

group on a wreck dive, eventually disappearing into the murk with one diver, leaving the rest of the divers at 80 ft. to find their own way to the boat/surface, two surfacing with less than 200 psi and too brief safety stops. On the next dive, two novice divers were completely separated from the main group and spent the whole dive in 25 ft of water while the rest of the group proceeded to dive the reef at 50 ft. The DM seemed unaware he was missing any divers. Fortunately, this was the only day we had that DM and as I mentioned, the other DMs were fun and engaged with the divers, pointing out interesting fish and frequently checking on all the divers. Overall the diving was fair to good, Arubans were very friendly, and accommodations superior. I felt safe and welcome the whole time in Aruba. If you are a serious diver, however, arrange a private boat to visit less frequented sites and dive your own profile, dive a dedicated Aruban dive resort, or dive nearby Bonaire, a protected marine park which I have dived numerous times and highly recommend.

**S.E. Aruba Fly and Dive, December 2006, Joel Solomon (Solomander@aol.com), Scarsdale, NY.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. Direct flight from NYC. On the way home, you go through US customs on Aruba, which eliminates the big bottleneck at JFK. We were advised to be at the Aruba airport three hours early. We checked our bags and got through customs within about half an hour, so I would not get there as early next time. Jet Blue ran on time. I hooked up with S.E. Aruba Fly and Dive. I had an enjoyable experience diving with them. Dived between Xmas and New Year's — a peak week. There were 12 divers the first 2 days and 18 the last day. 12 divers on the boat was

comfortable. On the last day, there were a lot more divers and the shop ran a second boat. 18 divers was cozy but not crowded. There were enough divemasters and staff to keep things running well. Ben, the captain, picked me up from my hotel every morning. The first day the crew sizes the new divers. If you are an experienced diver, you are given some latitude. If you seem to need help, the staff rides closer herd on you. There was a DM in the water per 6 divers. Divers had the option of diving on their own with their buddies instead of following the group. The dive briefings were good and informative. There were suggested bottom times. Only once was the dive a bit shorter than I would have liked. The dive operation was professional, friendly and competent. The level of service was in the middle. You aren't on your own, like I was in Florida, but you aren't fawned over the way I have been in Cozumel or the Turks and Caicos. A lot of coral in good shape. There were a lot of fish and a lot of schools. Aside from seeing 2 turtles (my first in 50 dives) and a scorpionfish, there weren't many striking or unusual fish. I did see a big rainbow parrotfish and an enormous puffer. Aruba also has the most honeycomb trunkfish that I have ever seen. We had to wait half an hour before we could splash when we dove the Antilla. Apparently there are a limited number of mooring sites for the wreck and we had to queue up and wait for a site to open up.

## THE BAHAMAS

Easily accessible from Florida for long weekends. Diving varies substantially among islands, with pretty reefs (many are affected by algae), decent tropicals, and resorts

that feed sharks. Live-aboards out of Florida take divers to spots with bigger fish and more dramatic seascape. Keep hurricane season, June through November, in mind; winter weather means low 70F water and sweaters in the evening; nighttime temperature is in the mid-60s, but can drop into the 50s if winter air blows off the continent.

## Abaco

### **Dive Abaco, House rented on Tilloo Cay, April 2007, Michael Marmesh (MEMarmesh@aol.com), Miami, FL.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 75 to 77 F, calm. Rented a house on Tilloo Cay and a boat on Marsh Harbor to commute around the local cays. We did six dives with Dive Abaco. Nothing but 63 c.f. tanks. We still got decent bottom time because 5 of the dives didn't exceed 35 feet. Last dive was to 65 feet and we got to see 3 reef sharks deep and a nurse shark in the shallows. Fish life within the local marine park was pretty good. Outside the park, the Abacos being a big sport fishing destination, not so hot. After the briefing you could dive your own plan, but following the guide weaving through multiple swim-throughs was also fun. Especially good was the site called Cathedral. Keith, the owner-operator, enjoyment of sharing his knowledge of the big and small stuff of his underwater world was infectious. He had a nice, gentle technique for correcting buoyancy problems and streamlining gear for those who hadn't been diving for awhile or who were new to the sport. This is a good operation for beginners to finish their open water certifications and get in a few easy starter dives. For the experienced, it's relaxed diving with enough to see

