

## CAYMAN ISLANDS

**Cayman Aggressor, February 2006, Gregory Kiyoi (gmk@sn1per.com), Pleasanton, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm. Captain Sam, Matt, Yannis, Jojo and Diane were accommodating and always wanted to dive with people. From Captain Sam down, all crew members in the water really gave great tours. For the newer divers, this worked out great for them. Anything we needed, wanted or wasn't working the crew promptly dealt with it. We were unable to make the crossing to Little Cayman or Cayman Brac due to weather. Some sites we dove earlier in the week still showed signs of hurricane damage (West side); as we moved to the East side, it was pristine and plush. The turtles were small, smaller fish life was excellent, and beautiful formations. Good inverts and night life during twilight/night dives. We left some bags on shore as per requested and the Aggressor van was broken into before they were transferred to the office. So, we came back to missing bags and some extra equipment we left in the bags. They promptly took us to get a replacement bag to get us home, then within 2 months we received a check for all our lost items. UW Photography Comments: Typical Aggressor — large camera table, fresh water rinse tank and plenty of room for chargers and spares. Photo pro was new and on his trial trip and didn't offer much still photo advice. Although he took nice trip pictures. Video pro made a great video, but didn't have too much input or advice.

**Cayman Aggressor IV, March 2006, Maki Thomas Livesay, DuPont, WA. (dupontgirl02@yahoo.com)** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet.

Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. The CAIV is a 110-foot custom dive yacht carrying 18 passengers. The boat was captained by Sam, with first mate Matt (who also served as the videographer), Boris (from Hamburg, Germany, the still photographer), Denise (from Manchester, England), the onboard instructor, Jolene "JoJo" (housekeeping) and Yanis the chef. The crew generally works 17-hour days on an eight-week on/two-week off schedule. Once onboard, we chose a locker and set up our gear for the week. The rooms are small but clean, with the toilet and shower with towels in the same space (separated by a curtain). The room had good storage space and a little porthole. I took the smaller upper bunk since it was closer to the air-conditioning vent. I woke up Sunday morning feeling a bit queasy (quickly cured with Dramamine and Relief Band). The crew rings the "dive bell" and briefs each dive site. The first was the Doc Polson checkout dive. The wreck was an old communication wire-laying boat, and was an easy dive down to about 50ft. Afterwards, as we did every morning, we had warm goodies on deck. The second morning dive was at Stingray City, where the "swarm of friendly Southern stingrays" literally attacked us for ballyhoo fish that was passed out while we sat in a circle. It was a comical dive in 12 feet of water, and everyone came back with a stingray hickey (bite) or two. After a shower on the platform, a warm towel was waiting. We did Babylon for the afternoon dive (70ft). It had canyons holding brilliant red cup sponges, gorgonians and black coral opening up to a sheer vertical wall. Immediately after dinner and banana splits, we rocked and rolled for 7 hours over to Little Cayman. Luckily, I avoided the dreaded rocky boat disease and spent most of the night in

my bunk. We awoke Monday morning to gorgeous weather for the morning dive at Randy's Gazebo. It was an awesome wall dive down to 100ft with swim thrus, grouper, barracuda and a moray eel. Dozens of fish swimming straight down the wall and pretty sponges, feathers and fans. We did our afternoon dive at Meadows (90 ft) and I paired up with Matt. I did my first-ever night dive but we didn't see much except a few shrimp and bioluminescence. It was pretty bright because the moon was almost full. On Tuesday, we dove Marilyn's Cut (105ft). It was a great dive with a black tip reef shark sighting out into the abyss a minute under. There were lobsters, a sleeping nurse shark, and lots of blennies and parrotfish. Then, we dove Nancy's Cup of Tea (91 ft) and saw a blue shell crab, a baby spotted eel, and a diamond blenny! On my second dive I got stung by a jellyfish around my regulator. After dinner, we made the short crossing to Cayman Brac. Wednesday morning, we were excited to dive the 330-foot long wreck. We saw brown garden eels nearby and looked around inside the took pictures on the guns (84 ft). We went back to Little Cayman for the rest of the day at Three Fathoms, a steep wall with narrow canyons and coral, and saw a scorpionfish, some lobster, turtle and blue crab (70-96ft). We had grilled steaks on the sundeck and were treated to a beautiful sunset and green flash. On the night dive (64 ft), we went over the wall out to the pitch black of the abyss. My light flashed on a big barracuda, so we retreated to the shallows and chased lobsters and giant crabs. Thursday morning, we dove Round Rock (92ft), with swim thrus, a male "super" parrotfish, and a pretty blue-nosed trumpetfish. The second dive I got jellyfish stings on my hand.

