

## Bonaire, Antilles: Mi Ta Stima Bonaire!

by Michelle Wyant, PassPorter Guest Contributor

*Mi ta stima Bonaire!* ("I love Bonaire" in Papiamentu, the most common language in Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao, the ABC Islands.)

Ahhh ... the pink airport! My husband and I are scuba divers and we have yet to find a more relaxing dive location than the **island of Bonaire**. Bonaire is a Dutch Caribbean island, along with its neighbors Aruba and Curacao. Getting to Bonaire from our home in Colorado takes a bit of time and is worth every second!

Our first journey to Bonaire was in October of 2002. My husband and I headed there to see what the **Bonaire diving** was like. One thing that really attracted us to Bonaire was this strange thing we had heard about, where you rent a truck for your vacation and then you drive around the island being your own dive guides.

**It's easy!** Just find a spot along the road, park, and walk into the ocean to start your dive. Huh? We were used to getting up in the morning, being at a dive boat by a certain time, and then doing whatever we were told by a dive master.

I still remember how strange it was driving along, looking for a **large rock painted school bus yellow** with the name of a dive site on it. But, that's what we did, and what a rush it turned out to be! The freedom of diving whenever you want to, however many times a day you want to, is a little intoxicating when you're addicted to diving.

Before our first trip, I thought that **making our own dive schedule** would mean we got to sleep in, take our time getting ready, and start our dives mid-morning. Wrong! It turns out that having our own schedule translates to "how many dives can we safely do in a day" to my dear husband. No sleeping in for him, or sadly, me.

Once I got used to the schedule there was nothing to do but enjoy ourselves. On our first visit we stayed at the **Plaza Resort**, which is just a bit "south of town," the town being Kralendijk. We really enjoyed that resort, and loved the proximity of our hotel room to the dive shop and the beach.

The first trip started with lost luggage that took about three days to catch up to us. Because of the missing bag we started that trip with **boat dives** because we didn't want to head out in the ocean by ourselves wearing gear we were unfamiliar with. When our bag arrived

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we headed out in our little truck right away and were hooked on the ease of diving in Bonaire.

Because of how much we enjoyed our first trip, we **returned a second time** with my parents and my in-laws. And then we returned a third time with our parents plus our three-year-old daughter.

On our second trip we stayed at the **Bel Mar apartments**, which are located eight minutes south of town. The decks on the apartments are fabulous and we spent most of the time we weren't diving on those decks. It is so nice to start your morning by sitting on a private deck and watching for dolphins.

We enjoyed Bel Mar so much we returned for our third trip and stayed for one week. At the end of the first week our daughter flew home with my parents. Chris and I stayed one extra week to celebrate our tenth wedding anniversary!

Our second week of that trip was spent at the **Caribbean Club**. We moved to a smaller location to save money and to try someplace new. The Caribbean Club is not quite in the same category as the Bel Mar apartments, but if we had stayed there first the difference would not have been quite as noticeable. While Bel Mar does not have a restaurant on site, Caribbean Club does, and that was very convenient.

We also love trying **new restaurants on Bonaire**. You could think that there wouldn't be a lot of selection on a small island, but you would be wrong. After staying for two weeks on our third trip we went home still not having tried all of the restaurants we wanted to. Following the first trip our favorite restaurant was Mona Lisa, we added Capriccio to the list on our second trip, and Bistro de Paris was added during our third trip.

Aside from many restaurants we would like to try, there are also lots of activities on Bonaire. You can kayak through mangroves, go mountain biking, snorkel, ride horses, kiteboard... the list goes on. Bonaire is also home to a world-class windsurfing spot, Lac Bay.

Lac Bay is located on the east side of the island and there is a huge section of the bay that is shallow, which makes it perfect for people learning to windsurf. On the last day of our most recent trip my husband took a lesson while I held down a beach chair for the restaurant there. I had to help out somehow! Chris really enjoyed it and when we realize our dream of owning property there I am certain we will also own windsurfing equipment.

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I feel like I'm neglecting to explain how much we enjoy the diving there. It might help explain things a little to give you a brief view of one dive from our last trip. I could write an entire report on this one hour dive, but I will try to keep it brief.

After drowning my camera earlier in the trip--operator error--we decided to rent a camera and underwater housing for one day. It was a great deal. I could take as many pictures as I wanted, go to the dive shop to get the batteries changed between each dive, and then they would burn a disc with all of my photos.

The man we rented the camera from pointed out that we chose a point and shoot with no strobes (external flashes) and thus wouldn't necessarily take excellent photos in all underwater conditions. But, he said, if you see an eagle ray you're still going to take the picture, even if it doesn't turn out very well. Ha! Ha! Ha! An eagle ray&hellip;

By now you may have guessed what we saw on the third dive that day. We didn't see the eagle ray until the end of the dive. Before that we were on what we both think is one of the most incredible dives we have ever experienced. Turtles, an enormous parrot fish, squid, trumpet fish, a huge lobster... all kinds of amazing things that we got great photos of, because of how close they allowed us to be to them.

As we were looking for the buoy to end the dive and go back to shore, I was exhausted. The dive was so exhilarating and long that I was ready to rest. Chris started pointing to the buoy mooring and I was just far enough behind him that I couldn't tell what he was pointing at. By that point, I didn't care. How great could it be?

Pretty great. That was the first time I got to see an eagle ray while diving. I started snapping and snapping, and swimming, and snapping, and swimming, and snapping more photos. Luckily, we were in shallow water at this point and if I had run out of air I would easily have made it to the surface. (Safety stops were already complete.)

When the eagle ray left and we got back to shore I just floated around to rest. What an amazing dive! I may not win any awards with my underwater photography, but I have included photos from that specific dive.

If you ever get the chance to dive in Bonaire, take it. Or don't, and that will leave more room on the island for us.

*About The Author: Michelle is a stay-at-home mom who dreams of Bonaire, Walt Disney World, and Disney Cruise Lines. She is anxiously awaiting her*

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family's trip to Walt Disney World in May!

Article last updated: 04-05-2011

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