

Sea Saba, Juliana's, September 2002, Elizabeth Hiltcher (reefsong@attbi.com) Oak Park, IL.

Vis: 80-110 ft. Vis: 82-84 F. Dives accrued: 226. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 depth, no deco. Pristine, beautiful place with healthy reefs and respectful, service oriented, ecology minded divemasters. Water and weather conditions couldn't have been better. Juliana's Orchid Cottage was wonderful. Sea Saba is a good outfit with a helpful but unobtrusive crew. Gatehouse — the best meals and ambiance on the island.

ST. BARTHELEMY

Dive With Dan, December 2001, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX.

Dives Logged: #42. Vis: clear. Water: 82 F. I really enjoy this little French island and always look forward to it when taking Windjammer's S/V Polynesia on its northern route. WJ booked us a single tank trip and unlike the other divers on board, I had all my own gear with me. I thought that this would be great timing: dive, quick shopping, lunch, then the afternoon on the beach! I did a light breakfast, as I avoid eating much before diving, then dragged my bag up three flights, only to learn that the operator dumped us to cater to a bigger group from a larger boat. We had to schedule our dive for the afternoon, and I wished that I'd had more to eat, as now I was looking at a light lunch and a rescheduled day that no longer included beach time.

When we finally got to the dive boat, the rest of the divers were disappointed that at \$50 for a one tank dive,

they didn't get depth gauges or auxiliary second stages with their steel tanks? We made do, though, and enjoyed the nice reef dive otherwise. My buddy surfaced, habitually looking for any fires, and — spotted one! A boat was burning near where we'd first boarded ours, and we watched as it was towed away from the dock. WJ's M/V Amazing Grace supply ship, which happened to also be in the harbor for delivery, pulled along side to douse the flames. By the time we got back to the Poly, showered and changed, the Grace had repositioned away from the smelly remains, and we all took launches over for a wine and cheese gathering on "the bingo boat" with the ship's quieter passengers. I have quite a collection of souvenir T-shirts, but I was feeling pretty salty by now and thought that this might be the time to wear my WJ Officer's Shirt -- available by special order only, not from the ship's store, along with matching WJ shorts and my straw western hat! Many of the Grace's passengers and some of my own mates took me for an officer, but I behaved pretty well for an old cowboy drinking wine out in the Caribbean on an empty stomach. We returned to our own craft for dinner, and I didn't moon anyone until our rowdy time ashore at one of Jimmy Buffet's old hangouts. I think we weighed and sailed around midnight. (Ph: 590-276478)

ST. EUSTATIUS

An historically significant island, St. Eustatius, which lies fifty miles

south of St. Maarten, was the first to recognize the United States as a country. As a result, British Men o' War pounded the island to a pulp. Some artifacts from the barrage can still be found in the murky water of the bay, and low-profile reefs offshore provide some diving. . . . The protected marine park is beginning to pay off, with pretty reefs and increasing numbers of fish. A hike up the Quill, an extinct volcano, is worth the effort.

Dive Statia, Kings Well, November/December 2001, Ed Golembe, MD.

King's Well is somewhat offbeat -- in a fun way. I love the owners, true eccentrics -- like staying with nice relatives except that there is a check (modest) at the end of your stay. The Old Gin House is more elegant and has a fine restaurant. Have dined there and it is good. It is almost directly across the street from Dive Statia, which is run by Americans Rudi and Rinda Hees. Dive boat has adequate sun cover and is fully equipped with oxygen, radio and flares, though most sites are no more than 10 to 15 minutes from the dock. Late effect from tropical storm "Olga" which decreased the usual 100-150 foot visibility for a couple of days. Most of its near-shore water is a designated marine sanctuary, suitable for any level of diver. The underwater life is extremely healthy -- especially the coral. Abundance of larger than usual small tropical fish and the occasional shark and lobster sightings were so numerous as to become boring! One

can find fascinating artifacts -- Delft pottery and the well-known blue beads used by the Dutch for trading. Dive Statia is a well-run, safe and very personable operation. The island, besides diving, has several historical sites and a dormant volcano, "the Quill," which can be hiked into and has double canopy jungle inside its walls. Safety is not an issue, except the odd nasty goat! Nightlife is a good book or conversation. It is the island of "The First Salute" by the late Barbara Tuchman and much of what was the lower town is underwater, thanks to the British Admiral Rodney. I am a DAN referral physician and have been a diver since 1973 and have been to most of the "big-name" locations. I keep returning to Statia when I want to really "get away." (Ph: 866-614-3491 or +599-318-2435; e-mail divestatia@megatropic.com; website www.divestatia.com)

Dive Statia, Kings Well, June 2002, Art Hulse (ntcc@iup.edu)

