

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-**

**ard Clark (richard.clark1@insightbb.com), Park Hills, KS.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. You fly a major carrier to mainland Honduras or Roatan and take a Sosa or Atlantic Airlines to a small landing strip in Utila. They have since changed docking locations to La Ceiba on the mainland of Honduras. This was the maiden voyage for this Aggressor. Small by live-aboard standards, this vessel sleeps 14 passengers comfortably. It has all the amenities one expects on a first class live-aboard, great food, in-room shower/head, daily housekeeping service, comfortable salon with books and DVD movies, hot towels and delicious snacks after each dive. The Captain, Eddy Anderson is no newcomer. He was the first mate on the Bay Islands Aggressor for years and knows these waters. The rest of the staff was first rate but a little nervous, (perhaps it was the first voyage experience or the presence of Allen Conner from the Aggressor Corporate office). The weather was rough so we didn't get the opportunity to see whale sharks. The diving was great. Utila sites have pristine reefs, abundant fish life and the possibility of seeing whale sharks. The sites in Cayos Cochinos are a macro photographer's dream: lettuce sea slugs, leopard flat worms, Peterson cleaner shrimp, quillfin blennies and blue bell tunicates. The remote location and interesting topography of the Cocos Seamount make it an exciting dive site; or perhaps it was the 30-40 great barracudas, large schools of yellow tail snappers, black durgons and horse-eyed jacks. Roatan has outstanding wall diving. Mary's Place and Connie's Dream are known for awesome sand chutes and swim-thru cracks that exit onto pristine walls and crystal clear blue water. These sites make me want to carry two cameras.

One equipped with wide-angle lens for the wall and the spotted eagle rays another with a macro lens for the two species of pipe fish and the seahorse. Three nice wrecks within the travels of the Utila Aggressor, the Aguilla and the Odyssey on Roatan and the Halliburton on Utila. The night diving was good. We saw octopus every night, toadfish, queen channel crabs and squid. UW Photography Comments: Good camera facilities. A large rinse tank dedicated to U/W photo equipment. Large camera table with plenty of lighting and compressed air nozzle. Initially I had trouble finding enough power outlets to charge my strobes. I mentioned it to the Captain and they created a charging station in the salon with several power strips.

**Utila Aggressor, March 2006, Thomas Nagle (tomnagle@hotmail.com), Fargo, ND.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm, currents. Due to Continental Airlines and inept immigration/customs in San Pedro Sula, we arrived 3 hours late. No one was there to meet us as promised. Our "charter" flight (SOSA) had left without us and after considerable scrambling, we arrived on the boat the next morning, missing the first dive. The crew and dive operation are excellent; they took good care of us. The air conditioning in our room was too good and we were cold all week. The food is plentiful, but bland and tasteless. The diving around Utila is so-so, and after 3 days of circling the island, we had to prod a bit to move to Roatan. Diving is better there, but we stayed close to land and had to compete, and sometimes dive with, the day boats. We never did go to a remote site, though this is advertised on the web site. Though fuel prices are now back down, we had to pay a

“fuel surcharge” of \$100 each. I would have been less upset about this if the fuel had been used to access the remote sites. As it turned out, I feel it was a rip-off. We only made 1 serious attempt to find whale sharks. Several were seen, but no good encounters. In spite of an excellent, friendly crew, this boat will probably disappoint serious divers.

**Utila Aggressor, May 2006, James Heimer (jmsjnk@earthlink.net), Houston, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm, choppy, surge. The Utila Aggressor is a new vessel (since Feb 06), with the typical small, but clean rooms. It is smaller than other Aggressors with only one lounge area. It accommodates 14 (we had 12) with six crew (Captain Eddy, 1st mate / DM Nestor, DM Shara, and cook Marna assisted by Candy and Shane in the galley. The crew is outstanding. However — we booked the Utila Aggressor to see whale sharks and to be able to dive the best sites on all three Bay Islands. Unfortunately, mechanical problems with a refrigerator/freezer and one AC unit curtailed the travel to one (partly stormy) day at Roatan. The rest of the time was spent a dive spots around Utila that can be reached from any shore resort, and we spent each night in Utila harbor. The owner of the Aggressor and the crew made every effort to get the repairs made in a timely manner, which they were. Because most of those on board were interested in maximizing diving, we did not take time out to look for whale sharks. We later learned that another boat (shore based) had had 11 encounters and gone in the water seven times to swim with both whale sharks and mantas. Walls and reefs with generally excellent vis. Did not see anything large, and only a couple of

