

Bonaire January 2018

Overview of Bonaire:

Bonaire is

- No order to the roads, so very easy to get lost
- Very friendly people.
- Fabulous snorkeling right from the shore – and diving too.
- Amazingly great food!
- Wonderful Island indeed!

Car Rental:

Avis was very professional. Nice little car. The roads are very narrow here, so you WANT a little car.

Condo:

Den Laman Condos, Kaya Gob N Debrot, Dutch Caribbean, Bonaire

Phone: 599 717 17 00 **Email:** info@denlaman.com

- Our unit is “Parrotfish” and is on the second floor facing the ocean. It was clean and large. Not luxurious by any means, but comfortable and a great location.
- Wonderful snorkeling right off the pier or from the beach. We found heading north was best, with a marvelous Elkhorn coral head in front of the neighboring “Sand Dollar” condominiums.
- Great “sea glass” hunting in the water’s edge in front of the hotel. Clearly Heineken beer is the most consumed here!
- We never tried the restaurant, but one is present. There are just so many in town that have great reviews.
- Town (Kralendijk) is only minutes away with great restaurants (see our list below) and many interesting shops.
- The park next door is noisy with music on Friday night. A little on Sat too, but minimal. The rest of the week it is very quiet here.
- The rooms are very well soundproofed, so you never hear your neighbors.
- They have a dive shop connected to the Den Laman, so divers have it made here, either from the pier or on their many diving boat excursions.

Bonaire January 2018

Restaurants in "Best" order.

A note regarding the "*" ratings: They are on a sliding curve. A burger place or a food truck may be a 5 star, and not expected to deliver a 5 star lobster. Likewise, a five-star fine restaurant is at a higher standard than the burger joint. If there is no website shown, it is because they do not have one.

Dinner Places (in order of excellence):

6* Mezze (<http://www.mezzebonaire.com>), The tuna sashimi, salad, grape leaves and lamb shank were all just superb. Came back for kebabs and the Moroccan chicken and then again for the "Dry cured beef", which is delicious tenderloin (They need a new name in the menu). Enjoyed their cuisine three times!

5* Cuba Compagnie (<http://www.cubacompagniebonaire.nl/indexeng.html>). This is not a "Cuban" restaurant, but more of an Asian fusion restaurant. The Japanese salad with raw tuna and the tuna teriyaki were both delicious. We had raw tuna salad and Teriyaki chicken and were both delicious. The setting is also great being in the open with local kids playing.

5* Capriccio Italian Restaurant (<http://www.capricciobonaire.com>). Complimentary appetizers were wonderful with great flatbread and sauces. We enjoyed the Lasagna and the pumpkin ravioli. We enjoyed the homemade Gelato and sorbets with decaf coffee drinks. The wine list is large with great house-wine selection. They are famous for their wine list. The staff was all professional and delightful.

5* La Terrazza (<http://www.laterrazzarestaurant.com>), a fabulous Italian restaurant. It was many small courses, \$6 each. He first asks what you like and don't like or are allergic to. We liked all served us except the duck, which he graciously took back and gave us Tuna. It is a new experience to not know what you are getting next.

5* Mi Banana Bar Restaurant where the whole Red snapper and the Mahi fillet were both superb. It was local and wonderful, well worth the search to find it.

5* Mona Lisa Bar & Restaurant. We had the onion soup, Tuna sashimi, Barracuda, shrimp and the table potatoes. All were delicious too.

1* Patagonia: It was the only bad meal we had with their attitude even worse. Sharon's sirloin was okay but Bob's NY Strip was $\frac{3}{4}$ gristle. After fighting my way through the $\frac{1}{4}$ of the steak that was edible, we called the waiter over and he said I had eaten the whole thing and that the only reason it was gristle is that I ordered it rare and beef should always be ordered well done. Every worker in the restaurant was as rude as the next. **Just do not go there.**

Lunch Places

5* Between 2 Buns [https://www.facebook.com/Between2BunsBonaire#_=_](https://www.facebook.com/Between2BunsBonaire#_=) They have wonderful sandwiches of all sorts. They also have deserts that are amazing. We took muffins home for breakfast the next morning. We ate there many times and loved every visit.

5* Cactus Blue Food Truck We enjoyed a Lionfish wrap and a cheeseburger. Both were delicious.

4* Rumba Cafe on the water downtown. It was very good Pizza and Fish & Chips. The staff was professional and nice. A large pizza served us well with frozen leftovers all week!

4* Bobbejean's where we enjoyed ribs. It is a little place with pleasant workers. The ribs were not very meaty, but delicious.

Bonaire January 2018

About Finding and Identifying Fish: You find an octopus by finding the Octopus's garden (and by watching for eye looking out at you), which is a bunch of large shells in one spot, with a hole nearby. Look into the hole and you may see the octopus looking back out at you. If s/he is not home, go back frequently and eventually you will find it home eating whatever it went off to get. Sometimes you find one on a walk-about by first seeing several large grouper family in a group following it. If one is sleeping in it's garden during the day, it is a "Caribbean Reef Octopus" (night feeders). If it is on a daytime walkabout, it is a "Common Octopus", which a day feeder.

Eels are often found by seeing several grouper family (Coney, hinds, groupers) all nosing around a chunk of coral. Look closely and you may find the eel they are accompanying. You also can find eels among coral, and under shelves.

