

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

of Caribbean fish. Large numbers of colorful Christmas tree worms.

Habitat Curacao, October 2005, Leslie and Michael Bardelli (lbardelli@snet.net), New Milford, CT. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Habitat Curacao is on desert-like cactus gardens. The buildings are colorful and geometric. Our room had 2 queen-size beds that made the room feel small. There is an in-room safe, a small closet with shelves. Nice size bathroom, kitchenette and TV. The balcony with the view was the highlight. It was nice to sit out at the table and chairs. Got rained on several times. Sunsets were the best. The hotel also has a small infinity pool. They provide boat/pool towels that can be turned in daily for dry ones. Oceans Restaurant: Habitat is about 30 minutes from town, so unless you have a rental car, you are eating at Oceans Restaurant. We found the food good. We prepaid for the breakfast buffet and were satisfied. It was basic, but plenty. It was not always ready, but we still had enough time to eat and get to the morning dives. It was nice to have the option of ordering a lunch entree at dinner. We never had a meal we were unhappy with. The BBQ night was great. We ordered a combo platter and had enough for 2 lunches as well. We borrowed English muffins from breakfast to make sandwiches from our BBQ. I would bring several cans of tuna or chicken with a jar of mayo to do lunches in the room. We booked 6 days of 2 tank boat dives with Easy Divers. The set up is nice. The dive shop is on the water with tanks ready to go for shore dives 24 hours a day. They have lockers, but bring your own locks. Combination type Master locks are too large for the clasp on the locker. They sell locks in the shop, but they rusted

out by the time we went home. The dive shop is multi-level with the shop on the main level, tanks and gear lockers at water level. Those steps can be slippery. The dive shop is well supplied with T-shirts, log books, defog as well as some equipment. We found the staff to be helpful. You need to sign up at the dive shop on a special board before the dives. When you check out they give you a computer printout of all the boat dives that you went on. The boats are large with space for dry storage up front. They have a small camera only rinse tank behind the captain's ladder. Boats do not have heads. Giant stride is used with 2 easy to climb ladders to get back on board. Each trip there is a boat Captain and Divemaster (all the staff do both jobs). Once the briefing is given you have the choice of going with the DM or off by yourself. They give a time limit and depth, but the profile is up to you. Each crew member usually did one dive. If you followed the DM, really watch you computer since the DM for dive #2 had no nitrogen debt. The reefs are healthy, teeming with life. We saw more eels than ever, our first sea horse and frog fish. The House Reef is easy to navigate. Just drop down at the bottom of the stairs, follow the rope to the reef. Follow the reef to the left or right, turn around half way and look for the rope on the way back. In the sandy shallows you'll find, anemones, crabs, and eels. We did several night dives and were not disappointed. We did 20 dives in 5½ days of diving. We were disappointed in was the lack of communication between the 3 businesses, hotel, diving, restaurant, since they are 3 distinct businesses. They don't necessarily have correct information about the other business. We found that information was not volunteered. They offer a shuttle into town 3 times a day. You

stay in town 4 –5 hours until the next pickup. They will drop you at a grocery store and you have 15 minutes to power shop. Gift shop is great for those things you forget, but not to get groceries in.

Habitat Curacao, October 2005, James McMeins (marinenine@hotmail.com), Carnation, WA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 87 F, calm, choppy. 6th stay at Habitat; rooms being well maintained now and include cable TV. Don't expect fast service and the menu hasn't changed much since first going there in 1997. Prices have gone up but not a lot. The shore diving from the resort is still the best I've had, there are lots to see and the corals are healthy. Boat diving is good but be warned, Mushroom Forest is rapidly going south. Although first time visitors thought it was great, I know what it used to look like. There are many bleached and dead coral heads. The DM's admitted it was getting worse and they felt it was from too many divers, warming waters and damage from storms. They need to close this area for a couple of years to let it recover. Storm one night during a dive, 20-25mph winds, rain, thunder and lightning. Had to crawl up the ladder due to wave action. Later went back down and helped another couple exit the water as by that time waves coming over the dock! They have large fresh water rinse tanks on all boats that are clearly marked for cameras only and as long as only 8-12 people on the boat, plenty of room for working on them. Shore facility has similar rinse tank but it sits in the sun so by afternoon, the water is really hot.

