

to attempt to prepare food inside the condo, with the exception of spaghetti or ramen noodles. The Argentinian restaurant downtown serves a gigantic \$15 platter of beef. UW Photography Comments: The dive boats are small and crowded. There was a small bucket for cameras. There was little room to make any adjustments with camera equipment.

**Wannadive, Yacht Club Apts., February 2005, Phil Donehoo, Dawsonville, GA.** Experience: 200+ dives. Vis: 50 to 100 ft. Water: 75 to 82 F, calm & flat, choppy. Back for the first time since 1984 (stayed Divi then). I stayed at Yacht Club Apts.. after reading about it in Chapbook. Good location, arranged a car and could not have been easier. Went out first with Phototours Yellow Submarine, and I observed total confusion. After two days (one good boat dive, I will admit), I moved to Wannadive, also heard through Chapbook. In 15 minutes more help and information than in two days at Yellow Submarine. Took us to little hurricane damage. I must give them high, high marks. Richards, Rains Fishes, Paris Bistro very good food. Only small fish and critters but in summary, Bonaire may not be a filet mignon but it is still a good prime rib.

## CAYMAN ISLANDS

Grand Cayman got slammed by hurricane Ivan in September 2004, and thousands of resident's homes Cayman were seriously damaged or destroyed. The readers' comments reflect that most businesses

are back and the reefs, though somewhat affected, are still attractive. Arguably the best diving is on Little Cayman and boats from the Brac make regular trips, though at times winter weather prevents the journey.

## Cayman Brac

**Brac Reef Resort, November 2004, Randy Cooper, Glen Ellyn, IL.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy, surge, currents. Our worries about hurricane damage were unfounded. Damage was light: the resort lost one of its two piers, and a few trees, but everything else was fully operable. Travel was a hassle because of flight cancellations, but hey UW Photography Comments: Separate areas on boats; separate rinse tanks, photo pro on site (Ed Beatty); overnight E6; some photo equipment rental and repair.

**Brac Reef Beach Resort, November 2004, Glenn Gracom, New Smyrna Beach, FL.** Experience: 500 dives. Vis: 100+ ft. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. Both the resort and dive operation were first class. Excellent location to dive and relax. We did the two morning dives six days during our seven-day visit but chose not to do afternoon dive. No night life. Beautiful grounds with hammocks and swimming pool. Hot tub on premises but not operational during our visit. Three a day buffet menus were excellent. Diving was first rate, as was the Reef Diver crew. Mick and Chris were outstanding boat operators and divemasters. Both gave excellent briefings and provided helpful hints.

Divers just sat down at back of boat and equipment brought to them. Divers were assisted putting equipment on. Excellent boat and great ladder. After dive sit at back of boat and equipment taken off, then back to station where tanks changed out for you. Everyone friendly and helpful.

**Brac Reef Beach Resort, February 2005, James Filipczak (jfilipczak2002@comcast.net), Columbia, MD.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F., choppy, surge. Fewer than 25 guests at Brac Beach, only 8 or so on scuba. Most were sun-bathing elders who, over dinner or drinks, enjoyed the big-fish tales related by divers. Coupled with accommodations in Room #121 (farthest from the bar and karaoke, but blessed with a small patio), our stay was restful. Couple of days with 65-70 degree air temperature and strong winds. Reef Divers' two 46' Newton boats were a real plus for dive-site travel. Whether just from false older-diver memories or Ivan's actual near-shore effects we perceived corals as less than vibrant, small critters nearly absent, and a profusion of both sand and algae coverage. Both reef and nurse sharks nosed around on several dives and smaller turtles appeared pretty regularly. Stonefish, green moray and viper eels, schooling barracuda, flying gurnards, large groupers, lobster, juvenile spotted drum, porcupine fish, octopus, squid, and eagle ray. Little Cayman's Bloody Bay and Jackson Bay sites were flooded with boats from LC and the Brac (fortunately no live-boards). Reef Divers supplemented their low Brac Reef diver census with several divers each day from nearby

condos. Before Ivan their 4 boats all shuttled to Grand Cayman, anticipating a major hit on the Brac. Unfortunately, all four ended up in heaps or parking lots when GC was submerged by the hurricane as it veered south. Locals say the Caymanian government banned television coverage of Ivan's aftermath for fear of tourism repercussions. UW Photography Comments: Reef Divers' boat staff was camera-helpful during water entry/exit. They have no fresh water rinse aboard, but dry space is available; separate rinse tanks await on shore. They have a good photo pro and are helpful with your digital and slide needs.

**Brac Reef Beach Resort, May 2005, Chuck Levine (cblevine@suscom.net), Red Lion, PA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm, no currents. My third time at Brac Reef. Although it was a quick weekend dive trip, it was an easily accomplished rejuvenation: flew out of PA Friday morning, on Cayman Brac by Friday afternoon; three-tank dive Saturday, two-tank dive Sunday (including an excursion over to Bloody Bay Wall on Little Cayman), eight great meals, and flew home Monday. Resort appeared to be pretty much back together after being hit by the storm surge from hurricane Ivan last summer. The docks are almost completely repaired; the dive boats and buildings weathered the fierce winds with little noticeable damage. Under water the reefs and walls appear relatively unscathed: just the occasional demonstration of residual from storm surge was noticeable. Viability was typical >100 feet in warm still waters. Sponges, soft and hard

corrals are abundant. Many juveniles on the reefs, and turtles check in regularly. Reef Divers as expected provided excellent "concierge-style" service, even for us 3-nighters! And, to the amazement of my traveling companion, every one of the dive staff greeted me by name on arrival (last visit was August 2004). Their friendliness extended to him during our long weekend.

**Brac Reef Beach Resort, June 2005, Mike M., Austin, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy. Good resort with a friendly and helpful staff, great food, and good diving. The diving would have been better if not for tropical storm Arlene. We only missed one afternoon but the water was choppy and the visibility reduced. However, the dive crew did an excellent job and we still had a good time. It was nice to walk to the back of the boat and have them bring your gear and then your camera. True valet service! A good mixture of reef fish, rays, turtles, coral, and an occasional shark. You could turn almost every dive into a wall dive by swimming out a little ways. The MV Tibbetts is a fun ship wreck with open passage ways that are easy to swim through. Not one thing outstanding, but all together it was a great trip. UW Photography Comments: There was a medium sized table for cameras on the boat but I would have preferred a large bucket filled with water. The divemasters would get your camera from the table and hand it to you once you were in the water.

**Divi Tiara Beach, December 2004, Michael Bergen (mbergen@anacreon.**

**com), Oakland, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 45 to 70 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm, choppy, surge. The resort had big clean rooms, clean running water, Jacuzzi (which we ended up using as a gear rinse tank) in the bathroom, lots of good food, and great grounds crew. And a well-stocked bar. Hands down the best crew ever. They not only knew the water, the boats, and all the dive sites, but took care of all their passengers so we all felt quite spoiled. The crew changed over our tanks between dives, made sure we all stayed hydrated, and even rinsed our gear in fresh water at the end of each day. And all smiling. Boat was in fine shape, checked over each night, and ran like a dream even in rough water. The general manager, Max, made sure we all had enough supplies, even when one whole plane's gear didn't arrive for several days. And Liz, the Dive Operations manager, kept everyone straight on every boat on every dive. Mic's wetsuit had gotten blown off of the dock during one particularly windy night, and was found 2 weeks after we got home. Liz sent an email to tell us it was found, and is sending it to us. Scott gave a great dive briefing. One family was certified on Christmas, and their dive master went down wearing a Santa suit along with all his gear. They have photos of each person sitting on Santa's lap at the bottom. Little Cayman's Bloody Bay Wall covered with tons of corals and sponges. One dive had rather strong current, and we surfaced at an empty mooring ball between 2 boats. Our boat was upcurrent, so Mic and another buddy hooked onto the mooring line and waited for the boat while Beth swam downstream

to the next boat to let them know about the current. Good thing we had those bright orange safety sausages so that we were easily visible. 4-1/2 days of diving in near-perfect conditions, then a strong current picked up with 25 knot winds and 10 foot swells. Only dive we didn't get to do because of local conditions was a Russian destroyer, the Tibbiets. No camera table on the boat, but there was a dedicated camera tank. Great photo shop with experts.

