

ANGUILLA

Anguilla (almost rhymes with vanilla) is a small, pricey Leeward island a few minutes ferry ride from St. Maarten. Its main appeal comes from beautiful beaches and exclusive ambiance. Good, typical Caribbean reefs are close in, but expect no drama. Fish population is low, due to overfishing. It's not an island to visit just for diving, but if you end up there for other reasons, by all means get in the water. It's in the hurricane belt. . . .

ANTIGUA

On my way to Dominica I stopped and dived Antigua. What I remember most about the island was beautiful beaches and scenery, high-dollar hotels, and a five-buck hot dog. The diving was forgettable. If you find yourself here, avoid boats that take divers from the cruise ships, as they do only the close-in, shallow reefs.

Dive Antigua/Halcyon Bay, November 1996, Jeff & Sherry Hotham, Phoenix, AZ. “ Divemaster was the captain leaving no one to tend the boat while we were in the water. Anchor thrown on the coral. Everyone was to backroll in at once and go straight down. My buddy and I waited and watched the banging collisions of inexperienced divers and then caught up. Divemaster touched everything! Not a sea fan escaped a pinch across its whole length. Never turned around to see if everyone was following. Everyone but us surfaced after 35 minutes without a safety stop; 300 yards surface swim back to the boat against choppy seas. As people were waiting to climb the ladder the divemaster stood tanks on the edge of the boat siding; missed a gash in my head by half inch as the sea pitched the tanks overboard. . . . Second dive the same: On the ride back rum is provided. Final insult: quoted prices included tanks but not the air in them; there is an additional charge for that. . . . Timeshare units at Halcyon Cove Resort are regular hotel rooms modified to hold a mini kitchen, but they forgot the sink for dish washing so the bathtub became the back breaking sink. The power failed every time we attempted to cook as the circuit breakers tripped.”

ARUBA

Just off Venezuela's Caribbean coast, Aruba is not a prime scuba diving destination, but bring your gear, especially if you have time for a jump to Curaçao or Bonaire for much better diving. . . . Miles of white sand, glitzy casinos, and beaches cater to windsurfers. . . . For the best deals on lodging and air, ask your travel agent to look into gamblers' packages. . . . Several good boat dives, such as the wreck of the *Antilla*, a German freighter scuttled at the start of World War II. The South Wall, past San Nicholas near the southern tip of Aruba, is also good. . . . Expect water temperatures in the low 80s most of the time. . . . South of the hurricane belt. . . .

Mermaid Divers/Pelican Watersports/Red Sail Sports, December 1996, Jeff & Sherry Hotham, Phoenix, AZ.

“ Diving average; only dive interesting was the Antilla, one of the best wrecks in the Caribbean. Mermaid Sport Divers a one-man operation of average quality, with scheduling problems. . . . Pelican Watersports average, with low quality boats and divemasters. Computer divers limited to tables diving. Red Sail Sports a disappointment. Lousy boat, divemasters had bad attitude. vis: 30-60ft. water: 80 degrees.”

Pelican Water Sports/Holiday Inn/Hyatt Hotel, September 1997, Kelly Hayes-Raitt, Santa Monica, CA.

“ Schooling fish, many morays (some swimming), good wrecks. Lots of seaweed. One divemaster found two seahorses. A few divemasters covered a lot of ground. My first divemaster led 10 divers! My buddy and I hung back rather than dive in a sandstorm. I was criticized for swimming too slowly and holding up the dive, though several asked the divemaster to slow down. The boat operator copped an attitude, and generally this didn't seem to be a happy place. Although divemasters are instructors and encourage diving conservatively, the dive salesperson (located in hotel) was so eager to sell dives, he encouraged me to sign up for a 7:30 pm night dive the eve before my 7:30 am flight.”

Red Sail Sports, December 1996, Ron Greene, Pinole, CA. “ Water: 80 to 82 Degrees, Vis: 40 to 50 feet. Goes to 3 or 4 dives sites only. The airplanes are for beginners — no fish, no coral, just 2 planes. The wreck is fun to dive on

snorkel—fewer small fish, though. The other dives sports Red Sail goes to are terrible. The personnel were nice, but they ran a package and didn't seem interested on having good or interesting dives.”

Red Sail Sports/Aruba Beach Club, September 1996, D.A. Little & R.J. Padgett, San Francisco, CA. “ Not a location for a dive trip, but if you are going there anyway, bring your gear! Island is divided into the “ low-rise hotel district” and “ the high-rise hotel district.” Aruba Beach Club is in the low-rise district and is the oldest timeshare on the island. It is a dump. A converted hotel with only limited cooking facilities in the rooms. The high-rise district looks like Miami Beach with casinos. . . . The island is known for its beaches, not its diving, but there are some interesting ship and airplane wrecks. Red Sail picked us up each morning in a beautiful, plush, air conditioned bus. Otherwise the land portion of this dive operation is thoroughly disorganized. Divemasters onboard the boats more than compensated for the incompetence of desk personnel. Boats had no more than five divers (including the three in our party). Divemasters did everything they could to find interesting sites. Better dive sites at Southern tip of island.”

Red Sail/Unique Sports, August 1997, Rance Wadley, Miramar, FL. “ Water 76 - 80 F brrr! wetsuit: 2 mm. Vis 15-70 ft. Divemasters overloaded with resort course divers and heavy dive schedules, so ignore single experienced divers. Good briefings when given; no instruction given on how to get back on boat in heavy chop; a Dutch couple plowed right over me while I was taking fins off on the tow line; weights on ascent line banging on coral. . . . Unique Sports of Aruba: quicker boats, more personal service, run by an American (Emmett), slightly cheaper package. . . . Beautiful shore diving at Pos Chiquito & Mangel Halto and a few other places — local directions needed. Best wreck in the Caribbean: 400ft W.W.II German Antilla: day & night! amazing profile, encrustations, fish life. Saw dizzying schools of boga, silversides, mysidium shrimp; Comb Grouper, Peacock Flounder, chain moray, blackspotted snake eel, huge club-tipped anemone, tunicates! 2 Frogfish. . . . Air Aruba: lost my luggage for 3 days, then destroyed it, equipment malfunctions at airport, purposefully rude employee, 2 hr return flight delay so AA could charter a flight & crew.”