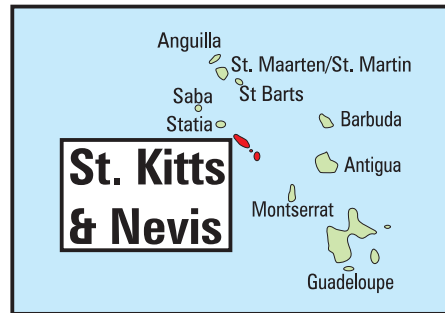


St. Kitts and Nevis

St. Kitts and its sister isle Nevis, became British under the treaty of Versailles in 1783. Today St. Kitts and Nevis are independent and make up one country separated by a 2 mile wide stretch of water. Whichever of the two islands you stay on, it is worth making a visit to the sister island.

St. Kitts & Nevis offers visitors a wonderful blend of Caribbean features. Still unspoiled by mass tourism, St. Kitts & Nevis has enough visitors to inspire plenty of good restaurants, shopping, activities and nightlife. Those that like an even quieter destination would do well to choose Nevis.



Scenically beautiful, it is a green island some 15 miles long by 5 miles wide. A steep central mountain range rises to 3,750 feet, and includes some fine rainforest for hikers. The land between the mountains and the sea is gently sloping, fertile, and planted in sugar cane; the island's major agricultural crop. A railway, used for collecting the sugar cane, runs right round the island. The shoreline includes many fine beaches.

The Caribs called St. Kitts Liamuiga, which means fertile isle. Columbus renamed it after his patron saint, and nowadays it is known officially as St. Christopher but is more often abbreviated to St. Kitts.

It became the first British Caribbean colony when Sir Thomas Warner landed with a group of settlers in 1623. A benefit of the early enmity between the British and the French

St. Kitts



From the top of the fort on Brimstone Hill you can see Statia. The boat just visible in the bay below is the liveaboard Caribbean Explorer, diving on the wrecks created by the fort's guns many years before.

in the Caribbean was the building of Brimstone Hill Fort, a strategically placed battlement that is now an outstanding national historic monument.

This wonderful old fort was built by the British and later captured by the French in a siege during which 1,000 British soldiers held out for some months against 8,000 French.

The fort has been painstakingly restored. The Western Place of Arms offers an outstanding view down to Fort Charles and out to sea. On a clear day you can see six islands, from Montserrat to St. Maarten.

Basseterre

Basseterre, the site of the original French settlement, is a delightful old town, built on the waterfront with architecture that varies from solid British to fancy French.

It was largely rebuilt after a fire in 1876, and The Circus is modelled after Piccadilly in London. In the last few years, both a marina and a big cruise ship dock have been built.

Basseterre is a delightful old colonial style town with many names that will be familiar to British visitors.



Frigate Bay

The main centre of tourist activity is Frigate Bay, a couple of miles south east of Basseterre. Here you find the island's largest hotel, Jack Tar Village with over 240 rooms, and many smaller establishments. Attractions in this area include great beaches, a golf course and a casino.

South East Peninsula

Up until a few years ago, St. Kitts' south east peninsula was only accessible by boat. Now a good road runs all the way down, opening this delightful area of hills, salt flats bays and beaches. It is currently a nature reserve and you may see some of St. Kitts' green-backed monkeys as you drive through. In the future it will certainly house some new hotels.

Nevis is one of the Caribbean's most charming small islands. From some angles Nevis looks like a sombrero, peaked in the centre and low around the edges. Clouds usually cap the 3,000-foot Nevis Peak. On occasion they cling to the summit and fall down the sides, looking somewhat like snow. Some say this is why Columbus named it *Nuestra Senora del las Nieves* (Our Lady of the Snows).

Various battles between the British and the French hampered development until 1783, when Nevis became British under the treaty of Versailles. After this it became a commercially successful plantocracy and there are many old plantations and crumbling sugar mills on the island. One example is the Nisbet Plantation, right on the beach amid pleasant gardens in the north east part of the island.

Nevisians have been careful to preserve their architectural heritage and many traditional Caribbean style buildings survive, some beautifully restored, a few sculpted by nature into lovely fading ruins.

Two historical figures associated with Nevis are Alexander Hamilton, who was born here, and Horatio Nelson, who married Nevisian widow Fanny Nisbet.

Pinney's Beach on the western shore is one of the most spectacular in the Caribbean, and with some 3 miles of it to choose from, it offers the gamut from sociable and lively areas with beach bars and water sports, to wild and deserted stretches.

Nevis has one big hotel, the Four Seasons Resort, in the middle of Pinney's Beach. This resort dwarfs the other accommodations and has most facilities, including a swimming pool, boutiques, several restaurants, a champion golf course and a 10-court tennis centre.

Charlestown, the capital, is picturesque with old stone and wood buildings, but very small. Those whose idea of a good vacation includes fashionable shopping and exotic nightlife would be bored to death here, but they would not starve.

Nevis has a good number of fine restaurants, serving all kinds of food from down-home local goat curry to elegant gourmet food.

This area, just south of the mountain, is elevated enough to offer pleasant views and to be cool. Of special interest are almost half a dozen old plantations that have been converted into hotels where visitors can re-live those gracious old days. These hotels also have elegant restaurants. Heritage, Old Manor, Montpelier and Golden Rock are in Gingerland.

Nevis

Pinney's Beach

Charlestown

Gingerland

Language: English
 Currency: Eastern Caribbean dollar (\$1.00 US = \$2.66 EC)
 Population: 45,000 (St. Kitts 35,000 and Nevis 10,000)
 Telephone code: (869) plus 465 St. Kitts and 469 Nevis

Après Dive

Nature lovers, beach addicts, and history buffs will all find plenty to occupy their non-diving time.

Take a visit to Romney Manor (not far from Brimstone Hill) in St. Kitts, the headquarters for Caribelle Batik. Romney Manor is a beautiful old estate house set in 10 acres of land, with a well-tended garden that covers nearly an acre, dominated by a giant saman tree. You can watch as white sea-island cotton, as soft as silk, gets covered in a riot of lively colours.

Golf

The Royal St. Kitts Golf Course in Frigate Bay is an 18-hole championship course with sea views. They welcome visitors. Also check out the 9-hole Golden Rock course.

Nevis' Four Seasons has a champion 18-hole golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones II.

Four Seasons Hotel, Nevis: (869) 469 1199

Golden Rock Golf Course, St. Kitts: (869) 465 8130

Royal St. Kitts Golf Course, St. Kitts: (869) 465 8103

Hiking

St. Kitts' 3,700-foot mountain range is a world of cool dark rainforest, windy elfin woodlands, volcanic craters and lakes. Serious hikers may want to opt for the all day (9-hour) expedition to the top of Mount Liamuiga, where you can descend into a 1,000-foot crater which puffs steam from several vents.

Nevis offers a variety of hiking, from rainforests leading up to Nevis Peak to flatter coastal land. Wild monkeys inhabit some of the highlands—try the Old Manor for tea one day if you want a good chance of seeing them.

David Rollinson leads some interesting historical and plantation tours and there some good rainforest guides. Information on these, bird books and trails are all available at the Museum of Nevis in Hamilton House in Charlestown.

Greg's Safaris, St. Kitts: (869) 465 4121

Horse Riding

In St. Kitts, riding stables are close to Frigate Bay. The countryside is beautiful with great sea views.

Riding is wonderful in Nevis with views of both the mountain and the sea.

Equestrian Center, Nevis: (869) 469 3106

Hermitage Plantation, Nevis: (869) 469 3477

Ira Dore, Nevis: (869) 469 5528

Trinity Stables, St. Kitts: (869) 465 9603

West Farm, St. Kitts: (869) 465 2222

Many of the larger hotels have their own tennis courts, and most of these will allow outsiders to play for a fee.

Some of the Nevis hotels have tennis courts, otherwise you can arrange with Four Season to play for a fee.

The larger hotels have their own water sports operations. From St Kitts, Nevis makes a popular day sail destination, and the trips offered by Leeward Island Tours are on very beautiful, very fast, high-tech catamarans built right in St. Kitts. The ride is smooth and sailing speeds, up into the teens with a fully laden vessel, are impressive.

