

The Nature of Saba



The island of Saba forms part of the inner arc of islands stretching between the Virgin Islands and Venezuela. All of these islands are of volcanic origin resulting in an extremely mountainous topography. Saba is approximately 13 square kilometers (5 square miles) in area with Mt. Scenery as its highest elevation at 877m (2877ft) above sea level. The slopes of the peaks and domes are steep, in some places exceeding 60°. Several valleys or ravines locally known as guts run down the slopes of the mountain. A few level plateau can be found, the largest being the valley of The Bottom and Flat Point.

The average annual rainfall for Saba is about 1,000 mm (40 inch). Precipitation varies depending on elevation and exposure to the eastern trade winds. The dry season is normally between December and July.

The summit of Mt Scenery

Dense vegetation with a variety of species covers the top of Mt. Scenery and upper section of the slope. The Elfin Forest covers about 8 ha (20 acres) with the dominant tree being the (1) Mountain Mahogany. (2) Epiphytes grow on trunks, branches and leaves of other plants. (3) Orchids are among the most common epiphytes

present. They have special structures that allow them to absorb water quickly when available. Other epiphytes include (4) Liverworts, (5) Bromeliads, (6) Mosses and (7) Ferns. In addition, (8) Mountain cabbage or palm and several species of shrubs including (9) Wild plantain, (10) Tree ferns and Mountain manna are very

common. At present the low cover and height of the trees a result of severe disturbances by hurricanes.



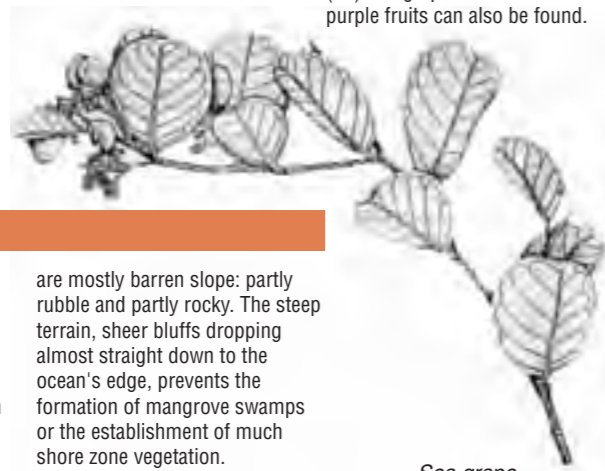
Mountain fuchsia

High hilltops to the lower slopes

Just below the top, but still high on the mountain, are Mountain palms and different species of Tree ferns. (11) Elephant ears and Wild plantain trees are abundant. Lower down on the slopes, the fairly tall vegetation usually shows no distinction between the tree and shrub layers. The average cover and

number of species are considerably less than that of the vegetation higher on Mt. Scenery. Redwood and (12) Mountain fuchsia are wild

tree species that grow in this zone. Cactus species including the (13) prickly pear cactus and (14) Sea grape trees with edible purple fruits can also be found.

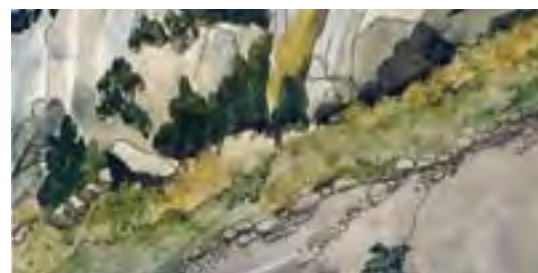


Sea grape

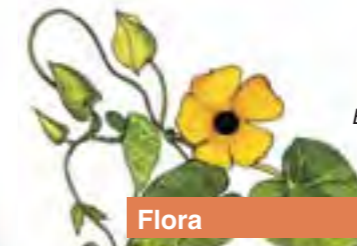
Meadows and cliffs

Grassy meadows with scattered shrubs are mainly found on the lowest southern and eastern slopes of Saba. This small patch of meadows to the northeast of the old sulphur mine differs from the other meadows of this species-composition. The grass *Botriochloa pertusa* is the most abundant. Shrubs such as Marron and Baye withe are found scattered in this zone. Steep cliffs surround the island of Saba and

are mostly barren slope: partly rubble and partly rocky. The steep terrain, sheer bluffs dropping almost straight down to the ocean's edge, prevents the formation of mangrove swamps or the establishment of much shore zone vegetation.