to entertain you. P.S. Ben. Please keep pushing to protect the marine environment and fight global warming. I've been diving for more than 40 years and can't believe how much the Caribbean has taken a turn for the worse. We had 2 divers, a father and son, with 7 year-old grandson, Jake, who snorkeled on the Dive Abaco boat with us. And it made me wonder what we'd have left by the time Jake had a son he could take out diving. At one site on this trip I saw one beautiful stand of staghorn coral, surrounded by multiple dead formations. It was like seeing the last passenger pigeon. Uncontrolled algae overgrowth and increased water temps (85 degrees at 100 feet) are bad signs. Keep speaking out.

## Bimini

### **Bimini Undersea, Big Game Resort, March 2007, Greg Yarnik (greg-yarnik@comcast.net), Palatine, IL.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 75 to 77 F, choppy, currents. The resort has been a mainstay on Bimini (only 40 nautical miles from Miami) since 1947, and caters to deep sea fishermen and divers, in that order. All the Hemingway memorabilia and museum artifacts that were once on-island were destroyed in the January 2006 fire of the Compleat Angler (you can view the crumbling and burned remains of this once-famous joint just down the street from Big Game). Our dive package included a full, stick-to-your-ribs breakfast and a 2-tank dive every morning, with the boat leaving around 9:30 am. Dive staff (usually just Divemaster/Boat Captain Melanie and dive shop owner Bill Keefe) were attentive and hard-working. Once you set your gear up the first day, you never had to touch it again as

it was rinsed, stored, and set up again for you the next day as you arrived at the boat. Entries were done from the seated position on the dive platform, because near constant heavy chop and currents pretty much prohibited a safe giant stride. Once you were seated with mask/fins, staff brought your BC/tank to you, and also met divers at the platform post-dive, when they carefully removed and lifted each diver's BC/tank for safe exit from the water up the ladder into the boat. BCs and regulators were immediately changed out onto fresh tanks for the second dive. Staff gave good briefings and knew each dive site intimately, including all resident critters. Most sites were 20-30 minutes from the resort dock and were usually located along the west coast of North Bimini. Some were located just off South Bimini, but the conditions prohibited going too far south to prime shark habitat. Nearly every day was cool (air temps stayed below 80 F), with considerable chop and current. Descents and ascents were safe only when utilizing the mooring line or weighted descent line. One reason for this may be that several dive sites are within a few hundred meters of the Gulf Stream current, which flies between Bimini and Florida at around 4 knots. We saw the usual reef species on every dive, sometimes literally teeming in the roaring current, which often blew sand and silt all over the coral heads and formations. I had to extract sand grains from the lens seal of my camera every day. We did see several large critters, huge green and spotted morays, nurse sharks, one black tip (too far away to photograph in the sandy current, though), and a surprise visit one day from a normally pelagic 6' long cobia, which swam right into our threesome and stuck around for good long while. Our last dive day

we were visited by several schools of Atlantic spotted dolphins, which playfully surfed under the boat hull and swam in the wake. They hung around a good 30 minutes and provided some excellent photo-ops. All in all, this under-utilized dive spot offers good Bahamian diving for an affordable price. Two restaurants on-site offer delectable island-type fare, with fresh fish, shellfish, and crustaceans from local waters as highlights. Both Continental and Chalk's (although not the seaplanes — they've been grounded by the FAA) fly to Bimini twice daily from Ft. Lauderdale. If you're looking for a quick trip from the mainland and decent diving with a competent, hard-working operation like Bimini Undersea, this dive shop and resort are recommended, but with one caveat — wait till later in the season as March is the windiest and most inhospitable month of the year around Bimini UW Photography Comments: Boat did not have dedicated rinse tank for cameras, only a freshwater bucket for mask rinsing, etc., which some folks didn't seem to mind using for a camera rinse, but not this photographer! Plenty of dry surface for camera storage and set-up, though.

