

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

fish. Most of the sites have nice swim throughs that open up into the abyss. It was just the divemaster and me all 4 days. There was never any mention of not going because there were not enough people. Most sites were within 20 minutes of the dock. Richy allowed me to dive my own profile. We would go deep on the wall and then slowly ascend as computer indicated. The only restriction was that it had to be a no-deco dive profile. Coral formations have lots of interesting nooks and crevices for exploring with a light. Saw a big white tip at our safety stop at hole-in-the-wall which was my favorite dive site. Also saw a school of dolphin but we were already on the boat.

Sunset Beach House, October 2005, Casey Christensen (hogfish@99w.us), Monroe, OR. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, choppy, no currents. We rented the "Sunset Beach House." The rent was \$1800/week. The house might be worth \$400/ week if not for the plumbing. The house water comes from wells, and not from a cistern as he claims. The top edge of these wells is low to the ground and were submerged by a large pond that formed from rain, so swamp water is pumped into the house. None of the windows close tightly and the screens are in sad shape, so we were eaten alive by insects until the caretaker used duct tape on them. The house is old and in dire need of repair. Additionally, coral reefs along the south end of the island are 95% dead and overgrown with brown algae. They were beautiful reefs at some time in the past. Virtually no Elk Horn Coral is still alive. Of the remaining coral, nearly all of it shows bleaching. Fish life was moderate. Locals were observed taking undersized conch. I did not see one hogfish.

Crooked Island

Pittstown Point Landing, July 2006, Alan and Barbara Fischl (FSC864@aol.com), Great Neck, NY. Experience: 700+ dives. Vis: 50 to 90 feet. Water: 83 F, calm and flat, no currents. Lovely wall ¼ to ½ mile off the lee (west) side of the island, just a 10-minute boat ride. We were the only divers at the resort and did a 2-tank dive with the captain/PADI instructor every morning. Nice, easy diving in crystal clear water with pristine coral and lots of tropicals. Not high voltage diving with lots of pelagics. The resort was nice (and quiet!) and the food and service better than expected.

Grand Bahama

UNEXSO Dive Shop, Carnival Cruise, Liberty, February 2006, Jill and Rob Caple (rg250cat@msn.com), Pasadena, MD. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 70 Feet. Water: 70 to 72 F, choppy. We were on a cruise with Carnival on the Liberty ship. I booked the diving through <http://scubadivebahamas.com/index.html> who I called and were nice. They even arranged for us to be picked up from the ship taken to the dive shop and returned after our diving. The dive shop was organized and pleasant to dive with. The diving was not good since the coral really seems in bad shape. Not a lot of fish life and the water was cold. Booking the diving on our own instead of through the cruise helped to keep us off the cattle boats and away from the crowds. If you want to dive at a couple of different places all on one trip, book your diving on your own before you leave home.

Great Guana Cay

Dive Guana, Dolphin Beach Resort, August 2006, Rick Neumann

(tidalcom@aol.com), Bethesda, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 140 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm. This was my 4th trip with Dive Guana on Great Guana Cay in Abaco. The dive operation is run by Troy and Maria Albury, who are committed local Bahamians, parents of 2 young kids, and run a small, organized dive operation. The primary dive boat is beamy, squeaky-clean, and updated. January-through March can be a crap-shoot diving here, like anywhere in the Bahamas. Late May though early July would be my choice. Our recent trip in August '06 was a gamble during hurricane season, but we had flat, calm seas, mostly, with endless vis. There are 3 or 4 great sites that are well worth diving more than once in a dive week, like Shark Alley and Grouper Alley. We saw 3 or 4 big reef sharks (as close as 5 or 6 feet) in the 4 to 8 foot range on all our dives here. There are huge Nassau and black grouper here, that will allow you to hold and pet them like puppies, if you are still, and gentle. Troy is like their mother, as they eagerly snuggle into his arms! Gray angels, French angels, and a few porky lobsters were also sighted. We also saw enormous nurse sharks, under ledges. We did see one eagle ray and a turtle, briefly, on "fly by" sightings. Caverns and swim throughs, in the 35 to 40 foot range, are loaded with silversides — you can't see anything but silver flashing, 2 inches from your face mask. When the sun hits a cut in the swim through, against the silversides, it makes a great photo op. Diving at the other end of the Island, the diving was a bit shallower, less spectacular, but still worthy. I saw my first ever Pacific Lionfish!! He lives under a hooded section of coral, and is remarkable to see and photograph. When you arrive at Dive Guana, they also take care of

