

FACTS & FIGURES



Location:
Caribbean, island in
the Caribbean Sea,
north of Venezuela.

Area: 193 sq km

Population: 71,891 (July 2006 est.)

Languages: Dutch (official), Papiamentu,
English, Spanish

Dependency status: member country of the
Kingdom of the Netherlands

Capital: Oranjestad

Climate: Tropical marine; little seasonal
temperature variation

Local Currency: Aruban guilder/florin (AWG)

GDP: \$2.13 billion (2004 est.)

Main export partners: US 86.6%,
Netherlands 3.8%, Canada 2.4% (2005)

Source: The CIA World Factbook

ARUBA



Where happiness lives

"Bonbini" is the word for welcome in Aruba's native language of Papiamentu. At the idyllic beaches, upscale establishments and colourful streets, you will never stop hearing it. And 40% of you will come back.



Tourism didn't exist in the late 15th century. Travelling was the stuff of intrepid explorers scouring the oceans for routes to the Indies or land that would yield gold and silver. So when Alonso de Ojeda came upon a 70-square mile island in the southern Caribbean in 1499 and found nothing but blue seas, white sand and cactus prairies he dubbed the place "Isla Inútil" (Useless Island) and moved on.

The Spanish must still be kicking themselves: that island was Aruba, a country which has managed to develop the perfect combination of hospitality, natural beauty and upscale accommodations. Out of the hurricane belt, just 15 miles off the coast of Venezuela and a mere two and a half hour flight from Miami, Aruba is set in the bluest of seas, permanently warmed by the sun yet cooled by gentle trade winds.

"Aruba's exclusivity lies in a blend of three major elements of its culture," says Edison Briesen, Minister of Tourism and Transport. "The island's close proximity to Latin America gives a warm nature to our people. Then our excellent European-based education system is characterized by a high level of discipline. And the US oil refinery that was established here in the 1920's created an American influence."

Myrna Jansen, Managing Director of the Aruba Tourism Authority (ATA) summarizes the formula for Aruba's success: "Hospitality, friendliness, quality, infrastructures, safety and fantastic cuisine." The very high, year round occupancy rate of the island's 7300 rooms has in fact caused a US\$274 million renovation program of facilities by ATA and its private sector partners: hotels, spas, casinos,

the airport and the cruise port are all undergoing expansion to be able to meet the upscale demand for Aruba.

Nevertheless, in 2005 the island staggered under the disappearance of American teenager Natalee Holloway. This was a tragic occurrence for the family and for a nation that rightly prides itself on the friendliness of its local population. The fact remains that Aruba is one of the safest destinations in the world, with the highest and most consistent repeat pattern in the region: 40% of visitors return, with 27% of these coming back more than six

"Our exclusivity lies in the warm nature of our people, our skilled workforce and our American influence."

Edison Briesen, Minister of Tourism and Transport



times. "Aruba as an island is all-inclusive," points out Briesen. "Our borders are the waters of the sea rather than high fences." The cruise business recognizes the safety of Aruba, as it is the only destination where ships remain after 9pm.

For a small island, Aruba in fact offers extraordinary diversity. First and foremost there are, of course, the beaches. They are pristine and white, with a calm sea that offers 100 feet of visibility. Palm Beach has been voted Best Family Friendly Beach by the Travel Channel, while Eagle Beach received no less than the accolade of #1 Caribbean Beach by USA Today. Most resorts and casinos line up along these beaches and many of them are undergoing expansion or face-lifts to cater to an increasingly more elite clientele.

Action lovers will prefer the rugged and wild shores of the north, where the waves of the Atlantic incessantly

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Courtesy of the Aruba Tourism Authority





Cruise ship passengers descend upon Oranjestad port, which is in prime location.

crash against dramatic cliffs, coral bridges and deep limestone caves. But for some extraordinary sights, visitors are well advised not to neglect the interior. The desert landscape here is unexpected, with cacti, aloe plants, rock formations and the strange, characteristic divi-divi or watapana trees that bend according to the permanent northeasterly winds. Activities range from watching colourful butterflies emerge from their cocoons at a farm, riding huge sand dunes in a buggy or walking the trails of Arikok Park in search of wildlife such as mountain goats, wild donkeys and iguana.

