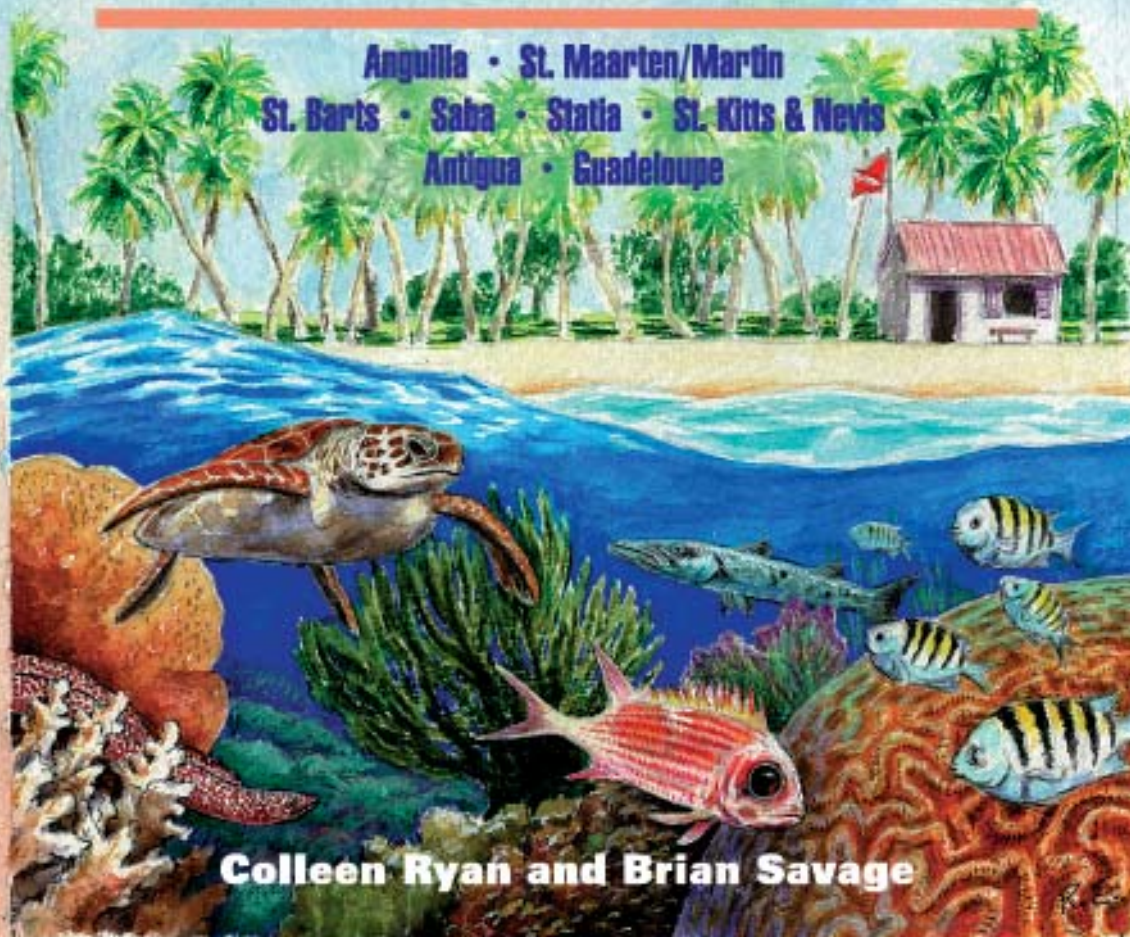


The
Complete
DIVING GUIDE

THE CARIBBEAN

VOLUME 2

Anguilla • St. Maarten/Martin
St. Barts • Saba • Statia • St. Kitts & Nevis
Antigua • Guadeloupe



Colleen Ryan and Brian Savage

Intentionally blank

Sint Eustatius (Statia)

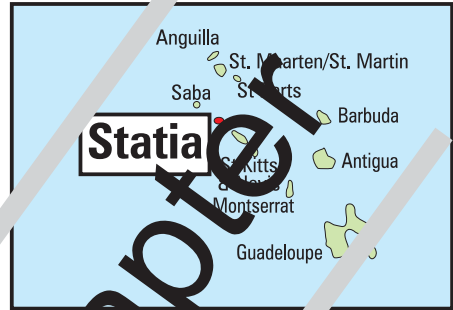
Statia is a curious small island, about 4 miles long and 2 miles wide. The south is dominated by The Quill, a 2,000-foot extinct volcano. The north of the island is hilly (with its own small volcano) and without habitations, except for an oil storage facility. The centre of Statia is relatively flat and this is where life is centred, around Oranjestad; a town of quiet charm, built close to the edge of a cliff, looking out over a long beach and the sea.

Statia is one of the quietest Caribbean islands. Chicks peck at roadside plants without fear of being run down, nothing much seems to happen to the point that sometimes feels like a forgotten outpost. There are a few pleasant beaches, good hikes, a surprising number of restaurants and occasionally even some nightlife. A few expatriots have washed ashore and the local population are mostly of African and Dutch descent.

When people talk about unspoiled Caribbean islands, they generally mean places that have been discovered but not yet overrun. Statia has not even been discovered, making it attractive to those prepared to meet the Caribbean in the raw, where visitors will be treated as people rather than tourists. Here there are almost no souvenir shops or glitzy attractions, just real peace and quiet, far from crowds.

It was not always this isolated. During the mid to late 1700s, Statia was the trade capital of the Indies. Over a hundred sailing ships would lie at anchor in front of the town and what is now a beach used to be a long street of shops and warehouses. During these years the European powers were fighting each other; in addition, England was unsuccessfully trying to put down the upstart American rebels. The major powers wrapped their colonies in a mass of red tape and taxes, stifling trade. This infuriated Caribbean planters who were prevented from getting the best deal for their crops.

The Dutch, who owned Statia, remained neutral and opened Statia as a free port. It became a market where you could sell raw cotton, tobacco and sugar, and buy fine



The Quill, Statia's sleeping volcano, dominates the landscape.



Old buildings, some restored and some inhabited only by vegetation, are testament to Statia's faded glory.



fabrics, silver, gold, household supplies, slaves and guns. Thousands of tons of commodities were traded daily along the colourful, noisy, bustling waterfront.

Countries not allowed to deal with each other could deal with Statia. For example, in 1770 Statia produced about 600,000 pounds of sugar, but exported 20 million pounds. It was officially approved fraud to get round international regulations and the 8,000 merchants of mixed Dutch, English and Jewish origins became so wealthy that Statia became known as the Golden Rock. But the prosperity was not to last.

In 1776 the *Andrea Doria*, an American vessel, came into harbour and gave salute. Governor de Graff, not sure what to do, decided to fire a return salute. He did not realise that, although *Andrea Doria* was a merchant ship, she was under the command of an American navy captain. Thus Statia became the first nation to salute an American naval vessel. British officials did not think much of this, and it was one of the incidents leading to war between Britain and Holland.

Admiral Rodney arrived and Statia surrendered. He confiscated all the ships and warehouses, and rounded up hundreds of Jewish men and deported them. The subsequent auction of this seized property netted him and his crew a fortune, but was not popular with British subjects who lost property.

By the late 1700s Statia was again Dutch and trade was flourishing, but by the early 19th century changing political and economic conditions in the Caribbean ended Statia's role as the Caribbean's first shopping mall and the population dwindled.

Language: English and Dutch

Currency: Dutch Guilder or US Dollars

Population: around 2,200

Telephone code: (5993)

For a quiet island Statia is sociable and friendly and seems to have as many restaurants per capita as Washington has lawyers. You have real choices, and in a one-week stay can eat somewhere different every night.

On the waterfront the Blue Bead offers local, Indonesian and Lebanese dishes. Outside there is a huge old silk cotton tree, and if you happen to be dining when it is in flower, look for bats feeding on the nectar. King's Well offers German cuisine, including smoked barbecued ribs, steaks, schnitzels, Rostbraten, and home smoked fish. In town several more gastronomic hot spots offer a variety of food.

Hiking in Statia is very pleasant, even the roads are quiet and offer pleasant views. Trails have been marked over much of the island and some of the most attractive are up to the Quill volcano, around the rim and down into the crater itself which is forested with some massive silk cotton trees and giant strangler figs.

Horse riding is also a pleasant way to see the island.
Sabra Pressman: (5993) 82760

Try Mazinga Gift Shop. They offer sports and beachwear, postcards, stationary and books, a selection of English language magazines, office supplies, toys, a wide range of gifts and they are also a full liquor store. Otherwise try The Park Place, which features local art and handicrafts.

