

Resort.. The resort is situated on a peninsula accessible only by boat, and it is a beautiful setting. The cottages, with individual docks, face the lagoon, and they are spacious and comfortable. Made of local hardwood, they have AC and ceiling fans, comfortable beds with good lighting, plenty of storage space, and baths with showers. The main building is also attractive and houses the dining room, an honor bar, and a game room upstairs with a TV. Meals were excellent, thanks to a new chef, and managers Luciano and Romina took care of every person and every request. The dive operation is excellent. There is storage next to the dock, and the staff sets up your gear on one of three wonderful dive boats. You carry only your wetsuit, mask, and fins, and step on board. Boats have camera tables and rinse tanks, and towels, fruit, snacks, and water are furnished. Even the ladder is outstanding — it is at an angle, so it's like climbing stairs. There are two morning dives and one afternoon dive. Nitrox is an extra charge. The enthusiastic divemasters, Kim and Sara, helped us find many reef fish, including some very unusual species, such as the Southern stargazer. The whole group had a great time finding and identifying fish. The reefs are not particularly colorful but most have interesting formations. For the morning surface interval, we always cruised around looking for whale sharks — didn't find any this time, but we've seen one here, and they often see them in the spring. The winds and choppy water made it hard for even Captain Wagner to find them, although he has been at the resort since it opened and is

a real expert. Dives are limited to one hour to get in the three dives. Shore diving or snorkeling is always available. Night dives are offered twice a week. Kayaking or hiking can be arranged, as can trips to town. This is a laid back resort where the focus is on diving, and it's almost as easy as diving from a live-aboard. The package prices are very good, and their US office does a fine job of arranging your trip.

**Laguna Beach Resort, September 2004, Ronald Gillespie (gillesprn2@msn.com), Huntington Beach, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm. Fifth time at Laguna Beach, snorkeled with whale sharks 4 trip out of 5. Captain Wagner will go out of his way to find a whale shark on our way to the first dive and during the surface interval. Diverse marine life. We've seen pairs of spotted eagle rays, turtles, seahorse, frogfish, lettuce leaf slug, lots of large angelfish, large green moray, and many others! Diving is done around the island, towards the north side of the island is better. We dove the pinnacles and the diving is excellent, schooling jacks and creole wrasse. Their house reef is very good. We've seen 14 or more lobsters hanging out, biggest lobster taking a leisurely walk, jawfish, lots of juvenile fish, turtles, and many more. Dive boat is roomy and fast, bungalows are over the water on the lagoon side of the peninsula. Plenty of food and the BBQ lobster night they had twice during our stay was great. There isn't much of a night life at the resort, but great service, great diving and with 3 dives a day

plus unlimited shore diving, great price. No-seeums may be a problem if there isn't much breeze, but as long as you have bug juice (Cactus Juice and Deet work best for us), it should not be a problem. They take very good care of our equipment, fresh water rinse bucket on the boat with roomy camera table.

**Utila Lodge, February 2004, Mike Foust (drfoust1@earthlink.net) Santa Ana, CA.** Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, surge. The facility, people and island were fine. The lodge was well managed and being improved. They run it just like a live-aboard system of diving and eating, etc. With the brief exception of the whale shark sighting, it was very disappointing to find that due to over-fishing there is minimal sea life. They are trying to address it so it may improve. ([www.utilalodge.com](http://www.utilalodge.com))

## MEXICO

Cruise ships daily disgorge packs of shoppers on the island of Cozumel, who descend on the shops, restaurants, and bars galore; sidewalk hustlers hawk condos and little plaster statues of guys wearing big hats leaning on saguaro cactuses ... Spectacular dives exist. While many operators cater to divers of mixed experience, savvy divers select from premier operations that travel to the best sites. Much of Cozumel's diving is deep or fast-current drift dives. Carry surface-signaling devices (strobe, safety sausage, etc.) and stay with your dive guide

or group. The best diving is in spring and summer. While it can be rainy during the fall (hurricane season) and winter, heavy rains closed the island for a week in June 2004. ... Accommodations range from small inexpensive downtown hotels to diver hang-outs to high dollar hotels. Many divers take side trips to the mainland to dive the fresh water cenotes. ... Along the coast, there are dive operations from Cancun south, but the diving is mainly patch reef diving. ... Whale sharks spend several summer weeks northwest of Cancun, near the island of Holbox, where one can just about be guaranteed to snorkel with scores of the behemoths. See *Undercurrent*, October 2004, for a review of this new discovery.

## Cozumel

**Advanced Divers, Villas Las Anclas, March 2004, Jack Gibson, Dallas, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 95 Feet. Water: 79 F, calm, currents. Ricardo and Tony did it for us again. On our first dive, 77 minutes at Palancar caves, we saw one of everything: a nurse shark, hawksbill turtle, spotted eagle ray, southern stingray, green moray, and a spotted moray. Punta Sur is my favorite Cozumel site and, on another day, I enjoyed seeing a spotted eagle ray silhouette against the blue Caribbean sea as he swam by the opening of the second cavern just before we emerged. From there we cruised on down the reef to take the

115' plunge strait down devil's throat. Then we spent the next 25 minutes of our 69-minute dive off gassing nitrogen while drifting along the coral heads and ultimately over a sandy bottom. After 9 years of diving with them, I can tell you these guys are pros who give you lots of bottom time over Cozumel's best sites. The boat, Careyitos, is a 40-foot Bertram with twin diesels, a spacious dive deck, a nice sun deck above and plenty of shade below. She isn't one of the "fast boats" that some seem to prefer. She's for those of us who like being on the sea — a nice pleasant ride out to your first dive followed by a great lunch of ham sandwiches, homemade guacamole, and fresh fruit during the surface interval. Then you get to dive again — 75 minutes if your air consumption is good enough — and cruise on back home. You only do two dives a day, but you can spend as much time in the water as you'll get in three dives with most other operators. The Villas Las Anclas has undergone some nice renovation since we were last there, which was just after Pedro an Eyal bought the place. They've installed new appliances in the kitchenettes, completely renovated the bathrooms, and added soundproof windows. Located about a block from the town square — near Pasta Primo — it is a very economical and comfortable place to stay. ([www.advanceddivers.com](http://www.advanceddivers.com))

**Albatross Charters, Casa Martillo, August 2004, Judy (judyflagg8@aol.com) New Windsor, NY.** Experience: 251-500 dives/ Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 Fahrenheit,

calm, currents. Small one boat operation. They offer fishing charters on their other boat and offered us Five days of diving. Rita and Burak listened to what we wanted to do and made great suggestions. We dove Barracuda as well as Palanacar Gardens. They offered us great variety and we were able to avoid the crowded sites. Only once did we have another dive boat at the same location, a great accomplishment. They do not over book. It can hold eight divers comfortably but we had six one day and only the two of us on two days. Great snacks! The boat is easy to dive from, had a covered area and was spotless. Felipe, the boat captain was always close when it came to pickup time after a drift dive. We never felt rushed during our dives. Our air consumption dictated the length of the dive. Casa Martillo is a small condominium in the Corpus Christi area of town. It's a short walk to most things. One bedroom unit, plenty of room, very clean and a great price. We used the pool for an after dinner swim. Check out the local dinner spots. We ate and drank for under \$15. most nights. We ended up renting a car to get around town and to explore the island. We paid \$20. a day for a beetle at Pay Less right by the airport. ([www.albatroscharters.com](http://www.albatroscharters.com))

**Aldora Divers, El Cozumeleno, October 2003, Brett Mook (brettm@aol.com) Chicago, IL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 90 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, currents. Aldora is a great operation for experienced divers that want to dive the deeper and more challenging sites. My

dive partner was new to diving (10 or so dives so far) and a bit nervous and Aldora really took the time and care to select fun yet skill appropriate sites and keep an eye out to make this trip enjoyable for her too. She came away more skilled and confident and glowing about seeing her first nurse shark. Aldora's large capacity tanks provided nearly double the bottom time you get from the aluminum 80's that are used by most operators. Divemasters treat divers like adults and allow you the freedom to explore sites without being constantly herded. Dives averaged over an hour each including safety stops even for the divers on our boat that were heavy breathers. Aldora ran multiple boats daily taking care to match divers skill levels with the rest of their group and selecting sites that are skill friendly and enjoyable. Dive groups are no bigger than 6 per boat and night dives are available on Wednesday and Saturday nights no matter how small the group and on other nights if there are enough divers to fill a boat. The boats were fast enough to get us out to the dive sites before the cattle boats began to arrive and scare away the bigger critters. Plenty of bottled water and warm post dive parka's were available on the boats. Surface intervals were taken at Playa Sol, a very nice beach club offering good food and a fresh water pool to relax in between dives. The best dive was on Columbia Deep referred to as "Dave's Throat." More interesting and enjoyable site than Punta Sur (Devil's Throat). The swim throughs are more extensive and when you ascend you get to drift over and explore a healthy reef system making it

like two dives in one rather than drifting over sand flats as you do when you ascend from Punta Sur. The El Cozumeleno is an all inclusive resort north of downtown, a \$5 cab ride into town. It would be a bit far to walk for most folks. The atmosphere is lively. There are plenty of activities for families with children as well as all adult groups. The main pool is very big with a swim up bar and nearby pool side grill (great for that post dive cheeseburger in paradise). There is a second quieter pool. Snorkeling is good and shore diving is available. The food was very good with buffet style meals and a sit down menu dining room option available nightly. The staff provided friendly and easy going service. Being up north, most dive operators will not pick you up at the hotel dock so divers should plan for an early morning trip south to meet their dive boats at another resort or pier and a cab ride home. ([www.aldoradivers.com](http://www.aldoradivers.com))

**Aldora, Brisas, October 2003, Peter J (peterj@wlrn.org), Hollywood, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy. From pre-trip emails to end-of-trip settling up, a first class operation. The steel 120 cubic foot tanks and two-hour-plus surface intervals allow for extraordinary bottom time and relatively deep second dives. I was picked up at the Brisas dock in one of Aldora's speedy outboards at 7:40 a.m., which got us out to the most popular dive sites well before the lumbering cattle boats. Never dove with more than 4 other divers, often with only 2. All gear, save wetsuits, was handled and rinsed by Aldora's crew

throughout the week, affording me the indulgence of some smugness as I walked down the dock with only my wetsuit in hand, watching as the larger ops packed 10 to 20 divers in their boats, all of whom had to rinse and store their own gear. Divemasters Memo, Bill and owner, Dave did everything in their power to accommodate my wishes and needs. Bill, especially, has a kind of Zen way of leading a dive without leading: he's always looking for — and often finding — the exotica of undersea Cozumel, but never herds his divers, nor rushes them. I, being the only photographer with Aldora that week, was often some distance behind, framing a shot. I was always able to keep the group within my field of vision and never felt pushed to keep up. While I dove with divers of varying skills and experience, I never felt hindered by any (except for one dive with a bottom-kicker who was quickly segregated from most other divers on subsequent trips). One reason for this is the long-hosed alternates carried by the DM's, providing extra air for those who ran low. The boats are smallish, maybe 28 footers, with tanks secured one in front of the other with bungies. Water always provided and encouraged, camera rinse bucket provided upon request. Backroll entries following DM's reconnoitering of site and current. Morning dives were the typical 100-foot-deep or more Coz wall dives with swim-throughs and reef-top finales. (Most profiles are very nicely shaped, with gradual ascents built into the topography). Surface interval at pleasant beach recreation area.) Playa del Sol, with large, shaded dining area and very decent, and expensive and gen-

erously portioned Mexican food. Scrupulously cleaned restrooms. Lots of beach activities available, though divers, of course, will want to just chill and off-gas. Afternoons still provided some deepish dives, but with more time spent in leisurely search and examination of critters at lesser depths. Brisas is a perfect dive hotel. Large, vaulted-ceiling rooms, fully tiled, with nice balconies equipped with good-sized drying pegs mounted on the wall, as well as plastic stack chairs and table for additional drying. Good size interior table for laptop or camera work, TV with lots of cable channels, many in English with Spanish subtitles. A short tunnel leads from the hotel lobby to the "beach" and the dive dock where all the ops will stop for passengers. The famously large pool, with multiple depths including a 6-foot wide, 4-inch-deep shelf which runs inside the perimeter, is an apres dive afternoon gathering place. Food is adequate, though it's certainly worthwhile to take the pleasant, 15-minute stroll into town to sample some of the better restaurants like La Chozza or Prima or take a cab ride to El Morro. There's a huge department store/grocery store on the way, just a 5-minute walk from Brisas, where you can stock up on bottled water (a must, though the first bottle's on the house from Brisas), bananas, batteries or a refrigerated San Miguel is best sampled on Sunday night when the cruise ships are absent. When they're in port (and you'll see as many as seven on any given day!) the area near the waterfront is awash with (literally and figuratively) ugly Americans.

**Aldora Divers, Hotel Brisas, November 2003, Bill Ferris, New Tripoli, PA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 200 Feet. Water: 74 to 78 F, choppy, currents. On my 5th dive trip to Cozumel, I dove with Aldora Divers and was very impressed. They run 120 cu. ft. tanks as a standard which translates into 50% more bottom time. Their dive boats are modern, well maintained, DAN oxygen equipped, and usually carry a max of 6-8 divers out to the reefs at speed. These are not 6 packs but full size boats with a cabin and overhead bridge that gives protection from the sun or the occasional shower. We were usually the first boat out on the reef in the morning. The staff and divemasters at Aldora were very professional. After a first day check with you as to how you like your gear configured, they took care of all your set up on each of your successive dives. The divemasters gave good detailed pre-dive briefings and seemed to have great familiarity with the reefs. I was allowed to dive my own profiles within no deco limits. Aldora Divers also offers day trips for cenote diving on the mainland and provide Nitrox upon request. They separate divers by skill level and put you on a boat with divers of similar abilities whenever possible.