In Nevis, sports fishing sailboarding and mountain biking are available at Oualie Beach Hotel. Some water sports are also available on Pinney's Beach.

Nevis Water Sports: (869) 469 9690

Nevis Windsurfing and Mountain Bike Center: (869) 469 9682

Leeward Island Charters, St. Kitts: (869) 465 7474

Mr X Watersports, St. Kitts: (869) 465 4995

Turtle Beach Bar, St. Kitts: (869) 469 9086

Boutiques start close to the waterfront in Basseterre, in St. Kitts, and fan out from the circus. Shopping areas include several little Malls where shops are clustered in one building. A good place to start is the Pelican Mall on the waterfront where you will find the tourist office. Local items include Kate Designs, Caribelle Batik for batiked and silk-screened clothes, and the Spencer Cameron Art Gallery for local art, old maps and prints.

There are a few boutiques in Nevis; some are in town, including the large Sandbox Tree Boutique, some can be found in the hotels, and at least one (Beachworks) is on Pinney's Beach.

After dinner entertainment can be found in many of the larger hotels and restaurants.

St. Kitts also has some independent hotspots. The Fisherman's Wharf has live music on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. The Ocean Terrace Inn has a steel band and fashion show on Wednesdays.

One nightspot with two bars is the Do Wop Days Italian Café. Those who remember how to rock 'n roll or twist can get out there and let go, as they specialise in music from the 50's to the 70's. They open from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. Wednesday to Sunday.

Department of Tourism, Basseterre, St. Kitts: (869) 465 2620

St. Kitts Hotel Association: (869) 456 5304

Nevis Tourism Bureau: (869) 469 1042

Nevis Hotel Association: (869) 456 5304

USA: (800) 528 6208

UK: (44) 171 376 0881

Tennis

Water Sports

Shopping

Nightlife

Accommodation

The Diving

St. Kitts and Nevis is not a major dive destination, in part because it has never been specifically promoted in that way. There are a number of interesting sites, but they are spread around from the east of Nevis to the west of St. Kitts. If you stay in one place you will not be able to dive the full range of sites.

The majority of sites are in the lee of the islands, so the sea is not usually rough. Some sites are on the north so are exposed to the wind and swells, and these sites are only visited on calm days.

Some dive sites are shared between St. Kitts and Nevis (sites 10 to 17), others are too far for operators from the other island to reach. (See the Operators section for details of diving ranges.)

Visibility is variable, especially on the sites close to Basseterre, where a silty bottom and run-off from the land sometimes leaves the water turbid and encourages algae growth.

Portholes on the Corinthian give a view of the fishy crew.



Wrecks

St. Kitts and Nevis does not have many wrecks nor any that are large. There are a couple of small wrecks that operators visit and these are near to Basseterre in St. Kitts.

A wreck not listed below is the *Christina*. She was a 60-foot inter-island ferry that sank in 1971 with considerable loss of life. Almost everyone on St. Kitts and Nevis would have known someone who lost their life on the boat and it is generally not considered respectful to use it as a dive site.

WRECKS CURRENTLY BEING DIVED

NAME	DATE	LENGTH	DEPTH	CONDITION	SITE
<i>Corinthian</i>	1996	60	80	Intact	10
<i>River Taw</i>	1987	144	45	Broken in half	8
<i>Talata</i>	1985	120	70	Broken	2

St. Kitts and Nevis has a range of diving that includes shallow inshore sites and offshore shoals, some stretching several miles.

Between St. Kitts and Nevis is a true coral reef, which allows divers to see many different species of coral. The sites in this area are often exposed to the wind and cannot always be dived, therefore.

The volcanic origins of St. Kitts and Nevis mean that there are lava flows that have since become encrusted with corals, sponges, and coralline algae. The lava has been undercut in places and some sites are riddled with tunnels and caverns (sites to the south of Nevis, in particular).

St. Kitts and Nevis has a good range of marine life. There is a good chance of seeing turtles on many sites and areas with overhangs often house nurse sharks.

St. Kitts and Nevis has a lot of soft corals—sea plumes, sea rods and sea fans. Hard coral is primarily star and brain corals, though there are also good areas of elkhorn and staghorn on Grid Iron (site 17).

Spearfishing is prohibited without permission from Fisheries. You may not use scuba gear to take lobsters.

The area around Sandy Point is designated a Marine Park and you must not damage or take any marine life.

You are not allowed to dive independently in St. Kitts and Nevis. Unfortunately, those arriving on yachts are not always told what the rules are and may find themselves breaking the law without knowing.

When we spoke to Fisheries they told us that Customs Officers were supposed to give a leaflet explaining the rules to every yacht. We were also told that ignorance of the law would not be considered a defence, even if Customs officials had failed to provide any information.

Two liveaboards have a special licence to dive here. (See Operators section.)

St. Kitts and Nevis has a good record for safety. The nearest recompression chamber is in Saba, a short flight away. Guadeloupe is also nearby, though unless the casualty is French, potential language problems mean that Saba would be the preferred option in the event of an accident.

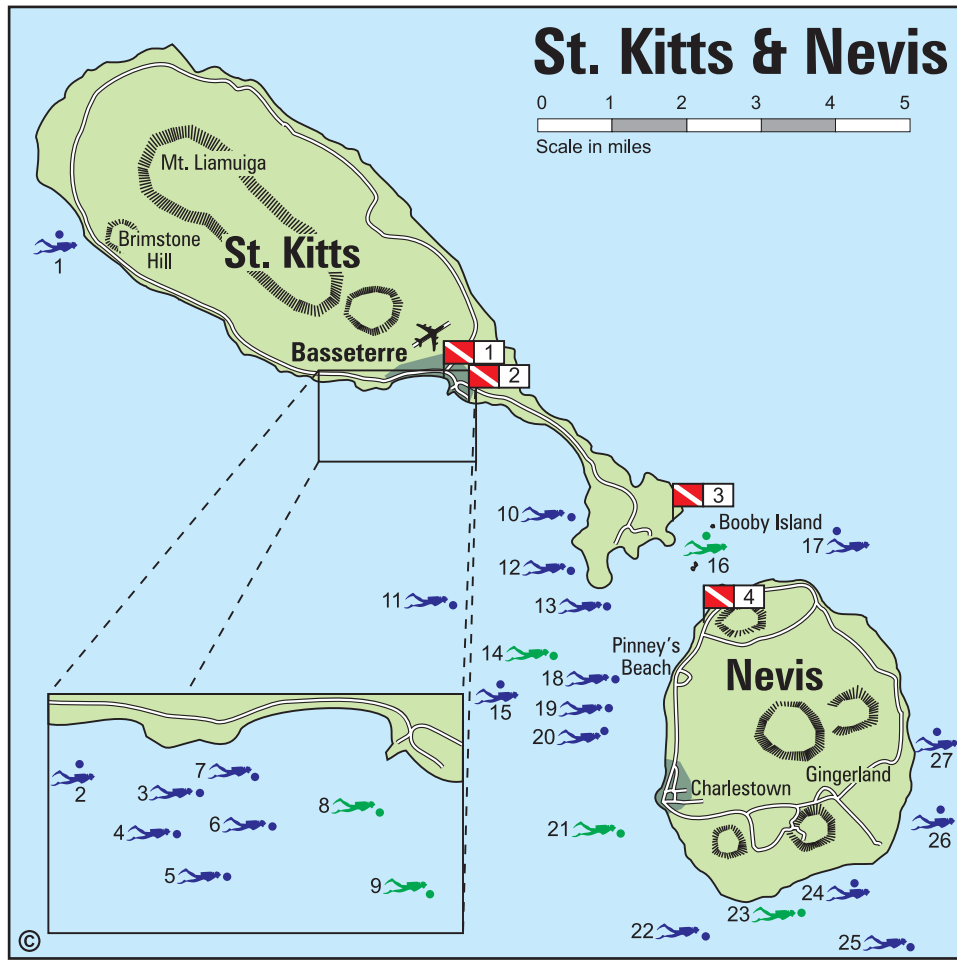
Reefs

Marine Life

Rules and Regulations

Independent Diving

Safety



St. Kitts & Nevis Dive Sites



NO.	SITE NAME	DEPTH IN FEET
1	Sandy Point	35-120
2	Talata and Reef	40-70
3	St. Peters	45-60
4	Coconut Tree Reef	40-120
5	Brimstone Hill Shallow	55-120
6	Black Coral Reef/Long Bar	40-80
7	Ponds Bar Reef	30-60
8	The River Taw	25-45
9	Corinthian and Broad Bar Reef	40-65
10	Ballast Bay Reef	Max 45
11	Five Islands	35-85
12	Turtle Bar	25-55

