

beaches were empty or just a half dozen people per quarter mile of beach at most. Great snorkeling everywhere. The Bioluminescent Bay is listed as the best in the world by marine biologists. The intensity of the light and the density of the dinoflagelates that produce the light is so great that everyone glows with a ghostly light and fish glow in the dark while leaving trails behind them as they swim. There are wild horses on the island that wandering out in front of your car. Horseback riding available. Dining, with some fine examples of the culinary arts, often in a laid-back atmosphere. History, with the old Spanish fort and museum.

Nan Sea Charters, Wyndham Martin-eau Bay Resort and Spa, November 2004, Ben Blair (bfbclair@comcast.net), Cherry Hill, NJ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 Feet. Water: 82 F, choppy, no currents. It had been six and a half years since my wife and I had been to Vieques. Back then, the accommodations were pretty limited, and there was only one dive shop on the island (Blue Caribe Divers). The diving was so-so then, but we decided that it was time for a return trip after the new Wyndham resort on the north shore finally opened in February 2004 (it was under construction by others when we were there in 1998). There's one less dive shop now — Blue Caribe is operated as a kayaking center specializing in night trips to the bioluminescent bay. But the last owner of the dive shop still lives on the island, and he runs two tank dives departing from the pier in Esperanza, the only town on the south shore, and the primary social center on the island for tourists. Only managed

to get in one day of diving. But Chipper ran a nice operation, the visibility was excellent, the dives were leisurely, and the tropicals were plentiful. On our first dive, a hawksbill turtle greeted us as we dropped down to the bottom at about 75 feet, and seemed to be in no hurry to leave the area. Chipper's limit is six divers, but there were only three customers plus Chipper diving the day I was out, along with Chipper's assistant, Dave, a newly certified instructor and a professional photographer. It wasn't rough, but the other two divers were seasick and didn't make the second dive, so Chipper and I had the entire ocean to ourselves. It isn't great diving, but it's certainly good enough to make a brief trip to Vieques appealing. They leave promptly at 8:30 in the morning, the dive sites are only a few minutes away, and you're back in Esperanza in plenty of time for lunch at one of the many restaurants along the waterfront. Since the Navy left, and the Wyndham opened, tourism is gradually on the rise, and there are plenty of good restaurants and watering holes on both sides of the island. Vieques is about a 15 minute flight from San Juan, so it's easy to get there from the States (you can take a high speed ferry from Fajardo, too, which takes about 30 minutes). The Wyndham was a great place to stay, with plenty of uncrowded beaches (most guests seemed to prefer the pool), and there are lots of good boutique hotels on the island as well.

SABA

Saba is one of the more adventurous Caribbean destinations, both

on land and in the sea. Pinnacle diving begins at 70 feet, with good fish life and occasional sharks and bigger fish. Accommodations are in quaint villages at 1,000 feet and above. Saba has delightful people, good restaurants, and a cool, pleasant climate. It's also in the hurricane belt. Be sure to close your eyes when your plane lands or take the short ferry trip from St. Maarten.

Saba Deep, The Gate House, December 2004, Jeffrey Yagoda (jeffy@axiomsw.com), Chappaqua, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, no currents. Saba Deep made diving easy and enjoyable. We never touched our equipment. They anticipated problems and had backups for everything. Short boat rides also made diving easy. We dove for 6 days, usually 3 dives per day. We were free to do what we wanted underwater, however, I would have liked the dive-master to point out some of the more hidden treasures at each site. We were disappointed that they don't do night dives. All the dive sites were in excellent condition and the coral and fish life was plentiful; we found a coral head with 2 octopus looking out. Each dive site was different than the next. Topside, Saba is a mountain that arose out of the ocean and its amazing that people can live here. However, everyone we spoke to, and every was friendly, loved living here. Gate House proprietors, Michel and Lyliane Job, are warm, friendly, genuine, honest, and couldn't do enough to make our stay pleasant. For example, one of our bags with all of our closets did not arrive with us thanks to a screw up by Continental Airlines.

They let me use their cell phone to call the States. I was on the phone several times for 45 minutes or so at a time. There was no charge for this courtesy. When our bags did arrive, without our knowledge or asking, Michel went to the airport and got the bag. The Gate House is a small hotel with 6 hotel rooms, a cottage, and house. The rooms are well maintained, clean, and have great views of Saba and the ocean. At the restaurant, Michael is the chef and Lyliane is the wine steward. Had two good dinners there. The wine list is excellent. The food was good; however, given the other choices on the island, I would consider this one of the finer restaurants on Saba. Our favorite was the restaurant at Eco-lounge.

