

## ***Barbados - Wreck Diving***

Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum! Barbados is by far the best wreck diving destination in the Caribbean.

Bridgetown, the capital city of Barbados, is among the oldest cities in the Caribbean. Historically, Barbados was a major port of call in the British Mercantile system of the North Atlantic and was known as the `jewel in the crown` of British colonialism. Settled for agricultural uses, the importance of the island skyrocketed during the 17<sup>th</sup> century as Barbados' sugar industry rose to become the largest in the world making Barbados the richest colony in the New World. With a long sea-faring history, Barbadians – or Bajans as they are affectionately known as – have the sea in their blood. These days, Barbados remains a major port of call for cruise liners filled with tourists from all over the world.

Barbados has two well known `pirates of the Caribbean` -Stede Bonnet and Samuel Hall Lord.

Bonnet – or Captain Thomas as he is otherwise known - is affectionately referred to as the `gentleman pirate`. Swayed from the life of a wealthy landowner by the excitement of the seas and a life of crime, Bonnet turned to piracy. His first sailing vessel – Revenge – had a salaried crew who sailed with him along the American eastern seaboard where he captured and burned the unfortunate vessels that crossed his path. In the winter of 1718, Bonnet was finally brought to trial and hung for acts of piracy.

Sam Lord was a quirky pirate and perhaps the laziest! Legend has it that Lord would hang lanterns high in the coconut trees around his seaside castle. The light coming from Lord's estate confused many a passing ship intending to moor outside of Bridgetown. Inevitably, the ships would sail directly into the reefs where they would be wrecked! Lord would board the ships and steel the booty which is how he amassed his fortunes.

While you won't see the ships of Bonnet and Lord, with over 8 popular wreck sites, the avid diver has plenty to see, explore and inspire the imagination. Wreck dives range from shallow beginner dives to the more extreme deep dives. All wreck dive locations are situated on the west and southern sides of the island.

For beginner to intermediate divers, Carlisle Bay is the perfect location to start. A marine park, this shallow bay opens up to 6 wrecks the oldest of which is the Berwin, a 45 ft French tug boat that went down in 1919 lying at 25 ft. Located on the south-west coast, the bay is protected from the strong currents and surges that typify the north and eastern waters. Carlisle Bay is an ideal location for aspiring underwater photographers, wishing to capture the mystery of these underwater vessels and the artificial reef life they support. With a variety of vessels made of wood, cement or steel each of the wrecks plays host to a unique variety of sea life and coral formations.

Both excellent dive sites, Friars Craig and the Pamir – two 170 ft freighters - are sister ships intentionally sunk for diving purposes in 1985. Pamir remains intact at a depth of 40 to 50 ft. Host to a colony of black coral and sea fans, this north-western site is frequented by schools of sergeant major fish, white frogfish, squid and large pelagic fish. Unlike its twin, Friars Craig lies in fragments across the shallow ocean's floor about 1 mile off Barbados' southern coast. Hit by impact of Hurricane Ivan in 2004, the

site experienced massive coral damage. Nevertheless, Mother Nature has returned the site to a glorious haven for hawksback turtles and countless variety of tropical fish. You are sure to see a number of blue tang, squirrel fish, peacock flounders, crab, lobster and the occasional sting ray.

The most challenging wreck dive is the SS Stavronikita. With the rudder lying at a depth of 140 ft and the top of the mast only 18 ft from the surface, the `Stav` is one of Barbados` most favous dives sites. Almost fully intact, this Greek freighter was purposefully sunk by the Barbados Government in November 1978. After being gutted by fire, all doors, loose fittings and bent metal were removed from the vessel allowing for divers easily access the site. Due to its immense size and bulk, the avid wreck diver will need to devote several dive trips in order to experience the entire vessel. The Stav is encrusted with gorgonias which branch out along it`s hull and deck in a scenic vista that`s not to be missed. Large fish species such as barracuda and amber jacks are frequent visitors to the site. Upon the assent, don`t forget to look up. The mast rising towards the surface is truly a magnificent site!

See our links below for more dive related information.

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