



Welcome to Bonaire



CochraneScuba

WELCOME TO BONAIRE

Welcome to CochraneScuba's guide to visiting Bonaire. Hopefully all this information will make your visit to Bonaire more enjoyable. We've tried to include everything we can think of; grocery store hours, dive sites and a word about safety, just to name a few.

- PROOF OF CITIZENSHIP - **Passports are required** for all US and Canadian citizens of all ages. Check the expiration date on your current passport. If within 6 months, it's time to get a new passport
- BONAIRE DEPARTURE TAX – This is payable **only** at the Bonaire airport. It is currently \$32 for each traveler leaving Bonaire
- "ISLAND" TIME – it's real, so if you've never dealt with it before on other vacations, be prepared for it. "American" time, as we know it, doesn't exist on Bonaire. It may take 10 minutes more to get something done in Bonaire, but remember we're there to relax and dive. I can guarantee that as the week goes on, we'll all be wishing time could slow down even more.
- MEDICAL - Bonaire has a 60-bed hospital and a number of doctors. There is an ambulance plane on call for emergencies. The hospital also has one of the newest hyperbaric recompression chambers in the Caribbean, installed in June 2008.
- DIVE INSURANCE – This is one of those things that you should invest in, no matter where you dive. There are 2 main companies that provide dive insurance: Divers Alert Network (DAN) and DiveAssure. I prefer, and carry, DAN insurance. Whichever company you choose, I highly recommend you carry some type of dive insurance.
- SOUVENIER SHOPPING – There is basically one street, about 2 blocks long, near the water where all the shops are located. You'll find some nice souvenirs, mostly T-Shirts for sale in all the shops. Don't expect to find anything like Colombian Emeralds or Cartier on Bonaire. ALL shops on "souvenir street" close from 12-2 everyday for lunch...more Island Time.
- MONEY, MONEY, MONEY – I take American \$\$...and so do all the vendors, markets and restaurants on Bonaire. Expect to get Guilders (Netherlands Antillean Guilders -ANG) as your change. Spend them before you leave since the exchange rate at the airport isn't the best. The island exchange rate hovers between 1.75-1.82 Guilders to the dollar. Whenever you eat out, your bill will typically show the amount due in Guilders and Dollars. Also, most restaurants list all menu prices in Guilders and Dollars. I've also used Credit/Debit cards in Bonaire with no problem. It's also a good idea to let your bank or credit card company know that you'll be in Bonaire.
- MARINE PARK FEE – All Marine Park users (divers, snorkelers, windsurfers, etc) are required to purchase a Marine Park Tag prior to activities (\$25 for scuba diving, \$10 for snorkelers and windsurfers)

- SAFETY/THEFT – You are probably safer on Bonaire than you are in Nashville or at the mall. There three types of people on Bonaire; locals (a mix of Caribbean nationalities), Dutch locals and scuba divers. I’m sure a person could find trouble while there, but they would probably have to look for it. Each resort/hotel is very aware of who is registered at their place for the week, so when they see people that “don’t belong” they don’t have any problem questioning them. I’ve been to Bonaire three times, been all over the island and I’ve never had a problem. As far as theft, there’s a couple simple rules to follow:
 1. Don’t leave valuables, cameras, etc in the truck either during a dive or at night. I’ll put \$40 in my swimsuit in case I need gas or food while I’m out diving. Wet money spends as easily as dry money. Also, if I take my camera IT WILL go with me underwater, even if I’m not planning on taking pictures.
 2. If you want to take sightseeing type pictures, plan some time to do it separate from diving. Friday after noon is always a good time to take pictures, since we fly out the next day.
 3. Take the truck keys diving with you unless you have a non-diver with you. Also, leave the windows down while you’re diving. Rolled up windows implies there might be something valuable in the truck.
 4. It’s OK to leave towels, extra clothes, food or coolers in the truck.
- TRANSPORTATION – Each room will have a 4-person dual cab pickup truck. There’s plenty of room in the bed for 8-10 tanks and gear for 4 people. We’ll pick up the trucks at the airport after we get our luggage. Although the basic rental price is included in your trip price, the rental agency will want an imprint of a credit card in case of damage. These items are not in the trip fee: insurance, gas, additional driver fee, extra day rental. FYI – all rental trucks on Bonaire look alike, so even though our group will only have 3-4 trucks, you’ll see 60 other identical trucks all over the island. How will we be able to spot each other while on the road?? Good question...I’ll be bringing distinctive car flags that we’ll use. Expect to see either Titans, Predators or orange UT flags for our group’s trucks.
- TRAVELING ON THE ISLAND – Good News...drive on the right side of the road, just like at home. You’ll pretty much know the major roads and where everything is located by Day 2. We’ll all get free road maps once we get to Bonaire, but here’s a good link that shows the [Bonaire Road Map](#). All the named dive sites are marked with either a number (shore access) or a letter (boat access). For you reference Eden Beach is located at #31. It takes ~8-10 minutes to get from Eden Beach to dive sites #44-52. The dive sites actually have names, they just happen to be on the back side of this map. There’s also a couple of nice sightseeing activities to do while there:
 1. Rincon – a small town inland, about 20 minute drive from Eden Beach. Good place to have lunch.
 2. Lac Bay – small windsurfing area on the East side of the island, about 20 minute drive from Eden Beach. Jibe City is a good place to eat lunch and has a fantastic chicken & fish BBQ, typically on Wed night.
 3. Slave huts & the Lighthouse – Bonaire started out as a slave island. There are about 10-15 slave huts remaining on the Southern side of the island, towards the lighthouse.

