

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

Islas Rosarias. Most of the 50 passengers on the boat were going to the Islas to lie around the beach and eat/drink. There were seven divers; two of us were certified. The remainder had had a one hour pool session the day before or were taking a short guided introductory dive. Although the weather was relatively calm, one of these novice divers became seasick. There were two dives — the first to 65 ft; the second to about 60 ft. Surface interval was relatively short. At the end of the first dive, we surfaced some distance from the boat. The boat driver happened to be swimming at the time so it took about ten minutes of whistle blowing to attract his attention. Fortunately the sea was relatively calm, although as the day progressed wind and waves picked up. I live in Bogotá at present so it was not difficult or expensive to get there. I speak Spanish. They advertise that the guides speak English but I did not hear a lot of English. The guides were polite and somewhat helpful but I didn't feel they particularly went out of their way. Although I took all my own gear - all the gear you need is included in the price of the two dive trip. Fresh water showers on shore for rinsing equipment — no tanks on boat.

CURACAO

A short hop from Bonaire (and a nonstop flight from Miami), Curacao's colorful, historic, cosmopolitan Dutch Willemstad offers plenty for the nondiver — shopping, casinos, night life, hiking, an orchid-filled forest, attractive rural villages, half-naked Europeans, and excellent restaurants. Dive resorts prefer the relatively undeveloped northwestern side of the island,

where there's outstanding beach diving from protected coves that are generally calm and easily accessible by car. Many divers who cut their teeth on Bonaire now prefer Curacao, which has much less diver traffic and development, and an increasing number of popular shore diving sites.

Dive Bus, March 2006, Lester Licht (chiroman@comcast.net), North Haven, CT. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: calm, choppy. The Dive Bus is a whole new kind of operation. Curacao has lots of excellent shore diving. But unlike Bonaire it's not all laid out on one road and easy to find. These folks will pick you up at your hotel and take you and your gear to some great beach diving sites around this cool little island. Someone stays topside so you don't get your car pilfered and a DM gets in the water with you. They can show you some beautiful beaches that you will have all to yourself and they can be much more flexible with schedules than a regular dive boat. They are hooked up with some local boat operators so you can go "a la carte" and beach or boat dive at your own choosing. Curacao has a lot more to see and do than Bonaire and some great history as well.

Habitat Curacao, September 2005, Gary Krrippendorf (gskrippendorf@hotmail.com), Redwood City, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 83 F, calm. The hope was to see the coral spawning, however our timing must have been off a bit. The rooms were roomy and included a kitchenette. We ate most meals at the restaurant, which was reasonably priced and had good food. The diving was good with lots of colorful corals and the typical mix