

DESTINATION REPORT

YOUR TRAVEL SPECIALIST

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YOUR TRAVEL SNAPSHOT: Destinations included in this guide

Willemstad, Curacao

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DESTINATION GUIDE

Willemstad, Curacao



INTRODUCTION

Dutch heritage in Willemstad, Curacao, is best expressed in its the rows of pastel-colored, red-roofed town houses. The island's capital city, Willemstad is divided into two parts: Punda (old-world Dutch ambience and great shopping) and Otrobanda ("the other side"—also good shopping, but with a more contemporary flavor).

Punda and Otrobanda each take about a half-day to see, and they're connected by ferry, a land bridge or the Queen Emma pontoon bridge. Take a guided walking tour of the town to observe the architecture. Ask the tourist office for a list of guides, or check *PasaBon*, the entertainment guide.

Most of the tourist sites are in Punda, which is the oldest part of town. Its collection of historic buildings is a big reason why Willemstad and its harbor have been declared a UNESCO World Heritage site. Of special note are Wilhelmina Park, Bredestraat (the main shopping street) and the Mikve Israel-Emanuel Synagogue.

The many brightly colored buildings in Otrobanda give this section of the city a fairy-tale feel. There are several bars and restaurants that afford stunning views of the Handelskade (the best-known and most photographed row of Dutch Colonial buildings in the city). The ramparts of the Rif Fort—built in 1828 to guard the harbor entrance—offer another good spot to take in the views.

CASINOS

Carnaval Casino

Day visitors and hotel guests at Renaissance Curacao Resort & Casino are welcome indoors at the resort's Vegas-style Carnaval Casino. The casino houses 25 gaming tables and 400 slot machines. Daily 10 am-4 am. Baden Powellweg 1, Willemstad.
<https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/curbr-renaissance-curacao-resort-and-casino>.

HISTORIC SITES

Beth Haim Cemetery

After visiting the Mikve Israel-Emanuel Synagogue, go to the cemetery to see the final resting place of Curacao's first Jewish settlers. Dating from the 1650s, its name means House of Life, and the images on many of the tombstones there bear remarkable similarities to cemeteries in and around Amsterdam. A felled tree meant the person died during adulthood; a single flower meant they had died in childhood. The image of hands holding a crown was reserved for the priestly caste: On this island, that was the Cohen family. Successful merchants had their tombstones made from costly Carrara marble. Call ahead to book a private tour. Sunday-Friday 8 am-6 pm. Emancipatie Blvd. 19, Maduro Plaza, Schottegatweg West (northwest of Willemstad), Willemstad. Phone 737-6843. <http://www.bethhaimcuracao.com>.

Fort Amsterdam

History buffs will enjoy Fort Amsterdam, which was built in the 1700s. It still houses a few government offices. The island's oldest Protestant church is inside the courtyard and dates from 1769. At one time, the church didn't have a roof because it doubled as a water reservoir for the town during rainy season. Look for the lead cannonball embedded in the outside wall. It was deposited there by Captain Bligh, who was aiming at the governor.

Landhuis Bloemhof

This *landhuis* is now a spacious art gallery devoted to local artists. The barn and storehouse holds a collection of books and photographs that belonged to the former occupants and artists, Max and May Henriquez, who hosted writers and artists in their home during the later part of the 20th century. The coach house and gardens display sculptures by May Henriquez. Tuesday-Saturday 9 am-2 pm. Admission US\$2. Santa Rosaweg No. 6 (near the Promenade Shopping Center, about 15 minutes by car from Willemstad), Willemstad. Phone 737-5775.
<https://www.bloemhof.cw>.

Mikve Israel-Emanuel Synagogue

Consecrated in 1732, this is the oldest existing synagogue in the Western Hemisphere and a marvelous example of Dutch colonial architecture. It still serves an active Jewish congregation, which is thought to be the oldest in the New World. The sanctuary floor is covered in sand to represent the desert where ancient Israelites lived after escaping slavery in Egypt. Many precious antiques furnish and decorate the interior. Also at the synagogue is the Jewish Museum, where the history of Curacao's long-standing Jewish community is preserved. Services are open to appropriately dressed visitors each Friday at 6:30 pm and Saturday at 10 am. The admission fee includes entrance to the museum. Monday-Friday 9 am-4:30 pm. US\$10. Hanechi di Snoa No. 29, Willemstad. Phone 461-1067. <http://www.snoa.com>.

