

ingly about diving here in the 70's, and while divers do report some very good dives, it's been 30 years since Jacques visited and fish life has declined just as it has throughout the Caribbean. Nonetheless, the island has unique charm, especially if you speak French.

**La Dive Bouteille, August 2005, Allen A. Smith, North Miami, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 77 to 82 F, calm. Make sure your traveler's checks are in Euros! One has to wade out to the boat. "Le Sec Pate" is a scenic spectacular: as good as the best of Cozumel. Several pinnacles rise from the depths to ~50 feet. They are covered in colorful sponges and deep sea fan. They support many colorful tropicals. "Les Antoinnes" isn't as good, but it's still a nice shallow dive. Divemaster went out of his way to accommodate the UWP in our group.

## HONDURAS

All dive resorts are in the Bay Islands: Roatan, Utila, Cayos Cochinos, all home to aggressive no-sees — some people have serious allergic reactions. Those who are unprepared — meaning without DEET — may find their vacations ruined. The diving features nice walls, offshore sea mounts, and excellent coral and gorgonians, although few large fish. Whale sharks are common near Utila roughly February through May and boats from Roatan are chasing them too. Some Roatan resorts have easy beach diving. The rainy season is

October through February, and can disrupt the diving. Spanish is spoken on the mainland, English on the Bay Islands. Classic Central American jungles and Mayan ruins inland make great mainland trips. Malaria protection is advised.

## Roatan

**Anthony's Key, February 2005, Kenith J Dunbrook, Fairview Park, OH.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 , calm. We were delighted with our divemaster (Greg) and boat captain (Tyronne), but had a terrible dive with a substitute group. This is a professional and well run organization, but some inept leaders on other boats. They were willing to adapt profile and location to those aboard and staying at the resort. Some outside/non-guests were allowed on boats and were a distraction with personal agendas and rude, mostly photography objectives. We stayed in contact with divemaster and kept to a reasonable profile. Typically you are assigned to a specific boat and crew for a given week, which is good. Very helpful with entry and exit as a friend had some back problems and they were considerate. Searched for and found many unique creatures (seahorses, etc.) with their help. Large green moray came out among us, turtles, some large fish (grouper) and many small and varied colorful reefs. Good, but not great marine life. An open water dive with Dolphins is a feature dive in 60' and was natural and enjoyable with fun interaction. Varied divers experience levels, but mostly ok — new monitored. Resort, efficient and well run, all

personnel extremely friendly, nice and helpful. Food ok to good, some variety. Very laid back with a few activities. Rooms over water (cabins) were great on an out-island with simple, quick boat shuttle. Not much to see/do on Roatan but it is scenic, 3rd world. Pool being built. Very good experience, decent value.

**Anthony's Key Resort, March 2005, Pat Cisar (doccisar@hotmail.com), St. Albert, Alberta.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F., choppy. Though Continental Airlines stated the 50 minute change-over in Houston was a reasonable time, my dive bags arrived a day late, going and coming. Anthony's Key Resort made sure someone obtained the bags and brought to me the next day. The Resort let me use dive equipment at no cost (only difference was the dive shop stuff was new). You are assigned to a boat for all week, though some changes can be made. You may find you are with divers of differing skills so let the operators know your true level of skill and if being with less advanced people bothers you. The diving is 3 to 4 dives a day. Next best thing to a live-aboard. The winds were up the week I was there so we did not get around the island though most other groups that week did. There are a couple of night dives per week and a couple of neat wreck dives. The deepest we got was 109 ft. Most days we did an 80 ft followed by a 60 foot dive with the 40 to 50 foot dive as the third dive. There were not many big pelagics, though the groupers were large. Lots of great coral and tropical fish. Most people got to see a seahorse. Barbaretta Island had great corals in a

pristine environment. The shore dive requires you to carry your equipment across to the island where there are tanks. Check the psi as some tanks are low. The boat tanks were always good. The poles used to mark the way through the reef were gone so you needed to follow a rope. It gets shallow at low tide but the "front Porch" shore dive is not too bad at all. The night Channel dive is the worst visibility but good shrimp and pipefish. The insects are a major problem. Be prepared. Food was good quality even if there were only two choices most meals. Breakfast is available early for the early morning trips.

**Anthony's Key Resort, April 2005, Joe DelGuidice (joe@mercurypersonnel.com), Boxford, MA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. Beautiful place. Dive sites were convenient and easy. All-inclusive resort. I have been diving for 20 years and my 16-year-old son a year. Joel our boat captain and Greg our divemaster catered to all our needs and abilities. Their enthusiasm, upbeat personalities, service and skills made everyone's trip a joy! They gave us variety and thrills, whether it was going to the south side of the island or moving the boat to get better vis or a fun drift dive. They were always looking for signs of a whale shark. Greg checked out my son's skills and accurately determined he could handle doing all the dives with us, and all the while keeping an eye on him (and other newbies) and instructing him and me on many finer points. The fish life was good not great: turtles, large groupers, snapper, etc. and schools of juveniles. We did not see a whale

shark nor a seahorse. Greg brought a bag of fish down on dives and the fish would come at us. The hungry, large groupers were aggressive. The vis was Ok as was the quality of the coral. The wrecks were good and provided fun dives. One wreck was lying beside a large patch of garden eels! We dove 3 times a day with 2 night dives. The rooms were good, clean and comfortable and I am glad we chose the key over the hillside. The short ferry ride is fun. No need for A/C. The weather was perfect. The main structure on the hillside has the dining area situated for great views and breezes. The food was good, especially the fish and soups. Lots of variety for breakfast and choice of meat or fish for lunch and dinner. The service was top notch. Guests tipped well, which keeps a positive cycle going. The bugs were not that bad. We did use cactus juice (they sell plenty there). The excursions off the resort were good: nature trail across the road; butterfly farm, and west end village. No need to rent a car, and no need to go to the east end of the island. Lots of taxis to take you to west end which is nice during the early evening and great for bar night life with live music. The beach picnic is nice and the canopy zip wire was ok. The nice white sandy beach is a short boat ride west of AKR. No real beach at the resort, although the small man-made beach on the key has a nice entrance to swim in the channel. Roatan was safe. You can drink the water and eat the fruit etc. The people off the resort were nice and friendly.

**Bananarama, Cabana Roatana, March 2005, Larry Polster (larrypolster@sbcglobal.net),**

**Martinsville, IN.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, calm. A location is for avid divers, not much else to do other than enjoy the sun at West Bay. The Cabana Roatana is more like camping with indoor plumbing, but you are on the beach and can walk to the dive boat a hundred yards away. Most dive sites are within 20 minutes and offer walls, reefs, and many swim thru formations with calm waters. The South shore offers great drift diving that shot us thru more than 1 dive site. Great for experienced divers, but may intimidate a newbie. Our divemasters, Liber from Cuba and Anya from Germany, put safety first and always gave us a pre-dive brief. Since they are both photographers, they were always pointing out the small critters one could over look while working on bigger shots. They are professionals with five plus years each, but made sure everyone is comfortable in the water. Experienced dive buddies could go without interference from dive masters, but had to stay in visual contact. Bottom time was usually 60 minutes, there was no hurry to get you up and out at 45 minutes like some cattle car operations. They have two boats, and usually had on four to eight divers, but it could get crowded on the days the cruise ships stopped. Shot digital, Nikon 5000 with Light & Motion enclosure, lots of turtles, morays, nurse sharks, and plenty of coral banded shrimp, Christmas tree worms, and other small critters for macro work.

