

second dive off Klein Bonaire. Pieter as DM was outstanding at critter finding for UWP (he is a frogfish and seahorse specialist)! Other DMs were great to dive with too. Gear lockers and rinse tank were right at the dock. Tanks were always at 3K+. Shore dive tanks were located in three different convenient places. 18th Palm off resort beach is great dive for orientation and afternoon/evening dives. every dive of the 12 was an aquarium dive! The slope starts at 20' and goes off to sand at 100' at 45 degrees. On every dive we were surrounded by reef fish beyond count. Juvenile Drums abounded as well as several seahorses and frogfish (sponges). Trumpets of 4 different colors were logged as well as several rays, peacock flounders, golden morays and scorpionfish. The sites were all easy dives with average bottom time exceeding 60 minutes at depths of 60'. Beyond 60', the fish life drops off as does the available light. There is simply no need to dive deeper than 60' anywhere in Bonaire in order to see maximum fish and coral. No reported crime, great restaurant choices, clean rooms, friendly staff and a great dive operator. Each boat had a large tub for cameras with signage for no masks – cameras only! Toucan also had a photo center with computer offerings to copy, edit (CS), burn to disc and print at a low cost. On-staff professional offered free advice.

Wannadive Bonaire, Eden Beach Resort, October 2005, Rebecca Hauser (rlhdvm@powercom.net), Brandon, WI. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, surge. Eden Beach Resort - nice facilities, great beach bar (Bongos), and fantastic dive shop. I used the city center dive shop location rather than the resort location because I was taking Advanced Open Water Certification, and it wasn't

offered at the resort. Instructors were awesome, made me feel completely at home and comfortable. Kind of like part of the "family." They were good at not pushing if you weren't comfortable with a particular dive, but were supportive and encouraging. There was one day with heavy surge that made for difficult entry/exit.

CAYMAN ISLANDS

While diving on the West End of Grand Cayman has succumbed to the travails of the tourist industry, the North Wall and East End still provide good diving. However, it's become extremely expensive so many divers head to the sister islands and even better diving. Arguably the best diving is on Little Cayman and boats from the Brac make regular trips, though at times winter weather prevents the journey.

Cayman Brac

Reef Resort, January 2006, Susan Mickelson (mickelsonscuba@yahoo.com), Kirbyville, TX. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm. Meals-included plan was great as the food and dining room service was superb. Rooms were spacious and clean. The small bar was a gathering place after dives to share stories. Diving was "valet" style - the staff picked up the rigs at the room on the first day and cared for them all week - even washing them each night! Jay and Ms. Vicki were most professional, yet friendly and helpful. Their drawings of the dive sites should be published, and Jay's story of the wreck 356 is not to be missed. The dive boat had less

than a dozen people on each dive, and was spacious enough for everyone to enjoy their 3 dives per day.

Brac Reef Resort, March 2006, James R. Grim (yorkdivers@aol.com), York, PA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 120 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, no currents. Great food and plenty of it. Superior dive operation that runs on time. Good air fills. One would have to look long and hard to find anything to complain about with this operation, hotel or diving. Donnie, our DM for the week, was super. No fresh water rinse container on board the boat, but there is fresh water rinse water through a hose, which was good until you returned to shore where they had large fresh water rinse troughs.

Brac Reef Resort, March-April 2006, Susan Sampson and Buddy (susanraesampson@hotmail.com), Renton, WA. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 75 F. Slightly more expensive than many Caribbean sites. Some dive sites were bland, but others were excellent. Crossed over to Little Cayman to dive at Bloody Bay Wall. The wall is awesome, and the reef crowded with schools of fish, all the tropicals, reef and nurse sharks, and more rays than anywhere outside sting ray city. Marine reserves make a significant difference in reserving a variety and abundance of sea life. The boats were 46' Newton Dive Specials, and comfortable for the 10 or 12 divers on our boat. Another boat was catering to a club of divers traveling together, so was slightly more crowded. The only challenge to the diving was watching out for other divers in difficulty; once the boat had to deploy a life ring and haul in a diver; one suffered anxiety, nausea and hypothermia; and two fell overboard while wandering to the stern with weight belts, but no

BCs on, while the crew was otherwise occupied and didn't see them. The night dive cost \$60 extra and was to an uninteresting site. The resort food, though served buffet style, was worthy of a linen-and-silver restaurant, offering Beef Wellington, Lobster Thermidor, and treats from the house pastry chef. Every dinner offered entrees of seafood, poultry, and meat. Island is good for bird-watching on the Western Ponds, known as a Cayman "Heritage Site," across the road from the resort, which also offers bicycles, tennis courts, ping-pong, foosball, a basketball hoop, a Jacuzzi, an unheated pool, and hammocks. The resort seemed friendly to divers traveling alone without buddies, and to an all-woman group of divers. Jet travel to the Brac requires use of Cayman Airways from Grand Cayman, which was problematical. Some divers arrived ahead of their luggage. Due to its failure to perform minor routine maintenance, we missed all our connections going home.

Reef Divers, Brac Reef Beach Resort, March 2006, Susan Durchslag (sued@mailbag.net), Newbury, OH. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm, choppy, no currents. All inclusive for the three meals a day, 3 dives a day, 3 drinks and a dive video. The resort itself was well kept up. The meals were a buffet for the most part, exceptionally good and a wide variation. There were activities every evening during the week. There were Kayaks, paddle boats and bicycles for guests to use. The resort also had a swimming pool and hot tub. At night there were lights on the dock and many fish to look at including the Tarpon. Many people painted rocks or other found objects. These were found all around the resort and were fun to look at. The entire atmosphere

was friendly and laid back. The dive operations was also exceptional. I was concerned about the large number of people per boat usually 15 to 20. But everything was so well organized it was never a problem. Before each dive the dive master drew the dive site. You were then free to go with your buddy or follow the dive master. A profile was given, but I had several dives of 60 minutes or more and that was not a problem. The Dive masters were good at finding small critters. Jayson was outgoing, friendly and professional. Josh was also on our boat and was good. The topography of most of the dive sites was interesting, with many swim throughs. We did go to Bloody Bay one day (weather permitting for that trip) and it was outstanding. We also dove the wreck The Tibbetts that was interesting. My favorite was Tarpon Reef (3 minutes from the resort) where 6 large Tarpon hung out. Night dives are scheduled twice a week weather permitting. Snorkeling was also good right at the resort.

Reef Divers, Private Home in Cayman Creek Area, March 2006, Jon Scott (jascott2@adelphia.net), Plainfield, NH. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80s F, choppy, surge. Family of 4 for first post-certification open water tropical diving. From the first day, Reef Divers staff made us welcome and gave us the confidence and support to dive successfully, safely and have a great time. Valet service was a big plus for us as new divers (could concentrate on in-water diving basics). Could follow divemasters or go explore on our own around boat to finish dive. Entry by giant stride from comfortable rear deck; exit by large stern ladders with tailing line to prevent ladder traffic jams. Boats comfortable and well laid out, even when full to capacity. Excellent, entertaining and informative but

not overwhelming pre-dive briefings. Good camaraderie with fellow divers. Thorough roll calls after dives completed. Plenty of snacks, fruit, water for surface intervals. Typical day was deep first dive, often with interesting swim-throughs and wall. Shallower spur and groove reef for 2nd AM dive. Lunch at shore. PM dive, more spur and groove, more laid back but still lots to see; fewer divers for PM. Garden eels, flying gurnards, nurse sharks, juvenile spotted drum, lobster, flamingo tongue, tarpon, eagle rays, huge grouper, variety of morays and more. Wrecks were a special treat and set up well for less experienced divers to visit. Night dive was well worth it; schedule depends on advance sign-ups, so register early or be disappointed. Snorkeling from shore also excellent, if care given to coral underfoot, tide/surge conditions; many dive mooring buoys accessible from shore under right conditions; bring dive flag. Saw squadrons of squid several times. Great hiking around island, friendly locals. Cooked our own food most meals (local groceries not as expensive as rumored) but enjoyed Aunt Sha's, and Barry's Golden Jerk stand, only open a few nights per week. Brac Reef resort puts out a nice buffet spread and has a good bar menu for lunches (but costs can add up quickly). Divemasters Jason and Vicki and other Reef Divers and Brac Reef staff went out of their way to make this first tropical dive trip a success for all of us.

Reef Divers, May 2006, Larry Polster (larrypolster@sbcglobal.net), Martinsville, IN. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, choppy. You were assigned to the same boat each day with the same crew (Vickie and Phil were great), so everyone knew each other with a roll call after every dive. Each dive brief-

ing was thorough with white board diagrams, reference points, boat location and compass readings. You could follow the dive master or buddy up and go on your own. General rule on first dive was 45 minutes and 100 feet, but those with computers were allowed to dive their own profile. All Nitrox divers were off the boat first and logged 55 to 60 minutes. Ice water, punch, cut fruit, and snacks, fresh water hose to rinse off between dives. Most of us did 3 tank dives each day with a break for lunch. Spoiled is the only way to describe the great service. Never touch your gear after the first day, they changed tanks, washed your gear, and had it dry and waiting for you on a dressed tank every morning. Boat had padded non-slip camera table with fresh water rinse tub.

