West Coast North Dive Sites



The area of former kunukus along the
island's northwest coast, below the
park boundaries and stretching down
into Kralendijk, are what Bonaire dive
guides call the north dive sites, no
matter how they actually face. The
sites past the airport are called south,
no matter how they actually sit on the
compass.

These are some of the most popular and heavily dived sites in Bonaire. They are just a short drive from the northern hotel row along mostly undeveloped coastline (although that is rapidly changing), and they offer a good variety of terrain, from broad, sandy beaches to rocky cliffs where you leap into the sea. Underwater terrain varies from quick drop-offs to gently sloping coral-covered plains.

Fish and invertebrate variety here is good. Seahorses, frogfish, sea turtles, jawfish and lots of hard corals add to the usual suspects found along the Bonaire Reefs. This is a good area for photographers to grab a knowledgeable local guide to help out with spotting macro subjects and pointing out behavior.

West Coast North Dive Sites	GOOD SNORKELING	NOVICE	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
7 NUKOVE	٠	٠		
8 CAREL'S VISION	٠	٠		
9 KARPATA	٠		٠	
10 LA DANIA'S LEAP	٠		٠	
11 RAPPEL			٠	
12 BLOODLET			٠	
13 TOLO / OL' BLUE	٠	٠		
14 COUNTRY GARDEN	٠	٠		
15 BON BINI NA KAS	٠	٠		
16 1000 STEPS	٠		٠	
17 WEBER'S JOY / WITCHES HUT	•	•		
18 JEFF DAVIS MEMORIAL	•	•		
19 KALLIS REEF	•	•		
20 OIL SLICK LEAP	•	•		
21 BARCADERA 22 ANDREA II				
23 ANDREA I	•			
23 ANDREAT		•		

NUKOVE

Location: Northwest coast Depth: 24-140ft (7-37m) Access: Boat Expertise Rating: Novice



Some say the most challenging part of diving here is finding the site. Then you have to clamber down some pretty rough 'steps' to a small beach. However, many divers like this site because it is often free of other divers.

Enter on the left as you face the beach. It is easy to see the sandy area that leads out to rocks and corals. Start a rather long swim out to the buoy. Go down to the mooring blocks and you will see the coral is healthy and recovering from any storm damage.



This is a nice sloping wall as it runs steep and has lots of hard corals, including black coral trees at the deeper reaches. Large, old growth corals are found here and big sponges abound. Very attractive topography fed by a current that keeps things big and healthy. Look for many cleaning stations in the 30ft to 70ft range on this reef.

8 CAREL'S VISION

Location: Northwest Coast Depth: 20-130ft (4-40m) Access: Boat Expertise Rating: Novice

This latest dive site was announced by Elsmarie Beukenboom, director of STI-NAPA (the organization that oversees both the Bonaire Marine Park and Washington-Slagbaai Park) in June 2005, while Philippe Cousteau was visiting the island.

Beukenboom, an active, lifelong conservationist on Bonaire, announced the naming of the site as Carel's Vision, located on the north end between **Oil Slick Leap** and BOPEC. The site is named after Carel Steensma, a principal mover and shaker on the island in helping to initiate and fund the marine park in its early years by bringing Capt Don and Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands together.

This is a good reef but still recovering, so there is some broken coral around from the 1999 storm wave damage. The upper reef margin is rubbly, but there are a lot of small fish and new corals taking hold.

Starting in about 25ft and sloping very steeply down below 100ft to sand, the reef has some black coral, lots of star corals, plate corals and a few good size brain corals.

Add to this big sponge and the opportunity to see something like a manta come in from the blue, and you have an interesting spot. The deep sand is a good place to look for southern stingrays.

There is nice hard coral here, plus French and queen angelfish, cruising bar jacks and grunts around the sparse sea plumes and other soft corals up shallow.

This site has one of the newer drilled eyelets for the mooring buoys that do

The Windjammer

In between the park's southwest border and the sites that move south from **Karpata** is BOPEC, an international terminal where oil freighters dock to unload oil for the island's power and petrol resources. This area has recently been placed out of bounds due to international security regulations stemming from the international war on terror.

