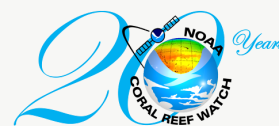




Saba



Regional summary of 4 dive sites. Figures are averages across the sites that report them (n = sites with a value); each site's own page has its individual values.



Coral Health Index: TBD



Photo: Anderson Mayfield/Coral Reef Diagnostics — Saba - Ladder Labyrinth

COUNTRY

Saba

SITES

4

each linked below

HARD CORAL COVER
(REGIONAL MEAN)

5.0% ± 2.3% (std. dev.)

n=4. range 3.0–8.9%

WATER TEMP. DURING
SURVEYS (REGIONAL MEAN)

26.5°C

n = 3 of 4 sites; surveyed Feb
2026

CORAL HEALTH INDEX
(REGIONAL MEAN)

not yet scored

n = 0 of 4 sites

MOST RECENT WATER
TEMPERATURE RECORD

29.5°C

16 Sep 2026 · [Leeward Caribbean
Islands](#)

MOST RECENT HEAT
STRESS RECORD



4.7°C-weeks

16 Sep 2026 · Alert Level 1

MEAN ANNUAL MAX DEGREE
HEATING WEEKS (DHW), LAST
5 YEARS

13.9°C-weeks 🔥

2021–2025 · Leeward Caribbean
Islands

HIGHEST ANNUAL HEAT
STRESS

23.2°C-weeks 🔥

in 2024 · Leeward Caribbean
Islands

SEVERE HEAT-STRESS YEARS

6

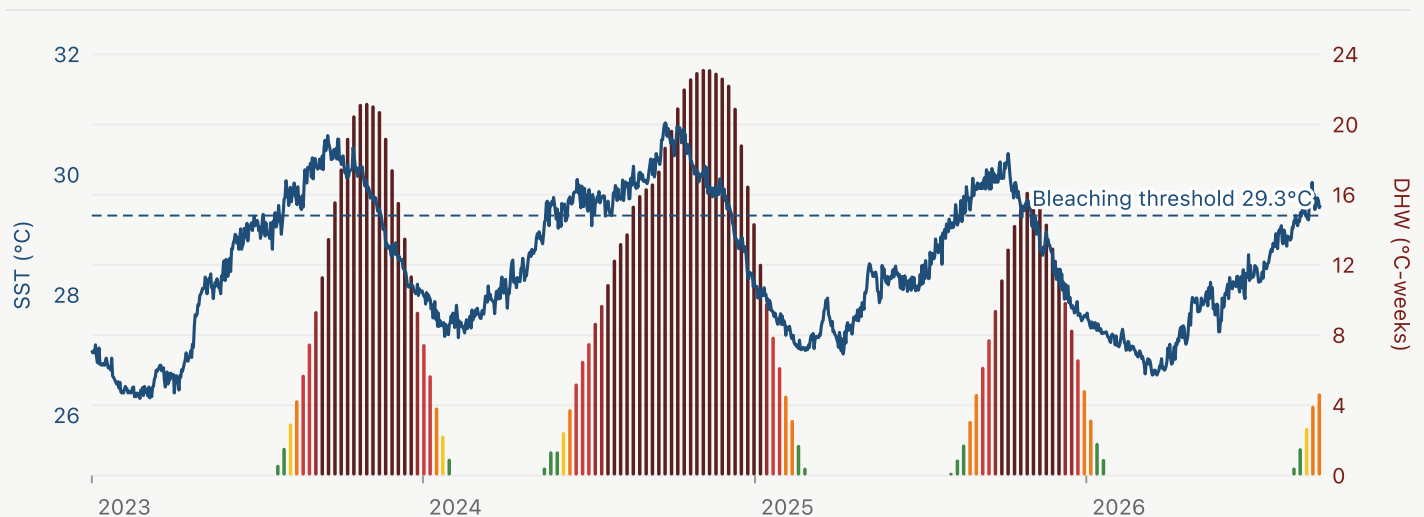
1985–2025 · 4 in the last 10 years

Heat-stress figures: [NOAA Coral Reef Watch](#) — [Leeward Caribbean Islands](#) 5-km virtual station. Each pill links its source record and carries the values behind it.