## Exuma Cays

**Dive Exuma, Palm Bay Beach Club, December 2006, Bob Sivak (bobsivak@cox.net), Mission Viejo, CA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 78 F, calm, no currents. "Dive Exuma" is the only game in town. This was probably the worst dive I have paid for. I was told we would go on a "blue hole" dive as conditions were too rough to go elsewhere. Baloney on both accounts. It was really a cavern dive with nothing to see. I didn't even turn on my camera. Additionally, they

allowed 6 divers to go far into a tight cavern and stir up the bottom nicely. After this fiasco we surfaced after 21 minutes and swam on the surface 300 yards to another cavern. More of the same, so I surfaced after a whopping 16 minutes. Too bad; they have a fantastic 36-foot power catamaran and a fun attitude. Why they didn't want to go to a better site is beyond me. Amie, the young new owner of the dive shop, has a lot to learn about satisfying customers. She has a good attitude and in time they may well figure it out.

## Grand Bahama

**Grand Bahamas Scuba, December 2006, Jesse H Scott (jesse\_h\_scott@hotmail.com), Fuquay Varina, NC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 72 to 78 F, calm, choppy.**

Excellent service! Came and picked us up every day from our B&B. Run by Fred Riger and his wife Melinda. They attempt to tailor the trips to the needs of the passengers. Got excellent dive rates. Nitrox available. Took us out every day we wanted even when conditions were choppy. Also took us to Ben's Cavern and Mermaid's Hole for cavern diving. What a treat if you are certified! These guys don't advertise much, but you get personalized service and friendly folks who like to dive with you. They also do OW training, specialties, etc. Also check out different B&Bs on the island instead of hotels. You can get much better rates and get to know friendly local folks.

**Sunn Odyssey Divers, Island Seas Resort, May 2007, Bill Shepherd (Chorsejbs@aol.com), Satellite Beach, FL.**

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, choppy. Small operation that caters to 6-8 divers on a boat rated for 20. Nick and his divemas-

ter, Ramone, were knowledgeable in all the areas visited and excelled at helping divers into and out of the water. Helped divers locate unusual and small critters but did not impose themselves. Sites visited provided plenty of fish and corals for experienced as well as beginning divers. They maximize the use of mooring buoys on established dive sites. Their personal service and attention to their divers promotes their popularity as a premier dive operation on Grand Bahamas. Island Seas Resort is nearby and offers excellent accommodations for divers and non-divers alike. On-site restaurant and good beachside facilities. Recommend rental car to visit other locations on the island. UW Photography Comments: Rinse barrel on boat with fresh water each morning. Operators handled cameras prior to and following dives.

**UNEXSO, July 2007, Joseph Stehn (stehn@belcotech.com), Hillsborough, NJ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm.**

Did 2 days of 2-tank morning boat dives. First day conditions were good, no current and dive sites selected were good. Accommodated request on 2nd dive to find site with sharks. Second day conditions were not good, first dive site had strong current which limited the dive time and 2nd site selected was not good, poor vis and nothing of interest to see. Divemasters were professional and friendly, provided adequate safety briefings and dive profiles were reasonable given the mix of divers on the boat. More experienced divers were somewhat restricted in time profiles but within reason given the mix of divers that had to be accommodated. The check-in procedure process at UNEXSO can be frustrating as numerous divers have to fill out waiver forms (I did mine the afternoon before and

there was no line, but still had to “check in” the next day and wait for those who did not), rental agreements, etc. There was only one line for scuba so anyone who had an issue with equipment or reservations held up everyone. However, it got done and boats left on time.

