

KEY FACTS

Official name: Aruba

Head of State: Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands; Governor Fredis Refunjol (from 2004)

Head of government: Prime Minister Michiel (Mike) Godfried Eman (AVP) (from 31 Oct 2009)

Ruling party: Arubaanse Volks Partij (AVP) (Aruban People's Party) (from 25 Sep 2009)

Area: 193 square km

Population: 106,113 (2011)* (101,848; 2010 census)

Capital: Oranjestad

Official language: Dutch

Currency: Aruban guilder (Afl) = 100 cents (commonly called the florin)

Exchange rate: Afl 1.79 per US\$ (Jul 2013)

GDP: US\$2.58 billion (2011)*

Balance of trade: -US\$650.00 million (2012)*

Visitor numbers: 125 (2012)*

* estimated figure

Aruba

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

1499 First European sighting of the islands of the Netherlands Antilles by Spanish mariners.

1636 Dutch took over; Spanish and Portuguese Jews escaping from persecution in Europe settled in the islands.

1800–02 British Protectorate.

1825 Gold discovered and mined until 1916.

1863 Slavery completely abolished.

1954 Internal autonomy was granted to Netherlands Antilles.

1986 Aruba seceded from Netherlands Antilles; both entities elected to remain part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Aruba has complete autonomy over its internal affairs; the Netherlands is constitutionally responsible for defence and external affairs.

2001 Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo (MEP) (People's Electoral Movement) won parliamentary elections and Nelson Oduber (MEP) became prime minister.

2003 A law was introduced in order to help fight money laundering more efficiently.

2004 Fredis Refunjol was sworn in as governor.

2005 MEP won parliamentary elections. The disappearance (and murder) of US-national, Natalee Holloway, caused an outcry in Alabama (her home state). A public protest began, calling for Aruba to be boycotted by all US tourists, for what was seen as an inept investigation and an accusation that Aruba's police service was incapable of protecting visitors. The risk to Aruba's tourist industry, with 930,000 US visitors spending US\$2.3 million annually, prompted the US State Department to re-assure its citizens and for the FBI to review the police case file. (A Dutch citizen, Joran van der Sloot, was arrested in Peru for killing a Peruvian student and convicted and sentenced to 28 years in prison in 2012; he was also suspected of killing Natalee Holloway).

2007 The chief prosecutor closed the official investigation into the case of Natalee Holloway (missing since 2005), even though at the time there had been no conviction.

2009 In parliamentary elections, the opposition Arubaanse Volks Partij (AVP) (Aruban People's Party) won 48 per cent

of the vote (12 seats of 21), the incumbent MEP won 35.9 per cent (turnout was around 85 per cent). Mike Eman (AVP) took office as prime minister.

2010 The state-owned PetroChina began discussions to purchase the Aruba refinery, following an agreement by the US-based Valero Energy Corporation and the government resolving a long-standing dispute over business taxes. However, no agreement was reached.

2012 On 30 April, a memorandum of understanding was signed between PetroChina and the government to purchase the closed Valero Refinery (the second time PetroChina had made an approach, and again reached no conclusion). The US owners of the Valero Aruba Refinery announced on 4 September that it had decided to re-open and reorganise the facility as a refined oil products terminal, but with a reduced workforce. The refinery would be improved, but continue to supply diesel, petrol and jet fuel for domestic needs, and also act as a third-party terminal operation.

2013 the Central Bank of Aruba announced that it expected GDP to grow by 2.6 per cent in 2013, driven by growth in the tourism sector especially.

Political structure

Form of state

Parliamentary democratic monarchy. On 10 October 2010, the Caribbean islands of Curaçao and St Maarten joined Aruba (1986) as semi-autonomous countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands; at the same time the Caribbean islands of Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba became Bijzondere Gemeenten (special municipalities) of the Netherlands.

The executive

The Head of State is the monarch of the Netherlands, who is represented by a governor. The governor is appointed by the monarch, on the recommendation of the Aruban Council of Ministers. Executive power is exercised by the governor and a prime minister who heads an eight-member council of ministers. The Council is accountable to the Staten (parliament).