The afternoon dive was at Bonnie's Arch (69ft), a pretty site named after a freediver who was lost during practice, and had a small crocodile nearby(!). We watched a hungry hawksbill turtle, too. Afterwards, a few beers and relaxing in the hot tub under clear skies full of stars. Friday, we did the first dive at Big Tunnels (65ft). We saw a baby turtle on descent and found a big spiny lobster. The last dive was near the cruise ships at Devil's Grotto, only 33ft. Everyone had a jellyfish sting and sunburn to take home, and I'd done 21 dives (of the 25 offered) over 6 days! The crew threw a cocktail party where awards and lots of laughs were shared. Email access onboard is only through a local ISP, so no internet or Yahoo! access. Signs said divers were required to unpack batteries from dive lights for flights out of Grand Cayman. The DVD was well worth the \$65. US\$ are accepted. The airport has a few duty-free shops and a PO box for last minute postcards ... try the meat patties at the bar. Make sure to take D-rings (to hang things to dry).

**Cayman Aggressor IV, April 2006, Robert Ewald (rewald@bellsouth.net), Louisville, KY.** Experience: 1000+ dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 F. I found the complaints about the Cayman Aggressor IV in your July issue to be nitpicking complaints that could be made about any live-aboard. I have well over 1,000 dives and have been on more than twenty live-aboards. I found the boat in excellent condition, the crew friendly and competent and the food good. Capt. Sam was good natured and responsive to our requests. If the marine heads clogged, it's probably because someone was not using them properly. We had no problem with the heads, but, as is true with every live-aboard, we were cautioned in their use. The complaint that the generator was

off line for a “short period” tells me the problem did not interfere with the trip. There are minor glitches on any boat and no basis to complain if the problem is quickly fixed. I’ve never been on a live-aboard where there wasn’t a caution about conserving water. A large gear rinse tank was provided, but Capt. Sam did suggest that it was not necessary to rinse off a wet suit in fresh water after every dive and asked that wet suits only be rinsed when necessary. This was a reasonable request. Likewise, there is no reason to hose off or rinse a BC and regulator after every dive, but the crew did not refuse if asked to rinse off a BC when hosing the deck. Not going into the interior of the boat in a wet bathing suit makes perfect sense; I have seen the same request made on many live-aboards. There was a head and two other small rooms off the dive deck where a change could be made. This was a request and not once was there any attempt to enforce the request. There was always a crew member or two in the water on every dive and we were always invited to follow them if we wished. We were treated as if we knew what we were doing and no demand was made that we follow a crew member. The cabins are cramped, which is true on any live-aboard. I found the Cayman Aggressor IV to be a very good boat, run by a friendly Captain who was engaged with and accessible to the passengers, together with a first rate crew.

**Cayman Aggressor IV, May 2006,**  
**Wayne LeCompte, Cape Canaveral, FL.**  
Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 45 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, choppy. The Aggressor IV appears to be a well maintained and operated vessel, but stuff happens at sea. We had a few marine heads that clogged and/or overflowed. The electrical generator was off line for a short period and the crew was

