

Nice big camera table with places to charge batteries and dry camera. On board computer to view digital pics, and video processing for slides. Dedicated fresh water bin for cameras. Camera pro wasn't helpful for me but may have been for more experience photographers.

## SABA/ST. EUSTATIUS/ ST. KITTS

**Caribbean Explorer II, September 2004, James Bolton (jstarbry2000@yahoo.com), Atlanta, GA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. Caribbean Explorer II is in good condition. The cabins are comfortable but the boat's diesel is relatively noisy, even in the most forward cabins. Light sleepers may have some difficulty. There were only 11 divers on board. The boat's capacity is 18 but the cabins would feel extremely small for two persons and there is not seating for 18 at meals. Compared to places such as Lighthouse Reef in Belize and West Caicos, the condition of the coral is not that good. Diving on the pinnacles off Saba feels more adventurous but not one in eleven wanted to do more diving there when offered. I think this is because at the depth, the dives are short, currents somewhat stronger and much less in the way of reef life. Great variety of crabs, lobsters, eels, worms, shrimp and sea slugs; things you may not see often at other locations. Perhaps due to the recent storms, much of the shallower areas were covered in a layer of silt, giving much of the reef a brown

tinge. Visibility ranged from good to murky, despite the calm conditions on the surface and little current at depth at most of the other dive sites. The Caribbean Explorer crew does not pamper the way that Peter Hughes boats are known to do. Captain Jim was personable enough as well as John the cook. The crew is turning over almost completely except for the captain. Dominique is now aboard as cook and Jon has gone to the dive deck. Separate rinse tank provided. Charging area provided. Large workspace available for cameras only. Crew was prepared and able to help with camera handling.

**Caribbean Explorer, April 2005, Marc & Anne Bressman (mbressman116712@comcast.net), Cherry Hill, NJ.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, choppy, currents. Much of the diving—Saba and Statia — was too deep for leisurely dives. Visibility was just okay and there was only one great dive—a night dive that included watching an eel devour a sergeant major. Crossings were rough. Since they were at night they prevented sleep. The cabin was cramped, especially the shower.

**Caribbean Explorer II, May 2005, Shelagh McGillicuddy (littlechaos3211@yahoo.com), Orlando, FL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 45 to 75 Feet. Water: 79 to 83 F., calm. We had to schlep our luggage through a parade to get to the boat in St. Maarten because it was Carnival. We just went with the flow. The boat accommodates 18 divers but there were only 7 so there was no crowding. We spent 3 days diving in the Saba marine

park. The boat used moorings and gloves were allowed for only descending and ascending on the moving lines. Lots of corals and sponges and it's a juvenile fish heaven. We dove Ladder Labyrinth several times. Always a new area to explore. Dove the Pinnacle/Eye of the Needle which was nice but deep. Little time to explore all the colors and life. Really liked Diamond Rock and Man of War Shoals. Lettuce leaf slugs, juvenile drums, flamingo dancers, gorgonians, seafans. The divemasters were new to the boat so they were learning the dive sites. As the week progressed and the crew got comfortable, the interaction underwater got better. Henry the engineer is great to dive with. Lots of knowledge and a great eye! Lots of anemones at most sites. Lots of cleaner shrimp and cleaning stations. Saw a couple of nurse sharks, several tarpons and barracuda. Saw a couple of turtles at Saba and Statia. We had a few dives with strong current but not too bad. Statia Marine Park. Dove Wreck City, the Ledges and Barracuda Reef. Lots of little fish! Park ranger dove with us the first dive then sat on the boat all day. Not sure of the purpose but if it prevents reef abuse, it is worth it. No gloves at this marine park. They said they cleaned the moving lines so they weren't necessary. On the third dive, I had equipment problems and had to abort my dive. Paul the Purser helped us remain calm and assisted us to the surface. We surfaced far from the boat so Paul signaled for the dingy. I was fine but had ended the dive out of frustration. The Captain, Vince the dingy driver and Paul not once made me feel like the fool I was. I dubbed the

