

on San Andres.. Seven day stay at the Nirvana Inn after an overnigher in San Jose. Unless otherwise requested, you dive with Sharkey's Dive Shop located in the Sunset Inn, a short 50 yard walk. Since most dive spots were 10 minutes or less away, everyone was encouraged to dress and gear up on the dock before leaving. There was no room to move on the boat, let alone dress and gear up. During one dive, out of the thirteen divers on the boat, five countries were represented, The United States, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, and Columbia. Diving: 50% of the reefs on San Andres are dead. Some reefs were bleached, others showed signs of wear, all were eerily missing medium to large size fish. The diving confirmed what over fishing and environmental non-control will due to the reefs. Although soft coral was abundant, the week produced sightings of three turtles and one ray. Sharkey's, although helpful, congenial, and friendly above the surf, had questionable actions and techniques once on the boat. On one dive, packets of crackers were handed out to feed the fish. I watched in horror, as the divemaster and others let the plastic wrappers float away. Approximately twenty discarded tires were dumped around the reef. Since no moorings are available and little to no currents exist, an anchor is dropped and most dives occur around the boat. The dive briefings and safety lectures were all but an after thought. Most were only time and depth of the dive, neither being strictly enforced. On our divemaster's day off, the new divemaster gave a three minute dive briefing only in French. Then jumped in the ocean with the rest of the boat, leaving

the three of us from the U.S. scratching our heads and laughing about "plan your dive, dive your plan". On another dive a local from Colombia was so grossly over weighted, I watched as he crawled on the bottom of the reef. The divemaster had him by the yoke pulling him up, clouds of soft and hard coral billowed around his body as he kicked his fins, trashing the reef in the process. Throughout the dive, this fellow kept landing hard on the reef due to his weight, yet the divemaster never intervened to help him gain neutral buoyancy or remove some weight. The Nirvana Inn, located seven miles out of town, is a perfect dive Inn. Conveniently located on the leeward side of San Andres, it's but a short truck ride to the marina and most dive spots. The Inn is kept clean with all rooms facing the ocean or the court yard and grounds. The courtyard is filled with a variety of tropical flowers, palm trees, and shrubs. The rooms, although Spartan, were cleaned and straightened daily with fresh towels and soap placed out. Although not a four star hotel, it's starting to show signs of wear, the ambiance and friendly staff made up for any shortcomings in the physical plant. There were only two other guests checked into the Nirvana Inn, one American and one Canadian, for the first three days of our stay. After they had left, we had the entire Inn, grounds, and pool to ourselves, no other visitors arrived for the rest of the week. The staff asked us what time we would like our meals served, all depending on our plans for the afternoon, we could set a different time for lunch and dinner. A convenience and a perk I've never

experienced on any other dive resort. A meal plan is recommended since there is not a restaurant for miles. The food, plentiful and wholesome, was served in courses, both lunch and dinner. The first course was always soup, home-made, hot and extremely tasty. A "salad" came next, usually consisting of cucumbers, tomatoes, and garnish in a wonderful lime/ olive oil dressing. The main meal consisted of either meat or fish with potatoes or plantains and rice. From ice cream to flan, desert ended the meals. Everything is cooked fresh on premise, with the biggest surprise being the juice. Every meal is served with liquefied orange, guava, or papaya juice. Fresh fruit is placed in a blender, liquefied, poured into a glass and served. Indescribably delicious! Buses circle the island on a five to ten minute interval; some are painted and decorated directly out of the 60's, costing 35 cents to take you the seven miles to downtown. Downtown is a beehive of activity with small shops lining the side streets and bars, restaurants, discos, and a few casinos lining the beach. We ended up renting motor scooters and touring the island on bikes. Although only 26 square kilometers, the island has two distinct personalities separated by a 100 meter high island center: the leeward side is relatively deserted and isolated while the windward side is crowded with four star resorts, beaches, shops, restaurants, and bars. The topside attractions on the windward side, staff at Nirvana's, and ambiance of the leeward side of San Andres made the trip enjoyable, charming, and quite relaxing.

CURACAO

A short hop from Bonaire (and a nonstop flight from Miami), Curacao's colorful, historic, cosmopolitan Dutch city of Willemstad offers plenty for the nondiver — international shopping, casinos, night life, hiking, an orchid-filled forest, attractive rural villages, windsurfing, half-naked Europeans, horseback riding, and excellent restaurants. ... Dive resorts prefer the relatively undeveloped northwestern side of the island, where there's outstanding beach diving from protected coves that are generally calm and easily accessible by car. The windward side is usually too rough to dive, but the diving's good if the wind shifts from its prevailing pattern. Many divers who cut their teeth on Bonaire now prefer Curacao, which has much less diver traffic.