NO.	SITE NAME	DEPTH IN FEET
13	Nags Head	30-115
14	Monkey Shoal-The Basin	55-65
15	Hot Tubs	60-110
16	Booby High Shoal	20-35
17	Grid Iron	5-30
18	Paradise Reef	45-90
19	Milliken	55-100
20	Coral Gardens	50-75
21	Booms Lobster Ledge	50-65
22	Hill and Gully	Max 40
23	The Devil's Caves	20-40
24	Truck Stop	Max 35
25	Fishbowls	60-70
26	Fisherman's Wharf	Max 35
27	Canyons	50-90

NO.	OPERATOR	LOCATION
1	Kenneth's Dive Center	Basse Terre
2	St. Kitts Scuba	Bird Rock Beach Hotel
3	Pro-Divers	Turtle Bay
4	Scuba Safaris	Oualie Beach (Nevis)

Dive Operators



Sandy Point is immediately below Brimstone Hill Fort, which accounts for some of the things you will see on this site. Ships used to anchor in front of the Fort to load and unload and some of them sank there or were sunk by the Fort's guns.

Nothing is left of these old wooden boats except for the

Sandy Point 1 35'-120'



Sponges and corals compete for attention, and on St. Kitts' reefs. It is often the sponges that grow tallest and in the brightest colours.

ballast stones. The stones have been fused into a ship-shaped solid lump by coralline algae. The other evidence that this was once a busy anchorage is the old anchors embedded in the reef.

Sandy Point has been recognised as a site of special quality in St. Kitts and has been designated a Marine Park. It is a long trip for all the St. Kitts operators, so they do not dive it all that often.

From 40 feet, the reef slopes down in a series of ledges and coral outcrops. There are parts of the slope which are almost vertical and there are areas sliced by canyons. It is a large area with varied terrain and you could dive it more than once and not cover the same territory.

The reef life looks scrubbed clean. The sponge's brilliant colours almost overshadow the polished glow of the hard corals. Barrel sponges grow large and look like old cooking pots belonging to the sunken ships. Azure vase sponges have a considerably more modern Art Deco style.

The visibility on this site is invariably good, and photographers will enjoy shooting film here.

2 Talata and Reef
40'-70'

The *Talata* is not so much a wreck as a wrecked wreck. She was a 120 year old cargo ship but all that remains now are pieces of wreckage. *Hurricane Luis* in 1995 smashed what was left of the intact pieces. The bow is now the only part that you could recognise as being part of a ship. The propeller is still there.

One other feature of interest is hot water coming through volcanic vents in the seabed near the wreck.

The site is rarely used anymore by dive stores.

3 St. Peters
45'-60'

Dive boats moor to an old anchor in 45 feet. The reef is round and has a low profile, rising only about 15 feet from the sandy floor. The sand has a lot of life—stingrays half bury themselves but you can see their eyes following your progress.

A range of hard corals and gorgonians cover the reef.

4 Coconut Tree Reef
40'-120'

The reef is very similar to St. Peters. It is flat on top and falls away gently. There are more boulders than on St. Peters and a profusion of sea fans.

5 Brimstone Hill Shallow
55'-120'

At its western end, this reef descends steeply to sand at 120 feet. The coral is in good condition because the site is a little farther offshore and does not suffer from as much sedimentation as the inshore reefs.

Dive stores dive both of these areas on one dive. You have to drop down to 80 feet to find the black coral trees and you can then continue the dive slowly ascending over the ridge back of the reef. On the top of the reef, coral growth is somewhat stunted, especially compared to the deeper part of the reef.

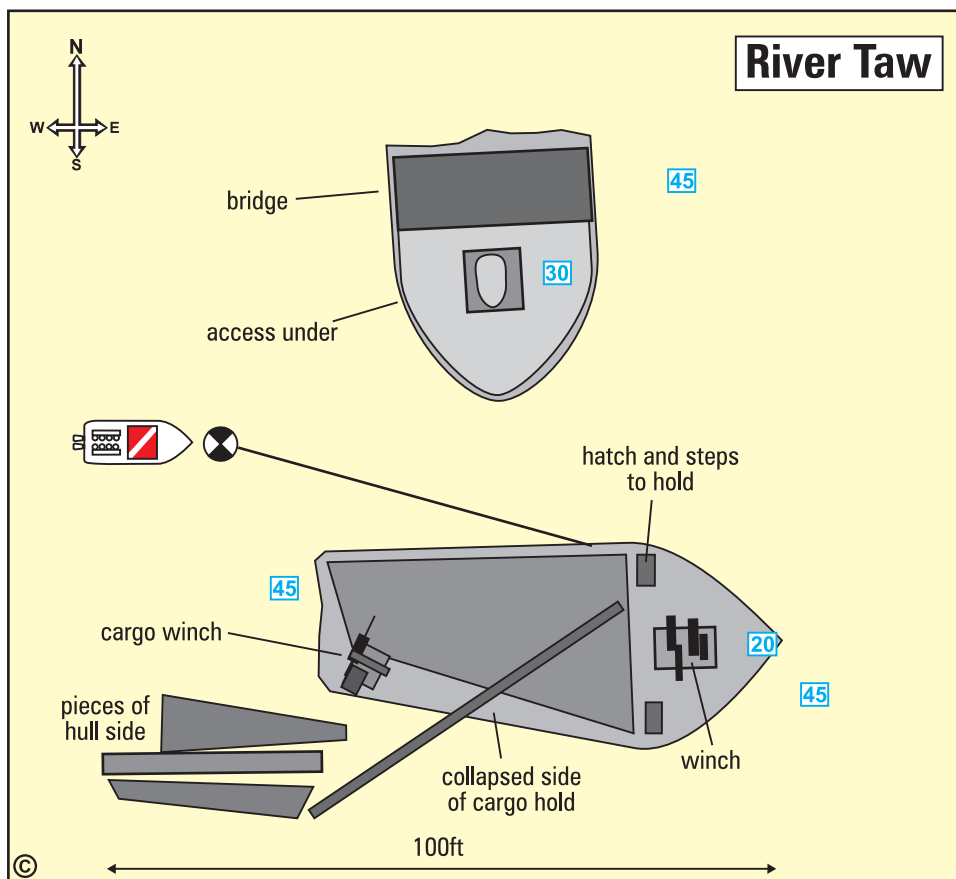
Black Coral Reef/Long Bar 6
40'-80'

Ponds Bar tends to be used as a check out or training dive site. It is a little too close to the town of Basseterre to ever get good visibility and some operators prefer not to use the site.

Ponds Bar Reef 7
30'-60'

We are not suggesting you take up fresh water diving, the site name refers to a ship not a river. The *River Taw* was a 144-foot inter-island freighter. She clearly got very confused moving back and forth from one island to the next as her bow is heading one way and her stern another, it looks as if a disagreement over direction caused the ship to pull herself in half. The real reason

The River Taw 8
25'-45'



"Here's lookin' at you kid". Portholes on the River Taw covered in telesto.



is more prosaic; swells following a hurricane ripped the boat apart and reorganised the layout.

Dive Profile

The mooring buoy, marked by a large blue plastic barrel, leads down to the bow. The hull sides are fairly well encrusted with peach encrusting and stinker sponges and even a black coral bush. Scattered all over the hull are Atlantic thorny oysters.

Up on the foredeck, winching gear is still in place and the forward hold is large enough to enter. Remember if you enter a wreck that your bubbles may dislodge loose pieces from overhead, so take care.

We swim over to the stern, lying 30 feet away. More growth is visible and this section has a hoary appearance, as telesto and colourful sea rods have spread across the hull, their exposed white polyps prematurely aging this relatively young wreck.

