

# True colours

The tiny island nation of Curaçao offers a Caribbean escape with a cultural twist, finds *Vivienne Dovi*



**J**ust 40 miles long and as many miles from the South American coast, Curaçao is a small island with a huge cultural footprint, blending Dutch, African, Asian, Latin American and Caribbean influences into something entirely its own. It's the smallest nation ever to qualify for the Fifa World Cup taking place this summer – despite a population of only 150,000 people.

Part of the 'ABC islands' along with neighbouring Aruba and Bonaire, it's one of four countries that form the Kingdom of the Netherlands, though it has been autonomous since 2010. The island has been shaped by centuries of Dutch colonial rule, still visible in its architecture and history, alongside foods and cultural influences carried across the ocean.

The island offers far more to do than its size might suggest. Willemstad's candy-hued waterfront, split

between lively Punda and Otrobanda, is the image most visitors know. Yet to the west lies quieter, verdant countryside, beaches with turquoise waters and striking natural landscapes. Curaçao's character comes alive through music, street art and food – a melting pot of traditions that makes the island feel like many destinations at once.

## WHAT TO DO

Curaçao's beaches are among the Caribbean's most stunning, and none more so than Kenepa Grandi (Grote Knip) at the northwest tip. The view from the cliff above is picture-perfect, with a sweep of white sand set against impossibly blue water. Nearby, smaller Kenepa Chiki (Kleine Knip) offers a more isolated feel and is popular with snorkellers. ➤

PICTURE: Shutterstock/guatao/curacao

# DESTINATIONS

## CARIBBEAN | CURAÇAO

### Foods TO TRY

**Funchi**, a cornmeal side similar to polenta, is served with meat or fish or sweetened with red beans and sugar.

**Yuana stoba**, or stewed iguana, is a local speciality slow-cooked and served with rice, tomatoes and aromatic spices.

**Pateshi**, a deep-fried pastry stuffed with fillings like spiced beef or chicken, is a popular street food.

**Red snapper and mahi-mahi** are among the fantastic and seemingly endless options for freshly caught fish and seafood around the island.



### BOOK IT

**Tui** offers a seven-night all-inclusive holiday at the four-star Sunscape Curaçao Resort Spa and Casino from £1,777 per person. Based on two adults sharing a Deluxe Double Garden View Room with Balcony or Terrace, departing Heathrow on May 12. Price includes flights, 23kg luggage and transfers. [tui.co.uk](https://tui.co.uk)

**Venture Ashore** offers an East Island Discovery Tour for £46 per person. The excursion departs from the cruise port and includes an English-speaking guide, round-trip transport, a two-hour island drive and a Blue Curaçao liqueur tasting. Stops include Willemstad's Scharloo District, the Wedding Cake House and Mambo Beach Boulevard. [ventureashore.com](https://ventureashore.com)



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** Grote Knip beach; Curaçao Marriott Beach Resort; colourful street murals

**PICTURE:** Jeffrey L Smith/Smith Photography Inc



On the east side, the Tugboat Beach snorkelling site offers an adventure to a coral-covered wreck, accessible via a small, rocky beach.

For those more interested in history and culture, Kas di Pal'i Maishi museum in Banda Abou offers a glimpse into Afro-Curaçaoan heritage. This small, traditional adobe house recreates rural life in the post-emancipation period. It's a contrast to the island's slavery sites, focusing on African traditions instead of horrific injustices. Guided tours explain the use of cacti as fences, show typical household artefacts, share traditional women's work songs and show the making of *pan será*, the island's local bread.

In Unesco-listed capital Willemstad, Punda's streets burst with colour and art. Murals depict Black women and children in bold, vivid shades, set against the bright façades of the city's buildings. The famous Handelskade waterfront, Queen Emma Floating Bridge, historic Mikve Israel-Emanuel Synagogue and a variety of boutique shops make the area ideal to explore on foot.

### WHERE TO STAY

In downtown Willemstad, the five-star Renaissance Wind Creek Curaçao has recently completed a renovation of its 237 rooms. The nautical-inspired lobby is all crisp white and ocean hues, while rooms feature sky-blue accents and sandy neutrals. Guests have access to a private elevated beach with white sand, a saltwater infinity pool and a redesigned casino. The resort is steps from the 19th-century Rif Fort – once armed with 56 cannons to defend the island from pirates and invaders – now a Unesco World Heritage Site filled with shops, cafes, music and upscale dining. It's also an easy walk to the Queen Emma Bridge.

Set on six acres of beachfront, the five-star Curaçao

Marriott Beach Resort has 336 rooms, two pools and grand ocean views from its open-air Great Room lobby. The calm waters of the Caribbean Sea make it popular with families, while the adult-only pool is a peaceful option for couples, offering a true resort feel a little removed from the lively atmosphere in Willemstad.

For a base close to the capital's main attractions, the Courtyard by Marriott Curaçao opened in 2024 as an affordable option for travellers wanting to be near the city centre. With 152 spacious rooms, a bold peach-and-yellow exterior, outdoor pool, whirlpool and live music in the lobby, it balances comfort and practicality within walking distance of the historic harbourfront.

### HOW TO SELL

Curaçao's geographical location outside the hurricane belt makes it a year-round Caribbean option. Direct flights from Amsterdam and connections via hubs such as Miami make the island accessible from Europe. The island suits couples, families and repeat travellers looking for a less crowded Caribbean alternative.

Adventure-minded clients can explore the rugged west by quad bike or ATV, visiting cliffside lookouts and hard-to-find beaches. Those looking to learn more history of the island can visit Landhuis Chobolobo, home of the island's eponymous liqueur, or the Tula Museum, located on the spot where the 1795 slave revolt began.

Food lovers can work their way through freshly caught fish at Kas di Piskado Purunchi, street food at Bario Food Yard, local dishes at Rustiq or linger over cocktails at Cascada. Art-focused travellers can tour Willemstad's murals, browse the vibrant Gallery by Bagira in Otrobanda, or take part in wearable-art workshops with Bold Fashion Curaçao, crafting jewellery from buttons, shoelaces and calabash shells.