morays and turtles to break the parade of the “usual tropicals.” Deep dives on the Aguilla (Roatan), at Mary’s Place (also Roatan), the Halliburton Wreck, and the Pinnacle were highlights, as was a dive at Corrine’s Reef (Roatan again). UW Photography Comments: Digital photography only supported; camera table on dive deck and dedicated rinse tank at the dive deck; staff extremely helpful with photography tips; not well set up to download cards to computer or display on large screen TV in lounge (connection ports for RCA cables no accessible/working only intermittently).

**Utila Aggressor, June 2006, Lorna Weible (mweible@juno.com), Magnolia, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 65 to 85 Feet. Water: 78 to 82F. Dive your own profile. Restrictions: 130 feet or your own computer; first drink = last dive. Diving about the same as Roatan. Not on scale with Caymans or Turks and Caicos. We understood this to be a protected reserve but found the fish life to be lacking. Saw no whale sharks, but in reading the captain’s log on-line they had only seen one since the boat started charters. There were different types of juvenile fish and Creole wrasse in rivers on almost every dive. No real currents and not tough diving at all. Good for beginners. This was our 4th Aggressor trip. Same rules — outside towels stay out, inside towels stay in. If you are reasonably dry you can go inside. They ask that you don’t sit on a cloth seat in a wet suit, but that should be general manners. The toilets backed up quite a bit, which was a rude wake-up call in the mornings. The crew all spoke fluent Spanish and would use it frequently in front of non-Spanish-speaking guests, and more than one commented on the rudeness of it. Also, some beds either did not have full linens or no linens.

When they were changed I found only a bottom sheet on our bunk and asked for top sheets. I got one the next day. One guest commented had not had any sheets since the start of the trip! We did not eat on the deck for any meal except the last cocktail party. However, it was windy the whole week and this may have been the reason. I have never been on a boat that did not have music to play on the sun deck. The quality and quantity of food Candy put out in the small galley was amazing. Fresh home-made breads and soups daily, desserts, some of the best salads ever. After the night dives we were served hot chocolate on the dive deck and after the first night the steward, Shane, learned we brought Baileys for just this purpose and never forgot to add it to our hot chocolate. This boat has only been sailing since March. Despite this newness it lost one engine in the middle of the week and this caused us to be late to dive sites whenever the boat would move. The trip back from Roatan took 6-7 hours. At the end of the charter it was suggested by a crew member that tips are "only recommended if you had a good time, and if you did 15-18% would be appreciated." The Utila trips have several add-on costs that quickly get the price up to the same as their other trips. UW Photography Comments: Plug-ins for batteries were inside the main salon while the photo table was outside on the dive deck. Lots of going back and forth. Camera table is plenty large and the camera rinse tank was large and filled with fresh water every morning.

**Utila Aggressor, August 2006, Wayne McNab (wmcnab@stx.rr.com), Corpus Christi, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 84 to 84 F, calm, choppy. We landed in San Pedro Sula and waited in the airport

