

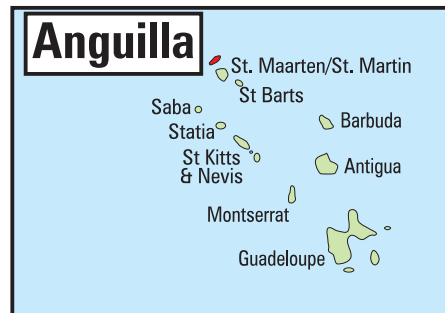
Anguilla

If peace, quiet and the perfect beach are your idea of heaven you need look no further than Anguilla. It has over 30 spectacular white sand beaches separated by delightful limestone cliffs that have been etched by the sea into intricate patterns. It is not hard to find a beach to yourself. Anguilla is just 16 miles long by 3 miles wide. As the highest point is barely 200 feet, it is easily accessible by foot or bicycle, or if you need to use a taxi or car, the rides are reasonably short.

Tourism is Anguilla’s major industry and, despite its size, Anguilla has an outstanding range of hotels—over 26 resorts and over a dozen simpler inns or guest-houses. You can also rent a villa. Top resorts, such as La Juluca and Malliouhana equal any in the world and will keep the most sophisticated traveller happy. The island has a wonderful sense of peace and the people are outstandingly friendly and honest.

In 1967, Britain lumped Anguilla with St. Kitts and Nevis and made them an autonomous state. This conveniently filed them away for the British Colonial Office, but ignored both social and geographical realities. Anguillans were dead set against this arrangement and wanted to remain with England. They rebelled against the rule of St. Kitts’ premiere Bradshaw who told them he “would show them who was boss” and threatened to “turn Anguilla into a desert.” An armed rebellion followed, which was probably the most peaceful ever; there were only minor casualties and no fatalities. A large armed crowd then gave the police an ultimatum to leave the island and they blocked the runway to stop reinforcements arriving.

The Anguillans, fearing an armed invasion from St. Kitts, decided to take the offensive and invade St. Kitts themselves. A small boatload of men went down, aided by two American mercenaries. The invasion was a complete fiasco. A big hole got blown in the ground near to the defense force headquarters and there was a shoot out at a



Coral Cays protrude through Anguilla's clear water.



Anguilla Tourist Office

police station. There were no casualties. However, after that, no one in St. Kitts really wanted to mess with the Anguillans.

In 1969 Britain, under the mistaken impression that Anguilla had been taken over by the Mafia, tried its hand at invading. Paratroopers, inadvertently dropped into the sea, waded ashore onto the beaches to be met by goats and curious small boys. After the embarrassment died down, Anguillans got what they wanted and were again administered by the British.

Shoal Bay

While all Anguilla's beaches are gorgeous, the beaches in the area of Shoal Bay are perhaps some of the most spectacular on the island. Anguilla is blessed with a number of islands not too far from shore like Sandy Island and Scilly Cay where you can play at being Robinson Crusoe in luxury, as they have restaurants.

Anguilla's coral limestone beaches are evidence of the coral reefs that surround the island.



Anguilla Tourist Office

Little Bay

For those addicted to undeveloped natural beauty, Little Bay is outstanding, even by Caribbean standards. Along the shore 70-foot cliffs rise from turquoise water. They are multi-coloured in reds, pinks, greys and whites, textured by holes, caves and grottos that are home to tropicbirds, pelicans and kingfishers.

The pelicans spend much of the day dive-bombing schools of fish off the beach. The tropicbirds circle overhead and chatter; agile goats wander to the edge of the precipice. The only access to the tiny beach at the head of this bay is by footpath and a cliff climb aided by a rope that is left in place.

Road Bay

Road Bay is Anguilla's main yacht anchorage and it not only houses Anguilla's oldest dive shop, but it boasts a fine collection of restaurants and makes a great place to hang-out. By night there is often live music at one of the establishments.

Anguilla Tourist Office



Anguilla's charm is reflected in the architectural style of its buildings.

The Valley is the closest Anguilla gets to having a main town, though this spread-out collection of houses, businesses and shops is very low key. Banks, a few shops, an ice cream bar and offices associated with Anguilla's offshore banking and company registration business is about all you will find there.

Language: English
 Currency: Eastern Caribbean dollar (\$1.00 US = \$2.66 EC)
 Population: around 7,000
 Telephone code: (264)

Do not expect too much in the way of sophisticated entertainment; the total island population is only 7,000. Should the peace and quiet threaten to overwhelm you, there is a frequent ferry service to St. Martin. The last ferry returns as late as 11 p.m.

Eating out in Anguilla is excellent, whether you want simple fresh fish or a luxurious meal prepared by a top chef. Every restaurant has a view and the variety makes eating out a delight.

Hiking is relatively easy because of the flat terrain, and the low level of traffic makes for pleasant walks even along the main roads. Bird watchers will find lots of waders in any of the salt lagoons that lie a little way inshore.

Anguilla, being flat, makes for easy biking.
Exotic Plus: (264) 497 2821

Horse riding is available and Anguilla's coastline of low cliffs and lovely beaches offers some great rides.

El Rancho del Blues: (264) 497 6164.

Many of Anguilla's resorts have tennis courts, including Covecastles, The Mariners, Rendezvous Bay hotel, Casablanca Resort and the Carimar Beach Club. If your hotel does not have

The Valley

Après Dive

Hiking

Horse Riding

Tennis

tennis they may be able to make arrangements for you to play at a nearby resort.

Cap Julaca: (264) 497 6666

Water Sports

Most resorts offer beach water sports like sunfish and sailboards. In keeping with the peaceful nature of the island, jet skis are banned.

Day sails to the Prickly Pear Cay (an offshore island) are available, as are continuous ferries to the closer islands—Sandy Island and Scilly Cay. If you happen to be in Anguilla during the first week of August, you can enjoy the spectacle of colourful local Anguillan sloops racing.

Gotcha Sea Tours: (264) 497 2956

Rampoosin Sports-Fishing: (264) 497 8868

Sandy Island Deep Sea Fishing: (264) 497 6395

Scilly Cay Ferry: (264) 497 5123

Shoal Bay: (264) 497 6617

Shopping

Supermarkets are modern and well stocked for those self-catering. Two of the larger ones are Food Center in the Valley and Vista not far from Road Bay.

Many resorts have sophisticated boutiques. Other shops are to be found in the Valley where you can buy local art and handicrafts, overseas newspapers and all essentials.

Nightlife

Nightlife usually consists of visiting a bar or restaurant that happens to be having entertainment that evening. Road Bay is quite active this way and many resorts have their own entertainment programmes.

If the last note dies and you are still wide-awake, try the Pump House—a late night bar in Road Bay. The atmosphere is lively and you can still see the machinery that was used for grinding salt prior to export. It opens at 8 p.m. and keeps going into the wee hours.

Information on Accommodation

Department of Tourism (264) 497 2759

USA: (516) 452 0900

UK: (171) 937 7725

Getting There

There are direct flights from the USA via San Juan. In the high season there are as many as three flights a day. To get to Anguilla from Europe, fly via St. Maarten or Antigua. LIAT has daily flights from Antigua and from St. Maarten you can take a ferry or fly Winair.

The Diving

Left to nature, Anguilla's diving would be limited to shallow dives on offshore and fringing coral reefs. So, man decided to intervene. Some farsighted people in the 1980s, realising that Anguilla could not compete with the dizzying pinnacles of its near neighbour Saba nor the deep walls of St. Croix, determined to make it a wreck dive destination. The result is a small island with a big range of dive sites.

Anguilla has shallow water around it and it is rare for any reef dive, natural or artificial, to be below 80 feet. Most of the diving is at around 60 feet, though several sites have a maximum depth of 40 feet or less.

Most sites receive some shelter from the land, so the trade winds are not able to build up big seas. There are exceptions, however, and operators will choose the sites for the day based on weather conditions. See the detailed descriptions below for sites requiring calm conditions.

Visibility is about average for the region. Big swells will stir up the sand and reduce visibility for a couple of days. On most sites the sand is fairly heavy coral sand so it settles quickly, but where it is siltier (for example on the wreck of the *Sarah*) visibility is always below average.

Not all of the ships that were sunk have survived subsequent storms, but five are currently being dived and three more soon will be. *El Buen Consejo* (site 30) is scheduled to be a marine park and historical site under the supervision of marine archaeologists.

The *Meppel* and the *Lady Vie*, both deliberately sunk to become dive sites, should have buoys re-attached by the end of 1998 and the dive stores will then check whether they are diveable.