Saba is located within the Caribbean hurricane belt. The hurricane season starts in July and normally lasts until November. Temperature, humidity, and rainfall vary significantly with altitude on high volcanic islands such as Saba. The vegetation varies within distinctive zones which are also related to altitude and humidity. Several vegetation types exist on the island. Clouds often cover the top of Mt. Scenery, resulting in cloud-forest vegetation. Slightly lower in a belt where high rainfall occurs, rain-forest vegetation is present. Still lower on the slopes where humidity decreases, the vegetation gradually becomes drier. Plants and trees found closer to shore often adapt to the salty environment, while species found at higher elevations would not survive at sea level.



Black-Eyed Susan

Flora

Saba's plant life is a mixture of species brought in by the early colonists and native species. Introduced species include Mango, Avocado, (15) Sour lemon and other fruit trees that now grow wild. Saba's national flower, (16) the Black-Eyed

Susan, is a native of South Africa probably brought in by Dutch colonists and is commonly found along the trails. The wide variety of flowering plants range from prolific (17) Oleander and (18) Hibiscus found in gardens, to

wild flowers and orchids in the rain forest. The (19) Wild begonia and (20) Wild raspberry are also common along the rain forest trails.



Black belly racer snake

Reptiles and Amphibians

The island's small lizards seen along footpaths from sea level up to the top of Mt. Scenery are a species of (21) Anoles lizard found only on Saba. The colour differences between males and females are unique. The male has black leopard spots and displays an orange-yellow dewlap during courtship, while the females are smaller and usually a drab olive colour. The

non-poisonous and harmless (22) Racer snake is a common encounter along the trails and roadsides. Although it typically disappears quickly into a nearby bush, it will sometimes remain undisturbed waiting to stalk prey and you can approach it quite closely. The species is only found on Saba and St. Eustatius. Large Iguana lizards are also

sometimes seen along the roads and most often on a hike to Old Booby Hill. (23) The Coquee is a tiny tree frog that is more often heard than seen. After sunset, the sounds of the tree frogs blend harmoniously with the distinctive noises of crickets.



Purple-throated Carib hummingbird

Birds

Saba is home to about sixty species of birds, many of which are sea birds. Bridled terns, Sooty terns, and Brown noddies breed every year in late spring on Green Island, a small cay just off the north coast. Red-billed and White-tailed tropic birds nest in the holes and crevices of the high cliffs while Frigate birds and Brown boobies soar near the coast.

Saba's diverse vegetative zones provide habitat for a wide variety of land birds. Five species of doves and pigeons

live on the island and several others have been known to visit. The small Common ground dove can be found at the dry lower elevations whereas the secretive Bridled quail dove frequents the higher wet forest. Red-tailed hawks can be seen on the lower slopes while Thrashers, Hummingbirds, and Banana quits can be found at higher elevations. The (24) Pearly-eyed thrasher is one of the most common birds seen both in the villages and in the forests.

Saba's Nature Trails

A. The Ladder

Hiking time: 40 minutes one-way

Difficulty: Strenuous

The stairway begins near The Bottom, a short distance past the hospital. From the lookout at The Gap, continue down a steep road through a residential area. The Ladder begins where the steps veer off to the left. The Ladder was used until the 1970s to bring up cargo from Ladder Bay to The Bottom.

Highlights: Views of coastal bluffs, old Custom's House, and ocean vistas.

B. Crispeen Track

Hiking time: 30 minutes to Crispeen, one hour to Rendezvous from The Bottom.

Difficulty: Moderate

The Crispeen Track begins a short distance past the dormitory in The Bottom and is well marked. Follow the signs to either Bud's Mountain Trail or the Bottom Hill Trail. The trail to Rendezvous begins above the last house on the left. The trail enters a rain forest and passes through fields and over a forest ridge. The trail continues into pasture land and on to the junction with the Mt. Scenery Trail. Access to Crispeen Track from Mt. Scenery/Windwardside is via Rendezvous trail.

Highlights: Views of The Bottom and secondary rain forest.

C. Maskehorne Hill Trail

Hiking time: 20 minutes one-way

Difficulty: Moderate

Look for the trailhead signboard on your left as you head up to Mt. Scenery from Windwardside. The route passes through landscape with lush vegetation thick with Elephant ears and climbs past tall boulders.

Highlights: Views of Windwardside.

D. Mt. Scenery Stairway

Hiking time: 1 ½ half hours one-way

Difficulty: Moderate-Strenuous

The stairway to the top of Mt. Scenery begins just west of the Trail Shop in Windwardside. Appropriate footwear is necessary as the steps are often slippery. Highlights: Secondary rain forest, fascinating changes in vegetation along the way, abundant bird life and spectacular views of neighbouring islands.

E. Sandy Cruz Trail

Hiking time: 2 hours one-way

Difficulty: Moderate

The trail extends from Upper Hells Gate to Troy Hill.

Highlights: Secondary rain forest, abundant bird life and spectacular views.

