PACK LIGHTLY

THE CARIBBEAN'S SAFEST DIVE ISLAND

Bonaire

Where shore diving rules and the whole coast is protected.

p.14 60+ named shore-dive sites reached by car and a walk to the beach

p.6 A mandatory STINAPA marine fee keeps the reef pristine and ensures access control

p.16 Flamingos breed in Pekelmeer's pink water while salt pyramids glow white

40 PAGES USD PRICES 90 DAYS VISA-FREE EDITION 2026.07

Start here

the shape of a Bonaire trip, what it costs, what to sort first



Bonaire rewards divers and snorkelers in a way few Caribbean islands do. The entire coast is the Bonaire National Marine Park, enforced via an online STINAPA fee paid per calendar year, separate rates for divers and non-divers. Dive access is not resort-based. Instead, yellow-painted roadside stones mark 60+ named entry points you drive to, park, and walk from. The island is small, quiet, and outside the hurricane belt. Four to six days covers shore diving, flamingo lagoons, salt pans, and a national park in the north. Most visitors are couples or solo divers seeking depth, not nightlife or resort sprawl.

The shape of a trip

Arrive in Kralendijk, the tiny capital. Spend two to three days doing shore dives along the west coast, since yellow-stone sites are a short drive apart. Day trips to Pekelmeer and Washington Slagbaai National Park. A boat ride to Klein Bonaire for snorkeling or deeper dives. Optional: Lac Bay windsurf lagoon. Most trips run five to seven days focused on water activities rather than sightseeing.

What a day costs

Budget travelers spend roughly 90 USD a day: dorm bed 30 to 40, local food 25 to 30, shore dive entry and rental 20 to 25. Mid-range runs 180 a day. Luxury is 380 and up. The STINAPA fee is separate, an annual charge, see stinapabonaire.org for the current rate. Flights from the US typically run 300 to 500 round trip.

Sort before you fly

Do you dive? Non-divers find value but fewer activities, since Bonaire's main draw is water. Are you comfortable self-guided shore diving: picking your buddy, reading conditions? That is the norm here. Will you rent equipment locally or bring your own regulator and fins? Four days works, six is richer.

HOW THE LINKS WORK

Some booking links earn Pack Lightly a commission, at no extra cost to you. Full disclosure sits near the back of this guide.

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01

The island

The trip on one page and the scorecard: a small, hub-and-spoke island where every site is under 30 minutes from Kralendijk.

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Your trip on one page

6 days recommended · 90 to 380 USD/day · best Dec to Apr, also Jul

Bonaire runs hub-and-spoke, not point-to-point. Base in Kralendijk and every site on the island sits within a 30 minute drive: the west coast dive sites, the salt pans and flamingos to the south, Washington Slagbaai's park loop to the north, and the Lac Bay windsurf lagoon to the east. Four days covers the shore-diving core; six adds the park, the salt flats, and a day at Klein Bonaire.

THE ROUTE (HUB-AND-SPOKE FROM KRALENDIJK)

Kralendijk — day 1-2

5-20min drive

West coast shore dives — day 2-4

15min boat

Klein Bonaire — day 3-4

15-30min drive

Pekelmeer and Washington Slagbaai — day 4-5

20min drive east

Lac Bay and Sorobon — day 5-6

BUDGET PER DAY

Budget	90 USD
Midrange	180 USD
Luxury	380 USD

BOOK FIRST

01	Flights, 6 to 8 weeks out	Aviasales
02	Accommodation, near a dive shop	Booking.com
03	eSIM, install before departure	Saily

BEST MONTHS

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
best	best	best	best	shoulder	avoid	shoulder	avoid	avoid	avoid	avoid	best

best: dry, calm seas, 80-120 ft visibility, Dec-Apr

shoulder: May and Jul, occasional rain, fewer tourists

avoid: Jun, Aug-Nov, rainy season, choppier seas

Bonaire at a glance

scores 0-100 · pack-lightly country-comparison data, vs Caribbean average

SCORECARD

Tourist infrastructure	65
Safety (Caribbean avg 60)	90
Budget friendly (Caribbean avg 59)	40
Nature (Caribbean avg 74)	70
Food and drinks (Caribbean avg 68)	55
Culture (Caribbean avg 76)	40

Budget travel	90 USD/day
Mid-range	180 USD/day
Luxury	380 USD/day

BEACH NATURE ADVENTURE WELLNESS

source: country-comparison tool, 2026-07

QUICK STATS

Capital	Kralendijk
Language	Papiamentu, Dutch, English, Spanish
Currency	US Dollar (official since 2011)
Timezone	AST, UTC-4, no DST
Best months	January to May, July, December
Days needed	4 minimum, 6 recommended
Power	Type A/B plugs, 127V, US-compatible
Tap water	safe to drink, desalinated
Tipping	10-15% at restaurants
STINAPA marine fee	mandatory, annual, see stinapabonaire.org

