

(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

varieties of cuisine, although local fresh catches are your best bet. Our favorites were the Blue Water Grille, Caliente and the restaurant at the Victoria House. For a good pizza, there is a small hut run by some Americans called Peppero-ni's. After consulting *Undercurrent* and other sites, we chose Amigos del Mar and were happy we did. The dive week with Amigos was exceptional and problem-free. They picked us up daily at our dock promptly (measured in island time) at 9:00 a.m. for a 2-tank local dive just east of the barrier reef located only .5 miles offshore. Accessing the dive sites, though, was dicey at times due to severe winds and chop/surge. Seasick-prone divers should prepare for the worst, but the good part of the ride out is that it's only 10-15 minutes long and the staff makes it easy for those with queasy stomachs to quickly gear up and backward roll into healthy spur and groove coral-dominated dive sites. The boats are not equipped with big ladders so you take your equipment off in the water and hand it up to the staff. You are taken back to the Amigos Del Mar dive shop between the dives where they have fresh oranges, coconut and juices. The quality and health of the reefs are among the best in the entire Caribbean region. Some sites require additional fees to the government for conservation purposes, but the reef quality makes you feel that it is money well-spent. You will see plenty of nurse sharks (didn't see any reef sharks), lots of turtles, great fish life including several large groupers and beautiful coral formations. Amigos Del Mar runs regular trips to the more distant sites Turneffe Elbow, Lighthouse Reef and those off Half Moon Caye (an uninhabited island sanctuary for protected booby and frigate birds). Book them on your first dive as they can be subject to change during the week

based on interest. You will not likely get to see much in the way of marine life at the Blue Hole although some dive operators do chum the waters to entice the bull sharks. All the above sites are accessed on day-long trips aboard a 48' boat that handles the ocean crossings with ease and comfort. A buffet lunch as well as drinks and snacks, are included on these trips. Amigos will stow and rinse your gear each day of your dive week and has your unit set up, correctly weighted, and ready to don each morning. All dives are low-impact drift dives, and on choppy days, it can be hazardous exiting the water, but Amigos staff does a great job safely getting everyone back on the boat.

Amigos Del. Mar, Ramon's Village, May 2006, Herman Tessman (zg1kred@yahoo.com), Arlington, VA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 85 F, calm, choppy, surge. Hotel is first rate, if a bit expensive. Food was good, but not gourmet. Non-diver wife wants to go back. Beach is shaded and wonderful. San Pedro town is small but safe, friendly, and close by. Ramon's Dive operation is canted toward "average" diver with decent rental gear. Barrier reef is recovering from severe hurricane damage in earlier years. Lots of nice smaller soft corals and little critters. Because it is adjacent to Hol Chan, nurse sharks are plentiful, as are big grouper and turtles. Booked trip to the Blue Hole/Lighthouse Reef through Ramon's but they put me on Amigo Del Mar's big boat, since they had insufficient registration to use their own 46' Pro Dive. Despite long bumpy run to Blue Hole, Amigo Del Mar's trip was well run, food was plentiful, including unlimited rum and cokes on the return trip! Once there, dive guides were fully occupied with unskilled divers and keeping them

safe at 100+ feet where the cave architecture begins. Again, left me and other advanced divers to our own profiles. Did shark feed before getting back on boat at Blue Hole. Then did Half Moon Caye Wall . . . a real stunner of a dive! NYC Diver whom I met up with on Blue Hole trip stayed and did Turneffe trip on Ramon's 46' Pro Dive and said it was not as well run or as comfortable as Amigos. UW Photography Comments: Smaller 30-ft. boats had no provisions for cameras and minimal safety gear. This may have been due to dive sites being 15 min. from the dock! 30-foot boats are open with sun shade and twin outboards. Dive masters/guides were friendly and experienced. Boats not crowded (shoulder season) so no real problems.