**Aldora Divers, Barracuda Hotel, April 2004, Tom & Diane Tyrrell (lovetodiv@aol.com), Chesterland, OH.** Vis: 70-100 feet. Water: 79-81 F. Experience: Tom – 500, Diane – 300. Barracuda a basic hotel, wonderful people, do anything possible to make your stay enjoyable. Neat, clean, inexpensive and two block from town!

Aldora – best shop we have dived with. Group divers by skill level, including dedicated Nitrox boats. Use steel 120's. Pick up early, long dive, long surface interval at beach palapa, then another long one. Would use Nitrox 32 on first dive and Nitrox 36 on second. Averaged over 1-1/2 hrs per dive! (12 dives). Equipment ready to go each day, water and fleece hooded coats on board. More expensive than most Cozumel shops, but most dives are twice as long as others. Memo, Mendoza, Aldora Mauacer, best divemaster we have ever had the privilege to dive with!

**Aldora, Presidente, May 2004, Nick Southall (nlsi@bellsouth.net) Mobile, AL.** Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm, choppy, currents. Presidente always great place to stay. Nice diving in front of hotel. Food wasn't as good as our last stay but we ate in town most of time. Aldora was very good, 120 steel tanks, 1 hr. bottom time most of time, went where we wanted to go after check out dive, went to extra effort to take us to barracuda reef. They were responsive to our request.

**Aldora Divers, Hotel Cozumel, May 2004, Ray (RHerman@msn.com), Naperville, IL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 F, choppy, currents. They don't believe in the "cattle boat" mentality. Small dive parties on small fast boats. They pick you up on time. The large steel tanks allow for extended bottom time. Every dive was over an hour bottom time. Interval time is spent on land where

you can stretch your legs, buy a bite to eat and talk to other divers. UW photography is the one area that needs a lot of improvement. On every dive there was at least 2 or 3 cameras

**Aldora, Coral Princess, May 2004, Terry Cole (tcole@swpaper.com) Wichita, KS.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. Aldora Divers was the best I have dived with in my limited experience. Divemasters Vollrath and Mateo were great, they kept an eye on you without smothering. 120 cu foot tanks gave over an hour on every dive. Did Maracaibo Deep twice, Punta Sur, Punta Francesa, Palancar caves, El Cedral, Tormentos and the wreck (C-53). I saw numerous turtles, sharks, eels, splendid toadfish six on one dive). What I didn't see the divemasters pointed out. The Coral Princess was beautiful. The oceanview was spectacular from our room and from the terrace. The food was very good at the Terrace Restaurant. The staff was very friendly and went out of their way to be helpful. They even surprised my wife (and me) with a cake on her birthday. North of town so I had to meet the dive boat at Aldor's pier, but worth it.

**Aldora, Casa Carlita, June 2004, Teresa Yent (tyent@nc.rr.com) Raleigh, NC.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, currents. This was our 5th trip to Cozumel. We took our children; they know that it is my husband and my favorite dive location for the Caribbean and couldn't wait to go. The trip was a bust. It rained 27" the first 24 hours

that we were there. It had also rained for two days prior to our arrival. The port was closed for two days then when we were able to dive, it was so churned up from the tropical storm that the visibility was horrible for Cozumel. There were many dive sites that we couldn't even visit because it was so murky. If you were below 60', it wasn't bad — but above 60' sucked. We still had a great time, but the kids were unimpressed with the diving! Cozumel is always fun because of the top side attractions. We rented scooters and went to Coconuts and went horse back riding. Many of the locals were flooded out of their houses. The hotels all lost power one night. They said that this was the worst rain that they have had in a decade — worse than a hurricane. We had no wind though with the storm. All the intersections were flooded 2 to 3 feet and the north side of the island was 4 to 5 feet. We were scheduled to dive with Living Underwater but due to the flood, Jeremy needed to bail out his house and take care of his family. He hooked us up with Aldora. The owner has put in a lot of TLC to make Aldora what it once use to be. We also were invited to a party at Villa Aldora which was great. It is just north of town and it is a place for Aldora divers to stay while in town. They have everything to offer you. Very simple motel like accommodations all the way up the chain to a house with several bedrooms. The pricing was reasonable and they will keep a boat up at the marina next to Villa Aldora to take divers to the dive sites south of town. We went to Playa Del Carmen and we dove a Cenotes. It was really cool and

a bit cold! Crystal clear water — it was like looking through air. Tulum was a great excursion. We dove with Mateo who is a real cave junkie! We rented a house, Casa Carlita which was beautiful and well worth the money. (<http://www.cozumel-vacation-rentals.com>) It was a 5 minute walk to Plaza Las Glorias pier for boat pickup and 2 blocks from the grocery store. They were awesome to work with and were very responsive before, during and after our trip. They had maid service daily with clean towels etc. Terrific for the money and we didn't get flooded. We participated in a DAN study while we were there which was very interesting. I had my 200th dive in Cozumel and this was the first dive trip that I have ever had any weather related issues.

**Aldora Divers, Fiesta Americana, August 2004, Greg Roberts, San Jose, CA.** 5 stars! Primary reason: 120 cu. ft high pressure tanks, chapbook comments on Aldora service. We decided on Aldora based upon the Chapbook. Aldora was great. Memo Mendoza was very helpful arranging our dive days and the group we would dive with. We dropped our equipment off before our first dive day and they took care of everything. At the end of our vacation, we picked up our clean and dried equipment. Boats are small and fast, this meant we were on station swiftly and our dive team was limited to 6 people. Bill De Rosa the divemaster is very professional. He has been diving for 17 years in Cozumel and over 5 with Aldora. He really made us comfortable and he also has an incredi-

ble eye for interesting things to see when down. No racing around. With the larger tanks, I was able to have over 65minutes on every dive! They may cost more. But the attention to detail and the longer down times really make it worthwhile. Tons of things to see from large formations to tiny crabs and nudibranchs so small you need a magnifying glass to see them. Fiesta Americana: clean, good food, good location for access to the reefs (they have a good dock for the operations to pick you up from). Plenty of decent snorkeling n front of the hotel. I would rate this hotel 3.5 out of 5. What could improve is the variety of dishes offered on the buffet's. While tasty, just not that much different from night to night. We went on the all inclusive plan. The booze is the cheap stuff. Margarita's were so-so.

**Aldora Divers, Villa Aldora, August 2004, John G. Kie, La Grande, OR.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm, currents. Small, fast boats (6 divers max), high pressure steel tanks (bottoms times all > 60 minutes), everyone dives a computer. Lots of hawksbill turtles and spotted eagle rays. Villa Aldora is a superb place to stay. North of town but within walking distance; dive boats pick you up at the dock behind the villa. Bicycles are provided for trips into town. Try Taco Diaz for dinner. Internet phones were being installed. Dave and Memo, the operators, are great folks; Luis a superb divemaster. Prices for diving and lodging are toward the top end, but worth every penny. A lot of Aldora's

business is from repeat customers. Limited on-board facilities for photographers, although the lack of rinse tanks was a trivial concern.

**Aldora Divers, Villa Aldora, September 2004, Barton (radiocampbell-web@yahoo.com), Campbell, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 Fahrenheit, calm, currents. Excellent service, a good choice for our family trip with our two kids (18 and 20 years) who are beginners. The DM Luis did a great job of recommending dives appropriate for our family, and finding small critters. The dive boat picked us up at the Villa each day until Hurricane Ivan destroyed the dock. We enjoyed the 75 minute, relaxing dives. The reefs are in excellent condition. Quantity of fish is moderate. The night dive was the best. Villa Aldora is a small new facility 1.2 miles north of the ferry terminal in San Miguel, a quiet location within walking distance of town, and taxis are available to town for \$4 to \$6. Clean rooms, good views, good air conditioning. Buy your own food and drink in town. There is excellent snorkeling, especially at night, off the back steps. We saw an octopus and several squid there. Consider it if you don't want the services (pool, spa, restaurants, etc.) of a big hotel. The perfect place for a relaxing vacation. Avoid the tourist traps set up for the multitudes from the cruise boats. Try the La Mission restaurant on Aldofo Rosado Salas. No specific provisions for photography on boat. Fast current often makes it difficult to set up a photo.

**Aldora, Villa Aldora, September 2004, Nick Southall (nls1@bellsouth.net), Mobile, AL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 130 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm. Aldora lets the divers choose sites and tries to group divers of similar experience. Fast boats and early departure = first on sites. Willing to go to most southern sites and arranged trip to barracuda for us. Villa Aldora, just north of town. Great place right on water, good diving in front.

**Aqua Safari and Advanced Divers, Plaza Las Glorias, February 2004, Ron & Sherry Smith, Levittown, PA.** Vis: 100+ feet. Water: 78-80 F. Dives logged: 274. Cozumel gets very crowded when the cruise ships are in. Great visibility, lots of turtles, sharks, huge Angelfish, and many other tropicals. Dove with our good friends at Aqua Safari the first week. Finished our specialty courses with Pedro for our Master Scuba Cert. Second week dove with Advanced Divers for more bottom time, and smaller dive groups. Tony and Ricardo are fun to dive with and take the boat to less crowded sites. ([www.aquasafari.com](http://www.aquasafari.com))

**Aqua Safari, Aqua Safari Inn, March 2004, Debra Lee Gaburo, Evergreen, CO.** Vis: 60-100 feet. Water: 78-79 F. Dives logged: over 1,000. Dive boats are clean, organized, and efficiently run. I had not been to Cozumel in 12 years and was pleasantly surprised to see that it has gone back to its roots. Coral and fish are healthy, lots of lobster, crabs, turtles, a few sharks, and all the fun stuff you expect to see in Cozumel. Dive staff was friendly,

knowledgeable and helpful. The small Aqua Safari Inn is clean, rooms are large. The staff will help you with anything you need. It is on the waterfront, close to downtown and restaurants. A wonderful place to stay to experience the real Cozumel.

**Aqua Safari, May 2004, Marc Massari (marcmass@earthlink.net) Redondo Beach, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, choppy, surge. Our plans were made over the Internet with Donna, one of the owners. The dive center was staffed with helpful people and they went out of their way to help us when we had regulator problems. The boats were nice, especially the fast boats. They got you to the dive sites first in the morning and we were rewarded with sharks on those dives! The divemaster pointed out creatures on dives, but allowed you to explore on your own (within reason). If you were staying at a beach resorts, they were willing to pick you up in the morning. Safari Diver does have rooms upstairs which are clean and nice, but have few amenities. Because we were staying in Playa del Carmen, we stayed a night in one of the rooms and were very satisfied. We are seeing more fish than ever before and the corals are looking good. It was nice seeing sharks. Drift diving is a blast, but leave your camera on the boat for those dives.

**Blackshark, Papa Hogs, La Cieba/El Cid, May 2004, Aaron Wiltfong, Hayden, CO.** Vis: 70-100 feet. Water: 80+ F. Dives logged: 500+. First day, first dive and the DM dropped a tank

on my foot and broke one of my toes! Blackshark said sorry about that and the dive cost \$65.00 please! And, the guy at the office did not ask if we were diving with them the next day! I have found a new home in Coz with Papa Hogs. Giovanni is back at Papa Hogs. Small, fast boats; good captains, and DM's that don't break your toes. Check out the cenotes on the island! Adds something new for the experienced Coz diver! ([www.blackshark.net](http://www.blackshark.net))

**Blue Bubbles, La Bahia, December 2003, Lee Schnell (scubatex@austin.rr.com) Austin, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 80 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, choppy, no currents. Christmas in Cozumel is a great time. The drawback is the large number of cruise ships! Eleven at once on Christmas Eve. Rent a car and get away from downtown! Avis is at the airport and you can make a reservation on-line and pick up and drop-off there. On Sundays there are no cruise ships and the square in downtown San Miguel is a great place to wonder around. Several restaurants and bars were closed on Christmas Day but finding food and drink was not a problem. Accommodations at Hotel Bahia are inexpensive and very convenient. Rooms have a full refrigerator and electric stove. The showers are large enough to rinse dive gear and there is plenty of hot water. Fifth trip diving with Blue Bubbles and as usual they did an outstanding job. Their new boat is very nice (42') and absorbs 10-12 divers very well. It is designed for more than 20 divers but Blue Bubbles has made the decision to limit it to no

more than 14 divers making it extremely comfortable. Divemasters Raul and Pedro-Pablo are excellent! Both are very knowledgeable of the marine life and love to find and point it out! They are also very safety conscious and provide good briefings before the dives. Blue Bubble's new boat has a sort of camera table in the middle. The boat crew is conscious of UWPs and responsive to handling cameras. ([www.bluebubble.com](http://www.bluebubble.com))

