

Kurt F and Linda I Wilkens, Green Lake, WI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. The crew and food were outstanding. We enjoyed the other passengers as well as the diving. We saw a lot of fish, corals and mantas. We enjoyed the Saba and Statia diving more than St. Kitts. We took all of the island tours and thought this was a bonus of the trip. The Explorer Ventures organization were accommodating and helpful.

TURKS AND CAICOS

T&C Aggressor, January 2006, George (film4rent@aol.com), Cashiers, NC.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 120 Feet. Water: 76 to 79 F, choppy. This was my 4th live-aboard, and by far the best. The food was almost gourmet. The diving was excellent and the crew was more than helpful with almost anything. Really was the best bang for the buck.

T&C Aggressor II, August 2006, Marshall Welch (mpwelch705@msn.com), Seattle, WA.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 110 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Great dive sites — dived NW Point sites, then West Caicos and French Caye and then back to the others in reverse order. Numerous reef sharks; nurse sharks on most dives. Some saw a squadron of seven spotted eagle rays, and one or two of these were spotted about every day. Fantastic crew — skilled, talented, pleasant, and eager to help in any way they can. They were kind enough to mix a batch of chemicals and develop my film during the week. However, I think they said that when the chemicals they have run out, they are discontinuing on-board E-6 processing. If you are sensitive to cold (air conditioning), you may want to

bring along a lightweight fleece jacket or pullover — the salon can get cool. They also sell sweatshirts on the boat. Not much good food is available in the airport lounge. Hot dogs was about it. Make sure you are well fed before arriving at the airport. The boat hosted the Jim Church School of Underwater Photography — taught by Mike Haber and Mike Mesgleski. The course is wonderful. I was a returning student, and look forward to joining them again. This boat and crew vigorously supports photographers and video. Dedicated camera rinse tank, spacious camera table with shelves beneath. The captain, second captain, and photo pro are each by themselves capable of supporting serious photographers/videographers. They had two Nikon D-70 cameras in housings available for rentals. Make your reservations early, though — they were already taken by the time I got interested in one. They also have digital point-and-shoots with external strobes available for rent. The video pro made a fantastic DVD, available for sale, from scenes she shot during the week.

T&C Explorer II, October 2005, Clem Clapp (cclapp@bellsouth.net), Maplesville, AL.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, no currents. A bit of a delay getting onboard. Had to find a taxi to take me to the pier, then a 15 minute wait on tender for delivery to boat in harbor. Boat was not at pier due to shallow water. Explorer was a 10-cabin, 120-footer. Clean. Comfortable dive deck. Adequate public area. good and varied food. Only 8 passengers and they gave me a free upgrade from the inexpensive lower level cabin to a nice double. En suite bath. Good ac. Accommodating staff. Friendly captain who invited guests to visit helm. Had tours of engine area with an engineer. Treated

divers like adults. Had extra engineers on board for training and trouble shooting some problems; one of which was the nitrox compressor that they finally had working after a couple of days. Mixture of wall and shallow diving. Got in 24 dives for the week. A nice touch was the warm blankets and hot chocolate with Baileys after the night dives. Lots of sharks on many dives. They told us that they would get close due to previous but now banned feedings. They were not overly afraid of divers and at one time I had to literally beat on a 5 footer with my fins and camera to make him go away. Experienced divers may want a little more variety by week's end.

T&C Explorer II, January 2006, Don and Marilee Hughes, Stewartville, MN. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 125 Feet. Water: 77 to F, calm, choppy. Good Caribbean diving off Providenciales, West Caicos, French Caye, and West Sand Spit, all completed from moorings except one drift dive off Smokestack Reef. The last two Friday morning dives of the trip were cancelled due to rough seas. Captain JF did super job at getting us to the best dive sites according to the weather. All sites had great coral walls in good condition with areas above the walls in the 40-60 foot range to muck around. Reefs were healthy though some coral bleaching was present. Sharks, eagle rays, turtles, and one manta with assortment of tropicals, smaller critters, and macro subjects present. Solo diving allowed if you are certified. Back to boat with 500 psi. No decompression diving. No diving greater than 130 feet. Five dives each day. First dive of the day was after breakfast. Night dives were after supper. A crew member recorded each divers depth and remaining air on a hand-held board. Either dive master Angelie

