

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)

provide additional challenges. The dive shop offers motorized water sports activities. They have lockers, so you can store your gear and not haul it back to your room. The Marriott was clean. The food was great. They offer an on-line all-inclusive deal that can't be beat if you eat a lot and like to drink after dives are finished for the day. The pool and pool bar were fantastic. Near the dive shop is a large hot pool. The dive shop does not have bathrooms and they close at 5:30. However, they will give you a key to the shop if you want to go on a night dive. It is close to the rooms, so after the dive you can sprint to your room if your bladder is small. On the beach, wearing a top is optional, so you need to keep an eye on your teenage sons. I, of course, always looked in the other direction. Do not pay to dive at the Sea Aquarium Animal Encounters. Vis was less than 5 feet and the sharks, which you feed through a chain link fence (or Plexiglas) did not eat. This experience was not as advertised. They did not refund our full payment. Our kids did love the Dolphin Encounter at the Sea Aquarium, however. Long distance from the room phone was \$6/minute. Purchase a long distance card for \$6 for 15 minutes. Marriott offered broadband Internet for \$15 per day.

Habitat, November 2004, Conrad Kantor (conkantor@aol.com), Westlake Village, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 Feet. Water: 82 F, calm. Last 4 years I have gone annually to Curacao. Lions, Papagago and Hilton hotel. Best diving is at the West end. Habitat has a great dive operation. Excellent shore dives. November was the rainy season, too many mosquitoes. Off insect repel-

lent was of no help. Three days after I returned I developed a skin infection from mosquito bites and developed cellulitis. Foot and leg swelled to twice its normal size. I spent 6 days on IV antibiotics in the hospital and I am still on antibiotics. I sent an email to Habitat to rethink their man-made lagoon which is a breeding ground and to spray more often. At breakfast we used napkins to keep the mosquitoes off our face. Off did not help, need something with DEET. I have traveled extensively to Central America and never had anything like this. Just unlucky, but would suggest to others: Use DEET, and use an alcohol wipe for mosquito bites, scratching only drives the infection in.

Habitat Curacao, January 2005, Mick & Elaine Jerome, Beloit, WI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, surge. Habitat Curacao was excellent, dive spot, shore diving was outstanding, we even found Chester the green moray eel. Lots of reef fishes, seahorses and the coral was in great shape. The food was good at the restaurant, the view from our room was spectacular. Ann Marie was helpful especially when we had to come in on a huge surge on our last dive, the dive boat couldn't dock so we all had to swim in, never been in a surge before; like that, the first huge surge in 7 yrs. and it only lasted that evening. For anyone that has never been there before; they have a shuttle bus that goes into town twice daily. We could just do the shore diving and be happy.

Habitat Curacao, May 2005, Henry C. Campbell, Fife, WA. Experience: 1800+ dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 82 to 84

F, calm and flat. This place is a little far from town. They have a van that will take you in. The diving is great. You can do your own dive profile and go solo.

Habitat Curacao, August 2005, Daniel L Crawford, (diverdan@adelphia.net), Morgantown, WV. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 90 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm, no currents. More than pleased with Curacao and Habitat Curacao. The restaurant gets old after a few days with it's food selection, but do not miss barbecue night.

Habitat Curacao, September 2005, W.L. McDade, Athens, GA. Experience: 100+ dives. Vis: 50 to 70 feet. Water: 84 F, calm and flat. The vis was down from what I expected, but the warm water (wore only a bathing suit) made up for it. The small fish were plentiful, unlimited short and night dives. Water was beautiful, and accommodations good. Even my wife, a nondiver, enjoyed it.

