

dedicated boat, and build a pier.
(www.tikaye.com/scuba)

Island Divers, Ti Kaye Village, June 2004, Sherri O'Neal, Stone Mountain, GA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 65 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, currents. Cab ride from the airport took us on a very scenic hour and half tour in an air-conditioned van. Although the roads were a bit bumpy and very narrow. Most drivers on the island did not have much regard for safety. The staff at Ti Kaye Village greeted us at arrival and we instantly felt as though we had discovered the most perfect piece of paradise in the world. The courteous staff walked us to our room where our luggage had already been delivered. Rooms are actually little cottages with huge hammock porches, fabulous private outdoor showers and a gorgeous bed with flower petals and mosquito nets. The cottages are spacious with a gorgeous view from any angle of the beautiful beach or the rainforest. The rooms also come with air-conditioning and a mini fridge. The staff was wonderful and would go out of their way to deliver anything you'd need to your room. We enjoyed mornings of coffee on the porch watching the gorgeous humming birds in the trees. Meals were served three times a day. Reservations were needed for dinner. All meals were the best I've ever had anywhere. My compliments to the chef, Paul Yellin. There was a terrific bar and again, wonderful staff. There is a pool on site and a gorgeous beach but, be warned, this is not the place to go if you don't like long walks and lots of stairs. A can of bug

spray was in the room but was barely needed as the pests seemed to stay away. Island Diver's, on the premises, doesn't get a very early start. Most dives are two tank and they begin their day around 10 or 11am. The guys were nice and accommodating. We could store all gear in a locked area. They were having some issues with getting a decent boat for the diving though and at times were a little stressed out about boat problems. They could've done a better job at keeping that among themselves and being a little more professional. Once in the water though, they were confident and capable. Not a lot of big stuff but some of the corals appear to be very healthy and lots of smaller life. Fishermen would often fish right above a dive sight. The seas were always calm and flat and there were a few currents. The sites nearest the big Pitons seemed to have much stronger currents and would be better for the more experienced diver. Most dive sites were a very short boat ride away and a little diving and snorkeling could be done right off the beach at the resort. In Castries the native islanders were rude, pushy and the town was not clean. There were times that I did not feel safe either. If you stay at Ti Kaye Village, be prepared to do a meal plan there. The road to the resort is long, desolate and bumpy and not one that you would want to travel often. There is more than enough to keep you satisfied at the resort though without leaving. The atmosphere is very romantic, laid back and stress free.

Ti Kaye, July 2004, George A. Bogard (awesomei@sbcglobal.net),

Rockwall, TX. Vis: 50-70 feet. Water: 80-82 F. Experience: 780+. This is a pretty resort, but definitely not a diving resort. First, it sits high on a cliff with over 150 steps to the beach! It is very understaffed, so everything takes forever to be done. The dive staff is more concerned with telling you what not to do than showing you the reef or critters. They tried to keep everyone herded together like sheep at shallow depths rather than help find animal life.

ST. MAARTEN

French St. Martin and Dutch St. Maarten are two islands in one, with wonderful beaches, superb hotels, fine cuisine — and poor diving.

Dive Safaris, Pelican Resort, December 2003, John Keith (jkeith@econ.usu.edu) **Logan, UT.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 27 to 28 Celsius, choppy, surge, currents. Our 2-tank boat dive with Dive Safaris was on a newly sunk tug and the older wreck (barge). We had 5 people on the dive. The dive-masters were attentive and were helpful, as were the people in the office (a real change from the rest of the "friendly island.") While not the most exciting dives, we did have fun cruising through the barge (saw a couple of large lobsters, a scorpion fish, and lots of small fish) and the newly sunken tug (even visiting a head). Not many fish were around, however. We very much liked the dive operation.
(www.thescubashop.net)

ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

St. Vincent lies in a beautiful chain of islands and is heavily forested, with pretty reefs and a good range of fish species. ... Daytime temperatures are in the high 80s year-round, the low 70s at night; afternoon cloudbursts are common; St. Vincent is in the hurricane belt. ... The Grenadines — Bequia, Palm, Union, and Carriacou — are a sailor's dream; they're islands with small hotels, little dive operations, decent Caribbean diving, and have become, perhaps, the "small critter capital" of the Caribbeans.