This announcement is somewhat of a disappointment to divers, especially deep diving techies, as the wreck of the *Windjammer* is sitting in the security area in deep water. It is a historic three-masted iron cargo ship. Originally called the *Mairi Bhan* (Scottish Gaelic for Bonnie Mary), built in 1874 in Scotland. She was carrying a cargo of asphalt, and wrecked off Bonaire in December 1912. Divers made the effort to dive her as she was in remarkably good shape and could be entered. Divers could swim inside the steel rib structure of the ship.

Recent reports say she has finally shown some signs of so many years under the sea and her bridge and upper deck structure has collapsed, making her somewhat difficult and unsafe to enter. Until the security regulations are changed, she will have to be left to the fish. less reef damage and are easier for park personnel to maintain. Eventually, all of the sites will have these kind of anchors.

9 KARPATA

Location: Northwest coast Depth: 23-120ft (29-32m) Access: Boat Expertise Rating: Intermediate

Karpata is a true favorite of many knowledgeable Bonaire divers and snorkelers for its rich coral and sponge growth. It has a walk down 20 steps (seems like 50 going up!) to the beach and then there is part of a concrete pier that goes to reef's edge. The conventional wisdom of getting into the water, depending on wave height, is to make your way to the edge of the cement and then surf out over the rocky reef on an appropriate wave. Getting back is done pretty much the same way. One tip is to wade next to the slab where there is a slight channel and surf out from here. Snorkelers and divers may want to wear a dive skin at the very least to prevent getting scratched up.



The park buoy here is moored with the old barrels in 23ft, which is where the reef already has some nice formations including stands of elkhorn coral. This is one of the few wall-like formations on Bonaire and it has steep rolling slopes and sand chutes with lots of coral cover. Turtle sightings and sleeping nurse sharks are common. The walls

Don't Touch the Coral



Wonder why you can't wear gloves and why touching the coral is such a big deal? The stony coral is the only animal in the world that can be injured or killed simply by being pressed against its own skeleton. Unlike the rounded bones of other animals, the skeleton of stony coral is razor sharp. The slightest contact slices living coral against its own skeleton.

The coral animals that create a coral head are only a few cell layers thick. To create a model of coral, think of a tissue draped over a razor blade, misted with water. Just as any contact would tear the tissue against the razor blade, so contact with stony corals slices the coral tissue against its own razor-sharp skeleton.

So Bonaire National Marine Park (BNMP) figures we should stay off the coral so our kids and grandchildren will be able to enjoy living reefs too! also feature big sponges including tube and nice elephant ear sponges. There is black coral deep and flowing sea fans. Look for juvenile fish and cleaning action around the three anchors that are found on the reef.

A large variety of fish are seen here including the beautiful scrawled filefish, queen and rock beauty angels, endless processions of Creole wrasse getting cleaned and moving along the reef and, if you're lucky, schooling horse-eye jacks. Keep an eye out in the blue for eagle rays and other blue water critters. Up in the shallows, reef squid may be present. This site is really one of the Caribbean's finest. There is even a deep cave here past 120ft. Some dive shops come up here for a boat dive and make two dives here at the request of their quests. There are underwater tiles here that are part of a marine park experiment. Do not disturb this site or touch any part of it. The reef also has an old anchor embedded in the coral from days gone by.

Aside from the excellent diving, there are two constants about this site. People complain about the entry and exit. People also complain about theft from their vehicles. If shore diving, don't leave any valuables in your car or truck if you want to be as happy after the dive as you were during the dive.



10 LA DANIA'S LEAP

Location: Northwest coast Depth: 15-115ft (5-35m) Access: Shore & boat Expertise Rating: Intermediate & advanced, tech



None other than the colorful Capt Don named La Dania's Leap. It seems one of his guests was a comely but rather aquaphobic lady named La Dania. She sought out Don's help to get her through her open water work with a demanding instructor. Don introduced her to his common sense, but unorthodox, methods.

'The sea,' he told her,' is like part of us. As long as we can breathe and control our temperature, we can become part of this wonderful ocean.'