- GAS – Although there are a few gas stations on Bonaire, the easiest ones to get to is [Bonaco Gas Station/Quick Stop Shop](#). It's the easiest because you'll drive right past it 20-25 times during the week. Bonaco is open 7 days/week, 7AM-10PM. The price is in Guilders/liter, so be ready to do some math. FYI – there are 3.8 liters/gallon. Expect to spend \$40-50 on gas for the week.
- FOOD – Two ways to approach this:
 1. Eating meals out – “American” breakfast is ~\$8, lunch \$10-\$15, dinner \$12+. Restaurants vary from Subway (no, really) to some nice restaurants that specialize in Argentine beef. City Café is a nice outdoor restaurant in the middle of town, right on the waterfront. Eden Beach also has a nice & affordable beach BBQ during the week. Eden Beach also offers a good American-style breakfast (eggs, bacon, taters, toast & coffee) for ~\$8-9.
 2. Go to the grocery store - there are 2 grocery stores in town:
 - a. [Warehouse Supermarket Bonaire](#) – Open Monday thru Friday, 8AM-6PM (nonstop) and Saturday, 8AM-1PM. The Warehouse Supermarket is where the Dutch locals & divers shop. They've got good meat, fresh bakery, produce...everything you would want. I would rate the Warehouse comparable to a Publix. I've had ground beef from here, made spaghetti with it and it was good. I'm pretty sure all the meat is from Argentina, which is ~50 miles away. I usually buy bread, peanut butter, meat, cheese & beer from here to eat on all week, and then go out a couple times during the week. I'll take peanut butter sandwiches while diving. Checkout the “[Assortment](#)” and “[Pictures](#)” links on their site.
 - b. [Cultimara Supermarket](#) – Open daily 7:30AM – 7PM non-stop (i.e. no siesta). This is where all the locals shop. Good shopping, though availability of some items is limited. Cultimara is located downtown, just down the block from the Hospital. If I had to rate Cultimara, I would rate it about the same as a Wal-Mart grocery.
 3. A couple of handy items to bring with you:
 - a. Salt, pepper, crushed red pepper, cooking spices – Why buy in Bonaire when you can bring them with you. Just put some of your favorite cooking spices in ziplock bags and put them in your checked bag.
 - b. Ziplock bags for sandwiches.
 - c. “Cold” bag like you see at Publix, Krogers or Walmart – These are handy for packing lunches or keep your favorite beverages cold.
- ACCOMODATIONS AT EDEN BEACH
 - Each room has a fully stocked kitchen, so it's easy to buy/prepare food in your room. The only thing I would suggest to bring is any special spices you might want to cook with. Electricity is 127 volt, 50 cycles; I use a Wal-Mart converter.
 - The 2 bedroom apartment has both bedrooms upstairs with a ¾ bath. The first level is kitchen/living room with half bath. Each apartment has a TV so you can stay in touch with world affairs.

- Wireless internet is available for ~\$70 for the week. There used to be an internet café downtown, not sure if it's there anymore.
- PACKING FOR BONAIRE – If you done any travel in the Caribbean then you've probably already got a routine for packing. If this is your first diving trip, then you have other things to consider when packing. Just to give some ideas, this is how I pack...
 - Backpack
 - Laptop
 - Digital camera & U/W case.
 - Extra camera battery (if not using rechargeable battery)
 - Prescription medication, Aleve, etc
 - Carry-on bag (I can still dive if my checked bag gets re-routed, I just rent fins)
 - BCD
 - Regulator
 - Mask
 - swim suit
 - spare shorts & shirt
 - Toothbrush
 - SUNSCREEN!!!
 - Checked bag
 - Remainder of scuba gear
 - Fins & boots
 - Wetsuit – good for protection against rocks & coral
 - Dive lights & batteries
 - Knives & cutting tools
 - 2 more swimsuits (they start to smell after a few days in the ocean)
 - 3-4 more shorts & shirts that I can cycle through. I'll take a nice island-type shirt in case I want to dress up for dinner
 - Lightweight jacket/hoodie (feels good after a night dive)
 - **DO NOT BRING** list
 - Weights – they are included in your package price
 - Weight belt – if not included, it might cost you \$5 to rent for the week
 - Towels – use the resort towels
 - Diving gloves – not allowed since Bonaire and the surrounding reefs are a protected national park. The reasoning is that dive gloves “promote” touching things underwater. Seriously, STINAPA (the governing agency) can pull your diving tag if you are caught wearing gloves in the water. See *Diving Protocol* below
 - Spear fishing equipment – illegal since Bonaire is a protected area. See *Diving Protocol* below
 - Chemical light sticks for diving – illegal since Bonaire is a protected area. See *Diving Protocol* below

