

PROTECT YOUR PEOPLE,
PROTECT YOUR ORGANIZATION



University of Maine Bonaire Assessment March 2019



October 2018
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SUMMARY

On Call International considers the overall travel risk rating for the proposed University of Maine trip to Bonaire as **Medium** risk. Most travel to the island of Bonaire generally can take place without major incidents. Road safety conditions, environmental hazards, theft, and petty crime are the greatest risks to the trip. Professor Steneck's experience leading multiple trips to the island and the group's coordination with Bonaire's Marine National Park will help the University of Maine travelers mitigate some of these risks.

Bonaire is a relatively safe island compared with others in the Caribbean for both visitors and locals alike. Theft is the most common issue reported by visitors, but vehicular accidents on the island's roads are also commonly reported. It is recommended that the travelers not bring anything of value to the dive sites, as thefts from these areas occur with some frequency. Smash and grab robberies targeting rental vehicles, in particular those at dive sites, are often reported. It is recommended that trip leaders ensure that they have adequate insurance, as local insurance sometimes does not cover thefts from rental cars or damage to vehicles. If possible, valuables should be left in the hotel safe, and travelers are discouraged from bringing valuable jewelry and clothing to the island.

Violent crimes involving visitors, including sexual assaults and muggings, are rare but do occur occasionally on Bonaire. Bonaire's proximity to Venezuela places it within a strategic area for illicit trafficking, and drug trafficking groups in particular are known to operate in and around the island. Drug traffickers in the area generally seek to maintain a low profile and rarely target those not directly involved in the trade, but their presence is worth noting. It is recommended that travelers avoid remote areas at night, travel in groups, and practice situational awareness at all times.

Risks related to the group's diving activities are somewhat mitigated by the fact that the travelers will be following AAUS/UMaine protocols for dive safety. Drowning incidents account for a majority of U.S. citizen deaths in Bonaire and the surrounding islands, and administrators and trip leaders should continue to emphasize dive safety leading up to and during the trip.

The U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs recently introduced [a new travel advisory and classification system](#) for countries worldwide. Using this recently updated Travel Advisory system, the U.S. State Department ranks travel to Bonaire as Level 1: Exercise Normal Precautions.

ASSESSMENT

Areas of Travel: Kralendijk, Bonaire, Caribbean Netherlands

Duration of Stay: 15-24 March 2019

Number of Travelers: 6-12

Overall Risk Rating: Medium

CRIME:

While Bonaire has lower rates of violent crime than many other Caribbean islands, petty crime rates remain average for the region. Theft is common and visitors are targeted by burglars, who often wait for tourists to head to dive sites and the beach before breaking in. Travelers should watch their bags at all times, and avoid carrying large amounts of money or wearing expensive jewelry. Considering that hotel and car rental break-ins are common, it is recommended to limit the number of valuable items brought to the island and to ensure that anything of value is secure for the duration of the trip.

Violent incidents are not common and typically occur between those engaged in criminal activities, and tourists are rarely targets. Armed robberies and muggings have occurred on the island. If travelers are the victim of a robbery, they should avoid resisting as this can aggravate the perpetrator and lead to increased violence. Dutch authorities, in close coordination with their U.S. counterparts, actively work to prevent drug smuggling and related gang activity in the Dutch Caribbean. Travelers should have their passports on their person, as Dutch law mandates the carrying of identification at all times. Cooperate with police if stopped and questioned. The emergency services on Bonaire are generally considered responsive and helpful.

Travelers are advised to make use of hotel safes, if possible. Thieves have been known to target hotel rooms on the island while guests are away. Travelers are encouraged to bring a copy of their passport in the event that it is stolen or lost. Travelers should also avoid bringing valuables to the beach and dive sites to the extent possible, and ensure that passports, phones, etc. are securely stored while diving.

Credit card skimming has been reported across the greater Caribbean. Travelers should exchange money prior to entering Bonaire, inform their banks of their intended travel plans, and be alert for skimming. It is best practice to only withdraw money from an ATM that is located inside of a bank or a hotel. Using an ATM on the street makes the traveler vulnerable to an attack, and these are more likely to have a skimming device. Travelers should always manually check the credit-card slot on an ATM to see if there is a discreet skimming device on top of the credit-card slot.

INFRASTRUCTURE:

Road conditions in Bonaire are generally safe. Most roads are adequately maintained, but there are limited road signs and increased caution is required at intersections. The roads can sometimes be extremely treacherous when wet. Driving at night is usually safe for experienced drivers who are familiar with the island. Drivers must be mindful of pedestrians and animals, particularly wild donkeys.

If the UMaine group intends to rent a “truck”, as per the Pre-Trip Assessment, they should verify that all vehicle safety features including road-side repair kits, lights, locks, and seat-belts are in adequate working fashion.

Public transportation is generally considered safe. Taxi fares are negotiated in advance and the price is given in U.S. dollars. Minibuses are inexpensive and run throughout the day; each minibus has its route displayed on the windshield. Buses run on the hour and have limited routes.