Caribbean Sea Sports, Curacao Marriott Beach Resort, October 2003, Kevin, Knoxville, TN.

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: 84 to 81 F, calm, choppy. Curacao has very good shore diving. Most Dive operations have decent shore diving plus many more optional shore sites resembling Bonaire. Reefs and a few wrecks are close to shore. I dive by boat for convenience. Caribbean Sea Sports(CSS) on Marriott property. CSS very efficient and well-managed operation. Experienced and informative staff. Everyone friendly. Tip jar in dive shop.

Free lockers and locks for safe overnight storage of gear. 42ft dive boat is 1-2 yrs old with diesel engines. Deck is covered. Boat has lots of room. I dove 7 days 6-10 divers was typical. Rinse tanks on board but sometimes not filled. Water, fruit and snacks on surface interval. Typical Marriott resort. Very nice! The pool is big and clean. Grounds well maintained. I ate all my meals at Marriott. Great place to stay if wife doesn't dive. Nice beach. OK man made reef for snorkeling. Noticed mild odor from fuel processing plant 3-4 miles away. I liked short walk from room to dive shop. Marriott has good off season rates. Need a car, town is 10-20 min. drive. However, hotel makes two free shuttles to town per day. Diving is very nice with great viz. Healthy reefs with lots of macro life. Lots of dive sites. Easier to get to than Bonaire. Caribbean Sea Sports and Marriott made a nice vacation. (www.caribseasports.com)

Habitat Curacao, Marriott, November 2003, James Reilly and Fran Klass (james.reilly4@worldnet.att.net) Wyndmoor, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm, no currents. The Marriott is beautiful and comfortable, pricey but well worth it. Wonderful service and on our trip, due to the off- season, Marriott gave us free breakfast and another \$100 in hotel credit. Did a shore dive off the Hilton (used to be the Sheraton). Pretty much a junk yard near the hotel but as we got further towards Willemstad it began to look more natural. Steeply sloped wall dropping to well over 100 feet, very

nice coral, lots of sea life but nothing very big. We also dove at Habitat Curacao, which has a very fine dive operation and a beautiful house reef. Just lovely shore diving site. New divers should go with more experienced divers when tackling Curacao. On this trip the currents and waves were not a problem. Last time we visited (2002), sudden, strong currents made two dives a bit more than one might like. Waves made getting back on to the boat a bit adventurous. This trip we chose to carry alert sausages, signal whistles, and a lift bag and reel to facilitate safety stops in strong currents (although we did not need them). Must have a car. Willemstad is a city of 130,000, with an interesting historic district and more than a few very nice places to eat. Touring the island is a must, especially the very fine national parks along the northern edge of the island. Curacao has instituted a \$22 cash only facility tax which we only discovered at the airport on our way home. (www.habitatdiveresorts.com)

Habitat Curacao, 2004, Jim Furlong (jfurlong@nycap.rr.com), Albany, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 Fahrenheit, calm. I always come back to Curacao. Maybe it's Willemstad, with the famous floating bridge; the massive port with the old fort walls & turrets and bustling hordes of locals and tourists shopping contrasted with beautiful countryside where you can drive or hike the ancient hills and caves. I like the minimal U.S. influence on culture. English is spoken, but Dutch & Papiement are the main languages. Habitat is on Rif St. Marie

along the southwest coast where the best boat and shore diving rivals Bonaire. Habitat Curacao has the "Diver Freedom" attitude. Tanks out 24/7. Buddy diving is encouraged but not forced. Anne-Marie & Harry, who run Easy Divers are excellent operators — friendly, knowledgeable and willing to accommodate. The crew who have been there awhile; Tristan, Angela, Dennis, Tuki and "J" are all friendly and helpful, environmentally conscientious and approachable. The house reef is beautiful and there is the guide rope from the dock on down to 120 feet so the novice can find the way back. Beautiful hard and soft coral teeming with small and medium tropicals and critters. I found two frogfish on the house reef. Night diving is fantastic — especially in Autumn during coral spawning weeks. Habitat's rooms are clean and comfortable — all have AC. The restaurant run by Esther and ably assisted by Sherman has good food and drinks. There are 70 marked dive sites — most accessible from shore. It's best to have a car and explore and there is much to do besides diving. There is a suburban like enclave — Salina — where many Dutch reside, fine shopping and great restaurants. Try Bistro Clouchard in Willemstad on the Otrabunda side in the old fort for world class French cuisine. Or Janchie's, a family run operation in Westpunt. The Ostrich Farm with it's authentic African touch. Numerous white sand beaches-bikini tops optional. The oldest synagogue in the western hemisphere is in Punda. Check out the Slave Museum or the Jewish Museum in Otrabunda. The awesome Christoffel National Park.

