

floors, spacious bathroom (with a tub), and one of the best furnished kitchenettes that we have encountered. Ask in advance for the one next to the canal. It has the best view through the sliding glass door and you are next to the patio where they serve fresh baked bread, tea and coffee each morning for their guests. The dive operation is next door with the dive boat at the canal's edge for easy entry and exits, rinse tank and drying facilities are close by. The whole facility is fenced except for that bordering the canal and they have friendly dogs in residence who keep things safe. The operation shows wear but is not run down. The dive boat is large with marine head, seating along both sides with ample storage under, aluminum 80's behind the seats, room for six divers, and a dive platform and easy exit aluminum ladders. There is a boat captain on board at all times and a DM on all dives and they both assist with gear handling. Safety gear and DAN oxygen was present as was radio. The diving was good and varied. We dove where shark feeds are routine and were visited by three large reef sharks. The School house, a great dive, was shallow, 30' max, had the most life and lots small critters. Four wrecks that had various stages of encrustment. If the boat was going out for afternoon dives and there was space available, the guests could dive for free if they were on a 2-tank morning dive package. There is so much algae on the coral, except where there is some current, that it was somewhat disappointing. The staff has since changed at Dive Dive Dive and, I understand, the operation is for sale.

## San Salvador

### **Riding Rock Inn, February 2004, Nancy Sack, San Francisco, CA.**

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 75 to 76 F, calm. Great trip. Weather had been rough before we arrived, but calmed day of arrival and we got out on the afternoon trip. Pleasantly surprised to see John Paul (the divemaster) & his wife Susan who we had previously dove with in Andros. Bruce, boat captain, also very helpful and accommodating. Tanks switched out for you, BC's brought to you at the ladder — spoiled! Hot showers and good facilities back at the docks. Excellent swim- thrus, dramatic chimneys. Turtles and sharks were seen fairly commonly, hammerheads on two occasions. Clean rooms at the hotel, good food and service in the lodge. A very relaxing, low-key place to dive with enough variety for both beginner or advanced divers. ([www.ridingrock.com](http://www.ridingrock.com))

## Walker's Cay

### **Walker's Cay Hotel & Marina, December 2003, Robert Morris morrisr1@wyeth.com, Wayne, Pa.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 73 to 77 Ft, choppy, surge. The shop took me out when I was the only diver. They use a nice 42 ft .turbo drive boat (no prop). The dives consisted of many caverns and swim-throughs and were short distances from the shop. I wore a 1.5 mm wetsuit and became cold. When other divers were on board (five divers altogether), the briefings were short and did not let the

novice divers realize what they would be getting into on swim-throughs. Some of those swim-throughs were long and had many turns and sometimes very dark ahead and a few divers were intimidated but felt that they had no option but to follow the divemaster. I'd rather see 2 divemasters on this type of dive so that one divemaster could take those who were afraid around the tunnels and meet the group on the other side. This small group became separated at one point and it was quite a while before the divemaster went to look for the missing. Saw many sharks (blacktips, Caribbean reefs, nurse and bull sharks) and more spotted eagle rays than anywhere I've been. Once, 8 Eagle Rays swam in a line along a reef. Not many regular Caribbean fish, only a few angels, trumpetfish, tangs, etc. Reefs in good condition; Shark Rodeo interesting and well done. ([www.walkerscay.com](http://www.walkerscay.com))

## BARBADOS

Barbados is busy and crowded, with lots of fast traffic, big splashy resorts, and restaurants galore. ... There's ordinary Caribbean diving with tropical fish, although big ones are rare, but it's fine for beginners or for a dive or two on a golf holiday. ... You still can find century-old bottles in the harbor and the wreck of the *Stavronikita* is interesting, but jammed with tourist divers. ... Keep hurricane season in mind.

### **Dive Shop LTD, Casuarinas Beach Club, June 2004, Ray Fealko (raydar**

**@netlink.net), Cortland, OH.** Vis: 80-100 feet. Water: 80-81 F. Experience: 120. Beautiful place both in and out of the water. The reefs are lush and healthy with a wealth of small fish and lots of turtles on every dive. The Stavronikta wreck was impressive. Resort only rated a 2 star, but a much nicer resort than most others we visited. It is a lush and tropical paradise. It is home to monkeys, birds, and is the nesting ground for turtles. We got to see 2 come in from the ocean and lay their eggs on our beach. The owner gives tours to the guests. We did a bicycle tour of the north coast that turned into a fascinating day, with the owner explaining everything about her island home. Ate at Ostins Fish market and had the best fresh fish for \$10. It's easy to use the public transportation to get wherever you need to go inexpensively. It's a beautiful, friendly island and a great place to take families. ([www.casuarina.com](http://www.casuarina.com))

**Reefers and Wreckers, Sandy Beach, February 2004, William Edwards, Placerville, CA.** Vis: 50-60 ft. Water: 80-82 F. The amenities were good, but not great. However, the beach was fantastic. The restaurants in the St. Lawrence Gap area were very good to excellent. I would especially recommend David's Place located right on the ocean. I signed on for two dives with Reefers and Wreckers Dive Operation. They were very accommodating and picked me up at my resort even though their dive shop was an hour's drive away. My first dive was a wreck dive (an old freighter) and the most interesting thing about it was that

we found an air space in the wreck that several of us came up in and talked to each other for a minute or so. The second dive was a reef dive and the reef was in very good condition. However, there is a lack of fish life in the area. The best thing about this dive is that I was the only diver and I was allowed to stay down for 78 minutes. ([www.scubadiving.bb](http://www.scubadiving.bb))