**AquaDives, AquaMarina Suites,
February 2006, Joe Cadigan
(joecad@comcast.net, Hanover , MA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, choppy. Ambergris was a great vacation spot, laid back, the locals were friendly. The only problem we had was with an aggressive (and I believe drunk) young local hawking timeshares in the street. The food was good relative to the price. Must eats include Elvie's Kitchen, Blue Water Grill, Caliente. The Palmilla at the Victoria House resort was the most expensive meal of the week, and the most disappointing at any price. We stayed at Aquamarina Suites, which was fairly inexpensive, and adequate. We stayed in the main part of the building with an ocean view, people that we spoke to that stayed in the north end of the building seemed less happy with accommodations. The desk and cleaning and maintenance staff were great, bartenders and wait staff at the mediocre on-site restaurant less so. AquaDives is 3 minute walk from the Suites. They

were by and large ok. The boats were ok, some divemasters were good (Carlos and Michael in particular) some were indifferent to somewhat rude. The trip to the Blue Hole/ Lighthouse Reef was rough, but I can deal with that (many couldn't, nothing else in nature replicates that color of green on a seasick face). The two reef dives were excellent, the Blue Hole is a "must dive" that I wish I'd skipped for the alternate three- reef trip. I don't see the point of diving to 135' just to dive to 135'. The bulk of pictures taken were of computers showing the depth. The real source of my complaint had to do with the speed at which our skipper navigated certain sections of narrow channels through shallow reefs. I thought he was going way too fast, but I figured he's probably done this a million times. I didn't want to be the wimp that said something. Then I saw the petrified look on one of the divemasters' faces.

**Bottom Time Dive Shop, Villas at
Banyan Bay, August 2006, Nunzio
Calce (nunzioc@imsi.com), Bronx,
NY.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 70 to 80 F, calm, surge, no currents. Both of the guides hired by Bottom Time — their own Divemaster Rudy, as well as the Amigos del Mar guides — were great. I've dived with Rudy before, and he's professional, knowledgeable, and cares enough about the reef to clean any sand off it that he finds as you go. Twice I dove with newly certified people, and twice they ran low on air (only about halfway thru the dive), and he was quick to share his with them, having enough PSI to still last the whole regular dive time. The Grand Colonies, the sister resort of Banyan Bay, is next door to it. One of the most luxurious places we've ever stayed, with gorgeous granite countertops and amazing views (espe-

cially Oceanside) and private in-room jacuzzis and marble bathrooms and a beautiful pool and an incredible kitchen and a dining room and a TV in each bedroom and a huge flat screen in the living room and the nicest beach-front property on the island, located close to town; about a 5 minute drive with the golf carts. The staff is warm and friendly, just like everyone on the Island that we've met. The golf cart rentals there can be expensive, though, people found better deals in town. The Island now sprays for mosquitoes, which we found to be a hundred times better than last year, when we got eaten alive even with bug spray. Just a few bites this year without using any bug spray at all. The dive shop is at Banyan Bay, a 5 minute walk away, and they will pick you up right at the Grand Colony dock if you prefer. Lot of healthy reefs and life — I saw a giant sea turtle and a spotted eagle ray and a Jack and moray eel hunting in tandem, and tons of nurse sharks that seemed like they almost enjoyed being petted, and barracudas and huge groupers and tiny brittle stars and conch and lobsters and cleaner shrimp, with lots of channels and a swimthru . . . and this was just on one dive at Tacklebox! The daytime snorkeling/diving, and especially the night dive, at Hol Chan is not to be missed; octopus and sleeping fish everywhere and two different species of lobster and moray eels and stingrays and we were lucky enough to see the coral spawning on the night of 8/16/06, what a treat. When you surface, be sure to look up, and see the most amazing stars ever. A touching end to the dive. Some people wore wetsuits, but I just wore a T-shirt and was comfortable. There was a thermocline this time, and it was pretty cool to see the visual effects of the warmer/cooler water meet-

ing. The cooler water was still comfortable, though. We have not had a single bad meal both times we have visited the island. The nightlife during the slow season (summer) is not abundant, but there's always something going on each night — the staff can give you a list of the bars that have live bands, karaoke, etc. Construction is on an upswing, and many areas are being developed. But it's still a pretty quiet place in the summer. We definitely plan on going back, possibly even next year. Rinse tanks are sometimes — not always — found on the small boats, but that doesn't matter much since they are always found at the surface interval dive shop, which is a 5-10 minute boat ride.

