

needs for me to certify my daughter, including the use of their pool for a quick refresher of skills. They took us on a short ride to fish-rich reefs. I never saw so many scorpionfish in a week of diving, and we only dived with Tank Ha for 2 days. We also saw huge turtles and barracuda. Didn't see pelagics, but that was fine with my new-diver daughter. The cenote trip with Kenny was incredible. Groups were limited to 4 people. The halocline and the cave formations have got to be seen. After our dives, my daughter thought her purse was stolen from the cubbies at Tank Ha. The staff helped us look everywhere. Luckily, she had left it in a dining room at the Barcelo resort, and it was returned to the front desk with only the money missing.

## MONTSERRAT

**Seawolf Diving, Vue Pointe Hotel, June 2006, Brant Shenkarow (brantravels@yahoo.com), San Anselmo, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 125 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm, no currents. This is a "new" dive destination. The old dive sites are gone, buried in ash. The north end of the island is the "new" Montserrat — new dive sites are being discovered and named weekly. There are relatively few divers visiting the island . . . most days I was the only visiting diver. The vis and light of the shallow sites are excellent for photography, as are the abundant and healthy corals, sponges, and animal life. The island is interesting topside as well. Recent volcanic activity has placed, as of June 2006, 60% of the area in an "exclusion zone," though it's not difficult to find a born-and-bred Montserratian to be your guide through the devastation. Walking

through the old capitol, Plymouth, is eerie and fascinating . . . bring your camera and a few varied lenses. The island is quiet, not for the party-going Caribbean tourist. The people are pleasant and helpful. There really aren't many good restaurants or hotels, since the island is just getting started again. The Vue Pointe is a 40-year classic, the oldest hotel and restaurant on the island, surviving the volcano's eruption in the mid 90s. Do not miss their Wednesday night BBQ. Fish are shy, not used to seeing divers, so good close-ups are difficult. I used my 12-24 and 17-35 mm lens exclusively after my failed 60 mm first dive. Good visibility and good ambient light. Since most dives are within 60 foot depth, 90 minute dives are not uncommon.

## NICARAGUA

### Little Corn Island

**Dive Little Corn Island, Casa Iguana, December 2005, Terry Anderson, College Station, TX.** Vis: 40-80 feet. Water: 84 F. 400+ dives all over the world. According to the 2004 Chapbook Little Corn is like the Caribbean in the 1950s, and in far as hotels, crowds, casinos, cruise ships, and discos, that it true—and that is wonderful. You fly into Managua and stay overnight. (Granada and Masaya are nice colonial towns if you want to see more of Nicaragua.) Cathy at Casa Iguana will help you set up flights from Managua to Corn Island, get your electronic ticket, and then get you on the 40 minute boat ride to Little Corn. The boat landing is in front of Dive Little Corn and the friendly DMs will help you stow your gear for the next day's dives before they get you on the path to Casa Iguana. The

entire island is only about 3 miles long and one mile wide; the mostly Afro-Carib people are friendly and understand the importance of scuba tourism. The cabanas at Casa Iguana cost between \$30 and \$60 a night, and most of the 30-max guests eat a fine dinner at their restaurant for \$9. Guests are international, and the type of Americans and Canadians you meet are fun and adventurous, not the cruise boat crowd. The diving is good, easy since it is rather shallow without strong currents; the vis was never as good as Cozumel. I dove three times every day, about \$30 a dive, and the most divers we ever had on their good boat was four, sometimes only two; once two DMs took me alone just for fun. The DMs appreciate having experienced divers to talk with, and at one 25-foot site I would dive and point out rays or sharks to the snorkelers. Little Corn could be called Eagle Ray Island since we saw them on almost every dive, including 9 one dive. We also saw lots of nurse sharks, and on one dive about 8 Caribbean Reef sharks on the windward side of the island. The DMs there also saw a hammerhead, which I missed. We saw the usual schools of Caribbean fish, and lots of lovely fan and soft corals and sponges.

**Dive Little Corn, Casa Iguana, February 2006, Ronald Presutti (smiles3@comcast.net), St. Clairsville, OH.** Experience: 250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm and flat, no currents. Being on Little Corn Island was an adventure, both above and below the reef. Casa Iguana, surprisingly one of quiet a few places to stay on the island. They grow their own veggies and provide a significant amount of electricity from wind and solar power. Although a bit worn to the point of being rustic, the location on a bluff and food made up for any lack of amenities.

