

joined by a group from Shark Diver Magazine. Andy and Eli, along with a couple of cameramen, accompanied us on the dive, were shooting both stills for the magazine and video for their first shark movie. Cool for us having cameras and lights in the water getting filmed during our first shark dive!

Ocean Explorers, Royal Islander Club, June 2006, Gary W Brown (gkbrown@vci.net), Benton, KY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 70 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, choppy, no currents. Beautiful and friendly island. Great beaches and wonderful places to eat. Try Lee's in Simpson Bay for a great and reasonable lunch. Walk out to the waters edge and see the school of tarpon waiting to be fed chicken scraps. Rent a car to see the entire island. We were not expecting great diving here based on reader reports. We dove with LeRoy French of Ocean Explorers in Simpson Bay. LeRoy is a nice fellow with an interesting dive shop. Their boat is somewhat small and a little awkward to maneuver about when filled with gear. Although they list several interesting dive sites we were taken to some closer ones partly due to rough seas. I would certainly not go to St. Martin just for the diving. They made a special effort to make my wife's 100th dive a memorable one. Stay some distance from the airport as the planes and the late night music from a couple of beach bars can get a little old.

Ocean Explorers, Divi Resort, September 2006, Michael Drumstas (griswald8@aol.com), South Grafton, MA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 87 F, calm. Ocean Explorers is owned and operated by Leroy French, NAUI #50 — that should tell you something. He has been on St Maarten for 25+ years and knows

a good portion of the U/W sites and critters. The dive boat is on the small side but that means good service and attention paid to each diver. We had a mix of fairly new, to us, at the 500+ dive mark. Lots of healthy coral and an abundance of fish life on all sites. Also spotted large Caribbean lobster. Diving was conducted in a group setting, but Leroy let us wander and take photos away from the pack. We also had our bottom time extended as our air consumption is fairly good. Fish life seen: scorpionfish, lots of southern rays, grunts, squirrel fish, morays — green and spotted, jackknife-fish, barracuda, angels and butterflyfish. The usual host of Caribbean fish, but lots of them. Divi resort has improvement in the condition of the rooms and resort amenities. St Maarten is a great place to vacation as the island is reasonably priced when it comes to food and goods. The diving, though not spectacular, was fun. Leroy French is a great person to dive with as his demeanor is laid-back, but he makes sure that all onboard have a safe dive. The surface intervals short as the dives were relatively shallow — 40-70 fsw.

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.

Bequia

Bequia Dive Adventures, Tradewinds by the Sea, November 2005, Francis and Deb Bollag (debbollag@earthlink.net), New Rochelle, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, currents. 40 minutes by ferry from St. Vincent: Drift dives along colorful, sponge-encrusted, volcanic walls; large schools of fish; dense soft corals; huge sponges; larger fish. All in pristine condition. Dive Adventures in Admiralty Bay (the guys with the yellow boats) really cares about their customers. This is a locally-owned operation and the DMs are full partners: Ron, Laury and Dave. (There’s a difference in how owners vs. employees treat clients.) Besides setting up and caring for our gear, they adjusted the dive schedule to fit our needs and even drove us to our hotel when we arrived, lost, at their door. Bequia’s 30 dive sites are on both sides of the bay’s exit. Boat runs are usually 15 minutes max. Seas permitting, there are a few magnificent, advanced sites further away. Boats are small and open but feel roomy. There’s no dock, requiring a walk through shallow water to board. Small groups — we had 6 one day — but mostly it was just a few of us. When we dove 3 tanks, the divemasters switched off and passed a shared computer so they could monitor the limits of all of their clients’ profiles. Surface intervals are spent back at the shop where they set up a furnished patio and provide Reef ID books and storage for personal items. The shop is sandwiched between the best roti (The Green Boley) and the best pizza (Mac’s)

on the island. They were generous on the pricing. We started with a small package but continued diving beyond it. As we reached a better package level, they lowered the costs for all of our dives — including those we’d already paid — to give us the best deal possible.

St. Vincent

Dive St. Vincent, Young Island Resort, October 2005, Tracey Bennett (Tdives@cox.net), Las Vegas, NV.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm, choppy, no currents. St. Vincent has been called the “muck diving capital of the Caribbean,” and I’m sure it is no exaggeration. Bill Tewes, owner of Dive St. Vincent, and his staff, have extraordinary knowledge of the local critters’ habits and habitats. They will find a great subject, write down the name on a dive slate, and move on to find you something else. Bill’s got just as excited finding beautiful and bizarre creatures as I did seeing them. You can do 2 morning dives, and with advanced notice, add an afternoon dive. I saw flying gurnards, red banner blennies, yellow face pike blennies, neck crabs, sea slugs, sponge crabs, flamingo tongues, seahorses, nimble spray crabs, various shrimps, numerous eels, squid, blue throated pike blennies, octopi, and yellowhead jawfish. There are beautiful tropical fish such as rock beauties, juvenile queen angelfish, jackknife fish, juvenile spotted drums, French angelfish, and many types of butterflyfish. St. Vincent is an excellent place to do night dives because, as Bill would often say, “there is nothing here bigger than you.” Accommodations at Young Island Resort are private and charming. Rooms vary greatly and their website maps and describes each room. Meals were outstanding, with many choices

available. Leave your watch at home.