your gear for your entire stay, including careful washing. I never picked up a tank. I'm not sure more than a week here, for serious divers, is the way to go. The diversity of dive sites is adequate for a week, but certainly not Bonaire-like. There is a nice wreck in 120 feet that we ran out of time to do, in fact. Troy and Maria are also at the forefront of a legal action against the Bahamian government to halt, or scale back, the project at Baker's Bay (Land Discovery Co.), that proposes to build a golf course on Guana Cay, certain to be harmful to the delicate reef system. Troy also chases poachers in his capacity as an Island authority, which we witnessed a few years back, when he got after some bad guys stealing lobsters. Dolphin Beach Resort is a small resort, tucked into a lush oceanfront property. There is damn good snorkeling just to the right. There is a cute, clean pool in the courtyard, but no on-site restaurant. The Blue Water Grill sits above Dive Guana, 200 yards away, and is excellent, and not too expensive...and what a view! Nippers eatery/bar is a 5 minute ocean beach walk. The Nippers Sunday Pig Roast is a must! There are hotel rooms in the Dolphin Lodge, and also assorted pastel colored cottages. It is on the Atlantic oceanfront, 200 yards from Dive Guana, which is on the Sea of Abaco. On Guana, the way to get around is by golf cart, which is so much fun. My son and I locked ourselves out of our cottage late one night and had to wake up the owner/manager, Rebecca, who gave us the key to a Lodge room for the night. We needed our "stuff", so we had to break the window, and get in to our cottage. They fixed this by 10 am the next morning, and refused to allow me to pay for it! Great Guana Cay is tiny! — only about 120 folks live here. The ferry from Marsh Harbor takes

30 minutes. Troy Albury went out of his way to take a photo of my son with a huge barracuda in the background. With groups with more UWP's, more attention is given to their needs, dip tank, etc. There is a nice fresh water hose on board that is always working, and always available. The dive sites are within about 30 minutes or less.

New Providence

Bahama Divers, Holiday Inn Sunspree Resort, July 2005, Henry Ziller (caziller@hotmail.com), Conifer, CO. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 84 to 84 F, calm, choppy, no currents. The dive operation will pick you up at the hotel and take you to the boat across the inlet. It would be nice if they would pick you up at the hotel dock. The boat was equipped with all the safety features, oxygen, first aid kit water, etc. I did not like the fact that they sell food right on the boat to feed the fish while diving, and is the reason the sergeant majors are particularly pesky. I had to keep pushing schools of them away from my mask. For some unknown reason on the rough 1.5 hour boat ride out to the Lost Blue Hole the dive master had everyone gather on the hull of the boat while in transport with waves crashing over the bow for his dive briefing. I could not see nor could I hear, it was plain dumb. He did say more than once not to touch the rim of the hole because the sand will impair visibility and one of the dive masters stood on the rim the whole dive because he is afraid of the sharks! The Lost Blue Hole dive has about 70 black tips and gray reef sharks swimming all around but they do not come close. Separate rinse tank.

Stuart Cove's, December 2005, Timothy Dixon (Dixons4@verizon.net),

Cape Charles, VA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 70 to 80 Feet. Water: 64 to 68 F, calm. Stuart's Cove was the only dive operation and that's how they treat you; it's a shame because they have a location that could make for some quality diving. The setup is for the most divers per boat per day. Also saw that there was a high personnel turnover, which doesn't help things either.

Stuart Cove's, Nassau Beach Hotel, May 2006, Arik Olson (arikolson@yahoo.com), New York, NY. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, choppy, currents, no currents. The dive sites were decent (nice reefs and walls, many wrecks) and I was placed on a boat with more experienced divers. The boat was 42 feet, well laid out, with 10-14 divers and 4 or 5 staff members. The staff on the boat included a captain, 2 divemasters, a photographer, and a helper. There was a large emphasis on safety which includes things like O2 on board and a written sign in roll call before leaving dock and after each dive and they suggest restrictions like 30 minutes bottom time and 100 feet max depth. I noticed that once when the divemaster giving the briefing (intentionally?) neglected to mention the time restriction one of the divers spoke up ("what's the maximum bottom time on this dive?") forcing the divemaster to suggest 45 minutes. Because of the large number of inexperienced divers they handle they have to operate this way. Razorback wall was a well developed and healthy reef a 20 minute boat ride south. I saw some nice macro stuff on a number of the shipwrecks. The sea was choppy one day and still the others, there was current on only one dive (during the full moon). A good place for a beginner or intermediate diver to dive, particularly if they don't mind the

emphasis on safety. UW Photography Comments: They did have a dedicated rinse tank for cameras.

