



# Buddy Line

## October Fun: Fiji's Garden Island Resort

*by Karen Edwards*

Flying into Tavenui Island, Fiji, was beautiful as we flew low over blue-green water spotted with lush green islands. As we approached the main island, we coasted down a long, narrow runway and approached an airport the size of two trailers. But that didn't matter as we had landed and arrived! We loaded into the bus and drove to Garden Island Resort, where all the caretakers joined in singing a welcome song in perfect harmony. Our spacious rooms opened to the ocean with whirlpool hot tubs on the back porches, separated by privacy walls. The resort recently built a nice dock that was big enough to hold a truck. Walking to the dive shop next door, I heard rattling up in the trees and noticed a bunch of birds — NO! — they were bats hanging upside down in the tree tops flapping their wings and fighting for the perfect sun spot. These were fruit bats, and at dusk we would see them flying en masse overhead.

The diving was beautiful as we went to aptly-named sites like Fish Factory, White Wall and Rainbow's End. All of the reefs had tons of various colored anthias dancing in and out of the corals. I saw a couple of white-tip sharks, a spotted ray, lots of different types of anemonefish but surprisingly not a lot of shrimp. We swam through several tunnels for fun and saw lots of white, yellow, orange, pink, purple and red soft corals. We had arrived just after a full moon, so the current was ripping more than usual. During one of our dives, the strong current above one coral reef caught us off guard with a vicious downdraft on the other side. This was a good reminder to always bring my safety sausage in case I get split off from the group and surface apart from the others.



Taveuni village visit, Fiji

*Photo by Karen Edwards*

We also enjoyed a trip to a local village where the Chief explained all the chores of the village. There was distinctly women's work versus men's work — much different from here in the States. Everyone we met was very friendly and welcomed us all. At the end of our stay, we drank kava in a traditional Fijian ceremony, listened to Fijian songs and even danced with each other. Of course, the Chief had two of us to dance with — ha ha!



Surface interval on the day boat

*Photo by GIR Crew*

During our surface intervals, some in our group enjoyed horseback riding and hiking to local waterfalls. There is even a marker for the international dateline — very romantic, since you could kiss for two days with one foot standing in yesterday and the other foot in today! 

## Diving For Life 2013, Curacao

by Kelly Thiemann

What do I remember most about Diving For Life (DFL) Foundation's 22nd annual SCUBA Diving Jamboree in Curacao? The great Caribbean diving? The hot and humid weather? The successful fund-raising efforts? The fabulous parties? Or being elected as President of the DFL Foundation? No, it was the cheese served at every meal. Curacao is a former Dutch territory after all, and there are no import taxes on Dutch cheese. Breakfast had cheese and bread; lunch had some sort of cheese dish that was left over from the night before, and dinner typically had a cheese dish plus cheesecake for dessert.

While Northern California Rainbow Divers' (NCRD) numbers were down from our all-time high in Bali last year, the nine members who attended had some memorable moments. Jojo Soriano compiled two photo books of last year's event in Bali that were sold at auction for over \$500 apiece. He also made friends with an adorable Homeland Security/Customs beagle at Miami airport who sniffed out that he had forgotten to eat the banana that was included with his cheese sandwich provided by the resort for breakfast (since many of us had to get up at 5 a.m. to catch our flights back home). Because DFL sold out so quickly this year, Kevin Fukuda and Nirmal Merchant were not able to officially register. So they came down to Curacao, stayed somewhere else

and then came for the live auction and the costume party. They were the successful bidders on many auction items.

We were saddened to hear that the resort filed for bankruptcy shortly after our visit. It's too bad because I think that people liked the resort; a WAG did say that perhaps that was the reason we were getting so much cheese. The dive operator, Go West Diving, will still be in business, which is good news because they provide great access to dive sites at the southern tip of the island. Although currents can be tricky there, those sites provide an opportunity to see pelagic mola mola — much smaller than their Bali cousins. The area dive operators are also trying to work on the lionfish problem by spearfishing. The results are fed to the eel population in an effort to train eels to hunt the lionfish and also fed to the local human population. I hear lionfish is tasty although I have not yet tried it.

This year's share of DFL charity funds for NCRD is \$6,530. So start to think about which local LGBT health-related charities you would like to vote for (see box, page 3). Like last year, voting will again take place online.

