

DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS CULTURAL RESILIENCE: SAFEGUARDING SABA'S INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

Exploring community-based approaches to cultural preservation.

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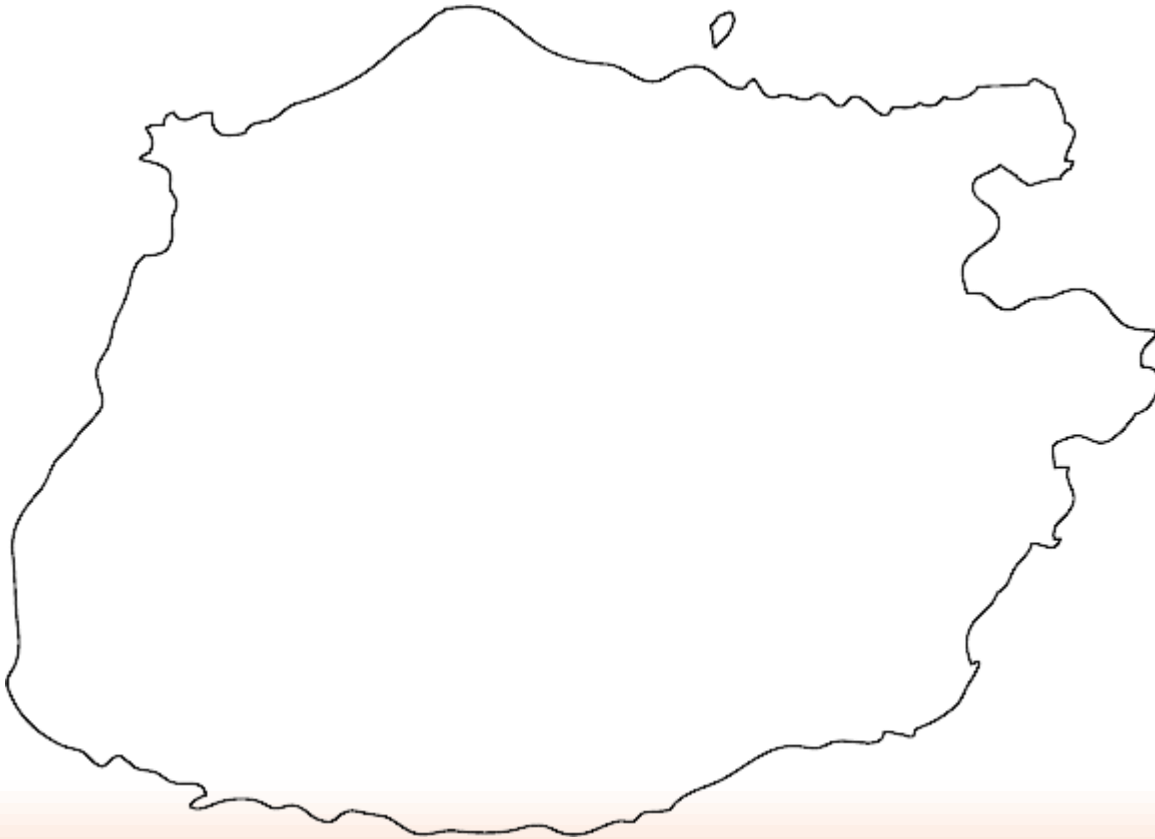
Saba Heritage Center