Portholes along the hull unmask the ship's inner secret—a school of blackbar soldierfish is suspended in the inner compartment. The stern has several potential entry points suitable for those intent on penetrating the hull, but it seems to us that we can see just as much by peering in through the windows and the hole where the stern has been torn from the bow. And, we do not risk a close encounter with one of the many bearded fireworms squirming over the hull.

The wreck sits on sand and on the swim between the two parts of the wreckage we see lizardfish, goatfish and a poorly disguised yellowfin grouper. In the water column are brown chromis, juvenile bar jacks and big yellowtail snappers.

Being a shallow dive, there is plenty of time to explore, but there is nothing around the wreck, so take the time to look closely at some of the smaller marine life living on the hull.

St. Kitts' youngest wreck has been in her current resting place since 1996. She was a working tug in St. Kitts until she became a victim of the 1995 hurricane season. So that her loss was not a complete waste, she was taken to her current mooring and sunk deliberately to make a dive site. The size and newness of the wreck is such that you would not need to spend a whole dive on her, and a short swim to the reef is a good way to finish off the dive.

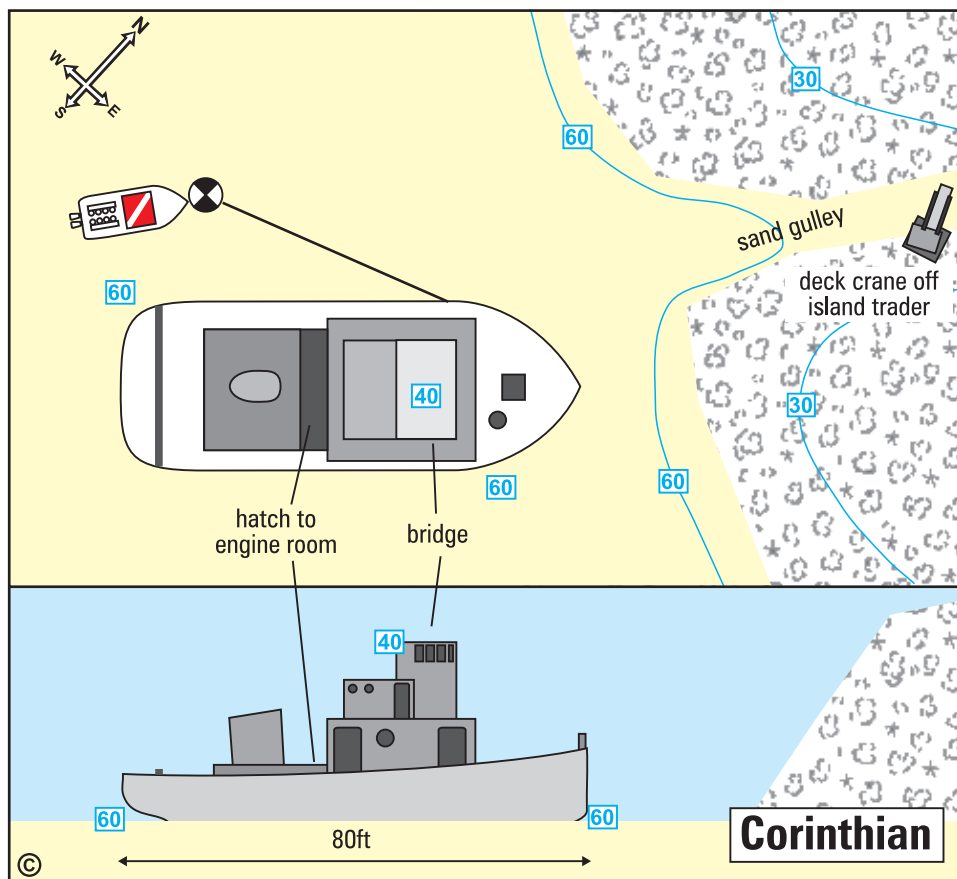
Corinthian 9
and Broad
Bar Reef
 40'-65'



Dive Profile

When we first drop down on to the tug, we think that there is not much growth because we can see the hull paint clearly. Closer inspection corrects our first impression because, although there are bare patches, the hull is beginning to foster a good variety of marine life.

The *Corinthian* is a small boat but it is possible to penetrate some areas. Feathery tube worms have found suitable habitat round the door rims, so if you enter please be careful not to damage these fragile creatures. A hatch just in front of the funnel





There are plenty of openings in the Corinthian that allow you to penetrate the wreck or just see inside.

gives access to the engine room.

Many fish congregate around the boat, including two large permits. Blackbar soldierfish, Spanish hogfish, fairy basslets and princess parrotfish make it a colourful dive. In the sand around the hull, garden eels poke up their heads to see what is happening.

Tunicates in particular are thriving. Bulb tunicates and giant tunicates are sprinkled all over the wreck. Though 'giant' may seem a bit pretentious for a creature no more than 4 inches tall, these anonymous, camouflaged leathery lumps are very definitely living tissue. As we move along the hull, wide open syphons squeeze closed, as though we are bringing a bad smell with us. With a few moments patience they can be coaxed to reopen.

After 15 minutes we head for the reef. The base is at 60 feet and a steep slope takes you up to the flat top at 30 feet. The slope has a covering of star corals punctuated by several patches of pillar coral.

Swimming west, we find a sand canyon with a discarded cargo ship crane lying half on the reef. Across the other side of the canyon the reef continues.

The amount of growth on the *Corinthian* after a short period immersed suggests that in time it will become an interesting dive for observing marine life.

10 Ballast Bay Reef
Max 45'

Unfortunately this site often has poor visibility. The sand bottom is easily stirred up though the sand is also one of the sites assets. It is like a parking lot for stingrays.

11 Five Islands
35'-85'

Five islands is a large area dotted with coral heads like a chain of islands. The coral heads are rough star, boulder star and various types of brain corals. Some pillar coral also grow here. Soft corals—sea rods, Venus sea fans and sea plumes—soften the hard profile of the coral heads.

Because it is some way off shore, there is a higher than usual likelihood of seeing pelagic species. Keep one eye on the blue, otherwise you might be so absorbed watching a tiny blennie that you do not notice that bull shark cruise by.

When is a Sponge Not a Sponge? When it is a Tunicate.

It surprises many divers that leathery blobs attached to rocks and wrecks are animals and it surprises them even more when they move. Tunicates though primitive in appearance have the ability to sense a diver's presence and close their syphons to protect their inner organs.

The syphons are used as part of the tunicate's respiration and feeding process. One siphon draws in water, which passes over a mucus gill net. Food particles and oxygen are extracted and the water is expelled through the second syphon.



This giant tunicate's syphons are open.....



But when it detects our presence they close.

The two-syphon design is one of the ways you can identify tunicates. Sponges may have lots of different size holes on their surface whereas tunicates normally have similar sized holes and the holes are in pairs. And, of course, sponges do not sense your presence and close up. Closing the syphons protects against small invertebrates which might otherwise dine on the tunicate's innards.

Tunicates are sometimes solitary and sometimes colonial. If they are colonial then they are either joined at their base or are embedded in a colonial tunic. Some tunicates are free-swimming and look like jellyfish, but they have no sting.

The site is made up of volcanic boulders that form overhangs and swim throughs. If you hover quietly you can hear creaking noises, as if the boulders are still settling. In the sand around the boulders the tiny heads of garden eels protrude.

Many fish find this a productive home. The overhangs are popular with squirrelfish and parrotfish and wrasse find rich pickings on the boulders. Hamlets scuttle into the branches of gorgonians as divers approach. On the face of the boulders fireworms feed on coral polyps or anything else edible that they come across.

Turtle Bar 12
25'-55'

13 Nags Head 30'-115'

Nags Head has a reputation for being a site where there is a very good chance of seeing something big, or unusual, or both. Eagle rays are strong contenders, so are sharks and turtles. Schools of fish are a common sight—Bermuda chub, jacks and snappers.

It is a site which the operators use for more experienced divers, except when conditions are very calm. It is almost always dived as a drift, as the current runs past the headland 90 per cent of the time.

The dive route takes you along a steep slope littered with boulders and interspersed with canyons.