Bequia

Dive Bequia, Gingerbread Hotel, February 2004, William Edwards, Placerville, CA. Dives logged: 220. Vis: 40-50 ft. Water: 80-81 F. Dive restrictions enforced: time limits. This dive operation was not smoothly run. When Bob, the owner, was in the boat it was always a "rushed" operation. Plus he had no qualms about dropping anchor on the reefs. Deedee was a much better divemaster. On one of my four dives I was allowed to stay down for more than an hour — we were usually allowed less than 50 minutes. The quality of the reefs and fish life was fair, but nothing spectacular. We stayed at the Gingerbread Hotel, which is about two doors up from Dive Bequia. Our unit was clean and comfortable, but certainly not the Ritz. Dinners at the restaurant were very good and there are

several other good restaurants along the same waterfront. We were plagued by mosquitoes. And we found it hard to get a decent night's sleep due to barking dogs and crowing roosters. Take several bottles of mosquito repellent, ear plugs, and I'll try Bequia's Dive adventures instead. (www.dive-bequia.com)

Carriacou

Carriacou Silver Diving, March 2004, Walter Brenner, Wayne, PA.

Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 78-79 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 60 min. max. Lovely, small, quiet island with little tourism and very friendly people. No big hotels. For Caribbean — excellent diving. Good variety of critters, healthy reefs, and enough dive sites to make each dive enjoyable. Excellent dive operation. (www.scubamax.com)

St. Vincent

Dive St. Vincent, Rosewood Hotel, October 2003, Paul and Cori Gondek (gonzodive@surfbvi.com) The Valley, Virgin Gorda.

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. The diving was very nice — lots of small things to see and photograph: frogfish, seahorses to the point of tiring of them, pipefish, nudibranchs, flying gurnards. Some very healthy sponges and coral life; large schools of chromis but no large animals or pelagics. Saw one small Southern stingray and one small barracuda. Water temp was nice and warm (82-84 F) and a 2.5 mm shorty was sufficient. Dive staff was wonderful and knowledgeable about the sites. We

went diving with Larry, DJ and Callie and enjoyed diving with each of them. The dive shop itself has no retail to speak of but there is a place to rinse and store your gear. The staff set up our equipment each day and changed it over between the dives. The boats were fairly small, max of about 8 guests which was nice. Day trip to Falls of Baleine with 2 dives and a stop for lunch was a great sightseeing/diving day. Would look for another hotel though — we expected Rosewood to be a little nicer than it was. The hotel was old and not near the beach, but only about ten minute walk from the dive shop and fairly easy access to buses and taxis to get around the island. It might be nicer to spend a little more and stay on the beach. Great potential for macro photography. The boats weren't really set up for cameras — a small fresh water area on one boat, no fresh water on another. We took digital photographs so don't know availability of film processing. (www.divestvincent.com)

Dive St Vincent, December 2003, Ray Haberman (RHaberman@msn.com) Naperville, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 150 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm. St Vincent lives up to its reputation as the "Critter Capital of the Caribbean" and Bill Tewes of "Dive St Vincent" is one of the most knowledgeable men on fish and critter identification. Bill carries an underwater slate and will tell you on the spot, what you are looking at. His enthusiasm is infectious and before you know it, you are looking everywhere for critters smaller than your little fingernail. St

Vincent attracts fewer divers and this allows for smaller dive groups. Smaller groups allows for slower, longer dives. Many of the dives will last from 60-90 minutes depending on your air consumption. Before going, contact Bill and see what packages he can arrange with the local hotels. Rinse tank provided on all boats.

Dive St. Vincent, Sunset Shore, February 2004, Carol and Ron Keller (rkeller3@cox.net) Derby, KS.

Dives logged: 135/160. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 76-77 F. Dive restrictions enforced: air. Several hotels along the Villa Beach, all within a short "beach" walk to Dive St. Vincent. We stayed at Sunset Shores, which was pleasant and comfortable. Mariners and BeachComber also seemed nice. Best food at French Veranda. Island appeared to have few tourists — mainly divers and sailors. Divemasters gave little if any briefing. The only limitation given was air. They were good spotters of small critters. I was disappointed to see one assisting a diver to collect shells. Seahorses, eels, octopus', squid, lots of small things to be seen. Dive St. Vincent charges 5% extra if you use a credit card. Cost of dives almost double if you don't get a dive package. Volcano hike is worthwhile.

