

**Ritchie (mcrkam@msn.com), Littleton, CO.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. We had a wonderful time. We were surprised at the laid back island time and late starts — you didn't meet at the dive shop til 9 am. Therefore most dive days are 2 dives not 3. To get to Speyside which is the more pristine diving it is 40 minutes by car, then you go with a partner captain and your own DM. Diving on our side was interesting, larger seas, not so much coral, more drift, lower vis, haloclines. Divers Thirst and Dream would have been more fun with a current, but it was relaxed with lots of time to look at things. We heard stories of killer current, but experienced none all week. We loved Big Dougie, who trains most all of the DMs and Instructors and Lifeguards on the island. His wife Kerry is pleasant. They take care of your gear and were surprised by our helping with gear and loading. Alvin Douglas did take us for a local dive so we could check our gear and get acclimated. Vis was awful but we made an hour and ten minutes which was great fun. No nitrox. Lodging was a beautiful 3 bedroom full kitchen on the beach next to the bar. We also did the land tour into the rainforest. No shopping, some restaurants, not too much nightlife. Frontier boat is open and small, but they gave me a bucket to keep my camera in and rinse. Mostly I just packed it in a towel and had the captain keep it under the driving console in a safe place. They handed it to me after backroll. No way to change film/batts until you go to beach for lunch, so shooting digital saves that step between dive 1 and 2. Dives were not deep so I shot every dive. If the waves are high and current is kicking it can be a challenge to get back to the boat for your camera, I did

wave off the captain one dive because it was too hard for me. I had fun shooting in Speyside especially. Very little current so could stop and DM went slow and stop speed! No marathons, but no current to help you catch up the group either. The DM understands photographer needs to go slow, but we were a small group of 4.

**World of Watersports, Hilton, May 2006, William Westman (wwestman@hotmail.com), St. Thomas, VI.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 70 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy, currents. The diving on the south end of the island was hampered by poor visibility. Diving in Speyside, which advertised bigger fish and better vis required a one hour drive (which never left on time). And the dives cost \$25 extra. Had I known that I would have used a dive shop in Speyside or Charlottesville, rented a car and done more dives on the north end of the island. Neither dive boat had adequate safety equipment. There was no oxygen or adequate first aid kits. There was no rinse tanks or fresh water available. The first boat has an igloo for drinking water that had dirt and sand in the water. The second boat had no ladder and no easy or comfortable way to re-board the boat. The staff was friendly and DM Marvin was patient, informative and helpful. But Marvin really needs a new wetsuit. The Hilton hotel shows the lack of maintenance everywhere. Rusting fixtures, no working ice machines on our floor. Elevators that are out of order. But the staff was friendly and helpful. They brought us ice without being asked.

## TURKS AND CAICOS

This island group, south of the

Bahamas and north of the Virgins, features awesome walls and clear water. Provo, the glitzy island, has spectacular beaches, but it's an hour's boat ride to the better diving of South or West Caicos. Grand Turk is a funky, laid-back island that has a wall right offshore and occasional fishy surprises — and coming cruise ships. Salt Cay has pretty diving and the boats visit Grand Turk's wall. Bring a long-sleeved shirt during the winter; it can get cool in the evenings. The flight to Provo from Miami is a little more than an hour.

## Grand Turk

**Blue Water Divers, September 2006, Embry Rucker, Prospect, KY.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm. Mitch Rolling's BWD is a good small group operation that doesn't get involved in the big cruise ship operations but will gladly take cruise ship visitors along on regular dives with prior arrangements. Mitch has been on Grand Turk for about 25 years and has done about 9000 dives there.

**Bohio Dive Resort, March 2006, Chuck Jayson (cjayson@sbcglobal.net), Hartland, MI.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 72 to 75 F, calm, choppy. The resort is on the beach; there are sailing boats and kayaks. We had a room with a kitchenette; not all rooms are oceanfront so if you want that you have to request one. The buildings all are in good condition and the staff looks after them well. Executive chef Zev Beck will thrill you with his creations. I can honestly say I have not had better food anywhere; the pricing at the restaurant is the same as any other place on the island. You just

might find one of the staff members going on a dive with you, I found that the executive chef loves diving as much as he loves to cook. Kelly and Nick are always there and make sure you don't need anything. My wife and I dove with four different dive masters; Sage, Craig, Kel and Sunny. All four dive masters went to great lengths to make your experience a pleasant one. All pre-dive briefings were well done and all of the dive masters followed the profile discussed on the boat. When there was a diver wandering off (and there was every dive) they would simply signal us to continue while he/she went to get the lone diver, they never said a word to the people on the boat after the dive they just wanted to know if everybody had a good time. All you have to do is bring your gear to the dive shop the first day and they take care of it the rest of your stay. Walking past the salinas ... they stink! But I didn't smell anything at the resort. We strongly suggest walking into town, the only cranky people you will find on the island are the tourists, we didn't see a Belonger with a frown the whole time we were there. When it was time for us to leave I was presented an itemized bill that Kelly and I went over in detail, there were no surprises and she made leaving a pleasant experience (she gave us a hug!).

**Oasis Divers, Island House, December 2005, Tom Hayes (tomhayes@cox.net), Pensacola, FL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy, no currents. This was our fourth trip to Grand Turk, and second stay at the Island House. The accommodations included a full kitchen, which was useful since the dining options on the island are some what limited and pricey — although generally good. The room came with a pickup (and bicycles) which made get-

ting around easy. The proprietor (Colin Brooker) could not have been more gracious and helpful. The place has a nice pool and a great view, although it is not on the water. Air conditioning was marginal, but the breeze and plenty of fans keep things cool. Oasis Divers is the best operator we have found in the Caribbean — we never had to handle our gear after the first trip — it was rinsed and stored each night and put back on the boat in the morning. We never had more than four divers on the boat, although we have had six on previous trips. All the surface intervals were on shore since none of the dive sites are more than a ten minute boat ride. The divemasters are all professional and provide excellent briefings. They were as much involved in the dive as requested, but otherwise just stayed along and let us do our thing. They were attentive to a couple of inexperienced divers doing their first ocean dives. The reefs are in great condition and the fish life is abundant. Water clarity was good, and except for a light chop on several days could not have been more enjoyable. We saw many nurse sharks, turtles and rays. The macro critters are abundant, as are the eels, lobsters and crabs. We also made a trip to Salt Cay, although the diving was not as varied as on Grand Turk. Visit Porter at the Island Thyme House (bar and restaurant) and ask him about “going to the zoo” (You get to keep the shot glass if you sample the requisite number of “animals”). Just don’t do it before you dive. The cruise ships will begin docking in March of 2006, but most of the activities will be confined to the south end of the island. Hopefully, the quiet ambiance of Grand Turk will not be affected. UW Photography Comments: Generally not set up for UWP, but Oasis will provide rinse tank

on boat if desired.

