

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 Deep, Sonesta Mayo, January 2007, Stephen Moore (s-moore@sympatico.ca), Toronto, Ont. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 75 Feet. Water: 81 to 81 F, calm. We stayed in St. Maarten at the Sonesta Mayo and dove in St. Maarten for four days with Dive Adventures. The diving in St. Maarten was mediocre. We had booked a one-day trip to Saba with Saba Deep (the ferry ride 90 minutes each way is challenging, as the crossing was pretty rough). When we arrived at the dock at Fort Bay, we were met by Steve, who immediately took our gear from us and put it in the back of a pick up truck. We didn't see the gear again until we got on the boat, where it was set up for us. We walked the 1/4 mile to the dive shop, where we checked in. We then went upstairs to place our lunch orders. About 15 minutes later, we were on the boat. The boat was a little on the small side and there were eight divers and Big Mike, a real character who tells a lot of corny jokes but better stories. The boat ride to the first site was about 10 minutes. We dove at Sally's Delight. The boat was anchored to a mooring line and Mike dove with us so there was no one left on the boat. The boat is smallish so we did back rolls into the

water. We got back on the boat using a narrow ladder. We handed our BCs and fins up to Mike and came up the ladder. We could clearly see the bottom, some 75' down. The corals were in pristine condition. The profile ended up being 75' for 40 minutes and our second dive was 65' for 40 minutes. The dive times were on the short side because one of the divers had a regulator that had a slow leak that couldn't be fixed between dives. There were a number of healthy large tropicals (big queen angels, French angels and a number of parrotfish). I have seen reefs with more small schooling fish in Belize, Turks and the Caymans, but the variety of fish here was excellent. We saw a number of very large lobsters as well. The dive was conducted at a very slow pace which allowed you to really explore. We then went back to shore and went up to the restaurant and had an excellent grouper lunch. The total surface interval was about 90 minutes and then we took another 10-minute ride out to Hot Springs. This was an excellent dive, with excellent corals again. We spent a lot of time exploring some sand chutes and saw a couple of healthy peacock flounder. At one point you can put your hand in very warm sand that is heated from underneath. When we got back to shore, our gear was thoroughly cleaned. We put our gear in our gear bags and it was transported by truck back to the ferry. We booked a second day later in the week. We dove with Steve, who did an excellent job. One couple we dove with in St. Maarten and the husband was an absolute air hog. They had not been diving since 1989. We phoned ahead to Dive Saba when we realized they were on the trip. We were thanked for the heads-up when we got to Saba. They had a 100 cubic foot tank for the husband. When he got in trouble at the

beginning of the first dive, Steve got him out of the water and conducted the dive. This dive was to a site called Twilight Zone which is a pinnacle beginning at about 90 feet. Our profile on this dive was 110 feet. Some of the divers saw a 3-foot blacktip and we saw a 5- to 6-foot blacktip about 35 to 40 feet off the pinnacle. Again the corals were pristine. Incidentally, the divers on the early morning dive saw a hammerhead. The last dive at Tent Reef had an 80-foot profile. It was a very interesting dive with a number of swimthroughs.

Sea Saba, Juliana's, June 2007, Vicki L. Smith (diveblueh20@yahoo.com), Gilmer, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, choppy. The rooms were all nice, especially the cottages and suites. We didn't have AC but it was cool at night at that altitude and always a breeze blowing. We slept with windows and doors open, and virtually no bugs. I would suggest an upper-level room; they get the best breezes and views. If you get a lower-level room, you may want to get one with AC. The food was great also. Sea Saba picked us up each morning at the hotel for a ride down to the boats. The boats were large and roomy, with good dive platforms. We had two morning dives each day with one afternoon dive. They were more than willing to do other afternoon and night dives for an extra charge. The water was choppy most of the time and the current was bad on some dives. The dive masters were excellent, giving good pre-dive briefs and letting us dive our own profile or stay with them. We did have a problem with one DM, Tom, who was not helpful, didn't show us anything on the dives, and led us on a crazy night dive that left nine of us lost and far from the boat. It took the boat 20 minutes to pick us up in rough water. The

current was too strong to swim for the boat. Then he joked about it and tried to make it out to be our fault. We had DMs and instructors and were all upset with him. One the same night dive, going down the mooring line at the 20' mark I discovered that my tank was not secured and about to slip off. My dive buddy was there to fix it for me. Overall, it was a good dive operation and all the other staff members were terrific. Some of the highlights were two large seahorses, some nice turtles, stingray, barracuda, black tip and nurse sharks. Several members of our group were stung by jellyfish, but nothing major. The town of Windwardside was quaint and beautiful. The whole island was laid back and friendly. Just be prepared for the walks. The roads are either straight up or straight down. There were several good restaurants and two well stocked grocery stores. There was not a lot of shopping, but enough for a few T-shirts and some unique gifts. Saba is famous for its handmade lace and we bought several nice pieces. Jo Bean's glass shop makes glass jewelry and other items. You can take a really fun class with Jo and make your own beads. I had a massage at the Saba Day Spa that was one of the best I've had. The Swingin' Door was a great hangout, cheap drinks and good food. We saw a slide show about the rain forest and had a great dinner at Brigadoon's. UW Photography Comments: They had a bucket of water on boats for cameras, but no table. A lot of micro and beautiful corals, but little macro.

ST. EUSTATIUS

A historically significant island, St. Eustatius, 50 miles south of St. Maarten, was the first to recognize the United