

ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Heavily forested St. Vincent lies in a beautiful chain of islands, 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 cloud bursts 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. St. Vincent has become the "small critter capital" of the Caribbean, perhaps because like most Caribbean islands, it's heavily fished.

St. Vincent

Dive St. Vincent, December 2004, Steven Levin, Arlington, VA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm. Boat is bare bones. Seating with 3 — maybe 4. Minimal shade. Very low on comfort. Water was a shared 1 liter bottle. Steel 72s. They said they had larger tanks but they were all out for hydro testing. Fills on 72s to 2500. End result was a longer shallow dive or a short dive if you went to 70 feet or more. Dive guide was Bill Tewes. He is enthusiastic about his area but to claim that it is a "critter capital" is a stretch. Lots of eels, a sea horse here and there. Young Island. Nice environment. Lots of biting bugs. Food is OK but not fabulous. Overpriced. UW Photography Comments: Small tank under a seat with a few inches of water.

Dive St. Vincent, December 2004, Raymond J. Haberman (RHaberman@msn.com), Naperville, IL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. After 4 months of diving at St. Vincent, it is easy to see why they are called the "critter capital of the Caribbean." Bring a macro lens and a magnifying glass. Bill Tewes, Don Jacks and Callie Roberts will keep your log book of critters seen full. Because of the weight restrictions, leave your gear at home and use his. It is included in the price of the package. For best air fares and hotel rates, contact him directly. Large fish are rare but critters and small fish are abundant.

Dive St. Vincent, Mariners Hotel, March 2005, Michael Foust (drfoust@comcast.net), Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 35 to 50 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm. My live-aboard Tahiti trip was canceled due to engine failure. I scrambled to arrange another trip. No simple task in a weeks time. Reading Chapbook 2005, Dive St. Vincent got generally good reviews. Prompt response to email and phone from the owner / operator Bill Tewes was instrumental. Assistance with air connections were made, accommodations/package arranged and I pulled this off.... with their help. The hotel staff was nice and Internet availability was a plus. The room had a good view and was comfortable enough. Small drawbacks the showerhead and TV remote in poor shape were tolerable. The mattress and bedding were minimal. The adjoining restaurant French Verandah was good if expensive. It is known as the "Critter Capital." Bill leads the 2

tank dive leaving at 9:30, getting back, around 2:00. Dives conclude when air is consumed from steel tanks filled to +/-2400psi. This produced dives of and average 60 mins or more as the average depth was 35 feet. Bill is dedicated to showing people these tiny discoveries, some you even need a magnifying glass for. After 20 plus years he still seems excited. He is interested in the photographer's experience, so I received several admonishments about perfect buoyancy control so as not to "muck" up the muck dive for others. However, he holds no grudge and just keeps wanting the experience to be the best. His divemasters, while competent, don't share his enthusiasm or interest. So your experience is quite different if he is away at a dive show (5 times a year). I was alone on the third dive I scheduled most days, which was easily arranged with prior notice. Bill led this on two occasions, continuing to discover things. The boats are well maintained and staff nice. Sea life: sea horses, pipe horse, pipe fish, frog fish(1), batfish, jawfish, many juveniles (jackknife, spiny lobster, etc.), assorted crabs, blennies, and gobies. Conditions: water was 82, air in the mid 80s, not being in the rainy season. several decent restaurants within walking distance. Tewes caters to macro photographers so there were rinse tanks on each boat.

Dive St. Vincent, Young Island Resort, April 2005, Joe Puglia (JPuglia@aol.com), Orlando, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Little critters are abundant and Bill Tewes loves to find them. There are nice reefs if you choose to

dive them but the real excitement is the macro critters. We saw long-legged octopus, six different seahorses, six frogfish, eight varieties of eels, including a photogenic Viper eel! There were flying gurnards and pipefish as well. Most of the dives were shallow making for long fun treasure hunt dives. Easy backrolls off the boat. The boats aren't the most comfortable but the rides are short. Bill is a big blenny fan. He'll break out the magnifying glass and you won't believe what he finds. Bill and his staff are friendly and do anything to make your dive and stay enjoyable. Young Island, but a little pricy, is great! The rooms are large and comfortable. There is no A/C but the breezes make it unnecessary. The food at the resort was outstanding. There is a small ferry that will run you back and forth to the main island 24 hours per day. St. Vincent is a little tough to get to but new service by Caribbean Sun out of San Juan was scheduled to begin in May.

Dive St. Vincent, May 2005, Estelle and Stuart Evans (estelle.evans@comcast.net), Industry, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Young Island fantastic with terrific food and staff. Rooms are clean and comfortable. No A/C, no phone, no TV. Internet available at the front office. We have been diving with Dive St Vincent before. Bill (the owner) was out of town this trip and we missed him but dive masters Callie and DJ took excellent care of us. Divemasters seem quiet but actually are just being polite. If you start a conversation they come out of their shell easily and are quite friendly. They are patient and give you as much or as little help as you need. Dive boats

are small but efficient. Largest number of divers we had at any time was 8. No large fish but an abundance of fish not seen often in other parts of the Caribbean. Sea horses, frog fish, flying gurnards, pipefish, etc. Dive masters know all the sites well and where to find the fish. Dives limited only by air supply and no dec time. 50 - 60 min dives not unusual. Water calm with little current. Contact Bill for package details. Bill prefers cash or check and but will take a credit card for an extra fee.

TOBAGO

On the northside of Tobago, which is little-developed, strong currents bring good diving, occasional manta ray sightings, and some interesting coral. Visibility is affected by the runoff from the Orinoco river in Venezuela. On the south side of Tobago, there are nice hotels, but diving is on burned out reefs.

Aquamarine Dive, Blue Waters Inn, October 2004, S. Titus, Herndon, VA.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy, currents. Aside from the disappointment of a mix-up in our reservation that put us in a 2-room kitchenette suite instead of a full cottage, we were pleased with the accommodations. The rooms were simple but clean and well-kept, beds comfortable, A/C if you wanted it, and bathrooms in good shape with no mold or corroding fixtures. TV is located in a game room; no phones in the rooms either. (Bring your own alarm clock). We had strong consistent water pressure, and were never out of hot water.

The grounds are well-kept, with many bird feeders to attract the hundreds of species that live on Tobago. The beach is narrow, with tree roots and rocky sand, but is kept free of litter. The manager — Duane Kenny — is sociable, attentive, and aims to please. Aside from him, service is slow; if you need something done or fixed it may take 2-4 requests. As long as you are patient and persistent, it will happen. The staff are polite, but not overtly friendly. We ate breakfast and lunch every day at the on-site restaurant, The Fishpot, as well as a few dinners. The food was consistent in quality and good. We also went to dinner at Jemma's Treehouse in Speyside for the most incredible lobster dinner we've ever eaten, and to Sharon and Pheb's in Charlottesville for another great local seafood dinner. Having a car helped — BWI is tucked away in a remote setting and a bit of a hilly walk to town. Most guests are Europeans, with a split mix of divers and birders. Everyone dressed casually. The dive shop, although on-site, is a separate business. The staff is courteous and helpful if asked, but no one steps up to tell you the "drill" on getting geared and onto the boat; you either watch or ask another diver. Set ups are done at the shop, a cart takes the gear to the boat. Gear is switched to new tanks at the dock between the dives; after last dive gear is carried (by you unless you ask) to be rinsed at shop and set aside for next day. The boat is simple — tanks in the middle with gear on, with divers seated in front of gear for 5 - 15 minute ride to sites. Group back-roll entries are done; some dives require fast descents due to currents. You are "counted" back