

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

dive on the pinnacle, we saw sharks (one nurse shark and either one reef shark several times or several reef sharks), lobsters, crabs, etc. The dive-masters were very good — attentive, careful of the coral and sea life, and fun on deck. Lynn, the co-owner of Sea Saba, was very helpful in the shop and fun to talk to. Juliana's was a nice accommodation. We had dinner at Brigadoon and would recommend it. (www.seasaba.com)

Sea Saba, Juliana's, Orchid Cottage, April 2004, Steven Bissell (fsbissell@aol.com) McLean, VA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm. Juliana's very good, though staying in the cottage is the way to go. The restaurant served home cooked meals, good seafood, daily specials, small bar area, fresh water pool. Wim and Jordana young energetic owners, rooms cleaned daily. Pick up at 8.45 am, 20 minute drive on mountain roads to commercial dock. Because of relatively late start, if you did an afternoon dive you arrived back about 4 to 4.30 at Julianna's. No ATM on island, bring cash or traveler's checks. Some other good restaurants. Lynn at SeaSaba very professional and efficient. Pinnacles were cool, but time fairly short at 110 feet. Not much small fish life on pinnacle plateaus, but shark sightings fairly common. Eye of the Needle had the most to see. Diamond rock the best second dive, lots of anemones, eels, barracuda, turtles, tropicals, some current. The other dives on the Southwest side of the island displayed brilliant sponge life, healthy coral, interesting crabs, frogfish, drum,

lobsters, nurse sharks, morays, schools of fish, but not many octopus, no eagle rays. Night dive on nearby Ladder Reef had strong current one night, one inexperienced diver swam for 20 minutes to reach the anchor line. We made the line, and got some great photos by ducking behind the coral and rock formations. Wonderful clean island, people working folks used to a challenging environment. All rain water is collected in cisterns. No beaches. Great hiking, tropical forest on the peak, views of Statia, St. Maartens and St. Barts to the east. Shortest commercial airstrip in the world. The boat had a tub for cameras, but no table.

Sea Saba, Juliana's, May 2004, Frank Klein (fjklein@mac.com) Colorado Springs, CO. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 70 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm. We went to St. Maarten for a week, and took two days to go to Saba and dive. We took the Edge (ferry) over and back. SeaSaba Diving is great. Lynn Costenaro took care of our hotel reservations (Juliana's), provided all transportation to hotel and to dive boat daily, and to the Edge for our return. She even arranged for sandwiches on the dive boat if we wanted them. Very good to work with by e-mail, very professional, and great, roomy dive boats. We had 5 to 9 divers on different trips. Saba Island is so cool, a step back in time. They have 1200 residents and 300 students at the medical school. Juliana's is a very nice small hotel with all the amenities, an excellent restaurant, satellite TV (for those of you who need TV), and wonderful views of the

ocean. Saba is a dormant volcano. It hasn't spewed forth for 5000 years, but at some dive sites where you can stick your hand into the sand, the temperature changes and gets warm. There's still heat down there. Unfortunately, the area had been having high winds for several days and the water was choppy with visibility down to 60-70 feet, less than they normally have. I took my underwater camera and got some great shots, but didn't see as much marine life as I thought I would. This could have been due to the windy conditions over the previous days and churning of the water. But still, the diving was great.

Sea Saba, Cat's Eye Cottage, May 2004, James Fisher (james@jamet.com) Burleson, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, surge, no currents. Diving is spectacular, near pristine reefs thanks to the early establishment of the Marine Park Reserve. The Pinnacle dives are awesome (Shark Shoals, Third Encounter/Eye Of The Needle are notable) and the sealife is friendly. Frequent encounters with turtles produced dramatic eye to eye contact and a swim along dive buddy too. Tent Wall, Tent Reef and Tent Deep are not to be missed dive sites. Sea Saba is the primary dive operation on the island (there are 3 total) with by far the largest boats (2-38 footers). Sea Saba is a professionally run operation with knowledgeable divemasters, crew and staff. John and Lynn strive to meet all your wishes and needs. The SeaSaba website have detailed information