Habitat Curacao, November 2005, Kevin Elman, Greeley, CO. (hammerhead7@comcast.net), Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to

150 Feet. Water: 78 to 83 F, calm. The good: Boat rides, entry/exit, dives easy. The shore diving from the dive shop was extremely easy and a great place for new divers. Reef was healthy and diverse. If you get the chance to dive "Seldom" (also called lighthouse), do! It's called seldom, because currents (a rarity in Curacao) can be tricky and dive shops "seldom" dive it. I've never seen a more beautiful reef. Divemaster were good if you wanted something, otherwise they let you be, i.e., their motto "diving freedom." The food was quite tasty, but you might have to wait. Rooms are simple and spacious, but lots of electrical problems (i.e., no power two of the nights...no AC ouch!) The bad: Dive shop was a smoke house and it wasn't the guests (my lungs actually hurt). They have a dive orientation at 9:00 but, the first morning boat goes out at 8:30, thus losing a morning of diving. If the briefing were anything of great importance (it took five minutes) I might agree, but this was unnecessary and a big inconvenience (even when I asked for an earlier briefing and was snubbed). The service and enthusiasm is lacking. The hotel and Restaurant staff almost went out of their way to ignore you. To check in I had to wait for five minutes until the two desk people could finish their chat and then I had to interrupt. Location is not the best and is at least twenty minutes away from Willemstad. The entire week I was there a truck was parked on the sidewalk to the dive shop and forced me to walk through the gravel and weeds (o.k. if you have shoes, not so o.k. in dive boots or bare foot). Have been to Captain Don's in Bonaire and I expected the same. I was disappointed by the new management and had I known, I might have spent the extra bucks and gone to Bonaire instead. UW Photography

Comments: The boat could never quite keep the masks separated from the cameras rinse buckets. I know the soap is the big issue for most, my issue was the way my equipment was being tossed around.

Habitat Curacao, December 2005,

Don, Spring Grove, VA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm, choppy. Like Captain Don's, Habitat Curacao has the same "Diver Freedom" attitude and tanks are available 24/7. The staff at Easy Divers, the Habitat dive operation, are excellent, friendly, knowledgeable and helpful on and off the boat. Habitat is at the southwest coast. Most of our dive gear did not arrive the first day and Anne Marie the owner of Easy Divers, lent us what we needed at no charge. The rest of our equipment arrived the next day. The famous floating bridge has been dismantled for maintenance and ferry service is the only way to access both sides of the Harbor. English is widely spoken and understood. The house reef is beautiful and like Capt. Don's, there is the guide rope from the dock on down to the reef. I would rate the house reef slightly better than Captain Don's and has beautiful coral which are swarming with small and medium tropicals. Night diving is fantastic, but unlike Captain Don's, there are no tarpon following your light. Habitat's rooms are clean and comfortable and have AC. Our ocean front room was getting somewhat frayed around the edges, but in general no complaints. The restaurant has good food and drinks and although "Island Time" rules when it comes to service. Get a car. Jannchie's, a family run operation in Westpunt is fantastic and the place to eat. Williamstead is just another cruise ship trap full of trash, but is worth an afternoon to view the architecture.

Christoffel National Park at the north-west tip could easily take up 2 more afternoons with hiking and exploring. The locals we met were all friendly and we did not feel threatened at all during our stay. American Airlines runs a daily flight out of Miami.

Habitat Curacao, January 2006, Ivan Jasper (junglecat@imt.net), Billings, MT. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm, choppy, no currents. It is not glitzy and there is little nightlife, but is isolated in a gated community on a lesser developed part of the island with little or no traffic noise. The staff was friendly and accommodating, the grounds are neat and not artificially manicured. The rooms are small but certainly comfortable and offer a private deck or patio. All with the intangible feeling of being in one of the most comfortable places on earth. Resort offers a free shuttle to downtown. Do bring mosquito repellent, but this was only a minor nuisance. There is a limited selection at the restaurant so you may want to hit the grocery store and use the in room facilities. And don't be in a big hurry, it is truly island time. Prices were \$6-10 for lunch and \$7-20 for dinner. The breakfast buffet was \$9.50, may want to supply your own pastries. The diving was good, but not extraordinary, and you may be disappointed if you expect the shore diving of Bonaire. There was noticeable coral disease at many sites. Lots of butterflies, snappers parrotfish, flounder, eels, and even some octopus. No tarpon or sharks. Dive First Encounter if given the opportunity. I would sign up the day before for the morning two tank boat dive and shore dive at the resort in the afternoon. There was no need to exceed 40 or 50' on most dives, even if the site offered 70+, and most offered lots of little

critters and good photos in 20-30', making it excellent for inexperienced divers. The divemasters were professional, friendly and funny. Diving is unlimited 24 hours a day. I am rescue certified and was allowed to dive solo. Grab some tanks, and as they said at the shop, "there's the ocean, go dive." Separate fresh water camera tank on the dive boats, although too small for large double strobe setups. Dive shop allowed me to check digital photos free.

