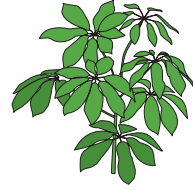


# Aruba

## Overview



**A**ruba is one of the most popular destinations in the Caribbean. Although it's the smallest of the ABC Islands (just over 19 miles long and six miles across its widest section), it has done the most to promote itself as a tourist destination. Visitors have fallen for the hype and returned again and again for the excellent beaches, perfect weather, superb resorts, and lively nightlife.

The vivacious capital of **Oranjestad** (oranJUSat) is packed with boutiques, restaurants, casinos, and nightclubs. Its lovely Dutch architecture mixes with bright Caribbean color to create a theme-park-like downtown waterfront area.

Just to the north, a dazzling white beach stretches up the west coast. A string of low-rise hotels and casual restaurants line up along the sand and directly across a narrow road. Less than a half-mile farther north, the high-rise resorts, glitzy casinos, and chic restaurants begin. The landmark **California Lighthouse** stands at the island's northernmost point.

South of Oranjestad, a good road leads to the fishing village of **Savaneta**, the former capital, and **San Nicolas**, the second-largest town on the island. Inland, the terrain turns rugged, good roads taper into rutted dirt paths, and adventurous tourists discover a wild countryside full of cacti, iguanas, and house-sized rock formations.

The wave-battered **east coast** features sand dunes, limestone cliffs, a photogenic **Natural Bridge**, and a boulder-protected **Natural Pool**. **Arikok National Park**, just south and inland from the pool, covers almost 20% of the island and protects a vast ecological wonderland of exotic plants and animals.

### IN THIS CHAPTER

- Overview
- A Brief History
- Official Business
- Unique Celebrations
- Getting Here
- Leaving Aruba
- Getting Around
- Touring the Island
- Adventures on Water
- Adventures on Land
- Shopping
- Where to Stay
- Where to Eat
- Nightlife
- Island Facts & Contacts

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## A Dozen Reasons to Visit

- Best beaches in the ABCs.
  - Colorful Dutch architecture.
  - Luxury resorts with all the amenities.
  - Friendly residents who welcome tourists in many languages.
  - A wild, arid countryside with spectacular geological formations.
  - Great dive sites and the largest shipwreck in the Caribbean.
  - Constant trade winds for windsurfing.
  - An eco-friendly national park.
  - A Robert Trent Jones, Jr.-designed championship golf course.
  - World-class casinos and nightclubs.
  - Shopping malls and designer boutiques.
  - Reasonably priced restaurants with international cuisine.
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## A Brief History

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### ■ Early Inhabitants



The Archaeology Museum of Aruba displays evidence that a semi-nomadic tribe of Amerindians lived on the island approximately 4,000 years ago. Though they left little evidence of their daily life, they probably lived in small family groups of perhaps a dozen people and survived on fish, conch,

and turtle meat.

The **Caiquetios**, a subgroup of Arawak Indians who migrated to Aruba from South America, arrived around 1000 AD. They also were fishermen, but they farmed a bit too. Archeologists assume the island was less arid at that time, before trees were harvested for their lumber and wild goats were allowed to graze indiscriminately. Ruins of former Caiquetio villages have been found around the towns of Savaneta and Santa Cruz, and Indian drawings are still visible inside caves and on rock formations.

Evidence of their fishing activities has been found along the portion of coast that is now lined with major hotels. The island's most powerful chief evidently ruled over the less prestigious chiefs of individual villages from his home near Santa Cruz. He, in turn, took his orders from the tribe's ruler on the mainland, now Venezuela.

## ■ The Puzzling Discovery

Lousy journal keeping, poor maps, and the exaggerated boasts of pretentious European explorers cloud the account of Aruba's discovery. However, most historians agree that the island was visited by Spanish-sponsored explorers sometime in 1499.

Spanish explorer **Alonso de Ojeda** (1466-1508), who got his start under the command of Christopher Columbus, ventured onto the northern coast of South America, near what is now Venezuela, soon after leaving Spain in May of 1499. He most likely spotted Aruba 20 miles to the north, or perhaps the visibility was poor, and a Caiquetio chief told him about the nearby island.

Either way, de Ojeda did not adequately document an island exploration or leave an irrefutable marker on Aruba. He did, however, write in his logbook, "I came... to an island of giants!" But, that remark could have been made about any of the islands, since archeological discoveries prove that Indians living in the Caribbean at that time were much larger than the average European.

