



# Sint Eustatius

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## Why Go?

'The Caribbean's Hidden Treasure' – the tourism slogan of tiny Sint Eustatius (more commonly known as Statia) is especially apt. The jewels of this castaway-style outpost lie under the sea: dazzling reefs, teeming marine life, rusting wrecks and vestiges of the Lower Town – part of the capital (and only town), Oranjestad – which is now largely submerged.

Incredibly, Statia was the world's busiest seaport for cargo transported between Europe and the American colonies in the 18th century, when the island became a tax-free haven under the Dutch. By the 1790s, over 3000 ships landed in 'Golden Rock' each year and the population exceeded 30,000. In 1796 the French took over Statia and instituted heavy taxes, driving merchants away. Later part of the since-dissolved Netherlands Antilles, Statia became a 'special municipality' of the Netherlands in 2010.

Today, Statia's few visitors are intrepid scuba divers, and hikers exploring its rugged, volcanic terrain.

## When to Go

**Dec–Jan** While neighboring islands swell with visitors, Statia stays remarkably calm.

**Apr–May** Savor the last of the dry season before the thundershowers plow through.

**Jul** Celebrate Carnival with locals amid live music and seafood feasts.

## Oranjestad

The only town on Sint Eustatius, tiny Oranjestad evokes a bygone era with its colorfully painted wooden cottages, historic ruins (including its centerpiece Fort Oranje (p637)) and dusty, virtually traffic-free streets.

Oranjestad is split into the waterfront Lower Town (most of which now lies ruined underwater following hurricanes, with only four 17th-century buildings remaining), and the Upper Town, where most services are located, including the government headquarters.

### Sights

#### ★ Lower Town Beach

BEACH

This narrow strip of oyster-gray sand is an extraordinary place to snorkel in pristine waters among the ruins of 18th-century warehouses, now caked in coral and teeming with multicolored fish. The ruins comprise most of the former Lower Town, which had been built on sand behind a sea wall and over time sank into the water as hurricanes wreaked destruction.

#### Government Guesthouse

NOTABLE BUILDING

(Emmaweg, Upper Town) This handsome 18th-century stone-and-wood building was thoroughly renovated in 1992 with funding from the EU. It's now the government headquarters, with the offices of the lieutenant governor and commissioners on the ground floor and the courtroom on the upper floor. The building, which once served as the Dutch naval commander's quarters, came by its name in the 1920s, when it was used as a guesthouse. Its interior is closed to the public.

#### ★ Fort Oranje

FORT

(Fort Oranje Straat, Upper Town; ☎ 24hr) **FREE** Soak up history and sweeping views from this extensively restored fort, a mighty citadel complete with cannons, triple bastions and cobblestone parade grounds. The current stone structure was built by the British in 1703, replacing the original wooden fort the French erected in 1629. It's the best preserved of the 16 remaining defensive forts on the island and is where the first salute was fired in recognition of US independence on November 16, 1776, now commemorated as Statia Day.

## SALUTE TO AMERICA

A plaque in the courtyard of **Fort Oranje**, commissioned by US President Franklin D Roosevelt, commemorates Statia's most famous moment in history. On November 16, 1776, the American war vessel *Andrew Doria* sailed into the harbor and fired a 13-gun salute (one for each of the rebellious colonies). Statia's governor Johannes de Graaff gave orders to fire Fort Oranje's cannons in a counter-salute, thereby becoming the first foreign nation to recognize the sovereignty of the new United States of America.

#### Dutch Reformed Church

RUINS

(Kerkweg) The thick 60cm stone walls of the old Dutch Reformed Church, built in 1755, remain perfectly intact, but the roof collapsed during a 1792 hurricane and the building has been open to the heavens ever since. The grounds are the resting place of many of the island's most prominent citizens of the past.

#### Sint Eustatius Museum

MUSEUM

(☎ 318-2288; <http://ssecar.org>; cnr Van Peereweg & De Graafweg, Upper Town; adult/child US\$5/3; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, to 3pm Fri, to noon Sat) Set inside an 18th-century house built by wealthy merchant Simon Doncker, this eclectic collection showcases pre-Columbian artifacts and exhibits on slavery, Statia's Jewish community, nautical history, and colonial relics including ceramics and mahogany furniture. There are also period rooms in the style of an upper-class colonial-era villa.

#### Synagogue Ruins

RUINS

(Mansionweg, Upper Town) These ruins are the roofless and slowly decaying yellow-brick walls of the Honen Dalim ('She Who is Kind to the Poor'), an abandoned synagogue dating from 1739, which makes it the second-oldest synagogue in the western hemisphere. The synagogue's *mikvah* (a cleansing bath for women) has been left intact. The ruins are 30m down the alleyway with art nouveau lampposts, opposite the south side of the library.

#### Jewish Cemetery

CEMETERY

(Mansionweg, Upper Town) About 50m south of the Honen Dalim synagogue ruins is a