**Blue XT Sea Diving, Hotel Villa Las Anclas, January 2004, Chuck & Nancy Anson (nanson@owl.csusm.edu) Oceanside, CA.** Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. max, 500 psi. The dive op staff was great with accommodating photographers and handling gear. They provided fresh water buckets when asked. We travel with a small cooler that holds all our gear and the staff would fill it with fresh water and place cameras in it at the end of the dives. No camera tables aboard but film could be changed during surface interval on shore. This was our fifth trip to Cozumel. With Blue XT Sea diving we got long bottom times, good fast boats, experienced dive staff, and our choice of dive sites. They picked us up at the Plaza Las Glorious pier each morning around 8:00am. Their dive boat, Shamu, is a fast twin engine boat that easily accommodates 8 divers but there were never more than 6 with us plus the D.M. They use aluminum 80's and fills were consistently 3000 plus. Almost all our dives were over 60 minutes. The two divemasters, Raul I and Raul II,

have each been diving Cozumel's reefs for over 10 years. You can tell them what you want to see and they will take you to it (great for photographers). They chose dive sites that were uncrowded and off the beaten path. Entry is a back roll with a sturdy ladder return after you pass your weights and BC up to the boat captain. After setting up for the first dive, we never touched our gear again. The crew rinsed and dried our gear each night and set up on the boat for us the next day so we didn't have to hump it back to the hotel. Surface intervals were spent on a beach or a resort pier where dry towels, drinks and snacks were passed out. All PADI required safety equipment was on board and in good condition. A second boat was available if necessary so that divers could be separated by skill level. If you are there in the winter, and are an advanced diver, they will take you north to swim with the eagle rays. We went 3 times on this trip. On one dive we saw 21 eagle rays. Blue XT Sea staff love their work and make diving fun. Villa Las Anclas is 1.5 blocks south of the town square and 1 block from the waterfront. It doesn't look like much from the street but inside the gated courtyard are 8 large air conditioned studio style suites with kitchenettes. A high wall surrounds the courtyard for privacy and security. There is a wash tank and drying area for divers and tables and chairs outside for lounging, dining, and socializing. The property was recently renovated and had large sound proof windows that let in lots of light, marble tile in the bath room and shower, upgraded fixtures and stained glass

windows. The living room, dining room and kitchenette are downstairs. A spiral staircase goes to an upstairs loft where there is a bed, bathroom and plenty of closet space. The dining area was large enough to accommodate 4 people. The kitchenette was adequate with a microwave, a 2 burner hot plate, mid sized fridge, bottled water and just enough cookware and utensils to prepare a modest meal. Villa Las Anclas is close to a number of restaurants, dive operators and scuba stores. The DAN chamber is in this neighborhood and Aldora's pier is just 1 block away. There are no in room phones but you can use the phone in the office. Cable was installed for T.V. but they had not arrived yet. Take bug spray if you are sensitive to mosquitoes and noseems. They are around in modest numbers. Daily maid service is provided. ([www.bluxtseadiving.com](http://www.bluxtseadiving.com))

**Blue XT Sea Diving, Occidental Grand Cozumel, September 2004, Gary Timm (garytim@bresnan.net), Grand Junction, CO.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Water: 83F. Blue XT~Sea Diving is a relatively new, small dive operator that focuses on service and a quality diving. Owner Christi Courtney's boat "Shamu" is a small, "fast" boat offering sun protection and dry storage. Oxygen is aboard. Communications are through the standard marine radio with a cell phone backup.. The cell phone works well out at dive sites. The boat carries the captain, a dive guide and six divers. Service is exceptional. If you choose, you can leave all your equipment aboard except for wetsuits. It will be

rinsed, setup and ready to go the next day. The crew exchanges the used tank for a fresh one between dives. Towels are provided and the fresh water rinse is a nice touch. Rain Ponchos are available. Snacks consist of bottled water, juices, small sandwiches, nuts, crackers, cubed cheese and cookies. The boat always was on time for my pickup. Pedro and Jamie are terrific dive guides, constantly pointing out things of interest we would have missed had it not been for their keen observation skills and intimate knowledge of the dive sites. If you are an experienced diver, they leave you alone except for an occasional look to be sure you are OK. If you need a little help, they offer quick assistance and provide tips on technique. Hector, the captain, can occupy you with his magic tricks for as long as you are interested. Surface intervals are at a nice sandy beach facility with chairs, palapas, food and drink concessions, both an open air and enclosed eating area and restrooms. Sites are picked by the divers on board. Dive profiles for a two tank day are typical. The first dive is the deepest at anywhere between 75 to 120 feet depending on the site. Second dives usually are in the 50-60 foot maximum range. My bottom times always exceeded 60 minutes except for two really deep dives. You are allowed to dive your computer's NDL or to 700psi. Divers using air faster than others are sent up while others are allowed to continue the dive. Tank fills consistently were 3000+ psi except for two that were in the 2800-2900 range. My trip was about a week after hurricane Ivans. Visibility was a about 70 feet

and continued to improve daily. By trip's end, it was 120 feet. Currents were mild to none. Weather was mostly sunny with no wind and calm seas. ([www.bluxtseadiving.com](http://www.bluxtseadiving.com))

**Cozumel Sports, Reef Club, July 2004, Tom (Thomslathrop@aol.com), Palm Desert, CA.**

Experience: 501-1000 dives Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm. I took my family of six plus two friends on what I had hoped would be a trip of a life time for my children ages 24, 20, twins 18 and two friends age 16. All of them and my wife had only been diving one year or less. At the Reef Club and were informed that due to heavy rains to we would have to stay at another hotel. Weather is out of your control so we made the best of it and moved. The Reef Club was an all inclusive and they told us they would pay for our taxi ride back and forth. At the Fiesta Americana (five miles away) they scattered our kids all over the resort and my wife and I found our room door had no lock. They said they would fix it; two hours later my key did not work and it took another four hours to get our room open by breaking the lock. They wanted us to move again but I told them to change the lock; speaking some Spanish helped, they agreed. We found the food not great and the next day took cabs (\$40 each way) to the Reef Club. When the cabs asked for payment we told them that the Reef Club would pay. After another 30 minutes of the run around the Reef Club decided they would not pay the cabs as promised. Service at the Reef Club was terrible. Since we

had not booked our dive with their operation Sand Dollar we were sent off property; other divers that were diving with them had rooms even days after we had arrived. Cozumel Sports is a small operation is owned by Enrique and was great. He was on time every day and made our dive trip enjoyable and safe. With all the new divers I had pictured every dive being filled with potential problems but Enrique and his skipper made it easy and fun. The currents were not over powering and the water was clear and warm. ([www.cozumelsports.com](http://www.cozumelsports.com))

**Dive Cozumel, March 2004, Roger Zander (rwzander@netzero.net)**

**Dearborn, MI.** 011-52-987-872-4567. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm, currents. We stay in the city of San Miguel. We enjoy the variety of restaurants and we meet up with old friends. Since we are out diving during the day, we usually don't mind the crowds of idiot cruise ship people. We require a dive operator to pick us up in town. The Yellow Rose ties up at the old Aldora pier and is supposed to leave around 8:30 am. However, we never left before 9 am and as late as 10 am on two days. Once under way, the quality of diving experience made up for the delays. The boat is a 48 foot twin diesel, supposedly capable of 20 knots. The starboard motor couldn't get up to speed. The layout of the deck has twin ladders in back, plenty of tank racks, a double deck camera and small gear table, a separate table for food, 2 large rinse barrels for cameras and gear, a marine head, fresh towels daily,

and plenty of protected seating for 16 divers. We were usually diving with between 6 and 8 divers. By the time we stepped off the back for our first dive of the day, the sun was high enough to illuminate all the reef features, even when going deep. There are too many shadows earlier in the morning. For the first surface interval, we enjoyed snacks like cheese and crackers, fresh fruit, chips and taco dip, stuffed olives, etc. During the second surface interval, we had lunch of deli meats the first day and tuna fish the next. We asked the owner to "kick it up a notch" on the quality, which he did. The captain's name is Paco, the deck hands Adam and Pancho, together with Roli, the owner and DM, and Jim in the shop office, they make a great team. Dive Cozumel is a first class operation, specializing in the extremes of technical diving. The boat is in excellent condition and very clean. We always were dropped bullseye, right on the starting point of each reef. The DM and captain were very careful to check currents and position. My buddy and I were the "last ones up" and we always got our maximum bottom time. Our depth limits were based on our experience and abilities, we dove deep air twice, following computer limits for deco stops. My days of crowding in a "six pack" boat and getting my kidneys busted and having my gear stepped on are over. 17 dives in six days. All the coral appeared healthy, except San Juan Reef. The leafy coral there looked half dead and there were almost no fish at all. Elsewhere, we saw a few eagle rays, all the usual reef fish, about 10 turtles, three nurse sharks but, no big

green moray eels. There were lobsters, crabs and spotted eels. I even found a splendid toadfish and a couple spotted drum. The shop manager, Jim, went out of his way to assist in the repair of my strobe. ([www.divecozumel.net](http://www.divecozumel.net))

**Dive House, Casa Mexicana, July 2004, Anne Warburton, Yorba Linda, CA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 Fahrenheit, calm, currents. Full plan with meals — food was more than passable. Accommodations were nice and service good. Hotel across the road from the beach along with one of the restaurants but was no problem. Boats were full every day (over July 4) with 12 -14 on board so it was a bit crowded. DMs gave good profiles of what we could expect. Boats left a bit late every day. Drift dives every time. Water served between dives. Beautiful, incredibly fast drift dive over Punta Tunich - many angels, lobsters, turtles, eels, rays and wonderful hard/soft corals. Night dive at Paradise North produced several splendid toadfish, many lobsters, several types of eels and lots of coral heads. ([www.divehouse.com](http://www.divehouse.com))

**Dive House, Iberostar, July 2004, Terry Davis (welve2dive@yahoo.com), Roswell, NM.**

Experience: 501-1000 dives Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 87 Fahrenheit, calm. 4 people in the group, 36 were divers, and a few snorkelers. We booked Dive House for six days of diving, the usual 1 night dive. Divers would tell the boat crew's daily which one they were go to dive the next day, so they made sure we had enough tanks

and anything else we would need including the goodies the dive operation furnished us daily. After two days of diving from the resort, 16 of our group ventured to the mainland to dive the “cenotes” a fresh water cavern dive. The trip started at 7am to catch the ferry to the mainland. Nice dive, good vis, water around 73 degrees, after the dive they were furnished lunch— from start to finish it was about a 12 hours adventure. Iberostar accommodations were great, service was great, resort grounds were very nice and well maintained, and the food at the three restaurants was some of the best we ever had. The Iberostar is all-Inclusive resort, 3 meals a day, all your drinks (including your favorite Alcoholic beverage), entertainment, skeet shooting and much more, including a day care center to keep your small ones entertained. The only complaint would be that Dressel Divers at the hotel contracts out to all of the resorts world wide. While diving, one of our divers had a BCD Power Inflator button stick in the inflate position. At the Dressel we asked to borrow a pair of needle-nose pliers to remove the old one and install a new one, and they asked “Are you diving through us? We replied no, they said they couldn’t help us. One of our divers wanted to rent a Wet Suit for the cenote dive and he was also refused because we did not book this through Dressel Divers, not a diver friendly operation.

**Dive Palancar, Occidental Allegro Cozumel, May 2004, Randy & Carol Thompson (baricat@aol.com) Shrewsbury, MA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 81

to 82 F, currents. Lockers for storage right at the dock. Homogeneous experience grouping on boats. Conscientious divemasters, most good at finding critters. Prices reasonable — good packages, willing to deal when purchasing packages of 25 or more dives. May buy one, big package and split with another diver. However, no deals on night dives, even with purchase of sizable packages. Have used this operation 6 times and will be happy to do so again. Nitrox \$6 extra and 24 hour notice required (not filled on the premises).  
([www.divepalancarcozumel.com](http://www.divepalancarcozumel.com))

**Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel Resort, March 2004, Allan Scott (allanscott@houston.rr.com) Spring, TX.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm, currents. Convenient flight from Houston; van waiting at airport; check-in at Hotel Cozumel Resort (formerly known as everything including Las Brisas) quick and easy; very nice pool; in the water by 4:00 p.m. for weight check and brief shore dive. Dive Paradise was great; nice snacks between dives with adequate surface intervals; diving was great with an 80’ dive to start the morning followed by a 60’ dive; highlights of the trip were a great night drift dive and penetration of the C53 wreck; pre-dive briefings were very adequate and Dive Paradise showed their concern for everyone’s safety. Talk the hotel into giving you a room facing the pool or on a floor other than the first. All we could see out of our room was the road between the hotel and the beach club. We were worried our gear might get stolen while

it dried on the first floor patio. Look for food elsewhere. Breakfast was ok, but the rest was not good. Nice hotel and great dive operator. Large camera tank available; inexperienced divers washed mask in camera tank.  
([www.diveparadise.com](http://www.diveparadise.com))

**Dive Paradise, Barracuda Hotel, April 2004, John T Kelly, Burlingame, CA.** Hotel accommodations were very good. Our group consisted of 7 accomplished divers. We dove from the “fast boats” and went to all the best dive sites. For example, we dove “Devil’s Throat” 130’ dive, and “Cathedral” 90’ located at Punta Sur. Of course we dove Palancar Reef. I did 10 dives and had only 1 boring dive. All in all a great week. My dive buddy was my 35 yr.old daughter.

**Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, August 2004, Keith and Mayda Davies, Houston, TX.** Water 80-86F, visibility 100-200 ft. Hotel Cozumel is fine except we had a 1st floor room that the sun rarely shines on, so the gear took a long time to dry. We would like to do shore diving at night around 11 pm since that is the best time, but we had to be back before the shop closed at 9pm and it would cost us \$6 each as free shore diving finished at 5pm. When I asked Aqua Dreams (travel agent) about shore diving I was told it was inclusive. Didn’t like the idea of different boats and divemasters on every dive. We went to the same site in the afternoon three times because the other choices we did as morning dives. Two sites we went to in the morning were dived against the

current, the first for only 20 minutes, the second for the whole dive, and there was more sand than coral. Twice everyone on the boat agreed on dive sites they would like to dive, both times we went elsewhere. I don’t spend \$3000 on a dive trip to do 35 minute dives. I don’t understand why if I pay for an all inclusive deal of 15 dives that I have to forfeit 2 dives to do the EDP dive sites and also pay an extra \$69. I can see paying an extra \$10 to use the fast boat if they are part of my 15 dives but not otherwise. The dive briefings ranged from 1 minute to 14 minutes. They spoke Spanish in front of the guests; my wife is fluent in Spanish and they were making fun of the divers. Victor was arrogant and not very safety conscious. He said if we drifted out over the wall on our safety stop then we were to surface immediately not worrying what our computer was saying. A fellow diver showed Mike his computer of still 12 minutes of deco time Mike told him to get on the boat. This not only could have got the guy bent, but made his computer lock him out for 48 hours. He had to pay someone to reset his computer and lost one day of diving. Another divemaster, after a 14 minute dive brief, drifted along the reef looking out into the deep blue sea. At the end of the reef he just stopped and hovered, as did others on other dives; Only one ever showed us small critters. We were never told to tip after every dive. I always tip after my week of diving is finished. I give tips to who I feel has done a good job, not just for the sake of it. Your crew seem to think that if they turn up for work we should give

them \$10. I was a dive shop manager, instructor, and divemaster for 18 months on Roatan. I know what divers want when they come on a dive trip. I have 1252 dives in 9 yrs.

