

again in a minute with another room. UW Photography Comments: two dedicated camera tables with air outlet were available. The divemasters handed your camera equipment to you in the water and took it from you in the water after the dive.

Sun Dancer II, June 2004, John DeBonis (debo@direcway.com) Midland, VA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 F, choppy. My first live-a-board. Things ran smoothly from the pickup at the airport to the drop off at the end of the week. The boat was in good condition with the rooms being kept clean and beds made daily. Plenty of room onboard to move about during surface intervals. The meals were varied and the food was very good. Breakfast and dinner were served by the crew with lunch being buffet style. Breakfast was cooked to order and on two nights we were given a choices for dinner. There were no dives prior to breakfast and the night dive was after dinner. Wine was served at dinner each night so if you were diving, you could not partake. My first trip to Belize and tropical diving. On my first few dives I found the creatures to be exciting and stunningly beautiful, but by the end of the week I felt like I had seen them all and was ready to move on. The coral appeared healthy and life around them abundant. I found myself getting bored with the diving by the middle of the week but changed dive buddies and was introduced to a whole different world of diving, taking time to slow down and take a closer look at macro life. The crew were friendly and helpful but they

did not go out of their way to do anything extra. Safety was good with a fire drill being done by us all and a nightly watch posted. Exclusive tank onboard for the cameras along with compressed air. Ample space for setup and maintenance of camera.

Sun Dancer II, July 2004, Joni & Bobby Lamb (scubalovers@comcast.net), Richmond Hill, GA. Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Awesome trip. Fantastic cook and excellent food! Hot chocolate (with Irish Cream) after the night dive! Meats and veggies are fresh and varied. Desserts and snacks. Unlimited beverages. A great, fun crew made sure all passengers were taken care of (one jerk complained about everything). An excellent dive boat. Plenty of room for everything. A hot shower and warm towel on the dive deck after every dive. Separate camera and equipment rinse tanks on each side of the dive deck. The diving was great with plenty of healthy marine life and corals. We could do 5 dives every day and 2 on the last morning. The two morning dives are at one site, two afternoon and one night dive at another site. Nitrox 32 was \$10/tank or \$150/week. Tank fills 3200 psi every time. Dive our own profile or follow a divemaster. Shore excursion to Half Moon Caye for bird watching is worthwhile. When we got home, our house felt like it was rocking until the following Wednesday.

Sun Dancer II, August 2004, Tita Lamm (titatom@bellsouth.net) Windermere, FL. Experience: 51-100

dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 85 to 90 F, choppy, no currents. My first live aboard, and it was a good experience.

CAYMAN ISLANDS

Aggressor, November 2003, Susan Rae Sampson, Renton, WA. 100+ dives, and Buddy, 1000+ dives. Vis: 100+ ft. Temp. 82-84 F. The fourteen passengers aboard on our cruise was a small enough a group to allow uncrowded diving. The decks are large enough to allow a diver to find solitude in the sun or shade between dives, if desired. Chef Andrew definitely has the touch for serving up good food, well prepared. The crew was consistently attentive and helpful; when my electronic storage device failed, they even allowed me to open a folder on the ship's computer for downloading my photos, then burned them onto a disk for me to take home. Although the boat engines are remarkably quiet, an audible generator has to run night and day; and if rough seas preclude docking at the pier, transit between boat and shore is by dingy, and requires some agility. We took our chances on the weather and lost: we were not able to get to Little Cayman's Bloody Bay Wall. Grand Cayman's dive sites hosted a wide variety of fish, but they were not in super abundance, except at Tarpon Alley, which was teeming with the big guys. We spotted one turtle and many rays. Besides the crew photo pro, a guest photo pro was on board running a digital photo class, and that led to one disturbing situation: in their fervor to get the perfect shot, some of the photo zealots on board were bashing

the reef. We know that the crew are not required to be reef police, so we were gratified to see a crewman reach down and pull a photographer off of the coral. We were also pleased with sound ecological practices on board, right down to issuing each passenger a reusable plastic mug for use throughout the week, to reduce creation of plastic or paper waste; and with the discretion and restraint demonstrated by the captain on the issue of tips (we were happy to leave what we think was a nice one.) (www.aggressor.com)

Aggressor IV, April 2004, Phil & Grace Hampton (gracphil@palmnet.net), Orlando, FL. Vis: 40-80 feet. Water: 76-78 F. Dives logged: Phil — 2,170, Grace — 800. We had hoped to dive the north and east sides of Grand Cayman, but Mother Nature had other ideas. Winds were 15 to 25 knots with small craft warnings from Saturday through Wednesday. So most of our diving was on the west side. Winds died down enough so that we were able to dive the north side Thursday. Captain Tom and his crew of five were outstanding. The crew meshed well and seemed to enjoy working together. The boat was clean and Andrew, the cook, is really a chef! Food was excellent and dietary individual restrictions were handled cheerfully. The diving was typical Caymans, with turtles on almost every dive. Tarpon Alley is a small gully. Five Stars!

