

Wider Caribbean

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

enforced: Example: 60 ft. 30 minutes-surface 50 minutes-40 feet 30 minutes. Go down and surface en masse. Dive operation is terminally disorganized. Boats never leave within an hour of schedule. Night dive set to leave at 5:30 returned at 9:20 from a 30 minute dive 15 minutes away and the restaurants had all closed! No dock — swim through the (easy) surf to the boat. Gear goes by plastic kayak, overloaded so about one in five dumps in the sand, surf or both. Nearly everyone in our group had hundreds of dives, but everyone waits on the surface until all are in the water, stay together, surface together when the first diver is down to 1000 psi. Only one ladder on the boat, so boarding takes forever. Bottom times arbitrarily limited to half of a reasonable time. Many of us lodged complaints, and it got worse. Dive sites are good. No big fish, but nice corals, some pristine, and small fish. Visibility O.K. to good, seas fairly calm. Sites near Soufriere are excellent. One dive guide, Mark ("Scuba-dread" from his hair) is kind, articulate, organized and safety-conscious without being overbearing; they need about eight of him. Sandals caters to couples, especially young ones, and runs very well, except for the diving. Several nice restaurants and almost uniformly pleasant staff. Good beach, but snorkeling and shore diving don't exist. Two hours from San Juan via American Eagle.

ST. MARTIN/ST. MAARTEN

French St. Martin and Dutch St. Maarten are two islands in one,

with wonderful beaches, superb hotels, fine cuisine — and poor diving, a situation that was not improved when the island was trashed by a hurricane in 1995. . . . Watch out for Eurotrash, shady characters who are drawn to the nude beaches and like to prey on tourists. . . . Make the short air or ferry trip to tiny Saba to dive. However, if you do decide to dive here, do it with Ocean Explorers. . . .

Blue Ocean, Nettle Bay Beach, December 1999, Edward (LAWYEREJB@aol.com), Hamden, CT. Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 80-84 degrees. Weather: sunny. Water: choppy, no currents. Dive Restrictions: try to say with divemaster but we were free to split off with buddy to take pictures or explore. Get on board with 500 psi. Good open wrecks for staged pictures of others, minimum chance for critters or fish. The diving here was at best fair. The dive operator was very good. Don't go here just for the diving. Blue Ocean is the French side in the Nettle Bay shopping center. The island was just recovering from the October hurricane that destroyed it and many of the hotels were closed. Nettle Bay was fair but expensive for what they offered in accommodations and service.

Dive Safaris, March 2000, Catherine Cochran, Gainesville, GA. Vis: 70 ft. Water: 76 degrees, choppy, surge, strong currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: none. Diving was offered from