

ARUBA

Near the Venezuela coast, Aruba diving doesn't match neighboring Bonaire and Curacao, but some operators will take you to some decent sites. Miles of white sand, glitzy casinos, hotels and restaurants may make it a good compromise destination for the nondiving spouse. There are several good boat dives. The south Wall, past San Nicholas near the southern tip of Aruba, is also good. Aruba lies south of the hurricane belt.

Dive Aruba, Aruba Beach Club, June 2006, Bill Shepherd (Chorsejbs@aol.com), Satellite Beach, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy, surge. Clive Paula at Dive Aruba is a legend on the island and runs the best dive operation. Operating a small boat, he takes only 6-8 divers. Clive knows the best dive sites and personally escorts divers to get the most out of each dive. His posted schedule of dive sites enables one to schedule their vacations around what they want to see and experience. Once your gear is set-up, Clive assists each diver in getting in and out of the water and also changes tanks between dives.

Mermaid Divers, Bucuti Beach, September 2006, Kathleen O'Connor (koconnor@eddy-current.com), Virginia Beach, VA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F. Aruba has a number of fantastic wrecks - the Antilla, the Jane C and the airplane. There are other smaller wrecks as well. The diving is fairly easy - only light current at most. No wrecks were deeper than 90 feet, and the visibility was fairly good. The coral and fish life were not exceptional. Mermaid Divers follows the schedule on their web site,

and visits all the major wrecks. The groups were generally small and the staff was helpful. They do not really cater to photographers or advanced divers, although with advance planning they would probably do so. Bucuti Beach is a nice hotel on a beautiful part of the beach. However, the food and service at their restaurant, the Pirate's Nest, is fair at best.

Pelican WaterSports, April 2006, Barbara McMillan (tissacs@shaw.ca), Sault Ste Marie, Ontario. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 30 to 75 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, no currents. I had completed my in pool sessions and test with our great dive shop Sault Scuba. I was looking forward to completing my open water dives, while my husband took the PADI course. At Pelican, Diana and Famke did our open water dives and certifications with us. Jerry was great as a dive master, and gave us several tips to work on; they are a great bunch to work with newbies such as my husband, and were quite comfortable letting me do my thing as I had prior training, but keeping a close eye on every aspect of our diving. We ended up both certified and the diving is great. We went to the Arashi reef (48 feet), the Pedernalis boat (25 feet) and the Attila shipwreck. We saw blue parrot fish, several species of angelfish, the smooth trunk fish is so cute to watch swimming, and we saw a huge porcupine fish, it had to be 3 feet in length.

Red Sail Sports, April 2006, Andy Kelly (andykelly86@msn.com), North East, MD. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 80F, no currents. Dives rushed, after the second dive while my son and I were still in the water, the captain started the boat. Dive masters would signal if I stopped to take pictures. Dive masters and Capt.

left the vessel before divers debarked. I contacted Red Sail Sports via email and received no response. Dive briefs emphasized little on what to look for or expect to see. Although relatively new to diving I have observed many operations and Red Sail Sports is the worst I have experienced. Rushed dive with stops for pics bringing a cacophony of banging from the dive masters.

THE BAHAMAS

Easily accessible from Florida for long weekends. Diving varies substantially among islands, with pretty reefs (many are affected by algae), decent tropicals, and resorts that feed sharks. Live-boards out of Florida take divers to spots with bigger fish and more dramatic seascape. Keep hurricane season, June through November, in mind; winter weather means low 70F water and sweaters in the evening; nighttime temperature is in the mid-60s, but can drop into the 50s if winter air blows off the continent.

Abaco

Dive Abaco, September 2006, Curt Laney (claney6863@aol.com), Port Orange, FL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. The dive shop owner, Keith, is the boat captain. Friendly and allows advanced divers the freedom they may want. The boat is adequately equipped and the dive sites were within 10-20 minute ride from dock. The tanks had 3100psi and Keith gave excellent briefings. The seas were flat and the vis was awesome, with no current to speak of. The coral was in good shape and we saw a nice live black coral. The Nassau

groupers were tame and plentiful and also a 40-50 lb. black grouper was present. Plenty of reef sharks around and 100s of yellowtail snapper too. Saw a medium sized green sea turtle during 1 dive also. The dives all took place in the Fowl Key Preserve. Booked a package with the Dive Abaco shop including lodging at the Lofty Fig Villas across the street. Clean room with a kitchenette and nice little pool.

Cat Island

Cat Island Dive Center, Greenwood Beach Resort, March 2006, Thomas Wittig (twittig@comcast.net), Bay Village, OH. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 75F, The island is quite undeveloped. No TV or phone in the rooms. Just bring some reading material and relax in one of the hammocks or on the 8 mile stretch of beach at Greenwood, a serviceable resort, fairly small (20 rooms), with good food. The meal plan was \$48 a day per person. There are few alternative dining options. Closest restaurant was 30 minutes and car rental was \$75 for one day. Breakfast was eggs, pancakes, cereal, yogurt, toast, fruit and juices. Dinner was also quite good. We had lobster 2 nights, fresh (same day) grouper, and Bahamian style chicken. I tend to be a "picky eater" and never went hungry. Honor bar for entertaining yourself in the evening. The Diving: Cat Island Dive Center is on site. Divemaster Richy is a seasoned pro who is making improvements to the operation. Rental gear was fine and tank fills were good. 2-tank dive is \$95 plus rental gear. Spectacular wall diving. I did 8 dives here with 7 of them on different spots along the wall. I was never disappointed and the coral formations rival Saba although there were not as many big