Tradition and oral history claim that de Ojeda named the island *Oro Hubo* (Spanish for "It Had Gold" – *hubo* is the third person past tense of *haber*, to have). But he didn't bring any gold back to Spain on that expedition, and no one else claimed to find gold on Aruba until more than 300 years later. Some experts say the island's name came, not from *Oro Hubo*, but from the Caiquetio word *oibubai*, which means "guide."

Whether or not de Ojeda is responsible for the island's discovery or its name, a cross standing on a hill in the Aruban village of Santa Cruz is a modern-day tribute to him.

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### Who Was Alonso de Ojeda?

De Ojeda was born in Cuenca, Spain around 1466 to noble parents who had good connections, but no money. He was able to get a job working in the household of a duke, where he met Juan Rodriguez de Fonseca, a bishop who became the Patriarch of the Indies.

The bishop arranged for de Ojeda to join Christopher Columbus' second voyage to the New World in 1493. On this trip, he distinguished himself as a good sailor who was daring, but excessively cruel in clashes with natives living in the New World.

In 1499, he set out again as commander of his own fleet of three ships. One of his crew members was Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian director of a ship company that supplied vessels for long voyages. They reportedly explored the north coast of South America and went on to Cuba, Hispaniola (Dominican Republic/Haiti), and the Bahama Islands. When Vespucci got back to Spain, he

boasted of his findings, including the exploration of islands off the coast of South America, near the mouth of the Orinoco River.

This is perhaps how some historians came to consider Vespucci the discoverer of the ABC Islands.

De Ojeda's third expedition included Francisco Pizarro, the future conqueror of Peru. (Hernando Cortes, who later triumphed in Mexico, would have been among the soldiers on this venture, but he became ill and couldn't sail.) When de Ojeda reached the South American coast, he found the natives very hostile and lost many of his men in battle. He escaped, but was shipwrecked on his way to Hispaniola, and died in 1508.

Soon after de Ojeda and Vespucci returned to Spain from their voyages with tales of their discovery of South America and islands off its northern shore, other Spaniards began arriving on all three islands to simultaneously enslave and convert the native inhabitants. They set up ranches and military camps on tiny Aruba, but conducted government and business dealings from Curaçao.

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## ■ European Influence & Control

From 1636 until 1816, Aruba's fate was closely tied to complicated political events in Europe. In 1636, Holland got the upper hand during the Eighty-Year War with Spain, and the Dutch took over Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao. They ruled under the charter of the Dutch West India Company until 1805, when England took the islands from the Dutch Republic, which had fallen to the French in 1795 and was annexed to France in 1810 during the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon met his final defeat at Waterloo in June, 1815, and new boundary lines were drawn up for many countries. The Kingdom of the Netherlands was established in 1816, and Aruba was soon returned to Dutch rule.

Gold was indeed discovered near 560-foot Jamanota, the island's highest point, in 1824. A population and financial boom followed, but the small cache was depleted around 1916. After that, the economy struggled along, dependent on aloe production for the most part, until a large oil deposit was found 20 miles across the sea in the Lake Maracaibo area of Venezuela. Aruba seemed an ideal location for processing the crude oil, and Esso Lago built a huge refinery at San Nicolas in 1924.

The refinery attracted workers and their families from other Caribbean islands, North and South America, and Europe. At one time the plant was putting out more than 400,000 barrels of oil per day, which made it a prime target when the Germans sought out important supply points for the Allies during World War II.

In 1942, Aruba made international headlines when it was attacked by German troops. A U-156 German submarine surfaced near the refinery in

San Nicolas on February 16 and fired torpedoes that sank four oil tankers docked in the harbor. The US immediately beefed up military protection for the island, and there were no more successful attacks, but the episode gave the island world-wide attention.

## ■ Oil & Tourism

After the war, Aruba continued to depend on oil to fuel its economy, but soldiers returned home with word that the island had perfect weather and a fabulous beach. Soon, sun-seekers began to arrive. When the oil refinery was closed because of an international surplus in 1985, Aruban officials increased the island's publicity efforts around the world, and tourism soared. Friendly islanders welcomed visitors with genuine hospitality and, even after the oil refinery reopened in 1991, they continued to build and improve their island's tourist appeal.

Today, as the license plates proclaim, this is "One Happy Island." Visitors repeatedly vote Aruba top ratings for its splendid beaches, excellent land-based attractions, and overall hospitality.

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### Telephoning

To call Aruba from North America, dial 011-297 + the six-digit local number. To call from Europe or most other countries, dial 00 + 297 and the six-digit number. On Aruba itself, dial only the six-digit local number.

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## Official Business

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**A**ruba became an autonomous member of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1986. This is different from being an independent nation, but the island has a separate status, *status aparte*, from other members of the five-island Netherlands Antilles, which includes Bonaire, Curaçao, St. Maarten, St. Eustatias, and Saba.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands includes Holland, the Netherlands Antilles, and Aruba. When Aruba was granted separate status, it gained the right to deal directly with Holland without going through the central government of the Netherlands Antilles.