Her final dive of the week brought her to this cliff. Even though the instructor himself balked at the cliff entry, La Dania didn't hesitate.

'There was no delay,' says Don. 'Her mask came down. She made two steps to the ledge, cocked her knees, did a little spring, and forward rolled off that ledge into the incoming wave. That surprised me a little bit!'

Capt Don was so impressed he named that dive site for this group in November 1966. It became the famous 'La Dania's Leap' and is one of the most sought after reefs in Bonaire today.

Divers jump in here and drift to **Karpata** as the current normally runs that way.

Jump in the deeper water to the north of the park buoy and be prepared for a more difficult exit than entry. This is much easier as a boat dive, by the way, but not as much of a rush.

This also has the wall characteristics of **Karpata** and lots of marine life. There is a true drop-off here and wall. Way



down at about 135ft a deep reef can be used for tech training. Deep reef indentations that could loosely be called caves hold tarpon, big groupers and sleeping sharks in the 160ft region. But most people enjoy this site in the 60ft and above range for a fascinating drift ending at **Karpata**.



Location: Northwest coast Depth: 30-110ft (9-34m) Access: Boat Expertise Rating: Intermediate

This site is a boat dive, as the name implies, and the cliff is not accessible unless you rappel. That's exactly what someone did and is how the site got its name. Bruce Bowker, one of the diving pioneers in Bonaire, and Stan Gdowksi, a mountaineer and diver who hailed from New Jersey, got together with dive and rappel equipment and trained to do the dive. According to Bowker's website, the two did this rappel in 1954 and the name has stuck ever since. He states it is easier getting into the water with full scuba gear than it is to rappel back up in full gear. And you thought **1000 Steps** was a tough dive!

The BNMP buoy here is in 36ft of water and most of the diving here is done in the 35ft to 70ft range.

Diving in the shallows can be tricky with an undercut from the 60ft high cliff appearing near sea level and continuing down 30ft more. It is an awesome sight, as waves crash into a white foam overhead. Then a sandy reef flat full of sea fans and flowing corals takes over. Look for flamingo tongue shells here.

Hard corals are abundant and schooling fish can be found in the protected areas. Coming up to the shallows, take care not to get too close to the cliff wall if there is strong surge. That is why at least intermediate training is good here. Or just make sure to follow your guide.

Most of the time it is a good place for exploration. Tubastrea corals grow along the rocks. This is a very popular dive site and guests request this boat dive virtually every week, so keep an eye on the boat schedule and dive from the mooring. It beats rappelling.

2 BLOODLET

Location: Northwest coast Depth: 35-120ft (10-35m) Access: Boat Expertise Rating: Intermediate

This is another boat dive with a deep mooring block and some moderate currents most of the time. This is good as the currents feed the abundant sponge growth along this slope. Good fish life is found here. Starting here and running down to **1000 Steps**, it is common to see the beautiful blue tangs in large schools eating algae and moving along the reef.

Different hard coral formations, including star coral, mingle with sponge formations. Yellow tubes in large clusters are found here. Look also for sleeping turtles and check the small cleaning stations for action.

As the mooring barrels are rather deep, move up to the shallows and look for nudibranchs and other invertebrates that have made their homes in the corals. Watch out for surge as well.

TOLO / OL' BLUE

Location: Northwest coast, past the radio towers Depth: 10-130ft (3-35m) Access: Boat Expertise Rating: Novice



If you come here you are already on the one-way road and must return home by driving north via the intersection down the road at **Karpata**. There is plenty of parking and a small lip raises the beach and sandy rubble. Just step down into the sandy area and make your way out. The buoy from the marine park is in shallow water at 16ft.

It is pretty evident why this is called Ol' Blue. This little bay has a sandy bottom leading to a gradual drop-off and the short swim out takes you past some staghorn coral and soft corals. From the boat, just head down to the reef.

The site has many fish, coral and sponges, including the ever-popular midnight parrotfish and the blue parrotfish. Plate corals intermingle with big boulders of star coral and there are





many cleaning stations and eel holes. This is also a spot where lucky divers have spotted eagle rays.

