

flights to IAH and I was unable to return home from Bonaire and remained on Aruba four extra days. I dived with Red Sail, which I would not do again due to generally indifferent attitudes. On the wreck of the Antille, there were two dive masters and three divers which was a significant improvement over the morning dives that included 14 divers in one group. The wreck is on a relatively shallow sandy bottom and is enormous, providing habitat for moray, jacks, sergeants, many common garden eel and jawfish at the bottom and much more. This alone was worth the time and inclination to spend some extra time on Aruba. The Continental supervisor went to bat for me and granted a reaccommodation fee and bought my ticket home on American Airlines or else I would've had to wait until Saturday to catch the next scheduled Continental flight to Houston. Aruba is nice for the beach, shopping, cruise boats and glitz but for diving I'll go back to Bonaire.

Unique Sports of Aruba, Divi Aruba Phoenix, November 2004, Matt Grace (mattgrace@cox.net), Encinitas,

CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 25 to 50 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, currents. Windy and unusually rainy (it rained every day but one) resulting in poor viz and no chance to dive the Antilla wreck. Unique Sports of Aruba ran a great dive operation. The divemasters were helpful in finding critters and would go as slow as you wanted. Our boat was spacious and never crowded with only 4-8 divers, unlike the Red Sail Sports cattle boat we saw. Aruba was too Americanized. Too many American fast food restaurants and businesses

(the last straw was seeing a Hooters on the way to the resort). Everyone spoke English, the road signs were all in English and dollars were the preferred currency. The local restaurants were fabulous. Some recommendations: Le Dome, Chalet Suisse, Driftwood, Texas de Brazil, and Madame Janette. They are all superb.

THE BAHAMAS

Easily accessible from Florida for long weekends. Diving varies substantially among islands, with pretty reefs (many are affected by algae), decent tropicals, and resorts that feed sharks. Live-aboards out of Florida take divers to spots with bigger fish and more dramatic seascape. Keep hurricane season, June through November, in mind; winter weather means low 70F water, and sweaters in the evening; nighttime temperature is in the mid-60s, but can drop into the 50s if winter air blows off the continent.

Andros Island

Small Hope Bay Lodge, April 2005, Phil Tobin (Philtobin6625@yahoo.com), Portland, OR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 75 Feet. Water: 74 to 74 F, choppy. The resort is wonderful. The staff was outstanding and truly cared about its guest. The rooms were clean and comfy, with plenty of hot water and a spotless kitchen. The food was good and plentiful. The staff was great, especially the dive staff. Wonderful place just to relax. The diving was disappointing. The corals were bleached

and just fair, the lack of fish was frightening. No large fish or sharks the entire week. A few groupers. Not really a place to put your camera gear on the dive boat. Large pontoon style boat.

Bimini

K & B EZ Dive, Scuba Bimini, South Bimini Yacht Club, August 2004, Patricia Sinclair, Plano, TX. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. Scuba Bimini's boats were down when we arrived and were still down when we left. I paid for 18 dives for each of us (6 days of 3 dives a day, and of those, two were supposed to be night dives.) We were never given the option to do a night dive. We only got to dive four days, not the six days. On the day we arrived, we were told the boats had only several more hours work to be done and we would be diving in the morning, never happened. The manager promised later to make sure we got on a dive boat in the morning. At 10:30 a.m., when the manager finally showed up, we discovered he had made no arrangements. That afternoon, a Virginia Beach group arrived, to much fanfare, back slapping and flirting with the girls. We did have a boat for diving the next morning (using another dive operator on the island, K & B EZ Dive) and for the next several days. After the last dive Thursday, the DS Manager said "I don't know what we're going to do with you two tomorrow". He promised to arrange for us to dive Friday morning. The Virginia Beach group left Friday morning, DS Manager showed up at 11:00 and no arrangements had been made. He offered to arrange for us to go diving in an open 20 foot flat bottom

outboard boat used to shuttle supplies. No ladder, no cover, no tank holders or proper seats/platform to gear up and get in or out. We declined. There was more attention to individual service by the previous owners of Scuba Bimini. The hotel staff was their usual helpful, outgoing selves. Each did everything to make our stay comfortable and enjoyable. They made a birthday cake for my husband. When we got locked out of our room (husband lost the key) Percy made sure we were not inconvenienced despite their being no spare key; they got us a new one the next day. K & B EZ Dive was great at helping you find the odd and small critters on the reef. Helped to find interesting fauna for the camera bugs, too. I would dive again with KB E Dive. The diving, was fantastic.