Next year's 2014 DFL will be at Captain Don's Habitat in Bonaire from September 13-20. NCRD is looking to have either a pre- or post-trip to other islands in the area. Register early because it will sell out.

**Northern California Rainbow Divers, Inc.**  
a California non-profit mutual benefit corporation

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*Trip Leader, Saba 2014*  
Christophe Beraud

<http://www.rainbowdivers.org/>

### CLUB POLICIES

Board meetings are held once a month and are open to any club member in good standing. If interested in attending, please contact any of the Board members listed above for location.

Membership dues are \$35/year and \$55/year for couples at the same address. A free email-only option is also available, although paid club membership is required for trip participation.

Advertising is available to club members for a business card-size ad, or for \$10/issue for non-club members, space permitting. If you are interested in advertising, please contact the editor. NCRD does not warrant, recommend or guarantee the products or services contained in advertisements in this newsletter.

Unless otherwise noted, all monies paid for club-sponsored events are non-refundable.

## Vote for DFL Charities

The Diving For Life Foundation (DFL), a 501(c)(3) volunteer-run organization, has completed its 22nd annual SCUBA Jamboree and fund-raising event. This exciting trip in 2013 drew together a sold-out capacity crowd of 134 participants to the Caribbean island of Curacao. Thanks to the generosity of all participants, the LGBT dive club members and our sponsors, we are pleased to announce this year's distribution of \$92,500 in charitable funds going to worthy LGBT health-related and social services organizations. Through hard work, ongoing support and selfless generosity over the past 22 years, DFL has reached the milestone of giving over \$1 million dollars!

Northern California Rainbow Divers (NCRD) has played an integral part of this by distributing over 18% (\$212,000) of the \$1 million in charitable funds over the years. This year, NCRD will designate \$6,530 of funds to be distributed to LGBT health-related charities.

Five organizations have been nominated by NCRD members to receive charitable contributions:

- Adolescent Counseling Center
- HALO (HIV/AIDS Outreach)
- Shanti Project
- Rainbow Community Center
- The Trevor Project

Please visit NCRD's website at [rainbowdivers.org/DFLfunds2013](http://rainbowdivers.org/DFLfunds2013) to find a description of each of the organizations and how the charitable contribution from NCRD would be spent. After reviewing the information, please vote for the charities you wish NCRD to support. You can vote for more than one charity. This poll will close on December 20.



Lovely Caribbean island of Curacao, location for Diving For Life 2013

*Photo and Design by Jojo Soriano*



Diving For Life 2013 participants in Curacao

*Photo by Chris Richards, Go West Diving*



Curacao sunset at Diving For Life 2013

*Photo by Jojo Soriano*

## 22nd Annual Diving For Life, September 21-28, 2013

*Text and photos by Jojo Soriano*

2013 marks the 22nd year that Diving for Life (DFL) has been contributing to the welfare of LGBT communities through its fund-raising efforts. This year, DFL raised well over \$92,000 towards healthcare organizations chosen by 120+ dive club members who dove in western Curacao under the guidance of Go West Diving. This was my third consecutive Diving for Life trip, and it was awesome!

### The Resort

It was called Kura Hulanda Resort, a half-hour shuttle ride from Willemstad Airport. Our small group arrived the night before, and Alex, our local driver who enthusiastically gave us an impromptu history of the island on the way to Kura Hulanda, shuttled us in. The welcome Bon Bini drink (bottled water or your choice of beer) was a wow factor – it didn't take much to please a dozen of us who had arrived on the island, the second group that had flown the night before DFL commenced. I chose to fly in a day early to avoid the rush of mass registration on Saturday and to ease myself into a place I'm visiting. The staff was wonderful, and the resort was perfect for DFL. We occupied the entire resort for the whole week. There were several 4-flex bungalows by the water. My dive buddy, Jason Gable of San Diego, and I stayed in the bottom unit with a lanai overlooking the ocean! It has an open layout with a small kitchenette, two beds, both indoor and outdoor seating areas, a spacious full bath, a safe and 4 iguanas that showed up and greeted me the next morning. I never saw them again during the week.

The resort has a main dining hall where we enjoyed a surprise visit with performances by Cher, the Villains and a Heroes-themed party. It also has a restaurant and a good sized swimming pool where we congregated when not diving and where we held our other themed party, Everything Orange.