Habitat Curacao, May 2006, Craig Young and Sharon Busey, Menomonee Falls, WI. Water: 84 to 86 F. Rooms include fantastic decks/balconies, small refrigerators, coffee makers, small stove, pots, pans, plates and utensils. Rooms have tub, small safe, air conditioning. They have no shampoo or hair dryers in the rooms. 110V outlets and desalinated, safe drinking water. Beach towels available at front desk. Nice freshwater pool overlooking the ocean. Resort food okay, but runs on island time. Rijstikaffel Restaurant — wonderful Indonesian Rice Buffet. California supermarket is in a small village just beyond turnoff from main highway to Habitat Curacao. Car rental places don't open until 7AM and didn't have any instructions for dropping your car off after hours (we didn't think to ask beforehand). Good rental equipment. 2 tank boats in AM and PM. Boats with radio, O2, fire extinguisher, camera rinse tanks. They give you oranges between dives. Rare mosquitos, beware of yellow jackets in Dive deck area. Large dive lockers accessible 24 hours a day (bring your own lock). Tanks and diving available 24 hours a day). Diving good — small amount of algae. Lots of eels (sharptail, goldentail, green, spotted, chain, reticulated), scorpionfish and peacock flounders. Saw parrotfish in mucous cocoon on predawn dive.

Good small stuff — leopard flatworms, flamingo tongues, fingerprint cyphoma, juvenile trunkfish, juvenile drums, and seahorses.

Habitat Curacao, June 2006, Steve, (sdrake@atcjet.net), Lexington, NE. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F. Stay within recreational limits The house reef is excellent. Lockers are next to the shore dive area, with a separate area to hang wetsuits. There is an on-site dive shop that is reasonably stocked. Nitrox (32%) is \$8/tank. Diving is a 24 hour a day proposition. The dive center allows you to pick up tanks for shore dives at other sites. The boat diving is equally good, though you transport your equipment to and from the boat, set it up and change it. The dive briefings are adequate, and divemasters lead the dive for those wanting it. The divemasters are present, yet unobtrusive, and know where to find seahorses, nudibranchs, etc. I dove the Mushroom Forest twice. It is a special place. Tube worms galore, orange cup coral, flamingo tongue snails, anemones with shrimp, crab etc. are plentiful, as are tube sponges, elephant ear sponges, black coral, turtles, etc. Habitat Curacao is comfortable but not luxurious. We stayed in a two-bedroom "villa." Each bedroom room has its own bathroom with tub/shower. There is a lanai outside the bedrooms with a small refrigerator and cook top with dishes. The main complaint was ants (the small, nonstinging variety), and some mosquitoes in the evening. The restaurant is average. At times we felt we were imposing on the waiters, though their attitude changed for the better when the manager was present. The Sunday night barbecue is the highlight. Breakfast was buffet and pretty good. But be there at opening to make the 0830 dive boat departure.

There are many excellent restaurants in Curacao such as Fort Nassau, Bistro Le Clochard, and Astrolabe. The service at all is excellent, the food first rate, and the wine lists adequate to excellent. The shopping in Willemstad will entertain for an afternoon. Habitat Curacao provides free shuttle service to Willemstad, but rent a four-door pickup (particularly the full size Toyota HiLux) if you plan on shore diving away from Habitat Curacao. UW Photography Comments: Crew handled the cameras carefully and reminded other divers not to use the camera rinse tank to rinse their personal equipment.

Habitat Curacao, July 2006, Geoffrey William Colino, Naples, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, choppy. Habitat Curacao looks like it might have been a nice, cozy destination a decade or so ago, but not it looks (and feels) run-down. The rooms were rather small, dirty, and poorly equipped (although ours was the top of the line). They included a "kitchenette" but no microwave and no cookware. Room service did little more than make the beds and change towels. The room smelled like urine. The dive staff was friendly but a little too easygoing — one dive turned into a drift dive when half the divers were already underwater with the intention of returning (as instructed) to the spot where we had left the boat (only the boat was not there) and, although they advertised 24/7 shore diving, we had to remind staff members repeatedly to leave tanks out for us when we wanted to take tanks outside the house reef. If/when they forgot to leave out tanks, we would have to haul tanks up three flights of steps and a fair distance just to get them from the dive shop to the parking lot.

Habitat Curacao, August 2006, Marc and Anne Bressman, Cherry Hill, NJ (mbressman116712@comcast.net). Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. well- designed boats, not crowded. Quality of divemasters mixed; except for Angela, who was excellent and found interesting fish and critters. Rooms were comfortable with a patio for eating breakfast and lunch. Hotel staff unhelpful. Healthy coral and fish life, including many critters. Wonderful pool for cooling off. Great shore dive at resort. Curacao is friendly with good restaurants.

