

Frommer's Portable Aruba, Bonaire & Curaçao

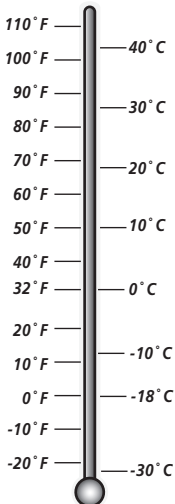




METRIC CONVERSIONS



TEMPERATURE



To convert F to C:
subtract 32 and
multiply by $\frac{5}{9}$ (0.555)

To convert C to F:
multiply by 1.8
and add 32
 $32^{\circ}\text{F} = 0^{\circ}\text{C}$



LIQUID VOLUME

To convert..... multiply by

U.S. gallons to liters	3.79
Liters to U.S. gallons	0.26
U.S. gallons to imperial gallons	0.83
Imperial gallons to U.S. gallons	1.20
Imperial gallons to liters	4.55
Liters to imperial gallons	0.22

1 liter = 0.26 U.S. gallon
1 U.S. gallon = 3.8 liters



DISTANCE

To convert..... multiply by

inches to centimeters	2.54
centimeters to inches	0.39
feet to meters	0.30
meters to feet	3.28
yards to meters	0.91
meters to yards	1.09
miles to kilometers	1.61
kilometers to miles	0.62

1 ft = 0.30 m **1 mile = 1.6 km**
1 m = 3.3 ft **1 km = 0.62 mile**



WEIGHT

To convert..... multiply by

Ounces to grams	28.35
Grams to ounces	0.035
Pounds to kilograms	0.45
Kilograms to pounds	2.20

1 ounce = 28 grams
1 pound = 0.4555 kilogram

1 gram = 0.04 ounce
1 kilogram = 2.2 pounds

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Frommer's®
Portable
**Aruba, Bonaire,
& Curaçao**

6th Edition

by Christina P. Colón, Ph.D.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Through travel writing, **Christina P. Colón** has merged her three greatest passions in life: conservation, education, and travel. With a Ph.D. in ecology and an M.A. in environmental conservation education, she has explored the jungles of Borneo, forests of Belize, shores of Bora Bora, woodlands of the Bronx, and beaches of Brooklyn. In addition to conducting scientific research, lecturing as a professor, and authoring academic publications, she has produced videos, enriched websites, and authored or contributed to numerous travel guides, including *Frommer's Caribbean Ports of Call*, *Frommer's Caribbean Cruises & Ports of Call*, *Frommer's Caribbean*, *Cruise Vacations For Dummies*, *The New York Times Guide to New York City*, and several *Fodor's USA Guides*.

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HOW TO CONTACT US

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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Travel information can change quickly and unexpectedly, and we strongly advise you to confirm important details locally before traveling, including information on visas, health and safety, traffic and transport, accommodation, shopping and eating out. We also encourage you to stay alert while traveling and to remain aware of your surroundings. Avoid civil disturbances, and keep a close eye on cameras, purses, wallets and other valuables.

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FROMMER'S STAR RATINGS, ICONS & ABBREVIATIONS

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system**. In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:



special finds—those places only insiders know about



fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun



kids—best bets for kids and advice for the whole family



special moments—those experiences that memories are made of



overrated—places or experiences not worth your time or money



insider tips—great ways to save time and money



great values—where to get the best deals

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE	American Express	DISC	Discover	V	Visa
DC	Diners Club	MC	MasterCard		

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PLANNING YOUR TRIP TO ARUBA

1

So many islands, so little time. With all the tropical paradises you could visit, why would you pick Aruba for your Caribbean vacation?

Well, there's the reliably near-perfect weather. If you have only a week away from the job, why not guarantee yourself 7 days of ideal tanning conditions—unwaveringly sunny skies, warm temperatures, and cooling breezes. And because the island's more of a desert than a rainforest, the humidity's low and it hardly ever rains. Hurricanes? Schmurricanes. There's rarely one within hundreds of miles. Aruba is far south of the tropical-storm belt.

You like beaches? Aruba's got beaches, some of the best in the Caribbean. In the world, for that matter. The photos only look as if they've been doctored. What you see is what you get: miles of white, sugary sand; warm, gentle surf; turquoise and aqua seas; and plenty of space.