MUSEUMS

Curacao Maritime Museum

Near the Floating Market, the Curacao Maritime Museum details the lives of the island's seafaring residents, from the earliest Amerindians through the European explorers and traders of later centuries. Displays include naval artifacts, model ships and maps. The museum is housed in a historic 17th-century renovated mansion. Monday-Saturday 9 am-4 pm. US\$6 museum admission, US\$9 tours. Van de Brandhof Straat 7, Scharloo, Willemstad. Phone 465-2327. <http://www.curacaomaritime.com>.

Museum Kas di Pal'I Maishi

Built about 130 years ago, Museum Kas di Pal'I Maishi was the home of a former slave, whose family still owns it today. The house is constructed of thin tree branches braided together and covered with adobe and plaster. Loosely translated, the name means "sorghum stalk house." It's surrounded with a cactus fence, called a *kadushi*, that is typical of that era. Lunch, featuring local dishes, is served in the backyard. Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm, Saturday and Sunday 9 am-6 pm. US\$2 adults, with free tours available on request. Dokterstuin 27, Ascension (about 20 minutes north of Willemstad), Willemstad. Phone 864-2742. <https://www.facebook.com/museumkasdipalimaishi>.

Rif Fort Museum

Rif Fort Museum traces the history of the fort's construction, inhabitants and many uses that included serving as a brothel, police headquarters, prison and radiotelegraphy station. After the museum, visit the Otrobanda pontoon bridge next to the fort for views of historic Willemstad across the water. Climb the fort's stairs for a commodore's-eye view. Gouverneur van Slobbeweg, Willemstad.

The Curacao Museum

The Curacao Museum in Otrobanda is small but interesting. Displays include the archaeological history of Curacao, a few Caiquetio artifacts, a traditional plantation kitchen and a unique carillon with 47 bells. The Snipgallery houses the cockpit of the first KLM plane to cross the Atlantic in 1934. Monday-Friday 8:30 am-4:30 pm, Sunday 10 am-4 pm. Free. Otrobanda, Willemstad. Phone 462-3873. <https://www.curacao.com/en/activity/curacao-museum?cat=museums>.

The Jewish Cultural Historic Museum

A rare collection of religious relics is housed in two 18th-century structures set across a courtyard from Willemstad's historic synagogue. Among the most fascinating are the 250-year-old *mikvah* (used for ritual bathing), an ancient Torah scroll that probably was brought to Curacao by Jews expelled from Spain in 1492, and a 300-year-old Chair of Elijah, where the godfather is seated while holding his infant godson during ceremonial circumcisions. Monday-Friday 9 am-4:30 pm. US\$10. Hanechi di Snoa No. 29, Willemstad. Phone 461-1633. <http://www.snoa.com>.

The Kura Hulanda Museum

The Kura Hulanda Museum traces the history of the region and the people (especially those of African descent) that have made Curacao the place it is today. The section on slavery is very realistic and includes the hold of a simulated slave ship. The owner's private African art collection is amazing. Monday-Saturday 9 am-4 pm. US\$10 adults. Otrobanda, Willemstad. Phone 434-7765. <http://www.kurahulanda.com>.

WINERIES, BREWERIES & DISTILLERIES

Landhuis Chobolobo

This is where you'll find the Curacao Liqueur Distillery, home of those exotic Curacao drink flavors for "Blue Whales" and "Tropical Sunsets." The not-so-secret ingredient is the island's *Jaraha* orange (a Valencia orange that grows small and bitter in Curacao's soil and climate). Although most brands of the drink are produced elsewhere, this small distillery continues to operate in Curacao, making it the only brand labeled as "original and authentic" and "the Curacao of Curacao." The tour is self-guided, there is no entrance fee, and free samples are available. Monday-Friday 8 am-5 pm. Elias R.A. Moreno Boulevard, Salina Ariba, Willemstad. Phone 461-3526. <https://www.curacaoliqueur.com/brand/distillery-tour>.