Stuart Cove's, June 2006, John Crellin (john15237@yahoo.com), Wexford, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F. This was their Shark Awareness dive so there were several restrictions including a required full wetsuit and a 60 feet max on the first dive. Stuart Cove's is a machine when it comes to getting divers out for the dives and back again to their hotels. Their facilities are hustle and bustle. If every diver on the boat had brought their own gear and gear bags, things would have been cramped. The shark awareness dive is a neat dive, but you are there to swim with sharks. If you want to dive on a reef, take a different dive. You spend most of your time on a sand flat called shark arena. You must dive their profile and time limit — both dives last about 40 minutes with a 30-minute surface interval. To maximize your time with the sharks, get in the water first. I would categorize Stuart Cove's as a tourist operation — they cater to the tourist who wants to snorkel or use their "sub" devices and get back to their cruise ship or hotel in a set amount of time. Bring your own snacks for the boat or pay big prices in their shop. There is only a water jug on board the boat. The employees are willing to help. It is not well stated in the brochure or instructions, but photos or videos are allowed for both dives. On the second dive (the feeding), you are not allowed to move around but you can take photos.

Stuart Cove's, August 2006, Jonathan Haraty (jharaty@charter.net), East Longmeadow, MA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 84 to 88 F, calm, no currents. This was a

three night cruise. Last year we could not dive the wall because we wound up with a twelve year old on the boat by mistake and they wouldn't take the family off and put them on another boat. This year we dove the wall and went to 110 ft. Wall was pretty but not spectacular, read no Cozumel. The real diving was the second dive. We dove the Runway and our divemaster led us to an area close to where they do a shark feed. The reef sharks were all over the place and moving in fairly close, looking us over and gliding overhead. It was a rush to see so many sharks swimming around you. The Sovereign of the Seas is one of Royal Caribbean's older ships but it is still nice, with great food and excellent service. The rooms are on the small side to accommodate two people plus dive equipment, but it is a great way to get in a weekend dive and still make the wife happy. There were only eight of us on the boat this time and there was plenty of room.

Stuart Cove's, Wyndham- Cable Beach, September 2006, Jim Cooper (mcnkeg@aol.com), East Greenwich, RI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy. On the Shark Adventure dives we only had 7 people on the boat. Stuart Cove's operation is the most efficient organization I have experienced. You can set your watch by the time they pick you up at your hotel and drop you off at the end of the day. With dive sites only 5-10 minutes away, and surface intervals of 30 minutes, we were back to the dock by 12:15 PM most days and on buses to our resorts by 12:45 PM. If you are looking for healthy coral formations, this is not the destination. The reef sharks here are obviously used to scuba divers and are not hesitant to cruise past you within arm's length. For the shark feeding dive you can expect

to be lightly brushed as they swim over and around you. Some easy wrecks. The Wyndham on Cable Beach is in need of renovations, but I had a nice room and a great view of the water from my balcony and the people could not have been friendlier. The Black Angus Grill and the Sole Mare restaurants are expensive, but as good as you will find in the Caribbean. I was blown away by the friendliness of every person. UW Photography Comments: Large trash barrel with water reserved for cameras only. DMs assisted lowering cameras into the water and retrieving them at the end of the dive.

San Salvador

Riding Rock Inn, November 2005, James Reilly (james.reilly4@worldnet.att.net), Baltimore, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, choppy, currents. Riding Rock Inn has gotten some good write-ups in *Undercurrent*, and deservedly so. The facilities, while a bit tired, are well maintained and well run. Ample hot water and plenty of towels, the room was clean, the AC loud but did the job; the beds well made. We were on the meal plan and ate well. We had choices at every meal and the food was well prepared and ample. They even throw in a glass of wine at dinner. The dive operation was professionally run. John Paul and Lupo were excellent dive masters and Bruce an experienced captain. Lots of safety equipment was readily available on board, including O2. Written descriptions of dive site were passed around in transit, a briefing made at the site and one was free to join a guided tour or dive their own plan. The dive operation was fun, not a chore. Place your dive gear outside your room for the crew to collect the first

day of diving and thereafter you only have to care for your wetsuit. You could set your own gear and handle your own diving, or the crew was happy to assist. True diving freedom. Saw a hammerhead, while the group we dove with saw several more and some other sharks. Also saw a few turtles. Plus the usual reef suspects. Unfortunately, we also saw some new damage to the shallow coral, a result of this year's Caribbean-wide high water temperatures. Deeper corals are still fine and vigorous. Despite the damage, the trip is well worth it.