Exuma Cays

Dive Exuma, May 2005, Nancy Collins (avschick@comcast.net), Santa Fe, NM. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 70 to 75 F, calm. Dove with Dive Exuma for two boat dives, both at 35 to 40 ft. Dive Exuma picked me up at my cottage and returned me to it after diving. Brand-new 36' Twin-Vee dive boat with head, first aid kit and oxygen on board. Giant stride entry off the stern dive ladder for reboarding. Matthew and Amie offer personalized service. I hadn't been diving in almost six years — they offered to help me gear up my tank if I needed any assistance, and do any refresher skills I wanted, besides making sure I was comfortable and "ok" once in the water. In depth dive briefings at each site. Amie and divemaster Garvin pointed out several

critters that I would not have seen.

Scuba Exuma, Hotel Higgins Landing, July 2005, Mickey Rosenberg (mickeyrosenberg@cox.net), Providence, RI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. Scuba Exuma picked me up most mornings at the Beach of Higgins Landing on Stocking Island, a mile or so across from their base on Great Exuma — their twin v cat drew 18 inches, so I waded out and jumped on a nice fast boat. The crew nice and competent. Dive sites standard Carib/Bahamas fare, with good small fish, lots of lobsters, an occasional turtle and healthy coral. Prices high: \$75 single/\$120 double, rumored to be due to the recent arrival of Four Seasons on Exuma, and resort of most of their customers! Higgins Landing is great, a quiet retreat. Cottage Eco resort (solar power, composting toilets) nice, not fancy, no ac. Amazing multi-course dinners, great hosts who built their dream after living on a sailboat for a year or so. July is hot and this time buggy.

Grand Bahama

Caribbean Divers, Bell Channel Inn, December 2004, Tom McNamara (tjmcnamara@earthlink.net), Marietta, GA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 70 Feet. Water: 76 to 77 F, choppy. Presley, the captain and owner of Caribbean Divers, enforced strict depth and time restrictions which turned out to be fairly reasonable. He did insist on guided tours with him or Jerry, his nephew. He refused to allow any wall dives. While not the friendliest team in town, they were not jerks

either. They provided a safe, efficient, no-frills service. Caribbean Divers has one boat, a 12-passenger vessel which was accommodating with the engine below deck so there were no exhaust fumes to deal with and it provided a shaded canopy. Fresh water was provided on board and Presley or Jerry took everyone's BC off after exiting the water and switched tanks for them. Water entry was via a backward roll and exit from the water via an open ladder. Dive sites were about 5 to 10 minutes from the dock and the dock was located at the Bell Channel Inn. Rinse tanks were provided on the dock. All rooms at the Inn were within 100 feet of the dock/boat. Restaurant service was inconsistent at the Inn but the food was excellent and reasonably priced. The hotel is showing the signs of a salt environment with metal rusting and tiles discolored. But it was safe and relatively clean. Dive sites were spur and groove formations with relatively healthy coral and sharks were seen on 4 out of 6 dives although no rays or turtles were sited and only one spotted moray. Abundant reef fish with large schools of Jacks. Caribbean divers provide good value for the no frills crowd.