Habitat Curacao, September 2006, Steve Simpson, Knoxville, TN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Our fourth trip. The staff at the resort, restaurant, and dive shop could not have been nicer. Marjorie at Ocean's Restaurant knew that I enjoyed their pork ribs, which are normally served once a week during BBQ night. When the staff cooked pork ribs for their staff meal on other days, Marjorie would save some for me. Ocean's serves a variety of good (not gourmet) food. Prices range from a grilled ham and cheese sandwich with fries for under \$4 to steak dinners at just under \$30. They are happy to serve lunch items at dinner, and the restaurant is open from 7am to 10pm. Our room was clean and in good repair, and the maids were accommodating to clean it daily at our convenience, not theirs. Requests for extra towels were promptly answered, and they continued to supply us the extra towels for the rest of our stay. During our previous stays, there were gardeners at work every day. We saw no gardeners this year and lots of weeds. Workers were busy painting every day. The slide shows are informative. The employees of Easy Divers were great,

as usual. Management, while being friendly, was definitely cutting corners. The dive boat's port diesel engine smoked badly and diesel fumes were strong, even after the engines were stopped. The boat wasn't being cleaned as thoroughly as in the past, and salt crystals accumulated on the tanks and railings. The engine covers (part of the deck) were cracking and sank noticeably whenever trod upon. The step from the gunwale to the deck was not attached, and it moved about, making it tricky to board and disembark. Camera tubs were not changed often, and after sitting in the sun all day the water became hot. If the afternoon boat did go out, the cooler was not resupplied with ice and the morning's ice had completely melted. The boat could stand another paint job. A full boat is 16 people, but it's crowded with 10. The staff could not have been nicer or more helpful. All boat trips are 2-tank trips. Dive briefings were good, and surface intervals were at least 45 minutes, and usually an hour. Lots of cold drinking water available and oranges are served during the surface interval. They take 2 DMs. One stays onboard during the dive and one goes in the water. You gear up your own tanks, which I like. The DMs are happy to provide whatever assistance you need. You can follow the DM or go on your own. Stay above 130 feet, turn around at 1500psi, and keep your dive to 1 hour. There was not enough dive staff. Anthony was injured and Emma was off on surgical leave. Divers were discouraged from signing up for the afternoon dives if there were classes or instruction going on. The afternoon boats would not go out unless 6 divers signed up. In the past, if 10 people wanted a boat night dive, they would arrange it. Night boat dives were not offered this year, though it

was during the coral spawning! Tanks are always available for shore diving, and with only a couple of exceptions, they're consistently filled to 3000psi (aluminum 80s and 63s with 3500 rated valves). The dive shop has always been rather poorly stocked and disorganized, with more emphasis on rental gear and souvenir hats and T-shirts. This year, most of the floor space was covered with tubs of un-displayed stock. They could not find the stamp pad so I could stamp my dive log. Weight limits have decreased from 70 pounds/bag to 50 pounds/bag, so it is a critical issue. The gift shop in the lobby has a limited selection of toiletries. The gift shop is open during the day, but there is only one person working there at a time, so it closes whenever s/he goes to lunch, goes to the stockroom, or takes a potty break. Since TSA requires you to pack all gels and liquids in checked luggage, it would be great if the gift shop had a better selection of these items, or the resort provided more toiletries than a bar of soap. You can take the resort shuttle into town, however, the shuttle doesn't run frequently, so plan on spending most of the day for a trip into town, or hire a taxi. We felt the reefs were seriously degraded from our previous visits. We found fishing line weights during our dive.

Lion's Dive, February 2006, Michelle Corazza (shell3scuba@wowway.com), Clawson, MI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, choppy. One of our divers was completing the open water at Lion's Dive. It's a PADI facility and my friend did his book/pool work with an SSI program at home; the first day at the facility the Dive Instructor assigned to him was confused with how to test an SSI diver though this person had a Universal Referral Form. Many of the

skills were new to this diver. Otherwise they were fairly good with him. Everyone has to do a check out dive in the bay (was hoping to dive off the boat ASAP). Dive boats were pretty crowded (18-22 divers). At the end of one of our dives we all ended up in a large fish net. There were men fishing at a popular dive site. Some divers were cutting the net to rescue fish that were stuck in the line and one fisherman roughly pulled a diver off the net. There was an argument between our captain and the two fishermen while we all came back on the boat. The Coast Guard was called and we left. I spoke with one Dive Master on the boat and apparently there are no laws protecting the site for divers, or for the fishermen. Legally, we can both be there. The staff was upset as the week before there was a ton of fish at this site. The resort was nice and clean. We could walk down the beach to other restaurants and bars. The food at the resort was good. The "included" breakfast was boring after one day. The pool was cloudy and full of kids. The Sea Aquarium was cool to visit. The diving overall was pretty good but not as good as Bonaire. Great for a beginner.