### DFL Organization

As usual, we were greeted by a few DFL directors (Stephen, Cordell and Matt), all volunteers to create this event. It had been a year since I last saw them – they all looked good! Every year, DFL organizers provide a fun and safe place for both divers and non-divers to gather, raise funds, have a blast and make a difference while diving in an exotic part of the world. And each year, newcomers are recruited as ambassadors to sell raffle tickets, a way to appropriate our well-earned dollars in support of organizations that help those in need. It's a win/win. Each year, John McCall, DFL's past president, auctions off several dive trips and miscellaneous items, including the DFL Bali 2012 Coffee Table Books that I had created, which raised \$550 towards the cause. Yay! All my work had paid off. Much gratitude to all Directors who had taken time off during DFL Curacao to attend meetings, put on costumes and wigs, deal with logistics and make sure everyone was well and happy.



### Diving

The Goddess Climatea, the weather goddess (I just made that up), answered our entire petition for great weather and warm turquoise Caribbean waters. The day we arrived, newly hatched turtles made their way to sea – a great sign! The dive shop, Go West Diving under the leadership of Bryan Horne, was truly exceptional. It's conveniently a short trek down the shore from the resort. One of the

things I really liked about Go West is that they listened to feedback. In order for them to accommodate the largest group they'd hosted to date, Go West had to purchase new equipment: computers, BCs, regulators, etc. After our dive week, they made them available for purchase. Cressi was a featured BC, which I really liked, and I ended up purchasing the travel version online, as it weighs about 6 lbs.

The registration process went smoothly, another good sign! Since a few of us arrived a day ahead, we decided to test our gear and went on a shore dive. It's as easy as that to go on as many shore dives as you wanted. "This is like bathtub water!" – an expression I'd hear often. There were a couple of shore-based night dives, including Chad's Naked Night Dive. I knew that lionfish was an issue, but I didn't expect the variety of lionfish present in Curacao. They were the biggest I'd seen – black, purple and the usual reddish versions of these predators. Pod A was a group of 11 divers mostly from Northern California Rainbow Divers (NCRD). Each day, we'd partner up with another pod of 10 or 11 divers on two dives per day, pre-scheduled for either the morning or afternoon. What stood out were a couple of dive spots called Watamula and Mushroom Forest, where huge corals looked like an Alice in Wonderland mushroom forest. At one point, the sea floor was covered with feeding fish. Our pod spotted a nurse shark while Chris of Go West was video-shooting our pod. We also saw a couple of flounder, frogfish, garden eels and other Caribbean fish species. The diving was quite easy. I didn't take an underwater camera this time, and the experience was much more rewarding for me. I felt that without the added chore of setting up the camera to compose the shot, I was able to just be in the present moment. For most of the dives, there was mild to little current, a perfect way for me to master my



The happy divers of DFL Pod A

Photo by Chris Richards, Go West Diving

buoyancy control. I used to be one of the first ones to go low on air. On this trip, I'd surface back up with 1,100 psi of air, and at best with 1,700 psi of air remaining. I was second only to Ed Pon, who had the most air after each dive. I think he has gills.

During our last dive, a Cressi dive gear sales rep, Theo, guided us. I asked, "Are the reefs dying?" His response was that the waters have been warmer than usual this season, and so the corals were affected. But he added, "It's seasonal. They do come back to life as waters cool off a bit." Recently though, I met an oceanographer who claims that climatic changes affect the health of our reefs worldwide. And silt and acid rain, he added, do contribute to the decline of our reefs.