Saba Deep, April 2005, Betty Peterson, Ryde, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 90 Feet. Water: 75 to 85 F, calm, choppy. We stayed in Cat's Eye Cottage arranged by Mike Myers of Saba Deep. It is at the end of the road up a hill, a nice walk for working off dinner. Vincent, our taxi driver also arranged by Mike picked us up at the cottage and dropped us off after diving. Vincent also drove us to dinner one night and told us all about Saba. First dive is a deep dive and after the first day we elected to do the second and third dives as one of our group went into deco. There was a large group from St. Martin so the boat was crowded on the first two dives. Usually only five or six were on the third dive. Big Mike set up tanks and led dives as did Oliver. Good dive briefing. If you needed assistance they were there but you could basically dive your own profile. Be sure to go to the Swinging Door barbeque. Eddie

and Pat are excellent hosts. The Gate House, although more expensive than other restaurants, was reasonable and well worth it. Saba is a beautiful clean island. The people are friendly.

Saba Divers, Scout's Place, September 2005, Sally Mayeux, Deming, NM.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, calm, choppy. Went with 10 experienced divers. Within 24 hours, everyone at Scout's Place (hotel), Saba Divers (dive operation), and restaurant, all owned by Barbara and Wolfgang Tooten, knew our names. Hotel (13 rooms) was immaculate. Saba is 80-100 feet on first dive of day, little at less than 50 feet, so free Nitrox was used by all. Entire area around Saba is a marine park, with specified moorings; reef is healthy and fish often ignored divers. After the check-out dive, Divemasters (Rodney and Rachel) gave us option of staying with them or exploring on our own. Both were good at spotting little creatures. Mostly small fish, although we also saw nurse sharks and turtles. Excellent dive briefings. Gear was rinsed and set up by dive operation daily. Lunch on the boat between dives was fresh and filling (sandwiches, fruit, etc.). Dinner at restaurant well prepared and varied. Weather was mostly sunny, hot and humid, with some overcast days and showers, causing occasional surface chop.

Sea Saba, Juliana's, June 2004, Peter J. Maerz (peterj@wlrn.org), Holly-wood, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy, no currents. Juliana's is a lovely if simple establishment. The view from the rooms is divided by lush

green mountains and misty blue sea. My room was spacious, with plenty of storage space, a good sized table for laptop and camera work and a great back porch with hammock and that wonderful view. It's more like a motel than a hotel in terms of luxury, but, practically speaking, it was perfect. U.S. configuration plugs and U.S. 110 volt current make power supply hookups a breeze. U.S. Dollars are universally accepted., though AMEX is not. The Tropic restaurant, on the grounds, also affords great views with its open air design. Wim, owner of Juliana's with his wife Johanna, is an excellent cook. The air is surprisingly cool at night though unremittingly soggy. The tiny "town" of Windwardside is a quaint, leafy, cozy jumble of artsy-craftsy shops, a well-stocked little grocery store, the Sea Saba office, and a sprinkling of restaurants and taverns. The roads throughout Saba all seem to tilt at a 45 degree angle or greater. The dive routine: pickup at Juliana's at 8:45 (read: 9:00) , a brief stop at the Sea Saba office where proprietor Lynn checks in on the group, and then a roller-coaster van ride down the mountain to the port. The port's the least attractive spot, a muddy, rocky, dusty shelf carved out of the shore's sheer red cliffs, with carcasses of old boat hulls and engines mingling with the diesel fumes and roar of the island's power plant and the clanks and squeals of industrial cranes dredging and moving huge boulders about. Once on the boat, the Sea Saba crew takes over with extremely professional boat briefings, Nitrox analysis and documentation, a short trip to a dive site, an excellent, thorough and often entertaining site

briefing and, finally, after backrolls off the side or strides off the stern of one of their large and well-appointed 40s, a well-led dive. As a single diver, once scrutinized for skills, I was allowed to choose my own profile. I could follow the DM (who, as is usually the case, knew where the good stuff was), buddy up with a particular diver or divers, or just loosely hang in the vicinity of the group. Man o' War Shoals and Diamond Rock are the standouts. The former, a twin-pinnacle site with valley in between, was thick with fish life and visually stunning. Lots of sea fans, corals, sponges and other stuff coating its surface. Diamond rock is about as wall-like a dive as you'll see, also dramatic in its encrustations of sponge and coral and featuring plenty of sea life as well. Ladder Labyrinth has some interesting swim-throughs and arches. The undersea topography is interesting in general. All volcanic structures on which corals, sponges, gorgonians, etc have grown. Morning dives were around 100 feet. Nitrox is a godsend on these dives, yielding well over a half hour of dive time on all but the deepest profiles. Surface intervals were just over an hour, usually spent in a sheltered area close to shore, gently rocking on the boat. Second dives, starting close to noon, would average at 75 foot max depths and the optional third, afternoon dives, embarked on after a docked surface interval when the crew would restock the boat, were often in relatively shallow patchy sites. Water and lemonade are on board, but other food or drink is the responsibility of the passenger. There's a head and a fairly spacious changing area below in the bow

