

## West Coast North Dive Sites



Sea rods frame a diver along the wall

The area of former *kunukus* along the island's northwest coast, below the park boundaries and stretching down into Kralendijk, are what Bonaire dive guides call the north dive sites, no matter how they actually face. The sites past the airport are called south, no matter how they actually sit on the compass.

These are some of the most popular and heavily dived sites in Bonaire. They are just a short drive from the northern hotel row along mostly undeveloped coastline (although that is rapidly changing), and they offer a good variety of terrain, from broad, sandy beaches to rocky cliffs where you leap into the sea. Underwater terrain varies from quick drop-offs to gently sloping coral-covered plains.

Fish and invertebrate variety here is good. Seahorses, frogfish, sea turtles, jawfish and lots of hard corals add to the usual suspects found along the Bonaire Reefs. This is a good area for photographers to grab a knowledgeable local guide to help out with spotting macro subjects and pointing out behavior.

West Coast North Dive Sites		GOOD SNORKELING	NOVICE	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
7	NUKOVE	•	•		
8	CAREL'S VISION	•	•		
9	KARPATA	•		•	
10	LA DANIA'S LEAP	•		•	
11	RAPPEL			•	
12	BLOODLET			•	
13	TOLO / OL' BLUE	•	•		
14	COUNTRY GARDEN	•	•		
15	BON BINI NA KAS	•	•		
16	1000 STEPS	•		•	
17	WEBER'S JOY / WITCHES HUT	•	•		
18	JEFF DAVIS MEMORIAL	•	•		
19	KALLIS REEF	•	•		
20	OIL SLICK LEAP	•	•		
21	BARCADERA		•		
22	ANDREA II	•	•		
23	ANDREA I	•	•		

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### NUKOVE

**Location:** Northwest coast

**Depth:** 24-140ft (7-37m)

**Access:** Boat

**Expertise Rating:** Novice

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Some say the most challenging part of diving here is finding the site. Then you have to clamber down some pretty rough 'steps' to a small beach. However, many divers like this site because it is often free of other divers.

Enter on the left as you face the beach. It is easy to see the sandy area that leads out to rocks and corals. Start a rather long swim out to the buoy. Go down to the mooring blocks and you will see the coral is healthy and recovering from any storm damage.

This is a nice sloping wall as it runs steep and has lots of hard corals, including black coral trees at the deeper reaches. Large, old growth corals are found here and big sponges abound. Very attractive topography fed by a current that keeps things big and healthy. Look for many cleaning stations in the 30ft to 70ft range on this reef.

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## CAREL'S VISION

**Location:** Northwest Coast

**Depth:** 20-130ft (4-40m)

**Access:** Boat

**Expertise Rating:** Novice

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This latest dive site was announced by Elsmarie Beukenboom, director of STI-NAPA (the organization that oversees both the Bonaire Marine Park and Washington-Slagbaai Park) in June 2005, while Philippe Cousteau was visiting the island.

Beukenboom, an active, lifelong conservationist on Bonaire, announced the naming of the site as Carel's Vision, located on the north end between

**Oil Slick Leap** and BOPEC. The site is named after Carel Steensma, a principal mover and shaker on the island in helping to initiate and fund the marine park in its early years by bringing Capt Don and Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands together.

This is a good reef but still recovering, so there is some broken coral around from the 1999 storm wave damage. The upper reef margin is rubbly, but there are a lot of small fish and new corals taking hold.

Starting in about 25ft and sloping very steeply down below 100ft to sand, the reef has some black coral, lots of star corals, plate corals and a few good size brain corals.

Add to this big sponge and the opportunity to see something like a manta come in from the blue, and you have an interesting spot. The deep sand is a good place to look for southern stingrays.

There is nice hard coral here, plus French and queen angelfish, cruising bar jacks and grunts around the sparse sea plumes and other soft corals up shallow.

This site has one of the newer drilled eyelets for the mooring buoys that do

## The Windjammer

In between the park's southwest border and the sites that move south from **Karpata** is BOPEC, an international terminal where oil freighters dock to unload oil for the island's power and petrol resources. This area has recently been placed out of bounds due to international security regulations stemming from the international war on terror.

This announcement is somewhat of a disappointment to divers, especially deep diving techies, as the wreck of the *Windjammer* is sitting in the security area in deep water. It is a historic three-masted iron cargo ship. Originally called the *Mairi Bhan* (Scottish Gaelic for Bonnie Mary), built in 1874 in Scotland. She was carrying a cargo of asphalt, and wrecked off Bonaire in December 1912. Divers made the effort to dive her as she was in remarkably good shape and could be entered. Divers could swim inside the steel rib structure of the ship.

Recent reports say she has finally shown some signs of so many years under the sea and her bridge and upper deck structure has collapsed, making her somewhat difficult and unsafe to enter. Until the security regulations are changed, she will have to be left to the fish.