

The Nature of Saba



The Saba Conservation Foundation (SCF) is a not-for-profit organization established in 1987 with a mission to preserve and manage Saba's natural and cultural heritage. Committed to the belief that a stronger island economy will result from the sustainable use of Saba's rich and virtually unspoiled resources. The organization carries out the majority of nature management for the island.

In order to achieve its goals, 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 manages the Saba's National Park and oversees the operation of the Saba National Marine Park and the Saba Bank National Park.

Vegetation Types

The Summit of Mt Scenery

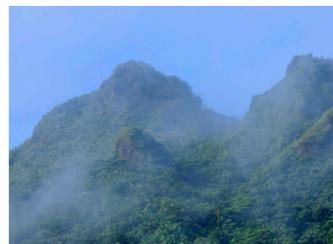
Dense vegetation with a variety of species covers the top of Mount Scenery and upper sections of the slope. The Elfin Forest covers about 8 hectares (20 acres) with the dominant tree being the (1) Mountain Mahogany. (2) Epiphytes grow on trunks, branches and leaves of other plants. (3) Orchids are among 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 are a result of severe disturbances by hurricanes, especially Hurricane Georges in 1998.

High hilltops and 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.

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 sulfur 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 slopes: 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.



Cloud covered Top of Mt Scenery



Cliffs along Wells Bay

Flora and Fauna

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 rainforest. The (19) Wild Begonia and (20) Wild Raspberry are also common along the rainforest trails.

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) Anolis lizard found only on Saba. The color 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 color. The non-poisonous and harmless (22) Black Racer (Red-bellied 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.



Black Racer snake

Large Iguana lizards are also sometimes seen along the roads and most often on a hike to Old Booby Hill. (23) The Lesser Antillean Whistling Frog 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

Birds

Saba is home to at least 100 bird species, 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 Tropicbirds nest in the holes and crevices of the high cliffs while Frigatebirds 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 Bananaquits 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.



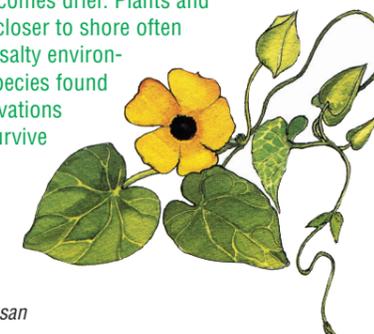
Physiography and geography

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 877 meters (2877 feet) 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 plateaus can be found, the largest being the valley of The Bottom and Flat Point.

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

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, rainforest 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. The species found at higher elevations would not survive at sea level.



Black-Eyed Susan

Saba's Nature Trails

A. The Ladder

Access: from The Bottom, follow the road past the hospital towards Wells Bay. Bear left at the junction by the lookout gazebo. After a short distance down the steep road you will see the trailhead sign on the left.

Time: 1 hour round trip

Degree of difficulty: strenuous (on the way back up)

Special features: historic step road by which cargo was hauled up from Ladder Bay to The Bottom. Mahogany trees, Cinnamon trees, beautiful vistas.

B. Crispeen Track

Access: from the Mt. Scenery steps just below the end of the Mountain Road (at the first shelter) or from the road from The Bottom to Windwardside, just above The Bottom.

Time: 1 hour

Degree of difficulty: easy

Special features: transition rainforest to dry forest; historic step road from Crispeen to The Bottom; view of The Bottom.

C. Mas' Cohone's (Maskehorne) Hill Trail

Access: from the Mt. Scenery steps just below the end of the Mountain Road.

Time: 15 minutes round trip

Degree of difficulty: moderate

Special features: a short alternative for those who don't want to undertake the climb to the top of Mt. Scenery, with great plant diversity and a wonderful view of Windwardside.

D. Mount Scenery Trail

Access: from Windwardside opposite the Trail Shop. Alternative access is from the end of the Mountain Road (this will reduce total hiking time by about 45 minutes) or from the Bud's Mountain Trail, which joins the Mt. Scenery trail at the highest shelter.

Time: 2½ hours

Degree of difficulty: strenuous

Special features: 1,064 steps to the highest point in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Unique cloud forest (Elfin Forest) vegetation at the top.

Note: the steps near the top are always slippery; even shaded portions of the trail at lower elevations can be slippery. A hiking stick is highly recommended!

E. Sandy Cruz Trail

Access: the trailhead is at the end of the first dead end road that winds through Upper Hell's Gate (Zion's Hill). If you are walking to the trailhead, signs will direct you from the main road. Or you can start from the road above Queen's Gardens hotel.