Hustler, May 2006, Jean Starkey, Bozeman, MT. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 15 to 30 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. Our three experienced divers plus two who had just completed open water certification and this would be their first "real" dive. The rental equipment was old and malfunctioning. The operation wanted one beginner to use a free flowing regulator, then to use the secondary instead. We protested and she got a different setup. Once in the water, this one leaked air into the BCD continuously. Another had a sticky air gauge which suddenly went from 1500 to zero at depth, and she was out of air! The weather was too rough for only one divemaster considering the inexperienced divers. Seas of 3 to 5 feet at the dive site. We rolled off at the back of the boat and were told to swim to the mooring line and hold it until we could go down. Most of us got tired of being slammed up and down 5 feet by the mooring line and either made it back to the boat or submerged enough to get out of the wave action. The latter people did a short dive minus divemaster who was too busy helping the rest

get back in the boat. Those in the boat got sea sick quite quickly, and all of us were thankful to get back to land in one piece. Our party refused to dive with this operation again, and dived with Ecologic Divers and Amigos del Mar who were both fantastic.

ProTech Divers, Xanadu Resort, November 2005, manitou@pol.net.

Experience: 250+ dives. Water: 82+ F, surf/surge mild. ProTech Divers. Our specific dive leader was Bryon. We also used Gilbert on 1-2 dives. The dive boats are twin outboard engines 24+ feet open boats with boat to shore communication, first-aid, and anchors present. Our group did anywhere from 8-13 dives during the week. We did two dives per morning. They would also permit us to dive our computer and do multiple dives in the afternoon with only one night dive. The morning dives were well run and efficient. It was not crowded. The reef is in quite good shape, relative to other reefs in the Caribbean. Multiple sightings of spotted eagle rays, hawk-billed turtles, lobsters, crab (2-3 varieties) were seen on each dive. Nurse sharks were numerous, almost as common as the fish in the water! Bryon saw that and let each of us dive to our own comfort level, literally and figuratively. The night dive was done at the Hol Chan Marine Preserve. It cost an extra \$10 for diving in this buoyed-boundaried area. Unfortunately, it is somewhat of a cattle-car dive as there are many dive operations that go at the same time. Nonetheless, it is an excellent dive with many sting rays seen as well as the largest parrot fishes most people will see (4-4.5 feet). It is a shallow dive (less than 28 feet) but certainly well worth the opportunity. Pro-Tech Divers is unquestionably a fine and spectacularly run dive operation. They are meticulous to detail, markedly

safety conscious, friendly and accommodating. I did meet the owner on 1 or 2 dives, an English chap who is most pleasant also. The interval between dives is on the land, and water and fruit are available. My accommodations were at the Xanadu Resort. Excellent place to stay in terms of comfort, friendliness, accommodations, and convenience. The staff is meticulous in maintaining a nice environment and certainly receptive to any requests by guests. They have bicycles on the campus as well as other water sports material.

Ramon's Village, August 2006, Mark Fenton (fentonm@georgetown.edu), College Park, MD. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. Ramon's Village proved to be a great resort. Food was good, but not great or particularly generous. Better, more-for-the-money meals found within walking distance in town, especially at Elvi's. Rooms were clean and adequately cooled. Beach was well maintained and always had lots of available space and lounges. The dive staff was friendly and accommodating, but the manager at the dive shop could work on his 'people skills'. If you pre-book dives here, expect to use 'em or lose 'em. Reef structure and condition was great, with mostly spur-and-groove formations and a few swim-thrus. Nurse sharks are common, enough so that on some dives you'll stop noticing them, but otherwise the reefs are somewhat fished out. We did see rays and turtles on more than one dive. Dove the Blue Hole with another shop, Ocean Divers, and highly recommend using them for the Blue Hole. It was a great experience, partly because we got lucky and had lots of reef and even some blacktip and bull sharks circling the rim. Staff gave a thorough briefing, and watched closely during the dive,

but didn't restrict or nag us. From 130 feet, you get an eerie feeling looking up at the silhouetted sharks slowly circling above. Rent a golf cart and drive up to Captain Morgan's for lunch and a swim, and a pina colada.