Reef Divers, Walton's Mango Manor, July 2006, Bill and Donna Goodwin (ptsllc@bellsouth.net), Birmingham, AL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. This was our third trip to Walton's Mango Manor, and the quietness, convenience (short walk through their sumptuous tropical gardens to the iron shore where there is a perfect cut leading to a fine spur and groove reef that's not even in the books—the resident Goliath Grouper would greet us like a dog after the first few dives there. The rental car (a clean station wagon) would take us over the empty road to the Brac Reef Resort where we had arrangements to pick up and drop off tanks for our three-four dives a day shore-diving habit. Breakfast is great, generous and when you want it, and the kitchen is yours the rest of the time. Nearby stores are well stocked and we could have cooked for ourselves if we desired, but we usually ate dinner at Brac Reef or Aunt Sha's (reef sharks swimming in two feet of water, fins

and backs exposed in the lights from the restaurant, while we ate). The shore diving is excellent - we swam out to the warship (Capt. Tibbetts) several times, dove Atlantis (we were skeptical but it's really quite cool, and big rays like it), Greenhouse Reef (great structure), Grouper town (fabulous tame groupers, 4 species of them, location a semi-secret), several sites on the south side (only when it's calm - that's the windward side most of the time), Police Cut, and several other sites on the leeward side (although the wind can reverse and mess up that side too). Spoiled Bonaire-style shore divers that we are, we have kind of carved out a shore-diving world on Cayman Brac and been rewarded with fabulous, uncrowded (just us most of the time), fish-thick diving, tranquil days and nights, unlocked doors, wonderful people (the Brac folks are the cultural and historical heart of the Caymans). Lynne and George Walton, your hosts, are great people - he's a retired USAF officer (and a Brac native) and she's a retired nurse from NYC. Their son Robert is a DM at Reef Divers and divers at Mango Manor get a 10% discount there. Three Ds has rented us the car each time — they meet us at the tiny airport, and ask us to just leave the keys under the mat when we fly out. And once we were buying some wine at a little store and were 5 dollars short the owner said take the wine, bring the money later — when we returned they were closed so we left the money stuck in the door. Reef Divers has excellent photo services, and when my computer system let me down Ed Beatty downloaded our chips and burned them to DVDs for us.

Reef Divers, Carib Sands, July 2006, Kent and Rachel Kossoy (dutch3667@yahoo.com), Kingwood, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75

to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm, no currents. We have visited the Brac more times than we can count and have always stayed at Brac Reef Resort, which has been excellent. This time we rented a condo/car and just drove back and forth for diving/meals, etc. At the end of the dive day we still found ourselves at the Brac Reef resort bar catching up with old friends. As always, the DMs are the best in the business and we are looking forward to our next trip to the Brac. Staying at Carib Sands was much quieter at night as there was not karaoke. etc. ... also the condo management had our refrigerator fully stocked upon our arrival with everything we requested ... we chose to eat breakfast in and usually ate lunch/dinner at Capt. Table. Reefs appeared pretty healthy and seemed to be on the rebound after the '05 hurricane season. Didn't see a lot of bigger groupers or nurse sharks this time though.

Grand Cayman

Divers Down, August 2005, Ross and Lynda Biederman, June Lake, CA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 86 to 88 F, calm. Divers Down took care of the gear and tried hard not to repeat dives for anyone unless requested. North Shore diving seas were a little rough but worth it. Hammerhead greeted us on the wall! Beautiful walls on the north shore and nice east side coral reef diving as well. "Aquarium" was our favorite shallow dive for photography and many small critters. Boats were not overcrowded and service was personalized, friendly, and helpful. UW Photography Comments: Cooperation and accommodation with all photographers, whether point and shoot or full camera gear. Helpful in pointing out photo subjects.

Divers Down, December 2005, Hugh Aaron (hearon@hrai.com), Mechanicsville, VA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. My wife, 12-year-old son and I were on the Carnival Valor the week between Christmas and New Years, 2005. My wife and I have been diving for about 25 years. My son was certified this past summer. We made arrangements via email before we left home to dive Stingray City with Divers Down at noon. Divers Down is in Georgetown about one-quarter of a mile from the tender dock. Divers Down staff informed us that conditions were not ideal, but they were going to attempt the noon trip to Stingray City. They suggested that we leave our gear with them and come back around 11:30. We did a walking tour of Georgetown (touristy, but nice people) and returned at 11:30. There were seven other people (all from a different cruise ship); who had also booked the noon Stingray City trip with Divers Down. Of the seven, two were certified divers, four were "resort course" divers and one was a snorkeler. Divers Down loaded us all into a comfortable van and took us to a marina about 15 minutes away. We filled out the usual paperwork in route. No one ever checked our C-cards. The boat had plenty of room and was well setup for diving. It was a 20 minute run out to Stingray City in fairly choppy, drizzly conditions. We anchored in the sand in about 12 feet of water. We were the only dive boat. Divers Down placed a safety line on the bottom with an anchor on one end and a weight belt on the other end so we would know when the current carried us too far aft of the boat. After a through briefing, including the proper way to interact with the stingrays, we entered the water. Both the Divers Down dive masters

dove with us. I was a bit concerned that no one remained in the boat. We were immediately greeted by a group of 20 to 30 stingrays. There was mix of larger females and smaller males. We spent about 45 minutes interacting with the stingrays, including feeding them squid. The stingrays were nonaggressive and quite interesting. My son was a bit overwhelmed by the stingrays. At one time he was swarmed by so many stingrays that his mask was knocked off. No big deal, but it made him a little nervous. We also saw a poisonous stonefish, which gave my son one other thing to be nervous about. Divers Down dive masters were excellent. They made sure no one drifted too far from the safety line and that everyone had opportunities to feed the stingrays.

DiveTech, Cobalt Coast, November 2005, Kevin McCarter (kmccarter@boncosky.com), Aurora, IL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 82 F, no currents. We're a group of six divers who get a dedicated boat and have our choice of dive sites. We've been here twice in November and have yet to get to the famed North Wall. The West Wall, however, is worthwhile. The deep dives have stunning coral reefs, and the shallower dives have tons of fish. We saw a moray eel 7' long. We also observed two angel fish cleaning a 20" turtle. A "Turtle Wax," so to speak. We did an afternoon walkout dive at Dive Tech's Turtle Reef shop and a night dive there as well. The waves were too big to dive at Cobalt Coast. These walk out dives are pretty average, really. We did our Nitrox certification with Divetech and find them to be accommodating, safe, and overall pretty strong. Our dive masters for the week were Gary (ex British Marine — a no nonsense guy) and Seb. Both led us on great dives. We had a couple of "air

pigs" and I wish these DMs had looked back a little more, but in the end, they did fine. Cobalt Coast is set up as a dive resort. Ari makes everyone feel at home; you have to like this guy for sure. It's not plush, but it's just fine for diving. Restaurant and food are good. WiFi access in the bar/restaurant.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast, November 2005, Diane Buhler, Palm Beach, FL. I've been diving for 15 years now. For my 40th birthday my sister and I and my best friend wanted a nearby yet memorable dive location for the Dive Chicks to enjoy. The dive operation, with Greg leading the pack, was phenomenal. Sue, Jack, Javin, Steve and Zelda took great care of us when we asked for assistance and they hosted terrific Cayman dive sites without a hitch. The resort itself was intimate and modern with a lovely staff and good food. Our rooms were clean and pleasant with all the amenities of home. The restaurant staff took it upon themselves to note that my sister was a major tea drinker and had her hot water and tea bag waiting in the mornings for her. You do have to put your gear in the transport truck, carry it onto the dive boat that is waiting at another location (in the Winter, the seas do not allow for diving right off the resort), rinse it down after your dives and hang it up yourselves. When I asked the staff to help me out with this on two occasions as I didn't want to miss happy hour, they happily obliged and took care of the smallest detail of even hanging my booties and mask to dry. We happen to be 3 professional, independent women and skilled divers but as ladies, we do like the occasional spoiling of gear lugging by someone other than ourselves. The Dive Tech crew was not only obliging to our requests of this but of dive sites we preferred, accommodating to a

last-minute boyfriend who arrived by surprise and they needed to juggle boat occupants around so we could all dive together, helpful with gear clean up and one minor gear malfunction, pleasant and engaging and educating on the marine life and detailed on the differing dive sites, on time and meticulous with the boats and terrific hosts to a somewhat fish depleted but still beautiful reef system with amazing topography. They noted each of our dive abilities and how we liked to put our gear on and helped accordingly. All this being done with a full boat.

DiveTech, Cobalt Coast, December 2005, John Critchfield, Seattle, WA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 83 F, calm. Dive Tech is on-site. Most guests were in family groups. There was a wide range of ability among the divers. Cobalt Coast is a modern, well-maintained resort. Our two bedroom suite was spacious, clean and in good condition. Staff was attentive and responsive. Our chirping air conditioner fan was fixed promptly. Sometimes there was a lack of hot water. So head right to the shower after the dive trip, then rinse your gear. The food was quite satisfactory. We were on the meal plan; the standard menu was supplemented with daily specials and substitutions were accommodated. Dive Tech shop was well-stocked and organized. I got quick help with a minor repair and found a suitable new mask for a diver in our group. Managers adjusted schedules to accommodate the various groups, when practicable. Divemasters and other staff were friendly, knowledgeable and attentive enough to suit us. Boats were in good condition and did not seem overcrowded. There is no head, but there is a fresh water shower and a hookah regulator hung at 15 feet. Reef conditions seemed variable

and there was some debris, which we attributed to Hurricane Ivan. The walls are awesome. We had good encounters with the usual tropical fish, plus moray eels, lobster, tarpon, barracuda, turtles, groupers, a spotted eagle ray and a humongous jewfish. Stingray City was a hoot! The shore diving and snorkeling at Cobalt Coast were enjoyable. The entry is easy with a short swim to the reef, along a well-marked route. The reef and fish were about as good as any. It made a nice night dive.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast, March 2006, David Van Ryn Elkhart, IN. (davevanryn77@alumni.indiana.edu), Experience: 400-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: choppy, no currents. Three days diving off North Shore/ North Wall Grand Cayman – good resort. Good dives. Lots of tech support – nitrox, rebreathers, etc. Great conditions – Tarpon Alley with hammerhead, eagle rays, turtles, tarpon.

