

there when needed. And they seemed to enjoy the diving as much as we did. The quarters were the usual for liveaboards. Anyone who goes on any liveaboard expecting luxury will surely be disappointed. The food was excellent; this cook was a cut above the average.

SABA

***Caribbean Explorer*, October 2001, Raj (rpopli@home.com) Pleasanton, CA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. Good pre visit information package, got prompt replies to email queries, was met at the airport by prearranged taxi. Was the only solo diver. Divemasters will make sure they are available to buddy up with me. St. Maarten and neighboring islands are not the best dive sites, but in every other respect this was a memorable experience. Clean rooms with daily service. Hot water poured into your wetsuits, hot chocolate and hot towel after night dives. Food service was equally good. (Ph: 800-322-3577 or 903-887-8521; e-mail info@explorerventures.com; website www.caribexplorer.com/caribbean)

***Caribbean Explorer*, December 2001, Pat Aderman (pat_aderman@juno.com) Irving, TX.** Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives accrued: 125. Only five paying divers with seven crew. It made for a great trip. The crew was not only helpful and friendly, but made us feel as if we were their personal guests, not paying customers. While the boat has

a little age on it, it is still comfortable and well maintained. The food was always excellent including a traditional Christmas turkey carved by the Captain, Jean Francoise, JF for short. The upper deck has an ice chest full of cold beer for after the day's diving and a large selection of spirits. Due to weather conditions the schedule is never rigid. We dove off Saba and St. Kitts for six days. Diving was great. Dive depths varied with most from 30-100 feet. Divers log their own time and depths on a board on the dive deck. As long as you dive within the limits of your computer there is no restriction. There are plenty of turtles and other marine life. I took pictures of one turtle that must have weighed 350pounds. The dive deck is laid out well with a large camera table. Tanks are always topped off and filled at each station without having to remove BCDs. Most diving is directly from the boat but a dinghy is available to retrieve anyone who gets too far from the boat. We also used it to do a drift dive close to shore called Nag's Head. A nice touch after night dives was the warm water the crew poured into our wet suits when we had dropped our gear. They also provided hot drinks. The crew arranged land tours on both islands with their regular taxi drivers. On St. Kitts the taxi had a VHF marine radio so it could communicate with the various boats. It's well worth spending an afternoon on each of the islands. I think I'll reread James Michener's "Caribbean" before I return.

***Caribbean Explorer*, April 2002, Bob Parks, Baton Rouge, LA.** Experience:

251- 500 dives. Vis: 50 to 90 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, choppy. Only six divers on our charter. Usually, they run close to 16 divers. Crew was energetic and ranked up there with the larger liveaboard dive operations. Food was plentiful and excellent. Good value. No ensuite”heads and no Nitrox. Dive conditions were typical of the Caribbean. Health of reefs was good, although a few of the dive sites were silted over with sediment or sand. Dive restrictions: 130 feet/max depth, no deco diving, and buddy system (although you could dive with the group without picking a buddy). I strayed away from the group a few times without getting any post dive lectures or stern looks. They never checked our computers, but asked divers to list maximum depth and bottom time on a board on the dive deck after every dive. The tours (Statia, St. Kitts, and Saba) were interesting. You would miss one afternoon dive if you took the land tours, but you did not miss any dive sites.

Caribbean Explorer, April 2002, Edwin L. Granite, Wilmington, DE. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dives logged: too many to count since 1968. Dive restrictions enforced: 130' max. Good diving, mostly Caribbean, not terribly exciting — but Saba pinnacles are very good. Crew members were the best of any live-aboard I previously used. They were Ritz-Carlton quality and couldn't do enough for the divers! Food wonderful!

Caribbean Explorer, May 2002, Ray Haberman (RHaberman@msn.com)

Naperville, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100+ Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy no currents. Great experience for my first liveaboard. Crew was friendly, courteous, and helpful. Food was good and plenty of it. Accommodations were cramped but bearable. Excursions to the islands available for those interested. Two fresh water rinse tanks and a large work table for cameras only. Capt. was knowledgeable about photography.

Caribbean Explorer, June 2002, Bill Chambers, Brooklyn, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 10 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm. Excellent boat, crew, diving and food. Great bargain at the \$995 discount rate. Very efficient and well organized while still informal — pros who know what to do and how to do it. Crew was safety concerned and always provided the little extras, like cocoa after the night dive. Weather was calm, for easy passages, air and water nice and warm — 1 mm jumpsuit or 3-mm shorty was comfortable. Slight current on some dives. Southern winds generated lots of plankton in the water that reduced visibility. Over fishing in St. Kitt's has almost eliminated larger fish species; much better on Saba and Statia, where marine park has helped the cause. Larger divers will probably want the lower berths that are 50 percent wider than the upper ones. Large dedicated camera table and two large dedicated camera rinse tanks. E-6 processing on board. Jean-Francois, the captain, as an experienced photographer and handled processing, repairs, flooding, and advice if asked.

Caribbean Explorer, August 2002, Cheryl & Ray Stobaugh, Atkins, AR. Vis: 30-80 ft. Water: 80-81 F. Dives logged: 230 each. Dive restrictions enforced: 120 or 130. We were very pleased. The crossings I had read about were not so bad. Anyone prone to sea sickness needs to take preventative for good measure. I have a bad problem with sea sickness and had read in an earlier *Chapbook* to request a lower birth which we did. The staff was great. Divers came first and they practiced and stressed safety throughout the week. We were free to dive on our own except at St. Kitts and a guide from St. Kitts must be on each dive. Saba charges \$1-3 extra for each dive. There was not much large stuff but an excellent location for macro. Saw octopus, turtle, one spotted eagle ray, squid, drum fish, top hats, nurse sharks. A couple of reef sharks and more. Food was plentiful. The first two evening meals were too salty but all other above expectations. BBQ on last night at sea. Day trip to St. Kitts nice. The weather was great all week. Visibility not go good but enjoyed anyway. First time to dive that part of the Caribbean. Myles and Nicole did an exceptional job as divemasters and good company on deck.

ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

Nautica Divers, Windjammer, December 2001, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX. Dives Logged: #43-46. Vis: clear. Water: 82 F. Our Windjammer ship arrived hours late at Nevis late that morning, so our scheduled 9:30 a.m. dive tour went at 11:30, we

were encouraged to rush through it, and again — our afternoon schedule was ruined. The dive was great though, lead by Austin — the operator from nearby St. Kitts. Soaked in a thermal hot spring on the first dive, 100 hundred feet down on a healthy reef with fish swimming about! Having a dive buddy with a camera is like diving solo, as the other diver's attention will be on his camera rather than on my safety, until he wonders where the boat is? I got to show off my compass and navigating skills, taking him back right to it on the first dive, and pretty close on the second. He wondered if I had an underwater GPS; I guess he doesn't read enough to know that such don't work under water. I grabbed one of my frequent two hour naps — the only way to survive the parties and activities of the week, then caught a launch ashore for supper on the beach and more dancing. We didn't sail again until day-break, but we only traveled across the channel to St. Kitts. Two more great dives, one on a small wreck in 100 feet, another at 70 on a nice reef. While I enjoy the cruises, I am bothered by their ads and "live aboard" listings in dive magazines. While they always illustrate with a picture of a tall ship under full sail, potential passengers should prepare for the fact that skippers seem to seldom bother. Of the four I've cruised with, only one would actually sail; the rest will have three or four sheets put up for show, not even trimming for propulsion, then motor along and see how far they'll get by sun-up. This put us hours late arriving