

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](mailto: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

edge of the hurricane belt. The 13-mile, round-trip hike to Boiling Lake is worth getting in condition for.

**Anchorage Hotel and Dive Center, January 2006, Gill Cruz, Pleasanton, CA.** Experience: 2500+ dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm and flat. The dive operation was good and accommodating. Left to do your own thing. Whether you know it or not, the first dive is a checkout by the staff. After that they let you dive at your level of abilities. Lots of fish, nothing big. Walls, hard corals, some soft. Good for beginners/intermediate levels. Dominica is laid-back and way out of the way. Good luck when flying American to San Juan, then transferring to Dominica. We never received our luggage and gear.

**Anchorage Hotel, March 2006, Jim Sherman (arrowlane@direcway.com), Julietta, ID.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy. I booked with Anchorage because I read that Dive Dominica did the cruise ships and ran cattle boats. It was just the opposite. They only had 2 large pontoon boats and one medium size boat to run the dives and whale watching for the hotel and cruise ships. They told me I couldn't dive the 1st day because they were over booked, though I paid for a 5-day package. Then they told the group of almost 30 that they couldn't dive 1 day because they had to do a whale watch and dive for the cruise ship. There was a big protest and they took us out in the afternoon instead of the morning. Our plan was to dive in the mornings and sightsee in the afternoons. They kept changing things around so you never knew when anything was going to happen. Some of the large dive group paid for upgraded rooms but received standard rooms. They still were charged for the

upgrade and the management refused to credit them the difference. Beautiful island and the people are friendly and laid back, except when they are driving. Riding in a cab or bus is a real thrill. They use the horn a lot more than the brakes. The diving could be pretty good if they established a marine park. The locals still make a living from the sea. You could see them fishing in front of the hotel every morning. The result is few large fish. The reefs are some of the better in the Caribbean and there are a lot of small fish.

**Anchorage Hotel and Dive Center, March 2006, Bruce Hall (bruce.a.hall@navy.mil), Kittery, ME.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 74 to 76 F, calm. To experience all that Dominica has to offer, we decided to split our stay between Fort Young Hotel in Roseau and Papillote Wilderness Retreat 5 miles up into the rainforest. Fort Young is a 4 star hotel right on the water with easy access to Roseau. Facilities are in good shape. The Oceanfront rooms are excellent with the older side more spacious (although only 2 double beds) while the rooms on the new side have king size beds but are a little smaller. The food at the hotel was good (for Caribbean fare) but a little pricy. We also ate at the La Robe Creole, across the street, where the food was good and inexpensive and they serve the best rum punch. If you want local food try the Guiyane, the local beer is a \$1.50 and the pastries are good. There were cruise ships every day, sometimes two or three at a time. We dove with Anchorage Dive center for 4 days and were pleased. They picked us up at the Fort Young dock (although they were always late even by Caribbean standards) and the excellent dive sites around Scott's Head were only a 15-minute boat ride away. Dives were all

they were hyped to be, no large animals but a tremendous profusion of life everywhere. The reefs are covered with hard and soft corals and large barrel sponges abound. The small fish cover the reefs with many schools exceeding twenty-thirty members. We saw turtles on almost every dive along with many spotted morays. Favorite sites were Dangleben's Pinnacles, Village and Caribe's Lip. The hot springs at the Champagne dive site are interesting for 5 minutes but the site is mostly a mud flat. The dive masters were friendly, upbeat and clearly enjoyed their job. They pointed out a lot of sea life and allowed everyone to burn off the last of their air at the end of the dive under the boat. Boats were well equipped, clean and always had plenty of water and fruit juice. The second half of the week we spent at Papillote, which is in the rainforest in the Morne Trois Pitons National Park. Our room had an incredible view down the valley and was comfortable but Spartan. This area is so dense with ferns, palms and all manner of tropical foliage that you could imagine King Kong breaking out of the rainforest. The island is mountainous and the flight in from San Juan takes you through the passes with peaks on either side of the plane, shrouded in clouds. The inn lacks AC or a pool but the evenings were always cool and the hot springs baths make up for the lack of a pool. The meal plan at the inn is your only real choice as there are no other restaurants in the area. The food was ok but limited choices. We hiked to Trafalgar Falls from the inn but had to employ a guide for the rest of the hikes, a bit costly but well worth it. Our guide would spend the entire hike explaining the various flora and fauna while cruise ship excursions blew past us on the trail. We did the Fresh Water Lake,

Middleham Falls and the Titu Gorge trips and they were all fabulous.