Statians are often used for a party. Sometimes they close off the traffic and jump up in the streets. Otherwise check out Frankey's which has live entertainment on Sundays and at any other excuse.

Department of Tourism: (5993) 82433
USA: (800) 692 4106

One of Statia's assets is the variety of diving. There are deep sites and shallow areas. There are ancient unrecognisable wrecks and modern wrecks under water no more than 6 months. Though Statia does not have a fringing reef system, coral that has grown on the rocks has become coral reef in some areas. (See site 6.)

The last volcanic eruption on Statia was 1,600 years ago, and evidence of the volcano's output is easily found on the seabed. Some of Statia's sites comprise fingers of old lava flows, some are hard basalt boulders, in other areas the substratum looks so much as if it has been hewn by human hands that it is hard to imagine that it results from natural phenomena.

Three diving areas are within the Southern Marine Park. Sites 1 to 7 are along or on top of a drop-off, which runs north east

Apres Dive

Hiking and Horse Riding

Shopping

Nightlife

Information on Accommodation

The Diving

Southern Marine Park

to south west off the south coast of Statia. A spur and groove formation cuts the edge of the drop off, creating sand chutes and coral fingers. In places the drop-off forms a wall, in others it is a steep slope. These are Statia's deepest sites.

On top of the drop-off, an ancient flow of volcanic material, not lava but hard basalt material, has left big boulders and humps which have become coral encrusted.

The next group of sites, sites 8 to 16 are on and in between fingers of lava. Five fingers extend seaward, running east to west. The fingers are perhaps 80 feet across and the height from the sand to the top of the fingers averages 25 feet.

The lava has become encrusted with coral and sponges but it is obvious even to an untrained eye, that these fingers have not been built by the slow natural, rounded growth of coral. Instead they must have been subjected to extraordinary forces. Blocks hewn in symmetrical angular shapes sit in grid patterns that look more man-made than natural.

The last of the three groups of sites, sites 17 to 21 are along a basalt plate with a gentle slope to the seaward side. The whole area has been referred to as Basaltic Reef in the past, but now there are five buoys in place and each part of the plate has its own name and distinguishing features.

There are few dive sites in this area and the marine park rules are slightly different. Anchoring is forbidden but fishing is not prohibited. It is very important that divers do not interfere with legally set nets and traps.

Although there are four mooring buoys, two of the sites are more appropriate for snorkeling than diving and we have described only the two used as dive sites.

Until recently, Statia's wrecks were more myth than reality. The wrecks that divers were visiting were so old that they were barely distinguishable as ships. All of the wood had long ago rotted away and only the ballast stones remained. Before the wood disappeared, the ballast stones were cemented in place by coral action, so you can still see the outlines of the ship's hulls. They are interesting archaeological sites and tremendous fish magnets. (See sites 23 and 24.)

No artifacts may be removed. The exception to this rule is blue beads. When slaves lived in Statia, blue beads were the former currency in which they were paid. They could be used to buy a wife, for example; the price being fixed by the number of beads required to reach round the prospective bride's waist. Rumour has it that on the abolition of slavery, the ex-slaves flung the beads into the sea as a symbolic act to mark their newfound freedom. Whereas you will be very lucky to find a full-sized bead (roughly an inch long) you might well find fragments,

Northern Marine Park

Wrecks and Archaeological Sites

which you are allowed to retain as a keepsake. Examples of blue beads can be found in the excellent museum in Oranjestad—possibly the best island museum we have visited.

Do not be misled by rumours of an undersea city just off the island. This is untrue and the operators were all at pains to clarify this. The beach does have some old ruins of houses from deep into Statia's past—it was a major trading port in the 18th Century—but this is all that remains. An old seawall is underwater, but only in 20 feet of water just off the beach.

More recently, marine park officials have been creating an artificial reef with sunken ships. Two tugs, two barges and some old oil pipes are now available for diver exploration. (See site 26)

All of the wreck sites are just a few minutes from the harbour. At the time of writing they were not within the marine park boundaries but the park's manager was hoping to bring them under park jurisdiction in the near future.

The Atlantic side of Statia is dived infrequently, and not by all operators. It is not in the marine park, so the sites are not buoyed and the dive operators have to anchor their boats.

As a very general rule, the Atlantic side underwater scenery is not as colourful as the Caribbean side of Statia. The sites are used for variety for divers on an extended package, when weather conditions are calm, and because the sea life sometimes delivers real treats. (See sites 30 to 33.)

A good variety of marine life presents itself for inspection around Statia. Of particular note are turtles, which you will see at many sites. As many of the ancient wreck sites are surrounded by sand, flying gurnards, stingrays and conch pop in regular appearances.

Shark sightings, while not guaranteed, are not uncommon especially on the Atlantic side and in the northern marine park.

Since 1996 Statia has had a marine park managed by the St. Eustatius National Park Foundation (STENAPA). Only recently, since the park manager was appointed in 1997, has the marine park become a reality. The park was officially operational from 1 January 1998.

Buoys have been placed at all the sites within the park and an education programme is about to start, along with consultation sessions with those affected by the park rules, such as fishermen.

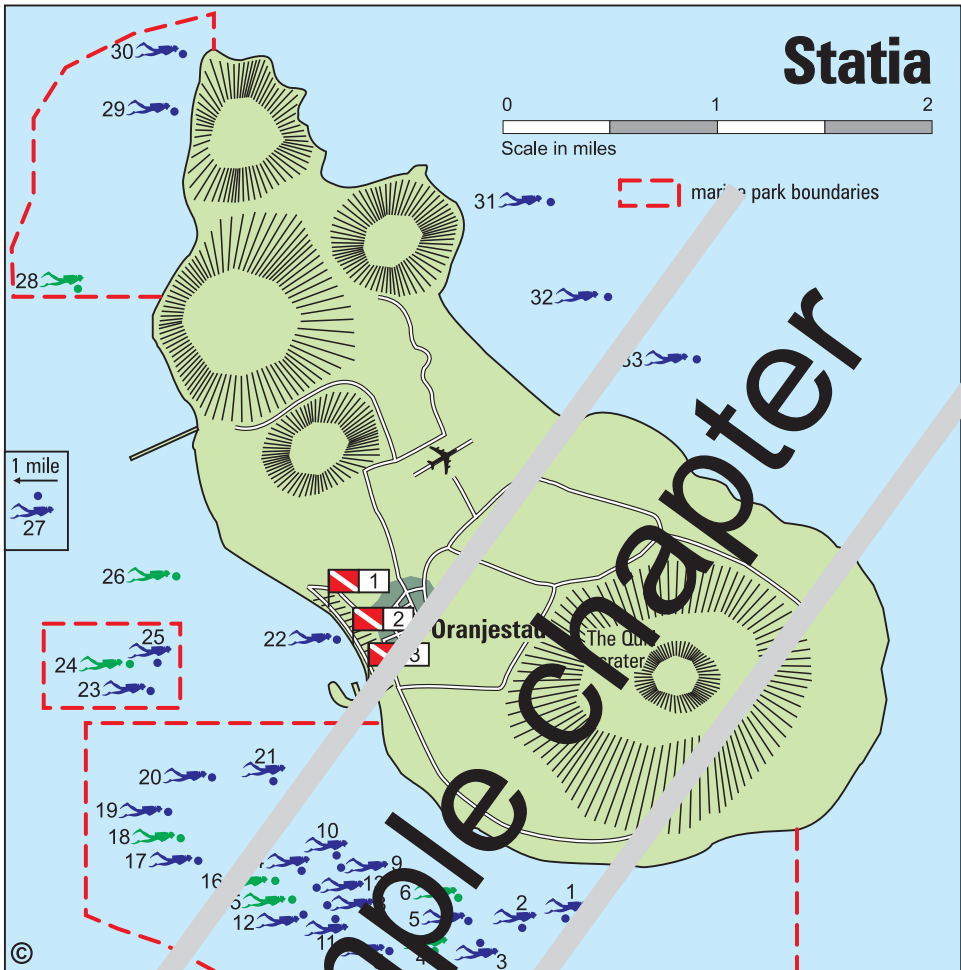
- No anchoring is allowed (not even on sand)
- Spearfishing is prohibited
- No animal or plant, alive or dead, may be removed
- No historical artefacts may be removed, except blue beads
- You may not touch or feed any marine life

Atlantic Side

Marine Life

Rules and Regulations and the Marine Park

Park rules



A fee of US\$3 per dive is charged. At the time of writing you had to go to the marine park office to pay fees, so there were plans being made to have the dive stores collect fees.

No spearfishing is allowed in Stata. Spearguns fall under the handgun laws and are not permitted.