**Bananarama, Mayan Princess, August 2005, Elaine (elaine@venturesetc.com), Redondo Beach, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water:

82 to 88 F, calm. The resort was fantastic. We had a condo just steps from the beach, and the accommodation and staff were great. Staff was attentive to our wishes and made sure we were satisfied. Food was OK, but inconsistent. We got five versions of nachos in five days! We had arranged that we would be using a dive operator where our gear would be carried to the boat, and removed and washed and ready for us the next day. Evidently, the "big boat" for Bananarama was broken, so they put eight of us on a 6-pack boat. The first day we had to carry our gear through the water and put it on the boat — including weights! Gear set up was in the middle of the boat, and there was not room to walk around it. After diving, we were instructed to again slog our gear (and weights) through the ocean, back to shore and wash and hang it. Diving was one group (no matter the skill) and 45 minutes maximum. Anya, the dive leader didn't watch the group, and simply used her whistle every time she wanted to check your air. 45 minute dive times were strictly enforced. When we complained to Ron, the owner about slogging and cleaning the gear, he said he would take care of it. When we complained about the 45 minute dive time, he stated that he had a schedule to keep and that all the operators on the island had gotten together and that we would not get more than 45 minutes wherever we were diving. The next day our gear was sitting in a wheel barrow on the beach. We slogged it again. They never did carry or wash our dive gear, and we got the added benefit that the dive leaders would not speak to us for the balance of our diving. Not sure how

they can be a PADI 5-Star Gold Palm facility. UW Photography Comments: On Bananarama's small boat, there was no clean water bucket. On the big boat there was a pickle bucket that was supposed to have fresh water. No place to do anything with your camera on the boat.

**Bay Islands Beach Resort, April 2005, Bill Gradwohl (bill@ycc.com), Trophy Club, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 200 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F., calm. The north shore is significantly better than the south shore for water clarity, large animals, varied terrain, and overall reef health. The dive operation was extremely well run. All cylinders were 3000+ lbs and there were no surprises or broken anything. Nitrox was available. Gear storage was adequate, and gear was brought on board by staff. Boats were spacious and well maintained. Snorkelers are welcome too, and have plenty to look at. Snorkelers saw a whale shark, but we didn't. The resort owner is a jovial character who mingles with his guests and sets the tone for the resort which can best be described as "Don't worry — be happy — have a good time." We bought two 10 dive packages for \$150/each. Lunch was an additional few dollars and was reasonable. We didn't stay at the resort, but were renting a house on the island. All dives were as long as your air supply lasted. 60 and 70+ minute dives were routine. No rush! Our dive master Gustavo, was the best qualified individual we've ever worked with. His assistant "Big Daddy" (a long term guest from New York) provided an endless stream of jokes Big Daddy should have his own TV show. Gustavo knew where to go,

and provided the best diving we've had to date. A videographer (Pablo) came on two dives to a wreck (Aguilla) and one other site and Gustavo provided expertise to offer shark, grouper feeding, moray eel feeding, turtles, the wreck, and much more for footage. It's the first DVD we've ever purchased because it was that good. The Aguilla and Spooky Channel shouldn't be missed. Watch Gustavo blow air rings underwater that maintain their shape to the surface.

**Bay Islands Beach Resort, May 2005, Kevin McCormack (kevimack@optonline.net), Vero Beach, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 82 F, calm. Room air conditioner did not work well our first night — they gave us new one the next day. Staff was friendly and helpful. Only 3-5 divers on our boat all week. The divemaster took us to sites that suited our interests — many swim thru opportunities, tunnels, caverns, etc. Some challenging dives and not the same old, same old kind of stuff. We felt like we owned the dive boat. Great level of personal service. A well run operation.

**Bay Island Beach Resort, July 2005, Beverly Leonard (bkleo@aol.com), Spicewood, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 85 to Feet. Water: 84 F, calm. Bring lots of bug spray. The owners are Americans and really great. The dive operation is sluggish in service and enthusiasm; the dive staff did not help much with gear in and out of the water, nor did they search for or show us anything we couldn't have found ourselves. They load the gear on to and off the boat. The accommodations are

fine; the water is safe as the resort has its own wells. However, several people became sick from perhaps the mayo (?). The menu becomes boring as the week progresses, with few different items added. They put on a nice pig roast with live music Thursday evenings. It's cheap, quick & easy to get to either Coxen Hole or to the West End (unlike staying at Fantasy or Coco View). You can shore dive but it's a long haul out to Spooky Channel (a really beautiful dive site because of its formations). Advanced divers may find the diving is just average.

**Bay Island Beach Resort, August 2005, Jan Gulley (jigulley@hotmail.com), Ft. Collins, CO.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Hector, the divemaster, made sure divers could handle themselves, and then let us dive our own profile. He was excellent at finding things from sea horses to scorpion fish. He might pick something up to show us and then he would carefully place it back in its original habitat. He had great respect for the fish, coral, and other living entities. Bay Island Beach Resorts is a hidden jewel in Roatan. The rates are reasonable, the service is excellent and the staff, including the owners Cam and Ted treated us like family.

**Coconut Tree Divers, Seagrape Plantation, August 2004, Stephanie Voris, Ft. Lauderdale, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm. Coconut Tree Divers is in the town of West End. They are run by a husband and wife team that make you feel extremely welcome. The boat can accommodate 16 divers. There was a

maximum of 10. They have a full service classroom and certify many levels of divers. The divemasters are friendly and safety conscious. They will give you a profile and time limit for the dive and ask that you stay within eyesight. If you wander they will herd you back but they are not tapping on their tanks constantly to keep the group tight and bumping into each other. They point out a lot of sea life. Diving was comfortable and relaxed. They charged \$15 per dive, including equipment. Sea Grape Plantation is a short walk from Coconut Tree Divers. Accommodations were clean and comfortable with a hammock hung on the front porch for afternoon naps. Everything in West End was in walking distance. There are plenty of restaurants and shopping along the main road.

**CoCo View Resort, August 2004, Robert Estep, (bestep@aol.com), Oak Hill, VA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 15 to 40 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm. Great place for new divers and those looking for basic dives with moderate expectations. The dive resort area is heavily used and it shows on the reef wall. The wall is much like Belize in that it has a full complement of tropical fish, corals and sponges. Unlike Ambergris Caye, the small area used for our dives was only about 900 meters. As a result fresh reef growth was in high demand. The staff was excellent and determined to take care of the guest. Schedule yourself from Saturday through Saturday as the operation's are routine and you'll miss briefings and key information if you arrive midweek. Excellent Nitrox operation. You are supposed to leave your C-card as a check for your

weights. When we left mid week there was no one in the weight room so we had to email the resort for our C-Card. The resort then could not find my card but agreed to contact the issuer of the C-Card, paid the replacement fee and had it mailed directly to me. For all the little things that fell through the cracks their customer service attitude (Billy: GM ) made me feel like they should get 9+ in a(1-10 good) scale. UW Photography Comments: Good place for shutter bugs. All five boats were nicely set up with water for gear separate from camera equipment.