Time: 2½ hours

Degree of difficulty: moderate

Special features: lush rainforest, abandoned farmland, great views, trail crosses the Saba's Terrestrial Park.

F. Sulfur Mine Trail

Access: going down from Upper Hell's Gate (Zion's Hill) towards the airport, follow the second side road (the one that branches sharply to the left); the trail starts at the end of the paved road.

Time: 45 minutes round trip

Degree of difficulty: moderate

Special features: part of the Saba's Terrestrial Park; location of the old McNish Sulfur Mine; great views of cliffs and airport; seabird watching (bring your binoculars!).

Note: Exploring the mine is possible when permitted, but flashlights are essential. Temperatures and humidity inside the mine are high. Enter at your own risk.

G. Flat Point (The Tidepools) Trail

Access: from the road below the airport to Cove Bay.

Time: 30 minutes

Degree of difficulty: an easy walk to the bluff overlooking the tidepools; a steep scramble over rocks to get down to the pools

Special features: lava flows; colorful saltwater pools with abundant marine life; ruins of an indigo boiling house.

Note: Mind the ocean! Don't climb too far down when the sea is wild.

H. Spring Bay Trail

Access: from the Agriculture Center in English Quarter (along the road from Windwardside to Hell's Gate/Zion's Hill) or from Kelbey's Ridge near the Airport.

Time: 2 to 2 ½ hours

Degree of difficulty: strenuous

Special features: dry forest and dry scrub vegetation; beautiful vistas; ruins of a sugar cane boiling house.

Note: Take enough water and sunblock—this is a long and hot hike; Cooler due to shade if started in the early afternoon.

I. Mary's Point Trail

Access: from the Wells Bay road.

Time: 90 minutes round trip

Degree of difficulty: moderate

Special features: ruins of Mary's Point village and great view of Wells Bay.

Note: Do not do this trail alone. Trail can be tricky due to north coast erosion.

J. All Too Far Trail

Access: from the Sandy Cruz trail in Upper Hell's Gate/Zion's Hill or from the split near the Sulfur Mine.

Time: 2½ hours

Degree of difficulty: moderate

Special features: this hike is mostly within the boundaries of the Saba Terrestrial Park. It combines some of the best developed rainforest including ravine rainforest with a gradual transition into dry forest and dry scrub vegetation. You can combine the hike with a visit to the Sulfur Mine.

K. Bottom Mountain Trail

Access: from the Crispeen track just below the Mountain Cottage or from the road next to Queen's Gardens hotel.

Time: 1 hour

Degree of difficulty: easy, except the steep descent on the side of The Bottom

Special features: secondary forest, transition to rainforest, occasionally farmed land, Mango trees, Mammee Apple trees, and views of The Bottom.

L. Bud's Mountain Trail

Access: from the Bottom Mountain trail or the Mount Scenery trail.

Time: 1½ hours round trip

Degree of difficulty: moderate

Special features: good example of secondary rainforest.

Note: This trail is a nice alternative on the way down from Mount Scenery.

M. Tara Ground Trail to St. John's

Access: from the Bottom Mountain trail.

Time: 45 minutes from the junction on the Bottom Mountain trail to the junction on the Crispeen track

Degree of difficulty: easy

Special features: well-developed secondary forest; transition zone between rainforest and dry forest.

N. Parish Hill Trail

Access: the trail starts at the beginning of the road from The Bottom down to Fort Bay, next to the Cable Office or behind the Hospital.

Time: 1½ hours round trip

Degree of difficulty: moderate

Special features: Parish Hill is one of the younger volcanic domes (less than 100,000 years old); great views of The Bottom and St. John's cave.

Note: If you want to enter the cave, we highly recommend to do so with an experienced guide.

O. Giles Quarter Trail

Access: from the road to the gas station near Fort Bay.

Time: 2 hours

Degree of difficulty: strenuous

Special features: close to the coast, great sea views.

Note: Take enough water and sunblock—this is a long and hot hike.

P. Dancing Place Trail

Access: from the road from Windwardside to St. John's at the Lion's club sign or from the monument of 'The Road'.

