

website www.larutadelosol.com/horisub)

VIRGIN ISLANDS, BRITISH

Patch reef diving on these closely-grouped islands is easy, pleasant, and fairly similar regardless of which island you choose, although the quiet British Virgins and St. John are far less crowded and more pleasant than the cruise ship havens of St. Thomas and St. Croix, where hurricanes and fishing have taken a toll. . . . BVI is a yachter's paradise with crewed or bareboat sailboats galore, and it's also served by several land-based dive operations. . . . BVI has nice little hotels, good restaurants, congenial surroundings, and British style.

Tortola

Baskin in the Sun, Prospect Reef Resort, September 2000, Rick Hindle, Keymar, MD. Viz 100+ ft., water 80-85 f., air 85-90. Prospect Reef Resort is undergoing renovations; although it caused some minor problems (no electricity on two different occasions, but quickly remedied) the staff and Chris Jarrett, the manager, are willing to fix anything for you, and cheerfully at that. Service staff at some of the eateries were surly and/or indifferent, as were half the islanders. Approximately half good restaurants are on hiatus due to hurricane season, many reopen in mid to late October. Better than average food and excellent service at Village Cay Marina. The

resort does have a wonderful salt water pool filled with plenty of small fish and critters (even one Green-Moray) which we both enjoyed daily. I did two 2 tank morning dives with Baskin from their 30' v-hull "Apache". First day dove wreck of the Rhone with the captain, a divemaster and four other divers. Second day was just myself, an islander who was doing underwater video project, and the captain. No one stayed on the boat, a standard procedure, weather and currents prevailing, and I did not feel this was an unnecessary risk as the boat was securely moored. Computer divers with buddies could dive their own profile, strongly urged 30 minutes and 500 psi, but allowed computer users to act like adults when gauging time. I buddied with the captain, Randy, who has lived on the island for 18 years and knows the sites well. Good dive briefings, excellent conditions. I only travel once a year and dive cold water in quarries the rest of the time, so I thought dives were excellent, I am sure seasoned warm water divers would be looking for more. Second day we dove Blonde Rock and Painted Walls, both excellent dives; I dove with Randy both days, he did fish ID at my request and counted over 80 species on second day's dive, including a golden coney. Only saw one nurse shark, one ray and one corvina but marine life otherwise is abundant and reefs are in good health. Excellent location for beginners and the dive op sits on the Prospect Reef property. (Ph: 800-650-2084; e-mail eservations@baskininthesun.com; website www.baskininthesun.com)

Baskin in the Sun, Long Bay Beach, December 2000, Mark Rosing, New Rochelle, NY. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet.

Water: 81 to F, choppy. Great island with beautiful beaches. Long Bay Beach is a great, mellow resort. Take an oceanside or hillside room and a food/car rental/etc package. A little far from the diving and the taxis aren't cheap. Baskin in the Sun and Long Bay should work out a subsidized taxi shuttle as a trip alone can cost \$18.

Divemasters were pleasant and Sue was an outstanding sea life guide.

Rhone: some got nauseous from particularly rough sea. Dive packages don't include night diving. They gave a discount for the night dives, but wouldn't even consider a supplemental fee for swapping day tanks for night tanks. Coral and underwater landscape was great, but the visibility wasn't so hot. Did see some great small critters, but the tropical fish weren't so large. Turtles were out in force and we had one dive with two turtles, a small spotted eagle ray, and a nurse shark. Throw in a few morays and some juvenile drums too.

Baskin in the Sun, Prospect Reef, 2001, Nicola Nelson (nicolanelson@email.com),

Chantilly, VA. Vis: Fair. Water: warm. Logged dives: 200+. Dive restrictions enforced: time, one hour or less. Large, clean; nice salt water pool and nice fresh water pool; close to marina and dive shop; High Tea was fun. Be sure and ask for air conditioning if you want it (when you make reservation), could use a more frequent hotel shuttle to town, not

enough towels provided; slow service in restaurant. Baskin in the Sun: Most of the crew tried to give us a good dive day; Rhone is a great dive, so is Indians; boat was good once the motor got fixed. Somewhat disorganized, no clear leadership of dive operation; no standard processes. Sometimes dive gear was on boat, sometimes not, sometimes it was set up, sometimes it wasn't. Dove Rhone and Indians 4 times in 4 days (8 dives). Should let experienced divers go in the water with their divemaster while students are getting set up to go with their divemaster, especially on a rolling boat.