unable to bring the standby generator into service. Condensed water built up in the salon AC system and created a minor leak, the crew was able to stem the leak, but the unscheduled maintenance kept them preoccupied most of the afternoon. The food was good but somewhat short on variety. Meals were served on time, however the Captain required the dinner service to be moved to 6pm whenever there was night dive. The last dive of the day was a little short to allow us to return and prepare for the earlier dinner. The diving was better than average. Most dives had a mild, if any, current. Only one morning with rain, otherwise it was sunny with typical sea breezes. Many turtles were spotted and most allowed us to swim close. Not many sharks, but enough sightings to keep us looking. Our best shark observation was on the predawn dive as we hovered on the top of the reef on the edge of the wall as the black tips were on parade. We also observed spotted, green and purple mouthed moray eels. In addition we saw numerous Nassau, tiger and black groupers. Lots of southern sting rays and a couple of spotted eagle rays. And scorpion fish. Lots of small critters such as red lipped blennies, sail fin blennies, juvenile drum fish, garden eels, yellow headed jaw fish ... the first time we have seen the male with eggs in its mouth. At one cleaning station we saw several large groupers and a great barracuda lined up. Plenty of wonderful swim throughs on most reefs, and the walls are steep, deep and spectacular. Unfortunately, there were not many offers by the crew to provide guided tours, yet their attitudes and performance were above and beyond. The web site states that the boat has a fresh water storage capacity of 3,200 gals, but we learned from the Capt. that he can only make fresh

water at a max of only 40 gals/hr! The Captain warned us that if we did not conserve water he was going to have to eliminate some water usages and we hang our wetsuits without a fresh water rinse; the only exception was if you urinated in your suit, then he provided a barrel partially filled with fresh water, without disinfectant, to be used for the whole day. There was also no way allowed to rinse any of our tank mounted scuba equipment (regulators, BCDs, etc.). However, the captain did give the sundeck a freshwater wash down every morning, and windows and the dive deck also received a fresh water wash down several times during the week. That is not to say that we did not appreciate having a clean boat, but there did not seem to be a proper balance between the boat and the guests. The Captain insisted that you had to change into dry clothes before you could enter the salon or return to your room from the dive deck. It did not matter how dry we toweled ourselves. When we asked where we were to change he offered the deck head (small and a messy floor as it overflowed several times on the trip), the laundry closet (only a contortionist could pull that off) and the cramped camera dark room ... all were accessible on the dive deck. Divide those among 18 divers! They do not offer much rental gear, so bring everything that you need. They do not even have regulators to rent and I blew out a high pressure o-ring on my integrated computer. It was an enjoyable trip but below the service level we are accustomed to on other live aboard boats. The crew consisted of the Captain + four, which was taxing for the crew to keep up with 18 guests. Large camera rinse tank, but the rinse water was not changed for the entire 7 day trip.

**Cayman Aggressor, May 2006, Gilda**

**and Warren Sprung, Houston, TX.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy. This was our 6th dive trip to Cayman and our 1st live-aboard there. We covered Grand, Little, and Brac during the weeks diving. Turtles and fairly large groupers are abundant as is the overall fish life. Saw 3 sharks on a dawn dive. Good Caribbean diving. We have been diving all over the world on with many different live aboard operators. This was our only unsatisfactory live-aboard. The boat was seriously undermanned (Captain + four crew). Four of the staff members were wonderful: Tom, Boris, Yanis (the wonderful cook), and Kat. But the overall synergy between the crew was lacking which added up to not being in tune with the divers. There was not always a divemaster in the water. If they were in the water, the only one that asked if we wanted a guided tour was Tom. The accommodations were lacking in that my husband and I had to crawl over each other to get out of bed. The rooms were cleaned daily, but the dive deck lacked the cleanliness and the clean water rinses that we have become accustomed to. The food was good, but the overall experience was lacking in quality. More like a class "C" operation with class "A" pricing. Captain Sam seemed to have the idea that his job was to entertain us with his not so wonderful wit. Dive briefings he gave always had the same theme: how lucky we are to be at this world-class dive site that only he understood. This guy is a total narcissist. He gave his crew no latitude to make decisions and we discovered late into the week that he was firing Boris, a most amiable and helpful hand from Austria. When Captain Sam informed us to only use the wetsuit rinse barrel if we peed in our wetsuits. I asked if the barrel would