**Coco View, February 2005, Michael Brawnstein, Las Vegas, NV.** Experience: 500+ dives. Vis: 30 to 75 ft. Water: 74 to 76 F. Almost as easy as diving off of a live-aboard. Bargain priced. Rooms and food adequate. A great dive operation and photo shop. The bad was the no-see-ums.

**Coco View, April 2005, Julie Arismendi, Clements, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F., calm. Nothing to write home about, critter-wise, but it was a great place to kick back and have a lot of relaxing dives. The staff was excellent and the kitchen crew worked their butts off in the heat. I feel like sending them some fans for the kitchen and dining area. Good accommodations, but the trip back was from hell, partly because they lost our luggage (got it back a few days later); the planes were delayed due to sugar-cane burning, and our car stopped on the highway home!

**CoCo View, May 2005, Dyrel Faulstick, Austin, NV.** Experience: 75-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 79 F,

calm and flat, mildly choppy, no currents. Read Chapbooks 2004 and 2005 — had no problems with food — dive-masters and crew helpful as I have a bad leg — have been there five times.

**CoCo View, June 2005, Ron Hyatt (rhscubadiver@aol.com), Arlington, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, choppy, surge. Been to Coco View several times. Easy check in/check out. They handle getting return tickets/seat assignment for you. One boat was out for repairs and had to use a boat from Fantasy Island, which made you appreciate the CoCo View boats even more. Julian, the DM, was thorough and friendly; dives were well thought out and easy. Morning boat dives usually one hour, the drop off dive on the way in is yours to plan. The shore diving is yours to plan; they do not baby-sit you, which is fine with me. You can dive 24/7. All the dive staff was helpful/friendly. Nitrox is a definite plus and the price was right. The food continues to improve in variety and quality. No one leaves hungry. Arranged the trip late and was assigned beach house #5 B would be great for two couples or a family with kids (two bedrooms, full kitchen, big living room and big screened porch, but it had no A/C, which made it miserable when I was there (hot/humid). Not enough breeze. You will not see the big fish, but the coral life seems to be just fine and there are lots of the small critters to see. Diving Newman's and CoCo View wall are great fun, easy dives. The wreck in the back yard is such an easy dive and you will see different kinds of fish; it's also grown over with all kinds of life. The "no see ums" will get you if

you do not have bug repellent; DEET works well. They can arrange different tours/dolphin/shark dives, etc. They work hard to please. If you want to go into town and that can be arranged as well as a night on the town. Underwater Photography Comments: Photo services are quite good. Tim Blanton offers a fine photo course and just good advice; minor repairs can be handled also.

**CoCo View, August 2005, Darren Dawson (darren.dawson@ces.clemson.edu), Clemson, SC.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Dedicated all-inclusive dive resort that can accommodate roughly 72 guests. The resort was full and the dive boats were (over)crowded. We found the diving to be good, especially the walls, which were really colorful with abundant sponges and corals. The fish life was healthy — lots of schools of small fish on many dives, though not great numbers of large fish. We used insect repellent with DEET and experienced no problems with mosquitoes or no-see-ums. We stayed in an over-the-water cabana, which was a duplex. It was air conditioned with two double beds and plenty of storage space. The bathroom was outfitted with shower, toilet and sink, and we were never short on hot water. No flushing of toilet paper and the tap water is not potable. A large jug of drinking water in the room. Our balcony was furnished with a hammock and Adirondack chair and offered a beautiful view. Maid service daily and towels were replenished each day. Guest rooms do not have televisions or phones. The electrical outlets took standard US plugs. The grounds were nicely maintained. The

main building contained the office and gift shop in addition to the dining area. The dining room was cooled with ceiling fans and not air conditioned, so it did get hot. Phone calls to the US can be made from the office at \$1 per minute. The food was average, but certainly acceptable considering CCV's relatively low price. All meals are buffet style. Breakfast with hot meats and made-to-order eggs, pancakes, waffles, etc. and cold cereals and bagels. The coffee was awful Lunches and dinners ranged from below average to good, though a few meals were quite good. For some meals there were limited choices, particularly side dishes, and the desserts were not fancy (cakes tasted like they were made from box mixes, but a knowledgeable source told me they were homemade). Fresh fruit was usually available at breakfast and lunch (bananas, watermelon). Friday night they served us surf and turf, which was excellent. Also, there was a free rum punch party in the bar/recreation area after dinner with live music and dancing. You can purchase sodas from the bar and you can get sodas and snacks from a small on-site store. The resort has 4 large dive boats. Divers could enter the water two at a time from the back of the boat or from either of two side entries. The boats are covered in the front, open in the back. All boats had mask rinse buckets and nice large, clean camera rinse tanks. They assign you a boat for the week and your gear is set up on the same spot all week. The gear rooms are walkthrough garage-style rooms with one end open to the dock by your boat and the other end open to rinse tanks and drying racks. There are

large rinse tanks on both sides of the gear rooms and camera rinse tanks on the resort-side. Two boat dives per day, one in the morning just after breakfast and one after lunch. The sites tend to be 5 to 25 minutes, though most are in the 10-minute range. Following each boat dive, you have can do a drop-off dive along one of the two walls on either side of the boat channel or on the Prince Albert wreck in the channel. You can also do shore dives any time. Tanks are stored in the gear room area, and you need to suit up there, then walk around the main building to the shore dive entry site. There is a smooth entry channel from shore, where you walk out to a wooden platform where you can don your fins and mask before swimming out to the wreck or the walls. The CCV video that describes the shore diving as "a few fin kicks away" needs to be modified to "a few hundred fin kicks away" as it is a bit of a swim out to the walls and the wreck. While the gear set-up and the boats were really well-designed, there were too many people on each boat. We regularly had 14-16 people on board following one DM. When the DM found creatures like seahorses and everyone piled on top of each other trying to look or get a photo, or at sites like Calvin's Crack and Mary's Place everyone has to go through part of the dive single-file.

**Fantasy Island, May 2005, Patricia Sinclair, Plano, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. Novice diver (first dives after certification) is allowed to dive with a group of experienced divers going to 90 feet. She freaked at the depth, her partner (more experienced than

her, but not by much) took her up to 50 feet, and then back to the boat when she showed no signs of getting better. Divemaster did not notice them leaving the group. Divers grouped together by language; good for communications, it is not good for “newbies” or people doing their first dives after certification to be with experienced divers or going to depths greater than 60 feet. Groups should be split by experience, photographers split out. 1 divemaster, 14 people (10 are photographers) on a night dive -bad! Luckily no one had a mask knocked off, or regulator kicked out of their mouth during the photo frenzy that ensued when anything was spotted! The instructor for EANx course was well informed and good with teaching/explaining what was not evident in the course book. Boats were well maintained. Fruit and drinks provided after every dive. Good in season fruit! Food, while not great, was plentiful and usually there was a fairly good selection, one which would please even Vegans. Rooms, are clean and neat and fairly well maintained, even if a bit sparse. TV had English channels and you could keep up with news Stateside. Weather great. Some divemasters good at finding the little stuff for photographers. Too many photographers on a lead dive make for a real cluster (around the poor, scared, hiding from the lights, critter).