Dive St. Vincent, The Beachcomber, November 2005, Francis and Deb Bollag (debbollag@earthlink.net), New Rochelle, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 40 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Everyone new to DSV receives the “first day checkout with Callie.” It’s not a big deal — standard St. Vincent diving — do your thing — and Callie’s an excellent DM. We didn’t know we were under scrutiny until we returned to the shop. For all other dives, we had the option to stick with the DM and learn about all of St. Vincent’s rich sea life or to explore independently. In either case, air was the only limiting factor. Much has been reported in *Undercurrent* about the great macro life, DSV’s knowledgeable staff and good service. Bill Tewes has amazing eyes and can spot a 1/4” critter from 30 feet away. According to Bill, we were lucky to have seamless connections and our bags via Puerto Rico on US Air and their codeshare partner, Caribbean Sun. The Beachcomber room was spacious, well-appointed and comfortable. Showers had plenty of hot water and good pressure. The hotel bar was fun but the restaurant staff was so surly that we strolled over to Mariner’s Hotel, Limin’ Pub and other places for meals. The food, ambience and service at the French Veranda at Mariner’s are topnotch. Stayed one night at Mariner’s to compare the facilities. Beachcomber’s room was much, much nicer. Beachcomber charged a small fee for internet access. Mariner’s provided free access. Mariner’s shower barely delivered water. The staff at Mariner’s was much more gracious. You call it: Diving, including afternoon, night and Falls of Bealine, cost a bundle (compared with Cozumel) but was so interesting and fun that we received good value. And

we finally have a “worthy” seahorse photo! Vincentians were extremely friendly and helpful, especially during our land excursions via dollar van, hitchhike and taxi. No need to rent a car. Pack your DEET (high concentration), a pair of shorts, a T-shirt and your dive gear and go to St. Vincent!

Dive St. Vincent, Young Island Resort, January 2006, Tom Doepfner (twd@cs.brown.edu), Warren, RI. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Bill Tewes, proprietor of Dive St. Vincent, is only great at finding things, he identifies them to you underwater via a slate. He takes great pains to make sure you get good shots. There are a lot of rare and unusual creatures (mainly small) — Bill seems to be intimate with all of them. This was my third trip to St. Vincent, diving with Bill. This is the best place for macro photography in the Caribbean. Young Island Resort is perhaps a bit on the expensive side, but a really nice place. The lower-priced rooms are a bit rustic, but nicely appointed. The food is good — excellent compared with most dive resorts in the Caribbean. Its wines are expensive and not terribly exciting.

Dive St. Vincent, January 2006, Tom and Joyce Schulke, Waupaca, WI. (classpix@sbcglobal.net), Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm. Bill Tewes, Dive St. Vincent, knows how to take care of your travel plans. He sought out a house for us to rent for 4 couples, booked our LIAT flights from Barbados, and takes care of getting you to your accommodations. If you want a resort, room, or house, let him direct you. As experienced divers, we especially like the dive freedom. The variety of sights and underwater landscapes is vast. From reefs to walls to grass to

sand. We always see new species of unusual fish and critters for us. He and his dive masters, Callie, DJ, and Larry, know their fish and critters and know how to find them. They'll give you as little or as much guidance as you request. The service is top notch with gear washing and storage provided. The diving is awesome for the little fish and critters not abundant elsewhere.

Dive St. Vincent, Young Island Resort, June 2006, Timothy A. Kolakowski (tkolakowski@choiceonemail.com), Erie, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. See the small stuff you've seen only in the Reef Guide books — sea-horses, frogfish, blennies, pipefish, flying gurnards, gobies, jawfish, even things you can't name ... or see, for that matter. Bill carries a set of magnifying glasses with him and finds things as tiny as a pipefish smaller than my thumbnail! Then he writes it on his marker board for all the divers to read. His enthusiasm, wit, and knowledge, undiminished at age 65, complete the experience. And there doesn't have to be a full boat to go — our "crowded" day had 5 divers. The other days had 2 or 3, and the first day they took me out by myself! Treat yourself and stay at Young Island and get treated like royalty. Begin your diving day at breakfast with the "Breadboard" — fresh baked white, whole wheat, banana, cinnamon raisin, or coconut bread. Have any kind of omelet you can imagine, pancakes or one of the above breads made as French toast. Add some homemade yogurt. Then go find seahorses and get back in time for the gourmet lunch. Dinner is 5 courses, with main course including filet mignon, fresh fish, and roast duck. On land, check out the movie sets and landmarks used in the 3 (yes, 3 — you'll see P/C III in 2008) Pirates of the

Caribbean movies and visit the western hemisphere's oldest botanical gardens. Ride on a minibus packed full of locals screeching around the hilly hairpin turns for \$.37 US.

Union Island

Grenadines Dive, December 2005, Francis and Deb Bollag, New Rochelle, NY. (debbollag@earthlink.net) Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 15 to 30 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Glenroy Adams, DM and owner, did a fantastic job keeping our group of seven sailors — with every level of dive (in)experience — together and happy on some speedy drifts. He saw that the two of us were relaxed and experienced drift divers and let us hang back from the less experienced group, pick our depth and linger when we found something interesting. Glenroy explored and named most of the dive sites, so he knows whom to take where and when. With seven plus two crew, the small boat was cramped. Runs were short so it didn't matter. Equipment was set up by the crew and taken back to their shop for care between dives. The hard corals were banged up by Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and, after an unusually rainy autumn, runoff from the Orinoco River severely limited visibility. Glenroy said that viz is much greater in summer. There's some big litter (empty paint cans, tires, etc.) on the bottom. There were plenty of accessible nurse sharks, turtles, rays, eels, small tropical fish and macro critters to entertain us. We tried but, due to swirling current, failed to dive the Purini wreck.

TOBAGO

Frontier Divers, Sandy Point Resort RCI, October 2005, Kris and Mark