02

Where to go

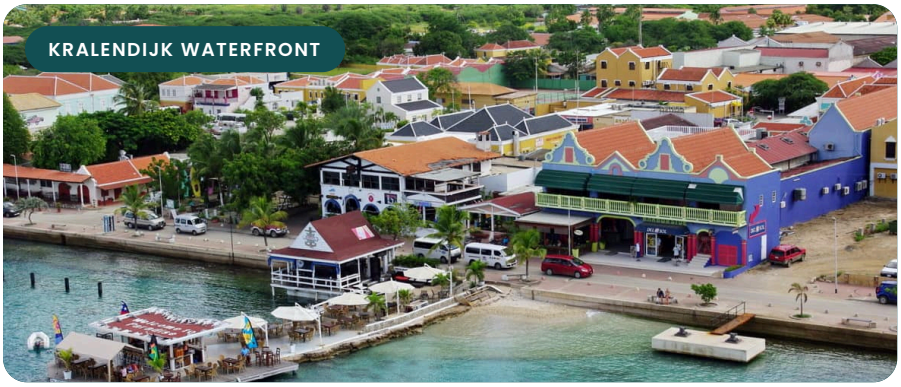
Five areas radiating from one small capital: a dive coast, a salt-and-flamingo south, a wild north park, a windsurf lagoon, and a quiet old village.

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Kralendijk

the only town · 1 night usually enough · logistics base



KRALENDIJK WATERFRONT

The only town, modest and functional: a town square, dive shops, restaurants, one main street. There is no beach here and no nightlife to speak of, and that is by design. This is a base for diving, not a destination in itself. Most visitors spend one night, get breakfast, rent equipment, and head to the coast. If you need groceries, a pharmacy, or cash, this is the place to sort it before the rest of the trip.

Skip expecting a Caribbean-town vibe. Kralendijk is industrial rather than charming, with no big beach or boardwalk. Come for logistics, not leisure.

Pick up a rental pickup truck here on arrival. It is the standard vehicle for reaching yellow-stone dive sites and the south coast.

Town square and dive shops

The main strip clusters dive operators, gear rental counters, and casual restaurants within walking distance.

Groceries, pharmacy, cash

The last real stop for supplies before heading out to the coast, the park, or the salt flats.

Harbor at night

Quiet after dark; stick to lit main streets rather than the outlying harbor area.

GO DEEPER

Nine things to do in town in the Kralendijk write-up, and the full country hub at pack-lightly.com/bonaire.

West Coast & Dive Sites

the reason people come · 60+ marked entry points · year-round

SHORE DIVING MARKER STONE, YELLOW PAINT

Skip expecting sand beaches here. Entry points are rocky; the underwater view is the point.

A printed dive-site map from any shop shows every stone's depth range. Space dives an hour apart.

This is why people come. The coast is a continuous coral reef guarded by STINAPA, with yellow-painted stones marking 60+ numbered entry points. Park at the stone, walk 10 to 50 meters to the beach, enter the water. Do two to three dives a day if renting tanks. Sites range 30 to 130 feet deep. Also snorkel in 5 to 15 feet. Klein Bonaire, an uninhabited islet 15 minutes by boat, adds easy house-reef snorkeling for a change of scenery.

1000 Steps

A limestone staircase entry into a steep coral wall, 60 to 130 feet.

Salt Pier

Encrusted-coral pilings from the old salt-loading dock, snappers and turtles common.

Bari Reef

A gentle slope with dense, diverse coral, a favorite for first dives and snorkeling.

Klein Bonaire

An uninhabited islet with easy house-reef snorkeling and deeper wall dives, no overnight stays allowed.

READ ON All 13 shore-dive sites in the Bonaire diving guide, the offshore islet in the islands write-up, plus dedicated pages for 1000 Steps, Salt Pier, and Klein Bonaire.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Pekelmeer & Salt Flats

salt works and flamingos · 1-2 hours · best at sunrise



Southern Bonaire is a solar salt operation run by Cargill, and enormous white pyramids of harvested salt line the coastline. Ponds turn pink, orange, or turquoise depending on salinity and algae. Pekelmeer lagoon is one of the Caribbean's few wild flamingo breeding grounds, with breeding season peaking in summer. The water is too salty to swim in. Pink Beach, a small beach with crushed-shell sand, sits nearby. Plan one to two hours from Kralendijk.

Keep at least 20 feet from flamingos. They are shy and disappear if approached too closely.

Not a swimming beach and not postcard-scenic. Best for photographers and nature lovers, not for relaxation.

Salt pyramids

Harvested solar salt piled into brilliant white mounds along the coast road.

Pink and orange ponds

Color shifts with brine concentration and algae, ranging pale blue to hot pink.

Flamingo breeding grounds

One of the Caribbean's few wild breeding sites, most active June through October.

Pink Beach

A small, salt-tinted crushed-shell beach a short drive from the salt works.

MORE ON THE SITE Salt flats and flamingo timing in the Pekelmeer write-up, and the crushed-shell beach in the Pink Beach page.

