

WALKING TOUR OF ORANJESTAD, ARUBA

Downtown Aruba has everything. Chic boutiques, architectural gems, exciting shopping malls, quaint restaurants, hip nightclubs, and an ambience unmatched anywhere else on the island. Add some history to your next outing by heading downtown and following our tour.

Exit the cruise terminal, turn right and walk approximately one half mile to **Wilhelmina Park** and start from there. On the way, we usually stop at the **Paddock** for a libation; a little further on at the end of the marina there is a street on the right with many outdoor restaurants, coffee shops and bars for more refreshment.

Queen Wilhelmina was the longest-reigning Dutch monarch, ruling the Netherlands from 1898 to 1948. **Wilhelmina Park**, with its marble statue of Queen Wilhelmina amidst tropical gardens, was laid out in her honor in 1955. There is also a lovely statue of Anne Frank here, the base of which is inscribed with a very moving quote from her book. Recent improvements in the park are part of a much larger project to build the longest linear park in the Caribbean, which will stretch from the airport to Arashi Beach. Just outside this waterfront park and to the left of Oranjestraat, are Aruba's parliament buildings, built after the island gained Status Aparte (semi-independence) in 1986. Looking west you'll see **Renaissance Marketplace** and the harbor beyond. This one-story complex has more than 40 shops and restaurants selling beachwear, jewelry, and gifts, and serving everything from sushi to lattes.

Walk north up Oranjestraat (heading inland) Aruba's first lighthouse, called **Willem III Tower**, was built in 1868. Time stands still not only on its clock, but also in the **Historical Museum** behind, where old photographs of the island are on display. The museum is housed in **Fort Zoutman**, construction of which began in 1796 to defend Paarden Bay. With fortress walls only 10 feet high, it seems improbable that it could withstand attack, but it did, against the English in 1799. Soon after, houses were built in its line of fire as Oranjestad began to grow. Nowadays, the **Bon Bini Festival**, with dancing, arts and crafts stands, and local food, is held here every Tuesday evening.

Continue up Oranjestraat to Wilhelminastraat The red building to the left is the **Hotel Colombia**, considered the first hotel on Aruba. Mr. Nadi Henriquez, who later set up the first open-air cinema, built it in 1918. Connected to it is the striking **Eloy Arends Manor** on Wilhelminastraat, Oranjestad's most authentic street. One of Aruba's most regal homes, it

is now the **Town Hall** and is often used for weddings. Eloy Arends was an Aruban physician and he built the home for his fiancée, Maria Laclé. During their engagement from 1922 to 1925 (it takes some time to build a mansion!), Ms. Laclé was obliged to avoid the neighborhood. The doctor's good sisters furnished the house during their honeymoon. No accounts were left of how the bride felt about her in-laws' choice of décor!

Explore further east on Wilhelminastraat Several buildings along Wilhelminastraat are, at their core, traditional *cunucu*, or country houses. These characteristic Aruban houses are low with a sloping roof rising to a saddle roof in the center. They were usually built facing the wind for natural air conditioning and plastered in ground coral. The building at number 27 is the oldest, dating to 1877. Most *cunucu* front patios have become shops and eateries, but the farther east you walk, the more authentic the houses.

