

coral island in the region with all white sand beaches. The temperature was between 75-85 F every day. We rented a house called Oyster Bay which is an elegant 4-bedroom villa, fully staffed, with swimming pool on the beautiful Lower Carlton Beach on Reeds Bay. We snorkeled off our beach and saw hawksbill turtles every day. It truly was 5-star for food, service, and accommodations. We chose to dive with Hightide Watersports based on a recommendation from Bajan Services, the concierge service that served the house we rented. Hightide Watersports is located just north of Hometown at the Coral Reef Club. We checked in with Tricia at the shop, and having brought our own gear, didn't need to rent any of their ample supply. We had to carry our own gear onto the 37' aluminum catamaran, grab two tanks and then set up. Their brochure says "the best diving is always at Hightide," but forgot to mention that it was also self-service. We both thanked each other for the wisdom in taking a refresher course three weeks prior to diving because it sure helped us familiarize ourselves with the intricacies of setting up your own tank and gear when you hadn't done it in several years. Ryan drove the boat on our first two dives while Neal was the divemaster. On our four remaining dives Ryan was the divemaster. The briefings were detailed, and as there were only three people going down, we were just told to watch our air and depth, follow the leader, and come up at the same time. The visibility was fantastic. The first day we dived Brightledge and The Cement Factory. At Brightledge we bottomed at 80 feet and The Cement Factory at 33 feet. The reefs were healthy with no bleaching. We saw sponges and coral in all shapes and sizes with forests of fan corals. We also saw smooth trunkfish,

fairly basslet, several hawksbill turtles, barracuda and plenty of wrasse, trumpet fish, jacks, butterfly fish and parrotfish. The Cement Factory dive site is under the cement factory's pier and pilings. The dive is shallow, allowing for a nice, long, leisurely swim. Numerous sightings of seahorses. We also saw several spotted eagle rays and some turtles. The dive site does have some debris like tires and old rum and beer bottles, but the reef critters have colonized them. Considered the jewel in Barbados' wreck diving crown, the Stav, a 365-foot Greek freighter, was deliberately sunk to form an artificial reef. The Stavronikita lies in 120 feet of water with the stern at 100 feet and the bow at 70 feet. We were to max our depth at 100 feet. It was a little chilly at 100 feet and we were glad we wore our 3 mm wetsuits.

## BELIZE

Inside the world's second-largest barrier reef, English-speaking Belize sports three major atolls. Good diving is reachable from live-aboards or from resorts on the offshore cayes. The deeply-cut, spur-and-groove coral reefs of the rapidly developing Ambergris Caye are interesting but disappointing to many experienced divers. Outer cayes have better diving. While there, take a couple days to visit Mayan ruins, the Jaguar Preserve, or take river tours. Belize is about a two-hour flight from Houston, lies in the hurricane belt and takes frequent hits.

## Ambergris Caye

**Amigos del Mar, Ramon's Village, December 2006, David Cutler (ramora1@**

**ida.net), Idaho Falls, ID.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, choppy. Everywhere we went we were treated well by friendly people. Even with divemaster Tony's (Amigos) hard work gathering nurse sharks and pointing out rays, experienced divers won't be impressed with diving around Ambergris Caye. Coral still has a long way to pre-storms recovery. We did not do any of the day trips (Blue Hole, etc.) which, depending on who you talk to, should be better. Our travel agent was told by whomever they use in Belize that Ramon's village was full and we would have a much better stay at the Perla Escondita Villas. When we arrived, the on-site manager had no record of our reservation. The only unit was bottom floor right next to the unloading dock with a never-ending string of trucks and forklifts all with functioning back-up alarms. Not only did they not have our room, but apparently the room configuration we reserved does not even exist at Perla. We walked on to Ramon's and found out they had many available rooms and it ended up costing less than Perla. The rooms were great, with cool balconies, good food, and friendly staff. Some airport AM noise but it's a small island. Food is expensive most everywhere. We had our meals at different places and were not disappointed.