**Oasis Divers, Salt Raker Inn, February 2006, Larry Bowden (lcb@marshridge.com), Gaylord, MI.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 150 Feet. Water: 72 to 78 F, calm. Grand Turk is a great place to get away from the busier islands. At least it was up till the cruise ships arrived. I liked the small, friendly feeling you get on the island and feeling of being in a safe and secure location. Oasis Divers was next door to the Salt Raker Inn, which is a small but nice place to stay. Modest accommodation but well run. The diving operation is well run and the dive master was knowledgeable of the area and briefed us completely before every dive. We had only six divers and it seemed that most other boats had no more than eight. Getting to the wall took only minutes. Saw humpback whales, giant eagle rays, turtles, nurse shark. The walls and coral are great and vis was 60-150 ft. Night life is relaxing; food is good.

**Oasis Divers, Island House, March 2006, Richard Saunders (saunders8235@sbcglobal.net), Indianapolis, IN.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 76 F, calm, no currents. We just got back from Grand Turk (3-10 through 3-17). Oasis Divers is a good dive shop and our divemaster (Macky) was terrific. Dale (owner) seemed stressed most of the time and we never saw Everett. If you let Oasis make inter island air arrangements make sure they give you plenty of time between connections. We missed ours. Customs is slow. Grand Turk is quirky but ok, we enjoyed most of it and felt safe wherever we went. Some islanders seemed resentful (i.e., grocery, bakery, airports etc.) but in tourist areas they were great generally. Everyone at the dive shop was friendly.

Boats usually held 6 comfortably with service intervals back on beach at dive shop. The diving was relaxing, coral was bleached and we were disappointed in the fish life. (Personally feel the Florida Keys are every bit as good or better, cheaper and closer but when it's winter you want to go somewhere warm) 3 mil suits were a must. It's awesome diving while hearing whales sing. Wouldn't want to dive here during cruise ship days as Oasis has gone all out to accommodate the masses. Might take the day off or go with other dive shop those days. Looked as if it could get crazy around Oasis when the ships are in. Island House is great place to stay and Colin a wonderful host. We enjoyed our leisurely breakfasts and coffee on the deck. Having a vehicle was a great perk from Island House. The Light House was a nice place to wander and good area for pictures. Colin gave us a personal tour of town upon arrival, pointing out spots of interest and was always available for any questions or info. There aren't many places to eat and the food is pricey everywhere. Service is on island time. Water's Edge had great food but slow. SandBar service better. Mooky Pooky's Pizza was great and Poop Deck chicken good if you feel like waiting around for it. Grocery at Cee's building seemed pretty good. We ended up buying additional round trip tickets to/from Grand Turk due to US Air not getting us to our connection in Provo. Sky King did not let us on our flight though 2 people in front of us who arrived with us were allowed to board. We were 2-3 minutes late (due to 1 hr. late arrival and slow customs) the plane was sitting right outside the door and the manifest was still in the building when we presented our tickets. But we were too late according to ticket agent. Departing we were forced to purchase

additional one-way tickets home costing \$1400 on US Air due to Air Turks and Caicos running a training flight and then putting the plane into routine maintenance following that, canceling flights without any notification. US Air refused to transfer our original tickets although twice they said we could.

**Oasis Divers, Island House, March 2006, Darren Dawson, Clemson, SC**  
([darren.dawson@ces.clemson.edu](mailto:darren.dawson@ces.clemson.edu))

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 74 to 78 F, calm. The water and beaches here are stunning – gorgeous shades of turquoise and deep blue water with white-powder sand. The dive shops and most of the tourist hotels and restaurants are along a stretch of beach and the sunsets are fabulous. The interior and non-tourist areas were not particularly attractive, though the people were friendly and we always felt safe. Horses, donkeys and dogs roamed around everywhere. We stayed at the Island House resort and dove with Oasis Divers. The Island House is run by long-time manager Colin and it was quite nice, though it was not on the water. Oasis is a good dive operation and we really loved our dive-master, Mackey. We found diving to be mixed – some sites were outstanding, while others were somewhat mediocre. Several sites contained abundant colorful large sponges and hard and soft corals – great wide-angle stuff. In terms of marine life, we saw a decent number of fish, especially on top of the reefs. Most of the standard reef fish were there. We came across turtles every dive. We saw quite a few butterflyfish but not many angel fish. We only found one spotted drum, and never saw a single scorpionfish. Schooling Creole wrasse were seen on many dives, as were groupers of all sizes, from small to quite large. We saw nurse sharks a couple of dives. Our

two night dives were excellent – we saw crabs, lobsters, squid, octopi, etc. both times. Lack of macro critters – we literally saw only a couple of banded coral shrimp on one night dive, occasional flamingo tongues, 3 Pederson cleaner shrimp (all on one dive) – not a single arrow crab, nudibranch, or other small creature. Weather was mostly sunny every day with no rain. The water was cold enough to be bothersome by the last half of the second morning dive. We didn't see mosquitoes or no-sees-ums here, except for a few mosquitoes in the evening. Providenciales and Grand Turk airports were fairly nice by Caribbean standards (well air-conditioned, clean, nice seats, etc.) and all airport personnel we dealt with were friendly and accommodating. There were long lines checking in and going through security screening in the Provo airport for our return flight. Sky King runs daily flights among the Turks and Caicos islands. The planes are small twin engine prop planes with about 15 seats. We had to pay excess weight charges for the first time ever on Sky King (\$10 going and \$14 returning – go figure). Our bags weigh about 120 lbs. total for all four – above their maximum allowance of 44 lbs. per person. Island House is a nice property, with pretty common areas and a pool. There are 10-12 guest rooms arranged around a nice courtyard, and Colin seems to be on-site to help tend to your needs. All rooms have A/C and good-size porches and balconies. You can see a large lagoon from the back side of the property, but the view is not beautiful. Our room was on the bottom floor, so the view from the top floor rooms may have been more scenic. Our room was outfitted with a double bed, dresser and a sitting area with a table. We had small kitchenette with microwave,

stove and refrigerator. Storage space was adequate. The bathroom had a bathtub/shower, toilet and sink, and we always had plenty of hot water. Tap water is not potable, but fresh drinking water was provided on-site. Maid service was provided daily and towels were replenished each day. Guest rooms had televisions, phones, alarm/CD players. The electrical outlets in the room took standard US plugs. Colin provides a car or truck with the lodging package.

