

Venezuela was created on December 20, 1973. We did three boat dives each day, surveyed 14 sites and identified 203 species of fish, including southern stargazer, mottled jawfish, southern guitarfish, key worm eel, diamond pipefish, sapo cano, spiny sailfin blenny, redbanner blenny, spotjaw blenny and resh pike blenny. We could not readily identify several fish. The photos of these fish are undergoing further study.

Another surprise was seeing the saddle bass, normally found at 250-750 ft, in abundance at 40 ft. Range extensions were noted for the plane head filefish, saddle parrotfish and two stripe puffer. Arturo Barrios, the owner of Horisub (+58-416-680-3800 or horisub@telcel.net.ve) was an accommodating host. His divemasters are safety conscious and knowledgeable of the area. **(Ph: (5881) 814878 or (5881) 816755 or (016) 6803800; e-mail horisub@lrs.com.ve; website www.larutadelsol.com/horisub)**

Atlantis Dive Center, Isla Margarita November 2001, Lee Knapp (kenipper@ionet.net) Prairie Vlg., KS. Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 77-80 F. Logged dives: 215. Dive restrictions enforced: Turn around on air left in the tank. The dive shop is well run and very friendly. Atlantis does not have a boat, so they contract. No problems there, the captain provided an excellent launch. Atlantis and boat handled all equipment and provided the divemaster. It took 50 minutes to travel to Los Frailes. Fortunately the water was calm. First two days were

shallow dives along the shore (50-55'). Lots of fish, dozens of puffer fish. Good macro and wide angle. Last day was a deep dive and some currents — especially at the site with a very large school of tarpon. **(Ph: 58-95-48668; e-mail atlantis@enlared.net or atlantis@unete.com.ve)**

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.

Aquaventures, Long Bay Resort, April 2002, Hank Martin (hmartin@elminc.com) Boonton, NJ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy, surge. After reading the Chap Book, I decided not to use Baskin, and found Aquaventures, a small shop near Road Town Harbor, and used them for my 12-year-old son's Open Water certification. They were great. The owner, divemaster and instructor were dedicated to making every trip a good one, even when we were the only two people. I was comfortable with my

son's care, and had a great time diving while he finished his check out dives. Diving wasn't spectacular, but it was decent. Our favorite sites were Painted Wall and Blond Rock, both near Dead Man's Chest. All equipment was handled by staff, and towels, drinks and they provided snacks between dives. Long Bay is a nice resort, but expensive. Ocean front cottages could use a major face lift — opt for the hillside villas. Very well equipped and nicely constructed. We stayed a newer one — it was beautiful with great views. Lot of walking up and down hills. Pool pretty beat up — the bottom needed resurfacing. Maintenance of the public areas could be better — it's not awful, but not spotless. Long Bay Beach is beautiful, but because of a rocky bottom, the swimming isn't great. Stay away from the weekly buffet unless you like overcooked steak, chicken and fish. Road Town is funky, but the restaurants are decent and the grocery stores well stocked. Try the take out at Bobby's — the curried chicken is excellent. (Ph: 284-494-4320)

Tortola

Baskin in the Sun, January 2002, Martin Staller, Fayetteville, NY. Vis: 30-80 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dives logged: 350. Beachfront rooms the only way to go. Harbor view rooms not very good. Food excellent, must dress (?) for dinner at main restaurant. Relaxing both diving and area. Interesting people and scenery. Good bathing, swimming beaches. Exercise spa, tennis facilities. Good walking, jogging. Additional gratuities probably

called for. Dive staff excellent, convenient. Small boat. Few divers. Wreck of Rhone not as good as the Fearless. Good video sites. Color good even without lights. Swimming pool should not be used with mask! Not very clean. (Ph: 800-650-2084; e-mail reservations@baskininthesun.com; website www.baskininthesun.com)

Baskin in the Sun, Prospect Reef, July 2002, Paul Martin, Asheville, NC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Prospect Reef Resort has seen better days. I took a list of 13 problems with our room to the manager (air conditioning, shower, sink, toilet, refrigerator, closets, ceiling caving in, etc.) and was told we couldn't change rooms although the hotel appeared to have many vacancies. Many problems were left unresolved by check-out one week later. The grounds are nice and the on-site restaurant (Callaloo) was excellent, although pricey. I'd stay at Long Bay Beach Resort, despite the 25 minute shuttle to the dive boat. Baskin in the Sun Dive Operation was advertised as "super service, you never carry a tank or gear." The tanks are on the boat (72's, although you could request 80's) — you set up your gear. Nearly half the tanks were low fills. The staff didn't check them even after many complaints. It was up to the diver to check the tanks he planned to use. No one helped you out of the water or changed tanks between dives. The staff was cordial and enthusiastic about diving, but not very helpful. The boat left Tortola and picked up passengers at Peter Island. Sometimes we would wait there for 45

minutes. The wreck diving was great, and the coral health and vibrant. The photo shop in the marina is outstanding. Jim is helpful and has the latest in digital equipment to demo. He'll download your images on his computer and burn a CD for you if your storage device gets full.

Blue Water Divers, Sugar Mill, June 2002, Michael Monarchi, Houston, TX. Vis: 40-60 ft. Dives accrued: 390. The soft corals were outstanding — excellent and vivid tube sponges. The reefs were healthy and had good quantities of life, both flora and fauna. Saw a couple of turtles and 3 sharks (2 nurse, 1 reef). Sea varied from flat to light chop or swell. Weather was hot and sunny, with some short rain showers (no thunderstorms). I was comfortable in a 2-3 mm wetsuit; some people dove with no wetsuit, but most had one. The wreck of the Rhone is excellent. (At Nanny Cay: **Ph: 284-494-2847; e-mail: bwdubi@surfbvi.com; At Hodge's Creek Ph: 284-495-1200; e-mail bwdubi@surfbvi.com; website <http://www.ultimatebvi.com/bluewater/>**)

UBS Dive Service, VIP Yacht Charters, December 2001, Keith & Ellen Irwin (irwinkw@earthlink.net) San Jose, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. We chartered a 45' powerboat from VIP Yacht Charters in St. Thomas then arranged for UBS Dive Service to rendezvous with us at various anchorages. UBS meets you at your boat and takes your party on the dives. They let you choose the dive sites and decide when to go. Our first dive was from Norman Island. We dove the Indians,

snorkeled "The Caves" during the surface interval, then did an easy dive at Angelfish Reef. We dove the wreck of the Rhone, a wonderful wreck dive. The Chimney and Bronco Billy at the Dogs. These were fun dives with lots of brilliant sponges, soft corals, and abundant small tropicals. They allowed us to dive our computers, often staying down for over an hour. They use a 27' dive boat and a 20' rigid inflatable. Both were comfortable, though the 27' could use a hand rail to make reentry easier. The staff was competent, safety conscious. (**Ph: 284-494-0024; e-mail page@scubabvi.com; website www.scubabvi.com**)

VIRGIN ISLANDS, U.S.

St. Croix

Anchor Dive Center, Hotel on the Cay, April 2002, Bonnie Huff (bhuff@willowbridge.com) Hillsborough, NJ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 85 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy surge. Professional, top notch dive operation. They only take out six divers and if a seventh diver wants to go they'll take them by themselves on the next dive. Their dive sites are a 10 minute ride and they come in between dives. They are a 10 minute drive from Christensted. They will pick you up, but you have you take a taxi back and the price varies from \$7 to \$10/person. They have a restaurant next door that is good and reasonable for lunch. The reefs and walls are healthy and vary in formation, but lacked large fish. Easy diving for beginners. The Hotel on the Cay is very friendly and convenient to