**Amigos del Mar, Belize Reef Suites, December 2006, David Dornbusch, Oakland, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm, choppy. Amigos del Mar is a first-rate dive operation. Will was an excellent dive master, provided detailed briefings, and worked extremely well with divers having a wide range of experience. Savas and Mike were fine boat drivers. Boats and gear in excellent condition. Picked up and dropped

off at dock near condo, always on time. Some dives had 11 divers for only one dive master. Belize Reef Suites were spacious, attractive, fully-equipped condos, on beach, with comfortable beds, air conditioning, and near San Pedro town. However, it is only a few hundred yards from the airstrip. When there was no wind, or wind was from west, and we didn't use the air conditioning, planes were noisy beginning at 6:50 AM for a full hour, then intermittently during the day, until 7 PM. During two mornings, had strong smell of plane engine exhaust. The Blue Water, Caliente, and Fido's served excellent food. Elvi's had a fine Mayan buffet on Friday night. Ali Baba has pretty good take-out barbecued chicken and Middle Eastern dishes, also served in small restaurant. We shopped in both the upscale supermarket and the small mom-and-pop markets. Recommend the small shops for less expensive groceries. Fresh fruits were consistently excellent from the street vendors.

**Amigos del Mar, Xanadu Island Resort, June 2007, David Anandel (cdandel@sbcglobal.net), Athens, IL.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm, no currents. We had a group of six divers. Amigos del Mar is located right on the beach in San Pedro. Did four two-tank dives on the reef of Ambergris Caye and a three-tank day trip to Turneffe Island. Amigos boat picks you up right from your resorts dock. Made all plans over through e-mails to Gilmar at the dive shop. All prices matched what he had quoted. The reef is located less than a half-mile from Ambergris; so all surface intervals were done on shore at the dive shop. Water, coconut, and watermelon were available for snacks. The dive master, Rene, was with us all week. He did a good job of pointing

out critters. A lot of free-swimming nurse sharks, grouper and eels. The reef was in good shape with an abundance of fish life. The day trip to Turneffe included breakfast at the shop in the morning, two-hour boat trip (ran out of steering fluid 30 minutes out of San Pedro and had to wait for another boat to bring us the fluid). 1st dive was at the Elbow; great amount of fish life, sponge and coral was in excellent shape, 2nd dive at Calabash Wall. Lunch was at the University of Belize Marine Station on Calabash Caye. 3rd dive at Tres Amigos. We stayed at Xanadu Island Resort, located about one mile south of town. Excellent location, quiet and removed from the noise of town. The resort is made up of six monolithic domes, built to survive a Cat. 5 hurricane. There are several different types of suites. All have a living room, full kitchen and fridge, large decks (for drying gear out) and daily maid service. No restaurant or bar on site, but that wasn't a problem because you could get anywhere on the island in a golf cart. Rentals are available at Xanadu. The resort has a great pool, right off its sand beach. Make sure to bring bug spray; the mosquitoes will carry you away! For food and staples, Marina's Market is located at the entrance to Xanadu, or in town is the Island Supermarket has a large selection. Across from the Island Supermarket is the Belikin Dist., where you can buy water and beer cheaper than anywhere on the island. You will not go hungry in San Pedro; it has the best assortment of restaurants and bars in the Caribbean. We ate dinners at Casa Picasso, The Blue Water Grill, Elvi's Kitchen, Sweet Basil, El Divino Steak House and Caliente's. All had great food. We will dive here again! UW Photography Comments: Dive boat had a dedicated cooler for cameras.

