

walls, good vis and a good captain and staff, safety conscious. We found a good restaurant about a block away. We were the only dive boat in the area on many sites, with about 7 divers on the boat, mainly experienced. We combined the diving with the rest of the island which is pretty. I was turned on to the operation by an article in *Undercurrent* in 1999.

Sea Ventures, CopaMarina, November 2005, Dennis LeTendre (plan2dive@aol.com), Longmont, CO.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F. Second time with Sea Ventures. Captain “Bam Bam” did a great job managing the boat. Good pre-dive overview. Has first aid, O2 and life jackets on board. Pointed out all safety aspects well. Saw mother pilot whale with baby on way out. Capt. Bam Bam slowed boat for us to get better look. DM Tony did a good job previewing each site, and worked hard to find critters. Did two dives — one on wall to 110 ft.— with nice sea fans, sponges on the wall. Saw one nice large 5ft nurse shark, a few nice green morays, and one chained moray. Also some large crabs. Reef in good shape, some bleaching. Not many big fish. A few puffers, and a school of barracuda. Lots of blue tangs, yellowtail and other typical Caribbean reef fish. Copamarina resort is a beautiful place- surrounded by the Guanica Forest. Three pools and three or four hot tubs — fantastic landscaping. Actual full size beds set 2 feet off the sand right on the beach with covers for privacy and “sun control.” Also hiked the Guanica Forest, a United Nations preserve. 700 year old tree, caves, unusual lizards and birds. One night we went into the town of San German — about 25 min drive from Copamarina resort. Beautiful town with many historical buildings. Found

exceptional restaurant in San German — Casa Vieja — excellent food, service and atmosphere — building was constructed in early 1800s. The owners are the Nelson family-three brothers, mother and father run the restaurant. It was so good, we went back for a second night. UW Photography Comments: Boat has cleaning tank and ample room for photo equipment.

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.

Saba Divers, Scout's Place, August 2006, Rick Cavanaugh (rick@rickcavanaugh.com), Ellicott City, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. We were scheduled to fly from St. Martin to Saba on Winair, but our plane was delayed in San Juan Puerto Rico. We missed the flight. We were able to catch the Dawn II Ferry at 5 pm. It looks more like a freight boat than a ferry, but it has room for 20 passengers. The Ferry cost \$40 each way and it takes about 2 ½ hours. Saba is a steep mountain that “pops” out of the water. The roads are extremely twisty and steep. All the buildings are white with red roofs and everything is clean and well kept. The 15-minute taxi from the island's only harbor to Scout's Place. A “Luxury Cottage Room” was adequate,

small, but clean. It had a small deck with a view of the ocean. The room had a small refrigerator, coffee maker and a TV. The TV remote and TV were different brands, but it worked the old-fashioned way of pushing the buttons on the TV. The screen would pop up with a message of calling an 800 number to prevent loss of service every hour (TV was of interest due to 2 storms/hurricanes in progress). After the speech from the owners of "conserve water" and "if it is yellow, let it mellow, if it is brown, flush it down" and take short showers" and use the waste paper basket for toilet paper." I would not describe our room as a "Luxury Cottage." Scout's Place had their own restaurant that serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. The food was good and varied. The Swinging Door Restaurant is a short walk and has several BBQ nights. My Kitchen (Mijn Keuken) was an excellent restaurant that was a 5-minute walk from Scout's Place. Scout's Place owns Saba Divers. Saba Divers has Nitrox for same price as air \$43 per dive. The dive shop is in the harbor which is a 15-minute taxi ride from the hotel. The taxi fare is included in the dive price. The diving is done from an older boat that would comfortably hold about 8 divers. There is little shade and not much sitting room. 3 tank dives do not return to the dock between morning and afternoon dives. Basically it is 3 dives in a row with 60 minute surface intervals. Bring your own lunch and water. There is no food. They supply water in refilled water bottles, really tacky. The boat has no head. The boat did not have a rinse tank for cameras. I dive with a Subal housed Nikon with dual strobes. They showed me a 2-gallon bucket that they suggested I put my camera in. After about 15 minutes of discussions on letting salt water dry

