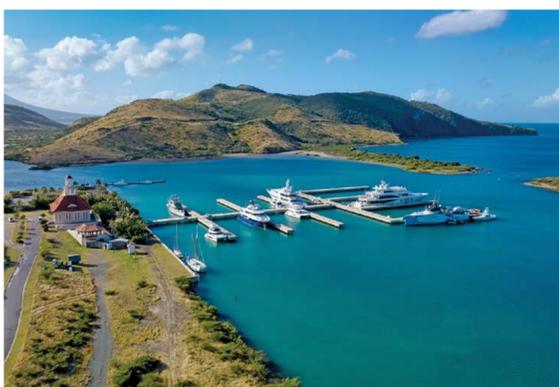
Among the investors set to benefit from the emerging opportunities on the island are entities from the US, a country that Denzil Lewellyn Douglas, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, Industry, Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Economic Development and Investment, describes as one of the nation's most robust partners. "We've enjoyed diplomatic relations with the US since 1983, when we attained independence from the UK. This has been reinforced by America's growing relations with the Caribbean Community and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States economic union, which we are members of," he says.

Douglas hopes that last year's appointment of Roger Nyhus as US Ambassador to the Eastern Caribbean region will act as a catalyst for strengthening private-sector trade and investment connections between the two nations: "The goals and priorities he has outlined align and complement my ministry's work program in terms of enhancing our manufacturing sector, bolstering trade between the US and St. Kitts and Nevis, addressing supply chain shortages, facilitating technology

transfer and attracting investments through strategic partnerships."

US businesses investing in the island have two advantages over investors from other countries. One concerns the US-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030 agreement, through which the Biden administration is promoting investment from the US into Caribbean clean-energy projects. The other, according to Stanley Jacobs, Director of the St. Kitts Investment Promotion Agency (SKIPA), is that St. Kitts and Nevis is a partner in the Caribbean Basin Initiative. "This trade arrangement with the US allows US companies in St. Kitts and Nevis to re-export finished products to the US without attracting duty, which is beneficial for industries that want to relocate manufacturing," he says. "This agreement has been very successful and we're currently seeing renewed interest from companies that want to focus on high-value-added products, such as electronics, cell phones, laptops and computers."

While both these agreements also apply to other countries in the region, St. Kitts stands out as an investment destination in a number of ways. "We're the region's financial capital and home to the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, we have an easily trainable workforce and an increasing number of direct flights to key international destinations," states Jacobs. Further attractions include a strategic location near to the US and major maritime routes; its modern infrastructure; and



St. Kitts benefits from close proximity to major maritime routes



Denzil Lewellyn Douglas
Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, Industry, Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Economic Development and Investment



Stanley Jacobs
Director
St. Kitts Investment Promotion Agency

the fact that it is a democratic English-speaking country, which complies with international standards and follows UK law. "We also have a stable government, a stable economy, a stable currency that is pegged to the US dollar, a stable investment climate and an investment-friendly government, which provides tax incentives for investors."

SKIPA's role is to make doing business easier for those investors. Responsible both for attracting FDI and supporting the expansion of investment projects, the government agency is the one-stop for investors in St. Kitts. As Jacobs puts it: "Essentially, we perform a hand-holding operation by navigating bureaucracy on investors' behalf."

In recent years, tourism and real estate have been sectors of particular interest to investors, according to Jacobs. "A significant amount of investment will continue to be concentrated in those sectors, with the ongoing construction of luxury-hotel developments, villas and condominiums. St. Kitts as a tourist destination is seen as fresh and investors tend to want to explore opportunities in newly emerging destinations," he explains. "However, we believe our country is ripe for sustainable investments — for example, in solar, wind and geothermal energy and also in agriculture. As we move toward creating a sustainable island state, we want to focus our investment promotion strategy on areas that will help us achieve our United Nations sustainable development goals, food security being one and affordable green energy another."

For that reason, SKIPA is now developing investment-ready proposals in those industries for potential investors, states Jacobs: "We've done a lot of work in agriculture. St. Kitts is small, with limited land for agricultural development. By utilizing greenhouse farming, plus smart nutrition and watering technologies, we could produce more crops using less land. To help channel investments into this sector, we're packaging investment opportunities in agritech and in the build-out of the government's Greenhouse Village project. We're also creating similar investment-ready opportunities for renewable-energy projects."

Other sectors with excellent prospects for investors include specialized medical tourism, financial services and information technology. "We've also been very successful in attracting international offshore educational institutions. Currently, we have four universities, with a student population of about 4,100, and we think there's room for more accredited institutions," he says.

Jacobs' message to potential investors is that St. Kitts is open for business: "We invite you to contact SKIPA and learn about the array of globally competitive opportunities that are available. Not only do we invite you to invest, we also invite you to visit and to experience the hospitality and friendliness of our people and our culture. I'm sure that, having experienced the warmth and beauty of St. Kitts and Nevis, you will agree that this is the right place to invest."

A CBI Programme that benefits the entire country

St. Kitts and Nevis utilizes the funds generated from its Citizenship by Investment Programme to positively impact its people

Established in 1984 with the intent of attracting foreign direct investment, the St. Kitts and Nevis Citizenship by Investment (CBI) Programme is the oldest of its kind in the world. It also took the coveted top spot in the 2023 CBI Index, which provides a captivating insight into the world's top investment migration programs.

The huge success of the initiative has had a substantial impact on the country in the last 40 years, allowing the government to invest in socio-economic projects such as building schools, hospitals and necessary infrastructure such as roads and bridges. This has ensured there is a positive impact on the citizens of St. Kitts and Nevis, while the added investment has also helped with the diversification and growth of the local economy.

"The funds are invested throughout the entire country, from the roads people drive on and the schools our students attend to the hospitals people are treated in and the hotels visitors stay in," explains Michael Martin, Head of the Citizenship by Investment Unit.

"The vast majority of these are funded by the Citizenship by Investment Programme as it is the largest contributor to the gross domestic product of the country. In fact, the benefits can be seen everywhere and they can be tracked back to our CBI Programme as it funds almost everything you see in the country. However, our job is to process the applications, then the government decides how to invest the funds generated by those applications."

MICHAEL MARTIN
HEAD, CITIZENSHIP BY INVESTMENT UNIT
"We introduced the first CBI Programme and it is the finest. This was proven by our program being voted as number one in the world by the CBI Index."

While it is the job of those within government to assign the funds, Martin and his team implement a strict due diligence process to uphold the country's reputation as a sound and stable democracy that is built on free market policies. Numerous measures are taken to ensure compliance with legislation from potential investors and determine the suitability of applicants.

"We place due diligence at the highest level of importance in our CBI Programme," he stresses. "There are many benefits to becoming a citizen as you will be part of a safe and secure country and will have unlimited opportunities for further investment."

"We are aiming to create sustainable investment opportunities. It's not just a case of making that first investment and leaving it at that, we like to encourage successful applicants to consider additional investments."

"Some clients look at our CBI Programme as a form of asset or wealth management. This is a good jurisdiction for that as it's a low-tax jurisdiction. However, there are many other benefits that an applicant can derive from being a citizen of our country, including greater freedom of movement."



Michael Martin
Head, Citizenship by Investment Unit

This includes global mobility as the St. Kitts and Nevis passport also provides more travel opportunities than any other Caribbean passport. Martin continues: "Then there is the major tax benefit as there has been no personal income tax in this country since 1980. That's a very substantial benefit. Our corporation tax is also relatively low, at 25%."

In addition to the many benefits on offer, the advantage of having 40 years of experience running the CBI Programme means that the entire process has become extremely efficient and streamlined.

Applicants have four ways in which they can apply and the application process has been made as simple as possible, while the processing time is just 120 days.

"A lot depends on the due diligence report; if there are major problems then we may have to ask for more information or possibly deny the application," outlines Martin.