nearly three hours for another passenger to arrive before we took the 2.5 hour ride to La Ceiba where the boat docks. They started photographing and fingerprinting everyone at immigration so it slowed things down. The cabins were nice and clean, though somewhat small. It appeared the starboard cabins were 1 foot wider than the port cabins. Typical cabins with a twin bunk on bottom and a single on top. Get there first and grab the bottom bunk. I thought I had it made, but my 83 year old roommate couldn't get into the top bunk. And be careful in the cabin heads, more than one person bumped into the shower valve and got soaked after using the facilities. Not too bad unless it's the last day and you're ready for the bus to the airport! There is a nice head on the dive deck as well. The first morning we took the 2-3 hour trip to Cayos Cochinos, where we did all our dives that day. These were my least favorite dives of the trip, though we did see an eagle ray on the first dive! The second day we did our morning dives at Coco's Seamount. We saw two morays, a toadfish, a stingray, and numerous barracuda, just to name a few. As we headed over to Roatan for the afternoon dives, the wind and seas picked up, so we ended up on the west side of the Island. There we dove Nitrox alley and Tavana's wall. On Tuesday morning we dove the wreck of the Aguila. Nestor spent 10 minutes playing with the resident green moray, who swam out to meet us and was obviously used to divers. The next dive was the wreck of the Odyssey, not as much fun as the Aguila, but a nice wreck anyway. Our afternoon dives were at the Dolphin Caves. Not many critters there, but nice swim throughs. It reminded me of the caverns at Shark's Cove on the North Shore of Oahu. On Wednes-

day we were off to Utila. We did two dives at Blackish point and the rest in the Marine Reserve. We saw the usual tropicals, sponges, and a hawksbill turtle. Thursday we had the flattest seas of the trip so after we did two dives at Old House we spent an hour or so looking for whale sharks but had no luck. Too late in the summer, I expect. At Old House, besides the usual lot of tropicals, we found a free-swimming spotted moray. The afternoon dives were at Black Hills Sea Mount. Here we found a green moray, hawksbill turtle, lobster, crab, and an assortment of jacks and snappers. The big fish hang out on the 'windward' side of the mount, and there were lots of them! Friday came too soon. Our last two dives were on the East side of Utila at Ted's Point. On the first dive we checked out a little wreck and then Nestor came though and found us a beautiful little seahorse! It wasn't an inch long, so it took us 30 minutes to re-find him on the last dive! The dinner Friday night in Utila was pretty good. I had a steak dinner and reasonable margarita for \$10. When we returned to the boat, there were three small eagle rays swimming in alongside for 30 minutes. We left early the next morning for to La Ceiba. The crew was great. Capt. Jay (from the Belize Aggressor), Shara, Nestor, Shane, and Marna. They all worked their butts off, from finding lots of critters to cooking us great meals. They worked just as hard the last day as they did the first.

## **SABA/ST. EUSTATIUS/ ST. KITTS**

**Caribbean Explorer II, August 2005, Mark Holman (Mark19191@cs.com), Prundale, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm, currents. Great value. Boat

and crew were both well prepared and helpful. The youngest member of our family, a 15 year old, was given all of the help needed by the crew to keeping her interested and having a good time both in the water and on board the boat. The Chef, Tony was one of the best with a truly amazing variety of food and high quality. The diving was generally good with the typical things that you would see in the Leeward Islands, with the diving off Saba being the highlight. Lots of turtles, reef fish, nurse sharks, but no other large pelagics in evidence. We dove for a day before on St. Kitts and enjoyed both the Island and local diving. At \$995 for the week it was a pleasant well run dive outing. UW Photography Comments: Adequate for the four photo people aboard but could get crowded if more people were serious photographers.

### **Caribbean Explorer II, November 2005, Don Ward, St. Louis, MO. (dward3863@sbcglobal.net),**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 82 F. The CE II is a great value and well-run. The diving at Statia and Saba were excellent. Highlights at Statia were dives in the marine reserve. The diving at St Kitts was above average at a couple sites. The cook, Tony, and the purser, Paul — who was overqualified for his job— were excellent. The DM/photo pro, C. Lee, was also first rate. The other two DMs were so-so, but were harmless and left us all alone, which is what I want and expect. The rooms were nice by live-aboard standards, with en-suite showers and heads. We had sea wasps on a night dive at Saba and the crew got out the saltwater hoses to aid divers on exits. No one was stung. Plenty of room for workspace, rinse tanks, etc.

### **Caribbean Explorer II, August 2006,**