Dive St. Vincent, Jenna's Place, February 2004, Glenn R. Barker (GlennB8@yahoo.com) Corpus Christi, TX.

Water: 78-80 F. The most abundant fish and small critter life in the dozen islands I have been to in the Caribbean. I routinely saw species and varieties of species here that are sel-

dom, if ever, seen in other Caribbean islands. Whether you want dirt diving for the critters or sheer cliffs, you'll find it in St. Vincent. Dive St. Vincent I really enjoyed. Right by the dock, close to the best dive sites, the staff, friendly, but not overly so (in the used car dealer attitude so prevalent in many dive shops). They leave you alone to dive in small, intimate groups, no cattleboats! I never once got the impression they were conducting a paratroop drop over enemy territory and they don't feel the need to organize and pair everyone up. The staff does not cater to the fussy. Can't stand it if everything isn't in its exact place and to have the gear piled in the center of the boat? Need a "detailed" dive briefing by a divemaster who thinks you're there to listen to him? Need an "attentive" divemaster who controls you and your dive? Need to be entertained by "fish stories"? Need to be told how to dive? Must have a place to stow everything? Go elsewhere. But, if you want quality service molded to you rather than the other way around, this is the place. In fact, both Callie and D.J. are excellent. They seem to realize you paid good money to dive. They help only when it is needed. They don't micro-manage your depth, air, or dive profile. You're treated as if you have enough sense to come back to the boat when you're low on air. The dives are not managed to the divemaster's insecurities like too many other dive shops, but by divemasters who do not constantly intrude on your solitude. You can't talk about Dive St. Vincent without talking about the dive shop owner and island character, Bill Tewes. After all, how many of

us have a postage stamp of ourselves in dive gear on the stamp of the county? (1985-86, I believe, see the Philatelic Society). This latter-day Fagin (when you meet and see Bill, you will figure it out) is a real treat. If you're a "real" diver — I don't mean in terms of experience or skill — but attitude, and not a dilettante, Bill will like you and he will show you creatures you have never seen. His knowledge of St. Vincent sea life is encyclopedic. (He can't remember what he ate for lunch yesterday, but he knows his sea life.) The natives of St. Vincent are very genuinely friendly. You must approach them, they are not reticent, just well-mannered. I never once got the whiff of "leave you money and go", or, preferably, "just send you money and don't come at all," I have experienced in other places. The accommodations were great. I stayed at Jenna's Place. It's 10 minutes from the dive shop. I had a 4 bedroom palace to myself. Jenna, their service, and the accommodations, couldn't have been better. The dozen or so dogs along the street barking all night, I could have done without, but that had nothing to do with superior service and accommodations. The restaurant dining was eminently forgettable. Be prepared to cook in your room — don't go out for the grub. The food and restaurants were average at best. No gourmet/ethnic dining here, even the touted Basil's, Cobblestone Inn, and Lime Pub were average. Bring a lot of books and be prepared for a lot of beach lounging.

Dive St. Vincent, Sunset Shores, February 2004, William Edwards, Placerville, CA. Dives logged: 220.

Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. I didn't get to dive with the world famous Bill Tewes, but Callie and Don were both very good at finding the small critters too. They pointed out a spotted spoon nose eel to us and box crabs and little critters including sea horses. There seemed to be a lack of large fish in the area. The Sunset Shores Hotel is just a short walk up the beach from the Dive Shop. It was clean and comfortable although not exactly The Allegro and Young Island. The people at Sunset Shores were very friendly and accommodating. We were picked up at the airport by a taxi driver names Smokey. Later in the week he took us on an island tour that included Fort Charlotte and the Botanical Gardens which were interesting. Smokey also took us to and from several of the nearby restaurants. The roads are narrow and the locals drive fast so I wouldn't advise walking to any nearby eating places — especially after dark.