**Oasis Divers, Osprey Hotel, April 2006, Glenda Ester, Burien, WA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm, choppy, surge. Still the small, quiet island that we remembered. The largest change was the telecommunications capability (internet, telephone and a couple of cell phone providers) and the selection of television channels. Oasis Divers is well run, well organized, good boats and great divemasters (Tim and Mackie were the greatest). Communicated through email with Dale, the owner to arrange air transportation between Provo and Grand Turk, hotel and dive package. Very responsive. Selected this dive operation based on reviews in the Chapbook and was not disappointed. Dale gave us all different options for hotel accommodations and helped us select one based on our requirements. Decided to rent gear from the dive shop rather than haul our own because of the weight restriction of Sky King (44lbs) and reports of gear being stolen at the airports. All gear was new or in great condition. Tanks, weights and belts, BC's were on board boats and ready to go for every dive. Never changed out a tank the whole time we were there. Typical morning was arrive at the dive shop by 9AM. Dive shop is across the street from the shore where the boats (Carolina skiffs)

were waiting for us. If you are too far to walk to the dive shop, they arrange for you to be picked up from your hotel or rental house. We'd take our personal gear with us to the boats and the crew would assist helping us board the boats. Travel out to the 1st dive site was 5-15 minute boat ride. Dive boats were never crowded. On the way to the 1st dive site encountered a school of dolphins. The divemaster stopped the boat so we could hop in the water to swim with the dolphins. Once arriving at the dive site, the divemaster would brief us on the dive site, depths, times, directions and special things to look for. Divemaster would help us into our gear and we'd back roll into the water. Divemaster would be last in the water and 1st out to help us back onto the boat. After the 1st dive, we'd head back to the beach and spend the surface interval back at the dive shop. Water, snacks and towels were available on the boat and fresh water showers, rinse tanks for cameras, drinking water and restrooms were available back at the dive shop. During the dive interval, the crew would change out our tanks and get the gear reassembled for the 2nd dive. Oasis Divers also offered afternoon and night dives. Their only requirement was a minimum of 4 divers and since we were a group of 4, we could take advantage of the afternoons and night dives anytime we wanted. Divemasters were accommodating on requests for dive sites. They made sure that we didn't dive any dive site twice unless we specifically requested it. Oasis Divers also offers afternoon trip to Gibbs Caye. On the way to the small island, the boat stops so the group can free dive for conch. After you get to Gibbs Caye, you feed the sting rays while the crew prepares hamburgers and hot dogs and the boat drivers clean the fresh conch. They then

prepare a conch salad for dessert that is out of this world. Bring your snorkeling gear, sunscreen, a hat and sandals to explore the island. Osprey Hotel was 1 block away from the dive operation. Clean and nicely furnished rooms. We had 2 rooms with a connecting door. One room had a king with a small refrigerator and coffee pot. The other room had 2 double beds, a kitchenette with microwave, refrigerator, table and chairs, and cooking utensils. Breakfast was served at the Courtyard café around the corner from the hotel. Great food to start the day. Lunch and dinner were available at the Osprey and a barbeque was available Sunday and Wednesday evenings. Best restaurant on the island was the Guanahani at the Bohio Hotel. Also check out the Sandbar (best rum punch and conch on the island) and the Breakwater. If your doing night dives, plan ahead with the restaurants to get food after 9PM or you could be out of luck. It rained with thunder and lightning a couple of days during the time we were there. Caused a lot of surge and stirred up the sand underwater that reduced the visibility down from the normal Caribbean standards. Once the weather cleared, the visibility returned and so did the schools of fish. We still saw a manta ray, a couple of nurse sharks and lots of turtles. Very pleased with the accuracy in the reports about Oasis Divers and the Osprey Hotel in *Undercurrent*.

**Oasis Divers, Crabtree Apartments, April 2006, John and Sandra Quick (jwquickmd@comcast.net), Grand Rapids, MI.** Experience: 450 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 79 F, choppy. Fourth visit to Grand Turk. Oasis is accommodating cruise ship passengers with dive and snorkel trips. They keep the cruise ship passengers separate from folks who are staying on the island and

diving with them. We weren't inconvenienced by the cruise ship passengers at all. In fact, cruise ship arrivals make for a lively time in town. Things have been spruced up and there are a few more restaurant and bars. We've previously enjoyed Island House. This time we tried Crabtree Apartments. We had a tidy 2 bedroom, 1 bath apartment on the beach a short (10 minute) walk from town and the dive shop. We had two bikes (came with the apartment; bring your own lock or be prepared to bring them in each night). We took a cab for initial supplies and water. The cabs are expensive so we tried to bike it for additional supplies and sundries. The diving doesn't appear to have been affected by cruise ship pressure. Still love the easy diving here. Our visibility wasn't great because of a few stormy days. Only disconcerting experience was being approached by begging children on a couple of occasions ... once it was a couple of little kids maybe 6-7 years old. A second time we were approached by 3 teenaged boys who were quite foulmouthed when we put them off. Is this behavior because of the cruise ship visitors?

**Oasis Divers, Osprey Beach Hotel, May 2006, Gar Whaley, Alexandria, VA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 81 to 81 F, calm. Osprey Beach Hotel - the upper floor window room was awesome. Recently redone, great bed and bathroom. Awesome view from balcony. Oasis Divers - really great service. Mackie and Emmanuel were great DM's. Made an effort to make sure no repeat sites. Took care of your gear after you set it up the first dive. Fun DMs made for a great trip. The shop is organized and well run despite having to deal with the cruise ships every Friday and Wednesday. The entire staff were all happy and provided great

service. Small boats — short rides = no rinse tank on boat

**Sea Eye Diving, Osprey Beach Hotel, August 2006, Amy and David Seibert (daseibert@comcast.net), Little Canada, MN.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. The island was almost devoid of vacationers. This led to a few restaurants and bars being closed, but it made our time there private and relaxing. We spent half our dives alone with the dive master or having one other couple along. We could dive at a leisurely pace, allowing for time to observe interesting critters, turtles, or fish. Bottom time was usually an hour or more. We saw some less common fish like two bat fish, frog fish, quillfin blenny, pipehorse, jackknife, spotted drum, eagle ray, huge friendly grouper (Alexander) that loved to be pet, and a black tipped reef shark. Soft coral was plentiful and colorful. We saw an alive reef with large schools of fish, several nurse sharks, snapper, various sea slugs, flounder, conch, flamingo tongues, fields of garden eels, turtles, anemones, moray and spotted eels, shrimp holding cleaning sessions, barracuda, butterfly, jawfish, parrotfish, sting rays, trigger, angel, puffer, trumpet, juvenile and adult trunk fish, squid, jacks, etc. Smitty, the dive master from Sea Eye Diving, was a great dive master. He was relaxed, fairly laid-back, and spent just the right amount of time pointing out all the unique critters. Although the boat wasn't in good condition, it served its purpose. Since we spent surface intervals back in our room or on the beach at Osprey, the boat only had to transport us to our dive spot 5-15 minutes out. We did have to tote our gear back to our room every day. We didn't start diving until 9:30am so you can sleep in if you like. The T&C

