

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

the behemoths. See Undercurrent, October 2004, for a review of this new discovery.

Cancun

Scuba Cancun, Occidental Grand, December 2004, William B. Heyn, New York, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives.

As an Instructor with a group of six friends/students, I booked a two-day package with them to dive Cozumel and the Cenotes while in Xcaret over the New Year. The group gathered in the hotel for our ride to Playa del Carmen to get the ferry to Cozumel. We waited for an hour before contacting Scuba Cancun who informed us that they had "forgotten" to pick us up and that they were sorry but we would not be diving that day. Despite disappointment we rebooked for the following two days but told them we would meet them in Playa del Carmen. On arriving in Cozumel, we realized that Scuba Cancun was planning to hire an operator at the docks in San Miguel. The divemaster briefed us for a reef dive to 70 feet. After swimming behind him for 15 minutes of open sand, we were approaching 105 feet and running out of no decompression time when I let him know I was turning back with my group to complete a safe ascent from our unscheduled depth. He and one other diver not from our group continued off into the blue as I brought my group safely to the surface and alerted the boat with our safety sausages. Day 3: 9:00 AM in the hotel lobby for a trip to the Cenotes. At 10:00, there was still no sign of anyone from Scuba Cancun so we packed up and headed off at 10:30. At 11:15, the SC representative

called from the lobby to find out where we were. It was too late, the group had already scattered and washed gear for our flights home the next day. The Occidental Grand Flamenco Xcaret is a beautiful hotel. Food and service were top notch, compared to other all-inclusives. Their "on-site" scuba operation is actually at the far end of the next-door water park and is a 30-45 minute walk, bad with dry gear before the dives, really bad with wet gear after the dives. Everything else about the hotel was great, go with your family, just don't expect to dive every day.

Scuba Cancun, August 2005, P.L.

Tucson, AZ, dives 1000. The hotel zone in Cancun spans 20 miles of luxury properties including upscale US and Mexican chains interspersed with nightclubs and fast food joints, minus some neon signs and big time stars. We booked three tank days, a night dive, and a day diving the fresh water cenotes, with longtime operator Tommy Hurtado's Scuba Cancun. Tommy was at the airport to greet my group, dropped us at the Executive Terminal for our flight to Holbox (where we snorkeled with whale sharks) and delivered our hundreds of pounds of scuba gear to the Fiesta Americana Condesa. When we returned we relished the hotel Fiesta Condesa's luxury, especially the air conditioning. Next morning at 7:10, Tommy's shuttle drove us twenty minutes to the dive shop where we boarded his custom 35-foot fiberglass boat. Tank holders line both sides of the boat with benches for sitting. There was a camera table and large single engine cover where we placed our bags. An upstairs deck had artificial carpet, but

no chairs. Oxygen was onboard. Bottled water and soft drinks were included. Both days we stopped at beachside cafes for lunch. The boat lacked a head and a ladder to the three foot dive platform. Two attentive divemasters, Pedro and Alejandro led us in groups of four. The first day was spent close to Isla Mujeres. We dived a C-55 Spanish war ship sunk in 74-feet of water by the government five years ago in a barren location with strong current. We used both a granny and the anchor line to descend and ascend. Other than a turret machine gun and a tank, we penetrated most of the ship without seeing more than twisted rusted metal. Other dives included Punta Negra and a shallow dive at Manchones. The sandy area, with some small seamounts, has a 30-foot religious cross with a carved Jesus at a depth viewable by snorkelers. The next day was closer to Cancun and proved better. Seeing the city's contiguous hotels from the water was beautiful. The three dive sites, La Herradura, Grampin, and San Toribio were along the same reef. All were drift and the current gently swept us along. There wasn't anything distinguishing one site from another. The wrath caused by Andrew several years ago is evident. At one place, the coral is tied to the reef, other places have algae-covered rubble. Along 50-foot depth is a small reef and an occasional swim through. All dives were an hour including a safety stop. The difference between Cancun and Cozumel is the lack of dramatic steep walls and big creatures. Cancun allegedly has a greater fish population. We saw schools of yellowtail snapper, French and blue striped grunt, a scrawled filefish, up

to eight lobsters tucked under a rock. Flamingo tongues clung to sea fans. Schools of honey and yellowtail damselfish swam near small sea mounts. Banded coral shrimp could be seen in the occasional small anemone. The largest critters were a hawksbill and green turtle and three permit. Corals included scroll, golf ball, blushing, elliptical, ivory, bush and green cactus coral, The dominant hard coral were elkhorn and pillars. The night dive brought out a moray with the head the size of a watermelon, a 3-foot blue parrotfish, and slipper lobsters. Four South American divers shared the boat and one had only one dive under his belt and immediately aborted the dive in the surge and current. I surfaced in a chilling rain. Viz varied between 70 feet and the water between 78-82 degrees. This was easy, but not enjoyable diving for the well-traveled. spent Dived two cenotes — amazing stalactites and stalagmites — an hour and a half south of Cancun. While the caves are not technical, and dives do not extend beyond 150 feet into the cavern, it is pitch black with occasional surface windows beaming reflective light from the jungle. Divers follow a yellow safety line and while there are arrows pointing to the entrance, I never saw one. Without our guide Arturo Pierce, we had no idea how navigate or get out of the cave. The first cave had small aquarium-type mollies, 3-inch fresh water shrimp like those garlic butter scampi — and darting cat fish. At Xel-Ha, we turned off the highway into the entrance of cenote Dos Ojos. Wooden steps lead to the cave as well as a stair into the water, making for an

easier exit. As many as 100 experienced divers explore this cave daily. Arturo gave us a briefing focusing on cave diving hand signals: a circle with no up-right OK-type fingers means you want to get out of the cenote, two fingers outstretch together means a restriction or narrow tunnel, crossed fingers signal the location of the safety line, which divers should always swim over to avoid entanglement, a finger circle defines a tunnel, the rubbing of fingers refers to kicking up silt, the last finger up signals decompression, a circle eight means entanglement, a curled index finger is asking a question, flashing fingers defines light, a triangle is the exit arrow. We were to advise Arturo when we had 2000 psi, at 1000 psi we would return to the entrance and exit. Arturo cautioned us about stirring the clay-like sediment and destroying visibility. He suggested using a frog or minimal kick several feet above the floor. We followed single file with three feet of separation. It was fascinating to surface and observe flying and hanging bats in Bat cavern. The water was 75 degrees, and we made two dives 30-60 feet, each lasting an hour. Cenotes are on private property and owners charge \$8/per person. Cavern openings extend approximately 150 feet before narrow, less explored, technical tunnels halt divers with large "Peligro" danger warning signs displaying dead bodies. In the two caves we dived, over the years 500 divers have died including dive instructors without caving certification. Chac-Mool's entry is natural with a rock path leading to water's edge. We could see as far as our lights would shine, but distance was relative to the size of the tunnel or room. In the

darkness of the cave, the halocline, a mixture of salt and freshwater, greatly diminished the crystal fresh water visibility we saw in Dos Ojos. Always swimming above the yellow safety line, we wound through narrow passages admiring the stalactites and stalagmites. In the Dome there was an air pocket where we found fossils of brain coral and other shells. Petrified tree trunks were topless, while above the water in an air pocket, roots hung from the ceiling of the cave. At one point, we could see reflections of the jungle from a window that opened on the surface. The Yucatan has more than 3000 cenotes and diving a freshwater cave is a great adventure. www.scubacancun.com or scubacancun@prodigy.net.mx or 998.8.49.52.26. Cenote cavern diving \$140 including transport and lunch. Two tank dives at 10 and 2p \$ 56 (their Cozumel operation charges \$140.00). Each dive is approximately 45 minutes. The PADI Five Star center offers every type of course and rental gear. Nitrox is \$12, but it was broken. Fiesta American Condesa facc@fiestaamericana.com.mx or www.fiestamexico.com Our room was \$299/person double occupancy for 4 nights.

Cozumel

Advanced Divers, Casa Mexicana, March 2005, Jean & Dave Rasmussen, Lynnwood, WA. Experience: 2500+ dives. Vis: 150 to 200 ft. Water: 78 F, choppy. Dive Cozumel had trip cancel so referred us to Ricardo, owner, and Tony, DM/entertainer of Advanced Divers. The boat, Careyitos, was spacious — covered deck, galley, head and nice sun deck. Plenty of room for your gear.

Boat was never crowded. Great lunches! Even better diving. This was our honeymoon and first warm water diving. We wanted steel tanks — no problem. All dives were drift — asked us to stay with group/close to a DM who deploy marker buoys that are easily recognized by boat easy, safe pickups. My husband and I wanted to hang back and explore the many caves, tunnels, swim throughs, especially at Santa Rosa Wall. Tony hung back with us. Plenty of DMs. Saw several nurse sharks, hawksbill turtles. Dived 'Barracuda' and saw large school of eagle rays. Also saw large parrotfish, wrasse, moray eels of varying sizes, huge schools of silver-sides, blue striped grunt, drum, angel-fish, barracuda. Coral healthy, vibrant colors. Effortless drift diving — would use a 7 mm wetsuit next time. Had some newbie divers onboard; they got their own DM. Crew was fantastic ask you to put your gear together for first dive (little bit of reassurance for them that you know what you're doing but they will strip clear down and change out tanks. Very efficient. Videographer Simone Rossini made a DVD for us and the other couple on the boat; quality was superb. You can hire him for \$150 US. It's well worth it. Contact him at simonerossini@hotmail.com. Casa Mexicana — clean, cool, in the heart of San Miguel. But bed uncomfortable, pillows felt they were filled with rock — service almost nonexistent. Desk staff non bilingual, yet majority of guests were American. We had to draw a diagram just to get extra pillows. Buffet breakfast's cooked food was cold, so stuck to fruit and cereal. Great experience. Advanced Divers, [\[divers.com\]\(http://www.advanced-divers.com\).](http://www.advanced-</p>
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Aldora Divers, Villa Aldora, October 2004, Robert White (rcwhitejr@comcast.net), Lakewood, CO. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 130 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm. Aldora continues to be a first class dive operator. I'm a PADI DM, my sister is a PADI AI and my nephew has just a few dives under his belt. Aldora kept us happy with a nice variety of dives suitable for our little group — not too simple and not too difficult, and along with 100cf tanks. Check in advance whether your regulator will work with the DIN adapters on Aldora's tanks. Apparently high pressure tank rules are changing. Devil's Throat is always a thrill. Mateo is everything a good divemaster should be — he pays absolute attention to details. We went diving with him a few years back and he still delivers the highest level of customer service — weights remembered and tucked into the BC, insightful briefings, concise instructions, lucid explanations, and excellent English. the Aldora folks tend not to mix with customers during the surface interval, though one of the owners — Memo — came around several times during the week to chat for a moment to see how we were doing. the lack of interaction made the customers feel unnecessarily like outsiders. The crew has their surface interval meals paid for at Playa del Sol and one other place, so we always return to the same one or two mediocre places for surface intervals. These on-the-beach facilities offer expensive food. Make a trip to the island grocery store Chedraui and bring their own snacks and bottled water or be prepared to spend a minimum of

\$12 for a drink and a snack. We stayed at the new Villa Aldora which is promoted on the Aldora web site. We were upgraded to the owner Dave's suite which consisted of a bed upstairs and a bed downstairs on two separate floors. After a brief mix-up where Aldora thought my sister and I were married and would sleep in the same bed, we were offered an additional room at no extra fee. Villa Aldora is a mile or two north of town near Puerto Abrigo. It is also right across the street from the airport runways / jungle — and consequently I experienced dead cockroaches in my room as well as a constant assault from mosquitoes, not something I had experienced before in Cozumel. The Internet phone and Internet connections were non-functioning. We had to bother the manager to make even the most basic phone calls for us such as for a taxi. Conditions at the Villa Aldora dock sometimes prevented the dive boat from picking us up — supposedly this happens whenever the north wind blows — common we are told in late fall and winter. We were able to save money cooking our own food, but the long and expensive taxi rides back and forth to the supermarket make this option more expensive than we had expected it to be based on the web site description. Think long and hard before booking the villa over one of the amazingly cheap hotel deals on Cozumel. We found errors in the paperwork which Aldora did gladly correct, but left undiscovered it would have cost us a couple hundred dollars extra.