Glover's Reef

Isla Marisol, December 2005, David Durbin, Springfield, IL. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm. Isla Marisol has a sort of luxury that is almost impossible to find anymore. It is private, uncrowded, and pristine. This is a 5 star resort that is unlike anything you will ever visit. There is no A/C, minibar, TV, or telephone. However, the cabanas are comfortable. The island is surrounded by coral reefs that are within a National Marine Park. The diving was the best we have seen in the Caribbean. There was an abundance of healthy coral and fish. Eddie Usher, whose family owns the island, may be your divemaster on one dive, the boat captain on another dive and the bartender after the dive. He is enthusiastic and works to please every visitor. He makes sure your diving experience, food and accommodations are excellent. That means diving your own profile if you are a competent diver and hand holding if you're not. That means fresh fish, fresh fruits and lobster at lunch and dinner. His staff was helpful and pleasant. They repaired my leaky regulator with ease.

Manta Resort, February 2006, Greg Stewart (gsclu@aol.com), St. Charles, MO. Experience: 175 dives. Vis: 50 to 100+ feet. Water: 80 F, choppy. Staff, locals were great, as were service and food. Conditions were rough, probably due to time of year.

Manta Resort, March 2006, Jim Nyberg, Clayton, MO. Experience: 692 dives. Vis: Usually 50 feet or better. Water 79-80 F. Choppy outside the lagoon, calm inside the lagoon. We were met in Belize City at the airport or hotel and taken by boat to the small island containing the dive resort, sand and coconut palms. Life centers in a large dining room with bar. Our air-conditioned cottage, the family house with two bedrooms and kitchen, was clean and had hot water showers. The food was good, varied and plentiful. The staff was pleasant and helpful. Diving was three one-tank dives per day, which provided two-hour surface intervals and was comfortable because all of the dives were typically ten minutes or less from the dock. These were all one-hour "drift" dives, but the currents were always barely noticeable. There were only a few divers that week, so our underwater escort was a leader plus another who kept watch on any stragglers. The reef is healthy, with plenty of soft coral. Several times we were approached by an enormous loggerhead turtle. We did not need to handle our equipment between dives. On the Saturday morning for return to Belize City, the shuttle boat's twin diesel engines experienced repeated failures of one or the other or both, caused by contaminants in the fuel. The resort engine mechanic repeatedly cleared the fuel lines to restart the engines. It was clear that in those rough seas we could not reach Belize City in time for some travelers to catch their return airline flights. The manager hired a smaller boat to take us the shorter distance to Dangriga, chartered aircraft to fly us from Dangriga to Belize City, obtained reservations for later airline flights, and paid hotel and meal costs for some who were rescheduled to fly out Sunday.

Manta Resort, May 2006, Debby Posich, San Diego, CA. Experience: 500+ dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm and flat, choppy. It's a 2-1/2 hour boat ride to the Manta Resort from Belize City. Beers, sodas and bottled water are provided for the trip. The resort is on a 12-acre island that has 12 guest cabanas. The island is powered by a generator 24/7 and they have a desalinator. The water out of the tap was quite good. The dive staff was great – friendly and informative. (This cannot be said of boat captain Gino who, although extremely competent, is pretty grumpy.) They offer 3 dives a day – 8 A.M., 11 A.M., and 3 P.M.. One night dive per week takes the place of the 3 P.M. dive. The dive sites were from 3 to 15 minutes away from the resort, the sites farthest away being the best. Diving profiles were set by the resort and there wasn't much room to take advantage of computers to gain extra bottom time. First dive to 80 feet; second and third dives 60 feet max. We had 2 to 16 divers in the water at one time. We think they should have split the group up. The night dive was a circus with that many people together in the water. Most dives had some beautiful fans and gorgonians, but we noticed algae on many sites. Other than the large schools of Creole wrasse, the fish were somewhat sparse. All the typical Caribbean species were there – just not in great numbers. We went during the time of year for the whale shark excursion. We saw one whale shark, a bull shark, a hammerhead and thousands of schooling snapper. Breakfast and lunch were served buffet-style. Breakfast always had a nice fruit platter, toast, johnny cakes or muffins, eggs and some type of meat. Lunches were varied and ranged from spaghetti to stir-fry. They always had cold cuts if someone felt inclined

