

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)

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)

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

jar of chum. The sharks held a brief melee to dismantle the chum jar. Calm after the chum was consumed, they consented to petting by the divers. One raised his chin like a kitten being scratched. I swear I heard him purr! A loggerhead turtle and a flotilla of groupers, also seemingly accustomed to divers hang about. We saw a few large 'cuda, but they didn't approach divers. (www.amigosdive.com)

Amigos del Mar, Sunbreeze, June 2004, Don Rorschach (don.ro@verizon.net) Irving, TX. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 90 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, surge, no currents. Diving was excellent with large critters in abundance. Large nurse sharks and huge grouper were all over the reefs. Many nice green morays and turtles to video. There were several spotted eagle rays and some "jagged tail stingrays" the size of eagle rays. I did not wear a wet suit on any of the dives including night dives. The guides were super helpful on board and in the water. Dive boats were well maintained. Back-roll entry was the best method of entry since diving was done on the windward side of Ambergris Caye and the dive boats did not have dive platforms low to the water at the stern. The dive guides and boat captains were most helpful with photography and video equipment and treated it very gently. The dive guides and boat captains saw that the divers enjoyed every dive beginning with helping during suiting up and getting back into the boats. This was the best diving we have had in twenty (20) years of diving. Sunbreeze Hotel was clean, com-

fortable and nice and the food excellent both at the hotel and the neighboring restaurants. The staff was most helpful. The people of San Pedro, Ambergris Caye were very helpful and friendly. This is truly an excellent dive destination as it took us only about two hours from Houston plus a thirty (30) minute prop plane ride to Ambergris Caye. The Sunbreeze Hotel is less than one-half block from the San Pedro, Ambergris Caye airport.

Amigos Del Mar, SunBreeze Hotel, July 2004, Jill Crocker (crockerjc@sbcglobal.net) Austin, TX.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, choppy. We had 22 divers in our group, including 6 in wheelchairs. They are making more modifications for wheelchair accessibility, but as far as we know, this is the only resort in Belize that is accessible. Bring an extension cord for your room; our bathroom didn't have an electrical outlet. Outstanding trip! Excellent staff and awesome diving! All 22 of us gave two thumbs up to both the resort and the dive operation! Just a water bucket for dipping camera into. But we could go to the shore between dives for battery changes. The subject matter was outstanding! We couldn't count all of the sharks!

Amigos Del Mar, The Palms Condos, June 2004, Allan Scott (allanscott@houston.rr.com) Spring, TX.

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, choppy. The weather was cloudy and waves were huge our first three days, but after that the weather improved and the seas

calmed. I've been there twice and both times there were rough seas. Most operators will require you to take your gear off in the water to get in the boat easier. Day trip to The Blue Hole and Half Moon Caye. This was our first real deep dive and we were a little intimidated. The dive was super. We dove to 135' and none of us got narc'd. There were huge reef sharks swimming with us. It is an experience of a lifetime. The other two dives at Half Moon Caye were super fun. I think we exceeded all PADI tables that day, but the computer let us keep diving. Just don't over indulge the night before. The price for these all day trips sounds high, but you definitely get your money's worth. A nice lunch is included as well as after dive drinks.

Amigos del Mar, Xanadu, July 2004, Elizabeth Garreau (bgarreau@mindspring.com) McLean, VA.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy. Great resort, pretty pool, nice beach, bikes provided, close to San Pedro but not too busy, very helpful staff, dive boat picked up us at the resort's pier and rinse tanks were near the pool. No restaurant, but quick walk to many nearby and also a small market for stocking the kitchenette. Suites aren't as "private" as a group of couples would like (one had a bed in the back of the living room, the loft room was completely open to the downstairs) but they are pretty and clean. Amigos were wonderful, dive guide very flexible once he knew our level of skills, went out of his way to please us. Surface interval at the dive shop with cold

water and fresh fruit. Only 5-minute boat ride to most sites. Lots of turtles. Healthy reef. Fun town.