For more than 17 years, Aruba has had its own constitution based on western democratic principles, with a governor and a seven-member council of ministers headed by a prime minister. The island manages such things as its own Immigration, Customs, communications, and aviation, while depending on Holland for its defense and foreign affairs.

Don't worry if you can't, or don't want to, understand the difference between Aruba's political status and that of the other Dutch islands. As a visitor, it doesn't affect you, and there's an ongoing movement to grant Aruba and some of the Netherlands Antilles complete independence, so the situation could change at any time.

Just know that Aruba has its own money, laws, and elected officials, but everything is headed by an appointed governor and overseen by the hereditary Dutch monarch.

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## Unique Celebrations

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In addition to the traditional holidays celebrated on all three islands, Aruba observes some of its own:

**January 25** is set aside to honor **G.F. (Betico) Croes**, a political leader who helped the island attain *status aparte* in 1986.

**March 18, National Anthem and Flag Day**, features folkloric presentations at Plaza Betico Croes in Oranjestad and sporting events throughout the island.

**May 1, Labor Day**, is celebrated with sports competitions, dances, and picnics.

**June 24, Saint John's Day or Deramento Gai** (the burying of the rooster), features lively music, bright yellow and red costumes, and traditional dances. It is celebrated on the Feast of St. John the Baptist to give thanks for a successful harvest. At one time, the festival included a game requiring blindfolded men to smash about with heavy sticks until one of them clobbered a rooster that had been buried up to its neck in dirt and covered with a hollow gourd so that it could breathe. Today, the live rooster has been replaced with a toy replica or a ripe calabash gourd.

## ■ Annual Events

**TIP:** For information and exact dates on these events, contact the Special Events Department of the Aruba Tourism Authority, ☎ 823-777.

### April

**Aruba Bartenders Contest** is a yearly competition sponsored by the island's Bartenders Association, the people who bring you the best cocktails in the Caribbean. The maker of the best original drink is sent to the regional Latin American Bartenders Contest.

April through August, the **Watapana Food and Art Festival** is held every Wednesday on Palm Beach between the Hyatt and Allegro Resorts from 6 pm until 8 pm.

## June

**Aruba Jazz and Latin Music Festival**, a two-day event, features well-known musical stars performing together and individually.

## June-July

**Aruba Hi-Winds Windsurfing Pro-Am World Challenge** is one of the most popular competitions in the Caribbean, with participants from 30 countries vying for the prestigious Aruba Hi-Winds title. Windsurfers of all ages and skill levels compete for prizes in six categories.

## July

**Heineken Music Festival** invites bands from throughout the Caribbean to perform in a free concert. It's usually held the first week of July.

## August

**Aruba International Pro-Am Golf Tournament**, held at Tierra del Sol Golf Course, is a two-day, 36-hole tournament.

## October

**Festival de Las Americas** is an international event featuring music, dance, and theater presentations at Cas di Cultura, a cultural center in Oranjestad.

**Deep-Sea Fishing Tournament**, hosted by the Aruba Nautical Club at Pos Chiquito, invites fishermen from Venezuela, Miami, Puerto Rico, Curaçao, and Bonaire to participate in the annual event. Get more information and exact dates by contacting the club, ☎ 853-022.

## November

**Heineken Aruba International Catamaran Regatta** takes advantage of the island's trade winds. Catamarans come from throughout the Americas and Europe to compete.

## December

**Sint Nicolaas Day**, December 5, is the birthday of Sint Nicolaas and this celebration features the arrival of the jolly man at the harbor in Oranjestad. Children come out to greet him and receive presents.

**TIP:** *The weekly **Bon Bini Festival** is held year-round on Tuesdays from 6:30 pm until 8:30 pm at Fort Zoutman in Oranjestad. This folkloric event highlights arts and crafts, local foods and drinks, music and dance.*

# Getting Here

## ■ By Air



If you arrive by air, you will land at the newly expanded and modernized **Queen Beatrix International Airport**, a short distance from the capital of Oranjestad. Unless several planes land at once, you'll get through Customs quickly and in air-conditioned comfort. Free baggage carts are available, and you'll find the Caribbean Mercantile Bank and an ATM to your left as you exit the terminal. New restaurants and shops may be open by the time you visit, but most facilities are located beyond the security checkpoint in the departure terminals.

Tourist information is available inside the arrival terminal, after you leave the baggage claim area. Taxis meet all flights, and car rental offices are directly across the narrow road in front of the terminal.