Time: 20 minutes

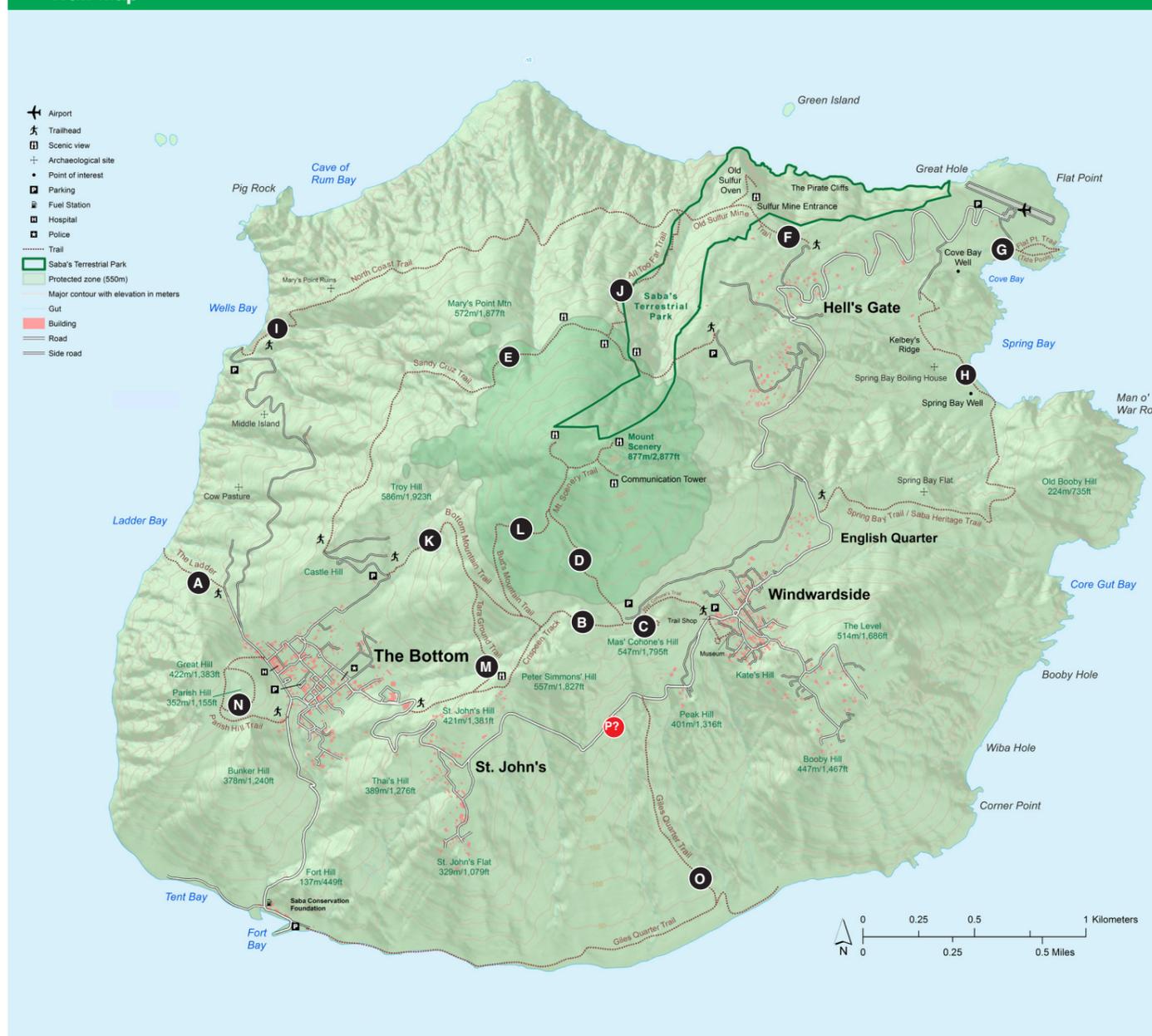
Degree of difficulty: easy

Special features: great views of the south coast.



Purple-throated Carib Hummingbird

Trail Map



Planning Your Visit: Get the latest information about the trail conditions at the Trail Shop.

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 landowners and do not wander off the trails. Do not pick the fruits in the plantations.

For Your Safety

- Carry plenty of drinking water with you. The heat of the tropical sun will force you to considerably increase your normal fluid intake.
- Protect yourself against sunburn or sunstroke by wearing a broad-brimmed hat and a high-strength sunblock lotion.
- Sturdy walking, running or tennis shoes are sufficient for the trails. However, hiking boots will provide an additional level of comfort and security.
- 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 rainforest. A hiking stick can provide an extra level of confidence and can be borrowed or purchased at the Trail Shop.

Nature fees and donations

The SCF is responsible for meeting the major expense of nature management and most funds are raised through nature fees and private contributions. The small nature fee is requested at your hotel and other donations to support us are very welcome. Your investment in the longevity of the natural environment is greatly appreciated.