ZOOS & WILDLIFE

Curacao Sea Aquarium

Just east of Willemstad is the Curacao Sea Aquarium. It has one of the most complete collections of Caribbean fish in the world. In the Animal Encounters program, you can feed sharks and interact with stingrays, angelfish, tarpon and groupers. Dolphin Encounters are popular, and so is a submarine tour aboard the Substation Curacao, a thrilling deep-dive experience. Additional fees for Animal Encounter and Dolphin Encounter programs. Tuesday-Saturday 8 am-5 pm. US\$15 adults. Bapor Kibra z/n, Willemstad. Phone 9-461-6666. <https://curacao-sea-aquarium.com>.

The Ostrich Farm

More than two decades ago, 13 ostriches were imported from South Africa, the owner's homeland, to test their survival in Curacao's climate: The group quickly grew to 120. Now there are hundreds of birds housed in large open pens, viewed from a truck on the motor tour of the vast acreage. You'll learn fascinating facts about these birds. Try an ostrich burger or steak at the *palapa*-style restaurant and browse the African-art and gift shop. Daily 9 am-5 pm. US\$15 adults. Groot St. Joris West z/n, Willemstad. Phone 747-2777. <http://curacaoostrichfarm.com>.

FISHING

Let's Fish

Book a deep-sea fishing adventure aboard the 50-ft/15-m *Princess Alexia* or the 32-ft/10-m *Let's Fish*. Captain Olly will clean your catch and let you take it home (check with your hotel; many will gladly grill it for you). The company will pick you up from your hotel. Brakkeput Abou K 92, Willemstad. Phone 561-1812.

HIKING & WALKING

Shete Boka National Park

Grab your hiking shoes and head to Shete Boka National Park on Curacao's rugged north coast. Ideal for families and active travelers, the 6-mi/10-km park is home to sea turtles, hawks and an abundance of iguanas, which also happen to be a popular ingredient in local soups and stews. The daring won't want to miss out on exploring Boka Tabla, located near the entry of the park. A short walk down slippery rocks reveals a dank, dark sea cave carved out by crashing waves. The Boka Wandomi trail offers vistas of rolling lava hills and limestone bluffs, while the main attraction at Boka Pistol is an impressive blowhole, spewing water more than 20 ft/6m into the air. Daily 9 am-4 pm. US\$10 adults. Boca Tabla z/n, Willemstad. Phone 462-4242.
<http://www.christoffelpark.org/visit-shetebokapark>.

BARS, TAVERNS & PUBS

Eetcafe Old Dutch

Hit this local old-world pub for a late-night drink, playing darts or watching soccer while noshing on typical Dutch fare (fresh pea soup and kebabs). Monday-Saturday 5 pm-2 am, Friday and Saturday 4 pm-4 am. Pietermaai 25, Punda, Willemstad. Phone 9-465-7225. <https://www.facebook.com/eetcafe-old-dutch-199945563362841>.

DANCE & NIGHTCLUBS

Club Facade

Dance with plenty of locals who sway and swing on three dance floors to live music. Thursday and Friday 8 pm-3 am. Lindberghweg 32-34, Willemstad. Phone 461-4640.

Emporio Grand Cafe

This popular club lures locals and tourists with its inclusive, upbeat atmosphere. DJs, live music and a constant stream of theme nights keep the place hopping. Tuesday-Saturday 8 pm-4 am. Nieuwe Caracasbaaiweg, Willemstad. Phone 687-6448. <https://www.facebook.com/pg/emporiocuracao>.

LIVE MUSIC

Sopranos Piano Bar

This is the place for live music, terrific cocktails (it offers more than a dozen types of martinis) and Cuban cigars. Check the website or call for special events. Baden Powellweg 1, Otrobanda, Willemstad. Phone 2-670-007. <https://www.shoprenaissancecuracao.com/sopranos-bar>.

DEPARTMENT STORES

Penha

Near the floating bridge on the Punda side, this upscale department store occupies one of the oldest buildings in town. It specializes in perfume at duty-free prices as well as name-brand cosmetics and designer casual wear. Monday-Saturday 8:30 am-6:30 pm. Heerenstraat 1, Punda, Willemstad. Phone 461-2266. <http://www.jlpenha.com>.

