

CIA World Factbook–Style Country Report

Territory of Navassa Island (United States)





Flag: United States

Map: Caribbean – west of Haiti, south of Cuba

Status: Unorganized, unincorporated territory of the United States (claimed by Haiti)

Introduction

Background

Navassa Island is a small, uninhabited limestone island located in the Caribbean Sea approximately 56 km (30 nautical miles) west of Haiti's Tiburon Peninsula. The United States claimed the island in 1857 under the Guano Islands Act after valuable guano deposits were discovered. Commercial guano mining continued until 1898.

A lighthouse was constructed in 1917 to support Caribbean navigation. Following its decommissioning in 1996, administrative responsibility transferred from the U.S. Coast Guard to the U.S. Department of the Interior. Today the island forms part of the Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge and is managed primarily for conservation and scientific research. Haiti continues to maintain a longstanding sovereignty claim over the island.

Geography

Location: Caribbean Sea, west of Haiti

Coordinates: 18°25'N, 75°02'W

Area

- Total: 5 sq km
- Land: 5.4 sq km
- Water: 0 sq km

Coastline: 8 km

Maritime Claims

- Territorial Sea: 12 nautical miles
- Exclusive Economic Zone: 200 nautical miles

Climate

- Marine tropical

Terrain

- Elevated coral and limestone plateau
- Surrounded by steep white cliffs 9–15 meters high

Elevation

- Highest Point: 85 m
- Lowest Point: Caribbean Sea (0 m)

Natural Resources

- Guano (historic deposits; mining ended in 1898)

Natural Hazards

- Hurricanes

Environment

- Protected tropical ecosystem
- Important seabird nesting habitat
- Coral reefs surrounding the island
- Native fig forests, cactus, and coastal scrub vegetation

People and Society

Population: Uninhabited

Permanent Settlements: None

Languages: N/A

Ethnic Groups: None

Religion: N/A

There are no permanent civilian residents. Access is highly restricted and generally limited to authorized scientific expeditions and wildlife management personnel.

Government

Country Name

- Conventional Short Form: Navassa Island
- Conventional Long Form: None

Political Status

- Unorganized, unincorporated territory of the United States

Administrative Authority

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Department of the Interior

Legal System

- United States federal law applies.

Capital

- None

National Holiday

- U.S. federal holidays

Flag

- Uses the flag of the United States.
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Economy

There is **no permanent economy**.

Historic activity centered on guano mining during the late nineteenth century.

Current economic activity consists solely of:

- Scientific research
- Wildlife conservation
- Environmental monitoring

No agriculture, fisheries, industry, banking, tourism, or commercial services exist.

Energy

No electrical generation infrastructure.

Scientific teams rely on portable generators and temporary field equipment during authorized visits.

Communications

No permanent:

- Telephone network
- Internet
- Broadcasting facilities
- Postal service

Communications during expeditions are conducted through satellite systems.

Transportation

Airports: None

Ports: None

Landing is difficult because of the island's steep cliffs and rough seas.

Helicopter access or temporary boat landings are occasionally used for authorized operations.

Military and Security

Defense responsibility rests with the United States.

There are **no permanent military installations** on the island.

Access is tightly controlled because the island is part of a protected National Wildlife Refuge.

Environment

Navassa Island contains one of the Caribbean's most intact protected island ecosystems.

Important conservation features include:

- Large seabird breeding colonies
- Coral reef ecosystems
- Native tropical vegetation
- Numerous endemic and threatened species

The island is considered an important scientific site for Caribbean biodiversity research.

Transnational Issues

Haiti has maintained a longstanding sovereignty claim over Navassa Island dating back to the nineteenth century.

Although administered by the United States, the territorial dispute remains unresolved diplomatically.

Strategic Assessment

Although extremely small and uninhabited, Navassa Island occupies a strategically significant position in the northwestern Caribbean, approximately 160 km south of the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Its surrounding maritime zone contributes to U.S. jurisdiction over regional waters and supports environmental monitoring and scientific research. The island's principal contemporary value lies in conservation, maritime domain awareness, and its geographic position rather than any economic or military function.