

Country Guide for CURAÇAO



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1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: Caribbean, 56km (35 miles) north of Venezuela.

Diplomatic Representation

Curaçao is part of the Netherlands Antilles represented abroad by Royal Netherlands Embassies - see The Netherlands.

Curaçao Tourism Development Bureau

Pietermaai 19, PO Box 3266, Willemstad, Curaçao, NA

Tel: (9) 461 6000. Fax: (9) 461 2305. E-mail: ctdbcur@attglobal.net

Web site: <http://www.curacao-tourism.com>

Office of the Minister Plenipotentiary of the Netherlands Antilles

Badhuisweg 173-175, 2597 JP The Hague, The Netherlands

Tel: (70) 306 6111. Fax: (70) 306 6110.

Curaçao Tourist Bureau Europe

Vasteland 82-84, PO Box 23227, 3011 PB Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Tel: (10) 414 2639. Fax: (10) 413 6834. E-mail: ctbenl@wirehub.nl

Curaçao Tourism Development Bureau (UK Representative)

Axis Sales & Marketing Ltd, 421A Finchley Road, London NW3 6HJ

Tel: (020) 7431 4045. Fax: (020) 7431 7920.

E-mail: destinations@pwaxis.co.uk

Caribbean Tourism Organisation

42 Westminster Palace Gardens, Artillery Row, London SW1P 1RR

Tel: (020) 7222 4335. Fax: (020) 7222 4325.

E-mail: cto@carib-tourism.com

Web site: <http://www.caribtourism.com>

British Consulate

Jan Sofat 38, PO Box 3803, Curaçao, NA

Tel: (9) 747 3322. Fax: (9) 747 3330.

Curaçao Tourist Bureau

475 Park Avenue South, Suite 2000, New York, NY 10016

Tel: (212) 683 7660. Fax: (212) 683 9337. E-mail: ctdbny@ctdb.com

Also deals with enquiries from Canada.

Consulate of the United States of America

Street address: JB Gorsiraweg 1, Willemstad, Curaçao, NA

Postal address: PO Box 158, Willemstad, Curaçao, NA

Tel: (9) 461 3066. Fax: (9) 461 6489. E-mail: info@amcongencuracao.an

Web site: <http://www.amcongencuracao.an>

Canadian Consulate

Scharlooweg 55, Willemstad, Curaçao, NA

Tel: (9) 466 1115. Fax: (9) 466 1122. E-mail: management@mcb-bank.com

Country dialling code: 599.

2 GENERAL

Area: 444 sq km (171 sq miles).

Population: 152,700 (1996).

Population Density: 344.0 per sq km.

Capital: Willemstad. Population: 144,097 (1992).

Geography: Curaçao, the largest island in the Netherlands Antilles, is geographically part of the Dutch Leeward Islands, also known as the Dutch Antilles. It is flat, rocky and fairly barren owing to its low rainfall. There are many excellent beaches.

Government: Part of the Netherlands Antilles; dependency of the Netherlands. The Netherlands Antilles consist of Curaçao, Bonaire, St Maarten, St Eustatius and Saba. The capital of the island group is Willemstad, Curaçao. Head of State: HM Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, represented locally by **Governor Jaime M Saleh since 1990. Head of Government:** Prime Minister Susanne Camelia-Römer since 1998.

Language: Dutch is the official language. Papiamentu (a mixture of Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, English, Arawak Indian and several African languages) is the lingua franca; English and Spanish are also widely spoken.

Religion: The majority of the population is Roman Catholic, with Protestant minorities, both evangelical and other low-church denominations. There is also a Baha'i temple and a synagogue.

Time: GMT - 4.

Electricity: 110/220 volts AC, 50Hz.

Communications:

Telephone: Good IDD service to Europe. Country code: 599. Outgoing international code: 00.

Mobile telephone: No roaming agreements at present. Handsets can be hired at the airport for a fee of approximately US\$4 per day and a deposit of US\$50.

Internet/E-mail: There is an Internet café in Willemstad. Local ISPs include IBM and Curanet.

Telegram: Facilities available in most large hotels and in the post office in Willemstad.

Post: Airmail to Western Europe takes four to six days.

Press: The English-language daily is called The Guardian.

BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies: From time to time these change.

