

DESTINATION REPORT

YOUR TRAVEL SPECIALIST

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YOUR TRAVEL SNAPSHOT: Destinations included in this guide

Aruba

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INTRODUCTION

Aruba is among the livelier, more developed islands in the Caribbean. Aruba has low- and high-rise resorts, great restaurants, and glitzy casinos lining the white-sand beaches and the downtown boulevard. You'll find plenty of things to do on Aruba, too: sunbathing, world-class windsurfing and waterskiing by day, and discos, cabarets, dinner shows and high-stakes gambling at night.

Except for the Arikok National Park Foundation, you won't see an abundance of natural attractions in Aruba. Nor is Aruba covered in lush foliage. It's about as close to a desert island as you'll find in the Caribbean, with stands of cacti and aloe vera dotting the dusty terrain. In fact, Aruba is so dry, goats eat the cacti in search of something resembling leaves. Still, Aruba has one of the world's most threatened tropical ecosystems—its mangrove forests.

MUST SEE OR DO

Sights—View the wind-shaped rock formations at Ayo and Casibari; bird-watching at Bubali Bird Sanctuary; go spelunking to see the impressive Caiquetio petroglyphs at the entrance to the Fontein Cave in Arikok National Park; spectacular views at the California Lighthouse.

Museums—Artifacts that trace the island's history and culture over 4,500 years at the National Archaeological Museum of Aruba; the Historical Museum of Aruba at Fort Zoutman/Willem III Tower; soothe your skin at the Aruba Aloe Museum & Factory in Hato.

Memorable Meals—A late lunch at Cafe the Plaza; local seafood specialties at Flying Fishbone; Caribbean dishes at Papiamento Restaurant.

Late Night—Evening concerts, musicals and ballet at Cas di Cultura; gambling, live bands and shows at one of the island's casinos; dance to merengue at Mojito's Cantina & Grill, or simply groove at Local Store; hop on the *Kukoo Kunuku*, Aruba's No. 1 party bus; party on at Garufa Cocktail Lounge.

Walks—Climb to Yamanota Hill in Arikok National Park, the highest point in Aruba; hike up the steps of Hooiberg for another great view of the island; stroll through Oranjestad to explore its Dutch-Colonial architecture; a walk through Wilhelmina Park to Seaport Marina.

Especially for Kids—An early-morning visit to The Butterfly Farm; baby ostriches at the Aruba Ostrich Farm; a day at Blue Parrotfish Water Park on private De Palm Island; more than 52 different species at Philip's Animal Garden; petting the donkeys at Donkey Sanctuary Aruba.

GEOGRAPHY

Just 15 mi/24 km off the coast of Venezuela, Aruba is the farthest west of the Dutch Caribbean islands known as the ABCs (Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao). It is 19 mi/30 km long and 6 mi/9 km wide, and the land is mostly flat and arid with scattered fields of cacti and aloe plants.

HISTORY

The islands off the Venezuelan coast and their Caiquetio inhabitants (part of a larger group of Caribbean people called Arawaks) were sighted by the Spanish in 1499, but the island was not developed because the newcomers found nothing useful there. (They were not aware of the gold.) However, Captain Henry Morgan and the infamous Edward Teach (Blackbeard) found use for the island's many hidden coves during their pirate days plying the waters.

Although the Dutch claimed Aruba in 1636, no European settlers arrived until the 1750s. The discovery of gold in 1824 brought some excitement and colonists to the island. The mining lasted 100 years and produced more than 3 million lb/1.4 million kg of the glittering mineral. For several years in the mid-1800s, Aruba was the world's largest exporter of aloe, and aloe products are still produced there on a small scale.

The arrival of the oil industry in the 1920s, after black gold was found in nearby Venezuela, had a big economic impact. Lago, which later became Exxon, was a crucial supplier of fuel to U.S. naval ships during World War II. At its height in 1965, the refinery in San Nicolas produced 550,000 barrels of oil a day.

When the market declined in the mid-1980s, Exxon closed the facility. Successive companies failed to maintain the operation, but the San Antonio (U.S.)-based Valero Energy Corporation gained control of the facility in 2004 and reportedly invested close to US\$640 million in upgrades. However, San Nicolas's town economy took another blow in 2012 when the Valero Aruba Refinery closed.

Tourists began arriving in the 1960s, but development of large resort hotel-casinos really started in earnest in the 1980s, when declining oil revenues led the government to seek new ways to bolster the economy. The boom outdid itself in enthusiasm, and the government had to issue a five-year moratorium on hotel building in the 1990s to keep supply and demand at the proper ratio; still, many new resorts have risen along Aruba's windswept shores.

Today, tourism is the leading industry, and more than half a million people visit Aruba each year, making it one of the most popular destinations in the Caribbean. As a result, the island is prosperous by Caribbean standards, and its citizens enjoy a high rate of literacy, good housing, education and health care.

Aruba has been quasi-independent since 1986, when it became a separate entity within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Actually, the island has been influenced as much by Venezuela (only 15 mi/24 km away from Aruba) as by the Netherlands. Most Arubans speak English, Spanish and Dutch, as well as the native language, Papiamentu (a mixture of African, Arawak, Dutch, English, Portuguese and Spanish idioms).

Formerly a part of the six-federation Netherlands Antilles, Aruba gained separate status on 1 January 1986. This means that Aruba has direct ties to Holland, but the island has its own constitution, based on Western democratic principles. This calls for a governor and an eight-member council of ministers vested with executive powers and headed by a prime minister. A 21-member parliament is responsible for legislative matters. Judicial powers lie with the common courts in Aruba, and ultimately with the High Court of Justice in Holland.

SNAPSHOT

Aruba's foremost attractions include beaches, shopping, casinos, watersports, excellent restaurants, high-energy nightlife and very friendly people.

If you enjoy good beaches, ethnic food, gambling and quality shopping, Aruba is for you. Don't expect, however, to partake in a "Bali Hai" island experience (Aruba resembles a flat desert) or to find much distinctive Caribbean culture. If you prefer lush rain-forest-type destinations, Aruba may not be your preference. It's more like Arizona or New Mexico than Puerto Rico or St. Croix.

POTPOURRI

Several ranches on Aruba raise *paso fino* horses—descendants of the Andalusian and Arabian horses brought to the New World by the conquistadors. The creatures' controlled and elegant gait is delightful, and trail rides are offered for all skill levels.

Those unusual-looking trees bent over by the wind are *watapana* (divi-divi) trees, and they make it impossible to get lost on Aruba. All of the trees are bent to the southwest, where the majority of the hotels and resorts are located.

The frequently used description *cunucu* house refers to a house in the countryside. *Cunucu* means "country" in Papiamentu.

The city of Oranjestad was established in 1824 and named in honor of the Dutch Royal Family, which is known as the House of Orange, whose first king was Willem van Oranje-Nassau (1544-84).

Fort Zoutman, site of the Bon Bini festival every Tuesday night, was built in 1798 to protect the east side of the

island. *Bon bini* means "welcome" in Papiamentu, and the festival is a year-round folkloric event that celebrates Aruban music, local cuisine and crafts.

Nature lovers: Be sure to pay attention to the lizards and cacti on the island—there are unusual species of both.

If you want to speak Papiamentu, start with *con ta bai* ("how are you"). *Masha danki* means "thank you very much." *Bon dia* means "good morning."

For some reason, the Aruba Island Rattlesnake chooses not to rattle a warning before striking. The danger of being bitten is very slight, however—in fact, the snake is an endangered species and one of the rarest rattlesnakes in the world.

Aruba's Natural Bridge was once one of the island's most recognizable attractions, gracing every tourist item from shot glasses to postcards. Alas, this wave-carved wonder collapsed into the sea in 2005.

LOCATION

Aruba's port is at Oranjestad, the island's capital and main town, which is on the southern coast, 2.5 mi/4 km west of Queen Beatrix International Airport. The dock is toward the north end of the town center, within easy walking distance of the bus terminal, shops, restaurants, casinos and museums.