As part of an agreement with the taxi union, the government prohibits hotels from providing shuttle service from the airport. Tour operators arrange bus transportation from the airport to hotels for their package vacationers, but everyone else must take a taxi or pick up a rental car.

**TIP:** See *Getting Here in the Travel Information chapter, page 41, for additional airline information.*

Local Airline Contact Information	
<b>Aeropostal</b>	☎ 837-793
<b>ALM /Dutch Caribbean Express</b>	☎ 821-919/824-636
<b>American Airlines/American Eagle</b>	☎ 935-176
<b>Aserca</b>	☎ 839-040/831-892
<b>Avia Air</b>	☎ 834-600
<b>Avianca-SAM (AVI-SA)</b>	☎ 823-388/826-277
<b>Avior</b>	☎ 839-040
<b>Continental Airlines</b>	☎ 880-021

<b>Delta Airlines</b>	☎ 886-119/886-127/944-970
<b>KLM</b>	☎ 834-406
<b>Oduber Aviation Center</b>	☎ 823-080
<b>Pro Air Charter Aruba N.V.</b>	☎ 829-197/840-712
<b>Santa Barbara Airlines</b>	☎ 837-175
<b>SLM Airlines</b>	☎ 932-562
<b>US Airways</b>	☎ 884-166/884-162/884-167
<b>United Airlines</b>	☎ 829-592

**TIP:** *American Airlines hosts a VIP lounge across from gates seven and eight for their business class departing passengers. It's open daily, 6 am-9 am and 11:30 am-4:30 am.*

## ■ By Cruise Ship



It's not unusual to see two or three large cruise ships docked at Aruba's modern cruise ship terminal in Oranjestad. About half a million visitors arrive by ship each year, and many return.

A tourist information booth and ATM are at the terminal, and Oranjestad's restaurants, shops, museums, and casinos are within walking distance. Most stores open on Sunday and stay open late on week nights when a ship is in port.

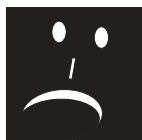
If you don't sign up with your cruise line for a shore excursion, you can take a taxi or bus to the beach or hire a driver for a private island tour. Taxis meet arriving passengers at the pier, and the public bus terminal is just across the boulevard.

**TIP:** *Tour operators and a selection of scheduled excursions are listed under Touring the Island, page 71.*

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## Leaving Aruba

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**A**ruba's airport is staffed by US Customs and Immigration agents, so you clear Customs before you board a plane bound for the United States. This means no long reentry lines when you land in the US, but the process of clearing in Aruba is time-consuming, so arrive at least three hours before your return flight is due to depart. You are required to be through Customs an hour before the flight departs.

The procedure goes like this:

- Check baggage and verify your flight with the airline in the non-secure departure building.
- Show your airline ticket and ID to the guard at the entrance to the secure US departure building in the courtyard.
- Clear Aruban Immigration by presenting your passport or ID and returning the small stub from the white tourist card that you received on the airplane before arrival.
- Stop at the duty-free shops for last-minute purchases and snacks for the airplane.
- Complete your US Customs form listing all purchases and gifts from your trip.
- Go through X-ray security screening, which includes receiving a clearance sticker for your carry-on bags. (The list of prohibited carry-on articles is long due to heightened security.)
- Pick up your checked luggage from the conveyor belt on the other side of the X-ray screener, and carry it to the US Immigration checkpoint. If you fail to do this, you will have to return to Aruba to claim your bags, since no one may claim them for you or take them through Immigration, Customs, and Agricultural (USDA) inspections.
- Pay the 4% flat duty charged on all purchases valued at more than \$600. (See *Duty-Free Allowances* on page 32.)
- If directed to do so, proceed to the USDA officials to clear any animals or plants that you wish to bring home and allow an agent to examine your bags for harmful or prohibited items.
- Pass by the individual airlines' carry-on luggage checkpoint, and stop, if asked, so that your bags may be searched for prohibited items.
- Place your checked luggage on another conveyor belt for transfer to the airplane and proceed to your gate.

If you have questions about what you can bring home or the screening procedures, call **US Customs**, ☎ 887-240. For information and regulations concerning plants and food, contact the **US Department of Agriculture**, ☎ 887-640. Immigration clearance and citizenship matters are handled by **US Immigration Services**, ☎ 831-316.

The Aruba airport is independent and sets its own security regulations, even though it is staffed by US Customs and Immigration agents. Simon Arends, director of Queen Beatrix International Airport, insists on strict security measures, and passengers departing from Aruba should be prepared to check various items that are routinely allowed in carry-on bags in the US. The list of prohibited objects has changed several times since the September 11 attacks, so contact your airline or consult the sign posted in the departure terminal for the latest information.

