

Saba

Dutch Caribbean



The unspoiled queen



Saba



Welcome to Saba!

A dark green dot on the map. At first glance Saba appears to be little more. The densely wooded flanks of an extinct volcano boldly rise more than eight hundred meters above the azure Caribbean Sea. Most of the time the summit of Mount Scenery is veiled in a thin blanket of clouds. Consider this a forewarning. Because Saba is not just any tropical island. The overwhelmingly beautiful nature and the fabulous underwater world are a carefully cherished secret. That is why there are no large hotels, shopping streets, discos, amusement parks and swimming paradises. Nothing of the sort. As if time stood still. The island belongs to the Sabans. They kindly invite you to a visit, but they sincerely opt for pureness.

'The unspoiled queen'

The fourteen hundred inhabitants of Saba proudly refer to their island as 'The unspoiled queen' and Saba deserves this title. The surface of barely thirteen square kilometers is not inhabited but populated. The difference is quite a relief.



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History and culture

Saba was created when a piece of the bottom of the Caribbean Sea was lifted by a volcano up to a height of 877 meters above sea level. Thousands of years of absolute quiescence and a fertile soil provided for an overgrowth which strongly resembles a tropical rainforest. When Columbus passed Saba during his voyage of discovery in 1493 he considered the pocket-sized mountainous landscape without natural harbor of little importance. At the time the island was inhabited by a mere handful of Indians. After the large seafaring nations started the colonization of North and South America in the 17th and 18th century, the English, the Spanish, the Portuguese and the Dutch continuously alternated dominion among each other. Since 1816 Saba has definitively been part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The male population was known as excellent fishermen and prime sailors. For a long time fishery has been the sole source of income. Later the fishermen started selling their home-built boats. The ship-owners brought prosperity. Yet the first paved road was not constructed until 1943. The first motor vehicle made its appearance in 1947. In 1959 the first airplane landed on the island.



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Unique architecture

It was the rich ship-builders who are responsible for the first houses on Saba. Because at the time it was only possible to bring goods ashore with the help of small vessels. This took place by means of the only access to the island, the 'Ladder Bay'. Here, the materials have been transported up the slopes of Saba for many centuries by mere manpower. The 524-step stairs are still accessible.

The typical cottage style is cherished up to this day. This also applies to the underground rooms next to the houses in which rain water is collected. The West Indian style features from the region can be found in the ground plan of the houses, the white wooden façades, the green shutters and the brightly colored sloping red roofs. A unique aspect of the typically Saban architecture is the small-mesh 'Gingerbread' woodcarving in markers, pergolas and fencing. Several original cottages can still be visited on the island.