islands have some of the most beautiful sandy beaches in the Caribbean. The water is so inviting, we found ourselves in the water frequently even when we were not diving. Several afternoons we snorkeled in front of the hotel. There is a small reef about a 15 minute leisurely kick out, besides an old salt boat wreck. We saw a few small nurse sharks, 5 ft long barracuda, and a unique sharptail eel, along with the usual reef fish. When not snorkeling, we passed the time with the addictive fun found in searching for well turned sea glass. We also spent an afternoon at Gibbs Cay, which was nice. Smitty cooked up ribs and chicken, which we washed down with rum punch. We swam around with the rays that some of the cruise ship passengers came over to feed. Go to Gibbs Cay on a day no cruise ships are docked. Although we purchased a dive package with Osprey, they failed to set up our dives with Blue Water, who we originally intended to dive with. They told us upon arrival we would need to set the diving up ourselves. We ran into a dive master in training, Isabelle. She introduced us on Sunday to Smitty, from Sea Eye diving, and 20 minutes later we met them on the beach to start diving. We needed to watch the tanks' PSIs, since the tank fillers tend to go pretty light. Smitty always was helpful in making sure we had a close to full pressure to ensure a long bottom time. Food is expensive. Our room had a refrigerator, microwave, toaster, and coffee pot, so we went to Cee's grocery and the liquor store, and ended up eating breakfast and lunch in our room most days. We enjoyed sunsets on our balcony (room 44) with a few drinks and some microwave popcorn. Pack a few staples like coffee, microwave popcorn, peanut butter. The Osprey had good food (\$17-\$27/meal), but Michael's Atrium across

the road was just as good or better and the prices were more reasonable. One night at Michael's we had a huge plate of chicken pasta and ribs for \$10 each. This is also where you will find a steady stream of "belongers" stopping in to pick up their carry-out orders. Our room had a large four poster bed and vaulted ceilings. Tiny ants in the bathroom were there the entire trip.

## Providenciales

**Beaches, April 2006, Craig Grube (grube@cox.net), Virginia Beach, VA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, choppy. Beaches is a great family resort with plenty to do for all ages and interests. Though it was near capacity, it never seemed crowded. The Hobie cats are fun, kayaks, snorkel boats, etc. Everything is included in the price even 2-tank dives daily. My family has been there 5 times due to the variety, the food, the grounds. For serious divers it is a bit of a bummer. Great location but they only let you go to 60 feet and max time is 30 minutes, including the safety stop, so you never get to really fully enjoy the dive. We dove Grace Bay, Northwest Point, and they even took us to French Cay when the water was too rough on the north side of the island. French Cay was beautiful with massive sponges of all types, large areas of gorgonians. The walls are awesome (too bad we couldn't get deep enough). We saw many huge grouper (Nassau and tiger), schools of jacks, variety of angel fish. Northwest Point has nice coral, had some good close up action with some reef sharks. Saw many grouper, several large crabs, lobster, angel fish, stingrays, a moray, and some barracuda. Grace Bay coral seems to be dying, could be result of a hurricane a couple of years ago. However, we did

see spotted eagle ray, nurse shark, large tiger and Nassau groupers and good size barracuda. Imagine how good it could be if you were in the water longer than 30 minutes. For beginners it is worthwhile as they are safety conscious and the marine life is quite fine. Serious divers will love the resort, but be frustrated with the diving rules.

**Big Blue, Beaches, June 2006, Mel McCombie (mmccombie@aol.com), New Haven, CT.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 Feet. Water: 82 F, calm. Since we stayed at Beaches for a family reunion, we wisely chose not to dive with them but to go with Big Blue. It's a superb operation. The cost is a good 50% higher than other island dive shops but one can dive one's own profile with no sense of being hurried and the surface intervals were long and filled with food. Our dives averaged 75 minutes. Big Blue is an environmentally active company—a green operation—and worth the extra money. The corals in Provo have clearly suffered from algal growth, probably linked with the number of large hotels and condos built in the past few years (with their sewage and waste); there were fewer big fish than in years past (I've dived there since the late 1980s). Although I have warm memories of Provo diving, it has clearly deteriorated in the past 15 years.

**Caicos Adventures, The Sands at Grace Bay, October 2005, Art Burke, Katy, TX. (scubadiver@houston.rr.com)** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm. Diving with Caicos Adventures was a wonderful experience. We had our 2 daughters with us that had not dove for some time. The crew on-board the CAT 54, Andy and Asa, were excellent. Both took their time to discuss the dive and showed the sites underwater. Nothing

was rushed. Upon exit, they handled the equipment for the next dive and even washed the gear down when we left it overnight for the next day diving. The double hull catamaran was roomy with easy giant stride entry and ladders for exit. The head was large and the front of the vessel allowed for sun bathing during the surface interval or while in transit. The boat is built for divers. They also had a safety stop bar at 15ft and a regulator hanging next to it in case you needed it to make your 3 min. safety stop. We did 2 dives a day and we went to West Caicos and French Cay – no other boats were around so we had the ocean to ourselves. We saw sharks, rays, turtles, eels, groupers and the usual reef fish. The dives were 60-90 ft. maximum depth and normally averaging 45-65 ft. throughout the dive. Water temperature was 82-85 F at depth in early October. There was healthy coral, shear walls, large barrel and tube sponges. Several dives had current but that made the return trip fun. The visibility was good – 70+ ft on most dives. We had sandwiches between dives and plenty of water and Gatorade on board. We brought watermelon, which was a hit with the divemasters. Fifi, the owner and captain, picked us up at the hotel at 8:15am and we normally returned by 3ish depending how far we went out to dive. Caicos Adventures tried to ensure we had great dive sites and saw different varieties of fish and reefs. The Sands on Grace Bay condos is about 5 years old and well maintained. We had a 2-bedroom condo for the 4 of us and it was excellent. Our unit had full kitchen, washer/dryer and a large porch with views of the pool and beach. There is a business center with computer and Internet. Also there is free wireless Internet if you have your own laptop. The pools were large and cool;

the beach has fine white powdered sand with umbrellas. There is no reef in front of the condo so it is just a sand bottom. The Coral Gardens hotel has a public beach and we snorkeled. They had it roped off so you could not swim over all of it. However, it was nice enough to get pictures of reef fish, turtle and even a nurse shark. The restaurant onsite, Hemmingway's, was good. We also went to the Tiki Hut and Bay Bistro, both were excellent. We rented a vehicle and found a secluded beach, Sunset Bay, which had a nice beach and view of the sunset. Restaurants, gifts and food were reasonable – when considering it's an island. The currency is US Dollars.