Cruise ships tie up at one of two modern, air-conditioned terminals. On-site services include a tourist information office, phones, Wi-Fi hot spots, tour desks, vendor stands, car rental operators and taxis. The terminals are operated by Aruba Ports Authority, Port Administration Building, L.G. Smith Boulevard 23, Oranjestad. Phone 582-6633. <http://arubaports.com>.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

Typical shore excursions include around-the-island sightseeing, an off-road Jeep or ATV tour through Aruba's wild countryside, or a sail around the island with stops for snorkeling and swimming. Some passengers may prefer a day of guided scuba diving or a horseback ride along the coast. Special-interest tours are available for photographers, and beach bums can sign up for a day pass at one of the waterfront resorts, which often includes use of all the facilities and watersports equipment.

Shore excursions—and their prices—vary from cruise line to cruise line. Check with your travel agent for additional information.

SIGHTSEEING

Aruba is an island for lazy beach days, late party nights and occasional excursions into the untamed countryside. While there are plenty of creature comforts, including all the grown-up toys made for water and land adventures, there are relatively few cultural or historical places worthy of more than a quick visit. Exceptions include the National Archaeological Museum and Aruba's Historical Museum at Fort Zoutman, both in Oranjestad.

The best natural site on the island, the Natural Bridge, crumbled into a rock pile in 2005, leaving behind smaller natural bridges, called Baby Bridges, and caves along the windward coast as the main tourist attractions.

At Casibari, in the center of the island, and Ayo, down the road in an easterly direction, you'll find the most striking landforms on the island—giant diorite boulders that have been carved into eerie, dramatic shapes by the wind.

Outside Oranjestad are a few other attractions worth visiting. For a panoramic view of the island, we suggest climbing to the top of Hooiberg (named after the rare Hooibergite rock formations, only found in Aruba and Iceland), located 6 mi/10 km east of Oranjestad. The climb up several hundred carved steps is strenuous but worth the effort. Although this isn't the highest point on the island, it has the best views. Make the climb early in the day, if possible.

There are many caves on Aruba, but none are very long or deep. Quadirikiri, a large bat cave, is basically easy to maneuver except for a few slippery slopes. Fontein (in Arikok Park) is rather shallow, but a must-see for its impressive Caiquetio petroglyphs—the best of which are near the entrance. Both caves are northeast of Oranjestad.

CASINOS

Aruba claims to be the founder of several table games, including Caribbean Stud Poker. The legal gambling age is 18, and the casino has the right to request a valid ID as proof of age.

Alhambra Casino

Lots of slots, gaming tables and special daily promotions. The Alhambra Shopping Bazaar (open 10 am-10 pm) has a great variety of gift stores, boutiques, cafes and restaurants. Cleo's Restaurant is fine for a snack or light meal, with happy hour daily 6-8 pm. J.E. Irausquin Blvd. 47, Aruba. Phone 583-5000. <http://casinoalhambra.com>.

Crystal Casino

This casino, at the Renaissance Aruba Resort and Mall, is open around the clock. Daily 24 hours. L.G. Smith Blvd. 82, Oranjestad, Aruba. Phone 523-6318. <http://www.arubacrystalcasinos.com>.

Excelsior Casino

If poker is your game, head for this casino. It has one of the largest poker rooms on the island and features low-limit to no-limit tables. J.E. Irausquin Blvd. 230 (on Palm Beach in the Holiday Inn), Aruba. Phone 586-7777. <http://www.excelsiorcasino.com>.

Seaport Casino

Crystal's smaller sister property, located on the waterfront across the street from Renaissance Marketplace, has an impressive assortment of high-tech games. L.G. Smith Blvd. 9, Aruba. Phone 523-6318. <http://www.arubacrystalcasinos.com>.

MUSEUMS

Aruba Aloe Museum and Factory

Get in touch with Aruban history at this factory and museum. Aloe grows well in the dry climate and was once a very important part of the island's economy. The factory estimates that its 1,600 acres/647 hectares produce about 2 million plants, concentrating on the aloe vera species (used for skin ailments and for healing burns). The modern building houses a museum, which documents the history of aloe in Aruba, and an enclosed catwalk lets you look down on production in progress. The aloe-oriented gift shop sells the full line of products produced in the factory, including body lotions and hair-care items. Monday-Friday 8 am-4:30 pm, Saturday 9 am-4 pm. Free. Pitastraat 115 (Hato), Oranjestad. Phone 588-3222. Toll-free 800-952-7822. <http://www.arubaaloe.com>.

National Archaeological Museum Aruba

Archaeologists have uncovered amazing things on Aruba. Chief among the ancient finds are skulls and bones believed to belong to members of a preceramic tribe who lived on the island between 2500 BC and AD 1000. Other relics include stone tools and pottery. Tuesday-Friday 10 am-5 pm, Saturday and Sunday 10 am-2 pm. Free. Instituto di Cultura, Schelpstraat 42, Aruba. Phone 582-8979. <http://www.namaruba.org>.

The Historical Museum Of Aruba at Fort Zoutman/Willem III Tower

Learn all about Aruba's history, culture, art and architecture by inspecting old documents, maps and photographs, historic artifacts and other interesting museum collections in the oldest building in Oranjestad. Explore the latest exhibitions and celebrate Aruba's music, folklore and cuisine every Tuesday 6:30-8:30 pm during the Bon Bini Festival. Museum open Monday-Friday 9 am-4:30 pm. US\$5 adults, US\$2 children. Fort Zoutmanstraat z/n (right across the Renaissance Marketplace), Oranjestad. Phone 588-5199.

NATURE

Arikok National Park

Arikok became a foundation in 2003 in order to receive European funding for the development of the park's infrastructure. The Arikok National Park Foundation is a proud example of conservation and preservation because of its almost 8,000 acres/3,237 hectares of Aruba's natural, cultural and historical heritage; excellent trails for hiking, biking and touring; a team of friendly and knowledgeable park rangers; a modern visitor's center; and educational programs and activities. This is one precious piece of Aruba that everyone should see. Open daily 8 am-5 pm. US\$8 adults, free for children younger than 17. San Fuego 70, Aruba. Phone 585-1234. <http://www.arubanationalpark.org>.

Casibari Rock Formations

Most visitors climb to the top of the highest rock (the one with steps and railings), take in the view and then leave. If you spend a little more time wandering in, around and behind the surrounding formations, you'll discover paths leading to secret gardens and flowering niches that have been blended into unusual crevices and ledges. It's raw nature, and seen by few visitors. There's a refreshment stand near the entrance. Casibari, Aruba.

AMUSEMENT PARKS

Aruba Waterpark

Offers a variety of slides, pools and playgrounds for all ages, including a gorgeous backdrop of cacti and boulders that highlight the park's countryside theme. US\$20 adults, US\$25 children age 12 and younger. Full-day pass includes one meal and two soft drinks. Hooiberg, Aruba. Phone 585-0060. <http://www.arubavacationpark.com/aruba-waterpark>.

The Blue Parrotfish Water Park

Part of the De Palm Island entertainment complex, this water park features a variety of waterslides as well as kiddie areas with tunnels, water guns and other water features. The water park is included with all the other De Palm Island offerings, including snorkeling and all-inclusive food, drinks and alcoholic beverages. US\$109 adults full-day, US\$83 children full-day. De Palm Island, Aruba. Phone 582-4400. Toll-free 800-766-6016. <http://www.depalm.com>.

ZOOS & WILDLIFE

Aruba Ostrich Farm

This attraction's parent company is in Curacao, where the ostriches are bred, but this farm is strictly for show and for supplying meat to local restaurants. A guided drive features stops at incubation pens and quarters for babies (who can walk shortly after birth) and older ostriches. There's an African-style store, and a bar and restaurant where you can try ostrich meat in various forms. Open daily 9 am-4 pm. Admission US\$12 adults, US\$6 children ages 3-12. Near Bushiribana, Matividiri 57, Paradera, Aruba. Phone 585-9630. <http://www.arubaostrichfarm.com>.

Donkey Sanctuary Aruba

This nonprofit organization cares for more than 100 mistreated, neglected, sick or roaming donkeys. You can pet the donkeys and learn about the sanctuary's mission. Entrance is free; donations welcome. Santa Lucia 4-A, Aruba. Phone 593-2933. <http://www.arubandonkey.org>.