Ocean Encounters, Hilton, September 2005, Larry Polster, Martinsville, IN. (larrypolster@sbcglobal.net), Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 81 F, calm. Curacao had some of the best restaurants and shops of all the islands. We ate at the French Bakery a couple times; their wine list was extensive. The food at most hotels was good, and many of the little beach bars had great sandwiches. Shopping downtown can take days. Finding a cup of coffee early was a problem; the rooms did not have a coffee pot, hotel restaurant did not open until 7AM. While Curacao does not have the great shore diving like its

sister island Bonaire, the boat diving is similar, the night life better, and the overall experience (with a non-diver wife) better. The Mushroom Forest was one of the best dive sites in Curacao. It's on the other side of the island, requires an hour van ride (supplied by Ocean Encounters) to reach the dive boat/site. It's worth the trouble. Unusual coral heads (mushroom-looking) plenty of fish, and lots of small critters. I photographed six different nudibranchs, blue, green, white . . . all out in the open and easy to shoot. UW Photography Comments: Some of the dive masters had UWP skills and could answer questions about cameras that they used. Little critters everywhere, bring a macro lens.

Ocean Encounters, Breezes, April 2006, Isabel DeOliveira (shop_deoliveira@comcast.net), Monmouth Junction, NJ. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 25 to 40 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm. To maximize our 7-day trip to Breezes, we wanted to do our checkout dives early the morning of the 2nd day of our trip. We arrived at the counter at 7am to fill out the paperwork. 4 employees were deep in conversation about nothing work related. We waited 5 minutes and had to interrupt them from their conversation. Ocean Encounters told us that the mandatory checkout dives were only done in the afternoon. My partner and I came back promptly after lunch and were informed that the checkout dives and shore diving had been canceled because of surging currents in the channel. After complaining that no one contacted me about the cancellation; we were "accommodated" by being put on the afternoon 1 tank boat dive. The mandatory check out dive is much more voluntary. Afternoon boat trips are usually exclusively to The Tugboat because of the snorkelers. This is fine

but I was not informed before booking 5 afternoon boat dives. The advertising gives a false impression that the divers help decide. I did not want to dive the same site 5 days in a row. I was not reimbursed for my full prepaid deposit. The shore diving is fine if you don't mind the tall wooden ladder exit. The surge wasn't bad on the days we shore dove. Tanks weren't all filled up to 3000psi. My partner dove the Superior Producer, advertised as one of the best dives on the island. Max dive time 20 minutes and 3 divers got caught in the surging current and had to be retrieved off another buoy marker. Prior knowledge would have been helpful. The dive shop staff was not friendly or helpful. We told them and they don't care.

Ocean Encounters, Lion's Dive, April 2006, Terry Flynn (pipefitter562@msn.com), Saint Louis, MO. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 72 to 75 F, calm. Check in was hectic and disorganized. Rooms were not ready due to large biking event and some people not checking out until a day later. This necessitated additional moves. Rooms were small and electrical outlets were lacking. Lion's Dive is an older operation but the facility is clean and well maintained. The housekeeping staff did a great job but the overall attitude of the hotel staff was so-so. The breakfast buffet was good but they only had instant coffee. Christian and his staff at Ocean Encounters went out of their way to accommodate. The dive-masters were knowledgeable and helpful. The boat our group had was clean, well equipped, and well maintained. We had a CCR diver in our group and the staff was accommodating with O2 fills, etc. The dive shop hosted a BBQ for our group Friday evening that was exceptional. Christian and most of the shop staff attended as well. Check out

Saturday morning went much smoother. UW Photography Comments: Separate rinse tank for cameras added — they added a larger tank after day 1 to accommodate some of the larger housings. DMs instructed divers not to use for anything but cameras. Had equipment ready when you entered the water.

Ocean Encounters West, Lodge Kura Hulanda, May 2006, Dave Padowitz (jenk1@sbcglobal.net), Mountain View, CA. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 F, calm. Lodge Kura Hulanda, at the less developed west end of Curacao, is a casual sister to the outstanding Kura Hulanda hotel in Willemstad. The new resort combines the quality and style of the original Kura Hulanda with proximity to some of the best diving on the island. The resort had recently opened and a few details needed to be smoothed out — we should have brought snacks for quick breakfasts and confirmed our airport transportation sooner — but it's a beautiful place to stay. Ocean Encounters West is a few steps away from the resort at the end of Playa Kalki beach. It's a new branch of Ocean Encounters, run by the friendly and professional Jim and Lisa. The house reef at Playa Kalki is easily accessible from the beach or the dock at Ocean Encounters West. The reef begins a few dozen yards offshore at 25' with a moderate slope and good diving from 35' down. Close to the beach the reef get heavy use, but it maintains a healthy coral community with diverse and abundant fish populations. Two small turtles, green and hawksbill, lived just off the dock. Playa Kalki was popular for night dives. While there were plenty of fish in shallow water off the beach, the reef edge was a little too deep for easy snorkeling. The famous Mushroom Forest is about

40 minutes away, but it was overshadowed by the spectacular Watamula, a pristine site at the end of the island, just a few minutes from the resort and dive operation. Watamula had mild current and gradual slope with lush soft corals transitioning to dense and varied hard coral both at a comfortable 35-45' depth.