**Fantasy Island Dive Resort, May 2005, Robert (beasonbb@att.net), Martinez, GA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 65 to 80 Feet. Water: 70 to 75 F, calm, choppy, no currents. Initial orientation was weak. There was no in water check out for us. I think some other boats

did have a check out. We were not told before we arrived that the “lock” boxes for personal items were not operable or my wife would have left jewelry at home. Though my wife hid them well, her wedding ring and another ring were stolen from the room. Another couple had money stolen. The staff conducted a routine search of our room (which we had done) and questioned the maids and reminded us of the years of service the maids had given with no problems. We lost over \$4,000 in property and the better part of a day in the Police Station filing a theft report. The rooms lock, but it is easy to gain access. I accidentally locked myself out and went to the desk and asked for a key and it was given with no questions of identity. The facility is well set up for divers but CoCo View and Anthony’s Key rank higher. Mary’s Place is one of the prettiest of all dives. The rest of the dives are good but not exceptional.

**Fantasy Island Resort, July 2005, Sue & Bernie Bufano (sbufano@admin.pat-med.k12.ny.us), Farmingville, NY.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 85 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm. The resort, food and dive operation were outstanding. The rooms are basic but immaculate. The food was always a variety of meats, fish, veggies, fresh-made breads and rolls, fresh fruits and beautiful and delicious deserts. Thursday night was a hit with lobster night. The waiters were attentive and pleasant and friendly (especially Lenny at dinner). Our dive crew, Boat Captain Pedro and DM Mark Washington were the best. Mark was unbelievable at finding stuff. On just about every dive he found a seahorse or two! They will set

up your equipment between dives but they make sure you have no objection to them doing so. We didn't see any big stuff but the corals and sponges made up for that. The walls and reefs were breathtaking. The tube and barrel sponges were the largest I've seen. Some barrel sponges were big enough to get into. The resort is just a beautiful setting with lush foliage and immaculate grounds. The crew was always out at 5:30 A.M. raking the beach and sprucing up the grounds. The beach was magnificent. Bugs were nonexistent. I usually come home from a trip with bites all over me so we brought plenty of sprays. Adding to the fun is all the wildlife on the grounds. Ducks, bats and best of all, monkeys were a blast. Roatan Airport has to get their act together with getting everyone through ticketing, departure tax payment and immigration.

**Inn of Last Resort, April 2005, Barry Clegg, Minneapolis, MN.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F., calm, choppy. The Inn of Last Resort is a few minutes from the West End, near many of the best dive sites on the north side of the Island. We picked it because it was smaller than the monster resorts and because of good write-ups in Undercurrent and it doesn't advertise "activities for the kids." Kids are welcome at the Inn Resort but they don't market for them, as a result I don't think they get many (none while we were there). The resort is 10 years old and nice. It has a "hard beach" — i.e., coral. It means fewer (but still some) sand fleas, which plague some of the operations that do have more sand. Bring DEET no matter

where you go on Roatan. The rooms are large and modern, all with AC. The bar and restaurant areas have great ocean views. The food service is not buffet. Entrees change daily and were good. They did ask about food preferences and allergies and were accommodating to special needs. The owners are customer service-oriented and this attitude is common in the staff at all levels. They do 3 boat dives per day with unlimited shore diving from their lagoon (which is actually about 100 yards from a dive buoy — a good dive site). They do one boat night dive per week. The reefs were in good shape. The area is still heavily fished by the locals so not as many fish as in more protected areas. Our dives ranged from 135 feet (Hole in the Wall) to as shallow as 40 to 60 feet. Their boats will comfortably hold about 14 — 16 divers. There were probably about 16 divers on most dives. The divemasters were flexible and would let folks do pretty much what they wanted. Most times, my buddy and I would hang with the group to see the feature of the dive and then signal to the divemaster and be on our separate way with no problem. With so many on the boats, was that people were all over the place at the end of the dive — and there were some in our group that wanted to take pictures at 30 feet until their air ran out — so those of us who did a 90 feet or greater profile often had to wait a long time for them. The resort has a capacity of 70 and there were 55 when we were there. The resort staff, the bar and the restaurant were great — even with the crowd. The dive operation was overmatched by the crowd. The resort only had 2 of its own boats when we

were there (a third was being rebuilt on site in dry dock — interesting to see), and they needed four for the crowd, so they borrowed one from Fantasy Island and one from Coco View. When you borrow a boat, you don't get the best of the fleet. The Coco View boat half sank tied to the dock when it's captain inadvertently turned off the bilge pump — it was refloated but the engine was water damaged and it was towed away. On the last day, one of the Inn's boats had transmission troubles and was not usable (they finagled another boat from somewhere). They didn't have enough Nitrox tanks to serve everyone. We thoroughly enjoyed the diving. One comment on the Anthony's Key dive operation. We overlapped with them at several dive sites: at the wreck of the Odyssey, they arrived at the wreck after we did and left before, the divemasters clanging their tanks constantly at every little thing (our own divemaster told us she would only clang the tank if she saw a shark or there was an emergency).

**Inn of Last Resort, April 2005, Susan Sampson, Renton, WA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 F., calm, no currents. Diving was easy, with no current. The boats are spacious, with plenty of shade, slow but steady — the dive sites are close in. The sites were typical Caribbean: reefs and walls lush with healthy coral and sponges, turtles, and colorful fish (wrasses, butterflies, parrotfish, squirrelfish, moray eels, barracuda, and puffers). Because the area is a marine preserve, many large grouper have been spared., divemasters located several seahorses and a pipefish. Night divers saw octopi and lobsters. Divemasters

were responsive to our requests to slow down and show us critters on dives where it was necessary to descend and ascend together to avoid boat traffic, and had no objection to our diving our own profiles any other time. The resort is a lagoon on site, almost too shallow for scuba, that affords a slow-moving photographer plenty of opportunity to spend two or three hours of bottom time per tank, seeing nearly everything found on the walls and reef. The resort is clean and comfortable and the food good. The managers offer land-based offer from a barbeque with fire dancers and singers ( the "Burrito Brothers" really stunk), and off-site rain forest canopy rides on cables, dolphin swims, and shark-chumming (which we passed up). The best entertainment was the resort's pair of Amazon parrots, which talk constantly.