"We spend approximately 30 days checking each application and if everything is in order then it continues through to the approval stage and then a Certificate of Registration is issued. This then confirms that the applicant has become a citizen of St. Kitts and Nevis and a passport can be acquired."

"Currently there are four options for those submitting an application; investing in a developer's real estate; a sustainable island state contribution; a private home sale; or a public benefit. An applicant must be able to meet the requirements set out by each of these investment options and we require proof of funds. You also must not have a criminal record or have previously filed for personal bankruptcy."

"It's a very wide profile that is then looked at by our due diligence providers who will help us to determine finally if this applicant is suitable to be accepted into our CBI Programme."

The importance of investment

Due to the popularity of the CBI Programme in St. Kitts and Nevis, there have been some significant changes to the scheme in the past year. Previously, it was possible to obtain citizenship through a \$125,000 investment in the Sustainable Growth Fund, however, this has now been replaced by the Sustainable Island State Contribution which currently stands at \$250,000.

Additionally, the real estate program, which



The Citizenship by Investment Programme has been in operation for 40 years

has long been a core element of the program, has seen the minimum investment increased to \$400,000. Explaining the reasoning behind these changes, Martin says: "We chose to make these adjustments in 2023 because the investment amounts were at such a level that it undervalued the CBI Programme."

"We believe that our citizenship is worth more than the amounts that were being charged and that is the main reason why we overhauled the entire CBI Programme. There is no more Sustainable Growth Fund and the real estate has gone back to \$400,000, which was its original level."

"At one point, with the introduction of more competition in the industry, it was felt that we should reduce our investment requirements to get more volume. However, our approach now is to focus on investment. We want people to invest. We are not just looking for numbers."

"We are not in the business of selling passports, we are in the business of attracting foreign investment to the country. That was the chief reason for increasing the prices."

With the main driving force behind these changes being to attract investors who want to be part of the development of the country, it is no surprise that the CBI Unit remains inundated with applications. Investors can feel confident they are making a positive contribution and are seeing the benefits of their investment throughout the country.

This is particularly the case in the real estate sector, where there are currently three options for investors. They can purchase a unit in a government-approved real estate project or invest in a condominium unit, both of which require a minimum investment of \$400,000.

Another option is to purchase a single-family private dwelling, with the minimum price for this investment being \$800,000. Investors can also earn an income of between 2% and 5% per annum by leasing a property and must keep the property for at least seven years.

"These have all become popular options thanks to the country being home to a competitive real estate market. "Based on what we have seen in recent years, the market is performing really well," reveals Martin. "We are seeing good volume when it comes to applications for real estate, which is a good indication of the health of the market."

An attractive offering

While the CBI Programme in St. Kitts and Nevis may have been running for four decades, there is no shortage of competition, particularly from other Caribbean islands. With more countries offering initiatives, the investor mi-

gration industry has become heavily scrutinized in recent years.

This led to the government in St. Kitts and Nevis taking a proactive stance and hosting roundtable discussions with representatives of the five Caribbean CBI nations and the US government. From this meeting, it was decided that all Caribbean CBI Programmes would agree on six principles to enhance and safeguard the security and integrity of the program.

MICHAEL MARTIN
HEAD, CITIZENSHIP BY INVESTMENT UNIT
"We want people to invest. We are not in the business of selling passports, we are in the business of attracting foreign investment to the country."

The sustainability of CBI Programmes was also discussed at the European Union Summit in Brussels last year, with representatives from all of the Caribbean CBI nations addressing concerns and stressing the importance of these initiatives as the revenue enables them to fund major infrastructural and development projects.

But with such an attractive offering from Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada and St. Lucia, how does St. Kitts and Nevis stand out from the crowd?

"We have a laid-back lifestyle, our people are friendly and we find that it is very easy for our new citizens to assimilate," explains Martin. "We have good weather, good people and a wonderful country that everybody loves. We often get feedback from people who have been to other Caribbean islands and they always tell me that they have the most enjoyable time here."

"I would also add that we introduced the first CBI Programme and it is the finest. This was proven by our program being voted as number one in the world on the CBI Index. And we are still constantly evolving as we are never fully satisfied with our service delivery and our communications. So we are always working hard to upgrade and expand our technology to help our stakeholders interact with us more easily and have quick access to information."

"Ultimately, our program is extremely well-managed and we welcome all suitable applicants to become part of our safe, secure and stable country."

IMPORTANT FACTS AND FIGURES



Stable political, social and economic environment

One of the highest literacy rates in the region at 98% and English is the official language

1st-class air, sea, communication and electricity infrastructure

Excellent direct flight connectivity to key US airports

Stable currency, fixed to the \$US

The financial capital of the Eastern Caribbean and a leading financial services hub

Investor-friendly government that offers a range of tailored incentives

Strategically located in the same time zone as the US East Coast

104 The two islands of St. Kitts and Nevis cover 104 square miles

~50K One of the smallest populations in the Western Hemisphere

4% Economic growth in 2023 to reach a total GDP of \$860 million

3.6% GDP average growth forecast for 2024 and 2025

42% Tourism is the largest contributor to the economy at around 42% of the total

1983 40 years of democratic independence and diplomatic relations with the US

2030 100% locally generated green energy should be powering St. Kitts and Nevis by 2030

2040 St. Kitts and Nevis plans to be the world's first sustainable island state by 2040

SOURCES: Morgan Stanley, United State Department of State, US Trade Representative, US Energy Information Administration, International Statistics database, Kpler crude oil trade flows data.



The magical Belle Mont Sanctuary Resort on St. Kitts

St. Kitts honors its past and promotes its culture

Whether visiting sprawling estates or sampling local cuisine, visitors will discover numerous ways to learn about St. Kitts' rich history

Boasting pristine sandy beaches, mountains with spectacular views, numerous activities on land and sea, and a warm and welcoming culture, it is no surprise that St. Kitts has quickly emerged as a standout destination for tourists seeking an authentic Caribbean experience.

The island has matured into a thriving cultural hub that is attracting visitors from around the world. Helping it to stand out from the crowd is the fact that St. Kitts has placed a premium on protecting its natural habitat and its history. Tourists are encouraged to explore the churches, estates, museums and monuments that delve into the nation's past, as well as to sample the delicious cuisine that honors local produce.

"We have numerous dishes that tell a story of our past and the fact that we had to use scraps and leaner pieces of meat then. Things such as blood pudding and goat water stew are part of our culture and have become delicacies," explains Marsha Tamika Henderson, Minister

of Tourism, Civil Aviation, International Transport, Employment and Labor and Urban Development. "These dishes have come from our resilience as a people and it was how we survived. Now they have been turned into something rather special and are really very tasty."

The history of the country is also well preserved at the National Museum in the capital, Basseterre, which includes detailed exhibits that display the island's 12th-century history, indigenous culture and early European settlements. Equally impressive is Fairview Great House and Botanical Gardens, an estate offering the chance to enter the past through tours and rum tastings. A similar experience can be had at the Wingfield Estate, the oldest rum distillery in the Caribbean, where walking tours are followed by the chance to sample and then label your own bottle of rum.

Another way that the Caribbean island is able to protect its heritage, while at the same time cater to tourists, is by encouraging visitors to meet local producers and artisans. This can

Unique destination in a crowded regional market

St. Kitts is working hard to encourage community tourism and ensure that its people benefit from a rise in visitor numbers

In the following interview, we hear from the Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, International Transport, Employment and Labor and Urban Development, Marsha Tamika Henderson, who explains why the tourism sector is a crucial driver of the economy.

What measures is your ministry taking to promote job creation and sustainable growth in tourism?

We are trying our best to diversify our offerings. We don't just offer sand and sea now; we have a lot more to offer as a destination and we pride ourselves on our off-the-beach experiences. For instance, we are preserving a lot of our cultural sites and have created a National Trust, which has taken ownership and management of places such as Brimstone Hill Fortress, a historic fortification that is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We also try to promote community tourism, as we want visitors to go into communities and meet with our local artisans. We've created funding and provided training to ensure the tourism dollar trickles down to the local communities.