**Anchorage Hotgel and Dive Center, March 2006, Jill (jifrazee@excite.com), Marquette, MI.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to F, calm, no currents. We brought a group of 15 vacationers to Anchorage Hotel and dive center. The diving was outstanding. Paul, Sherman, and Richard were the best. We saw turtles every day, sting rays, sea horses, octopi, and huge barrel sponges. Water conditions were as calm as we have seen and the temperature was comfortable. The resort was nice; the food was excellent. We had an all-inclusive package; however, our service was nothing to speak of. We did notice that "paying" customers were treated differently. I would suggest checking into cruise ship schedules before planning a dive vacation with this resort. Cruise ships take precedence and without "power in numbers" your vacation may suffer. The island is beautiful, the people are friendly, the activities are reasonable, and diving was exceptional.

**Anchorage Hotel and Dive Center, June 2006, Dave Andel, Athens, IL.** Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. As you approach the island, it looks like you're going to a set of Jurassic Park. The spiral approach was one of the best thrill rides I've been on! It take a few hours to drive over the mountains to get to Roseau. The taxi will take you to a grocery if asked before or after you check in. When getting into a taxi to go into town, always ask what the fare is per person. The set-up for the Anchorage Dive Center was easy. Boats pulled up to the dock right in front of the resort. No lugging tanks and equipment. DMs and staff had everything on the boat ready to go. Started the

week using Miser's Dream, a 60' Cat, more room than any boat we have been on. We would average 16-20 divers a day. Our group had 14. By the end of the week we were on the Passion, a 75' sailing Cat. Great for surface intervals, just lay out on the netting. Between dives water or juice was available, after the last dive, rum punch! The diving was great. Best site was champagne, a lot of small critters, the coral was in great shape. As much to do above water as below. Mountains, rivers, waterfalls, wildlife, and rainforest. Your afternoons can fill up quickly; take time to go to Ti Tou Gorge, Trafalgar Falls and the Indian River (where parts of Pirates of the Caribbean II and III were filmed). The resort was basic. If you want a larger room, get the Oceanfront Rooms; Poolside and Standard rooms are small. Rooms are Spartan. Daily maid service, beds made, fresh towels daily and room cleaned. Restaurant basic fare. Breakfast was filling, ate two dinners there before we ventured out. Great restaurant in Roseau, La Robe Creole, the Green Flash is within walking distance from Anchorage. It rained the night before we left and American cancelled our morning flight. Ended up staying the night at Theona's Courtyard before we could get a flight off the island. UW Photography Comments: Camera bucket (old cooler) on board boat, cleaned out every day. DM or Captain would hand your camera to you after you splashed in.

**Anchorage Hotel, September 2006, Sandra Walzer (blumermaid@msn.com), Littleton, CO.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 35 to 40 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, choppy. The catamaran, The Passion, was totally unsuited for divers in that it had no platform to put on gear and enter the water from. Exiting the water was equally difficult. When

we returned from our dive, there was water, but not enough juice for everyone and no snacks. The crew was amicable, but seemed disorganized. I was a passenger on Windjammer's Polynesia, which made the dive arrangements. There were quite a few divers on the ship and they did take out small groups of divers in their motorized inflatable, and did some shore dives. Due to the hurricanes, the waters were not particularly clear anywhere in the West Indies. There were a great many barrel and tube sponges, sea fans and small fauna, but only small fish. The dives were pretty, but not spectacular. As for "Windjammin it," it is definitely camping at sea. However, the food was good and the crew worked hard to see that everyone had a good time.

