

dive trip and Coastal had no clue what to do. 3 crew members and the captain did not want to help at all, and when asked to hand a mask to a diver, looked annoyed. Divemaster said little current but there was 2-3 knot; half of 15 divers never got to the wreck. Ladder is fins off and made for difficult and dangerous exits. 4-foot swells, which is common here. Crew could not see where we were tied in on 400-ft. wreck or how wreck lies in sand. No mention of safety equipment on board. We had to ask for mask rinse bucket and no accommodations on board for cameras.

## VENEZUELA

Los Roques is a short flight from Caracas, and is roughly parallel with Bonaire. Diving can be more edgy with the chance of seeing bigger schools. Los Frailes, the only town, is tiny and charming, and Spanish is spoken

### Las Roques

**Aquanauts, December 2004, Nancy Cheris (necjcc@ptd.net), Wellsville, PA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F, calm, no currents. The service and fun we had diving Los Frailes was exceptional. We were met at port by the owner who transported our gear and us to a taxi. We rode about 90 minutes across the island to a beach. (Free sightseeing trip!) We all helped push the boat over the sandbar then proceeded across the bay (45 minutes) to the coral islands. Pearl oysters everywhere. Water was cool by Caribbean standards and clear. The

divemasters opened the shells and let us feed the fish. This was not a marine sanctuary so we could wear gloves and knives. On the way back, the divemasters opened oysters for anyone who wished to partake. Beer was served, too. We even found a small seed pearl in one of the oysters. One of the best dive trips of the vacation. Isla Margarita is a great place to dive with Aquanauts. The only drawback is the lack of restroom facilities on land. The reasonable price of \$85 included the taxi. Be sure to have cash or travelers checks and money for tips and t-shirts. Contact Aquanauts at [aquanautsvenezuela@hotmail.com](mailto:aquanautsvenezuela@hotmail.com) UW Photography Comments: Rinse buckets on board. Cameras handed to us after we entered the water.

## VIRGIN ISLANDS, BRITISH

Patch reef diving on these closely grouped islands is easy, pleasant, and fairly similar despite which island you choose. The islands are small, friendly, and great getaways.

**Cooper Island Beach Club, September 2004, Mark & Lynn Thorne. (thorne@mindspring.com), Raleigh, NC.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. Our second trip to Cooper Island. The hotel staff and the dive staff at Caribbean Sail provide excellent customer service. Cooper Island is a quaint, out of the way, destination; free from the usual tourist trappings. You're awakened every morning by a gentle breeze and the sound of tropical birds singing outside your room. Your room looks over

the bay toward Tortola. You usually see moored sail boats and clear skies stretching to the horizon. After you take your time enjoying your breakfast, you take a leisurely stroll to the dock where the dive boat meets you around 9:00 AM. Options for dive locations and profiles are usually the diver's choice. The boats are clean, modern and well organized. This really is a diver's paradise.

**Cooper Island Beach Club, May 2005, Robert & Gloria Limoges (rlimoges@pivot.net), Poland, ME.** Experience: 101-250 dives, Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy. Quite facility with great food. Caribbean Sail Divers picked up at dock every morning and catered to dive requests. Set up all gear if desired. Good knowledge of sites. Getting there is an all day + affair. We flew into St. Thomas USVI, ferried to Tortola where we stayed overnight to catch the boat to Cooper Island which leaves "sometime in the morning" on MWF. We left the island at 7:30 AM the following Monday to catch a 9:45 (or thereabouts) ferry to St. Thomas, went through customs at the ferry landing then again at the airport for a 4PM flight out. (Can also fly into Beef Island). The stay in between was heavenly. Neat accommodation. Solar battery powered most of the day. Generator for a few hours each night so can recharge batteries. Nothing to do but relax.

**Jost Van Dyke Watersports, The Pink House, June 2005, Tim & Jill Kolkowski (tkolakowski@choiceonemail.com), Erie, PA.** Experience: 170 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 84-85 F, calm

and flat, no currents. Listen to Kenny Chesney's "Songs from the Blue Chair" CD and you'll picture laid-back island life. This is Jost Van Dyke. The tiny island has 2 natural harbors, a stunning beach, fascinating local people and beautiful scenery. Even "100 mosquito bites" as Kenny's song says. We ferried to Tortola, Virgin Gorda — hilly and gorgeous like the rest of the BVIs. The people we met were unforgettable. Really helped make the trip. Son James spent a morning at the local grade school's summer program. We stayed at The Pink House on White Bay, one of the few full-sized houses available to rent. It's 20 yards up from the beach with a big open porch, 3 bedrooms but only the 2 upstairs ones are furnished. Good snorkeling off the beach were James had his first real snorkeling experience. I can't be as positive about the dive operator, Jost Van Dyke Watersports. Colin and his wife run the business, which includes snorkel/hiking/boating trips around the area (called "EcoTours"). I prepaid for 5 days of 2-tank dives and 2 half-day Eco trips to take with my family. This was supposed to guarantee my schedule, but it didn't seem to fit Colin's schedule. It became apparent that I wasn't going to get my 7 days' worth of activities. Colin tried to cram in the Eco tours with my wife and son while I was diving, ruining the family activity I wanted to have. Colin developed some kind of ear problem and neither he nor his wife thought to refer us to an operator named "We Be Divin'" on Tortola that regularly comes to Jost to pick up divers I didn't even know about "We Be Divin'" until we were on the ferry to St. Thomas to fly

home. I ended up doing only 4 dives in 9 days, 1 of them a 40-foot/30-minutes in cloudy water so that another diver could check his ear-clearing problems. I was charged \$110 for a 2-tank dive. The other 3 dives were pretty good but nowhere near as good as Colin described them. Jost Van Dyke is a wonderful island, and the Park House is a great place to stay but expect bugs. Bring mosquito coils, bug spray, etc. and hope there is lots of wind to keep you cool at night (no A/C). If you want to dive, you'll be taking your chances with JVD Watersports. Maybe Colin can fit you into his schedule, maybe not, and don't ask too many questions because he can be condescending.