The friendliness of the staff and guests were refreshing. We stayed in a deluxe casita; two beds, small bathroom, no inside shower, no hot water, no dresser or closets, but the porch with the ocean view made the room priceless. There are no lights around Casa Iguana so a headlight or a dive light is a must if you plan to find your room after dark. The panga from Corn Island, the only way to get to Little Corn, pulls up next to the dive shop and it is a 7-minute walk to Casa Iguana on a dirt path through dense undergrowth, banana trees, and pineapple plants. The island has but one sidewalk, on the leeward side and with the only street lights on the island; the rest is crisscrossed with dirt paths, walking or bicycling being the only form of transportation on the island. Diving was three dives a day, with the limit of 60 feet/55 minutes being the profile for most dives. Since Little Corn has no walls, most sites' depths are 60 feet or less. There are a few deeper sites, but advanced certification is strictly enforced if you plan to dive the deeper sites. You set up your tanks and equipment on the wooden deck of the dive shop where you are given in-depth information on a blackboard about the dive site. Most people carry the tanks to the boat, a short 30-yard beach walk, but Lolo and Jorge, the boat captains, are more than happy to help carry any dive equipment. Karron, our divemaster, was thorough but relaxed. After observing our group dive the first day, she relaxed the 55 minute dive restriction and allowed us to dive our own profile. The dive sites are all within a 5-to 10-minute boat ride. The soft coral was abundant and thick, hard coral being slightly above average. Lots of lobsters. On Shark Hole we ran across a lone hammerhead and a squadron of eagle rays. The food on the island

was surprisingly diverse and delicious. Casa Iguana's breakfast will not leave you hungry and the dinners range from fresh fish to tacos (\$9) and you can get seconds. The Cuban restaurant down from the dive shop has the best lobster, but it has to be ordered 24 hours in advance. Elsie's has great conch and a great location on the beach. Farm Piece and Love, and Italian restaurant a 45-minute beach walk from Casa Iguana, serves Italian wines (where does Paola get them?) and all food is made that day. Go early on your trip; this is one place you will want to revisit. Little Corn Island is what the Caribbean was 30 years ago: no cars, no telephones, no radios, and no TVs, just sun, sand, beach, and plenty of stars.

**Dive Little Corn, Casa Iguana, April 2006, Fred D. Gentry, Olympia, WA.**

Experience: over 1,000 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, little or no currents. We flew from Managua (2 flights daily) to Big Corn Island. From Big Corn it is a bumpy 30- to 40-minute ride in a big open panga. Little Corn Island is about one mile by a quarter mile, in the village area where most of the accommodations and dive shops are. No cars or roads on the island. Casa Iguana was rustic but pleasant, with good food, and a 10-minute walk to the dive center. Casa Iguana has plus or minus 15 one-room cottages (showers outside) and provides a rustic but pleasant ambience. Most of the dives are in the 30- to 50-foot range with little or no current, making Little Corn a good choice for inexperienced or rusty divers. Hard core divers will get bored after 3 or 4 days. Fish and coral were varied but not abundant. Little Corn Island is a nice, laid-back place to visit and, for the relatively inexperienced diver, a good place to dive. They do 3 dives a day and all of the dive

sites are 10 to 15 minutes away, so they return to the island between dives. Dive masters Carron, Rob, and Tim were friendly and helpful.

**PUERTO RICO**

The south coast of Puerto Rico has several dive operations, with some walls, good reefs and decent fish life. Puerto Rico is easy to reach from many American cities and sports and interesting Spanish culture, with tours, small restaurants and hotels along the south coast, as well as national parks inland. Old Town in San Juan is worth a visit. Winters can be cool. The US military has abandoned the island of Vieques, where there is modest diving.

**La Casa del Mar, El Conquistador's Las Casitas Village, March 2006, Craig Kennedy, Albuquerque, NM.**

La Casa del Mar Dive Center has two, 46' Newton dive boats. The center is conveniently located at the bottom of the El Conquistador Hotel's tramway. With only one exception, diving at this time of year meant you were with no more than 8 other divers. Our primary DM, Tito, formerly had his own operation and was capable of leading a good, safe dive. He also carried his own bag of soft weights on the boat for anyone who wanted them. The operator would keep, rinse and hang your gear, but failed on one day to do this job, despite regular tips. This was an honest mistake and not repeated. While Fajardo area dive sites have an abundance of sea fans and gorgonians, the reefs overall are seriously bleached. The area has only a handful of sites, and they appear over-dived. Visibility on 12 dives was regularly 25' to 40' max. The exception