Dive Tech, Westin Casuarina Spa and Resort, April 2006, David Vickery and Suzanne Leeson (twodivers@att.net), Hoboken, NJ. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. In GC they are the best shop for technical training. They do take their tech diving seriously; if you sign up for a course it is not a guaranteed C-card, and you may spend the bulk of your vacation in class or on training dives. You will, however, learn what you signed up for. Once certified in an advanced course, you can rent doubles and deco tanks for use on the daily boat dives and you will likely be excused from diving with the group. You are responsible for your own dive, and your own safety. Advanced divers are still asked not to exceed 60 minutes of bottom time on any given dive; to do so is impolite to the other divers on the

boat. If you feel compelled to do some serious tech dives, you should check in with the shop where they can advise you where to go, provide a DM, and possibly arrange a charter. Non-tech divers should not be scared away. If you are a competent sport diver, you will be treated like an adult. The scooter rides are a gas, the staff is helpful and enthusiastic. Parents should know that there are courses for all levels of kids, even a Kid's Dive Camp Week. Still lots of turtles to be seen, a few sharks (we have seen hammerheads) and the odd eagle ray or two on the wall. Tarpon Hole has a large school of the big silver guys, and lots of tropicals on the shallower top reefs. The walls and overhangs are dramatic, especially if it's just you and your buddy. Direct flights make GC a short hop to get to from the east coast. The Westin is the best hotel on the island if you like a laid-back pool atmosphere in the afternoon with an ocean view, and reasonable comfort. The Ritz Carlton is open now, but we found the hotel repressively stodgy, and the pool is not near the ocean. Their restaurant, Blue, is arguably the best on the island, but you will pay for it. Their best deal is the Champagne Dive, a glass each of Dom Perignon, Krug, and Moet and Chandon Nectaire for \$51. Full sized pours, too. Chat up the waiters (many guests are repressively stodgy as well) and you may get an extra dessert or glass of wine. We always enjoy Restaurant Pappagallo, and for two people who are surrounded by Italian restaurants at home, that's saying something. We prefer the Calypso Grill for lunch, when it's quieter. Explore the native roti shops or the shwarma stands for cheap eats. UW Photography Comments: Rinse tank on boat, camera table on boat that is not supposed to be used for anything other than cameras, though you will

find other soft items on it.

Don Foster's, November 2005, Charlotte Ware (divers@thewares.net), Germantown, TN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Don Foster's appeared to be a well-organized operation, balancing many divers and boats at once. However, the restrictions and hand-holding really ruined the dives for us. My husband, who is an instructor and has over 1700 dives, and I who am an advanced diver, both brought our log books to show our recent dive activity. We were treated as divers on our first dive, and held to an 80 foot depth limit and 40 minute dive time (1st dive). The divemaster (who was friendly) said that we had to follow him, and banged his tank at me at 29 minutes to start up. I was the last one on the boat, at exactly 40 minutes dive time, including the safety stop. The second dive was with a different dive master, and I got about 45 minutes dive time (50 feet max depth). I understand being safe, but we are experienced certified divers with computers. We are trained to dive beyond 80 feet, and to use our computers to monitor our dive safely. Overall, I was disappointed.

Don Foster's, Carnival Cruise, Liberty, February 2006, Jill and Rob Caple (rg250cat@msn.com), Pasadena, MD. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 90 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm. We booked this dive with the cruise line, which we would never do again. The boat was way too crowded and some of the other people who were diving were not nice. We had to put our gear together on the front deck of the boat because there wasn't even enough room for each person to have their tanks and gear set up. I was thankful that my husband handled the tanks

because I would have lost my temper. They should have never had so many people on one boat. We enjoyed our dive master, Scott from South Africa, who helped make the crowded boat not as bad. Our second dive was better because we didn't have to stay with the group and could get away from the people who had no business being in the water in the first place. The diving itself was wonderful and the most beautiful we had ever seen.

Indigo Divers, Westin, May 2006, Adam and Julie Maurer, Chatham, NJ. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 70 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm, no currents. The Westin was about the same as any other Cayman hotel (nice, but overpriced). There is a restaurant across the street that we ate lunch at for much less money and with better food: Eat's Café. We dove with Indigo Divers. With a maximum six divers on board, it was a personalized experience for those people who prefer not to be cramped on a cattle boat. The captain, owner, and divemaster, Chris Alpers, and his wife, Kate, ran a topnotch operation. They let divers dive to their experience within reasonable limits. We preferred to dive with Chris and Kate rather than on our own; they pointed out sea life that we would have missed and brought us to spots with some of the bigger creatures, such as turtles, sharks (nurse, reef, and hammerhead), eels, and various rays. Kate also has a particular knack for finding critters, pointing out some beautiful smaller creatures that we would have missed. The boat was in excellent condition and often had only four divers, Kate, and Chris. Chris was receptive to customer requests, such as spending the surface interval at Stingray City or hitting specific dive sites. The equipment is taken care of and they have snacks and

drinks. Kate's sense of humor made the trips enjoyable and Chris has a wealth of diving experience. On our first dive, my wife's mask was filling with water due to a crack sustained during travel. Kate swapped masks with her under water and saved the dive. They went the extra mile to ensure that everybody was comfortable, safe, and had a good time. They provided Nitrox for \$15/tank that was worth it for us "geezers." The coral wasn't as great as I remember it, still nice, but we saw plenty of critters. Also, the water was not as crystal clear as I remember it. The island is still recovering from the hurricane in '04 and some shops and restaurants had just reopened. Tuesdays are all you can eat lobster at Deckers (do not miss it if you love lobster). Calypso Grill was another winning restaurant. Don't go to the Wharf unless you have several kids in tow.

Neptune's Divers, June 2006, Phyllis Mason (fcfpm@aol.com), Lebanon, NJ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, choppy, no currents. This is a dive operation only, but they can help you find accommodation. 8 divers max. They help you with gear and do setup for you. They will take you on slow guided tour or you can pair up. Excellent at finding fish and critters for you. Safety conscious. They do referrals and resort courses and are extremely helpful to beginner divers as well as experienced ones. For divers with computers they allow them to dive their computer and do not force early exit.

Ocean Encounters, May 2006, Larry Polster (larrypolster@sbcglobal.net), Martinsville, IN. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 85 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. You unload your gear the first day, they dress the tanks, wash out your

gear, and it's waiting for you the next day on the boat. Between dives, fresh dry towels waiting after a fresh water rinse. Cold drinking water, punch, and cut fruit with a ride on the bow of the boat. Dive your own profile with a computer, Nitrox divers in the water first, usually 55 to 65 minutes if you are the last one back on the boat. Got nick named "Bottom Time Bandit" by one of the Brit crew members. The East end is fantastic diving compared with the crowded West end, but the secret is getting out and Ocean Encounters is adding more boats to accommodate the crowds. Plenty of small fish, with many large schools, large tarpon and grouper, turtles, eels, cool swim thrus to set up shots. Fresh water rinse tubs for cameras and large table to place cameras between dives.

Ocean Frontiers, December 2005, Joel Snyder (jms@opus1.com), Tucson, AZ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm, no currents. We did 6 dives with Ocean Frontiers, within walking distance of the house we had rented. The operation was pretty typical: get there too early, wait for a while as they get organized, then pile on a boat (6 to 8 people on boats) and do a couple of fine dives. They took us out to Stingray City (we asked!) and I'd give it the "do it once, but never again" seal of approval. There were lots and lots of stingrays, but these were outnumbered by the tourists. Fortunately, divers can play in more than 3 feet of water, so it wasn't that bad, but just seeing 200 people in the water with 15 other boats gave me a sinking feeling. The boat was well run, well maintained, and no problems. Everyone once we got off the dock was professional. These guys love their dive briefings. It's like a little art class. They draw pictures, use colors, and give you

a long discussion of what is going to happen. A bit overkill, but everyone appreciated all the information sharing. Saw schools of silversides, lots of mid-sized groupers, jawfish, and some pretty black durgions. At the wall dives, the view is impressive, although the sea life about the same as at the boat in 25' of water. Avoid the west end with its cruise ship docks and horrible traffic.

Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, January 2006, Sandy Falen (skfalen@cox.net), Topeka, KS. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, calm. Topside Grand Cayman shows severe damage from Hurricane Ivan in 2004 (the old Cayman Diving Lodge is a shattered wreck). But the wall diving, for which East End has always been famous, remains stunning. The drop-offs, crevices, plunging vertical walls, and outstanding vis are reasons enough to come to East End. I was impressed with the first-class service provided by Ocean Frontiers. From reservation to diving to checkout (sob, sob), it was a first-rate operation. I stayed in their on-site, 2BR/2BA, Compass Point condo — the nicest accommodation I've ever enjoyed on a dive vacation. The condo has a full, well-appointed kitchen (microwave, dishwasher, smooth-top range — the works), stacking washer/dryer, whirlpool tubs, CD/DVD player, 3 Sony TVs, including a closed-circuit channel playing U/W video. There is a large lanai overlooking the water, accessed from both the living room and the master BR. The 2BR unit is larger than the 1BR, and worth splurging for, even with only 2 people. There is a lovely stretch of beach (but little shade for the hammock), and a nice pool and deck area. Boats were roomy, and on-board Nitrox service, with a crew member analyzing both of your tanks before the boat left the

dock. This was valet diving: equipment was picked up at your room before your first dive, was set up and waiting for you on the boat each morning, and then rinsed and put up to dry each evening in a locked storage area. The staff was friendly and competent, and well organized. This is a professional, well-run operation. Briefings were thorough (including drawings of each site) but not excessively long. DM's are happy to let you dive your own profile, and I never felt restricted. I was surprised to have seen few pelagics. East End is about a 40-minute drive from the airport, and an entire world away from Georgetown's traffic, tourists, and cruise ships. Grocery, beer, and wine shopping can be done near the airport, but stores are closed Sunday. There is virtually no shopping in East End, but there are a handful of excellent restaurants within reasonable distance. The Lighthouse at Breakers, while expensive, was outstanding (killer filet mignon), and made for a memorable special-occasion dinner. Grab some fish and chips for lunch at Vivene's kitchen (and it is, literally, her home's kitchen!); it's just down the road and within walking distance. Vivene is a Cayman legend, and one bite of her perfectly cooked fish will tell you why. Take a drive to the north side and have a meal at Over The Edge (aptly named given its proximity to the sea) — the grilled tuna and wahoo was moan-worthy. There is no on-site restaurant at Compass Point, but it's easy to prepare breakfast or quick lunches in the condo. Your Cingular phone will work on Grand Cayman, but save it for emergencies (like getting a Pina Colada recipe), as the roaming fees will come back to haunt. As for Georgetown and Seven Mile Beach, traffic jams and hoards of "cruise shippies" are not my idea of a dive vacation, and I found the

turtle farm to be a depressing rip-off. East End was tranquil and friendly.

Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, March 2006, Maria Chapman (mochapman@houston.rr.com), Spring, TX. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Ocean Frontiers never fails to deliver the best service. Their DMs are all knowledgeable of the area, the animals, corals, etc. and make sure that everybody is taken care of despite their level of abilities or experience (and without making it known to the other passengers). Their entire operation is one where safety is of the utmost importance without losing sight of the fact that people come there to dive and have fun. UW Photography Comments: day boats have a camera table that is well suited for the trips. DMs are aware of UWP needs and act accordingly.

Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, April 2006, Salvatore Perconti (sal@perconti.com), Saint Petersburg, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, surge. Excellent service, knowledgeable staff, excellent facilities. Always on time, but you never feel rushed. Small groups — never more than 12 on the boat. Flexible on site selection. Our gear was always waiting for us on the boat, rinsed and set up. Compass Point is an excellent dive resort. Clean, modern facilities with all the amenities (including hi-speed wireless for email). Condo had all needed appliances, from dishwasher to DVD players, even a washer/dryer. Somewhat limited non-diving activities but as a dive resort — the best. Staff friendly and helpful.

Ocean Frontiers, Morritt's Tortuga Club and Resort, June 2006, Robert Newman, Lompoc, CA. Experience:

501-1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, choppy. Even though Tropical Storm Alberto took away the sun and provided lots of rain, heavy at times, it was not until the end of the week when the winds got too high that Ocean Frontiers cancelled several boat dives. The storm did not affect the diving, just made it wet topside after the dive. They had a competent staff, Spencer (captain and lead DM) was outstanding. Ocean Frontiers is on the NE end of Grand Cayman and dives the east and north sides. We stayed 5 minutes away so they picked us up before our afternoon dives. We dove on the NautiCat. There were 12-14 divers, not crowded. Spencer gave a detailed dive briefing with depths, suggested profiles and special things to look for while holding a good drawing of the dive site. We could follow the DM or dive our own profile, so we started with the DM but headed off on our own after 10-15 minutes. Most of our dives were 40-50 minutes at depths between 50-85 feet. Those with computers could dive their computers as long as they avoided decompression dives with no time limits. They stressed doing a safety stop before every dive, and had a reg hanging down ~20' for those low on air. After each dive they asked for our time and depth and checked our dive computer. After they got to know us they did not check our computers, just asked for the info. At the end of the week Ocean Frontiers provides a printed dive log for each person. One could leave their gear on the boat in big plastic crates they labeled with our name and Ocean Frontiers would rinse it off and set it up the next day. We left our BCDs and fins, took our regs and wetsuits back to the resort to rinse; others left all their dive gear. Vis stayed great, but without sun it was darker and photogs needed

lights to take any pics. Reefs were in good to great shape. Lots of macro life, 1-2 turtles on many dives, a couple of sharks, and some big grouper. The sites Ocean Frontiers took us to really nice sites not dived much by others like on the west end. The Maze, Grouper Grotto and Babylon were really great dive sites with deep canyons and lots of sea life. Camera table not dedicated just to cameras. Camera rinse tank also had lights put into it.

Ocean Frontiers, Morritt's Grand, July 2006, Salvatore Perconti (sal@perconti.com), Saint Petersburg, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Ocean Frontiers is a 1st class operation. Excellent service, knowledgeable staff, excellent facilities. Always on-time, but you never feel rushed. Small groups — never more than 12 on the boat. Flexible on site selection. Our gear was always waiting for us on the boat, rinsed and set up. Morritt's Tortuga is a full-service resort with a great deal to do for the entire family. Large rooms with full appliances. Resort has a gym and a day spa as well as water craft (waverunners, kayaks, sailboards, sailboats) available for rental. Beach and pool (3 of them) activities as well as kids' activities are planned for every day. Shopping strip within walking distance includes grocery store. Morritt's also has a dive operation, which is adequate, just not up to the 5 star level of Ocean Frontiers.

Ocean Frontiers, The Reef Resort, August 2006, Clem Clapp (cclapp@bellsouth.net), Maplesville, AL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. Ocean Frontiers had a gift shop and booking desk at the resort as well as at Compass Point where their main op is. Friendly and competent

dive op. Treated divers like adults despite experience level. They kept and set up gear daily. Had a problem with high pressure hose after am dives one day. When I returned for pm dives it had been replaced. Nice, roomy and well-maintained dive boats. All tanks 3000psi. Nitrox @\$12.00 per tank. Choice of guided dives or not. Nice wall diving. Coral not bleached but probably damaged due to hurricane Ivan which hit the east side hard. Lot of varied sea creatures. Saw a number of turtles, a few sharks and the uncommon (I was told) manta visit on the Babylon wall site. Another favorite site was Snapper Hole which, while lacking in coral, had a good selection of critters from tarpon, spotted drum, nurse shark, banded coral shrimp and groupers and some swim thrus. The resort was well maintained with a beach bar for lunch and a restaurant for breakfast and dinner. Did not open for breakfast until 8:00 (nor did any other restaurant that I could locate) which was the time of the diving departure. There was a grocery store across the street which opened at 7:00am which helped a bit. Our accommodations were an ocean front studio on the 3rd floor with a Jacuzzi and covered porch. clean. Good ac. Nice view of beach and pool.

Ocean Frontiers, Turtle Nest Inn, August 2006, Craig Neal (canfsa@rit.edu), Pittsford, NY. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 120 Feet. Water: 85 to 87 F, choppy. This is our fourth stay with Turtle Nest Inn and diving with Ocean Frontiers. Both operations are nothing short of first class and service at both is both professional and friendly at the same time. It gets pretty expensive; a family rate would be nice, and perhaps we would dive more.

Peter Milburn, Don Foster, Silver

Sands Condominiums, August 2005, Ernie (ernie@casuarina-aquatics.com), Rye, NY. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, calm, no currents. I led a group of 22 divers; 3 were there for there OW certification. Also, 4 of our 10 non-divers took "resort" introductory courses with Don Foster's Dive. I have been diving with Peter since 1982 and was delighted to meet and dive with Russ and Sally of Don Foster's and to arrange the charter with Sergio. Used Peter Milburn's 28' rigid-hull inflatable and Don Foster's large, spacious, flat-top Cayman Wall dive boat. Each day, a different group of 6 dove with Peter. We were blessed with good weather; fine, spacious, on-the-beach, 2-bedroom, condo apartments; cooperative sea creatures; and breathtaking. The visibility on the wall was spectacular, making all of the architecture easy to appreciate fully. Peter's and Don Foster's boats met us early every morning at the West Bay dock and took us on brief, comfortable rides to the sites of our choosing. We also dove Turtle Reef from the shore via the Divetech facility and had several thrilling experiences as well as consistently good big-creature and macro photography. This reef structure consists of an overhanging mini wall that zigzags parallel to the shore and drops down from the hard pan at a depth of between 20 and 30 feet to a sand bottom at 55 feet. We were treated there to healthy coral along the crest of the wall; sponges covering the face of the wall; groups of large, adult, queen, grey, and French angels feeding on sponges as a group; free-swimming morays; scorpion fish; over a dozen huge rainbow and midnight parrot fish pounding the hard pan to break it and feed on encrusting algae; more than a dozen squid that allowed close

approaches and seemed to be paired for mating; about 50 closely packed tarpon plus one huge barracuda in company with a large, dense school of silversides; several large Nassau and tiger groupers; coney resting in sponges; lettuce sea slugs; banded coral shrimp and arrow crabs; Peterson cleaning shrimp living with pistol shrimp among corkscrew anemone tentacles; a large overhanging barrel sponge filled with cleaner gobies that would willingly clean a stable diver up to the neck (!); an octopus; lobsters; etc. The condominium provided an excellent setting for editing and viewing on divers' laptops. All the dives afforded excellent photo opportunities. Perhaps the best were at Turtle Reef, a shore dive site next to the Turtle Farm.

Resort Sports, May 2006, Paul and Donna Lima (plintn@hotmail.com), Christiana, TN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, calm. Booked a shore excursion on the Caribbean Princess. Peter and Marlin took us out to the North Wall of Grand Cayman on a clean, fast, spacious 46-foot Nekton for a wall dive followed by Stingray City. 13 divers on board. Plenty of deck space and plenty of shade. The wall was beautiful with great visibility and no current but fish life seemed scarce. The second dive was billed as the world's best 12-foot dive and it was. Plenty of stingrays and lots of action as we did as instructed and held squid pieces in closed fists. The stingrays were large (up to 4-foot wingspan) and went after the squid with great determination. Both of us ended up with large hickeys and bruises from rays sucking on our arms trying to get to the squid. When all the food was gone we went in search of Hector, a 6 foot green moray. Lured out by a piece of squid he placidly allowed himself to be petted and placed around

Donna's neck, certainly a dive highlight for her. Dive briefings were thorough and they did not push either tips or the availability of T-shirts. Time limits were generous as we were asked to be back on board with 500 psi.

Sunset House, July 2006, Thomas E. Spath, New York, NY. The hotel facilities are in excellent condition, apparently having been refurbished after Hurricane Ivan in 2004. Regrettably, Sunset Divers has not recovered as well. This was our third trip, and we recalled that the dive operation manned as many as six boats, our favorite being a large and spacious cruiser with good deck space for sunbathing on the way back from the morning dive and outfitted for ease in setting up and switching tanks. This craft is still on the north shore awaiting repairs. Most disappointing was that only two morning dives were offered. In the past, afternoon dives were available and evening dives could be scheduled if a minimum number of divers signed up for a trip. We arrived Thursday afternoon and found that the once-weekly night dive was that evening. We were told that neither additional night dives nor an afternoon boat dive could be scheduled, regardless of the number of guests who might be interested. While we did have a memorable encounter with ten tarpons in the caves, the reefs had suffered and coral bleaching was prevalent. One of my fellow travelers wrote a letter for friends with this anecdote: "Tom, Ted and I went for an afternoon dive out front to a wreck a 61 ft. by the 'white' buoy, about a 1/4 mile swim. We decided to swim out on the surface so we could find the marker and save air. Tom suggested it might have been a good idea to have a dive flag. When we got near the marker, we dropped down and seconds later a speed boat sped

overhead! We could have been chum! Tom had mooshed up bread and put it in a plastic bag inside a small mesh bag. No sooner did he poke a hole in the plastic bag than yellow tail snappers viciously attacked him and grabbed the bag. I grabbed the bag and had to play tug-o-war with the fish to get it back. I was laughing so hard I wet my pants — and for once it didn't matter. A fish was gulping down the plastic bag and I pulled the damn bag out of the fish's throat before he choked to death or worse. I saved that fish's life ... and what did he do? He followed me and bit the back of my hand, which is still red and a little puffy. Talk about "bites the hand that feeds you."