14 Monkey Shoal (The Basin) 55'-65'



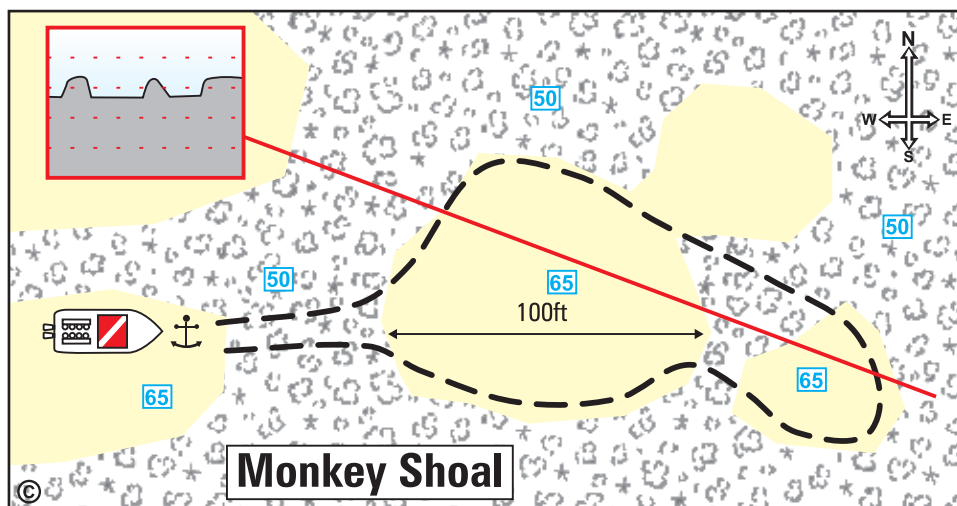
The plan was to dive Coral Gardens (site 20) but when we got there the visibility was not good so Ellis, our dive leader, decided to try Monkey Shoals. The Shoals cover an area of 3 miles giving the dive stores several sites to dive. Today Ellis chooses The Basin.

Because it is a little way offshore, there is a chance of seeing almost anything. This particular site is called The Basin because rocks and coral surround an area of sand.

Dive Profile

We gather at the anchor line and wait for Ellis to lead us across the coral encrusted surface and down to the sand. The sand basin is criss crossed with the tracks of conch and we see the give away sign of a stingray's print in the sand.

Where the reef joins the sand are small indentations, concealing spotted drums and shy stripy hamlets. Although the reef draws our attention we do not ignore those creatures that prefer a sand habitat. Two slithery sand tilefish are engaged in a



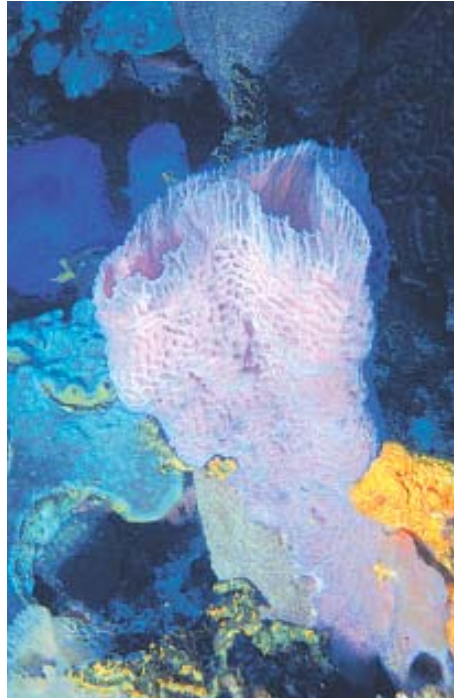
jousting battle, perhaps the result of a territorial spat. A hole appears in the sand, but we do not see what creature has suffered a ceiling collapse as a result of its over zealous burrowing. A barracuda comes to see if we have found anything interesting.

The reef has more colourful attire than the sand, due to an array of sponges. The corals may not be as good as those on Coral Gardens but the good visibility gives us a clear view of the many varieties of corals. Brown tube sponges and intense purple tube sponges lounge across the reef, as if the intensity of their colour makes them too heavy to stand upright. A veritable forest of gorgonians on top of the reef gives the area a lush fecund feel.

Over the next finger of reef we find our elusive stingray. No longer just a print in the sand, the corporeal version watches us approach. It is here that we see the quick flash of a kingfish, a silver dart reflecting the sunlight like a subaqueous Concorde. A school of Creole wrasse huddle together for comfort as this large predator takes another tour of the area.

As we do our safety stop on the hangline below the boat, we have an aerial view of how different fish respond to the presence of the kingfish and find ourselves surrounded by blue chromis. Perhaps they hoped to draw attention to us and away from them. If so they must have been disappointed when we got out of the water, an option not available to them.

Thanks to Ellis of Scuba Safaris.



Azure sponges are the Caribbean's star exhibits.

This interesting site has two sections. There is a steep drop to 80 feet then a gently sloping lip. The reef is pock marked with sinkholes where hot vents have blasted through. Hence the sites name, Hot Tubs.

Some very fine brain corals and colourful patches of great star coral make this an attractive site. Lots of gorgonians and long purple tube sponges add to the generally pleasing scenery. There are enough hiding places to make large porcupinefish feel safe and we even catch one out in the open.

Hot Tubs 15
60'-110'

16 Booby High Shoal

20'-35'



Booby Island has grabbed a spot right in the middle of the channel between St. Kitts and Nevis and this shallow area makes a good second dive or a night dive. It was as a night dive that we visited the site.

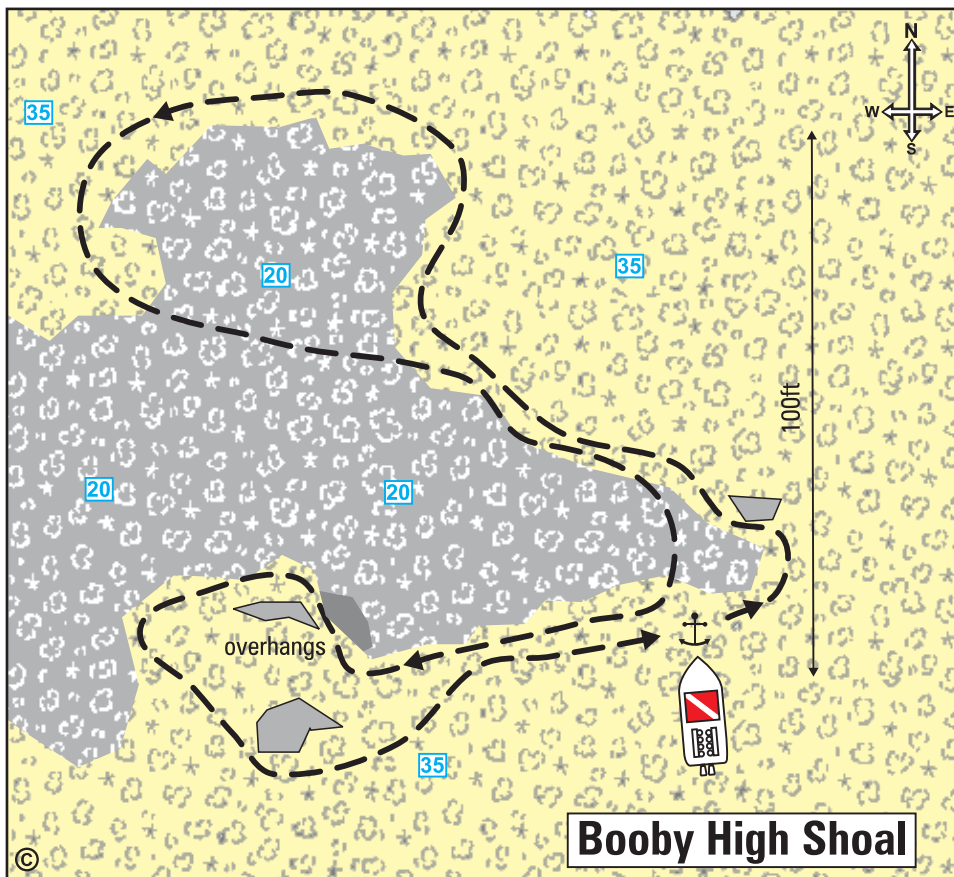
The terrain is quite flat with old coral heads approximately 3 to 5 feet high, forming overhangs and some holes right through the rock. None of the holes are large enough to swim through and generally the structures are small.