**Anchorage Hotel, September 2006, Chuck Wohlust (gchas1@aol.com), Winter Park, FL.** Experience: 225 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm and flat. The Anchorage is a little tired but the convenience of the dive shop made it worth it. The small boat (Anchorage Dive) reported in your September 2006 newsletter is gone and updated with a newer boat. The dive operation was good. Our DM was Sherman and he worked hard to make each dive memorable. We enjoyed his wonderful attitude. Mostly wall dives were great — healthy coral and lots of small tropical fish. Food was OK. We did eat out at several other places, including the Evergreen 2 doors down, LaRobe and the Yacht Inn (Thai food). Castle Comfort next door closes all September. Beautiful island but due to rains, trails were muddy so we did not get to enjoy the island interior.

**Dive Dominica, Castle Comfort Lodge, November 2005, Peter Bunce (phbunce@yahoo.com), St. Louis, MO.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm. Had to spend a night in San Juan each direction. We stayed in Old San Juan (a reasonable cab ride from air port) in La Taverna, a nifty and affordable hotel, and found good places to eat. Arrived early afternoon at Dominica. Met by the hotel's contracted van — an hour drive over the mountain to Castle Comfort. The drive is fun because this is a spectacularly beautiful volcanic island, with still active volcanic action — most notably a boiling lake that takes a day to hike to (we did not do it) and Champagne, a pretty dive spot with warm bubbles percolating from the shallow bottom. Over half the island is a nature preserve, and it is verdant, mountainous and beautiful. An easy afternoon excursion to Trafalgar falls was wonderful. Castle Comfort is a tight little self-contained dive resort; simple, pleasant rooms, oriented toward the water around, a small grassy courtyard with hot tub and bar. Food is not great but edible. We preferred to eat lunch and dinners elsewhere and found some pleasant, simple places within walking or taxi distance. (Dominica is not a gourmet destination.) The diving set-up is good and right at our doorstep. Divemasters are locals, competent and fun. We never were crowded in the boats — same crew all week. They had fun. So did we. Underwater: No big stuff. lots of great macro — seahorses on every dive, yellow frog fish, black, spotted and snake eels, other good stuff and fairly lush underwater scenery teeming with life. (However, a fair amount of bleached coral — which we had not encountered two years ago.) This is a gemutlich destination, and not just for the diving.

**Dive Dominica, Castle Comfort Dive Lodge, February 2006, Scott Vickers (markwscottv@msn.com), Denver,**

**CO.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, calm. Dominica is an ex-British colony and still a member of the Commonwealth, struggling to cobble together a viable economy centered around eco-tourism, both land- and sea-based. This is not an easy task, but Dominicans have several things going for them: plenty of fresh water (rainfall averages around 350 inches per year!); a beautiful and sometimes challenging terrain, with mountainous rainforest covering much of the island; healthy reefs teeming with abundant sea life; and, last but not least, a “can-do” attitude and friendly populace (at least among those lucky enough to be employed). The Castle Comfort couldn't be more appropriately named. Although some rooms face the busy street outside its confines, most face into the well-kept grounds and dock area. Three delicious meals are served daily (breakfast and dinner are included in the packages), and the similarly comfortable resort hotels on either side—the Anchorage and the Evergreen—also welcome non guests for lunch. The second of two large cities to the north, Roseau is somewhat ramshackle (except for the magnificent Fort Young Hotel and the Botanic Gardens), but is easily accessible by van jitneys that ply the narrow road for a small fee. You can also walk to Roseau, but the road has precious little shoulder (no sidewalks) and drivers weave in and out to avoid potholes and each other—it's a little scary. Regardless, we found a good restaurant there specializing in Creole food, and another south of us that featured American home cookin' (the Green Flash) that was exceptional. The ex-pat American owner even gave us a ride back after we ate, to save us the fearsome walk. Rooms over the dive shop (14-17) are the most spacious and

