

dive operations. They really know how to treat their customers. Visibility was the best. colorful reefs. Shark dive was good and safe, and casual compared to other shark dives I have been on. St. Maarten does not have the timeless tropical charm that other islands have. No friendly destination appeal. Hotel and car level of service far below expectations. No kind words about Hertz — dishonest staff. Diving was good; the island is dirty. Books and videos about St. Maarten misleading.

Dive Safaris, September 2007, Don Winchester (DonWinchester@alltel.net), Mooresville, NC. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm, no currents. Dove as shore excursion from Disney Wonder cruise ship. Visited the 18th century HMS Proselyte's cannons, anchors and other debris, an unidentified steel-hulled wreck and several coral outcrops. Second tank was on the Maze. Dive master pointed out several lobster and other critters. A small sea turtle came floating out of the depths and accompanied us. Numerous small fish and small schools, barrel sponges and a nice elkhorn coral, but not in the quantities I expected.

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, Gingerbread Hotel, May 2007, Rainer and Kristin Farrag, Dundee, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, surge. We have made 3 trips to this place and find the diving to be excellent. Ron and Laury at Dive Adventures are great to dive with and find all kinds of cool stuff to photograph. The diving is in small groups so we go at our own slow speed. The reefs are so beautiful, you don't want to miss anything — seahorses, highhats, and other things you don't see everywhere. It can be difficult to get in and out of Bequia, but we find the best bet is to go through St. Vincent and then ferry over from there. The ferry is within walking distance of the Gingerbread Hotel but they will gladly pick you up. The dive shop is about 100 yards from the hotel. Not much going on in Bequia, but the people are friendly and the diving is wonderful! The furthest dive is only 15 minutes away. You return after each dive.

St. Vincent

Dive St. Vincent, Sunset Shores Hotel, May 2007, Peter J Maerz (pjmaerz@yahoo.com), Hollywood, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy, no currents. Great weather with a perfect breeze. A beautiful island studded with mountains and lush with vegetation. Bill Tewes remains one of the great diving

enthusiasts and hosts on the planet. Five years after my first encounter with him, he remains every bit as enthusiastic about diving and finding stuff. With his ever-ready telescoping pointer and magnifying glass, he's always scanning for goodies. It's like having a personal valet. All I have to do is experiment with my settings; my subjects, if I haven't found them myself, are waiting for me at Bill's or his divemaster's hands. The requisite frog fish and sea-horses are there in relative abundance. But also all manner of tiny crustaceans, mollusks, echinoderms and others. Sea hares, nudibranchs, flatworms, shrimp of all kinds including virtually microscopic wire coral shrimp. Eels of all types on every dive. Octopi. Scorpion fish large and small (mushroom). Bill's demeanor is not for everyone, though I find it hard to believe that anyone could be offended by his always good-natured ribbing. He delights in "getting" as much as "giving." If you're willing to play along, you can have a ball. Bill almost always offers to meet his guests socially as well. (He sprang for drinks for my buddy and me at Young Island. Word of caution: Beware the "Island Special"!) I and a buddy stayed at the Sunset Shores, where I'd roomed in 2002. Breakfast is included in the Dive St. Vincent package. The rooms are good sized; most have views with nice terraces. Outlets are 220 and accept the 3-square-pronged British variety plug with two parallel pins and one perpendicular. The grounds are pretty and about a small beach, with views to Young Island beyond. The open-air but roofed dining terrace is comfortable, naturally cooled and has good views of the water. Bill's boat leaves at 9:30 sharp. The standard package includes a two-tank dive each day, but each dive averages 90 minutes (some are 110 minutes or

more; it's strictly a function of your air; deco isn't usually an issue since the depths can be shallow). Surface intervals average 50 minutes snoozing or chatting on the boat. A night dive almost every night. There's a \$10 surcharge for those dives, even if within the package amount, to pay for gas and the services of Callie, one of a Bill's long-term divemasters. Dives beyond the package price run \$57 plus VAT per. There are never more than 6 divers on a boat. 4 was the average. 3 divers max to a divemaster or Bill. The boat has a small sheltered area and a larger open deck. Dive gear is set up on the tanks, which are stowed in the forward hold in molded slots until needed. Gear is rinsed and kept in mesh bags overnight at the shop, with the exception of wetsuits. Callie, DJ and the other divemasters are extremely adept at finding goodies and are accommodating and helpful, though they are shy. Don't expect to be chatted up, but there's no rudeness or hostility. Most restaurants are expensive: a pizza joint served us two nine-inch pizzas for about 40 bucks US. It goes up from there. Expect to pay \$175 or more for a meal for two with all the trimmings (sans wine) at the luxurious Young Island Resort. The Sunset Shores has reasonably good food, if not particularly reasonably priced. There are some relatively cheap alternatives, such as Callie's sister's fried chicken, served from a converted bus at the side of the road, but you need to time your visits. Night dives brought us back at 8:30 or later and most kitchens closed at 9:00 or earlier. St. Vincent remains one of the unsung heroes of Caribbean diving and far surpasses many, if not all, of the super-hyped destinations. It ain't the South Pacific but it doesn't miss by much!