## New Providence

### **Bahama Divers, British Colonial Hilton, March 2007, Laurie Gneiding (laurierg@eclipse.net), Lebanon, NJ.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Water: 73 F, choppy, surge. Pickup at hotel varied from 7:30 am to 8:10 am. Check in on first day consisted of being ignored by surly employee for 15 minutes, then sharply told that the counter needed cleaning/straightening before paperwork could be completed. Lots of standing around until boat was ready at 9:00 am. Boat is a 40-ft. vessel outfitted to accommodate 28 divers. There were only 12 of us on first day along with three crew members. There is an onboard head, fire extinguisher, radio, and first aid kit. Water is complementary but soda is \$1/can and beer is available after diving. Bags of kibbled dog food are pushed to feed the fish — not a good practice. Dive is videotaped (the camera is in your face a lot) and you can get a copy for \$39.95. Mask defog is supplied and boat has separate camera tank but a lot of masks, gloves, and booties were swimming with my new U/W camera. Bahama Divers follows a set schedule — Monday is X, Tuesday is Y, etc., and it is difficult to get them to change. Monday is the Blue Hole, which is located approximately 12 miles east, in open ocean. Monday was also weather warranting small craft advisories due to 4- to 5-foot swells and 15- to 20-knot winds. Despite these warnings, we endured a 45-minute,

spine-jarring ride where divers became airborne (sustained nasty bruised leg after flying into the metal bench). Told to suit up and put on weight belts while boat still moving! Briefing: giant stride off the back, swim on the surface to the front, drop down the anchor line, follow the divemaster to 80 ft. maximum for 30 minutes. Jumped in and swam to the anchor line with every bit of strength I had but it was too much — I was exhausted (Im 51 but in pretty good shape) I couldn't stop hyperventilating and turned back to abort the dive. Then got really seasick, despite all the necessary precautions. Day 2: arrived at dive shop and stood around. Weather same as Day 1, so politely asked if we could dive in more protected waters. Argument ensued. I countered that I paid to dive and not vomit and that I would take my business elsewhere for the remaining two days. Glaring looks. On the boat, the captain (different from Day 1) indicated that due to the weather we would be doing two shallow dives (25) (yeah!). First dive unremarkable, second dive better as it was a shallow wreck. Several schools of schoolmaster and porgy and yellow and southern sting rays were observed. Water was 73F and I was cold despite having a 3 mm wetsuit, hood, and a shorty. Day 3: Winds died down to 10-15 knots. Wednesday is another Blue Hole dive. Boat more crowded, with 22 divers. Yellowtail snapper and sergeant majors abound because they're being fed. The big deal is to sit on the stone ledge and get your picture taken. Second dive at Piece of Cake was shallow coral head (25-30) with lots of fish species and resting nurse shark. Day 4: Finally, relatively calm seas and winds less than 5 knots. This dive was to Travelers Rest, a gently sloping wall that bottoms out in the hundreds of feet.

Dive profile was 80 ft., 30 minutes max., 2-minute safety stop at 15 feet. At least 20 minutes to get all 28 divers off the boat. Wall was completely unremarkable except for spotted eagle ray/remora. The second dive was 30 feet closer to shore than the first, with strong tidal surge and few fish. Overall, the reefs around Nassau are in poor condition, being colorless and silted over — perhaps due to hurricanes, perhaps due to the enormous amount of development in the area and probably a combination of both. Visibility less than 40 feet. Little macro life and not much species diversity (conducting fish census for REEF). Bahama Divers is more interested in selling fish food and videos than service. They cater to the cruise ships and the Atlantis resort on Paradise Island while practically ignoring individual divers. We expected to be returned to our hotel promptly, but it was routinely over an hour after returning and only after three or four requests. Groups always got preferential treatment. You set up your own first tank, they did the second and they brought your gear to get in. When you were done, you handed up your weight belt and BC then muscled your way onto the platform. Not easy in 5 foot swells. The divemasters shepherded rather than looked for critters (Calvin was the exception). On deep dives, it was follow the leader, shallow divers could go off by themselves provided they didn't go deeper than the prescribed depth. Surface interval between two dives was less than 15 minutes. Two of the four days students dove with us and when they ran out of air, the dive was over. Every dive I came up with at least 1200 psi but I was motioned to get out of the water before I could finish my tanks. Large signs in the dive shop indicate no refunds on diving or snorkeling and

they mean it. My husband became sick on the fourth day and couldn'tt dive — no refund.

