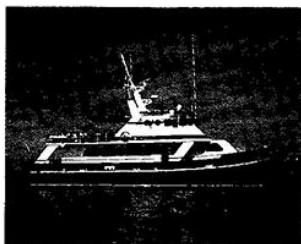


the Nimrod III

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Shark Reef. This ancient submerged lava flow, covered with rich coral and sponge growth, extends off Grand Savanna for more than a half mile, gently sloping downward. This vast area is nourished by a swift nutrient-rich current, which presumably attracts the elusive whale shark. Huge gorgonians and sea fans sway as divers move along the drop-off (out of the main current flow) which starts at 60 feet and falls off at a 45-degree angle to a sandy bottom at 120 feet. Permanent moorings have been placed at almost all of Castaways' sites to preserve these undefiled reefs for future divers.

Maggie's Point is the most dramatic of the afternoon dives out of Castaways. Wide-angle photographic opportunities are endless around stone piles covered with invertebrate marine life. The rounded chunks of basalt presumably were deposited by river run-off at a time when the ocean was at a lower level. Monstrous stands of fluorescent vase sponges and their symbiotic crinoid companions flourish here. Sand chutes between the elevated areas are home to docile stingrays. Golden coneys, trumpetfish and creolefish painted in day-glow colors pop into photographers' viewfinders almost on command.

Located less than a mile from Castaways, on a bluff overlooking the Caribbean, is the French-Provincial-styled Lauro Club Hotel. Individual efficiency guest houses dot the beautifully landscaped property and every cabin offers some of the best whale watching on the island. Their French restaurant is known for its magnificent food. East Carib Dive operations transports divers at the Lauro Club Hotel to the same dive sites frequented by Castaways.

It would take something extraordinary to entice shutterbugs from all that photogenic underwater excitement, and topside Dominica has it—the world's only hot and cold running waterfall. Trafalgar Falls, with its double cascade separated by a few hundred yards of lush foliage, can make you temporarily forget the underwater splendors. Hot-tub-size pools of sulphur-rich water beckon trekkers to shed their hiking attire and soak their sore muscles. You can also relax in the multitude of boulder-shrouded pockets of flowing water or sit under the rushing waters of the falls.

At our next stop, Titou Gorge, we plunge into a pool of water adjacent to a eight-foot-wide crevasse, which bisects a massive hillside of granite. Upon entering the portal, we swim upstream into a hidden cavern. Here the gorge nearly