BBC:

MHz17.7115.226.1955.975

Voice of America:

MHz15.3011.706.1301.530

3 PASSPORT

| | <i>Passport Required?</i> | <i>Visa Required?</i> | <i>Return Ticket Required?</i> |
|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| British | Yes | 4 | Yes |
| Australian | Yes | 5 | Yes |
| Canadian | 3 | 5 | Yes |
| USA | 2 | 5 | Yes |
| OtherEU | 1 | 4 | Yes |
| Japanese | Yes | 5 | Yes |

PASSPORTS: Valid passport required by all except the following:

- (a) 1. nationals of Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and The Netherlands holding national identity cards;
- (b) 2. nationals of the USA holding voters' registration cards or birth certificate, and alien residents of the USA with an Alien Registration Card; nationals of the USA born outside the USA with naturalisation certificates of American citizenship;
- (c) 3. nationals of Canada with birth certificates or proof of citizenship or with Certificate of Naturalization or with Certificate of Proof of Canadian Citizenship; alien residents of Canada still holding their national passport with either Canadian Immigration of Identification Certificates (CIIC) or Canadian Certificate of Identity;
- (d) nationals of Brazil, Mexico, San Marino and Trinidad & Tobago holding national identity cards;
- (e) nationals and alien residents of Venezuela, and travellers in Venezuela visiting the Netherlands Antilles as tourists with national identity cards.

VISAS: Required by all except the following:

- (a) 4. nationals of Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, The Netherlands (including Aruba), Spain and the UK for visits of up to 90 days (stay can be extended locally by the same period);
- (b) nationals of Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Hungary, Israel, Jamaica, Korea (Rep. of), Malawi, Mauritius, Niger, Philippines, Poland, San Marino, Slovak Republic, Swaziland, Surinam, Togo and the USA for visits of up to 90 days (stay can be extended locally by the same period);
- (c) 5. nationals of countries mentioned in the chart above and most other countries for a stay of 14 days (stay can be extended locally by the same period).

Note: Nationals of the following countries must apply for a visa before entering the country even for tourist purposes: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China (PR), CIS, Croatia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Haiti, Korea (DPR), Latvia, Libya, Lithuania, Romania, Vietnam and Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

Types of visa and cost: Single- and Multiple-entry: G48.50 (for 1 month); G64.50 (for 3 months); G81.00 (for 1 year). Prices are given in Dutch Guilders.

Validity: Up to 3 months from date of issue.

Application requirements: (a) Application form. (b) 2 passport-size photographs. (c) Passport valid for at least 3 months after date of intended return to home country. (d) Return or onward ticket.

Application to: Nearest Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.
Further information about visa requirements may be obtained from the Royal Netherlands Embassies which formally represent the Netherlands Antilles. For addresses, see The Netherlands section.

Working days required: 1 month.

Temporary residence: Enquire at the office of the Lieutenant Governor of the Island Territory of Curaçao, Concordiastraat 24, Wilhemstad. Dutch Europeans are permitted to reside in the Netherlands Antilles without having to apply for a residence permit.

4 MONEY

Currency: Netherlands Antilles Guilder or Florin (NAG) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of NAG250, 100, 50, 25, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of 100, 50, 25, 10, 5, 2.5 and 1 cents. US Dollars are accepted everywhere.

Credit cards: MasterCard, Diners Club, American Express and Visa are widely accepted. Check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available. Debit cards are accepted in large shops and supermarkets.

Travellers cheques: To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US Dollars.

Note: The Netherlands Antilles Guilder or Florin is tied to the US Dollar.

Currency restrictions: The import and export of local and foreign currency is unlimited. The import of Dutch or Surinam silver coins is forbidden.

Banking hours: 0800-1530 Monday to Friday.

5 DUTY FREE

The following items may be taken into Curaçao by those over 15 years of age without payment of duty:

200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco; 2 litres of alcoholic beverages; an unlimited amount of perfume; gifts up to the value of NAG100.

Note: If the total value of the goods per passenger exceeds NAG500, a declaration should be made on customs forms and cleared at the freight department.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 2001 New Year's Day. Feb 26 Carnival Monday. Apr 13 Good Friday. Apr 16 Easter Monday. Apr 30 Queen's Birthday. May 1 Labour Day. May 24 Ascension Day. Jul 2 Curaçao Flag Day. Oct 21 Antillean Day. Dec 25-26 Christmas. Jan 1 2002 New Year's Day. Feb 11 Carnival Monday. Mar 29 Good Friday. Apr 1 Easter Monday. Apr 30 Queen's Birthday. May 1 Labour Day. May 9 Ascension Day. Jul 2 Curaçao Flag Day. Oct 21 Antillean Day. Dec 25-26 Christmas.