to make their own sandwich. Dinners were served waiter-style and you were given a choice of two entrees or combination of the two. The flavors were in many cases good, but the portions could have been larger. Juice, coffee, tea and water were always available. They have an honor bar for adult beverages and sodas. They provided a snack plate during the cocktail hour, but no in-between dive snacks. The rooms: Comfortable beds and daily housekeeping. Each cabana has a patio (for those brave enough to contend with the no-see-ums), with a couple chairs and a hammock. Tipping, as always, is appreciated by the staff, but we were a little put off by a "hidden staff" tip box. This was where you could tip the people you didn't see. I'm cool with tipping housekeeping, but when was the last time you tipped the groundskeeper at a hotel? This resort is owned by the same person who owns Blackbird on Turneffe. We spoke with one of the staff at Blackbird Caye who said they felt the diving was better at the Manta Resort. The US representative for the Manta Resort put us up at the Belize Biltmore (a.k.a. Best Western) before we went to the island. This hotel is not in town (\$6 cab fare each way). We would have preferred staying in the city. It's a \$25 cab fare to get from the airport to town and it will cost you \$32 to get out of the country.

Placencia

Nautical Inn, March 2006, James and Janna Hawkins (jhawkins23@sbcglobal.net), San Antonio, TX. Experience: 73 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Very professional dive team operation. Went whale shark diving. A baby 35' whale shark came within 2 feet of us and gave us the once-over. Saw a

60' about 30 feet away and a 10-12' bull shark. Great experience.

Roberts Grove, Calico Jacks, May 2006, Scott Johnson (scottyj96@aol.com), Palm Springs, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, choppy, currents. I arrived for whale shark diving 3 days before the full moon. Everything I found on the internet and people I spoke with said three days before and after the full moon is when the cubera snapper are spawning ... thus, whale sharks in the Gladden Spit! Upon my second day of swimming in the blue for an hour at a time (before the full moon), I asked a divemaster what was going on and she said it is usually the 3 days after the full moon for the whale sharks and has always been! My last dive day (a day after the full moon) there were people who had not dove in a year. They put them in 6'-9' plus seas and strong currents! They had to spend time adjusting weights, blowing thru air, etc., thus cutting dive times by 25 minutes! Besides the whale shark diving, it was typical Caribbean diving. I dove Silky and Sapodilla Cays. Some pretty beige soft corals and at Sapodilla some hard corals, and some pretty fishies ... once in awhile here and there ... just OK diving. Roberts put 9 divers plus crew on a boat that should have had no more than 5 divers on it. I found the diving, meals, transportation to be the most expensive in the world. I can go to Palau for 10 days or more for what it costs to go to Roberts for 5 days and the diving is not in the same league. I have seen more in 30 minutes on a bad dive day in Palau, Christmas Island, Australia, Hawaii, Sipadan and even Costa Rica-Cano Island area that had visibility at 15' to 20' than I did in my 10 hours being underwater in Belize..

Sea Horse, Cozy Corner, March 2006, Willa Jean Menz (trdjsr@aol.com), Stoughton, MA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82F, choppy. Good, loved seeing the whale sharks! Long boat ride, up to 2 hours since the boat was not working on full power. No oxygen, no first aid kit on board, saw few life vests. Promised a trip to Glovers if enough people wanted to go (5). When I asked were we going I was told 3 different reasons why we were not. First was not enough people that I knew was untrue because I had the 5 people that wanted to go standing next to me, then told no boat, then told not enough people to run the boat (that they did not have). Kept going to Laughing Bird Caye repeatedly, granted the third time was due to the swells. Last day dove with Roberts Grove, what a difference, Big dive boat, well equipped. Would dive with them in a heart beat. Cozy Corner was great spot, centrally located. Rooms were clean, had ac and ceiling fans. Restaurant food was good and good prices. Need shelves in bath rooms. UW Photography Comments: Had to ask several times to get a bucket for my camera, used a cooler which worked but I had to ask the other divers and snorkelers not to put their masks in it.

Something Fishy, Turtle Inn, November 2005, George Arnold (arnoldgl@upmc.edu), Pittsburgh, PA. Experience: 250 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 82 F, choppy. The resort is a world-class operation. Extremely beautiful, quiet, and relaxing. Personal service in gorgeous surroundings. The dive operation is across the street. They use a 28 ft open boat with twin Yamaha 150 motors to get to the reef 22 miles off shore. All dives are accompanied by a divemaster, but only two to six divers. We had a picnic lunch between our

2-tank dives. The wall in Belize is beautiful although some coral bleaching has occurred. Personal service and any reasonable request is accommodated. We dove with Quinton and Devon. Julie is a PADI instructor and seemed knowledgeable and patient with new divers. Outstanding resort (owned by Francis Ford Coppola), first class luxury as well as good to excellent diving. Placencia is reached by a 35 min flight from Belize City on Tropic Air or Maya Air.