National legislature

The unicameral parliament, Staten (Estates), has 21 members, elected for a four-year term by proportional representation.

Legal system

Aruba's judicial system, which has mainly been derived from the Dutch system, operates independently of the legislature and the executive. Jurisdiction, including appeal, lies with the Common Court of Justice of Aruba and the Supreme Court of Justice in The Netherlands.

Last elections

25 September 2009 (parliamentary)

Results: Arubaanse Volks Partij (AVP) (Aruban People's Party) won 48 per cent of the vote (12 seats out of 21), Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo (MEP) (People's Electoral Movement) 35.9 per cent (8), and Partido Democracia Real (PDR) (Real Democracy Party) 5.7 per cent (1). Turnout was around 85 per cent.

Next elections

September 2013 (parliamentary)

Political parties**Ruling party**

Arubaanse Volks Partij (AVP) (Aruban People's Party) (from 25 Sep 2009)

Main opposition party

Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo (MEP) (People's Electoral Movement)

Political situation

In 2009 Aruba and The Netherlands became embroiled in a governmental disagreement over who ultimately has power in Aruba. Under the auspices of the Kingdom Council of Minister, based in Willemstad (Holland), changes to the draft consensus of law establishing a joint court of justice and new constitutional relations were approved, after Aruba strongly objected then withdrew from talks. This provoked a series of complaints by Aruba that it had been sidelined as the only territory under consideration with direct concerns about the changes. By July, Aruba was threatening to take its complaint to the United Nations Decolonisation Committee for adjudication, asserting the Netherlands would overrule its autonomy.

In October 2010 the Kingdom of the Netherlands was reconfigured to consist of the European country (including Caribbean municipal entities) and the Caribbean territories of Aruba, Curaçao and St. Martin.

Population

106,113 (2011)* (101,848; 2010 census)

Last census: 29 September 2010: 101,848

Population density: 516 inhabitants per square km. Urban population: 51 per cent (1995–2001).

Annual growth rate: 0.2 per cent (2003)

Ethnic make-up

Carib and Arawak Indian, European and African heritage.

Religions

Roman Catholic (82 per cent), Protestant (8 per cent), Hindu, Muslim, Confucian, Jewish.

Education

Literacy rate: 97 per cent

Main cities

Oranjestad (capital, estimated population 28,849 in 2012), Sint Nicolas (15,293), Pos Chiquito (5,527), Palm Beach (Noord/Tanki Leendert) 5,371, Alto Vista (5,178).

Languages spoken

Papiamentu is the local language. Dutch, English and Spanish are widely spoken.

Official language/s

Dutch

Media**Press**

In Papiamentu, from Oranjestad, *Diario* (<http://news.diario-aruba.com>), *Bon Dia* (www.bondia.com), *AWE Mainta* (www.awemainta.com) and *Solo di Pueblo* (www.solodipueblo.com) published in Santa Cruz. In Dutch, with an English edition, *Amigoe* (www.amigoe.com). In English, *Aruba Today* (www.arubatoday.com).

Broadcasting

Radio: In Papiamentu, Dutch and English, Radio Kelkboom (www.watapana-aruba.com) broadcasts news, talk and music. There are several other commercial music and religious programme stations including Hit FM (www.hit94fm.com), Magic 96.5 (www.magic965.com), Mega 88FM (www.mega88fm.com) and Cool FM (www.coolaruba.com).

Television: Tele-Aruba (www.telearuba.aw) provides a comprehensive service with locally produced news, current affairs, educational, cultural and sports as well as imported programmes. There are several cable and satellite TV stations, some of which are also US affiliates, including Cable TVAruba (CTA) (www.cta.aw), Venevisión, Flamingo TV, ATV and Caribbean Super Station.

Other news agencies: The Governor of Aruba: www.kabga.aw
Caribbean Net News: www.caribbeanetnews.com

Economy

The service sector is the major component of the economy, in particular tourism and financial services; the industrial sector is still important, as crude oil from regional sources is imported, refined and traded on. Construction, led by tourism, also provides employment and growth. Agriculture is largely composed of animal husbandry as the island's soil is arid and unproductive. Other, less obvious sources

of economic growth include trade in fine art and collectables.