Independent Diving

You are not allowed to dive independently in Stata. The rule applies to anywhere around Stata, not just the marine park.

Safety

From Stata you can see the towering mountain of Saba, where the nearest official recompression chamber is. However, the oil industry on Stata has its own chambers, one on land and one on a support ship. These are not officially available for recreational divers but we presume that no one would be turned away in an emergency.

NO.	SITE NAME	DEPTH IN FEET
1	Drop Off East	70-130
2	Drop Off West	70-130
3	Grand Canyon	60-130
4	The Cliffs/Down South	45-130
5	Coral Gardens	60-120
6	Mushroom Gardens	45-60
7	The Humps	45-50
8	Valley of Sponges	50-65
9	Five Fingers South	45-65
10	Five Fingers North	45-65
11	The Ledges	55-75
12	Anchor Reef	70-85
13	The Blocks	50-65
14	Hangover	45-65
15	Anchor Point South	50-65
16	Anchor Point North	50-65
17	Twin Peaks/Castle Rock	60-70
18	Barracuda Reef	55-75
19	Nursing Station	45-75
20	Blair's Reef	55-70
21	Crooks Castle	35 max.
22	City Wall	20 max.
23	Triple Wreck/Supermarket	50-60
24	Double Wreck	55-65
25	Stingray	40-50
26	STEMAPA Reef	60-70
27	Lost Anchor	60-85
28	Dobbies Crag	80-100
29	Gibraltar	55-80
30	Boulder City	20-70
31	Coral Gardens (Atlantic)	40-65
32	Nurse Shark Ledge	30-55
33	English Quarter	20-30

Statia Dive Sites



NO.	OPERATOR	LOCATION
1	Dive Statia	Lowertown
2	Scubaqua	Golden Era Hotel, Lowertown
3	Golden Rock Dive Center	Lowertown

Dive Operators



**1 Drop-Off East
2 and West
70'-130'**

Although two separate sites, the terrain is fairly similar on each. Steep sand chutes slice into the drop-off and expose fascinating hidden architecture. Delve into the caves or peek into crevices and you would be very unlucky not to find yourself a voyeur of some marine creature's life.

On the outside, gorgeous black coral lends an air of mystery to these sites at the farthest corner of the marine park.

**3 Grand Canyon
60'-130'**

Another dramatic dive—one which can be enjoyed as a 60-foot top of the wall dive, or as a deep dive down to rocks that thrust up from the deep to remain within 100 feet of the surface.

Whether you opt for deep or shallow, the beauty of the dive results from a combination of impressive underwater scenery and a bustling reef community, which occasionally attracts visitors from farther afield.

**4 The Cliffs/
Down South
45'-130'**

The Cliffs are located at the end of the wall that runs along the southern side of Statia. At this point the wall meets sand at 110 feet, the depth increasing as the wall progresses. The mooring buoy is anchored at around 60 feet in sand.

Dive Profile

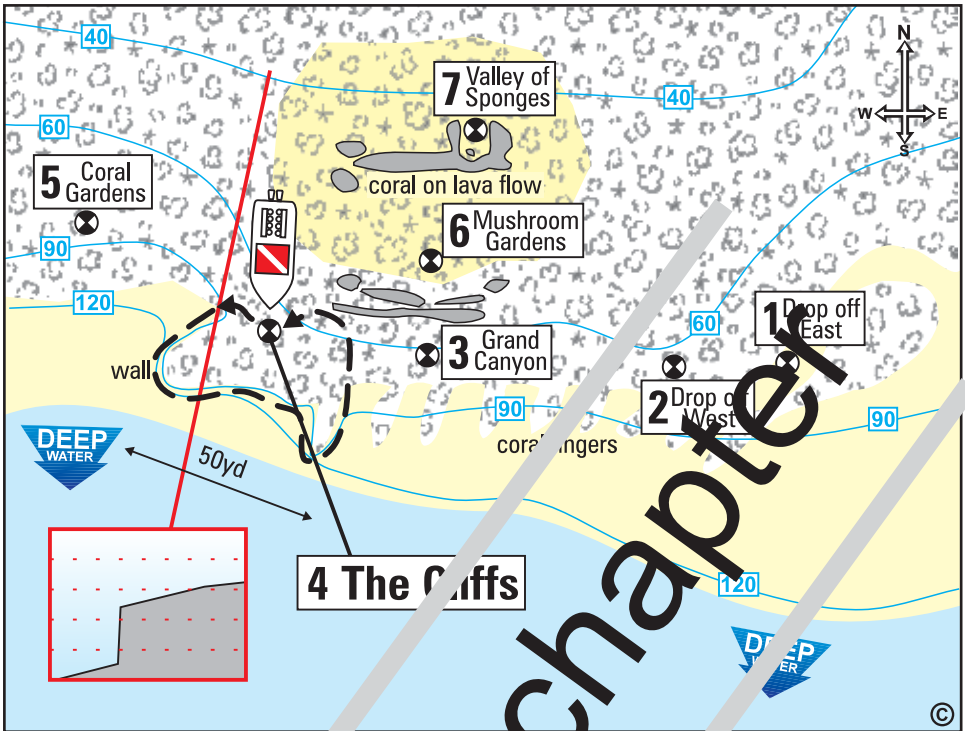


We have a short swim across a flat area covered in star corals and sea rods. A school of Creole wrasse accompanies us to the cliff edge, but prefers to hover in the water column feeding on the suspended matter rather than to take a plunge over the edge.

The wall at this point is vertical, with small shelves cut into the face. Blackbar soldierfish perch on the shelves like exhibits in a natural science museum. Circular patches of plate coral hang like bronze wall decorations, and from the face of the wall lime-green strands emerge. Despite their colour these wire corals are members of the black coral family. As if to shame the two-dimensional wire coral, farther along the wall deepwater sea fans weave a multi-layered, complex web of thick black strands.

We continue with the wall on our left until we come to a canyon with a sand base. Up through the canyon takes us back onto the flat top of The Cliffs, where we finish the dive.

There are more fish on the plateau than on the wall, especially rockhoppers, chromis, blue tangs, moray eels, and hamlets. A white spotted filefish, hovering near a gorgonian, catches our attention because it has a piece of sea fan protruding, as if stuck in its teeth. Dental floss is hard to come by under water. Our orthodontally-impaired filefish decides to swim over a rock where it meets another white spotted filefish and promptly turns from blotchy brown and orange to spotted black and white. Obviously there is room for only one blotchy liveried filefish round here.



Colour and patterns are an important part of the communication process between fish, though little is understood about the process. It should not surprise us, however, even humans use colour to express mood—we blush pink, go green when envy and blue with cold.

The filefish occupies our remaining time before we make a slow ascent back to the boat.

Thanks to Dive Statia.

This pretty slope, covered in coral, deserves its name. The slope is not vertical in this region, and instead leads you down a gentle slope, with all the flora and fauna, colours and textures that you would find on a stroll through botanical gardens set on a hillside.

Coral Gardens 5
60'-120'

Everyone has different tastes in dive sites, which is why we do not give the sites star ratings. However, we have no reservation about recommending Mushroom Gardens to divers who are interested in hard coral species and formations.

The dive route is around a series of coral heads that have developed on the top of the basalt wall which runs along the south of the island.

Mushroom Gardens 6
45'-60'



