

**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,

crabs, puffers, barracuda, angels, cowfish, and the usual other Caribbean reef fish. We didn't like the fact that they allow fish traps on St. Kitts. Kenneth's has a large boat with easy entry and exit. They expect you to stick with the dive plan, so my computer wasn't of much use. Occasionally dropped anchor on the coral. Dive guide was very helpful in finding critters. Avoid diving on Thursday when the cruise ships dock in St. Kitts. They have 20-30 divers on their boat at Kenneth's that day. The divemasters warned us in advance so we took that day off. The days we dove, only 4-6 divers on the boat. Timothy Beach is a good, clean resort. Our kitchenette helped us save some money on breakfasts and lunches. Dining is fairly expensive. Taxi rates are all fixed and somewhat expensive too .... \$16 round trip to town (a 5 min drive) and \$32 to Turtle Beach to feed the monkeys. Snorkeling was surprisingly good at Timothy Beach. Overall, this is the type of place to go on vacation with a non diving spouse because of all the shopping and land-based activities. It's a cruise ship destination. It was an enjoyable week, but we wouldn't go back just for the diving. (869-465-2670; Fax 869-465-6472)

**Pro Divers, Timothy Beach Resort, December 1999, Bill and Phyllis Dobrin (dobrin@direcpc.com) Libertyville, IL.** Vis: 50 to 100 ft. Water: 78 to 80 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: stay within sight of divemaster. Resort a group of condo buildings; very nice, large apartments on a hill

with beautiful view of Caribbean and Atlantic from large balcony. Small, clean pool and nice beachfront restaurant on premises. Resort staff very friendly and helpful; better beach at South Friar's Bay, a 5 minute ride by car but very difficult to reach on foot. Pro Divers at Turtle Brach operates 1 boat, 14 divers max. We never had more than 8 divers on boat, laid-back atmosphere, only restriction is to stay together as group underwater. Better dive sites are farther out from St. Kitts and between St. Kitts and Nevis. No large fish; some nurse sharks, turtles and lots of lobster. I'd recommend Pro Divers, especially if Ken from England is present.

**Scuba Safaris, Golden Rock Plantation, Nevis, April 2000, Gabriel I. Peagarfcano, Guaynabo, Puerto Rico.** The operation is small but first-class. Owner/Operator Ellis Chasterton runs a delightful shop with a very comfortable, fast boat that gets you to the several sites within 15-20 minutes from the dock. The weather was sunny throughout and the water temperature ranged from 77 to 79° F. Ellis, who makes a point of telling you he was trained by Puerto Rico's legendary Captain Efra of Parguera Divers, is extremely, knowledgeable, dives with you, gives a good briefing, and lets you dive your own profile. The sites themselves, with the exception of The Cave, were worthwhile. There is good visibility and lots of sting and eagle rays. Also nurse sharks and colorful reef fish. No walls, but very healthy reefs. We stayed at the Golden Rock Plantation, a superb

lodging about 20 minutes away from the shop. All in all, I was pleasantly surprised at this destination about which very little has been written. (Ph: 809-469-9518, Fax: 809-469-619) (Oualie Beach Hotel, 800-OUALIE-1 or 809-469-9735, Fax: 809-469-9176)

### **ST. LUCIA**

St. Lucia lies in the hurricane belt west of Barbados in the Windward Island chain. Diving on this beautiful, heavily-forested island, with pretty reefs and tiny fish, is managed and controlled. . . . Anse Chastenet hotel is located near the Pitons on the southwestern part of island, where the better diving is; there's not much worth seeing elsewhere underwater. . . . The year-round high is in the 80s days; night lows are in the 70s. Afternoon cloudbursts are common. . . .

**Anse Chastenet, August 1999, Rebecca Inderbitzen, San Diego, CA.** Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 84-86 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Most dives were <60 ft. Night diving was <30 ft. On 4/6 dives I was alone with divemaster, so attention was very good. There was a large group of divers at the resort, but dive staff made sure I got individual attention. This resort is not for solo travelers. (Ph: 809-459-7000, Fax: 809-459-7700)

**Anse Chastenet, November 1999, Wayne Johnson, (waynerj@aol.com), Holland, PA.** Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 80-

84 degrees. Dive restrictions: 60 ft. very controlled diving. First dive always a beach dive. No dives below 60 ft. St. Lucia was hit by Hurricane Lovi 2 days before we arrived. Surge wiped out most coral beds. Water cloudy due to rough seas off shore. Piton diving was the best for this trip. Not many soft corals.

**Anse Chastenet, May 2000, Ray Griffith, Evans, GA.** Vis: 20 to 30 ft. Water: 78 to 82 degrees, surge, strong currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: depth limits. The resort is rustic; there is a steep hike uphill from the beach to the dining area (130 steps). Then another 280 steps to your hillside bungalow. The service was average; no one went out of their way to assist you with anything (from meals to transport of dive gear). It rained every day and was extremely humid. The video guy at the dive shop was friendly and accompanied the boat divers regularly. Rinse tanks for gear were poor, although there was ample storage space for personal gear/rental gear. Water was chilly and very murky. Marine life was ok; large variety of small fish; much damage of coral due to hurricane. No sea horses as a result. Reef directly in front of hotel unimpressive; that's where they do the night dive. It took 1-1-1/2 hours by taxi to get to hotel, road very unsafe. For the money we spent, the quality wasn't there. Lots of bugs, sleep under mosquito netting because room is open.

**Sandals Golf Resort and Spa, May 2000, Martha and Jeffrey Hubbard, Glenmont, NY.** Vis: 30-50 ft. Water: 82-83 degrees. Dive restrictions