about the island, diving, lodging, restaurants and more. The divemaster we enjoyed most was Leda, but all are fantastic and knowledgeable about the area. Overall rating of SeaSaba's dive operation, 9 1/2 on a scale of 1-10. We stayed at the Cat's Eye Cottage and found this newly rebuilt Sabian cottage fantastic. Everything is new and modern. Wake up in the morning to a cloud rolling through the cottage. Only thing I would change is the couch (it was bought for looks and not comfort). Cat's Eye overlooks the village of Windwardside and has a spectacular mountainside view. Only complaint (other than the couch) is the hike up the hill or mountain. This was not disclosed to us before hand and is a good hike up to it. If you are not in decent physical shape, stay elsewhere. Overall rating of Cat's Eye Cottage, 9 on a scale of 1-10. Restaurant establishments are few with a somewhat limited selection. With few exceptions, service is slow at best (Island Time and in one case, ridiculously slow. Brigadoon was closed the entire 10 days we were there. Owners were off the island. Y2K has good food and is a nice place, service was good, no complaints. Scouts Place was good as well, great menu selection and a nice place, service was ok/good, no complaints. Tropics Cafe has pretty darn good food, but I think they grow everything after you order it and near have to beg for a second drink of anything (coffee, tea, beer), these folks don't get in a hurry for anything I saw. After 2 breakfasts and a lunch, each lasting 1 to 1 1/2 hours, I had enjoyed all this place I could stand. The Gate House has fan-

tastic food and wine with a great view, but, after 2 1/2 hours I was sooooo ready to leave this place. The Swinging Doors is a great place. Eddie and Pat are two of the most wonderful people you could ever hope to meet. Small corner saloon and restaurant with plenty of friendly locals. In our book, the best entertainment, food and drink on the Island. Tuesdays and Fridays are chicken and rib nights (umm, umm good) and Sunday is steak night (the old Island man can cook a ribeye now). Eddie will give a colorful commentary most all evening long and Pat will tell you how much of that you can edit. Fantastic place, great food, great service and two people we will never forget. Eddie and Pat could give the other places lessons in service (course Eddie would probably say that too). Because of the Swinging Doors the restaurant rating gets a 9 on a scale of 1-10. Saba is a great escape from our hectic lifestyles. If you want a laid back place with lots of peace and quite, pristine diving, friendly people and a place to relax, this is it. UW Photography Comments: Fresh water tank on the boat and that is about it. No film processing on the island.

Sea Saba, June 2004, Don Buswell-Charkow, Orlando, FL. Vis: 50-70 feet. Water: 80-82 F. Experience: 410. Depth limits and length of live were only issues. All reasonable to circumstances, i.e., deep dives. Sea Saba is an excellent dive operation. They pick you up at hotel or house (we rented a house) in nice vans for 15-minute ride to boats. Boats are excellent (1 with head, 1 without). Good dive briefings.

Seamount dives are deep, 90-100 feet to top, so dive times necessarily brief. I'd suggest getting Nitrox certified before going, but they offer course there. Food in local restaurants excellent! Island is charming though isolated.

Sea Saba, Juliana's, July 2004, Dick Sziede (sziede_d@mediasoft.net), Reston, VA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 60 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F. Caradonna Travel arranged all without a hitch. USAir hubs you in Charlotte NC, is a welcome relief after Miami or DFW.. Customs was a breeze on the return. Winair from St. Maarten to Saba hassled no one on baggage weight. Saba's first thrill was the cliff-side landing on the world's shortest commercial runway. The stall alarm sounded just as the wheels touched. There are six taxis on Saba. Roads are narrow, twisty, cliff-sided, and steep. We stayed at Flossie's Cottage. Rain was frequent, so the roofed porch at Orchid cottage would have been nice. The cottage is attractive and clean. Kitchen utensils are adequate for light meals. Arrival was after supper, so Saba Divers offered to stock the 'fridge for us. Bread, wine cheese and so on. The wine was Sancerre, a favorite of me bride and of Inspector Magret. The Windward market had a decent selection of food, and an excellent wineshelf. Beer is Heinekins or Caribe. AM 2-tank dives with Sea Saba were well-briefed and well led. At all except Diamond Rock one was free to wander. Currents at Diamond meant "keep the DM in sight." Dive sites are less than 30 minutes from the dock. First tank is usually on one of the pinnacles,