Dive Profile

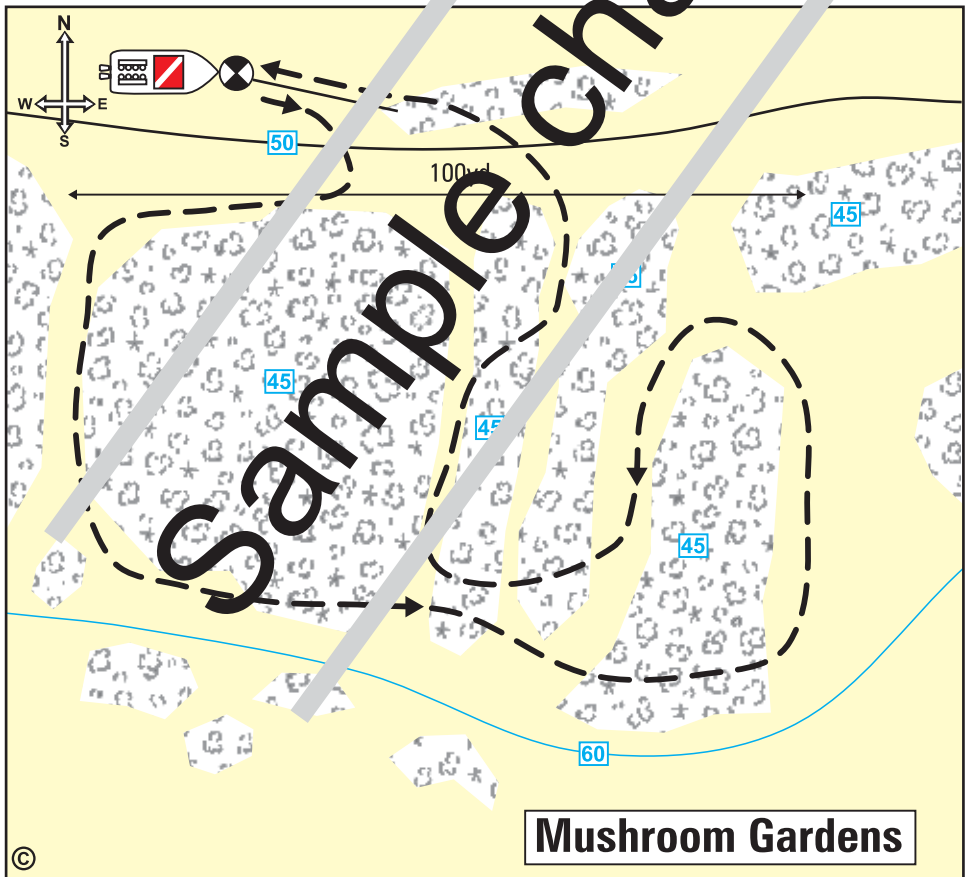
As we leave the mooring our masks are filled with the sight of mounds and hills that have been built by hermatypic corals over many years. These giant mole hills spill over, creating eaves below the flattened coral, which form the roof of the mounds.

Although the formations are not dramatic in terms of size, morphological variations have created a fairy tale world of coral castles, *Alice Through the Looking Glass* proportion mushrooms, and frozen waterfalls of cascading flattened star coral.

The symbiotic zooxanthellae, which colour the corals, have chosen a range of shades from bright sea-green to subdued taupe. Brain corals glow like ripened fruit and boulder star corals offer blush pinks and alabaster to the colour palette.

We had been told that whereas the coral on Mushroom Gardens is always exceptional, there were not usually many fish. Perhaps we were just lucky in seeing a broad variety, including horse-eye jacks, Creole fish, Bermuda chub, spotted drum, and many juvenile wrasse.

A smaller but equally interesting find was a lettuce sea slug





Colleen coasting through the Mushrooms

nudibranch. This creature is often the highlight of the show, but with coral this good, who needs a frilly slug?

Thanks to Eric of Scubaqua.

Two little mountainous humps composed from volcanic material and basalt boulders form The Humps. The profile of the site is only about 5 feet from top to bottom and this is an odd bit of scenery, not without charm and often attracting many fish.

The Humps 7
45'-50'

A valley between two lava flows is littered with barrel sponges, one every 5 feet or so. It is as if someone has set out tumblers for a giant's drink party. (One of the things we like about Statia is the dive site names actually describe the dive sites.)

Valley of Sponges 8
50'-65'

These sites are situated on the second and third lava fingers. (See page 164.) Site 9 on the third finger, is the shallower of the two by a few feet but the finger has more overhangs and crevices to explore. Sponges and corals have taken hold of most of the substratum and the number and variety of invertebrates is quite impressive.

Five Fingers North and South 9
10
45'-65'

Although dive boats previously tried to anchor on sand between the lava fingers, they could not guarantee to get it right and the provision of mooring buoy by the marine park will eliminate anchor damage and protect future coral development.

The southernmost lava finger is the longest and has two sites along it. Site 11 is about two-thirds of the way along the finger and has a mooring buoy in the sand. (See page 164)

The Ledges 11
55'-75'

Colour me Beautiful

Though our understanding of marine life has increased dramatically with easy access to scuba diving, scientists are still somewhat perplexed by fish colouring. Some of the rules have become apparent but others are still subject to speculation and debate, as alternative theories are proposed.

Fish that swim in the open sea have in common countershading as their basic colour scheme. What that means is they have a dark back, a lighter belly and silvery flank. Undoubtedly its purpose is to camouflage them. Looking up from below, a light belly is lost in the light from the sea's surface. Whereas, looking down, the fish's dark back blends in with the darker water below. The silvery flank helps to break the fish's contour. A different



This juvenile French angelfish sports the strident pattern of adolescence, but will soon adopt the more tactful livery of an adult.

means serve a similar purpose for fish that have blotchy patterns. The blotches blur their outline.

What is less clear is why some reef fish seem to have colour schemes that advertise their presence. The beautiful liver of angelfish seems to have no role other than to suggest up with its beauty. The theory, subsequently disproved, was that it was a way for territorial fish to say to members of their own species 'hello, I'm here and this is my patch'. Recent research suggests there is very little evidence for this. It does seem more likely that the difference between adult and juvenile colouring may be accounted for in this way, however. When a juvenile enters an adult's territory it is not chased away, but as soon as it takes on the adult colours it is not tolerated. In fact colour is used to protect juveniles in many ways. Very young fish are transparent or very difficult to see and thus suffer from predation.

Colour patterns appear to have evolved because of the ability to confuse. Some butterflyfish have a dark spot near the tail which looks like an eye. As there is often a bar through the real eye, one theory is that it is intended to draw predators to the wrong end of the fish, allowing it to escape. Another theory is that it makes the butterflyfish look like the front view of a much larger fish.

Of course, we have to consider whether fish can see colour in the same way that we can. There is evidence to suggest that some fish are colour blind but that others see colours well. Without question, recognition of tones and patterns is common to all fish. Maybe they just do not see what all the fuss is about when they hear us oohing and aahing as a Queen angelfish passes by.

The finger is about 75 feet across and 20 feet high. The dive route is along the line of the finger, which has been eroded at its base to create deep ledges.

Beguiling porcupinefish snuggle under the overhangs, out of sight of all but the most seasoned nook-and-cranny moocher.

If you continue out to the end of finger five you will find mooring buoy 12 and an anchor. The lava finger has a rounded tip, rather like a full stop, at the point the lava flow decided to end its wandering. The anchor is embedded in the 'full stop'.

Anchor Reef 12
50'-85'

What weird looking terrain. Solid rock has been neatly dissected into square and rectangular blocks as if someone was planning a massive building project. The other lava fingers have stayed pretty much intact but the strain was obviously too much for this one and it came apart at the seams.

The Blocks 13
50'-65'

So whereas this may not be the most curvaceous seascape, the marine life is not deterred from making homes in these city blocks. Lobsters hang out on the intersection of 6th and 7th and gangs of grunts fill the available space on 5th street.

We were assured that we did not have to be hungover in order to enjoy this dive, nor was it named by someone who had been. The name refers, of course, to the overhangs that are one of its defining characteristics. The other is a hole, too small to swim through, but offering a window to a mysterious blue world.

Hangover 14
45'-65'

The gorgonians, sea fans and sponges are exceptionally decorative as they extend their reach in elegant poses, nodding shyly as we pass.

Anchor Point is named after the anchor which sits off the point of a finger of lava. It has a number of other features that deserve equal exposure, such as swim-through and long ledges with deep overhangs that function as lobster motels.

Anchor Point 15
North and 16
South
50'-65'



Lobsters lurk under ledges at Anchor Point, their red colouring merging with encrusting sponges so that the area looks as if it is on fire.

Anchor Point provides good examples of the quality of marine life on Statia.