Washington Slagbaai National Park

wilderness · 24km loop · about 25 USD entry



Roads are rough and a regular sedan is uncomfortable here. Bring water and a full tank of fuel.

Not a quick day trip unless based nearby. Best for hikers with time and a hardy rental.

The northwest corner is a national park with a 24km dirt-road loop, high cliffs, and Gotomeer Lagoon where flamingos gather. Seru Largu, the highest point at about 240 meters, has views of the sea and Venezuela on clear days. The park is rugged, dry, and genuinely remote. Most visitors spend three to four hours driving and walking the loop, watching for iguanas, birds, and donkeys along the way.

Seru Largu

The park's highest point, about 240m, with clear-day views to Venezuela.

Gotomeer Lagoon

A shallow lagoon where wild flamingos gather, especially June through October.

Iguanas, birds, and donkeys

Wildlife spotting along the full loop, common enough to slow the drive.

24km dirt-road loop

High cliffs and rugged terrain; a high-clearance rental makes the drive easier.

KEEP READING

The full loop and its stops in the Washington Slagbaai write-up, the viewpoint on its own at Seru Largu, the lagoon at Gotomeer, and every summit on the island in the Bonaire peaks page.

Lac Bay, Sorobon & Rincon

lagoon and village · half day to full day

LAC BAY SOROBON WINDSURF

If diving is the main goal, Lac Bay takes a full day and adds little. Best for windsurfers or a traditional beach day.

Rincon has no beach and no tourist restaurants. Come for old-Caribbean village time, not an attraction list.

The eastern shore has a wide, shallow lagoon famous for windsurfing and kitesurfing, with calm and warm water year-round. Sorobon is a beach bar and kitesurf rental hub, and non-windsurfers get a lazy afternoon: wade, swim, lie on the beach. Water is murky lagoon silt, not ideal for snorkeling. Inland, Rincon, the oldest settlement on the island, founded in 1527, sits near a salt lake: tiny, quiet, and not tourist-focused. Most visitors skip it unless staying six or more days.

Sorobon kite and windsurf hub

Rentals and schools line the beach; the lagoon is beginner-friendly year-round.

Rincon, founded 1527

The island's oldest village, quiet and local, a detour for history rather than sightseeing.



PINK BEACH

THE LONG VERSION

The lagoon in full at the Lac Bay write-up, the kite hub at Sorobon, and the village history at Rincon.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

03

Diving and the marine park

The deepest chapter in this guide, because it is Bonaire's whole reason for being: self-guided reef access, star sites, salt pans, flamingos, and the food to refuel on between dives.

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The 60+ named sites and rentals 14

Self-guided discipline and star sites 15

Pekelmeer and Gotomeer Lagoon 16

Washington Slagbaai, Rincon, Donkeys 17

Food: the calibration dishes 18

Shore Diving and the Marine Park

the entire coast is a protected reef you access by car and a walk

Bonaire's coast is the Bonaire National Marine Park, protected and managed via a mandatory STINAPA nature fee. Unlike reef access on many islands, there is no resort intermediary. You rent a car, find a yellow-painted stone marking one of 60+ named dive sites, park, walk to the beach, and dive. This is DIY diving at island scale: you need a buddy, your own judgment, and rental tanks or your own gear. It works because the island is small, roads are direct, and entry points are marked and accessed the same way year-round.

The 60+ named sites

Yellow stones line the west and south coasts. Each stone is numbered and named (1000 Steps, Salt Pier, Bari Reef, Something Special, Reef Scipio). A printed map or app shows locations and depth ranges. Most are 30 to 60 feet, accessible to intermediate divers and advanced snorkelers. Entry is on foot from the beach. Weather is calm almost year-round, and average visibility runs 80+ feet.

Equipment and rentals

Kralendijk dive shops rent tanks, weights, regulators, and BCDs for 15 to 25 USD a day. Bring your own regulator and fins if you prefer a known fit. Compressor fills run 3 to 5 USD per tank. There is no resort deco facility; plan with a shop or boat operator if needed. Most divers do multiple shore dives a day, spacing them by an hour.





WORTH KNOWING BEFORE YOUR FIRST DIVE

- [ ] Yellow-painted stones mark every official entry point along the coast; numbers match a free waterproof map from dive shops.
- [ ] The entire coastline is one continuous marine park with free entry and exit after paying STINAPA. There is no resort monopoly on any site.
- [ ] Rent a pickup truck rather than a sedan; most yellow-stone parking is a dirt shoulder, not a lot.

ON THE WEBSITE All 13 shore-dive sites, entry points, and depth ranges in the Bonaire diving write-up.

Self-Guided Discipline and Star Sites

no lifeguard, no resort desk: you set the rules

You pick your buddy, read conditions (water clarity, surge, wind), and decide whether to dive. Shops offer briefings, but they do not police dives; this requires honest self-assessment. If you are not confident in your skills, take a guided dive instead, adding 60 to 80 USD. Good beginner sites include Bari Reef (25 to 35 feet) and Oil Slick Leap (15 to 45 feet, coral heads).