Aldora Divers, Dive Mike, Villa Aldora, October 2004, Marc Silling (smarc@uakron.edu), Tallmadge, OH.

Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 75 to 120 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm. Aldora Divers was excellent. Their tanks were steel 120s at 3500 psi, which meant that we did dives that lasted up to 75 minutes. When we were using 36% Nitrox I think I could have taken a nap on the bottom. In our boat the first dive was a deep air dive, and the second a 60 to 80 foot Nitrox dive. We give them the BCDs and regulators and when arrived in the morning, they were all set up. The boat was small and fast, with four divers, a driver, and one divemaster. He would talk to us about what we were looking for and then take us there. One reef (way south) could only be found by GPS and the divemaster had to dive in and look at the bottom to be sure we were there. We were then treated to one of the most pristine and untouched reefs I have ever seen. When the dives were over we took off our BCDs in the water and the boat driver hoisted them up. Because it was drift diving, the dive master wanted us to stay in sight. In some places the current was considerable. Basically we just sat there at the edge of a wall and the world went by. We saw lots of turtles and on the night dive my son wanted to see an octopus. We saw all sorts of them. We also did two Cenote dives with Dive Mike's. There was a cave divemaster (Victor) who knew the cenotes like his hand. There was also an assistant who followed, I guess in case I flipped out. There was only my son and myself on this dive. After safety instruction we were treated to some amazing views as well as absolute pitch black when we turned off our lights once. I felt safe even though we wiggled around quite

far back. It was interesting that we traversed a cave not only side to side, but also at times up and down. Memo, the head divemaster, was informative and insures good service. It cost a bit more but you get what you pay for. Greg and Kay at the Villa Aldoras hotel were extremely attentive to our needs and would drive us to town or even take us to the grocery store. We did a night snorkel off the dock (what's left of it after one of the hurricanes) and saw number of critters (squid feeding, etc.). There was an octopus on the ladder when my son started in.

Aldora Divers, Villa Aldora, December 2004, Marilyn Mitchell (divermar@charter.net), Brighton, MI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F., choppy, currents. Aldora Divers runs a diving operation the way it should be run. Hats off to Memo and Dave! They run small boats with 6 diver max and use steel 100 and 120 tanks, resulting in dives of more than an hour. After dropping our gear at the shop the night before our first dive, we never touched it again until we picked it up on our last day. The divemasters Mario, Mateo and Luis were terrific! Customer care was fantastic. I had a high pressure leak, which eventually resulted in the dive being aborted. We headed to a beach club to make repairs and while there, Memo, one of the owners, showed up to tell us they had brought extra tanks so we were able to do both dives after all! Each day, our surface interval was spent at a beach club, where we got something to eat and sat in the sun until it was time for the second dive. The diving was incredible although

waves caused by "el norte" made getting back on the boat a challenge some days. However, since your gear is handed up to the captain before boarding, it was definitely do-able. We saw 7 or 8 splendid toadfish, beautiful eagle rays with wingspans that looked to be 8 feet or more, huge grouper, several kinds of crabs, lots of lobster, morays, both green and spotted, a "herd" of more than 50 large gray angelfish "grazing" together on some kind of seagrass and lots more. One day when the harbor was closed due to the weather, Aldora arranged a trip to the Los Ojos cenotes, an awesome sight. Villa Aldora is owned by Dave, one of the owners of the dive operation, and is capably managed by Greg and Kay. Aside from one other couple who were longtime friends of Greg and Kay's, my husband Gary Sundermann and I were the only other people around that week. (It tends to be slow right after the holidays, although many divers were arriving the next week). We had a great time with Greg, Kay and their friends! We stayed in the Barracuda Suite, which included a king and a queen size bed, table and chairs, love seat and full kitchen. It was nice and was kept spotlessly clean. There is a nice courtyard where people can gather for drinks in the evening and a small "beach" type area for lounging. We were told the snorkeling was great right in front of the villa, but the wave action due to el norte kept us from jumping in. The Villa is about a 20 minute walk north of town.

Aldora, January 2005, Ian Kennedy (imkennedy@ucdavis.edu), Davis, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F., calm, currents.

We booked our travel via the Aldora Divers site. Aldora Villa is about 1 mile north of the center of San Miguel. We walked into town several times. The taxi is \$5 each way. We occupied the lower level apartment. It was clean, comfortable and had a kitchen so that we could prepare simple meals. As people left, we were moved to the top floor apartment with a great view of the sea from the balcony. This room had two separate sleeping areas. The small sand area adjacent to the wharf was great for relaxing and for catching some sun. Ladders permit entry into the water where good snorkeling along the wall can be found. In Dave's absence, the property is managed by Kay and Greg, his friends. Greg met us at the airport and organized our travel to the villa. Once there, they made us at home. They helped us negotiate our first taxi trip to town. The villa provides free snorkeling gear. Aldora dive boats come by at about 8 am each morning to pick up divers. Their wharf is just downstairs from the apartments. The boats then pick up a few other customers at hotels along the way as they head south to the reefs. Aldora boats are small and fast and accommodate no more than 6 divers each, making for a personalized service. The boats (the smallest in particular) can be a little uncomfortable in swells with a lot of banging up and down — getting soaked was part of the experience. The dive masters were competent and speak excellent English. Mateo is a graduate in biochemistry who managed to find a variety of almost invisible creatures for us. My son and I felt safe and comfortable with the crew on each of our dives. When we arrived in Cozumel, the dive

shop manager, Memo (short for Guillermo), suggested that we go out with a private divemaster so that our special needs could be taken care of. As it turned out, they paired us with a young couple on the boat who did not have a lot of experience so that we did an easy dive. Following that, Aldora did a good job of putting us with experienced divers who matched our skills and interests well. Memo was also obliging in taking my wife and daughter by car to meet us at the beach resort where we did our 12 hour surface intervals. You buy your own lunch and drinks at the resort. The dives were well led by the dive masters. They were typically multi level dives, starting deep at up to 100 feet and working up from there. Aldora uses steel 120 tanks filled to almost 4000 psi so air is not usually the limiting factor. Our dives were generally 70 to 80 minutes long, even the deep ones. The reefs were beautiful and there was a lot to see as we drifted along, especially at the shallower depths. The dives were slow — as much as the current would permit — which allowed us time for photography and poking around. We found the splendid toadfish several times. Went to Palancar, Tormentos, San Francisco, El Cedral, Yucab, and Tunich — all beautiful. We rented a cheap VW off Alamo. We found the best eating at Casa Denis in town. The waiter Balthazar is a character and in a day or two the quality of the margaritas noticeably improved.

Aldora Divers, Hotel Bahia, February 2005, Buzz Waterston (buzzdr1@juno.com), Wallingford, PA. Experience: ~ 150 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 ft. Water: 77 to 78 F, calm & flat. Aldora Divers a superb operation. Always on time, al-

ways picked good sites, always asked us what we wanted to do, always avoided the cattle boat sites. Matteo an excellent divemaster. Memo saved me about 20% by booking my stay at the Hotel Bahia for me, and was an excellent host. Hotel a block from the dive shop, in the center of town. Clean, roomy (my room had a king-sized bed, a queen bed in a separate area, and a kitchenette with full-size refrigerator). All dives excellent; using 120 SS tanks, every dive was over an hour long. At Palancar Daves saw two hawksbill turtles, one feeding voraciously on sponges. Loads of large angelfish and hazelnut jellyfish. At Yucab Wall, saw a half-dozen lobsters packed together under a ledge, huge black grouper, juvenile drum, and several large filefish. Strong current. Nitrox dive. At Palancar Bricks, saw two turtles and live filefish. Punta Tunich was one of the best dives of my life. Saw a turtle, five huge grouper (one of which was downing a triggerfish), lots of filefish; lobsters and crabs, several scorpion fish and a southern stingray. Saw two nurse sharks in a small cavern under a ledge. One of them was violently and repeatedly twisting its body around, trying to dislodge something. Devil's throat had eerily beautiful swimthroughs, one of which was large enough that we did it in virtually total darkness. Saw two turtles and a 9-ft. spotted eagle ray. At San Francisco, saw an 8-ft. green moray, two smaller morays including a goldentail, four lobsters hiding out in a row, juvenile spotted drum, large and small trunkfish, large tilefish, blennies, a scorpionfish, a big tiger grouper and a close-up 8-ft. spotted eagle ray.

Aldora Divers, Villa Aldora, March 2005, Mike Hynan (hynan@uwm.edu), Grafton, WI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 130 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, choppy. Our first time in Cozumel. Undercurrent and word of mouth made Aldora one of our top three choices. A phone conversation with Dave, the owner, sealed the deal. We stayed in the Barracuda suite at Villa Aldora and loved it. No problems with bugs. Great view and everything works. Greg and Kay, the managers, are the best. Greg met us at the airport at 8:00 pm, oriented us, and provided a six pack in the suite. The next day Greg took us grocery shopping, and brought the food back to Villa Aldora while we checked in at the dive office. He packed everything away for us! We ate four meals in (using the gas grill at the Villa), and three dinners out. Taxi rides into town were easy to find and \$3-4. Some other guests may have been bothered by noise from remodeling the back apartments. Internet connections and free long distance worked perfectly. Diving was also great, as this was our first concentrated experience with drift diving. We were put on a boat with divers of comparable experience. Vollrath was our dive master. He was friendly, attentive, and ran a tight ship. He was with us for all five days of diving. He was open to going to sites we wanted to go to and diving profiles we wanted. When my wife forgot her scuba boots one day, Vollrath lent his to her for the first dive, and Greg and Kay got her boots to her during our onshore lunch surface interval. Lunch was pricey, but good. I especially liked the club sandwiches. Cost of lodging and diving was

comparable to Little Cayman (maybe a little less), but the cost of food on Cozumel was much less.

