

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-

bles, 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

smiles and waves at you. At first, we were told no spare airs (unsure why) but they relented when pushed. Wanted to control our routes of dives at first but we are experienced and went our own way after the first day without problems. A few small critters, many angels, couple of sharks, several turtles, 1 seahorse, overall, average Caribbean diving from a spoiled Pacific diver. No rinse buckets on boat, 1 large bucket at the shop, saw a few interesting creatures, accommodating flying gurnards, several angels of all species, 1 brown seahorse, a few wrecks, some encrusted. A new wreck will be good in a few years, if you are into wrecks. ([www.divestatia.com](http://www.divestatia.com))

**Dive Statia, Kingswell Hotel, March 2004, Sam Pearlstein, DPM, (sbpdpm@hotmail.com), Manlius, NY.** Vis: 50-80 feet. Water: 80-81 F. Dives logged: 460+. About 20 divers in our group. Dive Statia had to bring in another boat to accommodate our group. Owner/operator "hated" the additional boat and let us know it. One of our divers chided (scolded) owner/operator, Rudy, for over-handling a lobster. He apologized, but a couple of us later heard him belittling the incident. Unprofessional. Otherwise, Dive Statia did a good job.

**Dive Statia, Old Gin House, July 2004, Martin Klein, Hoboken, NJ.** Experience: 200 dives. Vis: 60 ft., Water: 83 F, calm There are no sandy beaches lining the shore and you will see a tankers because of the oil terminal on the island, however, by the time we left we had started looking at real

estate. The tourist infrastructure is undeveloped with few hotels/guest-houses and only three dive shops. It seems authentic and kids get a blast out of the wandering goats, donkeys and chickens. I enjoyed diving with Dive Statia. Rudy and Rinda own the longest operating dive shop on the island and they make sure you have a good time. There are two other dive shops within 50 yards of each other. The divemasters were Jeremy and Hanneke from the Netherlands. They have a great sense of humor and take you where you want to go. You meet at the dive shop and then go by truck to the harbor (a 2 minute drive at 15mph). The boat rides are 10 minutes or less. Experienced divers will enjoy their freedom while they took good care of my wife who had a bad cold and had to take it easy. She was only able to dive two out of 10 pre-booked dives. Rudy did not charge us for the dives she skipped. They also took me out on their bigger boat on two days when I was the only diver. Fish life in the Statia marine park is excellent in numbers and variety. We saw several reef sharks, large schools of horse eye jacks on almost all safety stops, numerous turtles and lots of interesting shrimp varieties. The coral is in great shape. The obligatory "Blue Bead" dive turned out to be a superb muck dive. The blue glass beads were used as currency in the days of slavery. I saw a magnificent sea urchin, two snake eels, flying gurnards, a gigantic hermit crab, a baby scorpion fish, numerous beautiful translucent shrimp in various colors... I also found an 18th century bottle. I did not look for the beads but

someone else found two. There is a dock across the street from the Blue Bead restaurant and kids caught a small reef shark there. They could not be persuaded to let it go and the shark struggled for a long time on the pier while being prodded and kicked before it died. The Old Gin House was a disappointment. The standard rooms (\$130/night, \$110 when booking through Dive Statia) are dark. The hotel has hardly any staff during the day and in the evening there is no one there. the famed Belgian chef left for good so there is no restaurant for dinner at the hotel although the snack bar for lunch is decent. We mostly had dinner at the Blue Bead harbor where the food was simple but quite good. The first two days we had no hot water and it took significant prodding to get a different room. They still charged the full price for the previous days. Next time we would look for a vacation rental. Rudy and Rinda are remodeling a beautiful home to turn it into a guest-house with stunning views.

**Golden Rock Dive Center, Old Gin House, April 2004, Joni & Bobby Lamb (scubalovers@comcast.net), Richmond Hill, GA.** Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. We knew we were off the beaten path after we awoke to roosters crowing outside our hotel room at 4:00 am, and every morning thereafter. There were free-range goats, donkeys, cows, and chickens as well. And we loved every minute of our stay. Golden Rock Dive Center ([www.goldenrockdive.com](http://www.goldenrockdive.com)) owners Michelle & Glenn Faires made our stay comfort-

able and enjoyable. They booked us in the Old Gin House and provided transportation to and from the Statia airport. Divemasters Lisbeth and Michael were entertaining and knowledgeable of the dive sites. The staff was friendly and accommodating. Their pontoon boat was never crowded. We never had more than 10 divers. Golden Rock provided plenty of space to rinse and hang our gear to dry. They also put away our gear in their shop at night. The diving was great with plenty of healthy marine life and corals. The Old Gin House was a charming little hotel. There were few wait staff personnel, but they were friendly and we all managed fine by ourselves. We were on a small island and we have to make do with what we had. The breakfast was mainly continental, but did include cook-to-order eggs. The poolside rooms were comfortable and clean. We had hot water and a/c. The pool area had shade. We never had a bad meal anywhere on the island. We ate most lunches at the Blue Bead Restaurant at the boat docks. We would work up an appetite walking up the steep "Slave Walk" just behind the hotel for dinner in "Upper Town". When flying there, we had a four-hour layover in the St. Martin airport. We found an upstairs cocktail lounge in the in-transit side of the airport that provided plenty of free drinks and munchies for a \$20 cover charge. When flying back home, always plan for long lines at the St. Martin airport. We are required to claim our luggage from the island hopper planes, and recheck it on our connecting flight coming back home. ([www.goldenrockdive.com](http://www.goldenrockdive.com))

## ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

These small, intimate islands have a lot of "Old Caribbean" charm. Their strong suits are gracious hotels and old inns, verdant, green scenery, and lovely beaches. The diving is decent, but there are no thrills.

