

Curacao reveals slavery horrors

By **Deston Nokes**/ Special to the Herald
Sunday, November 13, 2005



WILLEMSTAD, Curacao - A remarkable museum depicting the horrors of the slave trade might be a curious promotion for a vacation paradise, but Curacao's Museum Kura Hulanda provides a fascinating and tangible journey into one of history's darkest periods.

Curacao is a vibrant, Dutch jewel in the Caribbean, just a two-hour flight from Miami. The island is celebrated for its tolerance of ethnicities and lifestyles, for its sherbet-colored buildings lining the thriving harbor and for the unmatched friendliness of its people.

Despite its treasures as a tourist destination, Curacao makes no effort to gloss over its history as the largest transport center for slaves in the New World. Locals believe it's an essential part of understanding the island's culture.

Curacao had no plantations itself, but in the 1660s, more than 1,000 slaves began arriving each week to be "seasoned" (taught various skills) before being exported to British and Spanish colonies in the Americas. The practice continued until slavery's abolition in 1863.



Punished slaves would be locked in this metal chair and put out in the intense sun.



The museum Kura Hulanda traces the history of the slave trade

The museum Kura Hulanda traces the history of the slave trade and its influence on the region's language, arts and ethnic evolution. The site is located at the Hotel Kura Hulanda resort complex (rates from \$210 per night; 800-223-6800; www.kurahulanda.com) in this capital city.

Dr. Jacob Gelt Dekker built the museum in 1998, after learning that a mansion he purchased on the island was the site of a well-known slave yard. Dekker, a Dutch entrepreneur and philanthropist, gathered the museum's impressive collection in just nine months.

It includes relics from the slave trade, West African empires, pre-Columbian gold, Mesopotamian artifacts and Antillean art. Modern exhibits cover civil rights movements and recent efforts to abolish slavery in African nations.

The Kura Hulanda's most emotionally wrenching artifacts include instruments of capture, discipline and torture. Shackles, traps, restraints and devices to assist in the punishment and imprisonment of human beings bring the visitor face-to-face with the incomprehensible cruelty of the trade.

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You may have seen famous illustrations of slaves wedged together on ships. At the Kura Hulanda you can walk down creaking wooden steps to see a life-sized replica of a ship's holding area. It resurrects the claustrophobic and filthy conditions slaves endured during their two-month journey from Africa to Curacao.

Our Curacaoan guide, Yflen, said the museum portrays an essential part of her culture. Holding out her arm, she said, "See my skin? It's from the slaves. I tell everyone to come here because they need to know their roots."

Museum admission is about \$5.50 for adults, \$3.50 for kids. The museum is open daily.



Curacao is a vibrant, Dutch jewel in the Caribbean. It is the largest of the Netherlands Antilles located between Aruba and Bonaire.



Yflen shows the different types of traps used to capture slaves in Africa

Yflen points out where there are still blood stains on the authentic KKK robes.



This necklace was used to punish a slave by locking it around his neck. He could not sleep, lean or lie in any position. It was designed to be left on for many days.