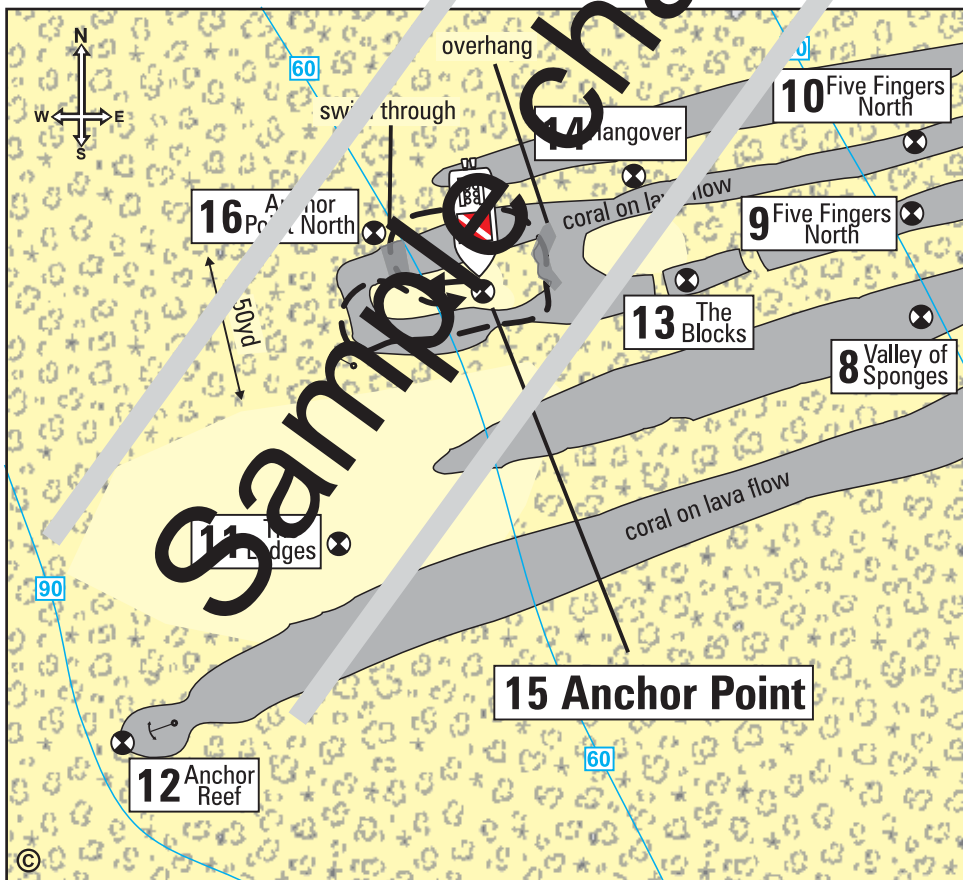
Dive Profile



Very near to the mooring point in 50 feet of water is a narrow swim-through, just wide enough to take one careful diver at a time. The walls inside the swim-through foster colourful encrusting sponges.

As you emerge from the hole, turn around. A colony of pillar coral squats on top like a stack of cooling towers, except, unlike their land-bound counterparts which expel water vapour, these are expelling air bubbles. Even though we know they are our bubbles escaping through the roof of the swim-through, it is still an astonishing sight.

From the swim-through we enter another sea cave along lava fingers that have eroded at their base to leave deep undercuts. The first lobster is spotted but when Brian approaches closely to get a picture, he realises this one is just the entry; tucked deep in the cut are several more. Sharing this sheltered spot are



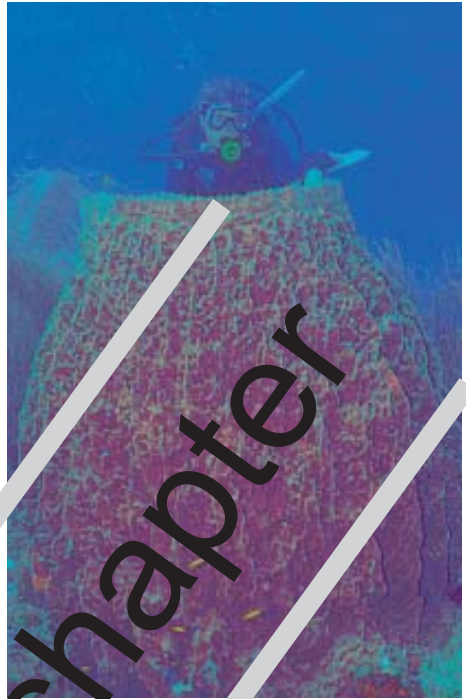
blackbar soldierfish, schoolmasters and grunts. Mat gorgonians coat the outer sections and we are content for a long time exploring the invertebrate life. Hermit crabs are everywhere, tube worms sprout lip-like radioles from the coral, anemones wave their arms as if to tell us to look closer to see the tiny shrimps benefiting from asylum, West Indian sea eggs play dead and arrow crabs tip toe along the rock as if avoiding the cracks.

There is more to see, so we follow Kevin, our dive leader, over the lava finger and into a flatter area of coral-encrusted rock. Two big attractions are worthy of note. A rock outcrop is topped by numerous feather bush hydroids. These forest-green polyp colonies look very much like soft foliant plants, but in terms of stinging power the analogy would have to be with a thistle. In the middle of this glade are fan-shaped branching vase sponges.

The second big attraction is barrel sponges, as big as a diver, scattered around the site. It is hard to believe that these massive structures feed on some of the smallest food particles in the water: they eat microscopic bacteria and have no digestive system organs. Instead, each single-celled animal is linked to those around it and obliging amoeba-like cells carry food around the structure.

Our circular route has brought us back to the buoy line. If the group's members have different air consumption, there is plenty of life around the mooring pin to divert those with air left to spare.

Thank you Dive Statia

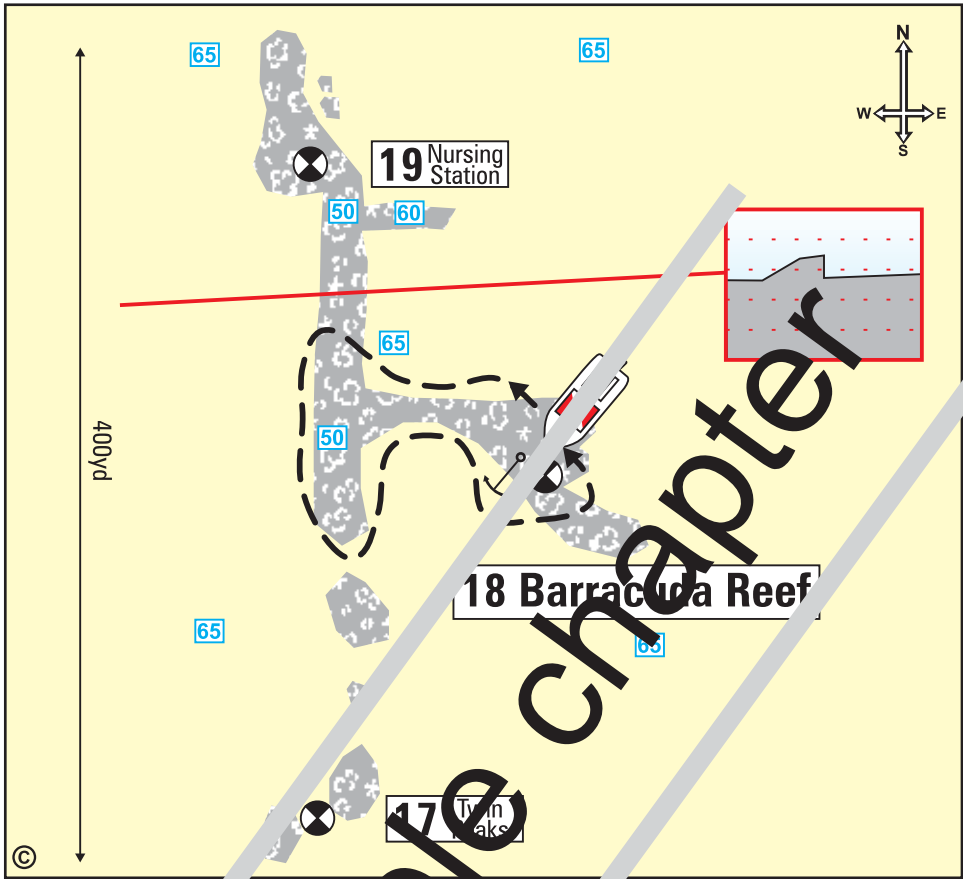


Barrel sponges the size of a diver litter the reef. These monster-sized creatures take many years to reach this size.

The site has two names because some operators refer to the two rocks at the end of the basalt plate as two mountain peaks, and others emphasise the castle shape of the larger of the two rocks. Local dive stores care more about these matters than do divers who enjoy the site whatever it is called.

The mooring buoy is in and at 70 feet, between the two rocks. Take a long slow cruise around these two satellites, admiring the décor and making friends with the locals. Gaudy Spanish hogfish slide by shamelessly flaunting their colours. We like the monochrome spotted drums that pace ceaselessly up and down, as if agoraphobia keeps them caged in the overhangs they inhabit.

Twin Peaks/ **17**
Castle Rock
60'-70'



18 Barracuda Reef
55'-75'

Sites 18 and 19 are very close to each other and some operators consider them one site. They would not, for example, take buoy 19 if there were another dive boat on buoy 18.

We found Barracuda a very lively reef with a good diversity of life. There are giant gorgonians, big barrel sponges, black durgons hovering overhead like the frigate birds above water, schools of fish and an abundance of hiding holes for invertebrates.

19 Nursing Station
40'-75'

Jaap, the park manager, always finds nurse sharks resting under the ledge which surrounds the sand bowl at the centre of the site, so he named it Nursing Station. It is another dive on Barracuda Reef. The bowl is not a complete circle; it might better be described as a horseshoe.