quiet, and all rooms offer TV, but only one U.S. AC outlet per room, so bring a voltage converter for British DC. The hotel staff was uniformly friendly and helpful, and the food was great, though not gourmet. The lead bartender, Rolle, makes a mean rum punch using his own ground-spice mixture, and plays a rollicking good accordion for your (and his) enjoyment. Dive Dominica (run by Derek Perryman, a real gentleman) has a fleet of five or six boats – one reserved for whale-watching trips, another for cruise ship passengers that dock in Roseau, and the others for servicing Castle Comfort. We usually went out on a large vessel with plenty of room for 12 or more divers, tanks, a head, and easy egress and return (2 ladders). Reggie is the most experienced dive master, watchful of his divers and knowledgeable about the reefs and currents. (Currents can be stiff on the windward side of Scott's Head at the south end of the island, but elsewhere along the southwest coast there were none.) The subaquatic topography is volcanic, and thus offers some truly awesome walls (such as La Sorciere ["The Sorceress"] and L'Abym ["The Abyss"], which overhangs about 10 degrees and drops straight off into the deep trench), intriguing pinnacles, canyons, gullies, and craters (such as the large Scott's Head Crater). The reefs are especially lush along this stretch between the villages of Soufriere and Scott's Head, and the boat ride down the coast offers spectacular views of Dominica's mile-high volcanic peaks and rainforest. At Soufriere Pinnacles and Champagne, divers experience bubbling gas vents and warm-water pockets from the volcanic activity around the island. Fish and critter life is abundant, though we saw no groupers or other eating-size fish save a few jacks and barracuda). Aside from a plethora

of the usual Caribbean tropicals, we saw sharp-tailed and spotted eels, a webbed burrfish, a reef scorpion fish, two sea-horses, and many varieties of shrimp, lobster (including a Spanish slipper lobster), and crabs. The so-called muck dive off the Castle Comfort pier offered up flying gurnards, a batfish, juvenile burrfish and French angels, and a lesser electric ray. All the reefs are rich in huge barrel and tube sponges, multicolored crinoids, anemones, gorgonians, branch coral, and many gigantic feather-duster worms of all colors. Take land-based tours of the interior, such as Boiling Lake, Trafalgar Falls, and Titou Gorge – the mostly undeveloped interior is lush, breathtaking, and pristine for a developing country. Dominica needs a new airport badly

**Dive Dominica, Castle Comfort Dive Lodge, April 2006, David Reubush (davereubush@cox.net), Toano, VA.**

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 70 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, choppy. Diving is generally easy with a current on only one dive and the coral generally healthy. Dominica is a relatively poor island with considerable subsistence fishing which results in almost no large fish. There are loads of bristle worms, anemones with anemone crabs and shrimp, juvenile spotted drum, golden morays, etc. (Five years ago there were abundant frog fish and seahorses. The frog fish are gone and we only saw 3 seahorses all week.) There are also lots of urchins, crinoids of various colors, spotted morays (we saw several free-swimming in the daytime), adult spotted drum, yellow-spotted snake eels, and a host of other small tropical fish. We saw 3 of the largest hawksbill turtles I have ever seen. There are whales in the area and we saw several humpbacks after one day's diving. The boat captain delayed returning to

Castle Comfort and moved the boat to the area of where the whales had been spotted and we ended up with 2 of them right next to the boat. There are tanks available 24/7 for shore diving. The shore diving is in 15 - 20 ft. of water over a boulder bottom, but the rocks are full of life. We stayed down for 90 minutes on one dive and I would have stayed down longer, but my wife was ready to get out. Deeper beyond the rocks is sand with some of the largest garden eels I have ever seen. The dive masters and boat crew are all friendly and helpful. While following the dive masters was encouraged, there was never a problem for anyone (mainly photographers) to go off on their own. The surface interval was generally almost an hour. The max dive time was never rigidly enforced, but peer pressure encouraged not stretching things out as many people came back, showered, ate lunch, and went on an afternoon tour. Food at Castle Comfort is good. There is a menu for breakfast and lunch (lunch costs extra), but, particularly for breakfast, they will make just about anything you want (if they have it). At dinner you typically would have a choice of two entrees. A lot of the dinner side dishes were island food and were not recognizable to most Americans, but were all good. The beds were past their prime. We flew through San Juan and found that 2 hours is not enough time to make connections. Going down we missed our connection and had to spend the night in San Juan courtesy of US Airways, but we lost a day of diving. Coming back we missed our connection and got upgraded to first class on the next 2 flights courtesy of Caribbean Sun Airlines, but our bags did not get home for another 24 hours. UW Photography Comments: While they advertise a 110-volt outlet

for battery charging in every room the only 110 outlet I found was in the bathroom and was intended for shavers. I used it for charging my batteries, but it required a 2 round prong adapter like that used in Europe. The rest of the 220 volt receptacles in the room were of the 3 flat prong variety.

