

# Curacao—a Dutch treat that's flavored with the spices of life

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

**CURACAO, NETHERLANDS ANTILLES**—New charter flights and reduced fare programs from the mid-western United States will open this tiny Caribbean island to travelers from Detroit starting Nov. 15.

Elliot Tours in Southfield will fly out of Metropolitan Airport Wednesday mornings through April 25, with seven-day package tours that include air fare and hotel accommodations for about \$400.

A new fare filed by Delta and ALM Airlines will reduce regular air costs by 25 per cent from Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati and Indianapolis. This fare requires a stay of three to

21 days and must be purchased with a ground package. Fares range from \$220 to \$350 depending on season and day of the week. They can be purchased from any travel agent.

The destination for all this is Willemstad, the capital city of Netherlands Antilles, which includes the islands of Aruba, Curacao, and Bonaire, 35 miles from the Venezuelan coast.

Curacao is an important part of the human history of both North and South America, and a good example of what human endurance can accomplish on a barren place of rock with one of the finest natural harbors in the world.

Ameglio Vespucci, the Italian navigator who gave his name to America, named it The Island of The Giants

when he landed in 1499 and met the resident Indians.

During 135 years of Spanish rule, the Indians were shipped off to the copper mines of Santa Domingo and eventually shipped back with sacks of orange seeds and a few cattle to scratch a colony in the barren earth.

Curacao didn't find its true place in history until the Dutch took over and turned it into an international trading post in the 17th century. That is the heritage, mixed with Spanish and African motifs, that flavors the island today.

WHEN ENGLAND, France and Spain were fighting over their respective islands in the Caribbean, Curacao became an international shopping center for goods from all nations. Sometimes warring nations bought goods from their enemies through this Caribbean clearing house.

It was also a major clearing center for slaves being processed for shipping to Brazil and North America. The descendants of these slaves, and of the multinational early population, form today's Curacaoan population.

This history gives Curacao a character that is exceptional among Caribbean islands. Downtown Willemstad owns a Dutch skyline of yellow, pink and green stucco buildings between the deep blue sea and the bright blue Caribbean sky.

The high narrow buildings, which look like they might float in a canal in Amsterdam, have peaked and gingerbread roof lines under red Spanish tiles.

Each window, door and eave is outlined neatly in white.

A tanker, a tugboat and a cruise ship cleave the canal past this ancient European waterfront district, and pass under a high bridge to the harbor.

Here, oil tankers and freighters full of shopping goods share space with the biggest drydock in the northern hemisphere.

Curacao is a prosperous, contemporary town. Local people joke about the tourists who expect to find them in peasant clothes and grass skirts. Instead, there is an abundance of blue jean and polyester, as well as first-

class restaurants and rock bands that will blow your ears out with the best of them.

MORE LONG natural beaches can be found on the neighboring islands of Aruba, which is essentially a man-made tourist island, and of Bonaire, which is still a natural hideaway.

Here the sand beach curves in small private coves along the otherwise rocky shore. Contemporary hotels like the Curacao Hilton and the Arthur Frommer Hotel are built on such coves. Both are on Piscadera Bay, where the wall of an old fort and the remains of gun emplacements mark the shore above swimming and boating areas.

The Curacao Plaza Hotel is the only high-rise which climbs the sky above the old Dutch waterfront of the city. There are more than 1,000 rooms available in various parts of the 37-mile-long island. The Hilton, Plaza, Holiday Inn and Princess Isles hotels have casinos.

First-class restaurants are available in the hotels, as well as independent chefs, but travelers will be disappointed if they expect either meals or shopping to be extraordinarily cheap.

A good meal will cost about \$10 at rooftop dining rooms in the Hilton or the Plaza, or at lunch overlooking the beach at Playa Forti.

The menu at La Bistrotelle sports \$25 dishes but it might include caviar or smoked salmon, soup, a plate of rare beef with vegetables and either cherries jubilee or crepes suzette, and a decent wine.

Local specialties include shrimp, lobster, conch, and a variety of fish from the adjacent sea. Local diners will probably be found at midday in a place called the Golden Star, an unpretentious bar-restaurant with a chalkboard menu and a good variety of Antillean foods, from goat or conch stew to a cornmeal dish called Funchi.

DAYTIME TOURIST activities on the islands are centered either at the beach, with its swimming, boating and diving, or in the downtown shopping area of Willemstad.

This is not a place to buy trinkets.



Landhouse Groot St. Michiel allows for the opportunity to amble about free-spiritedly.

because almost everything on the island is imported. It is, however, an excellent place to buy luxury goods such as fine china, leather or crystal at reduced prices.

A walk around the town will certainly take you to the floating market and to the yellow-and-white federal government buildings of the Netherlands Antilles Government.

