

SINT MAARTEN/SAINT MARTIN



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Split between the Netherlands and France, the island of Sint Maarten/Saint Martin is the gateway to the Caribbean Antilles archipelago.



The island is less than a three-hour flight from the U.S.



Sint Maarten has nearly completed a \$519 million infrastructure reconstruction program

The stunning and resilient island of Sint Maarten/Saint Martin brings a uniquely European flavor to the Caribbean.

Tiny Sint Maarten/Saint Martin in the Antilles archipelago stands out from other tropical paradises in the region — since the 17th century, the island has been peacefully divided between the Netherlands and France, bringing a touch of Europe to the Caribbean.

The southern 40% of the 37-square-mile island is Sint Maarten, a constituent country within the Dutch kingdom. The northern part, Saint Martin, is a French overseas territory and an outpost of the European Union (EU). Both sides have their own elected gov-

ernments, substantial fiscal and economic autonomy, and there is an open border between them for the island's total population of around 75,000, as well as visitors and trade. "Sint Maarten is unlike any other place in the Caribbean. We are one island, two nations — half French, half Dutch — but fully united in spirit," enthuses Luc Mercelina, Prime Minister and Minister of General Affairs for Sint Maarten.

The two sides also share thriving economies, particularly Sint Maarten, which has one of the Caribbean's fastest-growing gross domestic products that expanded by 3.0% in 2024 and 3.1% in 2025, according to its central bank.

Both economies are being fueled by increasing tourism, primarily, as well as public investment in infrastructure. In 2025, around 2.5 million visitors were drawn to the island's perfect beaches, blue seas, vibrant culture and festivals, green hills, adventure activities and renowned culinary scene. "It offers visitors an unmatched variety of experiences in a compact space," he summarizes.

Most travelers arrive on cruises or at Princess Juliana International Airport (PJIA)



Luc Mercelina
Prime Minister and Minister of General Affairs
Sint Maarten

in Sint Maarten, through which the island is linked to its region, North America and Europe with about 70 flights a day. As Mercelina notes, "PJIA is one of the Caribbean's busiest airports and serves as a vital regional hub."

That hub was devastated by Hurricane Irma, one of two storms to hit in 2017. "Irma and Maria left deep marks on our island, but they taught us invaluable lessons," he states.

Acting on

those lessons, Sint Maarten has reconstructed and is now expanding its infrastructure, utilizing highly resilient construction standards and with the support of a \$519 million trust fund that is financed by the Dutch government and managed by the World Bank.

Saint Martin has implemented a similarly robust infrastructure reinforcement program with funding from France and the EU.

Both sides of the island have also recognized the need to attract more international investors to meet demand for high-quality hospitality services and to diversify their

economies away from tourism to some extent. In the case of Sint Maarten, for instance, other sectors offering investment opportunities include regional logistics, agriculture, information and communication technologies, cannabis, renewable energy, fintech, health-care, education and housing.

The Dutch territory's tax and legislative regimes make it appealing for investors. To ensure its business environment is as transparent and efficient as possible, its government is now focused on digital transformation. Much has already been achieved in this area: half of all public services are digitalized,

"Sint Maarten is unlike any other place in the Caribbean. We are one island, two nations — half French, half Dutch — but fully united in spirit."

Luc Mercelina, Prime Minister and Minister of General Affairs, Sint Maarten

around 80% of Sint Maarten has fiber-optic connectivity and 5G is being rolled out.

Welcoming all potential investors and tourists to the multicultural, friendly and easily accessible island, Mercelina insists: "If you haven't experienced Sint Maarten yet, you're missing something truly special."



Tranquil Anse Marcel cove is close to Grand Case, one of Saint Martin's three main centers.



Sentry Hill, the highest point on Sint Maarten, offers panoramic views of the island and its neighbors.

Revitalizing the French overseas territory

Saint Martin's government delivered 30 public procurement projects in 2025

Port of Galisbay's expansion would allow cruise ships to berth there

Saint Martin is seeing a surge in public projects targeting infrastructure, education, community facilities and tourism.

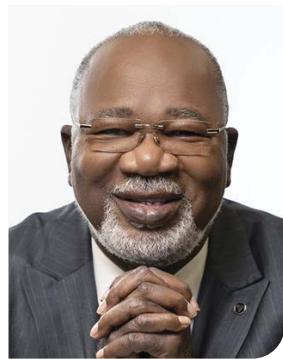
When Louis Mussington was elected as President of Saint Martin in 2022, his aim was to invest in revitalizing the economy of the French overseas collectivity. His government has achieved this, delivering 30 public procurement projects in 2025 alone. "We had a clear plan to substantially improve infrastructure after the destruction caused by Hurricane Irma in 2017, and so construction became a priority for my government, especially improving our road network and expanding public lighting," he states.

Strengthening education was another major target. "We saw building a new secondary school as essential, and 580 students are already studying in this state-of-the-art facility. In addition, we invested significantly in renovating a high school and around \$78 million in constructing two junior high schools. This reflects our commitment to quality education and better learning envi-

ronments," details Mussington. "We're now improving the educational program. I strongly believe in bilingual education, giving the children of Saint Martin the opportunity to master both English and French."

According to First Vice President Alain Richardson, "The government has also invested in doubling the scholarships awarded to support university students in their education, and training programs are in place to provide the skills needed for existing and upcoming job opportunities. For example, we work closely with the Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté, a training institution based in Guadeloupe that offers a catalog of courses for 30 to 40 professions, including construction, accounting, hospitality, mechanics, air conditioning, plumbing and electrical work."