The shallows here are good, with plenty of juvenile fish. Look for hermit crabs and other macro critters. Since the fish down deeper are a good size, the smaller juveniles are a nice contrast. One can off-gas here in the shallows for a long time. Snorkelers love this spot and often bring a picnic lunch and spend the day.

14 COUNTRY GARDEN

Location: Northwest coast Depth: 15-120ft (4.5-35m) Access: Boat Expertise Rating: Novice



This is a superb site, only reachable by boat, with some unique shallow water offerings and some great sponge life. The mooring here is in fairly shallow water with the buoy at 19ft. The reef top is pretty with small star and brain corals and some small sea rods.

The reef falls off rather steeply and the current feeds a great variety of sponges. The reef bottom, where it goes into white sand, is rather deep at about 120ft or more. The sponge life here includes some large and very beautiful yellow and purple tube sponges, branching vase sponges, big stands of rope sponges and a few elephant ear sponges.

Layers of plate coral have encrusting sponges underneath in reds and purples. There are plenty of holes for spotted morays and even big green morays.

The shallow part of the reef near the 10ft to 20ft area may be the best part of the dive. Chunks of the cliff line have fallen in the water here and are adorned in sea rods and other soft corals. New growths of start corals are also found here. Shoals of goatfish and grunts hover, often schooling together, and a diver can swim past and through the many schools found around the boulders.

Close to the mooring there is also a beautiful large head of star coral that attracts chromis and other small fish. There are also purple sea fans present, and be on the lookout for marauding schools of blue tang that come through looking for algae patches to devour. They make a colorful photo subject if you anticipate their movements and get close for a photo.

5 BON BINI NA KAS

Location: Northwest coast Depth: 10-100ft (3-32m) Access: Boat Expertise Rating: Novice

Another boat dive along this rocky shoreline, the site name is actually a Papiamento (local language) greeting for 'welcome home.' If you dive this site a lot, you may feel like you are returning home. Just around the corner from



the famous **1000 Steps**, this site is good for those who haven't done much boat diving.

The mooring is in shallow water at 18ft, and the reef slopes down, with the best diving in the intermediate range between 25ft to 60ft. This site also has some nice sponge life due to the very moderate currents that usually run here.

Look for turtles swimming by and for some larger parrotfish to cruise the reef. The endless schools of wrasse stop for cleaning action as they migrate down the reef.

16 1000 STEPS

Location: Northwest coast Depth: 10-120ft (3-35m) Access: Boat Expertise Rating: Intermediate



This is another of Bonaire's signature sites. Even if you don't dive or snorkel, go here to see the vista from the top of the steps. You can see the amazing blue water fade into the deep and look down the coastline to the mountains in the national park. If driving, park right by the entrance to the Radio Netherlands radio towers. If diving by boat, the buoy is in 21ft of water at the edge of the steep drop-off.

There are small shoals of fish in the shallows as you head out and then the reef drops off quickly. The fish life is also good along the reef with schools of male stoplight parrotfish coming here. Look for gray angels, tangs, doctorfish, schoolmasters and even ocean surgeonfish. There are lots of algae eaters here to observe.

The site is known for its clear water. Look for the black durgons in the water column. Many types of filefish, honeycomb cowfish, smooth trunkfish,

spotted rums and large white-spotted filefish can all be seen. Look also for sea turtles that seem to like the shallower water more so than the deep.

Exit back out through the sandy part of the inner reef and across the somewhat rubbly beach to the steps. Going down to the beach, there seems to be little debate about the number of steps. But the count on these steps on the way up is a different matter. The official number seems to be 68, although there are those that claim there are as many as 72 steps and as few as 64. But, if you have to haul your full dive gear back up after a long dive, it seems like 1000 by the time you're halfway up the flight.

This dive is a must for snorkelers and divers as well as beach bums wanting to enjoy the day. From this point on, the road is one way, so if you drive north, there is no turning back until **Karpata**. You can drive south from here on the narrow road back to **Oil Slick**, where the road gets wider and runs past the STINAPA Headquarters. There is also a very nice shoreline walk that runs from here to **Oil Slick**.