1000 Steps

A limestone staircase descent into a steep coral wall, 60 to 130 feet deep.

Salt Pier

Pilings from the old salt-loading dock, now encrusted coral, snappers, and turtles.

Klein Bonaire

An uninhabited islet with house-reef snorkeling and deeper dives, a short boat ride out.

Something Special

A steep wall with dramatic coral formations, best for experienced divers.

Bari Reef

A gentle slope, diverse fish and coral, popular for first dives and snorkeling.



KLEIN BONAIRE REEF

SHORE DIVING MARKER STONE, YELLOW PAINT

Klein Bonaire is a water-taxi day trip, about 5 minutes and 10 to 15 USD from Kralendijk, with no overnight stays allowed on the islet.

A dive computer, your own or a rental, is standard for tracking depth and time across multiple shore dives a day.

Salt, Flamingos, and Wild Parks

Bonaire's interior is dry, dramatic, and full of wildlife

Beyond the reef, Bonaire is a desert island with salt ponds, wild birds, and an intact national park. The salt ponds of Pekelmeer produce solar-harvested salt in pyramids glowing white against turquoise water, while the ponds themselves turn pink and orange from algae and brine shrimp. Gotomeer, a lagoon in the northern national park, is one of the Caribbean's few spots where wild flamingos breed. All of it is reachable by car in day trips from Kralendijk.

Pekelmeer and salt works

The southern coast is Cargill's solar salt operation. Harvested salt sits in 30-meter pyramids, brilliant white. Ponds range pale blue (deep brine) to hot pink (algae-rich shallows). Flamingos breed here June to October. Entry is free from the road; a closer permit costs about 5 USD. Swimming is not advised: hypersaline, slippery salt. Plan one to two hours.

Gotomeer Lagoon

A shallow lagoon in Washington Slagbaai, famous for wading and flamingo viewing, especially June to October. A short walk from the park road makes it an easy spot to scan for birds. Snorkeling is possible in clearer sections, and it is also reachable by kayak from the park entrance. Bring binoculars and a field guide.



PEKELMEER PINK SALT PANS



FLAMINGOS, GOTOMEER LAGOON

WORTH KNOWING

- [ ] Flamingos are most active at dawn and dusk at Gotomeer and Pekelmeer. Bring binoculars and stay low rather than approaching.
- [ ] April and May typically see the highest flamingo numbers at both sites, ahead of the June to October breeding peak.
- [ ] Swimming in the salt ponds is not advised: the water is hypersaline and the surrounding salt crust is slippery underfoot.

Washington Slagbaai, Rincon, and the Donkeys

the far north and the island's quiet inland side

A 24km loop road runs through rugged terrain in Washington Slagbaai National Park. Highlights include Seru Largu (the highest point at 240m, with views to Venezuela), Gotomeer, sea cliffs, and steady iguana and bird watching. Entry runs about 25 USD, roads are rough and steep, and most visitors spend three to four hours driving and walking the loop; a high-clearance vehicle helps.

Washington Slagbaai National Park

A 6,000-hectare reserve with the island's highest cliffs, a full-day proposition for anyone hiking beyond the loop road itself.

Rincon and Donkey Sanctuary

Rincon is the oldest village, founded 1527, quiet and inland. The Bonaire Donkey Sanctuary rescues feral donkeys and runs tours via local guides. Both are short visits, best for travelers with six or more days who want to slow down rather than dive every hour of daylight.



WASHINGTON SLAGBAAI LANDSCAPE

DONKEY SANCTUARY

WORTH KNOWING

- [ ] Entry to Washington Slagbaai runs about 25 USD; the receipt is usually valid across the same visit if you re-enter the same day.
- [ ] Rincon has no big attraction list; treat it as background scenery on the drive back from the park rather than a dedicated stop.
- [ ] The Donkey Sanctuary runs guided visits with local staff; check opening hours before making the detour from Rincon.

MORE DETAIL

The full park loop in the Washington Slagbaai write-up, and rescue-donkey visits in the Donkey Sanctuary page.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Food: the calibration dishes

simple and seafood-heavy · 3 to 35 USD a plate

Bonaire's food is simple and seafood-heavy, reflecting its small size and Cargill salt history. The local language is Papiamentu, and food names carry that flavor. Dishes are usually inexpensive, under 15 USD at casual spots, unless dining upscale. Local fruit and vegetables are limited, so most meals combine imported ingredients with fresh fish.

KABRITU STOBA, GOAT STEW

Kabritu Stoba (Goat Stew)

USD 14-22 · Bonaire staple

Slow-cooked, tender goat with rich sauce, usually served with funchi or rice.

PISKA KU FUNCHI, FISH WITH CORNMEAL

Piska ku Funchi (Fresh Fish with Funchi)

USD 18-30 · most common dinner

Fried or grilled catch of the day paired with funchi, a firm cornmeal polenta.