### Land Tours

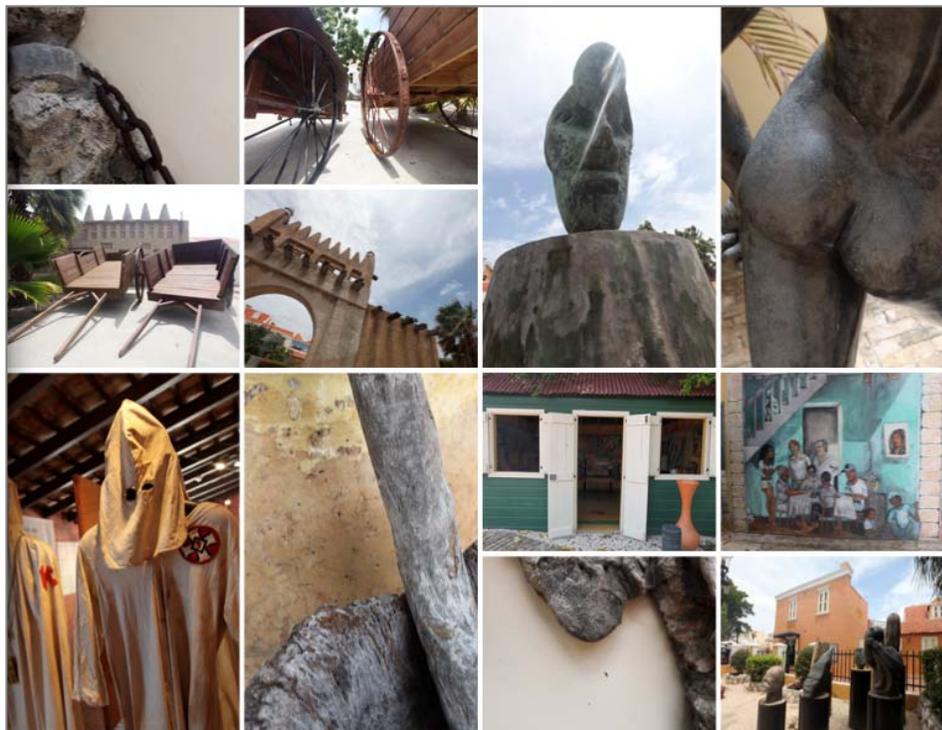
A few of us went to Willemstad town on a mission to find the Curacao Pride T-shirt since Curacao was celebrating its first ever Gay Pride. Jeff Parsons, Scott Moran and I also visited the Slave Trade Museum. Curacao was the destination point for the slave trading practices of the Dutch back in the 1790's. I had imagined the lives of African people back then torn apart from their families, lovers and friends to be shipped by force and traded for slavery. This act was even sanctioned by the Catholic church leadership. How could they even conceive, rationalize and justify that this was OK, especially by church leaders?

It was troubling enough to give me nightmares, which only subsided as I meditated and intended a universal appeasement by saying, "On behalf of humanity, I do ask for forgiveness for what we'd done to our brothers and sisters way back then." It's not OK to enslave anyone for the benefit of the little self. On the other hand, it was a celebration witnessing the island's first ever Pride celebration. After much searching and with the aid of two local police officers, we were able to track down the organizers of the Pride celebration and get our coveted T-shirts! At Willemstad, a local

restaurant's lunch special was lionfish. It was delicious, light and fluffy!

### Overall

Being in the moment diving was a plus for me without the chore of shooting underwater. I was able to focus on my buoyancy control and really enjoyed the moment. The dive spots were amazing, and it was fairly easy diving. We now have a 30-minute underwater video compiled by Chris Richards of Go West Diving to remind us of our dive trip. Doing things I really enjoy, diving and helping raise funds for healthcare organizations, makes any Diving for Life event a truly enjoyable and rewarding annual trip. This is another way to treat and love oneself and to contribute to the welfare of others. DFL 2014 is already open for registration. Who do you know that can benefit from a great trip like DFL? Encourage them to get certified, and invite them to join us! I hope to see you in Bonaire for DFL's 23rd anniversary! And congratulations to the newly elected DFL President, Kelly Thiemann, long-time member of our very own dive club, Northern California Rainbow Divers!



## Spooktacular Halloween Diving on Fiji's *NAI'A* Liveboard

by Karen Doby

*NAI'A* is not your typical diving liveboard. Fiji is not even your typical holiday destination, let alone your usual birthday celebration. But all this and more made Northern California Rainbow Divers' expedition onboard Fiji's *NAI'A* liveboard memorable. To start with, our dive group comprised a half-charter aboard the ship. The other passengers were a nice mix of buddy teams from the U.S. and a family from Australia. It took a few days for them to grok that we were an LGBT group, but when they did, they relaxed into the fun of it. We were also the first group to break in the ship's new cruise directors, Joshua and Amanda, so of course the bar was set pretty high for subsequent groups to follow.