**Bahama Divers, Atlantis, June 2007, David Rapp, Fort Worth, TX.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 79 to 86 F, choppy, no currents. Their boats are in good shape and handled 12 divers and 3 crew, all in shade without crowding. The captain gives a good, concise safety briefing. Oxygen and first aid are visible and accessible. The boat has a surface-level platform, so you can take off your rig, hand it up, and then just hop up. I never got a tank with less than 3000 psi and always returned with about 500-700. The dive masters are good guides and found fish we would have missed. At the end of the day, they rinsed and stored our gear. The next day, they knew which equipment was ours, and put it on board. The videographer, Arnaldo, is also a DM and helped us with everything from identifying fish to entertaining us on board. (No pressure to buy the video.) When all done, the Captain himself drove us to our hotel.

**Custom Aquatics, Atlantis, June 2007, David Rapp, Fort Worth, TX.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, no currents. Start with a high-quality dive operation, then add the freedom to tailor the diving day to whatever you want. When you make your reservation, you can specify everything: the schedule, how many dives, which sites, lunch menu, snacks, and end-of-day drinks. We were picked up at our resort and taken to the dive operation. The owner-operators, Fran and Monty, met us in front of their operation, greeted us a soon as we stepped out of the car, and took our gear to the boat. Grey Dawn is a-comfortable 40-foot dive yacht with

head, galley, and comprehensive navigation system (the WAAS GPS moving map sure came in handy when heavy weather set in). Fran and Monty are such a delight to spend the day with.

**Stuart Cove's, Paradise Island Harbor Resort, December 2006, Terry Garland, Naples, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 F, choppy. The first day was good diving, sharks, eagle ray and lion fish (lots of Pacific lion fish) and 35 minutes total dive time including safety stop. 2nd day both dives sucked and once again 35 minutes dive time. All dives are guided and held to less than decent dive times (I had some dives that I was forced back on the boat with 1800 psi) I am an advanced open water instructor, including having trimix and cave certifications, and still only 35 minutes dive time in 40 feet of water. The 3rd day was really cool — 50-60 sharks being fed made for some really good pictures, but once again, hurry up and get back on the boat, we got your money so who cares (\$140 for a 2-tank shark dive, ouch) I work hard for my money; next time I will find another company who appreciates and respects divers a little more for their ability. Stuart Cove's is OK for beginners. UW Photography Comments: 2 of the boats had a rinse bin for cameras but on the shark feeding not even a bucket. The crew was good with camera treatment, but the company had no concern about my \$7000 camera. They need to take some of their over-priced dive fees and buy some decent rinse bins. They acted like the only camera that mattered was the staff photographer's.

**Stuart Cove's, Comfort Suites, January 2007, Brent Barnes (bbarnes380@aol.com), Edmond, OK.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Wa-

ter: 74 to 76 F, choppy, no currents. Did 10 dives over 3 days with Stuart Cove's including two-tank dive at Shark Arena for shark feeding dive. It is important to understand what to expect when diving with Stuart Cove's, especially if you prefer dive operations with small numbers of divers and individualized attention. In reality, Stuart Cove's is likely one of the most efficient cattle boat operations in the world. I estimated they worked between 100 and 180 divers through their operation each day with a large fleet of boats taking 10-20 divers per boat. As most hotels are on the north side of the island, they send multiple buses to pick up divers staying all over the island and also cruise ship passengers doing an excursion with them each morning. We stayed at the Comfort Suites on Paradise Island, which is the farthest stop from their facility. This meant we were the first to be picked up each morning and the last to be dropped off in the late afternoon. We were picked up at 7:30 AM each morning even though the boat did not leave until 9:00 AM, and had a one-hour bus ride every morning while making stops at many other hotels to pick up other divers. This then repeated in the afternoon as we were the last to be dropped off. This meant a minimum of 2 hours on a bus each day, though buses were air-conditioned and comfortable. This bus time could be shortened by staying at a hotel closer to the shop, such as on Cable Beach. Once arriving at the shop, you would check in to find your boat assignment and set up your own gear. Dive sites were all short rides from the shop. Briefings were good; divemaster was always in the water leading the group. Maximum depths and time limits were advised and enforced. Several divers were politely reprimanded when they