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INDEX



> Welcome to Saba: The Unspoiled Queen of the Caribbean

> The Background

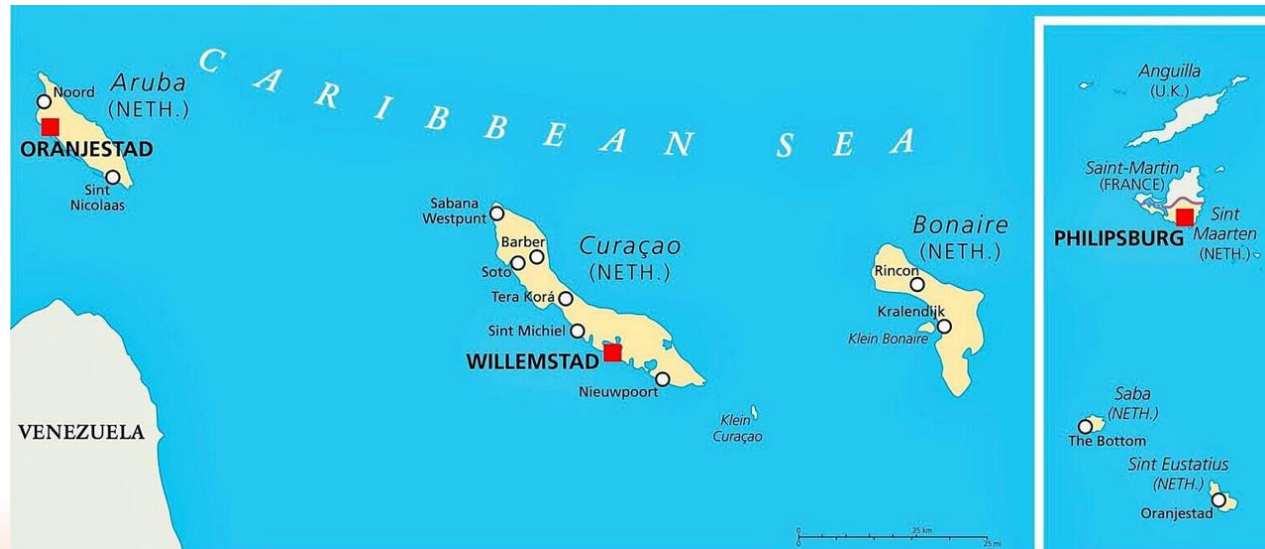
> Immigration, Emigration and Saba Today

> What is Saba's ICH and the Challenges it Faces?

> What Is Digital Storytelling And Why?



WELCOME TO SABA: "THE UNSPOILED QUEEN OF THE CARIBBEAN"



DEMOGRAPHICS

Landmass: Volcanic -steep, mountainous, with limited flat land

Size: 13 km² or 5² miles

Population: 2158 persons as of January 2025

Languages: English and Dutch

Religion: Mixed but Christianity dominated

Ethnic and Family Origins: Most of the population descends from Africans and Europeans mainly Dutch, English, Scottish settlers.

Capitol: The Bottom



BACKGROUND



Saban men awaiting incoming Cargo Ship to collect incoming cargo and arriving passengers
at Fort Bay– 1948.

An Island Marked By Migration

Historically, Saba has been an island marked by emigration with limited immigration.

Reason	Result
Lack of available land space for agriculture.	Many men became sailors.
Lack of higher education beyond high school (recent).	Children were sent to Aruba/Curacao/The USA/The Netherlands for higher education.
General lack of opportunities.	Many went to other Caribbean Islands or the Global North in search of better economic opportunities.
Oil and Gas industry in Aruba and Curacao (1920's).	Many men went to work in Aruba and Curacao to send money back to Saba, many never came back.
Health and Infrastructure Limitations.	Sometimes difficult to access specialist care on the island, people move to where they have easier access.

» IMMIGRATION, EMIGRATION AND SABA TODAY



Fort Bay Harbour and the Juancho E. Irausquin Airport



The first Pier in Fort Bay was constructed in **1972** – 53 years ago. This has allowed for a variety of commercial and passenger vessels to dock in Saba without issue.



- The airport officially began service on **24 July 1963** – approximately 62 years ago.
- Saba boasts the shortest commercial runway in the world, with a length of 400 m (1,312 ft).
- Multiple flights a day provided by Winward Island Airways (Winair).