**Dive Dominica, Evergreen Hotel, April 2006, Jackie Bartilucci, Marlton, NJ.** ([jbartilucci@comcast.net](mailto:jbartilucci@comcast.net)), Experience: 500+ dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm and flat. Lots to do topside. Rain forest and lots of hiking trails. Great dive operation – knowledgeable and helpful crew. Saw sperm whales while whale watching. Dive crew diligent about surface intervals. Lousy airplane rides – missed connection and lost luggage (American Air). Food at hotel wonderful. Scary medical service.

**Dive Dominica, Fort Young Hotel, May 2006, John Gibbs, Twin Lake, MI.** ([gilvie@comcast.net](mailto:gilvie@comcast.net)) Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 Feet. Water: 80 F, surge. Most of the divers on our boat were from Castle Comfort (Dive Dominica's home base), but we opted to stay at the Fort Young Hotel on the edge of Dominica's capital city, Rouseau. The hotel offers a small dive shop, rinse tank and dock where we were picked up each morning at 0830 by Dive Dominica. The Fort Young Hotel, although a bit pricier than a stay at Castle Comfort, offers much nicer accommodations. Rooms are all air-conditioned, most with refrigerators. Hot water is plentiful. Beds were clean and comfortable. The hotel, built within the remains of an old fort, offers 2 swimming pools, a well stocked bar, an open air restaurant overlooking the ocean, and another, the finest restaurant in Rouseau on site. The food was always well prepared and varied. The diving is best around Scotts

Head Point (Don't miss 'Condominiums'). Both hard and soft coral large and healthy. Many schools of varied fish, seahorses, turtles, etc. No pelagics. However, one day a school of Frasier dolphins followed us back to shore. Dive Dominica usually runs with 8 to 10 divers. (One day a crowd of 16 divers on board elicited cries of "cattle car." The following day we were split into two boats.) The divemasters change from day to day but all seem knowledgeable, helpful and friendly. Fresh water and fruit juice on board. Tanks always filled to 3000psi. Coral bleaching and algae growth were evident as well as less plentiful fish, particularly on the shallow dives.

**Dive Dominica, Ft. Young Hotel, July 2006, Lourdes De Cardenas (delfin\_boricua@yahoo.com), San Juan, PR.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 Fahrenheit, calm. I went alone to dive — got placed in a group of about 12 divers from a Georgia dive club. Diving was good, with several small critters: seahorses, mantis shrimp, jawfish, pike blennies. I was surprised that no frogfish were found — divemasters indicated they were all over before the last Caribbean water warming event, after which the frogfish were very difficult to spot. The hotel was OK, yet not great, although it offered good value. Meals were OK. The island is lush, full of vegetation, lakes, sulfur springs and hiking opportunities, a true "Pirates of the Caribbean" gem. Took the whale watching trip and saw a sperm whale, several false killer whales and a pod of dolphins.

**Nature Island Divers, Gallette Cottage, March 2006, Dale Treadway (trdwy@tconl.com), Omaha, NE.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 90 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm,

no currents. Getting there from USA requires a layover night in San Juan unless you start from the East Coast. Best Western Airport is convenient with Old San Juan shops and dining worth a few hours. Gallette Cottage is owned by Dive operation and it was fully equipped, clean and located right on the ocean. We had the top level of cottage and lower level was separate. The wave action on the rock coast was loud. We enjoyed but it might bother some. It was an easy 5 minute walk to fishing village of Soufriere dive shop and a 15 minute walk south to the fishing village of Scotts Head. Nice interactions with friendly locals. From airport our taxi stopped in the capital of Roseau to purchase staples for breakfast and snacks. Tony's café in Surfriere had wonderful fish and fries. Forest Bistro is a "taste of Dominica" experience. In addition there was several cafe's in the village of Scotts Head with fish and chicken as main menu items. The dive operation has great boats that are spacious, great ladders, short times to dive sites and small numbers of divers. Many dives were just wife and I, but never more than 5. They handled and cleaned all dive gear, were safety minded and helpful if needed. Dive briefing was good and they tended to lead the dive pointed out a few things but mostly letting you do your own dive. Many schools of smaller fish and all the small tropicals. There was amazing coral color and micro life. Several great wall and pinnacle dives. Nice swim-throughs and cleaning stations. 5 to 10 minutes to dive sites.