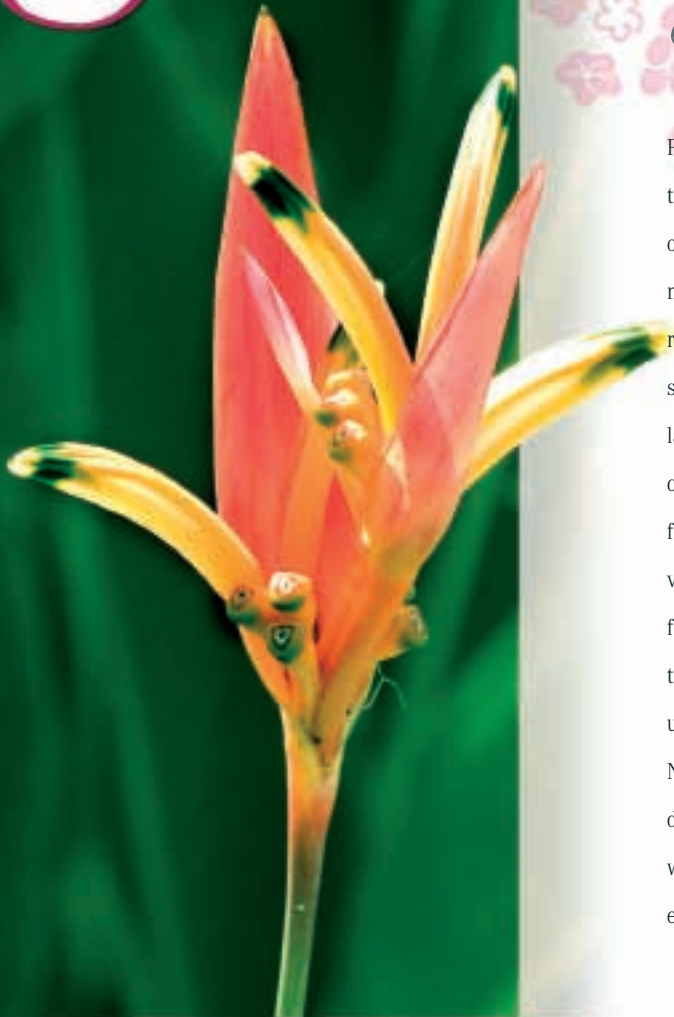




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Unspoiled natural beauty

Perhaps the nature on Saba is the best preserved on earth. As a result of the limited accessibility of the island tourists remains small-scaled and of a high quality level. Moreover, Saba has a small population and minimum infrastructure. To be precise, 'The Road' is still the only main road. The small airport has only been put into use at the end of the sixties of the last century. The small, artificial harbor could only welcome larger passenger ships as of the seventies. The pleasant incidental circumstance hereof is that nature has truly remained unspoiled. This first of all applies to the slopes of Mount Scenery. With an overwhelming variety of flora and fauna and a wide palette of fragrances of tropical flowers. The savanna at the bottom of the slopes transforms into a tropical rainforest at the summit. This also applies to the wonderful underwater world. With 30 controlled diving locations and the Saba National Marine Park Saba belongs to the absolute top among worldwide diving destinations. In the meantime the Saba Conservation Foundation watches over the preservation of the unique character of this small and extraordinary island.





Saba



Adventurous walking tours

What makes Saba completely different is the enormous variety of sights worth a visit at such a small territory. This goes for the flora and fauna but also for the traces left behind by earlier inhabitants. The Saba Conservation Foundation has set out interesting and more adventurously challenging walking tours which are all clearly marked at various locations. Most of the routes can be traversed without a guide. On Saba the distance between the savanna and the tropical rainforest only amounts to a few hundred meters.

Who traversed the Mount Scenery Trail cannot miss out on the four tours in the 43-hectare large Saba National Park. Walkers, who are in for a change, 'do' nature one day and a small village the other. The guided walks are highly recommended. The guide will take you to the most beautiful spots and will in the meantime tell you all about the amazing ecological system on the island. The most obvious option is to cover The Road on foot. There is no chance of getting lost on the only main road of the island. As a reward for your sportive effort you will be provided with a new panorama after every hairpin bend.



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Mount Scenery

Just outside Windward Side - in the direction of the capital The Bottom - you can find the point of departure of the Mount Scenery Trail. This walking route is an absolute. One thousand and sixty-four steps and an hour and a half later you will arrive at the summit of the mountain that does justice to its name. The view is phenomenal. Sometimes the summit of the mountain is mysteriously veiled in mist, on other days the view of the adjacent islands is more than enchanting. Not to forget that on your way to the summit you meander through a complete encyclopedia. Palm trees, orchids, banana plants and mahogany trees. As a human being you become ever more insignificant whilst nature adopts majestic forms. Saba's national flower, 'Black-eyed Susan', is the only thing that reminds you of the location. The colorful bird species, the bashful tree frogs and the innocent snakes react inattentively to the passers-by. Do make sure to bring a hot sweater and a raincoat. A different climate rules at a height of 877 meters.





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The underwater world

Perhaps the paramount advantage of Saba for snorkelers, novice and well-trained divers is that all the diving locations can be reached by boat within twenty minutes. Along the cliffs directly under sea level a remarkable world unfolds itself. Here, the water is still truly crystal-clear. This ensures a beautiful sight of the many types of coral, the multicolored large sponges and the enchanting pinnacles standing straight up like small needles. The most versatile types of fish insolently approach you to 'get acquainted' with the visitors from above. These surroundings are ideal to house the colorful types of fish and plants that softly sway on the rhythm of the current. Here the unique opportunity presents itself that suddenly an elegant stingray, a stout turtle or a nurse shark appears before the lens of the camera. The next magical encounter will be with the thermal springs and the mysterious lava tunnels. A very special diving experience consists of navigating through the lava rocks of the Ladder Labyrinth. Up to a depth of sixty meters the entire coastline under sea level surrounding Saba falls under the protection of the Saba National Marine Park.



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Experience Saba

As Saba has remained unnoticed by mass-tourism the island still radiates an authentic atmosphere. Here, everything is still in its 'original condition'. This applies to nature but certainly also to the typical building, the museums and the churches. The facilities of the economic hotels are of a progressive level. Almost all the guestrooms spread over the island have an undisturbed view of the sea. The fifteen restaurants and small bars are spread over the island. The hospitality and customer friendliness of the English and Dutch speaking Sabans are beyond discussion. They rely on a public that comes to enjoy nature and tranquility. In exchange for respect of the island and its inhabitants a few hundred tourists a week are allowed to personally experience the unique and unconstrained atmosphere. Not to create a wrong impression, Saba belongs to the Caribbean. With clock-like regularity there is a festivity planned in which the whole population actively participates. Count on it that the guests are more than welcome to join the festivities. The unspoiled queen maintains her grace.



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