

\$175 for 3 days, 2 tanks each day. RMSRHONE, Chikuzen, diving numerous areas. Decent boat never more than 3 divers on boat all week. Good vis. and warm water. Pretty crowded at Rhone but still a nice dive. B.E.Y.C. all inclusive and use of sailboats, wind surfers and small power boats. Gives 30% discount to airline employees.

Kilbride's and Dive BVI, Bitter End Yacht Club, July 2000, Stanley Holz, Whitefield, NH. Did eight dives, six with Kilbride's and two with Dive BVI. The resort was really nice, with bungalows by the water and in the hills. We had a room on the water...screened in deck, hammock, walk-in shower and two overhead fans, but no air conditioning. The evening breezes cooled the room to a comfortable level. Meals were always excellent, drinks were strong...a couple of their rum grogs will give you the origin of the term "groggy." Our room was across the way from Saba Rock, which is an all night bar. The sound from their bands was very loud and kept us up after midnight. Get a room away from Saba Rock. Kilbride's three divemasters were friendly and helpful on and off the boat. They set up all the gear on the boat, but each diver was responsible for removing his gear from the boat and washing it. Dive parties ran from 7 to 13 during our stay. Joe's Cave...you swim into a large opening in the rock face of the island. Inside, it's bright enough to reveal the red coloration of the walls. Looking back, you see the large triangular opening

framing the brilliant turquoise of the open sea. 2 squid, a golden moray and schools of bait fish. Rhone great! Tons of tropicals and a couple of big barracuda. The bow sits upright on the bottom and is an easy swim through. Inside, the entire hull structure is intact. The stern section is crushed. However, there is a short swim through that takes you right to the large, intact propeller. Dive BVI: Jim, their divemaster, showed up with an empty boat for us. The other boats were crowded with student divers, so they thought we'd be more comfortable diving by ourselves. Only three in our group! Jim took us to Shark's Point where we got within inches of a 10' nurse shark, laid next to sea turtle sleeping under a ledge, saw 5 juvenile spotted drums, and a small octopus hiding in the rocks. Chimney, a nice swim through, was topped off by a reef shark that swam about 25' away, and a school of Tarpon. Water was a consistent 87 degrees. Visibility 60 to 75' and currents ran from moderate to dead calm. My wife, a snorkeler, was always welcome on the dive boat.

VIRGIN ISLANDS, US

St. Croix

Anchor Dive, July 2000, Alan Laites, Newington, CT. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 82 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: depth. Boat rides to sites 10-25 minutes. Small group — 5. Great walls. Excellent dive operation. (800-532-3483, 340-773-3434; 809-778-8544)

Cane Bay Dive Shop, Cane Bay Reef Club, June 2000, John Bowman (J-

Bowman1@uchicago.edu), Homewood IL. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm surge. Dive your own profile. If with a DM and other people, come back to the beach or under the boat when the first diver runs low on air. A vacation with diving rather than a dive vacation. Outstanding reef health. Hurricane damage above 25', where the wall started, gorgeous coral below that. Mostly shore diving in front of shop. Entries through rocky shallows a bit dicey, didn't feel completely comfortable until last dive. Most of the usual small Caribbean suspects in great quantity, a good number of unusuals. No groupers larger than the hinds and coneys, a few morays and barracudas. Turtles on half the dives, a manta, a nurse shark, and big eagle ray. The dive boat was a small inflatable and might have been a problem due to space if the rides were more than ten minutes but they weren't. A sea horse on most dives, two octopi during the day, flamingo tongues and cleaner shrimp everywhere. Nitrox available, gear storage. Cane Bay Reef Club a fine place with great views of the ocean and the mountains, comfortable living rooms, and full kitchens. Five minute walk, one minute drive from the dive shop. A torn patio screen was fixed soon after we asked. Friendly locals, ex-pats, and staff made for a great scene at the hotel bar; the food was good. Excellent food at Dino's in Christiansted. Beautiful island, like Hawaii on a small scale with mountains, a rain forest, and arid sections. Excellent horseback riding from the rain forest to the beach north of Fredricksted.

SCUBA, St. Croix, November 1999, Rick Heym (Rheym@mediaone.net) Newton, MA. Vis: 60 to 80 ft. Water: 80 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: w/ guide. St. Croix Ultimate Bluewater Adventure was professional, yet relaxed, with small group, good boat, friendly and attentive. Molly's, Ed Buckley are good folks and run a good operation for adults.

St. John

Cruze Bay Water Sports, Westin, April 2000, Michele Stockey, Noblesville, IN. Vis: 50 to 70 ft. Water: 79 to 82 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: depth and time. Westin nice hotel but scenic side of the island is on the other side. Food at Westin poor and expensive. Took taxi into town to eat (Rec Lime Inn, Asolare). Diving very average; shallow dives. Nice color but not overall exciting; large turtle on night dive. Drove to Cinnamon Bay other nights to snorkel on own and saw octopus, rays, eels, etc. (800-835-7730, 340-776-6234)

Cruze Bay Water Sports, June 2000, Richard and Sarah Burdette, Lakewood, OH. Vis: 40-50 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Follow the leader diving. Average dive 40 min. Back on boat with 1200 psi. Nice diving, but not Cozumel or even the Bahamas. Typical reef fish, some rays, squid, turtles, large lobster. One 7 foot nurse shark. Huge schools of silversides with an occasional feeding tarpon. Dove the "General Rogers," a 130-

foot buoy tender at 65 feet. Best dive "Creature Cove." Impressive rock formations with steep canyons and swim throughs. No dives deeper than 80 feet. Cruz Bay Watersports a first class operation. Though boat can be crowded (12 to 16 divers) they are efficient and make gearing up hassle free. Boats have partial shade. Fresh water rinse for equipment and cameras. Wife did her open water certification dives and her instructors, Piper and Jay, were thorough, encouraging, and made it a positive and fun experience. Divemaster Artie gave good dive briefings and would take the time to point out interesting critters. St. John a beautiful island. Much more laid back then St. Thomas. Wonderful beaches with snorkeling but a lot of dead coral. Not for "hard core" divers but worth logging a few dives.