REGIONAL SUMMARY

Saba's four marine-park dives, in February 2026, cross volcanic boulders, basalt pinnacles, and sand rather than true reef framework, where [sponges](#) and [gorgonians](#) dominate and stony corals are small and sparse. Large animals are a strength, including Caribbean reef [sharks](#), nurse sharks, and green turtles.

Heat stress



— sea surface temperature (SST) (left axis) ■ DHW under 2 ■ DHW 2–3 ■ DHW 3–5 ■ DHW 5–8
 ■ DHW 8–10 ■ DHW over 10 (🔥 above 12)

Daily SST (line) and weekly maximum Degree Heating Weeks (bars), Jan 2023–Sep 2026, [NOAA Coral Reef Watch](#) 5-km Leeward Caribbean Islands virtual station. Dashed line: bleaching threshold (maximum monthly mean $28.3^{\circ}\text{C} + 1^{\circ}\text{C}$). $\text{DHW} \geq 4$: bleaching likely; ≥ 8 : severe bleaching and mortality likely. A bar is drawn only where DHW exceeds zero, so a stretch with no bar is accumulated heat stress of zero, not missing data — the SST line runs the full period.

Long-term record: 6 years since 1985 reached 8 or more $^{\circ}\text{C}$ -weeks at [NOAA's](#) Leeward Caribbean Islands station. [Download the annual DHW data \(CSV\)](#).



4 sites in this region — click a marker to open that site.

Regional setting

Saba, about 13 km^2 in area, is an inactive volcano that climbs steeply out of deep water, and its eroding, surf-swept rocky coast, with few sheltered bays and no permanent beaches, is poorly suited to reef building ([Wells 1988](#)). [Spalding et al. \(2001\)](#) likewise characterize Saba and [St. Eustatius](#) as steep-sided volcanic islands that lack much reef framework yet support important coral communities. [Wells \(1988\)](#) reports that a brief survey in 1984, made for the planned marine park, found a well-developed reef at about 24 m off the south coast, running parallel to shore for at least a kilometer, with more than 90% coral cover of large flattened *Montastraea annularis*, *Colpophyllia natans*, and *Porites astreoides*, and seamounts at 30–33 m with cover approaching 100%. Eroded boulders all along the coast have been colonized by corals, and at Core Gut Bay some resemble giant coral mushrooms where sediment has scoured their bases. The same account notes that the Windward Group islands hold fewer hermatypic corals than the Leewards (33 species against 50), and that *Diadema antillarum* mass mortality had reached Saba by the mid-1980s. Nearby lies the Saba Bank, a large shallow platform that may be a submerged atoll ([Spalding et al. 2001](#)). As of 2001 the Saba Marine Park protected all benthic

communities to 60 m. [Spalding et al. \(2001\)](#) estimate about 420 km² of reef for the former Netherlands Antilles, a combined figure that includes [Bonaire](#), Curaçao, St. Eustatius, and [St. Maarten](#).

[Souter et al. \(2021\)](#) report recent trends only for the Eastern and Southern Caribbean as a whole, a subregion that groups the Lesser Antilles with Trinidad and Tobago, Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, and Venezuela. Across it, mean hard coral cover fell from about 26.2% in 1999 to 14.5% in 2019, the largest decline among the five Caribbean subregions, while algal cover nearly tripled between 1987 and 2019 to reach 48.3%. For the Caribbean as a whole, the same report links these losses to the 2005 [mass bleaching](#), hurricanes, polluted, and nutrient-enriched coastal water, and overfishing of herbivores such as parrotfishes, and it names invasive lionfish, *Sargassum* influxes since 2011, and [stony coral tissue loss disease](#) (SCTLD) as newer threats; SCTLD, first seen in Florida in 2014, had been confirmed in 19 Caribbean countries and territories by October 2021. Earlier, [Wilkinson \(2006\)](#), drawing on the 2004 Caribbean Reefs at Risk assessment, placed the Lesser Antilles among the areas most threatened by coastal development and singled out its high islands for land-based pollution and sediment.

Overview

The Saba unit covers four dives made on 21 and 22 February 2026 in the Saba National Marine Park. Tent Drift and Tent Shallow are on the Tent Reef cluster, and the other two are Ladder Labyrinth and Man-of-War Shoals. All four are volcanic hardground rather than carbonate framework. Tent Drift is a low ridge of rounded lava boulders grading into gray sand, with a stretch of vertical wall. Man-of-War Shoals is the high-relief site, with basalt spires and pinnacles separated by clefts and walls dropping to sand. Ladder Labyrinth is a maze of boulder ridges 1 to 3 m high divided by narrow sand corridors, and Tent Shallow is mostly a garden-eel sand plain with isolated knolls.

