

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](http://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](http://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

of their own meals, and go with the flow. It is a pretty good tradeoff. ([www.natureislanddive.dm](http://www.natureislanddive.dm))

**Nature Island Dive, Galette Cottage, Calibishie Lodge, April 2004, Ted Shieh M.D., Chicago, IL.** Dives logged: 300+. Booked a 7 night cottage+10 dive package through Nature Island Dive. With so much to do upside, we changed our minds and opted to dive a bit less, and played-it-by-ear. NID was very flexible and accommodating of our whims. The conditions were pristine the first 2 days—just us two and Simon Walsh, their divemaster/business partner and U/W photog extraordinaire. No current, good vis (80'+). Water temp 27C/80F. After being spoiled the 1st 2 days, more divers joined us later in the week, but the boat rarely had more than 4 divers, and never over 8. DM:diver ratio never exceeded 4:1. Each dive blew me away. The reefs were so healthy and bustling with life that the critter noises were deafening. The hardest part with U/W photography was finding a dead/algae — covered piece of coral to put your finger on — couldn't find any much of the times! Bio-diversity was one of the most impressive I've ever witnessed in any one place. Juveniles and grow-ups all thrive here. Huge schools of soldier fish & grunts. Invertebrates and other macro subjects are endless. Did one night dive, and saw more critters than any other night dive I've done on either hemisphere that I can remember: a cowrie, squids, every type of Caribbean eel in the Humann book, & invertebrates everywhere. The boat leaves Soufriere daily at 9am (wish it was ear-

lier); boat rides were a few minutes only to dive sites, so surface intervals were spent back at the village. No need for Bonine. But the full moon attracted iphonophores, jellies, and other zooplanktonics which affected the vis in the days that followed. Guess it's true that jellies spawn at leeward sides on full moons. So snorkeling = jelly sting. (The siphonophore stings were easily cured w/ a hot shower). The one thing missing here only was big animal action. The Soufriere/Scott's Head Marine Reserve seems short on resources to maintain moorings, some of them lost at known dive sites. NID still took us there if conditions allowed. Many upside attractions drew us away from the reef; Sari-Sari falls, Trafalger falls were stunning bathing spots. The top floor of Galette Cottage is just right for 2, with a great view of Scott's Head to the South & Soufriere to the north; though it's on the road between Scott's Head & Soufriere, and a lot of foot traffic goes by on Sundays church goes, Saturdays with political party parades, and Thursday nights w/young party goes (good for people watching). Food choices were limited in Soufriere/Scott's Head, though Tony's had the best steamed and fried Mahi Mahi on the island! So finer dining often involved a drive north towards Roseau. We spent our last night in Callibishie Lodge, a cozy place on the NE side of the island (close to Melville Hall Airport) that caters to Europeans; It was built with aesthetics in mind; their restaurant had fresh, well-prepared food and drinks with fast attentive service not often seen at other places.

**Sunset Bay Club and Seaside Dive Center, May 2004, Don Brooks, Westmont, IL.** Great island! Just as beautiful underwater as above water. Weather the first week was a little rainy, but second week was full sun. Stayed at a lovely place in Coulibistrie (west side of island), the Sunset Bay Club & Seaside Dive Resort (<http://www.sunsetbayclub.com/>). The resort is run by a very friendly Belgian family. The resort has a dive shop at water's edge, pool, restaurant, and 13 rooms for accommodations. All were excellent. In fact, we had booked the first week at Sunset Bay Club, approx 30 minutes north of Roseau, and a second week at Anchorage Hotel, south of Roseau. During the week we drove down to Anchorage to see the place and decided that we would forgo our deposit at Anchorage and stay at Sunset Bay Club for the second week. There is no comparison. Sunset Bay Club sits right at the waters edge with approximately 20-30' of sandy beach. The sand does not extend all the way to the water, but approx the last 5-6' of the beach is water washed rocks (well washed and rounded). The accommodations are some of the best on the Island. The food in their restaurant was excellent. Our package was an all inclusive package since there are essentially no restaurants in the area. The pool is very nice and well maintained. The staff is extremely pleasant and very happy to please. The dive shop is run by a very congenial Olivier Van den Broeck, a PADI Dive Instructor with considerable experience. The shop is well maintained and has a lot of rental gear available.

Although, the shore diving is very good, admittedly, some of the best diving on the island is near the Scott's Head area. There are a number of good dive sites just a short ride from the resort. The boat ride to Scott's Head Caldera is approx 1 hr; the days that you travel south, they pack a picnic lunch, juices, and water; and tanks for three dives. The diving is pristine with very little, if any, diver damage. The fish life is exciting and well worth the trip. One image that stays in mind is the enormous barrel sponges (some 6-10' in diameter). Seahorses, octopus, mantis shrimp, jacks, remora, flying gurnards, electric rays, sharptail eels, spotted sharptail, snake eels, turtles, barracuda, and the usual reef fishes. ([www.sunsetbayclub.com](http://www.sunsetbayclub.com))

## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

While few American's visit, it's a popular and well-developed tourist destination for Europeans, with plenty of all inclusive hotels on nice beaches. While there are a few good dives, it's generally mediocre and for experienced divers, insufficient for a week's trip.