of the boats. A large plastic tub serves as a camera bucket, but is filled with sea water, since fresh is a scarcity. Gear is rinsed each day by the crew before your departure but, again, the water shortage tends to lead to a perfunctory spritzing of BC and reg with the fresh water hose. I found the diving to be enjoyable, though I did not see the abundance or variety of fish life I've seen elsewhere, such as Bonaire, St. Vincent, Dominica or Little Cayman. Saw a number of relaxing nurse sharks but no white tips, black tips or reef sharks, though some of my fellow divers spotted one or two. Durgeons are in relative abundance, lots of Sgt Majors about the shallower "reef" tops, some triggers, plenty of Southern Stingrays in the sand, as well Peacock Flounders. A couple of spotted morays peeked out of the cracks. One seahorse and one frogfish were reported by other divers. I was surprised to find a couple of nice nudibranchs and I did spot a burrfish. The hike to the sulfur mine is a breathtaking descent down the Oceanside cliffs. You needn't hike all the way up to Mt. Scenery's peak to appreciate the rainforest along the way. And just strolling about the impossibly narrow, quaint streets in the towns is enjoyable. There is virtually no crime on Saba I was not even given a key to my room.

Sea Saba, Juliana's, August 2004, Jeff Bloomer (jlbdiver@aol.com), Hebron, KY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm. Each day starts with a short taxi ride past the dive shop to the docks. We dived the windward side the first few days. They told us that maybe one day a month that side of the island

is available; the coral was great. Our first check out dive with the crew and we see a huge moray and a big crab. The crew, Bruno, Charlotte, and Alex were great and worked hard to make sure everyone's needs were met. If you wanted to be guided around and shown critters that's what they did. If you wanted to go your own merry way, then that was fine too. Dived Diamond Rock, cool dive, too much see life for a single dive. Current can be strong even on the leeward side so there were some must do dives we didn't get to dive. The dive operation is top notch and really do act as concierges. Ask for anything, dinner reservations, side trips, etc. and they will work it out. They even managed to get a restaurant to stay open late just for us so we could eat after the night dive. There is no poverty, everybody has a job and the entire island seems to be being swept constantly. The white walled, red roofed buildings (a requirement I was told) make an idyllic setting. Very hilly so be in shape. One intrepid sole in our group hiked to the 3000-foot top on Mount Scenery to see the Cloud Forest. Sounded great but a bit of an altitude change for us dive addicts. Food on the island is reasonable and I probably had one of the best filets I've ever had at "My Kitchen," a neat little place that reminds me of a European café. Juliana's was nice and peaceful, Wim and his wife (the owners), and the always attentive Stewart (aka Captain Stewy) were always there to make suggestions about what was going on the various days of the week, different hotels have theme nights throughout the week. Don't pass up Paula's cooking right there at Tropics

on the property. The EcoLodge presentation and meal are worth the trip too. The owner was involved in setting up Bonaire's and Saba's marine park and puts on an informative slide show on the five different ecosystems on the island. UW Photography Comments: Not a lot of room on the boat specifically for cameras although there was a separate bucket for cameras. No film developing on the island but we were shooting digital anyway.

Sea Saba, Juliana's, December 2004, Sue Taylor (staylor@courier.com), Hayward, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: to 140 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F., choppy, surge. Sea Saba was great to work with to organize the trip. Lynn gets top ratings from us. Juliana's was perfect for us. We had a great room/view (#7) and would stay here again. The Tropics Cafe on the property is great. Top picks — pancakes and the fresh tuna steak sandwich. We could walk into town for dinner if we wanted to. The Swinging Door was great for the BBQ night but make a reservation -it's popular. Brigadoon's is great and Saba's Treasure has great salads and pizza. EcoLodge is also worth the trek. We never had a bad meal. Friday night at the Tropics is movie night which is fun. Our last day we hiked up to Mt. Scenery which is worth all the effort! Bring your camera and hope that it's clear when you finally get up there (2900')! Bring something warm for the evenings- at least in January! Don't miss the glass blowing shop and she also offers classes. Extremely friendly island. You feel right at home. On diving — everything is organized. Here's an example of our day — 8:45am — Manny picked us up