Southern Belize

Hamanasi, January 2006, Jack Gullo (jgullo@carr.org), New Windsor, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 72 to 76 F, choppy. Beautiful resort — out of the way. Dives are ½ boat ride away — no shore diving. Quiet resort and even quieter small town. Dive crew was professional — accommodating all levels of divers. Dives were all drift dives. Surface intervals on a nearby island with snacks. Longer excursions to barrier reefs available and worth the cost and time. Also many shore excursions available from nature trips to Mayan ruins. Food was excellent and the meal plan was worth it. Be prepared for no-see-ums! The tree-houses are cool! Boats used a 5-gallon bucket to store camera in — with fresh water when the crew remembered to fill it. The bucket was also used as a seat during the boat ride.

Hamanasi, April 2006, Michael Emerson. The basic beach front was spacious and comfortable for my wife and me as well as my two children. The food was tasty. Had we known that there were several good restaurants in the area, we may have opted for a more limited meal plan and eaten some meals nearby. We traveled to the Mayan ruins on the first day and that was beautiful. The

guide was well educated. My 13-year-old daughter had completed her pool work for referral and the open water instruction was great. They were careful and allowed me to dive my own thing without having to supervise. She got her C card and had a great time. My 12-year-old son completed his advanced cert. during the week and the training was also topnotch. The resort is safety conscious and I always felt comfortable with their care. The reefs were healthy and quite nice. We saw turtles on almost every dive including the largest loggerhead that I ever saw. Repeated sightings of multiple eagle rays in formation. Very cool. Saw lots of lobsters including a slipper lobster and the usual suspects of reef fish including a good size nurse shark. My whole family had a great time and even liked it better than Disney World! The only negative was the lack of trips to the atolls while I was there. The resort goes there whenever 8 divers want to go and that did not happen. I would say that an experienced diver would enjoy 3 or 4 days of 2 tank dives before things get a bit repetitious.

Turneffe Island

Turneffe Flats Resort, May 2006, Jerry and Christy Bonnington (gbonnington@mac.com), Tualatin, OR. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, choppy. Staff for shore and dive operation were outstanding! Had 6 divers to a boat set-up for 20. Frederick was a great boat captain, made getting in and out of the water easy. Dive masters Jerome and Danielle were great! Would spend as much time as you wanted to show you things, or would let you dive your own dive. Blue Hole was fabulous except for the number of boats. The rest of the week we never saw another dive boat

at any sites! The resort is primarily a fishing resort, but they have integrated the dive operation into it with ease. We never went wanting for anything. The resort itself was great, the rooms we had were brand new. The kitchen staff were outstanding, even giving Belizean cooking classes to those who wanted. Kani and Justin were wonderful and took care of all our needs. UW Photography Comments: Had rinse bucket exclusively for cameras, staff helped in and out. Shore facilities for reviewing digital and video were good.

Turneffe Flats Resort, May 2006, Lynn Morton (lynn@lynnmorton.com), Oakland, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 82 F, calm, no currents. This was a family trip with my husband (both of us experienced divers), my sister (recently certified), her husband (completed certification in Belize), and my 93 yr. old father. My dad wasn't diving, but he was saltwater, catch and release, fly fishing. Our first week was at Turneffe Flats Lodge. My husband and I had spent a not-great week on the Sun Dancer, then my family joined us on route to Turneffe Flats. TF offers world class fly fishing, diving, snorkeling, nature treks, Mayan treks. The lodging was in duplexes and triplexes and had big rooms with all the amenities. The main hall was beautiful and was where all meals were served. The food was delicious and way too plentiful. We did 3 dives a day with 2 in the morning and 1 in the afternoon. The dive boat was roomy, fast and comfortable. My brother-in-law finished his open water work and was happy with Jerome, his instructor, a practical joker on the boat and was full of tricks. Danielle, the other dive master, was excellent at finding the tiny and the unusual. We saw several of the endemic spotted toadfish that seem to prefer

