

## Aruba

Most of the island of Aruba gleams with a fierce, extraterrestrial beauty, its battered coast defying development. But balmy sunshine, silky sand, aquamarine waters, and constant trade winds (so strong they've bent Aruba's trademark watapana tree - commonly known as the divi-divi tree – at a surreal 45-degree angle) have made the calmer southwest coast a tourist mecca. Most of its major hotels sit side by side down a single strip of shore, with restaurants, exotic boutiques, fiery floor shows, and glitzy casinos on the premises. Nearly every night there are theme parties, treasure hunts, beachside barbecues, and fish fries with steel bands and limbo or Carnival dancers. Surround all this with warm blue-green waters whose visibility extends up to 100 ft (30m), and you've got the perfect destination for anyone who wants sun salted with lots of activities.

The A in the ABC Islands (the other two being Bonaire and Curaçao), Aruba is small - only 19½ miles (31½ km) long and 6 miles (9½ km) across at its widest point. Once a member of the Netherlands Antilles, it became an independent entity within the Netherlands in 1986, with its own royally appointed governor and a 21-member elected parliament.

Aruba's stable economy was once based on oil, after a refinery was built in San Nicolas in 1924.

The refinery supplied oil to the Allies in World War II, and by 1949 it employed 8,300 people.

These days, however, education, housing, and health care are financed by tourism, and the island's population of 95,000 recognizes visitors as valued guests. The national anthem proclaims, "The greatness of our people is their great cordiality," and this is no exaggeration.

Waiters serve you with smiles and hotel hospitality directors appear delighted to fulfill your special needs.

Sun, friendly and courteous service, modern and efficient amenities, golf and tennis clubs, casinos, glorious beaches, duty-free shopping, and remarkably varied cuisine are all factors that help fill Aruba's many hotel rooms. But the island's distinctive beauty lies in its countryside - full of rocky deserts, divi-divi trees, cactus jungles alive with the chattering of wild parakeets, secluded coves, and blue vistas with crashing waves. With its cooling trade winds, low humidity, and average temperature of 82°F (28°C), Aruba has the climate of a paradise.

**Arriving & Departing By Air** Flights leave daily to Aruba's state-of-the-art **Reina Beatrix International Airport (AUA)** (PHONE: 297/ 5242424) from New York, Miami, and other American cities. The U.S. Customs checkpoint is able to handle 2.5 million passengers annually.

Aruba is 2½ hours from Miami and 4½ hours from New York.

### Carriers

**American Airlines** (PHONE: 297/582 2700, [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com)) offers daily nonstop service from New York and Miami and daily flights from Boston except Wednesdays

**Continental Airlines** (PHONE: 800/525-0280, [www.continental.com](http://www.continental.com)) has nonstop service four times a week from Newark and twice a week from Houston.

**Delta** (PHONE: 297/58 0044, [www.delta-airlines.com](http://www.delta-airlines.com)) flies nonstop daily from Atlanta and New York.

**JetBlue** (PHONE: 297-588-5388, [www.jetblue.com](http://www.jetblue.com)) flies daily from New York and three days in the week from Boston.

**United** (PHONE: 800/241-6522, [www.united.com](http://www.united.com)) flies from Chicago nonstop to Aruba on Saturday and Sunday.

**US Airways** (PHONE: 297/588 4166, [www.usairways.com](http://www.usairways.com)) has daily nonstop flights from Philadelphia to Aruba.

### **Transfers Between the Airport and Town**

**By Taxi** A taxi from the airport to most hotels takes about 20 minutes. You'll find a taxi stand right outside the baggage claim area.

**By Bus** Buses run hourly trips between the beach hotels and Oranjestad. The one-way fare is \$1.35 (\$2.25 round-trip), and exact change is preferred. Buses also run down the coast from Oranjestad to San Nicolas for the same fare. For schedules, contact the **Aruba Tourism Authority** (L. G. Smith Blvd. 172, Eagle Beach, PHONE: 297/582 3777).