PAN BATI, CORNMEAL PANCAKE

Pan Bati (Cornmeal Pancake)

USD 3-7 · breakfast or snack

Fried cornmeal pancakes, crispy outside and soft inside, often with cheese or eggs.

FUNCHI, CORNMEAL POLENTA

Funchi (Cornmeal Polenta)

USD 3-7 · usually a side

Boiled cornmeal, firm and sliced, sometimes fried; authentic and filling.

SOPI DI YUANA, IGUANA SOUP

Sopi di Yuana (Iguana Soup)

USD 12-20 · rare, traditional

Rarely served now due to wildlife protection, but appears occasionally at local spots.

CALCO, QUEEN CONCH

Calco (Queen Conch)

USD 20-35 · Caribbean specialty

Fresh conch, often ceviche or fried, sometimes in soup; chewy and briny.

Cadushi cactus liqueur is a local spirit worth sipping at sunset, or bringing home as a bottle.

Papiamentu carries the dish names; most menus also list a Dutch or English translation.

WORTH A READ The full dish list with prices in the food and drinks breakdown, and the full day-cost picture in the Bonaire travel budget.

04

Routes and itineraries

A 7-day version built entirely around shore diving and flamingos, a 10 to 14 day version that adds Lac Bay and a full national-park loop, and the tours worth booking.

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10–14 days: deep dive, parks, windsurf I 21

10–14 days: deep dive, parks, windsurf II 22

Tours worth booking 23

7 days: Shore Diving and Flamingos

the tightest version that still covers the whole island

Rent a pickup truck on day one and keep it the whole week; every stop on this route sits within 30 minutes of Kralendijk. Book Klein Bonaire's boat crossing a day ahead in peak season.

1	**Kralendijk** day 1-2	Arrive, rent car and equipment, two shore dives on the west coast. Get briefed on sites you will visit. Explore town briefly.
2	**West Coast** day 3	Three shore dives at different sites: 1000 Steps, Salt Pier, Something Special. Sunset walk in Kralendijk.
3	**Klein Bonaire** day 4	Boat trip to Klein Bonaire. Two dives or deep snorkeling on the house reef. Return to Kralendijk by afternoon.
4	**Pekelmeer & Washington** day 5	Drive to Pekelmeer for flamingo photos. Continue to Washington Slagbaai National Park for the loop road and Seru Largu views. Return by evening.
5	**West Coast** day 6	Two more shore dives at new sites like Bari Reef and Reef Scipio. Relax and do laundry.
6	**Departure** day 7	Optional last shore dive in the morning before heading to the airport, or rest and pack.

04

SEE ALSO A compressed three-day version built around Kralendijk, the marine park, and Washington Slagbaai in the 3 day itinerary. The ten to fourteen day version follows on the next two pages.

10-14 days: Deep Dive, Parks, and Windsurf

for divers with a week or more to spend on the reef

The complete version, for anyone with ten days or more who wants to hit 8 to 10 shore sites, add the full park loop, and still have a rest day for Lac Bay.

1 Arrival & Orientation
day 1-2

Arrive in Kralendijk, rent car for the week. Orientation dive and first dives, visit a few dive shops to pick your guide or buddy.

2 Dedicated Diving
day 3-5

Hit 8 to 10 shore sites: start with 1000 Steps, Salt Pier, then work south and east. Take one guided dive to learn local navigation and secret spots.

3 Klein Bonaire
day 6

Full day via boat operator. Four to six dives or snorkeling, house reef, lunch on the boat. Return by evening.

4 Rest & Explore
day 7

Day off from diving or easy snorkeling. Visit Rincon or the Donkey Sanctuary, or rest in Kralendijk and resupply groceries and gear.

SHORE DIVING MARKER STONE, YELLOW PAINT



KRALENDIJK WATERFRONT

10-14 days: Deep Dive, Parks, and Windsurf

the flex days and the wind-down

5	**National Park & Flamingos** day 8-9	Washington Slagbaai full loop, hikes, flamingo spotting. Pekelmeer at sunrise for photos. Night snorkel if conditions allow.
6	**Lac Bay & Sorobon** day 10-11	Windsurf or kitesurf all day if interested. Otherwise wade, snorkel, kayak. Relax and recover from diving.
7	**Final Dives** day 12-13	Last dives or snorkeling. Revisit a favorite site. Shopping and casual time in Kralendijk.
8	**Departure** day 14	Depart for the airport. Morning flight home, or a last shallow snorkel if the schedule allows.

LAC BAY SOROBON WINDSURF



PEKELMEER PINK SALT PANS

DIG IN

The full hub for every region covered in this route at pack-lightly.com/bonaire.

Tours worth booking

top-rated local operators, filtered to group trips, sorted toward backpacker prices

These are live, top-rated tours across Bonaire and Kralendijk, filtered to independent group trips and sorted toward the cheaper end. Match them to the route on the previous pages, and book the few that need a boat, a guide, or advance notice.