have “Sink-the-Stink”. He replied, “No, it was too expensive!” There was no bucket to rinse mask defog and when asked to supply one he reluctantly did so, only to leave it really dirty and never filled up. The camera rinse station, to my knowledge, never got changed the entire week. We had no rinse facility for our tank mounted scuba gear, yet the boat sun deck got a fresh water rinse every morning. The exception was the dive station area that was frequently covered with dead “Coconut Bugs.” The Captain also told us that the only way we could enter any of the carpeted areas of the boat after a dive was to first change into dry clothes. We not allowed into the salon or to return to our rooms after a post dive shower simply by toweeling ourselves dry. And the only places to change into dry clothes were the dive deck restroom (very dirty and nasty as the marine head constantly overflowed) or the cramped camera dark room on the dive deck. During the trip Captain Sam asked me about my anchor-chain bracelet. I told him who’d made it and that if he’d email me (I then gave him my business card) I’d put him in touch with the jeweler who’d made it for me. He asked me the price, and when I told him (pricey), he threw my card back at me! Have I mentioned the reaction of the guests when we were informed into the week that there was no more red wine? The \$10 per person shore tour on Little Cayman was more of a promotional thing for the dive operations ... why would I want to go see a research station that is under construction and their proudest moment was explaining how their composting toilets would work! And the Captain almost keel hauled those who did not go on the tour! The only interesting things were the Iguanas. This was truly a class “D” operation. Fortunately the wonderful

efforts by Tom, Kat, Boris, and Yanis raised it to a “C”.

**Cayman Aggressor, May 2006, Dan Lockwood (diverdan1605@yahoo.com), St. Clair, MI.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, choppy. The turtle release program on Grand Cayman seems to be working. We saw turtles on every dive. Lots of small fish around coral heads. Diving was pretty easy. I was surprised at the lack of color in the reefs. The boat crew did a great job working with their guests. We had a few novice divers and they spent a lot of time with them making them comfortable in the water. I dropped below 130 feet on a few dives, the only concern the crew had was verifying that I was not on Nitrox. Grand Cayman is an expensive island. All food and beverages include tips and taxes, which I did not find out until the second day. At the bar always ask for an invoice. My hotel bill included a 10% service tip for all hotel employees in addition to a 10% government tax.

**Cayman Aggressor IV, September 2006, Troy Merriam, Sammamish, WA (tdmerriam@msn.com)** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, no currents. Capt. Sam and crew Shaunah, Graham, Shawn and Osa, provided a perfect week of vacation for this old drysuit diver from the Pacific Northwest. We had excellent briefings with large sketches of the dive site every dive. Air was always generous at 3000+. It was pure, comfortable diving at its best. All cameras were handled professionally by the crew and the attention to our needs was met with a smile every time. The chef had the week off but the up and coming steward delighted us with great food all week. Wall diving was incredible - swim-thrus broke out into the

blue great wide open. Turn left or right and you have fantastic walls with huge sponges of all types, gigantic lobster, leatherback turtles, coral, nurses harks, rays, grouper and tropicals. The view from 130' to the surface is the stuff dreams are made of. The Cayman Aggressor IV is a clean, nicely appointed dive yacht with an excellent dive deck, comfortable salon and great berthing areas. I opted for the cheap seats and had a stateroom for two all to myself. Great camera table with compressed air and dry towels.

**Nekton Rorqual, May 2006, Michael and Jamie Resenhoft, Parlin, NJ.** (JamieR82162@aol.com) Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 88 F, calm. This was our third trip on the Rorqual. The crew was great. Captains Nelson and Mike, DMs Denise and Kat took care of you. Only the second week on the Cayman itinerary when we went. Still ironing out some bugs. Diving was great. Made a dawn dive on the MS Tibbetts – lots of fish. Great photo opp. Couple of big groupers just hanging out. Bloody wall was another great dive site. Food was good. Nitrox was not available — broken. Only negative was having to spend the day in Cayman Brac while the Nekton refueled. In Sting Ray City the sting rays were aggressive.