**Divi Tiara, December 2004, Ron Hyatt (rhscubadiver@aol.com), Arlington, TX.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 30 to 70 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F., choppy. Great visit; cannot control the weather, but what the heck. Nice room, well maintained and good maid service. Great food; custom breakfast, casual lunch and terrific dinner. Cliff still rules breakfast and lunch. Check in/check out went smooth. Water temp 77-78; water was choppy, windy during the week. Dive operations were good, our DM, Scott, did a nice job with his knowledge, briefings and patience. With the photographers, he was good. Got to dive our plan except for trip to Little Cayman, which is understandable. Boats in good shape; dive shack/dock still being replaced. Coral is recovering; saw all the usual critters, but seemed to see lots of turtles, rays also. Had a diver incident on Little Cayman trip, but the crew and Max, the general manager, got the diver to medical help and to Grand Cayman as quickly as possible, where a full recovery was made. Boat captains and dive masters did a nice job for the photographers; gave us pointers and tips where to find the best critters.

**Divi Tiara, December 2004, Janet Czapski (info@divetravelservices.com), Farmington Hills, MI.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 F, choppy, surge, currents, no currents. Our first dive was on the North Side of Cayman Brac and everyone enjoyed the 79 degree water and 100' visibility and then the wind kicked up and so did the seas. The remainder of our week was spent trying to find the calmest water on the South Side. Our dive guys, Gary and Gavin, worked their tails off trying to find dive sites suitable for our mostly experienced divers and a few newbies so they weren't blown off the dive sites! Visibility remained good all week but currents were strong along the walls on the South and the shallower dive sites were surgy. There was no hope of getting over to Bloody Bay Wall on Little Cayman or even over to the North Side until later in the week. Thursday we finally made it to the "Wreck" and had excellent visibility and a good dive, but getting back on the boat in 5-8 foot seas taxed our poor guys terribly. Dive Tiara's protocol is to have each diver sit at the back of the boat and help them on with their BCD, check their gauges and assist them off the dive platform. At the end of each dive, fins are handed up to the dive guys and after climbing up the ladder, to sit back down while your BCD is removed and tanks are swapped out for the next dive. One afternoon the resort canceled the afternoon boats because of safety concerns as the winds seemed to pick up significantly as the day progressed. The staff was impressive with their cheerful, helpful attitudes and concern about diver safety. The new bar

is larger with a much greater seating capacity. The Sunday night manager's cocktail party is held between the bar and the dining room with a slide show featuring the best of the Brac both above and below the water. The week in review show was held on Thursday night this week because of the planned New Year's Eve festivities Friday evening. One group diving on Christmas Day had a Santa under water with them and photos were taken of all the rest of the divers sitting on his lap with beautiful corals, turtles and sponges as background! Only one E-6 entry was submitted for the weekly photo contest so it claimed first place automatically. It seems the underwater photo world has joined the digital revolution and there were lots of qualified entries into the digital category. The winner of each category is awarded either a T-shirt or a hat as a prize and also entered into the yearly photo contest which will reward the winner with a week's stay at Divi Tiara. Cameras were well-handled on the boats; camera rinse tank available on the boats and on the dock. No camera storage facilities available in the dive deck area; they needed to be carried to/from the rooms and charging was done in the rooms. E-6 processing on site; computer access available to digital photographers to burn their photos to CD if they wished.

**Divi Tiara, March 2005, Sandy Jones (sandystormj@hotmail.com), Glen Allan, MS.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. The resort was accommodating. The food was fairly good in the all-inclusive plan. We could get to Little Cayman 2 days to dive Bloody Bay

Wall. They had a nice photo shop, and offered just about anything you wanted or needed for rent. They were helpful to photographers.

**Divi Tiara Beach Resort, May 2005, Kevin Robertson (kelseyfox2@cs.com), Knoxville, TN.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 70 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, surge, currents. Divi picks you up and takes you to the airport no charge. friendly staff. The resort buildings and guest rooms are a little antiquated despite updates. Guest rooms are basic but clean. Our air conditioner quit working and maintenance was quick to solve the problem. A/C went out again our last night. Request a room in the furthest east two buildings for best beach access and ocean view. The resort sits on a large beautiful sandy beach loaded with palm trees. Plenty of lounge chairs. A couple restaurants on the island are too far to walk. The food at Divi is only above average. Great breakfast with French toast, pancakes, eggs, fruit etc. The bar outside is fun with a great view of the ocean. It's a divers hang out. We took a short walk to Brac Reef Resort. We didn't see inside the rooms, but it's appearance is nicer than Divi. Their dining room is much nicer. However, the Divi beach is much nicer. Dive Tiara is an excellent dive operation. organized with experienced staff. They operate with one 46ft and three 38 ft. boats. They are clean and roomy even with sixteen divers. Tables and rinse tanks for cameras. Most dive sites are approx a twenty minute ride. Fruit and cheese crackers at surface interval. Loose diving restrictions. 110 ft depth and 500+ PSI back on boat. No time restrictions. No divemaster in

the water. You are on your own with a buddy, good dive briefings. All the dive staff members were professional, knowledgeable and friendly. One day they take you to Little Cayman for a couple dives at Bloody Bay wall. Outstanding dives. The dive sites at Brac are typical Cayman. Beautiful walls, swim throughs and sandy bottom areas. Lots of turtles, nurse sharks, stingrays and huge groupers. Plenty of macro life. Lots of the small reef fishes. The seas and currents were unusually strong. Your dive gear stays on the boats through your stay. They rinse your gear and return it to your room on day of departure. Your gear remains in the sun while being stowed on the boats. Dive shop doesn't stock much so purchase what you need before you leave home. They have a good photo shop. Cayman Airways small plane (approx 25 seats) to Brac was full. Some passengers including me had some luggage left in Grand Cayman due to space issues. The missing pieces were brought to our room that evening.

**Divi Tiara, May 2005, The Meyers (jmeyers2@charter.net), St. Charles, MO.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. Wonderful experience, from the diving to the food, to the island itself. It is a charming island that beckons to be explored, underwater and on land. It is safe, friendly and laid back. The hotel and rooms are not fancy, but they are clean and comfortable. The dives boats were big and roomy. The crew was great. You walk to the back of the boat, put on your fins and while sitting on the swim step they bring your BC/tank, help you put it on and help you to

stand up. You do a giant stride and you're in. Wonderful photo shop. Digital photos and video films of your dives are available to purchase. UWP can enter the weekly photo contest and they also show videos and slides of weekly dives around the bar in the evening.

**Divi Tiara, June 2005, John Thurber. (New23home@aol.com), Tallahassee, FL.** Experience: over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 110 feet. Water: 82 to 84 f. calm, currents. Divi tiara has recovered well from hurricane Ivan. The timeshare renovation is estimated at 45% with the entire second building yet to do. New 46-foot boat a real plus. With two ladders and a wider beam, it is a stable platform and quite comfortable. The divemasters are knowledgeable and have people skills. Their briefings are almost as good as ocean frontiers. The use of dry erase marker boards helps a lot. there are no Caymanians on the Tiara dive team. I miss the banter and grass roots atmosphere that they used to provide.