One successful example is in an area called Fig Tree in Sandy Point, where visitors can sample local food and learn about the history of the area. There are local artisans there too, who are creating things like candles and essential oils. In diversifying our offerings, we are creating job opportunities for people within our communities and the industry as well.

We want to increase airlift and to increase visitor spend as a destination. However, to get more airlift, we first have to increase the number of hotel rooms that we have, so we are looking for investments into hotels, and not just any hotels but the major international brands.

Where do you position the product and service offer of the country in reference to other regional competitors? What factors make you stronger in certain areas and why?

We conduct lots of exit surveys at our air and cruise ports and these show that visitors are extremely satisfied with our customer service and the authenticity of the destination as a whole. We are rich in culture and history, and people come here to learn about who we are and how



Marsha Tamika Henderson
Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, International Transport, Employment and Labor and Urban Development

we live. Even our food tells a story. That makes us unique and sets us apart from some of the bigger destinations such as Jamaica and Barbados.

MARSHA TAMIKA HENDERSON
MINISTER OF TOURISM, CIVIL AVIATION,
INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT, EMPLOYMENT
AND LABOR AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

"We are rich in culture and history, and people come here to learn about who we are and how we live. Even our food tells a story."

We believe visitors are looking for a more immersive experience and that is what we can offer. Of course, we have the great weather and sandy beaches, but we also have an array of national sites and heritage sites that showcase our culture. That is why we launched our 'Venture Deeper' campaign, to showcase our wider story. We have tried to preserve our history as much as possible so that visitors can understand what happened here more than 300 years ago.

We also like to showcase our local products,



The streets of Basseterre come alive during St. Kitts' vibrant carnival

be done throughout St. Kitts and, in particular, at Liamuiga Natural Farms, which National Geographic named as one of the world's top-20 cultural hot spots to visit in 2024. Sitting 1,500 feet above sea level, this patch of fertile farmland is surrounded on all sides by protected rainforest and is cultivated by farmers who grow produce — especially coffee and citrus fruits — organically.

Visitors have the opportunity to embark on tours that showcase the farms' lush landscape and then to have authentic Kittitian cuisine cooked for them that will be made from fresh local ingredients. Dishes on offer may include soups prepared in traditional yabba clay pots and a renowned coffee ice cream.

A great way to work up an appetite is by embarking on a safari tour or testing out one of the island's many hiking routes. One of the most challenging is hiking to the top of Mount Liamuiga. The highest point in St. Kitts, it takes anywhere from four to six hours to hike to the top of the dormant volcano but those who manage to reach the summit are rewarded with spectacular views.

The capital of Basseterre is another major attraction as the charming city's streets are lined with shops, cafes and museums, plus numerous historical landmarks. "The country as a whole has a lot to offer and we remain an authentic and untouched destination. It's not overdeveloped and is a true paradise. Visitors can come here and venture into our rainforest, they can zipline, walk to the old plantations, eat good food and have farm-to-table experiences," outlines Henderson.

"There is much to offer but we still want to diversify our offering further so that we can become a year-round destination. We created the St. Kitts Music Festival and held the inaugural edition 25 years ago and it has helped to boost tourism figures in June, which was traditionally the low season," she adds.

The St. Kitts Music Festival has been a huge success and continues to attract a growing number of tourists thanks to its ability to show-

case A-list musicians across a diverse range of genres. Similarly, the St. Kitts and Nevis Restaurant Week, held every July, is growing in popularity as it provides visitors with the perfect opportunity to enjoy traditional dishes crafted by the country's best chefs and restaurateurs.

"We are now seeing more visitors during the summer months and we plan to introduce more experiences so that we truly become a destination of choice throughout the year." There is certainly no shortage of events taking place throughout the island during the year already, with Caribbean Premier League Cricket running throughout August and September, for example. Then in late December through to early January, St. Kitts hosts the Sugar Mas Carnival, a six-week festival that sees the streets of Basseterre come alive.

MARSHA TAMIKA HENDERSON
MINISTER OF TOURISM, CIVIL AVIATION,
INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT, EMPLOYMENT
AND LABOR AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

"We plan to introduce more experiences so that we truly become a destination of choice throughout the year."

Running since the 1950s, the carnival is a non-stop party at which people dress up in their brightest outfits to watch parades, attend dances and celebrate Kittitian culture. A huge hit with locals and travelers, it is the most anticipated annual celebration in the country and continues to grow in popularity year-on-year.

All of these events are now easier to attend for US visitors from the East Coast, after it was confirmed late last year that JetBlue would run a year-round service from John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York to St. Kitts three times a week, adding to the numerous direct flights that already run between the two countries.



St. Kitts is a popular destination for lovers of all water sports

which are based around our rich history as producers of sugar. From sugar, we made rum, which can be found throughout the country.

On one of our sugar plantations, the Wingfield Estate, archaeologists were exploring the ruins and found a rum distillery that we didn't even know existed. This has now been restored and offers tours where visitors can learn about the history of the estate and then head to the beach to make a cocktail using rum. It's known as the Kittitian Rum Master experience and has won numerous awards.

So, we use what we have, what's unique to us, what's authentic to us and we work to make sure our tourism product remains fresh, relevant and maximizes the potential of our natural resources, and that's something that also puts us ahead. In fact, we were named Caribbean Journal's 2023 Caribbean Destination of the Year for providing the richest, most-authentic travel experience in the region.

We were also named as the Caribbean's top eco-friendly destination at the Travel Weekly Magellan Awards last year and we have won many other international awards for our diving sites and as a hiking destination, for example. We don't win the biggest destination awards, but we get awards that are relevant to the authenticity of the destination.

What is the economic significance of the North American market for St. Kitts and how has it changed, grown or developed over the past few years?

The US market is St. Kitts and Nevis' biggest source market and we get most of our visitors from New York, Boston, New Jersey and Washington. For us, tourism contributes a little over 42% of our gross domestic product, so our source markets are absolutely important. Outside of the US, among the next largest markets are other Caribbean countries, so regional trav-

el is a big thing for us, but our focus is on penetrating the US market further.

The number of tourists we welcome from the US has changed drastically due to an increase in airlift. Before COVID-19, we were doing relatively well. We had some legacy carriers coming out of the US market, including Delta and American Airlines. However, due to recent marketing and promotion we have done within that source market, there was a call to increase the airlift because there was huge demand. So we introduced flights from JetBlue and United Airlines. We now want to expand with more direct routes from North America, as we are definitely seeing both the interest and the demand for that.

What is being done to help cope with a potential rise in visitor numbers in the coming years? And how do you plan to offset the environmental impact that comes with more tourists?

We have made big investments in the Robert L. Bradshaw International Airport and our cruise port. We are still working on expanding our terminal at the airport, which is needed as we have outgrown its current footprint. We are also working on upgrading the seaport and even revitalizing the capital of Basseterre, without taking from the old architectural feel of it. We want to create a resilient and urban Basseterre.

As well as these upgrades, the government is implementing a development plan to transition the country into a sustainable island state and we have a roadmap that covers this transition over the next seven to 12 years. In line with these plans, in tourism and international transport, one of our focuses is renewable energy. We are looking for investors who want to invest in solar energy, as well as in areas such as desalination and waste management.



The luxurious St. Kitts Marriott Resort lies less than 2 miles from the airport

Explore a spectacular Caribbean island

One of the most diverse tourism destinations in the Caribbean, St. Kitts is home to luxury resorts, a vibrant rainforest, uncrowded beaches and historic attractions

The Caribbean has long been a popular destination for tourists around the world, especially those seeking sun and relaxation. But while many of the countries share similar characteristics, each island has its own unique culture and history that helps it to stand out from its regional neighbors.