7 HEALTH

| | <i>Special Precautions</i> | <i>Certificate Required</i> |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Yellow Fever | No | 1 |
| Cholera | No | No |
| Typhoid and Polio | Yes | - |
| Malaria | No | - |
| Food and Drink | 2 | - |

1: A yellow fever certificate is required from travellers over six months of age coming from infected areas.

2: All mains water on the island is distilled from seawater, and is thus safe to drink. Bottled mineral water is widely available. Milk is pasteurised and dairy products are safe for consumption. Local meat, poultry, seafood, fruit and vegetables are generally considered safe to eat.

Health care: There are three hospitals on Curaçao. The largest, St Elizabeth, is well equipped. Health insurance is recommended.

Tourism assistance: There is a 24-hour hotline to assist travellers in need of help (tel: 461 7991).

Travel - International

AIR: The national airline of the Netherlands Antilles is ALM (LM). KLM operates daily flights to Curaçao from Amsterdam and ALM operates from Miami/Caracas. Other airlines serving Curaçao include American Airlines, Avianca Airlines, Sobel Air and United Airlines.

Approximate flight times: From Curaçao to London is 11 hours (depending on connection time), to Los Angeles is 12 hours and to New York is 6 hours.

International airport: Curaçao (CUR) (Hato) is 12km (7 miles) from Willemstad. Bus to the city centre operates daily 0600-2300 (journey time - 45 minutes). Taxis are also available (journey time - 30 minutes). Airport facilities include duty-free shop, bar, restaurant, light refreshments (0600-2200), banks/bureaux de change (0800-1530), automatic currency exchange machine, post office (0730-1830 Monday to Friday; 0730-1230 Saturday), hotel reservation facilities and car hire. Taxis are available to Willemstad (journey time - 30 minutes).

Departure tax: NAG36 (US\$20) per person.

SEA: Over 200 cruises arrive in Curaçao from America and Europe. A ferry sails regularly between Venezuela and Curaçao.

Travel - Internal

AIR: Windward Islands Air International operates to Saba (SAB) and St Eustatius (EUX). ALM operates regularly between Curaçao, Bonaire and Aruba.

DEPARTURE TAX: NAG10 (US\$5.75); children under two years of age and passengers transiting within 24 hours are exempt.

ROAD: Traffic drives on the right. A good public bus service runs throughout the island and many of the main hotels provide their own minibuses to Willemstad. Taxi: These are plentiful as are car hire firms (both international and local), which are located at the airport and in the main hotels, as well as in the capital. Documentation: An International Driving Permit is required.

8 ACCOMMODATION

HOTELS: There are a dozen or so luxury hotels on Curaçao, all offering air-conditioning, restaurants, swimming pools and/or beach access, and a choice between European Plan (room only) and Modified American Plan (half-board). Most also offer some sort of in-house entertainment, a baby-sitting service and cable TV. Some have their own casinos. Out-of-town hotels provide their guests with free transport to and from Willemstad. A 7% government tax and 12% service charge are levied on all hotel bills. For more information, contact the Curaçao Hospitality and Tourism Association (CHATA), PO Box 6115, Kaya Junior Salas 1, Willemstad (tel: (9) 465 1005; fax: (9) 465 1052; e-mail: information@chata.org; web site: <http://www.chata.org>); or Curaçao Apartments and Small Hotels Association (CASHA) (web site: <http://www.curacaoweb.com/casha>).

GUEST-HOUSES: For details of more modest accommodation - guest-houses, commercial hotels and self-catering - contact the Curaçao Tourism Development Bureau (see address section).

9 RESORTS & EXCURSIONS

Willemstad: Willemstad, the capital, is noted for its brightly-coloured, Dutch-style houses and range of other interesting and complementary architectural styles, including Cunucu houses (based on African-style mud and wattle huts), thatched cottages and country houses. It has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and is one of the finest shopping centres in the Caribbean. Monuments of interest in the city include the Statue of Manuel Piar, a famous freedom fighter, and two statues associated with the Second World War: one given by the Dutch royal family to the people of Curaçao (in recognition of their support), and one in commemoration of those who lost their lives. The mustard-coloured Fort Amsterdam, now the seat of government of the Netherlands Antilles, stands at the centre of historic Willemstad, which from 1648-1861 was a fortified town of some strategic importance. The fort's church, still standing, doubled as a storehouse for provisions put by in case of siege; specially designed storerooms for food, sails and other essentials may still be seen. A cannonball is still embedded in the church's southwest wall. Nearby is the present Governor's Residence, dating back to the

Dutch colonial days. Also worth seeing are the Queen Emma Pontoon bridge and the Queen Juliana Bridge. The latter spans the harbour at a height of 490m (1600ft). The harbour itself has a floating market where colourful barges full of agricultural produce can be seen. Nearby is the new market building, the design of which is very striking. The market comes to life after 0600 on a Saturday morning. The architecture of the Scharloo area, reached by crossing the Wilhelmina Drawbridge, is fascinating, dating from as early as 1700. The Mikvé Israel Synagogue is the oldest in the Americas and, like the Jewish Beth Heim Cemetery, is worth a visit. Its courtyard museum has a fine collection of historical artefacts.

