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HIDDEN GEMS

Beyond the turquoise waters and sun-kissed, sandy shores exists the real Aruba – where natural bridges, caves, rugged desert, thriving culture, 90+ culinary influences and countless other hidden gems await visitors' discovery.

Antilla Wreck

Known as the “ghost ship” and the largest shipwreck dive in the Caribbean, the *Antilla* is a 400-foot-long German freighter built in 1939, used by the Germans to supply their subs during World War II. Scuttled in 1945 to prevent Dutch marines from seizing it, it now rests on its port side only 500 yards offshore and 60 feet below the surface, illuminated at night by fluorescent cup-corals. Explore its compartments, anchors, cargo holds and boiler rooms.

Arashi Beach

Tucked away from the masses and protected from development, Arashi Beach is the ideal snorkeling and swimming locale. A 10-minute walk from Malmok Beach on the winding road that leads to the California Lighthouse, this narrow stretch of beach is a favorite with locals, offering gentle currents, sandbars, vibrant marine life and several makeshift huts to host a barbecue cookout.

Aruhiba Tabaco Farm

Featuring hand-rolled premium cigars and cigar accessories, Aruhiba Cigars are the only handmade cigars offered on the island. Similar to a Cuban cigar, Aruhiba Tabaco is farmed locally on the island and is sold at the Aruhiba Cigar shop in front of the historic Dutch windmill near The Mill Resort and Suites in Palm Beach. Cigar aficionados can check out the daily Aruhiba Tabaco farm tours or indulge in a private cigar rolling class.

Balashi Gold Mill Ruins

Built at the tip of the Spanish Lagoon across from The Frenchman Pass, the once bustling Balashi Gold Mill turned into a ghost town in 1985 with the shut down of the island's gold refinery. The remains of the mill still exist and the grounds are also famous for being “haunted.”

Black Stone Beach

Lined with tiny, shimmering black stones, Black Stone Beach is Aruba's only beach boasting “black sand.” Located close to three newly forming natural bridges in Arikok National Park, Black Stone Beach lends itself to an ideal quaint picnic spot.

Boca Catalina

Beyond Palm Beach, visitors can follow the beach road to discover a hidden local favorite, Boca Catalina and Catalina Cove, where locals gather and fire up their grills for a sunset barbeque. As one of the island's hot spots for fishing given its shallow water, Boca Catalina brings families together to enjoy its sandy white, pebbled beaches and catch of the day.

Boca Grandi

A semi-circular, reef-protected cove resting on the eastern side of Aruba's southern tip, Boca Grandi is the mecca to kite surfers around the globe. Characterized by undulating sugar white sand dunes harnessed by low-lying sea grapes, this kite surfers' paradise wraps around a bay, unearthing on-shore winds and small rolling surf. Just north of the lagoon, secluded spot Grapefield offers a snorkel and picnic playground amidst large sea grape groves.

Boca Prins

A four-wheel-drive vehicle is required to make the trek to this strip of northern coastline, which is famous for its backdrop of enormous vanilla sand dunes that are constantly reshaped by the powerful trade winds. Near the Fontein Cave and Blue Lagoon, the beach itself is quite small and prohibits swimming—but with two rocky cliffs and tumultuously crashing waves, it's as romantic as Aruba gets. Captivating views are plentiful at Boca Prins Restaurant & Bar – the only restaurant to enjoy food and drinks within Arikok National Park.

Conchi (Natural Pool)

Northwest of Dos Playa and nestled at the base of the northern shore cliffs within Arikok National Park, adventurers trek through the rocky ravines on horseback or hike rocky terrain to discover one of Aruba's hidden gems, the Natural Pool. Known in Papiamentu as Conchi, this shell-shaped pool is surrounded by a large barrier of lava rocks that greet crashing waves from the Caribbean Sea.