**TIP:** *The \$34.55 international departure tax is hidden in most ticket prices, but check when you make your purchase. If you do any island-hopping, you may be charged a separate airport tax. At publication time, the tax from Aruba to Bonaire had been lowered from \$20 to \$10, but the tax to Curaçao remained at \$20. There is an inter-island move toward lower airport taxes to encourage travel for both locals and tourists, so the rate may be less by the time you visit.*

## Getting Around

### ■ Taxis



Most taxi drivers own their cabs, so they generally drive safely and expect passengers to avoid damage to their vehicle. They won't allow you to overstuff their trunk or sit on their seats wearing wet clothes. Many drive vans that accommodate large groups and diving equipment. Arubans are typically happy people, and most taxi drivers have participated in the government's Tourism Awareness Program, so you can expect a friendly welcome when you step into their cab. Check fares before you accept taxi services, and tip generously if you have a pleasant ride.

Airport Taxi Service . . . . . ☎ 822-116

Island-wide Taxi Service . . . . . ☎ 875-900

<b>Sample Taxi Fares</b>		
<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>	<b>Fare</b>
Airport	High-rise hotels	\$14
	La Cabana area	\$13
	Low-rise hotels	\$12-\$16
	Sonesta Hotel	\$8
	Marriott	\$17
	Tierra del Sol	\$20
	Noord restaurants	\$10-\$18
High-rise hotels	Low-rise hotels	\$4-\$6
	Oranjestad	\$6-\$8
	Noord restaurants	\$6-\$8
Low-rise hotels	High-rise hotels	\$4-\$8
	Oranjestad	\$6-\$8
	Noord restaurants:	\$6-\$8
Oranjestad	High-rise hotels	\$7-\$9
	Low-rise hotels:	\$6-\$8
	Noord restaurants:	\$8-\$9
Noord restaurants	High-rise hotels	\$6-\$8
	Low-rise hotels	\$6-\$8
	Oranjestad	\$8-\$9

## Taxi Rules & Fares

Confirm fares before you get into the taxi. Drivers do not accept \$50 and \$100 bills. All prices are per taxi, not per person (maximum of five passengers), and subject to change at any time. Surcharges are government-approved on Sundays (\$1), official holidays (\$3), and after midnight (\$2).

The minimum charge per ride is set at \$4, and the per-hour hire rate is \$35. Drivers may also charge \$8 per 15 minutes while waiting for you.

## ■ By Car

### Car Rentals

Most airport car-rental offices are open from 8 am to 8 pm, but a few operate from 7 am to 11 pm. Others appear to open and close on a whim. When you make your reservation, verify that someone will be available at the times you wish to pick up and return your car. Some companies have a drop box for after-hour returns; others arrange for an adjacent office to handle the paperwork, if they plan to be closed during your arrival/departure times.

Rental rates vary season to season, but they average about \$35 per day for a small car with manual transmission, air-conditioning and unlimited mileage. You pay about \$65 per day for a larger car or one with automatic transmission or four-wheel-drive. Weekly rates are available and may work out to be less per day. Insurance add-ons begin at \$10 per day, but you may be responsible for \$500 worth of damage, anyway. Check before you sign up.

International Companies	
<b>Avis</b>	☎ 825-496
<b>Budget</b>	☎ 828-600
<b>Dollar</b>	☎ 825-651
<b>Hertz</b>	☎ 821-845
<b>National</b>	☎ 825-451
<b>Thrifty</b>	☎ 855-300

**TIP:** For toll-free numbers and website information see Getting Around, page 47.

Local Companies	
<b>Airways</b>	☎ 829-112
<b>Caribbean Car Rental</b>	☎ 829-118; www.caribbeancars-aruba.com

<b>Carnaval</b>	☎ 828-851; <a href="http://www.carnavalrent.com">www.carnavalrent.com</a>
<b>Courtesy Car Rental</b>	☎ 824-129
<b>Econo Car Rental</b>	☎ 820-920 or 870-099; <a href="http://www.arubatourism.com/econocars">www.arubatourism.com/econocars</a>
<b>Economy</b>	☎ 830-200; <a href="http://www.economyaruba.com">www.economyaruba.com</a>
<b>Explore</b>	☎ 827-202; <a href="http://www.explorearrental.com">www.explorearrental.com</a>
<b>Five Star</b>	☎ 827-600
<b>Franco Jeep Rental</b>	☎ 831-053
<b>Hedwina</b>	☎ 830-880
<b>J/M</b>	☎ 828-250
<b>Marco's</b>	☎ 825-295
<b>More4Less Jeep &amp; Car Rental</b>	☎ 932-864 or 933-849; <a href="http://www.more4less-aruba.com">www.more4less-aruba.com</a>
<b>Optima</b>	☎ 824-828; <a href="http://www.optimarentacar.com">www.optimarentacar.com</a>
<b>Ruba Car Rental</b>	☎ 831-020; <a href="http://www.rubarent-aruba.com">www.rubarent-aruba.com</a>
<b>Super</b>	☎ 868-765
<b>Topless</b>	☎ 875-233
<b>Toyota Rent A Car</b>	☎ 834-902; <a href="http://www.toyotacarrent-aruba.com">www.toyotacarrent-aruba.com</a>
<b>Tropic</b>	☎ 930-788

