



Voluntourism on Aruba

Traveling is the great escape from our everyday lives. Soaking up the sights and sounds of a destination, meeting new people, discovering new cultures—for many of us, this is traveling. Some, however, take their vacations to an entirely new dimension, choosing to enrich their travel experiences by volunteering within the local community. “Voluntourism” is a growing segment of tourism that has a win-win effect for both the traveler and the community.

Here on Aruba, community service abounds, with locals volunteering their time, labor, and skills to a long list of organizations and charities. The island is doubly blessed in that not only do we have a strong sense of community and a “helping hand” mentality, but many of our valued guests also share precious vacation time volunteering for various causes and organizations on the island. For some tourists, Aruba is their vacation destination year after year, and they genuinely feel it's a home away from home; they are connected emotionally to the island and are eager to give back. For others, volunteering is a unique way to meet locals and have an up-close and personal vacation experience in Aruba. And for some, it's a great way to spend quality time together while on a family vacation. Whatever it is that calls upon travelers to forgo time lounging by the pool or beach, Arubans welcome the opportunity to share their passion for a cause with new friends.

Here, a few local charities, organizations, and community initiatives that welcome support.

If you love the sea, marine life, and beaches:

The Aruba Reef Care Project

The island's largest volunteer environmental initiative is the Aruba Reef Care Project. Initiated in 1994, the project has grown to amass some 1,000 participants scouring the beaches and dive and snorkel sites in a cleanup effort to preserve the island's crystal turquoise waters and sugar-white beaches.

The environmental initiative, supported by the public and private sector businesses, including resorts and activity companies, also raises awareness in

the community of the importance of preserving Aruba's marine environment. The annual event attracts both locals and tourists, who gladly give up a few hours of their day to remove debris from the beaches and reefs. The project takes place annually, and this year's cleanup is scheduled for Sunday, October 3, 2021.

In addition to the annual event, the foundation schedules monthly monitoring of our coral reefs as well as lionfish hunts to eradicate this invasive and destructive species from our reefs.

Interested participants can contact Castro Perez by email at castroperez@gmail.com or by phone at +297-740-0797.

Facebook: Reef Care Aruba

TurtugAruba

Aruba's shores have become a favorite nesting place for the Leatherback, Hawksbill, Green, and Loggerhead species. Fundashon TurtugAruba, established in 2003 and a member of the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network, is the local foundation that protects these four endangered species of sea turtles nesting on Aruba. These turtles invariably return to their natal beach to lay their eggs, and TurtugAruba volunteers know exactly where to patrol in order to spot, monitor, and protect turtle nests on the island, primarily at Eagle Beach, Boca Grandi, and Arikok National Park. Sea turtles begin their nesting season on Aruba in April, and hatching can continue all the way into December. Volunteers comb the beach during the season looking for nesting turtles so the area can be cordoned off and protected. These marked nests are then monitored, especially in the days nearing hatching, to record the number of babies and to safeguard their journey from the beach to the sea. For information on how to assist the organization, email inquiries to info@turtugaruba.org. Check out their Facebook page (@turtugaruba) for updates on current nesting and hatching activities and the continued efforts of the foundation.

World Cleanup Day

The Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association will be organizing a coastal cleanup day in honor of World Cleanup Day on September 18th, 2021.

Aruba's beaches and coastline will be filled with locals and visitors working together to make a clean sweep. For more information, contact Vanessa Rasmussen at AHATA by email at Vanessa@ahata.com.

Sponsor-A-Mile

Spearheaded by the Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association, Sponsor-A-Mile is a monthly cleanup initiative. Several hotels that are association members adopt a designated mile of beach, roadside, or countryside to scour for debris. Employees of the various hotels volunteer their time to keep their island clean, and are often joined by eco-minded tourists who enjoy the opportunity to volunteer alongside locals and add a meaningful experience to their stay here. Travelers can contact their hotel directly to see if they participate in the cleanup.

Scubble Bubbles

With a lofty goal to help save Aruba's coral reefs (50 to 80 percent of the coral reefs around Florida and the Caribbean have markedly declined due to a variety of factors), a group of youth divers formed a scuba diving club called Scubble Bubbles on Aruba. The teens immersed themselves in researching what they could do to make a difference, ultimately seeking the advice of the Coral Restoration Foundation, a non-profit marine conservation organization focused on coral reef restoration in Florida and around the world.

Locals and visitors who enjoy Aruba's coastline and reefs are welcome to contribute to the environmental initiative by donating funds to help the club purchase more equipment and gear at <https://www.gofundme.com/restoring-arubas-coral-reefs>. Visitors are also welcome to join by volunteering while on the island. Visit the Scubble Bubbles' Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/ScubbleBubbles/>, for more information on their various beach and reef cleanups.