**Caicos Adventures, Comfort Suites, November 2005, Jeffrey France (jf850@aol.com), East Stroudsburg, PA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm, choppy, no currents. The weather was great, the diving was excellent, but there isn't really anything else to do but go to the beach or drink "Turks head" lager (it's best with a lime, like Corona). 54' catamaran had large carpeted area for cameras with dry storage beneath, and average size rinse tank, crew hands you your gear after you enter the water.

**Caicos Adventures, Comfort Inn, December 2005, Jack Hall (eyesguy@aol.com), Ripon, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 150 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm, choppy. The diving was terrific and the boat that Caicos Adventures uses is one of the best laid-out and best maintained that I have seen, but we felt like they pulled a fast one on us for the pricing. Nitrox was advertised on their web site at \$9 per tank and yet they charged us \$12 per tank. When we told them about it being on the web site, they said "Oh, that was changed. I guess they didn't get it changed on the

web site," and they proceeded to charge us the \$12 per tank. This was after they had consulted with "Mrs. Fifi" (the owner's wife who runs the store operation and collects the money). Fifi insists on no shoes on his boat, but the deck has a knobby rubber surface that can hurt your feet. It will soon be the most overbuilt island in the Caribbean. There was construction everywhere, and a fine layer of dust from the construction overlays all of the vegetation and cars. There are six - and eight-story condos and hotels going up all over the island. The locals are understandably not real happy about it all, and the general attitude toward tourists is one of mild distrust and aloofness. Food prices are quite high (we spent \$100 for dinner for two with one beer and no dessert), but you can go to the local store and getting food in the deli section — they have lots of variety and the prices are only about 25% higher than in the US. The Comfort Inn room was quite nice and the staff were helpful. Continental breakfast was included, which made it handy because we could grab a quick banana, sweet roll and coffee before leaving for the day's diving. Also convenient was the dive operation — about 100 feet away from our room. Fifi (really Philippe, but he goes by Fifi) has a 12-passenger bus that he drives around to any hotel that has people who are diving with him that day. The whole pickup operation takes about 30 minutes. Most of the diving was deep — the top of the wall was often at 80 feet, so the dives tended to be well under 60 minutes. We were told that we are adults — we should dive our own profile and observe reasonable safety precautions: return with 500 pounds and stay above 130 feet but no one will be checking computers. There was always a divemaster or two to show us

around if we wished, but there was no “romper room” diving where we all had to hold hands and stay together.

**Caicos Adventures, The Sands, February 2006, Frank Thompson (stinva@gmail.com), Fairfax, VA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm, choppy. Twice there were 26 divers (not including crew) on one boat! It was a cattle boat, to say the least. I asked Fifi about this and he replied that it would still be a good experience and better than his competitors. The crew was great always professional and friendly. The dives were overall good with an abundance of sharks and eagle rays seen. The space aboard the boat was horrible. It was difficult to move and gear up on the crowded boat days (3 out of 5 days) where the number of divers exceeded 25. There was no mention of taking out the second Cat just sitting there waiting to be used. Fifi was also not aboard any of the trips.

**Caicos Adventures, Harbor Club, March 2006, Steve Bissell (fsbissell@aol.com), McLean, VA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 75 to 85 F, calm, no currents. Stayed at Harbor Club next to the dock; excellent little villa. Bumpy ride to town and restaurants, but full kitchen and short walk to the boat. Dove French Cay and West Caicos exclusively. Saw sharks on most dives, along with plentiful tropicals. Also mackerel, grouper. Fewer tuna and such as a Japanese fleet was fishing nearby and cleaning out the edible species. Fifi was filling the boats, and took the more experienced divers for himself on one of two boats. The two catamarans he operated were stable and spacious, great for the 45 min. trip to French Cay. Only shore diving was on Grace Bay. Hired

the dive operator at the Coral Gardens for two night dives.

**Caicos Adventures, Beaches, April 2006, Craig Grube (grube@cox.net), Virginia Beach, VA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, choppy. Caicos Adventures runs once a week 3 tank dive to French Cay or West Caicos on a 43' by 20' double hull vessel that slices through the water. Extremely smooth ride. The crew sets up your gear for each dive and helps you out of the water to your seat. There were only 12 divers on this spacious boat. Breakfast is donuts and lunch is sandwich and chips. Water and Gatorade jugs. These folks are organized. They require a computer on the 3 tanker and let you dive so that you are within no-deco limits. On this day we went to French Cay. The viz was good despite cloud cover above. Great sponges, fans and gorgonians. The wall was in excellent shape. We saw a couple of reef sharks, several spotted eagle rays, several large schools of jacks. There were also numerous good sized queen, French and gray angels. Each dive had large Nassau and tiger grouper, barracuda, scrawled filefish. They have a bus and pick you up at your hotel/condo and return you at the end of the day. It doesn't get much better.

**Dive Adventures, Royal West Indies Resort, August 2006, Steve Jarocki, Jr. (h2onutz@bellsouth.net), Sunrise, FL.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm. My wife and I had to postpone our vacation due to her back injury. Our West Indies Resort had a one-day penalty; Adventure Divers allowed us to rebook with no penalty. Adventure Divers is a good operation with a friendly crew. Weather conditions kept us diving West Caicos Island the entire week; some

sites we dove twice. Diving Turks and Caicos is not for the “hard core diver,” the distance to and from the dive sites allows only two dives per day. Turks and Caicos is a beautiful island; hotels, meals, and diving are on the high side of the price scale.