Aqua Divers, Sunbreeze Hotel, November 2006, Watt Hinson (whinson@sbcglobal.net), Bay City, TX. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm, choppy. We booked airfare on Continental Airlines direct from Houston. One bag did not make the flight, but arrived that afternoon. We booked the hotel/dive package through Bay Adventures and had no travel problems. The accommodations were good; 2 full beds in each room, small refrig, satellite TV and plenty of hot water. The hotel restaurant was good, but other restaurants were within walking distance. The hotel is across the street from the airport, but aircraft noise was not a problem. The rooms do not have balconies – rather, they open to a common walkway with 2 chairs and a table outside each room. As a result, we were cautious about leaving gear out to dry when we were not in the room. Aqua Divers was good. Our group was a mix of experienced and beginning divers. They accommodated us well, leaving the experienced divers pretty much alone after they were comfortable with our experience level. The dive shop is on the hotel premises. They use a combination of small and larger boats. Some days were cattleboat crowded, especially the Blue Hole all-day trip. They maintain the BCs and Regs and set them up on the assigned boat each day. The divemasters were good; friendly, gave good briefings, and helpful with the beginning divers.

**Aqua Divers, Sun Breeze, May 2007, Mary Wicksten, Bryan, TX.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Shallow areas of reefs are recovering from a recent hurricane — some live elkhorn and staghorn corals, big pillar corals. Little bleaching anywhere. Colorful deep-water gorgonians, black corals

on walls, fairy and blackcap basslets . Many tropical fish, lobsters, large crabs, sponges. Saw hawksbill turtles close up, also shy eagle rays, big Caribbean ray, loggerhead turtle. Tarpon made a pass, reef sharks in Blue Hole. Visibility was poor due to recent plankton bloom, wind blowing off reef flats. Saw clouds of silt pouring over the wall. Scant current, water flat to slight chop. For four days, our group mostly had a boat to ourselves. Our guides pointed out some cute animals and showed us some nice tunnels and swim-throughs. There seemed to be an unwritten rule that any shark, pufferfish, turtle or ray should be chased, grabbed at or otherwise annoyed. Although fish feeding was to be at Shark-Ray Alley, sharks were fed at another site, Esmeralda, and fish at Aquarium and even in Blue Hole. Divers were mobbed by jacks, snapper and sergeant majors. This gets tiresome quickly. What does it do to the local fauna? Our guides seem fixated on getting the maximum time underwater. One had an extra long octopus and urged anyone out of air to use it so that everyone else could stay down even longer. (What would happen if there really were an emergency?) We made long traverses at 40 feet or so, well over the reef but below the 15-foot safety stop, which was also made on each dive. We were supposed to go no deeper than a stated depth per dive, but beginners and the guides themselves could be anywhere from 5-15 or more feet deeper. My computer started going into the yellow on a couple of dives — not an immediate problem, but I wonder what other people read on theirs? There is a chamber on the island. We were eager to go on a night dive in Hol Chan, “inside the reef,” but it ends in a notch that goes outside, creating a stiff current except at slack tide. We

were not there on a slack tide. Imagine inexperienced divers careening over fire coral and experienced ones overweighting and grabbing sand. We saw night shrimp, a 100+ pound snapper, sea cucumbers, crabs, and sleeping fish. I joined an open boat for a trip to Blue Hole and nearby reefs. The boat was jam-packed with snorkelers and divers. Three obese divers constantly caused trouble as they heaved their heavy gear over the side, squeezed out the gate and sank far below everyone else. Then there was the mad rush to get back aboard. Don't hold on to the tag line and wait your turn — take your fins off way back there, thrash around and grab the ladder, then shove two other frantic newbies out of the way while you lurch upwards. One diver got badly “narked” in Blue Hole. The guides went from being impatient to downright nasty. Visibility was poor, but at least saw the famous stalactites in Blue Hole, lovely and colorful life on walls. Lunch at Halfmoon Caye bird Sanctuary pleasant. You must pay a \$40 U.S. to dive at Blue Hole and neighboring areas. Used my “off-gassing” day to take boat and bus trip over to mainland and Maya ruins of Lamanai. Trip with “SeaRious Adventures” went through mangrove swamps to village of Bomba, up bumpy road to New River and then to ruins and museum. Guides knowledgeable, had lots of drinks aboard, served breakfast, lunch and snacks. Saw birds, bats, howler monkeys, army ants, 8-foot caiman! Little on Ambergris Caye to do except diving, snorkeling, fishing or other water-oriented activities. Saw some ugly scenes developing with non-diving, bored spouses. Hotel clean, pleasant, right on beach but reef is too far out for a swim. Can snorkel over sea grass beds. Tiled swimming pool, beach side shower handy. Dive shop right next