Ocean Encounters, Curacao Seaquarium, August 2004, Tim & Jill Kolkowski (Tkolakowski@choiceonemail.com), Erie, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy, no currents. We went for the Kids' Seacamp. For \$600-\$800 your kids get first class treatment and activities. www.kidsseacamp.com. They are treated to dolphin, seal, and other animal encounters. They do ocean art projects and learn about the ocean and environment, taught by first class instructors. Depending on their age, they either learn SASY, scuba in the pool, or get their junior open water certificates. Parents either dive or take part in other activities, having the days to themselves because the kids are busy

from 8:30-3:30. The kids had lunch every day and 3 group dinners, plus a pizza and movie night. We parents dove with Ocean Encounters, a well-run organization. We always dove together, sometimes up to 20 on a boat, but after the first day it was like diving with friends. OC took us along the southeast coast where we found walls near shore, healthy reefs and nice coral. The surface tends to be a little rough. We found squid, seahorses, frogfish, drumfish and octopus, all pointed out by OC's helpful divemasters. During one surface interval we toured a 17th century fort, during another we came across a pod of dolphins and let them play in our boat wake. Two days whales were spotted offshore and several lucky folks jumped in one of OC's boats for a closer look. One of the Caribbean's best wrecks, the Superior Producer, is close enough to shore near the main harbor of Willemstad to shore dive. Many sites OC took us to can also be shore dives. Martin and Brenda at Silent Immersion pick up and drive you to different shore diving spots. Curacao's beautiful west coast is lined with beautiful beaches and little villages tucked into picturesque bays. The underwater topography is different from the east side — you'll think you're on a different island.

Ocean Encounters, Breezes, February 2005, Richard (rviss@aol.com), Caledonia, MI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F., no currents. The resort is all inclusive, and I really enjoyed the buffet three times per day. Custom made omelets for breakfast every day. Lots of variety for all meals, and the food was good. Many activities besides diving to

choose from if you wish. Or you can just lounge on the beach with your free pina coladas after finishing your last dive. (alcohol included too). Free shuttles to town. The package included one free shore dive per day, including all equipment. Ocean Encounters has an onsite satellite shop at Breezes. The Seaquarium is where their main shop is located. They provide cattle boat diving at it's finest. Their boats take up to 20 divers, and two of our mornings had at least that many divers on board. They had a group of about 40 divers from Rhode Island at Breezes. Ocean Encounters split them into 2 groups on 2 boats. They were great people and made us Michiganders feel welcome, but 20 divers on one boat is a lot. When the divemaster would spot something wonderful like a seahorse, there was a lot of kicking and scrambling. They leave the dock at Breezes at 8:30 AM and usually don't return until noon or 1:00PM. No heads on the boats, so either relieve yourself through your dive skin or try to hold it for 5 hrs. Minimize the morning coffee. They are safety conscious. First aid kit on board. They took a census before and after the dives. First dives usually lasted about an hour, but there was no strict enforcement. We were free to wander from the group following the divemaster if we wished. Divemasters were good at spotting cool stuff. They promised us and delivered seahorses on 2 different dives. Curacao diving was good, including in front of the resort where we saw 3 different kinds of filefish (white spotted, orange spotted, and scrawled) on the same dive. Saw a pair of squid right in front of the resort. Curacao is loaded

with fish and healthy corals. Huge fan corals, brain corals, and purple tube sponges. There aren't many large fish. We saw one turtle, a few barracuda, and some supermale stoplight parrotfish, balloonfish, scrawled cowfish, many trumpetfish, lots of spotted drums, large schools of blue chromis flowing like a river down the face of the wall.

Ocean Encounters, Breezes, March 2005, Tracy Ruttan (truttan@yahoo.com), Bracebridge, ONT. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 22 to 25 Celsius, no currents. Ocean Encounters staff is amazing. Family run, super friendly. Breezes includes one daily outfitted shore dive, can go with a buddy, or at 2:30pm with the group. After a week of diving with them, I was invited to a BBQ at their main shop at Lions Dive, down the beach. They even picked a bunch of us up in their boat. The boat dives were great, though when I booked the Klein Curacao trip (2 hour ride to an uninhabited island), we went on the tourist boat 'The Mermaid'. Big old boat, people hurling over the side the whole way:) Diving was out of a Zodiac, roll out, pulled back in. Turtles 'guaranteed' here. Huge green moray followed the group. Mushroom Forest/Watamula (awesome corals) dive was done on another companies dive boat (All West). Great boat, informative captain. Saw lobster, barracuda, lizard fish. Night dive pricy without my own gear. (\$35 from shore, \$47 from boat if the group was more than 5 +\$25 for gear). Request Flamingo or Pelican wing of resort — quieter than the Tower, and all rooms are ocean view. Some rooms run down. Trade winds help against

the heat, so wear shorts at night! Duty free at the airport not as cheap. UW Photography Comments: Camera rinse bucket ended up being used for masks, as there were only 2 people with cameras on boat :(Rinse hose for shore dives. Divemaster would call me over for any interesting fish/critters. Oc.Enc. has photographer on staff who will take pics for you/of you.