F. Sulphur Mine Track

Hiking time: 40 minutes one-way

Difficulty: Moderate

From the Windwardside, as you pass the church at Hell's Gate, make a sharp left at the second road to your left (which leads to The Gate House hotel). The trail begins at the end of the road. An unpaved path goes past a wooden house to your left and connects with the original path, which leads across the hillside towards another house before turning steeply downhill. At the trail junction, follow the sign and continue down to your right. Once you reach a grassy area overlooking the sea, a short scramble down the sulphur deposit will lead you to the mine entrance. Exploring the mine is possible, but flashlights are essential. Temperatures and humidity inside the mine are high. Enter at your own risk.

Highlights: Views of Green Island, the Pirate Cliffs above the airport, and the steeply eroded North Coast. Sea bird watching is exceptionally rewarding in this area.

G. Flat Point

Hiking time: 15 minutes one-way

Difficulty: Easy

A road just before the airport building goes down to Cove Bay and Flat Point. At the bottom of the road, walk out to the bluff overlooking the ocean. There is no trail as such.

Highlights: Tide-pools and views of the remains of the sugarcane boiling house.

H. Spring Bay Trail

Hiking time: 2-3 hours one-way

Difficulty: Moderate-Strenuous

From English Quarter, walk down the road to the right of the Agricultural Station. At the end of this road, the trail starts on your left. Continue down the path to Old Booby Hill and further down to Spring Bay. Take enough water and use sun block.

Highlights: Spectacular views of the ocean, the airport, and the island.

I. North Coast Trail

Hiking time: 40 minutes one-way

Difficulty: Strenuous-must be accompanied by a guide

Access the North Coast Trail from the main trailhead in Lower Hell's Gate. This trail continues beyond the boundaries of the Saba National Park to Mary's Point and Wells Bay. Only guided hikes are allowed beyond the All Too Far junction.

Highlights: Spectacular views of the ocean, ruins of Mary's Point.

J. All Too Far Trail

Hiking time: 1 ½ hours one-way

Difficulty: Moderate-Strenuous

This trail connects the North Coast Trail with the Sandy Cruz Trail.

Highlights: Transition from dry forest to rain forest.

K. Bottom Mountain Trail

Hiking time: 1 ½ hours

Difficulty: Moderate

From the Windwardside: begin Mt Scenery trail, follow Crispeen Track to Rendezvous. At junction take right turn and follow path to Troy Hill. May also begin trail at Queens Garden Hotel.

Highlights: Secondary rainforest and views of The Bottom.