Philip's Animal Garden

Philip Merryweather loves animals, especially exotic creatures, so this nonprofit habitat for more than 52 different species is a dream come true. It rescues and provides shelter to both native and exotic species, including monkeys, reptiles, parrots and even a Bengal Cat. There's a garden shop with an extensive collection of souvenirs and a food corridor. Open daily 9 am-5 pm. US\$10 adults, US\$5 children younger than 11. Alto Vista 116, Aruba. <http://www.philipsanimalgarden.com>.

The Butterfly Farm

Take a guided tour through lush gardens and around fish ponds. A guide regales you with anecdotes about butterfly mating habits, diet and identification. Go early in the morning when the 500 or so residents are at their most active. Delicate butterfly jewelry and other items are available in the gift shop. Open 9 am-4:30 pm (last tour at 4 pm). US\$15 adults, US\$8 children ages 4-16. One admission assures a free pass to the farm for the remainder of your stay. J.E. Irausquin Boulevard z/n (about 4 mi/7 km from Oranjestad), Aruba. Phone 586-3656. <http://www.thebutterflyfarm.com>.

RECREATION

Recreational activities on Aruba are virtually endless. The beaches and sea are spectacular, and many visitors spend most of their vacation in, on or under the water. Snorkel masks and fins are as essential as sunblock, and even novice scuba divers can see amazing sealife at shallow depths.

Sailing, kayaking, windsurfing and Jet Skiing are among the vast number of watersports available on the leeward coast. Guided ATV, horseback and off-road bike tours are popular with visitors who seek a bit more adventure.

BEACHES

Aruba has some of the best beaches in the Caribbean, at least when the winds aren't playing havoc with the sand. The calmest water and the biggest crowds are on the west side of the island near the major resorts. Beaches on the east side are less crowded, but the trade winds and tides can be very strong, particularly in the afternoon. Beaches on the northeast side of the island are rocky, and seas are rougher and not as good for swimming. The water is a wonderful blue-green color most everywhere.

Eagle Beach and Palm Beach, which are northwest of Oranjestad in the midst of the resort area, are among our favorites because of their powdery white sand. They also are easy to reach by bus or taxi—about a 15-minute ride from downtown Oranjestad. Get there first thing in the morning, before the sun gets too hot (or the crowds arrive).

Druif Beach is in the heart of the resort area. As a result, it tends to be crowded with cruise-ship passengers. Andicuri Beach, on the east side near the former Natural Bridge, has rougher surf and high waves, but more privacy. The best way to get there is to take a taxi.

Baby Beach, along a pretty bay on the southeastern tip of the island, is a more relaxed location, although it gets very crowded on Sunday. Be aware, however, that swimming past the Baby Beach reef is risky because of the strong currents and undertow.

Rodgers Beach, in San Nicolas at Seroe Colorado, is secluded and quiet.

BICYCLING

Mountain biking has become popular in Aruba, especially in Arikok National Park.

Rancho Notorious offers guided bike tours to the northern part of the island. Phone 586-0508.
<http://www.ranchnotorious.com>.

Aruba Active Vacations

Offers mountain-bike rentals for US\$25 per day and a two-hour guided tour for US\$55. Phone 586-0989 or 741-2991. <http://www.aruba-active-vacations.com>.

BIRD WATCHING

Bird-watchers will enjoy a visit to the wetlands at Bubali Bird Sanctuary, which is about 4 mi/6 km northwest of Oranjestad. Some 300 bird species either reside on or visit Aruba, and Bubali is the best place to spot fish eagles, herons and cormorants, as well as the oriolelike orange *trupiaal*, the *prikichi* parakeet and the yellow-bellied *barica geel*.

If you're interested in parakeets, visit the area near Frenchman's Pass (about 5 mi/8 km east of Oranjestad). These little birds also chatter up a storm in Arikok National Park, especially at dusk.

BOATING & SAILING

You can explore the waters around Aruba in catamarans, sailboats, motorboats and glass-bottomed boats.

Aruba Kayak Adventures

This company schedules guided tours daily along the coast with a snorkeling stop above an active reef. Trip includes kayak training, all equipment, lunch and transportation to and from the launch site for US\$99 per person. Office is at Ponton 90, Oranjestad, Aruba. Phone 582-5520. <http://www.arubakayak.com>.

Atlantis Submarines Expedition

Landlubbers who want to experience the joys of scuba diving without getting wet can take a two-hour trip on the submarine *Atlantis VI* down to Barcadera Reef, or go below water level on the semisubmarine *Seaworld Explorer* for an hour-and-a-half tour of the German shipwreck *Antilla*. Reservations may be made through De Palm Tours. US\$46-\$109 adults, US\$25-\$59 children ages 4-12, depending on tour. Phone 522-4400. Toll-free 800-609-7374. <http://www.depalmstours.com/atlantis-submarines-expedition>.

Mi Dushi Sailing Adventures

This operation runs a sailing and snorkeling cruise aboard the *Mi Dushi*, a 1925 Swedish wind-powered ship. Sunset cruises are also available. Sailings Tuesday-Friday; cruises and times vary by day. Prices vary. Phone 586-2010. <http://www.midushi.com>.

Red Sail Sports

This operation offers a variety of choices, including sailing, scuba diving, snorkeling, fishing and JETLEV (a water-propelled jetpack that soars up to 30 ft/9 m in the air). A four-hour snorkeling trip by catamaran with equipment, lunch and open bar costs US\$72 adults, US\$39 children ages 3-12. L.G. Smith Blvd. 17 Oranjestad, Oranjestad. Phone 586-1603. <http://www.redsailaruba.com>.

BOWLING

Dream Bowl Aruba

Offers state-of-the-art glow-bowl lanes, a variety of arcade games, a modern sports bar and billiards tables. Open Sunday-Thursday 4-11 pm, Friday and Saturday 4 pm-midnight. L.G. Smith Blvd 95 (on the top floor of Palm Beach Plaza), Aruba. Phone 586-0809.

Eagle Bowling Palace

The air-conditioned facility has 16 computerized lanes, a cocktail lounge and a snack bar. Open Tuesday-Thursday 4 pm-1 am, Friday 4 pm-2 am, Saturday 10 am-2 am, Sunday 10 am-midnight. Sasakiweg z/n, Aruba. Phone 583-5501 or 583-5038.

FISHING

The waters off Aruba are home to marlin, sailfish, barracuda and tuna, among others. Half-day trips can be arranged for about US\$260-\$350 per boat; full-day excursions are about US\$500-\$700 per boat with up to four passengers.

Driftwood Fishing Charters

The skilled crew aboard *Driftwood*, a fully equipped and tournament rigged 35-ft/11-m twin-engine yacht, will take first timers and professionals alike to catch their own dinner to take home or savor at the nearby Driftwood Restaurant. Seaport Marina, Aruba. Phone 583-2515 or 592-4040. <http://driftwoodfishingcharters.com>.

Mahi Mahi Fishing Charters

The fishing boat *Mahi Mahi* is the first one next to The Seaport Casino, in the Renaissance Marketplace area. The *Kepeasa* is next to the parking area, and the air-conditioned *Sea-iesta* is the newest and largest addition to the fleet. Seaport Marina, Aruba. Phone 587-0538. <http://www.aruba-mahimahi.com>.

Melina Charters

This operator runs light-tackle, fly and bottom fishing aboard 23-ft/7-m *Mr. Bone Fish*. Deep-sea trips go out on 29-ft/9-m *Melina*. The boats are docked at Hadicurari harbor on Palm Beach, Aruba. Phone 593-1550. <http://www.arufishing.com>.

GOLF

The Links at Divi Aruba

The Links at Divi Aruba is a nine-hole course with a pro shop and restaurants. Daily 6:45 am-7 pm. J.E. Irausquin Blvd. 93 (directly across from the Divi Village and Tamarijn resorts), Oranjestad. Phone 581-4653. <http://www.divilinks.com>.

Tierra del Sol Resort, Spa and Country Club

This 18-hole championship course on the northwest coast near the California Lighthouse showcases the island's desertlike beauty, with stands of cacti and unusual rock formations scattered about the course. The "No Embarrassment" clinic for weekend duffers and newcomers to the sport includes a one-and-a-half-hour lesson, equipment and lunch for US\$45 per person. Expect to pay US\$92-\$159 for 18 holes, including cart, depending on the season and time of day. Malmokweg z/n, Aruba. Phone 586-0978. Toll-free 866-978-5111. <http://www.tierradelsol.com>.