second inshore. Underwater formations are volcanic in origin. Sand near the island is yellow from sulphur, and toasty warm if you stick in a hand. Best dives are Diamond Rock and Man O' War Shoals. Water was choppy at the outside sites. Made me glad I kept to a toast & milk breakfast in the cottage, rather than bacon and eggs. Diver boats have a dry cabin and shelter from sun and rain. I wished for more sun from which to be sheltered. Head not working. There is a fin-on ladder. Sit on the transom while the crew takes your gear, and rigs it for the next dive. Small fish abound, and are unusually tame. Few fish bigger than a frying-pan. Some divers spotted a hammerhead. Juvenile spotted drum were at almost every site. One soft coral held multiple cleaning stations manned by coral shrimp, and patrolled by a teeny pipefish. A young hawksbill posed for us. Barracuda were shy of divers. A pair of Red Snappers escorted us through the night dive. We had to get tricky with our lights to keep them from chowing down on some of the small fry we scared up. Restaurant fish is flown in from Miami. Brigadoon had sushi-grade tuna, expertly prepared. The Eco-Lodge dinner is preceded by a slide show on Saba ecology. Saba is unreachable by cruise ship. Mt. Scenery is cloud/rain forest. Take hiking boots with big, Vibram lugs on the sole. The climb is wet, mossy rocks. The last 100 meters to the cairns at the overlooks are wet, mossy, muddy rocks. Slick as OJ's lawyer. Yes, I did a pratt fall. Clouds rolled in as I stood on the highest point in the Netherlands.

Sea Saba, Juliana's, July 2004, Martin Klein, Hoboken, NJ.

Experience: 200 dives. Vis: 30-50 ft., Water: 83 F, choppy. The accommodations and restaurants are better than on Statia with a nice variety for all budgets. The island is beautiful and super clean. You live on a mountain far removed from the sea below. Vegetation is lush with a cloud rainforest at the top. There is no beach and the island's three settlements are all high up on the mountain. Sea Saba runs a smooth operation. The two boats are large and comfortable but do not take more than 10 divers. During our stay they always had 8-10 divers. The divemasters were knowledgeable and professional. Although boat rides are short, getting to the water is involved. A van will pick all divers up at their hotels and take you to the harbor – 15-20 minutes down hairpin turns that will make you think you're in the Swiss Alps. Because of this commute you stay in the rather ugly harbor after your second dive and won't be back in town before 4pm. Bring your lunch. The fast food kiosk at the harbor leaves a lot to be desired. You leave your gear on the boat and they will set it up the next day. There are no rinse tanks. The divemasters spray your gear with a hose after the day's diving. We had booked a package with 10 dives, but because of a cold my wife could not dive. Sea Saba did not charge us for the dives she missed. Diving is more advanced than many Caribbean destinations because the famed pinnacles are deep. They urge you to dive Nitrox which makes sense. The diving was good but I was a disappointed nonetheless. Vis

was much less than I had hoped for. The coral in Statia seemed healthier and more abundant. There were more fish in Statia. Saba has a reputation for shark sightings, but I only saw sharks on one dive at Diamond Rock, a great dive with lots of life and much better bottom time than the pinnacles because it is shallower (80-90ft max). Man O'War Shoals is teeming with life. Accommodations at Juliana's were charming and their Tropical Café was great for breakfast or snacks. There is no air conditioning. Being high on the mountain, heat is not a problem. Because of the humidity clothes felt a bit damp. There are excellent restaurants. Our favorite was Y2K.

Sea Saba, Evemarie Cottage, August 2004, Omar Hafez (ohafez@earthlink.net), Mountain View, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 Fahrenheit, calm. Excellent staff at Sea Saba. Lynn runs a top notch dive operation. The dive boat was never overcrowded (usually 4 divers plus crew). Dive guides gave detailed briefings before each dive, were aware of experience level of all divers. Kudos to Guy, Leeda, Alex, Bruno and Marcel. Lots of healthy corals and sponges, excellent macro life, and the famous pinnacles. Although the "Needle" is at 90ft, the "Eye of the Needle" is at 160ft, so you cannot dive through it. Saw sharks, turtles, stingrays, nudibranchs, eels, squid, scorpionfish and jellyfish. Stay in Winwardside. The Evemarie Cottage is right across from the Brigadoon (with tasty meals from chef Michael), and within walking distance to the market.

