

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

the Grand Princess cruise, using Dive Safaris. All gear was setup when we arrived at the marina for Dive Safaris. We were divided into groups of no more than 6 divers with a divemaster. Fantastic briefing, did not rush our dives, great leadership by dm. Friendly captain and staff, sodas, water and cookies between dives. (011-59957-3436; Fax 011-59952-8983)

Dive Safaris, March 2000, Mickey and Adam Fivenson, Traverse City, MI. Reef Sharks, turtles, whales, 200-year-old wrecks, coral pinnacle swim-throughs, lots of soft coral, nice variety of fish. St. Martin got panned in *Undercurrent* as not a serious dive destination, but Whitney Keough, proprietor of Dive Safaris, convinced me through a series of emails that the diving was as good as nearby Saba. With 30 years of sport diving under my belt, I hoped to show my 14-year-old son and 21 year old daughter, both newly certified divers, a memorable experience. The shop is next to the cruise ship tender drop-point. The dive guides are divemasters and higher. The comfortable boat is well-supplied including cans of pop, crackers and cookies: Whitney warned divers that the dive would be rough, but the experience was worth the puke. Son Adam said: My first "real" dive and once I adjusted, what I saw below amazed me. These were the organisms that I had one week before, been studying in Biology class. The fish, the coral, once I reached the diving depth, all of it was but an arms reach away. Among other things, there were numerous lobsters, with long feelers

sticking out from under rocks, a reef shark (from 10 yards away), a sea turtle, dozens huge yellow tail fish, and hundreds of other types of fish, coral, and undersea animals. The rough seas that day didn't do wonders for my stomach either, but that didn't stop me from enjoying the experience to the utmost.

ST. VINCENT

St. Vincent lies in a beautiful chain of islands and is heavily forested, 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 cloudbursts 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, and few surprises. . . .

Dive St. Vincent, Grand View, October 1999, Laurie O'Connor (www.lo'connor@cityofsouthlake.com) Hurst, TX. Vis: 30-40 ft. Water: 82 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 500 psi. Bill Tewes of Dive St. Vincent is very opinionated, but a good divemaster, eager to point out hidden critters. The waters around St. Vincent have obviously been heavily fished, the food chain just stops at a certain size. We saw lots of small critters and fish, but medium size and larger just don't exist. The Grand View was excellent and very accommodating.