Wrecks

WRECKS CURRENTLY BEING DIVED

NAME	DATE SUNK	LENGTH	DEPTH	CONDITION	SITE
<i>Catheley H</i>	1993	110	60	Broken	10
<i>M.V.Commerce</i>	1984	137	80	Intact	16
<i>Ida Maria</i>	1984	140	60	Somewhat broken	6
<i>M.V.Oosterdiep</i>	1990	158	70	Intact	4
<i>Sarah</i>	1984	230	83	Intact	14
* <i>El Buen Consejo</i>	1772	N/A	40	Artifacts only	30
* <i>Lady Vie</i>	1990	118	N/K	Unknown	
* <i>Meppel</i>	1990	127	N/K	Unknown	

*Not being dived May 1998 but planned to be by end 1998.

Anguilla has a number of coral reefs close to shore as well as some that have formed offshore islands. The reefs have been built by stony corals at some stage, though they now carry a

Reefs

high proportion of soft corals and sponges. The long tendrils of gorgonians and waving sea fans make the reefs look like lush gardens, alive with tiny fish as if birds and butterflies inhabit this underwater world.

Sponges furnish much of the colour on the reef. They look nothing like the dull, dead woggles that you use in the bath. Star encrusting, rope and vase sponges are a common sight on Anguilla's reefs and, not only are they a delight to look at, they are a Pandora's Box packed with interesting marine life.

Marine Life

You would be unlucky to spend a week diving in Anguilla and not see a turtle or two. The sand that surrounds the dive sites is where you will see stingrays and garden eels, and there is a good chance of spotting conch. If you have a penchant for sharks, Scrub Island at the eastern end of Anguilla will virtually guarantee you a sighting. The wrecks attract barracuda, both schools of small barracuda and solitary grandfather-sized specimens.

Several sites are magnets for fish and the number and variety of species impressed us.

Photography

The bright white sand which forms the base of most dives on Anguilla captures the sun and reflects it back like the footlights on a stage set. It is always fairly light on the dive sites, therefore. The marine life on the reefs lends itself to close up photography, though some of the fields of sea fans make it worth taking some wide angle shots. The wrecks, of course, are perfect models for wide-angle photography. There is insufficient encrustation on some to make much use of a close-up lens, but the cup corals on the *Sarah* are the exception. You may be lucky and find the polyps open during the day.

Rules and Regulations

Anguilla has established a number of marine parks, notably round Dog Island, Prickly Pear, Little Bay, Rendezvous Bay, and Sandy Island. Anchoring is prohibited in these areas, as is the removal of any marine life.

Visitors are not allowed to spearfish anywhere in Anguilla's waters.

Independent Diving

Currently independent diving is allowed in Anguilla. If you arrive by yacht, you will find a Marine Park officer in the office where you check into customs and immigration. Note that you are not allowed to anchor in the marine park. If you take one of the dive site buoys, remember that a dive boat may want to use the site so tie up accordingly, and leave the buoy when you have finished the dive.

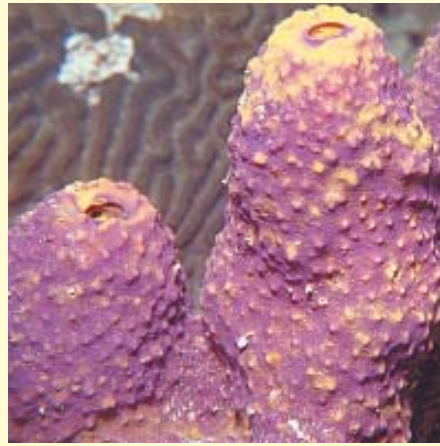
There are some beach dives and operators will sometimes offer unlimited beach diving if you buy a dive package.

Sponging off the Marine Life

You can consider sponges on two levels. On the one hand they are the most colourful and often the most prolific marine life on many dive sites. They appear in many forms—ropes, balls, encrusting, barrels, vases—and a myriad of colours, some iridescent so that they glow with an inner light. So you could just admire them for their worthy aesthetic qualities.

Then, there is the other face of sponges: home to an enormous range of marine life, food for turtles and angelfish, source of antibiotics and other advanced pharmaceuticals and a useful item for scrubbing your back in the bath.

As divers, sponges provide us with a motel for marine creatures, so we can observe several species at the same time. Bristle stars and basket stars use sponges as shelter during daylight and, even at night when they feed, they may use the sponge as a podium to spread out their arms to filter the water for food. Many species of worm also inhabit sponges; research has revealed populations of a hundred or more worms living in one sponge. Nocturnal fish use barrel sponges as shelter during the day and we have seen crabs and shrimps living in sponges.



Sponges contribute much of the colour on the reef, as well as playing host to hordes of other creatures.

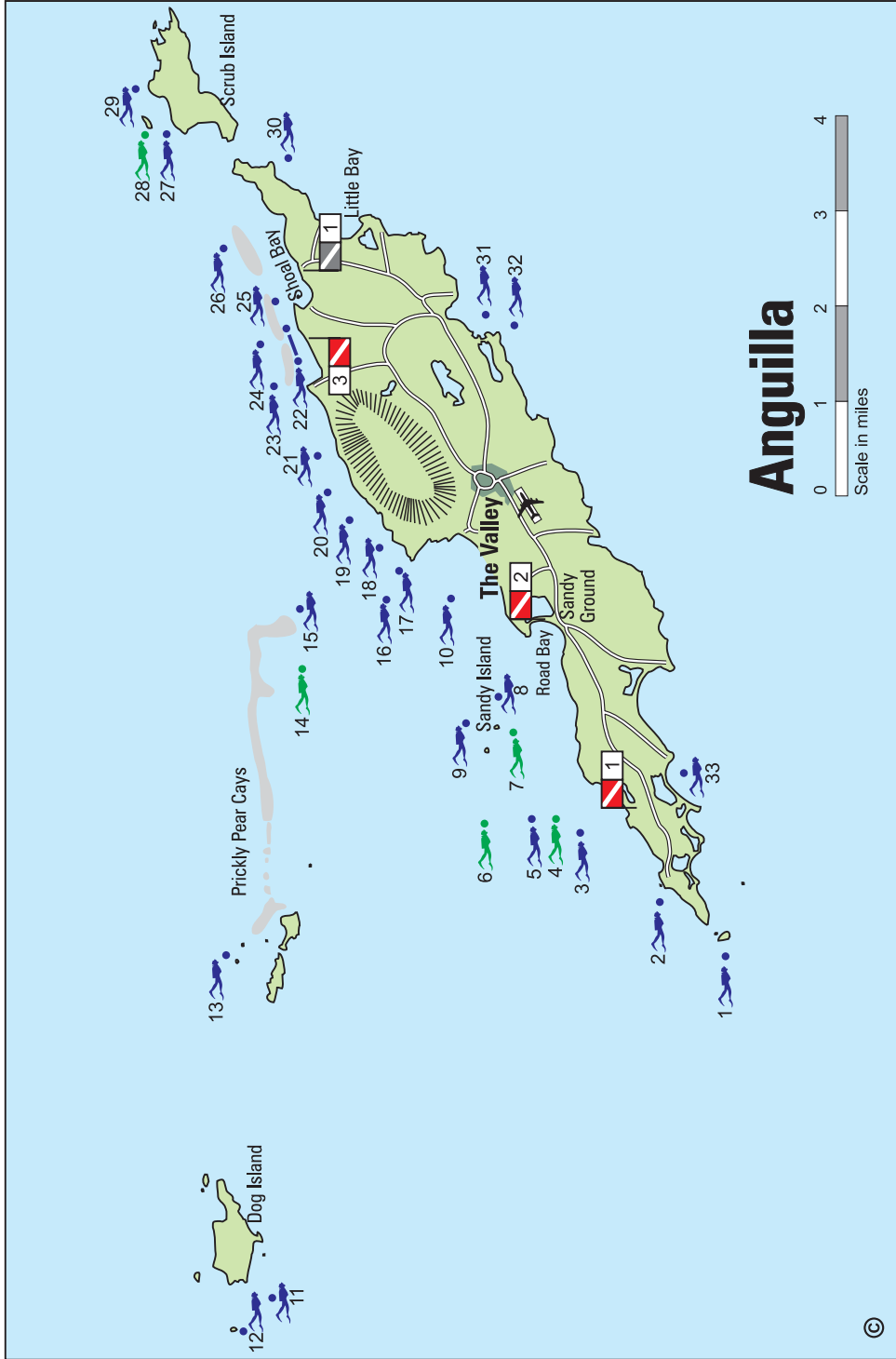
Most fish reject sponge as food, but there are two exceptions; Angelfish find them palatable and have found a way of digesting the hard spicules that give sponges their rigidity. Hawksbill turtles have a well-designed beak that enables them to take chunks out of large sponges. Anemones, zoanthids and hydroids sometimes live in sponges giving the sponge some protection from predators.