**Nature Island Dive, Gallette Cottage, March 2006, Darren Dawson (darren.dawson@ces.clemson.edu), Clemson, SC.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. Simon and rest of the DMs at Nature Island Dive in Soufriere accommodated

our requests for specific dive sites and we got to visit a couple of new sites besides some old favorites. You simply couldn't ask for a better crew to dive with – Simon, Wefee, Oscar, Tony and Selwynl. Be advised that they do operate on “island time” – could be frustrating if you are trying to stick to a tight schedule for some reason. Since people from some of the resorts away from Soufriere book dives with NID, you often end up waiting for them to arrive – sometimes half an hour late, then get geared up, etc. The weather was great during our stay every day except for one when it rained on and off all day. Bugs are not a problem here. We never used insect repellent at the cottage or while diving. The only time we used it (as a precaution) was when we had dinner one evening at an outdoor restaurant in a heavily wooded area. On the way back, our Caribbean Star flight to Antigua was cancelled and we had to catch a later flight to Antigua, leaving us at the Dominica airport (small, hot, remote) for 5 hours waiting for the next flight to Antigua. Our schedule was changed to spend the night in Antigua, then catch an early flight to San Juan with a connection to Charlotte in the afternoon. In San Juan and discovered that all flights to Charlotte that afternoon were over booked and we did not have confirmed seats that Caribbean Star had booked us on. The best that we could arrange was stand-by; we made it and it was filled to capacity with no empty seats. Lodging. We were quite happy with the upper unit of the NID cottage and really enjoyed sitting on the porch overlooking the bay while we were there. It is simple and peaceful – no phone, radio, TV, or computer – a nice change of pace. The upper unit has wooden louvers in the bedroom and living room that

open out to the porch, making the unit light, open and breezy. Another couple was staying in the lower unit this year so we checked it out. We did not like it nearly as much. It seemed dark and closed-in – not open and airy like the upper unit. Diving: The consistently great topography, vivid colors, and large sponge and coral formations are what sets Dominica apart from the other dive locations. We dove the southern sites in Scott's Head Bay and around on the Atlantic side in the Martinique Channel at the southern end of the island. (Fort Young is in Rosseau – meaning that the boat rides to the southern sites are quite a bit longer and they don't do all their diving at the southern sites.) NID uses pontoon boats that have plenty of space (especially the larger boat). Most of the sites can be reached in 5-15 minutes from the dock, and the boat typically returns to the shop between dives.

**Nature Island Divers, March 2006,  
Rick Cavanaugh Ellicott City, MD.**

(rickcavanaugh@comcast.net), Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm, currents. I am an avid underwater photographer and I am partial to locations with good photography, both wide angle and especially macro. We dove with Nature Island divers and stayed at their cottages located in Soufriere. You two main choices for dive operators in Soufriere Scotts head Marine Reserve are Dive Dominica and Nature Island. The best diving is located in Soufriere Scotts head Marine Reserve. This is as far from the airport as you can get on this island. The taxi ride is about 1 hour and is scenic and expensive. It is about \$60 one way. The roads are twisty and steep. There are few road signs. Take the taxi. If you are staying in the cottages, the taxi will stop off in town at the grocery store so you can

pickup provisions. Buy plenty. There is almost no shopping in Soufriere. Meals in Soufriere/Scotts Head are fish or chicken. Knowing this, do not buy fish or chicken at the grocery store. The cottages have 2 Units. The upstairs unit is smaller and is mostly dark wood. It has a larger deck. The downstairs unit is larger and has a nicer layout. It has a small sitting room that could be used as a second bedroom. The kitchen/dining area downstairs is much nicer. However the downstairs unit has a much smaller deck. No matter which one you choose, both are quite nice compared with other choices in Soufriere/Scotts Head. There are few restaurants on this side of the island. The food choice was chicken or fish. No choices on how it was prepared, just chicken or fish. I do not eat fin fish so, I ate a lot of chicken. The Rain Forest Bistro (Andre's) is a must visit. It is located up the mountain a little at Andre's House. Reservations must be made a couple of days in advance. Again, it is chicken or fish, but he is a farmer and grows his own fruits and vegetables. You will get some interesting local fruits and vegetables. He has the best food on that side of the island. Nature Island Divers use small boats and they do not put more than 8 divers to a boat and when it is that crowded there will be 2 dive masters. Usually there were only 4 divers to a boat. Some dives were only 2 divers. The dive masters are locals who have been diving the area for quite sometime. They know where the critters are and are excellent in pointing them out. Surface intervals are at the shop since the sites are so close. The marine reserve is located at a fishing village. They have fished this area to death. The fishermen will throw stones into the water to scare the fish into the nets. There were a couple of sites where the fishermen have destroyed the coral

