

Parguera. Parador Posada Porlamar is part of a network of 18 “paradores” in Puerto Rico — sort of a three-story eclectic country inn overlooking the South coast. We unfortunately got a room right next to the outdoor wooden staircase, and listened to stair climbers most. Also had problems with air conditioning, since the influx of holiday visitors to the town quite overloaded the town’s electrical capacity. The onsite restaurant, La Pared, was excellent (but pricey) for dinner. Buffet breakfast was included with dive packages but service was quite slow. And for some reason, the waterfront bar was never open. Parguera Divers (Angel Rovira and wife Roberta Santos are owner operators — [www.pargueradivers.com](http://www.pargueradivers.com)) was just spectacular. One of the best, most thorough dive ops we’ve seen. The ride to the wall can be pretty choppy, everything not stowed away in the fore cabin will get wet. Water temps were consistently 83 degrees top to bottom — balmy! Saw a huge crowd of Atlantic spadefish on one dive, an intrusive remora on another. Lots of black durgon, parrotfish, chromis, tangs, gobies. Corals were great and varied (sea fans and rods, black coral bushes, wire corals, brain and sheet and encrusting corals) and the walls just wonderful — particularly a swim-through at 120 feet marked by an eleven-tube lavender stovepipe sponge. We did a night dive one evening (I didn’t enjoy it — too many people and too little viz) and afterwards Angel took us over to swim in the Phosphorescent Bay, which was unbelievable. Recommend Guacataco for open-air local food, or Golden City

(Chinese/criollo in the local mall) for lunch, followed by naps!

### **Sea Ventures, Fajardo Inn, November 2002, Tom Rain ([tom-rain1e@hotmail.com](mailto:tom-rain1e@hotmail.com)), Irving, TX.**

Vis: 30 to 50 feet. Water: 82-85 F.

Dives logged: 350+. Dive restrictions enforced: no deco. We dove off the town of Fajardo, P.R. — on the East End of P.R. Nice hotel. Below average dive operation with marginal divemasters. Dive sites boring with poor visibility or fish life. Lots of sea fans but other coral was poor. Instead of diving, we should have spent our time sight seeing in old San Juan.

([www.divepuertorico.com](http://www.divepuertorico.com),  
[www.fajardoinn.com](http://www.fajardoinn.com))

## **SABA**

Saba is one of the more adventurous and exciting Caribbean destinations, both on land and in the sea. ... Pinnacle diving begins at 70 feet, with good fish life and occasionally sharks and big-gear fish. ... Accommodations are in quaint villages at 1,000 feet and above. ... Although there are no beaches or night life, Saba has delightful people, a few good restaurants, and a cool, pleasant climate at altitude. It’s also in the hurricane belt. ... Some divers claim that, after several days of diving, they get muscle pains if they climb 3,000-foot Mt. Scenery. ... Be sure to close your eyes when your plane lands ... or take the short ferry trip from St.. Maarten.

**Sea Saba, November 2002, Sheri Guzick (sheri.ray@sbcglobal.net), Dallas, TX.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. Sea Saba Dive Center is first class! In addition to great diving, they'll make dinner reservations and ensure drivers to transport you. Boats are first rate! Captain and dive master gave good pre-dive briefing. Reasonable safety measures taken; the viz is great; beautiful corals; sponges; fans; and fish. Third Encounter Pinnacle is breathtaking, the top of the pinnacle is at 80 feet. Some great shallow dives, too. If you want to get away from the city; crime; and pollution, this is the place to really relax. Hike the rain forest, the top is at almost 3,000 feet. (www.seasaba.com)

**Sea Saba, Cat's Eye (cottage), January 2003, Jonathan Segal (Jtoobad657@aol.com), Palo Alto, CA.** Dives logged: 200. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 78 to 82 F. Dive restrictions enforced: not below 130 feet. Saba is a unique island — small, mountainous, rural — like stepping back 100 years to small-town England. No beaches, but excellent hiking on tropically forested volcanic slopes. Be sure to dive Diamond Rock if possible. Had much better marine life than the famed pinnacles, at least when we were there. Sea Saba is the best dive company I've ever seen. Endlessly helpful, friendly, and customer oriented to the max! (www.seasaba.com) They can arrange for housing, dining, and nondive activities as well. They really function as a full service trip planning company. Cat's Eye is an excellent cottage with

terrific view, perched on volcanic hillside, two minutes walk from windward side (no car needed) at a reasonable price — truly a spot to remember. Favorite restaurants: Brigadoon for fine dining, Swinging Door for grill your own steak night (literally), Tropics Café for fresh, healthy lunches, Texley's beer, and the pool side view is stunning!

