



Aruba

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Why Go?

Americans from the east coast fleeing winter make Aruba the most toured island in the southern Caribbean.

And that's not really surprising given that it has miles of the best beaches, plenty of package resorts and a compact and cute main town, Oranjestad, which is ideally suited for the two-hour strolls favored by day-tripping cruise-ship passengers. It's all about sun, fun and spending money (lots of money – it's an expensive island).

But venture away from the resorts and you'll find that Aruba offers more. At the island's extreme ends are rugged, windswept vistas and uncrowded beaches. Arikok National Wildlife Park is an alien landscape of cactuses, twisted divi-divi trees and abandoned gold mines.

Mostly, however, Aruba is a place to do as little as possible. It wears its hospitality on its sleeve and in the national anthem, which includes the unlyrical line 'The greatness of our people is their great cordiality.'

When to Go

Average temperature for Aruba is a perfect 28°C (82°F). High noon is a bit warmer and at night it can get breezy, but mostly you'll be fine in shorts and T-shirt. The island is fairly dry, averaging a little over 2.5cm of rain per month. Much of this falls from September to early December. Aruba usually misses the Caribbean hurricane season; in recent years January rains have caused minor flooding. December to April is high season. High season for cruise ships runs October to April.

Itineraries

THREE DAYS

Find your hotel, head out to the beach and stay there. Maybe spend half a day exploring some other part of the island, but really just stay put on the lovely white sand of your choice. You may need to do a little sampling first, but that's part of the holiday.

ONE WEEK

Once you've reenergized after lying around a beach, spend a couple of days exploring Aruba. That's all you'll need to see it all, including the simple capital, Oranjestad, and the wilds of Arikok National Wildlife Park.

TWO WEEKS

All the above, but also consider a visit to the neighboring islands of Bonaire and Curaçao, each of which has a completely different personality to Aruba.

GETTING TO NEIGHBORING ISLANDS

Plans for ferries within the ABCs perpetually run aground. But flights between Aruba and Bonaire and Curaçao are frequent and last about 20 minutes.

Essential Food & Drink

Because of the arid conditions, food in Aruba has always been hearty. Thick stews made with meats such as goat and chicken, and with vegetables such as okra and squash, are predominant. Spices are used to give things variety.

» **Goat (cabrito) stew** A classic dish that most Arubans will say is made best by their own mother. Also appears in curries.

» **Cheese** An obvious Dutch legacy, usually eaten straight with a beer. When used in cooking it was traditionally a special treat.

» **Keshi yena** Comes in myriad variations: a cheese casserole with chicken, okra and a few raisins for seasoning. Much better than it sounds.

» **Seafood** Common and good, especially shellfish. Fish is popular in curries.

» **Funchi** Based on cornmeal, it is formed into cakes and fried, mixed with okra and fried, or used as a coating for chicken and fish.

» **Nasi goreng** Indonesian fried rice via the colonial Dutch.

» **Frikandel** Classic Dutch deep-fried, meaty snack.

» **Bitterballen** Another Dutch classic – little deep-fried meaty balls served at roadside stands.

» **Balashi** Aruba's lager is popular because it is *not* Dutch or American.

AT A GLANCE

» **Currency** Aruban florin (Afl); US\$ accepted everywhere

» **Language** Dutch, Spanish, English, Papiamentu

» **Money** ATMs all over; most dispense both Aruban florins and US dollars

» **Visas** Not required for citizens of the US, Canada and most EU countries up to 90 days

Fast Facts

» **Area** 181 sq km

» **Population** 106,000

» **Capital** Oranjestad

» **Telephone country code** 291

» **Telephone area code** 297

» **Emergency** 911

Set Your Budget

» **Budget hotel room** US\$80

» **Two-course evening meal** US\$30

» **Beer** Afl8

» **Day at the beach** Free

» **Aruba bus** Afl2.25

Resources

» **Visit Aruba** (www.visitaruba.com)

» **Aruba Community Forum** (www.aruba.com/forum) Want to know the best new restaurant? The posts with opinions will pour in. Looking for a gay bar? Look here.

» **Aruba Web Cams** (www.arubawebcams.tv)