at our hotel and brings everyone to the dock. Boat is scheduled to leave at 9:30 and for the most part does. The crew did set up our gear and we checked our nitrox levels and finished up the paperwork. Off to the first site which is maybe 30 minutes out. Lots close by. First dive has a max. depth of 130' — 35 minutes. Hammerheads were sited! Buoy line down to the pinnacle. Very easy dive but most of the DMs did not point much out to us. Getting into the boat was rough but we all made it and off to the next site but with a 1 hr+ surface interval. Bring something to eat as nothing is provided. 2nd dive was max of 80' — maybe 45 minutes. I can't remember what the DM said exactly but, we dive our computers. OH, no head on the boat. So, you're not back to the hotel until around 2PM and ready for lunch — see above notes on that great tuna steak sandwich! After a shower and a nice walk around town or relaxing by the pool, it's time to figure out dinner and get ready to do it all over again the next day. Notes, a dive group arrived the day after we got there and only 1 of the 9 dive bags made it on the plane to Saba with them. The airport is well aware of all the divers needs and works hard to get the bags ASAP. They are also known to send a plane with just bags. This is just how small the island is — Garvin was a few minutes late picking us up for our flight out — no problem, they just called the airport to let them know we were on our way and they were waiting to check us in. Our bags didn't make it on our flight (WinAir) out (due to wind) so they did not make our connection in St. Maarten. If this happens you must

fill out a missing baggage form on St. Maarten. They will not automatically put them onto AA or whatever carrier you're connecting to. With the form filled out, we had no problems and Sea Saba even followed up for us to make sure our bags got off Saba!

Sea Saba, Juliana's, December 2004, Paul Pearah (paulsear@yahoo.com.), San Jose, CA. Experience: 250-500 dives. Water: 81 F. A place to appreciate the advantages of nitrox. The pinnacles top out 70 feet and deeper, so dives on air can be brief. The pinnacles are encrusted with growth, often with no place to even plant a fingertip. We saw sharks on most pinnacle dives, especially at Shark Shoal. There were schools of fish, little current, and stellar visibility. The peaceful beauty of the majestic pinnacles is not easily forgotten. Man O' War Shoal and Diamond Rock were teeming with fish and invertebrate life, and I dove each of these at least twice in six days. Since we generally dove these shallower sites in the afternoon, we encountered some currents. Hot Springs was interesting for the yellowish sand that was tinged with sulfur and warmed by geothermal activity. Surface intervals were often spent moored in the calm of Wells Bay. In their relentless quest for a sea horse, our group insisted on doing a muck dive. The crew reluctantly anchored near Fort Bay and set them loose in the sand and they encountered the seahorse, which looked to be pregnant, courting flying gurnards, a spotted eagle ray more than four feet in span, a shortnosed batfish, a stingray, a sand tilefish, several interesting juvenile fish, and a black longlure frog fish! Sea Saba does two dives in the morning and

they will go in the afternoon if even one diver wants to. Night dives require a minimum of four. Nitrox is \$59 for a week. They have two 36-foot boats which are the biggest on the island. We reserved the one with a head, but the head was inoperable. The boat is comfortable for 12 divers and a crew of two. They have oxygen and a trained paramedic on board. The crews are competent, helpful, and friendly. They have an adequate supply of water and lemonade, but no snacks. The camera bucket is filled with salt water. Owners Lynn and John are involved in day-to-day operations, and Lynn and others in the office/store accommodated requests for assistance with restaurant reservations, taxi service, and activities. When my wife's BC inflator failed, they provided a free rental unit for the week. When one diver got flustered and came up from a dive crying, Lynn was waiting at the restaurant that evening to talk with her, and offered to send a crew member to buddy with her. Wim and Johanna at Juliana's are excellent hosts, and the rooms are clean, comfortable, and affordable. The four person cottages are even better, with Orchid the favorite. All include, at no extra charge, the peaceful chirping serenades of tree frogs. One indicator of the intimate, carefree spirit of Saba is that several of us were never provided with keys to our rooms. Saba lacks crime, crowds, and cruise ships. Wireless Internet access and a communal online PC are available 24 hours a day. Juliana's is in Windwardside, within walking distance of several good restaurants (reservations recommended), including their own Tropics Café. Book a reservation

