

which is also the owner of the dive shop. The environmentally-sensitive, rustic cabins are comfortable and the food is beyond what you would expect here in Paradise. You will also meet some of the most interesting people at happy hour and dinner as a certain type of sophisticated, intrepid traveler stays here. (www.divelittlecorn.com)

San Juan Del Sur, July 2004, Robert J. Duin (coachduin@hotmail.com)
San Antonio, TX. Experience: 83 dives. Vis: 3 to 10 feet. Water: 75–80 F. During initial research, both the dive operator and B & B operator responded promptly to my e-mails and made reservations easy. He was, unfortunately, not there when I arrived, so I dove with a new startup operation. Contact Mike Icanubi (sp?) at the Hotel Villa Isabel for info. This is a Naui operation, boat is a 23' Bayliner w/cabin, 150 Merc o.b., platform & ladder. They have a new compressor with less than 150 hrs. First class dive orientation. Diving took place during rainy season, so it was pretty poor due to runoff. Mike runs a first class B & B. Great place — friendly people, coldest coke and beer in town. This place is well off the beaten path. Diving \$75.00/day for two tanks. You gotta be adventurous. Lots of 20–30 backpacker — surfer type tourists from USA/Canada. (www.sanjuandelsur.org.ni)

PUERTO RICO

The south coast of Puerto Rico has several dive operations, with some walls, good reefs and decent fish life. Puerto Rico is

easy to reach from many American cities and generally an interesting island to tour, with small restaurants and hotels along the south coast, as well as national parks inland. Old Town in San Juan is surely worth a visit. Winters can be cool.

Culebra Divers, May 2004, Mark Wilensky (highmarksystem@comcast.net), Dayton, MD. Vis: 50-75 feet. Water: 80-82 F. Experience: 100. Culebra is laid back. Two dive operators on the island, and few divers. When I was the only person for one day, they made arrangements for me to go with the other dive op so my op didn't have to go out that day. Only 1,200 residents on the island and they want little development, so schedules mean little. (www.culebradivers.com)

Ocean Sports, Sept-Dec, 2003, Nancy B. Madison (burns403b@netscape.net), Mendham, NJ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: 80 F. It is always a pleasure to dive with Leslie. She can find things that others diver over look and will pick the little guys up to show you and then put them back where they belong. I saw Atlantic spade fish, yellow tail snapper, pork fish, a seahorse. Ocean Sports is well organized, friendly, helpful and knowledgeable. At Humacao there wasn't much to see. It's a training site. (787-268-2329)

Parguera Divers, November 2003, Nancy B. Madison, Mendham, NJ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to Feet. Water: 82F, calm. It's a pleasure

diving with Angel. He knows his stuff and doesn't go so fast that all you see are his fins! He can find the smallest critter and will show it to you and then put it back where it belongs. On one dive I saw barracuda, lobster, morays, parrot fish and spotted drum. On others a big turtle queen angelfish and French angelfish, parrotfish, hog fish, four eyed butterfly fish, 3 lobsters in one hole, and a seahorse! Visibility is normally in the 100 foot range but we had rain the day before which dropped it down. The water was so calm that it looked like a skating ring instead of the Caribbean. (www.pargueradivers.com)

Sea Ventures, Copamarina Beach Resort, December 2003, Ken Hylander, Eden Prairie, MN.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: to 79 F, choppy. Copamarina Resort is well kept with great grounds. Pools, hot tubs beach, etc., were all clean and comfortable. A family resort with lots of children. There is enough space that it did not seem crowded at all although I suspect occupancy was about 75%. Resort staff was friendly and responsive. Food is expensive but plentiful and good. Nice "outdoor" restaurant for breakfast and lunch. Dinner is inside and a bit more formal. Diving was mixed. Copamarina is not a primary dive resort so there were not many divers — which actually was pretty nice. Wall dives had good visibility with large lobsters and interesting nooks to look into. Reef dive visibility suffered a bit due to water turbulence but was acceptable. As typical, many more fish to see on the reef dives. Boat captain (Bill) and divemaster

