

January 2010

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Plus: BC, Panama

# Making New Friends

## Grow Caribbean Commissions Selling Aruba

By Melanie Reffes

**B**oasting the highest repeat visitor rate in the Caribbean, Aruba is on a roll with a host of new travel incentives. The Aruba Tourism Authority (ATA) and the Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association (AHTA) have launched an agent-friendly website – [www.aruba.com](http://www.aruba.com) – with a booking engine and social networking feature where visitors can share their experiences with other travellers. Agents can post their profiles and with bookings handled directly with the vendor, lowest rates are guaranteed.

Marketed with the snappy slogan “90,000 friends you haven’t met yet,” the island sits 20 kilometres from Venezuela in the southern fringes of the hurricane belt. Cactus-studded, the Dutch territory entices with a bounty of restaurants, immaculate beaches and sizzling nightlife. With 28 hotels, 200 restaurants and a repeat visitor base of 60 per cent, Aruba is a must-go for 2010.



**Four-wheel drive rentals explore Aruba’s roads less travelled where sites include the Alto Vista Chapel.**

Air Canada flies non-stop on weekends from Toronto and Skyservice and Transat offer flights in high season. “Over the past year, Aruba has not only seen the addition of restaurants, spas, hotels and attractions, but also increased air service from our top markets,” said Myrna Jansen-Feliciano, managing director, ATA.

A new initiative – One Cool Honeymoon (OCH) – offers a bouquet of enhancements for couples including champagne upon arrival, resort gift and free night for a return anniversary stay. More than 30 properties and attractions are OCH participants including Economy Car Rental with a 20-per cent discount on rates. [www.aruba.com](http://www.aruba.com).

### A Good Night’s Sleep

Voted one of the top 10 romance resorts in the world by Trip Advisor, Bucuti Beach fronts the widest stretch of Eagle Beach and with its couples-only policy canoodling Caribbean-style is de rigueur. Through the VIP program, the property works



ARUBA MARRIOTT RESORT

vigorously with agents. “Our goal is to build strong relationships with travel agents and help foster a personal relationship between agents and clients,” said Ewald Biemans, owner. [www.bucuti.com](http://www.bucuti.com).

Part of the Donkey Sanctuary, Cunucu Arubiano is the island’s first Small Luxury Hotel of the World with 20 casitas that reflect 19th-century Aruban architecture. Stays include a bottle of wine with every two nights booked. [www.cunucu-arubiano.com](http://www.cunucu-arubiano.com).

Unveiling a remodeled Okeanos Spa, Renaissance Aruba Resort has also added personal trainers for individual consultations. For coffee lovers, the first Starbucks in the Dutch Caribbean opened in the adults-only side of the resort. [www.renaissancearuba.com](http://www.renaissancearuba.com).

Hyatt Regency Aruba has finished upgrades to four specialty suites and the Palms Restaurant. “Our friends from Canada are very important to us and we appreciate their support of the resort,” said Susan Santiago, general manager. For the younger set, Camp Watapana has partnered with *National Geographic Kids* to offer coconut painting and seashell hunting on the beach. [www.aruba-hyatt.com](http://www.aruba-hyatt.com).

**Hiking trails through Arikok National Park on Aruba’s northeastern coast make it easy to explore as goats and donkeys graze on nearby brush trees.**



ATA



**The Aruba Marriott Resort appeals to adventurous clients with windsurfing or kite boarding lessons and Stellaris Casino, Aruba's largest.**

The top floor Tradewinds Club at the 411-room Aruba Marriott excels with pillow menus and evening cocktails. The "Surf into Luxury" package appeals to adventurous clients with windsurfing or kite boarding lessons and Stellaris Casino with 500 slot machines and 32 gaming tables is Aruba's largest. [www.arubamarriott.com](http://www.arubamarriott.com).

Undergoing a two-year renovation to 354 rooms and 41 suites, Radisson Aruba is a mainstay on Palm Beach. "The Resort boasts amenities and superior service that makes it a favourite of guests who return year after year," says Rob Smith, newly-hired general manager. [www.radisson.com/aruba](http://www.radisson.com/aruba).

North of Palm Beach, Aruba Beach Villas are a less costly alternative to the high-rise hotels on the strip. Thirty-one units vary in size making the property ideal for families. [www.arubabeachvilla.com](http://www.arubabeachvilla.com).

## Testing The Waters

Palm Beach and Eagle Beach lead the pack of grand strands. Packed with tourists and hotels, Palm Beach buzzes day and night while south to Eagle Beach, the quieter shore is idyllic for swimming and shell-collecting.

Surfers throng to the east coast where rocky terrain meets crashing waves at Dos Playa while sunset seekers head for the northwestern tip to an area Arubans call Arashi Flats. On the eastern edge, the aptly named Baby Beach borders a flat bay and is ideal for families with young children, hence the name.

Forty-two dive sites have earned the island a reputation as one of the top dive spots in the tropics. Red Sail Sports takes snorkelers to the *Antilla*, a German freighter that is also the

Caribbean's largest wreck. The four-hour trip includes an open bar. [www.aruba-redsail.com](http://www.aruba-redsail.com).

Deep sea fishing trips, sunset sails and dinner cruises are sold at major hotels along Palm Beach

## Landlubbers

The Explore Aruba Adventure on the open air Banana Bus is a four-hour tour that includes a swim and snorkel at Baby Beach. US \$30 [www.bananabusaruba.com](http://www.bananabusaruba.com).

On the northeastern coast, Arikok National Park is desert terrain with indigenous 'shoco' owl, giant cacti and a newly-opened Visitors Centre. Hiking trails make it easy to explore as goats and donkeys graze on nearby brush trees. Nearby, locals 'dune slide' or surf on dry land at the Boca Prins Dunes. Honouring what was once the main mode of transport, Donkey Sanctuary is nestled in Santa Lucia where visitors can play with these chatty animals at no cost.

Horseback riding tours navigate sand dunes and flat plains that are covered with cacti and distinctive divi-divi trees. First-time riders should ask for a Paso Fino horse that has a smooth and even gait.



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For the independent traveller, 4-wheel drive rentals explore the roads less travelled on the northeastern coast. Sites along the way include the Alto Vista Chapel and the Bushiribana Gold Mill ruins. A lagoon has recently formed following the collapse of the Natural Bridge in September 2005 and is worth a stop.

In Oranjestad, those who resist the call of the wild can tour the Historical Museum in the 18th-century Fort Zoutman, Numismatic Museum and Aruba Aloe Museum. Opened last July, the National Archeological Museum highlights 5,000 years of history through interactive displays. On the south coast, San Nicolas is Aruba's oldest village and now a tourist attraction with a few stores and the famous Charlie's bar.

## More Aruba

For more information visit the Aruba Tourism Authority at [www.aruba.com](http://www.aruba.com).

In *Canadian Traveller*:  
*Dutch Darling*, January 2009 ✈