Fortunately for sponges, most people scrub their back with artificial sponges these days. The days of massive fleets of sponging boats in the Caribbean is over, though recent discoveries have once again made sponges a valuable commodity—this time for their medicinal value. The good news is that there will be no need for large scale harvesting, as when the properties of the antibiotics have been analysed synthetic equivalents can be made.

Its hard to believe when you look at a sponge that it has so much to offer, but then just looking at it has its own rewards.

The island has a good safety record but in the case of an accident, the nearest chamber to Anguilla is Saba. All of the stores carry oxygen and will probably call DAN for advice on whether to evacuate someone to the chamber.

Safety



NO.	SITE NAME	DEPTH IN FEET	
1	Anguillita	15-35	
2	Frenchman's Reef	2-45	
3	Deep South/Oosterdiep Reef	40-65	
4	<i>M.V. Oosterdiep</i>	50-70	
5	Paintcan Reef	50-75	
6	<i>M.V. Ida Maria</i>	40-60	
7	Sandy Deep (Sandy Island)	15-60	
8	Sandy Shallow (Sandy Island)	30-70	
9	No Name (Sandy Island)	20-60	
10	<i>Catheley H</i>	35-60	
11	Flat Cay	10-75	
12	Author's Deep	60-110	
13	Flirt Rock	50 max	
14	<i>Sarah</i>	30-82	
15	Prickly Pear SE	45 max	
16	<i>M.V. Commerce</i>	45-80	
17	Limestone Bay (Seal Reef)	15-60	
18	Turtle Reef (Seal Reef)	15-65	
19	Lobster Reef (Seal Reef)	15-70	
20	French Reef (Seal Reef)	15-75	
21	Crystal Reef (Seal Reef)	15-75	
22	Shoal Bay Lower and Upper	20-60	
23	No Name	20-80	
24	Lobster Ridge	15-80	
25	Seafan	15-75	
26	Six Stars	30-75	
27	Upper Flat	20-70	
28	The Steps (Little Scrub)	15-70	
29	Ram's Head	20-80	
30	<i>El Buen Consejo</i>	20-40	
31	Sandy Hill	25-40	
32	High Cliff	30 max	
33	Cove Bay	40 max	

**Anguilla
Dive Sites**



NO.	OPERATOR	LOCATION
1	Anguillian Divers	Island Harbour
2	The Dive Shop	Road Bay
3	Shoal Bay Scuba	Shoal Bay

Dive Operators



1 Angullita 15'-35'

Operators dive the west side of the island, usually as a drift dive. It is not strictly speaking a reef dive, as the underwater structures are formed from broken rocks, but as the entire island is a limestone edifice there is little to distinguish between old rock and old coral. Some unusual underwater structures make this an interesting site and its location near open water means divers often see pelagic species. While we were on Anguilla (though not of course diving this site on this particular day) divers saw eagle rays at close range and in good visibility.

2 Frenchman's Reef 2'-45'

Named after the French chef who found the site, the site is straight off the cliff and comprises pinnacles which were once part of the cliff. The base is at 20 feet and the pinnacles break the surface. The rocks are encrusted with sponges and coral and, as on most of Anguilla's sites, many soft gorgonians thrive among the hard corals.

3 Deep South/ Oosterdiep Reef 40'-65'



Deep South is a long reef system running parallel to shore. Local operators say it could support half a dozen moorings spaced out to access different parts of the reef.

One of the areas commonly dived is the section adjacent to the *M.V. Oosterdiep*. The reef slopes at around 45 degrees from 40 feet down to the sand.

Dive Profile

We drop to the bottom of the reef and swim west, with the reef on our right. The slope has a good covering of hard corals interspersed with gorgonians. As well as the usual star and brain corals, we see several cactus corals. They vary in size from not much larger than a button to the size of a dinner plate. We also

Cactus corals punctuate the reef like cryptic entrances to secret tunnels.



find solitary disk corals. They look quite similar to small cactus corals, but whereas cactus corals are colonies of coral polyps (like star and brain corals), solitary disk corals are one-polyp households.

Much of the reef is covered in fan leaf algae, providing food for the many herbivores. Damselfish eat from their own algae patch but always leave enough so that the algae survives, rather like mowing a lawn to the length of turf.

We also see well disguised flamingo tongues, eating their way along the branches of gorgonians. Unlike damselfish, these little mollusks consume everything in their path.

At half tank we return along the reef, slightly shallower, until we find the mooring buoy.

Thanks to Christophe and Olivier of Anguillian Divers.

Damselfish—Farmers of the Reef

Damselfish are the farmers of the reef and will often be seen assiduously cultivating and guarding their tidy algae patches. Threespot damselfish nibble at a patch of coral about a foot square thus allowing algae to grow on the damaged area. The damselfish then tends this patch, tidying it and using it as a source of food.

Any wound to coral leaves it prey to creatures such as parrotfish and boring sponges, so we might consider the damselfish's actions a threat to the reef. Research has also shown, however, that there are benefits to this activity. For example, the algae farms attract invertebrates to a greater degree than the rest of the reef. And, algae promotes nitrogen fixation, which is necessary to support the food chain of the reef. The jury is still out, therefore, on whether the damselfish is friend or foe.

Despite the damselfish's tireless patrolling of its algae farm, it must rest at night. But it does so assured that its territory is safe, as herbivorous fish do not feed at night. Instead, like the little damselfish, they take cover in the reef until morning.

During the day time, the damselfish will succeed in repelling most trespassers, although occasionally a raiding party will overwhelm the little fish, which will return immediately the feast is over and once again tend to its plot. It is not at all deterred by the spiky sea urchins which wander across these algae patches, if allowed, hoovering up everything in their path. The damselfish will bite at the spines and, weight permitting, lift the urchin and carry it away. A braver creature than you or I!



Damselfish, the farmers of the reef, will defend their territory regardless of the size of the interloper.

**4 M.V.
Oosterdiep
50'-70'**

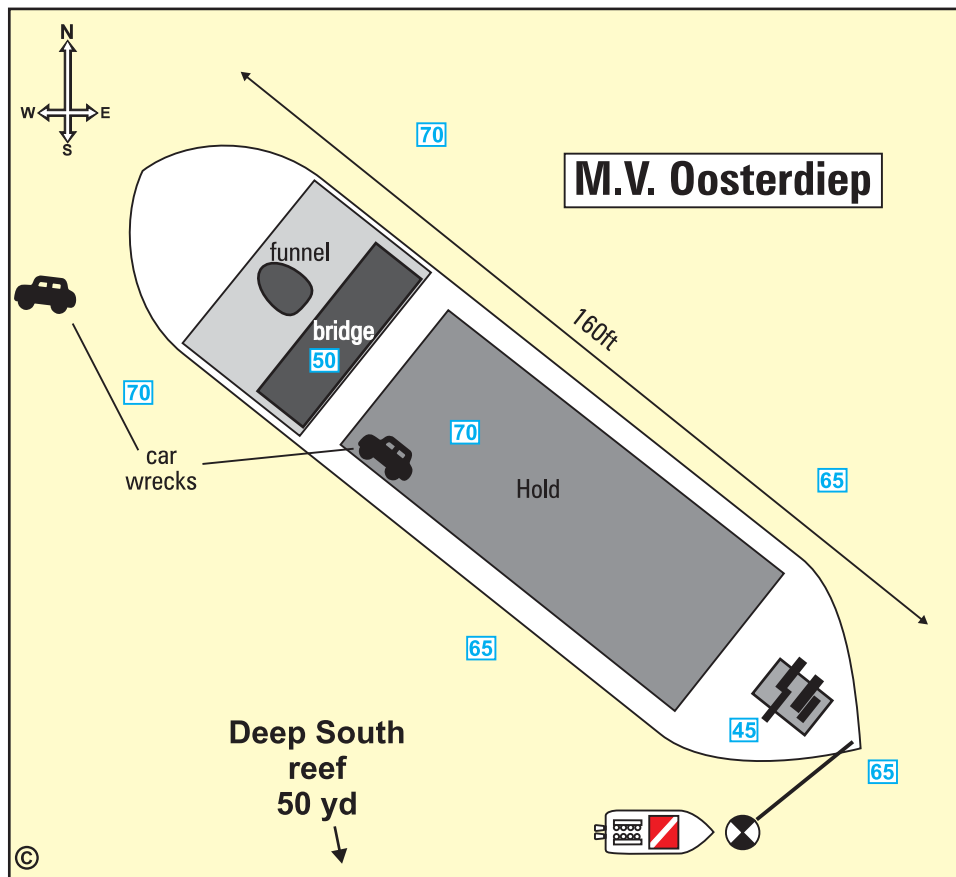


Although she is over 40 years old, the *M.V. Oosterdiep* has been serving divers for only the past 8 years. One small but fatal error caused her to go aground in the entrance to Sandy Ground harbour. After a barely respectful period of mourning, she was stripped by a salvage company and sunk as a dive site. Better perhaps than exposing all 158 feet of her to shame and ridicule, sitting high and dry for all to see.