on a camera and the costs of a flood, they brought a 30-gallon trash can and filled it with salt water. Remember, conserve water. On shore they had 3 tanks for rinsing gear. 1 for wet suits, 1 for BCDs and one for regulators masks and computers. I guess the regulator one will have to work for cameras too. They never changed the water in these tanks and the water was about 4 inches deep. The wet suit tank was quite murky after 4 days. Our divemasters were fairly new to the island and did a decent job of trying to make everyone safe. They basically gave you a tour of the site, pointing out the larger, more obvious critters. They went too fast and too far. I never asked to dive my own profile since I really did not think they would let me. As a photographer, I like to hang way back to avoid the other divers. When I did this, they asked me to stay closer. If there are any new divers or inexperienced divers, you will not dive the pinnacles since the shallowest dive on a pinnacle is about 90 to 100 feet. The deep pinnacle dives are not that great. The shallower dives are much better. The hard coral is bleached and much has died and is covered with algae from the bleaching event that occurred Caribbean-wide in 2005. There are still areas of soft coral that are quite colorful and healthy. There are flamingo tongues, leech head sea slugs, 3 different colors of lettuce sea slugs, cryptic tear drop crabs, day swimming octopus and other creatures to be found. Seahorses and frog fish were not found. We did 1 muck dive around the boat moorings. If you like small critters, you will enjoy this area.

Sea Saba, Cottage Club, January 2006, Marc (marc@streamsintl.com), Redondo Beach, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, choppy, surge. After a week in

St Maarten and poor diving, it was time to visit Saba. Now, rather than writing a novel here, I would just review the reader reports in the 2006 Chapbook and add my comments. First, Saba was small, 5 square miles of volcano. If you are weary of heights like me (understatement) this island will be a challenge. Don't let that stop you; just don't look as they drive you up and down the mountain. You can get there by boat (The Edge) or plane (WinAir via St Maarten). If you do the plane as we did, know that you are landing on the smallest commercial runway in the world. We stayed at the Cottage Club. We had our own little cottage that was simple, but had everything. You could whip up a great meal, or go out to a restaurant in town (go to Brigadoon's). Ask for cottage 1 or 2. They have the best view since they are on the cliff (#3). Sea Saba has a great operation. They have two good boats and don't take over ten divers on each. The boat had a head and covered area. Saba boasts great pinnacle diving and some of the best coral reefs in the Caribbean, comparable to Cozumel. The fish life was only good and not great, but the owner, Lynn, emailed me and told me that the water was calm and the eagle rays had returned (damn). One highlight was seeing elk horn coral thriving on the reef. Schedule time to hike. There are spectacular views and you can choose the level of difficulty. Make sure you take a day off diving (due to deco problems) and do the Mt. Scenery hike. There is no real way to explain it, so just go and do it. UW Photography Comments: Bucket on boat was filled with salt water. It would be nice to have fresh water on board.

Sea Saba, Cottage Club, February 2006, Earl E. Carpenter (ecrpnr@aol.com), Barrington, IL. Experience:

101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 110 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. Like being in the Alps with an ocean of blue at your feet. Five miles square and 3000 feet high it's unlike any other diver destination in the Caribbean. The people were as beautiful and welcoming as their island. A protected Marine Park and therefore have some of the best dive sites I've seen in this part of the world. Hotels range from individual cottages to a couple luxurious resorts. They all are small, clean, and close to nature. Our group of six stayed at the "Cottage Club," where each cabin had a complete kitchen, two queen sized beds, a deck facing the ocean, plenty of room and only a short walk to the center of Windwardside. The Swinging Door was great for ribs, a beer, and swapping stories with the locals at the bar; Brigadoon which could teach Boston something about clam chowder, a glass of wine, and a Chocolate Orgasm. We found prices on the island to be reasonable; some establishments include a 15% tip on the bill — thanks to non-tipping Europeans. From our first encounter via e-mail to set up arrangements for us six guys, to being picked up at the airport, being transported to the dive boats, the quality of the boats and the dive masters, to reservations for whatever we wanted to do after the days diving. When you contact Lynn at Sea Saba, she's in the Dive Shop, she knows all the local conditions. After your dive, she'll ask where you want to eat, and then pick up the phone to make you reservations. Lynn and John run the best professionally run dive operation as we've experienced in the Caribbean. They have two 38' boats which could probably handle over 20 divers, but we never had over 10 divers. Other dive operations have smaller boats and the conditions looked less than acceptable

to our group. Dive limitations were, “We’d like you to be back on the boat with about 500psi of air,” a discussion of diving in a Protected Marine Preserve, and safe diving practices. In twelve dives, I never experienced an air tank with less than 3000psi of air. The dive masters gave good outlines of what to expect on each dive. You could dive with the divemaster or on your own. I could not imagine an experienced diver being anything but elated with the dive operation of Sea Saba. Saba promotes deep diving on their Pinnacles at 100’. I personally was more impressed with the diving from 40’ to 70’, with a variety of terrain, pinnacles, fingers, mini walls and sandy bottoms. The quantity of marine life was overwhelming, which shows the value of having a protected marine park. I have not seen anywhere else in the Caribbean so many huge barrel sponges and such an abundance of black coral. My favorite was Diamond Rock, — two pinnacles about 30’ in diameter, raising from a sandy floor 75’ to crashing waves hitting their sides, every bit covered with beautiful coral and teeming with untold numbers and varieties of marine life.

