

# Overview of Montserrat

The beautiful island of Montserrat has a distinctly explosive history that has drawn intrepid travellers to its awe-inspiring shores. It seems quite clear the earth is trying to rid itself of this small Caribbean island, as its recent history is a list of major natural disasters.

A hurricane swept over the island in 1989, damaging 90 percent of the buildings. Following a hurricane in 1989, Montserrat's volcano, the Soufriere Hills, erupted in 1995 after staying dormant for hundreds of years.

It erupted again two years later, covering the capital city, Plymouth, in ash and mud, while limiting the 39 square mile (101km) island to a much smaller, inhabitable safe zone in the north of Montserrat. Most of the 12,000 inhabitants got the message and emigrated.

For those that stayed, tourism on the island is slowly growing and curious visitors are now eager to take tours of the active volcano where an ominous dome over the volcano's crater rebuilds and periodically collapses sending great plumes of ash into the air. Much of the island is within the 'volcanic exclusion zone' which was previously inaccessible; however, Montserrat tourism now conducts guided tours into the ashen wasteland in the south.

Despite the destruction caused by the Soufriere Hills, the volcano has also made some fascinating changes to the natural environment. Divers can see unique coral formations that have grown healthier from the volcano's substrate; sun lovers can relax on soft, volcanic sand at a number of beaches; and the nature walks and hikes have lush vegetation from the fertilised soil. As a result, Montserrat is looking to establish itself as a major player in global ecotourism.

The country often refers to itself as the Emerald Isle, an homage to its Irish settlers escaping religious oppression. The Caribbean is an unlikely place to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, but the national holiday highlights Montserrat's unique charm. Unlike Columbus, who sailed right past the islands, visitors to the Caribbean should make this a place to explore. Flights from Antigua and some surrounding islands arrive daily.

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## Key Facts

**Language:**

English is the official language.

**Passport/Visa:**

All foreign passengers to Montserrat must hold return or onward tickets, the necessary travel documentation for their next destination, and proof of sufficient funds to cover their expenses while in the country. Visa exemptions are for a maximum period of six months, though extensions are possible by applying to the Immigration Department. It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

**Currency:**

**Electricity:**

Electrical current is 230 volts, 60Hz. They use two-flat-pin plugs and three pronged plugs with two flat pins and one round pin (Plug types A and B).

# Travel to Montserrat

## Overview

Pivoting around a volcano, bordered by beautiful black sand beaches and crisscrossed by rugged hiking trails, Montserrat is a unique island getaway in the Caribbean that is both thrilling and serene. Immediately following a volcanic eruption in 1997, most locals left the country and Montserrat fell silent. However, people are slowly returning.

Today, intrepid travellers relish its rugged trails and, though most of the southern part of the island is a restricted zone, will find some daring spots for photo-ops with the Soufriere Hills Volcano close in the background. Verdant paths wind through endangered flora set among orchards, willows, and fascinating wildlife, all contained by some of the most pristine and quiet beaches in the Caribbean.

These are not the traditional bleached Caribbean beaches found in movies, as rather dense vegetation leads out to quiet stretches of dark sand dipping into choppy waves. Montserrat is also a diver's paradise, where coral bursting with colour lies beneath the water's surface.

## Climate in Montserrat

The climate in Montserrat is typically humid and hot, being tropical. However, Montserrat becomes slightly cooler from December to April, during their dry season and winter. Visitors can expect high rainfall and increased temperatures from April to November. Summer also brings hurricanes and tropical storms; so it is generally better to visit during the winter months.

## Health Notes when travelling to Montserrat

The most common ailment for visitors is traveller's diarrhoea, which is easily avoided by following basic food procedures. Travellers should drink only bottled water, or boiled, disinfected and filtered tap water, eat only hot foods, and avoid street food and uncooked, or unwashed fruits. It is recommended that travellers get an update on an MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine, a diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, and get vaccines for hepatitis A and B, typhoid, varicella (chickenpox), polio, and a yearly flu shot. Those travelling from a yellow fever zone will be required to produce a certificate of proof of receiving a yellow fever vaccine. People who are likely to come into contact with animals should consider a rabies vaccine. Taking along a set of basic medication and insect repellent is necessary because visitors are at risk of dengue fever. All medication should have a doctor's letter in explanation of medical problems and medications required for treatment. There are adequate medical facilities, but visitors should expect to pay in cash regardless of whether or not they have medical travel insurance.

## Safety Notes when travelling to Montserrat

Crime against tourists is rare, but basic travel precautions are still necessary. Among them, if there is no safe in their hotel, it is better that travellers carry their valuables with them rather than to leave the items in their room. The biggest safety concern in Montserrat is not from the locals, but from the environment.

While the Soufriere Hills Volcano is active and dangerous, the last major activity was in 2012. As a result of the volcanic activity, a third of the island is considered safe and inhabitable. It is advisable that visitors stay out of the other two-thirds, and only explore it with explicit permission and guidance from local authorities. Travel insurance with provision for emergency evacuation is highly recommended (both for natural disaster or medical emergencies).

## Customs in Montserrat

By all accounts, Montserrat might be one of the easiest places for western travellers to visit, with many tourists reporting that they felt like they couldn't have offended the locals they encountered, even if they'd wanted to! While, of course, this theory shouldn't be tested by visitors to the 'emerald isle of the Caribbean', travellers can look forward to a pleasant mix of typically European manners and customs, and a laid-back, relaxed and accepting social atmosphere. Visitors should be aware of the dangers posed by the Soufriere Hills Volcano, and make sure they stay out of restricted areas. They should also ask permission before taking photographs of locals, although more often than not, locals will indulge their request with a suitable pose.

## Duty Free in Montserrat

Travellers who are 17 and older may bring up to 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars, 40 ounces (1.14 litres) of liquor, six ounces (168g) of perfume, and gifts valued to XCD 250.

## Tippling in Montserrat

A five percent bonus over and above normal service charges will show appreciation for excellent service at restaurants. Porters are given \$1 per bag and cleaning services are often tipped at \$2 to 3 per night. Taxi drivers will expect a ten percent tip and it is a good idea for passengers to arrange a flat rate from the start. All tour guides appreciate gratuity, which should be between 10 and 20 percent.

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## Entry Requirements

### Entry requirements for Americans:

US citizens must have a passport that is valid at the time of entry. No visa is required for stays of up to six months. Those traveling to Montserrat on a cruise may use another Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) compliant document.

### Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadian citizens must have a passport that is valid for the expected duration of their stay in Montserrat. No visa is required for stays of up to six months.

### Entry requirements for UK nationals:

British citizens must have a passport that is valid upon their arrival in Montserrat. No visa is required for British citizens and British Overseas Territories citizens for stays of up to six months. British passport holders with other endorsements should confirm entry requirements before travel.

### Entry requirements for Australians:

Australian citizens must have a passport that is valid for the expected duration of their stay in Montserrat. No visa is required for stays of up to six months.

### Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish citizens must have a passport that is valid for the expected duration of their stay in Montserrat. No visa is required for stays of up to six months.

### Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

New Zealand citizens must have a passport that is valid for the expected duration of their stay in Montserrat. No visa is required for stays of up to six months.

### Entry requirements for South Africans:

South African citizens must have a passport that is valid for the expected duration of their stay in Montserrat. No visa is required for stays of up to six months.





# Currency

## Overview of the Attractions in Montserrat

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# Public Holidays in Montserrat