

.com), **Erie, PA.** Experience: Tim: 122 and Jill: 44 dives. We owe a big “thank you” to Ben for reviewing St. Vincent in *Undercurrent* because we hadn’t considered St. Vincent as a dive destination, and what a great trip we would have missed! Bill Tewes, the owner of Dive St. Vincent, calls this place the “critter capital of the world” and he is not exaggerating. We saw the “Humann Reef Guide” come to life. Seahorses, frogfish, pipefish, gold tail and snowflake eels, jawfish, brotula, chain moray, cherub fish, squid, etc, etc. At “Critter Corner” there were so many flying gurnards (including a 4 inch long juvenile) that they were getting in the way of my pictures of other fish. Bill Tewes was everything that the Chapbook reviews said he would be; funny, entertaining, and his eagle eyes found all the undersea highlights, which he showed off with his retractable pointer. His instructional skills paid off for Jill by making her feel exceptionally comfortable in the water and improving her diving skills. The Villa Lodge Apartment was more than adequate for our needs (including son James and babysitter Deann) with a friendly staff and a nice pool. The Grandview Grill on Indian Bay Beach provided a fabulous farewell dinner and a tremendous view our last night. The local supermarket was well stocked, easily accessed by the mini van taxis. Ah, yes, the mini vans — \$1.00 EC (37 cents US) gets you anywhere in Kingstown vicinity. The vans, privately owned and tricked out to the drivers’ taste, cruise the local streets, picking up riders as they go. Packed with locals and blaring hip-hop music,

the vans fly through the narrow streets racing around the sharp turns and almost flying off the hills. As Bill Tewes says, “the mini van drivers flunked out of kamikaze pilot school.” Although the urban areas of Kingstown are somewhat crowded, the local people were genuinely nice. They seemed especially curious about our 6 year old, James, smiling at him and occasionally giving him little presents and gifts. Bill can get great deals at local hotels and apartments, contact his website, [www.divestvincent](http://www.divestvincent), for more info. For upscale resort-type lodging, check into Young Island, the private island a few hundred yards off the coast across from Dive St. Vincent’s shop.

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Trinidad, the southernmost island in the Caribbean (it’s actually south of Caracas) isn’t for divers, but its smaller sister to the north is. ... Diving from resort hotels along the southwest coast of Tobago is inferior to the the north, where you’ll find huge coral heads and good fish life, with mantas in the spring. Strong currents and choppy water make this for experienced divers. (In 1997 a woman lost contact with her dive boat and spent 27 hours in the water before washing ashore). ... Blue Waters Inn is the main dive hotel; it’s situated on a nice beach about 15 minutes from all sites. ... Tobago is covered with rainforest and has good hiking, friendly people, and serene and beautiful beaches. Birding there is

excellent, but Trinidad's Asa Wright Nature Center (a small hotel with a view that's almost guaranteed to be filled with scores of tropical species) is unparalleled, as is the lagoon trip to see 2,000 scarlet ibis fly in from Venezuela each night.

**Aquamarine Dive, Blue Waters Inn, May 2003, Glen Kitchens, Cedar Crest, NM.** Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy, surge, currents. Flight is BWIA from Miami to Port of Spain, Trinidad, then a puddle-jump to Crown Point, Tobago. We got there at 10 p.m. That's where the trouble started. Blue Waters Inn is a one-hour taxi ride (\$50/cab) from the airport. We had paid for transfers both ways. No one was there to pick us up. It took two taxis to haul divers and gear. The next day, we approached management about reimbursement for taxis — they told us in no uncertain terms that we arrived after normal operating hours and would not be reimbursed. Water rationing was in effect, and water was on only a few hours at night, except the last night we were there, when water never came on at all. Most of the staff at Blue Waters gave the distinct impression that they were doing us a favor by being there. Don't dare walk wet into the open-air bar — they will toss you out. Lodge location, just out of Speyside, is a scenic location with good beach. The rooms are spacious with plenty of storage, but the new air conditioners do not cool the rooms. Shore diving is allowed, but only until 4 p.m., due to strong current at north point of bay. Night dives only by