**Dive Paradise, Occidental Grand, August 2004, Randall S. Preissig, San Antonio, TX.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 to 85 Fahrenheit. Cozumel is much more professional and much safer than it was 27 years ago when I first visited. It is still a good bargain and the coral is in better shape than anywhere in the Caribbean, including Cayman. A tropical storm 500+ miles away created surprisingly strong currents. Some guides were not prepared for this, but with this exception, the guides were excellent. Several nurse sharks, giant parrot fish, octopi, splendid toadfish, and more turtles than Cayman ever dreamed of. The Occidental Grand is all inclusive and has three specialty restaurants as well as an excellent buffet. It's five minutes from Palancar. Four separate dive trips are scheduled each day, plus 3 night dives a week. Special trips to Devil's Throat, etc are regularly scheduled by request. Overall a very good dive trip and vacation. Very few photographers. Set up is for 2 dive a day tourists.

**Dive with Alison, Occidental Alegre Grand, August 2004, Phil Tobin (Philtobin6625@yahoo.com), Portland, OR.** Experience: 101-250 dives, Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 Fahrenheit, choppy, currents. Wife and I have 150 dives in 2.5 years. Small, attentive, dive operation. At 8:30 each morning they were at our

pier at the Alegre Grand. We had arranged for 3 dives each day, and Alison was more than cooperative in choosing the appropriate sites. She would take a max of 7 divers, and Carlos assisted and drove the boat. We had all ranges of divers from beginners to advanced, and she was able to make each dive enjoyable for everyone. Alison was concerned for safety, without giving you the feeling of babysitting. Her rates are fair. She is up beat and humorous. She was a great guide and able to point out critters that we would have passed right over. ([www.divewithalison.com](http://www.divewithalison.com))

**Dive with Martin, The Reef Club, February 2004, Ernie & Marge Karalis (margek@aais.net), Algonac, MI.** Vis: 100-150 feet. Water: 79-81 F. Experience: 67. The Reef Club was a huge disappointment. Room adequate, beach nice. Food – every meal – cool to cold meat, nothing kept hot. Everything we tried to drink was watered down. Even the coca cola was poured into a glass half filled with water. Wonderful dive operation. Dive with Martin uses all 6-pack boats. Pick up at 8 a.m. for two-tank dives. Captain stays on boat, DM leads 6 divers. Wonderful swim-throughs at Palancar. Several huge Eagle rays circled us on one dive. Turtles and eels on every dive. At 700 PSI, DM extends safety sausage at depth for easy location by Captain. After safety stop, you surface to the boat waiting for you. Drift diving at its best. Back roll entry, large ladder over side makes it easy to climb on board. Remove BC and weights and fins – hand up to Captain

and then an easy climb back onto boat. Water, fresh fruit between dives. Surface interval spent on beach. ([www.cozumel-diving.net/martin](http://www.cozumel-diving.net/martin))

**Dive With Martin, Hotel Cozumel Resort, April 2004, Mike Hill (mikehill@casstel.net) Peculiar, MO.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm. Dive with Martin was fantastic. Pablo was the divemaster for our boat, 6 to 8 divers. Went to Punta Sur arrived before any other boats, left Hotel Cozumel (Brisas, Costa Club whatever) at 7:50 at Punta Sur by 8:30. Kept a loose group, no beginners, we were probably the least experienced with almost 100 dives. Good fast boats, prompt for pick up in the morning. Because of small groups and getting to dive sites first we saw many nurse sharks, eagle rays, turtles, sting rays, large grouper and very large parrot fish. We have been to Cozumel 3 other times, Dive with Martin is the best dive operator we have used there. Hotel Cozumel: The service was good, staff generally friendly. Ocean view room was comfortable and clean with plenty of places to hang wet dive gear. We opted for the all-inclusive package. Breakfast was O.K. lunch was O.K., dinner was O.K. Average at best. After talking to other divers it seemed there was a lot of sick people (presumably from the food). Ate out the last two days. This was second time at the Hotel.

**Dive With Martin, Plaza Las Glorias, July 2004, William & Frances Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol.com) Santa Ana, CA.**

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 130 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm, currents. Dive With Martin has five or six fast boats and is headquartered at the International Pier. Plaza Las Glorias which is about two miles north of the Pier. We booked a week of three boat dives a day (five days, two AM, one PM). DWM would not come and get us for the PM dive. Our options were to stay with the boat while they re-provisioned at their shop and miss lunch or forget the PM dives. They relented on our last dive day and took us to the C-53 wreck only because I mumbled something about Undercurrent reviews. Now, DWM's web site states unequivocally that you have the option to go out on the 0730 or 0900 boat and again at 1330 and 1500. BS. There is no 0900 or 1500 boat and, for us, there was no 1330 boat, although if you were lodged at a facility south of the Int'l Pier, they would pick you up. Thus, we lost four PM dives. We elected to dive Nitrox at \$9.00 per tank extra. They will provide any percentage you want, presumably to 40%. We dove mostly NOAA 1 and II (32% and 36%, second dive). When asked for the oxygen analyzer, the week-long response was, "it's on another boat, Lo siento amigo." We had to take their word for the tank gas content or forget Nitrox. But there is the free video and night dive when you book a package, although the video is generic and unedited with atrocious background music. While bringing up my wife's BC out of the water, the dive crew smashed her octo, nonchalantly shrugged it off, accepted no responsibility nor offered any apology. They

provided her a substitute but anguished over having to install it every dive day. "Pablo" the Dive guide shrugged and tried to convince her she didn't need one. Oh well. Notwithstanding, the guides were extremely accommodating as to dive sites. We never did the same site twice and did The Devil's Throat and Maracaibo without a flinch or request for extra dinero. Tips, of course. They however would not go to San Juan and Barracuda stating the currents were too severe, "this time of year." That was as the Del Mar Aquatics boat was returning from both sites. Aside from "Pablo's" slight intransigence and occasional smarmy attitude, the guides and crew were knowledgeable and professional. Fruit and bottled water was provided between dives. We got to see an alligator in the water, ostensibly washed down into the sea after three days of torrential rain in mid-June. Twice in five days divers with us ran out of air. Pablo took a look at one guy and immediately attached a ten-foot octo to his reg. Sure enough, twenty minutes into the dive Junior was out of air. He was attached by the umbilical cord for the balance of the dive. The second incident involved omitted decompression. The diver surfaced eight minutes short of full decompression because he ran out of air. The covered boats are all extremely fast with twin Yamaha 115 HP outboards. In five days of diving we saw the biggest Green Moray on the planet (I shoot you not, ten feet if it was an inch). Also the biggest Goliath grouper. Marine life was good to excellent and viz your usual Cozumel great. Currents were mild compared to some

previous trips here. The seas were flat. This is the first trip I never had to use Dramamine. Coming up from three dives it was pouring rain, which lasted about twenty minutes, then back to 97 degrees and sun. The entire reef has been declared a "Parque Nacional," and is so tagged U/W. None of the operators bother to provide divers with the requisite wrist bands except on those days everybody knows the park police are checking. The Plaza Las Glorias has been sold and will soon be renovated or torn down. Although still nice, it is showing wear and there isn't much maintenance being done. On our last day the maid decided to sweeten the deal and bagged my gold chain left on the night stand. I kick myself for not using the room safe. Chankaanab Park fees are \$12 but you can SNUBA or bounce on aerial trampolines for a few dollars more. Rented a car from "JE Rentals." It had no shocks, A/C, someone ripped out the radio, the sun visor fell off while I was driving, the convertible top didn't work, the windows didn't roll down and the steering wheel was off a Tonka Toy. It was like driving a Disneyland Autopia car, but not as much fun. Check out Coco's on the Hill and the 30 albums of bare breasted chicks who've hung it all out. Eating at Ernesto's for Fahitas used to cost five bucks. Four of us chowed down (two of them kids) and it cost \$75 and that didn't include La Propina.

**Dive With Martin, August 2004, Jack Hall Ripon, CA.** Several hundred dives. Took a cruise to Cozumel and contacted Martin via email saying when we would be there, and request-

ing a dive trip. The dive trips offered by the cruise ship were filled (at about \$40 apiece more). We were the only people Martin had for the morning dive. We asked if we could do a three tank dive, they agreed at \$70 each. Our divemaster David was great! He pointed out lobsters, eels, the splendid toadfish, stonefish. He would show us something, and while we were looking at it, he would go off and find something else. But he did not rush us. Both of us are photographers and so we tend to go slowly. They had water on the boat, a bucket (with sea water) for the cameras, and a great attitude. The sites they picked were terrific with 100 foot plus visibility.

**Dressel Divers, Iberostar, August 2003, David W Moore (david\_w\_moore@sbcglobal.net) Leander, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. I have stayed at the Iberostar twice now and both times Dressel Divers were excellent with their diving accommodations, service, and friendliness. I booked the Gorilla dive package which included 11 total dives. Two of which were in the cavern systems at Playa del Carmen. The current was strong on one of the days but were mild otherwise. The cavern dives were very exciting but excellent buoyancy skills are a must. The reefs are amazing and fish plentiful. Staff is very friendly and more than willing to assist with equipment and questions. Dressel Divers keep a tub of fresh water to soak masks and camera equipment in between dives. ([www.dresseldivers.com](http://www.dresseldivers.com))

**Dressler Divers, Iberostar, June 2004 Jeffery Guzowski, diveski@mindspring.com.** Experience 500-1000, Visibility 100-150 Feet Water Temperature 81° - 83 ° Seas: Calm and flat I am President of South Florida Divers scuba club (SFDI.com) and 25 members went to Cozumel. Experience level was from 10 dives to 500. Connecting flight, American Airlines/Mexicana from Cancun to Cozumel was canceled without explanation. We found the bus (\$8) which took us to the ferry (\$9) to Cozumel which we had to pay for ourselves. We arrived 2 days after a tropical wave had hit Cozumel, and their airport was closed — the runway was 2 feet underwater for 4 days. We were without A/C in the rooms for 4 days out of 8. Some rooms had no power. The resort was full so we had no choice but to deal with it. The Mexican specialty restaurant had no A/C, no windows, and extremely hot, so we never ate there. The dive operation had a big boat that could hold all 25 divers, but Mike from the dive shop, split us up with 17 on the big boat and 8 on a smaller 32 footer. There were a couple of people that had gear stolen from the flight over and gear malfunction during our week diving, but Mike provided loaner gear for free. There were divemasters assigned to same 8 divers the whole week, who gave special attention to individuals when needed. You were able to dive your own profile. Before each dive, the divemaster would brief us and they were great at pointing out things of interest. At 1000 lbs. divemasters sent a buoy to the surface for the boat to pick us up. If you

still had a lot of air, you could stay down longer. All dives were drift dives and on the deeper wall dives, the current was ripping, which made the dive more scenic covering a lot of area. We saw sharks, rays, moray and garden eels, two 150 lb. Rainbow parrot fish, hawksbill and green turtles, large black groupers and toadfish. On the night dive, there were lobsters, octopus, large hermit crabs, brittle stars and rough back batfish.

**Emerald Dolphin Dive Services,  
Hotel Cozumel (was Las Brisas)  
January 2004, Timothy Smith  
(timothywaynesmith@yahoo.com)**

**Richardson, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, choppy, currents. This was the first time I have been back to Cozumel in many years. I was quite disappointed to see how the island now caters to the cruise operators, and have really ruined the great diver's destination. The locals are realizing this, and are trying to ensure that the divers stay happy, and come back. The night life is there if the cruise ships are in town on the strip. Carlos and Charlie's has lost most of its old fun feel. The shops tend to focus around the port calls, and it was hard to find many open once the ships pulled out. Note: it is easier to negotiate with the locals if they know you are a diver, and have more than a few hours on the island to barter. The Hotel Cozumel (used to be Las Brisas) was clean, and the a/c worked great! The convenience to downtown, and the spacious pool area make it a nice place to relax. The nightlife was horrible as was the food. This is an all-inclusive

place, and your best bet is to go out and explore the local establishments or meals other than breakfast. We had an incredible experience eating at the Casa La Mission (not their location downtown, but one that is about 8 blocks inland). Great food, and service, along with a nicely landscaped and interesting grounds to explore. Go early, and sit out under the trees by the fountain. Wild animals are there for the viewing, as well as the old history of the Mission. The dive operators broke our group onto two boats after the first day that was a positive. The owner Tony is very nice, and the divemaster on the second boat Carlos was great. They make fresh guacamole on the trip out, and provide a simple lunch, muffins, and plenty of drinks to quench your thirst. The daily stop to get additional tanks should be eliminated from the itinerary, and done up front. These were larger boats that did increase the time to the dive sites, but allowed our group to be social. I wish we were able to do some of the lower end sites, but Palancar's multiple sites and Yucab still have plenty to swim through, and see fish wise. The relatively new C-57 wreck that had been sunk was fun, and had the most current. It is laid out nicely for divers to access, and was easy for even new divers in our group to enjoy. a good bang for the buck for us Texas Divers. The Dive Operator was not set up nicely for Photographers. One or two buckets were available with fresh water at the beginning of the day, but after the dive group would use this water for their mask cleanings, I chose to keep my camera out of the nasty buckets, and brought along my own

water to rinse both of my cameras.  
([www.cozumel-diving.net/edds](http://www.cozumel-diving.net/edds))