The wall around the sand bowl is 5 feet high with a ledge at its base and this is where you should find nurse sharks.

You may see this site referred to as Blair's Wreck, which though strictly accurate is rather misleading. There is a wreck at the site but you will need a good imagination to see it. Only the ballast stones remain, forged into lumps by years of calcareous algae and coral growth. The remains have created a ledge, which is enrobed with gorgonians, pink and star encrusting sponges and patches of boulder star coral.

Blair's Reef 20
55'-70'

Used mainly as a training dive, Crooks Castle is made up of a series of coral heads surrounded by sand. Juvenile reef fish fare well here, as they do not have to compete for the prime real estate on the more mature dive sites.

Crooks Castle 21
Max 35'

Do not get excited by images of sunken cities or imposing battlements. What remains of this old wreck is not considered a dive site by the operators, except for training or Discoverer's courses. It makes an easy night dive, however, and if you have booked a package with a dive store they may allow you to do this dive independently. Look out for flying gurnards in the surrounding sand.

City Hall 22
Max 20'

There was a time when the name Supermarket referred to the abundance of pots, jars, pipes and other artifacts that covered the bottom around the remains of old ships.

**Triple Wreck/
Supermarket** 23
50'-60'

The wood has long since rotted, but coralline algae and coral have cemented together the ballast stones, which are now indistinguishable from lumps of rock or coral. The ballast stones have created habitat for sessile marine life, which in turn has attracted fish and invertebrates.

Be in mind that the word wreck is, strictly speaking, accurate but it is a very loose interpretation of what you will find. This is not meant to deter you, however, as almost everyone comes up from this dive 'wowing' themselves into ecstasy. Photographers love the site and almost any article you read about Statia will have a photograph taken on this site.

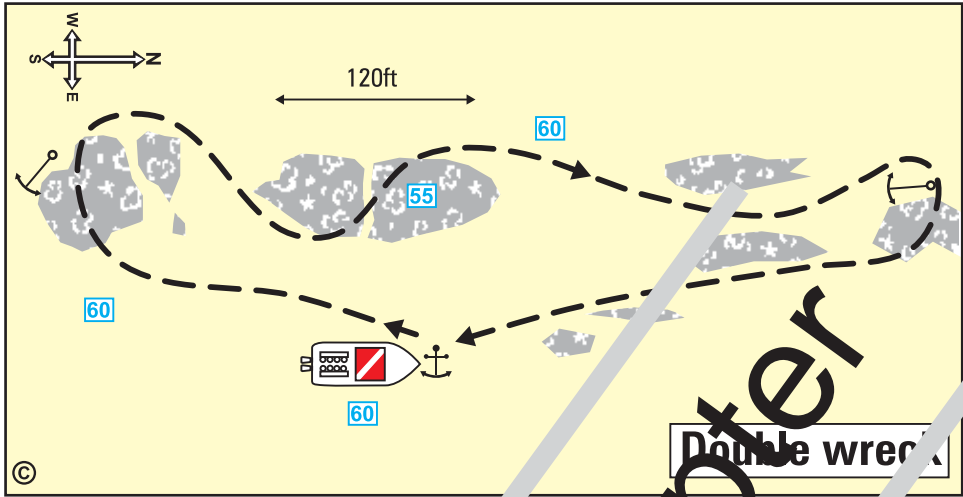
Double Wreck 24
55'-60'



Buoys come and go here courtesy of the tugs and other shipping entering and leaving the harbour. When the buoy is not in place, dive operators will anchor in sand near the main wreck. The pile of ballast rocks, which is all that remains of the ship, is roughly in the shape of a ship.

Dive Profile

To the south is another pile of ballast stones (the stones



are totally encrusted so do not expect to find neat, easily recognisable ships (ballast) guarded by an enormous school of grunts, perhaps as many as 50 on occasion. If you can push the grunts off of the way, take a look at some delightful green tube sponges.

Cruise back over the sand if you are interested in sea stars, conch-eating gurnards and the other inhabitants of sea grass. Look out for bottles, pipes and other artefacts as you go. Remember if you find a slave bead you are allowed to keep it, but anything else must be left in place.

To the north more untidy heaps act as carriers for sponges and invertebrates. One mound is so encrusted with tubeworms it looks like a flower garden. Social feather dusters defy the description marine worm and take on the appearance of a posy of pansies.

Marine worms make the area look more like a flower bed than the seabed.



It is hard to decide whether to hover near the stingrays in the sand or mooch under ledges to spy on porcupinefish—or should we watch the barracuda watching us? Spoilt for choice. Life is tough sometimes.

Thanks to Glenn of Golden Rock Dive Center.

Another collection of ballast stones lying on sand marks the demise of some ancient vessel. These areas act as an oasis on an otherwise barren seabed, drawing fish and invertebrates. Stingrays are the big attraction because they are present in large numbers. To see even one stingray is exciting, to see more is tremendous.

On the subject of funny-looking fish, you might also see flying gurnards.

Stingray 25
40'-50'

STENAPA stands for St. Eustatius National Parks, and this site was created by the park's management as a fish attraction site because sections of the coastline were closed to fishermen when the park was created. The first wreckage was sunk on the site 2 years ago, though one wreck had been underwater in a different location for 7 years.

The inventory of wreckage is:

Two pieces of pipe approximately 70 feet long

A water barge, 200 feet long, safe to enter

A second piece of a barge

Stern and forward section (separated) of tanker *Dundal*, which you can swim through

Golden Rock tug boat, intact, sunk initially in 1991

The *NEI*, old harbour boat, intact

The whole collection comprises Statia's unique underwater boat show.

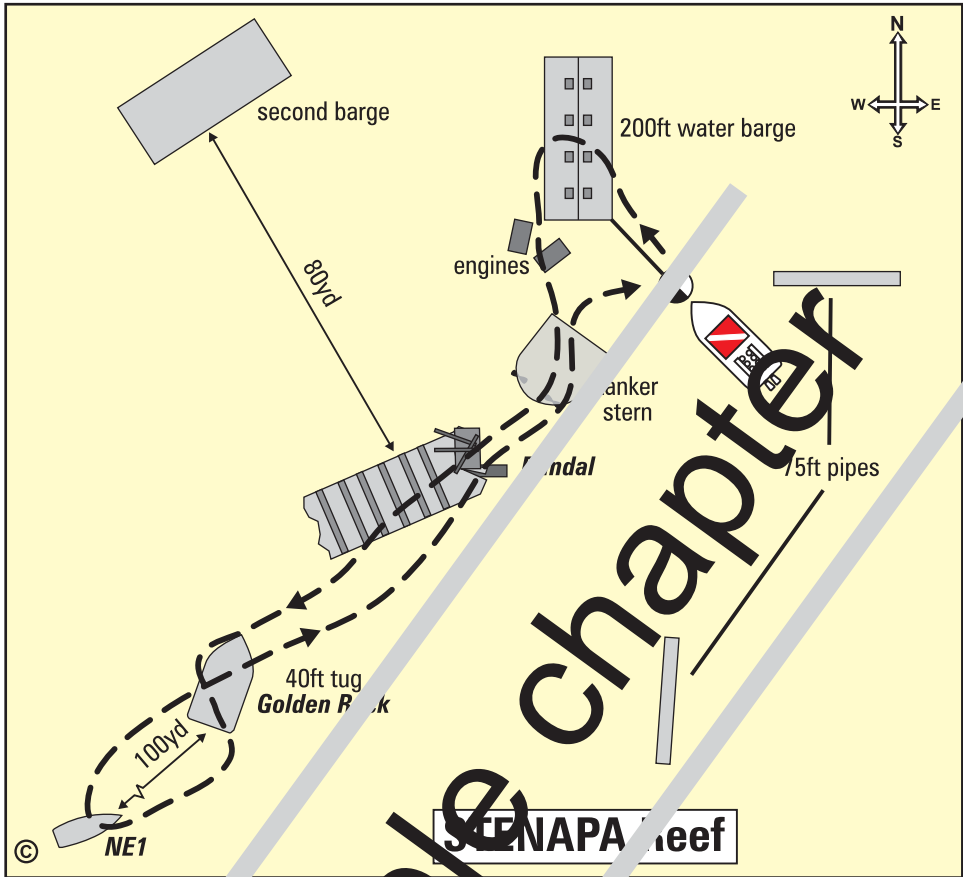
STENAPA 26
Reef
40'-70'



Most dive operators start at the water barge, as this is where the mooring buoy is attached (though it had disappeared when we were there and anchoring was the only option). Eight holes have been cut into the barge giving plenty of access to divers and light. It also allows the occasional grunt to squeeze in. A central bulkhead runs through the ship so you cannot swim in one side and out the other.