Ocean Encounters, Seaquarium Resort, June 2006, Edward and Debra Svitil (nwsvitil@hotmail.com), Alpharetta, GA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, choppy, surge, no currents. Went with Kid's Sea Camp to give our 6-year-old daughter a chance to experience "diving" in a controlled environment and the chance to dive ourselves. Unfortunately, the hotel's air conditioning broke down the first day we arrived. The rooms became almost unbearable with the heat and humidity. The resort did try to make things up by scheduling happy hours but until they finally fixed it Wednesday, we spent several miserable nights. The diving is average on a world scale, but it was just nice to be back in the water. Dive operator was excellent and we had an experienced group with us — boat a little crowded but everyone worked it out with little fuss. Divemasters Christian and Guillermo were personable and let you dive your own profile. No one on the boat was a "tank hog" and we all were back on time (which made life a lot more pleasant). Kid's Sea Camp was highlighted by "Rogest," an artist specializing in working with the kids and talented — has done work with DAN. Food is average and if you go, buy food the day you arrive. Grocery stores are closed Sunday and the hotel was less than accommodating in scheduling van runs to the stores and into town for divers ("we go at 10AM every day"

- unfortunately we are on the dive boat at 10AM. "Take a cab" — expensive — \$20 each way)

Sea Encounters, Sea Aquarium Resort, August 2006, Grabill, Palm Bay, FL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. Our visit was only for a week. Sea Aquarium Resort is a nice timeshare right on the water across a marina from Lion's Dive Resort and Sea Encounters Dive Operations; they are on the east end of the island. Sea Encounters has nice diving and boats but ask about prices up front. Got gouged on the unlimited shore diving package since we only did about 6 shore dives (a mistake on our part), we dove 4 days on the boat. On "check out" shore dive, without guide, was on local reef right outside the resort. We saw eagle ray, large school of bait fish (a ball about 20'+ across) with jacks feeding off it and the usual critters (eels, tropicals, etc.). On the night boat dive at Tugboat saw several lobsters, crabs and two frogfish on a sponge (extra special!). Klein Curacao has great dive locations. Food was great but the trip is pretty long (about 2 hours each way). Shore diving is good and was best on the west end of island (coral, critters, etc.). For the most part the distances to dive spots were 50-100' offshore and you were in about 40-60' of water. Drop offs in some locations were dramatic, couldn't see the bottom even at 80'.

Silent Immersion, Royal Sea Aquarium Resort, April 2006, Warren Vallerand (wpvmddd@yahoo.com), Novi, MI. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, no currents. Dove the house reef at the Habitat. The reef is still an excellent dive, but Habitat facilities are showing significant wear and decay. The Royal

Sea Aquarium Resort that is a nice property 5 minutes east of downtown. Room and facilities were excellent. Rooms have a/c and ceiling fans and are well maintained. Service was mediocre. Food at the one restaurant grows repetitive after several days. Try Hemmingway's across the lagoon or one of the several restaurants at the several resorts within walking distance. Silent Immersion is a great dive operation. Run by Jamie, an ex-pat Irishman, and his wife Miriam. My 2 teenagers had completed their pool/classroom work in the states and did their open water check out dives with Silent Immersion. Jamie is knowledgeable, accommodating and friendly. He did an excellent job of allaying my daughter's initial concerns about open water diving and turned her into a diving fanatic! Their prices were most reasonable. Did multiple dives on the East and West ends. Coral in good shape. No large stuff, but lots of spotted morays, lobsters, blue parrots, drums, trunkfish, scorpion fish and chromis. Producer's Bay and the Tugboat are two easy shore dives on the east side with great visibility and a large variety of flora and fauna.

Sunset Waters Beach Resort, September 2005, Daniel Imbody, Shorewood, IL. (dwebsterdwi2@wmconnect.com), Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 85 to 86 F, calm, no currents. A nice rather small resort on a bluff overlooking the Caribbean. The weather was warm, 90F or so. Very dry. Nor rain while we were there. Curacao has quite a dry desert type of climate. Curacao does not have lush, verdant, tropical vegetation. The accommodations are adequate. The food was good. The staff was attentive and concerned about our requirements. The dive staff was well qualified. The dive staff informed me that the diving at Cura-

cao is about as good as it gets in the Caribbean. Of course, every dive shop will tell you that. But I think that it is a rather accurate statement. Currents were virtually absent. The visibility was good. Many schools of smaller fish. No large schools of medium sized fish. No pelagic fishes were seen. My package was two tanks of boat diving and unlimited shore diving. I did not do any shore diving. The dive boats are well maintained. The number of clients on the boats ranged from about 6 or 8 to about 15 or so.

