

Joe Swider on his 31 ft. "Vessel Melitza" which is comfortable for diving. Normally you camp on the island by permit, but the days we wanted were taken by boar and goat hunters so we stayed on the boat and dived 5 tanks. Dives are limited by # of tanks the dive boat can carry. Excellent for the adventurous willing to forgo luxuries and rough it a bit. (787-823-4114)

SABA

South of St. Maarten, Saba is one of the more adventurous and exciting Caribbean destinations, both on land and in the sea. . . . Pinnacle diving begins at 70 feet, with good fish life and occasionally sharks and bigger fish. . . . All accommodations are in quaint villages at 1000 feet and above. . . . Although there are no beaches or night life, Saba has delightful people, a few good restaurants, and a cool, pleasant climate at altitude. It's also in the hurricane belt. . . . Some divers claim that, after several days of diving, they get muscle pains if they climb 3000-ft. Mt. Scenery. . . . Be sure to close your eyes when your plane lands. . . .

Saba Deep, El Momo, October 1999, Bob Hill (rhill43010@aol.com), Apopka, FL. Vis: 50-90 ft. Water: 83-84 degrees. Sunny. Water: calm. Restrictions: Recreational limits (130 ft), 500 # air at completion. Boat did not have a fresh—water rinse tank, however, returned to dock after every

dive (only 10 minutes at most) with good rinse facilities at dock. Staff handled photo gear carefully when helping diver in/out of water. Saba Deep is a first-class operation. Extremely impressed with their attention to detail, their knowledgeable and helpful staff and their desire to share the beauty of diving Saba. At end of dives with Saba Deep they present you with a packet of useful information about the island, their operation, a map showing all the dive sites they use, etc. as well as a complete list of the dives you dove with them to include the date, site name, depth, dive duration and name of divemaster. They have their main dive shop in town and a separate shop at the dock at Fort Bay. Their shop has complete and well-maintained dive gear and appeared well organized. We dove with them two days. They assembled your gear and made all tank changes. At the end of the day they brought all gear to the shop, rinsed it all in fresh water and hung up. The second day we arrived at the boat with all gear on the boat and tanks set up ready to go, another nice touch. The dive shop has a restaurant in conjunction with descent food. We made three dives per day — 9 and 11 am and 1 pm. The boat returns to dock between each dive. Between the first and second dive we placed our lunch order at the restaurant and it was ready within minutes of our return from the second dive. Great chocolate milk shakes! The diving on Saba is excellent. Basically, the entire waters surrounding Saba are a marine park, therefore, the area is pretty pristine.

Beautiful sea mounts and undersea pinnacles. Encountered strong current on but one dive. Viz was good (excellent the second day) though this was not the “ideal” time of year. A good variety of fish life on most dives but outstanding (similar to Palau) at a couple of sites). Only a few nurse sharks encountered which was a bit disappointing but otherwise, a very good variety of fish. Jim, our DM was extremely good — quite knowledgeable of the area and provided a very good pre-dive briefing. He was very helpful on the dives but did not interfere. Jim helped point out photo subjects for me. Flew from St. Maarten to Saba which is an interesting flight, landing on an extremely short strip the ends at a cliff overlooking the sea. Can fly back to other islands same day as they fly the return flights at less than 2,000 feet and have not had any diver problems. The island also has a lot of beauty to explore. Stayed at a delightful place called El Momo — a small complex of gingerbread cottages with private porches with spectacular views. This is quaint and a bit basic. Lodging for my wife and I was \$45 for the night (\$40 per night if stay more than one night). I give Saba Deep, El Momo and Saba a “big” thumbs-up! (Ph: 011-599-463347, Fax: 011-599-463397)

Saba Deep, Cottage Club, April 2000, Dave Sayles, (dave.sayles@can.com) Caledonia, MI. Vis: 70 to 100 feet. Water: 75 to 77 degrees, calm and flat, strong currents, no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: to 130 feet. 18 dives more than 6 days. Excellent operation. Barb, Mike and Mike were a pleasure to do business

with. Most dives 4-5 divers great fish life and lobsters, crabs, turtles, shrimp (various types) — cleaning stations. Dive operation was safety oriented but casual and fun. Third encounter excellent pinnacle. Tent reef was great 3rd dive. Cost included transportation from your Inn and all dive gear rental. Cottage Club was centrally located. The Swinging Door Ball Tue. and Fri. and Bar-b-que was not to be missed.