to hotel. Hotel restaurant had good Japanese food. Alcoholic drinks readily available, but watch out for dehydration! Other restaurants, curio shops, night life within walking distance nearby. Woodcarvings deals available if you shop carefully. UW Photography Comments: I still shoot film with a TTL Nikonos V. Got some really fine shots of colorful life on the walls, but then I shoot a close range — 3 feet or so. Anything at a distance (reef sharks, eagle ray, etc.) was “foggy” due to silt or plankton in the water. Boats carry a cooler full of water for cameras, guides hand down your camera if asked. No computers, film processing available close by. Film and batteries are available in town but expensive — bring your own. Dive operators appreciate your left-over batteries.

**Ecologic Divers, May 2006, John Ochs (jfochs@tir.com), Charlevoix, MI.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, choppy. Junior, Gilbert, and Suyapa would do anything to be accommodating. We were picked up at our hotel docks. Lots of large groupers, nurse sharks, and green morays. It is a new operation, and has new equipment, including computers. One of the best operations I have dived with. UW Photography Comments: Boat and shore had rinse tanks. Could recharge batteries on shore.

**ProTec, Ramon's Village, March 2007, Thomas Cranmer, Great Falls, VA.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy. Excellent individual instruction from Peter Jones (an Englishman who owns ProTec) and Sara Blandon (an American) at ProTec. Did specialties: Rescue, Deep Dive, Nitrox, Naturalist. Peter Jones also trains instructors and technical divers. Toured the first-rate Hyperbaric Chamber. Pro-

Tec is a member. DAN members receive a discount if one is unfortunate enough to need treatment. Local doctors are trained to treat DCI and DCS. Be sure the dive shop you use is a member of the Hyperbaric Chamber group. A good equipment supply shop is Captain Shark's near the Hyperbaric Chamber. Best restaurants are Blue Water and Wild Mango.

**Unda the Sea, El Pescador, June 2007, Wes Weiner, Jonesboro, GA.**

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm, choppy. Outstanding diving, best dive master (Alonzo) I have had in 50 dives. Alonzo is extraordinarily proficient, a great teacher, safety/environmentally conscious. You dive your own profile, but what makes Unda the Sea stand out is that you dive in a small group — I only dived with two divers or less. Consequently, you get personal attention “unda the sea.” El Pescador, the resort where Unda the Sea is, is a fishing lodge that has an exceptional dive operation. Enjoyed the full meal plan, all meals along with local drinks (beer, non alcoholic, rum). Food was excellent (fish, pork, BBQ), delicious soups, best desserts I have had including 5 star cruises. Accommodations were clean and comfortable, A/C worked well, no TV/radio — really encourages one to relax. Service was over the top — they learn your name and drink preferences by day two of a week's stay.

## Caye Caulker

**Belize Diving Services, Seaside Cabanas, February 2007, Russ Knapp (knappsci@hotmail.com), St. George Island, FL,** Experience: 200 dives.

Vis: 75 to 100 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. Great place for a laid-back vacation. Things to do other than diving.

Trip to Mayan ruins with Anwar's Tours was great. Rag-A-Muffin does a sailboat snorkel trip that was a lot of fun. Belize Diving Services is well run and professional. Boat rides are a little long but not bad. Seaside Cabanas also gets a thumb up — great place/nice people. Everybody on the island was friendly and easygoing. More restaurants than any place I've ever been — prices are fair. Places are clean.