(Shawna) are new to the resort (about 30 days) so they are still finding their way around a bit but overall did a nice job. No rushing and they displayed obvious concern for safety rules both on the boat and in the water. Two of the three boats were out of commission long term. One of the third boat's engines was close to failure for two days and had to be fixed on our third day which caused our dive trip to be canceled! I think the new Captain walked into a tough situation. He seemed very embarrassed. Bottom line if you are going to dive at Copamarina — ask about the boats before you commit. (www.divepuertorico.com)

Sea Ventures Pro Dive Center, December 2003, Larry Sandusky (lsandusky18@msn.com) Meridian, ID.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 15 to 30 Feet. Water: 81 F, choppy. This was a day dive scheduled after arrival in PR and after prior excellent diving at Parguera with another dive operator, some 3 hours away by car. However, this dive operation is a troubled one, fraught with friction between boat and shore staff. Our group of 4 divers was greeted enthusiastically at shop by David, but cost of diving was collected immediately and before we saw the boat. We arrived early for an 8:30 a.m. departure. Boat very crowded for the 12 divers aboard and had insufficient room between tanks to allow adjacent divers to assemble their gear or don tanks to actually dive. First departed close to 9:00 a.m.. and then the boat was recalled to accommodate 3 more divers who were late for a class. Boat staff observed in heated conversation

with office staff by phone, but clearly lost battle with office staff seeking to maximize revenue. Well after 9:30 a.m., and with the 12 divers growing increasingly angry over the delay, 3 youths and 4 parents arrive — this was 7 additional divers and clearly beyond the crowded boat's capacity. A nasty public dispute ensued over the capacity of the boat and oral reservations before the group of 7 left angrily (none of the divers aboard were sympathetic). And then the boat would not restart. Crew apologized for office staff's behavior and took everyone to a nearby deli to buy sandwiches and snacks on Sea Ventures, a nice gesture. At 10:30 a.m., we finally departed. Speed and construction of the boat guaranteed all were drenched by the time we reached the first dive site. Poor visibility and choppy conditions due to wind are not the fault of Sea Ventures, but neither were we cautioned about it at any time in the process. Group split into Advanced and Open Water groups and dived separately with 2 divemasters. Ours was an uninspiring guide, and kept us along sandy bottom when the reef at slightly shallower depths was far more interesting. Approx. 20 foot viz made diving your own profile in strange area questionable. Surface interval snacks of sliced melons very good, trip to 2nd site was brief. Divers expected to change own tanks between dives, but could ask for assistance. Second dive site offered more fish and slightly better visibility, but certainly not prolific. All fans beaten down by weather, although coral was ok. Upon our return, barrels of rinse water were provided, and staff offered hangers for

wet suits. Along with Divemaster Kim's (very customer focused) concerted effort to make up for our disastrous beginning, we were starting to feel better about the dive operation, when 2 members of our group emerged from the dive shop angry and resentful about the behavior of one office staff member, who had launched into a tirade about how much money we spent on sandwiches earlier. Coupled with the refusal of any office staff to even acknowledge their presence in the room, this was sufficient to torpedo the boat staff's best efforts. We spoke to the boat captain, wondering how much a sandwich and soda could possibly cost, and why it would be an issue under the awful circumstances of the morning, and he noted that it is "their problem" and then asked when we would come back. Not soon! Kim had noted earlier that the owner was out of town and therefore she had no route of appeal on departure problems, but this operation appears to have a number of problems beyond his absence. This is a revenue hungry, high volume operation. No accommodations for photography were provided — zero.