**Divi Tiara Beach Resort, June 2005, Jerre B. Sadler (jerlynsad@aol.com), Bartow, FL.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. 3d year in a row staying at Divi Tiara Beach Resort, a well-run dive resort. Managers Max and Liz's customer service is reflected throughout the staff at the resort from housekeeping to maintenance to the restaurant and to the dive operation. Their "can do" attitude is refreshing. Our accommodations were kept clean throughout our stay. The air conditioning was more than adequate to keep up with the Brac's humidity and the beds were comfortable but a bit lumpy. You only

handle your dive gear upon arrival and departure. You use a provided mesh bag to store your gear on the boat or to carry it with you on shore dives. The big boat (Brac Fever) which was clean, well-maintained, stable, and fast. Liz and Scott happily provided as much assistance as you needed. Every dive was preceded by an in depth (oops!) site briefing. Your gear has been set up for you and is brought to you at the stern before your dive and taken from you upon your return to be set up for the next dive. One or the other of our dive crew was always in the water with us pointing out highlights. Our group (Neptune's Underwater Tours) enjoyed 4 three-tank dive days, with 2 two-tank days, that included 3 Little Cayman trips and three Brac days. Night dives are available as are tanks for shore diving. Both diving and camera instruction are available. Cars can be had to tour the Brac, and bikes for the athletically inclined. Kayaks are available and fishing charters can be arranged. The food and dining facilities are excellent for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Chef Cliff and Karen will keep you fed and entertained for breakfast and lunch, and Patricia and the remainder of the staff take care of you for dinner. You will not lose weight during your stay. Max does a nice welcome party. He also does one slide show midweek and another one later with slides shot by guests. The outside bar is available for post-dive and later libations, and the karaoke can be loud and late. Cayman Air did better this time meeting schedules and getting all the luggage here. UW Photography Comments: No dedicated camera area on board boats, camera rinse tank on

board, crew attentive with cameras, excellent facilities for film processing at resort and Barbie(photo pro) always available to help and to produce good dive videos and stills.

**Divi Tiara, June 2005, Beth Landis (bethelandi@aol.com), Eagle, ID.**

Experience: 100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm and flat, no currents. Valet dive gear service — you don't touch your gear, except for wetsuit, until it's time to go home. My husband took an underwater photo dive class — excellent instructor. Great dive conditions, huge diversity of fish, short boat rides, lovely coral.

**Divi Tiara, June 2005, Mike Traylor (borderhart2@hotmail.com), EL Paso, TX.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 , calm, choppy, no currents. No need to bring gear bag — it's provided with a numbered tag to store your gear at the boat. The meals are buffet-style and breakfast is cooked to order. The cuisine is not gourmet but hot and tasty with plenty of choice. The floor in the dining room is always dirty and I never spotted anyone mopping. The dive sites are loaded with fish but no big stuff — only an occasional eagle ray or stingray seen. Octopi on two different dives. We missed a dive day due to the proximity of tropical storm Arlene and missed going down on the Paul Tibbetts. The boat crews were knowledgeable and enthusiastic and helpful with gear and showed a lot of stuff when diving with us. There are DAN O2 kits on the boats. The rooms and mattresses have seen better days, but the air conditioning worked well. One must wait a minute

or two for the hot “cold” water to cool at all taps. The lodging environs are quite pleasant with a nice open-air bar.

**Reef Divers, Coral Sands Condo, March 2005, Tim & Jill Kolakowski (tkolakowski@choiceonemail.com), Erie, PA.** Experience: 170 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 78-80 F, calm and flat, no currents. The Chapbook reports that Brac’s diving is not quite to the level of Grand Cayman’s East End and Little Cayman, and I agree. But Brac’s diving is still pretty good. Our 5 days’ diving was highlighted by 2 days at Little Cayman and the final morning on the Destroyer with an in depth tour deep inside the wreck. We dove with Reef Divers and they were excellent. Great dive guides, helpful, and enjoyable company. Of the 3 Cayman Islands, we thought that Brac offers the most of what we like above the water — non-touristy, great local restaurants, the chance to meet friendly locals and see how they live day to day in their little piece of paradise. If you go, spend a couple of afternoons exploring the bluff and the caves. We paid just \$1,100 for the condo and all my dives during Easter week. To top it off, we met a wonderful family that lives 30 minutes from our house.

**Reef Divers and Dive Tiara, La Esperanza, August 2005, David Prichard & Lily Mak (prichdave@aol.com), Dallas, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F, calm. Dive operations are next-door neighbors to each other on the western end of the island, so they mostly centered their trips on the northwest shore that is usually calm. The southern shore has

nice walls, but can be choppy when the wind is up. Both Reef Divers and Dive Tiara offer two-tank trips over to Little Cayman’s Bloody Bay Wall at least once a week. We dived “a la carte,” meaning we choose each day, depending upon our mood, either to shore dive all day or catch a few boat dives in the morning and then shore dive. We checked with each operation to see where they were planning to dive that day and then chose the one that fit our plans. Reef Divers had the better boat and pampered the guests more, but Dive Tiara’s crew was more personable and fun. Reef Divers keep us supplied with tanks and weights, plus threw in a dive-flag float for our shore dives during the week. Most dive sites are accessible from the shore, but easier to get to by boat. We dove the M/V Keith Tibbetts, the former Russian/Cuban patrol vessel, from the shore, but it was about 200 yards out for an energetic swim. We dove it again by boat and it was easier. Diver propulsion vehicles would be excellent for shore dives though we didn’t see any at either dive operation. Lots of great wide-angle photo opportunities along the walls, the nice Tibbetts wreck and even the new (but not completed) Lost City of Atlantis sculpture garden at Radar Reef. Lots of turtles, eagle rays, large sting rays and a few nurse sharks, a good assortment of the usual fish. Great time diving from the northern shore. All sites are marked with mooring buoys and the dive operators have directions to the popular dives. Greenhouse Reef (named because you park near a house that is green) and Bert Brothers Reef (named after a band of brothers whose first names all

ended in “bert” like Robert, Norbert, etc.) were favorites. Bloody Bay Wall was well worth the short ride to Little Cayman, but Brac seems to have more to offer more both below the waves and topside. Brac had lots of hiking trails and caves to explore. We stayed on the north shore at La Esperanza in a three-bedroom house that was delightful. The owners, Bussy and Velma, stocked our full kitchen with goodies and brought a huge slab of mahi mahi to cook on our gas grill (plus a key lime pie). Bussy has a restaurant and bar on the shore that’s famous for its jerk chicken. Brac may not be an exciting place like Grand Cayman, but it’s definitely got the better diving. Photography Comments: Reef Divers’ boat had a camera table and separate rinse tank for cameras in protected area. Dive Tiara didn’t have a table, so cameras had to be stowed under bench on life vest. Both operations handled cameras carefully in and out of the water. Tricky entering water from shore dives due to sharp volcanic rock (very little sand), but many dive sites had stairs or trenches cut out to deep water.

## Grand Cayman

**Dive N’ Stuff, December 2004, Jack Augsbury (augsbury@candw.ky), George Town.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, I live in Cayman most of the year. Post Ivan I have dived on the East End and West Side of the island and the reef was largely unaffected by the recent storm. Dive sites are clean with no debris and marine life looks good. There was a large amount of sand movement

on the West Side but the sites look good. I have dived with Ocean Frontiers on the East End who back to normal and looking good and with Red Baron on the West Side who have 2 boats operating. The limitation is not with the diving or dive operations but with finding accommodations. Rental cars are available and many restaurants are open. The island is in the process of reconstruction and many places are using this as an opportunity to upgrade their facilities.

**Divers Down, The Grand Caymanian, June 2005, Bill Stacy (wtwoforon@aol.com), Ruskin, FL.** Experience: 500+ dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 83 to 87 F, choppy, surge. Grand Cayman was devastated by hurricane Ivan in September 2004. The Grand Caymanian Resort is a time share and it is going through growing pain. They should not have held up their grand reopening until they had things under better control. While my nondiving spouse enjoyed the island, I did not. It is far too crowded and commercialized. I was here 25 years ago and it was wonderful. The water and the diving are still superb. Divers Down is a good operation with knowledgeable people. As with most Grand Cayman operators, they follow strict rules regarding depth (max. 110 feet) and time. Maximum 40 minutes. Even though computer diving and 1,000-1500 psi in reserve, we were required to surface. Restaurants are expensive. We needed a rental car as the resort is out of the way. Seven Mile Beach looks like the Jersey shore — totally built up. The Ritz Carlton is a monstrosity and an eyesore.