GDP growth averaged 3 per cent over 2003–07, but as the global economic crisis took effect – tourism from North America and Europe was particularly hard hit – and coupled with the temporary closure of the oil refinery in 2009 growth fell from 1.4 per cent in 2007 to 0.7 per cent in 2008 and into recession of -7.7 per cent in 2009. Growth was still negative in 2010 (-2.2 per cent), but was estimated to have risen to 7.1 per cent in 2011. Oil export revenues fell from US\$1.3 billion in 2008/09 to US\$200 million in 2009/10. The combined downturn in tourism and oil caused the biggest slump in any economy in the Caribbean in 2009. In response, the government loosened its fiscal policies, cut a business tax and increased social payments to mitigate the impact of the recession.

External trade

Aruba is an Overseas Country and Territory (OCT) of The Kingdom of the Netherlands and benefits from free trade with any EU member. Aruba also has free trade agreements (FTA) with the US, Canada, Malaysia and India. Aruba has regional associations for trade with countries of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Eclac), Caribbean Development Co-operation Committee (CDCC) and the Association of Caribbean States (ACS). Although not a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Aruba uses developments within the WTO to determine its trading practices.

Trans-shipment brings in important foreign exchange and Aruba offers free trade zones (situated near the harbour of Oranjestad and Barcadera) and activities, to foreign interests. Oil refining is an important industry, taking crude oil from regional sources for trading on.

Imports

Crude oil is imported for refining. Other products include foodstuffs, machinery, electrical equipment and chemicals.

Main sources: US (typically 50 per cent of total), The Netherlands (16 per cent), UK (5 per cent).

Exports

Main exports include refined petroleum products, live animals, animal products, art and collectables, machinery and electronic equipment and vehicles.

Main destinations: Panama (typically 24 per cent of total), The Netherlands Antilles (21 per cent), Colombia (18 per cent).

Re-exports

Refined oil and petroleum products.

Industry and manufacturing

Oil processing is the dominant industry in Aruba, despite the expansion of the tourism sector.

The Lago refinery, originally owned by a subsidiary of Exxon, was closed in 1985, depriving the island of one-third of its revenue, and later sold to the Aruban government for a nominal amount. It was rehabilitated by Coastal Oil and Gas Corporation of Houston and reopened in 1990. US-based El Paso undertook typical production of around 170,000 barrels per day (bpd) of oil, around 50 per cent of the refinery's capacity. El Paso sold the refinery and related marine, bunkering and marketing affiliates for US\$465 million to the US-Valero Energy Corporation. The refinery has a throughput capacity of 315,000bpd.

Tourism

Aruba has many Caribbean attractions and offers diversions for holidaymakers including sports, natural history and leisure pastimes. Most visitors arrive from North America, plus Aruba has cultural ties to The Netherlands and northern South America.

Travel and tourism is expected to directly account for 23.2 per cent of GDP in 2011, with 26.2 per cent of direct employment in the sector (13,000 jobs) and 75.5 per cent of total employment indirectly related to the industry. Visitor numbers were up by 6.2 per cent year-on-year in January 2010, as arrivals from the US returned following the global economic crisis. Foreign exchange revenue was forecast to be Af2.55 billion (US\$1.4 billion) in 2011.

Over 300 cruise ships visit Aruba each year and the ministry of tourism is active in attracting more vessels to visit and 'enhance the experience' of passengers when they arrive. The second annual Aruba International Film Festival (AIFF) was held in June 2011, with films from 13 countries. Construction of the new, 320-room Ritz-Carlton Hotel, sited in Palm Beach (considered one of the best Aruban locations for Caribbean beaches), is due to be completed in 2012.

Hydrocarbons

There are no known hydrocarbons reserves. Consumption of oil was 8,000 barrels per day (bpd) in 2008, all of which was imported. Crude oil makes up over 95 per cent of all oil imported and is re-exported as refined oil; refinery capacity is 271,000bpd. Oil exports are a major component of GDP and foreign exchange earnings.