at (which includes a taxi ride to) the Gate House, a fine French restaurant with a gorgeous view and an outstanding wine list. The Eco Lodge is owned by the founder of the marine reserves in Bonaire and Saba, who will (on request) present a naturalist slide show while your dinner is being prepared. Brigadoon served the best seared Ahi tuna, which more than compensated for owner Tricia's tasteless jokes. Even the taxi drivers made an effort to get to know visitors. Regarding the Winair flights, we had the same pilot both coming and going and he was masterful in his approach technique and execution. This is no routine landing! Two members of our group spent some time in Statia on the way to Saba. Their initial flight from St. Maarten to Statia was purchased 3 months in advance on the 6 pm flight, but Winair had so completely over sold the flight so they had a late departure, followed 90 minutes later by the last of their luggage. For their departure flight from Saba they held confirmed seats for over 3 months on the 11:45am flight. They got shifted to the 8:55am flight the day beforehand. The rest of the group all got on that 11:45 flight. The main group's luggage, however, traveled on the earlier flight and was left circling the baggage carousel until they arrived hours later! Travel agent Beth Jansen at Dive Saba/Statia in Washington negotiated a good package deal for us and made many helpful recommendations. She arranged for a 13th person to stay at Juliana's at the per-person double occupancy rate. She is personable, well-connected on Saba, and well-intentioned, but not all emails and phone calls were returned. She

sent us email links that expired and file attachments that could not be read. She never really gave us all of the details and costs in writing until the last minute. Still, with a little effort on our part we did extract what we needed from her at a fair price, and she followed up with Sea Saba to make sure that things were going well!

**Sea Saba, Ris House, February 2005,
Scott Vickers and Mark Waddell
(markwscottv@msn.com), Denver, CO.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 35 to 75 Feet. Water: 65 to 68 F., choppy, no currents. Saba is a beautiful, remote, small volcanic island (only 5 square miles) that has no beaches, no casinos, and thus no cruise ships. There are 3 small villages: Hell's Gate (due to its location near an abandoned sulphur mine); Windwardside, where we and most everyone else stayed; and The Bottom, where the medical school is located, along with some homes and a large hotel (Queen's Garden) that was curiously low on clientele. Mt. Scenery, at almost 3,000 feet, rises above Windwardside, which is at 1,400 feet. It was three days before we saw the top of Mt. Scenery due to the clouds that cling to it. Windwardside is the "Marin County of the Caribbean" because of its precipitous roads and foggy/sunny climate. One day we could only see 20 feet out the door. We were in a cloud. At the wharf, it was sunny and warm. Friendly people abound, mostly Dutch or other expats, and you don't have to lock your doors. Everyone speaks English (plus a few other languages, probably). Restaurant food was uniformly excellent, with prices ranging from \$10 for BBQ chicken and ribs with potato

salad, beans to \$130 for dinner, dessert, and a bottle of wine at the French restaurant in Hell's Gate (the Gate House). Taxi rides to restaurants outside Windwardside, where most tourists stay, are usually free with the meal. The Swinging Door, where the BBQ is served, is a hoot — their official T-shirt reads: "The world's largest outdoor asylum: We're all here because we're not all there." This is indeed a place where the disgruntled can regain their peace of mind. Groceries are not abundant; meat and seafood (except lobster) is frozen, but there is a hydroponic lettuce so good salads were plentiful, and we did have excellent meat and regular dairy. Other good eating-out bets are the Brigadoon (Michael, the owner, is a great cook!), Saba's Treasure (specialty pizzas, sandwiches), the Rainforest Restaurant (at the EcoLodge at 1,800 ft.; excellent salads and shrimp dishes), Tropics at Juliana's Hotel (great cheeseburger and club sandwich), or an evening at the spectacular Queen's Garden restaurant (lobster and other specials daily). The "Saban Cottage" (such as Iris House) is the architecture of choice — well-built pitched-roof wooden houses that are all painted white with green shutters and red metal or tile roofs (there must be a covenant about house colors!). Iris House, Cat's Eye Cottage, and other cottages are available for rent weekly at rates comparable to hotels. Residents said it was "cooler than usual," and we wore long pants and jackets to dinner at night. Winds blew pretty strong at night. We didn't see hardly anyplace with air-conditioning, although there are a few rooms in the larger hotels that have it. We would

