

Guyana

A FRESH APPROACH

Bordered by Venezuela to the west, Suriname to the east and Brazil to the south, the Co-operative Republic of Guyana (commonly known as Guyana) is a land of dramatic contrasts. Occupying a territory similar in size to that of Utah and filled with tropical rain forests, tabletop mountains, extensive rivers and the world's tallest single-drop waterfall, it lies just above the equator on South America's northern Atlantic coastline. It is the largest state in the Caribbean and home to the headquarters of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Indigenous peoples such as the Arawak and Carib originally populated Guyana. The Dutch first colonized it at the beginning of the 1600s, and it came under British control by the end of the next century. Called British Guiana until 1966, it renamed itself Guyana upon winning independence and became a republic in 1970. Today it is the only English-speaking state in South America. It is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and the Organization of American States, an associate member of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), as well as a founding member of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and CARICOM.

Guyana is endowed with immense natural resources. The nation possesses valuable and often untapped deposits of gold, diamonds and bauxite. It can



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“We have put together a Vision for 2020, and want to see an integrated Guyana in terms of its people and use of natural resources.”

**—WINSTON JORDAN
MINISTER OF FINANCE**

also significantly expand its traditional agricultural base into added-value activities, such as agro-processing for the region, and offers almost limitless growth potential in renewable sectors, such as forestry. Its unspoiled natural environment, home to incredible

biodiversity and outstanding attractions, is ripe for tourism development. And its enviable location makes it well-placed to serve as a preferential and cost-effective trade route between Brazil, the Caribbean and the United States.

For nearly half a century, however, Guyana was unable to prosper from its wealth, as successive governments failed to unite its diverse 750,000-strong population and stymied prospects for inclusive economic and human development. This May, the “A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance for Change” (APNU-AFC) coalition won the elections, ending 23 years of People's Progressive Party rule. President David Granger and Prime Minister Moses Nagamootoo now lead a multiparty government that has

WELCOME HOME

Multiracial, multifaith and multicultural, the Guyanese people arrived from all over the world to Guyana's shores in search of a treasure-filled El Dorado. Over the last few decades, many of the nation's citizens have left in order to seek opportunities elsewhere, but this is now about to change.

“About half of our population lives outside the country,” President David Granger says, explaining that around 80% of university graduates leave Guyana for neighboring nations such as Venezuela, Suriname and other Caribbean states. Guyanese have also migrated to English-speaking nations like the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom.

The government hopes to engage the diaspora to play a vital role in Guyana's development. It has put into motion new infrastructure projects that will open up the interior and provide reliable energy sources and social services, enabling educated, entrepreneurial Guyanese to return to their roots and help their country grow. For more information on the opportunities available, visit www.goinvest.gov.gy.

pledged to pursue accountable governance and build a unified nation.

The same month, ExxonMobil discovered game-changing deposits of oil and gas below the nation's offshore waters that look set to fuel long-term growth and provide a brighter future for generations to come. The find is estimated to be worth as much as \$40 billion, more than ten times the country's current GDP. The Granger administration is committed to ensuring that Guyana successfully and sustainably manages its future and embarks upon a new era of growth that seeks to benefit all.

"We have put together a Vision for 2020, and want to see an integrated Guyana in terms of its



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people and use of natural resources," says Minister of Finance Winston Jordan. "We have a challenge to bring unity to our country. This government is one of unity, with six parties. Guyana will go nowhere if we can't go together."

The government has already made major progress in its first few months, rolling out its far-reaching reform agenda to widespread public approval, and Guyana is looking forward to celebrating its first 50 years as an independent state in 2016. While President Granger acknowledges the magnitude of the task ahead, he believes his country has the chance to regain its reputation as an El Dorado. "I have a vision of what Guyana can be: a peaceful, plentiful land," he says. "We have tremendous potential. I am confident that with good governance, we can respond to the challenges."

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Q & A WITH
PRESIDENT
DAVID
GRANGER

Born in Georgetown in 1945, President David Granger joined the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) after school and studied for undergraduate and master's degrees in Guyana while pursuing military training in Nigeria, Brazil and the United Kingdom. He became Commander of the GDF in 1979, and in 1990 assumed the position of national security advisor. After retiring from the army, Granger founded a magazine, published his writing and returned to academia. He first ran for president in 2011. On his second attempt, he won a close-run race as an APNU+AFC candidate, and he assumed office in May 2015. He spoke recently about Guyana's goals, challenges, opportunities and regional role.