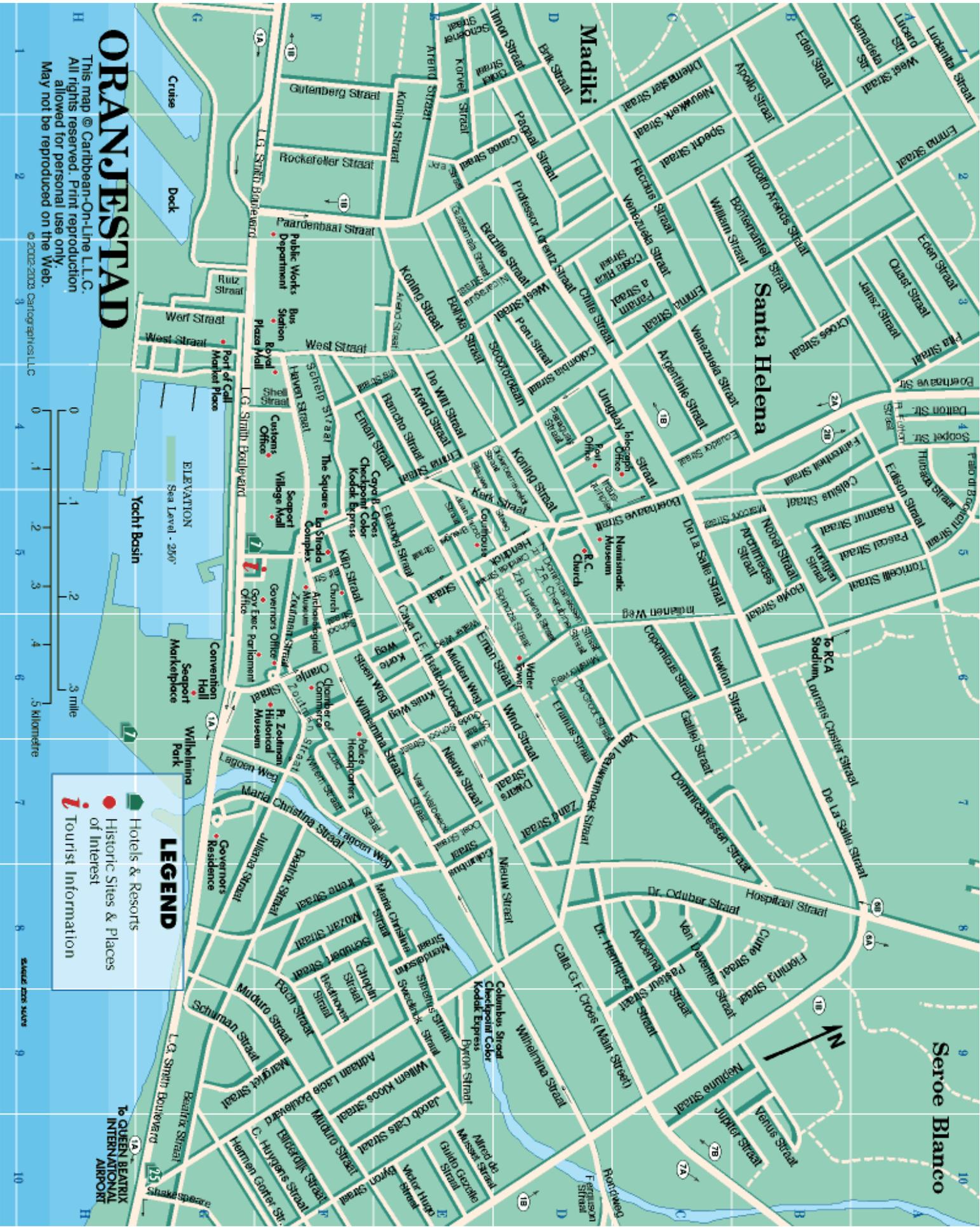
Return and head west on Wilhelminastraat The oldest surviving church on Aruba is the **Protestant Church** built in 1846, between Schoolstraat and Rifstraat. The building stones of the church come from the house that previously occupied the lot. Called the "Church on the Bay" because of its visibility from Paarden Bay, it displays beautiful woodwork inside and is used for exhibitions and concerts.

Continue west to Daniel Leo Plein Daniel Leo Plein is Oranjestad's most picturesque square with its colonial-style buildings. The decorative Dutch gables were inspired by those on Amsterdam's canals, but are splashed with pastel Caribbean colors. Many of these now contain tony boutiques and duty-free shops.

Walk to the north end of the square Caya G.F. Betico Croes or Mainstreet runs from the square to the east. Still more shops line this lively street, selling everything from cameras to clothing and jewelry. Heading in the other direction is Schelpstraat. The recently restored **Ecury Complex**, a historic trading house at number 42, is now home to the **National Archaeological Museum of Aruba**. The collection of buildings includes two *cunucu* houses from 1867 and 1870. Inside the museum, a 4,000-year-old skull, shell jewelry, and ceramic figurines guide you through Aruba's indigenous heritage. Schelpstraat has some impressive, restored *cunucu* houses. The grand **Henriquez House** (number 36-38), with its extra story, dormers, and terracotta roof tiles imported from Holland, is a more typically urban version of the *cunucu*.

Walk down towards Havenstraat and follow it back towards the center of town Nearby Havenstraat also boasts its share of historic homes, as well as shopping and fine

dining. Notably at number 23 is the House of Matilda, once Chez Mathilde restaurant. Dating from the 1850s, it is the only privately owned house that has remained in the same family since the 19th century. If shopping is what you're after, take some time to explore **Royal Plaza Mall** and **Renaissance Mall** both of which overlook the yacht basin and cruise ship terminal.



ORANJESTAD

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