Sea Saba, Juliana’s, August 1999, Thomas Daly (oilertom@aol.com), Hudson, NH. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 Ft, calm. Sea Saba is one of the worlds best dive operations, ranking right even with Ocean Frontiers on Grand Cayman. Sea Saba takes care of everything from picking you up at the airport, getting your dive schedule and accommodations in order as well as making dinner recommendations and reservations. The staff truly aims to please. The dive shop is fully stocked with equipment and souvenirs. Rental equipment is fairly new and is the best deal in the Caribbean. There was room to work but no dedicated table for photographers. The camera rinse tank always seemed to have someone’s regulator in it. The shop has a Sea and Sea Motor Marine mx 10 with ys-40 flash for rent and all the lenses are available. Film and batteries are available. John Magor is the resident photo expert and he is always happy to talk photography with you. The dive staff is all instructors and are dedicated to making your trip excellent. They have two 40 foot boats and limit the trips to 10 divers. The diving

is fantastic and the marine life is healthy and the corals splendid, with little sign of stress or disease. On the first dive to "third encounter" we saw three black tip sharks going after a barracuda on the surface. The pinnacles are beautiful and a great place for pelagic sightings. I filled a roll of film every dive and have photos of creatures I still have not been able to identify. Pinnacle diving starts at 85 feet and you usually end up at 120-130 feet. The second dive is usually at 60 feet after a surface interval on the boat in a protected cove where snorkeling is available. They usually offer a third afternoon dive and it's usually between 30-60 feet deep. There was no current on most dives however on Man of War Shoals the current made staying on the lee side more comfortable. Night dives are available with a minimum of 4 divers. Diving at night is not to be missed! We saw Nurse sharks hunting on the fringes of our light, many types of starfish were out, occupying most free surfaces, including basket star. There were eyes everywhere shining back at you from shrimp, lobster crabs etc. Visibility was worse than during the day, about 40 feet. Juliana's was nice, and affordable, with a restaurant and pool on sight. The food at the restaurant was excellent! Views from Juliana's are great as they overlook the ocean 1,200 feet below with lush forest in between. Franklin and Juliana Johnson do all they can to accommodate requests and make your stay comfortable and satisfying. Next time I will rent equipment from Sea Saba and not lug my gear across the

Caribbean! (011-599-462246, Fax: 011-599-462362)

Sea Saba, Juliana's, October 1999, Mark D. Bryant (bryant0614@aol.com), Pensacola, FL. Vis: 75-200 ft. Water: 80-83 degrees. Sunny. Water: calm. Dive Restrictions: 130' depth limit. Comments: Limited space on boat. Probably the most beautiful I have ever seen. Hurricane Jose cut our dive trip short. Sea Saba was very accommodating and the Divemasters (Michael, especially, was great) didn't attempt to hurry us thru our dive and was very helpful in pointing out the indigenous species and those hard to spot. Very laid back environment with breathtaking vistas and the people were extremely friendly. Your best bet is to get out of St. Martin and onto Saba as fast as you can. Very gay-friendly and the island was spotless. Rainforest on top of the 3000' peak. Great hiking and no night life, exactly what the Dr. ordered. Virgin reefs and plenty to see. I saw more in 2 dives here than 16 dives in San Sal, Bahamas.