**Fathom Divers Expeditions, August 2004, Chris Sklarew (sklarewc@verizon.net), Bethesda, MD.**

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 75 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 Fahrenheit, currents. Omar Gomez, who had been with Aldora, is knowledgeable, competent, and experienced, in addition to being the kind of person you like to spend time with. He does a lot of technical diving and instruction and has worked at the hyperbaric chamber in Cozumel. He also does freshwater cave diving expeditions on the mainland. Omar balances the need for safety with the desire for fun. One of us was an airhog, running out ahead of the rest of us, and one of us had an aversion to narrow swim-thrus. Omar helped solve both of these problems by watching the airhog and offering suggestions that led him to use a little less air each day, and by leading the hesitant diver through progressively more challenging swim-thrus, never pushing beyond her readiness. For all his expertise in technical areas, he never seemed bored by recreational diving, nor did he regard us as wimps. He is also great with kids. The current was much stronger than it had been on our prior visits, and the viz a little lower with stirred-up sand. We saw a dolphin, two big nurse sharks, a huge supermale parrotfish, many barracudas (one 6 ft. long), huge groupers, turtles and rays, in addition to the usual angels, jacks, parrots, triggers, porcupinefish, damselfish, tilefish, cowfish, snappers, etc. We stayed at Plaza las Glorias, our favorite because of its

proximity to town, but it was scheduled to be renovated the day after we left and thus was looking a little worn.  
([h2omarscuba@yahoo.com](mailto:h2omarscuba@yahoo.com))

**Liquid Blue Divers, Coral Princess,  
December 2003, Gail Blundell  
(ftgmb@uaf.edu) Douglas, AK.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 50 Feet. Water: 82 F, currents. Small, personalized outfit that goes the extra mile to make sure that your wishes and needs are met. Michaela runs the daily details of the shop and scheduling, and goes extra miles to solve problems and tackle challenges to make sure that everybody is very happy. She was also extremely helpful in answering e-mails before we got there, providing details on transportation and lodging suggestions. Liquid Blue Divers operates a small fast boat limited to only 6 divers. They get an early start to avoid the crowds of other dive boats. The steel 100/120 tanks allow long dives (65-90 minutes). When high winds and chop led to the port being closed to small boats, Micheala got on the phone to arrange for our group and DM to dive with another dive shop on a larger boat. Roberto and Jorge do a fantastic job at leading dives that will meet everyone's desires. They ask where you want to go or what sort of things you'd like to see and plan the dives accordingly. Both are excellent DMs as well as fun people to be around. When you dive with these guys you feel like close personal friends rather than part of a cattle drive. In the past I have dived with Aldora (Michaela, Roberto, and Jorge were formerly with Aldora) but I recommend the personalized div-

ing you get with Liquid Blue Diving. ([www.liquidbluedivers.com](http://www.liquidbluedivers.com))

**Liquid Blue Divers, Iberostar, March 2004, Duane Hill (dnhill@yahoo.com) Beaumont, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 Feet. Water: 79 F, choppy. Roberto and Michaela run a first class operation. They were attentive from the reservation process through dive completion. It is very nice when you get on the boat and the first questions are, "What would you like to see or where would you like to dive?" They use 120 cf tanks which allow plenty of bottom time regardless of depth or air consumption of others on the boat. There was never a dive of less than one hour. Roberto was an excellent DM and has eagle eyes to find some of the things he did. These are friendly people that enjoy what they do. It is nice to feel that they really want to show their divers a great time, not just that they have to go to work again that day. Iberostar was a good place for the family to be while I was diving. They enjoyed the grounds and the service. One problem that seemed to be emerging was that Iberostar was getting a little picky about other ops picking up divers on their dock. I really enjoy being so close to the reefs. When I stay here it is last on the boat and first off.

**Liquid Blue Divers, Plaza Las Glorias, April 2004, Steve Machoian (smachoian@msn.com) Annapolis, MD.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 120 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, choppy, currents. Roberto and his wife Michaela run a tight and timely and safety minded operation. Pick ups at

the dock at 740 a.m. in a fast 6 pack means you are one of the first at the sites. Steel 120's mean all dives exceed one hour with a good hour plus surface interval at Playa Palancar. You can follow Roberto or Jorge both great DM's, or you can do your own thing. However, you must notify DM when you have 1000 psi and cannot drift in front of the DM. A dive computer is also needed. All entries are backward rolls. No giant strides here. This is an operation for upper intermediate to advanced divers only. As usual the diving was great. One very notable dive was Devils Throat. A big coral that has some very dark swim throughs, a chimney and even a cathedral looking room with what looks like a coral cross. You come out on the wall at 135 feet then swim back through the many passages, always following the DM. The service was great and all in the operation speak fluent English. Roberto and Michaela go out of their way to see you have a great dive trip. This was my second trip to Cozumel in the past 10 years and I have stayed at Plaza Las Glorias both times. Decent rooms that are clean and walking distance to town.

**Liquid Blue Divers, Fiesta Americana, June 2004, Daniel Spitzer MD, Suffern NY.** Dives: 350, worldwide. (<http://www.liquidbluedivers.com>). Water: 82-84 F. Vis: routinely greater than 120 feet. Current: variable — none to ripping. San Miguel is a brash, noisy, interesting and diverse town with the worst of America (fast food chains, even faster bar scenes) mixed in with an interesting Mexican

culture. Cruise ships disgorge engorged masses, and some nights the center of town is best avoided. However, on a quiet night, and especially a Sunday, it is possible to enjoy a quiet dinner and walk around town, appreciating a different culture, and marveling at the ability of an entire family, husband, wife, and two children, to balance on a single motor scooter. (As a neurosurgeon, I cringe, especially since there isn't a helmet in sight.) (Note: a minor entering Mexico will need a notarized letter from any unaccompanying parent allowing him/her to travel!) LiquidBlue Divers, a small (two small boat) operation recently inaugurated. Owner Roberto Rodruiguez-Miramón and his brother Jorge share divemaster duties, while Roberto's wife Michaela (aka Michel's initially from Colorado) mans the office. Roberto is wiry, incessantly moving, and sharp as a cuda's tooth, while Jorge is taller and more taciturn. That noted, it is a pleasure to dive with both, as they enjoy leading a small group through the nooks and crannies of the reef, and pointing out interesting finds. Sites are chosen by consensus, as are profiles, dive duration etc. Nitrox is available, and was routinely used for the second morning as well as the afternoon dive, thereby further stretching bottom time. The group set pickup for the morning dive at 7:45 am at the Hotel dock, and the boat was always prompt. After a long first dive we would outgas in a leisurely manner on a nearby Playa, and then drop in for another long second dive. Back at the dock for lunch and a rest, we would generally go out for an afternoon dive about 3:15 or so, allowing us to shower before heading into

San Miguel for dinner. LiquidBlue uses steel 100 or 120 cubic foot tanks, so even the deep dives, such as a multiple entry of Devil's Throat are not time-limited. We chose to cap the dive time at just over an hour per dive, generally starting up slowly at the 60 minute mark, though Roberto and Jorge would have been happy to stay down much longer. Being heavier, steel tanks have the additional advantage of requiring about 4 to 6 pounds less weight to be carried on the belt or in the BC. Indeed, I can dive with a steel 100 with no additional weight at all, though I do find that the weight of the tank on my back tends to flip me over, so I tend to take a 2 pounder and place it in my cummerbund belt pocket, and add a touch of air to my BC. This allows me to hang comfortably, and roll around any axis, in a state of neutral equilibrium. Drift diving is a joy, once the basics are learned. Horizontal currents are incessant and variable vertical currents and eddies make the diver feel as though he's on a roller coaster. 5 to 8 foot vertical movement — allow the current to take you — within reason.) Upstream of a coral head, the diver will be pushed up, often just clearing the coral; downstream, the diver is pulled back down by the eddy, and several ripples continue to propagate downstream — often three discernible vertical up and downs could be felt — until the sequence starts again with the next outcropping. To pause, stop in the eddy of the coral head, or hunker down right next to the bottom. On a drift dive which combined Tormentos with Yucab Wall, since the current was running so fast. I felt like a fighter pilot sweeping over the reef,

observing the amazing sights 3 feet below me, marveling at groups of Queen angel fish, schools of horse eye jacks, ocean triggers, plus what we accept as standard in Coz: crabs, lobsters, mammoth file fish, French angel fish, and multiple moray eels. Turtles abounded. Punta Sur is well worth the trip to the south end of the island, while sand flats at Chancanaab revealed the ins and outs of mating conch. In-town or near to town hotels minimize cab rides for dinner, while southerly hotels minimize the length of the boat ride to the reef. Fiesta Americana: convenient and comfortable.

**Liquid Blue Divers, Palapas Amaranto, June 2004, Mike Frayn (mfrayn@bigfoot.com), Lutz, FL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm. Routinely offers the steel 120 cf tanks and longer dives. Aldora and Living Underwater offer similar services. Roberto and wife Michaela were very service oriented. LB rinsed and stored all gear except wet suits each night and would pick you up at a nearby dock every morning. The routine was a morning dive and then lunch/surface interval ashore followed by an afternoon dive. They have a roomy six pack boat in good condition. Roberto will take you to any site you request and is conscientious with newer divers. Unless everyone is diving Nitrox you really don't get the benefit of the big tanks. They charge \$80 for 2 tanks not including tax and \$2 marine park fee.. Although I had a positive experience with Liquid Blue I would probably go back to Living Underwater next time,

which charges the same price but it includes tax and marine park fees, they rinse and store wetsuits and offer snacks and towels when you get out of the water. That may sound a petty but when you are paying \$80+ a day, the extras matter. The diving and visibility were excellent. I am always amazed at how healthy Cozumel reefs are considering the number of divers. I saw all the expected fish as well as an enormous Goliath groupers, pipe horses, sea horses, scorpion fish, splendid toad fish and turtles.

**Living Underwater, Brisas, November 2003, Dave Warfield, OH.** 120+ dives logged. Vis: 100+ ft. Water temp: 83. After reading favorable reviews in previous chapbooks I booked a week with Living Underwater. All expectations were exceeded. The boat is prompt and once on board, each diver is provided seat cushions, a snack and beverage. On the fast trip to the reefs divemaster Jeremy checks each diver (maximum 8) for any specific concerns then helps the group settle on a first site. In every instance the divers call the site. Because 120cf steel tanks result in tremendous bottom times the surface interval can easily exceed an hour and is spent at a lovely, uncrowded beach club. Food is available but divers are not pressured to make purchases there. Divemaster Jeremy is adept at finding the unusual while overseeing the multi-level dives. Dive briefings are thorough and accurate. Given the bottom times and multi-level format safety is emphasized. Computers are loaned and instruction/oversight cheerfully provid-

ed to those who have not used them before. Entry by backroll minimized the cumbersome nature of the 120's and assistance donning gear and removing it prior to reboarding was provided to each diver. This was expedient and efficient. They hang suits to dry on surface intervals and a fresh towel is provided after each dive. Gear is held and rinsed overnight by them and waiting on you when you board the next day. Given the lengthy bottom times Jeremy proceeds very slowly and has a knack for avoiding heavy current. This was by far the best diving I have done in Cozumel. Much more time to visualize rather than fly through reefs and walls. All staff at Living Underwater seem genuine in their desire to provide a great dive experience and do exactly that. The Brisas (former Costa Club, momentarily named Magic Sunset and soon to be named Reefscape) was a great value. Apparently the current owners are indecisive regarding the name but seem to have a fix on all other aspects. The moderately priced all inclusive provided neat freshly painted rooms with adequate furnishings and amenities. A/C and hot water were in abundance. The pool, quite likely the largest on the island, was meticulously maintained. Likewise the lush grounds, well appointed dining and common areas and beach club. The beach club is accessed by a short, dry, well lit tunnel or you can simply cross the street and enter via Dive Paradise's dive shop. A large pier for pick up and large complimentary lockers are available. The beach club has great views, abundant, comfortable lounges and freshwater

(small) pool. Meals were varied, well prepared and served in an attractive manner. These were available for extended hrs. and at pool and beachside to accommodate divers schedules. All bar and wait staff were attentive and courteous. No waiting or crowding. Our flight out was canceled and Continental Air put all passengers (150+) up there overnight. The courtesy and efficiency during check in and dinner for this mass arrival was remarkable. Maid service thorough and typically complete by 1 pm. ([www.livingunderwater.com](http://www.livingunderwater.com))

**Living Underwater, Plaza Las Glorias, February 2004, Gary Wenzel (saluspop@aol.com) Bedford, NH.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 110 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, choppy, currents. Jeremy is the new owner of the dive operation. Previously, he had worked for the owner, Oracio. He starts with 120's that last forever underwater. He offers towels to all divers and warm, soft, long dive jackets for the whole time you are on board along with fruit, cookies plus plain and flavored water. Jeremy sets up all gear and cares for it at the end of the day. Dives generally last well over 1 hour with the large tanks and the jackets are a welcomed sight during the surface interval. I dove with a 3 mil suit and the next time I will be diving with a 5 mil. The dives are long and wonderful but chills came in for me especially during the 2nd dive. Pre-dive briefings were great, explained well so all were in agreement and understood. Went out of his way to show both the large and the small found U/W. Used an U/W

writer to question and explain to the divers what they were seeing. Lots of eagle rays, great turtles and great interaction with 1 nurse shark in particular. The boat is small with a max of 3-7 divers but still enough room for a camera rinse tank. He always asked "how can I make this dive experience better for you." The diving and service with Jeremy and "Living Underwater" doesn't get any better than this no matter where you go. Room was very large enabling me to wash my U/W video housing, lights and gear adequately. Small kitchenette with room offered more than sufficient room for recharging batteries and maintenance. Balcony offered a table, chairs and a long wall rack for drying any and all dive gear and camera gear.

