

Our third dive was to a shark encounter managed by Dive Safaris. Great diving day.

Dive Safaris, Princess Heights, May 2001, Joe Ruf (jruf@tiplus.com)

Vineland, NJ. Vis: 40-50 ft. Water: 80 F. Dives logged: 275. Couldn't go less than 60 unless you brought a shovel. Princess Heights in Down Bay Area, small 15 1-2 bedroom condos. Very nice, but plan on driving 30 minutes to restaurants and dive shops. Many restaurants and food was great! Roads and traffic terrible. Carnival Week (bad!). Make sure you know what is going on before going. You will need car. Shop for rates as there are many choices. Only did three dives. Dive Safari was excellent. Personnel and equipment top rate. No dedicated water bucket for cameras! They do shark feed dive four days a week. Very controlled. Mostly female Carib Reef and milky sharks. 25-30 animals up to 9 feet long. Great experience.

Ocean Explorers, July 2001, Stanley Richter (diveserv@prodigy.net) Oak Ridge, NJ. Experience: 101-250

dives. Vis: 90 to 110 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy. Leroy and Dominique, the owners, run an excellent shop. At "One Step Beyond" where we saw more species of fish than we could count! (Ph/fax 599 544 5252; e-mail divesm@megatropic.com; website www.stmaartendiving.com)

Tradewinds, July 2001, Philip Hamilton (jeepster@scubadiving.com), Sugar Land, TX. Experience: 51-100 dives.

Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to F, surge. 38 foot boat. We had a three

foot sea, which contributed to some fish feeding among some of our fellow divers. The Proselyte was a frigate which foundered 200 years ago. I encountered a pair of large crevalles, trunkfish, goatfish, a cowfish, and a rock beauty. I found a pair of cannons lying together, hardly recognizable due to the coral encrustation, as well as a huge anchor. Split rock has a nice reef: spiny lobster, parrotfish, and a school of snapper, a small barracuda followed me for a while, then lost interest, saw a sharptail eel, under the ledge of a rock on the sand and a peacock flounder. Not many operators crowding the sites. (Ph: + 5995-75176; fax + 5995-23910; e-mail twdc@stmartinstmaarten.com; website www.st-maarten-st-martin.com/TradeWinds/)

ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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. . . .

Bequia

Bequia Dive Adventures, Gingerbread Hotel, June 2001, Fred and Maxine Botti (fbotti@dfg.ca.gov)

Napa, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm choppy. Recent trips to Grand Cayman and Cozumel were disappointing. Bequia was “old Caribbean” with good chances for odd fish and a relaxing time. Gingerbread Hotel, a quaint two story hotel with wonderful balcony’s and great views. It is not air conditioned but the trade winds actually blow and cool you off. About 100 yards up the beach we dove with Bequia Dive Adventures. They made sure we enjoyed ourselves. They run three 1-tank dives a day (9AM, 11:30AM, and 2:30PM) with night dives on request. The boat is small and we were the only divers for the entire week, what a delight! The boat rides were 10-25 minutes, average 15 min. The reefs are sloping starting at 15'-20' and go down to around 80' where the bottom is sandy. There are a couple of small walls that were really very nice. The sea life was fantastic — sea lettuce, seahorses on three different dives, turtles, nurse sharks, four species of moray eel with 10-15 eels every dive, numerous shrimp of several species, small and large crabs and lobsters, and tons of fish mainly medium to small in size. The reefs appeared pretty healthy although algae was apparent on all the reefs. Bequia is a Hard to get to (you take a 1 hour ferry ride on the last leg from St. Vincent) but that is part of the charm. There is little to do on Bequia so reading and relaxing your major pastime when not in the water. The restaurants are a little pricey but not bad. (Ph: 784-458-3826; fax 775-665-7088; e-mail Adventures@caribsurf.com; website www.BequiaDiveAdventures.com)

Dive Bequia, November 2000, Holly Stump, San Jose, CA. Bob Sachs has assembled a fabulous team of divemasters: DiDi, the Queen of Seahorse Sighting and SoCa; Cliff “I Can Go Deeper” the Food Fish and Lobster Spotter; Douglas, well known for his large domesticated moray eel; and Antonio who makes sure all his divers are safe — but all the women in danger, after hours! Two fast, clean boats, good equipment (when my own regulator malfunctioned half way through the week they helped out), and they dive a variety of sites including a fun wall dive with some surge, a swim-through, usually sharks, and an octopus in his garden. Typically about 6 divers per boat, max was 10. Lots of color, the usual corals and fish, flamingo tongues, conchs, morays and gold spotted snake eels, turtles, lobsters, shrimp and crabs, nurse and black tipped sharks, and a range of seahorses. Bob is a social magnet for international tourists and boat people as well as locals, so the dive shop is a great hangout. My one regret: did not ever get to dive Devil’s Table. (Well, maybe I have two regrets, but he shall remain nameless!)