The locals are friendly and the many Dutch who reside here have lost that cool veneer. There of course is poverty, some government corruption, and crime, most of it on locals in towns a tourist wouldn't be in. It is always hot, but most times it is dry heat due to the tradewinds. Water temp ranges from 78 in "winter" up to 85 in summer to early autumn. Rain season-Oct-Dec.is light, but welcome on this thirsty island. There are numerous colorful flora and for the bird watcher many unique species. American Airlines runs a daily flight out of Miami.

Habitat Curacao, March 2004, Steven Coberly (coberlys@comcast.net) Oak Park, IL. Experience: 51-100 dives. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. Super diving! Morning trips of less than 30 minutes brought us to a variety of sites every day. The reef is healthy. Curacao's strength is its rich and interesting coral and sponge formations — Mushroom Forest is unbelievable! Lots of small critters. Very little in the way of big fish or pelagics. Every afternoon we dove the awesome house reef, although they do offer afternoon boat dives. Leisurely surface swim of about 80 yds to the reef which begins in 20' and slopes steeply downward. There's a resident octopus, turtle, two frogfish, and lots of other life. We dove it six times over four days; we saw no reason to rent a car to do other shore dives. The night dives on the house reef were pleasant but a bit disappointing. There was not much activity on the reef and there was very little life under the dock. Divers are given great freedom — dive whenever, however, and with

whomever you want. (For boat dives, bottom time is limited to one hour.) Beginning divers could have used more direction. Dive briefings were short and contained more jokes than information. There was very little explanation about the boat procedures. A dive-master was on every dive, but was always the last one in, and most did not point out very much on the dive. Crew put the tanks on the boat, but divers carried their own gear, set up tanks, and switched tanks during the SI. You could store gear in a locker by the dive shop (bring a small padlock). No Superior Producer dives — can't dive it when the cruise ships are in and it is too far away. Dive shop was well stocked and not expensive. The resort was very attractive and the rooms were pleasant, if a bit small. We shared a lanai with another couple — two separate bedrooms and bathrooms with a shared outdoor LR and kitchen. Service was typically Caribbean — listening, nodding, apologies, but very little action. Internet/email access for \$4 for 15 min. Game room was not really functional. Great pool. Overall, fairly quiet, despite its size. Food was great, with a nice variety. Sandwiches and entrees from \$7 to \$23. Free shuttle into town, but if you go for dinner you have to take a cab back — about \$40.

Habitat Curacao, May 2004, Clarence & Madelyn Schnitzer (cschnitze@sbcglobal.net), Saint Louis, MO.

Vis: 50-100 feet. Water: 80-89 F. We had been here twice before so we knew what to expect. We took our two oldest grandchildren for their high school graduation present. This was their first

time diving and they loved it. We stayed at the new, 2 bedroom, 2 bath lanai accommodations and it was nice and worked well for us.

Habitat Curacao, June 2004, David Andel (dandel@athens-213.org)

Athens, IL. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. Second time to the Habitat. The rooms are comfortable with a large verandah to hang out after dives, and dry gear. There is a fridge, stove, pots/pans, and utensils. Get a second floor ocean front room. You can leave your French doors open all night and enjoy the sounds and breezes coming from the ocean. Ants can be a problem, keep all food put away. They provide each room with a can of bug spray. The restaurant is open at 6:00am with a good variety for breakfast. Standard fair for lunch and supper. We stopped at the grocery store in Curacao before getting to the resort, loaded up on fruit, cheese and deli meats; and ate lunch on our verandah. Went into town and ate several times. Two boat dives a day. The DM were helpful especially Tuki! He knew where to find the little stuff. Seahorses, arrow crabs, flamingo tongues. Every dive was great. Boats were on time and well maintained. We were with a large group so most of the time we had the entire boat to ourselves. DM handed cameras to you once you entered the water and took them for you upon returning. Easy Divers does not offer film processing, all divers used digital so there was no need.

Habitat Curacao, July 2004, Dave Bridenbaugh (dtbriden@fuse.net)