**Divetech, Cobalt Coast, December 2004, Bob and Teresa Banker, Cumming, GA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. Divetech knowledgeable, helpful and accommodating. We were allowed to dive our own profile. Grand Cayman is restrictive, fewer shore sites to choose from, but it did not detract from our experience. We dove 16 times (11 boat, 5 shore) in 5 days all on Nitrox, 33% was the average O<sub>2</sub>; \$10 extra per tank. Bob had fun with a scooter, but Teresa thought he was harassing the barracuda he was chasing. We made two good shore dives using Divetech tanks at the abandoned Coconut Harbor resort just South of Sunset House. Cathy Church's studio was open and we bought her excellent new coffee table book with informative details on the Internet. We didn't try diving from establishments that required us to use their tanks. Our rental car from Marshall's let us dive at the non-Divetech sites, and let us eat at good restaurants such as The Wharf. We were there over New Years, the winds are stronger and tend to be from the NE. This makes the swells crash onto the Cobalt Coast pier, so no shore diving. It also make visibility poor at Turtle Reef — 20 ft until you get below 65 ft. Stingray City was closed due to heavy waves for a few days. The island is still recovering from Ivan, lots of dead trees lying along roadsides. The coral seemed to be affected. From afar it looks like sand was covering it; up close, it was dead coral. Fanning it with our hands didn't move any sand. There are still lots of healthy coral and beautiful sponges. Fish abound, lots of juveniles. The reef is recovering, but slowly.

Rinse tank on boat. We always took the camera back to the room to change batteries — they last for over two dives. We never open the camera on a boat.

**Don Foster's Dive Cayman, Comfort Suites, July 2005, Tripp Jones (Tjones@sc.rr.com), Columbia, SC.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 125 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm, no currents. Don Foster's was a well-run operation. We stayed at Comfort Suites and shuttled or drove our own vehicle to the old Parrott's Landing facility, just south of downtown Georgetown. The boats were clean, and quite adequate. The crew, especially Tom, Jason, Sterling and Isabel were good. Comfort Suite was clean and certainly adequate for divers. A restaurant on site, Stingers, was good, for both lunch and dinner. The coral looked fine, considering Hurricane Ivan ran through last September. There were good fish life, turtles, and the reefs still looked healthy. Trinity Caves is still a superb dive. The food on Grand Cayman is quite pricey, such as The Wharf, Reef Grill, and especially the Cracked Conch, which was not as good as previously.

**Fisheye of Cayman, Avalon, May 2005, C Vernon Hartline Jr. (hartline@flash.net), Dallas, TX.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. While I have been a diver almost as long as Ben Davison, I still love Cayman. Ben and I have disagreed for years about diving in Cayman. Cayman was where I learned to love to dive and it's still a damned good place to go underwater. The island was hammered by Ivan. Trees are down and some places are still shambles. The blowholes are

gone (filled up); however, the reef survived nicely and the diving is still easy, convenient and a dam site better than most places in proximity to the USA. Fisheye has a comfortable boat and the divemasters (Matty, Sean and Joanna) were friendly and competent. (Note from Ben: I have always written well about the East End and North Wall diving, and was the last guest at my long lost favorite place in Caribbean, the old Tortuga Club. Hurricane Gilbert ripped her up while I was there in 1989).

**Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, February 2005, John Wycoff (wycoffs@aol.com), Haslett, MI.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. These condominiums are all ocean front with large spacious balconies overlooking the ocean just steps away. Our 2 bedroom unit had nearly 1200 square feet of room and was furnished in beautiful colors and with great furniture. Large kitchens with Corian countertops, dishwasher, refrigerator with ice maker, stove with range and microwave. A washer and dryer are found in each unit and allowed us to bring much less clothing (low-mid 80s with no rain!). Our oceanside bedroom had a patio door opening onto the balcony. Each bathroom was spacious with a Jacuzzi bath tub. Three televisions, DVD player and stereo are in each unit. Daily maid service and clean plush towels and bathrobes were an unexpected luxury. Ocean Frontiers is a true 5-star dive operation. From the minute you book your stay and diving over the Internet with Lesley, to the greeting you receive from Fraser or Simon at the front desk, you feel important. Every member of the staff will know your name by the second day. You

drop off your dive gear when you arrive and each morning you will find your gear already set up on the dive boat and ready to be used. The dive sites of the East End are only 3 to 20 minutes from the dock. A thorough briefing, with diagrams, is given by the competent dive staff before each dive. The staff insures that each diver enjoys their dive experience, no matter what their level of experience should be. The reefs on the East End are spectacular. No significant damage from the hurricanes. The intricate swim throughs with incredible wall diving. The fish life from the small critters to 10 foot reef sharks are spectacular. Lobsters, crabs, turtles, angel fish and all the usually Caribbean fish are in abundance in the waters of the Cayman Islands. Water around 80 degrees with visibility around 100 feet. Fairly constant wind typical this time of year, so we spent much of our dive time on the leeward south side of the island. A couple to days we did venture to the north side (20-30 minutes from the dock) for more great diving. Ocean Frontiers has two dive boats. The Ocean Hawk is a 40 foot V-hulled dive boat with a large dive platform and two ladders to ease you way back onto the boat. A clean water bucket is available for your camera equipment along with a dedicated camera counter. This boat can carry 12 divers for two-tank dives comfortably. You can sit on the bow of the boat and enjoy the ride with you feet hanging over the edge. A head in on each boat. The other boat is a catamaran style boat named the NautiCat. It is an older boat but adequate for diving. Although it is a little slower than Ocean Hawk, it functions quite well. It also

can handle 12 divers for a two-tank dive without problem. Compass Point beach is great with plenty of chaise lounges, and a pool with new large surrounding deck. Bicycles are no charge. Kayaks are available. There is little traffic around this side of the island so a slow gentle walk either along the road or ocean side provides a great end to a great day. A restaurant with fast food (hamburgers, chicken and pizza) is across the street. Several fine restaurants are just a few minutes via car.

**Ocean Frontiers, Reef Resort, March 2005, Roger, Donna & Kate Soape (ras@rasoape.com), Houston, TX.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 90 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F, calm. The Reef Resort is nice, clean and comfortable — a short drive or shuttle ride from Ocean Frontiers dock. It is on a pretty, broad beach. Rooms feature kitchens — nice for breakfast (visit the grocery store on your way from the airport) as dive boats leave the dock about the same time the Reef's restaurant opens. The Reef's staff members were friendly. The food was good, especially casual lunches in the bar area, even if the service was a little more "laid back" than even island time should afford. Featuring good food and good service were Cayman Kai Yacht Club and Portofinos — both easy drives from the Reef, and the Lobster Pot in George Town. The East End is far enough away from George Town's hustle, bustle and cruise ships. (At least six were in port at the same time one day. To watch is to see why the rest of the world often holds we Americans in less than the highest esteem). Yet the East End is close enough to town to make afternoon excursions

for shopping or evening trips for dinner. Hurricane Ivan may have clobbered things topside but, underwater, things looked surprisingly unaffected. The south side was hit hardest by the storm and we saw some damage there to sponges and corals. The north side — prevailing southerly wind flow in the summer probably makes summer a safer bet for diving it consistently. The walls are amazing. The sponges and corals appear pristine. Lots of nice swim-throughs. Excellent overall fish life, too. Only one day in our whole week of diving did we even see another dive boat. On that day we found the Cayman Aggressor moored at one of the better north side sites. Ocean Frontiers staff always seemed cheerful and happy to help. Two boats leave the dock at 8:00 a.m. each morning with 10-12 divers each for a two-tank dive. They then do it all over again at 1:00 p.m. On our one afternoon dive Ocean Frontiers seemed to rush things a little less than on our morning schedule. One day our second dive was done as a drift dive. All other dives were from moored sites. The day's first dive is guided, with the Cayman 100' depth restriction heeded — if not exactly strictly enforced. A boat's divers are split into two groups with a time-staggered start. For the second dives (which were consistently the best second dives we have done anywhere), divers were on their own (or guided if they so chose). Seems to attract more experienced divers. We did not see as many turtles, eagle rays or sharks (other than nurse) as we had expected. Overall fish populations looked healthy, with good numbers of larger adults.