On the Guyanese people

My number-one priority is the alleviation of poverty. Unfortunately, owing to poor infrastructure, there is a divide between people in the interior and the coastal population. Most of our indigenous population lives in the interior, so that division also has an ethnic dimension. In parliament, one of our four vice-presidents is an Amerindian, responsible for indigenous peoples' affairs. So we have a multiethnic as well as a multiparty coalition. We also put a great emphasis on education. It is not a matter of simply getting more children in school; we need to put more emphasis on science, technology and engineering.

On responding to the hopes of the country's citizens

People were excited about the elections, but they have a great degree of patience. They understand it will take a long time to reverse the events of the last 23 years, but they feel we are committed—and we are. We will bridge the divide between ethnic groups and between the rich and the poor. The general public has shown confidence in what the government has been saying and doing. We continue to demonstrate faith in people's objectives and pay attention to their comments. We are working for them and moving in the right direction. Over this five-year period, there is going to be real change.

On the economy

The structure of the economy has been virtually unchanged since colonial times. We have added little value, if any. A big obstacle is energy. We have to deal with this to have a strong manufacturing sector. That's why the ExxonMobil discovery is so important. But there are alternatives: We have vast savannahs that can support solar farms, 300 miles of Atlantic coastline where we can generate wave and wind power, and 100 riverine sites for hydropower. We are looking at private or public-private partnerships, and are in talks with Brazil for infrastructure projects. In terms of diversification, we have proven agricultural potential to engage in the much higher level of agro-processing that the Eastern Caribbean needs. We have the capability, but need power from manufacturing and energy to deliver commodities. On another note, we have one of the potentially best tourism products in the English-speaking Caribbean, once we develop the infrastructure for it. We welcome FDI to help us benefit from these resources. We know we can't do it by ourselves.

On what makes Guyana unique

Geographically and historically, Guyana is unique. In 1965, our premier helped give birth to the Caribbean Free Trade Association, which in 1973 became CARICOM. Guyana's role in promoting regional integration has always been recognized, which is why CARICOM's head office is in Georgetown. Brazil has always had cordial relations with Guyana and wants a port from which to export to the Caribbean. The Eastern Caribbean is also interested in South America, which is a huge market. If you have a powerhouse like Trinidad, they want to get commodities into South America, and that will be through Guyana. We are well connected.

A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



This May, the United States' ExxonMobil Corporation, working at the behest of the Guyanese government, discovered a significant deposit of oil at its Liza-1 well in the Stabroek Block, some 120 miles off Guyana's coast, at a depth of more than 700 feet. If the discovery plays out as expected, it could contain as much as 700 million barrels of crude, more than enough to bring about a sea change in Guyana's economic fortunes.

"We are very conscious that this oil find will create a lot of expectations," says Minister of Finance Winston Jordan. "Even before we came into government, we talked about how to manage these resources properly. We are looking into developing a sovereign wealth fund (SWF), which doesn't just have to be for oil—it can be for all natural resources. We also need to be very careful to implement development in a sustainable way, to protect our natural habitats and people."

The government has already taken steps to ensure that it will fully account for any future windfalls. Minister of Governance Raphael Trotman recently stated that Guyana had sought assistance from Canada on ways to set up its own fund, which the country will likely finance with revenues earned from all of its assets.

"For too long, the people of Guyana stood by while a small group shared the fruit of the earth among themselves," Trotman said. "We intend to very shortly establish the SWF. Profits from the sale of resources, whether gold or silver, timber or uranium, will go to that fund."

The United States has also offered to lend a hand to help reduce the risk of corruption in the awarding of contracts to develop Guyana's natural resources. The U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires in Guyana, Bryan Hunt, said that in light of the recent discovery, the United States intends to prioritize Guyana's candidacy to become part of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

The Granger administration is committed to guaranteeing that Guyana does not suffer from the resource curse that has befallen other nations. "We are aware of all the pitfalls excessive wealth brings," Trotman noted. "Our government will be careful."

PROMOTION

A Wealth of Natural Resources

Water is both a challenge and a blessing for Guyana. An abundance of major rivers, including the Essequibo, Corentyne, Berbice and Demerara, flow north from the interior to the Atlantic. While waterfalls often interrupt the upper reaches of these rivers, near the ocean, where they encounter the low-lying coastal plain, their sluggish flows deposit silt in estuaries and on foreshores. This necessitates effective drainage, dykes and irrigation systems to prevent flooding and make land usable for agriculture.

These huge water courses not only create an obstacle to transportation along the coast, but also hamper communications with the interior. The national road network spans 2,500 miles, with six major routes that depend on a system of bridges and culverts to remain above water. The Inter-American Development Bank, one of Guyana's largest lenders, has extended \$100 million for infrastructure projects over the last five years. The Granger government is developing a master plan to put in place improved internal connections and open alternative trade routes between Brazil and the Caribbean.