The government's ongoing investment strategy will further enhance quality of life in the territory. "We're rebuilding three sports stadiums that were severely damaged by Irma, for example," says Mussington. "These modern facilities will meet the needs of our young people and host regional competitions. We have also secured land for a new home for senior citizens and are planning cultural centers in Saint Martin's three main areas — Marigot, Grand Case and the French Quarter — to support activities such as music, dance and theater for young people. Furthermore, we're advancing our ecolog-



Louis Mussington
President, Saint Martin

ical transition by developing greener public spaces and promoting sustainable planning."

Other projects on the horizon include ones for water production and distribution and a new electricity plant. "Our energy plan combines renewable sources, including biofuel, solar and the reuse of waste materials," Richardson reveals. "Looking ahead, there is potential to harness energy from dormant volcanoes over

the next 10 to 12 years. This could involve neighboring islands, creating more secure green electricity for the region."

The collectivity is also working to develop infrastructure for tourism, its dominant economic sector, with most visitors coming from North America. Mussington explains: "The U.S. market is essential to the economy of Saint Martin and travelers from there expect easy movement on vacation, like they experience at home. To remain competitive with other destinations, we must improve our infrastructure in areas such as roads and traffic flow."

One initiative that is being explored is expanding Saint Martin's Port of Galisbay and adding a dedicated cruise terminal in order to offer an alternative to Port St. Maarten on the Dutch side of the island for the growing number of vessels wanting to visit the island. "This project requires significant investment

— around \$160 million — so we are seeking funding through public-private partnerships, including support from the French state and private investors," the President notes. His administration is taking the same approach to financing a potential \$21 million runway extension at Grand Case-Espérance Airport, which can only serve small regional flights at the moment.

Mussington is in discussions with international hospitality groups about developing more accommodation too. "There is a clear opportunity in the hotel industry, as we could support two or three additional high-end, 4- or 5-star hotels," he discloses. "In tourism and beyond, we welcome all ideas, business initiatives and partnerships with private investors."

Richardson is confident that the French side of the island has the right environment for investors: "Saint Martin is a territory that

"There is a clear opportunity in the hotel industry, as we could support two or three additional high-end, 4- or 5-star hotels."

Louis Mussington, President, Saint Martin

offers confidence in its potential, in its political structure, in its financial sector and in the availability of manpower. That confidence is reinforced by strong demand across sectors, particularly tourism, and stability. In the unstable world we live in, Saint Martin stands out as a haven of stability and economic growth."

Two nations, one tropical paradise

Both Sint Maarten's air and sea ports are being expanded

Sint Maarten and Saint Martin are distinct but complementary tourism destinations

Sint Maarten is upgrading its infrastructure and systems in order to attract more travelers and investors.

lin-style cuisine, especially on the French side, and vibrant nightlife on the Dutch side."

The island is also the perfect base for discovering other treasures in its region, such as Anguilla, St. Barths, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saba and Statia. "You can reach Anguilla, for example, within 20 minutes by boat. There's never enough time to experience everything we offer on a vacation, which is why so many people have made Sint Maarten their home," she reveals.

Unsurprisingly, tourism dominates the economy, and the sector has now recovered from the impact of 2017's hurricane and COVID. Nearly 2.5 million people traveled to the island in 2025, 1.6 million on cruises and 856,000 on flights. The latter is 80% up on 2024's figure, thanks to the completion of the international airport's post-hurricane reconstruction.

"The next phase is airport expansion. This will allow us to target more visitors and boost activity during the traditional slow season from May to September. Our port is also expanding to handle larger ships, allowing three to four at a time, which many other Caribbean ports can't," states Heyliger-Marten. "Our goal is to attract new audiences and create year-round sustainability for tourism."

More specifically, Sint Maarten's government wants to draw in additional high-end travelers from North American markets and further afield. "To achieve this, we're redefin-



The island offers two zip lines — one goes over a mountain ridge, the other is the world's steepest line.

ing luxury hospitality, focusing on boutique hotels and upscale tourism, and we have a few boutique and 5-star hotels that are slated to break ground in 2026," she discloses. "Our plans also include island beautification and possibly preclearance for U.S. visitors."

The government's wider plans extend to sustainable economic diversification. "For example, we're creating a cannabis industry as an economic pillar. The legislation for this is finalized and it will be a major business attraction," she notes. Her ministry is also establishing an Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Agency to support farmers and fishers. "The agency will help with packaging, exports and promoting local products, including by encouraging buy-local initiatives

and agritourism experiences," details Heyliger-Marten.

The government is also working to improve an already attractive business climate. "We're a young country that only became autonomous 15 years ago, so we're still building our systems, learning and growing as a nation," she explains. "We're transitioning from direct to indirect taxation and need to reduce some tax burdens for investors."

Heyliger-Marten encourages potential investors in tourism or other sectors to visit Sint Maarten: "You will fall in love with the island — and with both Dutch and U.S. treaties, it's especially easy for American investors to do business here. We welcome you to the friendly island."



Grisha Heyliger-Marten
Minister of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport and Telecommunication, Sint Maarten

In many ways, Sint Maarten/Saint Martin is the epitome of an idyllic Caribbean island, with its clear blue ocean teeming with marine life, lush hills inviting exploration and 37 sandy beaches, some lined with restaurants and bars, others secluded sanctuaries.

In other ways, it is unique. "We have two sovereign flags — France and the Netherlands — and pride ourselves on being a true Caribbean melting pot," says Grisha Heyliger-Marten,

Minister of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport and Telecommunication for the Dutch part, Sint Maarten. "What makes the island special is the mix of European influence and Caribbean culture. Visitors can enjoy Miche-

An accessible, uniquely appealing destination



Sint Maarten's airport handles 64.6k flights a year



Visitor numbers surged by 33% in 2025



The easily explorable island covers just 37 square miles



Over 120 nationalities live on the multicultural Caribbean island



The island contains 400 restaurants and 37 sandy beaches



Sint Maarten's flamboyant carnival is held in April, Saint Martin's is in February

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The friendly island back on its feet

 Over half of the record 2.45 million travelers to Sint Maarten in 2025 were North Americans

 1.6 million visitors arrived on cruises, 16% more than in 2024

Sint Maarten is ensuring tourists can easily immerse themselves in a diverse and unforgettable island.