**Inn of Last Resort, April 2005, Clark Briggs (dickeyelectric@aol.com), Fort Worth, TX** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. We have been there several times. First time the resort was totally full. They rented two other boats to handle all the divers. Had a large group that wanted to dive together, so we were on much less crowded boat which worked out well. Only real negative was a bloom of sea lice. Food was wholesome and it was good. Larger rinse tanks on the boat for more cameras. Had great time

**Inn of Last Resort, May 2005, Richard Haines (haines2430@msn.com), Colorado Springs, CO.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 84 F., calm, no Currents. TACA

was on schedule and all our baggage arrived too! We were picked up by the ILR staff and met by the owners, Donna and Andy, and introduced to one of the DMs, Cher, and "Capt Ed" who is the "go-to guy" for just about everything. We were given the standard "sign your life away" paperwork, and given the "what to expect" briefing. They recommended I sign up for the 2 dollar a day "medical insurance" for each of us. Covers any cost of doc visit, including chamber etc. The only thing it didn't cover was drugs, if they were required. I have DAN for the whole family and thought I probably didn't need it, but it was explained that the money went toward helping to care for all the young lobster divers who get bent. I signed us up. We got settled in our room, a queen and 2 single beds, air conditioned; comfortable. Food is excellent, a three-course meal already planned and posted on a bulletin board. So if someone has a problem with the menu, they can request something else. There was always plenty and you just had to ask for more. The next morning, we loaded and set up our gear on the boat for the first dive, and the DM and boat crew changed tanks, unloaded our gear at the end of the diving day, rinsed it all out, hung it to dry, and then loaded it up the next morning. That same morning the other DM, Monica, was going to lead the dives. She had not met us, and wanted to see our C-cards. Although both DMs were professional, Cher appeared to really enjoy her job, and took interest in everyone and what they wanted to do. Monica just seemed to go through the motions; if she set up your gear, you'd better take a look. I was

comfortable with my daughters diving there. Breakfast was at 7:00 (okay, for the non-divers it was between 7:00 and 9:00), on the boat by 8:00 and usually in the water at 8:15. We were back by 9:30 and then back on the boat at 10:30. Then back for lunch by 12:00. The afternoon dive was at 2:30pm, and then dinner was at 7:00pm. The longest boat ride was 25 minutes. We did have an option one day to make the hour ride to the other side of the island to dive "Mary's Place" but the weather did not cooperate. The boats are long and covered. We had no more than 16 while we were there, and still plenty of room. There are two fresh water tanks; one is dedicated for camera gear. On the fifth day of diving my oldest woke up with a bad ear ache. We decided she should skip the diving. Well, after our 3rd dive she was ready to go see the doc. The resort took us to AKR to see the doc there with the chamber, and he said she had an ear infection but that her eardrum looked fine. He gave her some drops to take for 5 days, but said that she should be fine for diving the next morning. Cost 10 bucks.. Remember that insurance I mentioned, great stuff (and she did resume diving the following day). On the last day we decided to take the rainforest canopy tour. The girls and I had a blast!

**Inn of Last Resort, May 2005, Chuck and Nancy Anson (nanson@owl.csusm.edu), Oceanside, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 , calm, no currents. 2.5 hour flight from Houston on Continental. Immigration took us half an hour to clear. We were met by an Inn of Last Resort representative in the bag-

gage claim area who helped us through customs and got us and our bags to the resort's van for a 20 minute ride to the Inn. The staff at the Inn made our stay easy and returned us to the airport (printed boarding pass in hand). The meals were top notch with wait service (no buffets) linen table cloths and napkins, full place settings, 4 course dinners by candle light all deliciously prepared and served in an open air dining room with a view. All guest rooms are large, bright and clean with lots of storage space, a queen and two single beds, private bath and shower, A/C and ceiling fans, phone and no TV (bring a book). It is only a few steps from the guest rooms to the dining room, bar, library, lagoon, dive shop and pier. They do all your gear rinsing and setup for you and they offer 3 dives per day. Most dive sites are within 10 to 20 minutes of the resort and even though you do your surface intervals back at the Inn, they provide fresh fruit and towels on the boat after each dive. There are two covered wooden dive boats that can easily accommodate 18 divers each. Tanks are aluminum 80's (filled to 3000 psi) and sit behind the dive bench along both sides of the boat with storage beneath. Entry is a giant stride. The diving offers a variety of gently sloping and vertical walls that either drop down to a sandy shelf between 80' and 150' or into the abyss depending on your location. The walls are a welcome mix of mounts, pinnacles, cuts and grooves with a variety of swim throughs and caves. Healthy plate coral covers some walls providing hiding places for moray eels, lobster and large crabs. Large barrel sponges, smaller iridescent sponges,

sea fans, gorgonians, elk horn and soft corals attract a myriad of sea life. Small schools of Creole wrasse and blue tang on many dives as were barracuda. There were curious groupers and dog snappers along the walls accompanied by horse eyed jacks and several hawksbill turtles. The night dive at Fish Den was great. We saw lots of basket stars, spiny lobsters, tiny shrimp and crabs, an octopus, and a green moray. We did a night dive in the resort's lagoon and found scorpion fish, barracuda, octopus, lobster, shrimp, crabs, squirrelfish, grouper, and anemones. Boat captain spotted a pod of 20 pilot whales and took us out in the deep water to snorkel with them. Bring your favorite bug spray and lots of it. The no-seesums have discovered there is a constant supply of divers to munch on. UW Photography Comments: Crew experienced with camera handling. Large, separate camera rinse tank. Central area of the boat could be used for cameras but was not padded, could get wet, and no air available.

**Inn of Last Resort, May 2005, Leslie Bardelli, (lbardelli@snet.net), New Milford, CT.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm. Great diving, good food, large clean rooms and friendly staff. The Inn is on Gibson Bight on the road to the West End. It is a ride off the main road over bumpy terrain. The resort is made up of 4 buildings that form a rectangle with tropical plantings between. Three buildings house 10 guest rooms, 5 on each floor. The fourth houses the dining room, bar, TV, pool table, gift shop and library. Each guest room is large with 1 queen and 2 single

beds, 2 ceiling fans, AC and a small, but functional bathroom. The closets are large and open. All buildings have long benches out in front, so there is plenty of space to sit, or dry gear. The meals are a fixed menu, only one item each meal, but they can accommodate dietary restrictions. The food is good and plentiful. Appetizers are served at the bar before dinner. Lunch and dinner are followed by dessert. Watch out or your wet suit will be a bit small by the end of the week. The Inn has 2 large boats that can hold 15-18 divers comfortably. We only had that many divers on 3-4 days in 14 days of diving. The dive shop is a few steps from the boats and the staff will take care of your gear once you bring it down your first day. The resort sits in the middle of the marine park. They do 3 single tank boat dives daily. The sites are mostly within 15 minutes and surface interval is at the resort. Dives always have a divemaster leading them, but if the boat is moored you can go off on your own. They suggest depth and time was generally limited to 50-60 minutes each dive. The underwater life is healthy and plentiful. Macro life is incredible. Bigger fish, turtles, eagle rays are seen, but not with great frequency. The resort does one boat night dive a week and a trip to each wreck, El Agilia and Odyssey. The Inn has a private lagoon that lets you into the Fish Den. Ask the dive staff for tanks a few hours before and they will be waiting on the dock for you. The Fish Den buoy marks a coral head, go past and the channel opens to the reef. The lagoon is only 6-10 feet deep and has a lot of life. We did a night dive/snorkel in the lagoon: 2 octopus, cushion sea star, sand anemones,

brittle stars out and moving, eels. Saw a spotted eagle ray as well. We head down to the lagoon every evening for the sunset. The lagoon is my favorite spot in a hammock for that first cup of coffee in the morning. I just sit and listen to the water over the reef. UW Photography Comments: There are no facilities on the shore for photographers. The boats each have a camera rinse tank. They also have a dry area over the engine cover to store cameras before the dive. Rooms offer plenty of room to spread out to assemble photo gear.