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"We have to plan for infrastructure development: roads, bridges, airports and more walls along our rivers."

**—DAVID GRANGER
PRESIDENT**

"Our country is bigger than England and Scotland," President Granger points out, "but once you get about 75 miles out of Georgetown, there are few proper roads and bridges. Travel into the interior has to be by air; most of the rivers are not navigable. We have to plan for infrastructure development: roads, bridges, airports and more walls along our rivers."

Guyana's rivers could also be the key to satisfying its short- and medium-term energy needs, with massive potential for hydropower development. Rather than relying on a single river, the government is studying the placement of various smaller facilities in the basin that feeds Kaieteur Falls, possibly via partnerships with neighboring nations like Brazil. Such a project could harness the power of Guyana's upstream waters to develop sources of energy that would drive growth across the economy.

"Physically, we are very unique in our endowments," says Minister of Foreign Affairs Carl Greenidge. "On a per capita basis, we have one of the highest potentials for hydro worldwide. We have water in abundance, which is going to be the scarce commodity in the next millennium."

"This is the moment for Guyana," Finance Minister Winston Jordan agrees. "We need to come forward with a strategic approach and invite international partnerships. We are working on a properly articulated plan to diversify and modernize the economy, while making sure traditional sectors, such as agriculture, do not get left behind."



Iwokrama Canopy Walkway and ecotourists birdwatching with a local guide.

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A Preference for the Wild Side

If you're the kind of traveler who likes the less-beaten track, Guyana may be the perfect destination for your next vacation. According to the Caribbean Tourism Organization, the country welcomed fewer than 206,000 visitors last year, making it far from what you'd call busy. But as the Granger government's plans for the tourism industry begin to take shape and private-sector investment takes off, you might soon find many more people making the trip to Guyana.

Guyana offers a very different kind of travel experience from most of its Caribbean competitors. Rather than building yet another variation on the all-inclusive beach resort, the administration is working on developing a comprehensive Eco-Tourism Action Plan and Strategy for Guyana that seeks to position the country as a rival to Costa Rica and Ecuador, drawing on Guyana's natural wonders and cultural heritage to attract those who prefer the wild side to the seaside.

Guyana boasts a huge variety of landscapes just waiting for discovery—from the endless horizons of the savannah to the lush hush of the rain forest, which still covers some 80% of the nation's territory, and from the top of its mountains to the bottom of its waterfalls, including Kaieteur Falls, which is five times the height of Niagara. Guyana is also home to a bewildering array of flora and fauna, including several unique species of birds and mammals, as well as age-old indigenous Amerindian cultures that continue to flourish in the interior today.

"As part of the Amazonian basin, we have the largest eagle in the world, the largest river otter, the largest anteater and the largest rodent in the world. We have about ten of the largest species of animals in these categories," says President Granger.

In accordance with the goals of the country's Low Carbon Development Strategy, Amerindian Development Fund, and Micro and Small Enterprise Development project, the Guyana Tourism Authority, which comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism, is responsible for promoting opportunities not only in adventure and eco-tourism, but also in hospitality and transportation projects across the industry.

The \$138 million expansion work under way at Georgetown's Cheddi Jagan International Airport is expected to be completed by 2017, and the new Marriott Guyana, which opened this April, is already welcoming business and leisure travelers to the capital.

LOCATION, LOCATION

South American by location, Caribbean by vocation, Guyana possesses an enviable position at the heart of the Americas. Sandwiched between two of the continent's biggest economies, Brazil and Venezuela, it offers access to a market of more than 277 million consumers with an overall purchasing power of over \$2 trillion. English-speaking, well educated and well connected, it is a member of CARICOM and UNASUR, uniting the interests of both regions in one nation.

At a meeting with UNASUR's Secretary General, Dr. Ernesto Samper Pizano, during a visit to Suriname this August, President Granger said his country was ideally placed to serve as a conduit for commerce between South America and the CARICOM nations. He noted, "Guyana is committed to the infrastructural integration of South America," and as such, it could help the 12 members of UNASUR foster closer relations with CARICOM's 14 states.

The Guyanese government is seeking to leverage the country's strategic location to position itself as the preferred route for trade between Brazil and the Caribbean. At the same time, it is aiming to introduce a more enabling, business-friendly environment that will appeal to companies and investors from around the globe who want to set up shop in Guyana and work with clients to the north and south.

"We must re-engage by putting in place an investment climate that is predictable, reliable, transparent, accommodating and attractive to the international community," Minister of Finance Winston Jordan says. "We are competing with other countries and must improve the business and investment climate in Guyana. We are looking into incentives and opportunities here, among other initiatives."