In this interview, May-Ling Chun, director of tourism at Sint Maarten Tourism Bureau (STB), explains why the island is a growing hot spot for travelers.

Sint Maarten welcomed a record 2.45 million visitors in 2025, more than half of them coming from North America. What makes it such a compelling choice for travelers?

Sint Maarten is one of the most dynamic and complete destinations in the Caribbean, offering far more than a typical beach vacation. On one small island, visitors experience two nations, two cultures, two culinary identities and an extraordinary range of activities, all with the warmth that the region is known for. It's a vibrant, layered and genuinely unforgettable destination with heart and personality.

Travelers today are looking for ease of access, diversity, strong accommodation options and memorable experiences, and Sint Maarten delivers on all those fronts. In one day, you can enjoy world-class beaches, fine dining, local food, yachting, shopping, wellness experiences, heritage, nightlife and authentic Caribbean culture.

Furthermore, our Dutch and French duality gives the island a cosmopolitan edge,

while still maintaining that relaxed island soul. We are also a very convenient gateway to the wider Northeastern Caribbean, which makes us attractive as a vacation destination and as a hub for multi-island travel.

The island's visitor numbers surged by 33% in 2025. What has driven this rise?

The momentum reflects a combination of strategic planning, market confidence, stronger airlift, destination marketing and the resilience of our tourism sector. In addition, our recovery and development efforts across tourism infrastructure, hospitality and product enhancement have reinforced traveler confidence.

Infrastructure improvements at Princess Juliana International Airport (PJIA), as well as broader transport and port-related upgrades help us handle visitor growth more effectively, support air and cruise expansion and create a seamless journey from arrival to departure.

For Sint Maarten, infrastructure development is about elevating the standard of the destination. For example, Sint Maarten has positioned itself as a premier cruise destination by focusing not just on infrastructure, but on service quality, destination appeal, shoreside experiences and strong collabora-

"Sint Maarten's strength is that luxury doesn't exist in isolation here. It is paired with authenticity, accessibility and cultural richness."

May-Ling Chun
Director of Tourism, Sint Maarten Tourism Bureau

tion with the port and cruise partners.

We understand that cruise passengers are not simply passing through. They are potential repeat stayover visitors and their first impression matters. For that reason, we continue to enhance the overall visitor experience through destination beautification, product development, stakeholder engagement and alignment with cruise industry needs.



Sint Maarten's vibrant and multilayered culture is a strong attraction for visitors to the island.

Last year, PJIA handled 64,610 flights, 8% more than in 2024, with increasing volumes from the Caribbean, Europe, South and North America. How crucial are air links with the U.S.?

Air connectivity is a priority, and we have made meaningful progress through close collaboration with airlines, the airport and tourism partners. The U.S. market is critically important to us, and we've focused on strengthening access, preserving seat capacity and identifying opportunities for route growth with that country. Looking ahead, we aim to continue to strengthen gateway access, especially from key North American markets.

Among STB's successes has been promoting year-round events highlighting Sint Maarten's cultural wealth, such as April's Carnival, a food festival in November and Emancipation Day in July that celebrates the abolition of slavery. How else has the bureau adapted its marketing to reach global audiences?

We are moving beyond generic destination marketing toward storytelling that is immersive, human and locally rooted — we want audiences to understand not only what Sint Maarten looks like, but what it feels like. Hyper-local storytelling allows us to spotlight our cuisine, neighborhoods, people,

music, traditions and identity in a way that resonates deeply with modern travelers. At the same time, STB is modernizing through digital platforms, targeted campaigns, content partnerships, agile communication tools and data-informed decision-making.

A number of new luxury hotels and resorts are emerging on the island. How is Sint Maarten's hospitality landscape changing?


Projects such as the Vie EVen and JW Marriott resorts are signals of investor confidence and the destination's evolution to a broader, more sophisticated offering. At the same time, Sint Maarten's strength is that luxury doesn't exist in isolation here. It is paired with authenticity, accessibility and cultural richness. A visitor can enjoy a refined resort experience while engaging meaningfully with local cuisine, communities and the island's unique character.


Now is an attractive time for investors because Sint Maarten is demonstrating demand, visibility and momentum. It's a globally recognized Caribbean destination with strong North American appeal, a well-established tourism base, dual European-Caribbean identity, regional gateway function and room for product diversification. For investors, Sint Maarten presents both immediate opportunity and strategic relevance.



May-Ling Chun
Director of Tourism, Sint Maarten Tourism Bureau

Hospitality sector ups its game

 Hilton invested \$1.4 billion in two Sint Maarten resorts in 2021

 Simpson Bay Resort, Marina & Spa's revenues grew by 34% in 2024 and around 12-13% in 2025

Both new and established operators are strengthening the island's position as a luxury destination.

"Sint Maarten has everything: a cultural mix that feels both international and deeply Caribbean, great weather year-round, blue waters, white sands, music and world-class cuisine," states Rodrigo Gamboa, CEO of the luxury Simpson Bay Resort, Marina & Spa.

"There is so much to do — from beautiful beaches, zip-lining with amazing views, boat trips, golf, riding and countless activities that easily fill adventurous appetites, such as hiking

through the rainforest to the mountaintop or in Loterie Farm nature reserve. Add to that, it's a duty-free destination, which makes for a vibrant shopping experience from luxury brands to chic boutiques and local markets. There's something for everyone."

According to Gamboa, the entry of JW Marriott and Hilton into Sint Maarten has further bolstered the island's appeal: "These new projects strengthen the island's position as a premium destination and enhance its existing high-end offerings."