HORSEBACK RIDING

Get to know the wild side of Aruba during a horseback ride through the countryside—cacti, divi-divi trees and aloe vera plants provide the backdrop to an early-morning trot. Experience is not required, but sunscreen is recommended.

Rancho Daimari

Provides transportation for guests taking a one-hour ride-and-swim at the ranch or a two-hour ride through the national park and a dip in the natural pool. Prices run US\$50-\$75, with private tours for US\$105. L.G. Smith Blvd 382-A, Oranjestad. Phone 586-6285 or 586-6284 for reservations and pick-up. <http://www.arubaranchodaimari.com>.

Rancho Notorious

Offers a variety of rides, including beach, countryside and coast rides. The company also offers four-wheeler and mountain bike tours. Prices range from US\$45 for one hour to US\$200 for a two-hour private beach outing. Boroncana, Noord, Aruba. Phone 586-0508. <http://www.ranchnotorious.com>.

SCUBA & SNORKELING

Aruba's clear blue-green water makes the island an ideal place to engage in watersports—particularly snorkeling. One of the best places to snorkel is Boca Catalina Beach on the northwest coast, near the California Lighthouse. Fish come in all shapes and colors—yellow stripes, black dots, electric blue—and you'll find them close to shore.

If you don't have your own snorkeling gear, many resorts provide complimentary gear, and you can rent equipment at sports huts on the beach for US\$15 per day. Other good places for snorkeling are Mangel Halto, Arashi, Baby, Boca Catalina, Palm and Rodgers beaches.

Aruba's diving may not be as famous as nearby Bonaire's, but it's still good. Most shops schedule their dive excursions in the morning, before the wind picks up too much. Established operators are often affiliated with the

main resorts, and dives may be booked through the activities desk.

Most dive operators also offer introductory courses, which provide basic instruction and a shallow dive with an instructor for around US\$95. Red Sail offers SASY and Bubblemaker classes for children beginning at age 6 for US\$30-\$40 (phone 586-1603; <http://www.redsailaruba.com>). If you're not taking one of the introductory courses, you must be a certified diver and present your C card to rent equipment and go diving. One-tank dives average US\$50, with prices for two-tank excursions around US\$80.

Popular destinations include two shallow-water shipwrecks: the *Pedernales*, a German World War II oil tanker mistakenly torpedoed by the German navy, and the *Antilla*, a German sub-supply ship great for night dives. It was scuttled near Malmok, on the northwestern end of the island, after Germany invaded Holland, so the *Antilla* wouldn't fall into Dutch hands. Experienced divers enjoy the *California* wreck, the *Jane Sea* wreck and Mangel Halto Reef, which has beautiful black coral as well as giant barrel sponges.

Diving in Aruba is generally very safe, but in the event of a diving emergency, a recompression center is adjacent to the 300-bed Doctor Horacio Oduber Hospital, Dr. Horacio E. Blvd. 1, Oranjestad. Phone 527-4000.

In addition, the Diver's Alert Network (DAN) will provide treatment advice and, if necessary, arrange for evacuation. DAN also answers health-related questions about diving. Phone 919-684-8111 for DAN's headquarters in the U.S. Toll-free 877-595-0625. <http://www.dan.org>.

De Palm Tours

Offers a choice of catamaran cruises including a snorkel trip to the German shipwreck *Antilla*, with open bar, lunch and equipment. The company also offers snuba, a combination of snorkeling and scuba diving where you go to depths of 15 ft/5 m using a hose attached to an air tank floating on the surface. De Palm's Sea Trek adventure involves a large helmet over your head with a window that allows you to explore the depths as you walk on the sea floor in the midst of marine life. Full-day packages 9 am-5 pm, half-day packages noon-5 pm. Catamaran cruises with snorkeling US\$78 adults, US\$59 children; snuba lessons are an additional US\$56 adults, US\$42 children age 8 and older, US\$29 children ages 4-7. One-hour Sea Trek tours are US\$48 adults, US\$35 children age 8 and older. L.G. Smith Blvd. 142, Oranjestad. Phone 582-4400. Toll-free 800-609-7374. <http://www.depalmstours.com>.

Pelican Adventures

Offers a variety of scuba, snorkeling and sailing trips. Fees vary depending on trip. Pelican Pier (between Holiday Inn and Playa Linda Resort), Aruba. Phone 587-2307 Monday-Saturday, 586-1455 on Sunday. <http://www.pelican-aruba.com>.

SURFING

Strong, reliable trade winds make Aruba one of the world's top windsurfing spots. Hadikurari Beach, known locally as Fisherman's Huts, at the northern tip of the island (about 10 mi/16 km from Oranjestad), attracts serious wave riders from around the world.

But you don't have to be an expert to go windsurfing. Beginners can rent a board at Malmok Beach (at the northern end of Fisherman's Huts). One hour of instruction and practice cost about US\$50 from Aruba Active Vacations. Phone 586-0989 or 741-2991. <http://www.aruba-active-vacations.com>.

Kite boarding (or kitesurfing) has literally taken off in Aruba. Watch the locals practice their radical moves at Boca Grandi Beach, down on the southern end of the island where the surf is high, or up north at Arashi Beach near the California Lighthouse, where the winds play havoc with sea and air maneuvers. If you want to join the fun, a two-hour rental will cost you US\$60 at Aruba Active (only available to experienced kitesurfers), or book a five-lesson plan for US\$495.

Yet another way to take advantage of Aruba's famous breezes is to try your hand at landsailing, similar to windsurfing, but on land (specifically on a salt flat near Fisherman's Huts). Aruba Active offers landsailing rentals for US\$40 for two hours.

See & Do: Recreation

NIGHTLIFE

Aruba's lively nightlife has earned it a reputation as the Las Vegas of the Caribbean. In the evening, you can choose among casino gambling, discos, movable parties and cabaret dinner shows. If you want to sample a variety of places, most of the large resorts and casinos are north of Oranjestad between Druif Beach and Palm Beach.

The legal drinking age and for entry into most nightclubs is 18. Identification is required for admittance to adult-only clubs. The U.S. Department of State warns that the legal drinking age is not always rigorously enforced in Aruba, so extra parental supervision may be appropriate.

The island's casinos, all of which are in major hotels (a hotel must have a minimum of 300 rooms in order to open a casino), offer live bands, shows or discos, as well as gambling. Be sure to check the hours of the casino you're interested in beforehand—some are open 24 hours. A few stagger their opening times, depending on the game—for instance, they may open at 11 am for slots only, add blackjack and roulette at 1 pm, then open all games at 9 pm.

You'll find some nice clubs in Oranjestad itself. There's plenty of imported rock 'n' roll, reggae and rap pumping through the speakers, but you'll also hear merengue in Aruba. Some hotels also have nightclub shows offering anything from steel bands to Las Vegas-style and Latin extravaganzas (and, as is true elsewhere in the Caribbean, you'll find no shortage of Carnival limbo and fire-dance shows). Be sure to reserve a table early in the day, especially in season—the better ones often sell out.

If you get tired of the casinos, see a current movie at the cinemas in the Renaissance Mall (phone 523-6357) or Renaissance Marketplace (phone 583-5736), both in Oranjestad, or at the Paseo Herencia Mall near Palm Beach (phone 523-6745; <http://www.thecinemas.aw>).

For those who like to be on the move, reserve a spot on *Mi Dushi* for the Sunset Happy Hour Cruise, where you can take a dip from a rope swing on the mast (phone 586-2010; <http://www.midushi.com>); or a barhopping ride on the wildly painted Kukoo Kunuku bus with a built-in designated driver (phone 586-2010; <http://www.kukookunuku.com>).

BARS, TAVERNS & PUBS

Garufa

A well-appointed cigar club complete with humidors, this place offers live music beginning at 8 pm. Open Monday-Friday 6 pm-1 am, Saturday 6 pm-2 am. Wilhelminastraat 63 (across from El Gaucho), Aruba. Phone 582-3677. <http://www.garufa-aruba.com>.

Local Store

This popular bar located in downtown Oranjestad has local prices for drinks and snacks. There's also live music, and spectacular views of Aruba's harbor, boulevard and outdoor markets are free. Sunday-Thursday 11 am-midnight, Friday and Saturday 11 am-2 am. Weststraat 4-D (across from the Royal Plaza Mall), Oranjestad. Phone 583-8229.