**Nekton Rorqual, May 2006, Mark Bruscke (bruscke@abax.com), Caldwell, NJ.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 79 to 84 F, calm. Nekton's boats really work to eliminate seasickness. Most of the time I was unaware I was on a boat. Boats are well outfitted for diving. Ask for cabin 5 or 6 because those cabins are entitled to the dive stations on the dive deck adjacent to the ladder. Divers at those dive stations can gear up on the seat

next to the ladder where there is much more maneuvering room. The boat will hold up to 34 passengers (plus about 10 crew). At 28 passengers it felt pretty full; Crew was professional, friendly and helpful. Captains Mike and Nelson especially so. Most of the crew were experienced divers; most are instructors. Had a couple of problems with my dive computer (blown O-ring; reporting shallower depths than my other computers). Nelson replaced the O-ring and removed/replaced the battery to try to clear the depth problem. At Bloody Bay Wall Caymans have a limit of 20 divers per boat. We had 28 divers; so Nekton hired a local dive boat to take 8 of us to Bloody Bay Wall on a separate boat. Caymans' coral less colorful than Cozumel. Both of Nekton's boats have 29% nitrox. Unfortunately, the nitrox oil-less compressor's oil-filled cooler failed the previous week and they couldn't repair it. Nekton refuels at Cayman Brac; and, they told us, Cayman Brac authorities won't allow them to refuel with passengers aboard. Conjecture is that the authorities are trying to promote tourism ON the island and the refueling rule is a pretext. This shot a day of diving in exchange for a day of site seeing on the island. I would have preferred to be diving as there isn't that much to see on the island. I wish Nekton had hired a local dive boat to take the dive-addicts diving as an alternative to the day on the island. Nekton has a satellite phone; but, in the Caymans signal is erratic.

**Nekton Rorqual, May 2006, Tracy Schumer, Ocala, FL.** My husband and I previously dived the Caymans from the Cayman Aggressor as well as shore based operators. The day before our trip was to begin was spent on Grand Cayman. Nekton has made transfer arrangements for its guests in partnership with the Sunset House. Our dive

gear and luggage were picked up by Nekton staff at the hotel and delivered to the boat during the afternoon of our departure date. We didn't board the Rorqual until 7:00pm that evening as requested by Nekton. Guests can be picked up by Nekton staff at Sunset House or the airport depending on your arrival time. Once on board the Rorqual's homely appearance fades quickly. Roomy cabins with full sized sink and the shower and toilet do not share the same space. She's a floating three story hotel. The extra wide main salon and dining area were also a plus. Unlike her sister ship Pilot, the Rorqual does not suffer from condensation or mold problems in its cabins as reported in previous issues of *Undercurrent*. Our luggage and dive gear were already on board and waiting in our cabin when we arrived. There were two guests whose luggage and dive gear were lost by the airline in transit from Miami. The Nekton crew was able to retrieve all of their missing gear by the next day with no interruption in the diving schedule. At the end of the first day's diving on Grand Cayman, we began our overnight transit to Little Cayman. Nekton advertises its ships as stable even in rough seas, using a technology which consists of two large pontoons that support the craft from beneath the waterline. For the diver who routinely takes medication to prevent seasickness, however, I would make sure to have it with you on this boat too. The sixty mile crossing to Little Cayman takes all night due to the Rorqual's sluggish eight knot top speed, but unlike The Cayman Aggressor, Rorqual can make the trip in rough seas. The next two days were spent diving Little Cayman's famous "Bloody Bay Wall." Nekton's use of steel tanks meant we had lots of bottom time. The Rorqual's

crew was helpful and courteous and worked hard to make sure every dive was the best one of the trip. Food on board was also plentiful and good. On day four we made the six-mile crossing over to Cayman Brac. Here we spent the morning diving the wreck of the Russian destroyer "Captain Tibbetts." Unfortunately, the rest of the day was spent on shore at Cayman Brac. Nekton has made arrangements with the island for refueling. Passengers were not allowed to remain on board so we were all forced to spend the afternoon on shore. It's nice to offer a shore excursion, but not nice to force it on paying customers. It was obvious that this deal was made for the benefit of Nekton (regardless of how Nekton's home office spins it) because it in no way benefits the customer. \$250 for Nitrox is really high and Nekton's response to this complaint is that they are a U.S. registered ship and must comply with U.S. Coast Guard standards. O.K. but \$250 is still too high! For the week we were on board the Nitrox equipment was broken down most of the time anyway. The other complaint is Nekton's policy of not providing anything to drink on board other than various flavors of Crystal Light, tea, coffee, or water. Passengers are told up front that they must provide their own sodas and alcoholic beverages; this was a real inconvenience.