Dive Profile

Ellis, our dive leader, gives us a thorough briefing as we wait for the sun to slither down below the mountains of St. Kitts. We see a turtle pop to the surface, obviously wondering what is keeping us.

Although Ellis describes the dive route, we have the luxury of following his light and can concentrate on the marine life without fear of getting lost.

Below us is a flat area of sand with what appears to be coral ridges. Close up we can see that we are looking at old coral





Battling green finger sponges and barrel sponges cast strange shadows at night but during the day add colour and relief to the reef.

newly encrusted with sponges, hard and soft coral. The soft limestone base has been eroded so that it is undercut and has many nooks and crannies. But we do not have to do a lot of searching before we start tripping over turtles, jumbo-sized porcupinefish, and scurrying lobsters.

On top of a ledge, the movement of three slipper lobsters catches our attention. We hover above them and witness their lemming-like leaps from the top of the ledge to the sand below. One after another they reach the cliff edge and launch themselves off, landing in a surprisingly orderly fashion.

Our first turtle is an adolescent and seems torn between curiosity and caution. Later on in the dive, we find grandfather-sized turtles covered in barnacles and they can hardly be bothered to lift their heads to look at us, despite the excited bubbling of half a dozen divers. One large hawksbill is tucked under a ledge in what appears to be its private hotel room. We lose count of how many we see and start to look at the other marine life.

Spiny and slipper lobsters are abundant and oblivious to our lights. We try not to disturb sleeping parrotfish and other diurnals tucked into holes in the reef. Under the ledges night-time feeders such as orange ball corallimorphs wave their exotic tentacles.

With our lights we can see that this is a colourful reef. There is a mass of green finger sponges and bright red erect rope sponges. Barrel sponges seem ominous when caught in the beam of our lights. Encrusting the coral is red sieve sponge.

In the sand are tall sea plumes, taller than the reef. On top of the reef is a field of sea fans providing good pasture for flamingo tongues with their giraffe livery on display.

It is time to ascend as yet one more turtle paddles by, as if to ensure we will have enough to talk about back on the boat.

Thanks to Ellis and his crew at Scuba Safaris.

Turtles Return Home

The turtles you see on Caribbean Reefs are mature animals, at least 12 years old and maybe up to a 100 years old. They will have been born on one of the beaches in the area. So where are all the juveniles and adolescents?

When the hatchlings break out of their nest they make a frantic dash for the sea and swim until they are exhausted and at least 20 miles offshore. Then they drift in seaweed mats, which gives them some protection



Snuggled under a rock with its pet lizardfish and conch shell, this grand old barnacle covered hawksbill slumbers on through our photo shoot.

from predators. As they gain strength they swim slowly north until they pick up the Gulf Stream. Loggerhead turtles tagged in the Caribbean are found next in the Azores.

For the next 10 years or so they live in the waters around the Azores, feeding off fish, shrimp, squid and jellyfish. When they reach sexual maturity—somewhere between 12 and 35 years old—they head back to the Caribbean to the area they were born. By the time they reach the Caribbean they are around 3 feet long and weigh up to 400 pounds.

Their diet does not change much in the Caribbean but they add sponge, conch and urchins—just for a bit of variety. A powerful beak-like jaw enables them to crunch their way through crustaceans and mollusks

and to take bites out of sponges. They continue to eat jellyfish and you may notice that the eyes of some turtles are cloudy due to the toxins they absorb when they eat Portuguese-man-of-war.

Other than man, sharks are turtles only predators. Unlike their land-bound relatives, turtles cannot retract their head and limbs so sharks attack by biting off their appendages. They can then feast at their leisure on the carcass.

The best time to see turtles at close quarters is at night. They snooze on shallow reefs, sometimes tucked under ledges. They slow down their metabolic rate so that they do not have to surface to breathe very often and, as long as you do not harass them, they will remain in place allowing you time to take a good look.

You can tell the older turtles by their size and the encrustation on their shells, but it is hard to tell the males and females apart.

17 Grid Iron 5'-30'

To the north east of the Narrows (the passage between St. Kitts and Nevis) is a 5-mile reef sitting on a ledge. It starts due north of Nevis and continues north west until it fizzles out north of St. Kitts. The top of the reef comes within 10 feet of the surface and then drops to 30 feet. From the bottom of the reef a gentle slope falls to 120 feet then half a mile to seaward the ledge ends, descending sharply to over a thousand feet.

The entire area is called Grid Iron and dive operators dive at several places along it. It is a true coral reef so you will see every variety of coral—elkhorn and staghorn in the shallow areas, finger, brain, boulder star and pillar corals as you move down the slope.

Pillar coral polyps are the only hard coral polyps to expose themselves during this daylight dive, but at night this stony facade will come alive with the extended tentacles of thousands of coral polyps.

Soft corals also grow, both delicate sea fans and bushy sea rods. Despite the high percentage of coral cover, tube and barrel sponges have managed to find some space to grow and, if variety is what you seek then this is a site you will enjoy.

The reef has a healthy fish population comprising the typical balance of herbivores and omnivores. Blue tangs and surgeonfish act as the reef's algae cleaners and porcupinefish and grunts keep the invertebrate population under control.

The reef is exposed to the open ocean so the waves can be large and operators will choose calm days to head out to Grid Iron.



Pillar coral stands proud of the flatter species on the reef.

To the west of Nevis is one long reef system, making three interesting dive sites. They all have similar formations and marine life and dive leaders have their own preferences. Coral Gardens (site 20) is a favourite, but both Paradise Reef and Milliken offer a pleasant diving environment.

Paradise Reef is at the northern end of the reef system, so is nearest to the dive stores. The reef here has a gentle slope and a dense covering of soft corals (there are more hard corals at the southern end). The tiny ovals of butterflyfish flutter around the reef and there are some lovely tube worms.

Paradise Reef 18 **45'-90'**

This is a very lively reef in pristine condition. It is like a small mountain with gently sloping sides covered in sea fans and gorgonians. Iridescent sponges fight to be seen and the boulder star coral has to take on a variety of colours so as not to be overlooked.

There are very often barracudas hovering near the reef and black durgons are always present. Parrotfish, butterflyfish, lobsters, green moray eels, and nurse sharks make up the resident population.

Milliken 19 **55'-100'**

20 Coral Gardens 50'-75'

There is one big coral head on this otherwise gently undulating reef. Several areas have deep ledges concealing Caesar grunt, rock hinds and lobsters. Pillar corals and crinoids give the area a golden hue and big barrel sponges add another dimension to the reef profile. Barracuda and Atlantic spadefish are common along with schools of Creole wrasse.

