

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

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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

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

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

does not want any suggestions. Aquatic Adventures charters either the Aggressor or the Nekton for the two-month whale season and I might suggest seeing which boat he has not chartered and go with that one – he was that annoying. Despite this drawback, it was a wonderful experience. If you fly into Santiago instead of Puerto Plata, be prepared to make all your own arrangements (hotels, sightseeing, etc.) as Aquatic Adventures knows nothing about that city though they suggest it as a possible city to fly into.

Nekton Rorqual, March 2006, Paulino Gonzalez (scubaextreme@hotmail.com), New Port Richey, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm, choppy, no currents. Tom Conlin, the animal behaviorist, ran two quiet boats that held a maximum of 8 divers. No scuba is allowed since this would scare the whales. “Soft u/w encounters” done in a nonthreatening manner. Stayed 6 hours with a mother and calf pair that allowed interaction. Rest of days were “flybys,” where we saw them briefly, but did not want to interact. Definitely a different experience from normal diving. You feel that the animals are intelligent and it becomes “an alien encounter experience.” Different from organized shark dives, it is addictive! Capt. Nelson ran a first rate operation, crew was always helpful, would delay lunches to let us continue interaction with whales. An intense, incredible experience! UW Photography Comments: Excellent operation, superb facilities. Charging stations, dedicated camera tables.

GRENADA

Wind Dancer, August 2006, Tom Doeppner (twd@cs.brown.edu), War-

ren, RI. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, surge. We were disappointed in this trip. Though the crew was great, the diving was mediocre. Visibility was generally poor. Diving was from a tender and all were supposed to stick with the divemaster. If you took too long taking photographs, it was likely that the rest of the group would have gone on and were no longer visible. I spent much of the dives trying to catch up with the group after taking photos. The 45-minute limit on dives was necessary, they said, so that they could fit in 5 dives a day, though if they started earlier and finished later they could have allowed more bottom time. The boat and crew were new to the area, so they weren't terribly familiar with the dive sites. The combination of poor visibility and lack of interesting subject matter made for not a great photographic experience. The crew were friendly and really tried to make sure people were having a good time. Though the food was unexciting, there was plenty of it and it was served with good cheer. All alcohol was free, with the usual restriction of no diving after drinking. The captain was quite amenable to taking input on where to go. The boat seemed a bit on the shabby side — though the cabins were clean, they were showing their age. Reading lights were barely adequate. Anyone suffering from claustrophobia should stay away from the bottom bunks.

Wind Dancer, September 2006, Eldon Okazaki, Sunnyvale, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm, currents. The worry of hurricanes and bad weather was forgotten once underway. The motor was noisy; so hard to sleep during nights of motoring along. Weather was good all week. The only female divemaster (also she was purser) was Kelsey.