One of the islands that has managed to successfully differentiate itself from others in the Caribbean is St. Kitts, which has targeted travelers who want to get out of their hotels and explore all the destination has to offer. To achieve this there has been a focused effort on emphasizing the unique qualities, distinctive features and one-of-a-kind experiences that can be had throughout the island.

"We want visitors to experience our culture and cuisine, to try new activities and go on tours so that they meet the people of St. Kitts. That is why we introduced a brand new campaign entitled, Venture Deeper," explains Ellison "Tommy" Thompson, CEO of the St. Kitts Tourism Authority.

"The beauty of the island is unquestionably spectacular but we differentiate ourselves through the multitude of activities that we offer. We always urge first-time visitors to embark on a tour of the island, which can be done by coach, by catamaran or even by train, as we have the only scenic railway that is in operation in the English-speaking Caribbean.

"We also encourage everyone to travel to the top of Timothy Hill, as you have stunning views from there that allow you to see both the Atlantic and the Caribbean. Then we've got Brimstone Hill Fortress, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that provides you with more of the history of St. Kitts as well as incredible views. There are also tours that take you to Black Rocks, which is part of the volcanic formation of the island, as well as into the rainforest, where hikes are led by guides who tell you about the unique flora and fauna found on the island."

In addition to historical landmarks and natural attractions, St. Kitts is also home to several festivals that take place throughout the year. "We use a lot of these events to promote St. Kitts and to differentiate ourselves. Without a doubt, every visitor who comes to the Caribbean wants sun, sand and sea. We've got to promote that. But we want our visitors to have a richer experience with the destination," outlines Thompson.

With the tourism offering of St. Kitts growing substantially, the island is increasingly attracting visitors throughout the year. This has been helped by the addition of airlines now offering regular flights to the island, while the cruise market has been boosted thanks to investments in its cruise port that have allowed more and larger ships to travel to the destination.

ELLISON 'TOMMY' THOMPSON
CEO, ST. KITTS TOURISM AUTHORITY

"The beauty of the island is unquestionably spectacular but we differentiate ourselves through the multitude of activities that we offer."

"St. Kitts has always had a very strong relationship with the cruise market and we have most of the major lines, both European and American, calling in at St. Kitts. One of the things that we're very pleased about is that visitor satisfaction levels with the destination are extremely high. That's important for us," reveals Thompson.

"The major market for us when it comes to air travel is New York and we now have a non-stop service year-round from New York

thanks to JetBlue, while we also have flights out of Charlotte and Miami, the latter is daily and also year-round. We are now seeing some encouraging numbers out of the UK as well, especially with British Airways, which once again offers a year-round service.

"We've also seen an uplift in arrivals from other Caribbean nations, as we have new flights from Barbados and Antigua via Caribbean Airways. In addition to that, we've got Winair from St. Maarten and Seaborne Airlines from Puerto Rico."

A varied hospitality offering

Much in the same way that the island offers something for everyone, the hospitality industry on St. Kitts is equally varied and appealing. There is a wide variety of resorts, hotels and retreats that make it easy for visitors to find their ideal getaway. Nestled at one thousand feet on St. Kitts' iconic dormant volcano Mount Liamuiga, overlooking the point where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Caribbean Sea, there is a magical place known as Belle Mont Sanctuary Resort that highlights St. Kitts uniqueness. The resort, part of a luxury lifestyle development known as Kittitian Hill, is so enveloped in its

ANNA MCNUTT
GENERAL MANAGER, ST. KITTS MARRIOTT
RESORT AND THE ROYAL BEACH CASINO

"The wonderful thing about St. Kitts is that it feels untouched and you don't have the hustle and bustle of other major islands."

surroundings that you are, at the same time, in the mountain and always a glance away from expansive ocean views. Here, within the lush mountain, fifty signature West Indian-inspired villas and cottages have been carefully situated, enticing guests to privately co-exist with nature and still enjoy all the services and amenities of modern, fine resorts.

Ranging from one-bedroom private cottages to four-bedroom villas, most accommodations have private, reflective infinity pools, blending the surrounding nature and sky with the horizon and the property itself. Designed by celebrity architect Bill Bensley, Belle Mont Sanctuary Resort opened in July 2014 and has since become a landmark 5-star hotel of St. Kitts. A new spa, Mangifera Wellbeing Spa, is scheduled to open at the resort this year.

One of the most in-demand hotels on the island is the St. Kitts Marriott Resort, located in Frigate Bay, which is less than 2 miles from Robert L. Bradshaw International Airport. "We have 26 acres of well-manicured and landscaped grounds and we are unique in that we are flanked by the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean," details Anna McNutt, General Manager at St. Kitts Marriott Resort and The Royal Beach Casino.

"We are able to cater to all types of travelers who have a range of interests as we have an 18-hole links-style golf course with breathtaking views; an on-site casino; three large pools; and a spa that offers a vast selection of treatments and services.

"Our executive chef is also a master at crafting menus that showcase the best of local ingredients and are prepared with Kittitian flair. This can be seen in our seven restaurants and bars, while we are also opening a pop-up concept that will feature local musicians and authentic barbecued Caribbean seafood.

"Dining options in the hotel include a traditional Italian restaurant where you will find fresh hand-made pizzas. We also serve steaks, seafood, sushi and Caribbean comfort food. There is also tapas-style dining and speciality



The island's glorious beaches are never crowded



Ellison 'Tommy' Thompson
CEO, St. Kitts Tourism Authority

buffets that change several times a week and feature a variety of cuisines from around the world.

"The hotel is also a great base for those who wish to explore the island. There is a wide variety of top-notch excursions and immersive cultural experiences throughout St. Kitts. You can climb Mount Liamuiga, drive 4x4 jeeps through the rainforest and learn to snorkel or dive. The wonderful thing about St. Kitts is that it feels untouched and you don't have the hustle and bustle of other major islands."

Sustainability in tourism

The resort places an emphasis on sustainability, which is a common theme throughout the island. "St. Kitts Marriott Resort has started a 'Let's Recycle Program' that not only has an extensive recycling component, but also focuses on providing education about recycling and its impact on the environment," states McNutt.

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Holistic approach to sustainability

The government is working with all stakeholders to drive forward its ambitious sustainability agenda and transition to 100% green energy by 2030

At the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, Prime Minister Terrance Drew received acclaim for his government's strategy for transforming St. Kitts and Nevis into the first sustainable island nation. "We had one main goal at COP28: to present our Sustainable Island State Agenda (SISA) to the world. The outcome was international recognition of our prime minister as a champion for small island developing states, and the world now knows that we want to be partners and work together for sustainability," says Joyelle Clarke, Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Climate Action and Constituency Empowerment.

Clarke heads a new ministry that demonstrates the government's determination to address sustainability comprehensively and in partnership with other stakeholders. "When we got into office in 2022, we recognized there wasn't any real link between a national development policy, the United Nations' sustainable development goals and our quest to become a climate-resilient nation," she explains. "We realized it was critical that 'climate action' was given prominence as a named part of the ministry, so that not only our ministerial work would say climate action is important, but also the people of St. Kitts and Nevis, as well as our regional partners, will see that we're committed to climate action, we've resourced it and we've put ministry personnel to work on it."

As well as the country's future development needing to be linked to climate action, it is essential that its' populations are involved in discussions about those links, Clarke states: "We need to ensure there is climate justice and programs to protect people. Ordinary Kittitians and Nevisians have to think about how they put food on their plates and pay their bills. If we can't link those things to the climate crisis, then our work becomes very abstract to people."

One area of particular concern to her ministry in this respect is providing sustainable access to land in a coastal nation of just 104 square miles, two-thirds of which is protected forest park. In the past, it was hard to gain permits for any land development, she reveals. "We decided to change that narrative and link land to sustainability. For



Joyelle Clarke
Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Climate Action and Constituency Empowerment

example, you need land for farming, that's your livelihood and food security; you need land for commercial development so you can innovate and be industrious, that's linked to another SDG."