Aldora, Villa Aldora, April 2005, Cheryl Eagan (Turtlestudio@comcast.net), Birmingham, MI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 85 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 F, calm. This our second time with Aldora Divers and staying at Aldora Villas. Our first trip was in September 2005 during Hurricane Ivan. We got lots of diving in prior to the storm but it is hopefully our last category 5 hurricane experience. Memo made sure that we were safe and well taken care of. On our second stay with Aldora the same divers that we had ridden out the storm with returned to Aldora too! Dave had made sure that we were compensated with free accommodations and diving for the days we missed due to the storm through hurricane insurance. Very class operation our DM Bill was great and our accommodations were wonderful. A friend used Aldora Divers to get certified and was overwhelmed with the patience and superb service she received. Aldora provides unique service.

Aldora Divers, Villa Aldora, August 2005, David Sifre (dsifre@optonline.net), Bronxville, NY. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 95 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Aldora Divers is one of the most expensive operators on Cozumel. The philosophy appears to be to keep the prices high, and the number of divers low. I was never on a boat with more than four other divers, including my buddy and a dive master. There is no food included. Just bottled water. The surface interval is at a "resort" type

place where food can be purchased. There is also a swimming pool. This beats sitting on the boat for the surface interval, and may account for some of the cost (the resort costs \$15 for tourists to get into, but is included in the price of the dive). The boats are small, without a head. Your gear is set up when you get on the boat, they switch tanks between dives, and keep your gear as long as you are diving with them. They also include the din adapter for your regulator. Bottom times of 1 hour 20 minutes not uncommon. Watch your computer. The drift dive is a long leisurely drift — sometimes you can drift through several dive sites, and more often than not, you are diving much longer than with other dive operators — another reason why it is worth more to dive with these guys. Divemasters were friendly and knowledgeable, and protective of the reefs. The Villa Aldora is nice. You must go into town for all meals except breakfast, which costs \$5. Town is a \$3 cab ride (3 minute drive/15 minute hot walk). They are friendly and accommodating. Free internet access (high speed wireless, so bring the laptop); free telephone calls to the US, and a NYC area code compliments of an internet phone in the room; and free snorkel gear is provided on request so that you can snorkel out front of the Villa Aldora without having to take your dive gear off the boat. No swimming pool, and exit from the ocean is by way of ladder, so disabled or mobility challenged folks can't really get wet here. Boat picks you up outside your door, at 7:30 am, unless breakfast is late, in which case they wait for you. The boat was too small

to accommodate a dunk tank for the camera. The captain and/or divemaster were good enough to hand the camera after a backward roll entry, and the divemaster was eager and able to point out macro critters to be photographed.

Anita Divers, Fiesta Americana, October 2004, Ray Evory (r.evory@worldnet.att.net), Ft. Worth, TX.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 84 F, surge. Nice 42' boat, easy sites — wish my site choice (Palancar Bricks) would have been considered by Ramon Soltero (same good sites repetition as 2003, no swimthroughs, single group dives, mostly Punta Sur Area for intermediate divers) great onboard lunch, first day too long — 3hrs., responsible crew, friendly, except no visible post dives muster checks, no O2 on-boat analyzers to verify tank Nitrox % (bring your own), split fins OK for drift diving . Fiesta Americana. charges a daily security fee for in-room safe which we never used and I don't understand Spanish on hotel statement. Reef breakfasts across street were great; so were the local restaurants in town we used: Prima, Quidos, El Morrow. The airport now has A/C.

Anita Divers, Presidente Intercontinental, March 2005, Mariliz and Ken Licata (startpackin@aol.com), Staten Island, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 250 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, calm, choppy. This was our fourth dive trip to Cozumel, and we love the island, the people, the Mayan culture and the immense reefs. Our kids, 17 and 12 had the time of their lives. My husband has been diving for 25 years, and nothing

compares to the experience aboard the Anita. No cattle car; the boat leaves out of the Marina South of town (past the Cruise Ships) and if you are staying south of there, they will pick you up at your hotel dock. Scheduling is a breeze, as you can call Rudolfo (Owner) the night before for a dive the next day, or e-mail them the days of your visit. (www.Anitadivers.com). We get picked up at 9am at the Presidente, hand over our dive bags, and enjoy the day! The bilingual crew of Ariel, Ranz, Pino, Oscar and Ramone the divemaster extraordinaire, take care of you like royalty, and provide a fun-filled, sure to see fish, great reefs, caves etc., day. The crew sets up your equipment, No more than 8 in a group, with two Divemasters. All level of divers are catered to. After the first deep dive, the Anita takes you to a scenic area for your surface interval and treats you to a delicious lunch: salads, sandwiches, fresh fruit and vegetables and more. Plenty of fresh drinking water and soft drinks. Then a leisurely trip to the second dive, and back at the hotel about 3pm. No rushing, no confusion, just the care and expertise. UW Photography Comments: Plenty of room and Counter space Available for camera setup. Many photographers (3-4) on boat each day. Rinse Tank for cameras, freshwater shower on board.

Aqua Safari, Advanced Divers, Hotel Cozumel, February 2005, Ron & Sherry Smith, Levittown, PA. Experience: 361 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm and flat, strong currents. Hotel Cozumel very nice, just a little further from town. Rooms have racks on balconies — great for drying gear. Clear water usually 100+) and

great drift diving always bring us back to Cozumel. Dove with Aqua Safari one week — good friends with divemasters — good diving. Dove with Advanced Divers second week for more bottom time and some deeper dives. Saw tons of turtles, lots of toadfish, huge angel-fish and nurse sharks.

Aquaworld, El Cid La Ceiba, August 2005, Bill Pasukinis (cbpas@epix.net), Benton, PA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 65 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm. Calm waters between Cozumel and the Mexican coast. Hotel has their own scuba launch, convenient.

Blue Angel, Caribe Blu, October 2004, Melina Piekarski (afarmergirl@pocketinet.com), Pasco, WA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm. Over all my experience was pretty good. I did get a pair of shoes stolen from my room. I guess they needed the shoes more than I did. The owners reimbursed me. Hot water was all or nothing, we managed. Rooms were large and comfortable and convenient for diving. Blue Angel was good to dive with if you are an independent diver. Choose one of the more safety-oriented dive masters. I found one divemaster offensive, he criticized people's equipment, their personality traits, their body types, their race, just about everything. I didn't like that at all. He also hung the dive computer over the side of the boat to run down the timer. Don't let this keep you from using the facility or the dive op, I think every place has their ups and downs. Inexpensive, clean, convenient, quiet, friendly, and helpful place. The restaurant is open for breakfast and

lunch. Good food, and located above the dive shop. You cant book this hotel with a flight package, however you can book into another hotel with a flight package for 1-2 days then relocate to this hotel with a dive/lodging package to save hundreds of dollars.

Blue Angel Dive Shop, Caribe Blu Hotel, December 2004, S. Altchuler (zdzq1dm001@sneakemail.com), Rochester, MN. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 79 F, calm. Blue Angel Dive Shop: A well-run operation, that runs small, fast boats. Typically, there are only about six people on the boat. When I've dived with them in the past with enough people, we've been able to have an entire boat and the same divemaster all week, and choose where we go. Recently, there were only a few of us, so we went out with other divers. The choice of site is based on the experience of the divers in the boat, our interests, and where we have dived. The dive shop works to set up the boats with divers of like interest. Check in with the dive shop as soon as you arrive, so they know you're there. They do get walk-ins, and once the boats are full, they typically will not take out more people. The usual two-tank trip is one deep reef, an hour break with water supplied, and then a shallow reef dive. They will supply nitrox at an extra charge. The divemasters are knowledgeable and can point out unique features. We varied as to whether we were given profiles or allowed to dive our own profiles, depending on whether there was significant current and we were doing drift dives as well as experience of the group. The dive shop offers instruction

and will arrange cenote diving on the Yucatan. The divemaster for our cenote tour was skilled and knowledgeable. He was able to show us nooks and crannies not normally seen. The truck they use to travel from Playa del Carmen to the cenotes is aged. The ride in the back seat when you have the maximum four divers (so three in the back seat) is not comfortable. The best way to book with Blue Angel is through their US contact: 1-866-779-9986, bluangel@fidmail.com. Caribe Blue Hotel and the dive shop, as well as the restaurant, are all on the same site. If you stay at the hotel, you get use of the gear lockers and rinse tanks at Blue Angel, whether you dive with them or not. If you dive with Blue Angel, you also get unlimited shore diving. They are located off a pleasant shallow reef. The hotel is an idyllic diver hotel. All the rooms have drying racks outside for your gear. The hotel is on the ocean, and all the rooms have an ocean view. Fresh water pool, plenty of hammocks for lounging — ground floor rooms have their own hammocks outside each room. A few rooms have king-size beds. The hotel is 2.2 km south of San Miguel, so it's an easy walk to town. There are electronic safes in all of the rooms for keeping your valuables. Right over the dive shop is a small restaurant, that serves decent breakfasts and lunches at a reasonable price. US dollars are accepted. The only way to make a hotel reservation is to call the US number above.

Blue Angel, Hotel Cozumel, February 2005, Brad Griffin (bgriffin@excite.com), Cordova, TN. Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 79 to 79 F., calm. The Blue Angel dive

operation was incredible and accommodated the type of dives we wanted to do and let everyone dive their own profile. Hotel Cozumel wasn't all that wonderful. The hotel itself was nice and clean; however, the service was not that good. The outside bars ran out of beer and food and the staff made little effort to correct the problems. And when there was food, it wasn't all that great either — even when they tried to put on a show at the ocean side restaurant.

Blue XT Sea, El Cantil Condominiums, May 2005, Robin Abrahamson Masson, (ram@wigginsandmasson.com), Ithaca, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, currents. El Cantil: A new, nice condo complex with a pool and artificial beach. A dock for the dive op to pick you up. Across the street from the best grocery store. Free parking in secure garage under building. 2, 3, 4 bedroom units, individually furnished units. Blue XT Sea: A superb dive op. Great DM's, friendly, fun, and informative. Small boats mean 5 or six divers per boat, with 2 DMs in the water. Safety and respect for the reefs and creatures emphasized. But plenty of freedom to dive your own profile and no rush to finish the dive. Aluminum 63's available on request for short folks who don't gulp air, like me. Good quality rental gear. Surface intervals at a beach. Snacks served on board or you can buy your own on the beach. 24 hour film processing available on island.