Sunn Odyssey Divers, Flamingo Bay, August 2005, Bruce Wallace (laos61@excite.com), Indianapolis, IN. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 85 to 90 F, calm, no currents. Very personal service, excellent equipment, no more than 10 divers on boat that is rated for 20, PADI/IDC operator with excellent staff and personality. Sunn Odyssey, unlike Xanadu and UNESCO, does not do shark feeding dives. Nick drops you into Shark

Junction where the reef sharks hang out between feedings. This is pure excitement, unbridled and uncontrolled. Usually 12 to 15 sharks curious about divers. Photo ops are up close and personal. Theo's Wreck is exciting at 110 feet at rudder and 10 meters from edge of the abyss. Large sandy bottom with hundreds of yellow headed jaw fish. Over 40 buoy-marked dive sites off the south side of island. Flamingo Bay Resort and Marina rebuilt after 2004 hurricanes. Nice accommodations and staff is friendly. Need rental car (\$125/wk, drive on left). Freeport/Lucaya has all the photo shops and cyber cafes for film and digital work. DO has separate tub for cameras.

UNEXSO, Pelican Bay Hotel, Edwin L. Granite, Wilmington, DE. Experience: too many to count since 1968. Vis: 75 to 100 ft. Water: 73 to 74 F, choppy. Wonderful dive operation and guides. Many boats. Great variety of diving: shark feeds, open ocean dolphin encounters (planned), good reefs, good wrecks, and inland limestone cavern (Ben's Cave) with stalactites, stalagmites, columns, haloclines, etc. People friendly and see you are happy. Water coldest this time of year. Never more than 6 divers and many dives were just me and my buddy, with crew of 2-4! Great dive operators!

New Providence

Dive Dive Dive, Nassau Beach Hotel, February 2005, Arik Olson (arikolson@yahoo.com), New York, NY. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 72 to 74 F., choppy. Dive Dive Dive's boat was a little run down but had a great captain and dive-

master and they took us to good sites and gave us good briefings and help, but didn't take away our autonomy. I set my equipment up the first day but after they saw that I was able to do it they set it up for me, changed my tanks, double checked things etc. After a few days with them I felt like they treated me like a friend. Both DDD and NSC they don't always go out since they don't always have divers. Stuart Coves is much closer to the dive sites. The Nassau Beach hotel is fine, a big hotel, on the beach, clean, nice view from the rooms, friendly employees, lots of food options. I couldn't believe how inexpensive I got the room for (I booked a package with air through priceline.com). Nassau is a high traffic place with direct flights from many US cities and a big cruise ship port. Little undeveloped space on the island. Even the secluded beaches have houses with big fences to keep you out. Avoid taxis if possible (expensive and some drivers are nasty), the buses are easy and cheap. The Adastr Gardens (zoo) was cool, and the best experience was sitting on the beach looking at the amazingly light blue water, as well as the diving.

Nassau Scuba Center, Atlantis, March 2005, Craig Grube (grube@cox.net), Virginia Beach, VA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 72 to 76 F., calm, choppy. Dove numerous wreck sites, but the marine life was limited. The shark feeding dive was spectacular with 20 Caribbean reef sharks joining the fray. Excellent photo opportunity. Nassau Scuba Center is what I would call a mom and pop, with friendly, personal service. Small dive group and plenty of room on the boat. The boat

was a bit aged and worn, but acceptable. They pick you up at your hotel in their bus. Atlantis is an amazing resort with beautiful grounds and an 11 million gallon aquarium spread throughout. Water slides and plenty of pools, so there is fun for all ages. The food was excellent, but pricey. UW Photography Comments: Rinse tank on boat and they assisted with camera out of the water.

Nassau Scuba Center, March 2005, Thomas Wittig, Bay Village, OH.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 72 to 75 F, calm. I took my PADI Rescue Diver course with Nassau Scuba. The instructors (Neil and Ronelle) were knowledgeable and thorough. Staff was helpful. Their driver picked up from local hotels each morning. The equipment was fairly run down. The wetsuit they provided had a large hole in the torso, its replacement was not much better. BCD's were in varying states of disrepair. All the large BC's they had when I was there had weight belt straps sewn in instead of the Velcro cummerbund. Air fills were spotty. I had several tanks closer to 2000 psi than 3000 when I first geared up. The next day I checked 4 tanks before finding 2 good ones for the morning dive. The boat (Sea Hawk) was a good size, never felt crowded. The shark dive (tongue of the ocean) and the feeding are not to be missed. Close to two dozen Caribbean reef sharks appeared, with some approaching to 8 feet. Sharks were also spotted at other dive sites.