**TIP:** *If you plan to decline insurance coverage offered by a rental agency, verify in advance that the credit card you will be using covers you if you have an accident or damage the car. American Express and Visa Gold Card customers are not covered when they rent a sports car or four-wheel-drive vehicle.*

## ■ By Bicycle, Scooter & Motorcycle

The best way to get around the island is by car, but Aruba is flat and many roads are in excellent condition, so biking or motorbiking are also possible. Traffic in Oranjestad is heavy, especially when a cruise ship is in port, and

the main highways are busy during rush hours. Unless you're a skilled, experienced biker, stick to side-roads. An all-terrain or four-wheel-drive vehicle is best for the poorly paved or dirt roads in the countryside.

You'll pay about \$5 per hour or \$25 per day for a basic bicycle, \$35 per day for a scooter, and \$45 to \$100 per day for a motorcycle. To roar around the island on a Harley will cost \$150 per day during tourist season.

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## Rental Companies

**Red Sail Sports** is located at the Hyatt, Allegro, and Marriot Hotels, as well as Sonesta Island. Bikes may not be at all locations. Call to arrange pick up, ☎ 861-603.

**Big Twin Aruba/Harley-Davidson**, L.G. Smith Blvd 124A, Oranjestad, ☎ 828-660; [www.harleydavidson-aruba.com](http://www.harleydavidson-aruba.com).

**Pablito's Bike Rental**, I. G. Smith Blvd 234, Oranjestad, ☎ 878-655.

**George's Cycle Rental/Yamaha**, L.G. Smith 124, Oranjestad, ☎ 932-202.

**Melchor Cycle Rental**, Bubalbi 106B, Noord, ☎ 871-787.

**Ron's Motorcycle Rental**, Bakval 17A, Noord, ☎ 862-090.

**Semver Cycle Rental**, Noord 22, Noord, ☎ 866-851.

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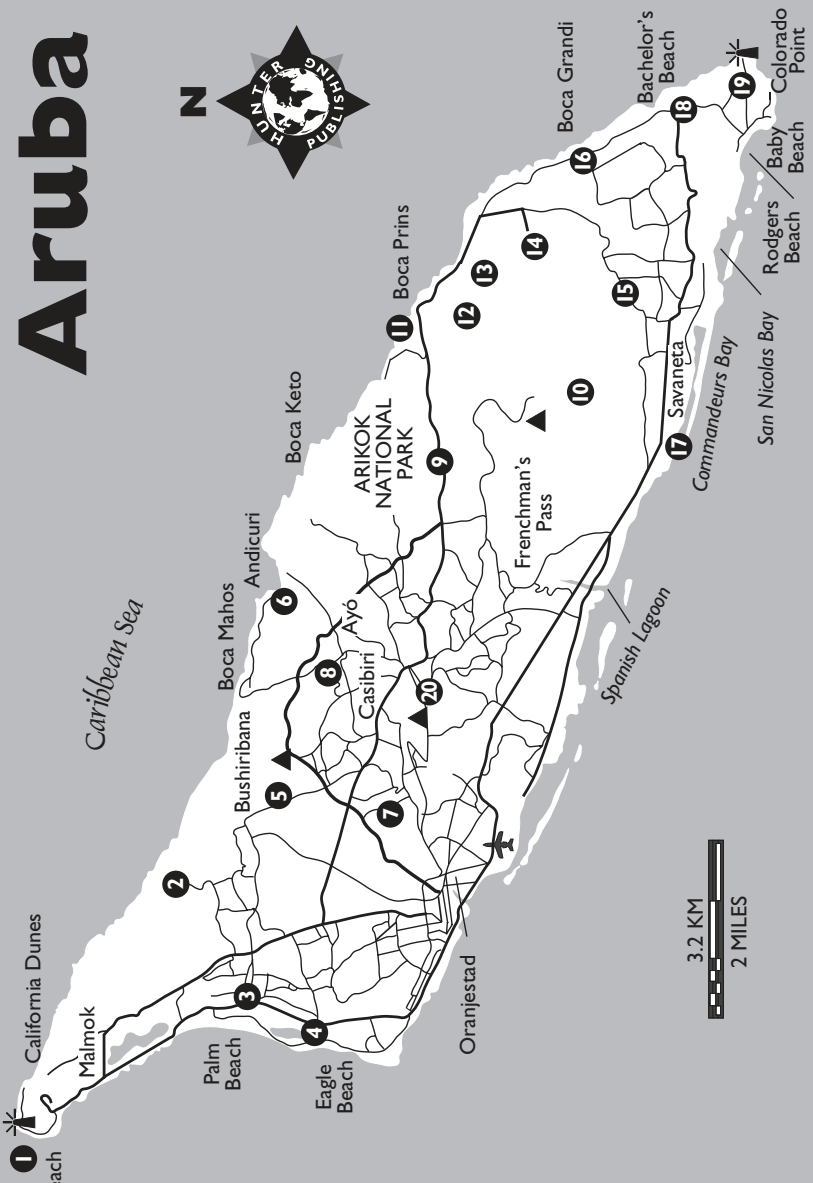
## ■ By Bus