Amigos Del Mar, Ruby's Hotel, August 2004, Mike Frayn (mfrayn@bigfoot.com), Lutz, FL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 84 F, A really good dive operation. They have numerous boats in excellent condition with sun protection and padded benches. They wash and store your gear every night. They will pick you up and drop you off at your dock and help you putting on your gear. Entry is by back roll. You hand up your gear at the end of the dive and climb the ladder. The seas ranged from smooth as a mill pond to 6 foot waves. Ambergris Caye has a fringe reef so boat rides did not last more than 10 minutes. The reefs were fairly healthy but lacked color. There was not a lot of small fish but a fair number of nurse sharks, grouper and one huge Southern Ray. The dives lasted about 50 minutes with the requisite safety stop. The dive-master kept everyone in sight and pointed out items of interest. Ruby's Hotel has two locations. One is on the beach, convenient to downtown San Pedro and Amigos Del Mar. The other is on the lagoon side and looks like a fire trap. This hotel is for someone who is looking for a bargain and doesn't require amenities. The hotel is well worn but clean. Rooms range from \$17.50 to \$30 per night depending on size and whether you want A/C. Restaurants were plentiful with reasonable prices. The locals made you feel welcome. Everyone spoke English.

Aqua Divers, Ruby's, March 2004, Edwin Regennitter (edreg@alltel.net) York, NE. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 84 F, calm, choppy, no currents. The tourist police were more harassing than I had ever seen. The island police were super and great to visit with. Ruby's is a super place to stay. Rustic and very accommodating and comfortable sleeping and rooms, primitive, but very nicely priced, air conditioned rooms were great and the shower pressure was the best. Aqua Divers wasn't bad. We had our own divemaster, George, whom I had met in Utila 4 years ago. He was awesome and a super guide. He did great dive briefings and was genuinely interested in all the divers in our group. Some of the other divemasters and boat captains the took us to the Blue Hole and Light house were bordering on rude and were not interested in any of the divers in the group. They basically did their job and nothing more. Working with the dive shop and Ruby's setting up the trip was fantastic and very helpful. I would bring a copy of the arrangements made to the dive shop. No separate rinse tanks for cameras — developed film when we got back to the States.

(www.ambergriscaye.com/rubys)

Aqua Dives, Sunbreeze Hotel, October 2003, Glen Kitchens (wglenkitchens@msn.com) Cedar Crest, NM. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 86 to 88 F, choppy, no currents. I had been here nine years earlier. The town of San Pedro (right next door to the hotel) has changed little. Estel's Dine by the Sea

still makes the best conch fritters in the Caribbean and there is still a talented wood carver on every corner. Sunbreeze Hotel is very good setup for divers with tile floors and lots of room to spread gear. Hotel has a restaurant, pool and bar on-site. There are lots of good restaurants in San Pedro. Everything from Belikin beer to fine wood carvings are quite reasonable. Aqua Dive is on the grounds of the hotel. Their operation is much improved with several large well-accommodated boats and very well-trained divemasters, esp. Carlos and Donovan — these guys are very professional. All boats carry oxygen, first aid and cell phones and divemasters give good briefings. Blue Hole is with 130' Blue Hole dive, lunch on Half Moon Caye where you can observe nesting Booby birds from an observation tower, and two very pristine wall dives — Half Moon and Eagle Ray walls. Cost for this day trip is \$185 US. When winds and waves are not bad, boat ride is 2.5 hrs. each way. On a rough day, it can be an hour longer each way. The Blue Hole is an unforgettable dive — stalagmites, stalagmites @ 130' with numerous reef sharks and even bull sharks constantly circling in the open water. This is the most sharks I've seen outside of Palau. One of our divers became somewhat narc'd on this deep dive and credits an excellent pre-dive briefing with not freaking out @ depth. Dive management will allow any paying diver to dive the Blue Hole. On our boat, we had 4 inexperienced divers that should not have been allowed to do the dive. Over Belikin beer later, the divemaster Donovan agreed, as it's his

ass on the line if a diver doesn't stop @ 130' and indicated he's chased more than one into the depths and dragged them back to reality.
(www.aquadives.com)