**Nekton Rorqual, June 2006, Irv Kaplan (cpt\_diver@yahoo.com), Henderson, NV.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy. Crew: The dive masters were great buddies. All the dive crew and the captain had great attitudes, and genuinely wanted to please (I wish the cook had the same attitude). Boat: It needs a lot of fixing and freshening up. There were a large amount of exposed rust and peeling paint, including rail-

ings, thresholds and walls. The “closet” in my cabin was held together by duct tape. The cushions in the salon/dining room are covered in plastic that is all cut up. It is uncomfortable. My cabin, being amid ship was quiet. Cabins on the same floor as the salon, underneath the sun deck, were disturbed by the people waking on the sun deck. Cabins in the aft of the dive deck, heard the tanks banging around during the crossing. Our cruise had 18 passengers; I cannot imagine the boat full with 32 passengers. There is not enough room in the salon/dining room for that many. The dive deck with a full contingent would be ridiculous. “Luckily,” the restrictions on diving Bloody Bay Wall, limit 20 divers to a mooring site, so the Captain has to hire day boats. The Rorqual swath design limits the side-to-side sway in rough water, but crossing in rough water, the up-down motion caused some people to be sick. The Rorqual, because of its high profile and exposure to wind, is limited to the number of pins it can moor onto. So on the Brac, we only got to dive the Captain Tibbetts (4 dives). On the Brac, they require all the passengers to be off the boat for refueling, but they make no arrangements for you. No lunch, rent a car, hire a cab, go to a hotel, buy an expensive lunch at the hotel, and spend 4 hours at the hotel. The spot where they left you off has good shore diving, but the Rorqual won't arrange for any tanks. They facilitated the car rentals. The Brac has good diving on the south side, but the Rorqual couldn't make it there. Live aboard diving in Sting Ray City is not something I really want to do, nor was the small wreck (Doc Paulson) on Grand Cayman worth diving. The North Shore and the East End have some good diving, but the Rorqual is too slow to get there. The boat uses

steel 95s, which take significant weight off your weight belt, but the hang tank was leaking from its neck seal. Nitrox is expensive and Nekton only guaranteed 26% — fills were typically 28 to 32 percent, with 2,800 to 3,000 psi fills (told not to complain if fill was at least 2,500). Food: At best, poor. At worst, they were out of food. For breakfast, scrambled eggs were the choice for most days, plus cold cereal or bagels (of course, if you don't get there at 7 am for the 7 to 8 am buffet, all the cream cheese is gone). Pancakes — arrived too late again, no meat, no butter (cook found some) but no syrup, therefore no pancakes. I filled out the form that indicated that I don't eat fish, told the cook on the first night that I don't eat fish, so when they served fish, the cook was upset that I wouldn't eat the fish. I was served leftovers from the previous evening. Forget their desserts. You couldn't even get ice cream as a substitute until the last night. By Tuesday they ran out of hot chocolate, Thursday they ran out of strawberry flavored drink. Cook and the passengers weren't allowed to make coffee, so you had to wait for a DM. Note: The Aggressor never made it to Little Cayman or Cayman Brac. Per the people we met at the airport heading home, “Little Cayman was not dive-able with only 10 feet of visibility and the day boats weren't going out.” UW Photography Comments: Air hose for drying cameras, broke and took 2 days to get a replacement.

**Nekton Rorqual, June 2006, Richard Lehach (lehachrw@hotmail.com), Larchmont, NY.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 F. Recreational diving limits. Buddy diving unless solo certified. I have been on the Rorqual 6 times in the past 4 years and have usually been happy with the crew and diving. While I think highly