The ship is still intact and sits upright. She is not often used as a penetration dive by the dive stores, but in the right conditions some operators will take a maximum of two divers inside, providing they are experienced in wreck penetration.

Dive Profile

The mooring line is attached to the ship's bow so we begin by swimming over the foredeck. Much of the deck gear is still in place, as if expecting to be called into service at any moment. There is not as much encrustation as we expect from an 8 year old wreck, but conversely she is more intact than we had expected.



Behind the foredeck we drop down into the hold. A school of tomtates shuffle begrudgingly over to one side, giving us access to the remains of a car (yes, that's right, a car). A large dog snapper being cleaned by a juvenile hogfish gives no such ground and continues its toilet unperturbed by the presence of an audience.

Big winch drums wound with hawsers dominate the deck immediately in front of the bridge. At either side, steps lead to the side decks. As we swim alongside the ship we can see inside the bridge. Cabins empty of their crew and equipment have been taken over by blue tangs munching on the vast quantities of algae that grows on the hull like a thick lawn. With the enthusiasm they show for eating, it is a wonder the hull does not shine like a new penny.

We leave the bridge and swim around to the stern as a school of horse-eye jacks flutters by. A quick look at the embedded rudder and propeller confirms that the *M.V. Oosterdiep* is going nowhere. A field of garden eels around the stern seems puzzled by the ship's predicament.

Under the stern is more growth. Cup corals grow in tight bunches. But not as tight as the holes we will soon be squirming through. Up on the aft deck is an entrance to the engine room. Once inside, a headfirst dive down a vertical ladder, a sharp left turn through a hatch, a swim round a walkway, and we are in the engine room. The engine is open for inspection, the cylinder heads have been removed and the pistons are exposed.

Note: Do not attempt this without a dive operator and do not enter if you have been instructed not to. It is a small confined space and the wreck is liable to further collapse. You have been warned.

Back into daylight we continue our circumnavigation accompanied by barracudas, bar jacks, and yellowtail snappers. Looking up, the silhouettes of scores of chromis and sergeant major fish darken the sky like a flock of birds. Below us a stingray swoops across the sand and amid all this frenzied activity the silent ship sits quietly, accepting its fate with dignity.

Thanks to Christophe of Anguillian Divers.

The bright colours on the reef were the inspiration for its name. Although the corals contribute some colours, they cannot compete with the gaudy statement made by sponges. The area is similar to Deep South (site 3), but the structures tend to be larger. The slope is also typical of Anguilla's reefs, falling approximately at a 45-degree angle.

The reef can attract large numbers of schooling fish, especially night feeders such as grunts, which seek the protection of the reef during the day.

Paintcan Reef 5
50'-75'

6 *M.V. Ida Maria*
40'-60'



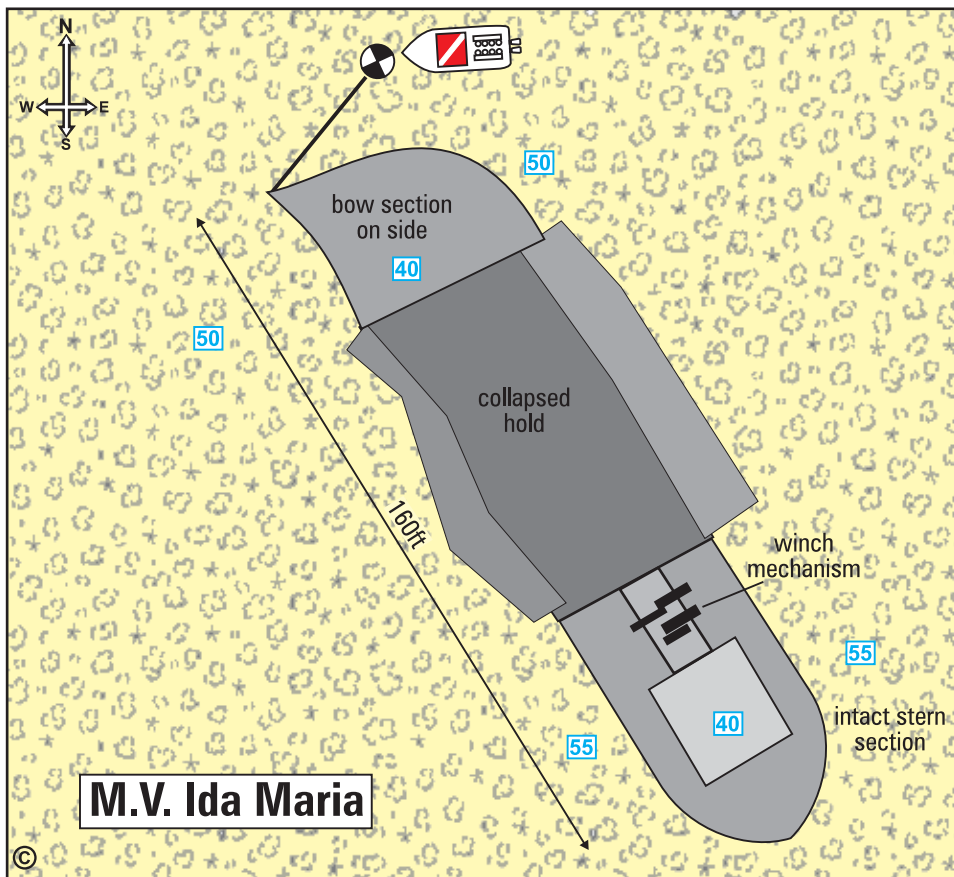
Although strictly speaking a victim of *Hurricane Klaus*, the *Ida Maria's* fate had already been set. She had been donated as a dive site and *Klaus* simply hurried things along. She was a general cargo ship that had served not just Caribbean islands, having worked in the waters of the Baltic and Africa before finishing her days in the West Indies.

Today the ship lies on the ocean floor, her back broken, her bow lying on its port side and only the stern sitting upright. She is still very recognisable though, and what she lacks in completeness she makes up for with marine life.

Note: No part of the wreck is safe to penetrate.

Dive Profile

The *M.V. Ida Maria* attracts a lot of fish. We barely have our fins wet when we see the first barracuda and throughout the dive we have at least one in sight—big ones, small ones, curious and shy, but not one that does not look like it works out several times a week.



We swim through the hold toward the stern and are almost mobbed by sergeant majors guarding their egg patches. It is tempting to point out that while they are busy chasing those of us who have no appetite for purple caviar served on rusty steel plate, a whole bunch of doctorfish are snacking nicely on future generations.

The stern has attracted a good deal of growth, which warrants close inspection. A mass of cup coral has spread over the hull forcing other creatures to grab whatever space they can. Overgrowing tunicates and file clams have succeeded in a few places and as we peer closely at a globular lump of living tissue in an attempt to identify it, the head of a secretary blennie pokes out as if to say "Yes, can I help you?" It was like being caught looking through someone's keyhole.

Because of the encrustation the stern is quite colourful and we amuse ourselves for some time before heading for the bow.

Bar jacks and horse-eye jacks track our progress and a pair of Atlantic spadefish checks out the activity.



A pair of Atlantic spadefish checks out the action.

Yellowtail snappers are surprisingly large, bearing in mind there is no ban on spearfishing. As we reach the end of the cargo hold, we can see that where the bow has twisted off it has created a small arch.

The top of the bow, canted 90 degrees to port, has the deck fittings in place and we can see the anchor chain. Each link is 4 inches across and 6 inches long. Overgrowing lumpy sponges have claimed squatters' rights on much of the equipment, giving this old working vessel a fairy pink hue.

We head back to the boat, bravely battling our way through the crowds of barracudas, which watch us with barely disguised boredom as we do our safety stop.

Thanks to Olivier of Anguillian Divers.

Sandy Island

Sandy Island is the stuff that postcards are made of, or at least it used to be. Pre-*Hurricane Luis*, Sandy Island was more than just sand; it was topped by a fine beach bar and a copse of palm trees, which gave shade to visitors and helped stabilise the island. On the day after *Luis* hit, the island had disappeared. Slowly it has built back up and attempts have been made to replant the palms but not as yet the beach bar.