Remember there is a lot to see on the site so do not be tempted to stay too long before moving to the *Dundal*. The stern, complete with propellers, precedes the rest of the hull. We think the main part of the hull is more interesting and definitely the most photogenic. The steel of the hull has been removed down to the waterline, exposing the ship's ribs. Swim in near the stern section and you will pass into the middle of the

Dive Profile



boat. Gangs of schoolmaster, grunts and snappers lurk among the ribs, and if you keep your eyes open for tell-tale signs of twitching tentacles, you may see a lobster or two.

Next stop is the Golden Rock tugboat. Of all the wreckage, this has been underwater longest as it was moved to this site from its previous underwater home. Seven years worth of growth has been preserved in the move. Corkscrew anemones, cleaner shrimps, brittle fireworms, green tube sponges, encrusting sponges, brain corals and tunicates are all current residents.

If you are planning to dive this site more than once then these three wrecks will probably suffice for the first dive. If you are greedy, like we are, you will want to see everything so the next stop is a 100 yard-swim to the NE1.

The NE1 used to be Statia's harbour boat until *Hurricane Luis* took a dislike to it in 1995. There is a surprising amount of growth on the boat considering it has been down for only 3 years.

On the swim to the tug the sand provides a good supporting cast of stingrays, flying gurnards, sand tilefish, razorfish, sea stars and sea cucumbers. Meticulous readers will notice that we

have omitted the second barge, as do most dive stores. It is the least interesting item, though in time encrustation may add to its appeal.

Thanks to Glenn of Golden Rock Dive Center.

Not everyone dives this site. Dive Statia, who keep its location quiet, found it; though they suspect that other stores might now also have discovered it.

The site is 2 miles offshore along a reef that runs east and west. The top is at 65 feet and it meets sand at 85 feet. The side facing land is deeply undercut and there is a gentle slope on the seaward side. Sponges grow particularly healthily in a variety of colours and morphological variations—tube, barrel, and rope sponges. At least five antique anchors are strewn along the reef. Other good finds are nurse sharks and turtles lying under the ledges.

Lost Anchor **27** 60'-85'

Doobie's Crack is one of Statia's sites that is susceptible to currents and, as a result, is occasionally undivable.

The Crack, referred to in the name, is a split in a round rock patch, surrounded by sand. Because it is an oasis that attracts big schools of fish, especially nocturnal species which hunt in the surrounding sand at night, returning to the relative shelter of Doobie's Crack at dawn. A big attraction for divers are the sharks that like to pop in just to see what is happening.

Doobies **28** Crack 80'-100'



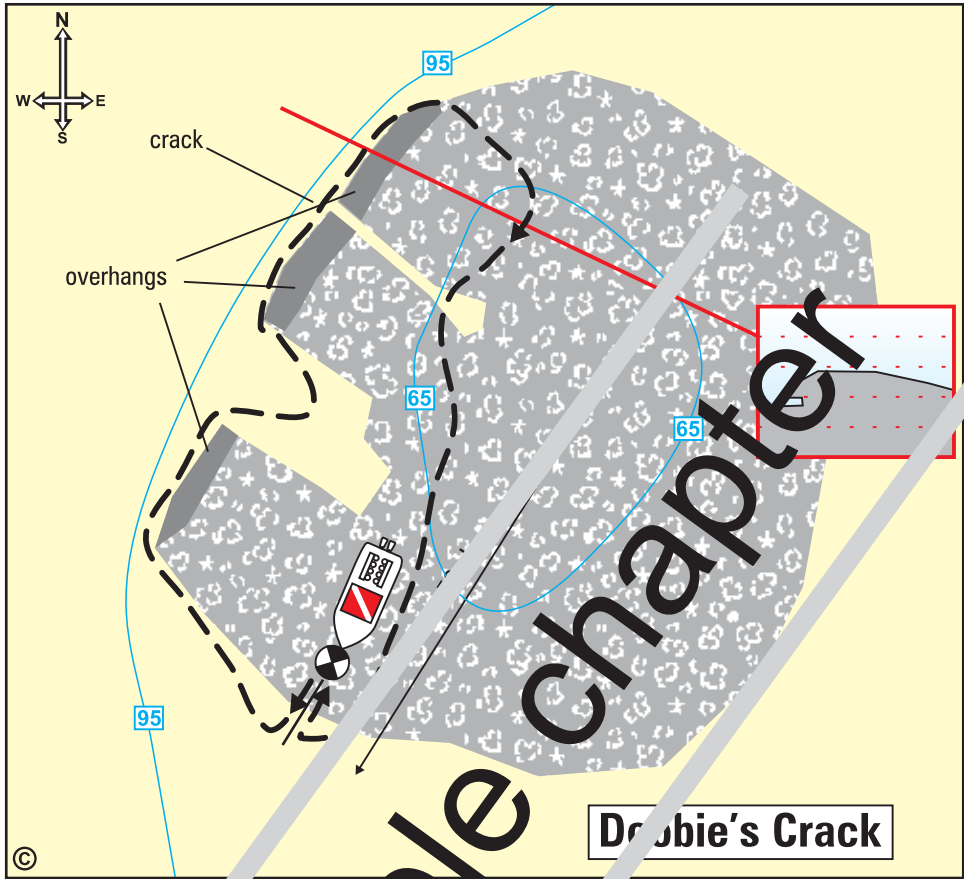
Dive Profile

When the dive buddies to the buoy, we can see that there is some current. Once in the water we work our way down the line, the current lessens and we can find enough places to dip out of the worst of the stream to make it a comfortable dive.

As we make the short swim from the mooring attachment



Doobie's Crack provides retreats for nocturnal fish, eager to keep their red colouring under wraps from the sun's rays.



at 80 feet down a slope to sand at 100 feet, a trio of permits makes a slow pass-by. But they are soon seriously out-numbered by groups of blackbar soldierfish keeping silent vigil. Under a deep overhang we see red and grey snappers, squirrelfish, Caesar grunts and glasseye snappers. These nocturnal fish make good use of Doobie's Crack to rest during daylight hours and the surrounding sand provides good hunting territory at night.

Deepwater sea fans add a frilly entrance curtain to the crack, which is a narrow split, perhaps 4 feet wide at the bottom but narrower above. The best way to appreciate the life within is to spend some time hovering in the entrance watching the fish, and then to swim up and above the crack and look down into it.

At the head of the crack is a shelf with several lobsters shuffling around, as if the fish have come to pay homage to these alien creatures. Or perhaps they are simply managing the activities of the myriad fishes rushing around below.

In the sand, schools of goatfish are engaged in communal vacuum cleaning of the sand carpet, though they leave well alone the very large stingray that has tucked itself under their carpet.

The Night Watch

The reef is a remarkably efficient system, even to the extent of operating a 24-hour shift. As most diving is done during the day time, you might think that you are able to see only half of the reefs creatures, therefore. But being inquisitive, we cannot resist looking under a ledge, peering into the gloom of a cave or poking our noses into any little hole. Consequently, we also see many nocturnal creatures that hide in the nooks and crannies of the reef to sleep and find shelter from predators during the day.

Nocturnal fish typically use the reef for shelter, leaving it at sunset to go to their feeding grounds. These feeding areas may be sand adjacent to the reef or open water. Nocturnal fish generally have large eyes able to cope with low lighting and have colours or patterns that are difficult to see in the dark. Many nocturnal fish are red and others change from strident patterns during the day to muted blotches at night.



Glasseye snappers have the perfect colour scheme for a nocturnal fish, along with large eyes that are sensitive to low light.

Examples of nocturnal fish that divers will see on Caribbean reefs are squirrelfish, blackbar soldierfish, grunts, glasseye snappers and glassy sweepers. Generally they will be found in schools during the day but, after they leave the reef at sunset, some species separate and hunt for food independently.

Eels are something of an exception as they feast at night on day time fish stuck into their night-time quarters on the reef. Eels hunt in the dark by smell, so some fish have learned to disguise their odours—parrotfish surround themselves with a mucus bag to contain their smell while they sleep.

Nocturnal invertebrates are more likely to feed on the reef than to leave it. Urchins, crinoids, lobsters and octopus all search the reef for food at night. Some filter the water with long tentacles or spines, so lack of light is not a problem. Others like octopus have sophisticated senses that enable them to detect tasty morsels buried in the sand or under rubble.

The most common nocturnal creature on the reef is coral, of course. Those stony lumps you see during the day turn into plush, deep-piled upholstery at night when thousands of polys extend their tentacles to feed under cover of darkness.