EXCURSIONS: Besides the excellent beaches and hotel resorts, the island itself has a number of other points of interest. Just outside Willemstad is the modern site of the Netherlands Antilles University, and further along the western road is the Landhuis Papaya (a country house), the Ceru Grandis (a three-storey plantation house) and the driftwood beach of Boca San Pedro. Also of note is Boca Tabla, the thundering underwater cave of the north coast and the picturesque fishing village of Westpoint. St Christoffel National Park, occupying the most northwestern part of the island, is a nature reserve dominated by the St Christoffel Mountain. There are several caves decorated with Arawak Indian paintings, some unusual rock formations and many fine views across the countryside - the ruins of the Zorguliet Plantation and the privately owned Savonet Plantation and the Savonet Museum may be seen at the base of the mountain; the latter dates back to the 18th century and is still in use today. The indigenous flora includes orchids and some very interesting evergreens. As well as the interesting birdlife, the visitor to St Christoffel Park might see iguanas and the shy Curaçao deer. Well worth a visit are the interesting Caves of Hato. Magnificent stalactite formations, wall paintings and underground streams with cascading waterfalls can be seen within the 4900m (16,076ft) labyrinth.

10 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

As with the other islands of the Caribbean, watersports are widely promoted and facilities on Curaçao itself are well developed. There are excellent beaches for swimming (some charge an entrance fee). Windsurfing, sailing and water-skiing are popular on the island and the hotels and watersports centres are well equipped. Snorkelling, scuba-diving and deep-sea fishing are also popular and there are plenty of opportunities to participate in these sports. Tuition is available. Other sports include tennis, squash and golf (at the Shell 9-hole golf course and the new 18-hole course near the Blue Bay golf resort; this course is due to be completed by autumn 2000). Horseriding can also be arranged.

11 SOCIAL PROFILE

Food & Drink: Traditional Dutch food (particularly using fresh seafood and cheeses) is popular, as well as the exciting flavours of Creole food, criollo, which also makes good use of the great variety of fresh fish. French, Italian and other international cuisines are also on offer. Restaurant styles vary from informal bistro to the very expensive. Drink: A wide variety of alcohol is available.

Nightlife: There are several discos run by hotels on the island and some hotels have a casino. Performances of drama and music can be found at the Centro Pro Arte.

Shopping: Curaçao (and other Netherlands Antilles islands) is a thriving centre for duty-free shopping. An enormous range of imported goods is on sale at considerably reduced prices.

Locally made curios are available for the tourist, a particularly popular souvenir being 'Curaçao' liqueur, which is made from sun-dried peel of a bitter orange and a mixture of spices. Shopping hours: 0800-1200 and 1400-1800 Monday to Saturday.

Special Events: For a complete list of special events, contact the Curaçao Tourism Development Bureau (see address section). The following is a selection of special events held in Curaçao in 2001:

Jan-Feb 2001 Carnival. Feb Carnival Tumba Festival. Aug Curaçao Salsa Festival. Dec Festival of Lights; St Nicolas Day.

Social Conventions: The social influences are predominantly Dutch, combined with Indian and African traditions. Dress for men should include tropical lightweight suits for business appointments and formal wear for evening engagements. Similarly, women should take some evening wear, but dress for daytime is casual. Swimwear should be confined to the beach and poolside only. Tipping: Hotels add a 5-10% government tax and a 12% service charge. Bar staff, waiters, porters and doormen expect a 10% tip.

12 BUSINESS PROFILE

Economy: Curaçao is the most prosperous of the Netherlands Antilles island group. The capital, Willemstad, is at the centre of a network of 'offshore' banking facilities and other financial services. Curaçao also houses one of the largest dry docks in the western Caribbean: its operations have recently become profitable after years of loss-making. Oil refining and transshipment are the other key economic activities. Import substitution has also been successfully pursued and a wide range of consumer goods are now produced locally. Venezuela, which supplies most of the crude oil for the refineries, and the USA are the island's principal trading partners.

