

Aruba's Reef Care Heroes



(Photo credit: Castro Perez, Aruba Reef Care Foundation)

It's no secret that our oceans are in crisis. Especially on a small isolated rock in the Caribbean like Aruba that welcomes over one million visitors per year. Keeping the beaches, waters, and reefs clean and pristine is no easy feat, but that has never stopped those dedicated to the mission.

Defenders of the deep

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” — Margaret Mead

On Aruba, one committed citizen in particular, Castro Perez, can be credited with getting the reef care ball rolling. A master diver, Castro began taking it upon himself to become an unofficial underwater custodian back in the late 80s. “I began noticing more and more garbage on the reefs,” he said, “And I couldn't just leave it there!” So, he began doing regular cleanup dives on his own and then enlisted local dive operators and watersports organizations to join him.



In 1993 Castro and fellow diver and marine biologist Byron Boekhoudt founded the [Aruba Reef Care Foundation](#) (ARCF) as a nongovernmental, not-for-profit organization dedicated to spreading awareness on marine life preservation on the island.

The organization has won many awards, and Castro was personally knighted into the “Royal



Order of Oranje-Nassau” in 2010 by Queen Beatrix for his contribution to Aruba’s marine life conservation. ARCF is also very active in trying to curb the [scourge of the lionfish](#) [3] population, an invasive species that’s devouring the native marine life.

Fast-forward to 2018 and ARCF has become the largest volunteer initiative on the island attracting over 800 participants annually — locals and visitors alike. Everyone is welcome to participate, and there’s a great party afterward! This year, the massive cleanup will take place September 30, 2018.

Teach your children

ARCF’s mission is also to educate youth on why they should respect the marine environment. Castro regularly lectures in schools, local community clubs, and the universities. The AHATA (Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association) [Environmental Committee](#) has been instrumental in the schools as well — planning cleanups and events and giving workshops to youth for over 15 years. And it seems that the island’s young people are beginning to listen!

Everyone makes a difference... make sure yours has a positive impact!

REEF CARE

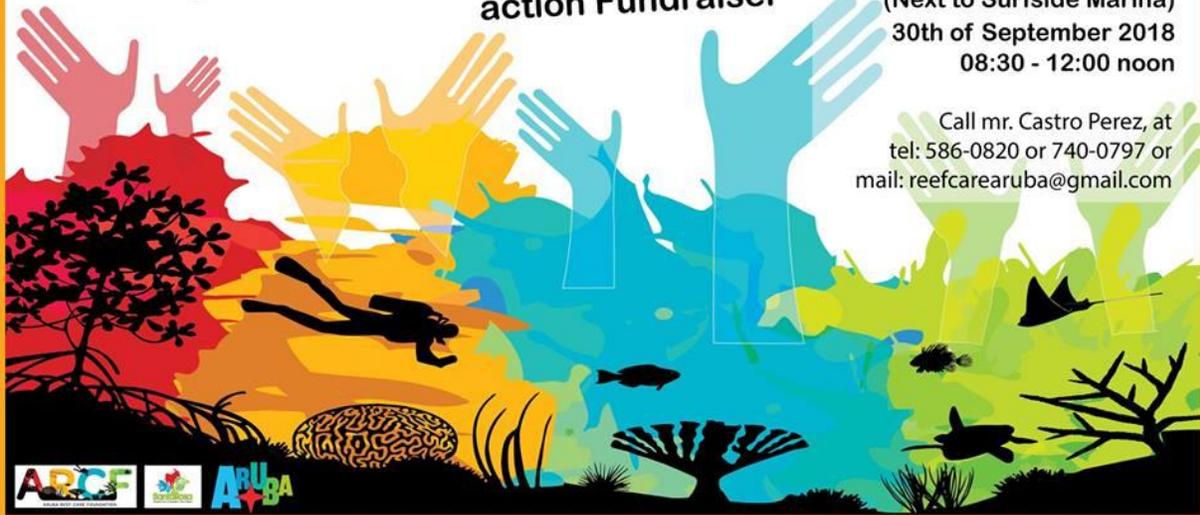
24th ARUBA REEF CARE PROJECT 2018

30th of September
Beach and Reef Clean Up
action Fundraiser

Put your intention
into action, give us
a helping hand!

