

DEVELOPMENT NEWS

Curaçao Experiencing a Tourism Boom, Prompting Development of Six New Resorts and Expansion of Five Existing Resorts

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For the first six months of the year, the 171-square mile island experienced an increase in visitor arrivals of 15.8 percent from Europe; 32.3 percent from South America; and 14 percent from the Caribbean region. Though American arrivals showed an overall decline of 4.1 percent during the same time period, the month of June yielded a 16.4 percent increase in U.S. arrivals. Moreover, cruise ship visits to the island grew by 60 percent yielding a 17.1 percent increase in passenger visits.

Tourism as an industry represents 15 percent of Curacao's GDP.

Curaçao tourism officials credit a global rediscovery of the island's unique and diverse attributes for its newfound popularity.

"We have been deeply engaged in marketing the many fundamental charms of Curaçao worldwide and have successfully conveyed the essence of the island in a manner that has seemingly enticed potential visitors and businesses from all over the world," stated Mrs. Evita Nita of the Curaçao Tourism Board. "The world has realized, or perhaps remembered, that Curaçao is far more than just a beautiful beach; we are an authentic, real and wonderfully diverse destination that is rich in art, history, architecture, sports, cuisine and culture where travelers can enrich their lives by experiencing a place and way of life that is like nowhere else on Earth."

Six new resorts are under construction at an investment of \$230 million and will yield 988 rooms for the island between

the end of the year and the end of 2009. These include the development of two major American chain resorts under the Hyatt and Renaissance flags, as well as privately owned regional resorts Caribbean Beach Resort, Flamingo Beheer, Palapa Beach Resort & Marina, and Toucan Beach Resort.

Five existing resorts are investing \$26 million for an expansion of 252 rooms collectively that will be completed between the end of this year and the end of 2008. They are the Chogogo Resort, Clarion Hotel & Suites, Lions Dive & Beach Resort, Marazul Quality Suites, and Papagayo Beach Resort.

Curaçao: A Rich & Diverse Destination

Though Curaçao's original inhabitants were the Arawak Amerindians, the Spaniards' arrival in 1499 spelled their end. By 1634, the island was occupied by the Dutch who founded the capital of Willemstad and brought the distinct culture of the Netherlands to the island for good. The natural harbor of Willemstad became a hot spot for trade which became Curaçao's most lucrative economic activity and positioned the island for its key role in the Atlantic slave trade.

This newfound wealth fueled the development of the island's unique architectural masterpieces which blend Dutch and Spanish colonial styles. The vast array of historic buildings in and around Willemstad earned the capital a place on UNESCO's World Heritage list. Former plantation estates and West African style "kas di pal'i maishi" or former slave dwellings, are peppered throughout the island, some of which have been restored and can be visited by tourists.

When the Dutch abolished slavery in 1863, widespread economic hardship led to vast emigration until the establishment of the oil refinery in 1914, when the destiny of the island was dramatically changed. Built on the site of the former slave trade market, the refinery provided an abundant source of employment for the local population and fueled a wave of immigration from surrounding nations.

Today, the transcontinental island of Curaçao has a varied population of more than 134,000 consisting of more than 55 nationalities, providing visitors with an inimitable multi-cultural, multi-ethnic experience. Languages widely spoken are Papiamentu, Dutch, Spanish, and English; many inhabitants speak all four.

Curaçao's proximity to South America resulted in a long-standing Latin American influence on the island, especially in the areas of language and cuisine.

Local food is called "kuminda krioyo," derived from the Spanish words for "creole" and "food," and blends the vibrant and bold flavors and ingredients typical of Caribbean and Latin American cuisines.

Curaçao lies just outside the meteorological area known as the hurricane belt, guaranteeing minimum vacation interruption with a 0-3 percent chance of a strike. The island's semi-arid climate means travelers will even find

vegetation atypical of the Caribbean, including various cacti, thorny shrubs and evergreen trees.

Nature lovers and hiking buffs can venture to Curaçao's highest point, the 1,230-foot Mount Christoffel which lies in a reserved wildlife park, known as Curaçao Christoffelpark, and can be explored by car, bike, horse or on foot.

Curaçao is renowned for its coral reefs and 160 dive spots located mostly off the calmer south coast. The most remarkable feature of diving there is known as the "blue edge," a steep drop off of the sea floor only a few hundred feet from the shore which enables divers to reach the reefs without a boat. The rocky and current-ridden north coast of the island is best suited for highly experienced divers with boats. Avid sport fishermen will find some of the wildest trips in the Caribbean here.

Even golfers can tee-off at the island's championship golf course. Casinos are abundant as well.

"The phrase 'something for everyone' doesn't begin to describe this beautiful island," added Mrs. Nita. "Curaçao has everything for everyone, and then some. A week is hardly enough time to see and do it all."

Daily arrivals into Curaçao are available on American Airlines connecting through Miami. Continental Airlines provides non-stop weekly service to Curaçao from Newark. In December, Delta will begin weekly service, connecting more than 40 cities to Curacao through Atlanta.

Curaçao is currently celebrating its Culture, Cuisine & Heritage Experience, a three-month celebration of its history, diversity and culture that lasts through November 15. For information, visit www.curacaoculture.com.

More information about Curaçao and a free destination DVD are available by calling 800-3-CURACAO (1-800-328-7222), or by visiting www.curacao.com.