**Sea Saba, Juliana's, February 2003, Jeffrey R. Johnson (jrj72113@aol.com), Maumelle, AR.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. One of the most unique places that my wife and I have been. Basically a mountain (dormant volcano) rising from the ocean. If you fly in, get on the right hand side of the plane for an exciting landing on the world's shortest commercial runway. The island is Dutch; everything neat, clean, and safe. It boggles my mind that anyone bothered to settle this island, as it has no beaches, has no flat land for agriculture, and had to be a struggle (no roads, only steps going up the hills, until 1948). Yet we fell in love with it — wonderful, friendly people, beautiful vistas, and great diving. You do a lot of diving on lava formations and pinnacles rising from the ocean floor. Many of the pinnacles are 80 feet or greater under the surface. We saw many fish species, a few sharks and eels, lots of turtles, lobsters, and sting rays, pretty good selection of macro stuff. Heard a whale in the distance. Pinnacles were interesting. Diamond Rock, Twilight Zone, and Tent Reef Deep were great sites. We dove with Sea Saba and were happy with their operation. They're well

organized. Divemasters give you some flexibility but keep you safe. Loved Dai, quite a Welsh character. Bit of a drive to the marina, but that also is an experience. We stayed at Juliana's in the Orchid Cottage, fantastic spot. Juliana's owners are great and go out of their way to help make your stay enjoyable. The cottage had a kitchen; we asked if they had a grill, so they went and bought one. And when our son sent an e-mail saying he got engaged, they called the dive boat. I'll always remember Dai saying "Frank popped the question and she said yes!" — and my wife then crying for joy. Had great meals at Gate House, EcoLodge, Willards — can be pricey but plenty of other reasonable and good places. Willards (same family as Willards in D.C.) is a special experience, but \$\$\$\$.

**Sea Saba, Orchid Cottage, April 2003, Joseph Puglia (Jpuglia@aol.com), Orlando, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 72 to 74 F, calm. Our second trip to Saba. The pinnacles, although deep, were outstanding; great visibility and great life. Current was nonexistent. There were large schools of the colorful tropicals, sharks on just about every dive, plus turtles. I ran into the largest tarpon I have ever been in the water with! Saba is still one of the best diving spots in the Caribbean. The Orchid Cottage lived up to its billing. Very comfortable with a great view from the balcony. Food on Saba has improved. Our favorites, Brigadoon for dinner and Tropics for breakfast, did not disappoint. Brigadoon has a great full

menu. Eco-lodge was also nice. Sea Saba does a great job and makes every effort to meet everyone's desires. Once they were comfortable with our skill level, we were able to buddy dive and explore which was great! Boat entries and exits were easy and the boats were comfortable. There were buckets on the boats. Crew was helpful!

**Sea Saba, Juliana's, May 2003, Ezra Lunde, Staten Island, NY.**

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, surge. Sea Saba is a premier operator. I made most of my arrangements with Lynn Costenaro, one of the shop's proprietors, and she coordinated everything beautifully. This included eight nights at Juliana's, PADI enriched air course, 12 boat dives, transfers, dinner reservations, and even a day trip to St. Maarten. I flew Continental from Newark to St. Maarten, then took Winair to Statia and finally Saba with no hassles. I was greeted at the airport, checked into my room, and doing classwork for the nitrox course within 45 minutes. The next morning on the boat, I analyzed the oxygen contents of my tank, strapped it on, and dropped into the blue. Now that's a tightly run dive operation. The diving ranges from average to spectacular — the pinnacle dives being the highlight of every morning. "Third Encounter," in particular, provided huge yellowmouth and Nassau groupers, fleets of Creole wrasse, blue chromis and black surgeon, white-spotted filefish, big snapper, and reef sharks. This is not to mention the diverse array of sponge and coral. "Man o' War Shoals" and