[Sponges](#) and [gorgonians](#) dominate the visible community. The main ones are giant barrel sponges (*Xestospongia muta*), tube sponges including *Aplysina fistularis*, elephant-ear sponges consistent with *Agelas clathrodes*, sea fans, sea rods, and sea plumes. Stony coral is sparse and small-colony: *Eusmilia fastigiata*, *Diploria labyrinthiformis*, *Porites astreoides*, and *Agaricia*. The best colonies at Man-of-War Shoals are domes of *Montastraea cavernosa*. Ladder Labyrinth has the most numerous live colonies, many fist- to dinner-plate-sized heads packed onto the boulder crests, though together they cover little area. Hard coral cover (Claude CV) ranged from 3.0% at Tent Shallow to 8.9% at Ladder Labyrinth; a nearby 2024 survey recorded 1.7% hard coral.

Coral condition is mixed rather than clearly impaired. Several *Eusmilia* colonies at Tent Drift held pigment only at the base, and colonies with sharply bounded pale patches or small white lesions

appear at Tent Drift and Man-of-War Shoals, none confirmed as bleaching. Invasive lionfish were seen at three of the four sites, along with a cup coral consistent with the invasive *Tubastraea coccinea* at Tent Drift, and an old fish trap lies in the sand at Ladder Labyrinth. Large fauna is a strength: Caribbean reef sharks at Man-of-War Shoals, nurse sharks at three sites, green turtles, a southern stingray at Tent Drift, and dense garden-eel colonies at the Tent Reef sites.

Highlights

- Man-of-War Shoals is the high-relief dive, with basalt pinnacles, some of the biggest [barrel sponges](#) of the Saba dives, and Caribbean reef sharks on the wall.



photo: Saba - Man-of-War Shoals

- Ladder Labyrinth's boulder crests carry the most numerous live coral colonies of the four dives.
- Tent Shallow's sand plain holds a garden-eel colony of hundreds of individuals.
- Great star coral (*Montastraea cavernosa*) forms the healthiest large colonies, at Man-of-War Shoals.



photo: Saba - Man-of-War Shoals

- Tent Drift on Tent Reef: a resting nurse shark, a green turtle, a buried southern stingray, and a dense garden-eel colony.



photo: Saba - Tent Drift

Notable observations

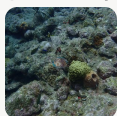
- [Saba - Tent Drift](#): Possible bleaching: multiple *Eusmilia fastigiata* colonies cream to near-white with pigment retained only basally, possible paling/bleaching; one large plating star coral with a sharply bounded pale-orange central patch, partial bleaching or a healed lesion. Invasive species: one lionfish (*Pterois volitans*) and a scarlet solitary cup coral consistent with *Tubastraea coccinea*. No diagnosable disease.



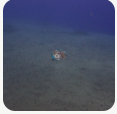
- [Saba - Man-of-War Shoals](#): Possible bleaching/mortality: several colonies cream to white or with sharply bounded pale patches (partial bleaching, recent mortality, or [sponge overgrowth](#); not called as bleaching); grooved [brain corals](#) with small white lesions. Invasive lionfish in one frame.



- [Saba - Ladder Labyrinth](#): Possible bleaching: one large meandroid/star coral colony reads unusually pale/whitish, possibly a blue-water lighting artifact rather than bleaching. Gear: an old fish trap wedged in the sand.

