
NEW YORK POST

NYP Travel
BEACHES AND BLING

Chris Bunting
1,275 words
24 August 2004
New York Post
NYPO
52

English
(c) 2004 N.Y.P. Holdings, Inc. All rights reserved.

WERE it not for its year-round 82-degree weather, white-sand beaches and calm turquoise waters, **Aruba** could be mistaken for 47th Street. A big swath of this Caribbean island is a flat landscape of jewelers, gem dealers and diamond shops. Throw in the casinos and luxury honeymoon suites, and it might seem impossible to avoid a "spend, spend, spend" itinerary.

So surely this 20-mile-long island, which has successfully warded off slave traders, pirates and the Nazis, is equally unwelcoming to frugal travelers.

Not so fast.

Both in and outside of Oranjestad, Arubas capital, is an undercurrent of familiar budget living: fast-food joints, inexpensive (but hot) attractions and cheap hotel rooms.

Just leave the gambling to the rich (or risky), leave the jewels for the newlyweds-gone-wild, and leave now (no hurricanes here) - this is low-season and fares grow come winter.

BEFORE YOU GO

Since **Aruba** went semi-independent in 1986 (the Nether-lands still appoints a governor), the "A" in the ABC (B is for Bonaire, C is for Curacao) islands has been happily minting its own money. But most prices are in U.S. dollars and our greenback is always taken.

Also, no adapters needed.

Visit **aruba.com** for more info.

HOW TO GO

Budget Arubas biggest enemy (actually, any budget vacations biggest nemesis) is the getting there. But killer deals pop up here and there, you just need to do some research.

An orbitz.com search done at press time revealed a mid-week low price of \$487 round-trip on American Airlines from JFK, with stopovers in Santo Domin-go and Curaao. The lowest price direct flight was a \$516 round-trip on American.

For three-night air/hotel packages, check with American Airlines Vacations - a \$555 deal at the Mill Resort is available now (aavacations.com).

You'll land at Arubas Queen Beatrix Airport, located on the southern coast about four miles from Oranjestad. Plan on a \$15-\$18 cab fare to the hotel. There's a bus, but treat yourself.

GETTING AROUND

Dont be spooked by the "fatal accident" barometer in the middle of town - you are going to need wheels to get around. Renting a car is nice, but expect to pay \$30-\$40 per day. Buses, though, cover the entire island, leaving every half hour (every hour after 6 p.m.) and cost only \$2 for a round-trip ticket.

The central hub is in Oranjestad, with lots of stops along the highways. The un-metered taxis are also cheap (\$4-\$8) alternatives if youre going short distances.

WHAT TO DO

Hourly renditions of Sades "Smooth Operator," courtesy of the Renaissance Crystal Casinos cover-band, will woo you to (or away from) the gaming floor free of charge. Penny slots are available in the public entrance, but avoid the more expensive poker and roulette tables until the last night.

In the meantime, escape the hazards of chance and take in the natural sights.

At 8-foot-tall, with powerful legs, homicidal claws and a pea-sized brain, ostriches can bash in the skull of any would-be predator without a second-thought. But at Arubas Ostrich Farm, the birds endear themselves to tourists long enough to get fed and have their babies tended to. If you want, you can ride one.

Oh yeah, you can eat the dinobirds, too, at the onsite restaurant (\$10 for a tour of the farm, [297] 585-9630).

Speaking of cuddly animals, did you know the male butterfly often gets drunk off of fermented fruit before mating with the female? I guess we do share 99 percent of our DNA. Learn lots of other cool facts about the winged beauties at Arubas outdoor Butterfly Farm in Oranjestad (\$12 for adults, \$6 kids; thebutterflyfarm.com).

History buffs should head to Oranjestads Numismatic Museum to view Arubas past through its currency. Good ol peg-legged Peter Stuyvesant was Dutch governor overseeing the ABCs in the 1600s, and he makes a cameo on some of the old time paper money (\$5, Zuid-straat 7, [297] 582-8831).