## Utila

**Deep Blue, August 2004, Bill Mashek (rubicon@sonic.net), Forestville, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Water: 78+ F, calm, choppy, surge. This was my third trip to Utila, the smallest of three islands. It can be reached by ferry or air transport from La Ceiba or San Pedro Sula. I combined diving with Spanish school through Central American Spanish School. They also have a school on Roatan, La Ceiba, and Copan. Spending 4-6 hours per day diving and four hours per day in class kept me out of trouble. I dived with Deep Blue. Small groups, mellow and extremely competent instructors as dive guides. Some of the sites we dived were spotted bay, west end CJs Drop off, Blackfish Point, Joshua's Swash, Great Wall, Black Bird Point and Black Hills. The North side is interesting diving but not any better than the south side. The visibility ranged from 60 to 100ft. Depths were 40B90ft. Most dives are wall dives except for Black Hills, an incredible sea mount. Corals and sea life are prolific in Utila. We saw, lobsters, big crabs,

mature spotted drum, blow fish, puffer fish, porcupine fish, burr fish, frog fish, lots of jacks, Stone fish several turtles, several morays, eagle rays, lots of interesting corals including sea fans and barrel sponges. All the dives were excellent. Three out of five days of diving Utila we dove with whale sharks. Utila is the only dive destination I know of, where you can just about be guaranteed a whale shark episode between mid February to April. Roatan and Utila are only a few miles apart geographically but a world of difference. The diving is similar but everything else is different. Lots of Americans on Roatan, the cruise ships come here twice per week and everything gets a little crazy during that time. Lodging, food, diving are more expensive, yet not any better than Utila. There is a lot of development on Roatan and property values have skyrocketed. I had reserved my diving with Sureno del Mar but when I arrived, they said they had no opening for me. Subsequently, I found Coconut Tree Divers. They were accommodating. I flew directly from Roatan to San Pedro Sula, and finely home. Rafting(1/2 hour from La Ceiba is great rafting and kayaking — class III-V. see:<http://www.aboututila.com>

**Gunter's Ecomarine, Sandy Bay Beach House, July 2005, Dave Jackson (thecolt@juno.com), Orem, UT.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 200 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy. Utila has great reefs, some good wall diving, and lots of diversity. Gunter's was accommodating. There is not a lot of Americans on the island and the Europeans tend not to tip so a tip or two goes along way in getting great service.

Our party of seven had our own boat for 8 days. The shop made us feel like part of the family. Didn't see any whale sharks, the we saw huge morays, eagle rays with their 8ft tails intact, lots of little critters. We stayed at the Sandy Bay Beach House and saved a ton of money. We ate at local restaurants and luncherias every day and found them not only inexpensive, but good. Utila is probably the lowest cost option in this hemisphere.

**Laguna Beach Resort, March 2005, Ron & Sherry Smith, Levittown, PA.** Experience: 361 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm and flat, no currents. Beautiful resort and charming ambiance. Spacious king bungalows with backdoor on dock over lagoon, front door on beach. Good diving and lots of it. Whale shark sightings were too brief — when people jumped in they usually went sounding to the depths. Black Hills dive — tons of fish and mantas around the boat. Dolphins were playful. Snorkeled with them one day, diving with them the next day. Staff friendly, food good, good time.

**Laguna Beach Resort, April 2005, Joan B. Nagy (jbn@kandnbookworks.com), New York, NY.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 82 F, calm, no currents. One of the best operations I've encountered in the Caribbean in 16 years of diving. Rustic, but handsome and comfortable, cabins with air conditioning and plenty of hot water. Marvelously efficient and charming managers (Luciano and Romina are still there) and experienced dive masters and boat captains. In April 2003, Undercurrent gave the food three stars.

I'd bump that to at least four. Certainly plenty of it, and much of it, very good. That same review seemed little better than lukewarm on the condition of the reefs and the number of fish and critters, but I thought both were as good as I've seen anywhere — except perhaps for pelagics. We saw lots of tropicals, and in the more exotic category long-glure frogfish, many hawksbill turtles, scorpionfish, seahorses, red-lipped blennies, eagle rays, and — yes — whale sharks and dolphins. All dive operations are in contact with each other via radio phone. When you come up from your first dive of the morning, the captains know whether there have been whale shark sightings. If there have, and if you're on the right side of the island, they head off immediately. Once you get to the location, the dive master starts yelling, "Get ready," That means get on your mask, snorkel, and fins and sit on the starboard rail. The divemaster, who has been standing on the bow waiting to see the whale sharks rise up from below, yells "Go!, Go!", and you jump in. It takes a few seconds for the bubbles to clear, and there it is. Maybe no more than 15 feet from you. Heading away and down. And for maybe five or ten glorious seconds, there it is. No more than ten or fifteen feet from you, heading away and down. But for all ten seconds, it's the most exciting thing I've ever seen in 16 years of diving. And we had six heart-stopping sightings. And snorkeling with wild dolphins was almost as spectacular. Great trip. No E-6 processing; communal computer with USB port and Photoshop.

**Laguna Beach Resort, April 2005, Rick Cavanaugh (rickcavanaugh@comcast.**

**net), Ellicott City, MD. Experience:** 251-500 dives. is: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F., calm. I think the plane leaves when they have enough people to fill it — our plane out of San Pedro Sula left at about 4 p.m. (over 2 hours late which was good for us!). No weight restrictions that I am aware of. Laguna Beach Resort is a short boat ride from the main town in Utila. The resort is nice. The management goes overboard to make sure your visit is pleasant. There is a nice beach on the Caribbean side. The air-conditioned cottages are on the lagoon with private docks for watching sunsets or anything but boarding a boat (the water is about 12 inches deep). Meals are served according to the scuba boat schedule. Meals are varied and excellently prepared on the Caribbean scale. Bugs were only a problem on one windless night. (I would still bring DEET). Most night I closed up the honor bar at about 9 pm. You can visit the town by taking a short boat ride to the other side of the lagoon. The town is a short 1 mile walk. Bicycles are available. A taxi ride is about \$3 US. The town is full of hippies. Many young Americans and Europeans tour this area with backpacks since it is so cheap. Overnight rooms are as cheap as \$4. If you go to town, check out the Jade Seahorse, an artist with too my time on his hands. Diving was disappointing. The reef has sustained substantial damage over the years, not the type that has occurred overnight. I am troubled by so many reports of the diving as being excellent. It is not. asked repeat visitors how the reef has changed over the years. The told me "it has not changed at all, that

is why they keep coming back!" This resort has many repeat visitors who are quite happy. The majority of the coral is dead, bleached or diseased. I saw white band and black band disease and significant bleaching. There is significant algae growth. There are some patches of vibrantly colored healthy coral. There are few large fish. There were plenty of small gobies, damsel fishes and a few angels. I only saw 1 small grouper, no reef shark, no nurse sharks, no large southern sting rays (saw a couple of small yellow sting rays). There were large patches of coral rubble that appeared to have been there for quite some time. Most divemasters went too fast to see the macro life that is abundant. I saw hundreds of cryptic tear drop crabs. Almost every sponge contained one. I saw 2 different varieties of neck crabs. There was a good amount of macro life to be seen if you would go slow. Nitrox is an extra \$8 per dive! There is no longer a one week discount. Most of the diving is shallow and easy. There is a maximum of 1 hour bottom time so nitrox is not a huge advantage. Few used nitrox due to the price. The better dives were the wreck of the Halliburton and the sea mounds located off shore. Whale Shark encounters would last about 15 seconds before the shark was out of site. The captains were excellent in finding whale sharks. You are not allowed to use scuba gear with the whale sharks. We saw whale sharks on at least 3 different days and some days we saw 4 different whale sharks. We got to snorkel with dolphins once. The area with the whale sharks was crowded with up to 4 other boats. It as a bit of a zoo as the different