Dive St. Vincent, Young Island Resort, June 2007, Joe DelGuidice (joe@mercurypersonnel.com), Boxford, MA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm. My wife, Joan (non-diver), and I spent 8 enchanted nights in Paradise at Young Island Resort, a 34-acre Cay, 5 minutes away by small ferryboat from the mainland of St. Vincent, a volcanic, tropical/jungle island with low-impact tourism. Young Island is a luxurious resort, but reasonably priced in the off-season. The place was a fifth full; the (all-inclusive) food and service excellent. The snorkeling around Young Island was good. Joan did her first night snorkel and spotted a large moray eel, lobster, crabs and many bright red brittle starfish. Bill Tewes is an amazing diver and dive guide extraordinaire, who specializes in small critter diving: Seahorses, eels, varied crabs and shrimp, frog fish, sea slugs, nudibranchs, pipe fish and many more. Many times I would use my 4" magnifying glass to gaze at these tiny beauties.—many critters being less than an inch long. It's amazing to follow Bill and watch him find these marine treasures, all in 20-50 feet of water. He would use his pointer to show me the critter, then use his underwater slate to write its name and info like "full with eggs." Larry was an outstanding DM whose warm personality and easy demeanor were a good balance. I bonded with Bill Tewes — Texan, dove in Papua New Guinea and then set up shop in SVG for the last 23 years. The most famous dive photographers, who publish the best fish ID books, dive with him to find the rare — the small — the beautiful. Bill is uniquely a personality who can give you a boat-load of ribbing — part out of sarcasm/fun and part out of instruction-mentoring, and you relish the attention. He gets personal

with his customers and holds you to a high standard. I was consistently with experienced divers who were cool. Except for a couple of days — this one woman was "the boss" of a dive club from Michigan.. She was way over the top, giving advice/orders to everyone. At one point early on I had to tell her to back off and that I took orders only from Bill. I learned a lot from Bill about how to find the critters. He would see me screw up and give me a look and wave his fist while writing on his slate, "breathe less heavy!" and "inhale to float up!" The pressure was on to dive like him and gain his respect. I know I am a much better diver because of Bill. There were many critters that I have never seen before: decorator nimble spray and ceramic crabs, magnificent urchin, social feather duster, opossum pipe fish, harlequin pipe fish, box crab, painted elysia slug and more — and the largest seahorses anywhere! One day we flew in a puddle jumper to Union Island — south in the Grenadines — and took an all-day catamaran sail to desolate white sandy beaches, which included the uninhabited, pristine Tobago Cays. Captain Yanni's Catamaran Tours did an excellent job! Young Island can arrange it all. It was Carnavale time at SVG, which is multi-day holiday. Thousands of people organized into groups they call "bands" dress up and dance and parade throughout Kingstown. This Carnavale is for the locals — VINCY MAS 2007! They wear bathing suits and put incredible themed costumes on. At times the dancing gets quite wild and erotic ... hot! Each band is accompanied by a large truck with massive sound systems. I danced in the street (hot and humid), rum drink in hand, for 2 hours, either on the side with all the spectators or behind various bands. I probably saw 6- 12 white

folk the whole afternoon. The people were friendly and loved to see me out there dancing with them. Street vendors were selling cold bottled water, beers, rums drinks and food. Man, do they let it all hang out! One small band did have a few white folk in it. They carried the banner "European Arrivals." This struck me as the group that descended from slave owners. Right after them there was a band titled "Slave Traders" in bright orange African costumes, carrying spears. Right after them in yellow costumes came a band where everyone had shackles on! One afternoon we went to the Botanical Garden. The oldest in the Western Hemisphere – 250-year-old trees and the original breadfruit tree that Captain Bligh brought there from Tahiti before the mutiny trip. Joel was a terrific guide! And Ricky is the best cab driver.

Indigo Dive, Sunset Shores Hotel, June 2007, Jane Goble, Lexington, SC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 8 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, no currents. Beautiful diving — tons of small creatures, no broken or dead coral, clear water, no other dive boats, great photo ops. Kay at Indigo took me diving when I was the only diver one day and fit my husband and me onto an all-day dive-snorkel trip that was preplanned before our arrival. Dale, divemaster-in-training, had an amazing ability to spot the tiniest creatures. I first contacted Dive St. Vincent. I have to say that I was put off by the owners reply to my inquiry if I could store my gear at his shop while I was diving with them. He informed me that I could if I had a specific type of mesh bag but if I didn't, I would have to buy one from him for \$15.00 USD. My USDivers mesh bag didn't meet his requirement so I looked elsewhere for a dive operator. After 23+ years of diving, that kind of rigidity put up red flags

for us. St. Vincent is a beautiful island with friendly people. Visit it before the 600-room hotel is built as well as the new airport which will allow the huge planes to land.

TOBAGO

Aquamarine Dive Ltd., Blue Waters Inn, September 2007, Clem Clapp (cclapp@bellsouth.net), Maplesville, AL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, surge. The resort was less than half full. Apparently we hit the customary dry spell during the rainy season that was referred to as the "petite carem" (or something of such). Made for a mixed bag of visibility throughout the 10 days, but at least it didn't rain much. Viz went from 80'+ to pretty bad at the end. Most visitors were from the UK, with a few others from Germany and Holland. Dive boats were pretty basic. Both had manually cranked, 70 HP outboard engines mounted on covered 25-30' pirogues with roll-out water entry. To exit water you could remove gear and hand it up before climbing the ladder, if necessary. Boats were functional for the 5- to 8-minute rides to the sites with all our diving done just out front of the resort around Goat Island and Little Tobago. 2 dives were done off the south point of the bay, where we spotted our only manta. Boats returned to the resort for the SL. Dive shop and boat personnel were pleasant and accommodating. Trips to St. Giles or other sites on other side of Tobago required 4 divers committing to dive there at least a day ahead of time. That we could never get arranged. Coral was varied, healthy and abundant. Fish were varied and abundant also but with few large fish. Nurse sharks were seen on about