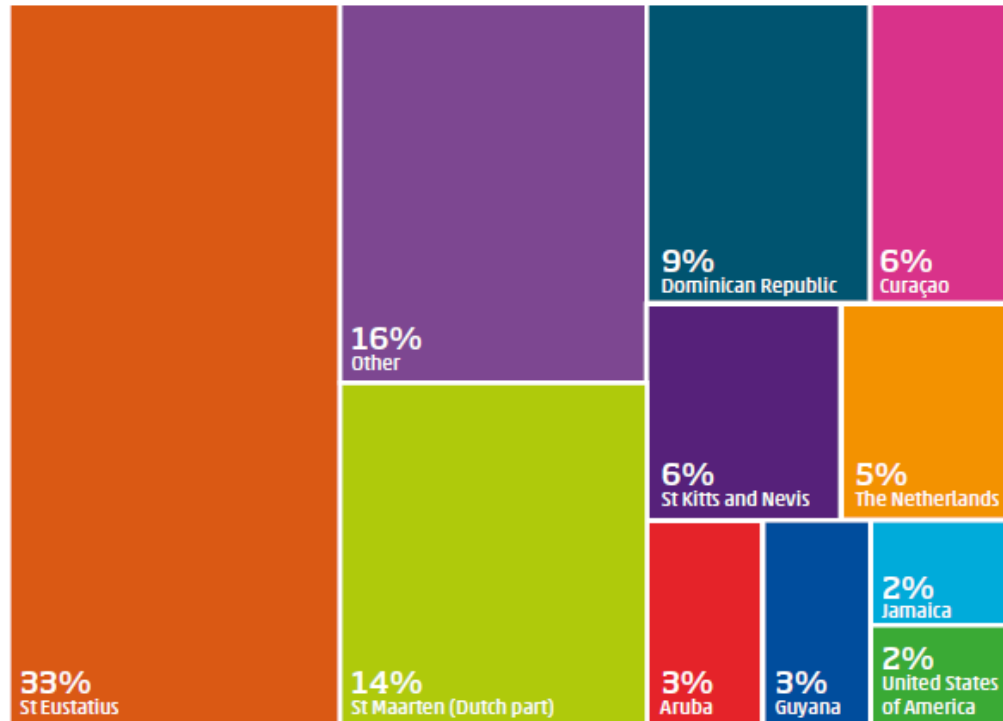
The development of the harbour and airport has allowed for much easier access into and from Saba.

Population of Saba in the last 4 Years.

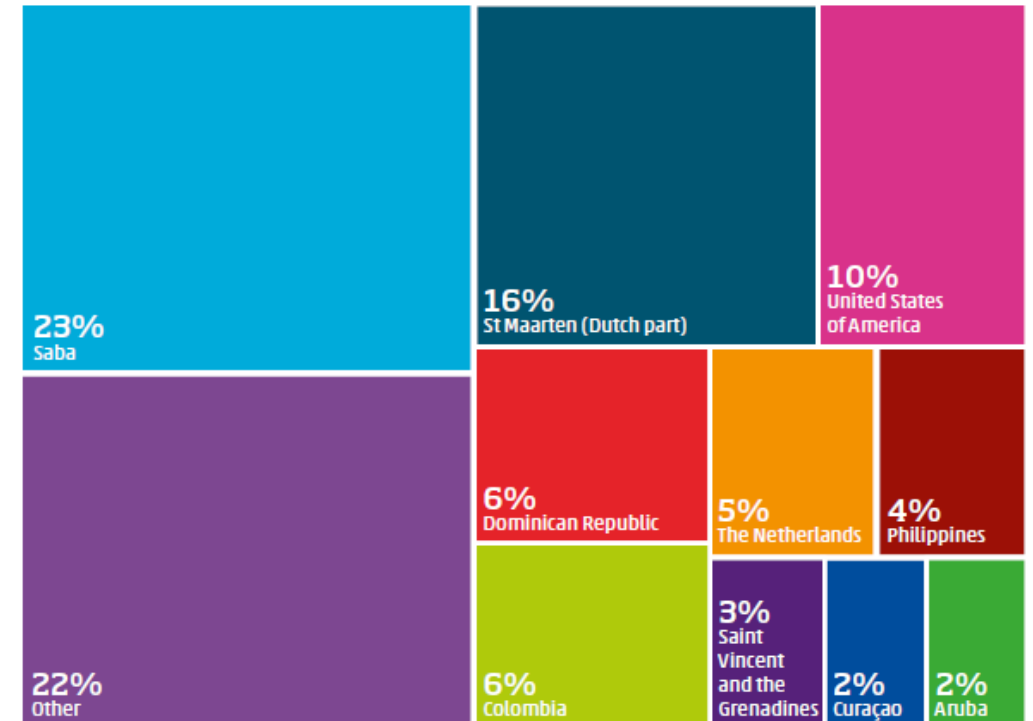
Category	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Population	1918	1911	2035	2060 (48 different nationalities)
Live Births	11	19	15	12
Deaths	16	15	13	11
Totals	-5	+4	+2	+1
Immigration	134	251	246	217
Emigration	154	137	186	109
Difference	20	114	60	108

A breakdown of Saba's population by Nationality in 2024

Population of St Eustatius by country of birth, 1 January 2024



Population of Saba by country of birth, 1 January 2024



Comparison of the populations of St. Eustatius and Saba, information provided by Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

Challenges posed by Immigration and Emigration Today.

