Diving in Bonaire

I landed in Bonaire in a bit of a rush, having spent the previous weeks scuba diving in Murcia & Mallorca working with Aqua Lung. I struggled to find time to properly research about the Island. All I've heard from my friends who own Scuba Schools in the Caribbean was: 'the Island has incredible shore dives; you will love it'. They were absolutely right. Here's everything I've learned while scuba diving in Bonaire during two weeks.

Bonaire is part of the BES (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba) islands which forms part of the Dutch Caribbean. Although Bonaire is part of one country it still holds its own flag.

Undoubtedly, there is a peaceful ambiance for daily life, without the hassle of traffic lights, hustle and bustle, or normal, day-to-day worries

The culture of Bonaire can be seen in the faces of its people. The different features and hues tell the story

of dozens of ethnic and racial influences. Indian, African, Asian and European inhabitants have all contributed to who Bonaire is today.

Luckily, It has become a tradition for many generations to understand the importance of nature and the unique position Bonaire has to conserve it. Bordered by globally endangered mangroves, numerous waterfowl breed and feed in the area of Lac. The Flamingo, protected on Bonaire, is the island's signature bird.

The Flamingo Sanctuary at Pekelmeer is one of the most important breeding grounds for the Southern Caribbean Flamingo population. Klein Bonaire, encircled by a great coral reef, offers flamingo feeding and turtle nesting areas. Gotomeer, foraging site for hundreds of flamingos, contains the most important food source for flamingos: brine fly and larvae.

A few Flamingo facts: Caribbean flamingos have the brightest coloration and are pink because of a diet rich in alpha and beta carotenoid pigments found in algae and insects. Flamingos mainly lay one egg, and chicks are grey and white.

Bonaire is known in the world for the way it protects its nature. That's why in 2012 the Bonaire island council granted a permit to the **Reef Renewal Foundation Bonaire** (formerly Coral Restoration Foundation Bonaire) to begin developing a coral nursery and reef restoration project in Bonaire.

The Mission of **Reef Renewal Foundation Bonaire** is to protect and restore coral reefs in Bonaire by developing new and innovative ways to restore reefs that are supported by research collaborations and

shared worldwide. The main production nursery is situated on **Klein Bonaire**, where the coral is disturbed as little as possible and more nurseries are located in front of Buddy Dive Resort & Harbour Village which are used for training and demonstrations.

RRFB works together with local businesses and dive operators, like **Buddy Dive Resort** & **Great Adventures Bonaire** to keep restoring the reef, promote awareness and involve and train tourists and local people as Coral Restoration divers. It is worth visiting https://reefrenewalbonaire.org

I had the fortune to be hosted by **Belmar**. This is a small and intimate oceanfront resort, with pretty stunning views of the ocean from each and every apartment. Yeap, every single one of them! The resort is located close to the Southern dive sites, windsurfing and kite surfing, just a few minutes away from the airport.

You can dive at Belmar with Belmar's onsite dive shop: **Buddy Dive** at Belmar (is a satellite shop of **Buddy Dive Resort**). This is a **PADI 5-star** resort with dedicated **PADI instructors** onsite who can teach **PADI courses** from beginner level all the way up to Dive Master and all **PADI specialties**.

You may also choose more tendered services, such as private courses and guided shore dives. Its super easy to pick up your tanks to explore the many other dive sites of the island with your own rental vehicle that automatically comes with all dive packages. It just couldn't get simpler!

Last but not least, Belmar offers valet boat dives for those divers who do not wish to worry-about-a-thing! Their crew will load your gear onto the boat and set-up it up for you. In the meanwhile, you can discuss your dive plan or make friends with a new buddy! Once you arrive at the dive site, dive masters will guide

you into the water and navigate the way to the hidden spots and marine life. On the boat, the crew hands out fresh towels, fresh fruit, snacks and refreshments. When the day is finished on the water, their crew will unload, rinse, and store your dive gear, handle with care and love.

One piece of advice: book the renown **'Drive, Dive & Stay'** package. You will have everything needed for a successful week of diving: Accommodation, airport transfers, shore diving with unlimited air and nitrox (plus optional boat dives) and a rental vehicle.

As you land on this breath-taking island, you will hear: 'Bon Bini na Bonaire!' (welcome to Bonaire!). Next thing you will know is that you are already breathing compressed air underwater.

About the author

Manuel is a PADI, Aqua Lung & DAN Ambassador. He travels around the world promoting safe scuba diving standars & sustainable practices. For more info visit www.manuelbustelo.com