Bonaire Cave Tour: Walk, Climb & Swim

from 75 USD
5.0 (114 reviews)
3 hours
Bonaire

1 Hour Mangrove Kayak Tour

from 40 USD
5.0 (20 reviews)
1.5 hours
Bonaire

E-Snorkeling Tour in Bonaire with Sea Scooters

from 125 USD
5.0 (95 reviews)
2 hours
Bonaire

Aquaspace Sunset Sail and Snorkel with Dinner

from 130 USD
5.0 (64 reviews)
4 hours
Kralendijk

Snorkel Marathon

from 75 USD
4.4 (48 reviews)
3.25 hours
Kralendijk

Small-Group Guided North & South Tour with Pick Up

from 65 USD
4.4 (258 reviews)
3 hours
Kralendijk

Live Viator tours, prices captured July 2026, ratings from verified bookings. Tap a card to book. Some links earn Pack Lightly a commission at no extra cost.

05

When to go

Outside the hurricane belt, so the real split is visibility, comfort, and rain, not storm risk. Three bands cover the whole calendar.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Weather, dive visibility, and rain 25

Best: December to April 26

Shoulder: May and July 27

Avoid: August to November 28

Weather, Dive Visibility, and Rain

outside the main hurricane belt, so travel is safe year-round

Bonaire is outside the main hurricane belt, so travel is safe year-round. The best time is December to April, when conditions are dry, cool (75 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit), and water clarity is highest. May and July see occasional rain but are still diveable. June and August through November are the rainy and slower tourism season: prices drop and crowds disappear, but afternoon showers are common and sea conditions can be choppier. July is a surprisingly good pick for solitude between the two wetter windows.



best: Dec–Apr, dry, calm seas, 80–120 ft visibility

shoulder: May, Jul, occasional rain, fewer tourists

avoid: Jun, Aug–Nov, peak rain, choppier seas

source: pack-lightly best-travel-time dataset, captured 2026-07

Best: Dec–Apr

Dry, calm seas, 80 to 120 feet of visibility, comfortable weather. Hotels fill up; book ahead.

Shoulder: May, Jul

Occasional rain, still good diving, fewer tourists, and prices step down from the peak.

Avoid: Jun, Aug–Nov

Peak rainy season, occasional rough seas, a small hurricane risk. Prices are lowest here.

Best: December to April

the driest window, and the highest dive visibility of the year

The five-month window most trips should aim for. Rain drops off, humidity eases, seas run calm, and visibility peaks at 80 to 120 feet across the west coast sites. It is also peak booking season, so hotel rates and flight prices run highest in this window, especially around the December and February holiday weeks.

Visibility peaks in this window

Water clarity across the shore-dive sites is at its best; anyone planning multiple dives a day should target this stretch.

Hotel pricing runs highest

Christmas, New Year, and February weeks carry the steepest rates of the year. Book dive-shop-adjacent rooms well ahead.

Comfortable temperatures

75 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit, with steady trade winds keeping the heat manageable on the salt flats and park loop.

Shoulder: May and July

fewer tourists, lower prices, still diveable

May and July sit at opposite edges of the wetter months and both carry good value for a flexible traveler. Occasional rain shows up in both, but conditions stay diveable and crowds thin out noticeably from the December to April peak.

May: warm and humid

The tail of the dry season, warmer and more humid, with rates stepping down from the April peak.

July: rainy but rewarding

Rainy overall, but has good weeks between showers and is surprisingly good for solitude on popular sites.

Book flexible where possible

Both months sit close enough to the rainier stretch that a flexible or refundable booking is worth the small premium.

Avoid: August to November

peak rainy season, low prices, small hurricane risk

June and the August through November stretch bring the wettest weeks of the year and the closest Bonaire comes to the Caribbean's hurricane season, though the island sits far enough south that a direct hit remains rare. Most weeks still pass without incident, and hotel and flight prices drop sharply, but conditions are inconsistent enough that divers should build in flexibility.

Travel insurance matters here

Buy a policy covering trip cancellation and rebooking before locking in flights or a room in this window.

Rougher seas, lower visibility

Shore dives are still possible most days, but surge and reduced clarity are more common than in the dry season.

The trade-off is real value

Hotel and flight prices both drop noticeably in this window; the cheapest time of year for a flexible diver.

06

Practical and safety

What a day costs, what to pack, where to sleep, and the marine hazards and self-guided diving habits that keep a Bonaire trip running smoothly.

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What a day really costs

itemised, budget vs midrange · diving and the STINAPA fee add extra

Diving and the STINAPA marine park fee add significant cost on top of the day-to-day totals below; non-divers pay the annual fee only. Capture month is July 2026.