Aqua Dives, Pro Tech, Aquamarine Suites, August 2004, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX. Cleared Customs, gladly paid a porter \$2 BZ (\$1 US) per 65# bag to hump my two 100 yards to Mayan Air, where we checked in for casual boarding: "Next three, this plane, please." 18 minute flight and never got higher than 1,000 feet A little guy in a white suit was atop our hotel screaming "Thee Plane, Thee Plane!" as we approached, and soon we were on the ground looking at the only Hyperbaric Chamber in the country across the street from our terminal. Golf carts meet us, driven by a hotel agent and one of our dive guides. "Aquamarina Suites is a very nice hotel, my room had a bedroom, oversized parlor and kitchenette, a balcony overlooking the pool and bar area. Some got housed in the connected annex overlooking an old, small cemetery, but they still had a nice view of the beach, ocean, and waves crashing half mile off shore Most of us were soon getting to know our new bartender, Phillip then it was briefing time, when we did our paperwork, the DGs pretended to look at our C-cards, we paid our \$1 per tank Chamber fees so no one would have to have to present a DAN card accompanied by \$500 deposit if any of us needed help. Aqua Dives Captain/DG and First Mate/DG were likeable fellows, and the new kid was okay, but I would not go with them again if I could find

anyone else to go with. We had to turn out with our gear early enough to be on the dock on time every morning, less we might get left behind. Special tank and Nitrox requests were hit and miss, the site briefings were limited to "Follow me," and the boat was a sick joke. They young, new guy threw out a drift line with a 3# lead weight tied to each time we surfaced, but no one got hit. Sunday check-out dive, shallow requirements and hard winds, bad viz. For those who had not been out on a boat in several months, or ever, the Puke Fest started. Monday, the Captain allowed four of us to wander off on our own, dipping into the canyons for our own explorations. Tuesday took us to The Blue Hole, one impressive, quick dive to 140-150 feet. My thought process was taking more time and work at my 154 deepest, as I helped the DGs keep the newer dives from missing the ledge and falling into the dark abyss below. I was on 28% Nx, with but a 19 cf Pony of air, and I knew I did not want to chase one. Sharks, accustomed to being fed dive boats, escorted us up the dark wall, and soon we were all doing long safety stops on top of the white floored shallows. Lunch & a tour of the Booby Bird Reserve were next. I don't know how long roasted chicken will stay good in Tupperware tubs at 80 degrees, but it smelled okay. We did two wall dives off Lighthouse Reef, and turned for the long ride home. Wednesday was blown out, but the wind died enough before sundown for a descent night dive in a channel. Thursday, we headed for Turneffe Atoll and the Elbow dive and a couple of more nice wall dives. I took a dive with

Pro Tech,” a much better alternative. Owner Roni has a comfortable, well kept boat and we headed out with his DM, Captain, and 4 tourist divers, and took off on our own, dropping down into a canyon — that fellow can dive. He’s an accomplished Cave diver, and uses only a frog kick, but as leisurely as he coasted along, he was something to keep up with! We drifted along on 28% Nx in the 150+ foot range, and I did dip down to 162 briefly before my SPG & both Puters suggested a slow, multi-level ascent. After two deep stops, I thought that three minutes was enough for the shallow stop, but he likes five or six minutes, so we did. I still had 500# in my 80 cf, 3000# in my 19 cf Pony, and he had half a tank left. Roni showed me his big boat almost ready for Blue Hole trips, and I drooled over the obvious comforts as compared to the rough rider we’d crossed in twice that week. There was a huge equipment deck, a large bow visible to the Captain so riders could go forward during the trip – an option not available on our previous crossings, and a really nice, air conditioned dry area with bunks and a simple kitchen. Some of the guys caught several nice size fish, including – a barracuda. (See CDC: Ciguatera fish poisoning!) for the evening barbecue. The locals said they ate them all the time, but I stuck to the Wahoo & trimmings. Golf car shuttled our bags and us to the airport and I toured the Chamber clinic before departure.