**Treasure Divers, El Candil, April 2004, Conrad Kantor (ckantor@metrocity.com) Westlake Village, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 Ft. Water: 80 F, calm. Some of the best corals and sponges to be seen in the Caribbean, very healthy reefs. Mostly small fish, local fishermen have emptied the reef of large fish. DR has friendly people and attracts Europeans. Most reasonable place to stay, beer \$1

and dinner usually \$5 to \$15. Nice place for a change but not a Bonaire. For the most part clean restaurants and hotels like El Candil two blocks off beach very reasonable with good service including pick up at airport. Treasure Divers is an average operation, friendly staff. Boat is slow but reliable. Not to many divers during April. Safe operation overall. Last day had 6 to 8 ft seas and the anchor line broke while underwater, lucky the captain could retrieve the line that broke on the surface. A surprise at the end, they wanted cash, no credit cards. Spent part of the afternoon in a DR bank getting cash. ([www.treasuredivers.de/eng](http://www.treasuredivers.de/eng))

## GRENADA

Hurricane Ivan wreaked havoc on Grenada in September 2004, damaging as much as 90 percent of the homes and shutting down the entire tourist industry. Divers planning to visit will need to do their homework.

**Devotion 2 Ocean, Rex Grenadian, March 2004, Willaim Thomsen ([thomswill@aol.com](mailto:thomswill@aol.com)) Indianapolis, IN.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 81 F, choppy, surge. Tried to contact this dive operation twice through the resort but never received a response. When I asked them (face to face) about the lack of response, they said that email went to the front desk and that they never forward it to them. When it was windy and wavy, they couldn't launch their boat from the beach so they only went out twice in a week. There was no

information given on the safety features of the boat. I didn't see any oxygen aboard for emergencies. Entry was a backward roll and exit was difficult when having an integrated BC because exit was up a ladder set over the side. I changed dive operations and hooked up with Aquanauts Grenada (Note, they were the only dive operation that responded to my email). They seemed to be the only other viable operation on the island. They were very accommodating. They had three boats with good entry and exit platforms. Rinse tanks for cameras, first aid w/oxygen. Different boats were scheduled for different dive sites. They also handled pick up and return to your resort for a small fee. Briefings were very comprehensive. Diving in Grenada was really less than I expected or hoped for. Other than the great amount of wrecks available to dive on, the diving was very uneventful. There was little wildlife, what there was juvenile (probably from overfishing), visibility was less than I expected and the coral was not very colorful (maybe due to light being cut-down because of water clarity). Not much for photography. No rinse tank on the boat, boat small and crowded, no camera rinse tank at boat facility. ([www.devotion2ocean.com](http://www.devotion2ocean.com))

**Dive Grenada, Grand View Hotel, February 2004, Walter Brenner, Wayne, PA.** Experience: 960 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 feet. Water: 78 to 79 F. Purpose of visit was to dive on the Bianca "C", an Italian cruise ship which burned and sank in October 1961. No penetration allowed because of deterioration and nothing much of

interest above deck. Two days of diving were plenty. ([www.divegrenada.com](http://www.divegrenada.com))

## HONDURAS

All dive resorts are on the Bay Islands: Roatan, Guanaja, Utila, Cayos Cochinos, and other small cays. ... Honduras is home to aggressive no-see-ums; they bite, bite, bite, and many people have serious allergic reactions. Those who are unprepared — meaning DEET — often find their vacations ruined. ... The diving features great walls, offshore seamounts, and excellent coral and gorgonians, although there are few large fish or lobsters due to overfishing. ... Whale sharks are seen near Utila, while diving on Guanaja falls short. ... There's limited access to beach diving except at CoCoView and Fantasy Island on Roatan, and Plantation Beach on Cayos Cochinos. ... The rainy season is October through February, and northers can disrupt the diving. ... Spanish is spoken on the mainland, English in the Bay Islands. ... Classic Central American jungles and Mayan ruins inland make great side trips. ... Malaria protection is advised.

## Cayos Cochinos

**Plantation Beach Resort, April 2004, Jeff and Laura Krause ([krause@bright.net](mailto:krause@bright.net)) Wellington, OH.** Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 Fahrenheit,

choppy. The resort is only accessible by boat, generally from La Ceiba. We were the only clients at the resort, missing eight people the week before and a full house the week after. That didn't stop the staff from catering to us. The food was very good and plentiful. Breakfast consisted of eggs, bacon, sausage, french toast, pancakes, cereal. Lunch and dinner varied from typical "American" food to local Honduran dishes. Soft drinks, beer and a limited selection of liquor was available from an Honor Bar Occasionally, we were joined for dinner by people who sailed in and moored in the bay. Our room was up the hill, a short walk from the dining room. The floor was tiled, and a ceiling fan over the bed helped to keep us cool. The shower was screened in on two sides, providing a beautiful view of the bay below. Two dives in the morning, one in the afternoon - unlimited shore diving, plus a night dive in the package. We were ferried to the dive sites by small runabout, rather than taking the large dive boat. Tank fills generally 3100 psi. Roger (manager, instructor, divemaster, mechanic, etc.) provided detailed briefings, explaining the characteristics of the site plus aquatic life. Danny (boat captain) was able to find sea mounts without a problem. He was helpful with equipment and photo gear when getting in and out of the boat. Aquatic life was plentiful, but we didn't see anything out of the ordinary worth writing about. Our mission was macro photography. We tooted around the bay on sea kayaks provided by the resort. We also hiked one evening to the lighthouse on the top of the island, and another to a