

METRO

Explore Aruba on the island's Kukoo Kunuku party bus



Stephanie Takyi Sunday 26 May 2019 4:32 pm



Aruba's nickname is 'One Happy Island', and we can see why.

The tiny Dutch Caribbean island is located approximately 16 miles from the South American coastline of Venezuela. It boasts calm glittering azure waters, sun-soaked shores and enjoys a tropical climate all year round.

Arubans are some of the friendliest people on the planet and the island has an ongoing success with tourists as it enjoys the highest repeat visitor rate of any Caribbean destination.

Plus it's located outside of the Caribbean's hurricane belt so the chances of a natural disaster are minimal.

There is no warmer and exciting welcome to Aruba than hoping on board Kukoo Kunuku, the island's flamboyant open-air party bus.

The six hour nightlife adventure begins with the bus picking me from my hotel. I am introduced to my party mates, who are fellow revellers from all over the world.



The six hour party bus bring together tourists from all over the world (Picture: Kukoo Kunuku)

Leading the way is Kukoo Kunuku's dancing queen Mama, who has worked for the company for over 21 years.

She is well-known on the island and no visit to Aruba would be complete without saying hello and having a drink or two with her.

The party atmosphere is set with a lively playlist of classic hits, current chart toppers and reggae tracks to shake our maracas along to. We drive past the capital city Oranjestad and head towards off-the-beaten-path spots that I might not have found driving on my own though the streets in Aruba.

Our first stop is the California Lighthouse, which is located at Hudishibana near Arashi Beach. This picturesque location is the perfect spot to watch Aruba's sunset and see the waves gently lap against the beach.

After having a champagne toast by the sea we are whisked away to one of Aruba's famous landmarks – the Casibari Rock Formations, where we enjoyed dinner under the stars at the Casibari café.



The first stop on the Kukoo Kunuku party bus is a champagne toast by the sea at the California Lighthouse (Picture: Kukoo Kunuku)



Mama is one of Aruba's most popular locals and a Kukoo Kunuku tour host (Picture: Kukoo Kunuku)

With all the niceties out of the way we set off on Kukoo Kunuku's adventurous bar crawl, which sees us making pit stops at U-Wanna Beer and La Ronda, where we are given one free drink ticket each.

The drinks menu includes Aruba's national beer Balashi and Kukoo Kunuku's special cocktail, the Lovers Kukoo Kiss. Savvy party goers purchase a Kukoo Kunuku souvenir bottle, which at \$6 (£5) guarantees free refills.

As the night becomes merrier, we dress up as carnival queens, learn some local dances and the grand finale sees Mama handpick some of the men in the bar to perform a rendition of Village People's YMCA.

The clock strikes midnight and even though its home time this party bus shows no signs of slowing down, so much so I'm still shaking my maracas as I'm dropped off back to my hotel.



The adventurous party bus stops at local bars such as U Wanna Beer where the tour's guests can mingle and party with guests (Picture: Kukoo Kunuku)

Another exciting introduction to the warmth and hospitality of Aruba is the Bon Bini Festival, a weekly folkloric music and dance festival in the island's oldest building in Oranjestad.

Bon Bini means 'Welcome' in Papiamentu, Aruba's national language, which is an infusion of Creole, Portuguese and Spanish. This colourful affair takes place every Tuesday in the outdoor courtyard of the historical Fort Zourman.

When I arrive I am greeted by a host of market stands displaying local art works, jewellery and handcrafted souvenirs. In addition to food stalls selling the authentic and regional cuisine staples like rice and peas, plantain and kabritu (goat stew).

The cultural immersion begins with the MC teaching us about Aruba's fascinating history and key Papiamentu phrases such as 'Mi ta stimabo' (I love you). The affair ends with a mini carnival with traditionally costumed folkloric dancers performing on stage followed by a drumming band stomping their way to the front with guests participating in the fun.

Both during the day and night Aruba is full of beaches to escape to for a spot of shade or seclusion. On the island's north-west corner, is Eagle Beach, which is regularly acclaimed as one of the world's most beautiful beaches.

From first glimpse I can tell why it's one of Aruba's finest. It's a true natural beauty with an uninterrupted stretch of glittering ivory sands and the island's iconic twin fofoti trees, which are perfect for an Instagram moment.



Aruba's Eagle Beach is well-known for its twin fofoti trees. They make for the perfect Instagram picture (Picture: Kalra Blake)

My favourite beach is Aruba's Baby Beach, located in Seroe Colorado at the south-eastern tip of the island. The waters here are shallow meaning non-swimmers can waddle out into the sea for a long distance and even touch the sea's bed.

The beach has huts and refreshment stands such as Big Mama Grill, where my taste buds were ablazed with a hearty plate of Oxtail, rice and peas, and coleslaw.

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If you're up for it Island life in Aruba can be quite an adventurous, as I discovered during a walking tour at Mira La Mar in Arikok National Park.

I put my endurance to the test as I weaved and meandered through 20 miles of rugged desert hiking trails. Prickly cactus plants are to be found at almost every corner of this beautiful landscape.

The hike is grueling but worth it as I am rewarded with breathtaking views of the three highest points in the island. Near to the park is Fontein Cave one of the island's most darkest and mysterious spots on the island.

