

Bonaire 2023

We stayed at Harbour Village on Bonaire (<https://www.harbourvillage.com>). This was our third time to Bonaire and second time staying at Harbour Village. It is a very nice resort with daily maid service, a beach and reef on the property, a swimming pool and a fine restaurant. The staff is all ever so friendly and the property well kept. Our room was #324, so on the 2nd floor in the middle of the beach. Perfect. It has a small kitchen with stove, microwave and dishwasher. The bedroom and living room both face the water and the porch is nice. We like the 2nd floor so there are few bugs when sitting out. When we return, we will book the same room.

There is a very active coral research project going on there with coral “trees” for breeding them and many transplant experiments. There is also a pair of cages near the camera at in front of the tip of the restaurant. The cage nearest shore is just an iron structure, while the one farthest from the shore is anodized using the battery you see near the cage. It is delivering just a few milliamps, but enough to reduce the dissolved calcium to calcium carbonate along with other minerals in the seawater. The study has gone on for many years and the result is dramatic with the latter cage now heavily covered with healthy corals.

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, of course, are estimates. In some cases, I think I have the correct IDs, but if not sure, I add a “?” after the name.

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 select the good shots. Most of the land pictures used an iPhone 8S.

Most pictures are then shoved through Photoshop where “Auto Levels” removes constant background colors and some (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.

A humorous thing about the GoPro is that the waterproof casing has a flat plate over the lens, so the fish see their reflection in it. The Damselfish and some others will attack the reflection, so you get some really interesting “Here’s lookin’ at ya” pictures.

In the “Sea Life” set, there are 178 sea life species identified with 69% Fish, 16% Corals, 1.5% Sponges and 7.5% other.

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Snorkeling Tips: The key is to be slow, try to shoot with sun behind you, shallow is your friend but be weary of waves, NEVER touch anything, stay flat on top of the water, not with legs down (it kicks up debris). To prevent mask fogging, each morning, we use an Oral-B power toothbrush with the non-gel type of toothpaste on the inside of the lenses, then very thoroughly rinse, also using the toothbrush. This eliminates all nucleation sites for fog to grow. Then, upon entering the water, we spit and rub it around, and rinsing in seawater. This lays a thin layer of protein over the clean surface. We never have any fogging trouble.

There are two ways to find an octopus: 1) On a “walkabout” is just luck, 2) Look for fresh shells all in one place with a hole nearby with the octopus sleeping inside – this is the “Octopuses Garden” (The Beatles did not coin that phrase, they barrowed it). Damselfish are much easier to ID from their juveniles. The adults need a good sideways view.

Night Snorkeling: With our cameras, videos are much better than stills in night snorkeling because the camera has trouble dealing with the contrasts of light and dark for the high resolution for stills but the lower res video manages it better. I then got stills from screen grabs of the videos. Set your GoPro or other camera to balance light to the center field, not the whole field.

Reefs Visited:

Most of the snorkeling was done at Harbour Village, there were three boat excursions on the Harbour Village diving boat. We snorkeled:

Harbour Village Beach: This beach is an amazing snorkel site. The first day here we photographed and ID’ed 52 fish. The first day is easy though, with all fish open for ID. But it still shows the plethora of fish here. Among them are spotted moray eels, porcupine fish, schools of energetic ladyfish, large green sea turtle, an adorable Spotted Burrfish, and the multitude of more common fish.

Bari Reef at the Sand Dollar Resort: We swam to the Sand Dollar (about 1 mile north) and back several times. There is an amazing Elkhorn Coral and other coral reef there. Extremely healthy with no breakages or disease. The quantity of fish there is amazing.

Andrea 1: Blade Fire Coral dominates almost totally the entire area. There is no sea grass and very little soft corals. This makes it rather boring snorkeling with one group of fish. Sometimes a turtle will swim past heading somewhere more interesting. We found it boring.

Kline Bonaire: This trip we did not visit Kline, but the last two times we did. The reefs over there are spectacular. This year we were having such good snorkeling near us, we did not bother.

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Restaurant Reviews:

Note that the star rating is balanced on expectations. A hamburger joint is on a different scale than a fine dinner restaurant. Both can earn a 5*.

Capriccio Restaurant and Boutique (5*+). It was 6*. Bob had Osso Buco and Sharon had grilled Wahoo. They give starters of a light salad and bread fascia. Then after is some sweet bread. It is a class act – and not outrageous in price for the quality of the meal.

Cuba Compagnie (5*). This is just plain excellent, and has been for many years. The “Japanese Salad” has a delicious peanut dressing and heaped with very fresh, delicious raw tuna. The beef Fajita is wonderful – but a little messy! It is finger liking good. Another night we had Tuna “catch of the day” that was rolled in sesame seeds and very lightly grilled to perfection. We ate there three times in 14 days! Prices are also very reasonable.

Ingredients (5*) at Den Laman. This restaurant is a very fine eating experience. It is at the edge of the property facing the sunset. The manager runs the restaurant smoothly and efficiently. We enjoyed their “Sea Salt Crusted Whole Dorade”, which is then prepared at the table. This dish is for two people. A second time there this trip, we started with the “Parmesan Truffle Pasta”, which is prepared at the table using a wheel of Parmesan cheese, into which flaming brandy is poured in to melt the cheese into pasta already added to the cavity in the wheel. Then powdered truffle is added and it is all mixed onto a serving plate. It is very rich and very delicious. Then we enjoyed the “Canard à l’Orange”, which was perfect and Sharon enjoyed Barracuda, which was the Fish of the day.

La Balandra on Harbour Village property (5*) with us sharing a delicious ceviche, Tuna prepared perfectly and Salad with tempura shrimp. We tried lunch and it was a 3*, so there is some variability.

Mona Lisa (5*) downtown. We shared a medley Barracuda, Rainbow runner, sailfish & wahoo that was just delicious. It was the “Catch of the day”. It has the bonus of being across the street of Gio’s gelato (5*) store where we enjoyed a scoop of gelato and decaff cappuccino.

Umbrella (5*) We shared a whole deep friend red snapper and a grilled wahoo. Both were sensational. We met Bob & Christine there and had fun catching up.

Between 2 Buns (5) They have a new site since were there last and the sandwiches are still really excellent. Their outside patio is shaded and breezy.

Döner Station (5*) where both enjoyed the “Döner Wrap” and a side of fries. After a very energetic day, this was a perfect quick and delicious meal.

Gio’s gelato (4*) store where we enjoyed a scoop of gelato and decaff cappuccino. The staff were more tired than the last time we visited Bonaire. Still was very nice – but not quite the same.

Mezze – (3*) This used to be one of our favorites, but they really are not the same. The front end is very disorganized and the wait staff amateur. Ours forgot to place our order, so after a long wait we asked and was told it about to come out. Then 15 minutes later, the manager told us they forgot. It was placed them. The Lamb Shank was very good, but very skimpy. The only meat was that at the very end of the bone with all the wonderful other

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meat removed. The manager gave us a dessert for the error, but a class act would have been to either comp the dinner or at least half comp it.