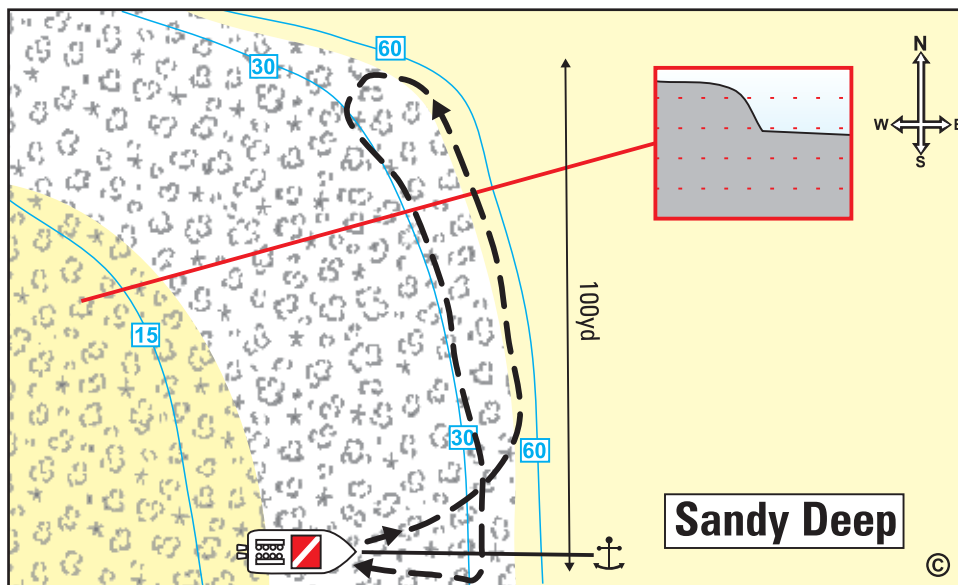
The reefs around the island also suffered, though they have recovered faster. A huge amount of sand, stirred up by the hurricane, settled on the coral. Hard corals would have had to work hard to clean themselves. Soft corals, especially sea fans, were destroyed by the wave and surge action, but they are quick-growing species and already there are hundreds of fans on the surrounding reef.

7 Sandy Deep (Sandy Island) 15'-60'



Sandy Deep is along a sloping reef system running for a quarter of a mile on the east side of Sandy Island. The reef slope varies in steepness but averages about 45 degrees until it flattens out at 15 feet. The reef is on a sand bottom at around 60 feet. The site is supposed to be buoyed but when we dive (May 1998) the buoy has not been replaced since it was lost in *Hurricane Luis*. Dive stores told us it would be replaced before the end of the year. Meantime, the operators anchor on the sand so that the boat hovers over the top of the reef.

We were told that there had been some damage to the reef in *Hurricane Luis*, especially to the sea fans, but that they were beginning to come back. We are hardly prepared, therefore, for



the mass of healthy fans on the site; it is hard to believe they were ever more abundant.

Immediately under the boat a 6-foot tall patch of pillar coral is an arresting sight and bodes well for the rest of the dive. The swaying motion of hundreds of common and Venus sea fans obliterates the slope ahead of us. Amid the spread of their fine nets, sea rods and sea plumes add to the fluid motion of the slope. Under the sea fans are the skeletons of ancient corals with fresh growth on top. The new hermatypic corals are star and great star coral, brain corals and some plate corals. The skeletal base is a mass of small holes and tunnels, harbouring a wide variety of marine life, both sessile and fully mobile.

We swim down to the sand and track along the bottom of the reef, heading north east. Navigation is not a concern—keep the reef slope on your left until you reach half tank then swim back at a slightly shallower depth with the reef on your right.

Our group of eight divers moves slowly, as we each become engrossed in some aspect of the reef.

Of particular interest to us was a fully extended tiger tail sea cucumber. It is almost impossible to believe we are looking at the head of this creature and not the tail of a much larger animal tucked deep in the reef. In holes and crevices we see more colours and patterns than the bravest fashion designer would dare to show: spotted drums and spotted eels, the large eyes of glasseye snappers and porcupinefish, the rainbow colours of redhinds, blue chromis and black margates, the flashy stripes of harlequin bass, princess parrotfish, and hamlets, and a catwalk style parade by two French angelfish.

In the shallower water the colours of the reef become evident. Scarlet overgrowing tunicates compete with green star coral and soft pink sponges. The violet tips of anemones sparkle under the gaze of the overhead sun as we hover over this palette of colours. If you are taking photographs, a macro lens will capture at close quarters the individual creatures that comprise this vivid scene.

Thanks to Douglas and Christine of The Dive Shop.

Before *Hurricane Luis* the reef was a mass of sea fans; 3 years later they have returned, though long-term operators still lament the loss of this lush forest. It is also somewhat misnamed, as it is the deeper of the two Sandy Island dives, i.e. deeper than Sandy Deep, but the Caribbean islands have their own way of naming things.

Dive Profile

Sandy Shallow 8
(Sandy Island)
30'-70'

**9 No Name (Sandy Island)
20'-60'**

The dive is a drift toward Dowling Shoal. When we first visited Anguilla in 1994, Dowling Shoal was barely visible yet now it is a sizeable island, no longer awash but high and dry. The ocean is no respecter of planning legislation. Follow the contours of the reef round and keep your eyes open for nurse sharks and eagle rays.

**10 *Catheley H*
35'-60'**

The *Catheley H* is in the worst shape of the wrecks that are regularly dived. She sank in 1993 as a result of catching fire when someone decided to have a bonfire to dispose of some garbage. It was always intended that she should become a dive site, but not by these means.

She sits in 60 feet of water with her bow facing east, into the current. For some unknown reason, smaller fish are attracted to her than is the case with the other wrecks.

**11 Flat Cay (Dog Island)
10'-75'**

Not all the operators visit Dog Island and even those who do will pick a relatively calm day. The big attraction is the quantity of fish, though the underwater structures are interesting too. It is a very good spot for finding turtles and there is still a healthy population of groupers. A fear of sharks deters local fishermen. Schools of snappers (although you might expect dog snappers, yellowtails are more common) drift silently by.

Some absorbing caves at 60 feet run 10 feet into the rock, making it worth taking a light with you.

**12 Author's Deep
60'-110'**

It is rare to be able plumb depths below 80 feet in Anguilla, but Author's Deep is the exception. A wayward tongue of deep water creeps into the Caribbean just north of Anguilla and the resultant upwelling of cooler nutrient-rich water is probably responsible for the healthy life in this area.

On a 45 degree angle slope running from 60 to 110 feet, sits a pinnacle at 85 feet. Sweeping expanses of plate corals drape the seascape and you can even find bushes of black corals.

Wish for calm weather to enable you to dive here.

**13 Flirt Rock
50'**

Flirt Rock may show some relief to its profile above water, but below it is more a plateau than a rock. The depth of the entire dive does not deviate by more than a few feet. Swim north to half tank then return back across the reef. It is a dive where you look down all the time and you may be surprised to discover how much marine life lives underground. The catacombs of a reef are a much safer place than the open water

for many fish and invertebrates to live their life. As well as crustaceans you will see eels and other fish whiling away the daylight hours.

At 232 feet long and 37 feet wide, the *Sarah* is Anguilla's largest wreck. Another victim of *Hurricane Klaus*, she sank onto her side in Sandy Ground and the first claim on her was made by Anguilla's industrious coastal waters, which attempt to turn anything that does not move into a beach. The hull quickly filled with sand making it very difficult to salvage. Six months after she sank she was raised and towed to her present resting place.