**Living Underwater; El Marques Hotel, February 2004, Ken Paff, Detroit, MI.** Experience: 250 Caribbean dives. Conditions: 80+ ft. Vis; calm to choppy; mostly sunny. Water: 80 F. In February 2004, LU was taken over by Jeremy Ansel, who was already the divemaster, from former owner Oracio Martínez. Both were once with Aldora, and the operation is similar: they cater to experienced divers, use steel 120 cu ft tanks, provide computers to all and a long beach interval between dives, and do Punta Sur as a deco dive; the LivingUnderwater1 is a former Aldora boat. We were there in the transition period from Martinez to Ansel, and the new owner was working the kinks out. LU has the pluses and minuses of a small outfit that is rather dependent on one person. LU charges \$80, com-

pared to \$87 at Aldora, and provides more personalized service; for example, towels and cold beverages. They dived the sites we chose. Our group of three had the boat to ourselves a couple days, with three others some days. With big tanks and occasionally long hang-time, dives were 65-80 minutes. They never rushed us. We found Ansel to suit our taste in a divemaster (we are critter-searchers with an interest in marine life and ecology), sometimes even too much so. He works hard to make divers comfortable on the boat and to meet everyone's diving expectations. You won't have to handle your equipment or even pick up a towel, it'll be handed to you. He volunteered to do a minor reg repair for us. We saw hawksbill turtles on half our dives, good and varied schools, a few eagle rays, and a couple new additions to our life-list. No pelagics except two 7' cruising nurse sharks. We took home some bumpy hydroid stings from putting the fingers too close to a couple of giant tunicates. Ansel's sharp eyes will find you a variety of sea slugs (e.g. painted elysia) and other small invertebrates and fish (e.g. pikeblennies). Our favorite dives this trip: San Francisco Wall and Colombia Deep. They have no dive shop (a la the early years of Aldora). When you're in Cozumel, Ansel is accessible by phone. Unless a northerly wind is blowing, Cozumel is dependably good diving, and — remarkably — relatively unspoiled by 300,000 dives per year. The walls are good, drift diving a pleasure, and the coral formations outstanding. The shallow, close-in reefs have, however, suffered. The cattle-boat operations are

bigger and badder than ever: Dive Paradise runs 14 boats a day, most of them freighted with gaggles of gringos. If you haven't been to Cozumel in a few years — expect 6+ cruise ships a day and enough jewelry shops to outfit that whole fleet in overpriced ornaments. Corporate franchises have displaced many local businesses, but some are still alive and easy to find. One suggestion: rent bikes and go to San Gervasio (Maya site) for a nice walk through history and some birding. Or to the east coast of the island, and go north on the unpaved and unpeopled beach road. Then head back by 3 pm to dive a twi-nighter. Hotels in town: El Marques hotel is just SE of the zócalo on hotel-row. Quite nice, and locally owned. \$35/night for a double. We've also stayed at similar hotels nearby. Phone 987-872-0537 for res, or just show up.

**Living Underwater, April 2004, Lori Brown (DoctorSLB2001@yahoo.com) Germantown, MD.** Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, surge. There have been some changes at Living Underwater — Oracio is gone. Jeremy is now in charge and doing a great job. The determination to give divers what they want, rather than what is convenient for the dive operator, is what makes Living Underwater a real jewel. We abandoned another dive operation that we had been diving with for years when they stopped focusing on where we wanted to dive and took us to the same old dive sites over and over again. Instead of deciding where the dive was going and imposing it on

divers, Jeremy let us decide, within the limitations of our abilities, where we should dive. As a result, we were able to dive sites that I haven't been to in years, including Barracuda. Jeremy was also flexible about the time that we started diving so that a few days, he picked up divers at 6:30 am (don't panic, it was by consensus). There are a lot less folks out diving at 6:30 than just a few hours later! I also did some less challenging dives with my 12 year old son. It was a good mix of sites including Punta Sur, Santa Rosa Wall, San Francisco Wall, Delilah, and Punta Francesca. The 120 and 95 steel tanks make all the difference — minimum time down (excluding Barracuda) was 72 minutes. We also discovered a new restaurant — La Lobsteria, on Avenida 5 Sur at Calle 7. As the name implies, they had lobster which they prepare with several sauces or just plain old broiled with butter. There was also pasta, fish, chicken, etc. The service was charming and the proprietor genuinely gracious.

**Living Underwater, Fiesta Americana, May 2004, Michael Kamens (kingston2@hotmail.com) Wintersville, OH.** Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm, currents. Jeremy runs a fantastic dive operation. As both owner and divemaster, he takes a real interest in satisfying his customers and his service is first rate. Pick up is prompt and gear is handled from the time they first get it from you until you are done diving. Wetsuits are taken nightly and cleaned. Within reason the divers pick the sites they want to dive. Once he

knows you are competent, he lets you have more freedom to experience the more advanced and thus more pristine dive sites Cozumel has to offer. I was thrilled to dive Maracaibo as a deco-dive since the best parts of the wall are deep. Devils Throat was also a highlight. There were never more than 6 divers on the boat. Bottom times due to the steel tanks ranged from 60 to 100 minutes. Props also to Pepe, Jeremy's other divemaster who was not only a great critter spotter, but a real riot making the surface time as fun as the dive time. As advertised, towels, snacks and jackets if needed, were provided. We saw over 2 dozen turtles in just 10 dives. They were literally everywhere. Nurse sharks were also seen. Many large stingrays. Several very large grouper as well with one topping out at what had to be 300+ pounds. Fiesta Americana is a nicely run hotel. We did the all inclusive and even though we did dinner in town a couple nights, the AI paid for itself in daily breakfast, lunch and unlimited domestic drinks. The staff was friendly and attentive. The pool and swim up bar very nice. The beach entry was a bit rocky and snorkel entries were a bit tough, but overall a nice beach area with non-motorized water sports also included. Rooms were sparse, but clean and bright. The food was mainly buffet style, but it was above average and plentiful. Try to be on the 4th floor or higher to get a true ocean view. Not what would be considered luxury, but clean, well kept and a very nice choice for a place to lay your head between dive days. Guido's (formerly Pizza Rolandi), La Choza and El Turix were

all very good and highly recommended. La Cocay, closed the month of May, but from last trip there, it shines.

**Living Underwater, June 2004, Larry Sandusky (lsandusky18@msn.com) Meridian, ID.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 81 F, calm, currents. We reserved boat for 2 divers and consequently had maximum one-on-one attention and support from Jeremy Anshel, owner of Living Underwater. Jeremy actively solicited input on our diving preferences before recommending dive sites, then gave excellent, detailed pre-dive briefings. He was also consistently attentive underwater, often checking your computer personally to make certain decompression dives were going smoothly. Living Underwater uses steel 120's for extended dive times and beautiful drift dives with the time to closely examine the smallest reef creatures. Jeremy is sharp-eyed divemaster who will show tiny creatures with the same enthusiasm as the large ones. Cozumel's reefs are in better shape now than the early 1990's, and Jeremy will show you many treats. Corals and sponges are in excellent condition generally, and although some damage is evident on extensively dived spots, we saw these only intermittently enroute from one beautiful spot to another with Living Underwater. Jeremy and Living Underwater are living proof of *Undercurrent's* value to the discriminating diver.

**Living Underwater, Hotel Cozumel, July 2004, Jim Baldwin (jbalwin@cox-internet.com) Ruston, LA.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 150 to 200 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, no currents. the fourth time that we have used Living Underwater. Jeremy Anshel formerly the divemaster for LU has been the owner for four months. The personal attention from boat cushions to cold water, to fresh fruit was extremely nice. The big towels and dry parkas were quite welcome. All our gear was rinsed and laid out the next morning. There was no packing gear back to the hotel. Our average bottom time on ten dives was 1hr and 20 minutes with the longest being 1hr 33 minutes. As we were veteran divers with LU we asked how deep we wanted to go and was usually 100 to 120 feet with the second dive in the 70 foot range. All diving was done with 95 or 120 low pressure 2400 steel tanks. Excellent fills and very slow diving. The boat holds a maximum of eight divers. On two days there were only two of us diving and on three days there were three additional divers. We saw over a half a dozen spotted eagle rays and numerous turtles during five days. Very slow diving which allowed plenty of time to stop and get the shot I was looking for without feeling rushed. Numerous shots of juvenile seahorses and other tiny critters

**Living Underwater, September 2004. Alvin and Renee Taylor (atnrt@ipa.net).** Been to Cozumel 12 times! Dive with Living Underwater and you will feel like you can live under water. Always pleasant, relaxing and safe. Jeremy, our divemaster, who is the new owner of LU is the best! The personal service he provides is excellent! He

takes care of your dive gear from the first day of diving to your last day of diving. He washes and rinses it each day and it is set up the next morning dive! He provides bottled water, snacks, and a parka (which we needed during a quick rain shower)! Jeremy always asks divers where they want to dive, he briefs the divers about safety, what to expect at each site, and what our dive limits are. We dive our computer within safe limits, with an average of 75 to 100+ minutes per dive. LU uses low pressure steel 95's and 120's. large tanks that allow for longer bottom time. We even did a few Deco dives.! We dove Punta Sur for 1 hour and 20 minutes and Maracaibo for 1 hour and 30 minutes. LU costs a little more however, you get a lot more service and bottom time.

**Pepe Scuba, Coral Princess Hotel, August 2004, Barry S. Yoss Vestal, NY.** Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 Fahrenheit, calm. Coral Princess Hotel located north of town. Adjoining high-rise buildings, one for hotel, one for timeshare. Some studio suites, most with twin beds and stall showers. We had one bedroom suite, more like an apartment with large bedroom, living room, and full kitchen. Two terraces, one with table and chairs. Ocean view, facing west, convenient for drying dive gear. Plenty of storage space. Full tub/shower, convenient for soaking dive gear. Plenty of hot water. Bottled water provided on arrival; additional bottles at nominal charge. Two small pools, one with swim-up bar. Large sandy beach area, with palapas for shade. Price was

the same at 6 different travel web sites. Hotel staff friendly. Restaurant with reasonably good food. Continental breakfast included, but food only mediocre – pay additional for full breakfast. Taxi to downtown \$3 per trip. Pepe Scuba on site. Rates discounted for multiple dive days. Two typical Cozumel open boats, accommodate 10 divers in each, but we never had more than 8. Awning for shade. Divemaster Rosendo very safety conscious, readily located treacherous down-wellings from surface observations and avoided them. Strong 3 knot current first few days. Lost a 12 year old and his mother to the current one day; divemaster quickly located them and boat readily located and picked up the wayward divers. Rosendo was good at locating elusive critters, such as the splendid toadfish, which is native to Cozumel. Saw large groupers, free swimming large green morays, nurse sharks, turtles, and saw a pod of dolphins on the way to the divesite. Because the hotel is north of town, while dive sites are to the south, we had a longer distance to cover. However, their boats are very fast, so we usually were one of the first groups at each site. No camera bucket. Boat captain hand you the camera after water entry. Surface interval done on shore, convenient for reloading camera without getting the film wet.  
([www.cozumel-diving.net/pepe](http://www.cozumel-diving.net/pepe))

### **Reef Club, Papa Hogs, November 2003, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX.**

A dive shop invited me along. Booked the Sunday 5 pm departure, and I got hit for \$25 on my 58 pounder? I'd read

my ticket about the "44 pound total weight allowance" thinking surely they meant per bag, and I just gritted my teeth when I turned my 110 pounds over to Ryan Air. Our 21 year old leader criticized me for bringing so much?! Doesn't she sell dive gear as her full time job? All inclusive, no tipping Reef Club is a nice resort for non-divers, pretty grounds, nice beach, and all. I wanted a downstairs room close to the boat dock, so I had to wait a few hours for a room, but it was worth it. Getting to the dock once or twice a day was a healthy hike around the time share part of the property, and the dive shop wouldn't let me rent a locker unless I booked with their operator, so all my "excessive" gear had to be humped a few times. The rooms were nice enough, and the beds as hard as feared, but I had five pillows in my private room with two beds, so I just lined them up for a decent nights rest. Hohum lunch and dinner. outdoor snack bar, where an early bird can coffee and stale rolls. Lunch was covered in flies, even on the hot dogs rolling on the roaster, and when I tried an imitation pizza slice from an enclosed cabinet, I found it to be at just the right temperature for microbe growth. I marched into the restaurant wearing a T-shirt and my wetsuit peeled to my waist. PH's Margaret had advised Local DM Gabriel to load Nitrox tanks for me, but that didn't happen the first trip. Otherwise, PH's sent a great crew of four to take care of ten divers — captain, two DMs, and a helper, all of whom were great helping with gear and everything else. A couple couldn't dive because of a medical condition

that'd flared up recently, but we had the young lady leader, her girl friend, their two boy friends who'd never dived in the ocean before, a nice very young couple with a little experience, another nice young couple with a little more, and one experienced lady my age whom I knew from a Lubbock Honky Tonk. She and I were assigned each other for the duration, but she made it really clear I'd better follow well. That didn't go well at all. We did a newbie reef, returned to dock so people could retrieve things they'd forgotten, I got my filled pony, and we did another newbie reef and sand field — except for one of the paper cards who went home hung over and seasick after his first ocean ever dive. Margaret promised me an extra afternoon trip as requested, but it'd be a different, smaller boat, so while everyone else could leave their gear on board where it'd be rinsed and guarded for them, I had to hump mine to lunch, then back. The afternoon boat pulled in on time, with a crew of two and one ready diver, one more to be picked up at the nearby Allegro. Now I was really impressed with PHs, willing to send a boat out for three divers, the other two only planning on one dive. Finally, a good dive happened, and the DM promised take me on a private dive after dropping the others off, then send me back to my place with boss Mike in his pickup, but — I was a little tired, and knew the last reef would be another newbie type, so I tipped him and humped my gear back to my room again. The dives improved the second day, but our young lady leader — not a DM, but Rescue trained and had been in the ocean a couple of