In spite of the fact that Aruba is isolated from the rest of the Caribbean, the beauty of the island became a word-of-mouth success, with cruise ships making regular stops from the 1960's onwards. "The port is a medium through which tourists sample the island," says J. Alphonso Boekhoudt, Managing Director of the Aruba Ports Authority (APA). Cruise ship passengers descend upon a port which is in a prime location: they may then take advantage of nearby beaches, a trip to the interior, or a stroll around the capital, Oranjestad. The city is extremely charming with its façades in bright, strong colours, its exclusive duty free shops, restaurants serving fine Caribbean, European and American cuisine and its museums and galleries. Oranjestad becomes even more colourful during Carnival, which takes place before Lent. Its multi-cultural, lively population puts on a unique show that gathers elements from Brazil, Venezuela, Holland and the United States, reflecting the harmonious co-existence of over 40 nationalities on the island.

APA conducted a survey which revealed that 33% of cruise ship passengers are very likely to return to the island for a land-based vacation. What makes most sense, though, is to increase the "fly and cruise" segment that was formerly limited by the number of rooms in the country. With the expansion of major hotels and the creation of new timeshares and condominiums, it will be increasingly possible for tourists to arrive by air, stay a few days and then join a cruise to other destinations. "We are also considering working in collaboration with other islands in the Deep South of the Caribbean, because we believe this would create an interesting market," adds Boekhoudt. The so called South Caribbean initiative would allow Aruba and neighbouring islands to attract more cruises in spite of the larger distances. After all, even Ulysses took the longer route when the stop along the way was an enchanted island.



Home, sweet home

The experience of timesharing seems not to be enough: more and more visitors to Aruba are opting to buy their very own home in luxury condominiums.

The couple with the cute children approaches the beaming doorman at La Cabana Villas in Eagle Beach and they exchange familiar greetings. They hand him a souvenir from the United States and ask about his family.

This may seem like a strange way for tourists to behave, but it may well be their 20th visit to the island! Hotel capacity in Aruba is five times the 1985 level, but the very high and consistent repeat pattern of visitors has sped up different accommodation trends in the island, which does not at all rely only on traditional hotel rooms with daily rates. Timeshares – also known as vacation ownership – allow participants to share ownership of a unit.

As many establishments on the island, La Cabana Villas functions in part as a hotel, by renting its fully equipped apartments by the day, but also sets apart units for its "members" or repeat customers that end up working as a sort of home away from home. "You can park your rented car in front of your villa and take groceries into your fully equipped kitchen and enjoy the island," says Albert Lacle, Principal at Key Management Group on behalf of La Cabana. "It's a refreshing change from entering a hotel lobby then taking an elevator to a mini-sized room. La Cabana offers large-sized condominiums, suites and one-bedroom apartments."

"Aruba is still very affordable, compared to other Caribbean islands." Ronald Groeters, owner and Managing Director of Best and Solid Realty Group.

In fact, condominiums are the latest trend in Aruba. Previous attempts to create condos had not caught on, until the government finally allowed their development by the seafront. In 2003 the Aruba Investment Bank (AIB) helped investors with the Oceania Project which sold out in a few weeks, successfully launching the condominium fever on the island. Aruba is currently experiencing a condo development boom, but there will be a limit to construction, due to the government's and ATA's concern with keeping the attractions of the island intact.

Anyone with an eye for investment and the desire to own a piece of paradise may do well to hurry. Foreign nationals are allowed to own property

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*Always find
the perfect something,
or nothing, to do.*





in Aruba, which also has the advantage of being governed by Dutch law. US citizens may get a mortgage in Aruba; conditions vary, but in most cases they will need at least 50% equity. And the good news, according to Ronald Groters, owner and Managing Director of leading real estate group Best & Solid Realty, is that "Aruba is still very affordable, compared to other Caribbean islands."