Turneffe Atoll. We dove the Blue Hole and the reserve at Half Moon Caye, the Elbow, and our favorite, the Aquarium. Fish life was plentiful everywhere with Creole wrasses, groupers, French and queen angelfish, and, at the Elbow, huge schools of horse-eyed jacks, permits, and barracudas. The guides started with restrictions on depth and length of dive, but proved flexible. The boat doesn't anchor, but follows the divers. You all need to remain at least nominally together and that can be hard on photographers. Our fellow diving friends use us as landmarks for where the boat is because we rarely move much. We felt we had to move a bit more than we would like because of this. I can't praise TF enough for their boundless aid and care when my dad fell and broke his hip. The resort owner, Craig, stayed up with me all night arranging the evacuation. Craig is a doctor and he knew just what had happened and could make my dad comfortable. He took him into Belize City at first light for his long trip to Houston and continued to call me weeks later to check on my dad's condition. Pop's back to playing 18 holes and owes a lot of that to Craig and the folks at Turneffe Flats. Despite everything, about all we could do was go ahead and we finished our trip inland at Lamanai Outpost Lodge. This resort is on a beautiful lagoon of the New River and about a 10 minute walk from the Mayan ruins at Lamanai. Lodging includes daily activities such as birding on the river or in the jungle (both fantastic), finding howler monkeys, touring the ruins with a guide, fishing on the river, dawn canoe tours, Mayan medicine trail, watching and participating in crocodile surveys, or a decadent breakfast or happy hour on a barge floating on the river, complete with chairs, bar, and gazebo. You can also explore the

ruins or area on your own. Our room was huge with lots of plugs and space.

BERMUDA

Triangle Divers, Grotto Bay Beach Hotel, July 2006, George T Felt (gfelt@verizon.net), Moultonborough, NH. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, no currents. Grotto Bay Hotel provides convenient access to Triangle Dive operation and comfortable accommodations. Food and drink are expensive (breakfast: \$22) but good, and generally good service. Try the “Swizzle Inn” restaurant next door for variety, and get the meal plan if you’re staying for a while. Hotel is near airport and bus line, but otherwise distant from anything one might wish to do. Scooter rental is convenient and worthwhile or get the extended bus pass. Taxis are always available, but long distances high costs. Triangle Divers is a well run operation with friendly and attentive staff. Graham is the captain and owner/operator of the shop — a likeable and knowledgeable chap. Bring your own gear or rent whatever you need — the important stuff (all ScubaPro) is in good shape, but you should try to bring your own wetsuit and fins if possible (limited selection of rental gear). The boat is solid but slow, and has a marine head. Staff changes tanks for you between dives — it’s pretty much full service and well done. The dive destinations are somewhat limited by the range of the boat. I did two days of two-tank boat dives at good sites, then took a day off (they don’t go out Tues). Then I repeated the sites again on the next two days. I rather enjoyed it, but some would object to the repetition. Talk to Graham — he is

honest and will tell you what the plan is (but as wind, weather, and boat may limit the available options you may have to choose between revisiting a site and skipping the dive action for a day. Look for thousands of purple sea squirts on “The Dredger” — an unusual and lovely thing to see. Excellent and diverse coral, good swim-throughs, and interesting wrecks provided good entertainment on every trip. Boat can be a bit crowded, but not always

Triangle Diving, Grotto Bay Resort, September 2006, William Fisher (wfisher2250@msn.com), Brigham City, UT. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 79 to 83 F, choppy, no currents. My wife and I had an outstanding experience in four days of diving with Graham Maddocks and Triangle Diving. We had some great dives and Graham runs a fine operation. After our first dive, we could pretty much do our thing or go with a divemaster and the rest of the group. Triangle always had 3-4 divemaster/guides in the water. We chose to dive on our own most of the time. We were always first in and last out, dove our profile and most dives lasted 1+ hour. The boat is equipped with all safety gear and the divemasters do a roll call after each dive. Graham and his entire crew made sure they that met all our desires. Dives consisted of wreck dive and then a reef. Grotto Bay Resort is a nice colonial style hotel. Our room overlooked the dive shop. The hotel is a nice 3 star resort and worth the stay. For dinner, I highly recommend the Lobster Pot in Hamilton.

BONAIRE

To many visitors, Bonaire’s attraction is shore diving, not only in