Sunset Waters Resort, November 2004, Edward Towles, (slebeau2003@yahoo.com), Florence, MA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 84 F., choppy. Most rain in a week since 1945. Kevin, Kurt, Lynn and Carlos from Sunset Divers were friendly and professional. I wanted to see frogfish and sea horses. Carlos and Lynn came through for me on both. A lot of small creatures, great coral, turtles, eagle rays, yellow sting rays and eels, eels, eels. I saw no sharks or real large fish. Resort manager was always there to make sure you were happy. Food was good. The chef was flexible in making something you liked if there wasn't anything on the menu that suited you (within reason). All of the staff was excellent! Friendly, service was fantastic, and, accommodating! Had great diving, made a lot of new friends and really enjoyed our stay there.

Sunset Waters Resort, April 2005, Laszlo & Amy Ilyes (amy_laz@netzero.net), Richmond Heights, OH. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F., choppy, surge. We've been shore diving the Netherlands Antilles for >15 years. Sunset Waters Resort. (see Undercurrent Vol. 20, No. 2); all-inclusive, fine food and nice

accommodations. Jim and Gaynor Hunter made a tireless effort to make sure we were taken care of. They've a great staff and there's live music with dinner most evenings! We rented a large-cab pickup truck at the airport from Hertz for US\$360/wk with A/C, and manual transmission. Port Marie and San Juan Area: Rent tanks at Easy Divers (Habitat). They're open 7 days/wk, charge US\$10/tank, and have a wonderful pier allowing easy access to Rif Saint Marie, their "house reef." You'll need to sign a waiver. There's a clean rinse for gear and cameras. Anne Marie and Harry run a no-hassle operation that's clean, courteous, and professional. To access the San Juan sites, you'll need to drive west and look for a rock on the roadside painted like a dive flag (site numbers 21, 23, and 24). Since access is through private land, you'll be charged NAFI\$5 by the owner as you drive through. You can choose from Playas LARGU, Shon Mosa, and Mansaliña. Nice sites. Sunset Waters -B Dive Harry's Hole or, if the current is right, Mako's Mountain. Rent tanks at Sunset Divers (no affiliation with the resort) for US\$10.50/tank. You fill out a waiver and attend a mandatory, scheduled, group orientation before you get tanks (yuk). Our scripted "orientation" (including tips on avoiding sunburn, dehydration and rough surf) lasted 40min while we dodged wasps that landed on us. When we were asked to surrender our C-cards to them during our stay, we objected and were allowed to keep them. There is a clean rinse for your gear but nothing suitable for cameras. The "camera rinse" is an unmarked garbage-can that guests routinely

used to discard cigarette butts, candy wrappers, tissues, and drinking-cups. (My Ikelite SLR camera housing and Substrobe flash were a constant source of amusement to two of their staff members; I wish they'd paid as much attention to their not-so-funny camera rinse). The current on this "house reef" varies in strength and direction. It's usually mild and to the west (dive to your left, Harry's Hole). On occasion, it was strong to the east (go right, Mako's Mountain). Nice varied reef activity in both directions. In addition to the cliché macro opportunities, sizeable schools of bait fish attracted some large porgies, schoolmasters, barracudas, barjacks and crevallies, especially around dusk. Sometimes, the predators would completely encircle their prey and form a "fish ball" that would cause the water to boil as the predators closed on the frenzied bait fish. San Nicolas Area — drove down a dirt trail west of Santa Martha bay but found our way barred by an unattended turnstile. We were later told that if the turnstile is unlocked, you can pass but expect to pay a NAFIS\$5 "toll" (private property). We never gained access. Playas Lagun, Jeremi, and Knip. These shore sites are accessible from sandy beaches. Parking lots are convenient so you don't have to carry your gear far, but be prepared to swim a bit to reach the hard coral. Rent tanks at Discover Divers, on Lagun beach. They only charge US\$6/tank and are friendly and professional. You might want to enjoy some refreshments on their shaded porch, overlooking Lagun beach. (Closed Mondays)! The conditions are generally calm, even on windy afternoons and offer snorkeling oppor-

