

ST. MAARTEN

French St. Martin and Dutch St. Maarten are two islands in one, with wonderful beaches, superb hotels, fine cuisine - and poor diving, a situation that was not improved when the island was trashed by a hurricane in 1995. . . . Watch out for shady characters who are drawn to the nude beaches and prey on tourists. . . .

Dive Safaris, Great Bay Resort, December 2001, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX. Dives Logged: #40 and 41. Vis: clear. Water: 82 F. I planned on going out a day earlier than my Sunday evening boarding time on the ship, phoning ahead to reserve space Sunday morning with the dive operator, and booking through the cruise line for one night at the Great Bay Resort. Using my usual pre-flight approach -- a farewell party Friday evening until closing time in Texas, breakfast with a clothes change, then "the red-eye" and sleeping my way through three otherwise boring flights, I arrived early Saturday evening on the Dutch side known as St. Maarten. After breezing through customs and a quick taxi ride along the south edge of the isle, hotel check-in and supper, I had plenty of time for gear check, treating a quart of drinking water, (they say the tap water is fine there, but I never risk it in the Caribbean) and a good night's rest. The next morning, it was breakfast, another quick taxi, then I was met at the dive operator's with a pleasant greeting and the explanation that they'd tried to call

me the day before to cancel for lack of business! I explained that I had to travel all day that day before and overnight there specifically to be there to dive! I didn't expect them to send a boat out just for me, but then they didn't want to totally disappoint me after my arrangements and travels, so we compromised. I'd go out with their students for a shallow dive in Little Bay, then they'd take us all on a nice reef dive. They really did try to accommodate me on the 30-foot dive to a sandy bottom by sending me down with my own Dive Master. Parts of an old metal pier had been dropped there to attract fish, and we found the circa 1700s cannons dropped from an old fort overlooking the Great and Little Bays by an interim government of the past. We also had to dodge a spearfisher and hooked lines from a row boat, but it was a nice refamiliarization dive. Following with a 60-foot dive on the reef was an inappropriate "reverse profile" approach. Nevertheless, the students had to graduate from their check-out dives in calm water before we took on the chop and surge of the open sea, so I planned a safety stop and made the best of it. The body-length surge persisted all the way down, but we managed to find some calm spots as we explored the reef and life, along with a couple of car sized anchors from a shipwreck that had left a noticeable notch in the reef a couple of centuries earlier -- one covered in coral the other clean from not being in just the right spot to encourage such growth. I'd been deeper than most of the newly certifieds so my air ran low

and I was back on the boat earlier than some. I sought to assist the First Mate with reboarding the last of the divers, as that part often gets backed up, and I noticed that while one was climbing, another was underneath?! I shouted a warning, to which the diver in the water just gave me a funny look, and then -- I recognized the Skipper! The First Mate laughed, saying I should have told him to put his regulator back in his mouth, too. (Ph: 011-599-545 3213; e-mail dives@thescubashop.net; website thescubashop.net)

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, and decent Caribbean diving in an area that has become, perhaps, the "small critter capital" of the Caribbean. . . .

Bequia

Bequia Dive Adventures, July 2001, Winston Reed, Milford, CT. Vis: 40-500 ft. Water: 75 F. Dives logged: 164. I was the only diver — very personalized service. DM's Ron Williams and Larry Stone were helpful and friendly. Would dive with them

again. Nice reef dive. Lots of colorful small stuff and lots of lobsters.

Bequia Dive Adventures, August 2001, Mike Plante (mplante664@aol.com) Milwaukee, WI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Not a big tourist destination although many yachts visit and some divers join you from the yachts. Often just our family (husband, wife and 14 yr. old son) were diving. Easy boat rides 15-20 min to dive sites that were in excellent conditions. Accommodations and meals range from reasonable to very reasonable. The dive shop will arrange for accommodations and taxi from airport on St. Vincent to ferry to Bequia. Nice beaches for lounging no shopping or night life. (Ph: 784-458-3826; e-mail Adventures@caribsurf.com; website www.BequiaDiveAdventures.com)

Carriacou

Silver Diving, July 2001, Winston Reed, Milford, CT. Vis: 40-50 ft. Water: 70 F. Dives logged: 164. Dive restrictions enforced: stay with group. Dive site was the Sisters (2 Rock). Depth: 25-100 ft. Currents: drift dive, easy, like flying over sea rods/plumes. Some coral-covered rocks. Sea fans went thru channel between Sisters. Moderate number of small fish. Saw one shark "sleeping." Nice dive. Pick up from our chartered mooring in small open skiff in 18 ft. Backrolls, very small wooden ladder. A little difficult to use in the chop. Max Nagel (owner) very pleasant and helpful. Carriacou Silver diving: fax/phone 809-443-7882. (Ph: 809-443-7882;