Baskin in the Sun, Prospect Reef, January 2001, Katrina Hays, Bend, OR. Vis: 60-75 ft. Water: 78-80 F.

Dives logged: 110. Dive restrictions: 45 min/500 psi. We were disappointed by Baskin in the Sun. Their new boat is nice and shiny with lots of room for lots of divers, but boy, the people who work there are below par, unless you get the A-Team. We were greeted at the front desk by a surly woman, Spike, who promptly aggressively and with escalating anger told us that, although we had paid for a 10-dive package, we would get no refund for a canceled New Year's Day morning dive. We have to recover from our hangovers, she said. Note: Both my boyfriend and I have been professional river guides for years. We both feel strongly about good service and treating customers like guests. There is no reason to ever argue with a client. Patience wins every time. While we did clear up our misunderstanding (8 dives = 10, so we didn't

lose money), it was a poor start. On our first day of diving, we were assigned to a hapless divemaster, Stephanie, who, although charming and nice, left the group to surface to figure out where she was, twice. We ended coming up about 200 yards from the boat and kicking back. Both Elliott and I knew we had been circling, but we did not want to leave the group without clearing it with the D.M. She later told us she had never done that dive (Black Coral) before. Our next D.M., Courtney, was rude, beyond rude, and after one head count announced: Good, you're all here, now we'll get paid. This dive company is only interested in a 45 minute dive period. Twice Courtney tried to get us to surface at 35 min because the rest of the group had blown thru their air. I never came back to the boat with less than 1000 psi. The second afternoon, another divemaster approached me and said, I'm Mark, and you will be in my group this afternoon, and you will come up when I tell you. When I pointed out that for every previous dive I had come up under time an over air pressure, he told me that didn't matter, and it wasn't fair for the rest of the people to wait and get sick. Mark was rude also. He and Courtney very plainly just wanted to get their money and leave. They showed up surly in the morning and had no gift for guiding trips. The third day was better, with a different crew. Sue was an excellent and cheerful divemaster, as was Duncan. Baskin caters to their least experienced divers, and are too lazy to figure out relative experience among their

clients and group them accordingly. They are not so concerned with providing a tremendous dive experience. Too bad for them. A nice shiny dive boat cannot compensate for a generally poor attitude among the staff.

Baskin in the Sun, Prospect Reef, March 2001, Rod and Chris

Hatchett, Tulsa, OK. Vis: 50 feet. Water: 78 F, calm and flat. Dives logged: 20. Restrictions: 90 feet. Unless you're interested in sailing or diving, Tortola offers limited entertainment. Several good places to eat — Prospect Reef having one good restaurant, "Pusser's" and the "Pub," downtown also provide good food. Highlight of the trip was Baskin-in-the-Sun dive company. Very friendly, professional, service-oriented and safe. They double-checked all gear prior to each dive. Checked off all divers as we re-entered the well-appointed 42 foot boat, washed and stored our gear for the next day's dives. Ask for air-conditioning at Prospect.

Baskin in the Sun, Long Bay Beach Resort, May 2001, Ezra Lunde,

Staten Island, NY. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. American Airlines Vacation package included round trip air from Newark and 6 nights at Long Bay Beach Resort — an excellent value. We had an open and spacious room equipped with two sinks, a small fridge, AC, a big bathroom and shower, and a little toaster oven. The niceties or our room combined with the overall excellent service and

stunning, sparsely populated beach, make Long Bay Beach Resort one of my favorite experiences. Baskin in the Sun was a different story. I prepaid for my diving a week before our arrival. This included a 6 dive package and an Open Water course for my girlfriend. Upon arrival, Baskin in the Sun had my name, but no information on whether or not I had paid for anything. My girlfriend enjoyed her course despite erratic scheduling and being cajoled from one instructor to the next, never having the same person twice. All dive personnel were otherwise professional and fun, particularly Marcus who seemed to bless the boat with a Caribbean lucidity. During our last day I found out that Baskin Sun had another facility at Soper's Hole, a short cab ride from Long Bay Beach. This really pissed me off considering we traveled three times the distance and spend three times the money to get to the Baskin at Prospect Reef Resort. The diving was good; The RMS Rhone was interesting both as a dive and a historical interlude, and on other dives the staff was quick to point out things such as banded jawfish, razorfish, sailfin blennys, soapfish, and logger head and hawksbill turtles. Baskin is a decent operation, but they could stand to be a lot more organized.