“Diamond Rock,” two of the shallower pinnacles, were charged with the same life and electricity as the deeper sites. Very good diving, and the nitrox made it even better. Sea Saba definitely has the best boats of the available operators, with plenty of cover from sun and room to roam about. Topside Saba is just as satisfying. As there are no beaches or super-resorts most tourists give it a wide berth, or just don’t know about it at all. Restaurants are generally good and night life is mellow to nonexistent. Find accommodations in windward side because of its proximity to everything: food, film, cigarettes, bar, dive shop, bank, trailheads, etc. Besides it’s a charming village with little red-roofed cottages and winding paths (streets?). The room at Juliana’s was great and nicer than it looks on the website. Beautiful island, nice locals, great diving.

**Sea Saba, Orchid Cottage, May 2003, Joseph Puglia (JPuglia@aol.com), Orlando, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Second trip to Saba. The pinnacles were truly spectacular with great viz. Nitrox, a must, increased bottom time and added to the enjoyment. The pinnacles are deep. Sightings included sharks, big rays, turtles and schools of jacks. The pinnacles had a large number of fish including schools of tangs feasting on eggs, creating a purple cloud as they closed in. There were some great game fish sightings including a nice sized wahoo! The pinnacles made for picturesque descents and enjoyable touring. The life on the pinnacles is exciting. Sea

Saba does a great job. Lynn leaves you wanting for nothing! They have great new boats that are comfortable, roomy and pretty quick. The food on Saba has improved greatly! There are a number of really good restaurants. Brigadoon leads the charge! Chef Michael creates fantastic dishes. Beth, at Dive Saba, set us up at the Orchid Cottage. It was a beautiful cottage overlooking the ocean in Windward side. The large porch was great for afternoon lounging. The cottage is part of Juliana’s so we also had the use of all the resorts amenities.

**Sea Saba, Juliana’s, August 2003, Tom Greenway (AG22591@aol.com), Morris, IL.** Dives logged: 250+ Water: 82 F. Dive restrictions enforced: No decompression. Personal service of the highest standard. Best boats on the island (2-38’s). Never more than 10 divers on a boat. Professional multi lingual crew. One crew in water, one in boat on all dives. Never rushed, never timed dives. We had 3 boat dives a day (no shore diving) with the first being a deep (100+) dive. Nitrox is encouraged. Dove with my 12 and 13 year old sons. Very accommodating of teenage divers. Very organized. John/Lynn-owners set the highest standard for their operation! Outstanding restaurants: “Tropics” — day, “Brigadoon’s” — night. There are no resorts, casinos, dance clubs, cruise ships or American franchises. Basically, the one main road connects the villages on this small island. The diving is exclusively in Saba Marine Park. No anchors allowed. These reefs were intact when the park was established so they have never been beat up.

There is not a lot of diving pressure. Nondivers will find plenty to do. The hiking is spectacular and can be extremely challenging. Hiking guides are available (James Johnson recommended). The peak of the island is approximately 2900 ft and there sits a rain forest. This hike is steps and easily self guided although still challenging. Saba does not have a beach so no resort developer has sanitized Saba. If you value peacefulness, friendly locals, safety, outstanding diving, great operators (seasaba.com) and an “old Caribbean” experience, Saba is certainly the place to go.