stayed down longer than the stated 2-3 minutes after the shark feed to search for shark teeth before surfacing. The average diver at Stuart Cove's seems to be fairly inexperienced and they do cater to the beginner. I was frustrated on my first dive as all divers were asked to remain on the surface until all divers were in the water and had performed a buoyancy weight check. I was the first in and multiple inexperienced divers after me had to swim back to the boat to add or remove weight, causing me to have to hang on the tag line for 10 minutes before everyone was ready to descend. This only occurred on my first dive of the trip and I suspect may be required on the first dive only. Dive-masters were friendly, gave good briefings and polled divers to see where they had dove previously to try to minimize repeat dive sites. Boats were fairly spacious and covered and ice water or juice was provided. After morning dives, you had 30-45 minutes before the afternoon dive boats would load. There are no restaurants nearby and there is not time to leave the grounds for food, so bring your own lunch or you may purchase homemade sandwiches and chips at the shop which were fairly tasty. After your final dive, you were responsible for unloading and rinsing your own equipment. They unloaded and rinsed rental gear. They do have a locked storage area where you can leave your personal dive gear overnight if you are diving the next day. They have a large amount of well-maintained rental gear. Stuart Cove's has been instrumental in assisting many underwater projects for Hollywood movies and has an interesting wall of fame with photographs of many movie stars and celebrities who dove or did work with them. The diving itself had good and bad also. The reef system is not incredibly healthy and

there is little large fish life. There is no marine sanctuary or protected area so there is a notable lack of large fish. The walls on the Tongue of the Ocean were dramatic but do not have the vibrant coral or fish life seen at other major walls in the Caribbean. However, you do not come to New Providence to dive with schools of fish or see vast coral. Diving in New Providence is strictly about sharks and wrecks. Two of my dives were among my top all-time dives for photography. The shark feeding dive is outstanding and provides you with the opportunity for extremely close photographs of 15-20 large Caribbean reef sharks. I preferred the "pre-feeding" dive at shark arena as we were allowed to swim about the area and out over the wall with 15-20 reef sharks swimming closely between us, obviously waiting for the upcoming feeding. The actual feeding dive was much more controlled; you had to sit or kneel in a semi-circle during the feed dive and could not move about. The wrecks are smaller but good and are fairly shallow, allowing good photo-ops and longer bottom time. Had lengthy encounter with a large lionfish and free swimming green moray on the Sea Viking wreck. Lionfish are becoming more common and are seen on many dives. Diving the Bond Wrecks on the "Tears of Allah" wreck used in Never Say Never Again and the scaffolding of the airplane "Vulcan Bomber" used in Thunderball were interesting. The Vulcan Bomber has been down for over 40 years and makes for great macro photography. Visibility was excellent throughout the trip. We stayed at the Comfort Suites on Paradise Island, a comfortable but not spectacular resort. Main advantage is that it is next door to Atlantis and guests of Comfort Suites are given admission to all of the Atlantis attractions

including the waterparks, though you must wear a special bracelet to get in. There is a great deal to do on Paradise Island but it is expensive. Good place for the diver with non-diving families or friends. UW Photography Comments: Separate camera rinse barrel available.