I was warned that I may see bats as I entered this cave which is located inside the great granite rocks of Arikok. The caves is both eerie and fascinating as it displays etched symbolic drawings from the Caquetio Indians, who were Aruba's earliest inhabitant from over a 1000 years ago.



The Arikok National Park features a popular hiking tours for locals and visitors to hike on (Picture: Kaina Blaka)



Back into the daylight I jump in an ATV and head down Aruba's bumpiest road, The Highway, courtesy of ABC Tours. We drive past the palm-fringed beaches and rock formations into the secret havens of Aruba's natural splendour.

The back roads lead us into stunning sites such as Aruba's amazing natural bridges, which were created about one million years ago and can be found along the north coast.



ABC Tours Aruba allow tourists to get off the beaten track to explore some of the island's natural gems (Picture: Katrina Blake)

We then take a dip in the steamy hot springs of the Natural pool, which was once used to hold sea turtles, and wandered through the Black Stone Beach where you'll find some of the island's impressive rocks.

While the Caribbean tends not to be associated with street art it is a blossoming area of development in Aruba.

One of the most colourful areas to explore in Aruba is San Nicolas, where you'll find the remains of the striking art created during the island's first street exhibit in September 2017.

12 leading street artists from all stretches of the globe – including Portugal, Mexico, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands, Argentina, Curacao and Germany – used the architecture of San Nicolas in Aruba as their canvas.

Before I leave the island I meet with one of the island's most renowned artist Stan Kuiperi, who told me more about his 40-year career and why Aruba is the world's next enticing destination for art.

'Today we have everything you can think of, everything that is done on the global scene, installations, video and performances,' says Stan.

'Everything is going on in Aruba! It's a short history but we've made a huge leap and progress in what's being done here on this incredibly small island.'

It may be small but Aruba is definitely one island that packs a happy punch.

Where to stay

Bucuti & Tara is one of Aruba's world class resorts leading the way for places to stay on the island. This four star adult-only boutique-style oasis has been opened for 30 years and is nestled away on Eagle Beach.

It's a modern property and its secluded location makes for a romantic and stunning choice for couples and travellers who are seeking an intimate environment.

The resort is conveniently located nearby all major attractions including the Aritok national park and is only 10 minutes away from downtown Oranjestad and 15 minutes from the airport.



The exclusive Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort is a four star adult-only boutique-style oasis situated on Aruba's Eagle Beach (Picture: Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort)

The service at Bucuti & Tara was consistently impeccable and the staff contributed to making my stay full of peace, love and happiness.

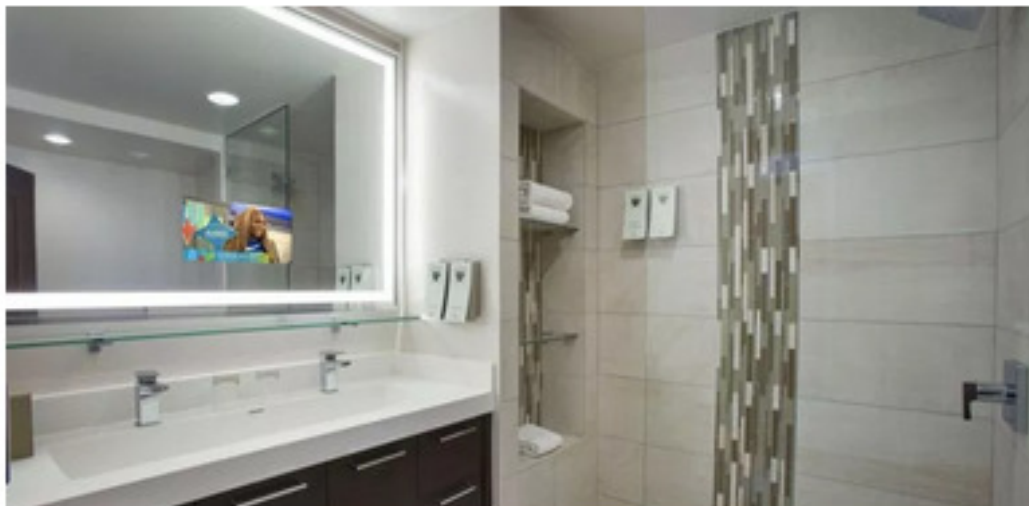
I stayed in the resort's luxury oceanfront Tara suite, which offers incredible, uninterrupted, panoramic views of the Caribbean Sea. The Tara suite is made for comfort and comes complete with a king-sized bed and a separate, elegantly decorated living area with its own television and sofa sitting area.



Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort's luxury oceanfront Tara suite (Picture: Bucuti & Tara)

With large balconies, you can relax whilst watching the famous Aruban sunset or if you're an early bird sunrise. The luxurious bathroom has walk-in shower and an electric mirror with a built-in TV.

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day and you won't want to miss Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort Full American Breakfast Buffet daily at the beachfront Elements Restaurant or in Tara Lounge.



The Tara Suite features a walk-in shower and an electric mirror with a built-in TV (Picture: Bucuti & Tara)

Kuoni (0800 540 4263 / www.kuoni.co.uk) is offering 7 nights at the exclusive Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort from £2,215 per person in a Superior Garden view room. Price includes breakfast and return flights with KLM from London Heathrow.*

**Priced is based on a departure date of 6 September and is subject to availability.*