You can't get everywhere on Aruba by public bus, but frequent scheduled service runs to many areas Monday through Saturday from 6 am until 6 pm, with less frequent service from 6 pm until midnight. On Sundays and holidays, buses operate a light schedule between 6 am and 6 pm.

Have the correct change when you board. A one-way ticket is \$1.15 or 2Afl, and round-trip fare is \$2. Stops are marked by a yellow *Bushalte* road sign. You can pick up a schedule at the Arubus station behind the Parliament Building on Zoutmanstraat in Oranjestad or at tourist information booths and hotel reception areas throughout the island. Regular routes run between San Nicholas on the southwest coast and the resorts along beaches on the northwest coast, with stops in Oranjestad.

**TIP:** For information on bus routes contact Arubus, ☎ 827-089.

# Aruba



1. California Lighthouse
2. Chapel of Alto Vista
3. Church of Santa Anna, Noord
4. Bubali Bird Sanctuary
5. Crystal Mountain
6. Natural bridge
7. Boulders
8. Indian rock drawings
9. Miralamar Pass
10. Jamanota Hill, highest elevation
11. Sea Grape Cove
12. Fontein Cave
13. Guadirikiri Cave
14. Huliba Cave
15. Lourdes Grotto
16. Sea Grape Grove picnic grounds
17. Savaneta Beach and picnic grounds
18. Natural bridge
19. Colorado Lighthouse
20. Hooiberg or "Haystack" Mountain

## Touring the Island



**Y**ou can tour tiny Aruba in one day. However, you will need to abandon the gorgeous leeward beaches for at least part of two or three days to explore the island well.

Many interesting sites can be reached on paved roads in a car, but consider renting a four-wheel-drive vehicle if you want to investigate the untamed windward side of the island. You'll be surprised at the difference between the suave resort areas and the striking outback.

### ■ Getting Oriented

Many paved roads and all unpaved roads on Aruba are not named and have no street signs. Locals give directions by landmarks, which is not helpful if you don't know the island well. Also, Aruba is positioned in the sea at a tilted angle to true north, so the cocoon-shaped island's coastlines are neither north-south nor east-west. The residents of San Nicolas say their town is on the sunrise side (east) of the island. Most people, looking at a map, would say San Nicolas is on the southwestern coast. This book uses the following terms for identification of and directions to various sites:

The longest coasts are east (the **windward outback**) and west (the **leeward developed side**). **California Lighthouse** is on the northern point; **Colorado Lighthouse** is on the southern tip. **High-rise** and **low-rise hotels** are on the sandy beaches of the curved northwest coast.

**TIP:** *Highways are numbered and lettered A or B. The letter signifies the direction of traffic, so Highway 1A is the same road as Highway 1B, with each going in the opposite direction. Road signs will differ depending on which direction you are traveling.*

### ■ Guided Tours

- **De Palm Tours** is the principal tour operator on Aruba. Their representatives will probably greet you as you exit the airport or step off your cruise ship. Their no-pressure offerings include a free Aruba Happenings orientation at 9:15 am on Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays. The 4½-hour Discover Aruba tour stops at most of the major sites and includes a swim and snorkel at Baby Beach. The cost is \$37.50 and includes soft drinks and snorkel equipment. Other half- and full-day tours include sightseeing aboard a large air-conditioned bus, off-road excur-

sions to remote areas of the island in yellow Land Rover Defenders, visits to private De Palm Island, combo land-water-underwater adventures, off-island day-trips, and nighttime jaunts to the casinos, bars, and nightclubs. Most hotels have a De Palm Activities Desk, and there is a De Palm Tours Pier on Palm Beach. Contact the main office for information and reservations, ☎ 824-400, 800-766-6016 (US); [www.depalm.com](http://www.depalm.com).