If you love animals and need some furry contact while on vacation:

Aruba Animal Shelter

The mission of the Aruba Animal Shelter is to improve the lives of dogs and cats on Aruba. This mission relies on the donations of contributors and the concerted efforts of a committed group of volunteers, including longtime volunteers, youngsters pitching in during the summer break, and guests visiting the island. But all the volunteers have one thing in common: the devotion to giving the neglected dogs and cats of Aruba a second chance at life. Those interested in volunteering, donating, or just cuddling some dogs, puppies, cats, and kittens can contact the Aruba Animal Shelter, or better yet,

just stop in!

Opening hours: Mon – Thurs, 8 am – 12 pm; Fri & Sat, 8 am - 3 pm

Address: Wayaca 128-B

Telephone: +297-582-1623

E-mail: animalshelterwayaca@gmail.com

Website: www.arubaanimalshelter.com

Facebook: Aruba.Animal.Shelter

For donation information, please email the shelter.

Join an organized walk or hike with rescued dogs up for adoption. The walks help the dogs with socialization, leash adaptation, mental stimulation, and exercise. Explore our countryside or enjoy a walk on the beach with these furry friends and meet locals and other visitors as well! Both Luna Foundation (<https://www.luna-aruba.com/volunteer>) and Sgt. Pepper's (info@sgtpeppersfriends.com) organize weekly walks and welcome volunteers.

Enjoy a furry travel companion! Several other island rescue groups specialize in sending dogs and cats to the States or elsewhere for adoption. These groups are always looking for flight volunteers to help transport these fur babies to their new home. Reach out to any of the following organizations to find out more about transporting: Animal Relief Foundation (info@ARF-aruba.com), Sgt. Pepper's Friends (info@sgtpeppersfriends.com), or New Life for Paws (newlifeforpawsfoundation@gmail.com).

Aruba Donkey Sanctuary

Tucked away in a semi-remote cunucu area (Aruba's countryside), a sanctuary can be found. The Aruba Donkey Sanctuary is a foundation supported entirely by donations and managed through the hard work of selfless volunteers to benefit Aruba's long-standing donkey population.

The Aruban donkeys date back 500 years, when Spaniards, who used them for transportation and as beasts of burden, brought the animals here. Today, around 200 donkeys live in Aruba, with about half residing at the sanctuary. Aside from rescuing and caring for donkeys, the sanctuary is a primary vehicle for educating the public about the animals.

The sanctuary eagerly welcomes new volunteers—whether to assist with the daily chores of feeding and cleaning, act as a tour guide, or assist with general maintenance and repairs. Those wishing to spend time volunteering at the sanctuary can go to the website's volunteer page at

<http://main.arubandonkey.org/portal/index.php/volunteers>, where there is additional information and a volunteer information form.

Opening hours: Every day, 9 am to 4 pm

Address: Bringamosa 2Z

Phone: +297-593-2933

If you are a people person:

FAVI

Aruba's foundation for the visually impaired offers a variety of services with the purpose of contributing to the happiness and well-being of individuals with visual impairment or blindness. Programs are implemented to encourage social interaction. FAVI addresses physical needs like examinations and rehabilitation as well as sensory stimulation and fellowship with activities ranging from cooking classes and gymnastics to talk groups and weekly handicraft classes. Organized group outings are also a regular part of FAVI's program. FAVI welcomes volunteers to help with the craft classes and the outings. Contact FAVI director, Cetty Baarah, at +297-582-5222 for more information.

If you like a little bit of everything:

Aruba Doet

Aruba Doet is the largest volunteer event on the island, taking place over two days every spring (dates announced a few months in advance). Participants sign up to help social organizations or a good cause together with friends or colleagues, school friends, or company workers. Whether painting, repairing playgrounds or gardening for a group of elderly, you are guaranteed to have fun!

Aruba Doet is part of a larger organization with efforts in The Netherlands, Saint Maarten, Bonaire, and Curacao all taking place over the same days. The Dutch fund makes large investments in social causes on the islands and strengthens the ties between the islands and the kingdom.

As a volunteer you can pick Friday or Saturday (or both) in the morning, afternoon or evening (or all three) and volunteer to help with social activities, renovating, building, cleaning, organizing, gardening, painting, decorating,

and administrating for a mix of elderly, adult, or child initiatives, as well as environmental and animal welfare causes.

info.arubadoet@gmail.com