Dive St. Vincent, Marina Hotel and Resort, March 2004, Charles Levine, Red Lion, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy, surge. We were a group of 14 from York Divers exploring St. Vincent for the first time. Experience levels among the divers ranged from <20 dives to >500; four divers were photographers. Getting to/from SVD took the whole day; lots of forms to fill out along the way, but overall no significant snags. Accommodations at Marina Hotel and Resort were clean and bright. Food was very good to excellent. Breakfast was included in our package; other

meals were reasonably priced and always tasty. We found Bill Tewes and his staff professional and fun to be with. We understood the requirement to pay cash for all add-ons in advance. We went on two boats (max 8 divers/boat). Bill always went on the late boat with the photographers, and was able to demonstrate critters that aren't easily seen without such a superb guide. Dives of 75-90 minutes were the norm on his boat. Our boat had non-photographers and more novice divers. We were allowed to dive our own profiles (with computers); table divers (2 of them) stuck with the DMs and had <30 minute dives. Fair amount of current at several sites required the boat to go after a couple of divers during the week. Overall visibility was in the 50-75 foot range. Although water temp was 79-81 F, it still felt cool so 3mm was definitely necessary, and hoods helped. Reefs appeared very healthy, fish life abundant, but other than one large ray, no large life was seen. Restaurants were all able to accommodate our large group willingly (with separate checks) with the notable exception of Lime N Pub, next door to the Marina Hotel. Terrific food and waitresses, but the owner/director was unaccommodating, brusque, and surly. Considering we spent over \$US 700 on dinner there, his attitude was horrible. Vincentians were overall pleasant and inviting; we didn't feel fear or discomfort walking or using local minibuses.

Dive St. Vincent, Young Island Resort, May 2004, Clyde and Eleanor (clyod@aol.com) Jefferson, GA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 45 to 70 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, choppy. The Chapbook's reports are right on. This place is made for macro. You can sit at one coral head and shoot a roll of film. I found myself shooting arrow crabs out of the way to get shots of seahorses. With Bill Tewes a nice video set up would be great. I was very surprised to find that there were some very nice wide angle shots as well. This place does not have the great majestic walls of Little Cayman or Grand Turk but it is very fishy in many places and I was pleasantly surprised at the number of pretty reef scenic shots.

Dive St. Vincent, Sunset Hotel, June 2004, Allan & Barbara Jones (divers@sbcglobal.net), Anaheim, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: 80 to 80 Fahrenheit, calm, choppy, no Currents. While the critters were far and away better than other Caribbean locations that we have dove, it was not even close to the South Pacific. Most would say "don't expect it to be", we have talked to some others, some highly experienced semi-pros, who have indicated that we just didn't see much. While any site goes hot and cold at times, we were there when the owner, Bill Tewes, was away. This allowed for a fair amount of laxity on the regular dive guides coupled with some 'attitude'. From previous Undercurrent reports we were aware of the hidden extra charges for the 'beach picnic and trip to the falls'. There is another 'nickel & dime trick' to avoid. There is an additional US\$10/person charge for night dives. It was not known until bill

presentation time that any diving after 3:00 pm is considered as a night dive. On one day we did 2 dives in the morning and 2 after lunch. The second one finished after 3:00 pm so we got charged extra for this. It leaves a cheap taste in your memories! We booked a 14 day package with room accommodations through Dive St Vincent and stayed at the Sunset Lodge about 150 yards you the beach. Good clean rooms. Our dive gear was rinsed daily at the dive shop and we carried our cameras back to the hotel. Just on the other side of the dive shop was the "Veranda" restaurant. Outstanding food! Make sure you try the "Mi Cri" desert! Some of the healthiest diving in the Carribean, (reminds us of Belize in the very early 80's), dive guides need a 'tune up', dive boats were in good running condition. For Californians, not an easy place to get to: red eye LA to Miami, then two more flights to St Vincent. Shore based dive operation had fresh water rinse facilities. We carried our cameras to hotel about 150 yards down the beach.

Dive St. Vincent, Sunset Shores Resort, June 2004, Juliet Trueblood, Orange, CA. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80 degrees F. Dives logged 200+.