17 WEBER'S JOY / WITCHES HUT

Location: Northwest coast Depth: 16-130ft (4-40m) Access: Boat & shore Expertise Rating: Novice

This is a good site for photographers as it is an easy and non-sandy entry down a stone path that leads right to shore's edge. The beach is actually coral rubble, so enter slow and easy if beach diving. If entering from a boat, the shallow buoy is in 16ft. The upper reef has elkhorn and staghorn coral stands, so make sure you don't jump in on them. There are lots of chromis at reef top around the staghorn. The reef drops quickly at 25ft and levels out in the sand at 125ft to 130ft. The nicest coral is in the 45ft to 80ft range just over the break of the slope, where there are large formations of mountainous star coral and great star coral. It is a good place to look for the purple-tipped sea anemones with their accompanying purple translucent cleaner shrimp and the delicate corkscrew anemones, also with shrimp. Octopus holes can be seen on the reef floor. Look for the broken shells and rubble by their doors.

This is a nice dive and also a very good spot for snorkeling. Look for colorful angels and parrotfish in the shallower waters. You may also encounter a few barracuda here.

18 JEFF DAVIS MEMORIAL

Location: Northwest coast Depth: 10-120ft (3-35m) Access: Beach Expertise Rating: Novice

This site from shore is a short walk down the coastal hiking path and then onto a rather small, rough beach. There's a ledge here, so to avoid a hernia, leave your gear on the ledge and hop down, then gear up. There's a sandy patch suitable for entry a little to the right, and the swim out is minimal. The mooring is shallow, in 15ft of water. This site also has some staghorns in the shallows, so watch where the boat swings so you don't jump in on them.

This place also has a nice collection of sea anemones with the colorful purple Peterson shrimp. The reef drops off quickly and has formations of corals and some sandy chutes that go down to the 120ft to 130ft range. The hard corals are interesting as they harbor squirrelfish, juvenile angels and barber pole shrimp in cleaning stations.



The corals are mostly hard corals with a few fans and sea rods here and there. There are also nice sea plumes, porous sea rods and black sea rods. The best diving here is from 45ft to 75ft. The shallows have lots of chromis in the staghorns.

19 KALLIS REEF

Location: Northwest coast Depth: 15-100ft (3-32m) Access: Boat Expertise Rating: Novice

This is a newly opened site in the park that can be dived by shore or by boat. The buoy sits in 20ft of water. This site is named in honor of one of the marine park's champions, Kalli DeMeyer, a former park manager. She is still involved in many inter-island reef conservation projects.

There are beautiful soft coral formations on the rocky plateau below the small cliff shoreline. It is rarely dived and seems untouched.

The shallows look a lot like a pleasant combination of **Karpata** and the entry at **Oil Slick**. The swim out isn't far and the reef drops quickly around the 30ft mark.

The terrain is similar here to **Jeff Davis** with lots of hard corals and sand chutes. The sandy bottom appears at 130ft with more hard coral heads interspersed in the bottom terrain. There is lobed star coral, plate and sheet coral and lettuce coral around this reef along with rope sponges and some branching tube sponges. Well worth doing. This new park dive is destined to become a popular one.



Seahorses

The seahorses found around Bonaire aren't always easy to see. They don't move much and take on the color of encrusting and small reef sponges, and are easily overlooked by the casual diver. Bring a small light and look for yellow, red, black or orange blotches on the reef, and then take a closer look. It never hurts to take a local guide if you want to find a seahorse. The guides usually know where they are congregating. This local knowledge saves you a lot of hunting time.

The seahorses are seen along the northern reef from **Small Wall** to **1000 Steps**, but can be found anywhere in these waters. They like the flowing stalks of the gorgonians. Seahorses are sensitive creatures and should not be harassed as they will move on and other divers won't be able to see them the next day. Please just look and don't touch. If you see a fat one, it may be a male carrying babies.

