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ART ACROSS AMERICA

Bonaire & Cousteau:

PRESERVING THE CARIBBEAN'S SOUL

BY KELLY VILLASUSO

“Bonaire is one of those rare places that still has a look, a feel, a semblance of what the Caribbean was like when I was a child,” he stated passionately. “I feel its soul!”

If you are one of the lucky ones, you recognize the place Fabien Cousteau — renowned filmmaker, explorer, ocean preservationist and the grandson of famed explorer Jacques Cousteau — speaks and have been stirred by its innate beauty. Bonaire guests understand why Cousteau declares, “This is how things should be everywhere.”

Bonaire's 24-mile-long, five-mile-wide stretch of omnipresent beauty faces outside pressure to develop. However, it strategically plans to remain a dose reflection of its current, untamed self. According to Cousteau, the world's most notable preservationist and conservationist, “I want to help this place stay Bonaire and still have a soul and thrive and be beautiful. And together maybe even make its natural assets grow.”



Fabien Cousteau



Jacques and Fabien Cousteau

IT TAKES A NATION, A VILLAGE, AND A BIT OF COUSTEAU

Renown for the best shore diving in the world, Bonaire is a Dutch island nation in the Leeward Antilles in the Caribbean Sea and a sister island to Aruba and Curacao. Although small in stature, Bonaire is an environmental Goliath, declaring 20 percent of its land area and 100 percent of its surrounding waters as protected national parks. Bonaire's government and residents recognize the symbiotic relationship between their economic growth and their environment. For instance, Bonaire was the first Caribbean island to collaborate with the Coral Restoration Foundation to help conserve its reefs and create programs to reduce CO₂ emissions.





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Tourism businesses on Bonaire, such as the luxury resort Harbour Village Beach Club and its Great Adventures Bonaire PADI 5 Star Instructor Development Center, share the concern about developing too quickly and negatively impacting the environment. They have launched major nature preservation and conservation initiatives, including a coral nursery and restoration site right off the beach of Harbour Village. Because Bonaire is at a very pivotal time when a broader global audience has taken notice of the Caribbean's 'best kept secret,' they are broadening efforts by partnering with Fabien Cousteau.

BON BINI FABIEN COUSTEAU'S OCEAN LEARNING CENTER

Harbour Village and Cousteau hope to exponentially build awareness of ocean conservation and preservation on Bonaire and throughout the world. Cousteau believes the expansion of his New York-based non-profit Ocean Learning Center on Bonaire, "will enable us to build a model that looks at oceans as the very real life blood that drives our businesses and economies, while also building into the model the rules and regulations that ensure we look at our natural resource bank account and, as a society, live only off the interest rather than eating away at its capital."

In addition to being a very unique luxury travel experience, the Ocean Learning Center at Harbour Village has two key objectives:

First, it will serve as a think tank, bringing some of the greatest minds from government, business and education worldwide together at the Fabien Cousteau Ocean Summits & Symposiums. Harbour Village Executive Director Eric Ewoldt confirmed that 3D coral printing, biorock building and 3D topographic mapping will be among the breakthrough initiatives launched via the Ocean Learning Center in Bonaire.

Second, the Center will educate and engage Bonaire residents and visitors, giving them a better understanding of our human/ocean connection and a path to being part of the solution. Guests may attend educational Fabien Cousteau Ocean Symposiums and other conferences and may participate in land and water-based projects, such as beach cleanups and helping the team fragment coral and clean the "trees" as part of the coral reef restoration program.

"Over the generations in my family — my grandfather, my father, myself — we've seen a lot of things change," said Cousteau. "The general public has become more aware — after decades of talking — that without a healthy ocean, there's no such thing

as a healthy environment or a healthy people. Through this partnership with Harbour Village, we can seize this moment to make a greater impact on what is our last frontier on this planet."

When asked if Cousteau's legendary grandfather, Jacques Cousteau, would be supportive of his efforts in Bonaire, Fabien shared, "My grandfather would see this as a natural progression of the family philosophy that he started. He used to say, 'People protect what they love. They love what they understand. And they understand what they are taught!' This mantra is our operating principle at the Center. I am proud to continue in the family's footsteps to preserve the soul of Bonaire and serve as a model elsewhere." ●

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PHOTO COURTESY BETH WATSON

Coral preservation diver at Bonaire Reef



THE ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME: FABIEN COUSTEAU VOYAGES

"[I have] had the unique privilege and honor to be a young child going on expeditions in places that no one had ever seen before, and really seeing those places in their natural state," shared Fabien Cousteau.

Through the Fabien Cousteau Voyages, guests can experience what young Cousteau did with his grandfather, Jacques Cousteau. Join Cousteau and his team on a seven-day expedition into virgin territory, traveling on a 187-foot NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) research vessel equipped with five luxury staterooms. Dive beside and ride in a submarine down approximately 1,500 feet below the blue carpet with Cousteau — and see things no one has ever seen before. Work alongside him and his scientists in the wet lab and dry lab on board to study the science behind the scenes. According to Cousteau, on this high-end travel excursion, "You just might be the lucky one that spots an animal that has never been discovered before and it can be named after you." And when each day is done, dine in luxury with Cousteau. At the end of the expedition, you will return to Harbour Village Beach Club for a few days of relaxation.

To book a coveted spot on board a Fabien Cousteau Voyages expedition, email: laureen@substation-curacao.com

For information on Fabien Cousteau Ocean Summits & Symposiums 2017,

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Fabien Cousteau Voyage's 187-foot NOAA research vessel with five luxury staterooms for guests