When you tire of lolling on the beach, there are scuba diving, snorkeling, great windsurfing, and all the other watersports you expect from a sun-and-sea vacation. On land, you can golf, ride a horse, hike, or drive an all-terrain vehicle over the island's wild-and-woolly outback. Away from the beach, Aruba is a desert island full of cacti, iguanas, and strange boulder formations. Contrasting sharply with the resort area's serene beaches, the north coast features craggy limestone cliffs, sand dunes, and crashing breakers.

And such nice places to stay: You can choose from luxury resorts, all-inclusives, cozy boutique hotels, and modest budget spots. They're all well-maintained and chock-full of bells and whistles to meet the whims of

Learning the Local Lingo

Although English is spoken throughout Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, learning a few words of the native tongue, Papiamentu, can be fun.

Bon bini	bahn <i>bee-nee</i>	Welcome
Bon dia	bahn <i>dee-a</i>	Good morning
Bon tardi	bahn <i>tar-dee</i>	Good afternoon
Bon nochi	bahn <i>no-chee</i>	Good evening
Danki	<i>dahn-kee</i>	Thank you
Di nada	<i>di nada</i>	You're welcome
Na bo ordo	<i>nah bo or-doe</i>	You're welcome
Kon ta bai?	<i>kahn tah bye</i>	How are you?
Bon	<i>bahn</i>	Good/nice
Dushi	<i>doo-shee</i>	Sweet/sweetheart
Te otro biaha	<i>tay oh-tro bee-ah-ha</i>	Until next time

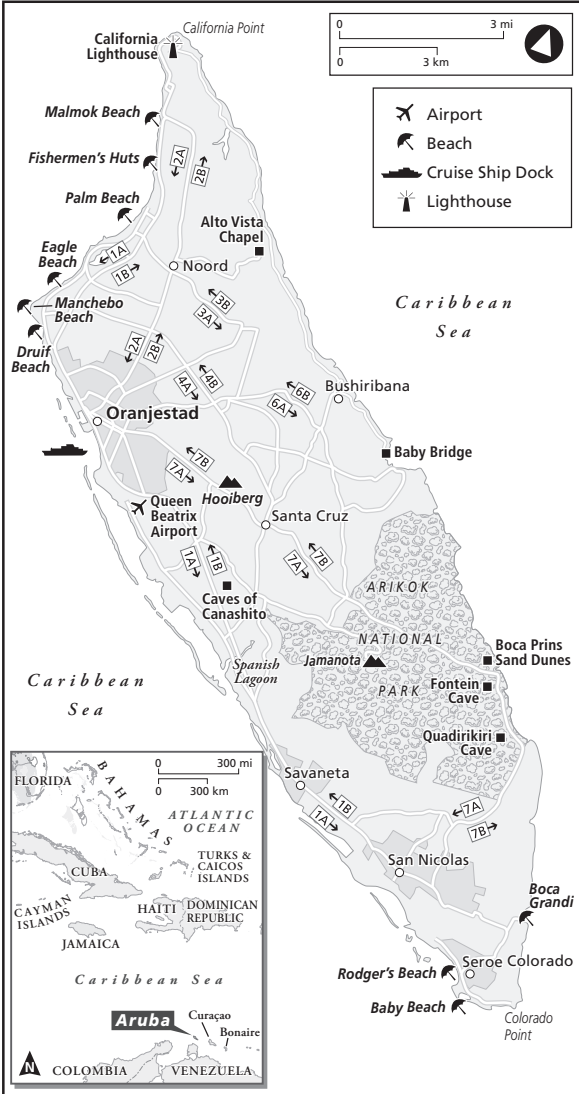
most travelers. With all the package tours available, they can be surprisingly affordable, too.

If you're a foodie, you will be surprised at how well you can eat in Aruba. Unlike the generally standard fare in most of the Caribbean, Aruba's culinary offerings are diverse, inventive, and often very good.

After the sun sets, there's plenty to do. You can try your luck at one of the island's dozen casinos, take in a movie, or listen to some amazing live music, including Latin jazz and Caribbean sounds such as the island's own tumba music. Bars, clubs, booze cruises, you name it—if you're looking for a party, you'll find it.