## Glover's Reef

**Isla Marisol Resort, September 2006, Tom Wilson.** We hired car that took us through some beautiful mountain country and to the coastal town of Dangriga. Eddy Usher met us. He owns the Isla Marisol Resort. It was a two-hour boat ride out to Glover's Reef and Southwest Cay, where the resort is. Glover's Reef is actually a 17 x 8 mile atoll with a shallow lagoon in the middle and deep drop-offs all around. It is more typical of what one sees in the Pacific than in the Caribbean. Our diving was on the outside walls. There was snorkeling in the lagoon. We lived in a beachside cabana and ate in a central dining and kitchen building. The resort is only 4 years old and can take 22 guests. Four days Joan and I were the only guests there! Usually we did three dives a day — two in the morning and one in the afternoon. I managed one night dive. Eddy was our dive master and Ashton was our dive boat skipper. It was a wonderful and simple escape with no phones, newspapers or television. A few rainstorms were vigorous with thunder and lightning, but they were over in fifteen minutes. The bar was out over the water at the end of a pier, and at sunset time we sat there sipping wine and swigging down beers. On Saturday five other guests came.

Two were moderately experienced divers, and three were beginners. They were tense and used their arms to swim. They breathed hard and used up their tanks much faster than we did. They had trouble finding neutral buoyancy. And night dives were too scary. We started our warm water diving in the Caribbean back in the 70s. Eddy wanted to show us "big stuff" and he would patrol outside the wall. We did see turtles and eagle rays and barracuda and a couple of sharks and one manta. We were content to poke around the reef looking for the beautiful and bizarre "little guys." For us, the diving at Glover's Reef was good but not great. If I shoot a whole roll of 36 exposures on a dive that typically takes 45 to 60 minutes, that's a great dive. On this trip I did that only 4 times out of 17 dives. So I'd give Glover's Reef 3 Vz or 4 stars. There were boobies, frigate birds, pelicans, osprey and sandpipers, and lizards and iguanas. One evening after supper we saw a few baby sea turtles that had just hatched and were trying to find their way down the beach to the water. The last afternoon I had time to paddle a sea kayak around an adjacent island. On Wednesday, the 6th, we were taken back to Dangriga by "fast boat," flew in a 12-passenger propeller plane to Belize City. Before we came here, we floated and paddled ourselves on inner tubes up a branch of the Cave Branch River and into some large pitch-black caves. We then walked maybe a half-mile into various cave chambers. They supplied us with headlamps. These were limestone caverns, and there were beautiful stalactite and stalagmite formations. Equally fascinating was seeing scores of Mayan sites where sacred rituals were performed hundreds and even thousands of years ago. We had a picnic lunch in a chamber where the

underground river reappeared. Then we got back on our individual tubes and floated out into the sunlit jungle.

## Southern Belize

**Hamanasi, August 2007, Gary Kennerley (kennerley@pbworld.com), Oakland, CA.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 86 F, calm. Staff were friendly and food was good but approximately double the cost of the restaurants in the village. We were there in the rainy season so lots of bugs. The diving was delayed as Hurricane Dean passed by with minimal effect. This reduced visibility to 40 feet but it improved to 60 feet after a couple of days. Typically only 4-6 divers on the boat. Hamanasi has three boats, two with covered bow and open stern, twin outboards (225 hp and 200 hp). The other was open with a fabric shade with twin 150 hp outboards. Trip out to the reef was about 25 minute, smooth sailing (an additional 10 minutes on the small boat). All dives were drift dives. Profile for first dive was typically 70 feet for 20 minutes along the wall and then 25 minutes at 40 feet on top of the reef. Second dive was 50 feet for 45 minutes. Plenty of reef fish, spiny lobsters, barracuda and jacks. Generally saw 2-3 eagle rays and 1-2 turtles on each dive. Plenty of hard and soft corals, but seemed somewhat colorless; may be partially due to the less-than-crystal-clear water. Normally Hamanasi needed 8 divers to go out to the atolls, but as it was low season, they agreed to go with only 6. Unfortunately, both times we had enough divers signed up, early morning lightning prevented the trips, although the regular 2-tank barrier reef dive happened. My wife went through her OW certification. She was the only student so had to pay the higher private

class rate and received little classroom instruction. She passed fine, but felt the course was a little hurried. Diving was very expensive for what you got (double of Mexico). The Hamanasi staff were very friendly, helpful and ran a safe operation.

