



The ABC's of Island Living

EXPLORING THE SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN
BY LEAH FURMAN

The Caribbean has gained an international reputation for its tropical climate, turquoise waters, friendly people and vibrant culture. And nowhere are these attributes displayed to better advantage than on the South Caribbean's ABC islands—Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao.

Located just off the coast of Venezuela, this trio of Dutch islands has everything that visitors expect to find when they flock to the region. From world-class shopping and luxury hotels to long strips of beachfront, secluded coves and underwater wonderlands, the ABC's offer up a delightful cocktail of everything that is most enticing about the Caribbean.

A IS FOR ARUBA

Oddly enough, the most famous of the ABC Islands is actually the smallest in size. Of course, there's nothing diminutive about Aruba's tourism industry. The gleaming facades of world-famous hotel chains and luxurious resorts line the island's famous Eagle and Palm beaches. The ubiquity of the American and Canadian tourists strolling along the Divi-tree dotted beachfront and drinking cocktails in the shade of their palapas attests to Aruba's appeal to sun worshippers from the north.

Yet the island is celebrated for far more than just its white-powder sand beaches. The service stands out as some of the finest in all of the Caribbean. The ultimate in Southern Caribbean hospitality can be found at the **Hyatt Regency Aruba Resort and Casino** on Palm Beach. This is Aruba at its finest and most posh. Recently renovated, the hotel features the kind of legendary service and updated five-star accommodations discriminating patrons expect from a grand hotel. What's more, guests don't have to go very far to find either a great meal or a night's entertainment; the hotel's **Ruinas del Mar** restaurant is one of the island's best and the on-site casino is always abuzz with activity.

Those who want to have a lively dinner out on the town should head over to **Madame Jeannette's** for the island's best social scene—to say nothing of the top-notch cuisine. For shopping, Aruba's main city, Oranjestad, has plenty of malls where you can buy big-ticket items such as jewelry at discount prices. For outdoor activities, some of the best horseback riding on the coast can be found at **Rancho La Ponderosa**. Meanwhile, **Red Sail Sports** is the island's first name in diving, snorkeling and sailing adventures. If you want to explore inland and check out some of Aruba's rocky desert terrain, book a Land Rover tour with **ABC Tours** and don't forget to bring your sunblock.









B IS FOR BONAIRE

Bonaire is the closest thing to a deserted island you can find among the ABC's. By far the most rustic and least populous of the three islands, this is the destination of choice for anyone who wants to get away from it all and commune with nature in all its unspoiled, undeveloped glory.

Without a doubt, the island's main attraction is its lush marine world. Renowned for majestic aquatic life and deep sea fauna, Bonaire is where the serious snorkelers and scuba divers congregate to compare notes and rack up bragging rights with each daring underwater adventure. (It says so right there on their license plates which read, "Diver's Paradise.") But the island's natural wonders extend well beyond the sea. Thanks to its lack of development, Bonaire's ecologically sound landscape provides wildlife lovers with no shortage of exotic sights like flamingos, parrots, and plenty of wild goats and donkeys.

Conventional wisdom may have it that Bonaire is more for divers than swimmers and sunbathers, but the beautifully secluded white sand shores of the **Harbour Village Beach Club** offer a haven for land-lovers as well. A member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, the Harbour Village has been voted Bonaire's Leading Hotel for two years running. The hotel's luxurious one- and two-bedroom suites provide a stark counterpoint to the bucolic setting, allowing guests to enjoy the best of both worlds. The hotel also features a fully equipped spa for those whose idea of post-dive relaxation includes a 90-minute Tropical Touch massage, an After-Sun Recovery Facial or even a Caviar Indulgence Facial.

As far as dining goes, Bonaire has over 70 restaurants serving cuisine that ranges from local specialties such as the **City Café's** Keshi Yena, cheese stuffed with a stew of seasoned fish, to international fare, as found at the Argentinean Patagonia Steakhouse.



C IS FOR CURACAO

While “C” may well stand for Curacao, in this case it also stands for culture, which is abundant if you wander away from the confines of your resort and into the main town of Willemstad. Colorful Dutch colonial architecture, fascinating museums, vibrant art galleries and a diverse population combine to form a bustling port town that is unlike any other in the Caribbean.

Willemstad’s sundry attractions provide many visitors with sufficient reason to choose a city hotel, such as the **Hotel Kura Hulanda Spa and Casino**, over a beach resort. The Kura Hulanda is far more than a beautiful luxury hotel, a popular casino and an acclaimed spa; it’s a monument to the spirit of the island and its rich history. Right on the premises, guests can find the **Museum Kura Hulanda** and learn all about the African slave trade that played such a major role in the formation of the island’s culture and language.

For those who want beachfront accommodations and don’t mind traveling into town for their dose of island flavor, the **Lodge Kura Hulanda and Beach Club** has all the five-star amenities of its sister property in the city but comes fully equipped with its own beautiful strip of beach as well as a natural reef that is a joy for divers the world over.

One of the best times to visit Curacao is during Carnival, when the local spirit is at its most festive. The Grand Parade enjoys a spectacular turnout and features costumes, dancers and elaborate floats—it’s Curacao culture at its most authentic.





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