have settled for a cozy fire or hot tub on a couple of nights! Saba diving is not quite as good as Bonaire, but still has its merits. Hiking and ecotourism is plentiful—1,000+ “steps” go to the top of Mt. Scenery from Windwardside, and there are about 10 miles more of hiking trails between Mt. Scenery and The Bottom. The key diving attractions are the pinnacles, which are the tops of other volcanic mountains that peak under the ocean, most at around 90 feet. All sites have mooring lines, and at the pinnacles you jump in the water and can't see anything beneath you, but you swim to the line and then follow it down until suddenly you see a reefy plateau looming up at you. Most pinnacles were deep, so you don't get much bottom time (20-30 minutes), but it was a unique experience. The draw is to see big stuff like sharks and supposedly the week before we got there porpoises were swimming. We saw large jacks, groupers, and spade-fish. The reefs are healthy and there is plenty of fish life—even some flying gurnards on a muck dive close to the harbor. Lots of turtles, eels, and coney, and the usual array of critters. Sea Saba has the best boats, and the divemasters are knowledgeable, fun, and friendly. Their taxis pick you up at the airport, and from your residence every morning for the ride down to the dock and back (all part of the package). Sea Saba's office staff had some basic foodstuffs we asked for delivered from the grocery to our cottage (at no charge) when we got there, and made dinner reservations. They can also fix most gear and rent the latest in computers. Nitrox is cheap and encouraged because of the climb

in altitude after diving. The island has its own decompression chamber and hyperbaric doctors at the small medical school in The Bottom. For packages: Lynn at Sea Saba (www.seasaba.com/MainPages/DivePackages.htm) or Beth Jansen at Dive Saba (<http://www.divesaba.com/MainPages/AboutDSST.htm>).

Sea Saba, Iris Cottage, April 2005, Allen (ahmoyer2@comcast.net), Boyertown, PA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. We rented Iris cottage in Windwardside; excellent accommodations. Lynn and Carolyn at Sea Saba took good care of us; they booked restaurants called cabs and anything else we needed — they even stocked the fridge for us before we arrived. Most dives were deep 110+ft. The dive crew, Steve, Bruno and Gersh, were helpful and knowledgeable about Saba and the waters. The island houses are well kept. The hiking up Mt. Scenery was worth the effort and there was no fog at the top like it is most of the time so we got some great photos.

Sea Saba, Daphne's Cottage, May 2005, Tom Garber (lgarber@bak.rr.com), Tehachapi, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. About 1,200 people there and the atmosphere is laid back and relaxing. The Dutch village of Windwardside has enough restaurants, pubs (two that we know of) and stores to provide everything you need with enough variety to keep things interesting for at least a week. The scenery is spectacular and the diving rates with the best that I've seen in the Caribbean.

I did 15 dives and never repeated a dive. With only around 25B30 dive sites, that speaks well for the dive operation. The divemasters asked us where we wanted to dive each day and did the best they could to accommodate all divers. The briefings were informative and the dives were all good. We actually preferred the intermediate depth pinnacles, with greater bottom times and more sea life, over the deeper pinnacles. The boats had between four and ten divers daily. The van would pick us up around 8:45 for the 15 minute drive to the harbor, we were usually back at the harbor around 1:00 after two dives. If you wanted to do a 3rd afternoon dive, the boat usually departed by 2:00 or so. I couldn't seem to muster up much interest for a night dive, but I think if I had pressed the issue; Sea Saba would have taken me out without any other divers. They are an organized and well-run operation. Did a multi island two week trip with stops at St. Eustatius and St. Maarten. We booked our trip through Beth Jansen of Dive Saba Statia. Although a little confused in making our arrangements at first, she got everything arranged and even called to check on us after checking our flights with Win Air and finding out that we had been involuntarily rescheduled. Win Air planes appear safe with skilled pilots, but the ground staff couldn't care less about your baggage or what flight you actually reserved. American Airlines lost our gear on the first flight from California; however, it took WinAir 2 2 days to get it to us on Statia. According to American, they had it the same day we departed the states. We made four flights with them (only booked 3) and

never once traveled with our baggage. We couldn't even bring carry-on on the last flight back to St. Maarten. There was no head wind for take off, so the plane could not carry the extra weight. It was always a weight issue, since they travel fully loaded with passengers on all flights. Be prepared to be without your stuff for awhile. We usually received our bags the same afternoon. The planes had a hard time landing on the short 1,000 ft. runway for about three days during the week, so would either turn around and head back after looking at the wind sock or not come at all. This runway is about the size of an aircraft carrier without the arresting gear. When they do land, they only use about 300 ft. One guy waiting for his wife had her finally show up on the ferry after three days of delays. If you like to travel with your stuff book "The Edge," which is the ferry. WinAir just made things more of an adventure.

