

## About Suriname

Country Information Suriname is located on the North-East coast of South America and covers 163,820 km<sup>2</sup>. Suriname is situated between French Guiana to the East and Guyana to the West. The Southern border is shared with Brazil and the Northern border is the Atlantic coast. The Southern borders with French Guiana and Guyana are disputed along the Marowijne and Corantijn rivers, respectively; while a part of the disputed maritime boundary with Guyana was arbitrated by the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea on September 20, 2007.

The country that gained independence from the Netherlands on 25 November 1975, is densely forested. The forested area constitutes about 90% of the national territory. Suriname is sparsely populated. From its estimated 500,000 inhabitants 95% lives in a coastal zone along the Atlantic Ocean. Nearly two-third off all Surinamese live in and around the capital, Paramaribo. Suriname is a member of the United Nations, the Organization of American States, CARICOM and a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Nations. Dutch is the official language, but English, Hindi, Javanese, Chinese, and Sranang Tongo are widely spoken.

### Society

Over the course of three centuries Suriname was transformed by the Dutch by means of slavery and later indentured labor from British India, Indonesia, China, Madeira and Syria into one of the most ethnically complex societies in the world. Suriname is composed of no less than eight distinct groups: East Indians; Creoles; Indonesians, principally Javanese; Maroons; Amerindians (2.5%); Chinese; Boeroes, decedents from Europeans, and others mainly Sephardic Jews, Syrians and Lebanese. Both the maroons and Amerindians who mostly live in the interior are divided into five distinct tribes. All ethnic groups mentioned, preserved their culture and religions.

### Culture

Surinamese society is one of the most multilingual in the world. Dutch is the sole official language, and is the language of education, government, business and the media. Over 60 percent of the population speaks it as a mother tongue, and most of the rest speaks it as a second or third language. In 2004, Suriname became an associate member of the Dutch Language Union. Suriname's ethnic mix is reflected in the religious allegiances of its people. The most important Christian denominations are Roman Catholic and Moravian Brethren, but many Christian groups also practice traditional African beliefs such as obeah and winti. About 80% of the East Indian population is Hindu. Although Dutch is the official language, the vernacular Sranan (also known as Surinaams), an English-based creole, is widely spoken. Hindi, Javanese, Chinese, Djuka and Saramaccan (both English-based creoles) and various Amerindian languages are also spoken.

Suriname is one of the few countries in the world where a synagogue is located next to a mosque (another place is Sofia, Bulgaria). The two buildings are located next to each other in the centre of Paramaribo and have been known to share a parking facility during their respective religious rites, should they happen to coincide with one another.

### Climate

Suriname has a tropical humid climate with dry and rainy seasons which are the short rainy season in December and January, the long rainy season from April to July. Throughout the year the average daily temperature varies between 21 and 32 C (70 to 90 F). Suriname lies outside the hurricane zone and the most extreme weather condition is the "sibibusi" (which means forest broom), a heavy rain shower.

### History

Beginning in the 16th century, the area was discovered by, French, Spanish and English explorers. A century later, plantation colonies were established by the Dutch and English along the many rivers in the fertile Guyana plains. The earliest documented colony in Guiana was along the Suriname River and called Marshall's Creek. The area was named after an Englishman. Disputes arose between the Dutch and the English. In 1667, the Dutch decided to keep the nascent plantation colony of Suriname conquered from the English, resulting from the Treaty of Breda. The English were left with New Amsterdam, a small trading post in North America, which later became New York City.

The Dutch planters relied heavily on African slaves to cultivate the coffee, cocoa, sugar cane and cotton plantations along the rivers. Treatment of the slaves by their owners was notoriously bad, and many slaves escaped the plantations. With the help of the native South Americans living in the adjoining rain forests, these runaway slaves established a new and unique culture that was highly successful in its own right. Known collectively in English as the Maroons, in French as the Nèg'Marrons and in Dutch as "Bosnegers" (literally meaning "bush negroes"), they actually established several independent tribes, among them the Saramaka, the Paramaka, the Ndyuka or Aukan, the Kwinti, the Aluku or Boni, and the Matawai.

The Maroons would often raid the plantations to recruit new members, acquire women, weapons, food and supplies. These attacks were often deadly for the planters and their families, and after several unsuccessful campaigns against the Maroons, the European authorities signed several peace treaties with them in the 19th century, granting the Maroons sovereign status and trade rights. Slavery was abolished by the Netherlands in Suriname in 1863, but the slaves in Suriname were not fully released until 1873, after a mandatory 10 year transition period during which time they were required to work on the plantations for minimal pay and without state sanctioned torture. As soon as they became truly free, the slaves largely abandoned the plantations where they had suffered for several generations, in favor of the city,

Paramaribo. As a plantation colony, Suriname was still heavily dependent on manual labor and to make up for the shortfall, the Dutch brought in contract laborers from the Dutch East Indies (modern Indonesia) and India (through an arrangement with the British). In addition, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, small numbers of mostly men were brought in from China and the Middle East. Although Suriname's population remains relatively small, because of this history it is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse in the world.