**Peter Island Resort, April 2005, Jeremy (jeremyellis@earthlink.net), Atlanta, GA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 85 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F., calm. Peter Island is amazing, with 1 resort and 1 dive operation. Both the resort and the dive shop are first class operations. You bring your gear to the dive shop on the first day and they'll set you up, rinse your gear and hang it up to dry each day. They assist you in and out of the water at each site and dive with you to offer a guided tour (not required). They are REEF field station and are happy to help you locate those hard to find fish or critters. The diving was excellent; however, several dive sites had fairly strong currents and surge. This isn't the place for wall diving, but you see a lot of turtles, some sharks and lots of schools of fish. Peter Island divers will run a dive with as few as 1 diver and up to 8 divers. I dove for a week with no more than 5 divers on the boat and most days only 3. Dive staff is

first class. They offer detailed briefings at and often draw a site map. They encourage divers to use computers and have several to rent. They have the latest Scubapro equipment to rent). They also have u/w digital cameras to try. The rooms are amazing — large beds, closets, bathrooms. No TV in the room, but there is one on the island. There is a business center with a high-speed internet connection. There are 2 restaurants — a formal one and a casual one. A first class spa was added about 6 months ago. The resort has several beaches from a completely isolated White Bay to the popular, but not crowded, Deadman's Beach. First class accommodations and diving, afternoons in a hammock, spa treatments for the nondiver and don't mind being a little disconnected (Blackberry still work on the island). UW Photography Comments: No setup on the boat, but dive staff was sensitive to divers with cameras. There was a separate rinse bucket. Photographers were allowed into water first and we handed cameras and could pass them back easily at end of the dive. Boat usually has less than 6 divers leaving plenty of space for cameras, but no specific setup area.

**UBS, December 2004, Hilary S. Ore (Den@aol.com), Vancouver, WA.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. We chartered a private boat with UBS to dive the RMS Rhone while cruising the E. Caribbean. None of the other operators could guarantee us to be back to the cruise dock by 1pm. We met with another couple who wanted to share our charter. Because there were 4 divers, the cost was below what any other dive

op in Tortola would have been. The boat was a 6-pack and with 4 divers and a DM/Captain, we had plenty of room. The trip to the Rhone was a fairly quick ride, and we quickly moored to a ball to dive the bow first. Our captain would show us the highlights of the Rhone. We descended to the wreck at 80 feet. The bow is in amazing condition and basically intact, and it was fabulous to look around inside and see the structure of the ship as well as coal that was sitting on the ground waiting to be shoveled into the boilers. The couple who joined us hadn't dove in about 4 years. The gentleman was a major air hog and within 25 min. had sucked his tank down and they needed to surface. The DM told my husband and I that we could stay and explore for a few minutes. We enjoyed another 10 min. of bottom time before heading to our safety stops. Our DM/Captain provided us with drinks and ginger snap cookies during our SI. The second dive was at 50 feet (max) at the rear of the Rhone. The stern is totally broken up, but you can still clearly see the propeller, the mast, a couple of boilers, and an anchor. Again our charter-mates sucked their air quickly, so headed back to the boat early. We looked around some more, but realized that we had only an hour to get back to the ship before sailing and surfaced with over 1100 psi in our tanks, and felt disappointment that both dives couldn't have been a little longer. We all enjoyed a few Heinekens on our way back to the dive shop, and they provided us with transportation back to the ship. Tony and Kate (the owners) were amazing to deal with in planning our charter and Kate was a

hoot when we got back to the shop after our dives.

## VIRGIN ISLANDS, U.S.

St. Croix is getting more attention from divers, thanks to its underwater topography and improved dive services. Once unfriendly to visitors, the Virgins are now a good tourist destination with decent Caribbean diving on St. Thomas and St. John.

### St. Croix

**Anchor Dive Center, December 2004, Gabriel I. Peñagaricano (guigo34@hotmail.com), San Juan, PR.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 10 to 75 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F., choppy, surge. I wish I had been forewarned of Anchor's significant limitations, both in its approach to dive safety and the handling of its finances. It is nothing short of insane to deduct \$10 from my bill for the cancelled dive and refuse to do likewise to my son. It is, of course, not the \$10 that rankles, but the absurdity of the situation. The shortsightedness of failing to grasp what those 10 would do to its standing, at least as far as I am concerned, is hard to understand. I guess that is why Undercurrent is such a valuable tool. My fellow divers will benefit from my untoward experience with Anchor. I contracted for a two-day, six-dive package and was quoted \$215.00. On the second day they took the boat out with 8-10 foot swells, 10 foot visibility and with a resort diver on board. The dive was a complete disaster and there was a minor injury to a lady while boarding. The second