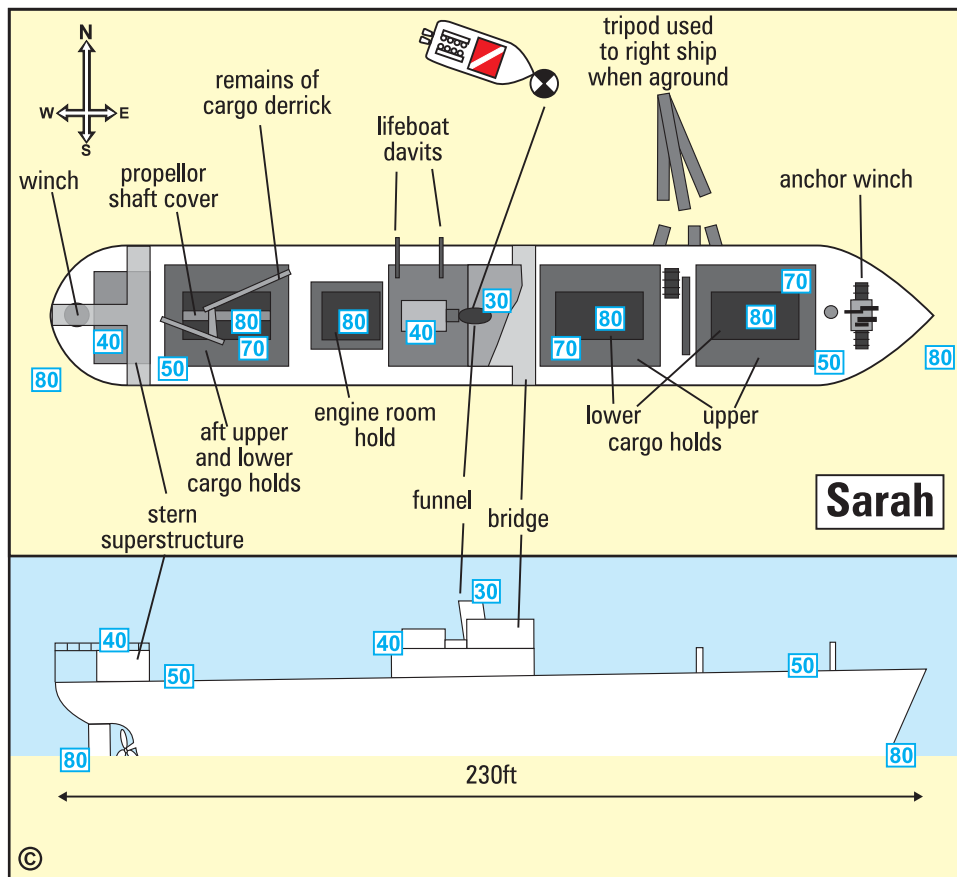
The wreck is completely intact, sitting upright and with large openings in the hull allowing access to the three holds.

We are given a thorough and animated briefing by our divemaster, Douglas, before entering the water, so we had a good idea of what to expect. The mooring buoy is attached to

Sarah 14
30'-82'



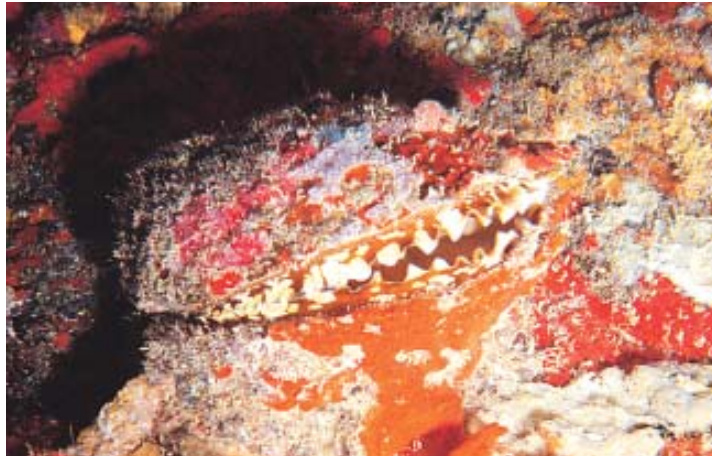
Dive Profile



the funnel, which is 30 feet below the surface. The propeller is at 83 feet, which gives some idea of the size of the ship. We were stretched to achieve a really detailed tour in one dive.

From the funnel we drop over the port side and swim to the bow, ducking through a large tripod structure lying alongside the hull. This was used to right the ship after it first sank. The hull surface moves as if an army of mice has been trapped under a carpet of algae. But it is not mice causing the ripple of movement—rather it is hundreds of Atlantic thorny oysters closing their valves as we approach. Occasionally we catch a glimpse of the brown and white blotches of the oysters' mantle, like a row of teeth, making them look as if they are smiling at us. The blotches are not teeth, but eyespots, which detect

The eyespots on this Atlantic thorny oyster's mantle will detect our presence and the valves will close.



movement and cause the valves to close defensively.

We pass around the bow and exchange the dull algae colours of the port side for the colourful encrustations of the starboard side. Dusky pink lumpy overgrowing sponges, violet Swiss cheese algae patches, and the frosty white polyps of colourful sea rods turn the hard steel of the *Sarah* into a vibrant mural. Bunches of cup corals, with their canary yellow polyps extended, are a delightful, if unexpected, sight. The polyps are normally extended only at night but in this shady spot they brave the daylight hours. Perhaps the bright full moon we have at the moment is adding to the confusion.

Over the bow, we pass down into the forward holds. There are two levels of hold, both accessible though the lower section is dark and has no life. Leaving the second hold, the bridge towers above us like an impenetrable Norman castle. Aware of how quickly the time is passing we head down to the propeller, perhaps 8 feet across and fully exposed. At 83 feet this is the deepest part of the wreck.

The aft deck has another hold which we barely have time to

explore before ascending to shallower water around the superstructure. On top of the bridge is a garden of sea plumes like potted plants set out for a captain's cocktail party. Endless items of deck gear are available for inspection and the mechanically minded will not be short of entertainment. Fish watchers will enjoy finding themselves surrounded by bar jacks, sergeant majors, blue tangs, bluestriped grunts and chromis. A scrawled cowfish was resident on our dive and those infamous wreck groupies, barracuda, watch the divers' progress.

Watch your depth and time on this dive. If you have good air use, you can find yourself close to the dive table limits.

Thanks to Douglas and Christine of The Dive Shop.

An expanse of soft corals characterises this shallow dive. Trumpetfish hang inverted in the sea rods, fooling any unobservant fish. Watch how their jaws hinge when they take a fish. Their long slender shape belies their voluminous mouths and capacity to take fish larger than you would expect.

Prickly Pear SE 15
45' max

The *M.V. Commerce* was another victim of hurricane *Klaus*. She is a 137-foot, 143-ton cargo ship. The bow is still intact and sits in 45 feet on a coral slope. The stern is also in one piece but it is down the slope in 80 feet. The deck area is damaged and the boat is cut in half near the helm.

The top of the wreck has lots of healthy growth, including gorgonians, hydroids and clams. In the sand around the wreck divers often see stingrays. The surrounding reef is also a lively environment. There are big barrel sponges and you can hang back and watch black margates, bar jacks, barracuda and yellowtail snappers buzzing around the ship.

M.V. Commerce 16
45'-80'

Seal Reef

Running parallel to the coast, from Limestone Bay north, is a long reef with several sites along it. Sites 17 to 21 are the locations dived most often. The slope is steepest at the eastern end and becomes progressively flatter nearer to Limestone Bay. The marine life is quite uniform along the reef, so we have noted below only the differentiating features of the individual sites.

Here there is a gentle slope with a proliferation of soft corals: sea rods, sea plumes, and Venus sea fans. These gorgonians provide excellent cover for trumpetfish and a host of other reef fish.

Limestone Bay 17
(Seal Reef)
15'-60'

Named not for its turtle population but for Captain Turtle, a local diver. The reef still slopes gently at this point and soft

Turtle Reef 18
(Seal Reef)
15'-65'

corals dominate the terrain.

**19 Lobster Reef
(Seal Reef)
15'-70'**

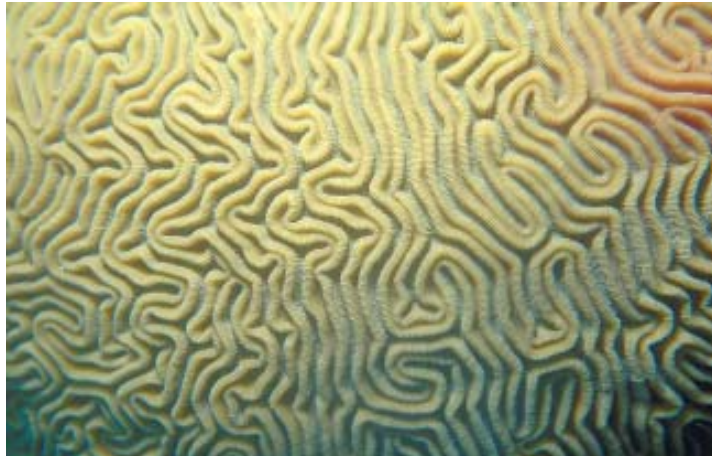
The slope begins to get steeper at this point. And, the site is named for the many lobsters which live in the cracks and crannies in the reef. At the base of the reef, the sand flats are riddled with the tracks of conch. Unless they are moving, the conch look like nothing more than a lump in the sand.

**20 French Reef
(Seal Reef)
15'-75'**

At this point along the reef, there is less soft coral but the range of hard corals is wider. Star and boulder star corals dominate, and you will also see elliptical star corals.

Brain coral is another important reef builder. Instead of the pincushion appearance of the individual polyp openings of star corals, brain coral polyps are joined along valleys separated by

The convoluted profile of brain coral is formed by coralite cups linked along the valleys and separated by septa ridges.



ridges called septa.