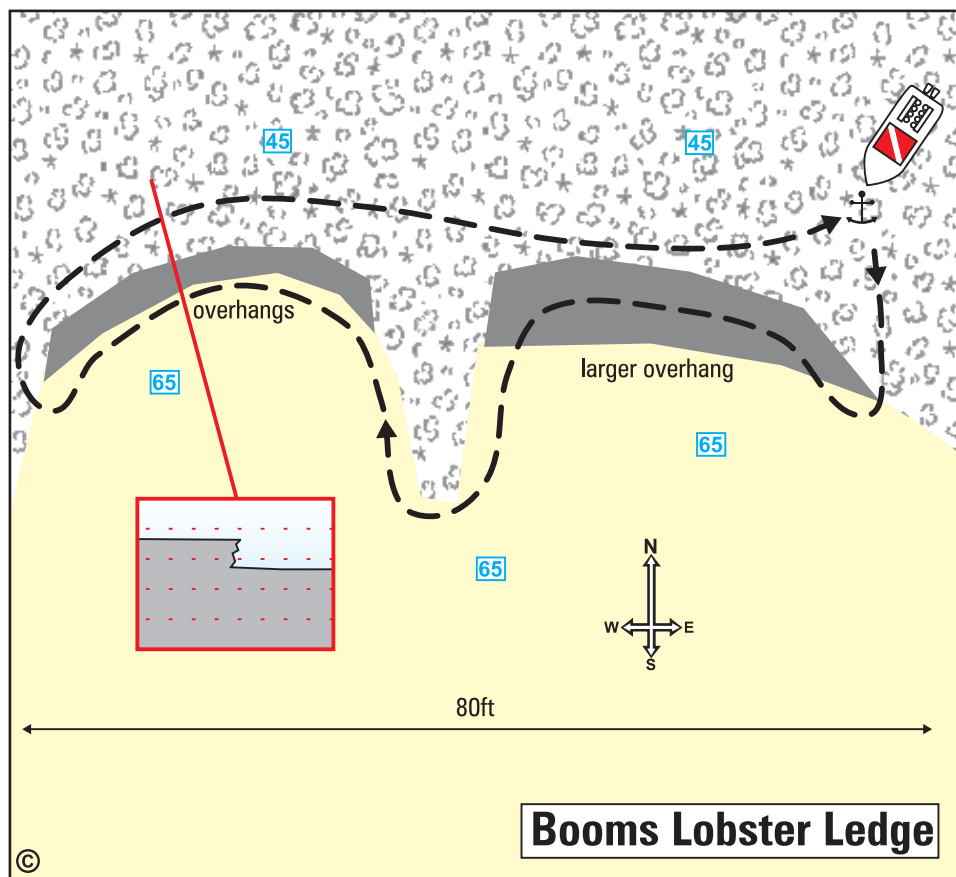
The coral is particularly colourful and varied on Coral Gardens, making it a popular site with the operators.

21 Booms Lobster Ledge 50'-65'



This is a small area, covering perhaps 80 feet, so you do not have far to swim. Two semi-circular areas with a ridge between comprise the site. The bottom is sand and rises to 20 feet. On the reef top are large barrel sponges and sea fans.

Around the edge of the sand is a ledge and you will spend your time seeing what is hiding beneath it. You will most likely see grunts, turtles, spotted drums, mahogany snappers and nurse sharks. In the eastern semi-circle the ledge forms a cave which you can enter.



Hang back and watch the bubbles come up through the reef from the divers inside the cave. It looks like the reef is breathing.

Atlantic spadefish and barracuda are equally fascinated by the bubbles and sometimes try to eat one. The image of a flatulent barracuda makes the mind boggle.

It is not the most vibrant reef in Nevis with regard to the coral but it is a fun dive and you never know what you might find under the ledge.

Thanks to Ellis of Scuba Safari.

Cracks and crevices are a gift to critters in need of protection from predators, so Hill and Gully has no problem enticing a population of fish and invertebrates to take up residence.

The cracks are in rocks encrusted with coral, sponges and several species of colourful algae.

Hill and Gully 22 Max 40'

The Devil's Caves is a popular site, but because it is off the south coast of Nevis it is not visited very often. It is a long way for the St. Kitts dive boats to go and the Nevis dive store is at the north of the island.

The caves referred to in the site name are actually tunnels, three in total—one long and two short. As you pass through the tunnels you may see lobsters hanging upside down and you are sure to see glassy sweepers. In the mouth of one of the tunnels is a 17th century anchor.

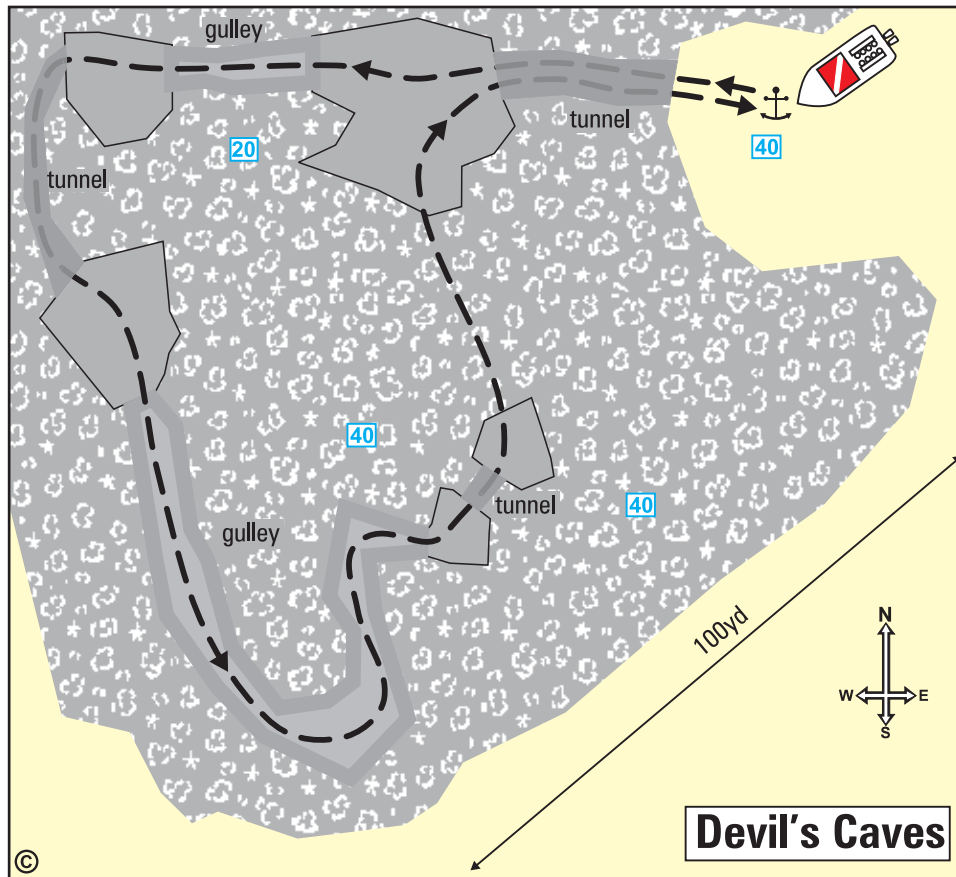
Well camouflaged crabs and lobsters inhabit the caves and tunnels. Look out for large channel clinging crabs (sometimes called King crabs) that scurry around; the cover of the tunnel must make them feel safe.

The tunnels are through old volcanic lava flows that have

The Devil's 23 Caves 20'-40'



A channel clinging crab braves open terrain, confident it can disappear in an instant into one of the many crevices inside the caves.



since been enrobed with a variety of marine life. Gloriously red sponges and encrusting pink sponge give the scenery a dramatic character. Red is also the predominant colour of the fish population—blackbar soldierfish, squirrelfish, glassy sweepers.

The maze-like structure of the reef attracts these fish because they are all nocturnal and look for somewhere to spend the day time hours safe from predators. Their red colouring gives them protection at night.

24 Truck Stop **Max 35'**

This small indent in a flat coral reef is filled by a truck full of sewing machines! The truck fell off a cargo boat coming from Montserrat and is now home to black durgons and grunts. Stingrays are often seen resting or feeding in the sand and occasionally a nurse shark naps here.

In a few years it will not be possible to tell what is reef and what is a sewing machine, as the marine life gradually accepts this foreign body as its own.

Fishbowls is a rather unpredictable site. Currents can be non-existent or very strong and the sea is sometimes choppy. The attraction of the dive is the quantity and variety of fish: black durgons, yellowtail snappers, pufferfish, glasseye snappers, tomtates and grunts.

The terrain is fairly flat with coral in sheet formations. Lobster tentacles poke out from under the flattened coral.

Fishbowls **25**
60'-70'

Fisherman's Wharf is so named because of the long straight reef that looks like a pier. And, like a pier, can you dive underneath it and join the menagerie of squirrelfish, lobsters and nurse sharks.

Fisherman's **26**
Wharf
Max 35'

A spur and groove formation has created a series of coral fingers, which make a pleasant dive site on the east side of the island. From Oualie Beach on the north west corner of Nevis it is about a 45-minute boat ride so, as you might expect, it is not a site that gets many visitors.

Canyons **27**
50'-90'

St. Kitts and Nevis has a relatively small dive business, with just four operators—three on St. Kitts and one on Nevis, plus a couple of liveboards that visit the island. They have all been established some time, making it a stable industry and ensuring the operators are experienced and knowledgeable about their diving environment.