boats put their craft into position for their snorkelers to jump in. I surfaced one time to be facing a bow of a boat headed right at me that was 20 feet away. On some days, many on the boat wanted to skip the second dive to go whale shark hunting. Expect good sunburns and seasick occupants when this happens as you sit on a slow moving boat always on the ready (you usually only have 2 minutes or less to get ready) for 2 to 3 hours. The policy is that if one person wants to dive, the whole boat dives. If this is you, expect pressure from everyone else on the boat. If you really want to see whale sharks, I would do a private charter during the lunch hours when there are no boats on the water. I think this was around \$75 an hour for a small boat. UW Photography Comments: Each boat has a camera rinse tank, but no real good place to change film, lenses etc. There is a table in the stern that is used by everyone to store whatever, and is quite wet. Each boat has a large rinse tank dedicated to cameras on the dock. No film processing. Good whale shark photos are nearly impossible to get due to the boat advancing on the shark rapidly. Whale sharks would dive.

**Laguna Beach Resort, April 2005, Lowell and Margo Greenberg (lomagreen@cox.net), Palos Verdes Estates, CA.** Experience: 200+ dives. Vis: 50 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm and flat. We saw whale sharks 10 times. They were spectacular and made the trip worthwhile. Otherwise the diving was average but adequate Caribbean diving. The hotel was excellent, the staff competent and friendly, and the dive operation excellent. No-see-ums a big

problem but otherwise a good trip.

**Laguna Beach Resort, May 2005, William Thomsen (Thomswill@aol.com), Indianapolis, IN.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F., choppy. For a dive resort, the grounds and buildings are well maintained and the location is ideal. Bring soap, a beach towel and a travel alarm clock. Meals were buffet style and were of good and adequate quantity. Drinks were fairly priced, serve yourself/honor type. The dive operation was relatively organized. I didn't understand the 1 hour bottom restriction when using Nitrox and the average depth being approx. 60 feet. That seemed restrictive. The divemasters were mostly navigators for the divers. They didn't spend much time exploring or pointing out items of interest. Dives along the north side of the island on the first dive and the second dive being on the south side of the island. Then the third dive would vary on the weather and the wishes of the customers. Night dives were part of the package, but if weather conditions were not adequate the dives were called off and there were no reschedules. I observed several shortcomings (a tangled inflator hose around a B.C. strap, a disconnected inflator hose, only one strap of a two strap B.C. attached to the tank and the damaging of the surface face of two first stages due to improper seating to the tank valve). I was impressed with coral reefs and diversity and health. Too bad visibility isn't greater. Prior to departure you were given a letter describing the check out procedures. This was informative. However, the management then went into a long solicitation on how hard the employees

work to satisfy the customers and how important it is to tip all these individuals. This I took as an affront, because I paid to be served by this resort and I always tip those individuals that offer service beyond the norm, not as standard offering. Utila is a good adventure and Laguna Beach Resort is a nice a facility. UW Photography Comments: Other than having some film and some batteries available, you had better bring everything you need because your on your own.

**Laguna Beach Resort, May 2005, Rick Hart (rick-hart@comcast.net), Richardson, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 90 to 75 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm, choppy. Managers Luciano and Romina are a delight and make sure you are taken care of. We to see a whale shark. There had been 2-3 every day until we got there, then they disappeared. However, we did see a 25 footer on our last day. The highlight was encountering a pod of orcas. We had 12 around the boat, 5 stayed with the boat for over 2 hours. They would swim under the boat, and seemed curious about us. There were 2 babies — maybe twins — that swam everywhere together while big mama kept her eyes on them and us. I got video footage of mama orca bumping my video housing. [www.oceanimagesinc.com/photo\\_gallery/rick\\_hart.htm](http://www.oceanimagesinc.com/photo_gallery/rick_hart.htm). There was a good breeze that kept the bugs away. I have been there when there was no wind and the no-see-ums eat you alive. The boats and dive center are really nice.

**Laguna Beach, May 2005, Phil Gans (pgans@pgans.com), Golden, CO.** Well managed. The accommodations were

comfortable, and well maintained. The dive boats were in good condition, and comfortable. The divemasters were knowledgeable and skilled. The diving was good. On a beautiful beach, fairly near town. When I wanted to go to town, they were always helpful and gave me a bike to ride in. The island is small but pretty. It is not for roaring nightlife. The food was varied and good. It is not that easy to get to Utila, but this place is worth it.

**Laguna Beach, June 2005, Brian Morrow, Roswell, GA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 75 Feet. Water: 83 to 87 F, choppy, no currents. We were supposed to be on the Bay Islands Aggressor but it was taken out of service so we were offered the Laguna Beach Resort. Factoring in the trade-off of live-aboard for land-based, the Laguna Beach was nice. The dive boats are uncrowded and would be fine even with a full house. The divemasters and boat captains are accommodating. Dives are guided but the divemasters factor in the group's skill and adjusts. There are few fish and the corals run the gamut from healthy and colorful to severely

damaged ... sometimes at the same site. We did see a glimpse of a whale shark, snorkeled with a pod of dolphins and saw frogfish and seahorses. The staff goes all out to serve you. We enjoyed our cabin. The food was tasty but there was not the variety we have seen at other places. There were 16 guests (out of 36 capacity) which may explain the variety. No see-ums are bad if the wind is not blowing. We enjoyed the diving more for the dive teams and the people on our boat than the underwater sites. Likely, we would not return...but we are live-aboard divers and rarely do a land-based dive vacation.

**Laguna Beach Resort, August 2005, Jamie Pollack (scubachick@intelecsys.com), New York, NY.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm. The managers are wonderful and help you with everything. However, our baggage (nine bags) was delayed for 1 day and we still had to pay for the rental of dive gear. Diving was good not great. Whale shark sightings were exciting but too quick. Though we had one hour max for each dive, I still came up with plenty of air and wish I could of had longer bottom times. Food was way too heavy and fried. Coffee was weak. BBQ night was the best. We were on a new boat called Another Time. Lots of room, fresh water shower, nice tank holders and easy ladders for entry. Kerry our boat captain was excellent always trying to find us whale sharks. They didn't have any photo facilities but had nice rinse tanks on board.

**Laguna Beach, August 2005, Hugh Connolly, Miami, FL.** Experience: 500+ dives. Vis: 70 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to

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85 F, choppy, no currents. Very windy all week — 20 knots — and night dive canceled. No-see-ums still terrible but only bothered two of six guests with generalized bumps — allergy? Allowed my wife on the boat to snorkel, no charge. Most dives were “walls” to 140', no swim throughs, nice topography and corals. No whale sharks, 2 months too late. Nothing to do for nondiving wife. Won't return but I had 3 good dives + 2 night dives. Short boat ride to town of Utila.