Operation Center:
Neptali Henriquez Park
(Next to Surfside Marina)
30th of September 2018
08:30 - 12:00 noon

Call mr. Castro Perez, at
tel: 586-0820 or 740-0797 or
mail: reefcarearuba@gmail.com



In fact, two new youth groups have recently sprung up on their own initiative. [MAGEC Aruba](#) is a young nonprofit organization out to help make Aruba greener. They recently held a big cleanup of Daimari Beach. [Scubble Bubbles](#) is another. They are a small group of university students (certified divers) that decided to start coral farming on Aruba! Staghorn and elkhorn coral are suffering from coral bleaching. This group plants baby corals on man-made underwater “trees,” and when they are strong enough, they transplant them to other areas that need them. You can also donate to their [foundation](#) to help other local students buy scuba equipment and get PADI certified so that they can join them.



(Photo credit: Scubble Bubbles Foundation.)

Combatting the plastic plague

“It’s only one straw,” said eight billion people. Single-use plastic items are by far the most insidious items to end up in the sea. That’s why Aruba officially [banned plastic bags](#) in 2017, and now the island is about to take much bolder steps. Starting January 1, 2019, Aruba will officially ban plastic straws, single-use cups, and foam plates. But there will be a one-year transition period to give everyone time to get on board.



Many of Aruba’s resorts and activity operators have already taken their own steps ahead of time. Like **Divi & Tamarijn All Inclusive Resorts** that have been using hard plastic reusable glasses for years. They’ve also recently banned plastic straws. **Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort**, arguably the [greenest hotel](#) in the entire Caribbean, has been providing guests with canteens for drinking water for years to avoid using plastic water bottles. They also have their own monthly beach cleanup that guests are invited to join.

If you really need a straw, you can always buy a plastic reusable glass with the hard plastic straw attached, and any bartender will be happy to rinse it out to change drinks for you! In fact, The Oasis Beach Bar at **La Cabana Resort** gives a discount on happy hour drinks when you use their reusable cups! [Full Throttle Tours](#) also supplies you with a “throttle bottle”: a plastic canteen you can reuse and keep as a souvenir.

Toxic sunscreen ban

Sunscreen with chemicals that are harmful to the reef will also be banned. But no worries, you can already buy reef-friendly sunscreen on island via **ArubaLife Organics**. It is locally made and available at [some retailers](#) and soon at all [Indulgence Aruba](#) spas. Or you can buy it online at www.arubalife.com, and they ship anywhere.

You can be a reef care hero too!

[Jolly Pirates](#) also promotes use of their own plastic reusable souvenir cups on board with a #CarryYourCup campaign, and Jolly Pirates' owner, Carla, also heavily promotes the **"#5minute beach clean-up."** The concept is simple: take five minutes a day on your holiday to clean up other people's trash, take a photo of it, and post it online with the hashtag to increase awareness. It's an international movement anyone can join. <http://5minutebeachcleanup.com/>.



(Photo credit: Jolly Pirates Aruba.)

Plus, you can volunteer with any of Aruba's great eco-organizations like [Turtugaruba](#) that protects the island's nesting and hatching sea turtles.

It's easy to acquaint yourself with the rules of the reef and ways to help safeguard it. Here is a great tip sheet to start!

Let's all be that group of committed citizens that makes the difference in cleaner oceans. And congratulations Aruba on your eco-awareness!

Source: <https://nightspublications.com/aruba/blog-entry/aruba-reef-care-heroes>

10 ways to protect CORAL REEFS

- Corals are already a gift. Don't give them as presents.**
It takes corals decades or longer to create reef structures, so leave them on the reef.
- EDUCATE yourself about coral reefs & the creatures they support.**
When you further your own education, you can help others understand the fragility and value of the world's coral reefs.
- Long-lasting light bulbs - ARE A - BRIGHT IDEA**
Energy efficient light bulbs reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change is one of the leading threats to coral reef survival.
- Choose sustainable seafood.**
Learn how to make smart seafood choices at www.FishWatch.gov.
- IF YOU DIVE DON'T TOUCH.**
Coral reefs are alive. Stirred-up sediment can smother corals.
- BE A MARINE DEBRIS CRUSADER.**
In addition to picking up your own trash, carry away the trash that others have left behind.
- CONSERVE WATER**
The less water you use, the less runoff and wastewater that eventually find their ways back into the ocean.
- Volunteer!**
Volunteer in local beach or reef cleanups. If you don't live near the coast, get involved in protecting your watershed.
- Don't send chemicals into our waterways.**
Nutrients from excess fertilizer increases algae growth that blocks sunlight to corals.
- Practice safe boating.**
Anchor in sandy areas away from coral and sea grasses so that the anchor and chain do not drag on nearby corals.

oceanservice.noaa.gov