**21 Crystal Reef
(Seal Reef)
15'-75'**

The slope here is steeper and a 15-foot section is vertical. Again hard corals are the major species, including elkhorn coral growing back after having been destroyed by storms. This end of the reef seems to be a more attractive habitat, as it is full of crevices that hide creatures such as lobster and pufferfish.

**22 Shoal Bay Lower
and Upper
20'-60'**

Shoal Bay is almost completely protected by a reef system 500 yards from the beach. Inside the reef, platinum blond sand turns the water translucent aquamarine. It looks inviting enough to drink. The two dive sites which local operators use along the inside of this reef are fine examples of the development of a coral reef. Though severe weather has taken its toll, you can see how the structures have been built by millions of coral polyps

secreting their calcareous skeletons.

No Name is on the outside of the reef off Shoal Bay. It is a steeply sloping reef and, because the open sea washes it, it attracts a lot of fish—larger species than those found on the inner reef. Yellowtail snappers and Creole wrasse are frequent visitors as are brown and blue chromis.

No Name 23
20'-80'

Here there is a tremendous variety of coral, including lovely plate corals which deck this horseshoe reef. For the first 100 feet or so many soft corals adorn the reef. Gradually hard corals take over, forming tall mushroom structures big enough to swim around. It is a good place to see eagle rays, which creep silently in from the blue to make a dramatic fly-past.

Lobster Ridge 24
15'-80'

You will, of course, have the pleasurable sight of hundreds of sea fans gently swaying to music only they can hear. The other interesting structure is a mini-wall down one side of the reef. The reef is small enough to make it possible to swim around on one dive.

Seafan 25
15'-75'

The top of the reef is at 30 to 40 feet and the best way to swim is around the base clockwise. A combination of the size of the reef and prevailing currents means it is usually done as a drift dive, which means you get about half-way round the reef. Congregating near the coral are many small reef fish, both those such as parrotfish that feed on the algae in the coral and those such as blue tangs and damselfish which keep it clear of algae.

Six Stars 26
30'-75'

Current and wave action between Scrub Island and Little Scrub has created a spur and groove formation known as The Flats. The upper section has the best coral formations; the lower area is rockier. The lure of the site is the pelagic fish that swish through the channel. Divers have seen dolphins passing through and even on a normal day you can see jacks, cero, barracuda, and chub.

Upper Flat 27
20'-70'

The sites off Scrub and Little Scrub are the most northern covered by this Volume. These small uninhabited islands, parked off the north east coast of Anguilla, jut out into the Atlantic ocean and attract just the kind of species you would expect to find in the ocean. The area is well known for sharks, and not just nurse sharks—black tips, tiger and bull sharks live around

The Steps 28
(Little Scrub)
15'-70'



Scrub. The sharks attract divers but have the opposite effect on local fishermen, who are afraid of sharks. Consequently, there has been no spearfishing and we saw more fish here than on any other site around the island.

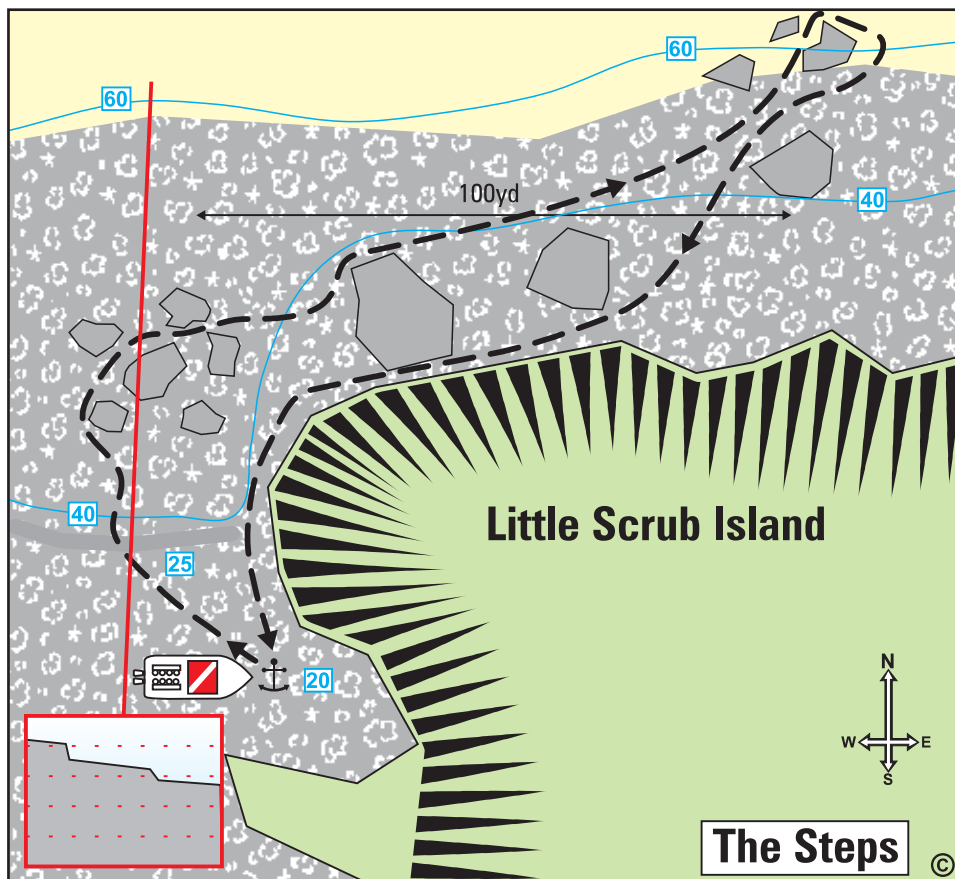
After *Hurricane Luis*, Little Scrub was 25 per cent smaller above the water, but the missing bits of land have increased the volume of boulders below the water. It is not difficult to see which boulders are new and which old by the amount of encrustation.

The site is used only when the weather is relatively calm because there is not a great deal of shelter from the seas and the area is prone to currents. Some operators dive it as a drift.

Dive Profile

As soon as we drop below the dive boat, in only 15 feet of water, we see a school of bar jacks swimming by, backed by a school of sennet so sleek and fast that they make the jacks look positively sluggish. We head north around the island.

It is obvious why the site is called The Steps. One long ridge



leads to another as we step down to 50 feet. The rock is topped with stubby sea rods, perhaps 18 inches high. Big boulders sit on the steps as if trying to decide whether to take the plunge to the next level.

Meanwhile sergeant majors have used the hard surface to lay egg patches, which they fiercely guard. A mixed group of blue tangs and surgeonfish form a raiding party, briefly frustrating one would-be Dad's efforts to protect his brood. A coney sees the activity and tries to join in but faced with just one target, the sergeant major succeeds in chasing it away. Too bad, there is



Finding safety in numbers, blue tangs raid a sergeant majors' egg patch.

not much left to protect when the tangs have finished snacking.

Out in the blue, the silvery bodies of Bermuda chub, barracuda and palometa spangle the water. More reclusive species—lobster, redhinds, and a nassau grouper—shelter under the overhangs made by the boulders. Another species catches our attention, but by sound not sight. We are captivated by the enigmatic, sonorous call of whales. We have no idea how near they are as their calls travel many miles. But human hearing is not as efficient at detecting these sounds as the hearing of whales, so we know that if we can hear them they cannot be too far away.

Some of the larger boulders have steep-sided cracks between them, and our dive leader takes us on a winding tour through the terrain. At 70 feet, the deepest part of the dive, is an especially large boulder which has been in place for some time. It is heavily encrusted, particularly underneath where cup corals, calcareous sponges and an army of small bivalves smother the surface.

Some current is running so we turn around a little before half tank to be sure of completing the trip back with sufficient air. By ducking down between the boulders we avoid the worst of the current and spend time mooching under the overhangs in search of interesting critters.

Thanks to Michel of Shoal Bay Divers.

29 Ram's Head
20'-80'

Indubitably the main reason for a visit to this site is to see sharks. They are almost guaranteed to put in an appearance. Sharks are present all year round but their numbers swell from time to time, it is thought in relation to breeding patterns. In other respects the site is very similar to The Steps (site 28).

30 El Buen Consejo
20'-40'

At the time of writing the wreck of *El Buen Consejo* (The Good Counsel) was not a tourist dive site, but it soon will be. This late eighteenth century ship carried 50 Franciscan priests among its passengers when it was wrecked in 1772 off the north east shore of Anguilla.

Little of the boat's structure remains, just a few ribs and some lead ballast, but there are several pieces of deck gear still visible. Five anchors, one 20 feet long, are clearly distinguishable as they are sitting upright, as if standing to attention. Also, a great deal of cargo is still to be found lying on the sea bed. Trunks overflowing with medallions, buckles and other trinkets have survived their years underwater and are now of great interest to archaeologists.

