

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 squirelfish, 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

Mares Bcs, Scubapro regulators, those soft-sided weight belts, and shorty wetsuits. Our hosts offered water and soft drinks, defog for masks, and were good at pointing out critters. They commented that "they assumed that all of us were certified." It is possible that the ship verified this before our signing up. I think the upscale island has some luxurious resorts and those divers supporting all those dive operators get a much better experience than two short, shallow dives near the harbor. I think this island has an unknown potential that has been limited by its exclusiveness and inaccessibility. A single tank dive cost \$55Euro, two tanks are \$100 while open water certification is \$560. West Indies Dive. St Barth Quai du Yacht Club Gustavia St-Barthelemy 05 90 27 70 34 www.west-indies-dive.com; marine.service.stbarth@wanadoo.fr. Other dive operators: Marine Service: 590 590 27 70 34; Master Ski Pilou : 590 590 27 91 79; Ouanalao Dive: 590 690 50 99 77; Plongée Caraïbes Catamaran: 590 690 54 66 14; Aquati'Barth: 590 690 419 749; La Bulle - Ocean Must: 590 590 27 62 25; Splash Diving center: 590 690 56 90 24; St-Barth Plongée: 590 590 27 54 44

ST. EUSTATIUS

A historically significant island, St. Eustatius, 50 miles south of St. Maarten, was the first to recognize the United States as country. As a result, British Men o' War pounded the island. Some artifacts from the barrage can still be found in the murky water of the bay, and low-profile reefs offshore provide pris-

tine 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 an afternoon. The people are friendly, there are a few small restaurants.

Dive Statia, April 2005, Betty Peterson,

Ryde, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives.

Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm, choppy. Rudy and Rinda own the dive shop. Rinda arranged our inter-island flights on Winair. We rented a house through Rudy across the street from Rudy and Rinda. Most dives are in the Marine Park. They are relaxed and colorful. Double Wreck was especially nice. The Charlie Brown is a newer wreck and a fun dive. Remco and Sonja are the divemasters and enjoy the "job." We did a scooter dive with Rudy. I'm sure we looked like kids on Christmas morning with new toys. The best dive was a night dive at Stenapa. There were huge sleeping turtles and squid, lobster and a hunting barracuda. It was supposed to be 40 minutes but turned into an hour. Rudy lent us their jeep the first day so we could get to dinner as we didn't pick up our rental vehicle till the next morning. The house had a pool and we enjoyed having it to ourselves after a day of diving. The stores were pretty well stocked, but couldn't find any Haagen Dasz ice cream. We enjoyed Sonny's Chinese Restaurant and The Blue Bead. UW Photography Comments: Separate rinse bucket at shop. Returned to shop between dives.

Dive Statia, May 2005, Leanne Wells

(mwells42@wf.net), Mineral Wells,

TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60