To maximize the potential, climate resilience and protection of the islands' lands in tandem, Clarke's ministry is utilizing digital mapping. "Geographic information system software allows us to take a more holistic view of national development. We can look at the country as a whole in terms of, for example, the development of housing, industry or agriculture; and we can layer that with conservation, as well as the areas that are more climate resilient, ones that need buffering and areas that are vulnerable," she says.

The ministry is also updating the country's planning legislation to encourage investments in, for instance, sustainable development projects in vacant urban lots. "We have a growing population and need to adjust our building codes to allow for more vertical construction and climate readiness in terms of cooling and heating," Clarke asserts. "We don't want to build traditional homes; we want climate-smart and resilient homes. That's an example of the types of investments we're trying to



St. Kitts and Nevis is rich in solar, wind and geothermal energy resources



Konris Gregor Menten Maynard
Minister of Public Infrastructure, Energy and Utilities, Domestic Transport, Information, Communication and Technology and Posts

attract. We want partners and investors who recognize that protecting paradise is vital."

Developing green energy is key

For Prime Minister Drew, the preeminent pillar of the seven that the country's SISA is based around — green energy, food security, economic diversification, sustainable industries, the creative economy, COVID recovery and social protection — is transitioning to 100% renewable energy by 2030. Clarke agrees: "The economic independence that comes with flicking a light switch and knowing that you're not harming the environment or your pocket, that's freedom."

Konris Gregor Menten Maynard, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Energy and Utilities, Domestic Transport, Information, Communication and Technology and Posts, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Energy and Utilities, Domestic Transport, Information, Communication and Technology and Posts expands on why this transition is central to the government's sustainability strategy: "If we're able to exploit our enormous renewable energy potential, it gives us a lot of possibilities. There's the possibility of becoming com-

pletely independent of fossil-fuel price difficulties; and of connecting to nearby islands by subsea cabling to provide them with energy, because we will have so much excess. It also gives us opportunities in manufacturing sectors that require high levels of low-cost energy, other energy-intensive industries such as data service, in the transformation of energy into green molecules like hydrogen and ammonia, and in powering cruise ships."

At present, only a small percentage of St. Kitts and Nevis' energy is generated by renewables, but that is set to change. Last year, the government announced that it had signed an agreement with SOLEC Power to develop the largest solar-energy and battery storage facility in the Caribbean on St. Kitts, which should be generating around 30% of the islands' energy needs within a few years. On top of that, the country is investing in the exploitation of vast geothermal energy reserves on Nevis. The government has financial support from the Caribbean Development Bank for this project and is now seeking additional partners. As well as solar and geothermal energy, St. Kitts and Nevis offers

JOYELLE CLARKE
MINISTER OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE ACTION AND CONSTITUENCY EMPOWERMENT
"We want partners and investors who recognize that protecting paradise is vital."

powerful wind resources.

During COP28, Vice President Kamala Harris announced the US-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030, an initiative to build climate resilience and renewable capacity in the Caribbean, which is being backed by over \$100 million in US funding. At the event, Harris singled out St. Kitts and Nevis as one of the nations she was working with to help unleash their potential in green energy, notes Maynard: "We're now actively pursuing partnerships. We're going to be opening ourselves up to invite proposals from anyone willing to partner with us to meet our 100% renewable energy by 2030 goal."

Building a climate-resilient and digital nation

St. Kitts and Nevis' small size makes it the ideal test bed for new technologies that address sustainability and digitalization

In the following interview, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Energy and Utilities, Domestic Transport, Information, Communication and Technology and Posts, Konris Gregor Menten Maynard, reveals some of the priority areas for his ministry.

In 2023, St. Kitts and Nevis' national parliament unanimously voted in favor of developing Nevis' geothermal resources. How extensive are these resources and why was this resolution so important?

St. Kitts needs about 28 megawatts of peak power and Nevis about 9 megawatts. So the country's total demand can be rounded to 40 megawatts. The geothermal reserves in Nevis are said to perhaps be in excess of 1 gigawatt annually. We certainly have enough potential energy there to power the whole of St. Kitts and Nevis and to give us opportunities to power neighboring islands, cruise ships, new manufacturing industries or to convert into other uses, such as green hydrogen or ammonia.

The potential is great and has been known about for quite some time. The challenge in the past related to the fact that St. Kitts and Nevis is a federation, with a federal parliament and local administrations on both islands. The position we took in the federal parliament last year was to signal to the world, international partners, investors and our citizens that the time has come for us to unanimously recognize the resource in Nevis as a federal national asset. It was important that the federal parliament made the declaration, with members from St. Kitts and from Nevis unanimously saying we will support the development of this geothermal resource for St. Kitts and Nevis.

All of the preliminary studies and analyzes have been done, including test wells. What is left is drilling production wells and the intended wells should supply a minimum 30 megawatts of energy. What is now crucial is that St. Kitts and Nevis connect to become one electricity grid. The two islands currently have independent grids and we need to connect them so that any development of power on Nevis can easily be transmitted to St. Kitts and vice versa. For example, government has just signed a renegotiated deal for the largest solar and battery energy storage facility in the Caribbean, which will be located on St. Kitts, and we also have the potential for wind energy. It's critical that we connect the two grids, so that any development of renewable energy on either island will service the entire federation.

The United Nations has classified St. Kitts and Nevis as one of the most-water-scarce countries worldwide. Last year, you announced the construction of

a 2-million-gallon capacity desalination plant. How will this help alleviate the islands' water challenges?

Prior to 2023, all water for consumers came from rainfall: 30% from surface water and the rest from well water. However, in the last 10 years alone, our rainfall has reduced by almost 20%. If our economy continues to grow, then we have reached a point where we cannot provide 24-hour water service to all of our customers.

One solution is desalination and the challenge with that has been that it is energy intensive. Until now, our electricity grid did not have renewable energy sources as an option and the escalating cost of the fossil fuels that have to be shipped here could have been seen as a prohibitive factor in moving toward desalination. But we have reached the stage where it is a must and a 2-million-gallons-a-day desalination plant is going to service the Basseterre Valley area on St. Kitts. There are some existing aquifers in this area, but we're seeing increased levels of saline intrusion in that water and we expect that an additional 2-million gallons per day will help to alleviate the challenges we have with providing 24-hour water service.

KONRIS GREGOR MENTEN MAYNARD
MINISTER OF PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE, ENERGY AND UTILITIES, DOMESTIC TRANSPORT, INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY AND POSTS

"I believe St. Kitts and Nevis can become a digitalization model for the Caribbean."

We've done some other things as well. While we believe we've exhausted most of the well water in the Basseterre region, we've just finished drilling a well in the Cayon area a few miles northeast of there, which promises to be one of the largest wells we've ever found. It has the potential to give between 500,000 to 1 million gallons a day of potable water. We're also analyzing all other potential well-water sites around the country, which we will drill to add more water to our infrastructure.

The government has a comprehensive strategy for making sure we have enough water at least to satisfy the population. Then we will deal with other challenges that concern upgrading our water infrastructure. We have put together a funding proposal in order to help adapt our water infrastructure completely. For instance, we want to move to smart metering and we're looking to expand our water storage capacity.

As part of your ministerial role, you are responsible for public transport infra-



The country is investing in desalination to address challenges in water services

structure. This includes a 30-mile circular railway around St. Kitts that was constructed about 100 years ago to transport sugarcane. How important is this heritage infrastructure and what new transport initiatives are in the pipeline?

The sugar industry sustained St. Kitts for a couple of centuries, but we had to take the painful decision to close that industry in the early 2000s as it had become unprofitable. However, it was decided to preserve at least half of its rail lines to allow for our scenic railway. This provides us with several benefits: one is a reminder of our long history as the king of sugar in the Caribbean; this is part of who we are and what helped build us. It also gives us an opportunity to showcase the country to visitors, as they can travel almost half-way around St. Kitts on it. The train gives visitors a historical perspective of St. Kitts.