## BELIZE

Inside the world's second-largest barrier reef, English-speaking Belize sports three major atolls — but not much in the way of beaches. ... Good diving is reachable from live-aboards or from resorts on the offshore cayes. ... The deeply-cut, spur-and-groove coral reefs of Ambergris Caye, the most developed of Belize's cayes, are interesting but disappointing to many experienced divers. Outer cayes have better diving and a chance to see large schools of fish, a big one here and there, and large nurse sharks. ... On mainland, you can visit Mayan ruins, the Jaguar Preserve, or take river tours. ... Belize is only two hours from Houston. ... Belize lies at the edge of the hurricane belt, and Ambergris Caye took a hard hit from Keith in October 2000 while southern Belize got blasted in October 2001, when Iris took down the Wave Dancer, with 20 souls.

## Ambergris Caye

**Ambergris Divers, Banana Beach Hotel, August 2004, Bill Stacy (wtwoforon@aol.com), Ruskin, FL.** Vis: 50-70 feet. Water: 85-89 F. Dives logged: 500+. Banana Beach Hotel is a small, quaint condos right on the beach. The one-bedroom deluxe ocean front suites have a full kitchen and a balcony overlooking the beach. Beaches here are not swimming beaches, loaded with eelgrass. You must pick and choose your way into the calm waters. Protected by the reef, the waters are quite safe and calm. The dive boats are small, requiring a backward roll to enter and a side ladder to board. Most dive sites are only 15-30 minutes away. Best to do the Blue Hole from a live-aboard, as it is a long, bumpy ride. El Divino restaurant leaves a lot to be desired both in food quality and service. Try Victoria House, Rendezvous, Capt Morgan's and Basil's. Golf carts and water taxis are the mode of transportation. ([www.ambergrisdivers.com](http://www.ambergrisdivers.com))

**Ambergris Divers, Capt. Morgan's Retreat, August 2004, Bill Stacy (wtwoforon@aol.com), Ruskin, FL.** Vis: 50-70 feet. Water: 85-89 F. Dives logged: 500+. Captain Morgan's is on the north side of the island where it is totally laid back and much less crowded. The food and service are excellent. The owners, Ernie and Karen, are involved in the day-to-day business. They do whatever it takes to make your vacation enjoyable. On site activities department is very helpful and friendly. We enjoyed our stay so much

we purchased a vacation club rental in a two-bedroom condo. Their 1200 ft beachfront is beautiful. They are in the process of building more vacation club rentals, and an onsite grocery and liquor store. Accommodations were 5 stars. Golf carts and bicycles are available to explore the island and to travel to San Pedro, which is the downtown area. It is what the Caribbean was 30-40 years ago, but with reliable utilities and modern conveniences. Diving is good, but not exceptional. The bone fishing was a blast. Belize has a stable government and economy and is ripe for development.

**Amigos Del Mar, Mayan Princess, June 2004, Dick Sziede (dsziede@hotmail.com) Reston, VA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 F, calm. When I was a new diver, me bride and I spent a romantic week on Ambergris Caye. I feared returning after ten years, afraid that our romantic getaway would have been paved over. Instead we were delighted. Yes there is development. The south end, where Harrison Ford filmed "The Mosquito Coast," is now filled with McMansions. There are more cars. But San Pedro retains its charm, and traffic is still mostly golf carts. And the diving is much better! Barb's Belize made flawless travel arrangements. Tropic Air ran on time, and showed progress; we never heard the stall warning alarm once on landing! The Mayan Princess rooms are all beachfront. There is always a breeze. We never turned on the AC. Our 3rd floor room had a kitchenette. The center of San Pedro is a little noisy, but if they had sidewalks

they'd roll them up at 10:00. No trouble sleeping. The week before Lent is Carnival, but San Pedro is not quite Rio! Elvie's is arguably the best restaurant. Fish a la Elvie is good. Stella is still slinging hash at Stella's. Great breakfast! Belize didn't attract many Germans that used the rest of Latin America to put distance between themselves and British hit squads after WWII, Belizean beer and the bread are nothing to write home about. But fresh fish abounds, veggies are cooked al-dente, and Marie Sharp's habenero sauce will put the right level of ty-yi-ti in any dish. Neither of us brought home any intestinal "souvenirs." Amigos Del Mar is right in front of the Mayan Princess. Two-tank dives are two-trip dives. Dive sites are within fifteen minutes of the dock. So my surface interval was spent on the porch with my non-diving bride. Amigos Del Mar boats lack wind and sun protection, but runs to and from the dive sites at speeds that would do a cigarette boat proud. Cool weather made me glad for my Gore-Tex for the upwind leg. All dives were guided. Back roll in. Undress in the water, handing gear to the crew before essaying the ladder. No dive platform, so climbing in with gear not possible. Dives are on healthy-looking coral fingers, depth 50-70 feet. Top of the coral is about 50 feet, so there were no shallows to loiter in at the end of the dive. Air or bottom time held most dives to 50 minutes. There were plenty of small critters, including streams of Creole wrasses al la Bonaire. A half-dozen semi-tame nurse sharks lurked about the coral fingers. The divemaster brought them a gallon