Aggressor IV, May 2004, Robin C. Russell, (scubarobin@msn.com), Seattle, WA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 200 Feet. Water: 81

Fahrenheit, calm, choppy, surge. I was traveling with two other — we are all in our 40's. I did 23 dives out of a possible of 26. Went to the famous Bloody Bay Wall on Little Cayman and the Russian wreck the Tibbetts on the Brac.. The seas were calm, the visibility crystal clear, the marine life and corals plentiful and the crew and ship amazing. I had the fleet assign me a roommate and we got along great (she gave me the bottom bunk). We became dive buddies and got our Level II certification. My average dive was 45 min., 80 ft (I did several deep dives for certification) and even did the scooters — too much fun! Captain Tom ran a fun, organized and safe ship and all the passengers got along famously such that we gave the crew going away gifts at the going away Crew Party. We were spoiled with a French-trained guest diver chef Marie who made magic in a small boat galley. Warm towels, treats, hot tub, freshwater shower greeted us after every dive. Top deck barbeques (prime rib one night!) and service by the hardworking dive guides/cabin stewards/galley crew (all one and the same) never stopped. Dave and Nick — two of the most hard working, dedicated and fun dive guides you will ever meet. AT&T Wireless works perfect and not nearly as expensive as every other type of communication. Steve was magic with the camera. We enjoyed evening videos of that days dive. The complimentary and purchased DVD's were well worth the money.

Aggressor, August 2004, Preston A Ball (mdleather4ever@ yahoo.com), Flowery Branch, GA. Vis: 100-150

feet. Water: 84-86 F. Dives logged: 225. Our 2nd trip in 6 months and the entire experience is awesome. This is the friendliest, hardest working, most down-to-earth, and fun crew of any live-aboard I've been on. The diving, service, food, and accommodations are top notch. The boat is very comfortable. Dive briefings are detailed, fun, and point out known "hangouts" of interesting critters. Travel to Little Cayman and Cayman Brac is weather-dependent and more possible during the summer months. Divemasters offer guided dives or allow divers to dive their own profiles for freedom extended to mature divers. Dive sites offer a variety of topography, including walls, reefs, wrecks, deep and shallow sites.

HONDURAS

Bay Islands Aggressor, December 2003, Jerry (jensen_jerry@hotmail.com) Eagle Point, OR. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 81 F, choppy. Big stable boat that is extremely well run and organized. The crew went out of their way to make this a vacation that we will never forget. The value for our diving dollar was excellent. Even though the weather was less than perfect, the captain went out of his way to find quiet and calm areas to dive at. We were able to dive the maximum of 5 dives per day and all at different spots. With poor weather, the land based operators were not going out while we moved around Roatan to find calm conditions. We were unable to dive at sites other than Roatan because of the weather, but the captain still tried even

motored a long ways out to another spot only to find that the currents were too strong. The food was excellent, I gained 7 pounds. They really must find a way to keep Jurgen as the cook. My wife and I were in the forward most cabin #1, further back in #6 the noise from the generator below in the engine room was deafening which went on 24/7. Another note about the crew, my Nitrox tank was refilled immediately upon coming up. Awesome compressors, maybe 2 minutes to fill a tank to 3000 psi plus. On our last dive, a baby humpback whale showed up above us for a couple minutes. At the end, my computer showed that my N2 and O2 were maxed out and I'm 51 years old. Regarding the flying arrangements. SOL air really screwed things up badly requiring an extra day going and 2 extra coming home. We were very happy with the *Bay Islands Aggressor*, a little rough around the edges but still a very good value. UW Photography Comments: dry camera table on dive deck with air hose to dry camera. Dive briefing asked us not to put drinks etc on camera table. (www.aggressor.com)

PUERTO RICO

Nekton Rorqual, December 2003, Richard Lehach, Larchmont, NY. Dives logged: 600+. Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130'. First group of guests on this itinerary. Conditions of reefs and walls some of the best in the Caribbean. Crew very helpful and friendly. Windy and chop made getting back on board difficult for many divers. Not a good choice for new divers but worth the

effort if you are up to it. Nitrox available (book ahead limited to half the boat). Very well run considering we were the first guests diving the area with them (not all pins installed). (Steel 95 provided, great bottom times with nitrox) (www.nektoncruises.com)

Nekton Rorqual, February 2004, Edwin L. Granite, (egranite@aol.com) Chadds Ford, PA. Experience: 1,000+ dives, too many to count. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130' no decompression. Good: Crew, food, accommodations, service — great crew! Bad: No large stuff, very few sharks, no mantas, some stingrays, a few small turtles. This dive area is over-rated and was not as described by the Nekton Company. I have been on their Cay Sal itinerary, which was much better. One good issue: dived a site which had never before been dived (according to the crew) — wonderful underwater topography — boulders.

Nekton Rorqual, February 2004, Ernest M. Fidance (fangee@aol.com), Wilmington, DE. Vis: 45-80 feet. Water: 79-83 F. Dives logged: 800+. Crew, detailed pre-dive briefing, help with gear, food and accommodations better than average, camaraderie. Called "the Galapagos of the North" — nothing further from the truth! Minimal sea life — no big animals. Nothing that was advertised showed up, except label of "High Energy Diving" — sea conditions consistently rough. Also, ladders too short — everyone struggles getting back in boat.