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CURAÇAO: A TOP 10 TO-DO LIST

TAKE A WALKING TOUR OF WILLEMSTAD

Founded in the 1600s, Curaçao's capital city features a historic blend of Dutch and Spanish colonial styles, which earned Willemstad a place on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites. You can see all the most striking architectural achievements on a short walking tour, going from 17th-century forts to the swinging Queen Emma pontoon bridge, and from the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel Synagogue (the oldest in continuous use in the Western Hemisphere) to the governor's mansion.

EAT IGUANA AT JAANCHIES

This is a quirky, out-of-the-way spot full of unique Curaçao flavor. The "walking menu" owner sits down to discuss daily specials and suggest dishes, with fresh seafood, curried goat and iguana (considered an aphrodisiac, but watch for bones!) often at the top of the list. Hundreds of tropical birds flutter around feeders on the restaurant's perimeter, while herds of free-range goats cross the road outside. Legendary among locals, Jaanchies is the best sort of tourist trap.



Inside the anthropological museum at the Kura Hulanda.

SEE THE KURA HULANDA MUSEUM

Like most Caribbean islands, Curaçao was built on the backs of slaves. This impressive anthropological museum chronicles the history of the island's predominant culture, with exhibits on the African slave trade, West African empires, Pre-Columbian gold and Mesopotamian relics. From recreations of slave ship conditions to a remarkably diverse collection of African art, this is one of the best museums in the Caribbean.

TAKE AN ATV EXCURSION OR JEEP SAFARI

An island made up mostly of coral, parts of Curaçao look like they're covered in lava, and the arid environment produces more cacti than palm trees. ATVs and safari Jeeps are best for exploring the rugged backcountry, so companies like Eric's ATVs and Curaçao Actief offer tours that take you from plantation ruins and the natural whirlpool of the Supladó crater to hidden caves and stunning vistas.

PLAY ON THE PLAYAS

Adventure lovers will find plenty to do on Curaçao, but the island is equally appealing for those whose idea of fun involves little more than a sunny day, clear water and a cool tropical drink. The southern coast features gorgeous beaches ranging from the intimate Playa Jeremi and Playa Lagun to full-service beaches like Cas Abao and Konkiki, which offer recreational activities and excellent amenities.

SNORKEL THE TUGBOAT & THE BLUE ROOM

The waters off Curaçao's coast are teeming with coral reefs that thrive with aquatic life. The Tugboat in Caracas Bay is the world's most photographed dive site, and it features a 25-year-old shipwreck that attracts angelfish, parrotfish and more. The Blue Room, located in Westpunt, is a massive sea cavern that's become a diver's haven for its stunning sights in eerie turquoise waters that glow like Blue Curaçao liqueur.



Inside the Curaçao Sea Aquarium we joined our fine flippers friends in their natural habitat.

DIVE AT DOLPHIN ACADEMY

Located at the Curaçao Sea Aquarium, this is one of only three facilities in the world that allows visitors to swim with our fine flippers friends in the open water, enjoying Bottlenose dolphins in their natural environment. Its up-close Animal Encounters give snorkelers and scuba divers an incredible opportunity to hand-feed a variety of sharks (thankfully, through a hole in a Plexiglas window), stingrays, turtles and tropical fish. It's truly a once-in-a-lifetime aquatic experience.

EXPLORE ST. CHRISTOFFEL & SHETE BOKA NATIONAL PARKS

Run by the Carmabi Foundation, Christoffel Park centers around Mount Christoffel (Curaçao's highest point at 1,292 feet), which can be reached via well-marked hiking trails. You'll see iguanas, a variety of birds and perhaps even a rare white-tail deer, and you can find paintings from the Arawak Indians in the Park's caves. Nearby Shete Boka National Park is home to seven caves, some of which serve as sea turtle breeding grounds.

TRY YOUR LUCK AT THE RENAISSANCE CURAÇAO RESORT & CASINO

Located in the heart of Willemstad's shopping district, the brand new Renaissance Curaçao Resort & Casino has become a happening hot spot for island nightlife. Enjoy live entertainment, grab a drink from the bustling Blue Lobby Bar or, if you're the gambling type, try your hand at one of the slot machines, poker tables, blackjack tables and more.

SHOP THE FLOATING MARKET

With such a dry climate and more rocks than soil, Curaçao isn't exactly the best place for a garden to grow. Fortunately, Venezuela is a mere 40 miles away, and every day finds a fleet of boats bearing fresh fruits, vegetables, fish and seafood heading to this colorful market on the Punda side of Willemstad to hawk their wares at surprisingly low prices.

—BRET LOVE



The floating market is a must-visit.