**Ocean Frontiers, Turtle Nest Inn, April 2005, Craig Neal (canfsa@rit.edu), Pittsford, NY.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 87 F, choppy. Diving was a bit rough with windy conditions, but OF always finds good dive sites no matter what the weather. Dove three times with our two girls, 13 and 15, certified at OF two years ago. They took a refresher and were doing great by week's end. The staff treated them great as they do all divers. Lots of fun and pride to have your kids dive with you. Turtle Nest Inn is the best, despite getting pounded by Ivan. The property looked great. There are not many places where at the end of your stay you settle your bill and then hug the innkeeper's good-bye.

**Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, April 2005, John Wentworth (johnwentworth@wentco.com), San Pedro, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. The south side of the island was hammered by Ivan. There is only one road to the East End. I've been there 20+ times. It didn't look at all as it did the last time — all the vegetation, trees, shrubs, that were on the water side of the road were on the inland side. Houses were gone or had huge holes through them. The Cayman Diving Lodge was one of those. Tortuga was trashed. We stayed at Compass Point. Except for the ground floor rooms, you couldn't tell there had been a hurricane. Ocean Frontiers has completely replaced the Dive Lodge as the premier East End operation. Nothing special: just, very good. Good captains. Good DM's. Good boats. Great diving. East End diving is high drama. The wall is

sheer and brightly colored and filled with soft corals and many fish. The spur and grove formations of the second dives are filled with tunnels and rooms with tarpon hanging out staring at you. The tarpon are the best. Years ago, one led me around his neighborhood and then brought me back to where we began. Cooked our own food in our kitchen.

**Ocean Frontiers, The Reef Resort, June 2005, Joni & Bobby Lamb (scubalovers@comcast.net), Richmond Hill, GA.** Experience: 101-250 dives, Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. One of the best organized operations we have experienced. The staff is friendly and accommodating. Nitrox is available. The "Nauticat" dive boat was well designed and fast. The boat was roomy for 16 divers and a crew of two. Fresh towels, drinking water, lemonade, ice chest, separate mask and camera rinse tanks. The briefings were informative and they guide each dive. You can dive your own computer profiles. East End walls and reefs are in good condition. The sites are great for experienced and conscientious divers, but beginner and damage-prone divers should stay away. If sites are too choppy on the South side, the less choppy North side was only 30 minutes away. Accommodations at the Reef Resort were excellent and the East End is away from Georgetown. Get a room with a kitchenette and rent a car (they drive on the left). Go to the supermarket near the airport and get groceries. Stay away from posh restaurants and the fast food chains. Look for places to eat that the locals go to — roadside pubs or outdoor barbecues, ask the dive shop

for recommendations. Vivine's Kitchen, half mile from the dive shop, is Vivine's house where you order at her back door and eat on picnic tables behind her house. Her prices were reasonable and a great place to have lunch. We love to these places off the beaten path.

**Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, August 2005, John Wycoff (wycoffs@aol.com), Haslett, MI.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 85 to 88 F, calm. The coral was spectacular. The water clarity was the best we have encountered. The East End reef structure is unbelievable. The pass throughs and deep crevices lead to the Cayman wall which immediately drops to 6,000 feet. There are multiple caverns to explore. Snapper Hole and Babylon were two of our favorite sites. The night dive offered twice weekly was great. The 3-tank safari dive, which included a one-hour dive at sting ray city was spectacular. We frequently encountered large sea turtles and nurse sharks. Caribbean lobsters were on nearly every dive. Ocean Frontiers is a 5-star dive operation. Great care is taken to ensure each guest has a memorable trip. By your second day all the crew knows you by your first name. Your gear is set up on the boat each morning. You needed weights are placed next to your tank. At the end of your 2-tank dive, you are given a large crate into which you place your gear. The staff takes the crate from the boat, rinses all your gear, hangs up your wet suit and BC each night. The next morning all your gear is on the boat and ready to go. The staff shows you different dive sites each day. A thorough dive briefing is given along with a drawing of the site. You can go

with the dive masters or dive alone with your buddy. There was never any pressure to surface early. You could always dive your computer. It is just a few steps from your room to the dive boats. We stayed in a 2-bedroom, 2 full-bath condo. Each condo has a balcony that overlooks the ocean, no more than 50 feet away. The views are breathtaking. Each unit has a washer and dryer, a stove, microwave, dishwasher, kitchen utensils and an electric coffee pot. Each bathroom has a Jacuzzi tub and shower. These units would sleep six adults easily with two Murphy beds. Each unit has 3 televisions, a DVD player and a stereo. There are several good restaurants with just a short drive. Portifino's is 2 miles away and offers Italian fine dining on the ocean's edge. Try Roland's Gardens. Just a short drive from Compass Point you will receive a 5-course gourmet meal. There is no menu and no charge for the dinner. All Roland asks for is a donation into the bucket as you leave his beautiful outdoor gardens. UWP Photography Comments: All Ocean Frontier dive boats have fresh water rinse tanks for UWP. They have a dedicated dive table of all cameras. They are careful and cautious with all your photography equipment.

**Ocean Frontiers, Reef Resort, September 2005, Chuck Wohlust (gchas1@ad.com), Winter Park, FL.** Experience 200+ dives. Vis: 100+ feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm and flat, surge. The diving was fair except for Turtle Pass, which was an excellent wall dive. Coral was not in good condition, few tube or sponges. The Reef Resort was excellent; all units oceanfront. Very relaxed and good food. Ocean Frontiers staff,

Sally, Karen, Spencer and Russ, were excellent. Probably the most courteous, hard-working, helpful, attentive staff I have ever seen. The Ritz Carlton of dive operations.

**Wall to Wall Diving, Plantana Condos, August 2005, Jim Reynolds (cjrynlds@koyote.com), Commerce, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 Feet. Water: 84-86 to F, choppy. We hit the tail end of Dennis and Emily, so we had some bad weather. Otherwise, some chop on north wall, but mostly fine. Vis murky sometimes — lots floaty goo from bad weather. Wall-to-Wall is the best we've dived with in 20 years of diving. Good boats (2), max. of eight divers. Friendly, knowledgeable staff. Snacks between dives, freshwater shower, Nitrox available. When necessary, experienced divers separate from beginners. Guides in water to point out cool stuff on both dives of 2-tank runs.

**Wall to Wall Diving, Sunshine Suites, August 2005, Mark Goldsmith, Livingston, NJ.** Experience: 175+ dives. Vis: 100+ feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm and flat, surge. Our 2nd year with Wall to Wall. This time we took our 16-year-old son. Our best family dive trip ever. Troy (DM) delayed his retirement so he could dive with our family. We also dove with owner Giles. As always we received TLC. First day we did a shore dive at The Turtle Farm. It was excellent, but surge and surface conditions made this an advanced dive on that day. Every subsequent dive offered something special. We saw a hammerhead, a free-swimming 6-foot green spotted moray which actually nipped at my fin, scorpion fish and spotted

eagle rays. I would much rather see 1-2 free-swimming rays than participate at the petting zoo of Sting Ray City. GC was largely recovered and the reefs appeared healthy. Sadly, there is still much devastation when you drive north or south from Seven Mile Beach. Sunshine Suites is refurbished and a great deal. The restaurants are pricey but offer the best food in the Carib. And Wall to Wall still offers the service that will bring us back next year.