**Dive Provo, Royal West Indies, April 2006, Tim and Jill Kolakowski (tkolakowski@choiceonemail.com), Erie, PA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm. You can be there by early afternoon from anywhere in the eastern US without inter-island hops. There is no crime, no litter, and no cruise ship traffic (the reef keeps them out). The 12 mile long Grace Bay Beach with flour-like sand has been rated by Conde Nast as the nicest beach in the Caribbean. Although the huge dollar condos are being built along the beach, the construction really isn't noticeable. There are good restaurant choices, but surprisingly few retail shopping spots — just a few small plazas — which gives Provo a small island charm despite the condo growth. To stay on the beach, you'll most likely end up in a condo. They range from nice to opulent . . . you can spend thousands per night if you're so inclined. But among the reasonably priced condos, Royal West Indies is the best value. The smallest size of RWI and beautiful gardens give it an intimate, relaxing feeling. Nicer than the others in the price range, such as Ocean Club, Alexandra, and Coral Gardens. RWI's on-site restaurant, The Mango Reef, is excellent and reasonably priced. Try the conch salad. There are snorkel trips to the offshore uninhabited islands, kayaking, sailing, and a conch farm with a fascinating guided tour. The diving is a long boat ride but worth it. We saw sharks on almost every dive, including my first hammerhead

off French Cay. It's all wall diving followed by a nice 30-50 ft deep reef with good marine life. Dive Provo is a well-run operation which handled the Easter Week crowds well.

**Dive Provo, Comfort Suites, June 2006, Brian Newton (Bfignewton@sigecom.net), Evansville, IN.** Experience: 101-250 dives. When I arrived I wasn't feeling good so I decided to take a day off from diving. The crew got me oriented to the boat and up to speed with the others quickly. The dive shop provides a rental mesh bag that your equipment would be kept in all week. Once I got my gear on the boat I never had to worry about taking it off or rinsing it, because it was done for me. My BC developed a problem. My power inflator hose had come “unglued” from the bladder. I thought I would have to rent equipment that I might not be real comfortable with. The captain of the boat said that he might have a glue, but if that didn't work there was not a lot that could be done since there are not a lot of repair facilities on the island. The next day my BC was back on the boat and it worked perfectly. They never charged me for fixing it. I know I missed a day of diving, but getting my BC fixed made up for it.

**Dive Provo, Comfort Suites, July 2006, Kristi Sharrai, Kansas City, MO.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm. From the time we checked in until the time we left, there were nothing but problems that even after speaking with the surly front desk clerk went unattended. Air conditioners leaked pools of water on the tile floors, soiled towels were taken by the maids but not replaced, locals crowded around the bar all day and night, making it difficult to get in to order drinks, mold was in the grout

in showers and the drains didn't drain, leaving you standing in dirty water. TV reception was horrible. We were supposed to have beverage vouchers for our rooms that they refused to give us for nearly two days (until our travel agent got involved). Breakfast was a pitiful bit of food — toast, spice cake, croissants, juice and coffee. The island is nothing but a bunch of construction everywhere you look — not pretty. The dive shop is at the hotel and has a nice but pricey selection of shirts, jewelry, souvenirs and some dive/snorkel gear. There was about a 10-minute drive by bus to the marina to catch the boat. The diving was not spectacular, but good. Reef was in good shape, with plenty of various corals, sponges, etc. Twice, Caribbean reef sharks swam up next to us; we saw octopus, turtles, rockfish and rays. Lots of trumpet fish and flamingo tongue. At Cathedral we saw a huge green moray. On West Caicos, as we boarded the boat our boat captain told us that right after we entered the water, one other boat at the end of the island reported that their divers saw a 20-foot whale shark! We did see a cool cannonball jellyfish. On July 19 we did a night dive at Boneyard and saw thousands of glow-worms. A beautiful sight! The divemaster told us it was unusual to see them there as they usually hang out near the mangroves and closer to the full moon than when we were there. Dive Provo was a great bunch to dive with. Every single one of the crew was friendly and helpful (such a nice contrast from the locals on the island!). They work on a rotating basis so we never had the same crew, which was not a problem. They took care of your gear from setting it up to rinsing and storing it. They would go wherever we wanted and let you dive your own profile. Divemasters were always in the water if

you wanted a guided tour. Tanks were always full. Snacks, both sweet and salty, were furnished as well as several beverages. The boats didn't have dry erase boards to show us a visual of the dive sites. The safety talk always included rules for camera rinse tubs and tables.

**Dive Provo, Sibonne Beach Hotel, August 2006, Marshall Welch (mpwelch705@msn.com), Seattle, WA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Seemed like a professional, well-run operation. Boats were pretty full but I didn't consider them crowded. Nice, helpful divemasters/crew, good pre-dive briefings. Efficient reservations process — call in advance for reservations — they have a stateside toll-free number. Advance reservations have lower rates than for walk-ins. They picked me up at my hotel at 8 AM and take all divers to their dive shop. There you find out which boat you are assigned to, show C-cards, sign waiver forms, pick up rental equipment, etc. First day everyone on our boat was first time diving with them, and we dived in Grace Bay, a short boat ride, to make sure everyone is comfortable with buoyancy. The second day the boat I was on left from a different dock, on the South side of Provo, and went to West Caicos, about an hour-long boat ride away. We dived two really nice wall dives — Driveway, and Boat Cove (a.k.a., Rock Garden Interlude). I dived on those same sites later in the week when on the Aggressor. We were back at the dive shop by about 2:45 pm. They don't allow big roll-aboard dive duffel bags on the boats. They want you to use a mesh bag for your gear; they loan you one if you need it. Plenty of beverages and snacks on the boat, but no lunch provided. My old depth gauge leaked after the first day — I only use it for back up; I have

a computer. I inquired if they had any depth gauges for sale, and their reply was that it's hard/expensive to maintain an extensive inventory of dive equipment in the islands. The shop did have a few masks, snorkels, fins for sale and I did buy a pair of lycra booties for the same price one would pay on the mainland U.S. As others said in the 2005 Chapbook, Sibonne Beach is a pleasant, casual little hotel nestled between some bigger, glitzier new hotel/condo developments. The restaurant there is great, but at \$5, beer can get expensive. You can buy local public bus/van ("The Gecko") tokens at nearby hotels but not at the Sibonne Beach (presently \$4.00 each way) and get a ride to the Graceway supermarket and stock up on food/beverages for your fridge. I think you have to phone for the Gecko; the hotel staff didn't know much about it. There are also privately operated vans that will stop along the side of the road and offer rides to tourist pedestrians, but they seemed expensive. I suspect they charge tourists higher rates than locals.

**Dive Provo, Comfort Suites, September 2006 Lucius "Bud" Foster (elijahsdad@prodigy.net), Duluth, MN.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm, choppy. We booked a package deal with Dive Provo and opted for the Comfort Suites next door to the dive shop. Next time I will pay a little more money to stay in a nicer place in Grace Bay instead of the Comfort Suites. The service was poor and the staff just did not care about anything but looking at the clock to see just how much time they had left until their shift was over. The free continental breakfast was bad and included watered-down OJ, coffee, and hard bread, period. Dive Provo was excellent and run professionally.

