

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

to this was a Saturday trip, an hour away to Sail Rock, on the way to St. Thomas, USVI. The seas were extremely rough and half a dozen divers fed the fish while en route. As Saturday brings out many local divers, the boat was jam packed, with only 1 DM, and he spent both dives holding one new diver by the hand the entire time. A diver of advanced age had an out of air emergency. The one and only DM was off in a totally different direction, and the man was lucky to make it back to the boat. A planned 2nd dive on a wreck was aborted, as the captain couldn't find the site, despite 15 minutes of figure 8's in rough seas. The 2nd dive was made on a shallow wreck off St. Thomas. This was a pleasant dive. The Newton dive boat suffered loss of one engine for the return trip, making for a long evening. El Conquistador is a former Windham resort. It lost its affiliation because it wasn't keeping up to standards. While remodeling was underway in the main resort, the property also runs an outstanding village of casitas. We had a 2 bedroom with a wonderful view. The accommodations and excellent service from resort staff made the overall trip worthwhile, despite the slightly less than pleasing diving.

**Parguera Divers, December 2005, June Jefford (j\_jefford@hotmail.com), Albuquerque, NM.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, choppy. La Parguera Divers (not associated with a resort) was outstanding in service and safety. Angel, the owner, was boat captain. He worked well with divers of all experience levels. I was impressed by his patience and concern for a beginner doing a "Discover Scuba" dive. For our group of three experienced divers, he made sure we saw a different site each day. Victor and Robbie, the divemasters, were per-

sonable, careful, and safety-conscious. All were concerned that we saw all their beautiful wall. Size of the group varied from five to thirteen. We were unable to do a night dive because there was a minimum of five people. I felt lucky we had read *Undercurrent* about this quality operation. We stopped by the competing dive shop, Paradise Divers, and were treated rudely and condescendingly. La Parguera is a quality operation, and we got it right the first time, thanks to *Undercurrent*. We selected "Andy's Chalet and Guest House" because it advertised a "fully equipped kitchen." What a joke. "Fully equipped" consisted of one plate and one glass. We had booked a two-bedroom. They ushered us into a dirty, cramped, dim one-bedroom. When we protested, they reluctantly gave us another tiny room with dark walls, filthy shower and one bare bulb. The next day, we told our story to Roxanna, Victor's wife and a La Parguera employee. She helped us locate a large, cheerful apartment downstairs from where she lives in the back of Sammy's hardware store and mini mart.

**Parguera Divers, December 2005, Jeffrey S. Levine (Jeffrey\_Levine@jhu.edu), Aliso Viejo, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 81 F, calm, choppy, no currents. Angel Rovira and his team did whatever they could to make the trips safe, informative, and enjoyable. A US Coast Guard certification was displayed on the boat and a full safety briefing included the location of fire extinguishers, radio, life jackets, etc. A fresh water tank was provided for cameras and a hose was available. The dive sites were usually on or by the wall which is about a 30 minute boat ride from shore. Dives were always 50 minutes plus an additional five minute safety

stop. No one felt rushed. The fish were of the standard Caribbean kind. We saw one turtle and a shark. The shop offers Nitrox. Besides standard 32% and 36%, the shop was also offering a special on a 30% blend which gives a max depth of 117-120 ft. I used it and it gave me just enough extra bottom time to make it worth it. Surface intervals were on the boat and lasted one hour. Sandwiches and cookies were provided and drinks were available. The hotel is a guest house/inn which carries the "parador" designation, bestowed by the Puerto Rican Tourism Company on inns that meet certain specifications. It is clean and serviceable, but plain with few frills. If you book a package through Parguera Divers you get a discount on the room. Breakfast is included and some discount restaurant vouchers. The restaurant is good but a bit pricey. There are plenty of vendor stands and smaller restaurants nearby. Every major restaurant chain is also on the island but you will need to drive. Since Puerto Rico is a US commonwealth, your auto insurance may cover you. Check before you leave. I recommend Charlie's car rental if you fly into San Juan. Ponce is much closer but has fewer flights to the mainland. Also, Internet access in Parguera is not great. I did find a few open hot spots but the hotel itself does not offer it.

**Parguera Divers, December 2005, Gabriel I. Peñagaricano (guigo34@hotmail.com), Guaynabo, PR.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm. Parguera Divers is the only operator of the four in the southeast tip of the island having a dive boat built as such. It is fast, taking you to the wall in about half the time the others take to get there. It is clean and accommodates 10 divers in comfort. Angel, the owner and

boat captain has been working at it for 12 years, first as an understudy to the legendary Efra, from whom he bought the operation five years ago. His is the outfit to go with if you are interested in a clean, safe operation where you are treated according to your experience, without with the one-size-fits-all restrictions of many other operators.