Rob Barrel, a co-owner of *NAI'A*, was on hand to show Joshua and Amanda the ropes as well as regale us with tales of famous passengers and his initial acquisition and refitting of the ship back in 1993. Passenger berths have been recently remodeled, and we found the cabins to be beautifully laid out and finished in native Fijian hardwoods. The main salon is eye-catchingly beautiful and comfortable for meals, watching videos and relaxing between dives.

The crew on this boat is phenomenal! Not only do they anticipate and cater to your every need and desire while diving, eating, going ashore, taking photos, etc., they are among the friendliest people in the world and spend downtime from their duties playing guitar and singing both popular and Fijian tunes. One evening, they offered a traditional Fijian kava ceremony, replete with native songs and good cheer.

What about the diving, you ask? This was my 6th trip aboard *NAI'A*, and it was as spectacular as ever. There was reef-top damage from a recent typhoon at the bommies at Vatu-I-Ra, and frankly I was the only one who noticed. Right from the start, we all were delighted with the brilliant soft coral, colorful reef dwellers and predators patrolling the reefs. As it was half moon, we didn't have the strong currents we'd experienced in Taveuni the week before. From Vatu-I-Ra, we headed into Namena Marine Reserve where we saw a handful of grey reef sharks at the dive site "Kansas", schooling barracudas and hordes of horse-eyed jacks. Our hearts really started racing at Wakaya when we witnessed a graceful manta ray duo ballet up close and scalloped hammerhead sharks in the deep blue.



At Makogai, in addition to some exciting diving, we visited a traditional Fijian village, drank yet more kava and enjoyed Fijian song and dance. Afterwards, we sailed to the tiny island of Gau, sat in the "bleachers" in Ngali Passage and watched as upwards of 50 grey reef sharks patrolled the channel. One of our divers, Carson, celebrated his birthday among all the sharks at Ngali Passage and later enjoyed chocolate birthday cake and ice cream after dinner.

On our way home, we stopped to dive the impressive pinnacles of Mount Mutiny and E-6, both of which feature sheer drops from the surface down to 3,000 feet. Returning to Vatu-I-Ra at the end of the trip, the current had picked up and with it, the numbers of reef predators. At Maytag, we saw the full range of Fiji's hunters: grey reef sharks, horse-eyed jacks, giant trevallies, great barracuda, dogtooth tuna, red snapper, longface emperors and even a lone wahoo.

Not to be remiss in mentioning, there was plenty of small stuff too: popcorn, cleaner and Thor shrimp, pygmy seahorses and pipefishes, nudibranchs galore, friendly octopus, stonefish, leaf fish, anemonefish, crabs of all sorts. All in all, we had some amazing diving and general merriment with a few interesting, colorful personalities thrown into the mix. We're already planning our next *NAI'A* adventure!



## A Trip to Saba Makes the Perfect Holiday Present

by *Christophe Beraud*

Thanksgiving is over, Black Friday and Cyber Monday are now distant memories, and some of you are still shopping around for the best gifts for the holiday season. Instead of the latest electronic gadget, cell phone, tablet, video game console, or whatever this year's 'must have' is, consider the gift of a dive trip with Rainbow Divers to the Caribbean island of Saba.

Rob and I were in Saba in October and really enjoyed not only the diving but also the atmosphere that this small piece of the Netherlands has to offer.

Saba is a rather small island with only 1,400 inhabitants. It is an ancient volcano that sticks out of the Caribbean Sea with sheer cliffs and amazing vistas. A few small whimsical villages (Hell's Gate, Windwardside, St Johns and The Bottom) are dispersed along a winding road (the road that could never be built) that goes from the airport to the harbor. Saba is not your typical Caribbean island; there are no chain stores, no beaches, no hordes of tourists, no cruise ships, no malls. However, it offers wonderful diving, intimate village atmosphere, friendly and open-minded locals, great locally-owned restaurants and an overall relaxing experience.

To get to this little piece of paradise, one has to fly to Saint Maarten; several airlines have nonstop flights from the U.S., such as United, Delta, US Airways and JetBlue. Once in Saint Maarten, you can either fly to Saba with Winnair or take the *Dawn II* ferry. Flying in and out of Saba is worth the experience, as it has the smallest commercial runway in the world!