You'll find the overwhelming majority of Arubans to be genuinely friendly and welcoming. Sure, the island's almost totally dependent on tourism, but nobody learns to be this nice. With little history of racial or cultural conflicts, the island has no cause for animosity. As the license plates say, it's "One Happy Island." And, although Dutch is the official language, almost everyone speaks English. You'll also hear Spanish and Papiamentu, the local tongue (a mix of several European, African, and Native American languages), now recognized as an official language, along with Dutch.

While safety is always a concern, Aruba enjoys one of the region's lowest crime rates, fueled in part by high employment. Though it's not uncommon to see solo senior tourists as well as solo 20-something women, it's always safer—not to mention more fun—to travel with a friend.



Enough of the good points: What's the downside? Well, if you're looking to stay in an old, converted, family-run sugar mill or immerse yourself in rich colonial history or pre-Columbian culture, you could do better elsewhere. From day one, Aruba's been pretty much of a backwater. It's still part of the Netherlands, so there's a Dutch influence, which adds a slight European flavor. A few small museums highlight the island's past and some centuries-old indigenous rock glyphs and paintings, but nobody visits Aruba for culture or history.

The people who do visit, though, come back. With 60% of visitors coming back for more, Aruba has the highest repeat-visitor rate in the Caribbean; the highest hotel-occupancy figures, too. Honey-mooners, families, and couples of all ages and types fill the resorts during the winter high season and in the traditionally quieter summer months as well. More than 70% come from the United States, and a fair number hail from Canada. Others come from Holland and South America, especially nearby Venezuela and Colombia.

The bottom line? Aruba's determined to make sure you have a good time. It's a great place to unwind, and few islands work as hard to make you feel as special and pampered. You'll learn your first Papiamentu phrase when you arrive—*bon bini* (welcome!). The last words from your lips as you board your plane back home will probably be in the local dialect, too—*masha danki, Aruba* (thank you, Aruba).

Aruba is a tiny island. Only 32km (20 miles) long and 9.7km (6 miles) across at its widest point, it's slightly larger than Washington, D.C. (180 sq. km/70 sq. miles). It's the westernmost of the Dutch ABC islands—Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao—and less than 32km (20 miles) north of Venezuela.

In a place as small as Aruba, it's easy to get your bearings, especially since just about everything for tourists centers on the two biggest beaches. Remember Mercury, the messenger god from Roman mythology? Aruba's shaped like his winged foot: toes to the east, heel to the west. Aruba's capital and largest city, **Oranjestad** (pronounced "oh-rah-n-juh-stahd" or "oh-rah-n-yay-stahd"), is on the island's southern coast, pretty far to the west, where Mercury's heel would be. The island's hotels stretch along the back-to-back shores of **Eagle Beach** and **Palm Beach**, a couple of miles west of Oranjestad, or up the god's Achilles tendon. One of the island's landmarks, the **California Lighthouse**, stands at the wing on Mercury's foot, while **San Nicolas**, once Aruba's largest city and home of the island's oil refinery, steps on his toes. Between Oranjestad and San Nicolas on the south coast, Savaneta is Aruba's oldest town and major fishing center.

If you're like most visitors, you'll be staying in one of three areas: in Oranjestad, in the Low-Rise hotel area along Eagle Beach, or a

little farther from town in the High-Rise hotel area on Palm Beach. The three locations have distinct atmospheres, so where you stay will determine the tone of your vacation. Would you rather be in the city or at the seaside? Are casinos and nightclubs important, or do you prefer quiet strolls along the beach? Are you looking for a casual beach town or a glamorous resort strip?

Let's start in the thick of the action. **Oranjestad** is Aruba's only town of any size or sophistication. If you want an "urban" environment with a variety of restaurants, nightclubs, and casinos, this is the place for you. The entire island has fewer than 100,000 residents, but most seem to live or work around the capital. Its waterfront bustles with cruise ships, yachts, fishing boats, and cargo carriers. Fueled by the boutiques, restaurants, bars, and casinos radiating from the docks, vehicular and pedestrian traffic in town is heavy much of the day and night. Contributing to the congestion, Arubans cruise the main boulevard to see and be seen, giving the strip an *American Graffiti* flavor on weekend nights. Plans are afoot to eliminate all vehicular traffic from the main strip, opening the way for pedestrians only.

