

Aruba Tourism Authority Honored with 2026 Aquila Whalesong Destination Award for Excellence in People Investment

MIAMI, FL, UNITED STATES, April 16, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence has awarded the Aruba Tourism Authority (ATA) the 2026 Whalesong Destination Award for Excellence in People Investment, presented at Seatrade Cruise Global in Miami Beach this week. The award honors ATA's exceptional leadership and long-standing commitment to sustainable, responsible and regenerative tourism through comprehensive capacity building across the island.

For more than a decade, Aquila has worked alongside Aruba to support the destination's evolution as a leader in cruise tourism excellence. Since 2016, this partnership has deepened through a coordinated, multi-year approach to strengthening collaboration across Aruba's tourism ecosystem uniting port authorities, tour operators, retailers and public sector stakeholders around a shared vision for high-quality, people-centered experiences.

"The Aquila Whalesong Award represents our deep appreciation for organizations that invest not only in infrastructure or marketing but in the human spirit behind tourism," said Beth Hatt, Founder of Aquila. "The Aruba Tourism Authority exemplifies this ethos. The passion and commitment we have witnessed across their training initiatives are a true testament to the island's leadership in sustainable tourism and world-class service excellence."

Through its partnership with Aquila, ATA has led a transformative journey to break down silos and foster stronger cross-stakeholder alignment across the destination. This has included ongoing service excellence and responsible tourism workshops, targeted coaching for tour operators, and multi-sector training initiatives designed to elevate both guest experience and community benefit. Operators such as De Palm, Fofoti, Pelican, and Kukoo Kunuku have



translated these learnings into tangible product innovation enhancing storytelling, improving guest engagement and integrating more sustainable, locally rooted practices.

The impact of these efforts has been significant. Participants overwhelmingly rated the training experience as valuable with strong endorsement of its practical application and collaborative approach. More importantly, operators have reported increased collaboration with local artisans and community partners, improved operational coordination and new business opportunities.

Accepting the award on behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, Ronella Croes, Chief Executive Officer reflected on this milestone achievement:

“This recognition is a powerful affirmation of Aruba’s belief that true destination excellence begins with people. By investing in our community, our partners and our shared values, we are shaping a tourism model that is sustainable, inclusive and deeply rooted in our identity.”

Symbolized by the whale tail, the Whalesong Award represents strength, wisdom and harmony. These qualities mirror the Aruba Tourism Authority’s steadfast pursuit of destination excellence and its highly collaborative approach to building sustainable and resilient cruise destinations. Aruba’s model demonstrates that true success in cruise tourism is built not only on infrastructure but on sustained investment in people, partnership and continuous improvement — setting a powerful example for destinations worldwide.

About Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence

Aquila is the leading destination training provider for the global cruise industry. They offer training strategies for international destinations, tour companies, tour guides, and front-line operators. With over 35 years’ experience in the cruise industry, Aquila is committed to cruise destination success through values-driven partnership with cruise lines and destinations.

For more information on Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence and its training programs, visit cruiseexcellence.com.

PHOTO CAPTION: Wendrick Cicilia, Aruba’s Minister of Tourism, Transport and Labor, and Ronella Croes, Chief Executive Officer of the Aruba Tourism Authority, receive the Whalesong Award from Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence during Seatrade Cruise Global 2026 in Miami Beach as executives from FCCA, Aquila and Aruba’s tourism and ports sectors look on.

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