Sea Saba, Juliana’s, February 2006, Bill Edwards, Placerville, CA. Experience: 290 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, choppy. I dove three days (2 tank dives each day) with Sea Saba. Dick was our dive master and let us do our own thing or follow him. He was a good guy but he didn’t find many small critters for us – maybe they are not there to find. The coral is healthy and we saw lots of tropical fish. The dive boats were especially nice. We stayed at Juliana’s in their Orchid Cottage — a nice, roomy two bedroom unit. There were only two of us so I took over the second bedroom for all my scuba gear. The view from the patio was spectacu-

lar, looking out over tropical foliage that drops down steep slopes to the ocean. The staff at Juliana’s was friendly and helpful. Our biggest complaint was the lack of lighting. We’re card players and there was hardly enough light to see the table, let alone the cards. There is a café on the premises that serves good food morning, noon and night. The place is operated by Wim and he is helpful in making dinner reservations, confirming airline flights and getting taxi service. Steep narrow roads. The only flat spot on the island is the short airport runway. What a thrill that is.

Sea Saba, Juliana’s, August 2006, Jeff Bloomer (jlbdiver@comcast.net), St. Charles, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 87 F, calm. This is our second time to Saba in 2 years. I like to see different sites and have never been back to the same place back to back. The island is the cleanest, nicest island I’ve been to. No big hotels. The island is more European than Caribbean in that it’s not over-traveled by tourists, eco-friendly and diverse. There are many good places to eat. The team at Sea Saba do a great job in coordinating restaurant reservations and making arrangements for anything else you want to do. We dived with mainly 2 divemasters, Girsh, a Brit who now has a couple of houses on the island, and Giovanna, an Italian who is still as excited about diving as she must have been when she first learned to dive. The beginning of our 10 days on the island started overcast but somehow the weather always broke long enough for our dives. As the week went on, conditions really improved. Sharks and turtles on almost every dive. So many turtles that I almost got run down by one. I jokingly told the DM that the turtles kept getting in the way of my pictures of coral. The last day the water

was clear. While on our way to dive Green Island the boat was surrounded by a large pod of dolphins. On our off time, many of us hiked the trails including Mount Scenery, which includes a cloud forest. It's a good 90-minute hike to get to the top and the scenery on the way up and down is super. UW Photography Comments: Limited space on the boat to deal with a camera. There is a dedicated bucket for cameras but if there were someone on the boat with a large housing there would not be any room. No table.

ST. BARTH

Plongee Caraibes, April 2006, Daniel Powers (powersdaniel@msn.com), South Wales, NY. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Very professional dive operation. Run by husband and wife team (Frank and Marion Noury) friendly and customer focused. Good rental equipment and attention to safety procedures. 45' twin hull boat lots of room, takes only ten divers.

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 pristine 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 after-

noon. The people are friendly; there are a few small restaurants.

Golden Rock Dive, Old Gin House, October 2005, Pat Sinclair, Tampa, FL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 35 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Michelle and Glen run a fine establishment. I was impressed by the service at both the Old Gin House and the dive shop. Hurricane Wilma caused a delay with our trip, by 2 days. But Glen and Michelle made the trip memorable. Upon arrival at Statia, we were met at the tiny airport and taken to the Old Gin House, dropped by the dive shop store front, checked in there. Walked to the Blue Bead restaurant and had a great dinner. Did dives at the 10 AM and 2PM dives. On the first dive, I got motion sickness, and while I made that dive I was not able to make the 2nd dive. DM Lisa found so much stuff for my husband; he was impressed with her and her knowledge. The next day I took my Bonine and made both dives. Good numbers of fish, turtles, lobsters, rays, eels and they were unafraid of divers, I guess since it is a marine reserve. Lobsters were huge! We did the Wreck City dive one afternoon with DM Lisa and saw the big loggerhead turtles (two big ones and one small turtle). Awesome to see that animal lazily swim past us. I went out with Mike as DM and we did the Blue Bead dive. There is no reef at all, but the amount of small critters was unbelievable. He also found an octopus hidden under a shell covering a hole in the sand. Cute thing, it was! Our last dive, was the Wreck City dive at night. We again went out with DM Mike, and this dive was just the three of us. Mike took us slowly through the wrecks and we saw the two large loggerheads asleep in their respective holds of two of the wrecks (one was on the small tug boat.) The tugboat wreck was literally covered