**By Car** Traffic is sparse, and you can't get lost. Highway 1A travels southbound along the western coast, and 1B is simply northbound along the same road.

### **Car Rentals**

Car rental companies are located in front of the airport. As convenience the Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino offers onsite the Economy car rental desk to rent a car.

### **Requirements**

You'll need a valid driver's license to rent a car, and you must meet the minimum age requirements of each rental service. A deposit of \$500 (or a signed credit-card slip) is required.

### **Road Conditions**

Aside from the major highways, the island's winding roads are poorly marked (though this is slowly changing). International traffic signs and Dutch-style traffic signals (with an extra light for a turning lane) can be misleading if you're not used to them; use extreme caution, especially at intersections, until you grasp the rules of the road.

### **Rules of the Road**

Speed limits are rarely posted, but are usually 80 kph (50 mph).

**By Taxi** There's a dispatch office at the airport; you can also flag down taxis on the street (look for license plates with a "TX" tag). Rates are fixed (i.e., there are no meters), though you and the driver should agree on the fare before your ride begins.

### **Contacts & Resources Business Hours Banks**

Bank hours are weekdays 8:15-5:45; some close from noon to 1 (the Caribbean Mercantile Bank

at the airport is open Saturday 9-4 and Sunday 9-1).

### **Post offices**

The central post office in Oranjestad is across from the San Francisco Church and is open weekdays 7:30 to noon and 1 to 4:30.

### **Shops**

Shops are generally open Monday-Saturday 8:30-6. Some stores stay open through the lunch hour, noon-2, and many open when cruise ships are in port on Sunday and holidays.

**Customs & Duties** Most Caribbean islands wave tourists through immigration and customs with only a cursory question or two. If you're yachting through the islands, note that harbor customs are often thorough.

### **Arriving in Aruba**

These rules generally apply throughout the Caribbean: you're limited to bringing *in* 2 liters of alcohol, 2 cartons of cigarettes, and a reasonable amount of duty-free goods for your personal use. More than that, and you'll be asked to pay a hefty import tax.

**Electricity** Aruba runs on a 110-volt cycle, the same as in the United States; outlets are usually the two-prong variety. Total blackouts are rare, and most large hotels have backup generators. Help Arubans conserve water and energy: turn off air-conditioning when you leave your room, and don't let water run unnecessarily.

**Emergencies Ambulance and Fire** (PHONE: 911).

**Police** (PHONE: 100).

### **Hospital Emergency Rooms**

**Dr. Horacio Oduber Hospital** (L. G. Smith Blvd., across from Costa Linda Beach Resort and the Alhambra Bazaar and Casino, PHONE: 297/587 4300).

### **Pharmacies**

**Botica Eagle** (L. G. Smith Blvd., near hospital, PHONE: 297/587 6103).

**Etiquette & Behavior** It's best not to mention to residents how "American" everything is – many have settled here from South America and Europe. Aruba has a separate status with the Kingdom of the Netherlands, allowing it to handle its own aviation, customs, immigration, communications, and other internal matters, but the island does retain strong economic, cultural, and political ties with Holland.

### **Guided Tours Boat Tours**

There are snorkeling, dinner and dancing, and sunset party cruises to choose from, priced from \$25 to \$60 per person. Many smaller operators work out of their homes; they often offer to pick you up (and drop you off) at your hotel or meet you at a particular hotel pier.

**De Palm Tours** (L. G. Smith Blvd. 142, Oranjestad, PHONE: 297/582 4400)

**Jolly Pirates** (PHONE: 297/583 7355).

**Pelican Watersports** (J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 230, Oranjestad, PHONE: 297/587 2302).

**Red Sail Sports** (J. E. Irausquin Blvd. 83, Oranjestad, PHONE: 297/586 1603)

**Tattoo Party Cruises** (PHONE: 297/586 2010).

### **Orientation Tours**

**De Palm Tours** (L. G. Smith Blvd. 142, Oranjestad, PHONE: 297/582 4400 or 800/766-6016) has a near monopoly on Aruban sightseeing; you can make reservations through its general office or at hotel tour-desk branches. The basic 3½-hour tour hits such highlights as the Santa Anna Church, the Casibari Rock Formation, the Natural Bridge, and the Gold Smelter Ruins. Wear tennis or hiking shoes, and bring a lightweight jacket or wrap (the air-conditioned bus gets cold).