or Graham was in the water giving a guided tour at each site or dive on your own. Angelie did great job finding and pointing out macro life. Minimum of one hour between the morning dives with a longer interval between the two afternoon dives. Tank fills were 3000 psi or better. Nitrox ranged between 30 and 32%. Dive platform was ideal, at one foot or so above water level. Two hot water showers on dive platform. Camera rinse tank was large. Good sized camera table with camera towels. Enclosed area under the large camera table for battery charging. The boat was in good shape and clean. Rooms were good live-aboard size, clean, and with adequate storage and good lighting. Bathrooms have adequate shelf area for toiletries, etc. Room AC control worked well. Hot water was dependable. Rooms were cleaned while you ate breakfast. Towels were changed mid-week. The two top level and five dive deck level rooms have desks with chairs, which would be great for lap top and camera work area. The four bottom level rooms don't have desks, but the dresser tops in those rooms could suffice for camera work area, though you'd have to work standing up as the dresser tops in those bottom rooms are too high for a chair. Comfortable salon area had a large television stocked with DVDs. There are two levels for outdoor lounge space. Food and between dive snacks by Stan were good. Coffee, tea, pop, red and white wine, along with some hard liquor and several types of beer were available. No diving after drinking. Mario was the engineer. There were only three other divers aboard. The crew had a good attitude and seemed to enjoy their jobs. This combined with the diving, food, and boat all combined to make this an excellent week of live-aboard diving. (Unfortunately, our four

checked bags never arrived with us on the island Saturday morning. Captain JF assisted with wetsuits and BCDs as well as arranged for our luggage to be delivered to the boat Monday morning at West Caicos.) The two top level and five dive deck level rooms have desks with chairs, which would be great for laptop and camera work area. The four bottom level rooms don't have desks, but the dresser tops in those rooms could suffice for camera work area, though you'd have to work standing up as the dresser tops in those bottom rooms are too high for a chair.

T&C Explorer II, May 2006, Orlando Reef Divers (www.orlandoreefdivers.org), Orlando, FL. Experience from 60 to 1,000 plus dives. Vis was anywhere from 75 to 100+ feet and water temp was 83F, calm to a moderate chop with light currents. Breakfast from 7:00 to 8:00AM, two morning dives, lunch at noon and two afternoon dives. Night dives every day with two early dives the last day. All together 27 dives were scheduled. Meals were fabulous with snacks between each dive and popcorn in the evening. Soft drinks, beer, wine and mixed drinks were included in the price with also Nitrox included depending on the package. Cabins were clean and roomy with air conditioning and personal bath with shower and some with TV. Combination lounge and breakfast room was spacious and comfortable with large TV, VCR and DVD. Camera table and rinse tank were more than sufficient seeing all but 5 divers had cameras. Dive deck was state of the art with plenty of room for the boats 20 diver capacity with tanks being filled in place so equipment movement was at a minimum. Some 100 cu. ft. tanks were available as well as 60 cu. ft. ones. Individual compartments were designated for smaller items while suits were hung

on a main rack with warm air circulating around them to dry. Dive deck was spacious, platforms made for easy entry and ladders made for easy return. Two hang lines were positioned, at 20 feet for safety stops. Two showers on dive deck, with warm water made clean up enjoyable with clean towels provided each day. Additional warm towels after each night dive. There were two experienced dive guides that alternated between water accompaniment and dive deck assistance. Crew was experienced and worked well with special requests dealt with quickly and efficiently. We encountered spotted eagle rays, garden eels, yellow headed jaw fish, lots of queen triggers, big squirrel fish, flying gurnards, turtles and at least one shark on every dive. There was not an abundance of marine life but the wall diving was good with a variety of corals. Dive spots were marked with permanent mooring buoys but a bit close together to provide variety of terrain. Some felt that cost of fuel limited movement of the boat that might have been solved by using individual tenders. Another negative, apparently due to the design of the boat, was the constant swinging in an arc on its mooring so one minute the boat was above you and the next it was gone, so you had to wait for it to return. The swing also made it difficult to maintain depth on your safety stop due to the line angle changing with the current developed by the swing. A good value. The most popular guy on the boat was Stan, the chef, who apparently has won awards for his creations.

T&C Explorer, June 2006, Michael Braunstein, Las Vegas, NV. Experience 250+ dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm and flat, occasional strong currents. Very efficient operation. Diving is from the boat that makes for easy diving (5 dives a day). The food was

good and plentiful. When I hurt my back, they were helpful. Getting to the boat was a negative. Also, the anchor sometimes hit coral.

T&C Explorer, July 2006, Juli Tracy and Dick Gamble, San Diego, CA.

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm. Good was the boat itself and rooms, and food. Bad was getting to the boat (had to wade to dinghy, then dinghy to boat — if the boat people hadn't brought us from the resort where we stayed, there is no way we could have found the anchorage). A projected hurricane threatened, so we had to cut short two days of diving. We left the island, as there was nothing else much to do on Provo, but others were left there not knowing what conditions would be. No refund for the unused days, of course. Diving was nice, especially at French Cay, but not spectacular.