GALLERIES

Carib Fine Art

There are three don't-miss displays at this gallery: an exceptional collection of antique maps and sea charts plotting the New World; original works of internationally acclaimed artist Romero Britto; and glass, sculpture and ceramic art made by Caribbean artists. Hotel Kura Hulanda, Langestraat 8, Otrobanda, Willemstad. Phone 465-5759. <http://www.kurahulanda.com>.

Kas di Alma Blou

The name means "House of the Blue Soul" in Papiamentu, and the gallery displays a diverse selection of art by local and international souls. The gallery itself is a historic Dutch-style villa, or *landhuis*, with three sunny exhibit rooms. The sculpture garden is shaded by a large mango tree and designed for peaceful reflection. Snacks and drinks are available, and the gift shop sells books and CDs as well as art pieces. Monday-Friday 9:30 am-5:30 pm; Saturday 10 am-2 pm. Landhuis Habaai, Frater Radulphusweg 4, Otrobanda, Willemstad. Phone 462-8896. <http://www.galleryalmablou.com>.

MARKETS

Floating Market

A highlight of any visit to Curacao is the Floating Market, on the waterfront in downtown Willemstad. Merchants sail the short distance from Venezuela to sell fresh fish and produce directly from their vessels under an array of colorful awnings—it's a picturesque scene.

SHOPPING AREAS

Promenade Shopping Center

Located in the Piscadera Bay area near the cruise terminal, this shopping center includes an open-air cafe, pharmacy and modern shops. 82 Schottegatweg Oost (about 10 minutes from Willemstad by car), Willemstad. Phone 555-3840. <http://www.promenade-curacao.net>.

Renaissance Mall

Find big luxe brand names from Little Switzerland to Breitling at this highly coveted mall with more than 50 shops. Easily accessible, it's located in the Otrobanda side near the floating bridge and the Mega Pier. Monday-Saturday 9 am-7 pm. Baden Powelweg 1, Otrobanda, Willemstad. Phone 435-5000. <http://www.shoprenaissancecuracao.com>.

Renaissance Mall at Rif Fort

Built in 1828 to defend Willemstad's 18th-century Otrobanda district, the fort now guards posh shops, pubs and restaurants. The pace is slow and the location beautiful. Be sure to check out Don's Ice Cream Shop, among the 15 eateries there. Baden Powellweg 1, Otrobanda, Willemstad.

Sambil Shopping Center

This is one of the largest malls in the area, with dozens of shops, a large supermarket and a food court. Daily 10 am-9 pm. Veeris 27, Willemstad. Phone 735-3131. <http://www.sambil.cw>.

SPECIALTY STORES

Bamali

Fashions are inspired by Indonesia, but everything in the store is designed by the owners. Look for original styles made of natural fabrics, unique jewelry and trendy accessories. Monday-Saturday 9 am-6 pm. Bredestraat 2, Punda, Willemstad. Phone 461-2258. <http://www.bamali-fashion.com>.

Boolchand's

This duty-free shop has better prices than at home on leading brands of cameras, watches and electronics, but do some research before your vacation and know what you want and what you should pay for it. Bredestraat 50, Willemstad. Phone 461-6233. <http://www.boolchand.com>.

La Casa Armailla

This bright yellow house (hence the name) is known for a large selection of duty-free luxury perfumes and cosmetics. Its featured perfumes include Chanel, Armani, Lancome, Viktor & Rolf, Cacharel and Ralph Lauren. There's also a large display of cosmetics from Sisley, Guerlain Clarins, Dior and more. In-house experts can give you a facial analysis. Monday-Saturday 8:30 am-6 pm. Bredestraat 46, Punda, Willemstad. Phone 461-3222. <http://theyellowhouse-zylo.com>.

Little Holland

Among the best buys are souvenirs, hand-embroidered linens, cigars and name-brand clothing, including Nautica and Ralph Lauren for adults and children. Braedestraat 37, Punda, Willemstad. Phone 461-1768.

Little Switzerland

Well known and highly respected, Little Switzerland has four locations in Willemstad. This acclaimed company specializes in designer jewelry, china and crystal, and Lladro figurines as well as Rolex, Cartier and Omega watches. Bredestraat No. 44, Punda, Willemstad. Phone 461-2111. <http://www.littleswitzerland.com>.