Also see Arubas Aloe Factory, where youll learn that aloe, a skin rejuvenator, is an even better laxitive. Arubas economy was once based on the plant (Schotlandstraat 9, [297] 588-6881).

The island, which can be crossed coast-to-coast via car in 40 minutes, also has quirky geographical offerings.

The 100-foot-tall Natural Bridge, formed by 1,000 of years of surf pounding the ground out from underneath it, is beloved by locals. Then there are the fontein caves, limestone hollows along the northeastern coast, with walls covered in ancient drawings (and graffiti).

Just stay out of the ocean on the north side - the tide pulls people from shore every year.

To see all the above, contact DePalm, the islands primary tour operator (\$35 for a 4 1/2-hour expedition that ends with snorkeling and a buffet on DePalms private island; depalm.com).

Of course, Arubas broad beaches - all of which are public - are surely not to be missed, especially Eagle and Palm Beach.

EATS/DRINKS

Aruba has all the comforts of home - including Hooters and Benihana. Pass on both, and not just because theyre expensive. Cheap eats like McDonalds, Burger King, Wendys, Little Caesars, Baskin-Robbins and Dominos have all infested the island, and you might as well make use of them. You can also get fast food at the El Rey food-carts off the main highway in Oranjestad (\$3 burgers, \$2 hot dogs).

For true Aruban cuisine, there are a few \$15-and-under choices. The Buccaneer restaurant in Noord, which features a 5,000-gallon salt-water fish tank and tableside aquariums, has reasonable prices. Barracuda fillets (\$12) and lobster bisque (\$3.50) are among its specialties (Gasparito 11-C, Noord).

When it comes to tossing back a few, scamming free drinks by idling at a blackjack table is not worth the bouncers wrath. (At least it wasnt for me.) Instead, go to the ultra-quirky Eetcafe the Paddock, the only "genuine" Dutch bar in all of **Aruba**, which serendipitously is on the beautiful main harbor in downtown Oranjestad. Sip \$3 Balashis (the local brew) while watching the cruise ships bring in the herds. For fun, check out the little wheel of fortune behind the bar. Spin it and you may win free drinks - or be forced to buy a round (paddock-aruba.com).

Dancing types can shake it at Mambo Jambo upstairs in Oranjestads Royal Plaza shopping center (\$5 cocktails). Its a hangout for locals and tourists alike, and the smoke machine complements the tunes nicely (mambojamboaruba.com).

SLEEPS

Intimidated by the skyscraper-heavy hotel row on Palm/Eagle beaches? You should be. Rooms run in the \$200/night area. But there cheaper ones to be had.

Take the Coconut Inn: Its near the tall guys, but worlds away in price. A swimming pool is on the property, though its only a minutes drive to the beach (studios from \$45/night and bedroom apartments -which can sleep four -from \$65; coconutinn.com).

The studio apartments at the 3-years-old **Aruba** Harmony in the Oranjestad burb of Ponton are modern and clean, and well-situated (from \$65/night, and week-long scuba specials are also available; arubaharmony.com).

Ticker

GOOD NEWS: American has dropped the number of Advantage miles needed to fly to Hawaii by 5,000 from Sept. 7 - Nov. 18, to 30,000.

- Arriba **Aruba**: Live it up for less. (Rubens Abboud/Alamy) - EPCOT? No, its downtown Oranjestad, **Aruba**'s clean and handsome capital. (Sergio Pitamitz/Alamy)

Document NYPO000020040824e08o0002v

Search Summary

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Text | aruba and bling |
| Date | All Dates |
| Source | New York Post - All sources |
| Author | All Authors |
| Company | All Companies |
| Subject | All Subjects |
| Industry | All Industries |
| Region | All Regions |
| Language | English |
| Results Found | 1 |
| Timestamp | 19 June 2016 18:28 |