

ANGUILLA

A small, pricey island, just a short ferry ride from St. Maarten. Beautiful beaches, expensive hotels and exclusive ambiance make it popular with honeymooners and the rich and famous. Typical Caribbean reefs and reef fish are easily accessible.

Special “D” Diving, La Sirena, January 2005, Lucius “Bud” Foster (elijahsdad@prodigy.net), Duluth, MN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 74 to 80 F, choppy. Well it all started on a trip to Cozumel in November 2004. My girlfriend was going to meet me in Cozumel after I had been their diving for a week. I was going to ask her to marry me (on my dive slate) while drift diving the Santa Rosa Wall. However, she turned up for a week with a cold and ear infection. Well, there went my plan. I did not know what to do so I asked her just before she got back on the plane for the States, and I explained how I had it all planned out to get married if she had said yes while we were in Cozumel. She said yes and we decided to go to Saba to tie the knot. When I got back to the states I found out that it would take a couple of months for the Saba government to put together the paper work (red tape). In Anguilla you only need to be on the island three days to get married and the diving was suppose to be pretty good. We stayed at the La Sirena at Meads Bay (www.la-sirena.com) in a side by side duplex one bedroom with an airy living room, breakfast room, and kitchen with a front

porch that had plenty of space for drying dive gear. It had its own little drive way to park a rental car and the walk to the beach was about 200 feet. Most every day the beach was empty and private because most people stay and go to the beach at Shole Bay. The food was good and the staff goes out of there way to make sure your stay is comfortable. I would drive every morning about 10 min. to Sandy Ground were Special “D” Diving would leave for the daily AM two tank dive. The 30’ dive boat is locally made (like most boats) with twin 150 HP outboards, center counsel drive, with comfortable side bench seats with plenty of room for up to 10 divers. Most every dive never had more then 10 divers and on most days 6 to 8. We were pretty limited to only the AM two tank dive every day because the weather for a week was windy and the seas were 4-8 ft rough and choppy. The owner (Doug Carty) and dive master was always professional, environmentally careful, and safety conscious. The visibility was limited because of the weather however, the dive usually started with a wreck for the first dive then a reef on the second. The coral is healthy with elkhorn limited due to the last hurricane that ripped most of it up some years ago. Lots of wrecks, healthy fan coral, lobsters, nurse sharks, eels, large turtles, spotted eagle rays, large spotted drums, large schools of Atlantic spadefish, and plenty of small stuff for the macro shots. I was pretty impressed. Anguilla seems to be growing pretty fast and they just completed an expansion to the airport so you can now jet in with having to take the ferry from St. Martin. There was no real set

up for underwater equipment on the boat but Doug (the owner) will arrange a plastic case or special area for your camera while on the boat. Then when we got in the water it was so choppy, the whole time I was there, that Doug would have the captain hand him the camera with strobes and he would bring it to me so that I did not have to deal with getting to close to the boat during the choppy seas. When I would come up from the dive he would give me bottled water to rinse the camera housing and strobes and then when we would get to the dock he would take the camera and diving equipment and rinse it all off with fresh water.

ARUBA

Near the Venezuela coast, Aruba diving doesn't match neighboring Bonaire and Curacao, but there is good diving and some operators will take you there. Miles of white sand, glitzy casinos, hotels and restaurants may make it a good compromise destination for the nondiving spouse. There are several good boat dives. The south Wall, past San Nicholas near the southern tip of Aruba, is also good. Aruba lies south of the hurricane belt.

Dive Aruba, Holiday Inn Sunspree, September 2004, Roland & Pam Hebert (rolpenny34@earthlink.net), New Bedford, MA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 78 to 84 F, calm, no currents. We got to Aruba 2 days after Hurricane Ivan which limited the visibility. The Holiday Inn Sunspree was an upgrade because the Mill Resort

was flooded. They were wonderful. The only bad part was there was no pool. One is under construction. We booked with Aruba Pro Dive who subcontracted us to Dive Aruba. Clive the owner/dive master was helpful and friendly. We wanted a small boat with not a lot of divers on board, and that's just what we got. Maximum seven divers worked out just right. The variety of dives was excellent. We did wreck diving for the first time, with Clive leading the way. The pre-dive briefings were professional and fully prepared us for each dive, even providing a history of the wrecks. We had no limit on the time of each dive. We were never rushed. If you had more air you could stay down longer. We heard that the larger dive operations had 45 minute time limits per dive. The drift dives were a real treat. Clive took the time to point out interesting fish, lobsters etc. Clive's van is not new. And the first day it wasn't working so he arranged for a taxi to pick us up at our hotel. He was always on time, with an 8:30 a.m. pick-up. He was also helpful in equipment assistance.

Dive Aruba, Boardwalk, December 2004, Bob Souza, Felton, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 75 Feet. Water: 76 to 77 F. Booked ourselves on-line at www.arubaboardwalk.com, a small 12 room resort across the street from the beach at the far end of the high rise hotel area, and reserved diving on-line with Clive Paula at Dive Aruba (www.divearuba.com). The Boardwalk was fantastic, pleasant and clean. The casitas were large and equipped with full kitchens, utensils, outside decks, barbeque, cable TV, VCR/DVD (with