In terms of the country's wider public transport system, what will be critical going forward is how we utilize St. Kitts' size as an advantage when it comes to the electrification of its transport system. We have a particular benefit when it comes to electric cars, for instance, which will have at least 200 miles of range: our island is just 23 miles long and 5 miles across at its widest points. My ministry is now actively looking at what electrification policies we're going to put in place to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels for powering our private cars, public-sector cars and public transport.

What is the government's strategy for boosting digitalization in public services?

We're pursuing a digital transformation agenda and have established a digital transformation management unit that will be responsible for transforming our government into an e-government. We're currently working on the key component of digital transformation, which is digital ID. We will allow different bodies to develop

their own systems; for instance, the court system, inland revenue, customs and utilities are all developing individual systems that allow us to do things online.

This approach will enable us to keep information segregated, such that there is never any single point of attack in our system. That's going to be the thrust of our digital transformation strategy: security is going to be paramount. Our digital transformation unit's primary role is to set up effective governance and policy structures that will govern the technology.

I believe St. Kitts and Nevis can become a digitalization model for the Caribbean region, because it is small enough to test very big solutions that can reach everybody in a short amount of time. We must use that as an advantage.

What final message about St. Kitts and Nevis would you like to send our readers?

We're open for business and our enormous renewable energy potential gives us opportunities to do great things. St. Kitts and Nevis is an excellent test bed for new ideas and technologies, because we are small enough. If you want to sample your new electric vehicle, if you want to assist in providing a complete, robust internet service to every user in the country, we're small enough to do it.

St. Kitts and Nevis didn't create the climate-change problem. However, because of climate change, some of our beaches are being eaten away, our water resources are now threatened and we're in the pathway of what surely will be a catastrophic storm at some point. We're taking the steps we need to take on our own initiative.

However, our economy of scale doesn't allow us to be able to do everything and we're inviting partners to come along with us as we build a sustainable St. Kitts and Nevis.



The Icon of the Seas made Port Zante the first stop on its maiden voyage

Powering a green future for electricity

Supported by the island's only electricity provider, St. Kitts is becoming a Caribbean leader in state-of-the-art, resilient and renewable power systems

As part from a few people that live in the remotest parts of St. Kitts, the island's households and business have universal access to power. "I like to say that the electricity on the island is a lifeline for the population and every industry. Therefore, it is essential that there is a reliable main supply and a reliable backup," says Clement Williams, General Manager of St. Kitts Electricity Company (SKELEC).

SKELEC, a state-owned private company, is responsible for ensuring this supply throughout St. Kitts. "We're a vertically integrated utility that provides all aspects of electricity service, from production through to transmission, distribution and sales," he explains.

At present, the island's sole electricity supplier primarily relies on diesel generators for production, which takes place at its Needs-must Power Plant that has an installed capacity of 48.9 megawatts.

Renewables contribute around 5% or less of St. Kitts' electricity mix, however, as Williams points out: "Part of St. Kitts and Nevis' United Nations Nationally Determined Contribution is that the country will become a sustainable island state, meaning its electricity supply should be constant, sustainable and accessible to everybody who needs it. By 2030, we should be 100% powered by renewable energy. That's a very bold target, but it's achievable because we're blessed with wind, solar and geothermal energy resources."

At the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference, Prime Minister Terrance Drew outlined a proposed five-year \$350-million investment program that would not only achieve this target, but would result in the country generating substantial excess clean energy that could support the green transitions of neighboring countries.

A crucial component of this program is linking SKELEC's grid on St. Kitts with the one



Clement Williams
General Manager
St. Kitts Electricity Company

that covers Nevis, which is operated by another state-owned utility, Nevis Electricity Company. "By connecting the grids of both islands via undersea cable, we would be able to benefit from and capitalize on each other's strengths," Williams states.

Nevis' strength is its yet-to-be-exploited geothermal volcanic energy reserves, which far exceed electricity demands on that island, he states: "If you interconnect the two islands, you would be able to feed that power over to St. Kitts, allowing our diesel generators to become standby generators."

While St. Kitts may also contain geothermal resources that can be utilized in the future, its confirmed strengths are in solar and wind energy, and the upcoming exploitation of those resources are set to turn SKELEC into its region's leader in renewable energy.

Last year, the utility signed a power purchase agreement with SOLEC Power — a joint venture between Switzerland's Leclanché and



SKELEC is transitioning St. Kitts' electricity mix from diesel to renewables

Canada-based Solrid — for the Caribbean's largest fully integrated photovoltaic and battery storage facility, which is scheduled for completion in 2025. The plant will have a solar capacity of 35.7 megawatts, a 43.6-megawatt-hour lithium-ion battery energy storage system and will replace 4 million gallons of diesel production a year, reducing the island's carbon dioxide emissions by 43,500 metric tons.

"The solar-battery project will supply about 30%-35% of St. Kitts' annual electricity demand and the energy stored in its batteries during the day can be pushed into the grid well into the nighttime," he reveals. "The system also offers the opportunity for emergency power — if we have a failure at our current generation plant, it has been designed so that about 5 megawatts can be pumped directly into the grid for a short period of time, so that we don't have any outage. In addition, the system can be used for frequency modulating to maintain balance on our grid."

The island has substantial possibilities for more solar installations, while SKELEC has identified a site with 6-megawatt capacity for wind turbines. "In all, we're looking at well over 100 megawatts of capacity in renewable energy sources on the island. Over the next 5 years, we expect to see developments that cover our current electricity demand and, in the future, we could use excess energy provided by renewables to make green hydrogen or ammonia fuels. The landscape is wide open," enthuses Williams.

Investing in grid modernization

In order to be able to manage this uptick in renewables and to provide its customers with the best possible services, SKELEC is investing in the modernization of its grid. A cornerstone of this program is new advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) and the company will begin an island-wide rollout of state-of-the-art smart meters this year.

"Our AMI will be integrated into our Ebiz online payment platform, through which customers can already pay bills and track their electricity use. With the new smart meters, customers will be able to do an almost real-time inspection of their usage, see what the major consumers of electricity in their buildings are and limit their use," he says.

"We're also incorporating geotagging on meters and other electricity infrastructure,

which will enable fault reporting and detection. For example, if a customer has a supply issue, we will automatically know about it almost immediately and will be able to send technicians directly to the point of failure to repair it. That will save a lot of time in restoration and troubleshooting. The future is very exciting for us."

In addition, SKELEC is investing to make its electricity infrastructure less vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. "With global warming, we're seeing stronger and stronger storms more frequently. This is something we have to be proactive about by, for instance, getting our infrastructure underground," he declares. "We've made significant strides in this over the last two years and about 30% of our electricity backbone is located underground at the moment. This costs five times more than traditional overhead construction, but it's something that we realized we have to do, as it increases resilience by three times."

CLEMENT WILLIAMS
GENERAL MANAGER
ST. KITTS ELECTRICITY COMPANY
"By 2030, we should be 100% powered by renewable energy. That's a very bold target, but it's achievable."

SKELEC has been receiving support from the US in its efforts to build resilience into the island's power systems. "Through USAID and the US-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030 agreement, we've been partnering with US-based companies on training and consultancy services to help better develop our electrical infrastructure and our utility's internal capacities," he says.

Williams believes St. Kitts represents an ideal destination for US investors in renewables, as well as other industries: "We're strategically located right in the middle of the Caribbean, where we benefit from sun, sea and sand; we're making substantial strides toward becoming a sustainable island state and we're working assiduously on bringing down the cost of energy. We know that one of the main things investors look for is a reliable and cheap source of power and we're well on our way to achieving this. With this in mind, St. Kitts is definitely a great choice for any investment."