Bottom Time, Banyan Bay, April 2004, Dennis Brower (dennis.brower@amedd.army.mil) Silver Spring, MD. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to

80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, surge, no currents. Captain Eddie and divemaster Chocolate were first rate. The boat was a single engine inboard with plenty of speed with seating for about 8 with a small cabin and head up front, approximately 28 feet. It had sun protection over 1/2 the boat. The crew picked you up at the dock where you stayed and took you out through the reef openings to moorings on the other side of the reef. The trip only took 5-10 minutes with the channel a bit rough. There were 3-4 foot swells at the moorings and you did a back roll off the back side of the boat. The divers did not come back to the moorings, but the boat followed the divers wherever they went. The visibility was generally good and usually improved as you move to the 60 foot depths. The surge was evident anywhere above 50 feet. There was plenty of soft corals and great cliffs, ledges, and valleys; very little hard or colorful corals. There were plenty of tropical fishes but you had to look for them and there was not a great volume. Saw several nurse sharks and large groupers which were very friendly due to feeding and interaction with the local divers. The dive operations were excellent (except for the on board camera care) and the tanks were routinely filled with 3200+ psi. You were encouraged to use all your air as long as you could do so safely and get in your no decompression dives. Chocolate always lead the dives and attempted to guide you to interesting sights. If you needed to linger he would wait — he was never demanding or pushy. There were never more than a total of 6 divers on board throughout

our 10 dives (5 days). After the first dive the boat went back to the Bottom Time dock at the town of San Pedro (5-10 minutes) and you did your interval wait there. This was nice as there was no rocking and you could get something to eat or just lay on the dock in the sun. The staff always changed our tank setup and if you dove with them consecutively they kept your tank gear and rinsed it each night and brought it back at pickup already set up. A very pleasant diving experience. The dive crew was great and they handled the cameras very well as you got in and out of the boat. However, there were no camera tables, containers of rinse water, or anything similar, on the boat. You had to hold the camera the entire time or risk having it slide around. There were rinse tanks at the dock. (www.sanpedroholiday.com)

Bottom Time, Villas at Banyan Bay, July 2004, Dave Mudrick (dmmudrick@hotmail.com), Topeka, KS. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy. Spacious, beautiful facilities and friendly service. Bottom Time divers was safe and dependable, and our divemaster Rudy was friendly, attentive and safe. He pointed out things we never would have noticed. We swam with nurse sharks, saw turtles and two large spotted eagle rays, barracudas. Visit Shark-Ray Alley, where you can snorkel with nurse sharks and sting rays. The people were friendly, and we felt safe. Some kids did try to sell us necklaces and other things, but they weren’t pushy. Rent a gold cart for transportation. Our trip to the mainland

for the jungle river cruise was interesting (we saw manatees) but overpriced, and the boat trip to the mainland was too long and rough. I was seasick. The food in Ambergris Caye was decent, and our favorite was Papi’s Diner.

Pro Tech Belize, Banana Beach Resort, 2004, Laura Lee Arlington, TX. Experience: 51-100 dives Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 86 to 88 , calm, choppy, surge. Banana Beach, was great. We enjoyed being a 20 min stroll to town. They had plenty of hot water, water pressure and the ac worked great. The pools were lovely as were the staff. Pro Tech Belize was wonderful. Everyone seemed to enjoy their jobs. The groups were limited to 6 per divemaster. Only on one day was the boat full. That day, we had a leader and sweeper divemaster. The depths were enforced to a degree. They asked that we stay about 70’ on the 1st dive and 60’ or so on the 2nd. I would go a little deeper to look at something and nothing was said. We did not feel rushed in the water. The dives lasted 50-55 minutes. We used Nitrox, which they also provide for the other shops on the island. Due to the full moon, the vis wasn’t the greatest and the fish life was lacking. That said, the diving was still very good. The divemasters give excellent briefings, count noses after the dives and go the extra mile for you. The boats are in tip-top shape. (www.protechbelize.com)

Ramon’s Dive Shop, Ramon’s Village, February 2004, Margaret Zometsky (mzome13816@aol.com), Conway, SC. Vis: 80-100 feet. Water:

80-81 F. Experience: 40. Divemaster was the most outstanding part of the trip. Resort had nice beach. Pictures of resort were better looking than the actual resort, but it was adequate. Food not that great. But, other resort restaurants are close. Side trips to ruins were expensive, but good. Lagoon style pool more for wading than swimming. Very large grouper, rays, nurse sharks. (www.ramons.com)

Blackbird Caye

Blackbird Caye Resort, July 2004, John Critchfield, Seattle, WA.