of the crew, my opinion on the Nekton operation changed for the worse. Diving on the Rorqual was to experience the Caymans at their worst. Day 1 diving was on the west coast by the large resorts (5 dives, 3 at Joe's tug). Due to the Rorqual slow speed we arrived at Little Cayman at 9:30AM and dove the southwest side for the AM and one of the most westerly sites on the North side for the 3 PM dives. Day 3 we moved to an easterly sites in Jackson's Bay (all five dives due to wind direction). Day 4 we were to the Brac for 4 dives on the Tibbetts wreck (6 AM, 830AM, 1030AM, and 830PM). Day 5 were 2 more AM shallow dives at Brac on reefs 50%-60% covered by green algae, the 3 PM dives we were back on Little Cayman on the south side. With strong southeast winds we dove in 30-40 feet white out visibility from the nearby shallows. Day 6 we were back on Grand Cayman with 2 AM dives in the north west and a long Sting Ray city. Unless the wind is from the Southeast the Rorqual cannot sit on a Bloody Bay site due to its draft and large scope, according to the Captain. The Rorqual required all guests to disembark on the Brac for 4 hours so they can take on fuel. Guests are on their own to get lunch and transportation from the drop off site to the pick up site 5 miles away. For safety reasons guests are not allowed on the boat during refueling. Yet on the way back from Little Cayman to Grand Cayman Thursday night the Rorqual met at sea with the Cachalot, the Nekton work boat, and transferred supplies and fuel to save on Cayman duties, according to a boat captain. I worked in the oil industry for 27 years, many of them with the Marine and Supply and Distribution Departments. The transferring of fuel at sea is only done in emergency situations. Trans-

shipment of crude (a non-flammable substance) is only done in a controlled situation approved by the local coast guard.

**Nekton Rorqual, July 2006, Douglas Kaip (dkaip@earthlink.net), El Paso, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. Little Cayman (Bloody Bay Wall) made it worth every penny. The Brac was nice. Nitrox is available for an extra fee, but, you must tell them you want Nitrox when you make your reservation. You are required to spend an afternoon on Cayman Brac when the boat is refueled. If you want to see the island, stop at the store and grab some food. If all of the guests show up at the same restaurant at the same time, it will use up most of your time. The locals operate on island time; hurry is not in their vocabulary. Both Nekton boats make excellent diving platforms. The crews on all three of my trips so far have been excellent and helpful. Steel 95s are used on the Rorqual. Dedicated camera table away from dive deck.

**Nekton Rorqual, July 2006, Lester Licht (chiroman@comcast.net), North Haven, CT.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 90 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm. We only had 11 divers on a boat built for lots more so they gave all of us solo travelers separate rooms. I would not want to have shared one of those cabins with another guy. Just too small for two guys. Food was good. Staff was excellent. Easy going, friendly and helpful. The Nekton SWATH design really does eliminate pitch while making the passage to Brac and Little Cayman. I took a Dramamine to be safe and slept well while we made that crossing. There were tons of turtles, a few sharks and Eagle Rays. Few morays for some reason. Crabs and lobster on night dives

and the usual Caribbean cast of characters. Overall, an excellent trip. They do a photo contest at the end of the week and the pictures were outstanding.

**Nekton Rorqual, August 2006, Maria Brinson (lemurs@cox.net), Lemon Grove, CA.** Experience: 51-100 dives.

Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm, no currents. The crew was a lot of fun yet professional. All the dives were great except Tarpon Alley, where the vis. was only about 30 ft. The weather held out for us. There were only 4 passengers, which was great. The food was really good. When we were heading for a mooring on Little Cayman, an Aggressor boat (which was already moored) saw us passing and decided to change dive spots and go to ours. We were heading to Jackson's Reef, our captain, Nelson, tried to contact them by radio and they ignored him as they caught up to us and cut us off. They did wave at us, though, as they passed. We all thought that it was rude. Our captain was diplomatic, and said that if Aggressor wants the spots before us, that is fine, Nekton would just like some kind of response so we can plan accordingly. After we moored onto another site, the 2 captains did communicate. We eventually dove Jackson's and it was a great site for 2 dives and a night dive. We saw 2 reef sharks, eagle rays and 1 large black tip there. The reef sharks were friendly and would quickly do "closing in circles" to anyone kneeling on the sand. This made me a bit nervous because they seemed agitated. I did bubble one that got too close. When we dropped down for a night dive the 1st thing we saw was a goliath grouper and then a reef shark heading toward us, being less than a foot away, he got bubbled again and didn't come back. I've only swam with sharks a few times and this is the only time I'd seen sharks

so 'friendly'. I was wondering if other dive boats had been feeding them. We did also spot some sea wasps and my husband got zapped because we forgot to purge on the way up. As long as you purged there was no problem with them.