Blue XT Sea, El Cozumelena, June 2005, Mike Reed, Cincinnati, OH. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet.

Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. Blue XT Sea was wonderful. Accommodating before, during and after. Everything from fresh muffins, juices, water to helping divers before, during and after dives. Did a great job with our 16-year-old on a night dive. The resort accommodations were nice, but the buffet (All Inclusive) was lousy. Room service was included in the AI and it was pretty darn good. There is a nice dress up restaurant that you can make reservations for, but you cannot wear gym shoes. Need to wear "leather" shoes, which precluded my wife and I and our three teenage sons. This place now at the northern end. UW Photography Comments: Fresh water rinse available, but no buckets or tanks.

Bottom Time Divers, Villas Las Anclas, December 2004, William (bboswell@marklang.com), Millersville, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm, currents. Raul's operation is top notch, fleece lined nylon wind breakers for those chilly rides during the winter months, water, fruit and/or cookies and cake during surface intervals. You dive your computer, we averaged over one hour of bottom time per dive. Raul still finds seahorses along with many other little critters that most divers miss in Cozumel. Raul was a divemaster with Blue Bubbles for many years, which has been sold twice in the last few years and things are quite different now.

Dive Cozumel, Casa Mexicana, May 2005, Steven Rosenfeld (oceanstevenr@aol.com), Westlake Village, CA. Experience 500-1000 dives. Visibility 100-250 feet. Water 84 F, calm,

currents. The good and the bad. I chose these two operations partially based on prior reviews in Undercurrent Chapbook. Casa Mexicana is a nice hotel located on the water front in Cozumel. There are numerous places to eat and shop in the immediate area. The hotel is clean and well maintained. There is a buffet breakfast included in the price of the room. The buffet has cooked to order eggs and many other items. The rooms were kept clean and fresh towels were provided every day. Each room had a television with some English channels, a wall safe, and a small refrigerator. As mentioned in a prior review the beds are hard. I booked a ocean view non smoking room 6 weeks in advance. I confirmed the room by E mail 5 days before arrival. When I arrived I was told that all they had available was a ocean view smoking room. I had to settle for another room as I could not handle the smoke. The first night I arrived I received a call in my room from Role, the owner of Dive Cozumel. I chose this operation because of the boat "Yellow Rose". I was told they did not have enough divers to run the boat that day. Next morning, along with two other divers, we took a cab and were connected up with "Advanced Divers" and the boat Careyitos. The name advanced divers is a little misleading, it's just the name of the company and not the type of diving they did. The boat Careyitos is a 40 foot boat, plenty of deck space, a large sun cover, and a head. The boat is slow but the crew was wonderful. We did two dives with a 2-hour break in between dives. They had a nice buffet lunch of make-your-own sandwiches and fruit. There was also a

ice chest full of soft drinks. Tony was delightful and told great “sea stories”. A good briefing was done before each dive and the water was clear and warm. The reefs look healthy and are covered with soft and hard coral. I dove with Careyitos on the two days that the Yellow Rose did not run. I dove on the Yellow Rose two days. It is a large 50 foot boat. Lots of deck space and sun cover. The boat has a head and twin jet engines. The boat is as fast as the smaller six packs but gives a much more comfortable ride. They had nitrox if you wanted and oversized tanks. For \$5 a dive more I used one of the oversized tanks. It gave me all the bottom time I wanted and after a two dive day I was ready to head back. There was no lunch or soft drinks on board. Just some water in a jug and some fruit. The owner Role ran the boat and was the divemaster on the two days I dove with him. On the first day I dove with him the dive briefing was three words, “watch your ascent”. The next thing I knew I was following him through numerous tunnels in 100 feet of water. On the second dive as we were about to jump in I asked him if this was a reef dive? He looked at me and said “I only make wall dives”.

Dive Equalizers, Fiesta Americana, November 2004, Michael Igoe (mike_igoe@estreet.com), Aurora, CO. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm. I had them take care of my entire land package, without regret. It's a small and well run organization, especially with the attention given to details by owner Darwin Zapata and his partner Norma Garcia. Absolutely not a cattle boat operation. As in the past they are dependable,

safety and environment conscious, and adaptable to divers' preferences. Beyond that, they are an excellent source for tune-up diving.

Dive Mike, Iberostar, September 2005, Karen Driskill (kdriskill63@yahoo.com), Torrance, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm, currents. Dive Mike in Playa Del Carmen (PDC) is a safe and reliable operator. That said, Mike is looking to sell his business. We purchased a package of dives that included open water in both PDC, Cozumel, and cenote cavern dives. In PDC and the cenotes, the ratio of divers to dive master ranged 2:1 up to 5:1 max, except in Cozumel. All boats were covered so we always had sun and rain protection. All dives were scheduled two tank dives. All dives were drift dives. There is definitely a range of diving in and around PDC. We saw lots of turtles, barrel sponges, big tarpons, barracuda, and lots of little colorful fish. They advised us that due to the intensive hurricane season that currents were a bit stronger than usual — that became an understatement. Scuba Staff in Cozumel took eight divers with varying skill and certification levels and did an intermediate wall dive with a wicked current that pulled at your regulator. No problem for four of us, but at least three other divers was bouncing off the coral like a southern California beach volleyball. Overall, PDC is nice place for beginner and intermediate divers.

Dive Palancar, Casa del Mar, January 2005, Paul Schmieder (pschmieder@sbcglobal.net), Bellville, TX. Experience: 127 dives. Vis: 60 to 80

ft. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm & flat. Group of divers (7) organized by the Discover Scuba shop in Houston. Owner Art Melvin did a nice job arranging pleasant, lower cost lodging at Casa del Mar; good proximity to the dock and unlimited shore diving. San Miguel was still close enough to taxi for dinners out and the diving was a pleasure. On our last day, 3 of us took the ferry to Playa del Carmen for some eye-opening cenote diving. The cenote dives were with Aquatec and Villa de Rosa, who did a great job.

Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, February 2004, Trevor (cramercraft@shaw.ca), Edmonton, Alberta. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 90 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, choppy, surge. The (was called) Hotel Cozumel was excellent, a 4 minute walk to town, a beautiful pool and beach area and the dive shop right there on the beach. A 30 second walk from your room to the dive boat!. Dive Paradise and their guide Hosai were great, helpful and the boat we had called Paradise was large and spacious. The dive shop was they should push and preach more about not touching the reef, once again there were bottom draggers and the dive masters should not let them dive unless those kind of divers improve their skills! The boat rides to the dive sites were 30 -50 minutes, but I'm a boat person so I did not mind the ride! The reef was great, drifting was cool, but they need to do a better job at preserving the reef!

Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, December 2004, Marjorie (griffing.mn.shop@comcast.net), Shoreview,

MN. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, choppy, currents. The resort rooms were large, balconies had pegs and racks to hang gear, beds were comfortable, wished the rooms had more light. The food was good — not great — and available at times convenient to the dive boats. No one got sick from the food. We got off the morning boat, ate at the beach restaurant and got on the afternoon boat after a rest under the palm trees overlooking the ocean. The underground walkway from the resort to the beach/dive shop was convenient. There are large rinse areas and places to hang gear near the dock. We didn't bother with the lockers — they are conducive to creating stench. The "beach" doesn't really exist. There is a sand area with several deck chairs. An area of the water is roped off for snorkeling, beach diving. The "hot tub" was more of a "warm tub." The dive operator was well organized, although dive briefings could have been more thorough. They tried to accommodate the divers' wishes as to dive sites. Briefings consisted of, "This is X reef, max time is Y, max depth is Z, start your ascent when you have 700 psi, follow the DM." The diving itself was incredible — saw juvenile trunk fish, juvenile spotted drum, variety of eels, indigo hamlets, seahorses (one was pregnant), the biggest lobster ever, splendid toad fish, every imaginable parrot fish, queen trigger fish, trunk fish dancing (mating?), etc. The DMs were good at finding the less obvious fish and critters. On several dives, the current was amazingly strong — flying backwards over a reef in excess of 3 knots is an interesting experience.

One day of diving was cancelled due to weather — they gave us a rain check good for diving more than 30 days after the date canceled, no expiration date.

While most Nitrox fills were within 1% of the mix ordered, one day a tank labeled 32% actually contained 37%. Tanks ranged from 2800psi to 3200 psi, whether air or Nitrox. Fly directly into Cozumel rather than Cancun. While you might save some on airfare, the hassle of the van ride, ferry ride is just not worth it.

Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, December 2004, James Fritch (jhfritch@hotmail.com), Citrus Hts, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, choppy, currents. Crowds of people over the Christmas holiday. I was disappointed with the Hotel Cozumel's food and Dive Paradise. Had to wait several hours for our room upon arrival. The room was excellent: plumbing worked fine; good third story views of the pool; good lock box included in the room; excellent patio layout permitted drying gear securely. The food was substandard. My wife became violently ill after the second day. Food poisoning was the culprit. Then I became sick during the "Noche Buena" fiesta by the pool. After a visit to the CMC hospital, the diagnosis was the same: food poisoning. I paid a substantial extra for the all-inclusive option assuming that we would always have a "safe" source of food at the hotel (far more than I would have paid had we taken meals at a local restaurant). The food that was available was bland and unappetizing. Only on Mexican food day was the food appealing and since I was recovering

from food poisoning, I could not fully appreciate it. Dive Paradise is one of the oldest on the island. It operates for the convenience of its dive masters, not the paying customer. We were treated as though we were rank amateur divers even though I am a dive master and my son has experience throughout the world. Every day we were assigned another boat and had to prove ourselves all over again. The boats depart at 8:20 AM and make stops along the way, putting us well behind the others on Cozumel's crowded reefs. I inquired about the more challenging dive sites listed on the waiver form. I was told by the dive shop manager that these were unavailable. Divemasters seem indifferent to US divers, but pay special attention to their Mexican clients. On one occasion the majority of the divers on a boat wanted to dive the C-53 wreck. A pair of Mexican divers wanted to dive Columbia reef instead. The response of the crew was to dive Columbia reef. It was not until a crew member sensed the inequity that he suggested that we do both sites. We were lucky in our selection of days to dive as the weather quickly became too windy and rough to send boats out. A large fresh water bucket was present on all boats for camera equipment. No camera table or tray.

Dive Paradise, Fiesta Americana, February 2005, Pat & Pam Murphy (themurphys@omurphy.com), Naperville, IL. Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 74 to 78 F, choppy. Our 4th trip to Cozumel so we picked our operator after reviewing comments in Undercurrent, and it was the best decision we made. We dove in

the small fast boats and we were back by 12:30pm everyday so we had the afternoon to go to the beaches. When all the divers were on the boat the divemaster asked where we wanted to go and dive and it was the decision of the divers. All the tanks had 3,000 psi. Dive Paradise divemasters and captains were professional and helpful. Fiesta Americana was a nice place. We rented a car and drive to the beaches and go to the restaurants that are off the beaten path. The room was just remodeled and it was clean and the bed was comfortable. I only wish they offered a breakfast only package.

Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, February 2005, Larry D. Sensenig (lsensenig@aol.com), Sioux City, IA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 , currents. We lost the equivalent of a day getting there because of a mechanical problem on a Continental flight. We were to arrive at 2 pm on Feb. 26, but didn't arrive until 11 am on the 27th. We were treated to a complimentary drink upon arriving at the Hotel Cozumel. We did not want a ground floor room, so after voicing our displeasure they changed the room. Dive Paradise is a well-run organization. They quickly get you checked in and allow you to do a shore check-out dive. I had been placed on what I knew was an older "slow" boat, but I came to like the smaller boats. Fewer people means more relaxed diving and more personal attention. Divemasters and crew try to be accommodating and they were friendly. Between dives one is served a sandwich, fruit, and a drink. The dive profiles were a bit conserva-

tive for a boat full of people that had dive computers. The divemaster always asked the group where they wanted to go (do or see) each day. No one mentioned tips, but most divers were tipping after each dive. Midweek we decided to take the ferry to the mainland to visit the Mayan ruins at Chichen Itza. Although the bus trip took all day I'm glad to have seen these magnificent icons of the past. Coral swim-throughs, walls, or coral beds on every dive. Turtles, large barracuda, lobster, crab, eels, quite a few spotted drums and lots of queen and Drench angels, grunts, silver sides, etc. The night dive was really special. I would recommend the following restaurants: El Moro, Las Tortugas, or Primas.

Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, May 2005, Walter Bennett (walterbennett@hotmail.com), Denver, CO. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. great trip, great location, great dive operator, great divemasters, and great water. The hotel was directly across the street and was hospitable, clean, and friendly. Dive Paradise takes you to the hard to find areas of those places in safety.

Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, May 2005, August 2005, Rob Fletcher, Branson, MO. Experience: 279 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 feet. Water: 78 F, calm and flat. Took my two teenaged sons. Food was excellent! Don't recommend the lobster for extra charge above all-inclusive options but everything else was good. Water in August 82 F. Villablanca is clean, comfortable, and economical. Good breakfasts at Temptations or Papa Hog's. Great restaurants in town

— reason enough to skip the all-inclusives. Suggest Prima, Aquarius, Lobster House, El Morro and La Choza. Second August in a row of nasty currents — fun for the experienced but challenging for the beginners.

Dive Paradise, Rental House (Casa Marcos), June 2005, Lee Schnell (lee.schnell@us.army.mil), Austin, TX.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Rented a house and it was outstanding. Casa Marcos is located on Calle 8 Norte and 20th. It is 3 bedrooms, 2 2 baths, full kitchen (with blender) and a pool. Great location and great accommodations. Dive Paradise boats were on time and the divemaster Eric is one of the best. Our niece was Open Water certified on Friday before we left on Sunday. Eric took this in to account on the site selections and by the end of the week we were on Punta Sur! Safety was never compromised and Eric had great situational awareness! They need to bring more water and fruit would be nice during the surface interval. Diving was great. Lots of turtles. A couple of eagle rays...even saw one breach during a surface interval. Nurse sharks and the usual suspects to include two friendly sea horses. Also had a great night dive with lots of sharps-tail eels, squids and octopus! Be careful on the weight restrictions for your luggage. American doesn't care that you're a diver and we paid \$100 for an "over-weight" bag on the return trip. Same bag on the way down was no extra? UW Photography Comments: Used a housed digital video camera for all dives. Crew was helpful with the camera.

Dive Shop, Fiesta Americana, March 2005, Jeffrey O'Brien (jgobrien83@msn.com), Fort Collins, CO.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 75 to 79 F, calm. Second time at the Fiesta Americana on all-inclusive package. Staff and the dive shop take care of our group. We had our own boat and same crew each day. Dive Master was good about pointing out things, but stayed with crew topside when out of the water. Lots of corals and fish. Water seemed cooler this year than last and less large fish. Beach diving great for observing critters without having to go far (<500') or deep (15') A lot to see for snorkelers too! Rooms not diver-friendly in setup, but clean and well maintained. Food good for Mexico and plentiful. Entertainment lacking, but we're not there to be pampered. UW Photography Comments: Used Sony P100 no external flash for first time and had pretty good success. Housing almost impossible to find for older camera.

Dive with Cristina, El Presidente, December 2004, Tracy Ashmore (tashmore@musgravetheis.com), Denver, CO.

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, choppy. Luis has been an instructor on Cozumel for 30 years and Cristina about the same. They actually care about their divers, they are passionate about protecting the reefs, they are knowledgeable about the aquatic life, and they are extraordinary instructors eager to improve the quality of their newer divers' diving. They both speak fluent English (Cristina has a degree in architecture from a U.S. university). If you want it, you will be showered

with individual attention and tips to improve your diving. After two trips to Cozumel with Cristina and Luis, my diving has improved exponentially, both from specific techniques for buoyancy control and overall confidence. My husband and I have been fortunate to have their boat to ourselves on two occasions. Enjoy sea kayaking between dives. www.divewithcristina.com.

Dive With Cristina, June 2005, Rick Flaksman (rickflaks@bigfoot.com), Cape Girardeau, MO. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 110 Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, choppy. Cristina Roman has been a dive instructor for years. Her boat is the Nena, a converted freight boat, a 42-footer equipped with weather curtains, stereo, DAN Oxygen, DAN first aid, and a sun deck, but not fast. There is plenty of shade. There is a head. Her prices are fair and generally include a home-made lunch. Her guacamole is the best. There are soft-drinks and water, no alcohol. The crew is well trained and helpful, getting our gear put together and on us. They had us take our gear off in the water and hauled it up for us, the last thing off before our ladder climb was the fins. There is a fresh water hose and the water is heated by the engine. Cristina is an excellent guide. She pays close attention to novices, taking them "under her wing". She helped one in our group with a mask-clearing drill on a sandy part of the reef. Her pre-dive briefings were extensive, and during the 1 1/2 hour surface interval she gave pointers to divers who wanted them. There were two divers in our group, 11 and 13 year old sisters. They were really good! They and their parents went as a family.

Since there were ten of us, we had two divemasters. It was a laid-back dive experience, but professional. The Nena is not a fast boat. www.divewithcristina.com.

Dive with Martin, Fiesta Americana Dive Resort, February 2005, Bob Sommerfeld, Tucson, AZ. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 74 to 76 F, calm, currents. Dive with Martin was an enjoyable operation. \$58 for 2 tank morning dive with all equipment. Left dock at 7:45 AM and returned at 11:45 AM. Bottled water and sliced cantaloupe provided between dives. Only 8 divers. Divemaster asked divers what sites they wanted to dive before we departed the dock. Boat was small but fast (back-flip entry). First dive was at Columbia Reef, 85-100 feet. Saw hawksbill turtle and great coral swim throughs/canyons. Surface interval was spent on shore at San Francisco Beach (toilets, chairs, gift shop). Second dive was at Santa Rosa Shallow, 35-55 feet. Saw Spotted Ray and lots of fish life. Good spot for macro photography. Fiesta Americana Dive Resort was just "OK". Bed was hard as a rock. Music from pool area was loud from 8AM to 9PM. Food was bland at restaurants. Buffet is "pushed/promoted" at every meal. Do yourself a favor and DO NOT go "All-Inclusive". Go into town (\$6-9 taxi ride) for some meals and/or eat at the Reef Restaurant across the road. Order off the menu. UW Photography Comments: Lot of plankton/backscatter in photos so a side flash or removable flash is essential.

Dressel Divers, Iiberostar, April 2005, James Boone (Masterdvr@hotmail.com)

com), Alexandria, VA. Experience: 251-500 dives. vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, currents. Dive operation is well run. Boats left on time. Same sites every week. No snacks after dives and water offered only once. Divemasters good. Boats good. No real challenges. Iberostar beautiful. great landscaping and food was good. Rooms ok. Plenty of hot water. All inclusive,. nice beach. Downside was many thimble jellies. On surface many people were stung. Had not been to Cozumel since 1996 and was saddened by the lack of black groupers and green morays. A lot more turtles though and more nurse sharks. Good trip.

Liquid Blue Divers, 2005, Bruce & Steven Mah, Danville, CA. Small family-owned operation. Roberto & his wife Michaela run the operation with a personal service that is unmatched. They even have t-shirts making fun of them, calling themselves the “mom & pop” dive operation because the bigger shops on the island tease them. Liquid Blue Divers dives earlier than most, beating other shops to the better sites. They usually only take the more experienced divers, and leave your egos behind. This is a laid-back group, but make no mistake, they know what they are doing. When we arrive in Cozumel, our gear is taken, put into “tagged” Liquid Blue Dive bags, and our gear never sees our hotel until we are ready to go. We pick up our gear at their shop, washed & cleaned, hanging in their shop when we go to close out our bill.

Living Underwater, Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, January 2005, Ted Shieh, M.D., Chicago, IL. Experience:

300+. Vis.: 60-100+ feet. Our booking was done on-line. We contacted Jeremy Ansel by phone upon arrival. No dive shops to visit. No hassles. The day starts at 8am. He begins asking us where we'd like to go, what we'd like to see. The boat is fast; we're at our dive sites in a jiffy. He made sure that we had plenty of bottled water, a fleece-lined Jacket if we wanted, and all the gear are set up before we leave. Because of the steel 120s, bottom times were long (75-100 minutes/tank); great for the deeper dives. Now that he has acquired new Nitrox tanks, bottom times were even longer. With a few beginners on our boat at times, Jeremy took the more advanced divers (2-4 divers), while Anna took the less experienced to different sites or shallower reefs. Jeremy balances safety concern with freedom to dive. After the dive, the captain hands you a dry towel, sets up / stows away the gear, and hands your wetsuit on a hanger. Jeremy provides a jacket, and serves plenty of beverages, cookies and fruit. Surface intervals are spent at a beach club for a bite. Saw 5 huge eagle rays on one dive. We interacted with sea turtles for long periods, until another diver from a cattle boat began chasing after it. Jeremy moves slowly and in a non-threatening way toward the animals, and is extremely careful with the reef and all the inhabitants. Gear is kept by LU, so little schlepping. He ends each day asking the divers what he could do differently to make the experience better. One day, conditions were rough, and prohibited LU's boat from docking at Hotel Cozumel. Jeremy called us early that day, and suggested bringing our dive gear to our hotel so

that we have the option to go dive with a dive op w/ a larger boat. Went on a much more economical 2 tank dive with Dive Paradise at our resort; \$53 for 2 tanks in the afternoon. However, the boat is slow, and the other divers were inexperienced, mostly off cruise ships. Dives were at closer reefs, which were not as worthwhile. Only frills on the boat: water, and not much was offered. Bring your own everything. The staff was friendly, but only one DM to the group of 8. The DM was seen harassing a balloon fish—perhaps to make it puff? (as seen with other mediocre Cozumel dive operators). The rest of the newbies proceeded to imitate the DM's behavior. DM behavior such as this will only teach the animals to fear divers, teach beginner divers to become ignorant divers, and teach me not to go back to dive with them. Hotel Cozumel is big but doesn't feel big — not bad for an all-inclusive. Food is OK. Big pool, a dive locker is provided for each hotel room, and well set up for shore diving. There's a "beach", and location— not far from town. Price was right, as a package with a new non-stop flight on United from Chicago! For a good place to eat, La Morena is close to town, fresh seafood, and inexpensive — must try the coconut ice cream.