**Dive St. Kitts, Marriott Royal St. Kitts, March 2004, John Konnak, Ann Arbor, MI.** Experience: 242 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 feet. Water: 79–81 F. Marriott is first class, but pricey. Less expensive accommodations are available for divers, i.e., Bird Rock Hotel where Dive St. Kitts operates. St. Kitts has limited dive sites; best is Sandy Point, 20 or 30-minute boat ride from Dive St. Kitts. Dive operation is very good; fast boat, friendly and helpful staff. No camera tank on boat. Tanks always over 3,000 psi. ([www.divestkitts.com](http://www.divestkitts.com))

**Kenneth's Dive Shop, Cruise, January 2004, Bruce Thompson (thompsv@Sherbtel.net) Cambridge, MN.** Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 20 to 25 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm, no currents. Two dives. First was a reef from 60-80'. Found a fish trap with about 3 dozen fish inside. Some coral, sponges and reef fish. Visibility was only about 20'. After a 45 minute wait, we went to a wreck site with a small ship broken in a couple pieces. Also a van and a bulldozer at that site. It had 50 old tires scattered on the bottom. Saw an octopus, eel, lots of fish. The ship had lots of life on it. Clams, urchins and

fish. Visibility was limited 20-25 feet. ([www.divestkitts.com](http://www.divestkitts.com))

## ST. LUCIA

St. Lucia lies in the hurricane belt west of Barbados. Diving on this beautiful, heavily-forested island, with pretty reefs and tiny fish, is managed and controlled. ... on the southwestern part of island is where the better diving is, but it's rigidly controlled; there's not much worth seeing elsewhere underwater. ... The year-round high is in the 80s days; night lows are in the 70s. Afternoon cloud-bursts are common.

**Dive Fair Helen, Ti Kaye, January 2004, William Parks, Columbia, MO.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: calm. Located several miles off the main West Coast Highway on an isolated bay, Anse Conchon, where the protected reef begins and runs down to the Southern tip of island. There are 33 cottages, 19 of which are separate, like the one in which we stayed, and the others are duplexes. Each cottage is nestled into the hillside overlooking a view of the Caribbean Sea. Simple luxury is the theme as the cottages feature wide slatted Venetian blinds, an open air garden shower, a romantic four poster bed draped with billowing white curtains and air conditioning, which we didn't need. The front porch had a table, rocking chairs and hammock, completely private from any other cottage. (Our cottage was named Hadi.) The restaurant and bar at the open pavilion was not disappointing. The

staff was attentive and friendly. The owners made themselves available, especially Jeannie who was particularly friendly and helpful. We dove with Dive Fair Helen which had a branch at Ti Kaye until the dock was destroyed in a storm in 2003. We were reasonably satisfied with their operation except for one divemaster who was so fixed on getting an octopus to show us from under a rock. He struggled for at least ten minutes not paying attention to any of us divers. The creature was dead when we finally pulled it out. We had to board the boat by swimming out from the beach. However, we rented a car for part of the trip and drove 15 minutes to Marigot Bay where we strolled onto the boat as it picked up divers who were staying at various resorts at that beautiful bay. On either side of the beach there is nice snorkeling, as well as at least 5 dive sites a minute or two from Ti Kaye. The diving itself was good, though not as good as our previous experiences in Cozumel, Bonaire, and Tortola. However, the island itself is spectacular. Our land experiences were more enjoyable than even those we've had on Tortola. Ti Kaye Resort is half way between Castries, and the spectacular Soufriere area with the awesome Pitons. We had pleasant, beautiful drives along the coastal highway, after a morning of diving, for site-seeing and some wonderful dining. Although you have to climb 166 steps down (and later, up) to the beach, it is a nice beach early in the morning and later in the afternoon. Nearly every day, one or two party boats carrying scores of snorkeling, swimming tourists from

Castries docked at Anse Conchon for several hours. There is plenty of room, as the bay is large enough, but most annoying were the handful of locals on sea kayaks trying to sell those tourists beads and conch shells constantly blowing their conches to get people's attention. ([www.divefairhelen.com](http://www.divefairhelen.com))

**Island Divers, Ti Kaye, December 2003, PA Jacobs (jacobspat@earthlink.net) Waldorf, MD.** While the resort side of TiKaye is wonderful, the diving operation was substandard. The resort had but one boat to share between water taxi duties and divers and snorkelers. Dive trips would start late because the boat was off doing water taxi work, then because the dive trip started late, the diving was hurried to meet the water taxi schedule. Diving was disappointing due to the overly conservative divemaster — Steve. One day I was the only diver. Steve had a divemaster candidate lead the dive which was limited to 50 feet and about 45 minutes- I am an instructor and had been diving with them for 3 or 4 days prior to this dive. I exited the water with more than 1500 pounds of air remaining! Not the type of diving I expected. I complained to the head of the diving operation and he apparently had no knowledge of this divemaster candidate diving with us. The next day, the head of the operation lead the dive which was a bit deeper and longer, but after that, it was back to the same routine of waiting for a boat followed by short/shallow dives. My second visit to TiKaye – the first with Dive Fair Helen was wonderful, but they no longer use that operation. TiKaye needs to get a