

St. Kitts-Statia-Saba-St. Maarten

Caribbean Explorer II Liveaboard

Day One:

We have checked the flight status all day as there is a big storm hitting Atlanta with snow. All day the computer reads "on time", until ½ hour before we are leaving it states "delayed, 1 ½ hr". No worries, we have plenty of time in Atlanta so we are good. Nine of us load into two vehicles and head for SeaTac Airport. We are about 10 minutes down the road and I receive a text from Joanne that she has landed safely and will meet up with us when we get there. Five minutes later the next text reads, "flight cancelled". My blood pressure spikes, this is not good, what the hell do we do now? I am immediately on the phone to the wholesaler, he is not happy to hear this news as well and for the next hour and a half drive we are scrambling. Arriving at SeaTac we don't even bother taking our luggage out, as we pretty much know what the outcome will be, but we have to give it our best shot. I immediately try and locate a supervisor to make some headway quickly as most of my group have already tried other agents with no luck. Did I mention that the line was very, very long! After waiting behind two other people (hour plus wait) I finally get my opportunity and for the next 3 hours we try and get 15 people rescheduled. With snowstorms shutting down the entire East Coast, there is not a flight to be seen. One seat here and there, but no way 15 people are going anywhere. Finally, the Delta agent looks at me and says, "There is nothing more I can do". I love the quote from my wholesaler Will who says "we put people on the moon and we can't get 15 people across the USA?" Completely defeated, we pack back up with a few extra bodies and most of us head back to Anacortes to camp out at "Hotel Scarzafava". It is now 2:00 am and we try and find a bed, couch, or floor for everyone who is now homeless. We will try again in the morning and if we can't get anything tomorrow, we are out of luck.

Day 2:

I might have gotten 4 hours of sleep if I'm lucky. I get on the phone and start making calls. I check in with the boat and reach Captain Ian who I informed that



we are stuck, no flights and not sure what the day will bring. I ask Captain Ian if the beer is cold? He says absolutely as I tell him I will really need one by the time we arrive, if we ever do. The house is full of sleeping travelers with no tropical destination at this time as I hide in the bathroom with laptop and two phones and try to make a miracle happen. There is not a single phone number to Delta Airlines that works and the group desk does not work weekends. Will decides the only hope we have is if he heads to LAX where he lives and speaks to someone face to face. I wish him luck as I pretty much have conceded that this trip will probably not happen. Several hours later he calls and says Delta can't get us anywhere until Tuesday, this of course would give us 2 ½ days of diving and what would really be the point? Will

decides he is going to give it one more try and heads to American Airlines to see if we can buy tickets. Did I say that there are 500 people going nowhere in every airport? The line is about 3 hours long, he tackles an agent and for the next 3 hours works magic and puts 15 people back on flights so we will arrive on Monday night. He calls with the good news as a cheer goes up in the house. I call everyone and tell them we are back on for a Sunday night flight. We are all amazed as we start to put everything back in motion for our departure tomorrow afternoon. We make a big dinner and celebrate with a few glasses of wine and dream of that tropical vacation that might still be within our grasp. I'm exhausted...good night.

Day 3:



Departure day-take two. Once again we arrive at SeaTac and start checking in and everything is going great with only a slight glitch with one of the reservations. Have no fear, we work it out and make it through security and quickly head to Anthony's for drinks. Yahoo, this is the farthest we made it so far. Our flight has left the ground and we are actually in the sky flying to San Francisco. Relief. We land in San Francisco, make our way to the hotel, check in no problems, we are off to bed.

Day 4:

Morning comes early as we catch the 4:40 am shuttle back to the airport. We already have boarding passes so we head right for security. The line is already long and going very slow, this is why we always start out a little early. We are all loaded on the plane, I make the call to Diana at the Explorer office and tell her all is a go, we are on the plane seated and ready for take off. I spoke too soon as the captain comes on to say there is a mechanical delay. It is now one hour later and we are still sitting here. They have now made an announcement that there is a medical emergency and clear the aisles for the paramedics. Are you kidding me?? Thank goodness we had not left otherwise I think we would be turning around trying to find a place to land. At what point do you throw in the towel? One hour and 45 minutes later we have rolled back from the gate and are headed to Miami. We have a 3-hour layover so we are still good, at least for this leg. I think I'll catch up on some sleep now.

Arrived in Miami, had about an hour to grab some food and load back on to the 2-½ hr flight to St. Maarten. Flight went great, met our driver Jean, loaded two vans full of luggage and people and off to the harbor to meet the boat.

Crew is waiting for us, take us aboard for a briefing and finally the cold beer I have been waiting 3 days for. We quickly unpack dive gear and get set up and then get the tour of our cabins. We will be departing St. Maarten at 11:30 pm for the 3-hour crossing to Saba. It will be a little choppy so everyone gets prepared. Shortly thereafter the seasickness sets in for several people as everyone just tries to survive until we can find the calm side of Saba, which just happened to be around 2:30 am. Finally, I can go to sleep, as 7:00 am will come early for the first dive.