## Little Cayman

**Conch Club Condominiums, June 2005, Steven Andrew Dingeldein (sdingeldein@triad.rr.com), Burlington, NC.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm, fourth trip as a family to Little Cayman diving with Conch Club Divers. Bill Christoffers (owner), Tim Jackson, and Ann Walther work together well and are funny, informative and helpful. Do not try to outwit Tim especially, because you won't win. That doesn't mean I didn't try, nevertheless. We dived three dives a day for eight days with great weather, good visibility and saw a ton of stuff. They pick up your gear when you arrive, take it to the boat and change the gear for you between dives. They have a wonderful 42' Newton dive boat with a good sized camera table. You take your fins and mask to the back of boat, sit on some benches and they slip your BC on. Up you stand and giant stride away. Bill likes the big stuff in the ocean better and Tim and Ann like the little stuff better so it is great to go with all of them on different sites. Tim is the expert pike blenny finder and head shield sea slugs (moving dots of dirt)

and both Tim and Ann find pipefish I'd simply pass over as sea trash. So many little things that I dove mostly with a macro 60mm lens. We saw an octopus out in the open feeding, manta rays, southern sting rays. There seems to have been a decline in the number of green morays but saw a few spotted morays. Turtles are plentiful as are nurse sharks and we saw one reef shark. We got to tour the island with Linton Tibbets whose son Dan owns the Little Cayman Beach Resort. We stayed at the Conch Club Condos that are still in good shape though the unit we stayed in is due a paint job and new carpet. They provide bikes to ride back and forth between Conch Club and the LC Beach resort but now you have to lock your bike. I actually had a bike in good working order with gears that actually worked. Bill, Tim and Ann were great about carting me and my 19-pound camera back and forth. The food at Bird of Paradise restaurant is quite good. A new chef has introduced more variation. The burgers at the Hungry Iguana have been quite good. UW Photography Comments: Boat is dive friendly. The rinse the cameras with fresh water hose and have a nice-sized table for cameras on the boat.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, August 2004, Peter Hartlove, Longmont, CO.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 F., calm. Went with a group of 25. The food is buffet style for every meal and the food is good and plentiful. The food and staff were fantastic. We had tuff weather for the first day and a half but then the seas laid down and Jackson's and Bloody Bay were fantastic (for Caribbean). Each

day the visibility got better and better, able to go the extreme east end for a great deep dive. The dive staff is good, we had the guys and the other half of us had all the women. Lots of friendly turtles, one of our group unfortunately didn't listen to the dive staff and grabbed a turtle and it quickly swam away. otherwise, if you observe them, they swim right up to you and will even open their mouth and hit your dome port, fun! The corals were healthy, no real signs of the hurricanes last year. Good assortment of the Caribbean reef fish but quite varied, just great! No rinse tanks onboard but the crew sprays the gear off with fresh water.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, February 2005, Donald Hoft, Holliston, MA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 74 to 77 F., calm, choppy, surge. The weather was windy for several days, restricting access to some sites but after 10 days you get to visit most of the good ones. The corals were healthy, but that the fish population was down considerably from previous visits. We had heard that they were seeing different fish after the last hurricane, but we did not find this to be so. Excellent dive destination essentially unaffected by the storm. The (low) fish population could just be seasonal. The water temp was as low as I have ever seen it here, 3mm was not enough for this old body to stay warm. Some people were renting heavier suits. Boats are in good shape, the crew was fine, the temporary pier is as good as needed. Great place to hang out while not diving. UW Photography Comments: On board and ashore facilities were all that was necessary.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, March 2005, Steven Evers (steven.evers@thermo.com), Boulder Creek, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 74 to 77 F., choppy, no currents. outstanding dive operator. A hardpan top at 15 to 35 feet and then a drop to 6000 feet lush in healthy hard and soft corals and a generous assortment of fish! A normal day included two dives in the morning, followed by a return to the resort for lunch, and then one afternoon dive. Boat was brand new and well designed for diving with lots of room. DMs Dottie, Adrienne, and Ralphy were knowledgeable and pleasant. Detailed map on a white board and a thorough briefing. During a surface interval Dottie did a rendition of a sprinting lettuce sea slug which was unforgettable! The resort is laid out in a two story fashion with most of the rooms facing the bar and swimming pool, although there are also a number of rooms that look out over the ocean. We had an ocean view room, which was great, but it was downstairs which we didn't like due to the sonic transparency of the ceiling from the foot traffic above. Not what I would have expected from a room advertised as "luxury". I would suggest an upstairs room if you want quiet in the evening. The bar was always a lively place to hang out before dinner, and the bar tender was a personable cute blonde. The food was buffet style, plentiful, varied, and quite good so bring your appetite!

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, May 2005, Bradley Blanchat (bradleyblanchat@charter.net), Fort Worth, TX.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 83 to 86

F., choppy. Reef Divers dive operation was first rate. They took special requests for sites, were accommodating, and the dive guides were friendly and informative. While they let you do your own thing, or follow the excellent guides, they limit your bottom time. They are not super strict, and no one came down on us, but in an effort not to be the rogue divers, we came up around the time they set. Of course, we both came up with well over 1,000 psi in our tanks. Nitrox fills are \$10 more so I felt like we were tossing \$3 in the pond after each dive. The diving was amazing. Huge cudas, giant swim throughs out into the deep. Vis good, guides great, healthy environment and tons of fish. Room cheesy but large enough. Food okay. We feel better with Pre fixe menus instead of buffet style. But it was okay. The resort itself is okay. Way over priced drinks and they nickel and dime you to death. We spent close to 3K for the ocean front, and they charged us \$1.20 for copies of log book pages. That is petty. Water shortage was not clearly defined upon arrival. The orientation is Monday and we came in on Wed. Because of this, we were made to feel like criminals for asking for dry towels. Again, 3k for a vacation should equal absolute service. Lots of talk of sea lice, wife got hit first day with one, but nothing after that. We did keep the Sea Safe on, however. Nothing else to do but dive, drink, float in the pool and sleep, oh yeah, and feed the huge iguanas.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, May 2005, Phil and Grace Hampton (gracphil@palmnet.net), Orlando, FL.** Experience: 2,300 dives (Grace 1,000).

Vis: 50 to 70 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. Fifth trip to Little Cayman Beach Resort. The boats are great, Newton 42s, and the crew make diving easy by bringing your tank to you to don at the dive platform. We had a group of 22 and all were happy with the dive operation and resort. Three meals a day, buffet-style service. Plenty of good food for even finicky eaters. Great and plentiful deserts. Diving 3 tanks a day, I gained 2 pounds. We saw lots of turtles and got lots of close-up turtle photos. location.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, May 2005, Rod & Ruth Fleming, Cleveland, OH.** Experience: 100-125 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 82F. Boats were the best we have been on. The crew explained all the features and safety equipment. Divemasters Dottie and Amanda were helpful, gave a good briefing before each dive and if they took us to a site and it didn't look perfect then we went somewhere else. The day we arrived our gear was taken to the boat and we never touched it until the day before we left. As long as you had a computer you could dive your own profiles. Or you could follow one of the divemasters and they would show you the best things. Most dives were at Bloody Bay Wall. Of the 17 dives we did in six days there were only three dives that were only OK. The rest were great with plenty of coral, fish, turtles, lobsters and rays. The meals were buffet and were the best we have had at a dive resort and better than some cruises we have been on. There was plenty of fruit at every meal. About halfway through lunch and dinner they would bring out trays of pies and cakes that were fabu-

lous. The front desk and kitchen staff are helpful and friendly.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, June 2005, Patricia Harmon (pharmon@insight.rr.com), Westerville, OH.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. The staff was terrific. You put your gear on the boat at the beginning of the week then they set up your tanks for every dive, you sit on the stern and they bring your tank to you and help you get into your BC. Then after the dive you sit on the stern again and they remove the tank. You could dive by yourself or follow the leader. We usually followed the leader because they tried hard to find things and did a great job of leading divers through the many cuts of Bloody Bay Wall (BBW). A sign in the dive shop suggests about \$90 for tips for a weeks diving per instructor. They are, therefore, quite motivated to be helpful. The most challenging part is the boat ride to BBW. A barrier provides a protected anchorage at the resort but when you exit the cut it gets rough for about 15 minutes until the boat rounds the point for BBW. We anticipated missing at least one day due to roughness, but this time we went out every day for a morning two-tank dive and an afternoon one-tank. The one scheduled night dive did not go due to rough seas. LCBR has three dive boats all of which are well made and maintained with camera tables, tank racks, excellent ladders and a head. The room was well appointed and air conditioned. We had an ocean front room that costs more, but had a great view. Exceptional mattresses, and the room was clean and well maintained with plenty of