Some of those established operators have also upped their game in recent years, with Simpson Bay Resort, Marina & Spa being a leading example. Located on the shores of a glorious bay that shares its name, the resort contains luxury studios, suites and villas with ocean views and direct access to a stunning beach.

In 2012, a five-year renovation plan was launched to transition the resort from a timeshare into a modern hotel-style destination with a focus on experience, dining and services. "What sets us apart is our service," he notes. "We treat every guest with individual care from the moment they show interest in us."

Investments have been ongoing since



Simpson Bay Resort, Marina & Spa is one of the island's leading luxury destinations.

then and the resort now has five restaurants specializing in everything from Mexican to American and French cuisines, as well as a café, various bars, pools and other new amenities. "For instance, we offer multiple venues, including a ballroom that seats 200 for banquets or 250 in an auditorium setup, which makes us a strong option for groups and events," Gamboa says. "In addition, Sint Maarten is the perfect hub for visiting nearby islands and our marina provides charters to all of them." Another notable feature is

Sunset Spa, which delivers bespoke health and beauty treatments.

Guests have been enthusiastic about the resort's investments in facilities, services, staff training and sustainability, with both demand and revenues rising. "Looking ahead, we will continue upgrading the resort and surrounding areas," he reveals. "Our focus is on adding upscale, intimate accommodations — such as villas with swim-up pools — designed for the modern traveler seeking a more luxurious experience."

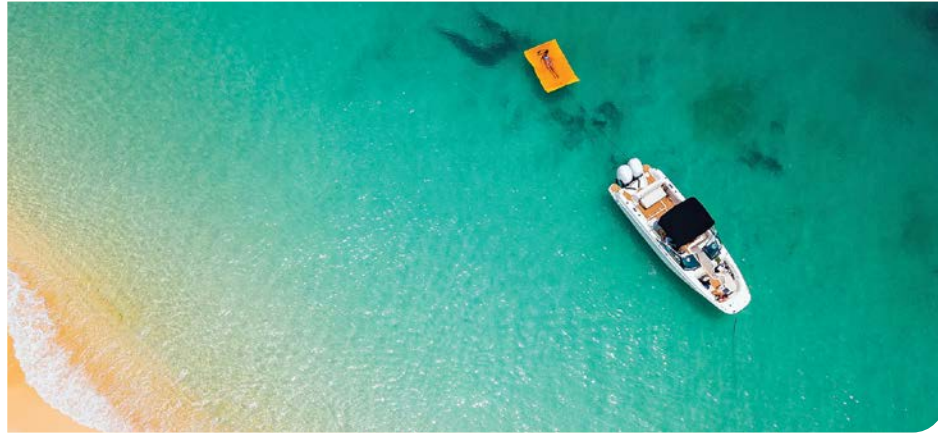
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Saint Martin: The art of the French touch

- Nearly 95% of Saint Martin's hotels and villas have been revitalized, enhancing its appeal
- Saint Martin's annual gastronomy festival takes place in November

The French side of the island stands out for its boutique positioning, relaxed lifestyle and exceptional gastronomy.

“The two sides of our island offer complementary tourism experiences, with larger resorts on the Dutch side and a quieter, boutique, lifestyle-driven atmosphere on the French side,” states Valérie Damaseau, president of the Saint Martin Tourist Office. Aida

Weinum, director of the office that is responsible for promoting tourism in French Saint Martin, adds: “Our accommodation offering is centered around intimate villas and boutique hotels, and visitors are drawn to our relaxed lifestyle and gastronomy. Together, the two sides offer travelers the best of both worlds.”

Despite being governed by two nations, the island remains borderless in practice, allowing seamless movement between both sides. This means that although the main airport is located in Sint Maarten, visitors can be enjoying fine French cuisine and wines in Saint Martin within minutes of landing. “Administratively, there are two sides, but it is one island. We’ve demonstrated what true collaboration looks like — different systems, even different voltages and currencies, working seamlessly together,” Weinum notes.

Cooperation extends to promoting the two complementary tourism offerings, which Damaseau believes contributed to a record number of people visiting Saint Martin last



Saint Martin's gastronomy brings French flair to the island's fresh local ingredients.

year. “We align our efforts with the Dutch side’s tourism bureau, the airport and Port St. Maarten, as well as with neighboring islands — Saint Martin is ideal for island hopping,” she discloses.

Since 2017’s hurricane and the pandemic, Saint Martin Tourist Office has also worked increasingly closely with the government, training centers and education system to enhance the sector’s skills. “Tourism represents approximately 95% of our economy and employs nearly a third of our workforce. Strengthening talent and supporting small businesses are essential to sustaining this growth,” Damaseau asserts.

In addition, the office has revised its promotional strategy to focus on the French side’s rich culture. “We place our people at the heart of everything we do,” explains the president. “By showcasing our chefs, musicians and cultural ambassadors, we create a deeper, more authentic connection that sets us apart beyond the traditional sea, sun and sand.”

As part of this strategy, a year-round calendar of cultural events has been created as well as off-the-beaten-path experiences that connect visitors with local communities. “For example, five years ago, we launched the Festival de la Gastronomie to showcase our identity as the Culinary Powerhouse of the Caribbean,” says Weinum. “It has become a flagship event that marks the start of the season.” Taking place over two weeks in November, highlights of this celebration include a waterfront gastronomic village, where visitors



Valérie Damaseau
President
Saint Martin Tourist Office



Aïda Weinum
Director
Saint Martin Tourist Office

can sample all the delights of Saint Martin’s hospitality, from Michelin-quality restaurants to food trucks. Another key event is February’s Carnaval, when residents take to the streets in fabulous costumes to enjoy parades and joyous Caribbean music.