**Utila Dive Centre, Mango Inn, February 2005, Becky Cochran (divingwahine@adelphia.net), Rondono Beach, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F., choppy. Accommodations were good and reasonably priced — air conditioned cabins or rooms with private bath and TV are worth the extra charge. Otherwise, you might be sharing your bathroom and accommodations with an instructor or divemaster student. Average wait for dinner was 1 hour after ordering — good pasta selections and pizza, but other selections just okay. UDC seems to be having a problem deciding whether to cater to students or to divers traveling on a package; John and Stefan tried to make the distinction and offer better service to those on packages, but attitude of other divemasters was not as service-oriented. There was much confusion over who were divemasters and who were DM's in training, who was leading groups, and who was giving briefings, etc. Morning boat schedules for cruise ship days were in flux until 6 p.m. the night before. Bring DEET — highest

percentage you can handle. I had Repel Sportsman's Formula with 29% DEET and kept covered from the moment I woke up until the moment I went to bed, including time spent on the dock between morning and afternoon dives and seemed to do pretty well with only about 10 bites for the entire trip.

**Utila Lodge, February 2005, Kathy Roberts, Orlando, FL.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F., choppy, surge. No whale sharks our week, though 13 the week before. No guarantees, obviously. Weather was the main factor for no whale sharks, it was windy and the seas were choppy. Reefs were in pretty good shape, healthy corals, but few large fish. Critter hunting was fun, though. Lots of blennies, including a quill-fin and yellow-faced pike blenny. Also found a pipe-horse. Despite the resort confirming our departing flight on Saturday AM, Atlantic Airlines left 15 people waiting on the tarmac on Utila, stating they had no record of our flight. They eventually brought a plane in, and nobody missed their connections, but frustrating. Whale sharks are their draw and without seeing any, the week was just so-so. UW Photography Comments: Fresh water rinse tanks on boat, limited dry space for working on camera on boat, if you wanted to do so.

**Utila Lodge, February 2005, Ralph M. Bishop, Ithaca, NY.** Experience: 1000+ dives. Quiet, clean, comfortable, well-run small lodge built over the edge of the harbor at Utila Town. We had good weather and no insect problems. The Bay Islands College of Diving is part of the complex, an ideal place to get

certified. The week package includes all meals and 17 dives, two at night. They serve the food buffet-style, and nobody should go hungry, and there is a really nice bar built over the harbor. Utila is off the beaten track, which means no shlocky tourist-trap-type places; lots of US and Euro backpackers. Connections from the US to San Pedro Sula are easy — a little iffy on the flights from there to Utila; delays. The week before we were there was the Shark Research Institute's Whale Shark Week. Whale sharks were spotted and tagged, but he said that none had been seen after mid-week. One would have to be lucky to see one between dives, although Willie the dive captain is legendary in his ability to spot them. During Whale Shark Week, the whole day is spent searching for them (snorkeling only is allowed). Utila has been fished out. Unfortunately, there is also a lot of bleached coral at some sites. However, the diving is not at all bad. The wall at Turtle Bay, for example, has healthy coral; during the week we did spot a couple of turtles, a couple of large morays, a couple of sting rays, a couple of larger barracuda, and the usual tropicals, though not in dense numbers. Some experienced divers were disappointed, but guess we must all temper our expectations these days.

**Utila Lodge, April 2005, Kevin Hopper, Cincinnati, OH.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 F, calm, no currents. Wonderful clean resort owned by an American. Friendly staff and locals. Captain Willy found whale sharks most days during surface interval or in PM. The captain locates

them and several swimmers will jump off side of boat to snorkel with them. Not long before they dive, but you get a great look, No touch policy enforced. Operates on schedule. We arranged for a bartender on her day off to take us 4 wheeling on back roads. Really saw the island. Like most of Central America it has been over fished.

**Utila Lodge Resort, May 2005, Tom Rain, Irving, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. An enjoyable trip. Utila Lodge is a nice dive resort. Good Caribbean diving, but minimal fish life on reefs. Corals were nice. Major disappointment was going to Utila to see whale sharks and not seeing even one during our week there. Had no problem with No-see-ums because it was windy. Lots of young (20s) divers in Utila. Enjoyed the uniqueness of the town/people of Utila.

**Utila Lodge, May 2005, Sheri Ray, Dallas, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. This was our third trip to Utila. The lodge, attention to detail by the owners and staff is impeccable. Screened in porches with hammocks in all rooms (eight rooms). Built over the water and we had constant breeze so no problem with no-see-ums. Food was great. Willie, boat captain, was great. Divemaster takes care of all gear for the week after the initial set up. The previous two years, (both trips taken in May) we had the privilege of snorkeling with whale sharks. This year, the water was too choppy to find them. Although the coral was in great shape, I found fewer fish this year. Some island-

ers make their living fishing, and it shows. They've fished out all the sharks. Saw many queen angels and some of the usual Caribbean fish . . . just fewer of them. Plentiful macro stuff. All the dive operations on the island are trying to help the islanders understand that over fishing will hurt their economy, but the fishing continues. For the price of an all-inclusive, including 17 dives, it's a great deal. They have Nitrox and you can dive all 17 dives for \$100.

## JAMAICA

Jamaica has nothing for a serious diver, with much of the coral burned out and any fish that is large enough to eat gets caught. Still, it's a beautiful island, with plenty of upscale accommodations and great food.

**Beaches, Sandals, June 2005, R. Moore, Ph.D. (padidm@earthlink.net), Vista, CA.** Restrictions so severe you don't want to dive. On one dive reef was at 80 ft. but we couldn't go past 60 ft. The limits made sure everyone had a half tank at the end of the dive. No dock so you waded into the chest-deep water carrying your gear. No photo table or camera rinse bucket, only a shower that was like spraying on your camera. Crew provided no service because tipping was not allowed. We did do one 90-ft wreck dive after we all complained.

**Sandals Montego Bay, December 2004, Barb Brauch and Larry Klick, Plymouth, MN.** Experience: 185+ dives. Vis: 30 to 50 ft. Water: choppy. Coral

seemed dead, no fish! Each dive site had own 6' x 6' cage to trap fish and crustaceans. Divemaster said fishermen placed them, but we were always taken to them for show. Bottom time was 60 ft. for 30 minutes. It was an all-inclusive resort, so we felt there was no incentive to go diving. During our week, we were able to dive only twice.

## MEXICO

All the comments here were written before Cozumel, Cancun, Isla Mujeres and the environs were hammered by hurricane Emily. Diving is deeper in Cozumel, so it can be less affected by hurricanes. Many operators cater to experienced divers – but some load boats with all comers. Many Cozumel dives are drifts. Carry surface-signaling devices (strobe, safety sausage, etc.). The best diving is in spring and summer. While it can be rainy in the fall (hurricane season) and winter, heavy rains closed the island for a week in June 2004. Accommodations range from small inexpensive hotels to diver hangouts to high dollar hotels. Many divers take day trips to the mainland to dive the freshwater cenotes. Along the coast, there are dive operations from Cancun south, but the diving is mainly patch reef diving. Isla Mujeres, off Cancun, has some decent reef diving and a drift or two. Whale sharks spend several summer weeks northwest of Cancun, near the island of Holbox, where one can just about be guaranteed to snorkel with scores of