dingy the "Dingy of Shame" where they called me Cleopatra for being escorted to the boat. The crew took the situation in stride and never once ridiculed me. Can't say the same for my diving companions though. For the last day and half of diving we moved to St. Kitts which wasn't as nice as Saba or Statia. Though Paradise Reef was made an enjoyable night dive. The CEII offered island tours on Saba, Statia and St. Kitts. They were OK with Saba being the prettiest. Statia had the most history but the tour leader was an old man and was tired by the end. St. Kitts we were put in a minivan cab and drove around the island. Once the historic parts were gone, it was boring and depressing seeing the poverty while on the other side of the island is a Four Seasons resort and loads of mini-mansions. Captain Paul and his crew are great folks who work hard to make sure your trip is enjoyable. Chef Tony is fabulous and the food was plentiful, great variety and served with a smiling face. The boat is ready for an overhaul. We first stayed on this boat in 2001 when it was the Sea Dancer and it looked almost the same. The cabins are SMALL and the heads are ready for work. It is an older boat but she was reliable. The weather was nice so we spent most free time up in the salon but when it gets hotter, the cabins will get smaller as you spend more time in there enjoying the A/C. CEII has a table just for UWP gear and separate rinse tanks. The boat photographer was on vacation and only two photographers on board so there were no special offerings or requests.

**Caribbean Explorer II, June 2005,  
Capt. Jim Davis, Conte Vedra, FL.**

Experience: 1,000+ dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, currents. When a group is going, book through the parent company and take out insurance in case someone has to pull out of the group. Generally the diving is for experienced/advanced divers. All dives are moored so the boat swings quite a bit. Visibility was good and the seas cooperated though a storm formed near the Florida Keys. The food was excellent with good variety. A couple of the crew could use some, as we say in the Navy, extramilitary instruction, on how they respond to and treat their guest. We did have one handicapped diver who was given personal hands-on guided dives on the ones the Captain thought he could handle. Several opportunities to do short shore excursions in Saba, Statia and St. Kitts at only \$15 to \$25.

## TOBAGO

**Wind Dancer, August 2004, Lester Licht (chiroman@comcast.net), North Haven, CT.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 120 Feet. Water: currents. With more than 350 logged dives and 15+ years of diving, I thought I was fairly experienced but I was quite the novice compared with my shipmates. That was good in that they allowed us a great deal of 'diving freedom' and bad for me because I hadn't been in the water for a year and a half and could have used more support from a reliable buddy. I was a solo traveler. It was my 1st live-aboard trip and he wake up-breakfast-dive-snack-dive-lunch-dive-snack-dive-dinner-night dive routine is a wonderful way to go. The group was friendly and congenial. Staff was excel-

lent from captain to DMs to cook etc. The warmed towels and hot chocolate with Baileys Irish Cream option was a fine touch. Cabins were more than adequate. They provided dive alerts and sausages on a reel. There was no instruction and when I decided, at 65 ft. to abort a dive I couldn't get the sausage inflated so I made a normal ascent with safety stop. Had I gotten the sausage inflated at depth I probably would have gotten bent because I had the reel hooked to my BC and was unprepared to let out the line safely. Now that I understand how the equipment should be used it wouldn't be a problem but it could have been bad news for me then. Even something as simple as a sausage and reel can be hazardous without the correct knowledge in how to use it properly. I remember reading about a DM who got bent using this same gear set up when the reel snagged and pulled him up instead of just letting the line run up to the surface. Peter Hughes joined us for most of the week. He's a fine host and a gentleman.

**Wind Dancer, November 2004, Timothy W. Smith (reefexplorers@sbcglobal.net), Richardson, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 80 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 Fs. We knew the diving wouldn't be the best due to weather conditions, but we had an overall great experience. There is surge, current, and changing conditions that require a diver with experience. You must be comfortable controlling buoyancy, and entry on and off a tender in rough surface water. Trinidad was quite dirty, and overcrowded. I wish we had time to explore the nicer parts of the Island, but really only stayed