

dive sites. They were all sympathetic about their limitations which truthfully have become a burden to those operators who are trying to run a 1st class dive boat but must focus on servicing the greater world populated by “resort divers.” I wanted to emphasize that the diving in the Bayahibe area was nice. I unfortunately missed the manta ray with an 8-foot wing span that the rest of the dive group had the opportunity to briefly swim with. Even while diving in the Punta Cana area where much of the reef life is dead there is still plenty of interesting topology and always some good small stuff to see. The diving staff made a good effort struggling to converse in broken English and used it as the universal language for briefings or instructions. At least half the divers on any given trip were from Europe. A dive guide looking at an unfamiliar dive computer displaying 500 psi could interpret the numbers as 50.0 bars. Seeing 50 bars would translate to 725 psi — a low, but still healthy amount of air. On any given dive most of the European divers and some European dive staff were using bars to monitor their gas supply. In Punta Cana it was sad to witness so many dive staff personnel with good attitudes constrained by financial limitations on the services.

Scuba Caribe, April 2006, Tom Chase (trchase@msn.com), Prospect, KY.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 90 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, choppy. Punta Cana is a beautiful beach resort area. It is not a good diving area. Scuba Caribe caters to people taking resort courses. We could not go outside the reef because of high surf. The sites are limited and the coral is pretty beat up. Very little in terms of fish life. My 14-year-old daughter finished her Open Water referral at this location. Her course was SSI and Scuba Caribe is PADI. Though

we were told via email we could do a normal referral, they made her repeat the pool work and take the PADI exam (though she had already completed the SSI pool training and passed the SSI exam). They did a nice job working with her and provided good one on one instruction. We took a two-tank excursion to Catalina Island (also through Scuba Caribe) and that was much better. It takes a full day, but CI has healthy coral and a nice wall dive. There is not much in the way of fish. At the end of the dive, they had an excellent barbeque and beach party. The trip back to the mainland was a regular party boat. It was fun, but not a place for serious divers.

GRENADA

Hurricane Ivan wreaked havoc on Grenada in September 2004, but the infrastructure has been rebuilt. While diving is fine for beginners, some operators are trying to give more experienced divers a better ride.

Aquanauts Divers, True Blue Resort, November 2005, Bill Schlegel, Jefferson City, MO. Experience: 600+

dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 85 F. My Cochran computer said up to 87 F. Currents: mostly nothing except one planned drift dive where there was about a 2-knot current. Electric outlets are North American, but they frequently had these alongside European outlets. Only swatted a mosquito occasionally. Water is drinkable. We had rain showers for a few minutes almost daily, followed by rainbows. Then blue skies and sun. True Blue Resort is delightful. They have a series of accommodations ranging from nice and clean double rooms to apartments and condos. The

regular rooms are clean and large. They all have a kitchen, refrigerator, television with a few cable channels, and almost unlimited hot water with a huge bathroom along with daily maid service. The apartments and condos are all slightly different and I only visited them but some are huge with two stories and several bedrooms that could hold a large family or 6 or more divers. Some have whirlpools indoors. All have beautiful ocean views. There are two pools including one endless horizon pool and there was also a small beach. Kayaks and catamarans along with trail bikes were available for rent. Many resort paths are covered with crushed nutmeg husks, a byproduct of the island's spice industry. Quaint and fragrant. The resort offers one week packages with variations on meals included. The meals are all quite tasty and presented in a quaint dining pavilion on pilings over the water. The buffet breakfast was acceptable and one could order an omelet or something in addition. Lunch was more varied, from a menu, and with a special of the day and good seafood. Dinner was good enough that many locals came there. There is a sports bar/restaurant called Bananas within walking distance. There are quite acceptable restaurants within a short cab ride on the island. I particularly like The Aquarium, 3 to 4 star food, moderately pricey and on the beach with a great sunset view. The owner of True Blue was busy finishing up repairs from Hurricane Ivan which devastated the island, but still visited with the guests. The help was friendly and helpful to an extent only seen in the best resorts in the US. Aquanauts Divers is next to True Blue, connected by a board walk but is a separate business. We had Paul and Ned as dive-masters for most of the week. Ned was trained