**SeaSaba, Juliana’s, September 2003, Thomas Daly (oilertom@aol.com), Oviedo, FL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 30+ Meters. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. SeaSaba owners John Magor and Lynn Costenaro made our trip stress free and most enjoyable from the planning stages, to the actual trip, and rechecking our Winair reservations for our departure. Their service and cheerful attitude are extraordinary. When they say “concierge level service” they are accurate in describing themselves. The diving was as usual, action packed. I had several opportunities to photograph smaller critters I am still trying to identify, as well as face to face (about 10 feet away) encounters with gray reef sharks at Third Encounter (pinnacle dive). Turtles were everywhere, all hawksbills I think. Caught a glimpse of the elusive manta. The marine life was healthy and plentiful. Schools of fish were everywhere, including the Atlantic spadefish. Our trip was cut

short due to a hurricane headed toward the islands; Lynn kept us informed at all times as to the status of the weather and the contingency plans. All went smoothly. The pinnacles are dives not to be missed. Juliana’s has new owners, yes Franklin and Juliana are retired from the hotel now, but you still see them around town. Franklin even makes the occasional appearance at the hotel. The new owners are a young Dutch couple Wim and Yohanna. They are willing to do what it takes to make you comfortable. They have added hammocks to the guest rooms that have balconies. The cottages have air conditioning in the bedrooms. The Hotel rooms do not. Willard’s restaurant was fantastic. Reserve a table for sunset on the deck, go inexpensive with appetizers and wine and use the hot tub as night falls or enjoy the world class cuisine. They have expensive wine selection from \$20 to over \$800 dollars a bottle. The Brigadoon restaurant is always a favorite of our group. Chef/owner Michael Chaama does all the food preparation and his wife Trish minds the restaurant operation well. Do not miss Michael’s slide show of Saba Underwater and topside photos. Lollipops restaurant had a great Rack of Lamb — reviews were mixed about the pizza. Swinging Doors Saloon is a great place on BBQ night. Slow pace, friendly people, everyone knows everyone (and their business) and charm. Saba remains the Mayberry of the Caribbean. SeaSaba provides enough room to work with your cameras for the number of people they allow on the boat. I have never seen a shortage of workspace. They provide a salt water

“camera only” rinse bucket to keep salt from crystallizing while on the boat. A Sea and Sea mx10 with flash is \$25/day at the shop — also available are accessory lenses.

### ST. EUSTATIUS

A historically significant island, St. Eustatius, which lies 50 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 pristine coral and plenty of fish; thanks to the marine park, the diving here is much better than average Caribbean diving. A hike up the Quill, an extinct volcano, is worth the effort. The people are friendly, there are a few small and excellent restaurants.

#### **Dive Statia, Gin House, June 2003, Edward Leibowitz, Jersey City, NJ.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 25 to 50 feet. Water: 73 to 77 F, choppy, surge, no currents. St. Eustatius had nice diving sites. Unfortunately, when I was there, algae were blooming, which sufficiently cut visibility to 25 to 50 feet. Rudy and Rinda Hees, operators of Dive Statia, along with Caroline and Nick, were very accommodating. Saw some big fish, neat coral formations, and a lot of small critters. The night dive was exceptionally good. I enjoyed eating at Sonny’s Chinese restaurant, with-

in walking distance of the Gin House. The food was exceptionally good. ([www.divestatia.com](http://www.divestatia.com))

#### **Golden Rock Dive Center, Old Gin House, January 2003, Deb Swackhamer & David DeVault, Stillwater, MN.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. We had a wonderful experience — met our expectations and then some. Glenn and Michele Faires of Golden Rock were warm, friendly, professional, and made sure we had great dives and great accommodations at the Old Gin House. They even arranged a quick trip over to Saba for us. The reef was pristine and rich in abundance and diversity — plus they have wall diving, wreck diving, reefs. Annouck and Benji are the dive instructors, and they were terrific — made you feel like family. A personal trip, sometimes just us diving with one of the DMs, and we always saw something special. We didn’t find any blue beads, but one of the other divers on one dive found two beauties. Very laid back, but professional operation. The Old Gin House was elegant in a colonial fashion, terrific food and service, we felt pampered. Exceptionally friendly local folks. Not much to do other than dive, but if you want exceptional Caribbean diving at a small, friendly, out-of-the-way place — this is fabulous. ([www.goldenrockdive.com](http://www.goldenrockdive.com))

**Golden Rock Dive Center, February 2003, L. Douglas Graham, Chicago, IL.** Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 79 F, choppy. My trip closely followed the January 2003