Sunset House, September 2006, Jack Hall (eyesguy@aol.com), Ripon, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Water: 80 F, calm. We went for the Digital Madness week. The boats were a little cramped with 14 divers, but not bad. The captains/crew/divemasters were among the best. Their choice of sites varied between fantastic and barely OK. The pre-dive briefing was comprehensive and yet brief. Safety measures were quite good, including what to do if they had to "cut and run" with an emergency while we were down (go to the mooring buoy and wait there until another boat came to get us). There was a great area designated for cameras only, a large (10 gallon or so) bucket for cameras, a separate bucket for rinsing masks. They allowed us to dive our own profile, but return to the boat with 500 pounds. At every dive the divemaster/captain told us the depth and time we should adhere to, but they were quite reasonable — 100 feet for 40 minutes or 60 feet for 60 minutes. My wife and I tend to be independent divers, and we did not feel at all restricted. There were lots of "critters" for photography, and

the walls and arches and swim thrus provided lots of wide-angle possibilities. We saw a turtle on at least one of the two dives per day. On one dive, we saw two turtles. Visibility was always over 50 feet, and often over 100 feet, but did seem a little off for the Caymans. Favorite sites were Eden rock, Trinity Caves, Bonnie's Arch, Cheeseburger (for the tarpon). Northwest Point did not seem as good as any of the other sites. We had unlimited shore diving, and we much enjoyed just toodling around in 25-40 ft. For the spotted drum, find the two cylinder heads in the gully straight out from the bar, face away from the bar and follow the gully for 100 plus feet. When the sides of the gully close in close enough to almost touch them with your outspread hands, look under the ledge to your left. Sunset House has been badly battered by the hurricanes, and, although they have made a valiant effort at remodeling, there is still a slight mildew odor to the rooms. The walkways outside the room were slick tile, and the air conditioner dripped water, almost resulting in a slip/fall incident when we were in bare feet. Shoes/sandals are a definite safety issue at this hotel. The water you use for showering and drinking (it is fine for drinking) costs 3 cents per gallon. Had I known earlier, I would not have taken a couple of "Hollywood showers." Everywhere the people in the shops and businesses were pleasant and polite and helpful. Security was almost a nonissue (maybe because they had a 24-hour security guard). People left cameras and gear out at will, and there was never a case of items "growing legs." UW Photography Comments: They had a large restaurant-style stainless steel double sink filled with fresh water to rinse the cameras in. There was a separate concrete tank for rinsing gear.

That tank was about 5-1/2 feet long by 3 feet wide by 2-1/2 feet deep, and it had a drain valve and was emptied and refilled during the week (unlike one in Fiji which is drained and refilled every Olympic year).

Tortuga Divers, Morritt's Tortuga Club, January 2006, John E. Keith (jkeith@econ.usu.edu), Logan, UT.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 15 to 40 Feet. Water: 26 to 28 Celsius, choppy, surge, currents. We expected windy conditions from the forecast and other Chapbook reports, so we were not terribly disappointed that boats did not go out on three of our seven days there. We did have a problem with Ocean Frontiers - the best operation on the East End according to the Chapbook. They cancelled us saying it was too rough, but we went out with Tortuga and we saw one of the OF boats. When confronted later, they admitted that "one of their two boats was not running well. It couldn't go out because of the conditions and you were scheduled on that boat." Honesty from the get-go would have been nice. Tortuga Divers (resort shop) was good. We did 2 2-tank dives on the south side. The divemasters gave a good briefing and were attentive, if a little stiff at first. Nothing but water on the boat between dives. One could dive his/her own profile on computer, but no one did. That made too many people (11) with one divemaster. The second day, they split the group (16) and it was better. The coral was in much better condition that I expected, but we didn't dive the deep wall because of wind and currents. Saw a few bigger fish (including a nurse shark) but lots of smaller ones. We did 2 shore dives (Eden Rock and Sunset House) both of which were great - good coral and big groupers and tarpon. Morritt's (1 bedroom RCI exchange)

was comfortable, well equipped, and pleasant. Staff were excellent. Drinks around the pool were a bit on the light side. Food there was quite good, as was the case for most of the places we ate on the island. Locals seemed really friendly and pleasant. However, take your money belt. Cheap it ain't. UW Photography Comments: Boat had a large fresh water tank for cameras plus another for masks. Unfortunately, one of the divers decided to use the camera tank to rinse off her BCD. She got a mild reprimand from other divers, but nothing from the staff. No facilities for cameras on shore.

Wall to Wall, Marriott Beach Resort, May 2006, Tom Beckham (Twbeckham@aol.com), Snellville, GA.

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80F, calm, no currents. Giles and Deanna run a first class operation. Superior service, friendly attitude, top notch equipment, friendly knowledgeable Divemaster Blair made for a dream dive vacation. These guys really know how to treat divers based on experience and capabilities. Newbies given the attention and support needed to make them safe and comfortable, experienced divers allowed to do their own thing as long as safe diving practices were adhered to. Grand Cayman will always mean Wall to Wall diving for me. Dining in GC is a good but expensive experience. Give Cimboco restaurant on West Bay a try. The food is excellent and the full moon dessert is good.

Wall to Wall Diving, Plantation Village, August 2006, Don Buswell-Char-kow, Ocoee, FL.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 85 to 86 F, choppy, no currents. Giles is the owner and takes boats out regularly. He is an excellent divemaster and finds critters, nurse sharks, and anything

else of interest. He is attentive to divers but not overbearing. He is knowledgeable about identifying underwater fish. He is entertaining on the surface. He has an extremely capable divemaster, Blair takes out the boats when Giles is occupied. He is a retired ex-pat from Canada with about 7000 dives under his belt. He is sharp and gives one the feeling that if there were some kind of problem, he's the one you'd want to have around. Once you bring your equipment on board at the beginning of your dive vacation, you can leave it and forget it, except for your mask, snorkel, and fins. They have two boats, one a little bigger than the other and with more cover. Both are excellent, though. Cold water and fruit is available between dives. Nothing fancy. They try to go to a different dive site every time and will accommodate special requests. They try not to take more than eight divers on a boat.

Little Cayman

Conch Club Divers, Paradise Villas, January 2006, Michael Hynan (hynan@uwm.edu), Grafton, WI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 120 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. We keep coming back to PV because we know that Marc and Sabine will provide a guaranteed good time. The villas continue to be spotless, and the food has maintained its excellent standards at the Hungry Iguana. Large school of bonefish congregating in the flats up the beach. I suspect that they were spawning because the school was in the hundreds and fishing was excellent (full moon). On five of our seven dive trips we were able to make it to the North shore, but diving on the South shore is not shabby. We enjoyed diving with Tim, Paul, Bill (owner),

and Ann (Conch Club Divers), but in general there were more divers and less personal care than our previous experiences with Paradise Divers. Conch Club is a class operation and did a good job of accommodating requests for certain dive sites. The head and fresh warm water were nice. Ann has a good eye for spotting small stuff, and all of the crew are friendly. Sea-Esta is a 42 ft. Newton with camera table. Divers bring only mask and fins to the stern for entry. A crew member brings over the tank and weights for an easy entry. At the end of the dive simply climb the ladder, turn around, and sit. One of the crew will remove your BC and attach it to a fresh tank. Dive briefings were informative with a map of each dive site providing a nice visual before entry. Dive briefings also resembled a vaudeville act with much witty bantering among the crew. One of the Conch Club crew picked us up at Paradise Villas and provided transportation to and from the dive boat located at Little Cayman Beach Resort.

Conch Club Divers, Paradise Villas, April 2006, Blue McRight/Warren Wagner, Venice, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 180 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, choppy, no currents. Paradise Villas is a lovely and immaculate group of five duplex bungalows steps from the sea. The peace and tranquility of the location are amazing. Near the tiny airport but not a problem. Marc and Sabine, our hosts, made us feel welcome. Bikes provided to all guests for island exploration which includes world-class bird watching. There is wi-fi for checking email, etc. Tasty lunches and dinners served at the on-site restaurant, the Hungry Iguana. Friday night BBQ at Southern Cross Club is fun and a good deal. We made breakfast and lunch for ourselves, buying grocer-

ies at a small store within easy walking distance of the Villas. US\$ accepted. No crime on the island. Paradise Villas lost their dive boat in the last storm so all guests dive with Conch Club Divers. Transportation to their dock is provided — easy and fast. Dive boat is a beautiful Newton 42' Dive Special, the "Sea-Esta." Completely equipped with high quality safety and communication gear, shade, marine head, and snacks. 20 divers max. but we never had that many; our max. was 14 and plenty of room for all. A.M. 2-tank dives with optional afternoon dive. We did every afternoon dive — like having a private charter with only 4-6 divers! Divemasters were excellent — professional and thorough with a great sense of humor, knowledgeable about dive sites, fish, and coral. They set up and assist you with your scuba unit and rinse it at the end of each day, with a room provided for overnight wetsuit storage. Excellent illustrated briefings made navigating the phenomenal underwater topography easy. In 8 days of diving we dove the spectacular north sites (Bloody Bay Wall/Jackson Wall) all but 2 days (due to wind and currents). Some damage to reefs due to heavy use, especially at swim-throughs. Less visited southern sites were also great. Saw reef sharks, spotted eagle rays, southern and yellow stingrays, shortfin pipefish, juvenile queen triggerfish, goliath grouper, many turtles and spiny lobsters, indigo and shy hamlets, peppermint basslets, diamond and sailfin blennies, southern sennet, batwing coral crab.