Government buildings, and a centuries-old Protestant Church surround the compound of Fort Amsterdam near the entrance to the harbor.

At the other end of the shopping area, three blocks away along the

canal, the floating market does business daily along a second canal.

Boats from Venezuela bring fruits, vegetables, flowers and fish regularly. Very little is grown on the island.

Two other downtown tourist attractions are Temple Emanuel, a former synagogue which now seats 235 people in regular showings of a Curacaoan film, and Mikve Israel Synagogue, built in 1732. Mikve Israel is the oldest synagogue in continuous use in the Americas. It was founded in 1654 by Jewish refugees fleeing the Spanish Inquisition in Brazil.



(Left) The heavily Dutch-influenced downtown of Willemstad and (above) a scene from the city's floating market. (Photos by Micky Jones)

## TRAVEL LOG of Iris Jones



### Constant enlightenment

EN ROUTE TO CURACAO—Travel keeps giving me new insights into the world. Today I discovered an unexpected aspect of the discovery and settlement of the Americas.

Like every student, I once learned that "in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." Later I learned that Chris never set foot in North America, although he claimed about the West Indies and coastal Venezuela.

During my first visit to Seville, Spain, I saw tapestries showing two facets of 15th century Spanish history: The Columbus voyages to America, and the overthrow and eviction of Moors who had ruled Spain for centuries.

I also saw streets where Jews traditionally lived before being thrown out of Spain during the Inquisition.

These three bits of information came together for me today on American Airlines flight 679 from New York to Curacao, when I read that Spanish Jews played a significant role in the early colonization of these Caribbean islands.

What's the connection?

The Jews, who had been persecuted in Spain for centuries, were glad to cooperate with the religiously tolerant Arab conquerors of Spain. When the Arabs lost Spain, the Catholic kings tried to force both Jews and Arabs to convert to Christianity, but didn't really trust them when they did. They called them new Christians.

In 1492, the year of Columbus' first voyage, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella signed an edict ordering the expulsion of all Jews who had not embraced Christianity.

Some Jews and New Christians sailed with Columbus. Thousands fled to Holland and were later resettled in Curacao and other islands of the Netherlands Antilles. Thousands more went to Brazil, and were later driven out by the invading Portuguese; they too fled to Curacao.

As a result, a major tourist attraction in Curacao's capital city of Willemstad is the Mikve Israel Synagogue, which is described as the oldest synagogue in continuous use in North America.

It was built in 1732 by a congregation that first gathered in 1654. A later temple, Temple Emanuel, is a prominent public building on the main square; it is now used for special film showings and other activities for tourists.

An interesting sidelight to all this is the number of black Curacaoans who now have Jewish names. Emancipated slaves took surnames from many sources, especially from their former owners. Dutch owners would only allow their surnames to be used if the names were altered significantly. Jewish owners gave their surnames freely to their former slaves.

All this is of interest to Jewish as well as non-Jewish travelers, because it gives a new view of the early colonization of America that is seldom mentioned during this Thanksgiving month.

It is a wonderful example of how travel broadens our horizons.

## Council seeks fair listings

The Michigan Council for the Arts (MCA) is seeking information on state arts and crafts fairs scheduled to take place during 1979.

The information will be included in the 1979 Michigan Arts & Crafts & Fairs Festivals Directory.

The free publication is scheduled for release in mid-March and will be available through the Michigan Council for the Arts offices.

For applications and information, contact the Michigan Council for the Arts, Office of General Services, 1200 8th Street, Detroit 48226, or call 266-3732.

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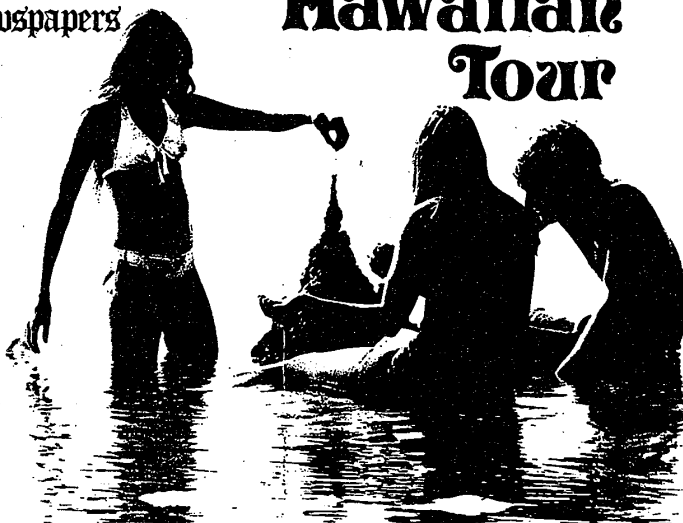
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