In recent years, Saint Martin’s accommodation providers have also evolved. “Nearly 95% of hotels and rentals now offer renewed or upgraded products, keeping the destination fresh and attractive,” Weinum comments. “In 2025 alone, more than 75 new restaurants opened. We’re also seeing strong growth in boutique hotels and villas.” Despite this, many of the French side’s estimated 1,100 hotel rooms were fully prebooked this year. “To support more investment in accommodation, we’ve put incentives in place, with a focus on sustainable and environmentally responsible tourism and reviving existing properties,” states Damaseau. “Our goal is clear: reaching a maximum of 3,500 rooms and maintaining our high-end boutique positioning.”

Casual chic and authenticity

- Grand Case is considered to be the Caribbean culinary capital
- California is among Grand Case Beach Club's top 10 source markets for visitors

West Coast Americans are increasingly drawn to tranquil Saint Martin’s welcoming home-from-home environment.

While French Saint Martin has long been a favorite short-haul destination for East Coast Americans, they are now being joined by a growing number of West Coast enthusiasts.

“Saint Martin is a must-see for Californians, offering everything they love: a sense of adventure, a growing wellness scene, gastronomy and a good dose of European flair. I think it’s a complete vacation,” says Alexandra Chirlias, general manager of the Grand Case Beach Club resort. “Many of our Californian visitors are foodies who appreciate our cultural proximity to Europe — the French side of the island is very appealing to them.”

She describes how the two parts of the island are complementary for tourists: “The Dutch side is more developed, with its nightlife and casinos, often perceived as more ‘American.’ The French side is quieter and its French cuisine and wine are a draw, particularly the high-end restaurants in Grand Case village, where our hotel is located. Across the island, the locals are very approachable compared to other destinations where there’s a divide between locals and tourists, and our island is small. The proximity of its many diverse attractions makes everything easy.

Chirlias confirms that Saint Martin’s tourism numbers have returned to their 2016 pre-Hurricane Irma peak, thanks in

part to the rebuilding of Princess Juliana International Airport and airlines expanding their flight schedules.

“Grand Case Beach Club had its best year ever in 2024 and an even better 2025, with very good year-round occupancy rates,” she states. “In addition to the island being increasingly accessible, Saint Martin has historically had a large pool of returning visitors who are loyal to the destination — Americans, in particular. Some of those guests hadn’t been back since the hurricane, but they’re returning now. They associate the island with positive memories and that connection has remained. The friendly island is still here and it’s preserved its authenticity.”

Saint Martin has managed to retain its authentic character even though its tourism offering is expanding and becoming more luxurious. Grand Case Beach Club is one of the established resorts that are moving upmarket, although it does not consider itself to be part of the luxury segment.

“We offer casual chic and maintain a very natural feel. Our guests come here to disconnect and that’s exactly what we offer them. They see us as a ‘home away from

home,’ which is what we’re aiming for, both in terms of service and benefits. All our suites are equipped with kitchens, for example, so guests can feel at home quickly,” explains Chirlias. “Our clientele is diverse: some are here for business, some are families, others come to party on the Dutch side and return here in the evening for peace and quiet. We also welcome many couples on honeymoon or celebrating an anniversary or wedding.”

Stretching along a mile of beachfront, Grand Case Beach Club features 74 suites with ocean and garden views, as well as a bar and lounge, elegant café for dining, pool and event spaces. “We’re very focused on the sea: the hotel is located on two of Saint Martin’s best beaches, Petite Plage and Grand Case, and all our rooms are just steps from them,” she says.

Asked how the resort stands out from others on the island, Chirlias points to its ser-



Grand Case Beach Club offers 74 spacious suites with ocean or garden views.

vice standards. “We have a very high level of service, personalized, friendly and attentive, without being overbearing,” she asserts. “95% of our staff are from Saint Martin and live here year-round. They remember returning visitors and their preferences, which our guests greatly appreciate.”

Secondly, Grand Case Beach Club encourages visitors to explore the island rather than spending their entire vacations in the resort and is happy to create tailored itineraries. “We’re focused on experiences

and integrating with the local community,” she insists. “We also work in harmony with the environment, particularly regarding the beach, and have recently received the world-leading Green Globe certification for sustainable tourism.”

According to Chirlias, the resort will continue to improve in line with changing market demands: “However, our guiding principle will remain the same — to stay simple and authentic while ensuring maximum customer satisfaction.”

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 Princess Juliana International Airport receives direct flights from 11 American cities

 54% of visitors to Sint Maarten in 2025 came from the U.S.

Following an airport reconstruction project, Sint Maarten now offers seamless and reliable transfers to numerous other Caribbean idylls.

One of Sint Maarten's most crucial endeavors in the wake of Hurricane Irma was reconstructing the heavily damaged Princess Juliana International Airport (PJIA). The \$129 million project to modernize and expand an airport that can handle some of the world's biggest passenger planes was completed in 2024, creating a newly resilient facility that boasts state-of-the-art check-in, baggage-handling and transfer systems. "With a completely rebuilt terminal, we now have the best airport in the region," states Hans van de Velde, CEO of the national airline Windward Islands Airways International (Winair).

The reopening has attracted more airlines to PJIA, boosting its global connectivity. It currently has direct flights to 43 destinations in the Caribbean, Europe and the Americas — including 11 U.S. cities — and is estimated to have handled a record 1.8 million passengers in 2025, with 54% of all arrivals coming from the U.S.

"Part of the explanation for that is practical. For U.S. travelers, Sint Maarten is the first major Caribbean island they reach, and it has the region's largest airport and strongest hub. Being the biggest center brings more attention and more flights, a position the country has built up over the

last 20–30 years," notes van de Velde. "Its role as the main regional hub also gives tourists the unique advantage of staying in Sint Maarten while easily exploring the surrounding islands."

