

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

and restaurants. There's decent diving with tropical fish and it's fine for beginners or even more experienced divers who want to enjoy Barbados topside. You still can find century-old bottles in the harbor and the wreck of the *Stavronikita* is interesting, but jammed with tourist divers. Keep hurricane season in mind.

Barbados Blue Dive Shop, Barbados Hilton, August 2005, Gary W Wenzel (saluspop@msn.com), Bedford, NH.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm, choppy. Diving Barbados was a great wonderful surprise! Barbados Blue has a great facility for storing your gear and tries in every way to accommodate your needs. Their rental equipment appears in to be in great shape. 2 great dive guides are Robert and "G". Roger knows how to run the boat and is always there to help handing you your camera after your back roll. They have 2 boats. One is a large catamaran and another is perhaps 30 feet. Max. divers were 8 and they would split you up with 2 dive guides. The west coast is calm and hot! East coast Atlantic side is wild and not often available for diving. The dive shop is on the property of the Hilton at Needham's Point between the Atlantic and the Caribbean. The amount of tropicals found there is amazing! The reefs are healthy with no bleaching. The best time is April and May when the hawksbill turtles come ashore to nest. On nearly every dive, I would see 3-5 turtles and what makes them so great is they allow you to get close to them. Sting rays of all sizes are abundant with no sharks seen, along with many trumpet and coronet fish and occasional barracudas. Brackish water (Atlantic water meeting the Caribbean water) where the temp drops

10 deg. and everything is blurry but that will last only for 5-10 seconds. This is a real interesting experience. In front of the dive shop and next to the Hilton is Carlisle Bay. There you will find at least 6 sunken boats that are easy to penetrate and dive. A quiet, sandy bottom with not too much coral but loads of creatures. Great for the 2nd dive because the deepest spot I found was 52 feet. Snorkelers also go there through the dive shop. You will be in front of the Malibu Rum factory, Malibu Beach and just a beautiful spot. There are constant changes of water conditions from easy, to gliding along and then flying with the scenery always changing. It's terrific with no chance of boredom. They have a marine biologist on staff at the dive shop, Andre Miller Msc. This was a wonderful place with great diving for me and the hotel along with so many great restaurants makes this dive destination better than most in the islands for me and my non-diving family. If there were beginners on board they would provide, usually Robert, my dive guide, to swim with me only so that I would have the best opportunity for videos. They would drop Robert and me on the deeper side of the reef and drop the less experienced others on the more shallow side.

Divepro Barbados, Time Out Hotel, September 2006, Catherine Hanlon (madmedic@pol.net), Clarksburg, NJ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy. Got a good deal on off season lodgings. Stayed in St. Lawrence Gap in Christ Church (SW side of island). Divepro was right down the street, across the street from a small harbor where the dive boat was anchored. Was delighted at service. Shop run by Summer Rain Worme (yep that's her real name), a 6th generation "Bajan." She and her team

(Jen, Adrian, Duane and Greg) had all our gear ready each day on board, took it all back for rinse out and hanging each night. Dove some neat reefs and wrecks. Most reefs 60 feet, wreck of the Stavronikita approx 100 ft. There's a marine park with 5 wrecks at 30-40 feet with lots of corals and fish. Not a lot of big pelagics, but loads of turtles, fish, corals and eagle rays. They keep a close eye on new divers, but let more experienced divers do their thing. Prices are reasonable, good selection of courses to take and staff couldn't do enough for us whether diving or giving us tips on what to see and where to eat.

Ecodive Barbados, April 2006, Andy Kelly (andykelly86@msn.com), North East, MD. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: to 70 Feet. Water: to 82 F, choppy. Andrew runs a small dive boat, however, the lack of creature comforts is more than compensated by the fantastic service he and his crew offer. After a dive in the Carlisle Bay Marine Park (we swam around 5 wrecks!) Andrew took time to explain what we had seen and the micro and macro view of the reefs. After a surface interval with homemade pastries and local juices we did a drift dive and saw Asta turtles, eels, barracuda, soft and hard coral. Upon returning to the dive shop our gear was rinsed for us and we were returned to the cruise ship pier. Relaxed customer focus Andrew provides is refreshing and provides for some fantastic diving.

The Dive Shop Ltd., March 2006, Rita May, Oak View, CA. Experience: 500+ dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm and flat, no currents. Barbados is out of the major hurricane path. Just a 3-night stopover before boarding a cruise ship from Barbados to Marseilles, France. The richness of the reef is astounding. Comfy catama-

ran. Airport pickup. Arranged a little apartment at "Healthy Horizons" (over "bistro Monet"). Very efficient operation. Dive guide excellent — worked there 21 years.

BELIZE

Inside the world's second-largest barrier reef, English-speaking Belize sports three major atolls. Good diving is reachable from live-aboards or from resorts on the offshore cayes. The deeply-cut, spur-and-groove coral reefs of the rapidly developing Ambergris Caye are interesting but disappointing to many experienced divers. Outer cayes have better diving. While there, take a couple days to visit Mayan ruins, the Jaguar Preserve, or take river tours. Belize is about a two-hour flight from Houston. Belize lies in the hurricane belt and takes frequent hits.

Ambergris Caye

Amigos Del Mar, Victoria House, April 2006, Jeremy Ellis, Atlanta, GA. (jeremyellis@earthlink.net), Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy, surge. You get around the island by driving golf carts along the dirt roads. The roads are fairly bumpy. The Victoria House, which is the most southern resort on the island and one of the more upscale resorts. The rooms are amazing and we recommend the #12 Plantation Suite. The food was fantastic and the staff friendly. There are hammocks on the beach as well as lounge chairs. The pool is designed to let you have your lounge chair in the water. Restaurants "downtown" are mostly good to excellent with all