Sea Saba, Juliana's, May 2005, Marilyn Adams, Cantley, QC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. Lyn of Sea Saba took care of everything from dinner reservations to making sure before and after every dive we were happy. It's common that Winair is unable to deliver the bags on the same flight as the passenger, especially at the beginning of a new term at the medical school. The taxi drivers go to the airport to meet the flight and deliver the bags to the rooms. It took 3 flights but we didn't miss a dive. Guy and Alex were our divemasters and we had detailed briefings and artistic drawings.. On the boat the staff was helpful. We were being certified on Nitrox and they never rushed us and changed

tanks immediately if not full or within the limit for Nitrox. We did a hike and enjoyed it. Food is great with all restaurants cooperate to have special nights with slide shows, ribs and chicken, eco-meal, etc. The museum is great. We stayed at Juliana's in a room and it was fine. They have take-away sandwiches ready after breakfast and were accommodating. There are 2 dive/day or 3 dive/day packages. We took the 2/day and were happy. It's a small island with 1200 people but we were never bored.

Sea Saba, Juliana's, June 2005, Lucius "Bud" Foster (elijahsdad@prodigy.net), Duluth, MN. Experience: 251-500 dive. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm. The air strip is on the only flat space on the entire island. Enormous green beautiful cliffs. I was impressed with the two drivers Garvis and Manny that work with Sea Saba (www.seasaba.com). They pick you up and return you to the airport and drive you to the docks and back every day for diving. For those of you who take Dramamine, take it so it starts to work just before the daily ride down the mountain. Sea Saba basically arranged everything for me. Lynn Costenaro, co owner with husband John Magor, of Sea Saba e-mailed me information on the places to stay that ranged from basically living off the land and environment to, we will massage your toes and feed you grapes while you relax in a spa type joint. They took care of everything from airlines bookings with WinAir, reservations at restaurants daily, transportation needed, were to go and what to do. Everyone that worked at the shop and on the dive boats were educated, wonderful, and pleasant. One dive instructor "Steve"

always cracked me up because he sometimes sounded like Robin Leech of "Lifestyles of The Rich & Famous." Sea Saba's divemasters are PADI Instructors and clean, hang, and store your dive gear on the boats every day, have your gear ready, set up, and in place when you arrive, make sure everybody gets to dive their profiles, and will not dive a site if the currents are too strong or any unsafe issues arise because there are always other places to dive Saba as the healthiest reefs I have seen in the Caribbean and Tom Van't Hof is the die-hard environmentalist responsible for getting the government to establish The Saba National Marine Park in 1987. Tom has also been responsible for similar projects in Bonaire and Curacao, stopping dynamiting coral reef projects in Indonesia with the locals. Tom is also the father of Johanna van't Hof co-owner with husband Wim Schutten of Juliana's Hotel (where I stayed) and Tropics Restaurant on the grounds. My room had two double beds with plenty of dresser and closet space, cable TV, instant coffee machine, mini fridge, a covered patio with a beautiful view of the jungle and ocean below, including a hammock, and hooks to hang wet stuff. The restroom had a single sink, standard john, and two people size stand up shower. There was no A/C but the mountain cool air breeze came through the room to keep you feeling perfect while sleeping and the sound of the tree frogs and leaves blowing in the slight wind mesmerized me to sleep. Also, they have wireless internet that worked from my room at the pool or at the restaurant. There is a meeting room with a computer and printer on

24/7 for e-mailing. Johanna and Wim made me feel like I was an old friend. It felt like a bed and breakfast and they cooked me meals of my choosing. Wim was raised in California like me and had that “hey dude” laid back mentality. Johanna and Wim have two cool dogs (Labradors) that never sat in the restaurant, but were always around to greet you and give you a lick if you like. The dogs will also go on hikes with you. The hiking is breathtaking. As far as the restaurants on Windwardside (walking distance from Juliana’s), they were all great and the food was always fresh. My favorite was the ravioli at Brigadoon and the smiles of Marylene who served me. Saba is clean, tropical, has awesome diving, great photo opportunities below and above water, no poverty, quite, crime free, and just what you would close your eyes and dream to go to with just three clicks of your heels after rush hour traffic and the local news of the daily negativity stomping down your city life. UW Photography Comments: The two dive boats run by Sea Saba have a large plastic container filled with saltwater for the cameras to stay in while on boat. Reason for saltwater and not fresh, no running water at dock. However, it keeps the cameras wet between dives so that they do not dry with salt water on them. They also provide a condensation hose (fresh water) at the rear of boats to rinse cameras. Camera/video storage under bench seats or in a saltwater bucket.