Cincinnati, OH. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, surge. We are avid Bonaire divers and did a little diving in Aruba — many similarities between the three. The reef system on all three is in good shape and some reefs are “pristine. Shortage of large fish and pelagics. The food was fair, but the selection is not so hot. Our room was great. We had the Lanai Villa and it had two large bedrooms with closet, TV, chest of drawers and writing table. The bathroom was adequate but not very roomy. The couple we came with had their room next to ours and we shared a very nice patio with couches, table and chairs and a sort of hutch that opened up into a stove, sink, small refrigerator and pantry. This as an open air with a roof over it and it had a ceiling fan. Reef system is very much like Bonaire surrounding the island with small walls and 45-degree hills dropping down to and lats 100-150' or more. Very good condition with abundant fish life. After a short orientation we dove right away. Lockers and tank room near the dive pier. There is rope coming off the pier extending down to the reef which starts at about 75 yards or so well down the reef about 90 feet or so making it a simple dive for non Daniel Boone divers to find the way back easily. I think this “house reef” is a little bit better than captain Don's in Bonaire. Some great diving especially for us gray haired types. Superior Producer can only be dived on when there are no cruise chips or supply ships in the harbor. We couldn't dive there the entire time. Our first dive was very good. Many eels, banded coral shrimp. Arrow crabs, cleaner shrimp, nudi-

branches, anemones, batwing crabs, lobsters, and all the marine life that usually indicate a healthy reef system. On other dives barracudas, turtles, frogfish, sea horses, and an occasional ray. The boat diving was easy. There are two tank boat dives in the morning and most afternoons depending upon the demand. The sign-up board gives you a chance to see where the boat is going a day ahead of time. Fills of 3,200 being a norm including Nitrox for an extra 7 bucks. The dive staff is a mixed bag; a couple of them are extra friendly and go out of their way to help you. Ann Marie the dive shop manager is great as are Divemasters Karen, and Dennis. Tuki is a character. A Divemaster goes in the water with the group and it's optional if you want to follow or dive your own profile and back on board with 500 psi. The restaurant staff seemed rather reserved and not so friendly. You can grab tanks from a tank fill house near the parking lot and go. Many other shore diving sights around the island but be aware of the fact that some are a far kick from the shore and often the surf makes it tough to get in and out. We dove Jeremi which was a beautiful reef but a long kick out, Kalki which is very popular and not an exceptionally long kick out. Lagun is a short kick and a nice reef, but if the surf's up can be tough on new divers because of the rocks. Several of the dive sites can only be accessed through resort areas that charge you about 5 Guilders per car to get to. There are enough good easy to get to shore sites that make renting a pickup or small SUV worthwhile. Since the resort is well out of walking distance to

any grocery or restaurant. Willemstad it is worth taking a look at with its Dutch looking buildings and decent shopping as well as some good eating-places. Dutch Caribbean which over booked and we had to spend an extra night in Miami because we couldn't get back when we were scheduled and missed our connection. Travel by Jamaica Air or American. Dive Shop has a resident guru who seems to have some photo sense, but film is sent out to a local developer and can be a little expensive for overnight service.

Habitat Curacao, August 2004, Clark Bloom, Phoenix, AZ.

Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm, choppy. Diving ranks with the best in the Carribean. We have made 5 trips in last 18 months. The house reef is pristine. We have seen frog fish, sea horses, slipper lobsters and basket stars. Similar to Bonaire, sloping reefs not walls. Diversity of corals, sponges and small critters, overall health of the reef is awesome. Harry and Annemarie run an A+ dive operation — "Total diving freedom 24/7". The divemasters and instructors are great. Rent a Toyota Hilux or Rav4, shore dive up and down the coast, visit town. Oceans restaurant at the resort is very good but also try Landhuis Daniel, Surf & Turf or TuTu Tango. Photography: Generally very good for regular or wide angle, even better for Macro. Boats and dock both have camera tables and dedicated rinse tanks.

Lion's Dive, February 2004, Tim Pekios (pekios@lidd.net), Cape Girardeau, MO. Vis: 50-80 feet.

Water: 76-90 F. Experience: 300+. Lions Dive only goes to the dives we most looked forward to, the Mushroom Forest and the Superior Producer, on Wednesdays, which we didn't know until we got there and we weren't there on a Wednesday. Of our twelve boat dives, we only went to six different sites, and did the Tugboat dive four times. All the dives were close to the operator's location; When I voiced these complaints to the dive operator, he seemed indifferent. The reefs were healthy but did not nearly compare to those in Bonaire. The divemasters were helpful and the boats were large and were not crowded. Dinner reservations are required. The food was good but overpriced. There was a free shuttle to town twice a day, but we were told it wasn't safe to leave the resort after dark due to the crime level. Aqua Dreams Travel told me over the phone that they had visited the resort, but they did a poor job relaying information to me about the resort and dive operator. This was surprising, since I found them through an ad in Scuba Diving magazine. (www.lionsdive.com)

Ocean Encounters, Breezes Curacao, January 2004, Ken Edmondson (BarbandKenE@aol.com) Danville, IN. Dives logged: 260. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dive restrictions enforced: depth 80'. The resort is very crowded. It does not cater to divers. The "big party" is their specialty. Ocean Encounters is strictly a "cattle boat" operation. 16-20 divers on every dive. All levels of experience on boat. You have to handle your equipment every day. The boat only went to sites on E

end of Curacao, which are very average sites. (www.oceanencounters.com)