If you will miss those muscle machines, there is a professional race-car track, the Aruba International Raceway, on the island. This has resulted in the appearance of a surprisingly high number of hot rods and souped-up macho machines. For more information on upcoming races, to see pictures of past events, and for directions and ticket prices, fasten your seat belt and log on to www.arubaraceway.com.

Much of the architecture combines Dutch gables and baroque ornamentation with such Caribbean colors as pistachio, ocher, pink, and aqua. The result is a sun-drenched gingerbread confection with a touch of theme-park squeaky cleanliness. Walk 5 or 6 blocks away from the waterfront, though, and Oranjestad becomes a nondescript, workaday town with neighborhoods ranging from tony to shabby. Staying in town doesn't necessarily mean sacrificing beach time: The best beaches are only minutes away, and one hotel (the Renaissance) even has its own nearby island replete with private beaches, a restaurant and bar, a spa, and a tennis court.

In sharp contrast to Oranjestad, but only a 20-minute walk west, the **Low-Rise** hotel area feels like a laid-back summer beach town. This district stretches over several contiguous strands with such names as Bushiri, Druif, Manchebo, and Eagle, but it's hard to see where one ends and another begins, and most people refer to the entire area as Eagle Beach. As the Low-Rise name implies, the dozen or so complexes here seldom climb above three or four stories. Some are directly on the beach; others are located across a relatively sleepy road. The small boutique hotels, quiet timeshares,

and sprawling resorts (including several all-inclusives) attract a diverse group of people. A couple of the smaller hotels cater to couples, while the timeshares have a generally quieter, older clientele (with kids and grandkids appearing at certain times of the year). The all-inclusives and larger hotels boast all kinds of guests with an especially large number of families and children. Many apartment-style accommodations feature full kitchens, living rooms, and guest rooms, facilities attractive to families and groups of friends who want to save a bit by eating in from time to time (large supermarkets are a \$6 taxi ride or 15-min. walk away). But plenty of restaurants are in the area and a couple of large casinos too. Low Risers are quick to point out that Eagle Beach is wider, quieter, and less crowded than Palm Beach, and they prefer the comfortable, casual ambience.

On the flip side, the **High-Rise** area begins about a quarter of a mile after Eagle Beach ends. Stretching along Palm Beach, this strip of glitzy High-Rise resorts is Aruba's Waikiki. The dozen or so hotels here tend to be swanky, self-contained resorts that ramble over acres of lushly landscaped grounds. Most boast splashy casinos, numerous restaurants and bars, and endless amenities and services. Some hotels here are definitely upscale, and others are perfectly middle class: Whether you're a big cheese or small potato, there's a place here to suit your budget. These hotels, unlike the Low Risers, are full-fledged glamour destinations. And if you're totally focused on sun time, you'll appreciate that all but a couple of the resorts are directly on the beach (the others are just across the street). The area also offers more places to eat, drink, and gamble, and its piers are a hubbub of dive boats and motorized watersports. However, with the increased number of amenities and giant resorts, Palm Beach doesn't offer the Low-Rise area's beach-town simplicity, and it's comparatively crowded.

Aside from the big three, you have a couple of other options when deciding where to stay. Next to the island's championship golf course **Tierra del Sol**, condominiums and free-standing villas appeal to vacationers who prefer time on the links to hours on the beach. This complex looks and feels like a desert resort in Arizona, and short-term rentals are available.

For the serious budget option, a handful of **motels** can be found a 10- to 20-minute walk inland from the beaches. They lack the glamour of the larger resorts, but they make Aruba affordable for almost everyone.

Away from the hotels and the capital, Aruba features splendid, if modest, natural wonders, more great beaches, and a handful of authentically native towns. But more about exploring the island later in the book.

FROMMER'S FAVORITE aruba EXPERIENCES

Bake on the beach. This is why you came: powdery white sand, turquoise water, and soothingly monotonous waves. Whether basking at Palm, Eagle, Manchebo, or Druif Beach, close your eyes and feel the stress evaporate. You're a beach potato; use sunscreen or you'll be a fried potato.