**Stuart Cove's, Radisson, Wyndham, March 2007, Arik Olson (arikolson@yahoo.com), New York, NY.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 15 to 40 Feet. Water: 72 to 77 F, choppy. Safety conscious, reliable operation with well trained friendly staff, well maintained equipment, and a high volume of divers of varied abilities. They have relaxed the time limits on the dives a bit since last year, allowing 30-45 minutes on deep dives and 45-60 minutes on shallow dives. The boats were in good condition and captains were competent. Both guides I dove with, Jill (Danish) and a male Swedish dive guide made sure all the divers had an excellent dive experience. Stuart Coves is sure to get you back to your hotel on time and there are many other things to do on the island, but I have become bored with the scenery in this part of the Bahamas, the shallow reefs have a lot of algae and are overfished (though the deeper walls were much better), and I am not all that fascinated with sharks. For a diver who is interested in seeing sharks, they are abundant. I ended up staying at both the Radisson and the Wyndham and I liked the Wyndham better. The Cable beach hotels are in the middle of a massive renovation/rebranding. You wont need a rental car. Excellent restaurants somewhat off the beaten path: Oyster Bar in Sandypoint, and Indigo on West Bay Street. I would suggest completely avoiding downtown Nassau. If one is interested in kayak diving/snorkeling, it is possible at Love Beach.

**Stuart Cove's, Carnival Cruise, Fascination, May 2007, Jill and Rob Caple (rg250cat@msn.com), Pasadena, MD.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 45 to 50 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F. We on a cruise. I set up our diving on-line through scubadivebahamas.com. We were picked up from the cruise port and taken to their dive shop, which was about a half-hour drive. We were assigned a boat and set up our gear. They put divers with more experience together. One couple who was on the boat even had hired their own dive master to dive with them since they hadn't been diving for a while. The first dive site was a wall dive and then came up on a DC3 plane that had been in a movie. Just as the last time my husband and I had dove in the Bahamas, we were surprised by the total lack of healthy coral and fish life. Our second dive site was called Pumpkin Patch. At least this site had some coral that was still alive, but still very little fish life. The normal diving is so dull. Outstanding, professional, and well-organized dive operation. My only suggestion would be longer bottom times.

**Stuarts Cove's, July 2007, Brian Goldman, MA.** All the staff were friendly, helpful and extremely competent. They took the time to help those who needed it, with or without asking. They set up equipment for those who needed it and they really made the attempt to be personable with the guests. The dive briefings were informative and to the point. They even handed cameras down and retrieved them when you boarded the boat. Every boat I was on had a dedicated rinse bucket, that the crew constantly reminded guests what it was (and wasn't) to be used for? I averaged approximately 45 minutes each dive. Granted, the shark dive is structured differently and they did want you back

on the boat when everything was done. This was explained as a safety issue. I logged 44 minutes on that dive. I was allowed to hang under the boat, take pictures and board at the end (like every other dive). No one ever rushed me out of the water and chastised me for being the last one onboard. The only thing that seemed to be required was to be respectful of others. Also, they were careful to check everyone in on board so no one would be left behind. I have been diving for over 30 years. We weren't treated like children, nor should we be.

## San Salvador

**Riding Rock Inn, August 2007, Jim Reilly (james.reilly4@gmail.com), Lafayette Hill, PA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, calm. We flew Spirit, which provided a nice modern aircraft and a smooth 58-minute flight, but unfortunately, it flies from the amazingly over-crowded Ft. Lauderdale airport terminal 4, which is dirty, has inadequate restroom facilities, clearly breaks fire safety standards and is unsatisfactory. FLL proved to be a pain coming and going. The flight is a charter to Club Med and their folks at the airport made an impossible situation tolerable. Club Med. Riding Rock Inn is a small 50s-built resort with a fine marina and a good dive operation. Since we were there two years ago, substantial renovations have been undertaken. Our room had a new ceiling, new bathroom fixtures and tile, a small fridge, a new air conditioner and a new sliding glass door to the ocean-front balcony. Outside new walkways have been built and a new sea wall was nearing completion, to replace the one damaged by a hurricane in 2004. Michelle, the owner, told us more im-