LOCAL & REGIONAL

Awa Di Playa

Overlooking Piscadera Bay and flanked by rusty fishing boats, this casual place might not attract a lot of foot traffic, but word-of-mouth keeps this local haunt bustling at lunchtime. Specializing in seafood that comes straight from the ocean to your Styrofoam plate, Awa Di Playa does not have a set menu. Servers will explain the day's fresh catch and how it can be prepared. Examples include prepared spicy, shredded conch served with generous sides of plantains and polenta, and thin, crispy pieces of fried whitefish topped with Awa Di Playa's homemade *pika* (spicy onion relish). Piscaderaweg, Willemstad. Phone 462-6939.

Address

Piscaderaweg
Willemstad, Curacao

Phone

462-6939

Blues Bar & Restaurant

This unique pavilion over the water at the Avila Hotel features everything from tapas to seafood and vegetarian dishes. The menu is on an LP record encased in an album cover. Live jazz Thursday 7-10 pm and Saturday 9-11:30 pm. August-April Wednesday-Monday 6-10 pm; May-July Wednesday-Sunday 6-10 pm. Reservations recommended, especially on Thursday and Saturday. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards. Penstraat 130-134 (Avila Hotel), Willemstad. Phone 461-4377. .

Address

Penstraat 130-134 (Avila Hotel)
Willemstad, Curacao

Phone

461-4377

Gouverneur de Rouville

Make a reservation so you can sit on the balcony and enjoy the lovely harbor views. The menu consists of burgers, salads, sandwiches and island favorites such as creamy banana soup. The restaurant is named after a popular governor, Abraham the Rouville, who presided over Curacao in the 1860s. Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards. Otrabanda Waterfront, Willemstad. Phone 462-5999. .

Address

Otrabanda Waterfront
Willemstad, Curacao

Phone

462-5999

Kome

Part of the island's "new wave" of culinary excellence, this restaurant features American, Caribbean, French and Asian fare. Try something from the martini or cocktail menu: The Ebe Korsou, known as "the only cocktail ever made on Christoffel mountain," is made with pineapple-infused vodka, St. Germain and vanilla liqueur. Wednesday night is tapas night. Attentive waitstaff. Monday-Friday noon-10 pm, Saturday 2:30-10 pm. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards. Johan van Walbeeckplein 6, Pietermaai, Willemstad. Phone 465-0413. .

Address

Johan van Walbeeckplein 6,
Pietermaai
Willemstad, Curacao

Phone

465-0413

Restaurant The Pen

The best place to try the traditional Antillean dish *keshi yena*. Also offers generous servings of Dutch and Danish dishes with a dash of local spices. The setting on a terrace by the sea can't be beat. Weekly theme nights include live entertainment. Monday-Saturday 6:30-10 pm. Reservations recommended for dinner. \$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards. Avila Hotel, Penstraat 130, Willemstad. Phone 461-4377. .

Address

Avila Hotel, Penstraat 130
Willemstad, Curacao

Phone

461-4377

Air

Curacao Hato Intl (CUR)

Curacao International Airport (CUR) is located on the Dutch Caribbean island of Curacao, that connects Europe and the Caribbean. The airport is served by Star, OneWorld, and SkyTeam alliances and has daily non-stop air services to Aruba, Bonaire, St. Maarten, Santo Domingo, Haiti, Trinidad & Tobago.

Curacao International Airport has the second-longest commercial runway in the Caribbean region and provides high-quality services with regards to handling passengers and cargo.

Security

The Departures Terminal is situated in the eastern part of the airport. While entering the terminal, you can find automated check-in machines in addition to the generic check-in counters. Items such as firearms, ammunition, dead/exotic living animals, drugs, and other weapons are prohibited on the flight.

Anyone who enters or leaves Curacao with items that are valued at 20,000 NAF, or more, must report it to customs.

Connecting Transportation

Curacao International Airport works with car-rental companies such as - Alamo, Avis, Budget, Dollar, Hertz, National, Sixt, and Thrifty. Their offices can be found in the terminal building, adjacent to the arrivals hall. The counters open one hour before the first departing flight and close for service two hours after the last departing flight.

Address

Margareth Abraham Plaza,
Julianadorp
Willemstad, Curacao

Phone

9-839-1000