A DAY IN BONAIRE

* budget *

bed, dorm or private guesthouse	30
food, street meals to casual dining	25
local transport, taxi or car rental	10
one activity, dive, snorkel, or tour	20
drink, beer, rum, or soft drink	5
TOTAL / DAY	**90 USD**

budget-calculator data, July 2026

A DAY IN BONAIRE

* midrange *

bed, private guesthouse	65
food, casual dining	40
local transport, taxi or boat taxi	20
one activity, guided dive or tour	45
drink	10
TOTAL / DAY	**180 USD**

budget-calculator data, July 2026

⚠ Luxury independent travel runs 380 USD a day and up: resort rooms, restaurant dinners, and private guide time or boat dives.

The STINAPA marine park fee is a separate annual charge; check stinapabonaire.org for the current rate before booking dives.

06

THE FULL PICTURE

Category by category detail in the Bonaire travel budget write-up, or run the numbers for your own trip length on the Trip Budget Calculator.

Packing checklist

five groups, built around dive gear and reef protection

DOCUMENTS

- [ ] Passport, valid 6 months or more beyond arrival
- [ ] Travel insurance with dive coverage
- [ ] Dive logbook, if experienced

CLOTHING

- [ ] Lightweight layers for air conditioning indoors
- [ ] Hat or cap for sun protection
- [ ] Beach cover-up or light long-sleeve shirt

HEALTH AND SUN

- [ ] Reef-safe sunscreen, SPF 30+
- [ ] Basic first aid kit and antibiotic ointment for minor cuts
- [ ] Any prescription medications

TECH

- [ ] Dive computer, own or rental
- [ ] Waterproof camera or GoPro, optional
- [ ] Dry bag for electronics and documents
- [ ] Headlamp for sunset or night dives

BEACH AND WATER

- [ ] Snorkel mask and fins, own or rent locally
- [ ] Water shoes for rocky shore entries
- [ ] Rash guard or 3mm wetsuit, for cooler months or sun protection
- [ ] Underwater slate or notepad for dive notes

GO DEEPER The full five-day packing list at the packing list page.

Where to stay

a rental pickup truck matters more than location on this island

Every base sits within 30 minutes of the west coast dive sites, so pick a stay by budget and vibe rather than proximity. A rental pickup truck is the standard vehicle, 30 to 50 USD a day, since most dive-site parking is a dirt shoulder rather than a lot. Taxis exist but run 15 to 20 USD a trip and do not suit a multi-dive day.

Kralendijk

The default base: walking distance to dive shops, restaurants, and groceries, with the west coast a short drive either direction. Check what a room costs around Kralendijk.

Lac Bay (Sorobon)

The pick for windsurfers and kitesurfers who want to fall out of bed onto the lagoon rather than drive to it. See live prices around Lac Bay.

CLOSER TO A SPECIFIC DIVE SITE

A handful of stays cluster nearer specific sites rather than the town center: near Salt Pier and Pekelmeer, near 1000 Steps, and near Washington Slagbaai's entrance. Klein Bonaire itself has no lodging and no overnight camping; it is a day-trip only.

Rooms and guesthouses across the island, with free cancellation while plans are still moving.

Find Stays on Booking.com


KRALENDIJK WATERFRONT


1000 STEPS DIVE SITE

Staying safe

the safest of the ABC islands, once marine hazards are understood

Bonaire is the safest of the three ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao). Violent crime is rare and petty theft is low compared to nearby islands. The main safety concerns are marine hazards and the self-guided diving culture, which requires honest assessment of your own skills. Standard precautions apply: avoid walking alone at night, secure valuables, and stay aware in Kralendijk's harbor area after dark.

Marine hazards

Watch for stonefish, sea urchins, and mild fire-coral stings. Shuffle your feet when wading, wear reef shoes, and look before touching anything.

Self-guided diving

You are responsible for your own safety and your buddy's. If not experienced, take a guided dive or refresher course, 60 to 120 USD, and do not exceed your limits.

Night safety and belongings

Avoid walking alone at night, especially near Kralendijk's harbor. Lock rental cars and secure valuables in a hotel safe; occasional theft from cars does happen.

STINAPA compliance and hurricanes

Water entry requires the STINAPA fee, paid online before arrival where possible. Bonaire sits outside the main hurricane belt, but storms are possible August to November.

READ ON

Current conditions by area on the Travel Safety Map tool.

Do and do not

five to follow, five to avoid

DO

Pay the STINAPA marine park fee before diving or snorkeling

Mandatory for anyone entering the water, divers and non-divers alike. Pay online before arrival where possible.

DO NOT

Touch or stand on coral

Coral fractures easily and takes decades to recover. Keep fins and hands clear at every site.

DO

Use reef-safe sunscreen only

Regular sunscreen chemicals damage coral. Reef-safe formulas are sold island-wide.

DO NOT

Expect large sand beaches or nightlife

Beaches are rocky and small; the underwater view, not the shoreline, is the draw here.

DO

Rent a pickup truck for drive-and-dive flexibility

The standard vehicle for reaching yellow-stone sites and the south coast at your own pace.

DO NOT

Dive or snorkel without training or a guide on your first visit

The self-guided system assumes real skill. If unsure, book a guided dive first.