Day 5:



It is a beautiful sunny day with a slight swell as we dive right in on the first of five for the day. The visibility is down from the swell, but at this point it just feels good getting wet. The day goes off without a hitch as we enjoy the usual live aboard schedule of dive, eat, dive, eat, dive, eat etc. The 4th dive of the day was the most exciting as we dove Diamond Rock and as we rounded one corner there was a huge school of fish. These were

being herded by Horse eye Jacks and then I see the 3 Black tip reef sharks have joined the chase. Just as I spot a huge Nurse Shark sitting in the sand, the visibility goes to less than 5 feet. Next thing I know we are surrounded by the bait ball. All I could think about was those 3 sharks mistaking us for a meal! We keep swimming trying to escape the cloud and the next thing I know there are two Black tips coming out of the gloom straight for us. My heart is pumping; this is incredible and scary all at the same time. It wouldn't have been so bad but the bait ball was all around us, making for some very exciting moments. Finally, we reach the end of the dust cloud and find the rest of the group. We start to head back for the boat and we can't see a thing as this dust cloud is now between the boat and us. Finally, everyone makes it back safely and we did not have one



dingy pickup today. Great job everyone! Today is Linda's birthday, so we celebrate at dinner with a wonderful chocolate dessert with candles. Happy Birthday Linda! Part of the group decides to do a night dive, the rest of us are just too exhausted and opt for a drink instead. Day one was great, can't wait for tomorrow after a full night sleep. I forgot to mention

that we are getting up at 5:30 to do an early morning dive. I better go to bed now.

Day 6:

The knock on the door seemed surreal at 5:30 am! Our time is short so we better get up and get diving! The diving today was great, the wind started to die down and we were able to move to the windward side of Saba to dive "Dave's Wall"



which was spectacular. It was the best visibility we had seen so far and a beautiful reef as well. At the end of the dive I see Bob swimming fast the opposite direction of the boat so I figured whatever it was it must be good. So, I took off swimming as fast as I could to try and catch him and when I did, I saw the biggest Green Moray Eel that I had ever seen! I didn't even know they got that big, it was huge and out swimming around on

the reef. It had to be almost 7-8 feet long! Almost everyone was able to experience this rare treat. It was starting to get rough so we decided to head back to the leeward side and we actually ended circumnavigating Saba. Captain Ian said it has been at least 3 years since he has been able to do that. Our luck must be changing! Tonight the seas are calm and the stars are out in full with the moon being a sliver in the sky. The night divers are out while the rest of us enjoy

a glass of wine and a raging game of Skipbo (of course Dale is running the table). We have the opportunity for the dawn dive again tomorrow as well as a land tour of Saba. It was a great day today and we hope for a repeat tomorrow.

Day 7:

Another 5:30 am dive, I really don't feel like getting up this morning but, were here to dive not to sleep. It is so odd to jump in when it's dark and then it turns



light and it's daytime. Our big dive of today is the "Eye of the Needle" which is a pinnacle that rises up from 200 ft and the top is around 100 ft, so it will be a quick one. The visibility is good, but from the mooring it is a bit of a swim out to the pinnacle, thank goodness the guides know where it's located. It is spectacular and filled with life all up and down the entire spire. Our bottom time is short due to the depth and we have to head back to a shallower part of the reef. This was a great start to our day! The wind is calm again today so we head back to Dave's Drop-off to see if we can locate that huge Green Moray again. It is a beautiful dive, no Moray, but plenty to see. There's a bit of a swell coming in so we move over to Tent Reef, with lots of color and good visibility. This afternoon 9 of us are headed into

Saba to take an Island tour. We meet our driver Garvis and he drives us all over the island, which the roads are amazing! They are very steep, narrow and windy. We stop at some overlooks to take pictures; the houses are all painted white with various accent colors, which make the island have a very quaint feeling to it. The whole island is



amazingly clean and well kept. The runway here is the shortest International runway in the world. We stop at a couple of shops along the way, Saba is known for its lace, and Saba Spice, which is a licorice flavored liquor. Back to the boat for dinner and of course, a night dive. The Tarpon are cruising around the back of the boat looking for the easy meal, as the fish are attracted to our lights shining down from the boat. The night dive was good with Octopus, Giant Lobster



and much more. A couple of milestones this week, I hit 1600 dives on the Eye of the Needle this morning and Linda hit 450. Tomorrow is another pre-dawn dive,

which Bob and I decided not to go on so we can sleep until 7:00 am. Eyelids won't stay open much longer so it must be time to call it a night. Chalk up another great day.

Day 8:

Today we opted to sleep in and not to get up at the butt crack of dawn for the early morning dive, but the majority of the group did. We did have another two great dives on two dive sites that we had not done yet. It was about noon when we departed from Saba for the 3-hour crossing over to St. Maarten. The crossing was great with just a small swell, compared to when we had left. Upon arrival we



caught a taxi over to Maho Beach, which is a beach that sits at the end of the runway where the planes come so close you think you can touch them. Our taxi driver Jean came back at 6:00 to pick us up and take us back to the marina so we can meet up with everyone for dinner. After dinner everyone is scrambling to get all their stuff packed up as we need to be off the boat by 9:00 am. Time to call it a night and finish everything up in the morning.