A group representing Michigan State University, the Anguillan Government and Shoal Bay Divers is negotiating a contract to develop the site for research and as a tourist attraction. The intention is to excavate 30 per cent of the wreck and to leave the rest in place. There will be a marked trail with signs giving relevant historical information. A marine park is already established, forbidding fishing or the unauthorised removal of artifacts.

31 Sandy Hill
25'-40'

Used as a training site, this shallow dive is also visited when northerly swells make the other side of the island rough. It can be dived from the beach and operators drive guests to the site.

The reef is a spur and groove formation with hard coral structures and soft corals on top.

32 High Cliff
30' max

There is no coral growth along this part of the island. Instead you will dive between big rock formations and curious fish will accompany you. Algae eaters have plenty to feast on in the absence of coral and the site appears to be something of a fish magnet.

33 Cove Bay
40' max

We mention this site because it is a beach dive and so might attract those who want to dive independently. Operators use it as a training site, as a saltwater alternative to pool training and

for Discover Scuba courses. Small coral heads draw juvenile reef fish and a variety of invertebrates.

For many years there was only one dive operator on Anguilla, but as the island gradually became known as a dive destination, the dive business has increased to support three stores.

At one time work was progressing to buoy all the dive sites but *Hurricane Luis* destroyed many of the buoys and some have not, as of this time of writing, been replaced. The Marine Park taxes the dive stores at the rate of \$1 per dive but still claims not to have the resources to replace buoys. They produce a map showing some of the sites and describing the rules but it took several days to get hold of one and they were not readily available to tourists.

All the dive stores were using good quality diving equipment. Most carried Sherwood spares. There is not a very wide selection of equipment for sale but if you specifically want to buy major items you could take a day trip to St. Maarten where you will find a wider selection and competitive prices.

The stores have fast efficient boats, though at the time of writing only one of the boats had any shade. Although the trip to the sites is not usually very long, it is still long enough to burn, so be sure to take a T-shirt and a high-factor sun cream.

None of the operators specialise in photography, though you can rent Sea & Sea cameras from a couple of the stores. Take film with you, as it is expensive on the island. Getting prints developed is not difficult but for slides you will need to contact Rogers Photography. (See Contact Information.)

On a small island, it is not surprising to find that operators' have very similar prices for single and 2-tank dives, but there are different rates for multi-dive packages. All of the operators quote prices excluding equipment rental. Allow around \$10 per day if you need to rent a BCD and a regulator.

All prices include weights and tanks only:	
Single-tank	\$45-50
2-tank	\$70-80
6-dive package (3x2-tanks)	\$195-250
10-dive package (5x2-tank)	\$275-380
Open Water Course	\$375-450
Open Water Referral	\$225-250
Discover Scuba	2 \$5-100

The oldest operator, The Dive Shop, is in Sandy Ground. It used to be known as Tamarind Watersports but when one partner left the remaining partner, Thomas Peabody, renamed the store.

Dive Facilities

Equipment

Cost

Operators



The Dive Shop's catamaran picks up guests from the beach in front of the store.



It is hard to match Thomas' knowledge of the diving off Anguilla. He played a major role in sinking many of the wrecks and is rightly credited with putting Anguilla on the dive vacation map. He continues to play an active role in promoting Anguillian diving and is on the board of the Hotel Association. (He is also a committed Grateful Dead fan.)

Thomas is not the only long term member of The Dive Shop team. The instructor diving with us had been with the store over 5 years and the divemaster, another long-term employee, is the only Anguillian divemaster on the island. All of the staff are warm and welcoming and use their knowledge and experience of Anguilla's diving to their guests' advantage.

The catamaran dive boat provides a big stable platform for divers to kit up on, but even so it comes back to the store between dives for the surface interval. Although The Dive Shop does not specifically offer other watersports, if there is room on the boat they are happy to take non-diving family or friends along, free of charge.

There is no afternoon dive. Instead the dive boat is available for private charter, with or without dive gear and a divemaster.

The diving range of The Dive Shop consists of sites 1 to 10 plus the wrecks of the *Sarah* (site 14) and the *M.V. Commerce* (site 16). The sites around Sandy Island are particular favourites of this store and at the time of writing no other store was diving these reefs. From The Dive Shop's pleasant beachfront store, you can see the white round hump of Sandy Island shimmering in the sun.

A second store, Anguillian Divers, opened in 1990 and was bought by new owners in 1996. The owners, who live in Europe, employ a store manager, Anne, who runs Anguillian Divers for them. Anne has been with the store for the last 2 years, having previously worked as a dive instructor in Bonaire.

Anne and her co-instructors are French and are able to teach in several European languages.

At the time of writing, Anguillian Divers had two bases, one at Island Harbour at the east end of the island and one in Meads Bay at the western end. Having two dive boats means they are able to keep one boat near each store, although they do switch the boats around depending upon the number of divers, site to be visited, and so on. From Island Harbour, sites 11 to 29 are used whereas from Meads Bay, sites 1 to 21 define the diving range. This was the only store visiting Dog Island when we visited Anguilla. Longer distances to the dive sites mean the boat does not return for the surface interval, so we were pleased to be offered a snack and water.

As well as the two dive boats, Anguillian Divers offer windsurfers, kayaks, and glass-bottomed boats, which you can



Anguillian Divers fast dive boat makes any of Anguilla's dive sites accessible.

take with or without a guide, and private charters on *Adventure Star*, a 32-foot powerboat.

Anguillian Divers and La Serina Hotel in Meads Bay offer a 7-night/7-dive package for \$700 to \$1,000 depending upon the time of year. A pick-up service is offered to those staying at the Mariners Hotel.

We found Anguillian Divers friendly and helpful. They are well located to cater to guests staying at the many hotels at the west end of the island and are able to cover all **3** the sites around Anguilla.

The newest store on the island is Shoal Bay Scuba , managed by Michel, another French diver recruited from Bonaire. In May 1998 when we saw Michel, he was still developing the store's offer. Recently, a new dive boat has been built in wood by a local boat builder.

Michel was also involved with the *El Buen Consejo* (site 30) project. He was part of the team which mapped the wreck and

Shoal Bay Divers store is located on one of Anguilla's best beaches.



is involved in developing the site so tourists can visit it.

Shoal Bay Scuba is on the beach directly in front of the Allamanda Beach Club. Currently 16 rooms are available but there are plans to build more. A 7-night/10-dive package costs around \$500 per person excluding food.

Shoal Bay is an idyllic beach with sublimely toe-wriggling sand (except that by midday you would need asbestos toes to avoid being toasted) and it is a pity to dive and leave. Michel has a range of other water sports activities to keep you at the beach: sunfish, Hobies, windsurfers, and kayaks—moulded to take a dive tank—for the really adventurous. There were also plans to build a bar and restaurant alongside the store.

This is a new store with lots of new ideas and if the *El Buen Consejo* project goes according to plan they will have an interesting package to offer.

Contact Information

- | | | | |
|----------|--------------------|-----------------|--|
| 1 | Anguillian Divers | Anne Michot | Tel: (264) 497 4750
Fax: (264) 497 4632
e-mail: Axadiver@anguillanet.com |
| 2 | The Dive Shop | Thomas Peabody | Tel: (264) 497 2020
Fax: (264) 497 5125
e-mail: amypeter@anguillanet.com |
| 3 | Shoal Bay Scuba | Michel Faligant | Tel: (264) 497 4371
Fax: (264) 497 5216
e-mail: sbscuba@anguillanet.com |
| | Rogers Photography | | Tel: (264) 497 2832 |

**Anguilla
Dive Operators**

	1 Anguillian Divers	2 The Dive Shop	3 Shoal Bay Divers	
STORE	Year Established	1990	1982	1997
	Number of Bases	2	1	1
	Instructors	2	3	1
	Diving Associations	P	PS	P
	Divemasters		1	1
	Languages	EFS	E	EFG
	Pers. Liab. Insurance	•	•	•
BOATS	No. Dive Boats	2	1	2
	No. Divers per Boat	4-16	15	8-20
	No. Boats with Shade			1
	No. Boats with Toilet			1
	No. Boats with FW			1
	Dives per day	2/2	2/0	2/1
	Time to dive sites	5-30	5-20	5-20
	O ₂ on boat	•	•	•
	VHF on boat	•	•	•
EQUIPMENT	Equipment sets	15	14	15
	Equipment for sale	2	1	2
	Equipment for rent	•	•	•
	Photo equip. rent	•		•
	Tank fills	•	•	•
	Nitrox			
	Equip. servicing		•	•