times — seemed bothered, insulting my diving, but I just took care of business and let the evidence speak for itself. DM Gabriel and I were quickly becoming buds, so he'd lead the first group, the rest would follow, I'd bring up the rear, and as the others exhausted their air, he and I would finish the dives. I hoped the air divers with charts were following their training, but I heard comments about "all the rules we're breaking on our bottom times." Lordie. I later heard that the air diving leader and her girlfriend were violating their computers but kept on swimming, ending with standard safety stops. I always thought that computer instructions were more than suggestions, but no one got bent badly enough to notice. We did a nice, uneventful night dive the second night, with Gabriel and I finishing up again, and went on to a couple of nice dives the last morning. Many were griping at the DM that they hadn't seen a seahorse yet, and he assured them, "By the last dive." He and I were cruising along ahead of the rest around 50 feet down when he motioned me over to a reef, where he positioned a two inch tall toy seahorse toy. After that last dive, we all unloaded our gear, said our goodbyes, I tipped \$5 per dive as I had each day. I needed to settle with PHs for the extra dive and Nitrox, but our leader didn't offer to assist, so I just planned on a \$13 cab ride to pay myself out after I rinsed all my gear to dry. I finally got to meet Margaret, learning that I'd just missed our leader who'd come to pay the standard charges. From there, I walked a few blocks to check out the Casa Del Mar motel where I'd be join-

ing a Singles Dive Group a couple of months later. Nice place for a lot less money, short sky bridge walk to the boat dock, available rinse tanks and lockers, short taxi ride to town, and no meal plan — which means that there will be competition for my dinning dollars. Next time, it'll be one airline, one connection, one day of travel, and so many other things will be better arranged — for less. “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me!” Gomer Pyle. “Don't even think about a third time,” Dandy Don. No one told me what time to be ready to go or how we'd get to the airport, but I found out anyway. Our local lime green shirted host demonstrated again how difficult boarding taxis can really be, no matter how simple it seems, and we were back to the airport two hours before flight time, as suggested. The line had already formed, and it was moving slow, as this airport uses people rather than x-rays and chemical testers to search bags, but my turn with my two huge bags finally came. One glance and they waved me to bypass security. Over packing is really a great way to discourage being checked by security or customs, I've found. The security people did search every carry-on bag, though, twice — at the security entrance, and again at boarding. ([www.papahogs.com](http://www.papahogs.com))

**Sand Dollar Scuba, March 2004, Tom Chase (trchase@msn.com) Prospect, KY.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 F, currents. This was arranged through Carnival Cruise Lines Elation so I was very skeptical. This was a first class

dive operator attached to The Reef Club. They provided all transportation to and from the cruise port. Since they were located several miles from downtown we were not put into a “cattle boat” configuration. Dive guides were knowledgeable, safety oriented and helpful. Typical excellent Cozumel diving. Great vis, lots of healthy coral and tropicals. Drift diving is about my favorite thing. It certainly fit the profile for a “no worries” cruise. I would dive with this operator again. I asked several of the guests at the Reef Club and they had that satisfied “narced up” look that a week or two of quality diving can do for one's soul. ([www.sanddollarsports.com](http://www.sanddollarsports.com))

**Sand Dollar, Reef Club, June 2004, Bill Meek (bmeek@graco.com) Salisbury, NC.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 85 to 89 F, calm. Took my three kids diving with me ages 11,13,15 and they had a great time diving. We did 12 day dives and one night dive. Incredible views and very easy diving. Depth ranged from 90 feet to 50. After the first dive where they checked my kids out they permitted them to go as deep as 90 feet which they handled with no problem. The dive boats were decent and the crew and divemasters were helpful. We averaged about 10 people to a boat not too crowded. The Reef Club (All Inclusive) is all right accommodations. The beds are hard and the room is bare bones but fairly clean. Thin walls — you can definitely hear your neighbor. The food is a buffet. The breakfast is good with made to order

eggs/omelets. A lot of fruit and cereals. Lunch and dinner is plain. They have two restaurants if you can get reservations, an Italian and a Bistro that both were not great but good. They also have a grill pool side for lunch and late night that has burgers and hot dogs that me and the kids lived off. Bars are limited in what they have. They have kayaks, wind surfers and snorkel gear included on the beach. The beach is sandy and decent snorkeling. They also rent jet skis, parasailing. The environment is kind of like a fraternity party, a lot of drunks, a lot of drinking. The guest tend to be loud and rude. We stayed last year at the Iberostar. It is all inclusive and found it definitely more upscale with basically the same set up just everything a notch above. The Iberostar is about \$100 a week more per person for the same package.

**Scuba Club Cozumel, May 2004, Sandy Horner (kevinlbaok@aol.com) Broken Arrow, OK.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, alm. Took you to good dive locations, pointed out lobsters, crabs, eels, turtles, gulf toad fish, flamingo tongue, and nurse sharks. Did a night dive and resort accommodated us with a late dinner, by keeping kitchen open after closing time. If you don't like a bed mattress on concrete slab, take air mattress. Storage lockers available for dive gear, remember to take a lock. Also you tip at the end of the week for dive boat, divemasters, wait staff, maid, and bellboy, envelopes are provided for this. Had rinse tanks on boat for cameras and an area to work on cameras,

or change film and store gear. ([www.scubaclubcozumel.com](http://www.scubaclubcozumel.com))

**Scuba Club, June 2004, Bill Schlegel, Jefferson City, MO.** 600 plus dives and semi- closed circuit re-breather dives. 8 previous trips to Cozumel, most at Scuba Club (formally the Galapago). Water temp 84 degrees. Visibility 50 feet (rarely) to 150 feet (mostly). Strong currents at times with some minor up and down-drafts and eddies but nothing that would bother even the novice diver. Scuba Club service and packages are still a good deal especially since the diving is still quite good and even better than a couple of years ago. The reefs are still beautiful, the water clear and the drift diving very well organized. They accommodate divers from the novice to the re-breather diver. The divemasters let us dive our profiles with the rebreathers with reasonable restrictions. All other divers were allowed to dive their computers or one hour bottom time which is fair for aluminum 80's. Very experienced divemasters with experience from Francisco (14,000 + career dives) to Zorro (3000 career dives) who still seem to enjoy what they are doing and can provide advice to any level of diver. Nitrox is routinely available in 32 and 36% at the hotel dive shop. For other mixes contract with Dive Cozumel, the technical dive operator who has a store downtown. The gas (except for Dive Cozumel who blends there own) is provided by the local industrial gas operation that supplies all of southern Mexico. They don't make special blends, fill re-breather

bottles etc. Large areas of healthy, but short, staghorn and lettuce leaf corals in addition to the usual huge sponges and other sedentary flora and fauna. Lots of hawksbill turtles attributed to the turtle hatching program that has been in progress for about 8 years. The hawksbills allow a close approach if not chased. There are thousands of the other usual reef fish with occasional schools of horse eyed jacks and other pelagics. Saw one huge, solitary, permit. Nurse sharks were fairly common, but no other shark species. All the wall diving is drift diving, with the Cozumel technique.. Saw sea horses (one on the hotel pier), several splendid toadfish, multiple lobsters and Caribbean reef crabs. You can go to the turtle hatchery and, for a fee, become the “parent” of a clutch of eggs by assisting them in hatching and releasing them at night into the sea. Cozumel night dives are a treat, lots of critters but frequently lots of divers. The current wreck dive, the Felipe Xicotencatl, is a 150 foot former U.S. (later Mexican) naval vessel at 75 feet and is pretty good for a staged wreck dive. Of course the Devils Throat cave is a classic but a fairly advanced dive. Had the opportunity to video a Goliath grouper next to a 230 pound friend of mine and the fish looks larger than Wayne and his inspiration re-breather combined! Hotel at Scuba Club is clean and room service is daily and thorough; quaint in a Mexican way. All the serviced staff and waiters are pleasant but not all speak English. Food is a combination buffet and limited order menu. There are no T.V.'s or phones in rooms. Call from main desk but cheaper down the street at the

Internet café (\$1.50 / hour) for the Internet and \$0.30 to connect a call. Don't drink the water unless you are used to Mexico. Very few bugs at Scuba Club, just an occasional mosquito. Contrast to the Hotel Presidente down the coast where we had to run for our car after just a few minutes at the outside bar due to clouds of huge mosquitoes and hundreds of bites in a few minutes. 5 or 6 large cruise ships are commonly docked each day. This means 10 to 15 thousand cruise ship tourists per day. This has inflated prices in the local economy, affecting the average Mexican who is now complaining. The taxi prices are going up and the whole place just goes nuts during the afternoons when several large ships are in. Sometimes on Saturday (few ships) and Sunday (no ships) you can see some of the old Cozumel. Be aware of rental car rip-offs. Two different people in our group were hit with ridiculous “balloon payments” when returning their cars to one of the small local companies, which attracts business by advertising cheaper rates. They were asked to pay several times the initially agreed cost when they returned the car. One of my friends refused to pay and was followed to the airport by an irate and apparently intoxicated rental car clerk. I sticking to a name brand car rental company: Hertz. Mexican rental car insurance is a rip-off no matter who you get it from.

**ScubaDu, Dive House, Fiesta Americana, March 2004, Jim Reilly and Fran Klass (james.reilly4@worldnet.att.net) Wyndmoor, PA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to

100 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm, currents. Stayed at the Fiesta Americana which bills itself as a “Dive Resort.” Room was fine and kept very clean. Concierge worthless. Bellmen very helpful, cheerful and friendly. Continental breakfast very good and included in our package. Except for one lunch which was terrible and expensive, we wisely ate the rest of our meals elsewhere. There are lots of very good places to eat in St. Miguel, including Garden of Eat'in (directly across the street from Dive Cozumel), where we dined on real Falafels. We split our diving between ScubaDu at the Presidente and Dive House at the Fiesta. Both offered about the same level of service — guided tours with DM's pointing out interesting things to see. Both offered water and sometimes soft drinks between dives. Both insured an honest hour of surface time between dives and were careful to insure that divers took a full safety stop and ascended slowly. ScubaDu also offered us slices of watermelon and bananas between dives. ScubaDu charged \$80 per 2-tank dive, while Dive House charged \$57 — so the ScubaDu fruit is quite expensive. We were greatly annoyed by the behavior of one of the ScubaDu DM's. On two dives very little time was provided to suit up and the boat crew was so rushed to get divers into the water as a group that there was no checking of gear, including no checking to see if the air was on. On one dive we discovered (by breathing on our reg pre-dive) that the air was not on. One of the ScubaDu DM's also loudly asked for tips after each dive. We are in the habit of tipping the last day, not each day. On our sec-

ond (and last) day with ScubaDu this DM reminded us loudly that we had not tipped the crew the day before. On the other hand the Dive House operation was well behaved and very polite. Great care was taken to insure safety. I actually saw them check a customer's dive computer, call ashore on their marine radio and finally deny this diver his second dive, since he had done 2 deeper dives that morning. Their facility was clean and the locker spotless and not evil smelling — how about that! ([www.scubadu.com](http://www.scubadu.com))

**ScubaDu, Presidente Intercontinental, March 2004, Ken Katz, Livingston, NJ.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, currents. Grade A vacation spot especially if your spouse doesn't dive. Our room was terrific, the service at the hotel and at the dive operation was very good, most accommodating. Dining in town was fun, and there was food for everyone's taste. We met nice people both at the hotel and on the dive boat. The divemasters were very attentive, gave good briefings and let the better divers explore a little more. They recognized the beginners very quickly, and kept them on a short leash, but that didn't affect the dives.

**Scuba Du, Presidente Intercontinental Hotel, July 2004, Art Burke (scubadiver@houston.rr.com) Katy, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm, currents. This was our 5th trip to Cozumel but 1st with Scuba Du and the Presidente Intercontinental Hotel. The hotel met expectations — beautiful

beach view room, relaxing pool, wonderful beach and diving/swimming area. The food at the only restaurant (the second restaurant was under construction) was good — excellent buffets and ala carte menus. The room was nice and large but the bed was rock hard. There was more than ample space to handle photography equipment in the room. The bath was a walk in shower. The AC worked fine and the up keep was excellent. Extra large and heavy towels. The scuba shop for Scuba Du was a covered hut. Adequate. The staff was friendly and helpful. Gear storage was on one side of the beach (by the dive hut) but the boats loaded out about 150 yards away on the other side of the beach near the restaurant. After the first day I figured out I could tip an “equipment handler” who rinsed my gear each night and brought it to and from the dock every day. Well worth the costs as you would have to lug your equipment back to the storage hut or to your room each day because all gear was removed after each dive outing. I requested a fast boat for the 2 of us but at the last minute Scuba Du changed this because a larger group booked all the small boats. This put us on the larger, slower boats. It worked out fine as we only had 7-11 divers each day and that was split into 2 groups for diving. It was quite comfortable, we had shade and a head with the only hectic part was getting everyone into the water at the site. To exit the water they wanted everyone to take off weight belts, BCD and fins prior to climbing the ladder. The DM helped with this and it went smoothly for all. The dive briefings were short but precise and more time was given if it was

your first day diving with Scuba Du. We had several DM's over the course of 5 days and all were very good in leading, helping divers with gear problems and finding unique critters to look at. They mixed experienced divers with beginners in the same group so you had to have patience but the DM's were excellent in handling these issues (we all were beginners at one time in our diving experience). The DM's were very safety conscious and kept tabs on all the divers and air consumption. At 700 psi they would begin the ascent to the safety stop. All safety stops were open water (no boat line to hang on) so the DM was very watchful on times and depth control during the safety stop. We tipped the DM's each day as we didn't know who we would be with the next day, however you can put your request in for certain DM's or boats each night and they would try to accommodate you. Scuba Du very professional and focused on making it a pleasant and enjoyable vacation. The drift dives were excellent with lots of fish although taking pictures in a current is challenging. Divers wore swimsuits, 1-2mm shorties or full 3mm wetsuits depending on their own needs for comfort. Boat has separate bucket for camera but no table. Divermasters/deck hands were cautious and helpful in handling camera pre and post dive. Had to go down below to change out film. A multi-strobe or multiple cameras would have been difficult to handle on the boat.