All of the dive guides were instructors and confident professionals. They pick you up each morning at your hotel in a van with A/C, then they proceed to the docks where the dive boats run out from. The dive shop is equipped with all the essentials for diving in case you forgot something at home, and are not over-priced like many island dive shops. I always bring my own gear but rental equipment was in great shape. The boats were big comfortable and always had some kind of fresh fruit, snacks, and drinks aboard. The most divers were eight to a boat and they put two dive guides in the water. You could dive with a guide or feel free to dive your own profile. The diving was good and similar to the good wall diving off Bimini, Bahamas. The difference is, the coral, sponge, fans, and aquatic life were in much better shape. I spent six diving days and dived off French Cay, Providenciales, West Caicos, Pine Cay, and North West Point Providenciales. Most of the time the visibility was 120+ and at Jule's Junction we saw a squadron of eagle rays swimming by on the wall. The colors at most of the sites were spectacular for camera. Day two was off Providenciales at The Crack and Black Coral Forest. These are both excellent wall dives with plenty to see. During the first morning dive a mother and daughter pair kept staying a little low and long on the dive and were not on nitrox like the rest of us. By the second dive at Black Coral Forest, the mother's alarm went off on her computer and I noticed her panic and start swimming at full speed for the surface. I turned really fast to catch her and assist, and as I turned, the back of my leg rubbed up against fire coral from the back of the knee to the ankle. I got to her and offered air and she stopped and showed me her computer that was saying she

was in Deco. I calmed her down and signaled her to wait until the dive guide got her. I showed her that on her computer she still had 1000 lbs. of air and that I had a Buddy air bottle and that seemed to calm her down. Her Deco was saying 24 min deco at 20'. Seconds later the dive guide was there and sent the other guide up (after his 3 minute safety stop) to get another bottle with regulator. This all happened within 90 seconds, then I swam under the boat and did my safety stop. The fire coral that had rubbed my calf felt just like it sounds, like a flame of a match was being held against my leg and would not stop. I can see why people say it can make a grown man cry. It did. I had to compose myself and keep from wanting to bolt to the surface. It seemed like the longest safety stop I had ever taken and my leg was killing me. When I got on the boat, the captain got me some solution to ease the pain, and it did, slightly.

**Provo Dive, Comfort Inn, February 2006, William Baines, Lexington Park, MD.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 70 to 80 F, calm. Provo Divers provides bus/shuttle service from shop (across from Comfort Inn) to all their boat locations. Brought gear to the shop the night before the first day of diving; it was set up and ready on boat for remainder of dive trips. Divemasters were friendly, knowledgeable and helpful. Boats were not overcrowded. Some excellent restaurants within walking distance, but food tends to be expensive.

**Provo Turtle Divers, Ocean Club, August 2006, Paul D. Bandt (pdb3810@yahoo.com), Las Vegas, NV.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. Serene diving; staff carried gear and changed tanks between dives;

you were responsible for getting in gear and water, but they were always ready to help. Guides did nice guided tours, but you were free to do your own thing. Everyone had to have a computer (they had them available for rent). You were responsible for your own time and depth. Max dive time 45"; we frequently had 1000 psi left (my equally experienced wife and myself). We were happy with the operation; boat was not crowded, large and comfortable; and a congenial group of "good" divers.

**Provo Turtle Divers, Ocean Club West, August 2006, Ross and Lynda Biederman, June Lake, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Saw reef sharks almost every dive. Turtles feeding and swimming about. Stingrays everywhere. Large fish every dive as well as an abundance of small fish and critters. Water is cooler — we rented shorty suits and wore them over our lycra. First dive the boat was overcrowded, but Provo Turtle Divers corrected the situation the next day. Informative Dive Masters with great guided dives. Really liked their conservation attitude! They want to protect their reefs and aren't shy about telling you to keep your hands off and leave the critters alone. Bus picks you up at your resort and delivers you home again. Leave your gear on the boat each day — they wash it and hang it to dry and then have it set up for you on the boat the next day. We usually had to set up our own gear on the 2nd dive, but overall the crew was helpful. Lots of good snacks on board for divers and a variety of juices along with water. Helpful and cooperative with all types of photographers. Allowed photographers a lot of freedom to do their own thing, but were more than willing to point out hard to find photo subjects if you wanted to stay with the guided tour.

Separate photo ice chest rinse to keep cameras in.

## Salt Cay

**Salt Cay Divers, Windmill Plantation, November 2005, Roger and Fern Begelman (roger.begelman@gs.com), Larchmont, NY.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: choppy. We hit some bad weather that was a first for us in a long time. I liked the dive operation, informal, the people were friendly and they knew what they were doing. They had enough boats that though one was in the shop they could accommodate all that were there, and comfortably. The divemaster, who was relatively new from Canada, made sure that we had good quality dives. Bad weather cancelled two days of diving however. Windmill Plantation was a fabulous place, excellent food, exceptionally nice owners and staff, and accommodations that were comfortable, but not stuffy. The bar had so many interesting things in, on and around it — it was fun to hang there.

**Salt Cay Divers, Tradewinds, December 2005, Barry Klickstein (bcklickstein@duanemorris.com), Swampscott, MA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. Debbi and Ollie of Salt Cay Divers are simply the best. There is nothing you might need on the island that Debbi can't arrange, from picking you up at the "airport" (the size of your garage) to setting up the accommodations (Tradewinds: comfortable, clean, on the water, and centrally located), to arranging whatever dive schedule you want, to wonderful meals, cooked just for you when you want. While the reefs at Salt Cay aren't up to Bloody Bay Wall, the diving was good, relaxing, and fun. We generally did a two tank in the

AM (with a surface interval on shore) and an afternoon dive when we wanted. A night dive (sharks, eels, turtle etc.) was substituted for an afternoon on request, and we also made a day trip to South Caicos to dive the wall (excellent, with the wreck of a DC3), a day trip to Grand Turk to dive that wall (very good), and a trip to the wreck of the Endymion (excellent). Salt Cay, with 60 inhabitants, gives laid back new meaning. Beautiful beaches, all to yourself, friendly folks — no locks, you settle your tab everywhere at the end of the week — and fresh delicious food cooked by either Miss Pat at her home, John at the Island Thyme, or Filomen at the Coral Reef Café, or wings from Sue at the Green Flash on the dock.