Experience: 251- 500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. Blackbird Caye is a small, remote, low-key diving resort located on Turneffe Atoll, in Belize. A 1? hour boat trip from Belize City transports guests to and from the resort on Saturdays and Wednesdays. Diving operations were well-suited to our group's different levels of skill & experience, which ranged from snorkeler to divemaster. Most of the dive sites are located along the barrier reef wall, less than 10 minutes from the resort. Surface intervals were spent on shore. Dive depths were generally less than 70 feet. A divemaster led the dives, spotted points of interest, and provided supervision where appropriate. Reef conditions were quite good. Corals looked healthy and tropical fish were abundant. We had excellent encounters with green turtles, stingrays, spotted eagle rays, barracuda, groupers, tarpon, drums, morays, and squid. We had just a glimpse of a shark and saw no manta rays. At the Blue Hole we had a deep

dive to 130 feet as part of an all-day excursion to Lighthouse Reef, about an hour away from the resort. This was the only place we saw other divers all week. We went ashore for a cookout lunch and visited the bird sanctuary to see the red-footed boobies and frigates. The resort is well managed and maintained. A schedule of activities was posted daily and events occurred on time. These included three dives, two snorkeling trips, afternoon beach volleyball, mealtimes, a "happy hour," and a fish identification slide show. Cabana-style accommodations were basic yet comfortable. The food was well-prepared and tasty, with enough choices and menu flexibility to satisfy everyone in our group. There is no shopping, no nightlife, no restaurants, no television, no radio, no Internet, no newspapers and no telephone. So, take everything you need, including plenty of insect repellent and sunscreen. (www.blackbirdresort.com)

Caye Caulker

Anwar Snorkel & Tours, Tropical Paradise Hotel, June 2004, Alice J. Tysinger, Philadelphia, PA. Vis: 70 feet. Water: nice to warm. Snorkels logged: 105+. My low budget accommodations were a one-room cabana with ceiling fans. Ocean view – nice and clean – daily maid service – friendly and respectful hotel staff. Anwar Snorkel & Tours provided an extremely efficient, private boat charter. Picked me up and returned me to my hotel for each trip. Handled my camera and video equipment with great care, provided rinse buckets, clean towels, boat snacks

and cold drinks each trip. Snorkeled the reef and the Holchan Preserve. Saw a lot of baby fish. It seemed like the whole ocean spawned before my arrival. I enjoyed good food on Caye Caulker, including two home cooked meals I was invited to that were superb. Some of my favorites: Marins Restaurant for angel hair pasta and shrimp; Tropical Paradise for grilled garlic'd and limed fish with mash potatoes, rice and beans. And, Happy Lobster makes the best banana milk shake on the island. The island – no cars, plenty of fresh, unpolluted air, friendly people. Some nice, native trees, e.g., coco plum breadfruit, wild zircote, palm trees. Birds galore. A nice family-oriented vacation spot that is not overpriced – casual dress is the norm. Customs in Belize broke my dive light inspecting it for contraband. My glasses went overboard on an inland jungle river cruise to the Mayan ruins at Lamanai when the driver hit the throttle after we'd stopped to photograph crocodiles on the banks of the "New River". My dive mask is somewhat prescription so my snorkel photo activities continued, but I couldn't see much else for the remainder of my trip. (Finding my gate changing planes was pure hell). Wish I'd taken a second pair of glasses. Take Deep Woods Off to Lamanai – you need it there. I forgot to pack my alarm clock! But, the hotel owners, Mr. & Mrs. Reyes, let me borrow one. Two waves of tourists coming in from Australia and New Zealand were sick with flu-like symptoms and/or really bad colds. Both groups had been to South America and then Guatemala before arriving on Caye Caulker. Cruise ships are bringing people to San Pedro

on Ambergris Caye, but not Caye Caulker. They could use a little boost as their economy is dependent on vacationers and it's such a lovely little island. They still have Coca-Cola in glass bottles! (anwartours@yahoo.com)