- Illegal drugs or weapons
- DIVING – The reason we go... The first dive on Sunday morning is the orientation dive, the main purpose being for you to show the dive shop people or their designee (probably me) that you have good buoyancy. All the water surrounding Bonaire is a natural preserve and they don't like divers bouncing off the coral, fish, etc. Once everybody completes the first dive you will get your Marine Park tag and be free to dive anywhere, anytime, 24/7, as long as you are a certified diver. Any students will have to successfully complete their open water dives with me before they get their Marine Park tag. The story goes that diving is allowed on Bonaire between 1:01AM – 11:59PM, the other 2 minutes are for sleeping and eating. I've been on Bonaire trips where I saw people in our group at the orientation dive, the next time I saw them was checking in at the airport 6 days later after 20-30 dives.
 - Air tanks – Tanks (air and Nitrox) are filled at Eden Beach and are kept in racks in the parking lot. Load tanks in the bed of your truck each morning; try not to take more than 2 tanks per diver. When those tanks are empty, simply drive back to Eden Beach and swap out your empty tanks for full tanks.
 - Dive gear – Eden Beach has two rinse tanks to rinse off salt water; one for dive gear, the other is for cameras & video gear ONLY. Expect a polite reprimand if you're caught rinsing your BCD or regulator in the "camera" tank. There is also a secured storage room next to the rinse tanks. You can either store your gear in the storage room or take your gear back to your room. I like to store my gear in my room, not so much because I'm concerned about another diver "borrowing" my gear out of the storage room, but because it's a shorter walk to the parking lot when I'm loading up each morning.
 - REMEMBER – your PADI dive table (and dive computer) advise you to stop diving at least 18 hours prior to flying. Since we leave on Saturday about noon, this means no diving after 6PM on Friday. A good rule is to stop diving on Friday by noon, for a couple of reasons:
 - Gives time for your gear to dry a little bit longer. Remember, wet gear = more baggage weight.
 - Gives you more time for souvenir shopping or sightseeing
 - Gives you some extra time for that last nap.
- TRAINING DIVES – For those interested in doing training dives, either to get an advanced certification or for Specialties, Bonaire is the place to do it. WHY...because it's cheaper in Bonaire. Cheaper for you to buy; cheaper for me to provide. Think about it – there's no quarry fees to pay, no air fills to buy and no travel expenses.

How much cheaper? The Deep Diver specialty, normally \$150, can be bought for \$50 in Bonaire. Same type of deal for other specialties also. A 5-pack of specialties cost only \$200...that's 5 for the price of 4. The Advanced Open Water Diver certification, normally \$250, is only \$125 in Bonaire.

I'll be soliciting input from everybody as the time gets closer so I can know what specialties everybody might be interested in taking. We'll use this info to build a 7 day dive calendar which will be used to show people where they need to be for training dives.

You are free to join me & dive for fun on these dives as a **non-certification** dive, join me as a student on these dives for the certification or venture out on your own and dive at any dive site.

- DIVING PROTOCOL – These are the rules that keep Bonaire a fantastic dive area
 - Orientation – on Sunday morning everybody will attend a mandatory “dry” orientation at Eden Beach. This is where the dive shop will explain the rules, give updates on dive sites, etc. The “wet” orientation will follow. This is where the buoyancy check will be performed for either the dive shop or me. All they want to see is that you have good buoyancy. It doesn't have to be perfect, just good enough so you're not banging on the bottom.
 - Gloves – not allowed unless you have a current physician's order stating that you must wear gloves.
 - Chemical light sticks – Illegal. If you have U/W flashlights bring them, if not they can be rented.
 - Spear fishing – Illegal.
 - Collecting fish, corral (dead or alive), sea shells, etc - Illegal. Bonaire is actually a corral island, so all the areas where we dive have pieces of old, dead corral laying around. DO NOT bring back the corral you see even lying next to your truck. Bonaire customs will remove it from your luggage if they find any.
 - Personal control – Do not make any contact with the corals or other parts of the reef. Avoid silting up the bottom, by swimming too close, or by kicking while in a head-up position over sand. Have the knowledge and the skills to make sure you don't damage any undersea environment: reefs, sand flats, grass beds, etc. - in any manner.
- MISCELLANEOUS
 - Two-way radios – We've had varying degrees of success using radios; sometimes good, sometimes not. Since everybody tends to do everything as a group (dive, groceries, dinner, etc) there's really not a need to bring radios.
 - Car Flags – I'll be bringing car flags for each vehicle. This will make divers in our group easier to see on the road and at the numerous dive sites

ALWAYS REMEMBER that we are visitors on Bonaire. Your actions are a reflection on, not only our little dive group, but on all American divers & tourists.