Two thousand condominium units are on the pipeline and applications for financial aid for at least half have been submitted to the AIB. "Aruba's condominium units are already classified as 'valuable' by Resort Condominium International and Interval International," says Frensel Giel, Managing Director of the AIB. "Though owners here rarely rent or sell their units, which they purchase primarily for personal use."

Potential owners may opt to buy property or to buy a house already built on lease land. The land remains the property of the government of Aruba, but a 60 year lease is given for a yearly fee. The lease is automatically renewed for another 60 years when the first period is over. Costs related to either ownership or lease remain very low, with a single yearly tax called land tax.

Other reasons to buy a condominium in Aruba are the upgrading of existing infrastructures on the island, which will increase the value of property. A destination catering to the affluent, Aruba is polishing up its seafront with massive hotel renovations, and is improving roads and expanding the port. Queen Beatrix International airport is undergoing a US\$ 34 million refurbishment with a new central security area, updated signage and a US\$ 16 million linear park that will connect it to the end of the high rise hotel corridor. The park will include a green area and a bike and walking path which will make full use of the ocean view. Many of the top international carriers, including American Airlines, have increased the frequency of flights to Aruba in response to the increasing popularity of the destination.

Case Study: The Sands

Theodore Rooijackers is no rookie developer. Having already managed ambitious projects in Europe, he found a dream come true in a seafront property on Eagle Beach. The Sands is set to become a 124 apartment luxury condominium carefully orchestrated to appeal to the high end of the US market.

No expense has been spared: residences include custom imported European kitchen cabinetry with a choice of wood finish, granite or marble countertops and designer hardware; the master baths will include a spa; an advanced security system and high speed DSL global internet will employ state-of-the-art technology. Residents may select units ranging between 914 to 2,443 square feet. US based architects, landscape artists and land planners as well as Aruban construction specialists have pulled all the punches so that The Sands should become the most exclusive possible getaway. "The Sands is really THE luxurious project now happening in Aruba," says Indira Solognier of AMPLUS Financial and Assurance Consulting. She represents the project management team of The Sands and has seen 600 interested customers visit the sales office for the condominium since it opened in January 2006.

Phase I of The Sands has already began and Buildings A and B are already for sale; Phase II will follow with the sale of Building C. Prices begin at half a million US dollars and go up to US\$ 1.6 million. With a 30% increase forecast before completion, it's hard to see how this could turn out to be a bad investment.

Making it hard to do nothing

Years ago the international jet set could think of nothing better to do than to discover paradisiacal islands to lounge in, drink in hand. Times have changed, and few travellers today want complete inactivity. Vacations are the ideal time to better one's golf handicap or trek through unknown lands and discover new ways of having fun.

Aruba offers a surprise wealth of activities. The fact that it is one of the Windward Islands, with year-round east and northeasterly trades that average 15 miles per hour, makes it a prime destination for hip young crowds who love wind sports. Windsurfing competitions, including the Hi-Winds Amateur World Challenge in June take place here. Aruba is also the perfect spot to try kitesurfing. Most hotels offer equipment and instruction in water-skiing, parasailing, jet-skiing and sailing.

If you haven't yet learned to scuba dive, this is the place to do it. The offshore waters offer a visibility of up to 100 feet and 42 dive sites provide a variety of sights to take your breath away: dazzling parrotfish, manta rays, eels and the rare green moray as well as stunning coral formations. Numerous premier shipwrecks give you a glimpse of the past. Boats can also be chartered for deep-sea fish, and your catch of the day might be marlin, tuna or sailfish.

If you're looking forward to staying dry for a morning or afternoon, there is a world-class golf course at the island's northwest tip. The Tierra del Sol 18-hole championship course was designed by Robert Trent Jones II



with the environment in mind. It makes the most of the rugged terrain and the local bird sanctuary, as well as of the spectacular view of the ocean.