The owners of the Valero Aruba Refinery announced on 4 September 2012 that the facility would be reorganised as a refined oil products terminal, with a reduced

workforce. The refinery will be improved, but will continue to supply diesel, petrol and jet fuel for domestic needs, and will also act as a third-party terminal operation.

Any use of natural gas or coal is commercially insignificant.

Energy

Total installed generating capacity was 150MW in 2007, producing over 80 million kilowatt hours. The state-owned, WEB Aruba NV is responsible for electricity generation, while NV Elmar is the sole provider of electricity on the island and responsible for transmission, distribution and sales.

The government is reviewing the installation of wind-powered generators.

Banking and insurance

The banking sector consists of six commercial banks, two of which are branches of banks established in The Netherlands and Curaçao, one is a subsidiary of a bank established in Curaçao and three have their head offices in Aruba.

Aruba is a signatory of a new EU tax agreement that was introduced in July 2005. It has agreed to pass on, to the tax department of an EU citizen's country, information concerning the amount of money in savings accounts, to allow tax to be levied from the account holder's home country.

Aruba has also agreed to supply information on tax fraud, for criminal or civil trials, and notify EU member states about additional malpractices.

Central bank

Centrale Bank van Aruba (CBA)

Offshore facilities

The offshore banking sector has great potential. The Central Bank has been better equipped to regulate the banking sector since the enactment of the State Ordinance on the Supervision of the Credit System, 1998.

Time

GMT minus four hours

Geography

Located in the Caribbean Sea north of Venezuela, Aruba is a flat island with large white sandy beaches and sparse vegetation. The highest point is Mount Jamanota which is 188 metres above sea level.

Hemisphere

Northern

Climate

Aruba lies outside the Caribbean's hurricane zone. It has an almost constant temperature of 27 degrees Celsius with cooling trade winds and an absence of tropical storms and hurricanes. Low levels of humidity and rainfall.

Entry requirements

Passports

Required by all, except nationals of US and Canada, who only need proof of citizenship, and of EU countries with EU Travel Cards. (NB citizens of Canada and US require passports for re-entry to their countries).

Passports must be valid for at least three months after arrival. A return or onward ticket and adequate funds are required.

Visa

Not required, except by nationals of former Communist and some other countries. For details, visit <http://www.visitaruba.com/travel/toaruba/customs.html> or contact the nearest embassy.

Currency advice/regulations

Import/export of Aruban currency is forbidden. No restriction on import of foreign currencies, but a licence is required for export.

Customs

Besides articles for personal use, persons aged over 18 are allowed 2 litres of alcohol and 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars and 250 grammes of tobacco.

Health (for visitors)

Mandatory precautions

Yellow fever vaccination certificate required if arriving from an infected area.

Advisable precautions

hepatitis A and B and typhoid vaccinations.

Hotels

There are numerous tourist hotels. It is advisable to book in advance. There is a 17.66 per cent service and government tax on room prices and a 10–15 per cent charge on food and drinks.

Public holidays (national)

Fixed dates

1 Jan (New Year's Day), 25 Jan (G F Croe's Day), 18 Mar (National Anthem and Flag Day), 30 Apr (Queen's Day), 1 May (Labour Day), 25 Dec (Christmas Day), 26 Dec (Boxing Day).

Variable dates

Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day.

Working hours

Banking

Mon–Fri: 0800–1600.

Business

Mon–Fri: 0800–1200, 1300–1700.

Government

Mon–Fri: 0800–1200, 1300–1700. Sat: 0800–1200.

Shops

Mon–Sat: 0800–1800. Some shops close 1200–1400 every working day. Malls and shopping centres open 9.30–1800.

Telecommunications**Mobile/cell phones**

GSM 900/1800 services are available, with coverage throughout the island.

Electricity supply

110/120V 60 cycles

Getting there**Air**

Regular flights from US, Venezuela, Colombia and The Netherlands.