Beautiful, healthy reefs and walls. Abundant small critters, excellent for Caribbean. Booked thru Bill Tewes, owner, no price break on 18 dives in 6 days. Told ahead night dives \$10 extra, not told dives after 3:00 p.m.. were \$10 extra, but charged. Bill was out of town and divemasters Callie and D. J. very unfriendly with bad attitudes. Had to ask D. J. any question three times to get

any response. No enthusiasm, no dive briefings. Each dive was like getting teenager up early Saturday a. m. for yard work. What ever happened to service with a smile? Hotel spacious, clean, friendly staff, included breakfast. Food very expensive, only restaurant worth it was French Veranda in the Mariner Hotel. Excellent cuisine and friendly staff and chef. Five divers in our group, which made trip and dive experience a pleasure in spite of D. M.'s.

TURKS AND CAICOS

These islands, situated south of the Bahamas and north of the Virgins, feature awesome walls and clear water. ... Provo, the glitzy island, has spectacular beaches, but it's an hour's boat ride to the better diving of South or West Caicos. Grand Turk, on the other hand, is a funky, laid-back island that has a wall right offshore. Salt Cay has pretty diving; West and North Caicos have no dive facilities. ... Bring a long-sleeved shirt during the winter; it can get cool in the evenings. ... The flight to Provo from Miami is a little over an hour.

Grand Turk

Blue Water Divers, Osprey Beach Hotel, June 2004, Anthony v. Dresden, Arlington , VA. Experience: Over 1000 dives Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. My 3th visit to Grand Turk and its wonderful, healthy walls and reefs continue to please and amaze. Although the mantas are not as plentiful, turtles on almost

every dive. Some other divers even saw a tiger shark. I saw a large midnight blue parrotfish. Tons of tropicals and great coral. Effortless diving and sites never more than 10-15 minutes from your lodgings Blue Water Divers – the island's only PADI five-star facility – is owned by Mitch Rolling. Mitch came as a teenager to Grand Turk and is mentioned prominently in Stephen Harrigan's wonderful book, *Water and Light*. Mitch has logged 8,000 dives on Grand Turk. He and his divemaster, Conchy display enormous enthusiasm and do a fabulous job. Boats are never overcrowded. Divers are polled as to what sites that have been on to avoid repeats. Mitch and Conchy will scour the reefs to find whatever weird blenny you need a photo of. They will help the novice diver while letting those with experience do their own thing. I followed Jenny Smith from the Salt Raker to the beachfront Osprey Beach which she now owns. This was once the infamous Kittina, which was subsequently placed under the witness protection program and renamed the Sitting Pretty. Now, it's a wonderful small hotel with lovely rooms and the same great staff she put together at the Salt Raker. Everyone is friendly. Food is very good with a changing menu and plenty of fresh fish and lobster (in season) and there's a great barbecue every Sunday and Wednesday night. Don't miss Annamae's key lime pie. Mitch and his local band, High Tide play on these nights after dinner. It's a rock and scrape band combining rock and the rake 'n scrape Bahamian style (think rip saws, screwdrivers as instruments). They're great. There is a serious effort to bring

cruise ships to Grand Turk – as soon as the Fall 2005. Any thoughts as what can be done to preserve this wonderful spot? (www.grandturkscuba.com)

Oasis Divers, Island House, October 2003, John and Sandra Quick, Grand Rapids, MI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 82 F, choppy. Our third visit in three years to Oasis Divers and Island House. We enjoy the quiet atmosphere and laid back diving. The folks at Oasis Divers have always been friendly and accommodating. Island House is not on the beach. It is situated on a hilltop overlooking North Creek and the Sea. It is a small family run operation with a handful of suites and apartments. With your room rate you get a vehicle which allows you to commute (5 minutes or so, maybe longer if there are donkeys or horses in the road) to the dive shop and to explore the island after your day of diving. No restaurant or bar at Island House. You can drive into town for dinner and nightlife. The rooms at Island House have refrigerators and limited cooking facilities so you can take meals in if you like. Grand Turk is one of our favorites because of the ease of diving. Short boat rides to dive sites. Lots of little stuff out there. Never fail to find juvenile trunkfish here. Lots of turtles this trip. Quite unafraid and approachable. This is the only spot in the Caribbean that we have seen Quill fin blenny. We have seen them every trip. An amazing number of large groupers considering they are on the menu every night every where! Govenors Beach is a short drive from Island House. It's a nice public beach.