St. Vincent

Dive St. Vincent, Sunset Beach Hotel, December 2000, Charles Kleman, Ft. Myers, FL. Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 78-81 F. Dives logged: over 125. Bill Tewes at Dive St. Vincent runs an extremely fun dive operation — your times and your sites — wonderful crew with personal attention. (Ph: 784-457-4928; fax 784-457-4948; e-mail bill2s@DiveStVincent.com; website www.divestvincent.com)

Dive St. Vincent, February 2001,
Tom and Joyce Schulke
(classpix@execpc.com) Waupaca,
WI. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 76-78
 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced:
 none if competent and comfortable.
 Dives logged: 630+. Uncrowded
 boats of 6-8 divers is Bill's style. He
 can do a great job finding fish and
 critters to show. Although current can
 be present, there's always a site
 without current. Excellent, unusual
 Fish life. Friendly island makes easy
 touring with plenty of restaurant
 choices. Bill Tewes, enthusiastic
 owner of Dive St. Vincent, calls his
 island the critter capital of the
 Caribbean. My dive buddy, Tom, and I
 found 211 species in our 34 dives.
 That does not include a few species
 we have not been able to identify as
 yet. Our photos and a little research
 will hopefully bring them to light. We
 found 15 species of eels alone. We
 were able to positively ID 4 species of
 pipefish and are working on 2 more.
 Yellow cheek basslets and three line
 basslets at Coral Castles, and hairy
 blennies at Indian Beach. Oh, golden
 hamlets, shy hamlets, and yellowbelly
 hamlets are regular residents, easily
 found. Bill has a special spot he calls
 Critter Corner that is viewed by first
 time visitors with a little questioning
 of his choice of dive sites. Within a
 few minutes however, this sand and
 seagrass corner begins to come to life
 with fringed and slender filefishes,
 black ear wrasse, bucktooth parrot,
 gold and blackspotted snake eels,
 pipefish, etc. Orca Point; huge
 volcanic boulders dominate the first
 60 feet. viper and broad banded

morays claim their homes here. In the
 adjoining sand, snake Fish, flounder
 and spotted snake eels. Hunt around a
 little, you might find a black frog Fish
 like we did. Crabs, octopus, different
 lobsters and mollusks will rapidly
 consume your film and bottom time.
 Walls, slopes, rubble, gorgonian
 fields, sand in the coarse style and
 silty style, grass, wrecks, rock
 shoreline, sandy beaches. Easy shore
 diving near Young Island and Dive St.
 Vincent tops things off with a chance
 to dive to your heart's content. St.
 Vincent's lack of current makes
 underwater photography easy. Diving
 is uncrowded with short boat rides,
 good surface intervals and diving
 freedom with your computers after the
 first day diving with Dive St. Vincent.
 Fish counting can reach amazing
 speeds of twenty feet of reef explored
 in one half hour. Bill Tewes, along
 with his divemasters, have made a
 concentrated effort to study and know
 the Fish species found in the area and
 are expert at finding them as well. If
 you have a group of 6 people, Bill
 gives you your own boat and dive
 master, allowing you to write your
 own schedule. A local celebrity, Bill
 has been honored for his promotion of
 St. Vincent and the Grenadines by
 being pictured on a St. Vincent
 postage stamp. He shows concern
 about the ecology of the reefs by
 educating the non-diving local
 population. The St. Vincent people are
 intensely friendly folks that want you
 to return again. You won't find glitzy
 shopping or bunches of cruise ships.
 Instead there are a few quiet resorts and
 rooms that will remind you of the

Caribbean of years ago. The area around Young Island and Dive St. Vincent has some very good restaurants with awesome island food and live music. The waters surrounding the island are fished with regularity. www.DiveStVincent.com
bill12s@DiveStVincent.com, REEF.org

Dive St. Vincent, Sunset Shores, March 2001, Robert Jackson, Birmingham, AL. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 77-79 F. Dives logged: >1500. Dive restrictions: computer. Bill Tewes' Dive St. Vincent is a basic dive operation that provides excellent, if no frills, service. The staff is excellent at maintaining the operation's efficient service. Personally, they are all wonderful individuals who are a pleasure to dive with. The operation and quality of the corals, Fish and invertebrates reminds me of the Caribbean of 25 years ago. In short, unexpectedly excellent. Muck (sand) dives are clearly a highlight with lots of small Fish and invertebrates available for photography. New Guinea reef is beautifully covered with large black corals. Sea horses, frog Fish, electric rays, shrimp, decorator crabs all abundant. Sunset Shores, about 100 meters away, is a small hotel that is comfortable and affordable.