International airport/s: Reina Beatrix (AUA), 2.5km from Oranjestad, duty-free shop, bar, restaurant, post office, car hire.

Airport tax: Except for transit passengers, US destinations US\$36.75, all other international destinations US\$33.50.

Surface

Main port/s: Oranjestad, Sint Nicolaas and Barcadera are deep-water harbours.

Getting about**National transport**

Road: A well-developed road system connects all major towns.

Buses: Regular services in and around main centres. Also *jitney* services and sightseeing tours.

City transport

Taxis: Usually identified by 'TX' before the licence number. Taxis are not metered; fares are government-controlled according to destination.

Car hire

Prices are reasonable. An international licence is required. Driving is on the right.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

The international dialling code (IDD) for Aruba is +297, followed by subscriber's number.

Chambers of Commerce

Aruba Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 10 JE Irausquin Boulevard, PO Box 140, Oranjestad (tel: 582-1566; fax: 583-3962; businessinfo@arubachamber.com).

Banking

ABN-AMRO Bank NV, Caya GF Betico Croes 89, Oranjestad (tel: 821-515; fax: 821-856).

Aruba Bank NV, Caya GF Betico Croes 41, PO Box 192, Oranjestad (tel: 821-550; fax: 829-152).

Aruban Investment Bank NV, Middenweg 20, PO Box 1011, Oranjestad (tel: 827-327; fax: 827-461).

Banco di Caribe, Caya GF Croes 90, Oranjestad (tel: 832-168; fax: 832-422).

Caribbean Mercantile Bank NV, Caya GF Betico Croes 53, PO Box 28, Oranjestad (tel: 823-118; fax: 824-373).

First National Bank of Aruba NV, Caya GF Betico Croes 67, Oranjestad (tel: 833-221; fax: 821-756).

Interbank Aruba, Caya GF Betico Croes 38, Oranjestad (tel: 831-080; fax: 824-058).

Central bank

Centrale Bank van Aruba, JE Irausquin Boulevard 8, Oranjestad (tel: 525-2100; fax: 525-2101).

Travel information

Aruba Cruise Tourism, Royal Plaza Mall, Suite 230, LG Smith Blvd 94, Oranjestad (tel: 583-3648; email: info@ArubaByCruise.com; internet: www.arubabycruise.com).

National tourist organisation offices

Aruba Tourism Authority, L G Smith Boulevard 172, Eagle (tel: 821-019; fax: 834-702).

Aruba Tourism Authority P R, A Schutte Str 2, Oranjestad (tel: 823-778, 823-779, 837-254; fax: 830-075; internet site: <http://www.arubatourism.com>).

Ministries

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Tourism, Government of Aruba, L G Smith Boulevard 76, Oranjestad (tel: 826-977; fax: 835-084).

Ministry of Finance, Oranjestad (tel: 823-237; fax: 827-116).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, J E Irausquinplein 2A, Oranjestad (tel: 583-4705; fax: 583-8108)

Ministry of Public Works and Public Health, L G Smith Boulevard, Oranjestad (tel: 824-900; fax: 826-826).

Ministry of Traffic, Communications and Utilities, Oranjestad (tel: 824-900; fax: 835-985).

Cabinet of the Minister Plenipotentiary of Aruba, R J Schimmelpennincklaan 1, 2517 JN The Hague, The Netherlands (tel: (+3170) 356-6200; fax: (+3170) 356-6210).

Other useful addresses

Aruba Foreign Investment Agency, 85 Caya G F Betico Croes, Oranjestad (tel: 826-070; fax: 822-745).

Aruba Trade & Industry Association, Pedro Gallegostraat 6, PO Box 562, Oranjestad (tel: 827-593).

Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry, L G Smith Boulevard 160, Sun Plaza Building, Oranjestad (tel: 821-181, 821-482; fax: 834-494).

Other news agencies: The Governor of Aruba: www.kabga.aw

Caribbean Net News: www.caribbeanetnews.com

Internet sites

Aruba government: www.aruba.com

Aruba online: www.arubatourism.com

Visit Aruba: www.visitaruba.com