Ocean Encounters, Lion's Dive, May 2004, Mark Webber, Toronto, Ontario. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 F, choppy. I was pleasantly surprised by the diversity and condition of the reef — very good coverage with hard and soft corals, sponges, crinoids, very little sign of bleaching or disease. Little reason to go below 70-80 feet. The currents were manageable but sometimes required drift diving — one advantage of the currents was very large Christmas-tree and feather duster worms. Fish, too, were plentiful and large, especially the midnight and blue parrots. Lots of little critters as well as larger crabs, lobster, squid, and the occasional octopus. Ocean Encounters Curacao (OEC) is a well-conducted, friendly and safe operation that does a lot of advanced instruction (including thorough rescue diver courses and divemaster qualifications). There are lockers, bathrooms, showers, and rinse tanks available at the dock/dive shop. The fills varied from 2,700 to 3,200 psi — it pays to check out two tanks before the boat leaves. Usually there is a two-tank dive in the morning only (leave 9:00, back by 12:30 or 1:00), but occasionally there was also a one-tank afternoon dive. Nitrox was available. The boat was a standard dive boat — a bit bouncy for some, but basically fine. They supply water, fruit, and some spare equipment along with oxygen and first-aid equipment. Some sites are suitable for snorkeling by non-divers; others are not — OEC can advise you. But the

actual dive sites may change from those scheduled due to wave conditions. It pays to chat up the office staff each afternoon to stay current (no pun intended). Divers are treated as adults — you are welcome to dive your own profile, but not to keep others waiting: max bottom time is 60 minutes. If you want to go with the divemaster, most of whom are very good about finding stuff, that's no problem, but navigating with this reef system is also no problem. Raul and Naldo were especially good in finding interesting critters, but all DMs were friendly and competent. If you have a car, there is good shore diving on the island — the double reef at St. Marie is especially recommended. Organized night diving was more problematical — canceled one for lack of divers. Lions Dive (LD) Resort is comfortable, clean, friendly, and very convenient. The staff are extremely eager to please. Rooms have all the amenities from air-conditioning to real hot water, room safes, phones, and a few TV channels (most in Dutch, Spanish or Papiamentu). It's not as luxurious as the nearby Breezes all-inclusive (same dive operation at both places), but may be more friendly than Breezes. LD is pretty Dutch, so if you need to believe that the world speaks English without exception, it may not be your cup of tea. The food was perfectly acceptable but a bit limited in choice and often heavy on the garlic. The breakfast buffet (included in our room package) was excellent, with lots of hot and cold offerings; lunch and dinner were less creative yet relatively pricey. The better place to eat is the Mambo Beach Club, about 5 minutes

by foot down the beach towards Breezes — Mambo's food was superior and less expensive, and the ambiance was better. Overall: A very good place that had everything we needed and did what it took to make us feel welcome. We still prefer Bonaire overall, but for those who want some city life too, Curacao, Lions Dive and Ocean Encounters are a good choice (there is a shuttle-bus into town twice a day). A very non-hassly and pleasant vacation. UW Photography Comments: Boats have separate rinse tank for cameras, no dry table; uwp shop in nearby seaquarium, but not at or through dive shop itself

Sunset Waters Beach Resort, October 2003, John and Nancy Damas, Orland Park, IL. Vis: 60'-100'. Water: 84-86 F and mostly calm. The diving is fantastic on pristine reefs. The minor damage from Hurricane Lenny 5 years earlier is limited to depths less than 30 feet. Beyond that the coral was as lush as any I've seen. Sunset Waters is located on the South side of the island near the West End — about 40 minutes from Willemstadt. This makes it the closest resort to the very best dive sites. General Manager Jim Hunter and his wife Gaynor went out of their way to accommodate our group. They even moved a set of bleachers to the front of the bar and set up three TV's so we Chicagoans could watch our beloved Cubbies lose to the Marlins! The rooms were spacious, clean, and air-conditioned, with television and ceiling fans. The food was varied and plentiful, and special requests were always fulfilled with a

