



Bonaire

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Why Go?

Bonaire's appeal is its amazing reef-lined coast. Entirely designated a national park, the beautiful waters lure divers from across the globe. But while no diving (or snorkeling) initiate will be disappointed, Bonaire also has much to offer above the surface, including world-class windsurfing. Although the beaches are mostly slivers of rocky sand, several take on a pink hue from ground coral washed ashore. Also in the pink are the flamingos found throughout the salt flats and mangroves of the south.

Bonaire has a real community feel: your innkeeper may be your divemaster by day or your waiter at a friend's restaurant at night. Kralendijk has a modest but enjoyable nightlife. Even if you're not a diver, you'll find this small island a restful and intriguing destination.

When to Go

Average temperature for Bonaire 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. Bonaire usually misses the Caribbean hurricane season; in recent years January rains have caused minor flooding and muddied the waters for divers. High season for cruise ships runs October to April.

Itineraries

THREE DAYS

Get a room at one of the waterfront diving resorts and take the plunge into the incredible shore diving. Think about a journey to one of the 90 named dive sites around the island.

ONE WEEK

Dry yourself off from time in the water and explore the island. Hike and drive the alternately lush and desertlike trails of Washington-Slagbaai National Park. Get to know the postcolonial town of Rincon. Spend time in the south amid the bold horizon-filling colors of the salt ponds and see how many flamingos you spot. Learn about Bonaire's slave past at sites across the island.

TWO WEEKS

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

GETTING TO NEIGHBORING ISLANDS

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

Essential Food & Drink

Because of the arid conditions, food in Bonaire has always been hearty – and salty. 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 (kabritu) stew** Still a classic dish that most folk will say is made best by their own mother. Also appears in curries.

» **Pastechi** Dough pockets filled with meats and/or Dutch cheese, and deep-fried.

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

» **Yambo** A Creole gumbo stew with plenty of okra.

» **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.

» **Satay** Indonesian skewers of barbecued meat with a savory peanut sauce, via the colonial Dutch.

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

AT A GLANCE

» **Currency** US dollar (US\$)

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

» **Money** ATMs in Kralendijk

» **Visas** Not required for citizens of the US, Canada and EU countries

Fast Facts

» **Area** 294 sq km

» **Population** 15,800

» **Capital** Kralendijk

» **Telephone country code** 71

» **Telephone area code** 599

» **Emergency** Ambulance 114, fire 191, police 911

Set Your Budget

» **Budget hotel room** US\$80

» **Two-course evening meal** US\$30

» **Beer** US\$4

» **Annual dive permit** US\$25

Resources

» **Bonaire Insider** (www.bonaireinsider.com) News, info and lively comments

» **Bonaire Talk** (www.bonairetalk.com)

» **InfoBonaire** (www.info.bonaire.com) Encyclopedic

» **Tourism Bonaire** (www.tourismbonaire.com) Official tourism site