Sea Saba, Juliana's, December 1999, Jim Virgil, Coeur d'Alene, ID. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 79-80 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 130' sometimes, depending on experience. Sea Saba lost both of their boats in during hurricane Lenny. As their new boats were not purchased yet we dove on a converted fishing boat. Although the exits and entries were a bit challenging we enjoyed our trip very much. Hurricane Lenny destroyed the port and the vegetation on the island was

mostly decimated. There was a great deal of damage to the basket sponges and some of the shallow coral. Tent Reef was badly damaged. The pinnacles appeared to be undamaged. The fish live was very healthy with plenty of large grouper and lots of sharks. Overall the hurricane, although quite severe, did not cause extreme damage to the dive spots. Sea Saba's crew was very professional and safe. Safety was important as the pinnacles are very deep dives as compared with most of Caribbean. Some of the divers that joined us during the week were very inexperienced and the crew made sure that they had their own dive-master. On your first day you leave your gear on the boat and you don't collect it until you leave. Sea Saba crew looks after it and sets it up for you on each dive. They even exchange the "tank bangers." Sea Saba arranges your transportation to the port every morning and your first dive begins around 10:00. As your first dive is normally a pinnacle dive and therefore very deep (120-130') you sit out a long time until your second dive. You normally bring a lunch. Your second dive is around 1:00 pm and you are back at port by 2:30. You can arrange for a third dive if you wish. Sea Saba gave us two complimentary third dives because of the less than wonderful "dive boat." Sea Saba is a great dive operation. Juliana's is very nice, clean and comfortable, with good views of the ocean (about 2000' below). Windward side is about 5 degrees cooler than at sea level. Tropics Café that adjoins Julianna's has excellent food. Saba is quaint,

clean with no apparent crime — we didn't bother locking our doors after the first night. The locals were very friendly. WinAir is very unreliable. Make sure that you have at least four hours between connections in St. Maarten. Also make sure that you reconfirm your flights before your trip as WinAir changes their schedules frequently. We had to spend an extra day because of Winward Air's inefficiencies and at our own expense.

Sea Saba, Juliana's, March 2000, Peter Louwerse, Goldingen, Switzerland. We arranged everything short-term over the Internet, because the *Caribbean Explorer* (on which we had booked for this week) let us know 2 weeks before departure that with only 2 passengers they would not go. Lynn of Sea Saba arranged our stay on Saba efficiently and quickly. All diving is based on Fort Bay, the port of Saba, 15 minutes by taxi from Windwardside. We have mixed feelings about the Pinnacle dives. The Needle is an awesome and must see dive. The others, however, are mostly deep, with resulting short bottom times. Nitrox would be an improvement here. Sea Saba is a well-run operation but it leaves all equipment on board for the week, so that there's no possibility of a rinse every once in a while. We felt that surface intervals were too short. We ran into decompression on the second dive to 75-80 feet. We preferred the South side of the island, with sites that had more diversified marine life. A special treat was spotting and observing humpback whales when returning to port. Special

compliments to Skipper Brian and dive guide Teresa. Juliana's accommodations are clean and sufficiently spacious. Franklin and Vanessa were most helpful in arranging telephone calls to Europe and charged them on the honor system! Caroline, formerly of the *Caribbean Explorer*, now manages the Tropics Café next door, and serves some of the best food in Windward side. We were smitten by the blueberry muffins for breakfast! The barbecue at the Swinging Doors is an event not to be missed. The island struck us as atypical for the Caribbean: meticulously clean and well-kept gardens. Everybody says hello.