**Nekton Rorqual, September 2006, (ruby2sail@yahoo.com), Swansea, MA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. This was our fourth Nekton trip. We were comfortable on the boat, and found it to be clean and in good repair. The crew was good and worked hard to accommodate all the passengers' needs. The food was good, plentiful, and filling as usual. There are now so many nitrox divers, the crew on the dive deck were distracted by them, as they have to verify each diver's percentages. That left those of us diving on air without anyone to witness our entries or hand us our cameras. The nitrox divers complained they had a long wait. Nekton needs to improve dive deck operations. The itinerary included diving all three islands. The reef around Grand Cayman for the most part appeared pretty beat up except for two sites we visited. Bloody Bay Wall at Little Cayman was beautiful and healthy. We only dove the Capt. Tibbetts wreck at Cayman Brac, which was enjoyable. We saw many turtles, and had one leave the reef and swim to us and circle us at close range several times, allowing me to take some awesome pictures! We were annoyed by the mandatory ½ day ashore in Cayman Brac, which was apparently forced on Nekton by the Cayman government so that we would spend money in the Caymans. We had to buy lunch on shore, and they offered tours and rental cars that we could pay for to entertain ourselves, which we did not do. We lay in hammocks all day at the resort

that hosted us (and where we bought lunch). We'd rather pay a bit extra in our Nekton fee and have a day boat take us out diving.

## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

**Nekton Rorqual, 2006, Anne and Fred Straus** (fredstraus@fuse.net), **Wyoming, OH.** It is hard to say more about a whale trip than the July 2003 issue of *Undercurrent*. Sixteen of us, the majority from Cincinnati area, booked through Marc Bernardi of Aquatic Encounters. The difference between our trip and the one reported in July 2003 was that the Whale Guru, Tom Conlin, of Aquatic Adventures (954-382-0024 or whales@aquaticadventures.com) rented Nekton Rorqual. While this ship advertises no seasickness since the 80' ship is a catamaran, one of our group did get seasick though he wore the patch behind his ear. This ship is only 5 years old and it is showing signs of wear. There is rust in the showers, the cushions in the salon are threadbare, and the ladder needed to climb in and out of the hot tub on the top deck is not attached to it. I would change the stars you gave out in 2003. The accommodations should be now rated 3 instead of 5. Previously the food was 3; this time Tom had hired a great chef who deserves a 5. Whenever we returned to the ship, we had hot cookies or appetizers waiting for us. After much urging, Julz shared his divine chocolate chip cookie recipe. Tom Conlin is still the "real deal" when it comes to finding and understanding whales. The captain and crew of the Nekton Rorqual were good.

**Nekton Rorqual, March 2006, John Kontnik, Lakewood, CO.** Experience: 1000+ dives. The Nekton Rorqual was

comfortable with lots of room; it did need some TLC. We had 24 guests and there was room for all. The rooms were fine. The snorkeling was done off two tenders (12 people per tender) and there was room for everyone. The Nekton staff was wonderful. The food was good (buffet style) and you could eat as healthy as you wanted. Any alcohol that one wanted had to be brought on board before the boat departed. The interactions with the humpback whales could last from 1 minute to 20-30 minutes (the whales' choice). I as a videographer and my wife as a photographer, found it was difficult to get good shots of the adult whales – they are just too big. The babies were easier, and we did come back with some great stuff. The plan is to locate cooperative whales (could take several hours) and then into the water for the interactions. While looking for the cooperative whales, you get some great surface visuals so time is not wasted. Our only complaint was with the organization that chartered the boat, Aquatic Adventures, and its owner, Tom Conlin. The man has ego. While spending time looking for whales, we received a never-ending verbal resume of what a wonderful and accomplished man he is. The other passengers and I also felt that at times we had to compete with him for some shots (he also has a production company, and guess where his photos and video go?). Any time a dive master or trip leader spends more time with his camera in his hand than the guests, you have to wonder about his agenda. The only part of the trip video that was actually of our trip was the guests getting on and off the tenders; the rest was best of Tom Conlin. During our orientation, we were urged to make any comments that could make the trip better. One woman tried it and Tom reduced her to tears, so I guess he really