Sunset Waters Beach Resort, January 2006, Jill and Rob Caple (rg250cat@msn.com), Pasadena, MD. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 80+ Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm. We went with Sharkriders Scuba Tours (www.sharkriders.com) and had a wonderful time. Sunset Waters Beach Resort was great and rooms were nice and all-inclusive. We had an ocean view room that had a beautiful view and spent a lot of downtime on our private terrace. Service was good, only a little slow. The dive shop would set up your dive gear before and after each dive. Enjoyed all the boat dives and the shore diving was good most days. We also did a few night dives off the shore, made easier to navigate thanks to their cool huge stone hand sculptures in the water. Two of our divemasters, Curtis and Carlos, were great and lots of fun. I wore full 3mm suit, hood and boots and stayed warm for the full length of dives.

Sunset Waters, February 2006, George T Felt, Moultonborough, NH. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, no currents. Sunset Waters is a comfortable, laid-back all-inclusive resort in a quiet and secluded corner of Curacao. Sunset Divers was a solid operation. The cap-

tain stays on the boat, the divemasters (usually two) lead the dive and change the tanks. Steve, Kurt, Seip, Rick (and others) were highly competent guides and good fellows all. Dive your own profile if you wish (first show them that you have the skills; beginners are well looked after without being smothered). Roll call done well. Intercepted a pod of about 12 dolphin one day and they jumped our wake for about 5 minutes (but swam off when we tried to jump in with them) - fun for all. Don't expect pelagics, but count on world class coral and superb small (to 10") tropical fish - some (e.g., Creole wrasse, brown chromis) in large schools that sometimes number in the hundreds. Not uncommon to see 50 royal gramma on one dive. Lots of spotted drum, various wrasses, butterflies, angels - the usual suspects. Excellent house reef - well-marked trail makes night diving easy. Bring a good book - there isn't much going on at the resort - or rent a car and cruise around the island (safe, scenic).

Sunset Waters Beach Resort, March 2006, Ernie Krumbein, Munster, IN. (passtoant@direcway.com), Experience: 500+ dives. Vis: 75 to 95 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm and flat, no currents. Not a 5 star resort but excellent in service and attitude. Extremely friendly and happy. Good cooks and great bakers.

Sunset Waters Beach Resort, March 2006, Jim Boone (masterdvr@hotmail.com), Alexandria, VA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm, surge. Boat was OK. Slow, but dive sites near. Divemasters helpful. Had not been to Curacao since 1999. Reefs have degraded. Mushroom forest interesting. Nitrox available. Normal Caribbean diving. Almost no big fish. Boats generally left on time. Resort well

kept. All inclusive. Food good, service slow, but servers tried to please. Shore diving easy. House reef good. No bug problems. Beach clean.

Sunset Waters Beach Resort, June 2006, Jay Levine (JulesIvan@aol.com), Charlottesville, VA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, no currents. From picking us up at the Curacao Airport, through the housekeeping and dining room staff and the dive operation, service was excellent, personal and generally consistent. The resort's manager, Jim Hunter, is a hands on manager that does everything possible to please his guests. The accommodations were nice; rooms right on the water with balconies. They are replacing the air-conditioning systems. When maintenance problems did arise, they were resolved instantly. The pool and pool bar was popular in late afternoons. Food was varied, and with a few exceptions, well prepared and nicely presented; several great buffets with the balance being individual menu service. All beverages, including standard alcohol brands, were included and the wait staff was always prompt and pleasant. The resort provides free shuttle service into town. Our group used of their largest dive boat (Day Dreamer) and it was roomy, had two boarding ladders and was stable and fast. Typical trip was 10 to 15 minutes. There was always one divemaster in the water and often, two. We saw little in the way of "big stuff" but the small fish were plentiful. We saw spotted eagle rays twice, big lobsters and morays, a large black seahorse and on the house reef, a frog fish.

Sunset Waters Beach Resort, July 2006, Marc and Anne Bressman (mbressman116712@comcast.net), Cherry Hill, NJ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 F,

calm. Well-run resort with good but not gourmet food. All inclusive including drinks. Good dive operation and staff, but they need to replace their boats that have poorly designed ladders and entry. Sometimes overcrowded. Healthy corals and many schools of fish, including many shrimp, crabs, and other small critters.

Sunset Waters, July 2006, David Hobby (dahobby@aol.com), Midland, TX.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, no currents. Sunset Divers (not a part of, but conveniently next to Sunset Waters) dive operation was great. The divemasters (Carlos, Sip, Kevin, Rickey, Lynn, and Anka) were laid back but professional and made all my dives enjoyable. Typically the DM would lead you down the reef slope to 60'-90', continue at that depth for 20 min., ascend to about 30', and return to the boat. The balance of the time was spent exploring and photographing in the boat vicinity. Some of the two-tank morning dives had a crowd, but all were competent, experienced divers. Most reefs are a short swim offshore and some of the better sites are off publicly accessible beaches. But boat diving was convenient, meeting new divers and trading stories is always a plus. The viz was a little disappointing, but they said there was an unusual inversion. Sunset Divers takes divers north to Puerto Cruz (including Mushroom Forest) and south to Puerto Mari. You can grab a tank 24/7 and dive the house (Airplane wreck) reef about 40 yards offshore. The reef is on the brink of, and extending far down a steep slope (50-70 deg. – Curacao is an old, volcanic island) covered in low mounds of hard corals and sponges inhabited by a variety of reef fish. Lots of trumpet fish, eels, occasional southern stingray, seahorses and frogfish. Large schools of Creole