DANCE & NIGHTCLUBS

Confession Club

There are few establishments in Aruba that offer the traditional nightclub experience. Confession Club has spacious dance floors, great sound, high-energy lighting, bars, lounges, guest DJs and special events. Open Tuesday-Thursday 8 pm-1 am, Friday and Saturday 9 pm-3 am. J.E Irausquin Blvd. 348, Aruba. Phone 660-5570 or 593-4201. <http://www.confessionnightclub.com>.

Jimmy's Place

This Dutch Caribbean cafe is a popular hangout with locals and visitors who like to party late into the night. DJs play music Thursday-Saturday. Open daily except Monday. Windstraat 32, Oranjestad, Aruba. Phone 582-2550. <http://www.jimmysaruba.com>.

Mojito's Cantina & Grill

Live bands play several times each week. L.G. Smith Blvd. 94 (Royal Plaza Mall, second floor), Aruba. Phone 592-4741. <http://www.tropicports.com/mojitos>.

LIVE MUSIC

Cafe Chaos

This well-seasoned Dutch pub is a local favorite for its happy hours, live music from local bands, a friendly mixed crowd and lots of beer. Monday-Thursday 5 pm-1 am, Friday 5 pm-3 am, Saturday 8 pm-3 am. L.G. Smith Blvd. 60 (across from the Renaissance Marketplace), Oranjestad. Phone 588-7547.

The Sopranos Piano Bar

This classy bar has a daily happy hour 5-8 pm, and pianists play a wide variety of music until 2 am. Monday-Friday 5 pm-2 am, Saturday and Sunday until 4 am. Arawak Garden, Palm Beach. Phone 586-8622. <http://www.sopranospianobar.com/aruba>.

FILM

The Cinemas

The Cinemas feature the best and newest film releases on the finest wall-to-wall screens with comfortable theater-style seating and sound. There are additional locations at Paseo Herencia (phone 297-523-6745) and Crystal Theater. Open Monday-Thursday 3:30-11 pm, Friday 3:30 pm-1 am, Saturday noon-1 am, Sunday noon-11 pm. Renaissance Marketplace, Oranjestad. Phone 523-6735. <http://www.thecinemas.aw>.

THEATER

Cas di Cultura

This center stages plays, concerts and dance performances in its 200-seat theater. Check current events and entertainment listed in *Aruba Nights* or *Aruba Experience*. Vondellaan 2, Aruba. Phone 582-1010. <http://www.casdicultura.com>.

SHOPPING

Although Aruba is not a duty-free port, the duty on most items is so low that shoppers often find discounts on all sorts of high-quality goods (note that we said discounts, not bargains). Liquor prices represent real savings, whereas the prices for jewelry, silverware and china are comparable to sale prices back home.

Popular items are Dutch products, including Delft ceramics, wooden shoes, and fine cheeses and chocolates. You'll also find good value in designer leather goods, Madeira embroidery, Indonesian crafts and wood carvings. Linens, crystal and perfumes from South America and Europe are good buys, too. You'll see aloe, grown and processed locally, in every conceivable form, from soap to skin toners.

Several malls feature upscale shops on L.G. Smith Boulevard in the center of Oranjestad, within walking distance of the ship terminals. The shocking-pink Royal Plaza Mall has trendy shops, as well as an Internet cafe and Iguana Joe's Caribbean Bar and Grill.

Renaissance Marketplace at the Renaissance Resort is a complex of restaurants and specialty shops overlooking the marina. Jewelry, beachwear, fashion accessories and island souvenirs are the main buys. Renaissance Mall is across from the marina and has more than 60 elegant shops, such as Chopard, Louis Vuitton and Gucci.

The beachfront hotel strip has become a shopping haven with the opening of Paseo Herencia Mall and Palm Beach Plaza. Also in the Palm Beach resort area, The Village offers live entertainment, original boutiques and restaurants, including the popular Papillion and Senor Frogs. South Beach Mall is home to a couple of well-known restaurants, such as Hard Rock Cafe, Benihana and Cafe Rembrandt, and chic jewelry and resort-wear shops.

Shopping Hours: Generally, Monday-Saturday 9 am-noon and 2-6 pm. Shops usually stay open during lunch hours when cruise ships are in port. Some open on Sunday, as well. Stores in the high-rise shopping malls typically stay open Monday-Saturday 10 am-10 pm, and some open on Sunday 5-10 pm.

ANTIQUÉ STORES

Louis the 15th Antiques & Curiosities Aruba

This palacelike construction with its 17th-century copper domes that can be spotted from afar consists of two buildings. The 23 showrooms filled with European antiques and curiosa give this antiques shop a museumlike atmosphere. Visitors can explore or buy, or visit the flea market the first Sunday of the month (9 am-2 pm). Open Monday-Friday 9 am-1 pm and 3:30-5:30 pm, Saturday 9 am-1 pm. Tanki Leendert 158-G, Rococo Plaza, Aruba. Phone 741-5640. <http://www.antiquesaruba.com>.

MARKETS

Fresh Seafood Market at Zeerover

Not your typical seafood market, this is a great fish shack where fishermen and locals meet, drink beer, play domino, eat the catch of the day and buy fresh seafood to take home. Open daily 9:30 am-midnight (depending on crowd level). Kitchen is closed on Monday. Savaneta 270, Aruba. Phone 584-8401.

Tourist Go Flea Market

This is an entertaining stop for bargain hunters. Visitors will find good prices on local art, crafts, souvenirs and beachwear. Don't expect to find amazing things, but the people-watching and group dynamics make this a worthwhile event. Vendors sell barbecue and cold drinks. Saturday and Sunday 8 am-8 pm. L.G. Smith Boulevard (across from the waterfront), Oranjestad. Phone 582-3777.

SHOPPING AREAS

Palm Beach Plaza

A multilevel shopping and entertainment center with a children's rock-climbing wall, minitrain, electronic games, playroom and bowling alley. Adults are more interested in the multiscreen movie theater, restaurants, day spa and upmarket shops. Popular stores include Panache, Benetton, Nautica and Birkenstock. Monday-Saturday 10 am-10 pm, Sunday 5-10 pm. L.G. Smith Blvd. 95, Noord. <http://palmbeachplaza.com>.

Paseo Herencia

This multifunction complex has movie theaters, restaurants, a cultural center and dozens of shops and kiosks. Well-known local shops include Maggy's, Aruba Aloe, Javaruba Batik Fashions and, for chocolate lovers, Taste of Belgium. Visitors especially enjoy the lovely architecture and colorful *Dancing Waters* fountain in the center courtyard. Monday-Saturday 10 am-10 pm, Sunday 5-9 pm. J.E. Irausquin Blvd. 382-A, Noord. Phone 586-6533 or 586-9233. <http://paseoherencia.com>.

Renaissance Mall and Marketplace

Aruba's first shopping center has evolved into the island's most exclusive venue—a superb resort mall with elegant stores, high-end products, luxury brands, the finest restaurants and one of the best spas on the island. For a more casual shopping spree, the Renaissance Marketplace across the street offers a variety of cafes and cozy eateries, souvenir shops, nightly live entertainment and a seaport casino. Daily 10 am-8 pm. L.G. Smith Blvd. 82, Oranjestad. Phone 582-4622 or 583-6000. <http://www.shoprenaissancearuba.com>.

SPECIALTY STORES

African Art Boutique

After touring the ostrich farm, visit this interesting shop that sells crafts and art from Zimbabwe. Products are made of such high-quality woods as teak and mahogany. Woven tapestries, animal figures and bowls are among the choice items. Open daily 9 am-5 pm. Paradera (on the eastern side of the island), Aruba. Phone 585-9630.

Aruba Aloe

This local company focuses on skin- and hair-care products made from Aruban aloe. Tour the manufacturing plant in Hato or stop by one of the shops to pick up top quality lotions, shampoos and soaps. Various store locations, including at the cruise-ship dock, downtown and at Palm Beach shopping center. Pitastraat 115 (Hato), Oranjestad. Phone 588-3222. <http://www.arubaaloe.com>.