World-class air and sea gateways

The country's main air and cruise port provide safe, secure and customer-focused services that align with international best practices

According to Adeola Moore, CEO of St. Christopher Air & Sea Ports Authority (SCASPA), St. Kitts' airports and seaports are "the gateway to economic development through trade and tourism. They give the first impression and the last impression of the country to their customers, so they have to make a very lasting positive impression."

SCASPA is responsible for ensuring this happens at all of the island's international transportation nodes: Robert L. Bradshaw International Airport (RLB) on the outskirts of the capital and three marine facilities in the heart of Basseterre: the Deep Water Cargo Port that handles container and cargo traffic and transshipments, Port Zante Cruise Terminal, plus a ferry terminal that connects to Nevis and other destinations.

"Our vision is to be a leading provider of safe, secure and customer-focused air and sea port services within the Eastern Caribbean, in accordance with best practices and international standards. We want to deliver sustainable growth while exceeding customers' expectations and to offer the most sustainable and efficient air and sea ports in the region," states Moore.

SCASPA's plays a particularly important role in St. Kitts and Nevis' economy when it comes to tourism, she adds: "Tourism thrives on the movement of people in and out of the country. We have to ensure that our facilities and services are recognized as being of international standard, so that tourism and the wider economy remain vibrant. The federation's main revenue driver is tourism and the more passengers come, whether by air or sea, the more revenues we can collect directly and indirectly through their spend with businesses on the islands."

To support ongoing growth in the country's tourism sector, the authority is continuously striving to improve its facilities and services. This is illustrated by its recent activities at the modern RLB airport, the federation's primary point of international air access that can accommodate large jets and handles over 400,000 passengers each year. "In December 2023, we successfully completed the airport's apron rehabilitation and expansion project ahead of schedule. The apron is now directly in front of the terminal, aircraft

the best passenger experience that we can," she asserts. One area of ongoing investment at Port Zante is providing clean energy to ships in port, Moore notes: "Pier one now offers shore power to cruise ships and we're working on getting shore power on pier two. We're also thinking about installing a solar farm at the terminal. In addition, a solar farm will be in place at RLB airport this year. As the country heads toward becoming a sustainable island state, we're trying to play our part."

The CEO would encourage everyone to add St. Kitts to their vacation itineraries: "You won't be disappointed. We offer more than sand and sea, with an expanding rainforest, the Caribbean's only scenic railway, a rich history, friendly people, great food and good vibes. And it's more than just a winter getaway, we offer a summer of fun to tourists. St. Kitts is a great place to tour, it's a great place to live and it's a great place to invest."



Adeola Moore
CEO, St. Christopher Air & Sea Ports Authority

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Nevis: A tailored-approach to investors

The smaller partner in the St. Kitts and Nevis federation is fostering an increasingly wide-ranging economic profile

Just 2 miles across the ocean from its larger sister in the St. Kitts and Nevis federation, the relaxed island of Nevis has nurtured a surprisingly diverse economy, despite having a population of around 12,000 residents.

While tourism is the mainstay of its economy, close behind it is a broad-range financial services sector that has grown rapidly in recent years. “We’ve been a financial services center for 40 years and have never had any scandals. We’re smaller than some of our competitors, but we have a solid core business that’s stable and well-regulated,” says Mark Brantley, Premier of the Nevis Island Administration, the island’s devolved government.

Like the US, the St. Kitts and Nevis jurisdiction is rated as largely compliant with the global Financial Action Task Force’s standards for combatting money laundering and financing of terrorism. “International agencies’ assessments of us are at the national level and the two islands have been working extremely well together, approaching regulation in lockstep as a single unit,” explains Brantley. His administration is ambitious to grow Nevis’ financial services sector by another 50% over the next 3 years, he states: “We’re aggressively pursuing new entrants and partnering with existing service providers to make their products better known in the international marketplace.”

Also expanding on the island are technology-based endeavors, particularly in relation to agriculture. “We’ve become the Eastern Caribbean leaders in greenhouse technology for planting and growing food — we have greenhouses scattered about the island now, generating high yields. The Caribbean Community as a region has set a goal of reducing our imports of food by 25% by 2025 and Nevis is well on target for that,” Brantley declares.

An emerging area of expertise is information and communication technology. In 2023, for instance, two data-processing and call centers opened on the island. One, from Radius Global Solutions, is servicing major US financial companies, while the second is focused on telemedicine and connected to US doctors. According



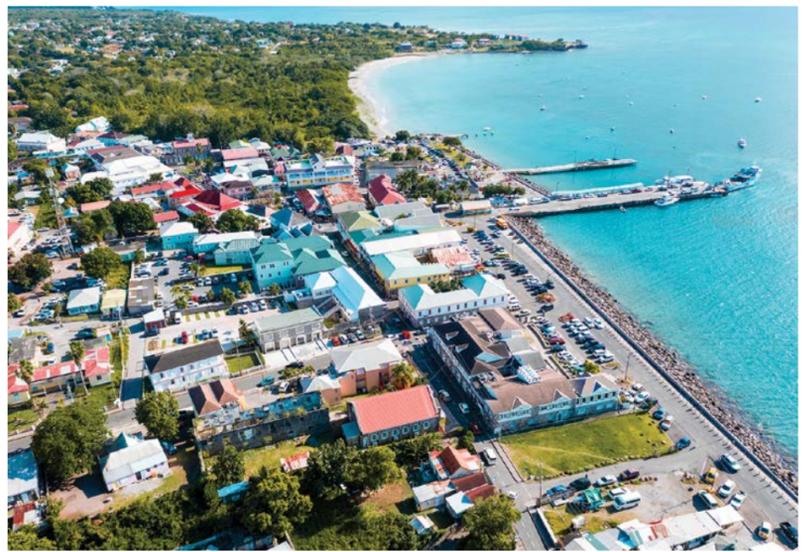
Mark Brantley
Premier, Nevis Island Administration

to Tamica Lawrence, director of the focal point for investors in the island, Nevis Investment Promotion Agency (NIPA): “Other call centers are also interested in moving here, which is partly because we have excellent and robust internet services and fiber networks.”

Another burgeoning sector is the orange, or creative, economy, Brantley reveals: “As a consequence of COVID-19 we had to close our borders and our tourism sector was closed down. We had to find innovative revenue generators and one thing we did was create a film industry from scratch. Nine films were produced in Nevis during that period of about two and a half years or so.”

When it comes to future economic diversification, his administration has prioritized the harnessing of the island’s volcanic geothermal energy reserves. “There’s very real potential that St. Kitts and Nevis, and more specifically the island of Nevis, can become the Norway of the Caribbean — except that, while Norway made its money exporting fossil fuels, we’re going to export renewable energy,” states Brantley.

“It means that we’re able to tick the boxes in terms of doing our part in the fight against climate change, but also ensures that we diversify



Nevis’ capital, Charlestown, is the island’s main administrative and business center

our economy and moves us into an economy that revolves around renewable energy. If we can achieve a 100%-renewable energy mix, St. Kitts and Nevis will be the greenest place on Earth and I think we’re very close to realizing that ambition.”

The island’s current power that is mainly generated by imported diesel can cost customers up to \$0.60 per kilowatt hour, which could be reduced to under \$0.10 if local renewables were used. “That creates the potential for a whole new economy, a whole redefinition and a shift in paradigm in terms of what we do as small island developing states,” he enthuses. “The Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis has said that the country will be the world’s first sustainable small island state, that it will be the world’s best place to live, work and do business. That’s the goal, a shared objective between St. Kitts and Nevis, and we’re working closely together to realize this goal!”

Leading the charge in this area is the island’s sole provider of electricity, the Nevis Electricity Company (NEVLEC). “Peak electricity demand in Nevis is below 11 megawatts and some experts estimate the geothermal potential of the island at over 1,000 gigawatts,” the utility’s General Manager Albert Gordon explains. “The plan is to transition to renewables, starting with geothermal because it isn’t an intermittent source. Our geothermal power plants will be 24/7, with each plant available 98% of the time. However, we also have potential for more exploitation of wind, in addition to the 3.2 megawatts of wind power we already have from an independent power producer, as well as solar and ocean energy — Nevis is small in landmass, but it has access to significant water resources.”

