



photography: Lodge Kura Hulanda and Beach Club

Curaçao

Mention Curaçao and the sapphire blue liqueur might come to mind. But this hurricane-free southern Caribbean isle just off the coast of Venezuela is making big waves with the recent opening of one of the newest eco lodges to hit this part of the ABC islands.

Nestled on Curaçao's remote west side amid prickly cacti, deadly Manzanilla trees and skittish geckos, The Lodge Kura Hulanda and Beach Club is the island's first luxury eco-lodge. It is the latest creation from maverick billionaire Jacob Gelt Dekker, who, only a few years ago erected a boutique hotel from the derelict brothel houses that once plagued the country's capital of Willemstad. Like his successful earlier entrée into the luxury hotel scene, Dekker's newest lodge is now the talk of the isle.

For the official launch of his latest venture this spring, Dekker splurged on a grand gala. Fireworks

announced the arrival of an old schooner helmed by the Dutch tycoon who was decked out as an 18th century sea captain.

CLIENTELE

Think rich Americans and the well-healed sun-starved Dutch. Both crave nature's tropical gifts without skimping on creature comforts. Movie stars, a U.S. senator, Miss U.S.A and planeloads from the meetings crowd are some of the guests who have discovered the lodge's manicured wilderness.

ROOMS

Of the 74 units, 44 suites overlook the secluded Playa Kalki Beach. With your choice of a patio or balcony suite, these luxurious rooms offer awesome views of the sea and the neighbouring Mount Christoffel. All rooms are furnished with high-tech gadgets including high-speed Internet, remote controlled air conditioner, and television. With the exception of the garden-view rooms, the suites all have CD/DVD players.

AMENITIES

The rooms offer 300 thread count Egyptian cotton sheets, 100 per cent cotton duvet covers, and Lord and Mayfair bath products. For the second-floor oceanfront suites, guests have a spectacular view of the ocean from a private outdoor shower, which is also a perfect place to catch a glimpse of the passing schools of tuna.

A winding pathway leads away from the stucco villas to an enclave of ten octagonal eco-houses. These 30 units are furnished with kitchenettes ideal for longer stays and for families. For die-hard roughing-it types, try the stand-alone tree house equipped with a steeply pitched ladder and an al fresco shower at its base. The eco units are made from natural material, recycled wood, and have a solar panelled roof for heating the hot water.

SERVICE

This new lodge is still ironing out the kinks. The friendly staff is eager to please but some are new to

the industry so a few requests might not be up to par. Avoid exotic cocktail orders and opt for a tried-and-true daiquiri.

FOOD & DRINK

Snack al fresco on coconut jumbo shrimp and sip some wine at the African-styled hut called the Christoffel Sunset Lounge. It's touted as the island's best spot to view the sunset. Adjacent to this conical hut is the massive open-air two-level Watamula Restaurant. Crisp white linen and decadent alabaster lamps from India adorn the tables. The dinner menu always includes the fresh catch of the day, usually swordfish, tuna or Caribbean snapper.

THINGS TO DO

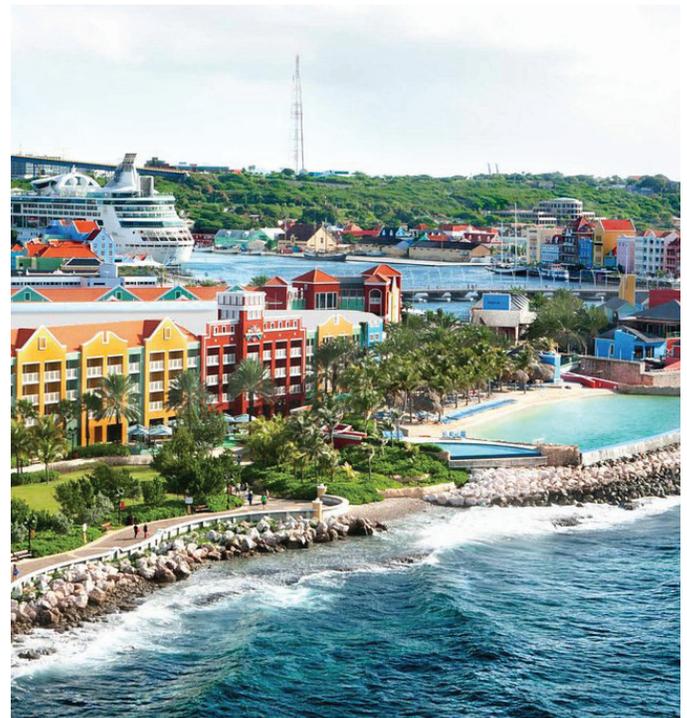
Amble to the end of the lodge's path to find a staircase descending into the earth's bowels. Dubbed the Indian Caves after the island's once indigenous Arawak-Taino Indians, this ancient grotto is believed to possess healing powers. You can chill-out in the refreshing spring waters before setting out on another eco-adventure.

A coral reef around the lodge's beachfront makes this a snorkeller's paradise, and scuba divers can register on-site for day excursions. For adventure lovers, take a jeep safari into the heart of Mount Christoffel National Park with former Mr. Curaçao, Steven Adams of Yellow Tourism Solutions. The park is 12 minutes away. ATVers can get down and dirty with Eric's ATV Adventures and zoom into the nearby Shete Boka National Park, home to the dramatic Boca Tabla and seven inlets.

Have a craving for shops, a spa or a museum? Then hop aboard the free daily shuttle service that takes you downtown to the lodge's sister property, Hotel Kura Hulanda. Besides the art galleries, shops and

a spa, Mr. Dekker has created a not-to-be-missed Kura Hulanda Museum. It houses a collection of rare artifacts chronicling the African slave trade and the origins of man

This tucked away getaway screams eco-chic combining all the earthly pleasures for the most discerning crowd.



photography: Renaissance Curacao Resort & Casino