

Aruba

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Aruba is a 33-kilometre (21 mile) island of the in the southern Caribbean, just 27km north of the Venezuelan mainland. It's geographical position differentiates it from much of the rest of the Caribbean - for example, it is not prone to hurricanes, and has a much drier, more arid landscape.

Aruba an independently-administered part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It has been under Dutch administration since 1636, though it has been occupied at various times by the British and Spanish.

The island's economy has been dominated over the years by four main industries: aloe, gold mining, phosphate, and petroleum. In more recent years, however, tourism has taken over, together with the associated duty free sales.

Aruba also boasts a well developed an offshore finance sector, which originated in World War Two as a haven for Dutch companies fleeing the German occupation of the Netherlands. Many financial links are to Europe in one direction and to South America in the other. Local taxes for residents, however, are high.

Most of the tourists are from either Venezuela or the United States, Aruba's largest trading partner. Before the "Status Aparte", (a separate completely autonomous country/state within the Kingdom of the Netherlands), oil processing was the dominant industry in Aruba despite expansion of the tourism sector. Today, the influence of the oil processing business is minimal. The size of the agriculture and manufacturing sectors also remains minimal.

Currency: The Aruban florin is pegged to the US dollar. 1.79 Florin equals 1 U.S. dollar.

Aruba has the third largest seawater desalinization plant in the world after Saudi Arabia and Curaçao.