smile. The all-inclusive price was extremely reasonable and our one-week package included 6 days of two-tank boat dives and unlimited, 24-7, shore dives. Sunset Divers was located on the dock, just a short walk down the steps from the hotel dining room. Owners Mike and Michelle Day, with instructors Wade and Kristin Olson and D/M Carlos Beaumont could not possibly have worked any harder to give us the best dive week ever. Their clean and well-maintained dive boat was built for 22 divers but they only took 18. A smaller boat could handle 8 more divers. Two-tank dives left the dock at 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. for a 3 or 4 hour trip. Most dive sites were within 20-30 minutes of the dock. Dive restrictions were self-imposed by common sense and our computers. We could follow our guide or dive our own profile. The coral was lush and dense. Hard and soft corals were healthy and plentiful as was the fish population at every site we visited. We saw all of the usual critters in abundance. Eels were everywhere. Sea horses, turtles, eagle rays, lobsters and most of the fish in the Caribbean Fish Guide were spotted by our group. Our gear was rinsed, hung up, and set up on the boat every day by the service-oriented staff of Sunset Divers. This was one of the best overall diving trips I have taken in my 30+ years of diving and 6+ years of teaching. Our group is already planning our next trip back to Sunset Waters/Sunset Divers. 1-599-9-864-1233; (www.sunsetdivers.com)

Sunset Waters, December 2003, Bill Youngblood (tru0428423@aol.com),

Land O'Lakes, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 Fahrenheit, calm. Sunset Waters is on the SouthWest end of the island. There is not much development here and only one other dive operation. The resort has a great beach, including a clothing optional section, a nice pool area with a swim up bar and most of all great service. The food is plentiful and good but not fancy. Sunset Divers is a first rate operation. They load your gear on the boat each day and change it to a new tank between dives. Kevin and his staff of Lynn, Barron, and Carlos were very friendly, courteous, knowledgeable and helpful. I especially liked the fact that they did not set diving limits but were available on each dive for those that wanted to follow them. There was nothing I asked for that they didn't provide. Lots of corals, small fish, eels, etc. Don't expect to see much, if any, large critters. The diving is easy, we had current on only one day of the week, and the water is warm and clear. We were there only a few days after Hurricane Ivan brushed by and that may have affected the vis and the fish life somewhat. There was little or no damage to the island and I saw only a little reef damage in just a few areas. In our last night we took and booze cruise out of the dive shop. We saw an area where tuna were feeding and the captain, Mike the owner of the dive shop, eased the boat up close so we could get a good look at the frenzy. Suddenly he spotted a whale shark that swam around the boat a few time before leaving. Overall, I recommend the resort and the dive operation but the diving will not excite

very experienced divers. The shop has digital cameras for rent and the crew will help with your gear but there were no serious photographers on my trip.

Sunset Waters, December 2003, Sam Hughes (dive3@aol.com) Jacksonville, OR. Dives logged: 77. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 120 ft. Main divemaster went off way ahead of divers, did not try to show any special things and went up to boat after about 30 minutes on every dive leaving every one. In 5 days of diving we went to same dive site 2 times when there were many other sites we had not gone to. P.S. Overnight stay in Miami Holiday Inn Airport Hotel was horrible. (Very rundown).

Sunset Waters, February 2004, Carol Riehlman, New Castle, NH. Experience: 54 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 75 to 78 F. Sunset Divers, Michelle and Michael Day, have just started this operation. They have two great divemasters, Wade and Kirstin, and a local, Carlos. Two boats, both in excellent condition, small, fast, 10 diver w/canopy top was great. Larger boat to accommodate 20 had plenty of room, also shaded areas. Both equipped with camera rinse buckets, fresh water, fruit and dry storage. Michelle also acts as divemaster when necessary and can find some incredible small critters. All dives very conservative if you follow divemaster, back under boat in 40 min. But, no problem diving your own profile. Coral best and more species than I have ever seen. Crabs, slipper lobsters, langostina out and about during day.

Christmas trees worms abound and many small schooling fish.

Sunset Waters, April 2004, Jackie Stein (popstein@adelphia.net)

Encinitas, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 82 F, calm. The resort and dive operator are both top notch and extremely service oriented. Mike and Michelle recently took over the dive operation, they have one large boat and one smaller faster boat. The large boat can accommodate 20 the smaller one 8. They try not to put more than 18 on the larger boat and there is plenty of room, and sundeck available. They spoil you, setting up your gear from your first dive to your last, switching over the gear between the two boat dives and rinsing it out at the days end. You don't touch your gear from arriving till you leave. They make the surface interval fun by offering options such as snorkeling in a cave, feeding iguanas, etc. Sunbathing is always an option, while enjoying the fresh fruit snacks they provide. You are free to dive your own profile, and to go with a buddy, or to follow their guide. Only rule is to come up with 500 PSI, and even that rule is not strictly enforced. They treat you like an adult. The manager of the resort Jim Hunter was on top of everything and quite accommodating to ensure every guest is pleased. While the resort is far from town about a thirty to forty minute ride, just tell Jim when you want to go into town and he arranges a free service to get you there. The resort has a beautiful beach and the ocean front rooms have totally unobstructed beautiful ocean vistas, and balconies,

with great sunset views. The ocean-front junior suite are quite large and offer large balconies. The all inclusive rate is hard to beat- three excellent meals a day, always several choices of entrees plus a fresh salad bar at lunch and dinner. The all inclusive rate also includes all alcohol. The service and staff of both the resort, and the dive operation is impeccable with the staff eager to please.