provements are to be implemented over the next year. We found our room to be comfortable but not luxurious, clean and kept that way. The food was made to order, but the norm is a buffet. The resort bar is an institution frequented with salty charter boat folks and locals. San Salvador Island is safe and the folks friendly. Hospitality was first class. The divemaster drove us to stores to get drinks and snacks for the room. When my mask strap broke, he gave me a new one and refused compensation. When my partner's recently repaired inflator broke and released all the air in her BC, she was immediately rescued by the Captain after kicking her way to the surface and the next morning when we arrived at the boat, her BC had been fixed by the divemaster — no charge. The owner drove us to dinner at a restaurant one night and then 2 hours later, picked us up. The diving was great! The divemaster, Patrick, and boat captain, Bruce, are seasoned professionals. The boat, while worn a bit, had full safety equipment, ran well and was spotless, including the marine head. Divers sat on the steps to the dive platform and the crew brought your gear to you. You suited up seated, stood up using the dive platform rail, then one step and giant stride. Getting back, you could choose to leave your BC in the water and have the crew recover it, or take the steps. Fresh fruit, cold water and good SITs between dives. We saw hammerheads on our first two dives. Following the divemaster's instructions, we stayed still and they came close to investigate! We also saw nurse sharks — 4 on one dive alone! The deep reefs, walls and swim-throughs are excellent. Two years ago the shallow reefs were bleached by high surface water temps. Now sponges are making a come-back, as are the soft fans, etc. Still, not a lot to

see above 30 feet, some to see at 30 to 50 feet, but deeper the reef is pristine. Not a lot of eels or small creatures. RRI has a small fresh-water pool and fine beaches are next to the property and elsewhere on the island. You can also charter a fishing expedition. RRI provides a tour of the island and a fun boat picnic the Friday before you leave. Do not miss out on Captain Bruce's fresh conch salad and you get a chance to catch the conch!

## BARBADOS

Barbados is busy and crowded with lots of fast traffic, splashy resorts and restaurants. There's decent diving with tropical fish and it's fine for beginners or even more experienced divers who want to enjoy Barbados topside. You still can find century-old bottles in the harbor and the wreck of the Stavronikita is interesting, but jammed with tourist divers. Keep hurricane season in mind.

### **Divepro Barbados, Almond Beach Village, April 2007, Bob Sivak (bob-sivak@cox.net), Mission Viejo, CA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, surge. Divepro Barbados is a great little shop owned by Summer Worme. She prides herself on good service and safe dives. After Ecodive Barbados didn't return my email or phone messages, I called Divepro and set up some dives. From Check-in on, I knew I had chosen well. helpful staff. Rental equipment appeared to be good. Their main boat was down for repair so we went out on the 30-something-foot catamaran. No head, or camera tank/table. I put mine in an unused tank holder (sort of). Dive sites were a short ride (20 minutes

or so). You do have to wade out to the boat into about stomach deep water. Not a big deal as the water is clean in their little "marina." My only gripe was the conservative dive profiles. However, their average diver is a complete novice so I guess it's understandable. I surfaced with 1000 psi remaining every time and was not too happy about that. Summer assured me that all dive operators on Barbados are the same or more conservative. The diving itself was surprisingly good. Pieces of Eight was a fantastic little sloping reef that had great viz. While the colors were a bit monochromatic (mostly brown fans and sponges), there were some nice bright sponges here and there. It reminded me of Cozumel, but without the constant colors. Fish were a tad bit on the thin side. I did see a nice school of Caribbean reef squid and lots of turtles. Several cooperative spotted drums were nice photo subjects, as well as penderson cleaner shrimp. The Almond Beach Village is a Holiday Inn type all-inclusive. The rooms were pretty dull, but the pools and beach were nice. Food was hit or miss, slightly more on the hit side, but nothing to get worked up about. The booze was quite good, though. Main problem is location. It is a full hour to the Divepro shop. It is all the way on the west end. I recommend staying in the south end, Bridgetown or maybe the Hilton area. Divepro was a nice little stop on a business trip for me. 5 dives that were fun and laid back.

**Hightide Watersports, Coral Reef Club, May 2007, David Komessar (dkomessar@yahoo.com), Needham, MA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 70 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm. My wife and I consider ourselves spoiled by the large pelagics and the Pacific diving. Barbados is the most easterly of the islands in the Caribbean and is the only