A full-day Jeep Adventure tour takes you to sights that would be difficult for you to find on your own. Bring a bandanna to cover your mouth; the ride on rocky dirt roads can get dusty.

### **Special-Interest Tours**

Explore an underwater reef teeming with marine life without getting wet. **Atlantis Submarines** (Seaport Village Marina, Oranjestad, PHONE: 297/583 6090) operates a 65-ft air-conditioned sub that takes 48 passengers 95-150 ft (29-46 m) below the surface along Barcadera Reef. Make reservations one day in advance.

The **Seaworld Explorer** (PHONE: 297/586 2416) is semisubmersible and allows you to sit and view Aruba's marine habitat from 5 ft (1½ m) below the surface.

**Health** Mosquitoes and flies can be bothersome during the odd rain shower, so pack some repellent. Tap water is okay to drink.

**Language** Everyone on the island speaks English, but the official language is Dutch. Most locals, however, speak Papiamentu - a fascinating, rapid-fire mix of Spanish, Dutch, English, French, and Portuguese - in normal conversation. Here are a few helpful phrases: *bon dia* (good day), *bon nochi* (good night), *masha danki* (thank you very much).

**Mail** You can send an airmail letter from Aruba to the United States or Canada for AFI2, and a postcard for AFI1.15; a letter to Europe is AFI1.75, a postcard AFI1. Prices to Australia and New Zealand may be slightly higher. When addressing letters to Aruba, don't worry about the lack of "formal" addresses (in some places) or postal codes; the island's postal service knows where to go.

### **Money ATMs**

If you need fast cash, you'll find ATMs that accept international cards at banks in Oranjestad, at the major malls, and along the roads leading to the hotel strip.

### **Currency**

The official currency is the Aruban florin (AFI), also called the guilder. The Dutch Antillean florin - used on Bonaire and Curaçao - isn't accepted here. Arubans happily accept U.S. dollars virtually everywhere,

so there's no real need to exchange money, except for necessary pocket change (for soda machines or pay phones).

### **Taxes**

The airport departure tax is a whopping \$34.50, but the fee is usually included in your ticket price.

Hotels usually add an 11% service charge to the bill and collect a 6% government tax.

For purchases you'll pay a 6.5% ABB tax (value-added tax) in all but the duty-free shops.

### **Tipping**

Restaurants generally include a 10%-15% service charge on the bill; when in doubt, ask. If service isn't included, a 10% tip is standard; if it is included, it's still customary to add something extra, usually small change, at your discretion.

Taxi drivers expect a 10%-15% tip, but it isn't mandatory. Porters and bellmen should receive about \$2 per bag; chambermaids about \$2 a day.

### **Passports & Visas Entering Aruba**

U.S. and Canadian citizens need a valid passport. Visitors from the member countries of the European Union must carry their European Union Travel Card as well as a passport. All other nationalities must also have a valid passport.

### **Passport Offices**

The best time to apply for a passport, or to renew your old one, is in fall or winter. Before any trip, check your passport's expiration date, and, if necessary, renew it as soon as possible.

Australian Citizens

**National Passport Information Center** (PHONE: 900/225-5674; calls are 35¢ per minute for automated service, \$1.05 per minute for operator service; [travel.state.gov/passport\\_services.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport_services.html)).

**Safety** Arubans are very friendly, so you needn't be afraid to stop and ask anyone for directions.

It's a relatively safe island, but commonsense rules still apply. Lock your rental car and leave valuables in your hotel safe. Don't leave bags unattended in the airport, on the beach, or on tour transports.

**Telephones** To call Aruba direct from the United States, dial 011-297-phone number, followed by the five-digit number in Aruba. To call from elsewhere abroad, substitute 011 with the country of origin's international access code.