Many fish hide under ledges. These include glass-eyed snapper; spotted drums, jackknife fish, many of the squirrelfish, porcupine fish and more. It is easiest to go straight down headfirst and shoot pictures upside down, inverting them later. That way your entire body doesn't have to be down so deep. It also is safer from the aspect of bumping into corals.

Snorkeling Safety and protocol: Never touch anything in the water. There are fire corals and urchins everywhere that are beautiful to look at, but very painful if touched. Eels are interesting, but if touched, they can grab your finger and not let go. If snorkeling, you will not be able to release it and may drown. The same is true of trying to pet a nurse shark. Everything is friendly and safe – as long as you do not touch them. The old saying is: Leave only your bubbles. If nights snorkeling, do not let your light linger on any of the puffers, as they may well puff up, and they can only do that four times in their life. You will see many eels, and again, watch but don't touch.

Fish identifications are done using three guides by Paul Humann and Ned DeLoach titled "Reef Fish", "Reef Creatures" and "Reef Coral". The "Fish" book is only fish; the "Creatures" book includes many genera including arthropods, cephalopods, mollusks, worms, sponges, jellyfish and more. The "Coral" book includes many types of corals, algae and sea plants. Sometimes confirmation includes searching the hypothesized fish in Google images or writing friends. The fish, algae and land animals are identified with a high confidence but the sponges and corals are to a lesser degree of confidence. Often algae imbed themselves in sponges, making them green or purple when the base color is brown, for example. Fish sizes are given and, of course, are estimates.

Another identification source is <http://reefguide.org/carib/> that has wonderful ID assistance.

Identification corrections are welcome!

About the Photography: Bob used a "GoPro 4 Black" and Sharon used a RICOH WG4 underwater camera. Both are excellent cameras. The Ricoh does not have the fisheye distortion, so longer distance shots are better. Often the color balance is more uniform for the Ricoh as well. The GoPro has the pole for reaching under shelves. I set it to a 1-second time lapse, so when I dive down, I hit "go" and just let it shoot. Then I use "preview" in my computer to selects the good shots. Most of the land pictures used an iPhone 8S.

To get good pictures underwater, the key is getting close to your subject. Try to shoot on sunny days. When diving down, be careful of your bubbles, as many great shots get ruined by bunches of tiny bubbles between you and the subject. Most pictures are then shoved through Photoshop where "Auto Levels" removes constant background colors and some

Bonaire January 2018

(few) needed “Shadows/Highlights” adjustments if in dark shadow of a cave or coral. I never use color balance or Hue/Saturation alterations. The pictures were then loaded into iPhoto for rotation and cropping. The iPhoto “Export/Web page” function was used to build the index sets for the webpage. The controlling “buttons” in the website are simply hand written in HTML pointing to the iPhoto built sets.

Beaches and Snorkel Sites (in order of our ratings): You want to wear booties when snorkeling because the shores, although accessible with great snorkeling, can be rough walking to get in.

- 1) **(5*) Kralendijk waterfront:**
 - a. Daytime snorkeling is wonderful with eels, Scorpion fish, squirreelfish and more. It was surprising to see such clear water in a port!
 - b. Nighttime snorkeling was almost shocking, it was so great. We saw at least 24 eels of four varieties (Spotted, chain and green moray eels and a sharp-tailed eel). We saw many Snook, Soap fish, blue tang and so much more.
- 2) **(5*) Harbour Village:** This resort is exquisite (you need a day-pass to use the facility). The beach is mostly sandy with very good snorkeling right off the beach. They are building a reef at the edge of the beach that already is well populated. We saw a HUGE tarpon there and so many others. At the tip of the restaurant is like an aquarium with so many fish.
- 3) **(5*) Den Laman Condos:**
 - a. To the south we saw a school of bonefish and many other fish, but it is not very exciting.
 - b. To the north, a spotted eel and many fishes. There is a marvelous elks horn coral head right in front of the “Sand Dollar” condominiums next door. Beyond that is a huge stag horn coral farm with a multitude of fish.
- 4) **(5*) Andrea I and II:** Entry is only possible at Andrea I because II is so rocky. So we entered at Andrea I and swam past II and back. It was wonderful. We saw our second octopus of this trip there and the rocks and coral are great.
- 5) **(5*) 1000 Steps:** There are only 77 steps, including the 5 in rocks to get to the 72 human-made steps. The reef is gorgeous. Swim out 20 yards or so to see the healthiest stag horn coral, soft corals and sponge reef. There were many fish as well. To the south there are several resident sea turtles.
- 6) **(4*) Te Amo Beach:** This is located at the end of the airport runway. It was quite nice with many fine fish.
- 7) **(4*) Van der Valk Plaza resort beach:** Wonderful clear water with a deep portion and the shallow portion. We saw our first octopus there.
- 8) **(4*) Klein Bonaire:** We used “WoodWind” for three stops. The calm side has beautiful coral and plentiful fish, but it got quite rough as we came around to the near side of the island. The boat has no cover whatsoever, so if you are sensitive to the sun, the sail there and back is hard. The reef was nice, but not spectacular.
- 9) **(3*) Salt Pond:** We did see a Rainbow parrotfish, a rock beauty, small hawksbill turtle and queen angelfish, but so deep that there are no photographs of it. Of the places we snorkeled, this was the least liked.