**Parguera Divers, Andy's Chalet, January 2006, Mary Herndon (mkherndon@mac.com), Littleton, MA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 83 F, calm. Angel, Victor and the rest of the crew run a great operation! Diving is fun, relaxed and safe. Divemasters and captains provide excellent, friendly, personalized service. Nice boat with dry storage area, plenty of room and some shade. Groups were small (<10 people). The wall is beautiful and coral healthy. Lots of large nurse sharks and schools of blue chromis. Great variety of small fish. Short boat rides to dive sites. Dive sites are not too crowded. We originally booked a room at Andy's Chalet, which was filthy and disappointing. The "2 bedroom apartment" had only 1 bedroom. The "fully equipped" kitchen had no coffee maker, dishes or utensils. Roxanna, from the dive shop, heard our complaints and found a vacant apartment we could rent for the week, which was nice, clean and even cost less than Andy's! Town has plenty of restaurants and tourist activities. There are no sandy beaches in the area, and Parguera is a tough drive from San Juan. Funky, less developed location.

**Parguera Divers, April 2006, Hank Goichman (goichphoto@earthlink.net), Los Angeles, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm, choppy. Excellent dive operation, nice boat, good diving with great

walls, good vis and a good captain and staff, safety conscious. We found a good restaurant about a block away. We were the only dive boat in the area on many sites, with about 7 divers on the boat, mainly experienced. We combined the diving with the rest of the island which is pretty. I was turned on to the operation by an article in *Undercurrent* in 1999.

**Sea Ventures, CopaMarina, November 2005, Dennis LeTendre (plan2dive@aol.com), Longmont, CO.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F. Second time with Sea Ventures. Captain “Bam Bam” did a great job managing the boat. Good pre-dive overview. Has first aid, O2 and life jackets on board. Pointed out all safety aspects well. Saw mother pilot whale with baby on way out. Capt. Bam Bam slowed boat for us to get better look. DM Tony did a good job previewing each site, and worked hard to find critters. Did two dives — one on wall to 110 ft.— with nice sea fans, sponges on the wall. Saw one nice large 5ft nurse shark, a few nice green morays, and one chained moray. Also some large crabs. Reef in good shape, some bleaching. Not many big fish. A few puffers, and a school of barracuda. Lots of blue tangs, yellowtail and other typical Caribbean reef fish. Copamarina resort is a beautiful place- surrounded by the Guanica Forest. Three pools and three or four hot tubs — fantastic landscaping. Actual full size beds set 2 feet off the sand right on the beach with covers for privacy and “sun control.” Also hiked the Guanica Forest, a United Nations preserve. 700 year old tree, caves, unusual lizards and birds. One night we went into the town of San German — about 25 min drive from Copamarina resort. Beautiful town with many historical buildings. Found

exceptional restaurant in San German — Casa Vieja — excellent food, service and atmosphere — building was constructed in early 1800s. The owners are the Nelson family-three brothers, mother and father run the restaurant. It was so good, we went back for a second night. UW Photography Comments: Boat has cleaning tank and ample room for photo equipment.

## SABA

Saba is one of the more adventurous Caribbean destinations, both on land and in the sea. Pinnacle diving begins at 70 feet, with good fish life and occasional sharks and bigger fish. Accommodations are in quaint villages at 1,000 feet and above. Saba has delightful people, good restaurants, and a cool, pleasant climate. It's also in the hurricane belt. Be sure to close your eyes when your plane lands.

**Saba Divers, Scout's Place, August 2006, Rick Cavanaugh (rick@rickcavanaugh.com), Ellicott City, MD.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. We were scheduled to fly from St. Martin to Saba on Winair, but our plane was delayed in San Juan Puerto Rico. We missed the flight. We were able to catch the Dawn II Ferry at 5 pm. It looks more like a freight boat than a ferry, but it has room for 20 passengers. The Ferry cost \$40 each way and it takes about 2 ½ hours. Saba is a steep mountain that “pops” out of the water. The roads are extremely twisty and steep. All the buildings are white with red roofs and everything is clean and well kept. The 15-minute taxi from the island's only harbor to Scout's Place. A “Luxury Cottage Room” was adequate,