DO

Dive or snorkel with a buddy on all self-guided shore dives

No lifeguards and no resort desk policing conditions; a buddy is the only backup you have.

DO NOT

Remove anything from the marine park

Shells, coral fragments, and marine life all stay in the water; enforcement is real.

DO

Keep at least 20 feet from flamingos

At Gotomeer and Pekelmeer, they are shy and disappear if approached too closely.

DO NOT

Assume a regular sedan handles the park loop

Washington Slagbaai's dirt roads are rough; a high-clearance rental makes the drive far easier.

07

Tools, print cards, sources

The live tools this guide draws from, the questions readers ask most, and where every number in this edition comes from.

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Take the live tools with you

scan to open · data updates after this PDF was printed

This guide is a snapshot; the tools behind it keep updating. Scan a code or type the short URL, each one preloaded with the same Bonaire data this guide was built from.



Trip Budget Calculator

Bonaire: 90 USD/day budget, 180 midrange, 380 luxury.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/budget-calculator/



Packing List Generator

A custom list for dive gear, sun, and the park loop in one trip.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/packing-list-generator/



Best Time to Travel

Best: December to April, plus July. Month by month weather for 140+ countries.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/



Visa Checker

Confirm your entry rule before you book: most passports get 90 days visa-free.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/visa-checker/

Frequently asked questions

the eight questions that come up most

The short answers to what readers ask before booking. Longer detail on each sits in the matching chapter.

Do I need to scuba dive to enjoy Bonaire?

No. Non-divers snorkel the same reefs after paying the STINAPA fee. Shore snorkeling is excellent, Klein Bonaire is a water-taxi day trip, and hikes, windsurfing, and village exploration also work.

What is the STINAPA marine park fee, and is it required?

An annual fee for entering the water, diving or snorkeling. The amount varies by category; check stinapabonaire.org for current rates. Paid online before arrival, and strictly enforced.

Can I snorkel without a guide?

Yes. The coast has marked yellow-stone entry points; snorkel from the beach or water-taxi to Klein Bonaire. Always use a buddy, stay clear of boats, and never touch coral.

Do I need to rent a car?

For diving, yes. Most shore sites spread along the coast; a pickup truck at 30 to 50 USD a day lets you explore at your own pace. Taxis run 15 to 20 USD a trip.

Are there beaches to relax on?

Beaches are rocky and small, not wide sand. Flamingo Beach and Pink Beach offer shallow entry. Most visitors snorkel rather than sunbathe.

Is Bonaire safe for travelers?

Yes, one of the safest Caribbean islands. Crime against tourists is rare. Avoid leaving valuables in cars in Kralendijk. Tap water is safe and medical care is adequate.

Where and when can I see flamingos?

At Gotomeer lagoon in the north and Pekelmeer salt ponds in the south, especially early morning. Keep 20 feet distance; April and May see the highest numbers.

What is the hurricane risk?

Bonaire sits south of the main hurricane belt. June through November brings rare storms; December through April is virtually storm-free. Travel insurance is still recommended.

A note on the links in this guide

disclosure · why this guide is free



WRITTEN BY

Wouter van Kemenade

Founder of Pack Lightly. Performance marketing background, data led travel research. Every number in this guide is verified against a source listed on the next page; if a price moves more than 15 percent, the next edition flags it.

This guide is free because some of the booking links inside it are affiliate links. When a reader books a flight, a stay, or an eSIM through one of those links, the merchant pays Pack Lightly. The reader pays the same price either way.

The pick comes before the partner. A stay area is chosen for the trip it makes, and where a partner link exists for it that link is used; where none does, the plain link still points there. The commission funds the guide, it does not choose for it.

Questions, corrections, or a place you tested that belongs in the next edition: write to hello@pack-lightly.com.

Partners linked in this edition: **Aviasales** · **Booking.com** · **Saily** · **Stay22** · **Viator** · via **Travelpayouts**

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Tour data and prices: Viator Partner API, captured July 2026. Author portrait and brand marks: Pack Lightly.

Sources used in this edition

where every number in this guide comes from

SOURCES

1. Budget figures: pack-lightly budget-calculator dataset, captured July 2026.
2. Country scores and vacation type tags: pack-lightly country-comparison tool, captured 2026-07.
3. Regional comparison figures: Caribbean average across the pack-lightly country-comparison tool, captured 2026-07.
4. Food prices: pack-lightly local food and drinks dataset for Bonaire, captured 2026-07.
5. Visa rules: pack-lightly visa-checker dataset (US perspective), researched 2026-05-15.
6. STINAPA marine park fee: rates change; verify the current amount at stinapabonaire.org before booking dives.
7. Pack Lightly Bonaire cluster pages, retrieved 2026-07: the hub · food · islands · diving · 3-day itinerary.

What changed in edition 2026.07: first release on the v2 design standard for Bonaire. Not covered here: technical or night-diving certification courses, liveaboard boats, cruise stopovers.