T&C Explorer II, September 2006, Jeremy Ellis (jeremyellis@earthlink.net), Atlanta, GA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm, no currents. The captain and crew go out of their way to make the trip a memorable one and to accommodate your every need. Before you arrive they ask you to fill out forms and mail them in, asking you for any special requests (specify preference on beer brand, liquor or wine). They try hard to accommodate all of your requests. There are several rooms below the main deck (which are bunk beds and a private bathroom), rooms on the main deck (which are two single beds and a private bathroom) and 2 VIP suites (which have queen size beds and a private bathroom). All of the rooms have storage space, ample room to charge devices, a desk and individual AC controls. The AC worked well in all

of the rooms except the ones below the main deck. The salon was large, with 3 tables for meals, a large couch and a 32-inch TV with DVD/VCR and stereo. They have all of the Reef Books on the boat as well as books guests have left behind, and there is an extensive movie library. You can complete 27 dives during a normal week, but you are putting yourself through a fairly grueling day. Breakfast at 7am, dive at 8:15, dive at 10:30, lunch at noon, dive at 1:30pm, dive at 4:30pm, dinner at 6:15pm and night dive at 8pm and then you repeat this every day. On the last day, you are woken at 5:30am for a 6am "dawn" dive and an 8am dive so you can get back to port for noon. You set up your equipment on a tank on the first day and never need to touch it again. The crew has your tank refilled within 20-30 minutes after each dive. Almost everyone on our boat used Nitrox and they have an analyzer and log to track Nitrox usage. The fills ran between 32% and 35% all week long between 3000 and 3500 PSI. There is ample storage space for all of your gear and hangers to dry your wetsuit / skins. There is a briefing before each dive and then the pool is open for diving. You walk down the stairs to the dive platform, put your fins on and jump in. There are 2 hang lines down to 25 feet and the ladders to exit are large and easy to use. The staff could not be friendlier and give you a lot of extra touches like filling your wetsuit with hot water after a night dive and a fresh hot towel. The food is OK but I would have enjoyed more fresh fish. All meals are buffet style and included the usual breakfast fare (eggs, pancakes, French toast, cereal, oatmeal, toast/muffins, etc.), hot and cold lunches (sandwiches, hamburgers, salads, etc.) and hot dinners (pork chops, chicken, turkey, pasta, salads, etc.). Des-

serts were great as well. There is ample space for you to sprawl out on the boat, including a sun deck with 10 lounge chairs and a fly bridge that can easily hold 10-15 people and remains shaded most of the day, with a nice breeze. We spent most of our time on the fly bridge (which also has a 2nd fridge for cokes/beer). The dive sites are great. You tend to anchor at a site and do 2-3 dives at that site. I would have enjoyed moving around a little bit more, but remaining at the sites did help you go back and get that photograph you missed (such as the seahorse someone found on one of our dives). Around Provo the visibility was 20-40 feet, West Caicos was 40-60 feet, French Cay was 50-70 feet and the White Sand Spit was 60-80 feet. We saw reef or nurse sharks on every dive and spotted eagle rays on almost every dive. We saw several octopus, squid, lobster, crabs, shrimps, etc. We even saw several dolphin as we cruised between dive sites. The walls were stunning and the coral life was fantastic. The diving was better the farther away from Provo you were, with French Cay probably being the best diving. When we arrived back in Provo on the Friday, we could walk around the Aggressor; after seeing both boats, our group made the right decision to go with the Explorer. The boat had a much better layout with more open space, larger rooms (except the VIP room), a larger sun deck, etc. The boat has multiple charging stations. There are always 4-5 dry towels to dry camera equipment. The staff goes out of their way to look after your equipment by handing it to you after you enter the water and collecting it from you after the dives and placing it in the rinse bucket for you. They have q-tips to apply lubricant to O-rings.

**Turks and Caicos Explorer II,
September 2006, Tom Rain, Irving,**

TX. (tomrain1@hotmail.com) Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 87 F, calm. Good crew/service. Excellent food. Nice room though my a/c was not as cool as I would have liked. Sharks and eagle rays were often seen. Saw a seahorse! Lengthy immigration and customs procedures when entering T&C.

Turks and Caicos Explorer II, September 2006, Gerald Canning, Cape Coral, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 200 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm. Much of the diving was on pristine walls. The tops generally at 40-50' and extending down several thousand feet. We saw reef sharks, nurse sharks, hawksbill turtles, spotted eagle rays and southern rays as well as the usual Caribbean reef fish. The plate corals and sponges were in excellent shape. Jenn was good at finding new stuff we had never seen, such as bumble bee shrimp and squat anemone shrimp. You set up your tank once and then it is refilled between dives with a whip. You have a station for your tank with storage underneath for all your stuff. Even with 19 of 20 possible divers on board, the boat and dive deck had a roomy feel. After night dives, you were met with warm water poured down your back after you took off the tank. Then you could take a hot shower on the dive deck, followed by a warm towel and hot chocolate. JF, the captain, found us great dive sites. He also acted as the engineer to fix any mechanical problems. The rest of the crew, led by purser Jenn, provided all the service I could have ever wanted. We took almost four hours of video during our 27 dives and we have some great stuff. The boat had a dedicated camera table and 110 volt outlets — not only on the camera deck, but also in every room.