Living Underwater, Barracuda, January 2005, John M. Artim (jartim@uistyle.com), Oakland, CA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 72 to 78 F, calm, choppy, currents, no currents. Jeremy is a conscientious, safe dive master. The flaws were outlined in Undercurrent last year — steel tanks past their useful service life (bottom rust) and

significant overfilling of tanks. [editors note: these problems have since been corrected]. Otherwise, safety of his divers is his first concern. Safety stops were always a part of the profile. Most days we did two dives and were back to the hotel by early afternoon. We dove Nitrox the second dive each day. We did a night dive with him. Dive briefings were good. Only restriction was that he asked divers to go no deeper or faster than he did. Once he judged a diver's skill to be sufficient, the group would tend to spread out. Group never exceeded 7 people. The other divers were significantly more experienced than I which, I think, made my diving experience much better (no cattle-boat crowds with fins and hands flailing everywhere). Jeremy knows his sites well and can find all manner of creatures. I like to go away from a dive trip a better diver and Jeremy is helpful. He's went over a number of areas I could improve and suggested simple changes to my gear to increase my safety and a change of fins to improve my current-swimming (these were tried on a subsequent trip to Indonesia and were a substantial improvement). At Tormentos the current was strong (at least 2 knots, possibly 3). Unlike other current dives we've done with Jeremy where folks drop down and out of the current from time-to-time to explore whatever they fancy, this current was too much to do that. It was an awesome dives I've done. Like flying over the reef! Most things were hunkered down including a beautiful 5' grouper! We stayed at the Barracuda on the edge of San Miguel, within walking distance of town and close to the supermarket. This was a

room-only rate, a good thing. The hotel restaurant is a sad looking Tex-Mex BBQ that was nearly always empty. On a few of the days we were in the room, a cruise ship was anchored close enough (they are now spreading quite far down the coast) that its diesel fumes were wafting into our room. Otherwise, the Barracuda was a decent hotel at a good price.

Living Underwater, Hotel Cozumel, February 2005, Bradley Wm. Bowen (bbowen@strongandhanni.com), Farmington, UT. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: to Feet. Water: to F, choppy, currents. We decided on Living Underwater as Jeremy was the only operator who would agree to four dives per day on steel 120 tanks with the second and third tanks being Nitrox. Jeremy constantly asked for feedback, and how he could do better. . Water temps had dropped from the low 80s during our October trip to between 76 and 78. My wife and I were fine in polar fleece lined dive skins with polar fleece hoods, but skinny family members needed 3 to 7 mil wetsuits with hoods, and were still a bit chilled. Jeremy indicated it was Eagle Ray migration and mating season. The trip was fabulous! Jeremy purchased 20 brand new steel Nitrox tanks to accommodate our group. We all were able to do four dives per day. First tank was on air and we were able to do some deco dives to 150 feet on Maricabo, El Islote and Punta Sur. Second and third tanks were Nitrox, which enabled us to dive the fabulous deeper sites more than once a day. Last tank was on air for a twilight or night dive, depending on the day. We had Jeremy pick us up at 7:00 a.m. as it gets light about 6:20

and this allowed us to avoid the crowds on the pier between 8 and 9. Jeremy timed things so that we were doing our surface intervals while the cattle boats were diving. We never saw anyone else in the water at the same time as us. Best of all we watched in awe as squadrons of spotted Eagle Rays repeatedly paraded past us on 5 dives. Three reef sharks at El Islote and a reef shark that has taken up residence at Punta Sur. Spotted Eagle Rays in feeding and mating behavior on several other dives, numerous turtles on almost every dive, some of them absolutely huge, barnacle covered and obviously old. Nurse sharks on many dives. We had fresh slices of cantaloupe after each dive (except twilight/night dive), lots of cookies and fruit (which we ate for breakfast as well as after dive snacks), and plenty of bottled water and sodas. The fleece lined coats Jeremy keeps on board were used frequently by most divers. Jeremy is an expert at finding all kinds of small critters, and is adroit at coaxing them out of their holes. This trip started with a full moon and we had several nights of no moon. I observed numerous species of fish engaged in mating behavior. Suspect mating in many species occurs after full moon, at least several times a year based on other observations. Living Underwater dive boat has a tower and cuddy, and was faster than all other dive boats we observed. The tower was crucial for diving the North sites because you often surface 4 to 6 miles from shore in high waves. Difficult to spot someone without a tower. Boat was far superior to the Aldora and Dive with Martin boats, which were the "runners up" in our selections of a dive

operator. On some of the days we went to a beach with restrooms, showers, pool, large restaurant, lounge chairs, etc. for our surface interval. Food at Hotel Cozumel is mediocre. Length of dives ranged from an hour and fifteen minutes to two hours and ten minutes, depending on our requests.

Living Underwater, Fiesta Americana, May 2005, Benjamin Schaffer, Indian Rocks Beach, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm. Valet diving service provided by Jeremy and his crew, professional and hospitality excellent. Started with a fantastic night dive and Jeremy pointed out all sorts of creatures: octopus, spotted toad fish, seahorses, large ocean crabs, dancing lobster, etc... Every day, went to a new dive site of our choice and always dropped off on the mark. Jeremy had everyone meet on bottom for a little "chill" time and off to view the amazing underwater world. Jeremy, a "Zen master" of calm, always giving us lengthy dives and small creatures never noticed by us on previous dives. Devil's throat a must! His new steel 120s provide for lengthy dives 75-90 mins! We enjoyed the warm towels, dive parkas, and fruit/snack/water between dives.

Living Underwater, August 2005, Kathleen Minke, Bel Air, MD. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. Outstanding week. Gustavo led our first two days of diving and Jeremy led the last three. We had our own group of six and the divemasters tried to take us to less crowded sites. We had one newly certified diver and Jeremy was attentive to

her needs and offered her many tips. None of us had dived with steel tanks before and the divemasters were terrific in helping us adjust our weights. We arrived a couple of weeks post-hurricane so the visibility was not what it can be in, but we saw tons of turtles, small critters, and lobsters. We got to watch a lobster-octopus battle. We saw black tip sharks one day and a young nurse shark played with us for about 10 minutes on another dive. We rented a house in town that was \$1500 for the week and comfortable, if a bit run down (the pool was great).

Palancar Divers, April 2004, Arthur F. Graf (art9323@aol.com), San Antonio, TX. Experience: 500+ dives. Vis: 50 to 100+ ft. Water: 75 to 78 F, cam & flat. Large dive operations. Max 6 divers per group, 12 divers on big boats. Plenty of 6 packs. They do not mix divers. First day red flag out. Rain check for all divers, but experienced divers could go out if they wished in a large boat. The dive: double-check your gear and meet on sand. Return, top line hand up weights and fins and climb aboard. Divers' choice on dive locations.

Papa Hog's, Las Brisas Condominiums, December 2004, Lucius "Bud" Foster (elijahsdad@prodigy.net), Duluth, MN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 77 to 81 F, calm. Las Brisas Condos are two miles north of town, so you will need a rental car or scooter to get back and forth to the docks each day to get picked up for diving. Papa Hog's will pick you up at the dock in front of the condo's if you arrange with them. There is a small private beach and fresh water pool and

the units come with daily maid and laundry service. Most units are three bedrooms with two of the bedrooms facing the ocean with spectacular views, huge kitchens with all the amenities, furnished Carib style, a/c, covered porch on ocean side with drains for the wet stuff and deck furniture, safe, three full bathrooms, one 1/2 bath, good size breakfast room, security 24/7, parking, and worth the \$300 plus tax a day. Papa Hog's is one of the best dive operations in Cozumel. They have 4 six pack boats with radios, and O2 tanks first aid kits (in need of inspection) ready to depart by 8:30 AM prompt or earlier each day for the morning AM two tank dive, there DMs are good and all locals, no more than 6 divers per boat plus DM and Captain, there is a larger boat that holds up to approx. 20 divers available for large groups that want to be together or charter fishing trips, Papa Hog's does a trip to the mainland to dive once a week on large boat to a site with hundreds of turtles and possible whale sharks, nights dives 2 times a week, afternoon dives if two or more divers, all levels of instruction available on site, and Papa's Hog's restaurant across the street with the best Mexican food and a breakfast however you want it. They also have a few rooms for 60 to \$140 a night next to their restaurant. Super nice. The coral is in great condition and most of the deep sponges are huge. There is a great wreck dive that was sunk for an artificial reef in 2000 "The Felipe Xicotencatl." All sorts of safe penetration (A must photo op in restroom sitting on Johns). The fish population is great and many large turtles, rays, and sharks were viewed

on most dives. There is a decompression chamber in Cozumel and it seems to be used allot. Buoyancy control and calm nonpanic reaction is crucial. Not a place for the new diver. Small boats so I tucked my camera under the bench with towel. The DM or Captain always hand you down cameras and they are cautious and courteous with your stuff. Rinse tank and table on shore available after dive.

Pascual's Scuba Center, November 2004, Dean Knudson

(deanknudson@yahoo.com),

Golden Valley, MN. Experience:

251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet.