Sunset Waters, June 2004, Brant Shenkarow (brantravels@yahoo.com)

San Anselmo, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. I've visited 5 times. I believe it's too often overlooked and underrated but that's okay since it's the absence of divers which ranks this island's western half above Bonaire for desert isle Caribbean diving. Sunset Waters is the old Coral Cliffs Resort and dive operation both have been owned by separate concerns. While the new Sunset Waters Resort is way better than the old Coral Cliffs Resort, the new dive operation doesn't do as good a job. CCD used to go more dive sites farther west. The new Sunset Divers could make it well worth the extra fuel cost by doing all day trips to the west end, charging for an afternoon dive and having lunch prepared by the resort for a \$5 surcharge. The new operation just isn't as adventuresome as the island beckons. Kevin, Lynn, and Bernd are friendly, helpful, and professional; however Carlos seems to be concerned about only himself. Though he led about 1/3 of the dives, he is not a qualified PADI divemaster, so by rights he should not be leading dives through

this qualified PADI dive operation. I was off diving and taking pictures on my own. Curacao's western half offers the u/w photographer great opportunities for macro life and wide angle reef-scapes. I used my 12-24, 17-35, 60, and 105mm lenses with my Nikon D100 and twin Ike DS-125's, taking an average of 100 shots per dive. If I staked out a 50 foot square and stayed put in just a few spots, I had all the subjects I needed – octopus, peacock flounder, stonefish, turtle, all kinds of tropicals, seahorse, morays, spotted eagle ray, and some of the most beautiful and healthy hard and soft corals and sponges I've ever seen. The resort is very comfortable without being fancy. The food is pretty good and there's lots of it with either buffet or menu choices for each meal. All drinks are included including alcohol at the two bars. There's a clean, expansive private beach with a portion of it clothing optional. (For 2 weeks in September the entire resort is clothing optional). I'd make it clear to the dive operators that I expect to dive the coral-dense 4 mile Mushroom Forest, Jeremi, and Watahuli which are all spectacularly healthy and rich with reef life. The boat is very roomy, there's separate rinse barrels aboard for cameras and masks. Dive crew handled my big rig to me and from me very well. Ashore there's a large rinse barrel for cameras only and there's a hose for final rinse before going to hotel room for equipment maintenance and computer work.

Sunset Waters Beach Resort, August 2004, Irene Fox Briggin, MD, Chestnut Hill, MA. Diving con-

ditions were fine, including visibility. Plenty of undamaged reefs My husband and I are both senior citizens and their policy of setting up the gear for each dive and then washing and storing it for us after the dives. Since I am a small woman, Lynn, an unusually capable instructor, suggested I remove my gear in the water and she lifted it up for me, saving me the usual struggle up the ladder. Lynn and Kevin the instructors, and Carlos the divemaster were skillful in pointing out a variety of critters, Carlos, in one day, found two frogfish, a rather large seahorse and a stingray. We watched as a Mantis Shrimp handed him a shell. While there were few pelagics and no large fish, the waters were rich with healthy coral and sponges and fish life. Kevin repaired a broken fin strap and fixed a regulator problem with no charge and good spirits. Carlos was wonderful above water and a conscientious divemaster. Head counts and roll calls duly attended to. The boat was clean and well equipped with never more than 8 divers. The surface interval fruit was plentiful. The Resort combined the attentive service and amenities of a luxury resort with the laid-back informality of shorts and T-shirt hideaway. Jim Hunter, the manager, had an unoccupied suite and upgraded us at once. We had a good sized nicely furnished living room with a view of the sea and mountains, a balcony with a shaded covering, and a spiral staircase leading to a large loft/bedroom, also with a large window looking out to the sea. There was a refrigerator, sink and stove. All food and liquor was included in the reasonable price and it was very

good. The Chef was eager to prepare dishes to our liking and the staff was attuned to our personal tastes. I commented on my habit of enjoying morning coffee upon awakening and Jim sent a pound of coffee and an automatic coffee pot to my room. The television set accessed many channels. Kayaks, pedal boats, tennis, swimming pool, lovely beach, a national park and an interesting island to explore.