Baskin in the Sun, Turtle Dove Lodge, May 2001, Jason Harris and Maria Okuniewski, Champaign, IL. Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 80-83 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: more than 1,000. Dive restrictions: guided dives. Excellent destination for combination

of diving, sightseeing and relaxing on the beaches. The sites are fairly pristine, and the coral and fish life are good. Turtles on every dive. Visibility varied on sites. This destination is more for the beginner divers, although we did get to dive some of the more advanced sites along the north coast of Tortola and Jost Van Dyke. Here, the surge and currents were strong, but the pinnacles were spectacular and we were met by large schools of tarpon, bait fish and jacks. The dive operation required guided dives (bad). For most days, we had the boat to ourselves or there were only a couple of people.

Baskin in the Sun, Prospect Reef Resort, June 2001, Mike & Linda Suter-Gibson (msutergib@qwest.net) Denver, CO. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 90 to 110 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. Studio. First unit shabby. We requested a nicer unit. "No problem". New unit very nice. Staff very friendly and willing to help in every way. Good, clean, fast boats. They do every thing for you. Set-up, tear down, rinse. Dock-side secure storage. Great staff. Divemasters very laid back but watchful. Stephany and Tony are great.

Virgin Gorda

Dive BVI, Little Dix Bay, August 2001, Alan/Barbara Fischl (fsc864@aol.com) Great Neck, NY. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm no currents. Dive BVI has exceptional people, especially their instructors, 2 married couples. We loved the wreck of the Rhone where we did a 2 tank dive, the first on the bow and the

second on the stern section which is strewn all over the bottom. Most dives are the 60 to 80 foot range with good viz and interesting topography. No big critters, but there are a lot of reef fish. Not a lot of coral either, but the rock formations are great. (Ph: 800-848-7078 or 284-495-5513; fax 284-495-5347; e-mail info@divebvi.com; website www.divebvi.com)

VIRGIN ISLANDS, U.S. **St. Croix**

Anchor Dive Center, The Waves, June 2000, George H. Stephens, Pocatello, ID. Vis: 30-60 ft. Water: 80-81 F. Kevin Ryan, the owner of The Waves, was an excellent host and divemaster. He taught us to navigate under water and once we were ready set us free to do our own shore dives. We did 2 night dives at the pier in Fredricksted — unforgettable — beautiful octopus, seahorses. (Ph: 800-532-DIVE or 340-778-1522; website www.anchordivestcroix.com)

Anchor Dive Center, Scubawest, Cane Bay Reef Club, October 2000 Tom & Brenda Richart, Richmond VA. Vis: 50-85'. 85 degrees. St. Croix kind of blue collar. Cane Bay Reef Club is a down to earth, family run place, weathered, with character. Directly on the water (no beach but one within walking distance). Owners made us feel as if we were old friends. Two units, penthouse and presidential, not connected to rest of facility, had exceptional views of island. Bar at motel was somewhat of a local hangout, cool vibe in evenings. Three other bars/restaurants within walking

distance. The north shore is laid back and friendly. Rooms were not upscale but were clean and comfortable.

Anchor Dive: first dive 80 feet 40 mins. second dive 60 feet 40 mins. They threatened to cut dive short if you went deeper than 80 feet. I've already signed my rights away with their pre-dive release form, so I don't believe popping down to 110' is a sin. However, they are a good dive operator and friendly people. Dive guides pointed out critters and unusual stuff — red banded lobster. The diving was good from Salt River Canyon — west. Saw the usual tropicals, a turtle at the West Wall Salt River. Got up close to a small 6-7' nurse shark. Rays, jacks, morays. Pleased with quality of corals and good fish life. Scubawest dives the west side wrecks and reefs. Restrictions — just have 500 psi. Fine operator — boat was small but there were only 4 people + crew. They dive the Fredricksted pier, a very good dive. We enjoyed that better than town pier in Bonaire. They did a great job showing us the stuff.

Anchor Dive Center, the Waves at Cane Bay, July 2001, Joseph Brown (Iko@home.com) Omaha, NE. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 90 Feet. Water: choppy. One of the best dive values in the Caribbean, especially for experienced divers. Room cost (\$75-\$85) includes unlimited shore diving. Most of the best walls are right off the bay, so two divers can dive and room for a week for less than \$600. The diving was very good. Coral in great shape. Wide