wrasse were amazing on some sites. Not any big fish though. Locals fish them. Sunset Waters resort has nice rooms with good views. Most meals were buffets. Breakfast began at 7:30 am (dive boat leaves at 9:00). Chef will make omelets. Lunch – salad bar and a light fare, sometimes off a menu. Dinner was usually fish, beef; chicken various ways with trimmings. Monday night is seafood buffet, Thursday barbeque. Thursday thru Sunday live local music artists – all talented and enjoyable. My wife is not a diver, but enjoyed reading on the beach, snorkeling, taking offered tours to local attractions and shopping in Willemstad (30 min. away). Name brand jewelry haggled with local currency for best deals. The staff was courteous and friendly. The residents of Curacao made us feel “part of the family.”

Sunset Waters Beach Resort, August 2006, Anne Efron, Baltimore, MD.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm, choppy, no currents. Great dive operation and excellent service. No head on the boats and limited shade, but we had a great time diving with them. Lots of interesting coral and reef fish, including seahorses — great place to take your time and look for the small stuff, but nothing bigger than a tarpon. Saw virtually every type of eel in the Caribbean. The sites did start to look alike by the end of the week, though. Very easy access to gear and tanks 24 hours a day and the staff were friendly and helpful. We thought that we would do more shore diving, like Bonaire, but other than a nice site off the resort, we were too lazy. The sites are far from the road and didn't “call to us” like they did in Bonaire. Be sure to do a night dive. Resort nice enough, staff eager to please. Food okay, never bad, never fantastic,

always plenty. A good 45 minutes from Willemstad and few food options near the resort, so the all inclusive is your best bet.

Sunset Waters, August 2006, Amy Clark, Littleton, CO. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm. The staff, Anka, Carl, Carlos, Kevin, Lynn, and Rick, all created a top notch dive experience for us. In this age of “cattle-boat” diving, this was a refreshing change. A genuine group of Divemasters looking to make your trip the best. In only a week, we felt like we were leaving our friends. All our gear was promptly on the boat in the morning, ready for the dive before us. After 2 dives, 60 minutes max bottom dive, our gear was rinsed and stored. The divemasters switch out every couple days, so after a week you can enjoy different personalities and styles. Access to the shop 24 hours and the shore diving is fantastic. The entry is easy and wheelbarrows are available for your gear. A frogfish is a great marker at 55ft. The dive boats are comfortable and have a dry area for clothes and towels. Try to plan your trip in the off season and you may have a private boat! The dive sites are varied, diverse, and a short boat ride. A different site was visited every day and the staff is willing to go where you would like if you are in search of a certain species. The fish life was good not great: turtles, eels, octopus, seahorses, stingrays, etc. Visibility was clear and most of the coral was in good shape. Camera services are available with a separate rinse tank and your digital film is available to be burned on a disk. The resort is clean, comfortable and has a number of activities for your surface interval. A free shuttle takes you into town as well as organized tours to explore the history of Willemstad, sunset cruises, casino nights, and a

visit to the ostrich farm. A pool bar, putt-putt golf course, pool table, and ping pong at the resort. The food was typical of an all-inclusive and lacked a little in variety. This was overcome after the Monday seafood festival with huge lobster tails and the Thursday barbecue party.

Sunset Waters, September 2006, Suzanne Stenson Bedford, TX. (s_stenson@sbcglobal.net), Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. Everyone — dive staff, hotel staff, restaurant staff, shuttle driver — went above and beyond, with a smile, to provide the best service ever. The shore diving on the house reef was great, with a resident frog fish at 55’ straight out from the shore, too many eels to count, and a seahorse. Dive masters kept us entertained between 2-tank boat dives, finding interesting places to snorkel, etc. Best Caribbean dive value for the dollar that we have found!

DOMINICA

Dominica is the best all-around adventure island in the Caribbean, with gorgeous reefs, plenty of reef fish, lush rainforests, hiking, waterfalls, warm water springs, splendid fruits and vegetables, modest hotels and restaurants — and it’s inexpensive. Small seaside hotels and diver retreats are affected by the nearly continuous cloud cover over the mountains, and there’s not much happening beyond residents leading their lives. Expect daytime temperatures in the 80s and night lows around 68 in winter and 73 in summer, although a few minutes up the mountain into the cloud forest can change that. July to November is the wet season. Dominica’s at the