NEVLEC intends to connect its electricity grid to that of St. Kitts Electricity Company that feeds the larger island in the federation too, after which it could establish interconnections with the grids of other Caribbean islands and start producing green hydrogen and other renewable energy derivatives.

Exceptionally easy to do business

All of the previously mentioned sectors — plus real estate, food processing and more — are ripe

with possibilities for investors and there is a very good environment for those investors on Nevis, Brantley says: “The governments of both islands offer considerable fiscal concessions to those coming in. My government will partner with investors, provide support and, in some cases, we’ve provided access to land, tax concessions and various other assistance.”

Corporate investors, as well as individuals looking to establish themselves on the island through the federation’s Citizenship by Investment Programme, also benefit from the one-stop services of NIPA, Lawrence notes: “It’s very easy for an investor to do business with Nevis and with our agency. For example, we’ve recently introduced a digital platform on our website that allows potential investors to submit applications online and upload all the required information, which gives them a fast-track way of making investments.”

MARK BRANTLEY
PREMIER, NEVIS ISLAND ADMINISTRATION

“The beauty of Nevis is our size. We’re small enough that we can make decisions and move quickly.”

Attracting more US investors to Nevis is one of NIPA’s priorities, she reveals: “We’re currently working on setting up a New York-based office, in order to gain more traction for the island and to let people know exactly what we have to offer.”

For Brantley, a big advantage of the island for investors is the speed with which new projects can be implemented: “The beauty of Nevis is our size. We’re small enough that we can make decisions and move quickly, we can cut down on bureaucracy and we can tailor our approach to suit a particular investor.” Lawrence agrees: “We’re able to meet the needs of every investor and provide them with a special one-on-one service. Nevis is just simply the queen of the Caribbean. It’s a nice place to live, to work, to do business, to invest and to get good returns on your investment.”



Only small cruise ships can dock at the island of Nevis



Nevis’ volcanic peak is over half a mile high

Distinctive tourism experience with wellness at its core

Nevis has a barefoot-luxury appeal for the discerning tourists who arrive on the small volcanic island’s shores

The enchanting island of Nevis does not provide a typical tourist experience. “There’s nothing wrong with the mass-market side of tourism, it’s just not the Nevis way. Nevis is a place where you come to escape, to recharge, to find yourself. It’s for people who want to experience the authentic Caribbean, as it used to be,” says Mark Brantley, Premier of the Nevis Island Administration.

Although the island has an airport that can accommodate small aircraft, most visitors arrive by water taxi or ferry from nearby St. Kitts and the destination’s singularity is apparent from the minute you dock, declares Devon Liburd, CEO of the Nevis Tourism Authority: “You feel your shoulders instantly relax, all the tensions in the world just evaporate. Everything is at a much slower pace, there’s no rush, there’s no hassle, there’s no bustle.”

There are many other things you won’t find on the island. “If you’re looking for a cookie-cutter-type destination, we’re not it. There are no fast-food chains, no movie theaters, no street traffic lights,” Brantley states. “What we have is a sort of barefoot-luxury bespoke appeal, which is not for everyone.”

Liburd elaborates on this appeal: “Nevis attracts discerning travelers who need somewhere to chill, relax and just be themselves. And maybe they want to enjoy the island’s friendly people and experience the uniqueness of our rich history, our culture and our natural environment.”

Although Nevis covers only 36 square miles, it contains varied and stunning land-

scapes. At its center is an awe-inspiring volcano cone that stands over half a mile high. Below this peak are lush tropical hills, botanical gardens, hot springs and amazing palm-lined beaches that lead down to a crystal-clear blue ocean.

“It’s the perfect place for wellness experiences. Our beaches, for instance, are always empty and the air everywhere is fresh and unpolluted,” Liburd notes. “It might be a bit difficult to get to for some people — because you have to take a beautiful ferry journey over from St. Kitts — but once you get here, it’s even harder to leave, because it casts a spell over you.”

The natural island

The island’s population is diligent about keeping the environment pristine, reveals Brantley: “The tagline for Nevis tourism is ‘Nevis Naturally,’ we promote everything we do as a natural island. Our aim is to protect our beaches, turtles, wildlife, flora and fauna, and I think we’ve done a good job so far.

“With our sister island, St. Kitts, we’re moving aggressively to ban single-use plastics soon, while our hotels and restaurants have already moved to a plastic-free world. We also take very good care of our coastline and we’re clear as to what we will permit in terms of building along our coast. It’s for this reason that you don’t find any large-scale developments in Nevis — we’ve managed our growth and development in a very deliberate way.”

The authorities’ goal is for the island’s entire tourism sector to be 100% green, he adds:

“Everything that we touch in Nevis, so far as tourism is concerned, is going to be green. We cater to higher-end tourists that are socially responsible. They want to be going to a destination they feel shares their ethos of trying to be kind to our planet and Nevis is that place.”

The hotels on the island share this ethos too. “We don’t have high-rise buildings. All our hotels blend in with the nature around them. When you step out of your room, you’re not stepping into a hallway, you’re stepping right out into the beautiful outdoors,” says Liburd.

“We have just one international-branded property, the Four Seasons Resort that has been here for 30 years, which falls perfectly in line with Nevis’ upscale-tourism branding. In addition to that, we have several very small and intimate boutique properties.” A great example of those luxury accommodation providers is Mount Nevis Hotel, a serene family-run haven by the ocean that has been welcoming guests since 1989.

MARK BRANTLEY
PREMIER, NEVIS ISLAND ADMINISTRATION

“Nevis is a place where you come to escape, to recharge, to find yourself. It’s for people who want to experience the authentic Caribbean, as it used to be.”

While all the hotels conjure up superb culinary delights, Liburd would advise visitors to try out the delicacies on offer at the island’s restaurants and bars as well.

“You have to experience the local authentic cuisine, you have to go to the beach restaurants and sample dishes there, you need to go to Wilma’s, you need to go to Passion at Cox and you need to do a rum-punch tour to discover how varied all our rum punches are,” she asserts. “We’re very big on farm-to-table and

sea-to-table experiences. In Nevis, the fruits and other food products are all natural, they’re not enhanced by chemicals.”

If tourists want to do anything beyond just sitting back and relaxing on the island, a range of more physical activities can be enjoyed, including diving and other water sports, mountain climbing, hiking, off-road all-terrain-vehicle tours, horse riding and golf. Tourists can also explore the island’s history and culture.

“For example, you could visit New River Estate, a large sugar plantation that was set up in the 1700s, or the Nevisian Heritage Village, which has been developed on another of our old plantations. This shows the evolution of housing over the past 200 years, and how our ancestors used to live to how we live now,” notes Liburd.

“A further illustration is our artisan village, where you will be able to see our artisans at work on their unique crafts and items that they will sell to visitors. You can go on various tours as well. We don’t have large group tours and it may very well be that you’re the only individual on one, so you can do it at your own leisure and pace.”

In addition, throughout the year there are a number of unmissable events if you are on Nevis when they take place. These include the Nevis to St. Kitts Cross Channel Swim, a marathon and triathlon, a festival that celebrates the many varieties of mango grown on the island and Culturalama, a vibrant two-week summer carnival.

Overall, concludes Brantley, “Nevis has a very special tourism product. We’re the Caribbean that used to be, the Caribbean that’s unhurried, the Caribbean that’s unspoiled, the Caribbean that offers the very best of our people, the very best in our hospitality and the very best in the cleanliness of our environment. That’s the Caribbean that I love. I’m a Caribbean person through and through. I’m a member of this Caribbean civilization and I feel that we have a duty to protect it. This is what the island is doing.”