### **International Calls**

The country code for the United States and Canada is 1; for Australia, 61; for New Zealand, 64; and for the United Kingdom, 44.

International, direct, and operator-assisted calls from Aruba are possible to all countries in the world via hotel operators or from the Government Long Distance Telephone, Telegraph, and Radio Office (SETAR), in the post-office building in Oranjestad.

AT&T customers can dial 800-8000 from special phones at the cruise dock and in the airport's

arrival and departure halls From other phones dial 121 to contact the SETAR International Operator to place a collect or AT&T Calling Card call.

### **Public Phones**

When making calls on Aruba, simply dial the five-digit number. Local calls from pay phones, which accept both local currency and phone cards, cost AFl.25. The Aruba Marriott's Bazaar rents prepaid cell phones for \$15 dollar a day. This can be used to make local as well as international calls.

### **Visitor Information Tourist Offices**

In Aruba: **Aruba Tourism Authority** (L. G. Smith Blvd. 172, Eagle Beach, PHONE: 297/582 3777).

At Home: **Aruba Tourism Authority** (PHONE: 800/862-7822, [www.aruba.com](http://www.aruba.com)).

**In the U.S.:** (1 Financial Plaza, Suite 136, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33394, PHONE: 954/767-6477; 3455 Peach Tree Rd. NE, Suite 500, Atlanta, GA 30326, PHONE: 404/892-7822; 5901 N. Cicero, Suite 301, Chicago, IL 60646, PHONE: 773/202-5054; 1000 Harbor Blvd., Ground Level, Weehawken, NJ 07087, PHONE: 201/330-0800; 12707 North Freeway, Suite 138, Houston, TX 77060-1234, PHONE: 281/872-7822).

**In Canada:** (Business Centre 5875, Suite 201, Hwy. 7, Vaughan, Ontario L4L 8Z7, Canada, PHONE: 905/264-3434).

**When to Go** The Caribbean high season is traditionally winter - from December 15 to April 14 - when northern weather is at its worst. During this season, you're guaranteed the most entertainment at resorts and the most people with whom to enjoy it. It's also the most fashionable, the most expensive, and the most popular time to visit - and most hotels are heavily booked. You must make reservations at least two or three months in advance for the very best places (sometimes a year in advance for the most exclusive spots).

Hotel prices drop 20%-50% after April 15; airfares and cruise prices also fall. Saving money isn't the only reason to visit the Caribbean during the off-season. Temperatures are only a few degrees warmer than at other times of the year, and many islands now schedule their carnivals, music festivals, and other events during the off-season. Late August, September, October, and early November are least crowded.

February or March witnesses a spectacular Carnival, a riot of color whirling to the tunes of steel bands and culminating in the Grand Parade, where some of the floats rival the extravagance of those in the Big Easy's Mardi Gras.

The Caribbean climate is fairly constant. The average year-round temperatures for the region are 78°F-88°F. The temperature extremes are 65°F low, 95°F high; but, as everyone knows, it's the humidity, not the heat, that makes you suffer, especially when the two go hand in hand. You can count on downtown shopping areas being hot at midday any time of the year, but air-conditioning provides some respite. Spend the day near beaches, where water and trade winds can keep you cool, and shop early or late in the day. As part of the fall rainy season, hurricanes occasionally sweep through the Caribbean. Check

the news daily and keep abreast of brewing tropical storms. The rainy season consists mostly of brief showers interspersed with sunshine. You can watch the clouds thicken, feel the rain, then have brilliant sunshine dry you off, all while remaining on your lounge chair. A spell of overcast days or heavy rainfall is unusual, as everyone will tell you.

### **Holidays**

New Year's Day, Betico Croes's Birthday (a politician who aided Aruba's transition to semiindependence; Jan. 25), Carnival Monday (Feb.) National Anthem and Flag Day (Mar. 18), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Queen's Birthday (Apr. 30), Labor Day (May 1), Ascension Day, Christmas (Dec. 25-26).