



BONAIRE'S WILD SIDE

Text and photos by Ali Postma

Bonaire is known for continual trade winds, typically blowing in from the east and averaging 12 knots. All the diving on the west side of the island, including Klein Bonaire, is in the lee protection from the wind. On rare occasions the wind shifts, making the east side of the island hospitable for diving. A few savvy dive operators find ways to deploy small boats from the eastern shore. Their reward is a seascape virtually undived, with turtles, tarpons, and jacks resident. Divers have discovered artifacts, such as cannons and anchors.

WITH AN ANCIENT CORAL REEF RISING off the seabed and luscious blue waters teeming with fish, Bonaire is more than just another Caribbean island. Thousands of underwater enthusiasts descend upon this leeward Antilles gem each year to experience world-class shore diving on vibrant reefs just a stone's throw from the shoreline.

My husband, Joey, and I first visited Bonaire six years ago, wanting to shake up our run-of-the-mill coldwater diving routine. We planned to work remotely, dive every day, soak in the tropical waters, and then return home. We didn't expect to leave with a second family.

Bonaire gave us more than just exceptional diving — it gave us a community. Since then Bonaire has become our go-to escape, a place where we can work, reconnect with friends, and immerse ourselves in the sea and the sport.

DIVING BONAIRE'S EAST COAST

Just as every story has two sides, so does Bonaire. The familiar west coast — the side you usually read about in dive magazines — has calm, sheltered waters where most shore diving takes place. The wild east coast faces the

untamed Caribbean Sea. It is challenging to access and even trickier to dive.

Instead of serene turquoise waters lapping against white limestone shores, the east is raw, powerful, and unpredictable. Even on a good day, the whistling trade winds and rip-roaring whitecaps make the ocean appear daunting. It is not the place for casual diving or effortless entries. The waves will test your resolve as you enter and exit, and the unpredictable currents will remind you why skipping cardio at the gym was a mistake.

During our last November visit, we experienced an unprecedented wind reversal that lasted nearly two weeks. These reversals happen when there is a hurricane elsewhere in the Caribbean. The downside? The island was oppressively hot and muggy. The upside? Shore diving on the east coast was open for business.

Even though it becomes viable, shore diving is still demanding — you'll stumble over sharp rocks, brace against rolling waves, and push through whitecaps until you can finally submerge. Despite the difficulty, we seized the opportunity and set out to explore a new site to add to our growing roster of east coast dives.

Maarten van den Hazel, the go-to expert for east coast diving, was our guide. His enthusiasm for Bonaire's lesser-known dive sites is infectious, and when he offered to take us to an unmarked location with unidentified anchors and cannons, there was no doubt in my mind that we had to go.

We descended, playing follow-the-leader until we reached the artifacts. The first thing to catch my eye was a single sunken cannon, its structure etched with a thick layer of coral growth. It blended into the surrounding reef at first glance, but its barrel and bore became clearly discernable from the right angle.

Next, I spotted the largest of two anchors. Unlike the cannon, this one stood out immediately. Joey was already circling the crown and large cast-iron ring, positioning himself for a photo. Encrusted with coral and vegetation, it was significantly larger than him, hinting that the ship that lost this anchor was likely sizable. A smaller anchor lay scattered nearby, less imposing but equally overtaken by marine life.

As we continued along the rocky seafloor, I discovered two additional cannons resting side by side. Like the first, they were painted with the surrounding reef and had plenty

of marine life making homes in their crevices.

This east coast dive was something truly special. We witnessed a hidden piece of history seen by few divers. After our dive together, I spoke to Maarten about sharing this experience with a publication. Many islanders in this small place have heard rumors of the anchors and cannons off the east coast, but few know their exact location. As one of the few people with this privileged knowledge, Maarten was abundantly clear on aspects that I could report and what he wanted to keep under wraps — namely, the location.

As an underwater photographer with a background in marine biology and sustainability, I have so much respect and support for his thought process. The east coast is not a place you mess around with. Knowing the location could tempt divers to go there to search for these items and get hurt in the process. The reefs are also very fragile.

"Anchors and cannons are treasures of the sea and should remain so," Maarten said. Having someone disturb or loot the site could have devastating consequences.

This most recent trip to Bonaire was one I won't soon forget. Even in a place as well-documented as Bonaire, there are stories waiting to be discovered, history resting just beneath the waves, and uncharted dive sites that reveal themselves only to those willing to seek them out.

Our world may feel small, but the ocean remains vast, unpredictable, and teeming with mystery. For divers like me, that is exactly what keeps us coming back for more. **AD**


The logo for YAP (Yapese Association of Photographers) features a stylized eye with a colorful, swirling pattern. The text "YAP" is in large, bold, blue letters. Below it, the tagline "Mystical Micronesia where Mantas dance" is written in a smaller font.

YAP
Mystical Micronesia where Mantas dance

A manta ray is shown swimming underwater. The ray is white with dark spots and is moving towards the right.

SCUBA DIVING

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