Beauty and the Beast

You'll find unique jewelry at this shop. Costume pieces and playful sterling silver designs are stylish and affordable. Open daily 10 am-7 pm. L.G. Smith Blvd. 82 (Renaissance Marketplace), Oranjestad. Phone 582-4622.

Bianco e Bianco

White can be the best color, or noncolor, in the Caribbean. Search this world-of-white store for top-quality cotton and linen household articles, accessories, and clothing for men, women and children. L.G. Smith Blvd. 95 (Palm Beach Plaza Mall), Noord. Phone 586-0097.

Ecco

Pick up Delft blue pottery, tablecloths and well-priced gifts at this shop. Open Monday-Saturday 8:30 am-6:30 pm. Caya G. F. Betico Croes 22, Oranjestad. Phone 582-4726.

Lazy Lizard

This whimsically named shop sells fun resort wear, souvenirs and gifts. Favorites include batik beach wraps and cuddly stuffed island critters, such as iguanas and parrots. There is a second location at Alhambra Mall. Open daily 9 am-10 pm. South Beach Center (next to Hard Rock Cafe), Palm Beach. Phone 586-6206.

Taste of Belgium

Chocolate fans will need a bit of willpower at this decadent shop. Irresistible choices include dark, milk and white chocolate in artistic shapes and sizes. Gift boxes are available to go, and a cozy sitting area serves coffee drinks and pastries for those who need instant gratification. The company also has a bistro in the Paseo Herencia shopping mall. Open Monday-Saturday 10 am-8 pm. L.G. Smith Blvd 82 (Renaissance Mall), Oranjestad. Phone 586-6388. <http://www.tasteofbelgium.aw>.

Terrafuse

This artistic studio is the perfect guide to glass blowing, glass bead making, kiln casting and ceramics workshops. It is also a gallery, where visitors can browse, watch the local artists as they work, buy an exclusive piece. You can even create your own glass accessories by arranging an appointment to learn the craft. Open to the public Tuesday 3-5:30 pm and Thursday 9 am-12:30 pm. Turibana 14, Noord. Phone 586-7826 or 592-2978. <http://www.arubaglassceramics.com>.

DINING OVERVIEW

Aruba has a tremendous variety of restaurants, including Japanese, Indonesian, Dutch, French and Italian. Excellent local food can be found at the island's many cafes.

Among the local specialties are shrimp *en coco* (a delicacy made with brandy and coconut), *pastechi* (meat, shrimp or fish wrapped in a light crust), *funchi* (cornmeal) and lamb with *pan bati* (flat bread or pancakes). Top it all off with a taste of *quesillo*, a delicious caramel flan. Be sure to go to a restaurant offering a rijsttafel, an Indonesian buffet at your table that could feed an army.

The local beer is Balashi, brewed on the island (<http://www.balashi.com>). Imported beers from the Netherlands are also widely available.

Through the efforts of the Aruba Gastronomic Association, visitors can dine at more than 30 of Aruba's top eateries as part of a well-organized Dine-Around program. Prices for coupon books range from US\$117 for three dinners to US\$262 for seven dinners. Participating establishments put very few limits on your coupon value. The Wine-Around program features six top restaurants, and each US\$85 dinner voucher entitles the guest to a five-course meal with matching wines. Contact the association to purchase booklets. Phone 586-3797. <http://www.arubadining.com>.

If you are in Aruba around Christmas and you're brave, try the traditional Dutch Caribbean Christmas dish called *sulz*. Aruban cooks marinate a pig's ear and feet in vinegar with onions and hot pepper, boil it and serve it with bread.

Expect to pay within these guidelines for a meal for one, not including drinks, tax or tip: \$ = less than US\$15; \$\$ = US\$15-\$25; \$\$\$ = US\$26-\$50; and \$\$\$\$ = more than US\$50.

LOCAL & REGIONAL

Charlie's Bar

This long-standing tavern in southeast Aruba has reached legendary status. The walls are decorated with memorabilia from family, locals and legions of worldwide visitors, and every conceivable knickknack hangs from the ceiling. Local seafood specialties fill the menu. Monday-Saturday for lunch and dinner, bar open until 10:30 pm. Reservations accepted but not usually required. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards. Zeppenfeldtstraat 56, San Nicolas. Phone 584-5086.

Address

Zeppenfeldtstraat 56
San Nicolas, Aruba

Phone

584-5086

Cunukero

The name (Farmer) alludes to a story about a local farmer who lost his plantation, but kept his country house and the traditional style of home cooking you'll find there. Waitresses wear traditional dress, and portions are generous. Stews, soups, and typical entrees such as shark and grouper have an Aruban flair. The chicken salad with peas and mashed potatoes on top—colored with beet juice—is delicious. Top off your meal with the drink *chuculati pinda* (hot chocolate with milk and peanut butter) or one of the island's fresh fruit beverages. Daily lunch and dinner. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards. Tanki Leendert 145-K, Oranjestad. Phone 582-5281.

Address

Tanki Leendert 145-K
Oranjestad, Aruba

Phone

582-5281

Papiamento Restaurant

This 150-year-old family home—a true *cunucu* house—is chock-full of antiques and collector's items. If you're dining in the garden, be sure to roam the rooms inside. Caribbean dishes are presented with flair, with many beef and seafood dishes cooked and served on a sizzling hot stone. Those in the know order the house specialty—a clay pot for two filled with seafood, vegetables and fine herbs (it's not on the menu). Open Monday-Saturday for dinner. Reservations recommended. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards. Washington 61, Noord. Phone 594-5504. .

Address

Washington 61
Noord, Aruba

Phone

594-5504

Pinchos Grill & Bar

Located on a pier hovering over the Caribbean sea, Pinchos Grill & Bar is a chic yet casual restaurant that is equally known for its food and ambience. Owners Robby Peterson and Anabela Peterson de Sousa bring decades of experience in the hospitality industry to the open-air dining spot. Each entree, whether it is seafood, meat or vegetables, is expertly cooked over an open grill. The cocktails are well-crafted, including frozen options, and there is a large wine list. Live music is featured on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Open nightly for dinner. L.G. Smith Blvd. 7 (at Aruba Surfside Marina), Oranjestad. Phone 583-2666. .

Address

L.G. Smith Blvd. 7
Oranjestad, Aruba

Phone

583-2666

Zeerovers

Zeerovers is the ultimate local dining experience, an ultra-casual waterside restaurant that serves only the day's fresh catch along with a handful of side items, such as French fries and plantains. The fish is so fresh that you may see the fishing boat come in with the day's haul—including your meal. The open-air restaurant permits diners to sit on the patio or on the dock that extends into the water so you feel as if you are dining on the ocean. Guests are asked to place their orders at the front of the restaurant where it's weighed to determine the exact price. Adding to its casual ambience, Zeerovers serves its fish no-frills-style: on paper plates and with plastic utensils. Savaneta 270, Savaneta. Phone 584-2544.

Address

Savaneta 270
Savaneta, Aruba

Phone

584-2544

PERSONAL SAFETY

The disappearance of American student Natalee Holloway in 2005 raised travelers' fears about crime in Aruba, but the crime rate on the island remains low. Some petty crime (including the occasional armed robbery) occurs in Aruba, so take the usual precautions: Lock your hotel room and don't leave valuables unattended on the beach. Theft of rental cars also occurs, so be sure to lock your vehicle and park it in a safe place.

The downtown area and hotel strip are well-lighted and patrolled by security, but visitors should avoid dark streets and isolated areas. It is also wise to travel in groups after dark or when visiting remote sections of the island. If you plan to go out alone, take the precaution of informing a companion or the hotel reception desk of your destination and expected return time.

For the latest information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency. In the U.S., visit <http://travel.state.gov/travel>.

HEALTH

The sun can be intense, so use sunscreen, moisturizing lotion, sunglasses and a hat. You can eat the food and drink the water in Aruba without consequence. Don't forget a comfortable pair of walking shoes.

Medical facilities in Oranjestad are excellent, including the Dr. Horacio Oduber Hospital just off L.G. Smith Boulevard (phone 587-4300; <http://www.arubahospital.com>). A recompression center for divers is adjacent to the hospital. Phone 730-7246.

For medical help, dial 587-4300. In an emergency, dial 911 for police, ambulance or fire.

For more information, contact your country's health-advisory agency. Toll-free 800-232-4636 (in the U.S.). <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/aruba.aspx>.

