

# Watersports & Activities

## Dive Experience – At 33 Years, The Name Says It All!

Dive Experience turns 33 this year! Owner Michelle Pugh, a 39-year resident, learned to dive in LA in 1970 and continued diving while attending San Diego State University and working part time for Fish and Wildlife. In the fall of 1977, she accepted a chance to teach diving on St. Croix and ended up moving here and starting her own business.

Sam Halvorson, Captain, Instructor, Dive Master, and Videographer, has been on board for 28 years. He knows the reefs like the back of his hand. His videos are a favorite souvenir! Skeeter, the dog, loves the dive boat and swimming with the divers.

One of Michelle's most incredible dives was in 1979, as a photographer in Canada shooting killer whales for the book, *A Whale Called Killer*, by Erich Hoyt—an experience that would serve her well later on.

In 1993, along with Jacques Cousteau, she was inducted into the Platinum Pro 5000, through SSI, and in 2004 into the Women Divers Hall of Fame for being the first woman to dive with killer whales in the wild, the first American woman to teach diving in Moscow, Russia, and for establishing the mooring system on St. Croix. That same year, Michelle was given the SBDC and Congressional



Susan Wall

sional Award for Entrepreneurial Success.

Toting a 100-ton Captain's License, she has been on the St. Croix Fisheries Advisory Committee and on the Caribbean Council for Fisheries Management here since 1989.

Michelle, who's made over 10,000 dives on St. Croix is the only dive center owner that actually dives every day—guiding lots of customers by request. Michelle's diving adventures include the West coast (Mexico to Canada), the East coast (Virginia to Rhode Island), the Red Sea, Australia, Solomon Islands, lots of Caribbean islands, Borneo, the Philippines, and recently the Antarctic.

Dive Experience is working locally with the Florida-based Reef Environmental Education Foundation to help curb the Lion Fish invasion on St. Croix and has taught local kids to dive for free hoping they will help protect the reefs once they see them.

Dive Experience, St Croix's oldest established dive operator and first PADI 5-Star Dive Center, is on the Christianstair boardwalk at the Kings Alley Hotel; their Dive Experience II dive boat on its waterfront dock.

Learn to dive from novice (Discover Diving Program) to professional dive instructors here. The store is full-service, with prescription masks and snorkel vests and a state-of-the-art repair department, but caters to the non-diver, St. Croix visitors, and locals with hats, towels, tees, Trudi Gilliam art, and the largest Reef sandal selection on island.

"With Dive Experience reaching 33 years and me with over 39 years of only being in the dive business, I'd like to think we're simply the best at what we do," says Michelle. "Celebrate with us—Anniversary Party, Saturday, June 25!"

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