

St. Maarten and St. Martin: Two Nations, One Island

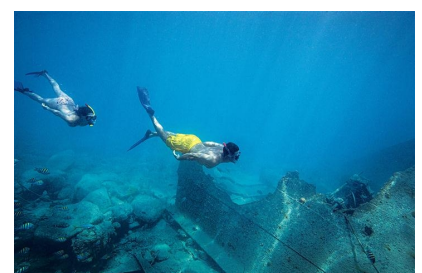
A fact so charming, it always has to be mentioned first: The Caribbean island of Sint Maarten–Saint Martin is the smallest land mass in the world to be shared by two different nations. Only 37 square miles are shared by France and the Netherlands Antilles.



The French territory covers about two thirds of the island and is technically part of Europe and the European Community. The Dutch side is a member island of the Netherlands Antilles and part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, but not considered European territory. There is no real border, just modest monuments and signs. The island is known as an almost perfect holiday environment; beaches and nightlife are spectacular, shopping and dining the best in the Caribbean.

To get a feel of the area covered by St. Martin, multiply 6 miles by 6 miles. You get already 36 square miles... But this is the biggest small island in the world. Without visiting it is impossible to imagine the variety of landscape, cultures and entertainment to be found here. St. Martin just doesn't feel that small... Its central mountain range provides for a rugged and interesting terrain, with winding roads up and down the hills, through small villages and still plenty of untouched land.

The Caribbean's largest lagoon and the pride of the island is the Simpson Bay Lagoon, landlocked with the exception of two narrow channels with draw bridges. The Lagoon is large enough to have a real sail and is home to a giant fleet of yachts, which are either berthed in one of the luxury marinas or anchored in the sheltered waters. St. Maarten has become the yachting center of the Caribbean, home port to some of the world's most outrageous megayachts.



Horseback riding, snorkeling, scuba diving, parasailing, windsurfing, jet-skiing, kayaking, hiking (even up

to the peak of Pic Paradis!), mountain biking, sailing and deep sea fishing are some of the most popular activities on the island.

During the evenings, enjoy the vibrant nightlife of tropical cocktails, casinos, steel bands, dance clubs, discotheques, open air cafes and incredible fine dining.

St. Martin's people represent the ultimate micro cosmos. The island is home to residents from over 90 different nations. The island broke out of the Antillean group of third-world economies and societies and became the exciting, active, bustling economic center of the Northeastern Caribbean. To be sure, there are problems associated with its rapid growth, but there are also stunning success stories to be told.



One is the Concordia Agreement: The Dutch and the French side agreed more than 350 years ago that residents of either side of the island can be commercially active on the other side without any Red Tape or border difficulties. This contract of peaceful coexistence turns out to be the oldest active, undisputed treaty on our planet!

St. Martin entered the "Big Time" during the Eighties when investor friendly policies on the Dutch side resulted in rapidly developing tourism industry. The French side soon followed with special tax incentives for French citizens to invest into tourism and charter boats.

Sources:

<http://www.st-maarten.com>

<http://sint-maarten.net>

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<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-st-maarten-island-discover-the-small-caribbean-paradise-article1759>