Dive St. Vincent, Rosewood Inn, April 2001, Dwayne W. Miller (charbill@joplin.com) Neosho, MO. Experience: 101- 50 dives Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy surge. Took too much gear and clothes. The diving was as good or better than in Palau. Sun Dancer II was good, but this was better due to Bill Tewes. Rosewood Inn was a good

place to stay with kitchenettes, close to operation, nearly new and good management. Dive St. Vincent is without peer and Bill makes diving really fun. Points out and writes (etch a sketch) the name of animal and uses pointer to show critter. He has a good sense of humor, don't be sensitive, and loves to show off his reefs and their beauty. He spends free time with clients and makes sure you are comfortable, happy and caters to any special interests if possible. St. Vincent is laid back island (no parties like Coz) but if extremely friendly and has excellent restaurants. The divemasters (Dowie, Callie, D.J.) are excellent at accommodating customers and have many years at Dive St. Vincent. The worse note was Barbados and the routing of flights through the island. Never saw another dive group, ours was usually only 4-6 people per boat. Bill furnishes all gear and I will take him up on that next time. The weather was perfect with only a few showers and the side trips and sites (Falls, botanical gardens and taxi's (get a ride anywhere for 38 cents)) only add to the ease of the trip. Saw at least 30-40 new species, most of which I would not have seen without Bill's unique talent for spotting them hiding in the corners and crevice's of the reef. This is a place to go for photo divers and people that want solitude. Usually only 15 minutes to site, surface interval, dive and then 10-15 minutes back to operation.

Dive St. Vincent, Sunset Shores, April 2001, Scott and Jann Taylor,

Cave Junction, OR. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F. St. Vincent runs a close second to Dominica in having both intriguing diving and a wealth of topside activities. We stayed 8 days, logged 12 dives and spent each afternoon touring or hiking. Getting to St. Vincent was a bit challenging. Due to limited flights to and from St. Vincent, we needed to overnight in Barbados on the way home. We were met at the airport by a taxi arranged by Dive St. Vincent and transported to Sunset Shores Motel. At the hotel we were greeted by Bill Tewes, the owner of Dive St. Vincent. Bill introduced us to two other divers staying at the hotel and we all ended up going out to dinner. Sunset Shores is a short walk from the dock for Dive St. Vincent. The motel rooms are reminiscent of an old Holiday Inn but are clean and comfortable. The courtyard has a small pool and the view of sailboats anchored in the channel was lovely. The restaurant/bar combination is open air and is very pleasant. Food and service were outstanding. Menu included fresh fish and vegetables and yummy desserts. Two evenings featured wonderful buffet bar-be-ques and live music. For lunch there are a variety of other restaurants within walking distance and every meal we had was excellent. More upscale accommodations are located just across the channel at Young Island. Dive St. Vincent is a relaxed but well organized operation. The dive boats left at 10:00 am each morning, returning around 2:00 pm. The sites are all close so rides were short. Tucked into alcoves and sheltered

bays, the boat sat as still as if on a lake. The diving was all easy, with no current. There are no big fish or pelagics but there are lots of small fish and critters and Bill and his staff are incredible at finding the unusual inhabitants. While you are free to follow the guide or dive with your buddy, Bill and his team made each dive interesting. Frogfish and sea-horses were an everyday occurrence. Photographers will find plenty to stay busy. The dive boats were well maintained and reasonably comfortable but there was very little space for rinsing or storing cameras. Bring your own drinking water and snacks for between dives. Night dive was outstanding. Lobsters, octopuses, seahorses, and eels were plentiful. Once a week or so Bill makes an all day trip to the north end of the island for two dives and a hike into the Falls of Baleine. After two dives, the boat anchors off shore and divers make a short swim to the beach. The falls are up a short trail and have a terrific pool for swimming. On the way back, the boat stops at a beach side restaurant for lunch. In the afternoons we did hikes through the rainforest and toured the Botanical Gardens. One day we opted to ride the ferry to the neighboring island of Bequia for the morning. We returned about 3:00 pm and Bill met us at the ferry dock with our gear and took us on an afternoon dive. Critter Corner: only 15-20 feet deep and a bottom of sand and sea grass, at first this dive seemed uninspiring. However, with Bill's sharp eyes we located a virtual menagerie of crabs, nudibranchs, shrimp, blennies, eels,

etc. Macro lens were the order of the day and 36 exposures nowhere near enough. Did an all day hike up the volcano. The hike starts in a bamboo forest and climbs about 3000 feet to the barren and windswept top of the crater. The crater is an eerie sight, with sham still issuing from vents and clouds and mist swirling around. We used "Smokey" as our combination taxi driver and trail guide. The dive boats were never crowded, the motel was almost devoid of tourists. People were friendly and the island felt safe. On our return we spent a day and night on Barbados. We stayed at the Casarina Beach Hotel which had beautiful grounds and a terrific beach. We did a land tour of Barbados which included a trip through a cave, a tour through a plantation, and other historical sites.

