

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

seems to have increased with reef sharks added to the nurse sharks that were always present. The deep wall gorgonians were impressive. The advantage of Statia is the mix of diving available, from deep walls to modern wrecks to archeological wrecks teeming with tropical fish life. One of the major population segments is the sting rays, which are on many of the dive sites, and range up to six footers. There are also medium depth reefs, both high and low profile that display macro subjects as well as herds of tropicals. Major beneficiaries of the marine park seems to be the lobsters. Not only were there lobsters everywhere, but some were huge. There also were some big groupers, and one shy individual that may have been a Jewfish. Some of my particular favorite dive sites; Hangover, a high profile reef that always has several pairs of large queen and French angels, and a good population of jacks. Sharks and turtles too. Drop off is my favorite deep dive with spectacular gorgonians at the 110-120 foot level. Of the archaeological wreck sites Double Wreck and Triple Wreck are my favorites, with herds of tropicals and macro critters in abundance. The Dive Statia operation caters to small groups and individual divers. They have 2 boats — one that can take 10 divers, and a RIB that is used for one or two divers to visit special places. The Marine park has some 30 marked sites, but Rudy and Rinda of Dive Statia have a few that are known only to them. With this set up they can cater to divers of all levels and interests. The shop is on the verge

of installing their Nitrox equipment. The dive schedule is somewhat flexible, with three dives a day easily handled. Night dives are only available if several people want to go, which comes down to about once a week. Since the boat returns to the dive shop between dives you can service your camera and change film and lenses between each dive in comfort and safety. Kings Well hotel is a small operation located on the cliff above the dive shop. The place is run by Win and Laura, who see to it that nobody is a stranger long. The rooms are large and in good condition, but even more of a draw is the food. Staples include jager schnitzel, weiner schnitzel, veal cordon blue, and a fish of the day. Specials on this trip included duck with grand Marnier sauce and ginger chicken. Laura's garlic bread is widely respected on the island as are her salads. Win makes you a cooked to order breakfast including his great omelets but be warned that eating breakfast and dinner at Kings Well can be harmful to your weight control program. Statia is a small island, population about 2000. It is reached by a 20 minute flight on Winair from St. Maarten. The island has no central water system, so they advise visitors to drink only bottled water, which is readily available. In 6 years of annual visits I have never had any problems with any of the restaurants I have tried, however it is a good idea to get a room with a refrigerator so you can keep cold water or other beverages in your room for nighttime consumption. (599-38-2435; Fax 978-246-5934)

Scubaqua, Golden Era Hotel, March 2000, Peter Louwerse, Goldingen, Switzerland. Since 1998, the Stenapa Marine Park has been operational and has buoyed 29 sites. We found generally healthy corals, excellent soft corals, admittedly affected by hurricane Lenny, and a large diversity of fauna. The manager of the Marine Park told us that Statia has greater biodiversity than any other Caribbean island and we, having dived most of the Caribbean islands, would confirm that. Scubaqua is Swiss-owned attracts mostly European divers. Its base is at the Golden Era hotel, its boat is based in the port. The equipment is stored in the shop and transferred by pick-up truck to the boat, a 30-foot Boston whaler type. There are always two guided dive groups organized according to preferences (deep or not so deep) or capabilities. The Marine Park has a North side, beyond the oil terminal, where we went once and it didn't impress us. Neither did the Stenapa wreck, sunk as an artificial reef but too new to have growth. Close by we found bricks, used as ballast in sailing ships, old bottles and shards of Delft Blue porcelain. The South Marine Park has more and better sites. They vary in depth from 130 ft - like Saba's pinnacles - to 75 to 80 ft. The profile slopes up gradually, allowing a lot more bottom time. We've never seen so many lobsters walking around in day time; they don't hide when a diver approaches! We didn't see bigger pelagics as we did on Saba, but found an abundance of smaller stuff. Statia has 3 hotels; they go bankrupt and

reopen frequently. The Golden Era is the only one located on the bay. Our room was spacious enough, but was cleaned rather superficially at 6 pm. The Old Gin House next door has been renovated and reopened. Statia has many small restaurants with reasonable prices. Blue Bead is one of the better ones. The Old Gin House is the fanciest and most expensive, without being the best. Statia is not particularly touristy and the locals are friendly. One even gave my wife a blue bead (a specialty of Statia) for her birthday. It has one of the best local museums that we've seen in the area. **(00599 318-2345, 00599-38-2345)**

ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

These small intimate islands have a lot of "Old Caribbean" charm. Their strong suits are gracious hotels and old inns, verdant, green scenery, and lovely beaches. The diving is decent, but there are no thrills. . . .

Kenneth's Dive Center, Timothy Beach Resort, February 2000, Richard and Joy Visser, Caledonia, ML. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: Varied. Last minute "substitute" vacation for us when our dive trip to Dominica fell through. The diving ended up to be a lot better than anticipated, although 2 hurricanes in the past 3 years have taken a toll on the coral in the shallower dives (40' or so). We petted a live, sleeping (under a ledge) 8' nurse shark and saw 2 others. Saw our first Flying Gunnards. We saw lobsters,