Sea Saba, July 2005, Chuck Levine (cblevine@suscom.net), Red Lion, PA.
Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, surge, currents. Saba is a beautiful, clean and friendly

island. Connections on Win-Air are efficient and landing on the world’s shortest commercial runway on the side of an extinct volcanic island must be experienced! The handmade road winding up and around the mountainous island is a remarkable testament to human engineering (20 years to build). Windwardside is a quaint collection of stone houses with red galvanized roofing planted on the side of the hills. We stayed at Iris House, a private cottage within walking distance of many tiny but well-appointed restaurants and groceries, and just down the road from Sea Saba Dive Center. The house is in need of repairs and updates, something the off-island owners are reportedly going to take care of. The rooms are small, the beds uncomfortable in the high humidity conditions. Water pressure is low for the showers, the toilet leaked enough to deplete the water cisterns (water is collected from rains and stored in the cisterns). Roosters crowing at 0400 each morning (and throughout the full-moon nights!) made for restless nights and early morning awakenings. Being somewhat isolated from other divers prevented the usual pre/post diving kibitzing. Sea Saba is one of the oldest dive operations on Saba, and the store is well-stocked with “T’s and T’ings” plus the required PADI paraphernalia. Owners Lynn and John were off island most of the week we were on Saba, but Caroline kept things under control. Sea Saba has two boats, each of which could hold 20 divers; they limit each boat to 10 divers plus two instructors working as DMs. All 24 dive sites within the protected Saba Marine Park are within a 5-15 minute boat ride from

the Fort Bay harbor. We wanted to dive the pinnacles, strong currents plus the age of one of my girls prevented us from diving them. We did get to dive the intermediate pinnacles. Other than one dive with >3kn current and not-insignificant surge, all dives were good with viz of 50-75ft. Corals, sponges, and reef life were bountiful and healthy, and following the DM was beneficial on most of the dives as they know the sites well. We only saw a single nurse shark. Many turtles, many typical Caribbean reef critters, most unafraid of divers. Restaurants are small and intimate, staff attentive, food very good to excellent. Brigadoon for dinners, and Tropics for breakfast were our favorites. Family Bakery wheat bread is nirvana on earth! Nightly- themed meals, including slide shows about the ecology of Saba. One downside is diving with new divers daily. Because one of my girls is 14 years old, we seemed to always be on the boat with the newly arriving divers, therefore "easy and intermediate" dive spots and profiles daily. While understandable for safety reasons, it was not easy to develop rapport with a group of divers over the week as we've done on previous vacations. Coupled with our isolation at Iris House this made us feel distant.

ST. BART'S

An expensive playground for the rich and famous, St. Bart's seldom sees an American diver.

West Indies Dive, April 2005, Mary Peachin (mary@peachin.com), Tucson, AZ. Experience: 501-1000

dives. Do scuba divers go to St. Bart's to explore a lesser known underwater environment? Or have the rich and famous, those who dive this small eight square mile dry volcanic island French dependency of Guadeloupe, kept this destination a secret even from Undercurrent? Located in the northern end of the Lesser Antilles and populated by about 6500 residents, the island's harbor circled by the colorful red-roofed town of Gustavia boasts a playground of beautiful anchored mega-yachts and nine dive operators. Eight of us on a 31-foot Ocean Master were met at the cruise ship shuttle dock to plungee, as the French would say, into 82 degree water, viz 75 feet. Having cruised to the island from St. Maarten, we signed up for a two-tank dive. With most of the divers being novices, our minimal 30 minute bottom time was limited to a shallow 30-50 feet. We were divided into two groups led by divemasters Vincent and Pascale. We back rolled into the water at The Whale of Big Island to be greeted by a gnarly big-toothed barracuda before bottoming above a nice size Southern stingray. Parrots, yellow snapper, grunts squirrelfish, swam along walls of fire coral while schools of tarpon circled nearby. A nurse shark shared a crevice with a lobster. We saw a hawksbill turtle, cleaner shrimp, yellow headed jaw fish, goby, and beautiful barrels and brain coral. Climbing up the Xmas tree ladder without flat steps was not the most comfortable. The second dive followed about 30 minutes later at Big Island, both sites just outside the harbor. The boat, while crowded, was a virtual dive shop. We sat on the gunwale, fitting ourselves with