Connecting the region to the world

Visitors seeking to use PJIA as a gateway to islands that cannot accommodate big aircraft benefit from the services of Winair, which offers the largest intra-Caribbean network, with 30 routes to 17 destinations.

"We are proud to be the region's oldest airline, serving the Caribbean for 65 years, a longevity that shows we have a clear and sustainable place in the market," he says. "Winair has been connecting the small islands around Sint Maarten for decades and places like Nevis, St. Kitts, Saba and St. Eustatius rely on us and Sint Maarten for their daily needs and economic activity. St. Barts, in particular, depends on Sint Maarten as its lifeline — we carry about 100,000 passengers there every year on more than 25 flights a day, showing the strength of this route and the trust our customers place in us. As an airline, we prioritize punctuality and reliability, and are the best in the region for both."

According to the CEO, Winair's ongoing success is based on its combined serving of local and international needs. "Our commercial partnerships with airlines like Jet-Blue, United Airlines, Air France and KLM

"For U.S. travelers, Sint Maarten is the first major Caribbean island they reach, and it has the region's largest airport and strongest hub."

Hans van de Velde, CEO, Winair

allow us to fill about 50% of our seats with international passengers — and on some routes, up to 80%," he reveals. "Thanks to these agreements, a traveler going from New York to Nevis, for example, can check in once, have their baggage transferred automatically in Sint Maarten and enjoy a smooth, seamless journey."

The company has also partnered with World Cargo Solutions (WCS), the leader



Winair operates the largest intra-Caribbean flight network, which currently includes 30 routes.

in airfreight logistics, to cater to the rising demand for cargo services in the region. "Shipping goods between cities like London and New York is easy, but sending them to small islands requires reliable connectivity. We can offer space on our aircraft, and WCS ensures full connectivity through commercial agreements with U.S. and global carriers," explains van de Velde. "This support is vital because many islands rely on imported goods, especially fresh food."

By balancing local and international markets, the airline has built a strong, resilient network and achieved steady, profitable growth, avoiding the fate of many Caribbean airlines that have failed by expanding too aggressively. For example, it has introduced additional flights to its schedule gradually. "Not every new route succeeds, but our failure rate is very low," he discloses.

"Over the past eight years, this has allowed us to expand beyond our immediate area to destinations like St. Vincent, Barbados, St. Lucia and Trinidad, routes that appeal to local travelers and visitors from the U.S. and Canada who first fly into Sint Maarten because they don't have direct service to those islands. Our growth strat-



Hans van de Velde
CEO, Winair

egy is careful and financially disciplined."

As part of this strategy, Winair has increased its fleet to nine 20- to 50-seat aircraft, with plans to raise that number after it has completed an International Air Transport Association Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) program. "We expect to receive IOSA certification this year, which only one other airline in our region has. While we have al-


ways had an excellent safety record, this will confirm that our safety procedures and organization meet the highest global standards," the CEO asserts.

"IOSA certification is also a strong signal of quality and reliability. It will strengthen our partnerships with major airlines, attract more international passengers and allow us to expand the number and types of aircraft in our fleet. The future of Winair looks very promising."

Van de Velde is especially keen for more visitors from the U.S. West Coast to experience Sint Maarten and the islands around it: "Sint Maarten is well known to travelers from Florida and New York, many of whom even have second homes here, but it is still waiting to be discovered by Californians. They should give it a try — it's a fantastic destination."

An efficient regional transshipment hub

 Port St. Maarten handles about 75% of the island's maritime traffic

 Leading logistics provider INTERMAR has 40 years of experience

With logistics thriving thanks to top-class port services, Sint Maarten is now seeking to enhance its inland infrastructure.

For decades, Sint Maarten has been known globally as a premier Caribbean cruise destination. Less visible, but equally important to the island's economic future, is its growing role as a strategic logistics hub serving the Northeastern Caribbean. At the heart of that transformation is Caribbean International Maritime (INTERMAR), one of the region's most established maritime logistics providers.

The multifunctional Port St. Maarten in Philipsburg serves as the primary maritime entry point for the island's cargo and plays a central role in regional trade flows. Cargo volumes continue to grow alongside a robust cruise industry. In 2025 alone, the port welcomed nearly 600 cruise ships carrying approximately 1.6 million passengers — a 16% increase compared with the previous year.

"Sint Maarten has achieved remarkable success by providing cruise and luxury travelers with a comprehensive and efficient destination," explains George Pelgrim, president of INTERMAR. "Over the past decade, significant investments have been made to develop a world-class port capable of accommodating the largest vessels while offering visitors a diverse range of attractions and experiences."

Beyond tourism, the port functions as a vital regional transshipment hub. Major shipping carriers from the U.S. and Europe frequently use Sint Maarten as an initial Caribbean stop, where cargo is transferred to smaller feeder vessels and distributed to neighboring islands across the Northeastern Caribbean.

"Sint Maarten excels as a transshipment hub due to its strategic geographic location, strong maritime connectivity, deepwater port facilities, experienced workforce and highly efficient operations," Pelgrim says.

Operational efficiency has been another important factor behind the island's logistics success. Compared with many regional ports that face heavy administrative procedures, Sint Maarten provides streamlined customs processes designed to maintain security while keeping cargo flows uninterrupted.

"Our customs and border authorities prioritize security and crime prevention using advanced systems that do not disrupt logis-

"My vision is for INTERMAR to be the most reliable, innovative logistics partner in the Northeastern Caribbean."

George Pelgrim
President, INTERMAR

tics operations," Pelgrim explains. "Equally important, the port operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, offering flexibility that many competing ports in the region cannot match."