Glovers Reef

Glover's Atoll Resort, July 2004, Walter Hurst (walter@umich.edu), Springfield, OR. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Great resort for someone trying to get to the atolls on the cheap. No running water or electricity in your accommodations — you can even camp if you really want to go cheap. Toilets are pits although they are clean and not a problem to use and there are many of them. Thatched roof bungalow over the water with the lagoon stretching to the horizon and the waves breaking on the reef a hundred yards away. Kerosene stoves and dishes in each bungalow. \$100US/person for camping for a week or \$210/person for a bungalow for a week. This includes the round trip boat ride from Sittee River to the atoll. There are sand flies so bring DEET repellent or stay in the wind. You can eat meals at the main lodge (\$12 for breakfast, \$9 lunch, and \$15 dinner). Bringing your own groceries (and you have to bring your own liquor) is the way to go. You can buy fresh water on the atoll — they sell rain water but you can get bottled water. Other fresh water (nonpotable) is limited to well water — we didn't shower the week we were out but washed up in the lagoon. The diving was great. There was complete diving freedom. We were taken to dive

sites, given a quick briefing, and then did the dive ourselves. We could dive our own profile for as long as we wanted. Almost all the dives were wall dives on the outside atoll reef. Usually the only divers were me and my buddy and our usual profile was max 80' for 60-90 minutes. The boat would drop us off and pick us up further down the wall. When we dove with newer divers, there was a dive leader with them. Amazing coral and the warm water. The reefs had great soft and hard corals. Big brain coral formations and huge tube and barrel sponges. Little if any bleaching or dead coral. The water was 84F which was completely comfortable with just swim trunks and a t-shirt and there was no thermocline. There was not an abundance of marine life. One or two dive sites did have a lot more fish schools. Saw nurse sharks, turtles, dolphins, barracuda, crevally, parrot fishes and other coral dwellers. Boat dives were between \$30USD and \$40USD, depending on whether you needed to rent gear. Kayaks are \$175USD for a week. They will fit two people. Shore diving is \$14 for a filled tank. You can get lobster when they are in season (some other travelers got some when we were there). Typical boat ride is 5-10 minutes. They will recharge digital cameras in the main lodge. They have a laptop computer which may work with your (digital) camera. The computer does not have a CD burner.
(www.glovers.com.bz)

Isla Marisol, August 2004/08, Rieko Arimoto, Ann Arbor, MI.
Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to

100 Feet. Water: 83 to 87 F. The resort was on Southwest Caye in Glover's Atoll, one-hour boat ride from the mainland. Accommodation was in a cute cabana which is simple (no AC, TV) but sufficient (plenty of hot water, vanity) and clean. They served fresh fish/lobster/fruits every meal! All resort staff were very friendly and helpful. The water off the beach is shallow, but there are coral patches and drop-off at 5~10 minutes' kayaking, great for snorkeling. We saw an octopus dining a conch and giant green moray. The reef around Glover's Atoll was beautiful, probably the best in Caribbean that I've seen. Big groupers, snappers, jacks, angelfish and huge schools of fish. 100% drift diving. We were swimming (floating) along the gentle current, if any, taking time to find interesting things. The boat captain followed the bubbles or saw the divers underwater (visibility was superb) and picked us up at the end of the dive. Most of the week two of us were the only divers and never saw other dive boats. Turtles, morays, lobsters almost every dive. Large nurse sharks and dolphins were regular sightings. The night dives were amazing. I have never seen so many lobsters and crabs walking around, saw an octopus and toadfish. We didn't see any sea slugs and saw only a couple of flamingo tongues. Their divemaster was great. (www.islamarisol.com)

Isla Marisol, August 2004, John Murray, Philadelphia, PA.

Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 60 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 Fahrenheit, choppy. This small resort is on a little island, part of an atoll 40 miles off the

coast of Belize, surrounded by 50 miles of pristine reefs in a National Marine Park. Diving is from open boats, 5-10 min from the resort, on the nearly vertical wall that rings the atoll. Currents were light to nonexistent, though they can be strong. Although some poaching activity was observed, this area has the best preserved flora and fauna that I've seen in the Caribbean in 35 years of diving.. Huge groupers are abundant. Large turtles and enormous green morays on every dive. At night, the reefs are crawling with crab and lobster, as well as the occasional octopus. Dolphins are frequently and we swam in the middle of a playful school of 20 for half an hour. Inside the atoll, numerous coral patches make for great shallow water snorkeling from the beach or from ocean kayaks provided free. The island has been in the Eddie Usher family for generations. Eddie is an avid diver, knows every nook and cranny, and has a competent staff all of whom love to show off their beautiful dive sites. Dive groups are small (4 divers max while we were there) and there was never another dive boat in sight. Accommodations are in 10 simple, well-equipped and spacious cabanas, a few yards from the water. Even with a blazing August sun, the constant ocean breeze kept the rooms comfortable. Mosquitoes were not seen, but the sand-fleas can be a nuisance if you forget your DEET. The guests are pampered. Lunch and dinner feature fresh fish or lobster caught by the resort staff. Seasonal fresh fruit served with every meal. A bar over the water provides a great place for and watching the sunset.

Lighthouse Reef

Lighthouse Reef Resort, July 2004, Sherrie Barker (sherrie49@hotmail.com) Jefferson, OR. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy, no currents. We began with a side trip to the ruins at Tikal (Guatemala), which was amazing. We encourage visitors to make it a priority. Contact Crystal Paradise Resort for a 3-day package deal. We found Lighthouse Reef Resort to be a great tropical escape. No shoes, no worries. Only the no-see-ums. Accommodations were not brand new, but were very clean and comfortable, and the air conditioning worked very well. In-room mini-fridge kept beverages and snacks cold, and was replenished daily. The small gift shop had a good selection of promo items, plus those things you forgot to pack them. The 21 diving guests were on two boats — ours held 6 divers and 2 divemasters, the other held 15 divers, 2 divemasters and the captain. Once we checked out for ability, we didn't handle our gear again until we loaded it into bags to go home. Divemasters Bart, Gilbert, Glenn and Ernest traded groups midweek so were with everyone at one time or another. All were excellent, taking it very slowly so we could check every little crack and crevice in the coral. No dive site was more than 40 minutes by boat, including Long Caye and Half Moon Caye. Several were just offshore of the resort, so intervals were on the island. Shore staff in the restaurant, office, and housekeeping took great care of us. Breakfast was from a daily menu,

lunch varied with the day, and dinner was posted on the board the night before so we could choose one of two or three selections. All meal portions were more than enough to eat. The boats had fresh water for camera rinse. The resort had some photo supplies available, but no processing. (www.lighthousereefresort.com)

Lighthouse Reef Resort, September 2004, Yoko Hosoya, Toronto, ON.

Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 25 to 30 Meters. Water: 29 to 30 Celsius. The sea was calm. A week before they suffered from strong winds and high waves caused by Ivan and had to cancel the diving for three days. There were only four guests so everybody got full attention of the staff — one of the best serviced, most relaxing and most scenic resorts I have ever stayed at. Diving-wise, I found the Long Caye the best. It's worth going to Half Moon Caye because of the bird sanctuary, but the walls were less interesting. One has to dive the Blue Hole just to say "I was there!" Otherwise it's a waste of time. The most interesting dive was the night dive 10 minutes from the resort. We saw a ray, octopus, crabs and lobsters, peppered moray, etc. No big stuff, no "surprises" — so the diving was in a way disappointing. No shore dives. Apparently the resort will starting next August for a complete rebuilding.