**Salt Cay Divers, Tradewinds, February 2006, Sheri Ray (sheri.ray@sbcglobal.net), Dallas, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 77 F, choppy, surge. On 1/3 of the dives, the vis was less than 45 feet. When the vis improved, there was still a lot of silt all over the corals. It looked like it had snowed underwater, all over the corals. During humpback whale season (Dec - Mar), it's typical to have 3-4 days of choppy seas and poor vis, followed by 2-3 days of calm water and great vis. The locals recommended coming there for 10 days to increase our good diving days. Salt Cay Divers is a good operation. We did see whales from the boat on our final day, but they wouldn't come closer than 100 feet and the water was rough. It was incredible to see the whales and they hung out around the boat for quite a while. Out of the 11 dives I did, there were 2 "WOW" dives, where the vis was great and there were abundant fish and a couple of rays. For the money we spent on this trip, we were disappointed. Above water though, I enjoyed it more . . . beauti-

ful white sand beaches, slow paced life, and good food. There are 5 restaurants on the island, but we ate at only 2, the Coral Reef Bar and Grill and Island Thyme Bistro. Both were good and offered fresh fish and lobster. We carried in some of our own food, as eating out and purchasing food on the island is both pricy and uncertain. Nelly makes wonderful homemade bread! UW Photography Comments: Had to ask for bucket for cameras, and after that, one was usually provided.

**Salt Cay Divers, Tradewinds, February 2006, Name withheld.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm. Salt Cay is about as remote as one can get. Access to online services is extremely limited and phone calls are expensive, so plan on pretty much being incommunicado during your stay. This is OK for about a week, and then cabin fever begins setting in. The diving was average, with no large schools, so larger fish, and average hard corals. Not many soft corals. However, just 10 miles away around Grand Turk, all that changes. More fish, better corals, just better all-around diving. Salt Cay Divers makes the Grand Turk trip a couple of times a week. Also, the hour boat ride to the HMS Endymion wreck is worthwhile once during your stay. There are old cannons scattered around and other signs of the ship, which sank around 1800. A second trip isn't worth it, especially if you are on the island for only a week. Didn't see the humpbacks that cruise through. They use Carolina skiffs for short trips, and, naturally, there was no space for my video camera, so I held it in my lap. On the one larger boat, there was deck space for the camera, but not much.

**Salt Cay Divers, Sandy Toes, March 2006, Cindi and Bob Robertson**

(uzisu@aol.com), **Interlochen, MI.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F, choppy. This, our fourth trip to Salt Cay, brought no whales, however it did bring us a nice old style anchor on an uncharted reef! The water still had a bit of winter in it. (One dive lasting 77 minutes). I bring a lot of rubber, so usually I stay warm, however, some ladies diving in a 3mm, were shivering at the end of the dives. (So were some men!) Salt Cay Divers has shorties you can use. Hurricane Francis skirted the island in 2004, and there is still evidence of that underwater. Last year, I wondered why some dive sites were almost completely white. The current theory floating around is that the Hurricane basically 'sandblasted' the coral in some places. I am happy to report evidence of new coral growth and I'm optimistic about the recovery of the reef. This is wall diving at its best. That, coupled with a great dive operation, and small crowds. But be warned, there is almost nothing to do but dive. Bring your own food, or bring lots of money to dine out. Miss Pats, Island Thyme, Green Flash and Coral Reef are about the only places to buy meals. Be sure to make your airplane reservations starting from Salt Cay back to your original point of departure. The airplanes from Salt Cay to Provo are a bit fickle, and they don't always stick to the previous plan. We took the boat over to Grand Turk and spent a night, before flying out the next day. Salt Cay is an arid island, and water is a precious commodity. Sometimes the trade winds blow so hard, it is difficult to even ride your bicycle. This is a good thing, because we have never had a bug problem. (only on Grand Turk, when the winds died down and we were swarmed by flying termites!).

**Salt Cay Divers, Tradewinds, March**

**2006, Gary W Brown (gkbrown@vci.net), Benton, KY.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. We loved the tiny island of Salt Cay and the people. Debbie at Salt Cay Divers helped us make travel arrangements and on site reservations. It was pretty windy and the visibility was stirred up a bit. The dive operation is first class. Matt and Trevor set up all of our equipment each day. Most of the diving is done from small boats, backrolling into the water. The walls are nice but there was quite a lot of sand covering some coral. Dive your own profile and come up with 500 psi. Very friendly staff and hard working to make sure you enjoy your vacation. Several people told us that a good time to visit is May and June. We did see a few whales and sometimes heard them calling while diving. Some wonderful places to eat include Island Thyme, Pats, Mt. Pleasant and the Green Flash. Make reservations ahead to be sure food is prepared. Very quiet, uncrowded and remote island. Transportation is by bicycle or golf cart.

**Salt Cay Divers, Tradewinds Guest Suites, July 2006, Bob and Diane Moore (mooresrv@aol.com), Cleveland, OH.** Experience about 100 dives. Nothing has changed since the 2005 reports in the Chapbook. The diving is good and easy. Salt Cay divers were accommodating with never more than 6 divers in a 24' Carolina Skiff, often only the 2 of us. They went where we wanted, when we wanted, guided us at our pace and helped with the gear. Rental gear was old and tattered but quite serviceable. The reef is in good shape with lots of small critters but few larger fish. There were large schools of jacks, goatfish and spadefish and lots of parrotfish. We saw only a few solo angel fish, a few nurse sharks and lobster.

There was one show-off octopus fanned out over something on the wall. Saw a huge group of garden eels. This was my first time back diving anywhere near the Bahamas in 20 years and I was shocked at how little live staghorn and elkhorn coral is left. Soft corals were plentiful and healthy. Debbie could not have been more helpful. She seems to run everything on the island. One day she helped us in the dive shop, the boutique, and at the Tradewinds, then cooked and served our dinner. That night she was up to 1:00 AM to arrange an emergency evacuation and then picked us up at 4:45AM for the trip to the airport, where she took care of the baggage and the tickets. Salt Cay is fascinating, with lots of bicycling, hiking, beach combing and exploring. We stopped to peer in the windows of an old church, only to be invited in and shown around by a friendly islander. Bought breakfast and lunch supplies at Miss Netty's, limited selection but her bread is great. Dinners were at Salt Cay Divers or Miss Pat's and all were good. Don't forget to make reservations. Tradewinds guest suites are clean, comfortable, convenient and yes, the trade winds blow through all day. Air Turks and Caicos was on time but their schedule does not fit with the airline schedules to Provo so you may lose a lot of time sitting in the Provo airport. Contact Debbie at Salt Cay Divers to arrange your trip.

## UNITED STATES

### Florida

**Southern Swim and Scuba, Atlanta Technical Divers, North Florida Cave, July 2006, David N Scarborough (david@wan2dive.com), Douglasville,**