20 OIL SLICK LEAP

Location: Northwest coast next to park headquarters Depth: 20-80ft (5-24m) Access: Shore & boat Expertise Rating: Novice



Unlike **La Dania's Leap**, this is only about a 4ft jump into the water, but seems higher. This site is right next to STINAPA Park headquarters and there is plenty of parking. The wooden pier and new ladder are courtesy of a sponsor, the Caribbean Club Bonaire. People come here to sunbake, snorkel and dive. The buoy is offshore in 28ft of water. The water at the entry is around 15ft deep. The ladder is the only way out so remember this and don't drift too far away from your exit point. You can also go in by ladder, but that's no fun ... jump!

Snorkelers like this area as the shoreline wall has a series of small caves along the shallows. Since the area borders the stone shoreline, there is no sand beach, so visibility is always guite good.

The shallows have big gorgonians with a good collection of flamingo tongue cowries in the base of the branches. The reef starts sloping down at 20ft. Sea turtles like the hard coral



cover here and there is a nice fish population. Look for small barracudas staring back at you. Also, remember to look in the gorgonians for seahorses.

This is a very popular site and divers and snorkelers alike repeat trips here and enjoy it for night diving as well. According to local historians, there was never an oil spill or oil slick here. It was once proposed as the site for the BOPEC pier (now up next to Washington-Slagbaai Park) and the resulting name stuck, even though the project never happened.

21 BARCADERA

Location: Northwest coast Depth: 15-125ft (4-36m) Access: Shore & boat Expertise Rating: Novice

This dive is a boat or shore dive and since it is closer to town and the hotels, you are getting into the area that dive shops visit more frequently. This is also a leap or ladder entry just north of the hot flamingo-pink two-story house. The mooring sits in 20ft of water and there's lots going on at this reef.

The shallows have some nice sea plumes and sea rods and a few stands of staghorn coral. The gentle current here means the gorgonians are feeding with their polyps flowing in the surge: good for video. Look also for lots of nice brain coral formations.

Cleaning stations abound. Groups of Creole wrasse come in to get cleaned near stands of finger coral. Barber pole shrimp sit in vase sponges and wait for customers like graysbys and red hinds to come in to clean. Fairy basslets hang near large elephant ear sponges. This is a nice, active reef with good hard corals. Look at the patterns on some of the brain corals here – they are wild!

22 ANDREA II

Location: Housing area, northwest coast Depth: 15-115ft (4-36m) Access: Shore & boat Expertise Rating: Novice



There is some housing construction going on here, so check with your dive shop about any access changes to this site. By boat, it is a simple matter. The mooring sits in 15ft of water and there is good snorkeling and a gradual plain out to the drop, which is rather deep. Yellowtail snappers and sergeant





majors will probably greet you on your way down, as some fish feeding takes place here.

The soft corals are abundant, with tiny filefish hiding in the cover of the large sea plumes and sea rods. Flamingo tongues are also bountiful. Trumpetfish hide in the cover of the rods and the finger sponges, and seahorses have been seen here frequently. Spotted morays like the cracks and crevices.

Divers will find the drop-off starts deeper than most sites (at about 60ft) and goes down into competitive hard corals. Look for cleaning stations in the plate corals. Fish life is very good, including French angelfish, lizardfish, barracuda and lots of parrotfish. Even mantas have been seen here, so watch the blue. This is a popular beach for snorkelers and divers alike of all experience levels. The ship *Aquaspace* also moors here on the middle buoy for snorkelers to enjoy the fish and marine life.

ANDREA I

23

Location: Housing area, northwest coast Depth: 13-110ft (4-35m) Access: Shore & boat Expertise Rating: Novice

This site is similar to the *Andrea II* site, with a sandy bottom and interspersed corals in the shallows. Occasionally

a turtle will swim through here, and also look for squid in the shallows. This whole reef area is just a bit sandier than its nearby cousin. This slope also goes down gradually and the sandy sea floor at 110ft has a group of garden eels. Watch for stingrays in the sand in the deep, and also look closely on this reef for small fluorescent flower corals.

This site is a favorite of fish watchers who report seeing doctorfish, blue tang schools, schoolmaster shoals, trumpetfish, triggerfish, midnight and stoplight parrotfish among many others. In the cracks and crevices a lobster or two has been seen at this site, as have seahorses.

Break-ins have been reported to vehicles from here so do not leave valuables in your dive ride.



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