Government support has also encouraged continued investment in port infrastructure and logistics services. Strengthening this sector is widely viewed as a critical element of Sint Maarten's economic diversification. "Sint Maarten's heavy reliance on tourism makes the economy vulnerable to external shocks," he notes. "Expanding industries such as logistics creates year-round employment opportunities, attracts international investment and provides meaningful



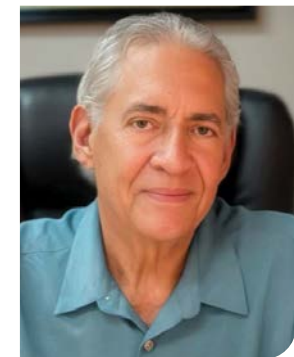
Major U.S. cargo carriers use Port St. Maarten as an initial Caribbean stop.

career paths for local professionals."

As Pelgrim explains, "The turning point for Sint Maarten's logistics industry came in 2001, when the port expanded to accommodate larger container vessels serving both domestic cargo and transshipment operations."

INTERMAR has been a central participant in that transformation. Founded by Pelgrim 40 years ago as a small shipping agency, the company has grown into one of the Northeastern Caribbean's most comprehensive ship agency and logistics providers and is a key pillar of Sint Maarten's maritime economy.

Today the group employs approximately 150 multilingual professionals and delivers



George Pelgrim
President, INTERMAR

integrated services including cargo and cruise agency, port stevedoring, cargo handling, dry and refrigerated warehousing, third-party logistics (3PL) and inland transportation through a fleet of multiple container and cargo delivery vehicles.

INTERMAR operates in the modern terminal at Port St. Maarten and manages the equivalent of an average 1,500 TEU containers per

week, handling cargo ranging from heavy project shipments destined for regional infrastructure projects to individual consumer packages.

The company services lift-on/lift-off and roll-on/roll-off container lines operating at the port and has become one of the island's

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largest logistics providers for e-commerce shipments.

“Our principals work directly with major U.S. and European companies, allowing customers on the island to receive their purchases within roughly a week,” Pelgrim says. “As online commerce expanded, we invested in a dedicated logistics facility designed specifically to handle this growing demand. Our streamlined process allows packages to be available for delivery as soon as the day after they arrive at the port.”

The U.S. and Europe represent the majority of INTERMAR’s inbound cargo flows and consolidation activity. “We are strengthening partnerships with carriers and freight forwarders in both regions while expanding digital visibility and operational capabilities to position Sint Maarten as an even stronger gateway for Caribbean trade,” Pelgrim explains.

Continuous investment has been essential to INTERMAR’s growth. The company regularly upgrades equipment including reach stackers, top loaders, forklifts, yard mules, container trucks and a large fleet of chassis to maintain operational efficiency as cargo volumes expand. At the same time, INTERMAR is investing heavily in digital transformation. The company works with technology providers in areas such port terminal, transport, warehouse management platforms, artificial intelligence and fleet electrification.

“INTERMAR is actively supporting Sint Maarten’s transition toward more sustainable logistics operations,” Pelgrim adds. “We have begun introducing electric and low-emission equipment and implementing smarter yard management systems designed to reduce fuel consumption.”

Equally important has been the company’s focus on human capital. “Our greatest strength has always been our people,” Pelgrim says. “Many members of our team have been with us for decades and have helped build Sint Maarten’s logistics ecosystem. We remain committed to training local talent and developing the next generation of maritime professionals.”

Looking ahead, Pelgrim’s vision is clear: “My vision is for INTERMAR to be the most reliable, innovative logistics partner in the

Northeastern Caribbean — recognized for service quality, community impact and the development of local talent.”

Over the coming years, the company plans to expand regional services while reinforcing Sint Maarten’s position as a strategic maritime gateway. “That means deeper digitalization, stronger 3PL and warehousing capabilities and continued investment in people so our team grows with the industry,” Pelgrim says. “We are focused on growth and aligned with the government’s plans to improve infrastructure, including roads and port facilities. We welcome partners who want to grow with us and contribute to the continued success of Sint Maarten.”

Built-in infrastructural resilience

“Infrastructure is Sint Maarten’s biggest challenge,” affirms Minister of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, Environment and Infrastructure (VROMI) Patrice T. Gumbs, acknowledging that investment in this area has not kept pace with the country’s expanding economy. “The future of our prosperity depends on connectivity, accessibility and quality infrastructure.”

With the substantial redevelopment of Princess Juliana International Airport completed and a \$65 million-plus enhancement program underway at Port St. Maarten, one of VROMI’s next targets is land transportation. “We’re implementing a road-maintenance program through 2027, while exploring new routes and sustainable construction methods,” states Gumbs. “We’re prioritizing

“A transparent investment framework, with clear zoning and predictable rules, makes Sint Maarten a better place to invest in.”

Patrice T. Gumbs, Minister of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, Environment and Infrastructure, Sint Maarten

drainage and sewage systems too. A \$25 million sewage-upgrade project will begin this year and nearly \$60 million is being invested in modernizing waste management to support more sustainable practices and strengthen the circular economy.”

As part of the latter program, Sint Maarten will close its landfill facility by 2032. “Instead of sending waste to landfill, we’re turning it into economic value, such as reusing construction debris for road-



Semsamar’s Mawali Residence contains 28 apartments with views of Marigot Bay in Saint Martin.

works and bricks and repurposing tires for sidewalks and other road applications. This creates new economic opportunities and keeps the island cleaner,” he describes. “We’re also exploring long-term waste-to-energy options.”

On top of this, VROMI wants to promote renewable energy, which has yet to be exploited in the country, with the help of \$40 million in Dutch government funding. “Solar energy is abundant, stable and free from geopolitical risk,”

the minister comments. “We’re developing an energy roadmap that includes initiatives such as a national solar farm and battery storage to strengthen grid resilience.”