Sea Ventures, January 2004, Jacques Miller (kilkeny@ix.netcom.com) Brooklyn, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 10 to 50 Feet. Water: choppy. Sea Ventures is actually the reason why I subscribed to Undercurrent as I was not happy with them at all and I wanted to be able in the future to avoid operators like them. Everything seemed to be all right until we got on the boat. Dive shop was nothing fancy. I rented all my equipment as I was

actually not planning on diving in PR at all as this was a business trip/conference. They do not rent dive computers. The dive briefing was not acceptable at all at the first site. Profile was announced as "Stay with the guide, he will let you know." On descend my buddy had problems equalizing. The guide went off with the remaining 2 divers, since there were problems. We lost the guide and just decided to stay in the area then. Vis was about 40 ft. Not happy, but it should come worse. Some snorkelers got seasick so the staff announced we are going to a site with very bad viz, nothing to see but feed fish with cookies. The 2nd dive briefing was as bad as the first. This time we were instructed to swim on the surface towards a buoy about 100 ft away before descending. Vis was about 10-15 ft (!). One of the divers in the group had a bad tank of air. The staff refused to change the bottle while on the boat. She went into the water and got dizzy. They finally changed the tank. The guide decided then to descend next to the boat. That decided the dive for my buddy and me: 100 ft away, viz 15 ft: Lost guide, saw nothing, fed the 3 fish we saw with cookies and made our way back to the boat. Complaint about the service with no result. Decided to try to get my money back via AMEX. Sea Ventures/Westin Hotel send them a letter stating several incorrect facts and refused to give me credit. Main argument was nobody else complained. My two buddies did not complain as they charged it to the room and did not have to pay for it and I assume so did the others.

Taino Divers, Casa Kristina, April 2004, Ezra Lunde, New York, NY. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. I rented a big house from Nicole (787-823-5839), who has a great deal of houses and condos to select from, and is very personable. In Rincon there are two dive operators: Taino Divers and Ocean's Unlimited. I chose Taino Divers because they claimed to take less time to get out to Desecheo Island, and were closer to where we were staying. Ocean's Unlimited, however, has Nitrox and what appears to be a much nicer boat. The trip from Rincon to Desecheo takes about 45 minutes, which was no problem given the calm, dry weather. The Taino boat is a 20-odd foot pontoon with twin 200 outboards that gets a little crowded with more than 5 people. The dive staff were a young and fun group of American dudes (urp), but were a little sloppy in regard to underwater policies. They harassed a burrfish to inflation, rested cameras in sponges, did not help divers with buoyancy control issues, and were in general pretty laissez faire. Despite this the diving was good and very easy. We did Candyland, Crab Alley, Aquarium and Pesones (Spanish for nipples); nothing deeper than 70 feet, excellent vis, gentle surge, etc. The coral is in average shape, but the small fish life is good. I was surprised to see several Sargassum triggerfish and what I thought were either gray or ocean triggerfish. We only dove the eastern sites as the swells and current around the other side of the island were too strong. Overall I liked Rincon with its excellent beach and surfer community feel. There

are a few cool places to eat — Rock Bottom, Tamboo — and you're never far from any of the conveniences of the USA. (www.tainodivers.com)

SABA

Saba is one of the more adventurous and exciting Caribbean destinations, both on land and in the sea. ... Pinnacle diving begins at 70 feet, with good fish life and occasionally sharks and bigger fish. ... Accommodations are in quaint villages at 1,000 feet and above. ... Although there are no beaches or night life, Saba has delightful people, good restaurants, and a cool, pleasant climate at altitude. It's also in the hurricane belt. ... Some divers claim that, after several days of diving, they get muscle pains if they climb 3,000-foot Mt. Scenery. ... Be sure to close your eyes when your plane lands ... or take the short ferry trip from St. Maarten.