The diving in Saba occurs within the confine of the Saba Marine Park, which was established in 1987 to preserve and manage Saba's marine resources. What makes Saba's underwater environment so

special are its seamounts and pinnacles. Third Encounter, Twilight Zone, Outer Limits, Mt. Michel and Shark Shoals rise dramatically from the depths to within 85 feet of the surface. These depths have protected them from natural storms as well as man-made damage. These pinnacles are covered with large sea fans

environmental issues with the local population. We met Sea Saba owners Lynn and John during Sea and Learn when we were in Saba in October and were extremely impressed by their dedication to their business and employees, the island of Saba and the protection of the environmental resources that this tiny island has to offer.

There are only a few hotels in Saba, but none of them beat the Shearwater Resort. Perched on top of Bobby Hill, one can only be amazed by the breathtaking panoramic view of the Caribbean Sea and the islands of St Eustatius, St Kitts and Nevis in the distance. This small resort is gay-owned and operated, has a

very nice swimming pool, comfortable modern accommodations, full bar and restaurant. Enjoying the sunset with a glass of wine or cocktail by the pool after a day of diving is priceless.

During our stay, Rob and I were pleasantly surprised with the overall quality of the food available on the island. A number of small restaurants in the village of Windwardside offer great cuisine, and we will take full advantage of this by dining at various restaurants during our stay.

The package we put together for this trip includes 5 days of 3-tank guided boat dives with Sea Saba, 7 nights at the Shearwater Resort (double occupancy), breakfast, lunch (on diving days) and dinner at various restaurants, transportation between airport/harbor and the hotel. The cost of this trip is \$1,790 per person, and we need at least 8 divers signed up by the end of January, 2014, to make this trip a reality.

More details regarding the trip are available at [www.rainbowdivers.org](http://www.rainbowdivers.org). If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at [secretary@rainbowdivers.org](mailto:secretary@rainbowdivers.org)

Hope to see you there and happy holidays. 🐠



and sponges with an abundance of reef creatures and fish. The structures themselves are not to be missed, with the most unique being the Needle, just off in the deep blue from Third Encounter. It is common to encounter schools of tropical fish, jacks, groupers or even members of Saba's robust shark population. When Rob and I were there in October, we encountered nurse and Caribbean reef sharks on most of our dives and the largest Southern Stingray we had ever seen. Although these dive sites are virtually bottomless, they can be safely enjoyed with 100 to 120-foot dive profiles, well within the limits of recreational diving. In addition to these deep sites, there are a number of shallower dive sites that are also very good and make a great second or third dive for the day.

We have selected Sea Saba as our dive operator. While the quality of the services provided by Sea Saba and its dive guides is exemplary, they are also very involved in the community and the protection of the local environment. Once a year, they organize Sea and Learn, a month-long educational event that raises

## Board Meetings

### Upcoming: January, TBA

Board meetings are open to club members. If you are interested in attending, please email Karen at [president@rainbowdivers.org](mailto:president@rainbowdivers.org)

## Election Results: 2014 Board

The club's annual election of Board members was held on December 8 in conjunction with our year-end holiday party, this time hosted by Christophe Beraud and Rob Raso at their lovely home in San Francisco. Festivities included a fun give-away as well as plenty of food and drink. Five officers were re-elected to the 2014 Board of Directors: Tommy Todd, Kathi Doster, Dennis Nix, Christophe Beraud and Karen Doby. Thanks to all for your continued service to the club.

## Calendar

Please see details at <http://rainbowdivers.org/>

| Non-Diving Events  | California Diving  | Exotic Dive Destinations   |
|--|--|--|
| TBA — check website for dates<br><i>Board Meeting</i><br>via Skype | TBA — check website for dates<br>Monterey/Carmel, CA<br><br>May 3-4, 2014 <b>NEW!</b><br><i>Swann Charters</i><br>San Diego<br>Southern California<br><br>August 23-26, 2014 <b>UPDATED</b><br><i>Truth Liveaboard</i><br>Channel Islands<br>Southern California | March 9-16, 2014<br><i>Yap Pacific Dive Resort</i><br>Yap, Micronesia<br><br>March 16-23, 2014<br><i>Tropic Dancer Liveaboard</i><br>Palau, Micronesia<br><br>March 23-31, 2014<br><i>Blue Lagoon Resort</i><br>Chuuk, Micronesia<br><br>May 31 - June 7, 2014<br><i>Shearwater Resort &amp; Sea Saba</i><br>Saba, Caribbean |



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