- **ABC Tours** takes passengers on an Island Safari in their 24-passenger air-conditioned bus and runs Off Road Safaris in customized Land Rover Defenders that hold six, rather than the usual nine, passengers. Small groups, an adventurous spirit, unlimited soft drinks, and stops at often-missed sights make this energetic company a favorite. Most of their business is from word-of-mouth advertising by happy tourists. Give them a call, ☎ 825-600 (943-543 after 7 pm).
- **Wix Tours** is owned and operated by Marco Wix. His staff of friendly guides starts your vacation off right with round-trip transfer service from the airport to your hotel for \$12 per person. After you're settled in, take the 4½-hour tour of major sites in their 24-passenger air-conditioned bus. The \$30 charge includes a stop at Baby Beach for a swim. The Jeep and Eco Adventure is a full-day-trip by Jeep to remote sites and the National Park, lunch, and snorkeling at Baby Beach. The \$57 cost includes snacks and snorkel equipment. Book by phone or online, ☎ 820-347; [www.tours.arubaswebmall.com](http://www.tours.arubaswebmall.com).
- **Flintstone Tours**, the company that runs the colorful Paranda Party Bus at night, offers a full day of sightseeing from open-air Flintstone-mobiles that are able to travel off-road. The \$65 tour leaves at 9 am, follows a scenic route to favorite sights such as the Chapel of Alto Vista, a natural bridge at Boca Prins, and Fontein Cave. You'll get personal attention and be spoonfed a lot of interesting history and culture along the way. Lunch is at a restaurant, and the afternoon includes a swim at Baby Beach. For information, ☎ 870-115 or 931-114.
- **Pelican Adventures** are known for sea quests, but they also operate a land tour of intriguing sites and best-kept-secret places. Entertaining guides narrate as the air-conditioned bus travels across the island; passengers are encouraged to ask questions and offer feedback. Tours cost \$20 and you can book reservations by calling ☎ 872-302.
- **Aruba Experts** is an online and on-site company with an office in the Royal Plaza Mall, Oranjestad. They act as a match-making service between visitors and local tour operators, restaurants, car rental companies, and private rental companies. Check them out on-island, ☎ 882-777, or online at [www.arubaexperts.com](http://www.arubaexperts.com).

**TIP:** See Adventures on Water, page 84, for information on sightseeing by boat, snorkel / scuba trips, and party boats. Evening tours are listed under Nightlife.

## ■ Walking Tour of Oranjestad



Tourists head into the bustling capital city to shop, eat, bar hop, and play the slot machines. But, you'll miss a lot if you don't take the time to stroll aimlessly through the streets and stop to visit the museums and historic sites.

Locate **Wilhelmina Park** on the main waterfront highway, L.G. Smith Boulevard, at the southeast end of down, just before the highway crosses a lagoon. This is an excellent place for rest and orientation. The lush park is named for Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, who reigned for 50 years (1898-1948) and abdicated in favor of her daughter, Juliana, after ruling through two world wars. A statue of the popular queen stands on a green lawn in the center of the landscaped park.

The Sonesta Suites Hotel is beyond the park, on the water at Paarden Baai/Bay, and the popular **Seaport Marketplace** is tucked between the north side of the park and the boat-filled **yacht harbor**. Across the main street, you'll see a sprawling marble **World War II memorial** set beside the lagoon.



It helps to have a map, and you can pick up a free **Aruba Road Map** at any tourist information center, car rental office, or hotel reception desk. (A better choice is the laminated island and city map published by Berndtson & Berndtson. You may purchase one at hotel gift shops, or order it from a bookstore before you leave home.)

Walking toward town on Smith Blvd, you'll come to the **Historical Museum** (Museo Arubano) located inside Fort Zoutman, the oldest building on the island. It was built in 1796 and named after a rear admiral in the Dutch navy who had an honorable fighting record against the British.

**DID YOU KNOW?** *The capital was named for the royal Dutch house of Orange-Nassau in the 1800s.*

The coastline ran alongside the fort until the harbor was filled in during construction in 1930, so the fort's four cannon were well placed to protect the island from 19th-century pirates and foreign navies. It's worth the \$1.25 admission just to get inside the building. The haphazardly arranged displays include fossils, tools, furniture, and other items from the island's earliest times to the present.