Water: 79 to 83 F., calm. Pascual Tun (pascualscuba@hotmail.com) is a gem,

one of the best divemasters of the twenty or so I have used in Cozumel. Has his small shop in the garden terrace area as Kelly's restaurant, about four blocks off of the main square. He arranged a daily pick up at a pier near our bed and breakfast, and was always prompt. His boat, "The Fat Grouper" is a bit old and shop-worn, but has a sun awning, is sturdy, has a reliable set of engines, is perfectly serviceable, and holds eight comfortably. We never dove with more than six. The dive briefings were customized to the group, and he blended several dives using two dive sites. He was as good as any I've seen finding large and small sea life, including toadfish, and it was spooky watching him stalk free swimming fish. His small stature never interfered with the dive operation, he can haul tanks and toss gear without difficulty. Possibly because of his 25,000 plus dive experience, he uses an astonishingly small quantity of air — he never swapped

his own tank between dives, since he often surfaced with 3/4 of his air left after a 100 foot 60 minute dive. If you ask to dive your own profile, he'll let you, and you must watch your computer carefully. Several times three of us came close to receiving deco warnings from our computers near the end of 60 minute dives. Pasqual never pressured the group to surface, we could dive as long as we wished, and he would come up with the last diver. Surface intervals were spent at nearby beaches, and we were never pressured to do mediocre second dives. He's a one man show, and if he were to develop problems, he has no back up other than referrals to other small operations in the area. He maintains good relationships with many. Kelly's bar (<http://www.islacozumel.net/food/kelleys/>), about a block away from the church near the main town square, has evolved into the local U.S. ex-pat hangout, and serves good food in a pleasant courtyard and covered bar. If you need a long term apartment or home rental, a car rental, a dive master, current restaurant suggestions, or just the current gossip on the island, he's the guy to get unvarnished advice from. His website is the only non-email Internet link to Pascual, he will pass on messages to Pascual. Tips: If you can roll all your bags 200 feet without difficulty, then don't use the large airport van taxis just outside the door of the airport. Roll your bags to the main road entrance of the airport, which takes about 90 seconds. Standard smaller taxis, which are cheaper and much quicker, will pass at two minute intervals, and will pick you up. The larger vans run a defined hotel route, and it can take you an hour to

get to your hotel, if you are the last stop. The smaller taxis charge less, and will get you to your hotel in five minutes. The larger taxis run about seven dollars per person, the smaller taxis about five dollars to ten dollars for an entire group. We stayed at Summerplace Inn (<http://www.cozumelbedandbreakfast.com/default.htm>), and Joe, Marta and Henny did a wonderful job. We rented the three bedroom upper condo for \$125/night. Summerplace is three blocks from the shore, near the supermarket. We called Joe directly to negotiate the rate at the last minute. Henny and Joe discourage late night loud noises, and don't tolerate loud parties, but there are plenty of nearby bars to satisfy that need. Henny also provides free bikes and a shopping cart. Her pool is nice, and the complex is walled and private. There is a rinse tank, but no gear storage lockers. She is attempting to sell the place. If you never studied Spanish, obtain the ALanguage 30" Spanish course on CD, and to memorize the first 30 minutes of it while commuting. It's worthwhile to buy a small electronic translator (Berlitz makes a good one) to take care of your communication outside of the main square. The locals will smile broadly, and will go out of their way to help you, if they hear even broken Spanish. Several web sites (e.g. freetranslation.com) offer free English to Spanish translations which you can cut and paste to a word processing program. Another handy travel tool is www.skype.com. For about ten dollars, you can purchase a computer headset at Target or K-Mart. This headset plugs into the microphone (pink) and headphone (green) mini-jacks of any

computer, including laptops. With a Skype account you can then purchase telephone time in blocks of \$20, paid by VISA, and this allows you to call any telephone in the world for about two cents a minute. It's handy for calling small operators or lodges directly in advance, to negotiate prices. Not all small outfits maintain web sites, but all have telephones.

Pepe Scuba, Coral Princess Hotel, November 2004, Michael Foust (drfoust@comcast.net), Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, currents. Rosendo, the dive master, was well acquainted with the sites available and educated divers in addition to safe diving. Pangas with 4-8 divers allow for great treatment; one day it was my and my buddy.... great dive. Cozumel is always a treat but the macro stuff is more noticeable and the marine preserve laws are so enforced the fish are huge.... e.g. angels large. Convenient, and knowledgeable. Great hotel/time share. Helpful crew assisted in locating splendid toadfish.

Scuba Club, October 2004, John Merrill (jonmer@aol.com), Salem, OR. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. It seems in Cozumel they only want you to use the American dollar. We stayed at Scuba Club Cozumel and dove with them, great time, great operation. While diving with them we noticed a dive operator tearing up the reef, with fins and gear marked "Black Shark Divers". He was wearing garden gloves and pulling apart the reef to show divers in his group things. watched them exit

the water and get onto the "Black Shark Divers" boat. I was upset to see them not respecting the rules of the Cozumel Underwater Park.

Scuba Club, January 2005, David Hollabraugh (dhollaba@kid.net), Fulton, MO. Experience: 394 dives. Vis: 130 ft. Water: 7 to 79 F, calm & flat, choppy, currents. 4th visit to Scuba Club. Very consistent operation.

Scuba Club, May 2005, Ben Glick (bglick@vgernet.net), Williamstown, MA. Experience: 1500 dives. Vis: 100 feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm and flat. Beds — hard. Shore dive — fair-poor. Food good but 10%-20% of people developed Montezuma's Revenge. Diving varied from excellent to poor. Had to follow dive guide on almost all dives.

Scuba Club, September 2005, Robin J. Humphrey. (robmarta@tampabay.rr.com), Crystal River, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 87 F, calm, currents. We have been diving Cozumel since the early 70s. Scuba Club Cozumel, formerly the Galapagos hotel, is the next best thing to a live-aboard. Accommodations are air conditioned, roomy with porches to hang gear, king-sized beds, clean and neat. Bathrooms are roomy and hot water plentiful. This resort is geared to divers. Eight boats with usually no more than eight divers assigned to one divemaster, some of whom we have known for 17 years. Boats depart at 8:15AM and mostly travel south for an hour or less. An 80-100ft dive is followed by an hour's surface interval, after which a dive usually to 50 ft is made. Unlimited shore diving, and the structures in front of the hotel are a

nursery for lobster, octopus (at night) flounder damsel fish crabs, morays. Back at the resort by 1-2 pm. Meals are good, substantial, and cooked to American tastes. Plenty! Phones in the lobby, and a small fridge in each room, but no TV. Wireless access to the web available. The staff is courteous, helpful and friendly. Booze at the hotel is pricey, but the market two blocks away offers reasonably priced beer and sprits. Diving is often some variation of a drift dive, with the boat picking you out of the water wherever you come to the surface, so as long as one stays within visible distance of the group, "navigating" to the boat is not necessary. Fauna varies from year to year in density and size. The 30 -40 pound groupers were not around this time. Feeding is no longer allowed. We did see many turtles and a couple of large nurse sharks. Tropicals are abundant and varied. This resort is ideal for family diving and large groups find they can use a boat for their exclusive use.

Scuba Shack, El Presidente, August 2004, Michael Emerson (medas2004@msn.com), Eden Prairie, MN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Hurricane Emily appeared to have little impact on the reefs. Palancar Horse-shoe was good with 100+ visibility. Saw a 6ft+ free-swimming moray eel and several turtles close-up. Also saw a large barracuda. Several saw two sea horses and an eagle ray. First dive trip for my 11-year-old son and my friend. The divemasters were great with both and made sure that we had dive sites where both experienced and novice divers could enjoy themselves. We also

had a great night dive at Paradise Reef and saw several lobsters and a free-swimming octopus. The Presidente had some surface damage because of Emily but things were well under repair. The rooms were nice, the view great, and the food was good as well.

Scuba Cozumel, April 2005, Theresa Ritz (titles@comcast.net), Wheeling, WV. This was our second trip to Scuba Club Cozumel and we were eager to return following a positive trip in November 2004. We arrived on Monday afternoon, April 11 and checked in at the dive shop. We requested that we be placed on a boat for advanced divers. Our previous visit found us spending the week on a boat with novice divers, some of whom were doing check-out dives. Scuba Cozumel has a fleet of comfortable, large boats and guests are assigned to the same boat with the same crew and dive master for the week. We were pleased the following morning to find ourselves on a boat with about six other divers of similar skill levels and with Jesus, a veteran instructor and dive master. Most of the advanced sights are at the south end of the reef and are about an hour's boat ride away. The highlight of the week was diving Punta Sur where Devil's Throat is the hallmark dive. It is a swim-through ending at 129 feet and then a second swim through up to about 70 feet. Inside the second swim through is a coral formation that appears to be in the shape of a cross. It is a spectacular dive with lots of silversides and other fish and massive coral formations. Each dive site offered lots of life and we were never disappointed. During the week we saw many splendid toad fish, scorpion fish, moray,

and a small juvenile octopus. Water temperatures were about 83 degrees and visibility varied from 50 to 75 feet. There were often strong currents, but drift diving was relaxing and we enjoyed the sensation of flying over the reef. The boat did not utilize a tag line and on the second day of diving, after the first dive, my husband, Fred, was holding onto the ladder and removing his fins. Another diver climbed over Fred's back and onto the ladder. Fred's finger became pinned between the ladder and the boat. It bled profusely and I requested a first aid kit from the mate. The kit was poorly stocked with only some cotton and some adhesive tape to use for bandages. I began first aid and was assisted by Geiger, the dive master on the boat on Jesus' day off. Fred sat out the second dive. The dive shop was contacted by radio and they offered to meet Fred at a dock nearby to take him to medical assistance. He refused thinking he would not need medical attention. When he continued to bleed two hours following the incident, William, Scuba Cozumel's dive shop manager, took us to the International Clinic in San Miguel, where Fred received excellent care and five stitches. He was permitted to dive the following day and requested the boat crew put a tag line into the water for divers to hold while awaiting entry to the boat. The tag line was utilized the remainder of our trip. The inconsiderate diver who climbed over Fred was overheard joking about injuring him. He and his two companions failed to exercise proper diving etiquette while taking photographs underwater. They gathered around whatever was pointed out by the diver aaster and continued to

take pictures until the subject disappeared or they had stirred up enough silt that photography was futile. Our trip coincided with a couple of natural occurrences which made our diving even more special. The jelly fish were newly hatched and the waters were full of small jellyfish that seemed not to sting. They caused some concern while floating in the water waiting for pick up by the boat. However, they are a favorite of sea turtles so the we observed more turtles than usual. On our final day of diving, April 18 we entered the water and saw a phenomenal sight. The corals were spawning. White matter was pouring profusely from the vase corals like a fountain flowing. The dive master said it was a rare occurrence. There is unlimited shore diving available directly off the dock in front of the resort, where there is a patch reef. Some items, such as pieces of concrete pilings, have been placed and are home to some fish. We saw moray, a sea horse, parrot fish, surgeon fish while diving there. Other divers at night reported seeing octopus on night dives. The night we planned to do a night dive we watched waves growing larger and larger breaking on the dock until they eventually reached more than ten feet. They lasted several hours then dissipated. There was no accompanying storm. When we returned home we learned that a cruise ship in the Bahamas had been flooded by large waves about the same day and we believe these waves must have been part of that activity. Scuba Club Cozumel offers an all-inclusive package including diving and food at a reasonable price. The food and service at Scuba Club Cozumel are very good. The food offered is typically

Mexican with a few American alternatives available. All is fresh and tasty. The wait staff quickly learned names and preferences and give personal attention to diners. The resort is within a short walk from downtown San Miguel if you want a dining alternative. Typically the resort offers a special and menu choices for lunch and two choices for dinner. We were always able to find something to our liking. Should we decide to return to Cozumel we wouldn't consider staying anywhere else.