POLITICAL STABILITY:

Along with Sint Eustasius and Saba, Bonaire is a special municipality of the Netherlands. It was formerly part of the Netherlands Antilles until the country was dissolved in 2010. Residents of Bonaire have the same rights as other Dutch citizens. Protests and civil unrest are not a safety concern on the island.

Located some 50 miles north of Venezuela, Bonaire is used as a transshipment point for drugs headed from South America to Europe and North America. The Netherlands, U.S., and other regional partners cooperate closely in anti-narcotics missions in the area. Police and military forces present in the area primarily seek to disrupt the operations of major drug trafficking organizations operating out of Colombia and Venezuela. Surveillance aircraft and patrol vessels monitor the surrounding waters and target vessels and aircraft they believe to be smuggling narcotics and other illicit goods. The authorities often have a highly visible presence and travelers should not be alarmed. In the unlikely event that University of Maine travelers are approached by law enforcement, they should respectfully comply with their orders and have photo identification ready to display.

TERRORISM:

The U.S. State Department considers Bonaire to be at a low-risk for terrorist activity. Travelers should remain alert to surroundings at all times. The very nature of terrorism is fluid and volatile. Acts of terror are random and indiscriminate, and cannot be predicted in advance. At best, there may be indicators and warnings of an attack that can afford some time to take a protective posture.

NATURAL DISASTERS:

Hurricanes typically pass far to the north of Bonaire, and the island has not been hit by a major hurricane recently. There are occasionally tropical storms and depression. The University of Maine travelers are encouraged to monitor all weather forecasts prior to departing on the trip and monitor projected weather on a daily basis, including through the Meteorological Department of Curacao and the National Hurricane Center.

HEALTH:

Bonaire's medical services are generally considered adequate but serious emergencies, or cases requiring specialist care, often require patients to be transported by air ambulance to Curacao or Aruba. The main hospital on the island is Hospital San Francisco (Fundashon Mariadal) in Kralendijk.

Zika and Chikungunya are present in Bonaire. Pregnant women are strongly advised to reconsider travel. Travelers should wear long sleeved clothes and at least a 30 percent concentration of deet at all times. Particular caution should be taken at night for mosquito bites.

Foodborne illnesses are also of concern. Travelers should only eat in reputable restaurants, and avoid uncooked meat or fish. In addition, travelers should only drink bottled water and avoid tap water or drinks with ice. Particular caution should be taken when eating reef fish, as ciguatera poisoning can result.

When swimming and diving, travelers should take caution to avoid jellyfish or coral. If stung by a jellyfish or scraped by coral, the traveler should seek medical attention immediately. Travelers should monitor ocean conditions and be wary of strong rip currents or undertows. Drownings are the leading cause of U.S. tourist deaths historically in Bonaire. Furthermore, there are several water-craft/sport businesses, including scuba diving and snorkeling, that operate on Bonaire; if not already vetted, administrators and the local partner organization should ensure that contracted companies have all essential permits and functional emergency supplies, such as lifejackets and fire-extinguishers.

FEMALE SAFETY:

Female travelers are at a higher risk of unwanted advances and sexual assault if travelling alone at night and specifically when inebriated. While these incidents are infrequent on Bonaire, they do occur. Maintain situational awareness, even at the hotel, and remove yourself from uncomfortable or questionable situations if possible. Drink spiking is rare, but is a tactic used to prey on victims across the Caribbean, in particular tourists at nightclubs. Travelers must never accept beverages from a stranger, and never leave their food or beverages unattended.

LGBTQ SAFETY:

There are no legal restrictions on same-sex relationships or the organization of LGBTQ events in the Dutch Caribbean. Bonaire is governed by the laws of the Netherlands and members of the LGBTQ community are protected against discrimination. The island is seen by members of the LGBTQ community as welcoming and friendly.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- As a practical counter-measure to mugging and pick pocketing, using a “throw away” wallet is recommended. A “throw away” wallet is a cheap wallet that you use as a decoy, inside place some petty cash and some expired gift cards to fill it out. The purpose is to have something to give up to the assailant if you are mugged; also having a broken cell phone to give up as well is an additional option. Travelers should place their vital wallet components such as money, credit cards, and identification in a passport holder that hangs discreetly down their neck, on the inside of their shirt.
- All travelers who are U.S. citizens are encouraged to enroll in the [U.S. State Department Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) prior to departing, this is the only guaranteed way for the embassy to verify that you are in-country, should a significant incident occur, such as a natural disaster.

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION:

Emergency (Police/Fire): 911 or +(599) 717 8000

Emergency (Medical): 912

Dutch Caribbean Coast Guard: 913

Hospital San Francisco

Address:

Telephone:

Public hospital

Kaya Soeur Bartola #2

+(599) 717-8900

DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS:

United States Consulate General Curacao



J.B. Gorsiraweg 1,
Willemstad, Curaçao

Phone: +(599) (9) 461-3066

Emergency: +(599) (9) 510-6870

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