Turneffe Island

Turneffe Island Lodge, November 2003, Stanley N. Kanzaki, (stanzakronin@aol.com), New York. Dives logged 500+. Water 80, Viz: 40'

50. 'Dive own profile, yes. Dive restrictions: Max 130', 500 lb return, 15'/ 5 min. deco. stop, etc. A well organized operation from the moment of pick up boat from Belize to Turneffe. First dove this area in 1984 aboard the Isla Mia and in 1988 aboard the ill fated La Strega. Entire lodge staff friendly and looked after the divers on land and in water. First few dives not too interesting, saved the best dives for the end. Lefty's Ledge named after a resident turtle with a missing flipper seen by some. The Great Blue Hole was an interesting deep dive but too short. Later went to Half Moon Caye. Best dive with wall, many fishes and rays and interesting bird sanctuary on island. From observation deck saw many ospreys and frigate birds nesting on top of trees protecting their chicks. Three Amigos was interesting. Puffers, eels, yellow tails, spotted eagles and a sleeping shark underneath a rock. Did night dive there and saw red scorpion fish and same sleeping shark. All dives were from small boats and was either drift dives or follow the DM except where there were moorings. The initial dive briefing at the lodge was too long and did not ask for any questions. The boat Capt./DMs were Marcel and Rick who were excellent except briefings on the dive site were too short. Danielle the genial efficient administrator took care of all land operations and was the perennial Island limbo champ. The divers were from all over the USA and were an interesting group. The food was good and the entire place was clean and well maintained. The accommodations were excellent. Every morning just outside of your

cabin there was an individual pot of hot coffee or tea on the table just by your door. Free access to canoes, kayaks and small sail boats. Two friendly well trained pet dogs. Near the waters of the lodge was a resident alligator about 4' long which I nearly bumped into while kayaking. I heard that there was another dog but it is believed it became a meal of the gator. Total of 17 dives in 6 days. (www.turneffelodge.com)

Turneffe Island Lodge, February 2004, Ramsay Thom (Ramsaythom@aol.com) New York, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, choppy. It was quite windy and therefore the surface condition was quite choppy. Because dive sites are so close to the resort, small boats are used. You need to remove BC/tank before re-boarding but the crew lifts your BC/tank back on board. This is true "valet" diving. I would go a bit later in the year next time due to windy conditions.

Turneffe Island Lodge, March 2004, Ron & Sherry Smith, Levittown, PA. Vis: 60-70 feet. Water: 76-78 F. Dives logged: 274. This was our fourth visit to this beautiful island hideaway. Great service, food, and lovely beachfront accommodations. Although the wind got worse as the week went on, we enjoyed ourselves anyway. Visibility got worse as the winds got stronger, but our dives were still enjoyable. Bo and Ricky are great to dive with, and got to see my first Hammerhead on this trip! Great place.

Turneffe Island Lodge, June 2004, Roger, Donna & Kate Soape (ras@rasoape.com) Houston, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. We visit every couple of years. The food here is consistently among the very best we have experienced anywhere in the Caribbean. The accommodations — especially the cabanas — are very nice. The resort occupies its own island, which is reachable only by boat, so — it is very quiet. We did not experience as many spotted eagle rays and black tip sharks as on some prior trips. The currents weren't really running and the moon was full; maybe that was why. Still, lots of turtles and pelagic fish (permit, jacks, snapper). Several spotted toadfish and a good number of the usual reef suspects. We dove with groups of about a half dozen in a small, open boat. Most dives — including the renowned Elbow — are done as drift dives just a few minutes ride from the resort so surface intervals between the three dives are done at the resort. Experienced divemasters and boat drivers continue to pamper guests. Sometimes swift currents in open water, and deep dives.

BONAIRE

In 1999, hurricane-driven waves damaged, even destroyed, many of Bonaire's beautiful shallow coral gardens, ruining snorkeling in many places. Still, Bonaire is a diver's island par excellence, with easy diving that's especially well-suited to beginning divers or those returning to the water after