As we swim back over the reef, we see more big schools of ghost-like glasseye snappers. Above us and all around us, fish are engaged in a feeding frenzy. Black durgons, bar jacks, rainbow runners and chromis compete in a formation dancing championship. The arrival of a barracuda livens up the tempo.

We hang on the mooring line, doing our safety stop, fully entertained by this fish dance spectacular.

Thanks to Glen of Golden Rock Dive Center.

29 Gibraltar
55'-80'

Gibraltar is a good example of the difference between the two marine park areas. The marine biologist who is the park's manager hypothesises that coral development came later to this area than to the sites in the Southern Marine Park. Generally there is less coral cover and more boulders, but that does not diminish the appeal of the site.

A huge boulder, perhaps 60 feet by 60 feet, similar in appearance to the Rock of Gibraltar has some lovely gorgonian-covered walls. From the mooring buoy in 60 feet the dive route takes you north around the boulder and over fingers of rock and sand. Stingrays lie in the sand and turtles favour this spot too.

30 Boulder City
20'-70'

Statia's disturbed geological past has created some strange topography above and below the water. Large boulders and deep fissures, a drop-off and a ledge, are all manifestation of the earth's movements—slow determined pushing and moving to cause folds and ridges, alternating with violent eruptions flinging rocks and basalts across a wide area. Earthquakes tearing rifts and fissures. When the creation of unimaginably hot lava, boiling the sea on contact. It is no wonder the underwater terrain looks a bit strange in places.

The other strange and wonderful phenomenon is the eagle rays that call this area home.

31 Coral Gardens
(Atlantic)
40'-65'

Coral Gardens covers quite a large area and could easily be two dives. There is a gradual slope, covered in large brain corals, which attracts a mass of fish. Big outcroppings create cryptic accommodation for a wide variety of reef creatures, though the site is named for the attractive coral cover.

32 Nurse Shark
Ledge (Atlantic)
50'-55'

No surprises with this site. An extended ledge shields nurse sharks from the sunlight while they sleep away the daylight hours. It used to be an area popular with fishermen and though they still use it, the fish life is abundant and healthy.

33 English Quarter
(Atlantic)
20'-30'

A good second dive because it is shallow, English Quarter is a great spot for groupers and also for moray eels. The dive boat anchors in a hole and the dive route takes you around the hollowed out area.

Diving Facilities

Until a few years ago, Statia was relatively unknown as a dive vacation destination and supported only one dive store. Whereas its fame in the dive magazines still does not equal that of its famous neighbour Saba, there is a growing awareness of Statia diving and the facilities have grown too. There are now three stores, a marine park, and the tourist office is actively seeking new partners to give divers more ways of getting to Statia.

Nevertheless, part of Statia's appeal is its undeveloped status so do not expect to find stores bristling with dive equipment for sale. What you will find are small friendly operators who can take the time to meet your individual needs.

The operators all have modern equipment, in good condition and replaced regularly. We found the dive boats comfortable and well equipped.

Because no independent diving is allowed on Statia, all operators will only rent equipment to people diving with them. They will, however, fill tanks for yachts passing through.

The stores offer underwater still and video cameras (see operator section for more information) to rent, but you will not be able to get films developed on the island.

Not being a famous dive destination, combined with some degree of competition as business grows, has conspired to keep prices modest. If you have your own equipment, you can buy a 2-tank dive for \$65 and package rates are good.

Prices include equipment rental:

Single-tank	\$40-45
2-tank	\$75-80
10-dive package (5x2-tank)	\$280-350
Open Water Course	\$300-375
Open Water Referral	\$125
Discover Scuba	\$60-75

Remember you will also have to pay \$3 per dive or \$25 for 5 consecutive days to the Marine Park.

Starting with the oldest first dive Statia **1** has been offering diving in Statia since 1985 (although not under its current ownership. Texans Ruddy (pronounced Rudy) and Rinda took over the store in 1993, having previously managed dive resorts in the Caymans.

Their philosophy is strong on safety and professionalism. They have their air quality checked regularly, and because Ruddy knows Statia's waters well, he knows whom to take where and in what conditions. Ruddy and Rinda can claim 50 years diving experience

Equipment

Photographic Equipment

Cost

Operators



between them. Dive Statia is a PADI 5 star and NAUI Gold Palm operation.

The store is right on the beach so you don your gear and wade out to the boat. At times, when the surf is too heavy to do this, the boat is taken to the town dock for loading. Statia is a volcanic island which means the beach is black (the colour of volcanic sand) so by midday it is a fast trip down the beach to save your toes being toasted. Although the information matrix shows a 2-tank morning dive, the boat returns to the store between dives.

Dive Statia welcomes groups and can arrange your whole trip for you, including airport transfers, island tours etc. During the low season (i.e. the summer months), a 7-day/10-dive package can be as little as \$650 per week, rising to \$750 in the high season (per person per day). Dive Statia works with the Windjammer Fleet and the Freewind (Scientology ship), which visit Statia from time to time. Most of their guests are from the USA. The store is closed for 2 or 3 weeks in September.

A few yards along the beach is the Golden Era Motel, home to a new store Scubaqua ². The store is owned and run by a group of Swiss nationals and mainly attracts divers from Europe. We found the store very friendly and professionally organised. For each dive site they have an underwater map which is used to brief divers. The briefing is given at the store and then the divers are driven—a 2-minute drive—to the dock to board the boat.

The dive boats are well organised for safety and comfort. A spare tank is hung at 10 feet and there is always someone left in the boat. Divers are led and they are not to exceed a diver-to-leader ratio of 5 to 1.

A video with housing is available for rental, so aspiring photographers might want to test their artistic talents.

European guests often stay for 2 or 3 weeks and Scubaqua

Scubaqua guests are driven to the dock to board the dive boat.



Intentionally blank

Sample chapter

make a genuine effort to make their guests feel at home, creating a personalised family atmosphere. They can arrange fully inclusive packages and the Golden Rock Hotel is no more than a giant stride away.

The third store, Golden Rock Dive Center **3**, is 100 yards away toward the town dock. Glenn and Michele visited Statia and fell in love with the island and its diving so they moved from St. Maarten to Statia to start their store. They literally built their operation from scratch. They did not just build the business, they put every plank and nail of the building in place too. Glenn has charming stories of the period when he first arrived, of local people coming by and leaving fish and conch for him and Michele, with no ceremony just to give welcome to the island.

Glenn's background in computer sales has led him to be a good listener; he listens to what his guests want and will endeavour to meet their needs. For example, he does not set a rigid dive schedule, understanding that some divers like to make an early start, some prefer to sleep in.

Boarding is from the dock, along the store. The main dive boat has a good aft platform and ladder making entry safe and easy, an important requirement on Statia's more exposed sites.

The main dive boat is available for half-day private sports fishing trips and the store's inflatable can be used for private dives for example if one or two people want to be taken to dive a site on their own (but always with a dive leader).

Golden Rock Dive Center offers inclusive packages with the Talk of the Town. The cost is around \$690 for 7-nights/15-dives. The store is just across the road from the Marine Park office and the Blue Bear restaurant which became our favourite lunch spot—the food is good and eating there means you do not have to walk up the slave path in the midday sun.

Glenn runs a friendly flexible operation, serving mostly US guests though he also attracts a number of German tourists.

Contact Information

1 Dive Statia	Ruddy and Rinda Hess	Tel: (599) 382435 Fax: (599) 382539 e-mail: divestatia@magatropic.com
2 Scubaqua	Eric and Ronald	Tel: (599) 82160 Fax: (599) 82160 e-mail: scubaqua@megatropic.com
3 Golden Rock Dive Center	Glenn Faires	Tel: (599) 82964 Fax: (599) 82964 e-mail: goldenrockdive@megatropic.com

**Statia
Dive Operators**

	1 Dive Statia	2 Scubaqua	3 Golden Rock Dive Center
STORE			
Year Established	1986	1997	1995
Number of Bases	1	1	1
Instructors	3	3	2
Diving Associations	P	PSC	
Divemasters	1	2	2
Languages	E	EDGS	EDGS
Pers. Liab. Insurance	•	•	•
BOATS			
No. Dive Boats		2	2
No. Divers per Boat	3-10	3-20	3-14
No. Boats with Sha	1	1	1
No. Boats with 7' net			
No. Boats with FW			
Dives per day		1/1	1/1
Time to dive sites	15	5-15	5-15
Com on boat		•	•
WHF on boat	•	•	•
EQUIPMENT			
Equipment for sale	14	20	6
Equipment for rent	2	1	1
Photo equip. rent	•	•	
Tank fills	•	•	•
Nitrox			
Equip. servicing	•	•	•