hot water and good water pressure. The food was wonderful. Three meals a day are provided buffet style in the dining room. A variety of choices at all meals, including salads and vegetables and the desserts were sumptuous. The resort has only 40 rooms so there was never a long line at the buffet. BBW is a thrilling site as you float over a 6,000 foot drop off. There was little to no current. Turtles were on nearly every dive plus a few nurse sharks and one Reef shark. Several rays were spotted and we watched a ray feed in a sand flat. All the traditional reef fish were present in good numbers as well as a pet-able grouper, "Benjie." There were numerous hard and soft coral and sponges. Not much to do on this tiny, undeveloped island; there's a nice pool, a tennis court and a pleasant bar. UW Photography Comments: Camera tables on boats were great for day boats. Photo shop had capacity to download from card to DVD.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, July 2005, Jeffrey Bell (jeffkbell@aol.com), Mableton, GA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 87 F, calm, no currents. Similar to Cayman Brac Beach Resort but newer and a bit larger. There was a new dock courtesy of Ivan; all boats (Newtons) were in great condition. Resort facilities were in great shape. Reef diving as good as any I have had in the Caribbean. Divemasters Coco and Amanda were exceptional, Elisa the videographer did exceptional job (My wife had her do a private video that was professionally done!). Some reef still recovering from storms, but fish and reefs are in excellent condition. Three dives per day (two morning and

one afternoon). This operation really tries hard to satisfy from accommodations to diving.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, August 2005, Greg Yarnik (gregyarnik@comcast.net), Palatine, IL.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. The LCBR is small, all-inclusive, and entirely dive-oriented. Not much to do at the resort or on the island (resident iguanas and booby birds outnumber humans). Rooms are well-appointed, air-conditioned, and have views of the pool or beach/ocean. They serve guests three all-you-can-eat meals of terrific food each day. Fresh produce, local seafood, home-baked goods, and daily ethnic offerings and island-fare provide a wealth of culinary options. There was so much food that my wife and I could only bring ourselves to eat two meals each day. Reef Divers are professional, experienced, and knowledgeable about the Bloody Bay Wall Marine Park. Your dive package includes two morning dives plus a third after lunch. Night dives are once or twice per week. Shore diving is only available outside the resort as the shallow house lagoon is thick with turtle/eel grass. Three 40+' Newton dive boats comfortably support all dive guests, who remain on the same boat with the same two or 3-person crew during the week. Divemasters Nicky, Elisa and Christophe are knowledgeable, extremely hard-working (after you set up your scuba unit the first day, you never have to do so again during your entire stay), personable. An open-air, roofed drying room is next to the gear rinse tanks. Reef Divers staff will rinse, store, and

set up your BC and reg each day. Nitrox and rental gear available. Dive site briefings are detailed and supplemented with colored-marker sketches. Depth limits are enforced at 100' for the first morning dive and they allow computer divers to dive their own profiles and strike out on their own. Bloody Bay Wall was lush and healthy, with teeming fish and invertebrates. Out in the deep blue along the wall were pelagics like eagle rays, sharks, and turtles, and some or all could usually be spotted on at least one dive each day. Downtime is usually spent hanging out at the bar or lounging by the pool with a good book and trading "fish stories." Excellent full-service photo shop; boats well-equipped for UWP; secure, padded table for storage, rinse water, etc. Staff helpful.

**Little Cayman Reef Resort, August 2005, John McGinnis (chopjohn@verizon.net), Cambridge, MD.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, choppy. Six of the nine folks had been here 4 years prior and loved it! What a change. Most of the group followed the baggage restrictions religiously since we flew Island Air last time but expected more from Cayman Air this time. Guess whose bags got left in Grand and who got ALL theirs, overweighted and all. Next AM tried to reschedule the AM two tanker for a couple of one tank afternoons. Thought we were asking for the moon though later we noticed the boats were almost empty for some of the afternoons. No biggy, they loaned us gear for the am dives and since we had our computers in carry on, we survived nicely. Dive boats crew almost

universally unfriendly, appearing to be overworked and with lousy morale. One of our crew was particularly unfriendly: "Do Not Touch Anything". I tried the old trick of scooping up sand on the bottom when I had spotted a sting ray hoping that it would close in to investigate and give me a photo op. A sharp tap and shaking finger was my reward with the follow up tongue lashing about viz and little sand burrowers being disturbed. Have you ever watched a big ray hovering along the bottom?? Talk about kicking up sand and disturbing the critters! Resort staff unaccommodating. Although we booked five rooms requesting "as close as possible", the rooms were at three points of the triangle representing the farthest points in the room chart. This was with five months advance notice. And of course change was impossible. Last trip food was great: a steak night, lobster night, grouper and snapper. This time, roast beef night was the highlight. Think college food with a Caribbean twist.

**Paradise Villas, December 2005, Mike Hynan (hynan@uwm.edu), Grafton, WI.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F., choppy, surge, no currents. Paradise Villas was only slightly damaged by Ivan, which actually added much more beach in front of the villas. Before Ivan hit, they sent the dive boat over to Grand Cayman. After Ivan, only Banana Wind's hull was salvageable. New motors were bought, so BW was in service for our visit. But it was missing the old canopy superstructure, so our rides were wetter. Winds died down somewhat, so we were able to travel to the Bloody

Bay side for each trip. The reefs appear largely undamaged by Ivan on both sides of LC. As usual Vince, Rod, and Marc made every trip wonderful. We saw our first seahorse diving on the Gay's reef site on the S. side and Jerry was there to greet us at Marilyn's Cut. The Villas were as comfortable as ever, although some food selections were in short supply at both the grocery store and Hungry Iguana. Ivan's clean-up also led to a more decorative and functional arrangement of stones in front of the villas. I also figured out how to catch bone fish this trip. I used a medium spinning rod and 10-12 lb. test. Squid can be bought at the grocery store. I used a #4 hook with split shot 12-18 inches above. A smaller piece of squid (about 1/2 in wide) cast on the sand flats close to the buoys N. of the Villas will catch different species. About every 5th bite was a bone fish. Hold on!

**Pirate's Point Resort, March 2005, Robin Abrahamson Masson (ram@wigginsandmasson.com), Ithaca, NY.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, no currents. A funky, laid back place. Everything is taken care of. The food is excellent, varied, and plentiful. Wine is ok and plentiful. Open bar for guests (no drinking in the AM before diving!). Lunch served about 15 minutes after returning from the morning dives. Cocktail hour before dinner, with hors d'oeuvres. After dinner, dominoes with Gladys. A good dive op, with plenty of DM attention. Small groups on the guided tour. Several eagle rays and a turtle or 2. A nice boat and fun ,informative DM's who respect — almost a reverently — the reefs and

life. Accommodations are decent, and it was worth it to pay \$10 extra a day for A/C. Lots of hammocks in the shade for afternoon naps. Gladys is a genial hostess and made us feel like family. I was disappointed that there were not as many fish, and few large fish — considerably down from when I was at Bloody Bay 4 years ago. But the corals are healthy despite the big hurricane last year, and there are lots of juveniles. Dive staff serves and cleans up from breakfast, making dive departure at 9AM, and return at 12:30 or 2PM. No afternoon dives, infrequent night dives. No processing available on the island. Boat had a bucket, but no dry table for changing film [for those dinosaurs, like us, who still use film] or messing with cameras.

