

are small but efficient. Largest number of divers we had at any time was 8. No large fish but an abundance of fish not seen often in other parts of the Caribbean. Sea horses, frog fish, flying gurnards, pipefish, etc. Dive masters know all the sites well and where to find the fish. Dives limited only by air supply and no dec time. 50 - 60 min dives not unusual. Water calm with little current. Contact Bill for package details. Bill prefers cash or check and but will take a credit card for an extra fee.

## TOBAGO

On the northside of Tobago, which is little-developed, strong currents bring good diving, occasional manta ray sightings, and some interesting coral. Visibility is affected by the runoff from the Orinoco river in Venezuela. On the south side of Tobago, there are nice hotels, but diving is on burned out reefs.

### **Aquamarine Dive, Blue Waters Inn, October 2004, S. Titus, Herndon, VA.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy, currents. Aside from the disappointment of a mix-up in our reservation that put us in a 2-room kitchenette suite instead of a full cottage, we were pleased with the accommodations. The rooms were simple but clean and well-kept, beds comfortable, A/C if you wanted it, and bathrooms in good shape with no mold or corroding fixtures. TV is located in a game room; no phones in the rooms either. (Bring your own alarm clock). We had strong consistent water pressure, and were never out of hot water.

The grounds are well-kept, with many bird feeders to attract the hundreds of species that live on Tobago. The beach is narrow, with tree roots and rocky sand, but is kept free of litter. The manager — Duane Kenny — is sociable, attentive, and aims to please. Aside from him, service is slow; if you need something done or fixed it may take 2-4 requests. As long as you are patient and persistent, it will happen. The staff are polite, but not overtly friendly. We ate breakfast and lunch every day at the on-site restaurant, The Fishpot, as well as a few dinners. The food was consistent in quality and good. We also went to dinner at Jemma's Treehouse in Speyside for the most incredible lobster dinner we've ever eaten, and to Sharon and Pheb's in Charlottesville for another great local seafood dinner. Having a car helped — BWI is tucked away in a remote setting and a bit of a hilly walk to town. Most guests are Europeans, with a split mix of divers and birders. Everyone dressed casually. The dive shop, although on-site, is a separate business. The staff is courteous and helpful if asked, but no one steps up to tell you the "drill" on getting geared and onto the boat; you either watch or ask another diver. Set ups are done at the shop, a cart takes the gear to the boat. Gear is switched to new tanks at the dock between the dives; after last dive gear is carried (by you unless you ask) to be rinsed at shop and set aside for next day. The boat is simple — tanks in the middle with gear on, with divers seated in front of gear for 5 - 15 minute ride to sites. Group back-roll entries are done; some dives require fast descents due to currents. You are "counted" back

at the shop — not on the boat after dives. Everyone is given a safety sausage, if you don't have your own — we also carried whistles. First dive is at 10-ish, second dive after lunch around 1PM. One or two night dives can be done during the week. Hurricane Ivan did a real number on the delicate finger corals at a few sites (also strange to see a large land cacti at 100' depth), but still many sites with beautiful corals and lots of small to mid-size fish remain. Japanese Gardens is particularly stunning. Currents are not always consistent — switching at depth or along the wall — so on occasion you may need to swim into pretty stiff water for 10 - 15 minutes. It helps to be in shape — and you need solid buoyancy control to be comfortable. There is no drift line off the boat...so re-entry can be time consuming while the boat maneuvers to collect everyone. A few dive guides surprised us by grabbing little arrowhead crabs and releasing them away from their spots, or pulling lobsters out of crevices by their antennae while leaning on corals — not actions we wish to see. Also saw a good sized turtle shell on a night dive — the turtle had been freshly harvested and the shell dumped. No conservation efforts are apparent to protect the reefs. Tobago is behind the curve on protecting her underwater resources. Still worth a trip; the island itself is beautiful with many waterfalls to hike to and a rainforest to explore. Englishman's Bay is a movie-set beach for a quiet day swimming and sunning. UW Photography Comments: The design of the boat doesn't accommodate large cameras, but the staff used a styrofoam cooler as a makeshift camera

bucket for us. The camera rinse tank at the dive shop was not filled for some reason. Did our camera maintenance in the room. Speed of current on each dive will determine success or failure for pictures!

