

Understanding the Port

Curaçao hands you a European capital, a desert island, and some of the Caribbean's prettiest beaches in a single stop. Ships dock steps from Willemstad's famous waterfront, so even a no-plan day delivers. With a plan, it gets even better.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Port Area

Most ships dock at the Mega Pier, a short walk from Otrobanda and the Queen Emma pontoon bridge into Punda. Some berth inside the harbor, even closer.

Cash & Currency

The Caribbean guilder replaced the old Antillean guilder in 2025; old notes are no longer valid. USD accepted virtually everywhere; expect change in guilders.

Getting Around

Taxis wait at the pier, unmetered with set rate sheets; confirm the fare first. Mambo Beach is about 10–15 min. The postcard west-end coves run 45 min or more.

GOOD

Willemstad on Foot

Best for: Short stops, easy days, minimal logistics

- ✓ Queen Emma Bridge and the Handelskade colors
- ✓ Punda shopping and Otrobanda street art
- ✓ Back at the ship whenever you want

Low effort, high reward.

BETTER

Beach Day (Pick Your Distance)

Best for: Couples, families, beach lovers

- ✓ Mambo Beach: closest, with chairs, food, shops
- ✓ Cas Abao or Porto Mari: calm mid-island coves
- ✓ Clear water and easy snorkeling at all three

Arrange your return taxi before you settle in.

BEST

The Postcard West End

Best for: First timers, snorkelers, photographers

- ✓ Grote Knip: the clifftop view you have seen online
- ✓ Wild turtles at Playa Piskado (look, never touch)
- ✓ Island tour stops: caves, coves, and liqueur

Timing management required. Plan around all aboard.

Top Experiences to Consider

GOOD

The Floating Bridge & Old Town

Cross the swinging pontoon bridge, photograph the Handelskade, and wander both sides of the harbor. When the bridge opens for ships, a free ferry carries you across instead.

BETTER

Beach Day

Mambo Beach is the easy, full-service pick close to the ship. Cas Abao and Playa Porto Mari trade a longer ride for calmer coves and better snorkeling. All are worth it.

BEST

West End or Island Tour

Ride west for Grote Knip's clifftop view and the wild sea turtles at Playa Piskado, or build a tour around Hato Caves and a genuine Curaçao liqueur tasting at the Chobolobo estate (weekdays only).

Where Staff & Travelers Recommend

The Handelskade

The most photographed waterfront in the Caribbean, two minutes from the bridge. Do not leave without seeing it from the Punda side.

Cas Abao / Playa Porto Mari

The consensus beach picks: calm, clear, well-run coves with food and chairs, without committing to the far west end.



The Handelskade, Willemstad, Curaçao



Docked at Willemstad, steps from the Rif Fort

Key Considerations

Distances are the main planning question here. Willemstad is at the gangway, Mambo Beach is minutes away, but the famous west-end coves take the better part of an hour each way. Pick your radius and enjoy it, rather than chasing the whole island.

When the Queen Emma Bridge swings open for harbor traffic, it is a show, not a problem: a free ferry shuttles you across, and the same ferry covers the bridge's occasional maintenance closures. Prices may appear in guilders; US dollars work everywhere, and change comes back in local currency.



The Queen Emma Bridge and Handelskade, Willemstad



Grote Knip (Kenepa Grandi), Curaçao



Green sea turtle, Playa Piskado, Curaçao

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Port Orientation

FROM THE PORT (WILLEMSTAD)

● Rif Fort & Otrobanda	Walkable from the Mega Pier
● Queen Emma Bridge & Punda	~ 10–15 min walk
~ 10–15 min by taxi	
● Mambo / Seaquarium Beach	Closest full-service beach
~ 15–20 min by taxi	
● Hato Caves & Chobolobo	Liqueur tours weekdays only
~ 30–45 min by taxi	
● Cas Abao / Playa Porto Mari	Mid-island coves
~ 45–60 min by taxi or tour	
● Grote Knip (Kenepa)	The postcard west end

DON'T FORGET

Confirm your all aboard time before you leave the ship.
Set a phone alarm. The ship will not wait for you.

Key Takeaway

Curaçao is two great days squeezed into one: a walkable UNESCO capital and a coastline of coves. You only have time to do one well.

Stay close and soak in Willemstad, or commit to the beaches. Either way, this port over-delivers.

ETA will help you choose the right experience based on your travel style.

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Did You Know?

A UNESCO Capital. Willemstad's historic center and harbor have been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1997.

Blame the Governor. Legend has it that in 1817 Governor Kikkert banned white buildings, blaming the glare for his headaches — and, so the story goes, he quietly owned shares in the paint business.

The Swinging Old Lady. The Queen Emma Bridge has floated on pontoons since 1888 and swings open sideways to let ships into the harbor.

The Real Blue Curaçao. Genuine Curaçao liqueur is made from the laraha, a bitter orange unique to the island, born of Spanish orange trees that turned bitter in the desert climate.

Oldest Synagogue in the Americas. Punda's Mikve Israel-Emanuel Synagogue (1732) is the oldest in continuous use in the Americas, famous for its sand-covered floors.