as a marine biologist so he could give more than the average pointers about the reefs. His talk on coral bleaching, given during a surface interval one day, was one of the best explanations I've heard. One of the smoothest resort dive operations I've seen as far as checking out the divers and we frequently had 1 hour dives when conditions and depth allowed. They provide Nitrox but only 30% as they frequently will guide their customers to 110 - 140 feet and want a reasonably deep MOD. They will smoothly assess your abilities and let you dive them. The two approximately 40 foot inboards are safe with oxygen on board, careful roll-calls and other reasonable rules. Both boats have heads, radios, nice dive ladders, camera tables and camera rinse tanks. They will readily assist anyone up the ladders. Every diver was issued a safety sausage, without charge, and instructed in its use. We dove several large wrecks, in progressively deeper water, 80, 100, 110 130 feet. The Bianca-C is an approximately 600 foot long Italian cruise ship that went down in the 1960s, in about 160 feet of water. Her decks and superstructure are at 100 feet. There is a lot of coral bleaching and black-band disease. There are few medium to large reef fish, probably due to subsistence fishing by the locals. They are trying to phase this out but the older locals claim a right to fish. The soft corals and fans were better than some heavily trampled places like Cozumel. Most diving was on the west side of the island, with these conditions. When we dived the rougher southeastern or Atlantic side, the visibility was better, the coral healthier with less bleaching, there were bigger fish and lots of reef critters like reef crabs and lobsters. Someone even saw a shark. However, the current was fairly brisk (fun) and the seas can get

rough over there. Try to get them to take you to the Atlantic side, unless you want to dive the wrecks.

Aquanauts Adventures, True Blue Resort, March 2006, Gabriel I. Peñagaricano (guigo34@hotmail.com), Guaynabo, PR. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 86 F, calm. Outstanding group of professionals. The dives are all drift dives, mostly for the comfort of the divers. There was something for everyone: monster wrecks, healthy, large reefs (one drift dive was for 50 minutes and all uninterrupted over the same reef). I could see the miniature blenny which received a full page photograph in the recent edition of one of the diving magazines. It was on the wreck of the Shakem. The signature wreck, the Bianca C, is worth three or four dives to better appreciate it: the Andrea Doria of the Caribbean. The dive boats are in excellent condition and the staff could not be better qualified. Five dives over two days did not do justice to all there is to enjoy underwater.

Aquanauts Dive, True Blue Bay Resort, May 2006, Jamie Pollack (JamieLynn@IntElecSys.com), New York, NY. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, calm. With a nonstop flight leaving from New York I can arrive in Grenada in 5 hours' time. The boats from Aquanauts are big and have lots of space. Two divemasters, Bruce and Reese, were excellent at helping with gear and showing us all the great sites and critters underwater. The owners of the dive shop, Gerlinde and Peter, run a great and safe operation. We broke down on the way to dive the Bianca C. They came out in another boat right away and Peter and the Dive Masters were working to fix the engine. Soon we were

on our way. The dive shop is attached to the resort so it's easy for divers to get to. The resort offers breakfast with your room rate and it's pretty good. The food in general at True Blue was excellent but expensive. The service is quite slow and if you are trying to catch the afternoon dive and want to have lunch, well, let's just say you will have to eat and run. As far as the reefs go, Grenada has some excellent dives to offer. The reefs are in excellent condition, lots of fish and great wrecks. I even saw a seahorse! The people of Grenada are friendly and love to party. UW Photography Comments: Boats have large area for storing cameras and separate rinse bucket

HONDURAS

All dive resorts are in the bay islands: Roatan, Utila, Cayos Cochinos, all home to aggressive no-see-ums — some people have serious allergic reactions. Those without DEET may find their vacations ruined. The diving features nice walls, offshore seamounts, and excellent coral and gorgonians, although there are few large fish. Whale sharks are common near Utila roughly February through May and boats from Roatan are chasing them too. Some Roatan resorts have easy beach diving. The rainy season is October through February, and can disrupt the diving. Spanish is spoken on the mainland, English on the Bay Islands. Classic Central American jungles and Mayan ruins inland make great mainland trips. Malaria protection is advised.