Get dirty. If you love the rugged outdoors, spend the better part of a day hiking, biking, driving, horseback riding, or off-roading through expansive Arikok National Park to marvel at Aruba's diverse ecosystems and rural past. Ramble over hills strewn with boulders and cacti, visit old farms (known as *cunucus*), spelunk through caves in search of Indian rock glyphs, and slide down sand dunes. Along the way, you'll meet hummingbirds, hawks, iguanas, goats, and donkeys.

Chow down. Dining in Aruba is a daily ritual of indulgence and romance. Most restaurants have picturesque settings, with both indoor and outdoor seating, often on or overlooking the water. The service is consistently good and the food is among the best in the Caribbean. Whether you opt for a local favorite on the cheap, or a French classic that breaks the bank, you are guaranteed to stagger back to your hotel room sated and happy as a stuffed clam marinated in a dry martini.

Play Jacques Cousteau. Aruba has some of the best wreck dives in the Caribbean. In fact, Aruba boasts the largest sunken vessel in the Caribbean and has some of the most haunting and accessible sunken ships this side of the *Titanic*. If you'd rather not get wet, you can still descend 45m (148 ft.) below the surface to make friends with a variety of marine critters from the comfort of a tiptop submarine or semisubmersible boat.

Come sail away. The turquoise Caribbean water that surrounds Aruba is even more captivating when you are sailing across it. Whether you choose a sleek catamaran, teak schooner, teeny trimaran, or a windsurf board or kiteboard, as the saying goes: *Just do it!*

Toast the setting sun. Aruba's picture-perfect days almost invariably melt into picture-perfect sunsets. What better way to round off the day than with a tropical drink at sunset; so grab a front-row seat at one of the many stylish bars on the beach, or on the water, or overlooking the harbor and drink up while you drink in the view.

WHEN TO GO

The Weather

Almost invariably, the weather is wonderful—warm, sunny, dry, and breezy. There's no monsoon season and no threat of tropical storms—the island is far outside the hurricane belt. The average annual temperature is 82°F (28°C), and no month of the year has an average high temperature lower than 85°F (29°C) or higher than 89°F (32°C). Lows range from 76°F (24°C) to 80°F (27°C).

The sun can be hot, and its reflection off the white sandy beaches is blinding. Fortunately, the almost-constant trade winds make it easy to forget just how warm it is. Usually a godsend, these pleasant, gentle breezes can occasionally escalate to surprising gusts or sustained winds, so hold onto your hat. Better yet, buy one with a chin strap, and no they're not all dorky. With the right attitude, anyone can pull off a straw cowboy hat; these hats are readily available at most souvenir shops. In September, though, you'll wish the breezes were back. Tropical storms plaguing less-fortunate islands far to the north suck away the trade winds during that back-to-school month, making Aruba as hot as any other spot in the Caribbean. Unless you fancy relentless heat with no relieving breezes, avoid visiting in September.

The wind provides a collateral perk, too. It blows away annoying mosquitoes and other flying pests. That said, with the creation of so many new High-Rise hotels, the breezes aren't nearly as strong as they once were. So when the breezes wane, it's time to bring out the insect repellent. Aruba's dry, though, so you'll never encounter the number of bugs that infest more lush islands.

Rainfall averages about 46 centimeters (18 in.) a year, with most precipitation falling from October through January. Even then rains tend to be erratic and brief, and it's rare for the sun not to shine most of the day.

Another plus: The humidity is less oppressive in Aruba than in most of the Caribbean. Although not exactly Arizona, the island's more dusty than sultry.

HURRICANES The curse of much of the Caribbean, hurricanes are something you can pretty much ignore if you're vacationing in Aruba. The island is many miles from the storms that wreak havoc on much of the region from June to November. On rare occasions, storm activity far to the north is so violent that it causes wave action to ripple in Aruba. Some damage has occurred over the years, but it's relatively negligible.

The High Season & The Off Season

Because the weather is consistently nice year-round, Aruba's high and low seasons reflect climates in the United States and Canada rather than the weather on the island itself. When it's cold and wintery in North America, demand for Aruba's warmth and sunshine peaks. Roughly speaking, the island's high season runs from mid-December to mid-April. During this period, hotels charge their highest prices, and you'll need to reserve a room well in advance—months in advance if you want to bask on the beach over Christmas or in the depths of February. Guests during the high season tend to be older and wealthier, although there are plenty of families. The national mix weighs heavily toward Americans and Canadians.

