

cheap place. Beers are \$.75 to \$1.00, and there are plenty of young Europeans, creating a lively bar scene. The two best bars are La Tranquilla and La Champa. The resort food is above average and plentiful. Meals are timed around the dive boat schedule. Honduras is a poor country. The average monthly family income is around \$110 on the island of Utila, and only \$80 on the mainland. A seven-day-old baby died of a fever, on the island, during the week we were there. There is little violent crime, but theft is something of a concern. The resort owner insists that the entire resort is secure, and we had no difficulties with our valuables. The sunset view from the Bay Islands College of Diving bar is excellent, and the drinks are substantially cheaper than in the main lodge bar that is only 60 feet away. There are only two roads on the island which are paved, totaling about 5 miles. Renting a bicycle and spending an afternoon riding around will allow you to see all of the island. The treehouse bar is worth a happy hour drink. Gunther, the sculptor, is an interesting character, and his shop is worth a visit. There are no large interesting wrecks, and if one does not encounter a whale shark the dive vacation becomes average to slightly above average. There are both malaria and dengue fever on the island, although they are both quite rare, and it is a good idea to use malaria prophylaxis, and to have the oral typhoid vaccine before departing. Captain Willy can attest that dengue fever is quite an experience. He apparently came close to dying from it. A Florida style condominium complex is apparently being planned for one of the main lagoons. The island will probably lose its charm in the next decade. The dive guides are concerned about the possibility that the mangrove swamps will be trained for

development. They fear the reefs will decline substantially without abundant healthy mangroves to filter the island water runoff.

Utila Dive Lodge, May 2006, Sherrie Barker, Jefferson, OR. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F. Basic lodging, good food, and terrific diving. The deck over the water was a great place to relax. Queen Ann's hermit crab races ended the week. The Sea Sprite, with Willy at the controls, was large enough to accommodate our group comfortably, even in rough water. Safety sausages were provided mid-week for all divers. Dive sites were plentiful, but with so many dive operations on the island, some were inaccessible. The island is small enough that you can get to all sites fairly easily. Rough water made some trips seem longer than they were. Stop by the Jade Seahorse and the Whale Shark Oceanic Research Institute while on the island.

JAMAICA

Jamaica Scuba Divers, December 2005, Jim Schoeneck (braves@san.rr.com), San Diego, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 78 F, calm, no currents. Group of 12 divers off a cruise ship. Christian, a friendly person and our primary contact, met us at the tourism office just off the cruise ship pier and we were quickly off to the resort to gear up and get to the boat. Diving was off pangas at Runaway Bay, about a 30 minute ride from the pier. Service at the resort was great. Staff took care of paperwork, secured necessary equipment and got the gear to the boats, making sure everyone was well cared for. A secure locker was available for valuables. Diving was comparable to other close in dives in

much of the Caribbean. First dive was a tug boat wreck in at 70 feet, teaming with fish and a couple of interesting pass throughs. Second dive was on a shallow reef with lots of juveniles and other small critters, plus a couple of turtles. We had a couple of snorkelers in our group who really enjoyed being 20-30 feet above us. We had drinks and snacks at the bar next to the dive center and then it was back to the ship, where we were dropped off as close as possible to the entrance gate.

Sandals Royal Caribbean, March 2006, Mike Mew (mike.mew@saintjohn.ca), Saint John, NB. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, surge. The dive boat was excellent, as was the staff. The practice of dropping divers at sites and returning was unnerving to beginners and some experienced. We surfaced after 45 minutes to drift for 10 minutes in 3-4 foot swell. This was due to cutbacks with one boat servicing two resorts. This, in my opinion, is a poor practice as any diving/health incident would escalate with no means of evacuation.

Sandals Whitehouse, July 2006, Arthur F. Graf, Jr., San Antonio, TX. A first class, large, self-contained resort. A good hour's drive over not-so-good roads from the airport at Montego Bay. Plenty of good food, evening entertainment (far from the best), many swimming pools with swim-up bars, a long, nice beach kept clean. Many types of water sports equipment, para-sailing, etc. The staff is helpful: All the diving equipment is first class including a good day boat, but that is as far as it goes. They have two 30-minute dives a day: 9:00 AM for beginners and 11:00 AM for advanced divers. Dive the first day and then other days are a repeat of the first. There are several swim-

throughs that are interesting, if you don't mind the bottom-stirring divers ahead of you. The reefs are in bad shape, as they have been over-fished for years and are covered with algae. If you see two fish on a dive, you are doing good. One professional diver that is in the New Jersey emergency rescue squad forgot his C card and instead of giving him a brief checkout dive, they insisted that he take and pay for a resort course.

MEXICO

Cozumel and Yucatan peninsula diving took a big hit by Hurricane Wilma in September 2005 and diving is still seriously affected, as these Chapbook reporters will testify. About the only good effect was that it slowed down cruise ship arrivals. Many operators cater to experienced, savvy divers — but some load boats with all comers. Much of Cozumel's diving is deep or drift dives. Carry surface-signaling devices (strobe, safety sausage, etc.). The best diving is in spring and summer. It can be rainy during the winter. Accommodations range from small inexpensive downtown hotels to diver hangouts to high dollar hotels. Many divers take day trips to the mainland to dive the freshwater cenotes. Along the coast, there are dive operations from Cancun south, but the diving is mainly patch reef diving. Isla Mujeres, off Cancun, has some decent reef diving and a drift or two. Whale sharks spend several summer weeks northwest of Cancun, near the island of Holbox, where one can just about be guaranteed to snorkel with scores of the behemoths. See *Undercurrent*, October 2004, for a review of this new discovery.