boat, at \$50/person. Psi in tanks not consistent — anywhere from 2,500 psi up. All diving we were offered was within 10 minutes. Boat travel from the dock, which allows for shore break between dives. All dives were drift dives with good visibility and reefs in good shape. Pretty good macro subjects, but no big fish. Boat exit and entry was often complicated by surge and waves. Boats are crowded with no storage space, especially for cameras and no dunk tank. One of my buddies had his camera passed to him in the water with one strobe dangling on the cord, the mount having been broken in the boat, after we got in the water. All dives are led by divemasters, who don't seem to appreciate meaning of drift diving, on several occasions leading divers against strong currents with intent (my opinion) to shorten dives. Once back at the Aquamarine dive shop, no water in the camera dunk tank and no water in the rooms — not a good situation for cameras. Oh, and we got to see the world's largest brain coral (you've all seen the picture in magazines) on three separate dives. My buddies and I have stayed in some pretty rough places around the world (Papua New Guinea comes to mind), but this one ranks right up there. The majority crowd at Blue Waters is birders, not divers. So don't plan to stay up late and get rowdy — birders can be a cranky bunch! At least our transfer back to the airport was paid for. Due to water shortage, dive shop dunk tank was empty. No water in rooms after diving. No dunk tank on boat. Boats have no storage for cameras.

([www.aquamarinedive.com](http://www.aquamarinedive.com),  
[www.bluewatersinn.com](http://www.bluewatersinn.com))

**Man Friday and Redman, Man O'War Cottages, January 2003, Beverly Coburn (bcoburn@gwe.net), Montrose, CO.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, choppy, surge, currents. Our family of four (including two boys, five and seven) went to Tobago after reading a recent *Undercurrent* article, which we followed up with additional research. Man Friday Divers (Charlotteville) — Anna, a sweet, watchful divemaster, did a good job in the water but inadequate briefing. Confusing policy for reboarding the boat in rough seas. Tremendous surge underwater, swells and fumes top-side left half of us sick (although with the SCOP patch, I was the only one to actually succumb to the nausea). Bjorn, “the boss,” was downright hostile toward every American diver we spoke to in Tobago (including us) and has a poor reputation with the locals due to his arrogant, nasty demeanor. His outrageous behavior (rude ranting and raving, badmouthing divers in their absence) and scheduling rigidity were unprofessional and unprecedented in the decades (combined) my husband and I have been diving. Unfortunately the other Charlotteville dive operator, Ron, was out injured and did not dive until the end of our trip. So we made the drive over to Speyside and dove with Redman, a local with the best reputation on the island. He bent over backward to accommodate our little group of four, adding a separate trip for us so the boat and diving would not be too crowded. Beautiful drift diving over pristine reef with lots of variety in terrain and perfectly timed so safety stops were spent over shallow reefs. Lots of great fish life

although not the mantas or hammer-heads recently reported by other divers. Our original cottage at Man O'War Cottages was somewhat shabby and not as clean as it could've been, but we adjusted to it and were happy there due to the comfy beds, roomy deck, beautiful grounds, and super location right on the beach. We loved the short walk to town by beach or road, the constant twitter of tropical birds, the exciting and flavorful local cuisine, the rainforest, and mostly the lovely local people. We were able to hire a young local woman to watch our kids, and they loved her. As reported by others, big sister Trinidad is a must for nature lovers, including ASA Wright Nature Center, Caroni Swamp Tour, and Aripo Cottage for delightful accommodations and great surprises. Not the place for underwater photographers with either of these operators due to open boats, rough seas, no facilities, potentially lots of current and surge. Personally, it was nice not to have to deal with beginner divers with cameras or “professionals” with their huge camera setups grabbing and stomping the reefs.

(<http://manfridaydiving.dk>,  
[www.trinbagoinfo.com/mdive/index.htm](http://www.trinbagoinfo.com/mdive/index.htm),  
[www.man-o-warbaycottages.com](http://www.man-o-warbaycottages.com))

**Man Friday, Man-O-War Bay Cottages, August 2003, Jim Roberts, Tavernier, FL.** Vis: 60-150 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Experience: 1,900 dives. Beach and view from Man-O-War Bay Cottages was a 10+. No a/c in our units. Locals were friendly and food was inexpensive — \$5 for breakfast/lunch, \$10-\$12 for dinner. Flying

fish and goat along with chicken and fish. Offerings of iguana and possum were declined. Piroques were part powered with twin 75 hp, but gear assembly was somewhat difficult. All dives were drift, although currents were not that strong except one dive was in the 1-2 knot range.

**Manta Lodge, March 2003, Ronald Presutti (smiles3@aol.com), St. Clairsville, OH.** Vis: 30 to 50 feet.

Water: 79 to 81 F. Dives logged: 170.

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” so sums up the trip to Manta Lodge in Speyside, Tobago.

First the good part: The people.