Xtabay Divers, Reef Club, June 2005, Jade Gibbon (svontoaste@aol.com), Lakewood, CO. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 86 F, calm. The Reef Club resort is far from town. Pay attention to the signs or you'll drive right past the road to the resort. The onsite dive store refused to rent us tanks or weights as we were not diving with them. Resort food was ok. For the most part, the staff were not helpful or friendly so those who were really stood out. Xtabay Divers is run by Dario who runs an excellent service. He found big fish and tiny critters, too. We had a new diver with us and he was patient with her, but not to the expense of the rest of us. The boat was big enough for 8 divers plus Dario and the captain, so far from being a cattle boat. Not much photo setup on the boat and no photo facilities available for us at resort.

Isla Holbox

Villas Paraiso del Mar, July 2005, Vickie Ellett (vickellett@hotmail.com), The Dalles, OR. Experience: 500 dives. Vis: 20 to 30 feet. Water: calm and flat. We took your advice (October 2004)

and went to Isla Holbox to snorkel with whale sharks. Saw whale sharks both days (then had to evacuate due to Hurricane Emily). Rooms, meals, service at Villas Paraiso were good. They sprayed for mosquitoes but I got bites every day (despite DEET). Boats small — 1 hour ride each way. 7 AM to 12-1 PM. Breakfast was included w/room, but boats left before breakfast. Typical lunch.

Isla Mujeres

Aqua Adventures, May 2005, Andrew L. Rubman, ND (naturdoc@bigfoot.com) Southbury, CT. Experience: 1000+ dives. Vis. 5 to 100+ feet. Water 74 to 85 F. Limited development and commercialization a 20 minute ferry rides from Cancun. Aqua Adventures is a partnership between "Connecticut Yankee with Mexican roots" Soja Fuentes, and PADI Instructor and cave diver Gerardo Rodrigues. Dives are led by dms or instructors with newbies following the leader and advanced staying in bubble sight. Gerardo is the most 'zenned-out' diver I have ever passed gas with. In December, I dived with Gerardo leading the gig and Michael Gleason taking up the rear. My son was diving too. Gerardo rightfully assessed that the young man was ready for anything as his open water card was earned in the kelp beds of Monterey, CA and proceeded to take us into an entry-level wreck penetration. The major reef area off Isla is manchones, or "patches." The average depth is 30', current is light to nil and visibility typically 80' to 100' with year-round water 79°F - 82°F. The area is part of the protected reef area on the Western side of Isla and only anchorage via buoys is allowed.

The contour and topography features a younger horizontal distribution and more mature coral heads. Fish include: angels, groupers, snappers, and grunts. Quite a few sting rays, and eagle rays and some large turtles. Mario, an experienced commercial fisherman, runs the operation's 24' dive boat flawlessly. The vessel has a dry cutty forward and a central sun shade, and Mario and mate will do your set ups and tank swaps if you choose. Aqua Adventures will carry a maximum of eight divers and during my three weeks, averaged four divers per trip. Fresh water is provided; chow abundant at Avalon Reef so none is on board. The atmosphere is friendly and unhurried. Punta Sur, or "South Point" skirts the Garafon Mayan ruins. Mario likes to have the dive party roll or jump in all at the same time and then pick you up an hour later. The depth starts at 40' with a 4 - 5 knot current whisking you southeast toward the shallows around the point. There are hundreds of snappers, brightly colored schools of grunts and assorted tropicals and dolphins who approach closely and "dance" with the drifting divers. Bronze artifacts can be seen in the rocky crags that you navigate through. An ancient anchor, stuck in a rocky passage marks the entrance to the chute called the "Death Star." Divers are swooped into an underwater 'river' that starts at 30' and dumps you out onto a sandy 10' deep flat at a dizzying 7+ knots. After sailing across the "beach," the bottom drops down again, the fish and dolphins return, and Mario is there to pluck you out. Since the depth is modest, 70 minutes of "bottom time" is common. Chaidel, off the northeast

corner of Isla, is a good site to get deep and see schools around an artificial reef. The wreck, some kind of ferry boat, was flipped and crushed by Ivan. The keel is at around 85' and the bottom 94' or so. Barracuda are attracted in schools often exceeding 150. Cobia and lobster are prolific. I free dived the anchor line down and secured to the ferry's keel. Try a swim down on one breath to 85', stroking and equalizing with a jaw thrust as opposed to nose squeeze. This technique perfected by the Navy SEALs frees up both hands while equilibrating. At close to 100', the current ran a few knots so we crabbed along the bottom and the sides of the wreck. Aqua Adventures has their own compressor and 40 100 cu ft bottles with 2875 PSI or better. Sonja has a few 120's for the "Darth Vader's" among us. El Yunqué is a nursery at 40' featuring a myriad of species like lobster and Cubera. The quintessential evening and night dive site is the "Sleeping Shark Cave." Many species of shark come to this swim-through to lie on the bottom. This location features a rather constant 2 knot current that allows sharks that must maintain water flow over their gills to provide sufficient oxygen, the luxury of a resting environment. Media Luna, or "Half Moon" is a mix of topographic surprises, unusual critters (like a pack of eagle rays that came blazing through one morning), to nifty holes, caves, swim-throughs, and odd corals. My favorite challenges are the Cañonerros, Mexican Navy patrol boats intentionally sunk. They rest in 85' of water and the larger of the two is intact and provides entry and intermediate wreck diving challenges consisting of prolonged 3-sided deck swims with

laddered companionway transitions, to internal passageway and blind state-room confined spaces. The smaller 80, was broken in half, amidships by Ivan and allows for the more intricate wreck challenges. Some advanced maneuvers that divemaster Michael led my son and me through were horizontal 180's, limited vis / limited light tactile exploration, and inverted hatch penetration. The later features passages so narrow that one has to exhale at least 2 way to wriggle through while in a head-down position in twilight darkness; excellent! Aqua Adventure goes beyond the descriptions that I've read in Undercurrent of 'valet operations'. I felt like I was being welcomed into a family of mellow professionals who got up every morning with the sole purpose of spending another day diving, exploring an additional area. We bought into a 2-BR/private deck/Jacuzzi timeshare at Avalon Reef. They are working on broadband for the island but 49 - 56K is possible over dial up. The resort is well run and their "all-inclusive" is a good value. The dive operation runs from their dock. They feature a main dining area with buffet-style offerings featuring different theme meals. The preparation of the food was good to excellent with wonderful fruits and vegetables and good beef and pork. Corona is on tap. Additional restaurants at Avalon: Mi Casa es Su Casa with Mexican gourmet offerings, a beach side porch serving the large open bar/ dining area during the day and as an Asian fusion restaurant with 7 tables at night and an 8 table area adjoining the beach, Kelly's Grill, features Mexican/California Grille cuisine.

Yucatan Peninsula

Akumal Dive Center, Hotel Akumal Caribe, February 2005, Dave Jackson (thecolt@juno.com), Orem, UT.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F, calm, choppy, no currents. We dove by ourselves most days. The reefs are spectacular and a 5-10 minute boat ride. Locals fish the reefs so the fish population is less than across the channel at Cozumel. We saw a great 'cuda in a cleaning station — 6' feet long and 2ft thick. We saw a large school of juvenile 'cudas. Akumal means place of turtles in Mayan. We saw many large green turtles who were curious and friendly, up to 18 on one dive. Our guide has dove these reefs for twenty years. He seemed to enjoy himself and though his English was even worse than our Spanish he gave us great service. We also did the cenote Dos Ojos with the same shop and had a good experience. I would give the shop high marks. The Hotel was well kept, on the beach, a million dollar view, and reasonably priced. Food prices were close to US prices and we had some fine meals.

Aquatec, Villa de Rosa, January 2005, Paul Schmieder (pschmieder@sbcglobal.net), Bellville, TX. Experience: 127 dives. Vis: unlimited. Water: 75 F. We dove two cenotes, Ponderosa and Taj Mahal, led by Gonzalo of Aquatec/Villa de Rosa and organized by Art Melvin of Discover Scuba from Houston. Gonzalo and Art provided us with a wonderful, memorable experience in which the water was clear and the profile exciting. I highly

recommend this for first-time cenote diving.

Sealife, Private Residence, March 2004, Jeffrey R. Johnson (jrj72113@aol.com), Maumelle, AR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: 77 to 82 F, surge. Would not recommend Playa del Carmen as a primary dive destination as diving was not spectacular, unless you want to take the ferry to Cozumel (we did not so dives noted below are local to Playa del Carmen). But if you're there to enjoy the beach and nightlife, take a couple of days to dive. The cenote diving made it worth bringing the dive gear. On an ocean dive named Tortuga, saw more turtles than I have on any one dive. Other ocean dives we did were named Barracuda (swim throughs), Pared Verde, Moc-che — saw the usual Caribbean stuff including a nurse shark, spotted morays, stingrays, big schools of various fish. Our cenote dives were at Dos Ojos. Wonderful experience after we got over the early apprehension. Very interesting being in a cavern with stalagmites etc. Divemaster kept us together so always felt safe.

Yucatech Expeditions, April 2005, Lori Brown, Justin Green (DoctorSLB2001@yahoo.com), Bellevue, WA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 75 to 75 F, calm. We contacted German Yunez at Yucatech Expeditions in Cozumel. We arranged to dive in a cenote on the mainland the next day. There were no other divers on the trip. We met German at the ferry depot in the morning and headed over to Playa del Carmen. Our equipment was spirited to the rental car by a bicycle carrier dude for

a few dollars. The trip to Dos Ojos was 30 miles from Playa del Carmen B- a mile south of Xel-Ha. The cenote is off the highway over a gravel road. There are several crude huts set up for clothing changing, a toilet, rental equipment (mostly for snorkeling), and a gift shop. There was also a (very cute) coati-mundi — it must have been a pet since it had a collar on. There are crude tables and benches to set up dive gear both in the parking lot and down at the cavern entrance. We set up our gear in the parking lot and carried our equipment down the stairs (no rail) with German's help. Entry into the water was from a wooden platform by giant stride. The outside temperature was over 90 degrees F. and the humidity stifling. The water was in the mid 70s — really refreshing. We did two dives in the cenote — one on each side. The deepest we went was 27 feet. The water was so clear that visibility seems to be unlimited. There are beautiful stalactites, stalagmites, and columns. In some places, there is an eerie reflection off the air that collects on the ceiling. We saw a solitary shrimp, about 3 inches long, and some small fish. We saw some divers with a stream of silvery fish following them, evidently following the light. There was an area in which we surfaced into a "bat cave" although there were no bats apparent. The dives were well worth the trip to the mainland. German took care of everything including ferry tickets, car rental, carrying equipment, lunch, and drinking water. He doesn't take more than 4 people at a time. He also offers training for cave diving in Cozumel.