Riding Rock Inn, January 2006, Mary O'Malley, Miami Beach, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm, no currents. On almost every dive we saw sharks, hammerheads most often, then reef sharks, occasional nurse sharks. Many turtles and normally calm and unafraid of divers. Also on several sites there are sting rays swimming around on the sand under the boat. Friendly Nassau groupers are great. Saw large octopus and lots of big crabs plus lobsters on the night dive (one included in week trip at no extra charge). A couple of times we saw whales from the boat. Boat captain Bruce and divemaster Lupo were extremely helpful — relaxed, but everything is taken care of. The boat is comfortable — nice dive platform, ladders, plenty of space in and out of the sun. The hotel is nothing to rave about, but the rooms are clean, good sized and have a beautiful view. No night life except the little bar at the Riding Rock unless you want to pay to go to the Club Med, which no one did. Riding Rock is a laid-back place for serious divers. Boat has a large rinse tank and staff is helpful and careful with handling cameras. No camera shop on the island, so be sure to bring every-

thing you need — batteries, etc. Hotel rooms have ample space for setting up equipment.

Riding Rock Inn, January 2006, Robert Dion (lupodiver@mac.com), Miami Beach, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. The best wall diving I have ever done in the Caribbean. The wall starts a few hundred feet from shore at 30-60 feet then a sheer drop-off to the lower ledge at 170-270 feet, then down to the abyss. Boat rides are 3 min -55 min. The 2 boats are comfortable (42 foot) with a bathroom and lots of weather protection and sun deck. Only 2 dive operations on the island; the other one (cattle boat operator) sends its divers to Riding Rock Inn. There is a recompression chamber. The dive staff bring your gear to the boat where it stays all week, they clean it and bring it back to your room at the end of the week, they change tanks for you and bring it to the back of the boat for you. They are constantly helping, whether it be a ride into town or taking you to see something that is not on the island tour that is a part of the dive package. They are working on getting National Marine park status. There is rental gear but nothing to buy except t-shirts. The only real nightlife is at the Riding Rock Inn bar called the Driftwood Inn, which is covered with dive things autographed by divers and fishermen. The fishing is world class, with many records being set there. Fishing excursion was awesome. Caught blue marlin, tuna and wahoo. Riding Rock Inn has been open since 1959 and is a diamond in the rough. Throughout the weeks we saw schools of hammerhead sharks ranging from 3-15 and then on my last dive, right before our picnic, I was doing my safety stop and a large spotted eagle ray came by. I saw a school

of hammerheads coming toward me. 26 hammerheads just slowly swam by. Awesome safety stop. The week before, we had a 14-foot giant manta come from the ledge at 250 feet up to us and swim around on top of the wall at 45 feet. Because of the ease of diving, no currents, no need for a compass, amazing visibility, from seahorse and lettuce sea slug to scorpionfish and even lionfish to giant mantas and schooling hammerheads, this place out-shines better-known Caribbean and Bahamian dive locations. Small critters on the wall, beautiful wide angle scenery in swimthroughs, friendly Nassau groupers, lazy turtles, stingrays, moray eels, hammerheads, reef sharks and nurse sharks on every dive.

Riding Rock Inn, April 2006, Glenn Gramom, New Smyrna, FL. Experience: 553 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 74 F, calm and flat, choppy. Diving was very good but quite a lot of algae and sand on the coral. Walls, cracks, crevices were nice. Services on boat good. Patrick, our divemaster, and Bruce (boat captain) did an excellent job. Thought that Patrick took divers who lacked a lot of experience too deep on several dives, but didn't hear any complaints from divers. Food was excellent. Rooms were adequate but several minor repairs needed. Staff friendly and helpful. Water in room tasted bad but was told could drink it. Chose to drink bottled water instead. No restrictions on bottom time and only restrictions on depth were to go no deeper than divemaster. Great swimming beach a couple of hundred yards from RRI.

BARBADOS

Barbados is busy and crowded with lots of fast traffic, splashy resorts