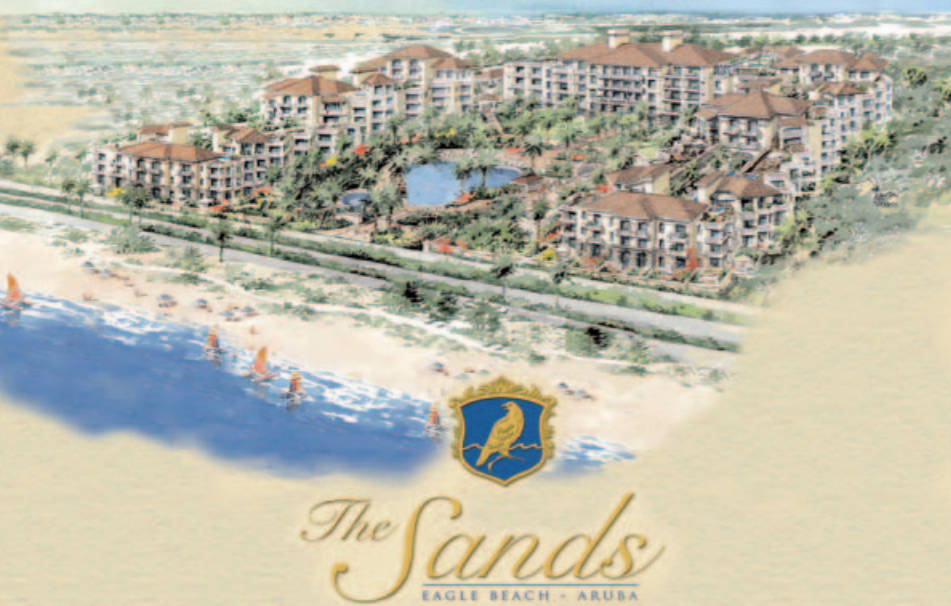
All this activity will earn you a respite: luxurious spas throughout the island cater to your every need and whim, giving you a choice among a variety of body treatments that include shiatsu, Swedish massage, hydrotherapy, aromatherapy and wraps. Revived by the ministrations of health and beauty experts, you may face an evening at the glitzy casino or nightclub of your choice, or relax with fine wine while sampling cuisine from the island or from different exotic nationalities. Aruba is known for its good food.

And should the ultimate thrill be necessary, why not get married in Aruba? It not only consistently ranks among the top honeymoon spots in the world, it has also introduced the first-ever online destination bridal registry. It offers friends and family the opportunity to offer part of the honeymoon as a wedding gift to a very fortunate couple.

For more information on the fun and exciting activities available in Aruba look at www.visitaruba.com.

IMPORTANT: As of January 8, 2007, all U.S. citizens and foreign nationals will be required to carry a passport or other accepted secure documents to enter or re-enter the U.S. from vacations or business travel anywhere in the Caribbean. For more information, please visit www.travel.state.gov

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Roland Croes,
Managing Director
of SETAR



As a destination Aruba is not competing on price, but on quality. That means providing services to a very demanding clientele.

Roland Croes, Managing Director of SETAR, the telecommunications company, is well aware of that. He makes sure that not only the nationals get the best in communications options and that these run smoothly, but that tourists should keep connected. "We want to ensure that they have linkages to their respective phone companies, whether it's Verizon, Cingular, Sprint or T-Mobile," he says. "The US uses three types of cellular technology and we try to accommodate as much of that technology as possible. At the moment we are able to accommodate 80 to 90 percent of US technology for the convenience of our tourists."

SETAR works on supplying the latest on information technology via PDAs, Blackberries, mobile services or wireless connection. Customer friendly and easily accessible centers, such as the one on Palm Beach, help international customers and residents have a great and hassle-free experience.

"We have also concentrated aggressively on the distribution of broadband throughout the island, with almost 50 percent of the households benefiting from it," adds Croes. It's SETAR that provides broadband services to many hotel rooms and condominiums in Aruba, helping to keep visitors relaxed but connected.