

Subject/Area: Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao

BONAIRE: so hassle & theft free after Venezuela (even free check in/out)! Perfect place to scuba for novices and anyone who like easy conditions: moorings on all dive sites (for boats up to 38ft and dinghies), book describing dive sites, good visibility, no or very little current (90% sites), pick your depth from 25ft and down, easy u/w navigation along walls, ... Your 10\$ dive permit will be worth it and prices charged by dive centers to go with them on dives are very reasonable compared to the rest of the Caribbean (Sand Dollar well organized and cater to cruisers)!

Our favorite dive sites were 4.bise morto, 9.rappel, 40.Hilma hooker wreck, 41. angel city, 57.red slaves (current!) N. Forest, V.Carl's hill. If you want to do a wreck not part of the Park's official dive sites, try the 237'Windjammer wreck just off Bopec (145'+ deep). While here, we gave full open water PAD course to the crew of "Teddy" (parents and 2 young daughters, even the 4 yr. old got to do a mini-experience!). Great place to learn scuba!

Since we were there in October, we participated to the Bonaire Regatta as the only multihull in the newly introduced cruiser's class. Despite the very amateurish organization and unfair handicaps, everyone had a lot of fun participating! Nice social life with weekly pot-luck at Harbor Village Marina (met SSCA "Andiamo", "Fenix", "Vixen" and many other nice cruisers) and the interesting "Port Call" free weekly paper published by the nice ex-Commodores George & Laura De Salvo. We rented a double-cab Toyota for 2 days with other cruisers and had a great time touring the island: plenty of video opportunities and good roads with clear markings leading you to lighthouses, caves, beaches and to the beautiful land park in the North; Bonaire in not only the u/w world! Beware in the anchorage of occasional wind reversal!

Keep in mind that you have an easy sail to CHICHIRIVICHE on the Venezuelan coast for provisioning fruits, vegetables, beer and gas at much better prices than in Bonaire. We did it for a week to avoid the wind reversal coming in Bonaire after the passage of hurricane George. No formal check-in is necessary; just have to see the port captain for a short stay before going to Puerto Cabello. Nice anchorages and exploration in the Bahia de Cuare with Indian caves & religious site.

Keep in mind that the Moroccoy Park official user fee for foreign flag vessel is 84000 B\$!

CURACAO: most boats never anchor anywhere else than in Spanish Waters! Get a (free) permit from the harbormaster to anchor all along the coast and enjoy very good diving (even if conditions aren't as easy than in Bonaire). Make sure that you ask for every anchorage you may want to go because you will be checked (by either helicopter, big vessel or fast patrol boat running drug traffic surveillance)!

Plenty of very nice anchorages like Fuikbaai, St. Michielsbaai (good place to hide if you wait for wx to calm before heading SE), Santa Marthabaai (in the lagoon completely protected in front of the dive center "Easy divers" run by the very nice

Dutch couple Harry & Annelise, narrow entrance scary looking but with plenty of water to enter), Boka Santa Cruz, Grote Knip and West Punt (good departure point

for Aruba). Our favorite dive sites: 10. the cave (short dinghy trip from Boka Santa Cruz) and Punt Kanon (long dinghy trip from Fuikbaai possible only in calm seas). To find the spot at Punta Kanon, you go North of the lighthouse and keep it at a bearing of 180d and keep the far away NE point of Curacao at 330d. You will be a top of a ledge, follow it South at 50ft deep and you will run across a long cave (take a light, you just loose the sight of daylight when you reach the end of it), later follow the ledge again and then you will see a nice arch (with a school of tarpons resting?) and if you are lucky like we were you may see a manta ray swimming past!

When in Bonaire, it was tough to get parts to repair anything on board but don't believe the ones who will tell you that you can find everything in Curacao! Anything a little specialized has to come from the states and cost quite a lot by Fedex or air if you cannot wait the 2-3 weeks it will take to come by sea (sea Florida Express). In Spanish Waters you can get things from Imke (buy like you would from a mail order company: not much technical help, not much warranty on off the shelf items and bargain!) or recently from Capt. Jerry (affiliated with Budget Marine) who has more technical expertise.

ARUBA: even that you have to go at the dock to check-in and out (no big deal and no fees!) Aruba is a nice island to visit even if some complain that it has that Disney look. Good anchorages in front of the runway (plenty of wind and they don't fly at night!) or at Palm Beach quite away from the shore. If you rent a car, you can visit the island in less than a day with many nice sights also. If you like provisioning in huge, clean, well-stocked supermarkets at slightly better prices than in Curacao or if you enjoy night life (casinos, expensive restaurants) you will also be glad you stopped in Aruba (met a few boats been there for many months or even yrs!)

From there you get the shortest trip to Carthagena or the San Blas.

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Luc & Jackie s/v Sloepmouche