DISABLED ADVISORY

Aruba is becoming more handicap accessible, but older parts of the towns and most natural attractions are difficult to manage for visitors with mobility limitations. A list of hotels and tour operators offering special facilities or services to visitors with disabilities is available at http://www.aruba.com/TraveltoAruba/Travelers_with_Disabilities.aspx.

Queen Beatrix International Airport meets all standards set by the American with Disabilities Act, and travelers with physical restrictions may request specially outfitted rooms, wheelchairs and canes at most of the larger hotels. Before leaving home, check with one of the large tour operators or the tourist bureau about transportation to and access at major attractions on the island.

Red Sail Sports participates in programs for handicapped divers, and De Palm Tours has a bus equipped for travelers with disabilities. Medical equipment and health-care products are available through Labco. Phone 582-6651. <http://www.labcoaruba.com>.

Adapted Happy Wheels rents handicap-adapted recreational vehicles and equipment, including a beach wheelchair. Phone 593-0812.

DOS & DON'TS

Do conserve water. The island depends on costly desalination for all of its drinking water.

Don't casually inquire whether a restaurant serves sushi. The word means "garbage" in Papiamentu.

Don't litter the beaches: There's a stiff penalty—around US\$275—and the more you litter, the higher the fine.

Don't remove any plants or parts of plants (especially cacti) from Arikok National Park.

Do get to know the people of Aruba. Their longtime tourist slogan is "One Happy Island," and you'll find that spirit reflected in many of the locals you meet.

Don't go topless while swimming or sunbathing. It's only permitted on private nude beaches, such as Renaissance Island, not public beaches.

Do support nonprofit organizations such as Arikok National Park Foundation, Donkey Sanctuary Aruba and Philip's Animal Garden to help safeguard the island's flora and fauna.

Geostats

Passport/Visa Requirements: All U.S. citizens must have a passport when traveling by air to or from Bermuda, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America and Mexico. Citizens of Canada, Mexico and the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda also must have a passport or other designated secure document to enter the U.S. Passports are required for land crossings at the Canadian and Mexican borders with the U.S. and for cruise passengers returning to the U.S. from Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada or Bermuda. Reconfirm travel-document requirements with your carrier prior to departure.

Proof of onward passage is required. Certain airlines may require confirmation of return flight before departure, but the major airlines do not.

Population: 106,113.

Languages: Dutch (official), English, Papiamentu (official), Spanish.

Predominant Religions: Christian (Roman Catholic, Protestant), Jewish.

Time Zone: 4 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (-4 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is not observed.

Voltage Requirements: 110 volts.

Telephone Codes: 297, country code;

Currency Exchange

ATMs that accept foreign bank cards are located at more than 50 locations throughout the island, including the airport, shopping malls and banks. This is the best way to obtain currency. Most banks are open Monday-Friday 8 am-noon and 1:30-4 pm.

Aruba has its own currency, the florin. However, there is really no reason for U.S. visitors to exchange money. U.S. dollars are accepted everywhere. Personal checks are not accepted; traveler's checks are a bit old-fashioned and troublesome, but still widely accepted. Major credit cards are the preferred and safest method of paying for all but small purchases, tips, taxi fare and snacks at small restaurants.

Taxes

Aruba's sales tax, which is often called the BBO (*belasting op bedrijfsomzetten* in Dutch) is 1.5%.

Be aware that there is a 9.5% government room tax and an average 12%-17% hotel service charge added to your room rate. Energy fees and other charges also may be tacked on. Note that the service charge does not go to the housekeeping staff, so an additional tip is appreciated. Determine in advance if your rate includes these taxes and other charges.

U.S. citizens must also pay an airport departure tax of US\$36.75 (US\$33.50 for others) if staying in Aruba longer than 24 hours. This is often included in the airline ticket price.

Tipping

A 15% service charge is normally included in the bill, but may not be given to the wait staff. If in doubt, ask the restaurant manager. If the service charge is not added or given to the person who serves you, leave a 10%-20% tip for good service. Tip taxi drivers 10% of the fare and bellmen or porters US\$1-\$2 per bag.

Housekeepers, bartenders, tour guides and other service providers do not expect tips, but will always appreciate a kind gesture, especially when they're doing an excellent job. Ask whether tipping is allowed to avoid complications.

Weather

Aruba is consistently warm throughout the year, and the humidity is very low. The average day temperatures are in the 70s-80s F/23-32 C, with nights in the 60s-70s F/15-27 C. It's rainy November-February, but the rain seldom lasts longer than half an hour. Annual rainfall is less than 20 in/50 cm. The coolest months are January and February, and the hottest are August and September.

The island is outside the main hurricane belt, so it's one of the best islands to visit July-October, when the rest of the Caribbean is threatened (even so, our favorite time to visit Aruba is January-June).

Trade winds blow steadily from the northeast year-round (the breezes can be refreshing, but you'll have to hang on to your hat at the beach).

What to Wear

Even though Aruba is an informal island, it's considered rude to wear swimsuits anywhere other than at the beach or pool. Do not sit in a taxi in a wet suit, or enter a business barefooted (or bare-chested).

Most casinos do not require men to wear jackets in the evening, but some upscale restaurants expect evening diners to dress smartly. Casual summer clothing is appropriate in most other circumstances, excluding conferences and business meetings.

Take a light sweater for cool evenings or air-conditioned restaurants or casinos.

Topless sunbathing is frowned upon at public beaches but can be found at some private resorts, such as Renaissance Island.

Telephone

In Oranjestad, international calls can be made at hotels, at the post office and at Servicio di Telecomunicacion di Aruba (SETAR) sites throughout the island, including at the airport in Oranjestad. Expect hotels to add a service charge to the cost of international calls. SETAR offices also sell calling cards to make international calls from the phones on the street or from SETAR sites. <http://www.setar.aw>.

Most cell phones work with a SIM card, and prepaid cell phones are available from several companies on the island, including Digicel. <http://www.digicelaruba.com>.

Internet Access

Aruba is one of the best-wired islands in the Caribbean; you'll find in-room Internet access and/or Wi-Fi (often free) in many resorts and hotels. Oranjestad has two Internet cafes, and there are at least 30 Wi-Fi hotspots on the island, including a location at the cruise terminal, the airport and the National Library in Oranjestad. For more Wi-Fi locations, visit <http://www.wifi-aruba.com/hotspots.php>.

iZone Internet Cafe and Business Center

Offers Wi-Fi and high-speed Internet access on new computers. Paseo Herencia Mall, J.E. Irausquin Blvd. 382-A (in the high-rise resort area), Aruba. Phone 586-7583.

Address

Paseo Herencia Mall, J.E.
Irausquin Blvd. 382-A
Aruba

Phone

586-7583

Mail & Package Services

The main post office in Oranjestad is on J.E. Irausquin Boulevard (phone 582-1900). It's open Monday-Friday 7:30 am-noon and 1:30-4 pm. Federal Express receptacles are also available, one of which is near the cruise-ship terminal across the street from the Royal Plaza Mall.

A FedEx Service Center is located at Wayaca 31-A, Oranjestad (phone 582-9039). UPS is at L.G. Smith Blvd. 128, Oranjestad. Phone 588-0640.

Newspapers & Magazines

Aruba Nights, *Aruba Experience* and *Island Temptations* are free publications that are available in hotel lobbies and other tourist locations. These magazines publish happy hours, theme-night dinners, concerts, movies and other entertainment options.

The local daily newspaper, *Bon Dia*, is printed in Papiamentu and on sale throughout the island. The English-language edition, *Aruba Today* (<http://www.arubatoday.com>), is available online, as well as *Aruba Daily* (<http://aruba-daily.com>) and *The Morning News Aruba* (<http://www.themorningnewsaruba.com>).

Arubook is a smartphone app with a business directory, event calendar, map, coupon box and daily info, designed to keep locals and visitors on top of everything in Aruba.

Transportation

Regular public bus service covers a wide arc around Oranjestad and includes the hotel strip, San Nicolas and all but the remote sections on the windward side of the island. Most hotels have a schedule at the reception desk and a nearby bus stop.

If there are two or more people in your group, taking taxis may be your best bet. Rental cars, Jeeps and motor scooters also are readily available at the airport, hotels and in town.