St. Thomas

Admiralty Dive Shop, Bluebeard's Castle and Tropic Leisure Resort, December 1999, Sherry and Kevin Graham, Puyallup, WA. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: calm and flat and choppy. Restrictions: stay with guide. Wonderful dive vacation . We spent 2 weeks diving every other day. The diving was excellent as was the service of Admiralty Dive Shop 1-888900-dive or www.Admiraltydive.com. The dives were on beautiful reefs and 4 shipwrecks. The colors and formations were spectacular. Vis was 100 feet. The best dive service we have ever used. They take 6 per boat. They carry your bags and handle your gear you sit on the swim step and they bring your

tank and BC to you and you roll off forward into the water. Before getting into the boat, you hand them your weight belt and BC and fins and then climb the ladder. They pack your gear in your bag and take it back to their shop, rinse it, dry it, bag it, and bring it back to the boat on your next dive trip. They pick you up at certain hotels. Since they do not go to the wreck of the Rhone on B.V.I. they referred us to Chris Sawyer Dive Shop. This was an all day trip with 2 dives on the Rhone, a world class wreck dive. We were impressed with the dive, so we bought a video from Armando Jenik, who taped our diving the wreck. The tape was excellent. Chris Sawyers' service uses the same gear handling procedures, but you had to pack up your own gear. There were 12 on the boat. Lunch was good. Chris Sawyer was along and he gave us an excellent history of the sinking of the Rhone due to hurricane in 1865. We found some good snorkeling at Secret Harbor Beach at the entrance of the Harbor (on the left as you look out from the beach) around the rocks. We went to all the beaches on St. Thomas and our favorites were Sapphire; Secret Harbor and Magon's Beach. We stayed at 2 different timeshare condos that we traded to 2 weeks we have at Rockaway Beach Resort in Oregon. We had a studio unit at Bluebeard's Castle that was very spacious and had a view of the harbor. We stayed the other week at Tropic Leisure Resort in a studio unit. (888-900-3483, 340-777-9802)

**St. Thomas Diving Club,
Blackbeard's Castle, November**

1999, Marv Sommerfeld, St. Paul, MN. Weather great. Hurricane Lenny had left the island almost untouched. St. Thomas was green and beautiful. Water temp 80 degrees F, air temp 75 to 85° F. Divers with us were wearing a range of thermal protection: no suit, skin, shorties, and full 3 mm. Mild current with minimal chop. Suspended particulate was very noticeable and at times reminded us of Minnesota diving. Four days after Lenny, visibility was about 30 ft, but daily improved so that by the end of the week was at least about 60 ft, depending on the site. After several days of diving, the divemaster gave the option to dive separate from the group lead. They allowed divers with computers to dive their computer. Maximum depths were controlled by the sea floor. Several small nurse sharks; large and small turtles, Southern stingrays, from 3 to 6 feet diameter lobsters, including a slipper lobster (during a night dive), and many Barracudas. Much of the reef had a layer of sediment deposited by Lenny. Overall diving for beginners. St. Thomas Diving Club gets many divers from the cruise ships. This provides the opportunity to be picked up at Bolongo Bay (where the dive shop is) or at Havensight at the ship pier. The large dive boat, the Elysian Lady, is a 30-foot catamaran that can handle up to 20 divers easily. The crew asked for recommendations for dive sites (within reason) and for the weather conditions. Groups of three to six divers were typically lead by a divemaster, unless the crew was comfortable with a group setting off

on its own. Bill Letts is the owner is supported by a topnotch crew. Virginia has the shop operating smoothly (except running out of Snicker's bars mid-week). Captain Steve and divemasters Rhonda and Dave made the trips fun and exciting. The sites are good (not great) but worth the time and money. It is easy to walk off the ship and down the pier to where the Elysian Lady waits, jump on board, and go diving. Bill is considerate of the time restraints the ships impose. Dived several sites on the south side of St. Thomas. Coral Bowl (aka, Joe's Jam), Armando's Paradise, The Supermarket, Buck Island Point and Dive Flag Rock, Packett Rock, The Barges, and Cow and Calf Rocks. The best was Armando's Paradise; it had a variety of fish life, good coral formations and a light current. The next best was Coral Bowl: easy enough that anyone could dive it, yet diverse and large enough that we dove it 4 times including our night dive and each time from a different angle. The coral was not in the best shape but the different fish varieties were plentiful. **(877-838-8734, 340-776-2381; Fax 340-777-3232)**

St. Thomas Dive Club, July 2000, Randy Vanlit, Metuchen, N.J. Vis: 35-40 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: 60 ft. Good people, young divemasters, very knowledgeable and helpful. Excellent pre-dive briefings. Follow the leader and strict on safety. Second dive to 40-45 ft. with approximately 8-10 ft. Nurse sharks, sting rays and barracudas. Got their aboard Holland American Cruise.