

ARUBA – ONE HAPPY ISLAND

by Chase Binder

Truth be told, Bud and I haven't paid a lot of attention to Aruba over the years. Oh, we've been there a couple of times, brief stops on cruises for a few hours. But we'd never spent any real time there until just last month.

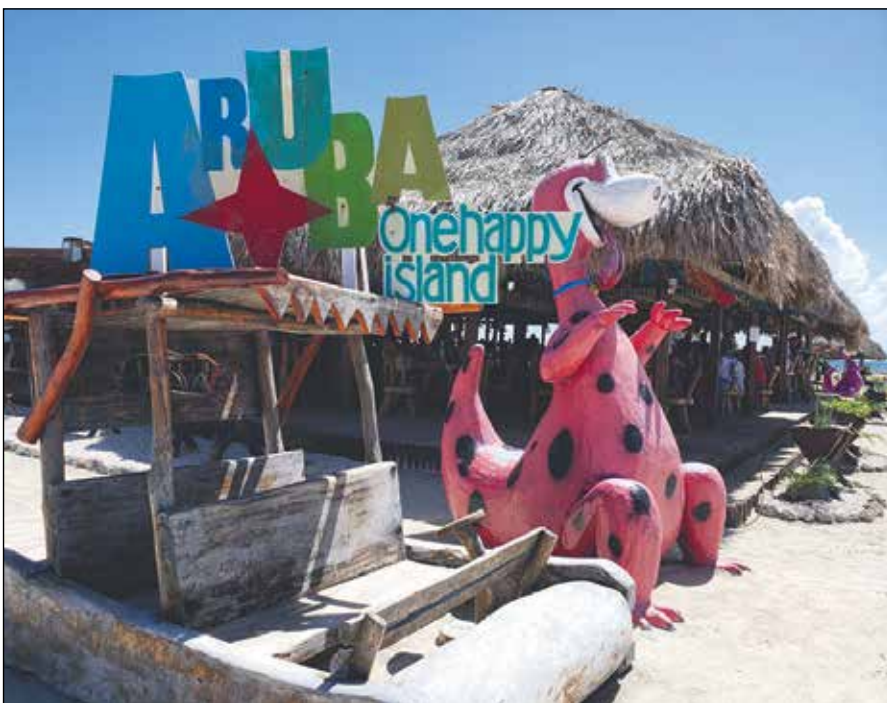
Hurricane Irma is the reason we ended up on this arid island, an arid and windswept chunk of land just off the coast of Venezuela. Irma virtually flattened St. Maarten, home to our much-loved timeshare at Divi Little Bay. Luckily for us, Divi also owns sister resorts on Aruba (5 of them, actually) and we were able to switch our weeks for Divi Dutch Village, one of the first resorts along the "low-rise resort" stretch of beach.

Several days after we arrived, we were still shaking our heads and grinning. Turns out there are lots of reasons to vacation in Aruba.



The beaches in Aruba are so accessible. Some would call this heaven.

Let me start with the beaches. They are pristine, white-sand gems that stretch for miles. Bud and I aren't really beach people (something about the sand that gets everywhere) but Aruba's beaches are truly compelling. The water is that "I can't believe it" turquoise blue and most, if not all, beaches have sturdy palapas with loungers—even the public beaches! Some palapas are marked with handicap accessible signs and have clever boardwalk "floors" to accommodate wheelchairs.



Baby Beach is at far end of the island, but has wonderfully shallow water and fun decorations for kids.

Which leads me to Aruba's marketing tagline "One Happy Island." Amazingly, this phrase seemed to be spot on. Whether we were exploring beachfront restaurants, visiting one of the many casinos, walking the beaches, heading for the tennis courts and fitness center or even shopping for groceries in the local market, smiles were everywhere. This factor is huge for us. So many of the islands give off a vibe of "just spend your money and go." It was very pleasant to feel genuinely welcome.



Chase Binder

Hotel options abound. Accommodations are mostly divided into two sections; the low-rise hotels and, a bit further along the beach, the high-rise hotels. Our hotel was in the low-rise area, a very casual, laid-back, "right on the beach" ambiance. Some are all-inclusive, some not, but all evoke a time almost gone by. We loved it!

The high-rise area also includes some all-inclusives, some with adults-only sections and

generally appeal to those looking for full resort amenities like spas and nightclubs. And yes, the wind is normally an issue, no matter where you are along the beach, but clever architects and resort designers have designed pool and lounge areas around lush courtyard-style areas with stunning landscaping. Our favorite on the low-rise beach was right where we stayed, Divi Dutch Village; on the high-rise side, the Hyatt was just spectacular.

One of the things we especially loved about Aruba was the lively casino nightlife. We visited all (yes, all!) of the casinos and ended up with a favorite, The Seaport Casino in downtown Oranjestad where live music kept the tables hopping. For those of you who like gaming, the table limits are low and it's fairly easy to find a seat.

If you're tempted, visit www.aruba.com, the official tourism website. It's very intuitive and also a treasure trove of info on everything from accommodations and golfing to restaurants, diving and family activities. Happy dreams!



Hanging out under a beach plum tree, watching cruise ships go by and chatting with friends. Nice!



Working donkeys were abandoned with the advent of motorized vehicles, but Aruba is home to a wonderful Donkey Sanctuary (www.main.arubandonkey.org) where volunteers and visitors help feed and care for these fun animals.