tunities for the non-diver. They're far more crowded on the weekends because this is where the residents come to relax too. The reef is healthy, although you'll see some fishing line snarled amongst the coral pinnacles. The fish were not particularly wary and I found that I could usually get close with my camera. There were butterflyfish, grunts, wrasse, morays, and angelfish. Watch for Jawfish on the sandy bottom as you head out toward the reef (several minutes of swimming). You can find seahorses hiding in the gorgonians. Take a compass. The slope is so gradual, it's easy to get turned around at these sites. Santa Cruz Area — There's a beach with a parking lot. The local operation is Capt. Eric's Dive Hut. No information on these guys, other than they're closed Mondays. Playa Kalki — use All-West Divers to tank up! (closed Mondays). These folks are nice. They have a clean, professional beachfront dive shop. (They also have a location in Westpunt). At Kalki, you'll have to carry your gear down some steps to their beachfront shop, but if you rent tanks from them, you can use their beautiful wooden pier, rinse tanks, and dive lockers for no charge! This location is great and the staff went out of their way to be helpful, even though we were just visiting shore-divers. Once, they came down to the pier to help us out of the water! The waters are generally calm and the reef is healthy. Class outfit. You can buy various cold refreshments from them at a reasonable cost. We didn't boat-dive on this trip, but you can readily make arrangements with Habitat (Easy Divers) leaving the dock at 8:30am, Sunset Divers leaving at 9am, and All-West

with departure at 9:30am. These operators also go in the afternoon.

Sunset Waters, April 2005, April, CG, Boston, MA. Booked a trip with Sunset Waters and your piece came out the following day. It was pretty much right on. The resort was low keyed barefoot casual with good food with a local staff that bent over backwards to please you. The dive operation was first class and the diving was easy and sweet. Not a lot of big guys but enlightening visibility and prolific reefs with lots of macro opportunities. The staff is delightful and Mike is the high voltage fast talking owner, removed from the hands-on daily operations. Steve, Mike's partner, is a real sweetheart and has all the schmooze that makes for a perfect trip. The rest of the staff is top shelf and the ease of their operation is the perfect no-brainer dive trip. A dive club that came through Jamaica with lots of their luggage getting lost and not arriving till the day they left. Seems this is a common occurrence with Jamaica airlines through Jamaica. The proximity of the reefs being so close to shore with great visibility and beautiful corals is a treat not to miss. The diving reminds of Bonaire back in the 70s.

Sunset Waters Beach Resort, May 2005, Jim and Terri Turner, Binghamton, NY. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F., calm, no currents. Caring, attentive staff and great service, it's our favorite Caribbean spot. The food is excellent and my vegetarian husband is spoiled with attention. Sunset Divers, is the best, with professional, knowledgeable

instructors and staff. Kevin, Lynn, Carlos, Steve and Kurt are fun, provide lots of support to and instill confidence in new divers and others advancing their skills. They are eager to find new critters, e.g., frog fish, seahorses, pipefish, leopard flatworms, etc., always willing to help identify species we find on shore dives. The boats are clean, well cared-for and comfortable for 20+ divers. The house reef is excellent, and we dive it every afternoon/evening and always find something different from turtles and seahorses to slipper lobsters and octopi, and a flying gurnard.

DOMINICA

Dominica is the best all-around adventure island in the Caribbean, with gorgeous reefs, plenty of tropical fish (nothing sizeable), lush rainforests, hiking, waterfalls, warm water springs, splendid fruits and vegetables, modest hotels and restaurants — and it's inexpensive. Small seaside hotels and diver retreats are affected by the nearly continuous cloud cover over the mountains, and there's not much happening beyond residents leading their lives. Expect daytime temperatures in the 80s and night lows around 68 in winter and 73 in summer, although a few minutes up the mountain into the cloud forest can change that. July to November is the wet season. Dominica's at the edge of the hurricane belt. The 13-mile round-trip hike to Boiling Lake is beautiful and a good work out.