Conch Club Divers, Conch Club Condos, May 2006, Bob Sugarman (sugarman@abanet.org), Aventura, FL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, calm. Conch Club condos is a three minute bicycle ride from and is managed by Little Cay-

man Beach Resort, where we ate lunch and dinner. The condos are individual townhouses facing the beach, each individually decorated and containing every amenity (beach towels, dishwasher, cable TVs, stereos, a/c, full kitchens) on perfectly groomed grounds. Meals and the dive dock are accessed by a 10 minute walk or a pleasant three minute bike ride (on bikes provided by the resort) to the LCBR, where Chef Chubby prepared tasty and plentiful meals. The condos are much roomier, quieter and private than the well-maintained hotel rooms at LCBR. Both LCBR's and Conch Club Divers' boats leave from the LCBR dock. The CCD dive boat was spacious, well equipped, comfortable and the dive crew was most helpful and accommodating. The briefings were complete and the selection of dive sites, all on the awesome Bloody Bay wall, was diverse and interesting. The divemasters would lead those of us who wanted a tour while leaving those who preferred their own profile to dive on their own. Full valet diving so after each dive morning we just rinsed and hung up our wet suits and fins, ate a tasty lunch at LCBR, and bicycled back to our townhouse for a relaxing afternoon. The wall diving is diverse, colorful, and easy. A full selection of the usual Caribbean reef fish and healthy corals. In the evenings, we biked back to the LCBR for dinner and then went to the bar, where to hockey and NBA playoffs were on the TV, culminated by fun karaoke Friday night. When Cayman Airways small plane broke down and couldn't get us back to Grand Cayman for our flights home, LCBR's manager had us picked up from the Little Cayman airstrip, commandeered one of the dive boats, had his staff load 20 passengers and their luggage on the boat, and took us on a one hour boat trip to the Brac,

where he had the Cayman Airways jet hold its departure to get us all to Grand Cayman to make our connections home.

Conch Club Divers, Paradise Villas, June 2006, Douglas W. Peterson, Naperville, IL. Experience: 501-1000 dives.

I contacted all of the Little Cayman operations by e-mail. Paradise Villas responded so quickly and with such a helpful attitude that I just had to stay there. Marc, the manager of Paradise Villas, was really helpful and the villa itself was super clean and accommodating. The only suggestion would be to beef up the air conditioning a bit (we were in unit 1) and beam the wireless internet out from the management office all the way to villa one. The on-site dive operation, Conch Club Divers, ran a super-pro operation. They were on-time every day to pick us up with a smile, and their boat was just the right size and in mint condition - the warm water freshwater rinse was outstanding! Captain Bill, Tim and Ann were super-friendly, cracking jokes and teasing each other all the time, and Ann was the most warmhearted, outgoing DM I've ever met. The dive sites were excellent — especially the Great Wall East. The Hungry Iguana restaurant had excellent food and good service. Conch Club Divers let my wife and me dive our own profiles with only one minor hiccup. Some guy who couldn't dive well showed up on the boat and started playing dive police with me, tapping me on the shoulder at 80 and telling me to raise my profile. I found out that he is an investor in Conch Club, and he stopped bothering me after I politely asked "who is this guy?" I wanted to mention it 'cause I hate self-styled dive bosses, especially since I am a careful and respectful diver with dual computers, a pony, giganto safety float, proper

dive etiquette. We boarded the boat every day at Little Cayman Beach Resort's dock, ate lunch there at least 5 times, and rented their wireless. Every single staff person with whom we interacted at LCBR seemed to have an "I'm too cool for school" attitude, especially the management types at the front desk. We took one afternoon dive with them, and their female DM needed a personality makeover.

Conch Club Divers, Paradise Villas, June 2006, Rhonda VanSpeybroeck Rock Island, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82

to F. We arrived on June 9th and the wind was so strong on the 10th that the dive boat did not go out. The weather continually improved. Conch Club Divers is a professional and well-run operation with a small, knowledgeable and friendly staff. They picked us up promptly each morning from Paradise Villas for the 3 minute ride to the dock and the dive boat. They had a nice boat that would accommodate up to 16 divers, but usually had less. There was a camera table, but no camera holding bucket. Bloody Bay Wall and Jackson Bay on the north side hold most of the island's dive sites. As most all of the accommodations are on the South side, there is a short (15 min.) boat ride each morning. The first dive up to 100 ft. Divers are allowed to do their own profile and a 60-minute maximum time. There is a 45-minute surface interval and then a second dive with a 60-ft max. depth and 60-minute max. time. The boat is back to the dock by noon so divers can get lunch and head out for an afternoon dive around 1:30pm. Conch Club Divers requires a minimum of 4 divers to do the afternoon dive. They do not do any night diving, but can help you arrange this with other operations. The architecture and life

on the wall is superb. There are always numerous turtles and an occasional eagle ray, nurse shark and reef shark. Sometimes there is a seahorse. There is rarely a current and the wall makes navigation easy. Visibility is usually 100 ft or better. There are numerous swim-thrus. Paradise Villas has 12 villas, each with a bedroom, bathroom and small living area and kitchenette. Each villa has a porch overlooking the ocean. We sit on the porch every morning for breakfast and again for lunch, enjoying the serenity and beauty. The Hungry Iguana restaurant is on the grounds and is a great place for dinner. They serve lunch also, but we fix our own lunch and eat on the porch. Dinner reservations can be made at some of the other resorts, but the Hungry Iguana is the only open seating restaurant on the island. To tour the island, we jump on the bicycles provided for each villa and take off on our journey. Point of Sand is a nice beach on the east end of the island and is a great snorkeling location. It is too far for the bicycles, but transportation can be arranged through Marc or Sabine, the resort managers. There is also a bird sanctuary and large iguanas along most roads.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, January 2006, Victor A. Bary/Maureen E. Stra (vbary@yahoo.com), Cranford, NJ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, surge. Excellent food and food service. Spacious, attractive room always cleaned before we returned from morning dive. (The Exit sign outside the room — 215 — was a mosquito magnet at night). Friendly dive shop management. Somewhat disinterested front desk staff (needs improvement). Dive boats are large and well maintained. Rental equipment is newer and well maintained. Excellent whiteboard dive

briefing before each dive. Pre-departure and post-dive roll-calls. Only one dive-master in water with groups of 12-18 divers, perhaps not an issue in our boat as all divers were highly experienced and competent. Other than Dottie Benjamin — an institution in her own right — divemasters made little or no effort to point out sea life. Staff set up equipment and broke it down after each dive. Hosed off camera equipment as you boarded after dive. Bloody Bay Wall is fabulous and healthy. It was a week before grouper spawning — Little Cayman is one of only a few such Caribbean spawning sites - and the reefs were alive with large, docile groupers. Turtles on almost every dive were numerous and accepting of divers. A pod of porpoises fell in with the dive boat on one trip and the boat circled for 15 minutes so we could enjoy them. One of the best Caribbean experiences and a property and dive operation I would return to. UW Photography Comments: Boat had high pressure freshwater hose for cameras and a camera table. Cameras only rinse tank outside dive shop. Photo operation owner Richard Brooks produced the best dive video I've encountered.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, February 2006, David Van Ryn (davevanryn77@alumni.indiana.edu), Elkhart, IN. Experience: 400-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, choppy, surge. Great diving at a nice resort — compact, easy access to services. Usual hassles from GCM to LCM. Good dive operation. Boats not crowded. Corals/soft corals/fans were spectacular. Cold front diving our week — temps cold above/below. Believe this bothered critters too. Food plentiful, good. Bar is noisy. Watch room location. New manager, eager to please.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, March 2006, Paul and Sandra McCrossan. Experience: 400+ and 500+ dives respectively. Vis: 80-100+ feet. Water: 78-79 F, no currents. The breeze was from the south east and all diving was done in the sheltered Marine Park off the north side of Little Cayman except for one optional dive of the Tibbetts wreck off Cayman Brac (\$25 surcharge). While the dive sites along the north side of Little Cayman are varied, all have a similar structure. There is a flat area close to shore at depths of 20 – 50 feet until the wall area. The wall could be a sheer drop of 6,000 feet from the top of the flat (“pan”) area or it could have several small ledges before dropping into the deep. Several sites have interesting swim-throughs or chimneys. The coral is generally healthy. While there is some macro life (infrequent nudis or tiny spotted drums) and some pelagic life (a couple of reef or nurse sharks), the real feature is abundant good sized groupers, snappers, grunts and jacks. Rays are plentiful on the flats. Green or hawksbill turtles were seen on almost every dive. The usual odd shaped fish (drum, trunk, file, trigger, cow, etc.) are found in fair numbers. Rooms are a good size, air conditioned and well maintained. However, if all divers hopped into the shower immediately after diving, water pressure could drop sharply requiring a wait to rinse off. There was no shortage of hot water once pressure was restored. Pre-dive briefings were thorough. The dive crew called the same profile for the three dives each day (first dive – 50 minutes for 110 feet, second dive – 60 minutes for 80 feet, third dive – 60 minutes for 60 feet). Generally, there was one dive leader in the water who could be followed; but there was no compulsion to follow the leader. The number of divers

on each dive boat ranged from 7 to 15 (when “follow the leader” instructions would have led to crowded conditions). No “deco” diving was permitted. No gloves were permitted either. Every dive trip started with a roll call of every diver on the boat and every dive was followed by a complete roll call of all divers before moving from the site. Divers who didn’t stay with their buddies were admonished. Food (all buffets) was consistently good. Breakfast offered the usual cereal and egg choices supplemented by a custom made omelet or fruit plus the day’s variations on blintzes, hash or biscuits with gravy. Lunch was light casual food. Dinner always involved home made soup followed by choices among red meat, fowl or fish. There were no repeat hot choices offered during the week. Both lunch and dinner offered several choices of home made desserts. Air Cayman had to control when it took luggage aboard. For four days running, divers were asked to have their luggage ready for pick-up outside their rooms at 2: 30 in the afternoon the day before the scheduled return to Grand Cayman. This led to three choices: give up two dives on the day before departure and travel with dry dive gear; dive the two morning dives on the day before departure and pack wet gear for the early pick-up; or ignore the notice and only have dive gear ready for pick-up on the day of departure — hoping that the gear traveled home with you. Several divers, including us, forfeited paid for dives on the last day to try to ensure dry dive gear made it to Grand Cayman in time for the connecting trip home. While we understand that divers leaving on Monday were not asked to have luggage out the afternoon before departure, those leaving Thursday to Sunday were. So, if departing on

a weekend, rather than pay for dives that are not used (as we did), visitors might be advised not to prepay for any possible dives on the last full day at the resort - but rather to plan on a relaxed complimentary bicycle ride.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, March 2006, Greg Fay (fay15546@aol.com), Fort Lauderdale, FL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. The resort was great. The staff was helpful, the food good, and the diving great. The staff was accommodating on dive site selection. Dotty and her multi-colored dive skin was the best dive guide. She found all the little critters and was all-around fantastic. The last day of diving was "blown out" for the best dive sites. I passed on the alternate sites offered and opted for a drink at the resort bar and the Hungry Iguana. UW Photography Comments: The staff photographer was helpful. I just went digital and this was my first trip with my new camera. He suggested testing the housing and that advice was worth its weight in gold. The housing flooded and with a minor adjustment the problem was corrected and I was able to take 250+ pictures.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, April 2006, Mark and Lynn Thorne 332(thorne@mindspring.com), Raleigh, NC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, choppy. The hotel and dive operation are run efficiently with a focus on safety. Dive briefings are thorough. Divemasters are courteous and helpful. The dive operation uses Newton 42 foot dive boats that are roomy even if the maximum number of 20 divers is on board. (Little Cayman enforces a dive boat limit to 20 divers or less.) Fresh fruit, snack bars, chips and water are available on the boat between dives.