1. **Changing Demographics:** Growing immigrant population reshaping social identity and traditions. Intangible Cultural Heritage is at risk
2. **Erosion of Identity:** Shared “Saban” identity becomes less distinct with increasing diversity.
3. **Loss of Cultural Continuity:** Elders’ knowledge not fully passed on as younger Sabans move abroad – for school or work (no plans to return soon).
4. **Limited Integration:** Many newcomers rarely engage in heritage activities.
5. **Language Shift:** Younger generations adopt dominant languages, losing local dialects.
6. **Heritage Under Pressure:** Small population and high turnover make it difficult to sustain traditional practices.
7. **Cultural Dilution:** Traditional practices risk being overshadowed by foreign influences.
8. **Cultural Commercialization:** Local culture sometimes adapted for tourism or outside audiences.



C.H. Photography



WHAT IS SABA'S INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE CHALLENGES IT FACES?



WHAT IS SABA'S INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE?

UNESCO defines Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as “the living practices, performances, knowledge, and skills that communities passed down through generations, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, and traditional craftsmanship.

Saban ICH

- Recipes
- Instrument Making
- Bush (Natural) Medicine
- Reading the weather
- Saba Lace
- The Maypole Dace
- The Quadrille Dance
- Building Construction Techniques
- Stone Wall Construction Techniques
- Agricultural Techniques
- Saba Spice

What have we lost completely?

- String Band Music
- Basket and Hat Weaving
- Recipes (some)
- Boat Building
- String Band Music
- Slaughter of Animals (how to)

AN EXAMPLE OF A THREAT

Examples of Traditional
Saban Cottages 70+
years old



Saban Cityscape – Windwardside

Saban Cottages/Architecture is known for its traditional red roofs, green storm shutters and whitewashed walls.

AN EXAMPLE OF A THREAT



Proposed Development by Sotheby's International
asking price \$5,185,000.00USD



House built by a migrant family who have made Saba
their home.

WHAT IS DIGITAL STORYTELLING AND WHY?



Digital storytelling is the process of telling a story using video, images, audio, music, geospatial applications, and any other digital media.

Why did we choose Digital Storytelling for this mission?

- **Connects Generations:** Youth record and reinterpret elders' stories.
- **Empowers Local Voices:** Communities become narrators, not subjects.
- **Integrates Newcomers:** Digital platforms invite participation and dialogue.
- **Preserves Diversity:** Multiple perspectives enrich the cultural archive.
- **Fosters Belonging:** Shared stories strengthen community identity.

“Digital storytelling allows everyone on the island – old and new – to see themselves in the story of Saba.”

Why did we choose Digital Storytelling for this mission?

Our aim is to Bridge the gap!



“Digital storytelling allows everyone on the island – old and new – to see themselves in the story of Saba.”

An Example of Bridging the Gap!

“As Saban As”

Produced by the Child Focus Foundation.



Saba Heritage CENTER

Preserving
Voices, Building
Bridges: An Oral
History and
Digital
Community
Archive Project



PROJECTS AND PLANS

SABA Banana Pie

PASTRY

- 3 T. shortening
- 3 T. sugar
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1/3 cup milk

FILLING

- 6 bananas, mashed
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon

✓ For filling: Stew the ingredients over a medium heat until they boil (about 5-10 minutes). For pastry, cream shortening and sugar. Add salt, egg and vanilla; beat well. Add milk and beat well. Stir in flour and baking powder. Press the pastry into a greased pie plate. Spoon in banana mixture. Decorate with strips of dough. Bake at 350°F until golden brown and done.



Recipe Courtesy Joan Hassell Barnes Hells Gate
Recipes From Our Table - Saba Lace Ladies



Sustaining Cultural Resilience Bridging Past, Present, and Future

“Preserving heritage is not about holding on to the past — it’s about ensuring the past continues to live in the present.”

- **Our aim is to:**
- **Empower Local Voices:** Continue training Sabans in documentation and storytelling.
- **Invest in Heritage Education:** Integrate Saban history and traditions into schools.
- **Strengthen Community Partnerships:** Encourage collaboration between locals, newcomers, and institutions.
- **Preserve Digitally, Celebrate Locally:** Use technology for access while maintaining authenticity.
- **Plan for Continuity:** Ensure heritage efforts remain community-driven and intergenerational.

“Every story told is a step toward keeping Saba’s heritage alive.”

THANK YOU!