with the stones. The good news is that there is a huge amount of large colorful sponges with colorful crinoids surrounding it. The colors are fantastic. It is easy to shoot 100 wide angle photos on one dive. I have never seen so many crinoids anywhere. For those who are far sighted and do not like hunting for macro life there are many scenic sites with beautiful panoramic views. Most of these sites are around Scotts Head Pinnacle. There is some coral bleaching. Most of the Caribbean experienced a bleaching event in 2005 and Dominica was effected as well. About 50% of the brain coral is bleached and it does not look like it will recover well. Overall color of the area is excellent due to the amount of sponges present. The area is also good for Macro Photography. Seahorses, leech head sea slugs, lettuce sea slugs, miniature melo, squat anemone shrimp, spotted cleaner shrimp, mantis shrimp, bumble bee shrimp, crinoid shrimp, sea whip shrimp, Pederson cleaner shrimp, regal slipper lobster, stareye hermits, neck crabs and quite a few things that I could not find in any book! If you like muck dives, dive the sandy area around the site Champagne. We did a dive with dive master Oscar that lasted 1 hour and 55 minutes in the Champagne area. I was amazed at some of the life we found. It is an incredible dive if you go slow enough and look! Champagne itself is not overly interesting, the grassy area around it is! We saw a few turtles, juvenile drum fish, sea horses, honeycomb moray, chain moray, sharp tail eel, spotted spoon nose eel, juvenile French angel fish, flying gurnard, and other more common Caribbean fish. We did not see any frog fish on this trip. The dive masters have not been able to find them recently.

**Nature Island Dive, May 2006, Phil Stasik (stasik@cfl.rr.com), Merritt**

**Island, FL.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm, no currents. Previous *Undercurrent* reports led us to this well organized and laid-back operation that respects experienced divers. We only did five dives in a two-day period, but we dove exclusively at Dominica's best locations in the Soufriere/Scotts Head Marine Reserve. The dramatic and interesting volcanic topography of the island continues below sea level. The igneous rock forms beautiful ledges and truly vertical walls that drop to thousands of feet below. The massive sponges, dense gorgonians, plentiful anemones, and diverse fish life rival anything we've seen anywhere! We saw a few turtles and sea horses but not a lot of pelagics. We called Nature Island Dive only a couple of days before our short visit and they were totally accommodating. The small, somewhat Spartan shop owns a beautiful, two-unit cottage that is located directly on the rocky shoreline, about 1/4 mile south of Soufriere. We rented the fully equipped lower unit that has twin beds and a sleeper sofa plus a full kitchen and an awesome balcony. There is no TV, radio, or air-conditioning. The temperatures were a bit warm in the evening, but every window opens, providing good sea breeze/land breeze cross flow. Occasional road noise and the song of breaking waves provided a yin/yan of white noise. Restaurants are few in Soufriere and Scotts Head, so it is advisable to pick up some groceries when passing through Roseau. At the simple restaurants we found, fried chicken and fried fish were the staples. Nature Island Dive owns two aluminum "six-pack" and one larger aluminum dive boat, all with lots of space, and a nifty fold down entry platform/ladder. They are equipped with oxygen kits, flares, and a cell phone. Since the