Renewable energy is also an integral component of a new national housing policy, which aims for 1,200 additional homes to be built over the next decade. “For example, we are acquiring 70 acres of land for affordable housing and finalizing a zoning plan that will bring clarity, fairness and certainty to developments, while protecting green, conservation and historic sites. It’s essential that all new development projects integrate with and enhance the natural environment that supports Sint Maarten’s tourism industry and residents’ quality of life,” he declares.

At present, the country’s development investment model is overwhelmingly tied



Patrice T. Gumbs
Minister of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, Environment and Infrastructure, Sint Maarten

to public funding and diversifying financing sources is seen as essential.

According to the minister, “Many organizations, including family offices and non-governmental entities, are ready to work with us on projects that the government alone struggles to advance. We also have long-standing investors and loyal visitors who care deeply about Sint Maarten. Expanding our reach into U.S. private investment and equity markets is the direction we need to pursue to turn that affinity into real investment.”

To attract more private investors, the ministry has updated permitting processes for building and civil works and is making its procedures more equitable and aligned with public-private partnerships and corporate social responsibility.

“By integrating PPP and CSR considerations, we aim to strengthen the relationship between investors and the community, ensuring development creates real synergy,” Gumbs states. “A transparent investment framework, with clear zoning and predictable rules, makes Sint Maarten a better place to invest in — and to live. This openness to reform creates space for investors who want to make a meaningful, long-term impact. It’s a unique moment for them to help shape a stronger, more resilient Sint Maarten.”

A new wave of real estate developments

- 🏠 **Around 60% of residential purchases on the island are made by international buyers**
- 📊 **Semsamar’s investment portfolio stood at \$110 million in 2024**

Property projects are booming to meet the needs of citizens and the demand for luxury from overseas buyers.

The government of Saint Martin is capitalizing on the opportunity presented by tourism-driven economic momentum to further develop the French territory.

“We have, for example, implemented a policy for elevating the standard of hospitality, as there is demand for boutique hotels, villas and short-term rentals,” says Saint Martin’s First Vice President Alain Richardson, who is also president and CEO of Semsamar, a leading real estate developer and operator. “The government is in discussions with many private investors and we expect a minimum of 1,200 new hotel rooms within three to four years.”

In addition, Saint Martin is expanding its housing stock for citizens and international buyers. “The government has introduced a program to catalyze construction, with the objective of building 1,800 homes over the next six years,” he reveals, adding that developing water, electricity and other infrastructure has also become a priority.

Semsamar is one of the main enterprises addressing these real estate and infrastructure shortfalls, a responsibility it has held since it was founded in 1985 as a small local public-private company. It is now 51% owned by Saint Martin’s government, with the remainder held by partners including other French Caribbean regions and finan-

cial institutions. “Today, we’re a major player in Saint Martin, Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana, and the only entity in all four territories. We play a major role in urban planning, housing development, and assisting public and private investors with investment policies,” explains Richardson. “For instance, we’re very active in social housing — which we build, own and manage — as well as the private housing market.”

The ISO-certified company’s recent housing schemes include a community of luxury ocean-view villas and apartments in Grand Case. “Another substantial project with 160 units in Chevrise is set to begin this year. This will cater to rental and ownership markets, with almost 50 units designated as affordable ownership housing,” he notes.

As part of its housing schemes, Semsamar often builds associated commercial and public facilities ranging from police barracks to senior citizens’ homes. “We purchase and develop properties with full infrastructure networks, which are rented out or sold to private investors and local government entities,” states Richardson. “In Saint Martin, we’re working on key properties for territorial development. For example, Semsamar is a central partner in reshaping the entrance to the capital Marigot, enabling the development of infrastructure and creation of commercial spaces. We’re also negotiating a large acquisition where new electricity and water plants will be established, and we plan to develop a technopole to consolidate Saint Martin’s digital and tech-driven sectors.”

The company is trusted to take on complex projects like these because it provides tailored solutions covering the real estate value chain. “We’ve accumulated 40 years of experience, which has allowed us to develop the necessary skills and expertise,” he asserts.

As well as its in-house training programs, Semsamar benefits from the government’s bolstering of skills for growth sectors like construction and hospitality. “Overall, Saint Martin presents strong potential for investors. The combination of stability, international



The new Wataki healthcare and rehabilitation unit was developed by Semsamar.

standards, location and business-friendly policies makes it attractive,” Richardson concludes. “The government is supportive and Semsamar stands ready to partner in developing projects across sectors.”

The business environment on the island’s Dutch side is equally appealing for corporate investors and homebuyers, according to Zev Mandelbaum, president and CEO at Altre Development, the Toronto-based developer behind the Vie L’Ven Setai-branded resort and residential scheme in Sint Maarten. “The

island is entering its next phase: luxury hotels and residences, including our project,” he says. Another luxury development on the Dutch side is Ocean Residences, part of the portfolio of Island Real Estate Team, a prominent local property company. “Sint Maarten is a safe, easy destination for buyers, and it is undervalued, though we expect appreciation as word spreads,” reveals the firm’s owner, Arun Jagtiani. “Projects like ours are the beginning of a wave of luxury development. It’s an exciting time for the island.”

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Intermar is a St. Maarten-based maritime and logistics company that has supported the island's trade and port activity since its founding on June 23, 1985. Now marking four decades in operation, the company has built its reputation around dependable, round-the-clock coordination for the vessels and cargo flows that keep St. Maarten and the wider North-eastern Caribbean supplied and connected.

At the center of Intermar's work is its role as a shipping and port agency, representing vessel operators and managing the operational requirements of port calls across a range of sectors—from container and break-bulk shipping to cruise, tanker, and yachting. This includes vessel husbanding and port support services, as well as the coordination needed to ensure compliant, efficient turnaround in a time-sensitive environment. Beyond port agency services, Intermar's broader offering ties directly into day-to-day logistics on the island, supporting cargo movement through documentation and clearance processes and linking maritime activity to inland transportation and delivery.



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