

## ANTIGUA

Beautiful beaches and scenery, high-dollar hotels, and forgettable diving. If you find yourself here, avoid boats that take divers from the cruise ships, as they do only the close-in, shallow reefs.

**Aquanaut Dive Center, January 2007, Francis and Deb Bollag (debbollag@earthlink.net), New Rochelle, NY.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm, no currents. Since we heard that the diving in Antigua wasn't great, we hoped to fit in only a tank or two during the week we spent sailing there. As luck would have it, we were taken by a good operator to some very nice sites and ended up diving six tanks. Aquanaut is a full-service dive center based in English Harbor and it maintains 20 dive moorings on the southern side of the island. The habitat is comprised of ledges and sloping drop-offs littered with boulders (some huge) covered with sponges and hard and soft corals. The rocks form channels and overhangs that shelter an amazing number of juvenile and adult fish and eels. While the area isn't the most colorful in the Caribbean, the diving is in an overstocked aquarium. At one site, we found a group of over 50 high hats. There were huge numbers of reef and four-eye butterflyfish. We also saw silversides and big numbers of glass-eye snapper, blackbar soldierfish, wrasses, parrotfish, fairy basslets, grunts and small groupers, gobies and blennies. Bigger fishes were cero, barracuda, cubera snapper, black jack and porgy. The diving was easy: Small groups, no currents, short runs to the dive sites, backward roll entry and ladder exit. John, the owner and lead divemaster, knows the area and sealife well and was

very good about pointing out interesting sights. He was also happy to let experienced divers explore on their own while he guided others. At the SI, John served fresh fruit from his trees and cookies. While we enjoyed the diving and highly recommend Aquanaut's services, we can't recommend Antigua for a dive-only vacation. There is better diving elsewhere in the Caribbean. But this is a great place for new divers or to sneak a few dives into a family vacation in Antigua.

## ARUBA

Near the Venezuela coast, Aruba diving doesn't match neighboring Bonaire and Curacao, but some operators will take you to some decent sites. Miles of white sand, glitzy casinos, hotels and restaurants may make it a good compromise destination for the nondiving spouse. There are several good boat dives. The south Wall, past San Nicholas near the southern tip of Aruba, is also good. Aruba lies south of the hurricane belt.

**Dive Aruba, August 2006, Maribeth and Charlie (Zelda5747@aol.com) Stratford, CT.**

Clive, the owner of the operation, is a nice, helpful man. Clive brings you to his home/office to get the paperwork, equipment if needed, each day after he picks you up from your hotel. If there is a new diver, each day you have to spend up to an hour of precious time at his home. He is the only crew member on this boat! If something was to happen to him, we would all be at the mercy of a possible save from another passing boat. Clive moors the boat, takes the divers approximately halfway through the dive and then leaves the divers to return to the boat.