Business: Suits should be worn and punctuality is essential. Office hours: 0730-1200 and 1330-1630 Monday to Friday.

Commercial Information: The following organisation can offer advice: Curaçao Chamber of Commerce and Industry, PO Box 10, Kaya Junior Salas 1, Willemstad (tel: (9) 461 1451 or 461 1455; fax: (9) 461 5652; e-mail: businessinfo@curacao-chamber.an; web site: <http://www.curacao-chamber.an>).

Conferences/Conventions: For information contact: Curaçao Convention Bureau, Pietrmaai 19, Willemstad (tel: (9) 461 6000 ext 249; fax: (9) 461 5017; e-mail: ctdbcur@ibm.net; web site: <http://www.curacao.org>).

13 CLIMATE

Hot throughout the year, but tempered by cooling trade winds. The main rainy season is from October to December. The annual mean temperature is 27.5°C (81.5°F), rainfall is 515mm and humidity is 75.9%. The island lies outside the Caribbean 'hurricane belt'.

14 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

History: The Netherlands Antilles group, of which Curaçao is the largest and most prosperous, was first encountered by Europeans in 1499 when Alonso de Ojmeda, one of Columbus' lieutenants, reached the island. It was settled by the Spanish in the early 1500s who retained possession until the Dutch East Indian Company seized it in 1634. Thousands of slaves were then imported to provide labour for the island group's plantation agricultural schemes. In the early 19th, persistent attacks by the British and French destabilised the island for a while; at one point it was even leased to a New York merchant. By 1816 the Dutch had reasserted control and introduced further plantations. The abolition of slavery in 1863 set off a long period of economic decline, relieved in 1916 by the opening of an oil refinery. This and other oil-related industries became the mainstay of a booming economy until the 1980s. On the back of this, Curaçao became the most prosperous of the Netherlands Antilles, a position which caused some resentment among the others in the group, particularly Aruba. Nonetheless, constitutional referenda held on the three smaller islands (St Eustatius, St. Maarten and Saba) in 1994 produced majorities in favour of remaining with the Antilles group. At the February 1994 elections to the Staten (see below) a new Curaçao-based party, the Partido Antia Restruktura, emerged as the largest single grouping and its leader, Miguel Fournier, assumed the premiership. The economic austerity package introduced by the government proved unpopular and at the most recent poll in January 1998, the PAR was deposed by an alliance of the Antilles' two other main political parties: the conservative National People's Party (PNP) and the left-liberal Labour Party People's Crusade (PLKP). The PNP's Suzanne Camelia-Römer assumed the premiership.

Government: Curaçao is a constituent island of the Netherlands Antilles; the others being Bonaire, Saba, St Eustatius and St Maarten. The Netherlands Antilles, Aruba and The Netherlands each have equal status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands as regions autonomous in internal affairs. The Dutch monarch is represented locally by a Governor, while the Netherlands Antilles are represented in the Government of the Kingdom by a Minister Plenipotentiary. Foreign policy and defence matters are decided by a Council of Ministers of the Kingdom, including the Plenipotentiary, and executed under the authority of the Governor. The internal affairs of the islands are administered by the central government of the Netherlands Antilles, based in Willemstad, Curaçao, responsible to the Staten, or legislative assembly. Curaçao may elect by non-compulsory adult suffrage 14 out of 22 members to the Staten. Routine local affairs on each island group (Bonaire, Curaçao and the Windward Islands) are managed by an elected Island Council, presided over by a Lieutenant Governor.

15 OVERVIEW

Country Overview: Curaçao, the largest island in the Netherlands Antilles, is part of the Dutch Leeward Islands, also known as the Dutch Antilles. Willemstad, the capital, is noted for its brightly-coloured, Dutch-style houses and Cunucu dwellings (based on African-style mud and wattle huts). It is one of the finest shopping centres in the Caribbean.

The harbour has a floating market where colourful barges full of agricultural produce are moored. Nearby is the new market building, the design of which is very striking.

St Christoffel National Park, occupying the most northwestern part of the island, is a nature reserve dominated by the mountain of the same name. There are several caves decorated with

Arawak Indian paintings, some unusual rock formations and fine views across the countryside. Lucky visitors may spy iguanas and shy Curaçao deer.

Traditional Dutch food is popular, as well as the exciting flavours of Creole food, criollo, which makes good use of fresh fish. There are several discos run by hotels on the island some of which also have a casino.