

does not want any suggestions. Aquatic Adventures charts 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.

She gave the V sign during a briefing to signify that if you ran out of air, she takes Visa or MasterCard. Then, on the 5th day, instead of writing the usual stuff on the slate for safety, etc., she wrote “blah, blah, blah.” The night we had turkey for dinner, she claimed they had to catch pelican, that’s why dinner took so long. The most unusual stuff were large stingrays, spotted rays and small critters. No seahorses. Food was usually tasty. The crew and divers were mostly friendly and fun.

**Wind Dancer, September 2006, Juli Tracy and Dick Gamble, San Diego, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm. Perhaps because this is a new itinerary for the boat, and perhaps because many of the crew were fairly new and the captain was a relief captain, the boat was disorganized. Starting from the first night aboard, there was no safety briefing (which we finally had one Monday, two days later), then the next morning, although we had arrived at the dive site in the wee hours, our first dive was not until after 10AM. We divers were a little eager to get in the water! (Although, once we did, the water was green and murky — Grenada was not good diving) The tenders were fairly easy to dive off of, but not easy to get back onto. Back rolls were the entry, and seating, even with a BC on, was easy on the way to the sites, usually not far. But the ladders back on tilt under the boat, so unless the dive crew helped by pulling up the air tank as you climbed up (and even then), it was difficult to climb back up the ladder. St. Vincent and the Grenadines provided better diving, but we seemed to lose a few dives there, too, as things were always running late. The last day we had two morning dives, then were motoring during the time of the first afternoon dive, supposedly

passing by the scheduled dive because current was too strong, so didn’t have two afternoon dives. (Thursday, not Friday, the usual “only two dives” day, and, by the way, the one dive we did do had current so strong that we were tumbled around like leaves and most of us did a less than 30 minute dive.) Friday was supposed to be a wreck dive, but we were told that the current was too strong — later we talked to other divers from the island who dove it just fine. Food was good at dinner, so-so at lunch, lacking condiments such as cheese, onions or pickles, for the burgers, or for the sandwiches. Ran out of some dishes on a few days at lunch and ran out of eggs for breakfast Friday. Communication on board was terrible. We had a captain’s briefing only when we specifically asked him to tell us what was going on, and then it was often wrong. It is always nice to know what the plan is for the following day — motoring times, dives planned, etc. We did not get this, nor did the crew know what was happening much of the time. There also were no slide shows, nor pictures or videos of the trip. Rooms were comfortable, except for the two nights when the A/C quit, but the crew got that fixed admirably quickly. It was worth what we paid for it — half price! We have been on many Peter Hughes boat before, in Palau, Belize, Turks and Caicos, Indonesia and Southern Bahamas and this was the first one that has been so sloppily run. UW Photography Comments: Nice camera table on back deck and two rinse buckets (after we asked for a second one due to the number of large cameras on board).

## HONDURAS

**Utila Aggressor, February 2006, Rich-**