Day 10:

The crew has a continental breakfast out for us and of course the most important...coffee! We finish final packing and 9 of us opted to do the Americas Cup 12 meter yacht racing. Their store is right at the same dock so it is just a short distance for us to check in. Of course it is a hurry up and wait situation as you have to wait for all the people to get off the cruise ship. Finally, we have everyone together and we pick teams as there are 3 boats racing against each other. We have Stars & Stripes, Tru North & Canada 2. Our group was put on Canada 2 and from the looks of it we have a young strong team, so we are confident that our boat will do well. We meet our crew of Captain Morgan (seriously, you can't make this up), Stephanie, & David and they assign us each a job. Grinders are going to do the most work, as you have primary and main. Scott takes a main grinder job with Linda, but Linda immediately couldn't keep up with Scott so we moved her to time keeper and Hal moved into take her



place. Lori, Peggy, Bob and myself were put into primary grinder position with Dave and another guy as backup in case a few people got too tired. Dale is in the stern as a rear winch grinder. During the race we sustained a few injuries as Dave's hand started bleeding and Hal got smacked hard with the main grinder

handle. But our team prevailed and had the power but just couldn't beat the other boats. It was great fun, but we're all too competitive so we didn't take losing lightly. Time is running short, so we make it back to the dock and grab our team t-shirt and head for the boat to grab luggage. Jean is there shortly to load up all bags and haul us off to the airport. We are at the airport in good time, over 2 hours before our flight, the Delta counter line is empty, how great is this our group is first to check in. That's when it all started going downhill, there are 15 of us and apparently one gal is going to check in our entire group. It is now utter confusion and it is taking forever. We look up to see the security line. It looks to be about 2 hours long, or longer, this is really not good. It took an hour to check our group in and now we have to navigate the security line. I'm not sure but apparently there was a bomb scare on a KLM flight that landed yesterday and we think they heightened security because of it. Let me tell you, we had to throw elbows to make any headway in this line. Finally, Dave, Kathy, Bob and I bring up the rear and race to the gate for final boarding. I am amazed that we made it. Now here we are on the plane but starving to death, but hey, we have a seat on an airplane! We have a 4-hour flight to Atlanta, which should be just enough time to bring my blood pressure back down to a normal level.

We are in the very last row and start a conversation with the flight attendant in the back. We tell her of our adventure and that we are starving when a funny look comes over her face to tell us there is not enough food for everyone on the plane. Are you kidding me? The look on our face must have been pretty desperate as she asks us what we want and hides it in the back for us. Right now, she is the best flight attendant in the world! The rest of our flight home was uneventful and even going thru customs and immigration in Atlanta was smooth. We arrive shortly before midnight, everyone's luggage made it back as we quickly give hugs and say goodbye to everyone. We arrive in Anacortes shortly after 2:00 am and head for home and finally fall into bed.

Summary:

First I have to thank everyone who helped us pull this trip off. If it wasn't for Will at World of Diving we would have never made it out of Seattle. Trust me, no other wholesaler would have gone to bat for us the way he did. Second, I have to thank the staff at Explorer Adventures if they had not been willing to move the boat to St. Maarten we would have never been able to make the trip at all. Lastly, the crew on the boat, they got up with us at 5:30 am every morning to "squeeze" in more dives. The Caribbean Explorer II is not your luxury live aboard that you are used to if you have been diving in the Pacific. The cabins were some of the smallest we have ever encountered, but we were not there to hang out in our cabin. We were here to dive and that they did very well. They were willing to give us 6 dives a day and all with a smile. Never a complaint. This crew was good and seemed to gel together nicely and was willing to give us the best trip possible for the limited time we had. The dive deck was spacious with plenty of room to move around with a hot shower on the back after the dive. Two dedicated camera rinse buckets and a very spacious camera table. Unfortunately, I cannot give a report on how the diving was in St. Kitts or Statia since we never made it there, but the diving around Saba is good. The "Eye of the Needle" was

great as well as several of our dives around "Diamond Rock" and the 8 ft Green Moray at "Dave's Wall" had to be the highlights for us. If you are looking for a quick week trip to the Caribbean and you enjoy live aboard diving, I would definitely give this boat a try. Our group had a great time, we only wished it was longer, but were thankful for the time we had. The America's Cup 12 meter yacht race is fun, even though we came in last place! We're still trying to figure that one out, we think it was rigged or either that or our Captain Morgan was still recovering from the night before. The trip to Maho Beach to watch the planes land was great, I really don't think there is any other place like that where you can be so close to the planes, drink a beer and sit by the water and watch the sunset. This is what life is all about!

Yes, this was one of the most difficult trips we had to deal with due to the airlines and Mother Nature. But, in the end it was worth it as always!

Thanks everyone for sticking with us and having a great attitude when the deck was really stacked against us. We look forward to traveling with you all again on our next adventure.



Bob & Kelley

SABA-ST. MAARTEN

February 2010



ANACORTES ADVENTURE DIVE TEAM

Marle, Jim, Lori, Scott, Mary, Dale, Peggy, Linda, Dave
Bob, Kathy, Joanne
Kelley, Hal, Jesse