The off season—roughly from mid-April to mid-December (although it varies from hotel to hotel)—is one big summer sale. All resorts routinely slash their room rates, which means you can get the same accommodations in the low season for 20% to 50% less than you would in darkest winter.

But if you think Aruba's a ghost town in the summer, think again. The deals are so attractive, and the season dovetails so nicely with Europe's traditional vacation time and South America's winter, that the island's resorts are still pretty full. The mix of visitors shifts in the summer toward families, Europeans (especially Dutch), South Americans, and the more budget conscious from everywhere. Americans still make up the largest national group.

Some activities and attractions scale back a bit in the summer, but not much. For example, instead of six excursions a day, a tour operator may offer only three; restaurants might close an hour earlier; and hotels may use the "downtime" for new construction or renovation (ask if work is scheduled; if it's potentially disturbing, request a room far away from the noise).

If you're single and want crowds, don't worry. Lots of potential playmates are around in the summer, as well.

Because the difference in high-season and low-season rates at most hotels is drastic, I've included both in chapter 2. That way you can compare how much you can save if you wait a bit for your fun in the sun.

Since the global economic downturn in early 2009, the travel industry worldwide has suffered, because people are more reluctant to indulge in a vacation. Aruba's tourist-based economy has at times been hit hard. But there is a silver lining; in uncertain times, fearless, opportunistic travelers can find significant bargains. For example, many restaurants are now offering early-bird specials, prix-fixe meals, and free appetizers or cocktails with a coupon.

Some even let children eat for free. The offerings change weekly. When times are lean, keep an eye out for these deals, which are advertised in tourism brochures and fliers and on websites.

Holidays

Most stores and restaurants close on official holidays. If you stay near the resort areas, however, you may not be affected at all. Here's a list of Aruba's holidays: January 1 (New Year's Day); January 25 (Betico Croes Day); February 20, 2012 (Carnival Monday); February 21, 2012 (Fat Tuesday); February 22, 2012 (Ash Wednesday); March 18 (National Anthem and Flag Day); April 6, 2012 (Good Friday); April 8, 2012 (Easter Sunday); April 30 (Queen's Birthday); May 1 (Aruba's Labor Day); May 17, 2012 (Ascension Day); December 25 (Christmas Day); and December 26 (Boxing Day).

Aruba Calendar of Events

For an updated list of events, and specific dates, times, and locations, contact the **Aruba Tourism Authority** (☎ **800/TO-ARUBA** [862-7822]; www.aruba.com/ourpeopleplaces/events.aspx) or check <http://events.frommers.com>, where you'll find a searchable, up-to-the-minute roster of what's happening in cities all over the world.

JANUARY

Dande. For almost 200 years, roaming troubadours have marked the end of the old year and the beginning of the new in Aruba. As the clock strikes midnight, groups of musicians go from house to house serenading each family with good wishes for the coming year. If the *dande* group misses your home, you'll have nothing but bad luck in the coming year. Some families set off fireworks after they've been serenaded, and the mother of the house often sweeps out the "old spirit." January 1.

Betico Croes Day. G. F. "Betico" Croes, Aruba's seminal political leader, was instrumental in the island's fight for "*Status Aparte*"—semi-independence from Holland and autonomy from the other Dutch islands in the Caribbean. Low-key patriotic observances mark the holiday. January 25.

Carnival. Highlights of Aruba's version of pre-Lenten revelry include the Children's Parade (toddlers, dwarfed by their elaborate costumes, dance down the street) and the Grand Carnival parades in Oranjestad and San Nicolas (calypso, marching, and drumming contests accompanied by monstrous sound systems). During the Tivoli Lighting Parade, thousands of miniature lights blanket the costumes and floats. Representatives of the island's various districts vie for the title of carnival queen, and unsuspecting tourists, whisked off their planes, help decide the winner. The parties, dancing, and music begin in January, culminating on the weekend before Ash Wednesday. Early January to late February.