DOMINICA

Dominica is arguably the best all-around adventure vacation island in the Caribbean, with gorgeous reefs, plenty of tropicals (though few of eating size), lush rain forests, hiking, waterfalls, warm water springs, splendid fruits and vegetables (prepared by great local cooks), modest hotels — and it's inexpensive to boot. ... No beaches, even seaside hotels are affected by the nearly continuous cloud cover over the mountains, and there's not much happening beyond polite residents leading their lives. The airport doesn't handle large jets, and there's little tourism infrastructure. ... Expect daytime temperatures in the 80s and night lows around 68 in winter and 73 in summer, although a few minutes up the mountain and into the cloud forest can change all that. ... July to November is the wet season, but showers may occur anytime. Dominica's at the edge of the hurricane belt. ... The 13-mile, round-trip hike to Boiling Lake is worth getting in condition

for. Dive operations usually offer two dives in the morning to allow time to tour in the afternoons.

Anchorage Hotel, January 2004, Lori Rocheleau (Lori.Rocheleau@fallon.clinic.com) Paxton, MA.

Dives logged: 174. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 78-82 F. The diving here was better than expected. Saw a really nice variety of fish, eels, frogfish and a sea-horse. Mostly we shared the dive boat with another couple but on our last day a large group came in and the boat was crowded. We had the opportunity to trade some of our dives for whale watching and the hotel offered excursions to waterfalls and the Carib Indian reservation which was interesting. Dominica doesn't lend itself well to self-guided tours. The hotel staff was sometimes not helpful or indifferent. You can walk to other restaurants or take an inexpensive bus to town. (www.anchoragehotel.dm)

Anchorage Hotel, May 2004, Bob Lambertson (rdlamber@artsci.wustl.edu) St. Louis MO. Vis: 80 ft. Water: 82 F. Dives logged: 400+. Dive restrictions enforced: time, depth (very relaxed). We went for a one-week, ten-day package. Unless you live in a hub, you'll probably have to overnight each way — but who would complain about spending a night in old San Juan? The Lesser Antilles cruise ships visit Dominica, but otherwise its remoteness has favored keeping the island beautifully undeveloped. They have a heavy investment in eco tourism, an outstanding population of endemic birds, and spectacular mountains, lush and green.

It recalls Tahiti. The dive sites are in great shape — all volcanic with patchy coral. Most diving is at a flooded crater (La Soufriere) twenty minutes south of the hotels, with beautiful topography and great fish. Michael, one of Anchorage Dive Center's excellent divemasters, found us a Spotted Snake Eel and thoughtful, attentive Francis produced the biggest seahorses I've ever seen. The most frequently visited site is "Champagne" — a shallow second dive for the boats and a great snorkeling site, accessible from the beach (ticket access). Volcanic gasses bubble up over a large shelf, with deep groves in the lava. We went back to snorkel it one afternoon and encountered about fifty cruise-ship passengers, dropped in the water by another operator with waterwings to enjoy the bubbles. These are the worst crowds you'll encounter, and were amusing to watch. They were largely unaware of the amazing spectacle twenty feet below them, where many Sergeant Majors were actively spawning, each male preparing and protecting his own patch for the purple egg-masses, while courting yet more females to come and make their contributions. In their hormonal distress, these males showed colors you won't find in any fish book. Dive Dominica, next door at the Castle Comfort Hotel, had more customers, but catered to the cruise-ship crowds. One evening, there was an onshore party at our hotel for a cruise ship. The hotel had given us notice and told us it would end at 10:00. When it did not, I found another angry guest already at the desk when I arrived to complain. The desk responded, the noise level dropped quickly,

and the cruise crowd soon returned to their ship. I give the Anchorage Hotel high marks for this responsiveness to the needs of its guests.

Nature Island Dive, October 2003, Chuck Kerl, Saint Paul, MN.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Diving was outstanding, easy and reasonably priced. We dove with Nature Island Dive located in Soufriere, south of the capital, Roseau. We rented a cottage on the water's edge from Nature Island Dive. The cottage was fabulous. Karen at (natureislanddive.com) can arrange cottage, jeep rental, etc. Photos on the website are very accurate. There are at least 20 dive sites within a 5-minute boat ride from the dock in Soufriere. The dive area, called Scotts Head, it is a volcanic caldera. The reef is exceptionally healthy. Great colors. There are lots of small reef fish. Larger fish were absent; due to fishing. There were plenty of turtles, but no sharks during our week. We had great bottom time on the dives — all dives were at least an hour. Nature Island's routine is two daily dives. Downside is that the island infrastructure is minimal. The closest good restaurant is back in Roseau which is a 30 minute white knuckle drive from Soufriere. The roads are in poor condition, narrow, fallen rocks, and, by the way, drive on the left. We were unable to see much of the island because we didn't finish diving until 1:30 pm, our location in the far south of the island and the narrow, mountainous roads. This is a destination for divers willing to put up with a third world environment, prepare some