Possibly the friendliest, happiest, and best natured people on any island in the Caribbean. The local residents have a quick, disarming smile that is often followed by “how’s the diving” or “how you doing”? Often that led into pleasant conversations about Tobago, Carnival, diving, fishing, etc. Meet “The Fruit King,” he’s a hoot. Tobago is a beautiful, unspoiled gem of an island stuck between the Caribbean and Atlantic Oceans. The sleepy fishing village of Charlotteville, a short but difficult walk from Speyside, is the quintessential Caribbean village. It is located on a crescent-shaped, white sandy bay, with turquoise blue water, hand painted fishing boats with their bamboo outriggers attached, and untouched by the tourist industry. The food at Manta Lodge was wholesome, plentiful, and delicious. Fish was the main staple, even for breakfast a meal of the local favorite, salt fish and coconut bake, was wonderful. Lunches were served at the Manta Lodge, but

with local restaurants a short walk away, especially Jemma’s Tree House, The Bird Watchers Restaurant, and The Blue Water Inn, we always ate out. The staff at the Manta Lodge were charming. In 24 hours they knew our name, room number, and type of food we liked. The cost of the trip was extremely reasonable. One member of our group flew in from Washington, D.C., four hours before the rest of us. Manta Lodge forgot about him and failed to pick him up. He called the lodge, and two hours later a driver arrived to pick him up. One person in the party paid for a single, yet Manta attempted to place him in a double that had three beds with two other people. Although the discrepancy was quickly resolved, if the lodge had been full, this would have been a problem. The next day, Ash Wednesday, our first dive day, the divemaster didn’t show up. The word from the locals was that he was too drunk from Carnival last night (Fat Tuesday) to get out of bed. A few hours later our replacement divemaster showed up. During the entire eight days, their main dive boat was “down with repairs,” so the smaller, secondary dive boat was utilized. Unfortunately this boat had no cover or shade to hide from the relentless sun. The first instruction out of our replacement divemaster’s mouth was how he expects to be referred to. Mr. Motley was his name, and he expected to be called by that name. Mr. Motley and the dive shop failed to ask for our diving cards and experience. Greg, in our group, was on his first open water dive since certification. The first dive was Bookends, and it had a current! Mr.

Motley had a camera and was furiously snapping photos of everything under water; a divemaster with a camera who turned into a bad diver with a camera, another first! He paid no attention to our group of divers. Due to the strong currents I frequently counted the group, and when Greg slipped down to 130 feet, below the rest of the group, I had to beat on my tank and get his attention. The boat's motor was not working correctly. So we headed back to the dock. There we had our surface interval. I chose to forgo the second dive and walk back to Manta Lodge. The second day of diving was canceled at the Manta Lodge due to "strong currents and a broken motor." All other dive shops in Speyside dove that day, so the strong current excuse was questionable, if not deceptive. The dive operation for the rest of our stay rented a small fishing boat to be used as our dive boat. Although functional, it was crowded, had no tank holders, ladder, shade, or water. If you want water, you have to purchase it at the bar prior to diving, it's not provided. You set up, tear down, rinse, and hang all of your dive gear every day. Nothing was kept on the boat. We went fishing one day in Charlotteville and managed to catch a large wahoo and tuna. After filleting them, we brought them to Manta Lodge, gave them to the owner, and asked them to be cooked and served for dinner or even lunch. Not a good idea, we never saw them again. ([www.mantalodge.com](http://www.mantalodge.com))

## TURKS AND CAICOS

These islands, situated south of

the Bahamas and north of the Virgins, feature awesome walls and clear water. ... Provo, the glitzy island, has spectacular beaches, but it's at least an hour's boat ride to the better diving of South or West Caicos. Grand Turk, on the other hand, is a funky, laid-back island that has a wall right offshore. Salt Cay has a guest house and pretty diving; West and North Caicos have no dive facilities. ... Bring a long-sleeved shirt during the winter; it can get cool in the evenings. ... The flight to Provo from Miami is a little over an hour.

## Grand Turk

**Blue Water Divers, 2002, Richard Connell, Colyton, Devon, UK.** Dives accrued: 300+, stopped counting. Grand Turk is as much a state of mind as it is a dive destination. You simply have to like decent owners, fellow divers, and operators. The best are on a stretch of beach 200 yards long, and there is a civilised "island time" atmosphere. Jenny Smith has now taken over the Osprey, and it will rise to her high standards. Blue Water Divers continues its informal, friendly, and sane approach. Like the rest of the Caribbean, Grand Turk suffers from a low volume of large fish, but whales in season are common and dolphins like the place. For me, Grand Turk has been a near annual venue since 1989. ([www.grandturkscuba.com](http://www.grandturkscuba.com))

**Blue Water Divers, Osprey Beach Hotel, 2002, Faye Stiles, Somerville,**