Saba Deep, Cottage Club, November 2003, David Sayles, (dpsaayles@cnsurety.com) Caledonia, MI. Experience 500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F. Dive restrictions enforced: based on experience. Diving is all in Marine Park. Reef fishes were numerous and large. Corals very healthy and colors very bright and vibrant. Sharks were blacktip, reef, nurse. Lots of turtles, mostly hawksbills, and grey Southern rays. If approached slowly, you could get right next to the rays and turtles. Yellow headed jawfish would play hide and

seek with you if you approached slowly. Large lobsters, eels every dive. Fish cleaning station. Big Mike led most dives. Excellent pre-dive briefing and outstanding at finding the marine life. Paid attention to divers needing assistance, but not to extent he ignored the better divers. Outstanding operation owned by Mike Myers. When you dive with Saba Deep it is like diving with good friends. Tank fills 3100-3500 psi. Second time with Saba Deep and I will dive with them again. Cottage Club is clean and equipped so we could make most of our meals. Bar-b-que on Tue & Fri at Swinging Door and Sunday for steak fry. Cottage Club and Swinging Door on windward side. Beautiful, friendly island excellent for relaxing and diving. (www.sabadeep.com)

Saba Deep, Juliana's, November 2003, Jill Guthrie and Mike Webber (jguthrie@walshking.com) Vancouver, BC. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Saba is a beautiful lush green clean small island. No litter or mosquitoes as they work to minimize both. The restaurants were great and usually a special somewhere each night. Went to Y2K, Brigadoons, and Swinging Door for dinners and Tropics for breakfast and had lunch often above Saba Deep's operation and all had fantastic quality. Best food we ever had on a holiday. Juliana's Orchid Cottage was way more than the two of us needed with beautiful deck looking over ocean, (TV/VCR etc), with real neat outdoor shower and toilet room. Very private. Mike Myers and Big Mike ran the best dive operation we have ever experienced.

Big Mike seems to organize all your equipment before and between and after dives without you even noticing while relaying great stories and keeping the short boat rides fun. Pre-dive descriptions great, usually 6-8 divers, and boat is designed for easy comfort. Dives all great and they checked where you've been to ensure variety and were willing to change location if needed based on actual conditions. You can dive at your own pace. Both Mikes dove if needed (or for fun) and respected their marine park, they would go out of the way to pick up any floating garbage (which was rare as very clean everywhere). They would dive as many dives as you wanted, usually 3 per day and night-dives if desired. Above water, hiking is also very nice and the Sandy Cruz trail is a must for last non-dive day (if you bring your bathing suit, end hike with nice lunch and swim at the Queens Garden!)

Saba Deep, November 2003, Sandra Fogarty, Cortez, CO. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 15 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 79 F, choppy, surge. Saba is a wonderful place to dive. Saba Deep is a great operator. They really took care of us and all with a big smile. Mike and Mike have been on Saba for about as long as anyone can remember and they know the Saba dive sites as well as they know their own backyards. They are fun people, very accommodating, and good divers. Saba is for divers and Dutch folks on holiday. It's pretty quiet there, has no beaches or nightlife to speak of, but the diving is world class. They are extremely serious about maintaining the marine park and

it shows. We stayed in Effie's Cottage. It rained day and night and the roof leaked. Under normal conditions, I'd highly recommend Effie's.

Saba Deep, Juliana's, December 2003, Gloria Jean Ehlers, Madison, WI. Vis: 60-100 feet. Water: 80 F. Experience: 186. The dive operation was excellent. Both Mikes were helpful and knowledgeable. We usually did three dives daily, with around six divers and, at the most, ten. Juliana's had just undergone a change in ownership. Their dogs were everywhere, including the restaurant. Only had maid service half of time. The new owners tried to be helpful, but next time I will e-mail Mike at Saba Deep and arrange to rent a cottage/house. Beautiful island, little to do (hike, dive).

Sea Saba, Juliana's, December 2003, John Keith (jkeith@econ.usu.edu) Logan, UT. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 27 to 28 Celsius, choppy, surge, currents. Saba was very nice diving. Very nice coral and lots of fish and critters (lobsters, crabs, etc.). We took the catamaran from St Maarten to Saba one morning (a fairly rough ride even if the captain said it was relatively calm — more than one person was sick) and dove a 2-tank boat dive that afternoon around the pinnacle area (although not deep dives) with Sea Saba. The next morning we made one dive on the pinnacles (deep dive) and another at the "hole in the corner." The coral on all the dives was in fine condition with lots of fish. This was as close to the Red Sea as we have seen in the Caribbean. On the