Save a couple of days for hiking in the rainforest. It's well worth it.

Sea Saba, Cottage Club, August 2004, Richard W. Zuckerman (rwzuckermanesq@insightbb.com), Peoria, IL. Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm. This was one of the finest dive trips I have been on in 10 years. I worked through Beth Jensen at Dive Saba Travel. She made the arrangements with Cottage Club including getting us the cottage we wanted. She also arranged for our provisions for the cottage. The cottage was beautiful with an incredible view. Fixed some of our own meals and also ate at a number of eating establishments. Gate House, Eco-lodge, Brigadoon were particularly outstanding. Scout's and Tropics were great lunch places. Sea Saba is an very well run operation. Two beautiful boats with plenty of room for gear. Never more than 8 divers. Morning dives at 9:00 and optional afternoon dive at 1:30. Night dives were arranged. Did one night dive with just 4 divers. All dive sites are 10 to 15 minutes from dock unless you were lucky (like we were on our last day) and able to dive the windward side of the island. Crews know where each diver has been and make sure divers don't go to same sites. Dive briefings are concise and right on point. Almost everyone dove Nitrox32 so divers dove similar profiles. Pinnacles are magnificent. There are also spur/groove reefs and Cayman-like walls. All of the coral was in excellent shape and sealife was abundant. Southern and Eagle rays, tur-

gles, nurse and reef sharks were seen during our five days of diving. Steve and Lita were a great dive crew. The above ground activities of hiking, bird watching and shopping were also fun. Saba is still one of the most pristine spots in the Carribean.

SeaSaba, September 2004, Lisa Vignerot (lvignerot@hotmail.com), Stafford, VA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 86 to 88 Fahrenheit, calm. Wish I took the Ferry. WinAir did not put our bags on our plane, so we had to dive in rental gear. Of course we had baggage insurance, but WinAir refuses to give us a delayed baggage report so we can file a claim with our insurance. The airline was a very unprofessional group, terrible service, and the planes didn't look too good. Exciting trip and it was fast. Sea Saba was awesome and took care of us. They were a great group — boats were well equipped, and the dives were awesome. Garvis the cab driver is the best!

St. EUSTATIUS

A historically significant island, St. Eustatius, which lies 50 miles south of St. Maarten, was the first to recognize the United States as a country. As a result, British Men o' War pounded the island to a pulp. Some artifacts from the barrage can still be found in the murky water of the bay, and low-profile reefs offshore provide pristine coral and plenty of fish; thanks to the marine park, the diving here is much better than average

Caribbean diving. A hike up the Quill, an extinct volcano, is worth the effort. The people are friendly, there are a few small restaurants.

Dive Statia, King's Well Inn, March 2004, Peter Hartlove, Longmont, CO. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 79 F, choppy, surge. We were a group of 25, special chartered plane to get there, crowd and band met us at the airport, big deal for us flying Sun Caribbean in! Win and Laura at King's Well Inn were very accommodating but weren't used to such a large group. We filled the place and had all 3 meals a day there. They worked their tails off! Very nice rooms, overlooking the ocean, no A/C but didn't need it. The waves crashing were wonderful at nite. Reena and Rudy at Dive Statia also were accommodating but not used to 25 divers at once. Had to borrow a boat to accommodate us on 2 boats. Took 3 days to settle into the routine. Had young, relatively inexperienced dive guides, not great at pointing things out. It was stressed that there was no touching and no gloves allowed. Then, on the 2nd dive, my wife saw Rudy grab a lobster buy the antenna, pull it out of it's hole and wave it around to show everyone, as it struggled to free itself. She confronted him topside and his defense was that he wasn't hurting it. I guess the rules don't apply to him. Reported to the Marine Park officials. There are a few interesting wrecks (some encrusted, one brand new that will mature with age), average Caribbean diving. Old style Caribbean island that has not been built up, that was nice, everyone