Cultural Influences of the Caribbean

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Taíno

This thatched hut is part of a reconstructed Taíno village in Cuba. The Taíno were an indigenous people of the Caribbean. They once inhabited multiple islands in the region, but were largely killed off after the arrival of Columbus. Despite this, modern genetic testing has shown that many people from the Caribbean have Taíno ancestry. In Puerto Rico, the Raíces Fountain is a celebration of the island's Taíno, Spanish, and African heritage.
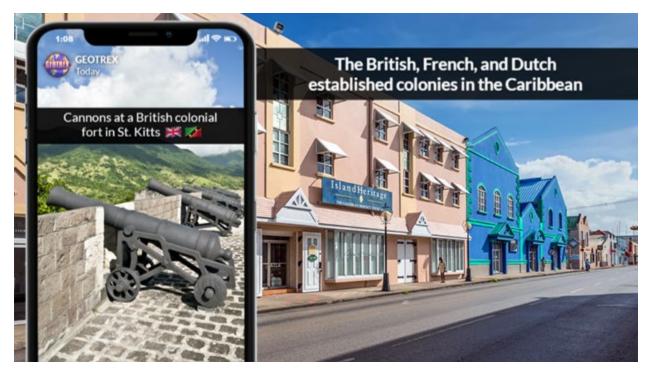
Christopher Columbus

This statue of Christopher Columbus stands in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. Santo Domingo is also one of the oldest cities in the Caribbean. Spanish colonization of the Caribbean began after the arrival of Columbus. Colonies were established on several islands in the region. Some of these colonies were under Spanish control for hundreds of years. As a result, Spanish is the primary language in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico.

European Colonization

This British colonial fort is located on the island of St. Kitts. In the seventeenth century, the British, French, and Dutch began to establish colonies in the Lesser Antilles and the Bahamas. The British also seized Jamaica from Spain. The French gained control of the western part of Hispaniola, which later became Haiti. Several islands in the Caribbean are still considered overseas territories of these nations - for example, Martinique, where this Catholic cathedral is located. French and English are also widely spoken throughout the region.

Sugar Plantations

This historic slave watch tower is located on a Cuban sugar plantation. It was once used to monitor slaves who were forced to work the surrounding sugar cane fields. Sugar plantations greatly increased the number of enslaved Africans brought to the Caribbean.

In some areas, slaves made up the majority of the population, and rebellions were common. Toussaint L'Ouverture was the leader of a successful slave rebellion in Haiti. In this 1804 rebellion, the French were overthrown and Haiti became an independent nation. It also ended slavery in all of France's remaining colonies.