**Pirate's Point Resort, April 2005, Dean and Diane Levi (dean\_levi@nrel.gov), Indian Hills, CO.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. During our first three days north winds were 15-20 mph, which prevented us from reaching Bloody Bay and Jackson Bay walls. During the last half of the week winds dropped, allowing us to dive 3 days on the north side. Pirate's Point has a 42' Newton dive boat called the Yellow Rose with a capacity of 20 divers. The boat is comfortable and there is a head. There were never more than 9 divers. The capacity of the resort is about 20 people in 10 cabins. Usually some guests are not divers. The resort staff does double-duty as dive masters, waiters, cleaning staff, etc., with a total of 5 DMs/instructors on staff. Most have been at the resort for five years or longer. They add DMs to the boat as needed to keep dive groups

at 6 or smaller. All diving is from mooring buoys. Generally dives are 'follow the DM', but once the staff becomes comfortable with your diving abilities, they are fine with you doing your own thing as long as you come up with 500 psi, don't go into deco, and stay above 100'. Diving on the south side of the island consisted of tongue and groove reefs leading to the wall top at 60 feet. The walls on the south side are cut with crags and canyons and are less vertical than the north side. There was healthy coral and lots of the standard fish, with frequent large groupers and turtles. We also found numerous swim-throughs. Bloody and Jackson bay walls were spectacular. Some are perfectly vertical with such abrupt and sharp drop-offs that it felt like soaring out over the top of a skyscraper. Although fish life was not abundant on the wall, there were large, colorful sponges growing horizontally. The walls in Bloody Bay start in 20B25 feet of water. We would start with 25 minutes at 70'-90' on the wall, then ascend to the wall top for another hour. One day I was five minutes short of three hours of bottom time in two dives. There was a myriad of fish action on the wall tops. Many turtles, a few eagle rays, a black tip reef shark in the blue, and on one dive a team of three groupers waiting out an angelfish they had trapped inside a coral head. Mixing Bowl is a large open bowl of sand where Bloody bay and Jackson bay walls meet, swept by a nutrient-rich current; we hung around with a school of swirling ocean chubs, and watched schools of French grunts, black durgions, Creole wrasse, and a five-foot goliath grouper. On one dive we found a six-foot bar-

racuda lurking under the boat. Daily they clang an old scuba tank with the bottom cut off for breakfast at 8:00, then for diving at 9:15, then 2:00 for lunch (often minutes after the dive van returns), then happy hour with hors d'oeuvres at 7:00 and dinner at 7:30. Because the dive staff also serves meals and are frequently around, we quickly got to know them. Though the resort was near capacity, it felt rather deserted most days. The dining room is cozy with 4 tables for 6 guests at each table and you sit wherever you want. We got to know nearly all the guests, as the daily seating arrangement is a bit like musical chairs. Owner Gladys Howard has written cookbooks and ran her own cooking school. We have stayed at various resorts and live-a-boards, and the food is the best we have ever had. Breakfast included such goodies as eggs benedict, lunches always included several choices of freshly prepared hot and cold entrees, salads, etc., and dinners ranged from paella, to prime rib, to tuna steaks to fajitas to barbecued ribs and chicken; always with a generous array of delicious side dishes, salads, fresh fruits and vegetables and desserts. You may not want to visit Pirate's Point is if you are trying to loose weight. UW Photography Comments: Boat included a large, carpeted camera table in the covered area of the boat. DMs were strict about cameras only on the table. The cooler used as a rinse tank was sometimes crowded.

**Pirate's Point, August 2005, David Reubush (davereubush@cox.net), Tono, VA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 80 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F, calm, no currents. This was our 7th trip since

1995 to Pirate's Point. We started going right after we got our subscription to Undercurrent and received a booklet on the best places to dive as an inducement to subscribe. Ben was right then and it is still our favorite place. There are at least 10 of us who meet there the same week every year. The resort only has 10 rooms so there are never more than 20 people on a 42 ft. Newton. The second week there were only three of us, which made it like a private charter. We spent two full weeks of wonderful diving. The water was warm and flat, the visibility was great, and we saw lots of stuff, both large and small. We found one Goliath Grouper, saw several reef sharks, lots of nurse sharks, several eagle rays, lots of southern sting rays, and many turtles. On the small side we saw two sea horses (my wife actually found one), three pipe fish, a baby trunk fish, and lots of varieties of other small fish. There is little turnover in the staff so you see the same divemasters year after year. They know your skills and know the reefs well. It is amazing the stuff they can find. The food is to die for. The chefs (and I mean chefs not just cooks), Cam and Diane, have been there for years. We always gain 5 pounds and have to work hard to get it off in time to gain it back the next year. UW Photography Comments: Dedicated table on boat for cameras, small rinse tank on boat strictly for cameras, larger, dedicated rinse tank back at resort.

**Sam McCoy's Dive Lodge, September 2005, John C. Lewis, DVM (madvet@earthlink.net), Madison, FL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 84 F, calm, no currents. The walls are fantastic and pristine — no

diver damaged and dead corals. Swim thru tunnels are great. Saw turtles on every dive. 25 lb grouper that you can pet and follows you around. Only place that closely rivals Bloody Bay Wall is Cat Island, Bahamas. Boat was spacious and provided fruit snacks on surface interval. We were the only divers on the only dive boat operating the days we were there. Accommodations at McCoy's are a little rustic. Rooms were large, A/C excellent in 2 of 3 rooms and problems in the 3rd room cheerfully resolved by owners. Food was excellent, but not fancy. Water pressure was a bit weak, but we generally had warm water for showers. This lodge has served divers since 1984 — first dive lodge on the Island. Afternoon dive was a good choice — diving is cheaper than the bar, which does have out of this world sunset views. The staff was friendly, but not obtrusive. The island is small and safe. we didn't even get a key to the room as they don't consider security an issue and most lodge employees are family members. There is 1 store, 1 church, 1 grass/gravel airstrip, 1 school, 115 people and some of the best diving in the world. Easy travel via Cayman Airways. Other dive resorts on LC are a little fancier, but are on the other side of Island from Bloody Bay Wall. Our package price of \$ 496/pp included 3 nites lodging, 3 meals a day, 2 days of 2-tank AM boat dives, unlimited shore dives, taxes, etc. We added a PM boat dive for \$50/dive.

**Southern Cross Club, August 2004, Michele Joyce (michelejoyce@cox.net), San Diego, CA.** Experience: 0-25 dives. One of the best dive operations imaginable. The club has it own pier

and boats, so no shuttles or cattle rides. Also does night dives. The accommodations are fantastic. 900 feet of private white sand beach, just 13 airy, ocean front, well-appointed and air conditioned bungalows. Fantastic fresh and tropical dining alfresco. And it is also conveniently located by the infamous Bloody Bay Wall.

## CURACAO

A short hop from Bonaire (and a nonstop flight from Miami), Curacao's colorful, historic, cosmopolitan Dutch Willemstad offers international shopping, casinos, night life, and the rest of the island has hiking, an orchid-filled forest, attractive rural villages, windsurfing, half-naked Europeans, and excellent restaurants. Dive resorts prefer the relatively undeveloped northwestern side, where there's outstanding beach diving from protected coves that are generally calm and easily accessible by car. The windward side is usually too rough to dive, but the diving is good if the wind shifts from its prevailing pattern. Many divers who cut their teeth on Bonaire now prefer Curacao, which has much less diver traffic and development.

**Caribbean Sea Sports, Marriott, December 2004, Glenn Tuck (GTuck2119@hotmail.com), Mechanicsville, VA.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, surge. Curacao has little to offer in the form of larger fish; however, the reefs were beautiful, as were the colorful &

plentiful fish. Marriott was fantastic.

**Caribbean Sea Sports, Marriott Beach Resort, August 2005, Scott Bardowell (scottbardowell@comcast.net), Chattanooga, TN.** Vis 80-100 ft. Water: 82 F. The Marriott house reef is in exceptional condition. The affiliated dive operation, Caribbean Sea Sports, is friendly, well staffed, and efficient. Most of our dives were right from shore to the house reef. \$9 for tanks and weights on the first dive of the day and \$6 for each dive thereafter on the same day. My children, son 14 and daughter 12, find a 40 minute boat trip boring and get a little sick in choppy water. This shop did not pressure us into guided dives or boat dives (where they can make more money) and supported us on the shore dives. I used their tools at no charge to hook up my dive computers, which I took on the plane as carry-ons. They watched us leave on our shore dives and made sure we came back in the same numbers. They could tell relatives exactly when we went underwater. Entry at the house reef is in a protected bay. The reef is 20 yards from the entry and begins about 20 feet deep. The reef is a nice slope (almost a wall) from 20 to over 100 feet. Currents run from left to right. Sometimes they can be strong; you don't get as far as you think at 1500 psi and will drift back to your exit, which is well marked, fairly quickly. A spotted eagle ray posed for pictures. We saw crabs, lobster, file fish, scorpion fish, squid, turtles, balloon fish, just about every type of eel, great coral, and schools of beautiful fish. No big fish. Perfect place for a family that dives together. For more experienced divers, boat dives (or alternative shore dives)