

Guantanamo Bay

Historic Naval* Base meets Suburban America



by Erin Mahaney, *Geography Intern. (Thoughtco.com)* Updated July 29, 2018

Located four hundred miles from the mainland United States, Guantanamo Bay in the Guantanamo Province of Cuba is the oldest overseas American naval base. It is also the only naval base in a communist country and the only one that has no political affiliation* with the United States. With 45 miles of naval infrastructure, Guantanamo Bay is often called the "Pearl Harbor of the Atlantic." Due to its remote* location and jurisdiction, Guantanamo Bay has been deemed* by one United States government official as the "legal equivalent* of outer space".

History of Guantanamo Bay

At the wake of the 20th century, the U.S. formally leased this 45 square mile parcel from newly independent Cuba to use as a fueling station. The lease was renewed in 1934 under Fulgencio Batista and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. The agreement required consent* of both parties should either want to withdraw; that is, reconsider U.S. occupation of the base. Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba were severed* in January of 1961. In hopes the U.S. will forfeit* the base, Cuba no longer accepts the \$5,000 annual American rent. In 2002, Cuba officially requested that Guantanamo Bay be returned. Interpretation of the 1934 mutual consent agreement differs, causing frequent squabbles between the two countries.

In 1964, Fidel Castro cut off the base's water supply in response to the U.S. government fining Cubans for fishing near Florida. As a result, Guantanamo Bay is self-sufficient and produces its own water and electricity. The naval base itself is divided into two functioning areas on either side of the bay. The east side of the bay is the main base, and the airfield occupies the west side. Today, both sides of the base's 17-mile fence line are patrolled by U.S. Marines and Cuban militiamen.



During the 1990s, social upheaval* in Haiti brought over 30,000 Haitian refugees to Guantanamo Bay. In 1994, the base provided humanitarian services to thousands of migrants during Operation Sea Signal. That year, civilian employees and their families were evacuated from the base to accommodate* for the influx of migrants. The migrant population climbed upwards of 40,000. By 1996, the Haitian and Cuban refugees had filtered out, and family members of the military were allowed to return. Ever since, Guantanamo Bay sees a small, steady migrant population of about 40 people each year.



Facts:

- Detainees currently held at Guantanamo: 40
- Total number of detainees ever incarcerated at Guantanamo: 780
- Detainees released under President Bush: Over 500
- Detainees at start of Obama Presidency: 242
- Detainees transferred, repatriated* or resettled* under Obama Presidency: 197
- Detainees transferred, repatriated or resettled under Trump Presidency: 1
- Detainees transferred to U.S. for prosecution: 1
- Yearly cost to U.S. taxpayers of a prisoner in a maximum security federal prison: approximately \$78,000

Source: Humanrightsfirst.org

Geography and land use of Guantanamo Bay

The bay itself is a 12-mile long north-south indentation* and is six miles across. Islands, peninsulas*, and coves can be found on the east side of the bay. The Guantanamo Valley lies west of the bay along the Sierra Maestra. The lowlands on the west side are adorned in mangroves. Its flat nature makes it ideal for Guantanamo's airfield.

Similar to many American towns, Guantanamo Bay is furnished with subdivisions, baseball fields, and chain restaurants. Roughly 10,000 people reside there, 4,000 of which are in the U.S. military. The remaining residents are family members of the military, local Cuban support staff, and laborers from neighboring countries. There is a hospital, dental clinic, and a meteorologic and oceanographic command station. In 2005, four 262-foot tall wind turbines were constructed on John Paul Jones Hill, the highest point on the base. During the windiest months, they provide the base with about a quarter of the power it consumes.

Since the sharp population rise in 2002 of military and support personnel, Guantanamo Bay boasts* a golf course and an outdoor theater. There is also a school, but with so few kids that sports teams play against groups of local firefighters and hospital workers. Separated from the base by cacti and elevated landforms, residential Guantanamo Bay bears much similarity to suburban* America.

Guantanamo Bay as Detention Center

Its true nature and inner workings are somewhat elusive to the American public and are under constant scrutiny*. One can only speculate on the future of Guantanamo Bay and as history suggests, its utility and habitation* are ever changing.

Presidential quotations on Guantanamo:



"I believe strongly that torture is not moral, legal or effective. In the dark halls of Abu Ghraib and the detention cells of Guantánamo, we have compromised our most precious values. Guantanamo will be closed no later than one year from now."
Barack Obama, Jan. 22, 2009

"It doesn't seem like we are going to close it anytime soon. We're going to load it up with bad dudes. Don't tell me it doesn't work - torture works"
Donald Trump, Feb. 24, 2016



Repatriated: sendt hjem Resettled: forflyttet Indentation: Indhak Peninsula: Halvø Boasts: Kan prale af
 Suburban: Forstads Scrutiny: nøje undersøgelse Habitation: Beboelse