Kittannins, PA. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 81 F. Dives logged: about 700. Dive restrictions enforced: no deco. Dive Statia is an excellent facility. Rudy, Rinda and divemaster Bill run an excellent establishment and accommodate your dive requests. They have Nitrox and pump either EANx 32 or 36. Dive boat is modified Carolina skiff about 26 feet long. It is wide and flat bottomed and provides a stable dive platform. Dive sites are within fifteen minutes so surface intervals are spent on land. Dive day includes two morning dives and an afternoon dive. Night diving is available if enough

divers are interested. Dive master is always in the water but you can dive your own profile. Coral is healthy and the fish life is abundant and diverse. I logged over 120 species of fish. Schools of horse-eye jacks, bar jacks, and black durgon were around on most safety stops. Saw sharks (nurse and reef) on three dives and turtles (hawksbill and green) on about six dives. The Marine Park has about 30 moored dive sites and Rudi goes to others that are incredible. Diving is extremely diverse with walls, ledges, sea mounts, patch reefs, historic wrecks and artificial reefs. Current varied from none to strong. The Kings Well hotel is an excellent place to stay. Laura and Win are friendly and make you feel at home. However, if you don't like animals it would not be the best place to stay since dogs, cats and parrots abound. Win is a fantastic cook and prepares excellent meals. The hotel has a swimming pool and a hot tub. Rooms are large and airy and have refrigerators. St. Eustatius is a small island about a 17 minute flight from St. Maarten and about a 10 minute flight from Saba or St. Kitts. Planes fly low enough that "wait to fly" is not a consideration when connecting between the islands on WinAir.

Golden Rock Dive Center, Old Gin House, April 2002, Ray Haberman (Rhaberman@msn.com)

Naperville, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy currents. No frills operation. They do a one tank dive in the AM and one in the PM. They

return to the shop after each dive. There is no rinse tank or drinking water on the boat. They try hard to please. They provide an appealing dive package that gives ten boat dives and quarters at the Old Gin House. The hotel is old but clean and comfortable and some rooms are new. The food is excellent. The hotel is within walking distance of the dive shop. The currents were strong. Most of the dive sites start at 60'. It meant using the mooring line for descents and ascents. On almost every dive we saw sharks, rays and turtles. Reefs are all healthy with lots of small fish, fans and sponges. Enjoyable but tiring week. **(Ph: 800-311-6658; e-mail grdivers@goldenrock.net; website www.goldenrockdive.com)**

Golden Rock Dive Center, Old Gin House, July 2002, Tom & Lita Schaffer, Livermore, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, choppy. Golden Rock Divers operation was excellent. Very accommodating on where we wanted to dive and at what times. The group set the dive times and dive location. We all decided on a 9:00 morning dive and a 2:00 afternoon dive. The operators, Glenn and Michelle, were friendly and knowledgeable. The Dive Masters, Benji and Annouke, were capable and good with the new divers. Usually took you where you could find whatever critter you were looking for. They did not hurry through the dive and were patient for the photographers. The dive boat accommodated the usual 6 divers without feeling crowded. The

owners and staff even went out with the group for dinner and drinks several nights. There was plenty for my non diving wife to do and she did not get boring. The Old Gin House was newly renovated and comfortable. Rooms were clean and maid service available daily. The pool, although small, was a welcome dip between dives. The restaurant is good and has a 4 star chef. Dinner was about \$40 (1 Guilder = \$1.80 US). There were several good places to eat on the island and Smoke Alley, made great desserts. The eating establishments on "Island Time" so be patient.

Golden Rock Dive Center, Old Gin House, August 2002, Charles Stigall (cstigall47@earthlink.net) Sealy, TX. Vis: 45-65 ft. Water: 81-82 F. Dives accrued: 200+. Dive restrictions enforced: 500 psi, but not really strict. Glenn and Michele Faires along with their dive masters, Benji and Annouck provided the most accommodating dive experience ever. They would dive whenever and wherever you wanted. Their boat, Stumpy, was not state of the art, but was more than adequate. Also used an inflatable for one to two divers, sites were close to shop and we returned after each dive. Corals were in good shape, especially soft corals. Large critters were limited, but we did see some reef sharks, nurse sharks and several turtles. Found one black frog fish — which I had never seen before. Several wrecks to explore. Diving is easy and hassle free. Golden Rock dive masters set up gear for each dive and rinse it after. Blue beads that can be found. These were used during the

slave trade years for the slaves to buy wives with. I found one during a dive. Old Gin House is probably the nicest place to stay on the island. A/C worked, hot water worked, they furnished bottled water daily and kept the room clean. The grounds were well kept and there is a small pool. Breakfast in our package. Lunches at Old Gin House's ocean front restaurant. The island has several places to eat, Smoke Alley and Cool Corner to name two that were good. The Blue Bead Restaurant across the street from the dive shop, was a good lunch stop. Se the museum in town to learn the island's history, visit Fort Oranje and if you are there at 6:00 p.m. introduce yourself to Stanley Van Putter, the gentleman who lowers the fort's flag and rings the bell each day at 6:00 p.m.

ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

These small, intimate islands have a lot of "Old Caribbean" charm. Their strong suits are gracious hotels and old inns, verdant, green scenery, and lovely beaches. The diving is decent, but there are no thrills. . . .

Kenneth's Dive Center, St. Kitts, February 2002, Kyle O'Malley, Le Center, MN. Vis: 60-70 ft. Water: 74-75 F. Dives accrued: 150+. Dove St. Kitts as a day trip off the cruise ship. Contact Kenneth before your trip by phone as we did and save a lot of money over the cruise ship's commission! Arrangements were made and Kenneth himself met us at the cruise ship dock — considerate. Diving (not a fair critique here because time