Air

Queen Beatrix Airport (AUA) is a modern facility 2.5 mi/4 km southeast of Oranjestad. Recent and ongoing improvements include new shops and restaurants in the refurbished and enlarged terminal. One runway serves both arriving and departing aircraft, and is long enough to accommodate jumbo jets. Passengers board and deplane through jet-way bridges. A tourist information desk, bank and shops are located inside the two-level terminal, which is air conditioned and equipped with escalators and elevators.

Airline service changes seasonally, but major international carriers include American, Continental, Delta, KLM, Jet Blue and Air Canada.

Major rental car companies maintain branches at the airport. A taxi to downtown Oranjestad costs about US\$18,

and to the hotel area, about US\$25.

Public buses operated by Arubus travel frequently from a stop just off the airport grounds to Oranjestad and the hotel strip. Phone 588-2300. <http://www.arubus.com>.

Visitors returning to the U.S. must clear customs in Aruba. The procedure is a bit tricky to navigate, but follow the signs and arrows and you'll be rewarded when you land in the U.S.

Aruba's airport is one of only three or four in the Caribbean that use jet ways. <http://www.airportaruba.com>.

Car

Rental cars are available at the airport and near the cruise-ship terminal. Prices start at about US\$35 a day. (Jeeps and vans are priced much higher.) Aruba recognizes valid driver's licenses issued in the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and Australia. The renter must be at least 23 years old and have been licensed for at least three years.

Main roads on the island are in good repair, but some dirt roads to popular tourist sites can be a bit bumpy. If you plan to visit more rural parts of the island, rent a Jeep or another vehicle with a high suspension. Ask for a road map when you rent the vehicle, or use the maps available in several attraction guides. The most complete one we found was in *Aruba Quick Reference Guide*, available from the tourism office (and sometimes found in hotel brochure racks).

Driving is on the right. Be aware that residents drive aggressively.

Public Transportation

Public buses (Arubus) are inexpensive (US\$2.30 round-trip) and are a fairly good way to get around most parts of the island. But they can also be crowded and slow at times. Most stop running after 6 pm.

The main bus depot is a large, modern facility across from the cruise-ship terminal in Oranjestad at Sabana Blanco 67. L-10 is the tourist route from town to the high-rise district, as the Palm Beach hotel area is known locally. Buses run every half-hour on the route. Phone 588-2300. <http://www.arubus.com>.

The newest public transportation service on the island is also one-of-a-kind in the Caribbean: a solar-powered trolley, or tramcar. Although the center of Oranjestad is still under construction, this green trolley is already picking up passengers at the cruise terminal for a scenic ride through downtown. Fare is US\$1.

Ship

Several cruise ships include Aruba on Caribbean itineraries. They dock in Oranjestad within walking distance of shops, restaurants and a variety of street vendors. Taxis and tour operators meet arriving ships; the public bus stop and car rental agencies are nearby.

The modern terminal has a tourist information desk, interactive computer information, an ATM, public telephones and a small gift shop.

Taxi

Determine the fare prior to getting in—taxis are not metered, but fares are set—about US\$18 from airport to downtown, US\$22 to the low-rise hotels, US\$25 to Palm Beach high-rise resorts. Fares increase after midnight and on Sunday and holidays.

There is a US\$6 minimum fare. Taxi drivers are often amenable to serving as private tour guides, charging around US\$45 per hour for up to four passengers.

Taxis are abundant, most drivers have participated in the training provided by the tourism board and speak clear English. Hotels and restaurants will arrange for taxi service, or phone dispatch at 582-2116.

For More Information

Tourist Offices

Aruba: Aruba Tourism Authority, L.G. Smith Blvd. 8, Oranjestad. Phone 582-3777. Fax 583-4702. <http://www.aruba.com>.

U.S.: Aruba Tourism Authority, 100 Plaza Drive, First Floor, Secaucus, NJ 07094. Phone 800-862-7822 or 201-558-1110, fax: 201-558-4767.

Aruba Embassies

As a part of the Netherlands, Aruba is represented by Dutch embassies.

Canada: Embassy of the Netherlands, 350 Albert St., Suite 2020, Ottawa, ON K1R 1A4. Phone 613-237-5030 or 877-388-2443. Fax 613-237-6471. <http://www.netherlandsembassy.ca>.

U.S.: Embassy of the Netherlands, 4200 Linnean Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20008. Phone 877-388-2443 or 202-244-5300. Fax 202-362-3430. <http://www.netherlands-embassy.org>.

Foreign Embassies Serving Aruba

Canada: Canada is represented by the Embassy of Canada in Venezuela: Avenida Francisco de Miranda con Altamira Sur., Altamira, Caracas. Phone 58-212-600-3000 or 58-212-264-0833. Fax 58-212-600-3017.

U.S.: The U.S. is represented by its consulate in Curacao: J.B. Gorsiraweg 1, Willemstad. Phone 599-9-461-3066. Fax 599-9-461-6489. <http://curacao.usconsulate.gov>

Recommended Guidebooks

The Unofficial Guide to Cruises by Kay Showker (Unofficial Guides).

Adventure Guide to Aruba, Bonaire & Curacao by Lynne M. Sullivan (Hunter Publishing).

Additional Reading

An Island Away and *Under A Blue Flag* by Daniel Putkowski (Hawser Press).

Calendar

Carnival is the most important celebration on the island, and it lasts more than a month, beginning around the second week in January and continuing into February. The celebration kicks off with a Children's Carnival that is followed by music, dance, costumes, *tumba* (traditional carnival and dancing) and other competitions. The highlight for most people is the Grand Parade, held on the final Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Fat Tuesday features the Old Mask Parade and the burning of King Momo, a traditional Carnival symbol. <http://www.visitaruba.com>.

The Soul Beach Music Festival is held in May (<http://www.soulbeach.net>). Also in May is the Aruba Food & Wine Festival. June brings the International Triathlon, and windsurfers of all skill levels compete in the Hi-Winds Amateur World Challenge. The island plays host to an annual International Film Festival in June (<http://www.arubafilmfest.com>). July starts off with the Annual Aruba Reef Care Project, where residents and tourists pitch in to clean the beaches and sea floor, and have fun doing it.

In August, Tierra del Sol Golf Resort hosts the International Pro-Am Golf Tournament. (<http://www.tierradelsol.com>), and Cafe Rembrandt hosts a three-day regatta for yachts, beachcats, sunfishes, windsurfers and kitesurfers. <http://aruba-regatta.com>.

Music is part of most events, but fans especially look forward to the Caribbean Sea Jazz Festival in October (<http://www.caribbeanseajazz.com>). Racing boats from the U.S., Europe and Venezuela compete in the Aruba Heineken Catamaran Regatta in November. <http://www.arubaregatta.com>.

If you're in Oranjestad on a Tuesday, try to attend the Bon Bini Festival in the courtyard inside the fort 6:30-8:30 pm. *Bon bini* means "welcome" in Papiamentu, and Arubans make visitors feel right at home with local music, dancing, food and crafts.

St. Nicholas Day (6 December) marks the beginning of the holiday season in Aruba. On this day, Saint Nicholas and his colorful helpers arrive by boat in Oranjestad and distribute gifts and sweets to children. The festivities continue throughout the month with a mix of Latin and international influences toward Christmas. In addition to fireworks at midnight on New Year's Eve, singers and musicians go from house to house (and, in the tourist areas, from hotel to hotel). They even go from store to store on downtown Main Street. Don't expect to get *any* sleep if you're visiting on that night. *Dande* is the music they play. The songs ask that you be blessed and have a happy year that brings children and prosperity. Of course, the singers pass the hat, and the more you give, the more they sing.

Fans of traditional *dande* music look forward to the Dande Festival that takes place every year around the holiday season. More than 50 singers accompanied by typical musical groups present their original works.

The Carubbian Festival in San Nicolas is a relatively new event and already very popular with locals and tourists. Every Thursday night 6-10 pm, the streets of Aruba's Sunrise City are filled with music, dancing, carnival costumes, local cuisine, arts, crafts and a lot of ambiente (atmosphere). Packages that include round-trip transportation are sold at the hotels.

For more information, contact the Aruba Tourism Authority. Phone 582-3777. <http://www.aruba.com>.