**World of Watersports, Coco Reef Resort, October 2004, S. Titus, Hern- don, VA.** Experience: 251-500 dives.

Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy, surge. Diving at the southern Crown Point end of the island is not as dramatic as the sites at Speyside; but the currents aren't as strong. Better for novice divers. The corals are plentiful, lots of small to medium tropicals, and lots of critters. The deep wreck, the Maverick, has a lot of critters and a few sharks and larger ocean fish passed us by. World of Watersports is not the on-site operation at Coco Reef. They pick you up at your hotel, and drives you to whatever beach is near the morning's dive site. You waded to the boat, climb on and head out for a short ride. Comfortable boat; not too crowded. Our dive guide, Marvin, was friendly, knowledgeable and helpful (we think the shop should upgrade his gear for him, however. Two dives are done, with a surface interval on the boat. Gear is managed by the dive staff; they take it off the boat, rinse it at the shop, and have it setup on board the next day. Great service from Marvin. Due to currents, everyone enters and exits at the same time. No drift line is on the boat, so you will be collected if you float away from the group. Coco Reef Resort is a true resort — a popular current film star was staying there as well — so "damp dive casual" dress won't work! There is a strict dress code

for the hotel restaurant, most clients were in classy casual in general. The grounds are gated with controlled entry; the swimming beach is protected by a rock jetty; and lush tropical plants are everywhere. Although the appearance is classy, underneath the veneer it is typical Caribbean. We had little water pressure in our room; from about 5PM - 6:30PM when everyone was coming off the beach before dinner there was no hot water, either. The AC unit in our room vibrated like a DC-9 on take-off; although it was worked on twice it never was acceptably quiet. I had scheduled a massage; it was not until I was standing at the desk at the appointed 3 PM time that I was told the masseur had called in sick — so an afternoon was shot from that. I rescheduled for the next day, and discovered on arrival that the A/C was not working in the spa. The room was about 98 degrees with no windows, and a fan. The food for breakfast and lunch was good but not outstanding. On the upside — messages were delivered with great speed, housekeeping was outstanding (fresh towels twice a day) and the staff was friendly. We ate at local restaurants — Coco's, Dillon's, Ru-B-Lou's and the Pelican. All were good and well priced.

## TURKS AND CAICOS

This island group, south of the Bahamas and north of the Virgins, features awesome walls and clear water. Provo, the glitzy island, has spectacular beaches, but it's an hour's boat ride to the better diving of South or West Caicos. Grand Turk is a funky, laid-back island that

has a wall right offshore and occasional fishy surprises — and coming cruise ships. Salt Cay has pretty diving and the boats visit Grand Turk's wall. Bring a long-sleeved shirt during the winter; it can get cool in the evenings. The flight to Provo from Miami is a little over an hour.

**Beaches, February 2005, Robert McDonald (rmcdonald99@shaw.ca), Coquitlam, BC.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: choppy. Most dive were at 60' for 30 Minutes. But we did dive up to 90' on 4 dive just because there was enough advance divers on the boat. My wife and I both dove on our own since we had dive computer we were aloud to go any depth as long as our dive was no more then 40 minutes. The small test before diving is standard at every Sandals resort (Beaches is part of Sandals). The test in the pool was quite simple (mask on/off, reg recovery and fin pivot). If you did not have a dive computer and the boat was mainly open water diver then you were stuck to 60' for 30 minutes. Boat was well equip with radio, oxygen, 15 feet Bar and safety stop reg, first aid on board, water, food and shower. All dive were PADI standard Briefing before dive we knew our profile before we got in the water. So we plan the dive and dove the plan. We did 60', not like other resorts where 60' always ends up 90' or so. This includes the deep dive we were toll 90' and we did 87'. Great two weeks.

## Grand Turk

**Blue Water Divers, July 2005, Embry Rucker, Prospect, KY.** Experience: 251-