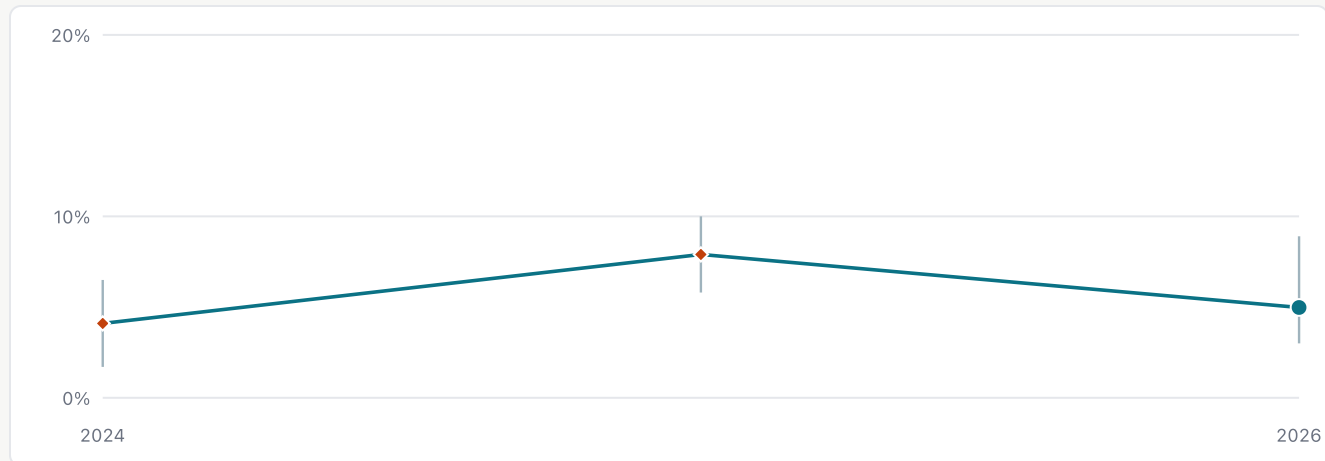


- [Saba - Tent Shallow](#): Invasive species: a lionfish (*Pterois volitans/miles*) tucked into a rock crevice.



Coral cover over time (pooled)

One point per year: the mean of every hard coral cover value available for this region that year — Anderson's own dives and every independent survey station within 5 km of them. The vertical bar is the full range behind that mean. Different programs use different methods at different stations, so this is a regional summary, not a single comparable series. Years resting on fewer than three values are drawn as smaller points (2024, 2025). Marker shape: ● his own dives, ◆ other organizations' surveys.



Sites in this region

- [Saba - Ladder Labyrinth](#) — 8.9% coral cover
- [Saba - Man-of-War Shoals](#) — 3.7% coral cover
- [Saba - Tent Drift](#) — 4.3% coral cover
- [Saba - Tent Shallow](#) — 3.0% coral cover

Nearby external survey stations

5 independent survey records within 5 km of a site in this region (deduplicated across sites).

- [MERMAID](#) project "Saba_Marina_Relocation"* — Black_Rock_Donor (2024): 1.7% hard coral cover, 1.45 km from Saba - Tent Shallow
- [MERMAID](#) project "Saba_Marina_Relocation"* — Black_Rock_Donor (2025): 10% hard coral cover, 1.45 km from Saba - Tent Shallow
- [MERMAID](#) project "Saba_Marina_Relocation"* — Black_Rock_Donor (mean of 2 surveys, 2024–2025) (2025): 5.8% hard coral cover, 1.45 km from Saba - Tent Shallow
- [MERMAID](#) project "Saba_Marina_Relocation"* — Hole_in_the_Corner_(HITC)_Recipient (2024): 6.5% hard coral cover, 3.15 km from Saba - Tent Shallow

- [MERMAID](#) project "Saba_Marina_Relocation"* ([MERMAID](#) test project) — Black_Rock_Donor (2025): 5.8% hard coral cover, 1.45 km from Saba - Tent Shallow

All images from [Coral Reef Diagnostics](#). Data are from [Coral Reef Diagnostics](#).



© Coral Reef Diagnostics.

References

- Souter D, et al. (eds) (2021) *Status of Coral Reefs of the World: 2020*. International Coral Reef Initiative / [Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network](#). [\[PDF\]](#)
- Spalding MD, et al. (2001) *World Atlas of Coral Reefs*. University of California Press, Berkeley. [\[PDF\]](#)
- Wells SM (ed.) (1988) *Coral Reefs of the World. Volume 1: Atlantic and Eastern Pacific*. [UNEP/IUCN](#), Cambridge. [\[PDF\]](#)
- Wilkinson C (2006) Status of coral reefs of the world: summary of threats and remedial action. In: Côté IM, Reynolds JD (eds) *Coral Reef Conservation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. [\[PDF\]](#)