A few sites are buoyed, especially those near to Basseterre and the wrecks. On other sites the dive boats anchor or do drift dives.

For a small island we found there was quite a wide range of boat types and this, to some extent, dictates the range of dive sites that the operators are able to reach.

Rental equipment appeared to be of an adequate standard, everyone was using Sherwood gear so if you have any other brand you will probably not be able to have repairs made. Get your equipment serviced before you arrive.

You will not find rental equipment in St. Kitts and you may have difficulty getting slide film developed. Visibility, especially in the vicinity of Basseterre is not particularly appropriate for underwater photography. Sites farther offshore have much better visibility.

Operators do a 2-tank dive in the morning so the cost of a single-tank dive shown below is for an afternoon dive or a single-tank dive by special request.

St. Kitts and Nevis Diving Facilities

Equipment

Photographic Equipment

Cost

Prices include equipment rental:

Single-tank	\$40-45
2-tank	\$70-85
6-dive package	\$185-225
10-dive package	\$300-325
Open Water Course	\$350-350
Open Water Referral	\$200
Discover Scuba	\$60-80

Operators

St. Kitts



St. Kitts Scuba's base is on the beach below the Bird Rock Beach Hotel.



Of the three operators in St. Kitts, Kenneth's Dive Center **1** is the oldest. Kenneth was originally a free diving conch fisherman. Gradually he acquired scuba gear from yachts that would pass through and ask Kenneth to show them where the reefs were so they could dive. He remembers a German yachtsman gave him his first tank, an American his first regulator and a Canadian his floatation jacket.

From these small beginnings, Kenneth built his dive business. Kenneth is a divemaster and he employs instructors to conduct training courses. From his store on the waterfront in Basseterre he describes how he got to know what it was that divers were interested in seeing and slowly built up a repertoire of sites.

Today his guests stay in hotels, though he still attracts visiting yacht crews who want to dive. About 20 per cent of his business is from yachts. The remainder is from hotels in Frigate Bay—the Royal St. Kitts and Jack Tar Village.

Just to the east of Basseterre is the Bird Rock Beach Hotel. The hotel has its own dive store, St. Kitts Scuba **2**. A 7-night/10-dive package costs between \$700 and \$900 and includes free shore diving. However, only a small percentage of St. Kitts Scuba's guests come from the Bird Rock Beach Hotel. The rest are from cruise ships and other hotels, including the nearby Jack Tar Village.

When we visited the store, they had a 30-foot dive boat moored on the dock next to the dive store, but were in the process of buying another larger boat. The larger boat is required to cope with cruise ship days, as the smaller boat was going out five times on busy cruise ship days (Thursday was the peak day in 1998). St. Kitts Scuba collect passengers from the cruise ships by boat. They will also pick up yacht crews by boat. The store is closed on Sundays.

All dives are led with an additional dive leader at the back of the group. Having two dive leaders in the water means that divers

with a computer can dive their own profile as the group can be split into two, each with its own dive leader. St. Kitts Scuba dives from Sandy Point (site 1) to Nags Head (site 13).

At the eastern tip of St. Kitts is Turtle Beach, home to Pro-Divers **3**. Auston and Margot, the owners of Pro-Divers have been on the island since 1981, though they only started their store in 1989.

Auston likes to take small groups and is very selective about the sites he dives. He makes regular trips to the dive sites to the north of St. Kitts and Nevis (for example, site 17 Grid Iron) and also visits the sites off the south west corner of Nevis.

Two powerful outboard engines on each of his dive boats keep journey times to a minimum. He does not mix snorkellers and certified divers on the boat. This operation is a good choice for experienced divers.



Pro-divers fast dive boat makes short work of the ride to the dive sites.

Pro-Divers work with the Windjammer Fleet to provide diving for their guests. Windjammer passengers are collected from the ship. Their divers also come from a variety of local hotels—Horizons Villa Resorts, Sun 'n Sand Beach Resort (both in Frigate Bay). Guests of these hotels need to take a cab to Turtle Beach to meet at Pro-Divers' store.

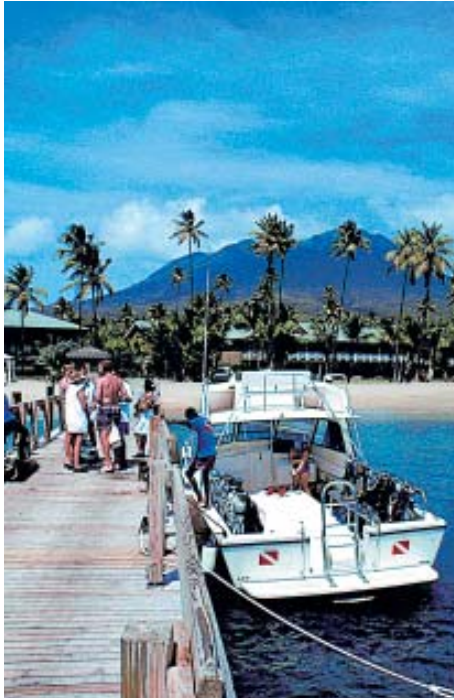
The liveboard dive boat *Caribbean Explorer* visits St. Kitts and Nevis every week. (See St. Maarten chapter for details.)

The liveboard *Cuan Law* also visits St. Kitts and Nevis from time to time, usually in the spring. One or two trips to St. Kitts and Nevis are made each year.

Liveboards

Nevis

Scuba Safaris dive boat boards guests from the Four Seasons Resort Dock.



Nevis has one dive store, Scuba Safaris **4**. Ellis Chadderton is the Nevisian owner of Scuba Safaris. Ellis has a wickedly West Indian sense of humour and is a friendly pleasant dive leader. He runs a flexible well-organised operation. The choice of dive site is always a matter for discussion between the divers and Ellis so that the diving is tailored to individual preferences.

Scuba Safaris store is on the beach next door to the Oualie Beach Hotel, which offers a 7-night/10-dive package for between \$950 and \$1,050 per person, double occupancy. Scuba Safaris also provides diving services to the Four Seasons Resort. Guests are collected from the Four Seasons jetty. Scuba Safaris also collect divers from yachts.

All three Scuba Safari boats have powerful inboard engines so that average journey times are 20 minutes or less.

Ellis is very safety conscious and there is always someone left on the boat when the divers are in the water and all dives are led. On night dives, in addition to a torch, every diver is issued with a marker wand, which is attached to their BCD.

We found the atmosphere on the dive boat very pleasant and were not surprised to discover that Ellis gets a high proportion of repeat divers.

Contact Information

1 Kenneth's Dive Center	Kenneth	Tel: (869) 465 2670 Fax: (869) 466 5250
2 St. Kitts Scuba	Nikki Sinibaldi	Tel: (869) 465 1950 Fax: (869) 465 1950 e-mail: brbh@caribsurf.com
3 Pro-Divers	Auston Macleod	Tel: (869) 465 3223 Fax: (869) 465 0265 e-mail: prodiver@caribsurf.com
4 Scuba Safaris	Ellis Chadderton	Tel: (869) 469 9518 Fax: (869) 469 9619 e-mail: oualie@caribsurf.com

St. Kitts & Nevis Dive Operators

	1 Kenneth's Dive	2 St. Kitts Scuba	3 Pro Divers	4 Scuba Safari
STORE				
Year Established	1985	1993	1989	1984
Number of Bases	1	1	1	1
Instructors	2	3	1	3
Diving Associations	P	PS	P	PN
Divemasters	2	2	1	2
Languages	EF	E	E	E
Pers. Liab. Insurance	•	•	•	•
BOATS				
No. Dive Boats	1	2	2	3
No. Divers per Boat	8	12-20	12-14	12-15
No. Boats with Shade	1	2	1	3
No. Boats with Toilet	1	1		
No. Boats with FW	1			1
Dives per day	2/1	2/OD	2/OD	2/1
Time to dive sites	5-60	5-30	15-45	10-35
O ₂ on boat	•	•	•	•
VHF on boat	•	•	•	•
EQUIPMENT				
Equipment sets	25	20	20	24
Equipment for sale	1	1		1
Equipment for rent	•	•	•	
Photo equip. rent				
Tank fills	•	•		•
Nitrox				
Equip. servicing	•	•	•	•