Sea Saba, Juliana's Eve-Maries Cottage, May 2000, Fran Leach, Brewster, NY. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F. Restrictions: 500 air, no lower than 120/130. Sea Saba could not have been more helpful and attentive. They have replaced their old boats lost in hurricane Lenny with 2 large boats; only once was there more than 10 on our boat. They pick up at your hotel and drop off in the harbor. There was a large group of people from Texas staying the same week as us and they all wanted to dive together. All 20 of them crammed onto the other boat. If you did not want to set up your gear, they would do it all you. They also took up all the rooms in Juliana's and they offered us a private cottage near Brigadoon that was fabulous, with large kitchen dining and living room for the same price as a room at Julianas. We were there for 6 days of diving and could only dive the outer sea mounts on the

last day because of a fierce current. The other pinnacle dives were great diamond Rock and Shark Shoals were covered with fish and other creatures, lots of rays flying by in the sandy bottom. Lenny knocked out the desalination plant and it's nowhere near being replaced, so the island relies on rainwater caught in their cisterns. The harbor was also torn up and was lacking lights, so no night diving. Saba is a very peaceful island without too many (bad) American influences. Windward side had enough restaurants that we could eat somewhere different every night if we wanted and the quality of food at Tropics and Brigadoon good. There is also hiking on the island, we walked around Mt. Scenery from Windwardside to Royal gardens on the other side for lunch, it is really a goat path!

Sea Saba, August 2000, Candi Cato Keys. Our experience left a real bad taste in our mouths which is unfortunate. Four of us (2 couples) purchased dive packages with Sea Saba that promised 12 dives. Actually, what it turned out to be was 10 dives more than 5 days with the 2 extra dives only to be taken as afternoon dives during the 5-day package. This little detail was not focused on at all during our daily discussions with the dive crew and dive office although every other detail, down to booking dinner reservations for the divers were given extreme priority. In effect, what we thought was 12 dives during our week long stay, cost an additional \$250+ because we opted to dive on the Saturday before we left on Sunday and

use what we thought were dives we already purchased. When I disputed the charge they promptly informed me that it was written somewhere in our correspondence and that they (Sea Saba) were constantly having divers complain about the miscommunication. We found that they vaguely eluded this detail to in a letter from Saba Travel, but could really be left open to translation. So, this is a warning to divers planning to visit Saba and dive with Sea Saba. Make sure you fully understand all details of your dive package or you will be disappointed. Although Sea Saba insisted this was not part of a “smoke screen” effort, I really and truly believe it is, for two reasons: They were over conscientious on every other detail of communication. They admitted this misunderstanding occurred frequently so why not assure it is communicated up front.

Sea Saba, Juliana, August 2000, Thomas Daly (oilertom@aol.com), Hudson, NH. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 F calm choppy currents no currents. Computer divers dive your own profile, use common sense. Those without computers must dive the dive leaders profile. Outstanding operation. They have recovered completely (from the customer standpoint) from hurricane Lenny and have two boats. The staff is top notch with a can do attitude. There were occasional strong currents prohibiting the use of some dive sites. Saw black tip sharks and either a bull or gray reef down deep, plenty of nurse sharks, turtles, free swimming morays and plenty of photo

opportunities for larger fish and macro subjects. Mont Michelle is not to be missed: a beautiful pinnacle with not schools but clouds of fish including a large population of jacks. Saw a reef shark here.

ST. EUSTATIUS

An historically significant island, St. Eustatius, which lies fifty miles south of St. Maarten, was the first to recognize the United States as a country. As a result, British Men o' War pounded the island to a pulp. Some artifacts from the barrage can still be found in the murky water of the bay, and low-profile reefs offshore provide some diving. . . . It's been several years since I've been there and the dive operation I dove with is long since gone, but I've talked to several people in recent years who have told me that operators are now visiting much better sites than the mediocre ones I was taken to. A hike up the Quill, an extinct volcano, is worth the effort.

Dive Statia, Kings Well, February 2000, Bob Kaufman, Beckley, WV. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 75 to 77 F, calm choppy surge no currents. You can see the impact of the marine park established 2 years ago. All the species that inhabit the area had larger than usual individuals. There were more members of big fish species than in earlier visits. Particularly noticeable was the turtle population — more than 9 days of diving we saw at least one turtle on 6 days. The shark population