Dos Playa

Located along the rugged northern shore of Aruba, Dos Playa is a haven of turquoise waters and white-sand beaches juxtaposed against a backdrop of cacti and desert-like terrain. While swimming is not advised at Dos Playa, the crashing waves against rocky limestone cliffs create coves. Located within the island's Arikok National Park, this secluded beach surrounded by two cliffs lures advanced surfers, bodyboarders, sunbathers and the leisure picnicker.

Fontein Cave

Famous for the decorative brownish-red Arawak pictographs etched by the Amerindians and found on the cave's walls and ceiling, Fontein Cave is marked with rich ancestral history that continues its storytelling among thousand-year-old stalactites and stalagmites. Shallow in depth and low in height, the cave invites visitors to crawl through the space, uncovering civilization and history at every turn.

Local Rum Shops

As one of Aruba's oldest traditions, the local rum bars dot nearly every road on the island and play host to lawyers, fishermen and everyone in between. These quick in-and-out bars offer drinks and a rich atmosphere filled with years of history and culture.

Mangel Halto

Tucked away along the western coast in the Pos Chikito district near the Spanish Lagoon, Mangel Halto gets its name from its welcoming mass of mangrove trees that provide shade for the perfect afternoon picnic or slumber. A narrow clearing of mangroves leads to inviting, shallow inlets of calm and refreshing turquoise waters. Swimmers and divers can wade out to explore the protected barrier reef.

SS Pedernales Wreck

A well-kept-secret dive spot, the SS Pedernales was a World War II lake tanker that was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat en route to a refinery in Aruba. The center portion of the vessel still remains submerged off the shore of Palm Beach, approximately 25 feet below sea level.

Guadirikiri Cave

The most visited among several small limestone caves along the northern shore within Arikok National Park, the Guadirikiri Cave is famous for the bursts of natural sunlight that seep through limestone holes throughout the cavern. Explorers can venture through various layers of the cave, which range from tall and wide to low and narrow. Adventurers who dare to look up may find friendly bats also touring the cave.

Rodger's Beach

Wrapped around a reef-protected bay and lesser known than its neighboring swim and snorkel spot Baby Beach, Rodger's Beach is equally worthy of a visit. Dotted with colorful, traditional fishing boats along the far end of the sheltered bay, this undiscovered, quaint spot offers charm and ideal conditions for swimming. On a crisp, clear day, the coast of Venezuela can be seen by the naked eye.

Spanish Lagoon

A protected wetland between Pos Chikito and the Balashi Gold Mill Ruin, the Spanish Lagoon is a true ecosystem and incubator of young marine life. The lagoon leads inland to a salt marsh surrounded by dense vegetation and birdlife – bananaquit, parakeets, herons, troupials and ground dove – a birdwatcher's paradise.

Frenchman's Pass

Wedged between coral cliffs above the Spanish Lagoon and across from the abandoned and haunted Balashi Gold Mill, the narrow canyon known as The Frenchman Pass is home to hundreds of chattering parakeets and egrets. Legend has it that French pirates tried to invade Aruba in the early 17th century, but were confronted by Indians in the narrow passage. Many Indians were killed during the invasion and, since then, the passage has been named *Rooi Frances* in Papiamentu or Frenchman's Pass.

Yamanota

Offering a birds-eye view at 620 feet, hikers discover sheer serenity atop Yamanota, the island's highest elevation point granting panoramic views worth remembering. Picturesque contours of the northern and southern shores are captured from a single vantage point, offer picture-perfect moments.

Zeerover's

Located in the sleepy fishing town of Savaneta, Zeerover's is a fisherman's wharf promising heavy local flare. Locals line up at the window to buy fresh caught fish or order the deep fried catch of the day – barracuda, mahi mahi, shrimp and more – tossed in a big plastic bowl with homemade fries, plantains and *pan bati*. Those who choose to stay awhile on the waterside deck enjoy fresh breezes, fish fry aromas and a cold Balashi beer, as they crank up the jukebox to hear vibrant Caribbean calypso beats and watch fisherman cart their catch by the net full.

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