Tobago Cays

Grenadines Dive Shop, February 2001, Jill Rain (jrain@lopez.wednet.edu), Lopez, WA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. On a sailing trip in the Windwards with non-divers, I brought my dive gear. I radioed Dive Grenadine. Shortly, they picked me up from my boat, and along with 3 other divers, I was motored to the outside of the reef, 10 minutes away. The driver and divemaster asked us about our interests and experience. I was very impressed when, on hearing that one couple was flying the next morning, the DM radioed the home office and received confirmation that these people should not dive; this lost them business, but indicated that safety was

a priority (they had emergency equipment on board as well). The dive was very pretty and lazy, along a wall at 60' then back to the boat shallower. No current. Very large schools of chromis, tang, surgeonfish. Exceptionally crowded with many species of parrotfish of all ages. Porcupinefish, trunkfish, stingray, squid, eels. The DM was there in the water but let me do what I wanted until my air was down to 500. Then back in the skiff, and a few minutes motor over to my boat where I rinsed and hung out my gear. The staff was very competent, and the operation organized. Call them: channel 68. **(Ph: (809) 458-8138; fax (809) 458-8122; e-mail grenadinesdive@grenadines.net; website www.grenadines.net/union/grenadinesdivehomepage.htm)**

Union Island

Grenadines Dive Shop, Anchorage Hotel, October 2000, Karen and Fred Becker, Oxnard, CA. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80-81 F. Dives logged: 300. Dive restrictions: 130 feet. Second time in 2 years. Awesome operation — 2 main local divemasters still there. They really make the trip! The diving is pristine. Not often dove. Beautiful reefs, lots of fish; sharks and sting rays on every dive. Some gentle drift dives. Took my beginner parents along and they loved it! Easy, relaxing diving. Back roll off the boat, they take your gear at the end and you walk up the ladder. Awesome night dive on the wreck of the 1918 Piruni. Anchorage Hotel very nice accommodations, best on the island. **(Ph: (809) 458-8138; fax (809) 458-8122; e-mail**

grenadinesdive@grenadines.net;
website www.grenadines.net/union/grenadinesdivehomepage.htm)

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Trinidad, the southernmost island in the Caribbean (it's actually south of Caracas) isn't for divers, but its smaller sister to the north is. . . . Diving from resort hotels along the southwest coast of Tobago is inferior to the diving to the north, where you'll find huge coral heads and good fish life, with mantas in the spring. Strong currents and choppy water make this a place for experienced divers. (In 1997 a woman lost contact with her dive boat and spent 27 hours in the water before washing ashore.). . . . Blue Waters Inn is the main dive hotel; it's situated on a nice beach about 15 minutes from all sites. . . . Tobago is covered with rainforest and has good hiking, friendly people, and serene and beautiful beaches. Birding there is excellent, but Trinidad's Asa Wright Nature Center (a small hotel with a view that's almost guaranteed to be filled with scores of tropical species) is unparalleled, as is the lagoon trip to see 2000 scarlet ibis fly in from Venezuela each night. . . .

Tobago

Blue Waters Inn, April 2001, Jeanne Moore, Bellows Falls, VT. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: choppy. Dives logged: 33. Dive restrictions: 60-70 feet

(novice divers). Getting there took forever — 3 planes and an 1-1/2 hour taxi drive. But it was well worth it. Rooms looked out onto the uncrowded beach — totally carefree. We locked our money in the safe and never needed it. No phones, TV or radios in room so we totally relaxed. The staff was wonderful. The people at the dive shop made sure the dive was right for you. When they got 8 divers they added another boat. There was strong current and I'd only had 23 dives but I felt very secure — they gave me easy dives at first and more difficult as I was ready for it. They would even go out with only 1 diver. **(Ph: (800) 742 4276 or (868) 660 4341; fax (868) 660 5195; e-mail bwi@BlueWatersInn.com; website www.bluewatersinn.com)**

Dive Tobago, Manta Lodge, December 2000, Fran Prince (jpfranprince@hotmail.com) New York, NY. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy surge currents. Current was hard. There is little life, outside of Angel fish, hog fish and damsels. No nudibranchs or little stuff. If Shaun Robinson is not there, the divemasters will refuse to do a second dive unless you force them. The boat is small and many days we went out overloaded. One day as we rolled back into the water I got hit in the head with a tank. One day we had to wait to go out because of a resort. The rental equipment needs to be replaced; the bcd's leaked. The tanks were all overdue for testing. Every day we had people traveling from the other side of the island (1 1/2 hours) to