Daily routine starts with breakfast between 7:00 - 8:00. Be on dive boat by 8:15 for 2 tank dive. Usually return to dock by 1:00. Then lunch is ready. Afternoon dive is available at 2:30, usually return by 4:30. Supper is ready by 6:00 PM. Food is buffet style and is consistently good. Dive boat routine is as follows; On the first day of diving, your dive gear is picked up outside your room at 7:30 AM. Dive staff assembles BCDs and regulators on tanks by the time you board dive boat. Once boarding a divemaster orients new divers to the boat and overall logistics. Once moored at dive site, simply walk to the back of the boat, sit down, point out your equipment to dive staff. They will bring your gear to you and assist with donning of gear. After dive, dive staff will remove gear and set you up for your next dive. Resort is in great shape and kept spotless. The resort is picturesque with palm trees everywhere with hammocks nestled below. There is plenty of time to nap underneath the palms while listening to the gentle breezes and distant surf. We have been to about 30 land-based dive operations and we rank Little Cayman Beach Resort in our top 5 places for overall value and consistently great dives.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, April 2006, Mark and Anne Bressman (mbressman116712@comcast.net), Cherry Hill, NJ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 Feet. Water: 78 F, choppy. Reefs and fish quantity have deteriorated significantly since our last visit in 2000. Quality dive operation and pleasant dive staff, who set up and carried tanks to back of boat for easy entry. Comfortable resort. Good but not gourmet food.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, June 2006, Don Fraser, Orange Park, FL.

Experience: 250 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm and flat, no currents. Good dive operation, full service on boat, knowledgeable, friendly divemasters, food at resort excellent. We don't mind restricted profiles so diving is great! Cayman Air from Little Cayman late and slow so we missed connection home — little help at the airport.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, July 2006, Alan and Krista Binnie, Tucson, AZ.

(packodogs@comcast.net), Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F. The weather was mostly sunny and breezy with some afternoon thundershowers, seas were never more than 2-3 feet. We dove three times a day every day but the day before we left. The weekly Tuesday night dive was cancelled due to surge. All our dives were in Bloody Bay at great sites. Boats moor on a ball, typically over sand or hard pan in 20 to 50 feet of water near the wall. If there is much current, divemasters relocated to find calmer waters. The spectacular wall usually starts at 40 to 60 feet and falls more or less straight down (to 6000 feet, they say), with lots of swim throughs, canyons, and small caves to play around in. Lots of small turtles. 2-3 foot fish are common, including some groupers that enjoy being stroked, as fishing is restricted, but not many fish much bigger except for some reef and nurse sharks. Lots of small schooling fish. Soft corals and sea fans are in great shape, and the topography is the best we've ever seen. Almost all the hard corals are dead and there is quite a bit of algae-type overgrowth on them. The hotel holds about 80 guests, almost all divers. All meals are served buffet style, and the food is good and plentiful. We prepaid for breakfast and dinner; lunch runs \$20 each, drinks \$4-\$8 at the resort bar. While not fancy

or unique, the rooms are nice and clean and come equipped with hairdryers and coffee makers. Bikes are available free. The dive operation is efficient, and ran flawlessly while serving lots of divers. Divemasters are experienced and courteous, offer illustrated briefings, and do a headcount before leaving each site though the shore is nearby. Equipment is handled for you — you just sit on the stern and they put it on you, then they take it off and swap tanks when you exit the water. Boats are easy to exit and enter. No water tank for cameras on the boat, but a dedicated shelf is provided and the trip back to dock is only about 30 minutes. A soaking tank is on the dock. There were up to 18 divers per boat, but this did not pose a problem because almost all were experienced, all were allowed to go their separate ways, and all the dive sites offer plenty of space to spread out.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, August 2006, Rich, Salem, VA.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. Saw spotted eagle rays, southern sting rays, reef sharks, nurse sharks, many, many turtles, squid, Goliath grouper, lobsters, conch, and all the usual assortment of reef fishes and corals. One odd thing that stood out to me was the lack of healthy looking sea cucumbers ... I saw few and they looked "distressed." I saw one tiny stand of staghorn coral and it was bleached solid white. The seas were calm, flat, warm and perfect — although visibility was somewhat diminished. We had current one dive. The dive shop has been expanded a bit, the dock has been rebuilt and much larger and is nice. The boats were superb and roomy as normal. The gear drying area has been improved and expanded a bit. Our ocean front room was quiet, clean, well appointed. The grounds were neat,

clean and well kept. A new Chef did a nice job. Breakfast was good, lunch had declined in selection and variety somewhat, and dinner had slightly improved – but the desert selection and quality at dinner had declined somewhat. The rum punch party was scaled back in terms of things to nibble. The most significant negative was the increase of algae on the reefs — including the wall. I'm no expert, but it is becoming a serious problem and is having a significant and negative impact on the sea life, reefs and diving. One woman was so upset with the alga on one part of the wall, she turned around and went back toward the boat. She said something to the effect of "The alga is so thick and it's so upsetting to me I don't want to even look." Ron and Adrian on our boat were fantastic, helpful, fun and accommodating. Many new faces at the resort and on the boats. They now charge for the video that used to be free if you stayed more a week or more.

Pirate's Point, February 2006, Don Acheson (Don.Acheson@verizon.net), Silver Spring, MD. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy, no currents. Diving on Bloody Bay and Jackson Bay walls is as good as it gets in the Caribbean. The grouper spawning grounds have been protected for a few years and there are lots of them — Nassau, black, tiger, yellow fin, etc. There are also plenty of rays - southern sting, eagle, and yellow spotted - and turtles. Sharks were seen by somebody on most dives. Pirate's Point, a small resort with a capacity of 20, still offers fine dining — three generous and tasty meals every day. The staff is friendly and helpful. The accommodations aren't luxurious, but they're clean and reasonably spacious. The dive boat is a big twin diesel, easily accommodating a full complement (20)

of divers if necessary. An instructor leads every dive, but it's not mandatory to follow him/her.

Pirate's Point, July 2006, Rick Tavan (rick@tavan.com), Truckee, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. Bloody Bay Wall is simply spectacular, miles long and thousands of feet deep. Most sites along the wall have shallow moorings within 30' of a sheer drop-off. Some have great swim-throughs that take you through the "shoulder" of the wall. Typical first-dive guided profiles go quickly to 80-100', then swim leisurely upward until returning under the boat after 45 minutes. Most divers have enough air to explore in the shallows another 15 to 30 minutes, so dive times average over an hour. You can wave goodbye to the divemaster or arrange to dive on your own. Nitrox is available. The resort does one two-tank boat trip daily, with occasional night dives by request. This time we did an extended lights-out swim toward the end of our night dive, a new and enjoyable experience for me. There is good albeit shallow snorkeling behind the resort but you need to hitch a ride to shore diving that the resort does not encourage. Pirate's Point is most notable for friendly staff and incredibly good food. They have only 10 or 11 rooms and everyone gets acquainted quickly. Proprietress Gladys Howard has been inspiring the Cordon Bleu level cuisine and playing dominos with her guests nightly for twenty years. The pace of life is relaxed. Staff is stable, not static, and first class. Accommodations are spacious and clean but not luxurious. Affordable wireless Internet is available. The lounge is decorated with eclectic art creations made by guests out of flotsam and jetsam. My daughter-in-law stayed and dived free this time because her Red-

Footed Booby display won first prize in the annual art contest. The diving is pretty easy and 2:00 to 2:30 hours of bottom time daily may be too little for macho dive rangers. There is no night life, shopping, golf or tennis. It takes three flights to get there from most US originations and you usually have to overnight, at least in the southbound direction if not both. Cayman Airways, the monopoly on the Grand Cayman to Little Cayman leg, annoys with frequent flight schedule changes for which the major carriers have no sympathy.

Pirate's Point, August 2006, Clem Clapp (cclapp@bellsouth.net), Maplesville, AL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. A small, dive oriented resort with a guesthouse feel to it. 10 rooms w/choice of ac or not. Nice pool with Jacuzzi. Outstanding and varied cuisine served buffet style. Competent, friendly and accommodating staff at resort and dive op. Most dive staff did other jobs around the resort. Self-serve honor bar with good selection. Diving was good with all done in Bloody Bay area except for the wreck, The Soto Trader on the south side. Nitrox was expensive at \$14/tank. They use a well maintained 42' Newton dive boat. They do only a 2 tank am dive each day with a night dive on request. Breakfast was at 8:00. The boat left the dock between 9 and 9:30 and returned around 2:00pm. 15 minutes or so to dive sites. Lunch served shortly thereafter. Dinner included wine and was served at 8:00pm with dominoes afterwards. I had only one dive less than 60 minutes and that was due to equipment problems. Lot of wall diving with some beginning as shallow as 30fsw. Made for great wall-hanging safety stops. Pretty good coral and critters on all dives. Dive staff attuned

to protecting underwater environment. Resort guests were mostly well-traveled and well-behaved divers. Lot of repeat customers. The owner, Gladys Howard, lives on the premises and celebrated her 20th anniversary in business in August. She drove us on an afternoon tour of the island one day. Topside activities are limited to biking around the small island, a little kayaking, viewing a large colony of red footed boobies and looking for iguanas. My nondiving spouse loved the quiet atmosphere and shaded beach hammock for reading and napping.

