



Curaçao

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Why Go?

Go-go Curaçao balances commerce with Unesco-recognized old Willemstad and an accessible beauty, thanks to hidden beaches along a lush coast. It's a wild mix of urban madness, remote vistas and a lust for life.

It has a rich history dating back to the 16th century. Central Willemstad boasts fascinating old buildings and excellent museums. Remnants of plantations dot the countryside – some are now parks. The west coast has oodles of beautiful little beaches, good for diving, snorkeling or just lazing.

Curaçao has a surging economy beyond tourism, which means that Willemstad, apart from its historical core, has factories, many humdrum neighborhoods and at times bad traffic. Catering to visitors is not the primary aim here, but if you're looking for a Caribbean island that is busy setting its own pace, Curaçao is for you.

Best Beaches

- » Kleine St Michiel (p360)
- » Kas Abou (p360)
- » Playa Lagún (p361)
- » Knip Beaches (p361)

Best Places to Stay

- » Avila Beach Hotel (p355)
- » Hotel Kura Hulanda (p355)
- » Hotel Scharloo (p356)

When to Go

Average temperature for Curaçao 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 25mm of rain per month. Much of this falls from September to early December. Curaçao usually misses the Caribbean hurricane season, though in recent years January rains have caused minor flooding. December to April is high season. High season for cruise ships runs October to April.

AT A GLANCE

» **Currency** Netherlands Antillean guilder (NAf); see p363

» **Languages** Dutch, Spanish, English, Papiamentu

» **Money** ATMs all over; most dispense Netherlands Antillean guilders and US dollars

» **Visas** Not required for citizens of the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and most EU countries

Itineraries

THREE DAYS

Set yourself up in a place to stay in or near Willemstad. Explore this fascinating and at times confounding old town. Shop the markets and admire the ongoing restorations of old neighborhoods. Take a day to drive the northern coast loop up and around through Westpunt, stopping at beaches and Christoffel National Park on the way.

ONE WEEK

Spend more time exploring. Do Kleine St Michiel and the road to Kas Abou on separate days. Spend time in the twists and turns of Spaanse Water. Compare as many of Curaçao's 38 named beaches as you can, go for a dive, decide on your favorite old Willemstad street.

TWO WEEKS

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

Fast Facts

» **Area** 471 sq km

» **Population** 143,000

» **Capital** Willemstad

» **Telephone country code**
☎599

» **Telephone area code** ☎9

» **Emergency** Ambulance
☎912; fire and police ☎911

GETTING TO NEIGHBORING ISLANDS

Plans for ferries within the ABCs perpetually sink before they can be launched. But flights between Curaçao and Aruba and Bonaire are frequent and last about 20 minutes.

Set Your Budget

» **Budget hotel room**
US\$80

» **Two-course evening meal** US\$30

» **Beer** US\$4

» **Tour of harbor** NAf15

» **Sint Annabaai ferry** Free

Resources

» **Curaçao Tourist Board**
(www.curacao.com)

» **Gay Curaçao** (www.gaycuracao.com)

» **National Parks** (www.carmabi.org) Fascinating info on Curaçao's treasures on land and sea

» **Webcam Curacao** (www.webcamcuracao.com) Live images of huge ships passing through Willemstad

Essential Food & Drink

Reflecting the crops and animals that thrive in the semiarid climate, food in Curaçao is basic and filling. 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 Curaçaoans 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 many 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, used as a coating for chicken and fish etc.

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

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

» **Curaçao** Yes, there really is a liquor by the name. It's a startling blue, especially given its orange flavor.