**Sea Urchin, Careyitos, Scuba Du, Iberostar Hotel, March 2004, Julia Gumenik, Coconut Creek, FL.** Went with SeaUrchin and Careyitos, a 6 and

a 15-or-so pack. One day with Scuba Du 'cuz the others couldn't get to me at Iberostar, given the conditions. Was surprised that Scuba Du was such a rote operation with so many beginners. Loved Isidro's SeaUrchin. Trouble is, Isidro is most vulnerable to all attempts by Iberostar to control the piers, as his is the smallest op. Iberostar greeted arriving non-Dressel op's with their written edicts about presenting licensure, etc. The threat was that any competition would have to pay a per-head fee for all divers picked up at the Iberostar dock. It is sometimes hard enough for the small operations to buck the ocean current and move all the way down south to pick up. But with the potential penalty, it is close to impossible for them to prosper. I loved my stay at the Iberostar. My husband is a non-diver with severe health problems who would enjoy going back for the relatively pristine beauty of the place, the food (excellent by all-inclusive standards) and the genuinely caring staff. It bothers us both that our next trip, planned for sometime soon, might have to be planned for another resort because of the abysmal treatment of the locals by a foreign corporation which cannot seem to make it on its own dive operation without these undue restrictions to competitors. We do feel we owe our allegiance to a population which has been a main source of happiness to us for about two decades.  
([www.seaurchindive.com](http://www.seaurchindive.com))

**Wet Set Dive Adventures, Iberostar Paraiso Beach Resort, September 2003, Malcolm Carter (mcarter4@kc.rr.com) Stilwell, KS.** Experience:

51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, choppy, currents. Iberostar Paraiso Beach is south of Puerto Morelos. It is a large (maybe too large) all-inclusive. The rooms were comfortable, with the beds softer than we have become used to in Mexico. Maybe that's because they aren't on a concrete slab. Housekeeping was excellent. The food at the ala carte restaurants was very good, but the buffet started to get really old, not a lot of variety. The evening entertainment was the same as we saw three years ago at the Iberostar at Playacar. My wife and I did numerous dives with Paul at Wet Set in Puerto Morelos. My wife wanted easy dives, so we did those for three days, although Paul got her on the C-51 at about 90 feet. This wreck is a sister to the one off Cozumel. It hasn't been down long enough for a lot of growth on the wreck yet, but there were numerous sting rays and eagle rays hanging around as well as a lone nurse shark and a ton of barracuda. Went through the wreck from bow to stern. It's opened up enough that we were quite comfortable and didn't need any lights. Paul promises encounters with all sorts of fishes and he delivers! We say everything from lobsters to sharks. The reefs are less dramatic than Cozumel, but the marine life is a lot more abundant. On the days my wife didn't dive, Paul offered me deeper dives to about 120 feet, with a strong current. No finning, just get neutral and fly over the bottom. Our one attempt at petting a shark came to naught as it didn't want to play. All but two of our dives were led by Paul, and there were never more than 3 divers on the boat. Paul has two crew-

man on the boat, and one snorkels above you for the whole dive, while the other follows in the boat. Never had a wait for pickup. Paul asks what you want to do and then does it. After diving with Paul for five days, I did one dive with Dressel Divers at the Iberostar. Instead of a two tank morning dive, they only do a single tank in the morning at a single tank in the afternoon, and I signed up for the Saturday am dive. When I checked on Friday evening, I was the only one signed up, and they weren't sure they would go, but when I got to the dive shop on Saturday morning, the DM said we'd go. They have a large boat, and it definitely wasn't crowded with two people. We did a dive to around 100 feet with about a 1 1/2 knot current. Abundant marine life, but not a lot of coral. It was a good dive, which set me back about as much as two dives with Wet Set. Dressel is a good operation, but they cater to the guests at the hotel who probably only want to dive once or twice during their vacation. Next time, we'll stay closer to Puerto Morelos at a smaller, more laid back place. The Iberostar was too big and the cab rides to Puerto Morelos got expensive at \$25/round-trip. ([www.wetset.com](http://www.wetset.com))

## Isla de Mujeres

**Avalon Reef Club, May 2004, Denise P. Kalm, Walnut Creek, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 90 F, choppy, surge, currents. Because of the chop, we often had to enter the water at the same time and go straight down. We mostly came up together, but small

groups meant this was not a limit. Most operators in Isla have open boats — no shade. Avalon has the best boats and a good operation. They are relaxed about time — but never start so early that impacts vacation. They have very good rental gear and most of the divemasters are excellent (local people, which we like). The diving is much rougher than expected, so bring your favorite seasickness remedy, if needed. Water on boats, but no food or other drinks — bring your own. Good rinse and hangar facilities at the dive shop. The town is like Cozumel 15 years ago — family-owned restaurants, friendly people, no chains, casual atmosphere. Island small enough to traverse in a day. Very relaxing, nice beaches, excellent food (surprisingly high quality). Avalon makes getting from the airport a snap — best place to stay if you can afford it. Easy access to other islands, if you wish, as well as Cancun, if you must. ([www.avalongrandcancun.com](http://www.avalongrandcancun.com))

## Yucatan Peninsula

**Bahia Divers, Bahia Principe, February 2004, C. Kabat.** Our third trip to that resort in 3 years. The Bahia Divers dive shop on the property is the best dive operation we have ever dived with. We have been diving for 10 years and have been in Cozumel, Grand Cayman, Roatan, Belize. Bahia Divers handle our gear from the moment we arrive till we are ready to head back home to the U.S.A. The reef in front of the hotel is several miles long. There are 3 dives per day on that reef system, weather permitting. The group also takes divers to Cozumel. Transportation

to the ferry in Playa del Carmen and the ferry ride across the ocean is included. The divemasters know the reefs and are very enthused to take the entire day to go to Cozumel. They also dive the Cenotes on the mainland and are certified cave divers. We just did 18 dives with them in 10 days and every one of them was wonderful! ([www.bahiadivers.com](http://www.bahiadivers.com))

**Dive Mike, (Playa Del Carmen), December 2003, Steven Goldstein (steven@sgarch.net) Sacramento, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 350 Feet. Water: 76 F, calm, no currents. I booked two dives to start with and decided to evaluate the quality of the diving before committing to a second day of diving the cenotes. Cenotes are freshwater limestone caves, some of which are huge (one has been explored to a length of 25 miles and still hasn't been fully mapped) with fantastically clear water. Visibilities are routinely more than 300 feet. Diving the cenotes is expensive, but worth it. I talked to other divers who bought packages that involved reef one day and cenote the next who said the reefs were not great but everyone loved the cenotes. We did two dives at Dos Ojos both of which were very easy, relatively shallow, and great fun. We were never deeper than 30 feet and the cave is very pretty. One chamber is loaded with bats which was fun to check out. This cavern is pretty popular so it can be a bit crowded. On the second day we went first to Angelita which is very interesting and very uncrowded. It is a sinkhole in the middle of the jungle that you need to pre-arrange access to. The entry is a little

challenging if you are not sure of yourself with gear on, but once you are in the water, you are in for a treat. The descent to 30 meters is through clear water with beautiful rock walls that are almost vertical. You then encounter what looks at first like the bottom. Upon closer inspection it appears to be a dense yellow gray cloud that is a layer of hydrogen sulfate trapped between the fresh water on top and the salt water below. Since debris has fallen into this cenote over the centuries, there are decomposing trees looming up from this strange cloud which makes for a very eerie appearance. As you watch divers enter the cloud and disappear beneath there is a real other worldly quality to this dive. By the way, the sulfur smell actually is discernible through your regulator — pretty strange. Once below the cloud, the dive is fairly straightforward. We descended only to 120 feet and then began a gradual ascent punctuated by a small swim-through cave on one of the sidewalls at a depth of only 25 or so feet. Our final dive was at the enormously popular Gran Cenote which is fairly similar to Dos Ojos only bigger. It was very pretty with phenomenal stalactites and stalagmites and stunning visibility. Dive Mike is a very well run operation. The shop is small but attractive, clean and with very good equipment for those who don't bring their own. Mike is a Dane who has lived in Mexico for 4 years and is a genial host. We did our dives with Mike, his friend Kim, a charming young Dane who is there temporarily, and Dai, a Welshman who has been around Playa for awhile and is a hoot. ([www.divemike.com](http://www.divemike.com))

**Maya Ha, February 2004, Patrick (langley@dimensional.com) Littleton, CO.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, choppy. We were only able to dive on the first two days of our stay, due to windy conditions on the other days. The first day we dove two dives on the local reefs. Visibility was ok but we did not see much in the way of fish. We did see a couple of barracudas, an eagle ray and a sea turtle, which did not seem to be spooked by our group. The second day, after a rough two-hour ride, we made it to Chinchorro. diving was spectacular! The Aquarium was aptly named. Visibility was 100+ feet with large schools of small reef fish hovering around the coral heads. The other sites were equally awesome, with large schools of blue tangs and jacks, fields of garden eels, and lots of rays that seemed indifferent to our presence. The quantity, diversity and size of the sponges and corals exceeded anything we had ever seen. [Eds. Note: *Maya Ha has new owners, effective July 2004, and is being renamed.*]

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**XTC Dive Center, Tierra Maya Hotel, January 2004, Bob Wojcik (bwojcik@mindspring.com) Malone, WI.** Experience: 51- 100 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, calm, no currents. I did this trip with a friend who was completing his open water certification. Eric at XTC was very accommodating and did an excellent job with my friend. He went into great detail to explain all procedures and answer all questions. Lot of times we went out with only 2 to 4 divers. Most of the sites are only 10 or 15 minutes from shore and have a real variety of terrain including pinnacles, a large chimney you drop into opening into a cavern on one side and several valleys. We saw spotted eagle rays, several sting rays, large grouper, turtles, lobster, and a variety of other fish. They will do a trip to Banco Chinchorro, which is about an hour by boat, but do require 4 divers. They also do boat trips to Ambergris Caye for \$200 a boat, maximum capacity 4 people and will help make arrangements for you to dive there. This trip takes about an hour and a half and is cheaper to do than going from Belize City if you have 4 people. We stayed at the Tierra Maya which is about one mile away and located on the water. The accommodations were excellent and included a continental breakfast which was very good. They also serve dinner and have a bar which also was very good. Internet and phone access was available at the main office. Xclak is located about three and a half hours south of Cancun by car so it is not easy to get to, but worth the effort. Because we were traveling on motorcycles I did not

bring my underwater camera gear and as a result do not know. There were no rinse tanks on the boat however the boat captain and crew member were very accommodating. All our dives were less than 20 minutes from shore and there was a limited rinse area at the dive shop. ([www.xtcdivecenter.com](http://www.xtcdivecenter.com))

**Xcaret, Occidental Grand Flamenco Xcaret, November 2003, Kim S. Devoe (devoeks@att.net) Loveland, CO.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 85 to 86 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents. The diving is average. The coral reef structure is no where near as developed as it is in Cozumel. The currents are extremely strong: about 4 knots at times. The seas can be very rough on this the windward side of the strait with Cozumel. When I told them I was an Assistant Instructor they never even checked my C card. They also were not very alert to inexperienced divers. After dropping us off in blue water that had waves running about 5 ft. in a wind of 20 knots, they took us down to 130+ ft. which really freaked out one diver that had not been diving in a while. He kept depressing his BCD deflator button instead of the power inflator as he headed for the bottom at 150 ft. I was about to go after him when he swam up using considerable effort with a completely deflated BCD. Then this diver quickly depleted his air supply and headed for the surface without a 3 minute safety stop. Then he went back down after he realized what he had done. This dive-master was not in control of his divers. The following day we had a more experienced or careful divemaster, and had

some great dives. At the dive site called appropriately, Tortugas, I saw 8 turtles. My son, a friend, and I snorkeled Heavens Door and Nohoch Cenote, which was awesome! A spectacular flooded cavern full of Stalactites and Stalagmites. The Flamenco Xcaret Hotel had excellent rooms, food, grounds and service. There is no beach, except a nice sandy inlet, which is great for the kids. Two very nice pools. Kids activities and facilities could be better though. ([www.xcaret.net](http://www.xcaret.net); [www.grandflamencoxcaret.com](http://www.grandflamencoxcaret.com))

## NICARAGUA

### Corn Islands

**Dive Little Corn, Casa Iguana, July 2004, David Richardson, Portland, OR.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 Fahrenheit, choppy. Little Corn is not yet on the diving map. It takes a trip to Managua and than plane ride to Big Corn and then about a 40 minute boat ride across the open water to Little Corn, which is a tiny island that is a true throw-back to the Carribean of 30 years ago. Relaxed island environment and excellent diving if the winds are not up. If the winds are down, this is an enjoyable week of interesting shallow diving with plenty of bottom time, unique swim-throughs and sharks and eagle rays and maybe a visit to a previously unexplored site. The dive shop crew is a fun bunch and Bryce from New Zealand runs a top notch operation and has excellent equipment. Dive sites are 5 to 10 minutes away in small boats. he best place to stay is the Casa Iguana