Pirate's Point, August 2006, David Reubush (davereubush@cox.net), Toano, VA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 87 F, calm. This was our 8th trip to our scuba diving home away from home – Pirate's Point on Little Cayman. Great diving, great food, and wonderful people. Hurricane Charlie got us in 2004 it only cost us 2 days of diving which got made up since the airline couldn't get us home for an extra 2 days. There are 9 of us from all over the U.S. who meet there the same week every year. The fish and reef are healthy. Lots of the fish and turtles are used to divers so that you can get close and get some great photos. This trip 5 turtles swam slowly enough that I could get lots of great shots. My wife and swam for extended periods with small schools of squid. I also had about a 20 minute swim with an eagle ray who allowed me to keep flashing away. At a couple of the sites there are several large Nassau groupers who will follow you around and want to be petted. Most of the dive masters have been there for many years and are like old friends. If they are comfortable with your capabilities, you can do your own thing or tag along with them. We loosely tag along as they know where

all the interesting tiny things are. They only do 2 dives a day with an occasional night dive. The first dive typically ends up running about 70 minutes and the second about 85-90 minutes. Then back for lunch. Gladys Howard, the owner, is a gourmet chef. Cam and Diane, the two chefs follow her lead and the food is amazing. I typically gain 5 pounds every year and it takes me until the next year to get it back off and then I start the whole process over again. Gladys' advertising is almost entirely word of mouth and after you have been there you understand why she doesn't have to spend a lot to keep the place full. UW photography comments: Dedicated top shelf of table on boat for cameras. Small rinse tank on boat, but water changed every day. Dedicated rinse sink on shore.

Southern Cross Club, May 2006, Tom and Lynn Hayes (tomhayes@cox.net), Pensacola, FL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy, surge. The staff went out of their way to serve us, the units were reasonably well appointed, and the food was excellent. Our dive gear was handled for us before and after diving, the briefings were good, and the dive-masters allowed the buddy pairs to follow or go off on their own. Since there was virtually no current it was easy to navigate the sites back to the boat. The boats themselves were comfortable and we seldom had more than 10 divers. Bicycles and kayaks were provided for exploring. There is quite a bird habitat and plenty of chances to see birds not often seen in any large numbers in the Caribbean. Lots of large (5'-6') iguanas in the lesser populated areas. A number of our fellow visitors were there for fishing, and they all reported a successful trip for bonefish and tarpon, although only a few permits were

caught. The bar and pool made a great gathering place, and the bar operated most of the day on the honor system. No alcohol was allowed for anyone who was signed up for a dusk or night dive. Fresh fruit was generally available and coffee makers were in the rooms for the early risers. We had a good breeze blowing all week, which meant no bugs but generally rough seas. Had to bypass a few sites several days due to the seas making reboarding difficult. Peter, the owner, runs a good operation.

Southern Cross Club, May 2006, Marilyn and Sandy MacGregor, Santa Fe, NM. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. The most depressing thing about returning to an area you've been to before is to find it's not what you remembered. About 15 years ago we cruised Little Cayman and found diving in the Bloody Bay Wall area to be the most exciting and abundantly alive in the Caribbean. In 2006, after two days of diving from the lovely land-based operation of Southern Cross Club with a group of five, the talk on the boat and at meal times was rarely about the diving: there was nothing to talk about except the bad news. The reefs are in perilous condition, the fish life has diminished greatly and the night dive was eerily quiet. After a week we were depressed. Although the staff and dive masters try valiantly to show guests a good time, they can't produce what isn't there. The weather was great; the water was warm (too warm for May) and sea conditions perfect. It's just that what we remembered as being something like swimming in an aquarium turned out to be more like one of those "underwater" restaurants of yesteryear where every now and then a turtle would swoop by. I wished we'd known this before we went and I wish I knew what

to do about it now.

Southern Cross Club, May 2006, Jim and Deborah Chambers (jimbo_limited@mindspring.com), Tucker, GA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, no currents. Deborah and I recently returned from our 6th trip to Little Cayman and the Southern Cross Club. The damage from Hurricane Ivan in 2004 has been completely repaired or rebuilt better than before. The reefs were fine too, with virtually no signs of damage. In fact, the diving was the best we've ever had. There are only about 150 permanent residents on the island, which is about 90 miles ENE of Grand Cayman, and there's nothing remotely like a traffic jam. The only way to get to Little Cayman is on a Cayman Air Express DeHavilland Twin Otter from Grand Cayman, about a 40-minute flight into a grass airstrip. The island is a bird sanctuary, the coral reefs are strictly protected, and there are probably more iguanas than people. There are six small resorts, each different, and each has its own disciples who return time after time. Southern Cross Club is nothing real fancy, consisting of a main building (office, dining room, and bar) and duplex cottages along the powdery white sandy beach. Rooms are clean and comfortable and nicely furnished, and the AC works well. Everything faces South Hole Sound, a wide shallow lagoon with a barrier reef that breaks the waves and provides a nice setting for snorkeling, swimming, and kayaking. There are all kinds of marine life in the lagoon, including some huge, voracious tarpon that cluster around the fishing dock (deep-sea). There are no TVs or telephones in the room, but there are ample 110-120 volt outlets, and the electrical supply is 24/7 and stable. The Southern Cross Club added

wi-fi in 2005, so I was able to email photos to our families and friends. Meals are served in the main building. Breakfast is a buffet with fruit, bread, cereals, and meats and eggs cooked to order. Lunch is also a buffet, with fruit, salads, hot meat dishes, cold cuts for sandwiches, and desserts. At lunch, they give you a choice of two meat entrees for dinner, and they also accommodate vegetarians. Dinner is at 7:00. Meats were absolutely first class. We had some of the finest steaks and seafood that we've ever had anywhere. Desserts were yummy. The Southern Cross staff were clearly dedicated to seeing that we enjoyed our stay. The managers, Chris and Cate Ferreira, are absolutely first rate and really make you feel welcome. Casual is the word here! When we arrived, I took off my shoes and went barefoot the next two weeks. They have a washing machine to do your laundry. The diving is superb. Bloody Bay Wall is ranked as the finest wall dive in this hemisphere, but Deborah and I really love the shallow dives, where we can get an hour or more bottom time while photographing the parade of fish and critters. The most divers we had on the boat was ten, and it's a big boat. SCC has two dive boats, and if the number of divers is more than about 8-10, they take the second boat out too. There were no currents. Each boat carries a big cooler filled with fresh water to keep the cameras safe, and if necessary, they carry additional coolers. We had three divemasters: Steve, Mark, and Henri. We've dived with them before, and they're just super. Deborah and I usually do our own dive, but Steve would come find us whenever he saw something he knew we would want to photograph. Steve found pipefish, numerous kinds of shrimp and crabs, pipehorse, juvenile scorpionfish, arrow blennies,

tiny juvenile flame scallops, pike blennies, sailfin blennies, and a superb little juvenile yellow tail damsel. Henri found a magnificent tiny purple spotted sea goddess. On every dive we saw an endless parade of snapper, grunts, tangs, squirrelfish, butterflyfish, angelfish, grouper, stingrays and spotted eagle rays, lobsters, nurse sharks, turtles, and so many other fish. We dived mostly on the north side of the island, where the walls are most dramatic. Travel time was about 25 minutes for most sites. SCC is valet service for divers. You show them how you want your gear set-up, and they have it ready to go each morning, including a good rinsing after the dive. Nitrox is available, although it's a bit pricey - \$14/tank: No photo shop, but the boat crews are helpful and take good care of photo equipment.

COLOMBIA

Diving Planet, Casa Indias, September 2006, Carl Scott (cdscott@swbell.net), Spring, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 86 F, calm, choppy. As for the dive operation, safety was always a demonstrated priority, and the guides did provide good service, once you were on the island base. However, novice (as in just finished the resort/Discover Scuba course this morning) divers were put in the water with the most experienced divers. This did not present much of a problem, except that the dive sites may have been selected differently, as an extra guide was provided to accompany the newbies. This operator has offices in Cartagena, and all divers meet at the shop in the morning. From there, they grab taxis and take you to the pier for a boat ride to the island. If you ride in their boat, or in Dolphin Divers' boat,

it's a 30 minute ride. However, if they take you to the day tour boat, you pay an extra \$3.50 or so and ride for 50 minutes. I didn't consider this an appropriate way for them to deal with the fact that they only had 1 diver. Lunch may be a delicious fried fresh fish or chicken, with coconut rice and fried plantain and coleslaw at the minimalist "hotel" on the island, or the same, but previously frozen, fair in the nice hotel. One day, they sent sandwiches and chips. This is not a destination to be praised for its abundance or diversity of marine life, though I thought it was on par with Belize. Visibility was never great, but the huge sponges and dense corals made for some eye-popping landscapes. Otherwise, there are a few large (1 to 1.5 meters) grouper and an abundance of queen angels, along with parrotfish, wrasses, triggerfish, etc. The hotel is a cozy and economical (\$62.50/night) in the charming old central part of town (think Bourbon Street, Spanish style). Breakfast is included and was great. However, there is no hot water! People there seemed stunned that a warm shower was important to me. Apparently, they think it's just fine to shower in 80 degree water. UW Photography Comments: Boat rides were 5-10 minutes, minimizing the need for it. The abundance and diversity of coral is matched, in my experience, only by Palau's Oolong Channel. My suggestion is, leave your strobe in the boat, slap on a red filter, and shoot landscapes. They really can be spectacular here.

El Caribe Dive Centre, April 2006, Jack Adams (chasqui@dccnet.com), Sechelt, BC. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 35 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. This is not a location for experienced divers. The trip consisted of a 45 minute high speed boat trip out of Cartagena, arriving at a hotel at the