shop is directly on the marine park shoreline, they don't have much of a need to go more than a ten minute ride from the town's small floating dock. As expected, divers return to shore following each dive, and this allows an easy walk back to the cottage for lunch or a chance to hang out with the nice staff. They take care of all of your gear at the end of the dive day. Both divemasters that guided us, (Simon and Oscar), were outstanding. They expected that we dive our own profile and computers. Our longest dive exceeded an hour. The Scotts Head location is the southwestern tip of Dominica and provides walls and pinnacles at the confluence of the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. Currents were mild to nonexistent and the surface had light chop at worst. The hard coral is quite healthy, but there was some widely-scattered evidence of bleaching. There is an abundance of crinoids in all colors, a lot of them residing in the plentiful azure vase sponges. We saw many spotted and golden tailed morays on every dive. We enjoyed following a golden tail and a coney on a classic symbiotic hunting expedition. Cleaning stations were everywhere, and Pederson shrimp were eager to give manicures. We enjoyed a few swim throughs including a cave filled with barred soldier fish. Large fish included one large grouper, one barracuda, one cerro, and possibly one tuna. There were schools of Creole wrasses, blue and brown chromises, and a variety of bait balls. The entire staff was knowledgeable and friendly. They told us that the EU has provided some developmental funds to install a 4-person hyperbaric chamber. The partnership of Karen and Simon seemed to be among the leaders of this small island's dive community and they promote sustainable, low-impact use

of the underwater preserve. Soufriere is generally sleepy. The island was created by a large number of volcanoes, seven of which are still active. The waterfalls, hot springs, boiling lake, trails, mountains, and birds are legendary. Nature Island Dive has a fleet of bikes and kayaks and divemaster/boat captain, Selwyn, serves as a naturalist tour guide. Driving Dominica's narrow, winding, mountainous roads is a test of skill and nerves. We took two hours to drive our Suzuki rental SUV from the airport (on the northeast coast) across the World Heritage Site Rainforest through the Caribbean-urban streets of the capital Roseau down to Soufriere. A 4WD vehicle is a must for exploring. Driving can be fun if you allow plenty of time and keep your eyes open. Driving is done in the left lane, in the English tradition. The locals were quite friendly — speaking mostly Creole, but fluent English as well. We were approached by several folks begging or peddling mangoes, papayas, bananas or coconuts.

## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

While few Americans visit, it's a popular and well-developed tourist destination for Europeans, with plenty of all-inclusive hotels on nice beaches. Diving is subpar.

**Dressel Divers, Iberostar Bavaro, September 2006, Frank Nelson (teach1@nb.net), N. Huntingdon, PA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 2 to 25 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm, choppy. Divemaster/Instructor Leo was professional in leading both experienced and newbie divers. Made sure everyone had all gear and was functioning and all were comfortable in water, took experienced divers into cave-like structure while making newbies stay at entrance,

The Atlantic side was terrible, with surge and poor viz. The beach was polluted with seaweed and rough waves. Iberostar Bavaro nice place to stay. It's all-inclusive. Specialty restaurants good, gourmet restaurant excellent — get the lobster salad. Wednesday night buffet is lobster (excellent) — it is all you can eat. What is left over is served on the beach Thursday for lunch. Room nice but had only one drawer. Rooms have a refrigerator and the maid stocks it daily. There are 3 Iberostars here and all share privileges with each other; however, only the Bavaro can book Bavaro specialty restaurant. I just wish I had known that the diving was going to be bad and that maybe we should have booked another Iberostar that is on the other side (Caribbean). From talking to others, it would seem to be a good idea. They charge \$88 to take you to the Caribbean side from the Atlantic side and this does not include the price of diving. It is about an hour and a half ride in both directions. Roads are not nice. Resort people and dive shop personnel were friendly. Nothing set up for UWP. Must carry everything but tank thru beach, jump into small outboard (gets hairy when ocean is rough) and then transfer to another boat (watch your step). Hold your camera for dear life when ocean is rolling — nothing stopping it from rolling or falling.

**Pelicano Watersports and Dressel Divers, Ocean Blue and Iberostar Bayahibe, February 2006, Irwin Danto (irwindanto@aol.com), Detroit, MI.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 5 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 77 F, choppy, surge. Trying to make advance plans was difficult as most diver operators spoke poor English. There are 40+ mostly all-inclusive resorts on the east end of the Dominican Republic in Punta Cana. Transportation between resorts is diffi-