(Continued to page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

HELPING RESCUED ANIMALS



Aruba Airport

One evening Bud and I serendipitously stumbled upon a booth asking for volunteers to help escort rescued Aruban island dogs to their forever homes waiting in the US and beyond. A brief discussion explained the basics. The non-profit animal rescue group Sgt. Pepper's Friends (www.sgtpeppersfriends.com) has been rescuing needy animals in Aruba since 2015 and works through their website and with visiting tourists to arrange adoptions around the world. Sometimes the adopting families can fly to Aruba and bring their new family members home, but often they need a volunteer flying back to the US to escort the dogs.

They needed folks flying back to New York or Boston on American Airlines 737 aircraft, which have climate controlled and pressurized holds for larger dogs. Most Aruban island dogs are 35-45 pounds, slim and very cheerful, especially after weeks or months in foster care regaining their health. We checked our itinerary and, sure enough, our flights to Boston were perfect. We called and offered to escort a dog and they were thrilled—in fact, asked if we would take two! Why not?

The local volunteers met us at the AA check-in counter, with adorable island pooches Minzi and Marly, their flight-ready crates and paperwork all set. It added about 30 minutes to our check-in process, and we had to wheel the girls in their crates through Aruban emigration and passport control, then along to US passport control, immigrations and customs (happily right on the island!). Overall it was a breeze.

On arrival in Boston, Minzi's new mom was waiting at the luggage carousel...so happy! A Boston volunteer for Sgt. Pepper's Friends collected Marly for an overnight before her onward flight to British Columbia the next day. Sgt. Pepper rescues have gone throughout the US, Europe and as far as Sweden. Helping left us with tearful grins.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!

8 Town Employees have been in the Military

	BRANCH	MILITARY RANK	
Edwin "Ted" Bardwell	Navy	Petty Officer 3rd Class	Fire Department
Ken Judkins	Army	Specialist	Fire Department
Adam Seligman	Air Force	Senior Airman	Fire Department
Gregg Brown	Army	Sergeant 1st Class	Fire Department
Margaret Lougee	AirForce & Air National Guard	Master Sergeant	Police Department
Richard Oberman	Army & Army National Guard	Colonel	Fire Department
Tom Modini	Army	Captain	Fire Department
Bryan Westover	Marines	Chief Warrant Officer	Community Development

SCHOOL BUS DRIVER SHORTAGE AFFECTS SCHOOLS

With an unemployment rate below 3% the issue of a shortage of school bus drivers has been a concern across the southern part of New Hampshire.

Bow Superintendent of Schools, Dean Cascadden, said "we have not been fully staffed for one school day this year."

According to RSA 189:6, school districts must provide transportation for students in grades 1-8 that live more than 2 miles from school. Since high school transportation is not required and in Bow, high schoolers are not transported with elementary and middle school students, "so that is where we adjust if needed" said Cascadden.

"Our regular high school routes require 4 drivers and we are currently doing high school transportation with 2 drivers. We were able to limp through the fall sports and field trip season with the help of creative solutions and the use of some outside providers."

One problem Cascadden said is that "bus drivers essentially have to block out their entire day but are paid for part time hours. What I mean by that is the time between the completion of the morning run and the start of the afternoon run is not long enough to have other employment."

The Superintendent also addressed benefits: "Currently in Bow we do not offer benefits to the majority of our drivers. This can be an issue when some of the large, nationwide for-profit providers are providing benefits.

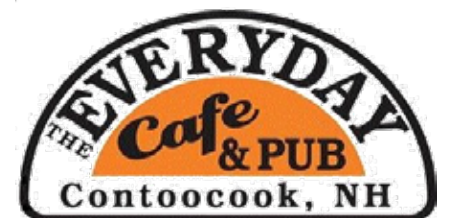
"Our drivers also do not qualify for unemployment benefits of any kind because we offer them an employment contract at the end of the school year for the next

school year. This provides reasonable assurance of continued employment in the eyes of unemployment laws and thus they are not eligible," said Cascadden.

Finally, the licensing and testing requirements are extremely long and hard. A person who comes with a regular operator license, with no endorsements, can expect the entire bus driver licensing process to take 8-10 weeks if everything goes well. The interested person must pass a drug screen, background check, must possess a clean driving record, pass four different written tests and then take and pass a driving test.

Background checks are an issue addressed by Assistant Superintendent Duane Ford who said "previously the state law had a bright line that Felony Convictions for section V violations of RSA 189:13-A was cause for failing a background check. In 2015, the law was changed so that misdemeanors would also be included on the records check report both federal and state. To safeguard privacy, only the superintendent can see the report and he or she must destroy it after making a decision on hiring."

Localities have different tolerances and standards. Some have a no misdemeanor policy and others like Bow give the superintendent discretion in looking at the type of offense and the length of time since the offense. A person with a misdemeanor in their 20's might be a great employee in their 60's, or they might have completely changed their life around since a mis-spent youth.



Hours of Operation

Monday 6:03am-3:00pm
 Tuesday 6:03am-9:07pm
 Taco & Tequila Tuesday
 Wednesday 6:03am- 9:07pm
 Trivia Night Wednesday
 Thursday 6:03am-9:07pm
 Take-out Night Thursday
 Friday 6:03am-9:07pm
 Burger & Beer Night Friday
 Saturday 6:03am 9:07pm
 Sunday 6:03-we close at 3pm

14 Maple St. Contoocook NH
 603-746-6041