L. Bud's Mountain Trail

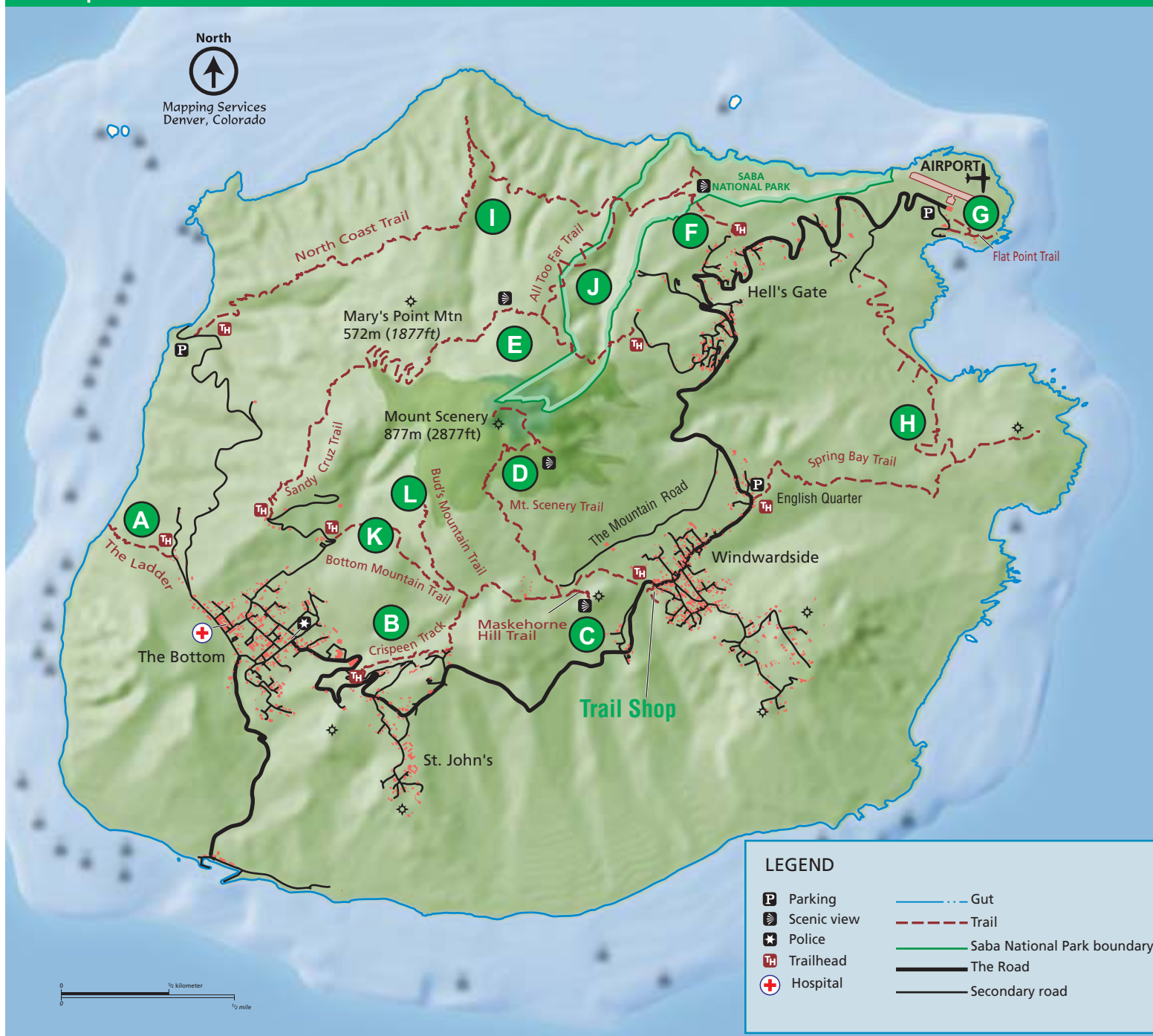
Hiking time: 1 ½ hours

Difficulty: Moderate

From Windwardside: begin Mt Scenery trail and follow the trail to Crispeen Track. Take right at Rendezvous junction and then next right a little further on.

Highlights: Views of Windwardside, St. Johns and secondary rainforest.

Trail Map



Planning your visit

Trail Manners

Help to keep the trail clean. Please carry your own litter out to be properly disposed of in a trash container!

Leave the trail cleaner than you found it by picking up any litter that other people have left behind!

A picked flower soon dies. Please leave all plants and flowers for others to enjoy after you!

Be considerate to others. Loud noises can disturb wildlife as well as other hikers wishing to enjoy the serenity of the area!

All trails are on private land, and we are allowed to use the trails because of the landowners' generosity. Please respect the rights of the landowners and do not wander off the trails. Do not pick the fruits in the plantations!

For Your Safety

Hiking and other strenuous activities in extreme heat can be hazardous. Pace yourself and rest often!

Carry plenty of drinking water with you. The heat of the tropical sun will force you to increase considerably your normal fluid intake!

Protect yourself against sunburn or sunstroke by wearing a broad-brimmed hat and a high-strength sun-block lotion!

Sturdy walking, running or tennis shoes are sufficient for the trails. However, hiking boots will provide an additional level of comfort and security on the more strenuous trails!

As you gain elevation and enter the rainforest, the temperature may drop markedly. You may want to bring along a light jacket or anorak!

Trails can frequently be slippery, especially in the rain forest. A hiking stick can provide an extra level of confidence and can be rented or purchased at the Trail Shop!

Saba Conservation Foundation



The Trail Shop in Windwardside

The Saba Conservation Foundation (SCF) is a non governmental organisation established in 1987 with a mission to preserve and manage Saba's natural and cultural heritage. It is committed to the vision that a stronger island economy will result from the sustainable use of Saba's rich and virtually unspoiled resources.

In order to achieve its goal, the SCF promotes the development of parks and protected areas, manages a network of hiking trails, encourages the preservation of historic buildings, and promotes supportive scientific research and education. The SCF also manages the Saba National Park and oversees the operation of the Saba National Marine Park. The SCF is responsible for meeting the major expense of nature management, and most funds are raised through private contributions.

With more people visiting Saba each year, the costs of maintaining the trail network has increased. Your

investment in the longevity of the natural environment is appreciated. A Naf 5, 3 euro, or US \$3 hiking fee has been instituted to provide funds for trail maintenance. In return, you will receive an SCF nature disc that identifies you as a contributor. You can also help support conservation work by joining the "Friends of Saba Conservation Foundation" with a minimum contribution of Naf 45, 25 euro, or US \$25 per year.

Contact the Trail Shop or Saba Conservation Foundation/Marine Park visitor centre at the Fort Bay for more information.