Sandals, December 2004, Beth Landis (bethelandi@aol.com), Eagle, ID.

Experience: 85 dives. Vis: 25 to 50 feet. Water: 72 to 75 F, choppy. Sandals is a resort for couples and the majority are not divers. The weather was fairly unpleasant, so the resort put us on a bus, took us to the other side of the island, and used another company's boat so we could dive. They went out of their way to try to make a good diving experience for everybody. The restaurants, food are resort quality. New Year's Eve party outstanding.

Stuart Cove's, Wyndham, October 2004, Ken Katz (kenkatz13@hotmail.com), Livingston, NJ. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 90 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm. Six dives with Stuart Cove's. A wetsuit wasn't needed, though I dive in a lycra skin and I was comfortable. The Willi Lauri was surreal looking with its rusted superstructure. The sunlight was behind the wreck as I approached it from the starboard. There were holes for entry in the bow section and you could swim along the keel line to the stern. It was dark looking forward but there was always light behind me. On three dives there were sharks, swimming pretty close. But at Shark Arena there were 20-25 Black Tips ready for their meal. We were positioned in a circle about 20 feet in diameter on a sandy patch of the reef. The divemaster/feeder slowly dropped into the middle with his aluminum crate of fish heads. Over the next 30 minutes the sharks swam all around. Coming extremely close, at one time even parting my hair. Boats were clean and well run. We stayed at the Wyndham which was nice, about 30 minutes and at least 50 or so from downtown Nassau. UW Photography Comments:

There was a rinse bucket on board and dive master made a comment that it wasn't a mask rinse off .

Stuart Cove's, March 2005, Kevin M. (kmccarter@boncosky.com), Aurora, IL. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 70 Feet. Water: 73 to 74 F., choppy. Absolute cattle car. They put more than 24 divers on the boat. It was jammed. Stuart Cove's personnel, starting with the bus driver, were downright surly. Two kids were the supposed dive masters, but they left the divers pretty much on their own. After diving with two other shops in Nassau, I learned there are much better dive sites than the one we visited, but they're not as close to Stuart Cove's dock, which makes it tougher for them to "turn" their boats two or more times. If I had to dive like this every time out, I'd quit and take up bowling.

San Salvador

Club Med, May 2005, Hal Shanis (shanis.hal@verizon.net), Bryn Mawr, PA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 125 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to F., calm. Typical of a Club Med, we did not get much of a flavor of the island culture. Instead we experienced cultural diversity among the guests, since only 10% were Americans. We met some nice people on the boat and at the family style eating tables. The room and food buffets were excellent, with at least 10 different fresh homemade bread selections. The foods would satisfy any taste at every meal. For the first 2 days there were only 10 divers on our large, double-decker catamaran. When there were 30 divers on the boat the last day, we still had

plenty of room. Convenient room to rinse and store our equipment, by the dock. The coral was beautiful and the fish were plentiful. Everyone who dove saw at least one hammerhead. The water was chilly. But after I rented a 5mm, to replace my 2mm, I was comfortable. The two boats took out different level divers. Divers on our boat were experienced and respected each other's space. The divemasters were extremely pleasant. We spotted the stingrays, flounder, shrimps and hammerhead ourselves. We did enjoy the independence of "drifting off" on our own because all of the reefs were easy to navigate. The walls were spectacular!! I would have expected divemaster who could further enlighten the guests about the beauty, fragility and interconnectiveness of the life in the sea and point out critters.

Riding Rock Inn, July 2005, Marie Hofman, San Jose, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 F, calm. The hotel is a bit worn but the wall is phenomenal! While I dove through the swim-thrus/caverns at over 100' to come across hammerheads (multiple times!) my friend, who is a novice diver enjoyed checking out creatures at the top of the wall at 40'. Always the only boat and not crowded. Dive staff was ready to help with anything, answer questions, point out creatures. Resort atmosphere laid back. Not much to do on the island but they gave us an island tour, party one evening, underwater slide presentation. Wish I had known how difficult/expensive it is to buy supplies here such as batteries/film/sunscreen.