**Kanantik Reef and Jungle Resort, November 2006, Laurie, Lebanon, NJ.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy. It advertised itself as an eco-friendly resort for both nature (specifically, bird watching) and scuba. The resort is situated between Dangriga and Placencia with a beautiful beach, pool, and the luxurious cabanas with king-size beds, polished wood floors, huge showers, and twice daily maid service. The gourmet food is served formally. The land excursions for bird watching to the nearby Cockscomb Wildlife Refuge and Mayflower/Bocawina National Parks were fabulous and well worth visiting even if you're not into birding. There is also an archaeological trip to ruins near Guatemala, a 2.5 hour drive. The reef is nearly an hour's boat ride away. The resort has two boats fitted for diving/snorkeling. The first day's diving was canceled due to high winds at the reef but we were able to go the following day (dive cancellation seemed routine due to winds even though conditions in the bay were calm). There were only six people at the resort and only four of us were diving so we had lots of room and attention from the divemaster and two crew members. We left our equipment on the cabana porch the night before the dive and all was set up when we boarded the following morning. All equipment is available if needed. The crew takes care of all your equipment setup and they are helpful in getting you in and out of the water. However, based on the three dives completed (my husband devel-

oped an abscessed tooth and I developed an inner ear problem, precluding additional dives), Kanantik requires a maximum bottom time of 30 minutes. When questioned, the answer was that divers must be escorted throughout the dive; therefore, everyone comes up when the first one is 800 psi. I had 1400 psi after my first dive and received little more than a shrug from the crew when questioned. The divemaster does little to point out anything except turtles. The three sites visited (maximum depth was 80') were unremarkable as Hurricane Iris destroyed much of the surface reefs in 2001. Visibility was no more than 30 feet due to northerly winds. We did manage to see a large Nassau grouper, a large school of Creole wrasse, parrotfish, a manta ray, and a few hawksbill turtles. Surface intervals were spent on South Water Caye, where we were provided a tasty lunch (main course, salad, fruit, bread, dessert) and plenty to drink ... including beer.

**Seahorse Dive Shop, Laru Beya Resort, May 2007, Todd Shannon Sr. (ecrad-dock@rogers.com), Mississauga, ON.**

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. Laru Beya Resort restaurant wasn't much. The hotel, which has nice accommodation, is right next door to Robert's Cove, where food is excellent, and near Turtle Inn with 5-star dining. Long boat rides from Placencia to Gladden Spit and wind was up. uncomfortable but unavoidable. Sea Horse upped the \$10 fee to enter Gladden Spit to \$15. They charge 50% for canceled dive days due to bad weather, and since you pay in advance, you're stuck. This, however, did not happen to us. Dive masters capable, good, sound boats, radios, GPS, O2, and good operators. Sea Horse is not the only operator in Placencia, but probably the best one, and

in spite of their unfriendly customer service attitude, the whale sharks were amazing. Good trip, worth the effort. UW Photography Comments: Nothing formally set up; go well prepared to be self sufficient.

## Turneffe Island

**Turneffe Island Lodge, December 2006, David Dornbusch, Oakland, CA.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm, choppy. The reefs near Turneffe Caye are in much better condition than off Ambergris Caye, except that we saw many more nurse sharks near Ambergris. The sharks at Turneffe were fewer but bigger. Sea life was much more abundant at Turneffe. Blue Hole is an interesting formation, but except for some reasonably-sized sharks, it's only worth the trip because it's combined with a dive at Long Caye. Most dive sites were only 10 minutes from the lodge and were in fine condition, with abundant and healthy life. Long Caye is an outstanding deep wall near a wonderful coral garden at 15-40 feet to finish the dive. The lodge facilities are better than they look on the website. The lodge is entirely on its own island, with no other lodges or dive operations anywhere nearby. The outsides of the cabins look simple, but are all natural varnished woods inside, with excellent beds, air conditioning, and both indoor and outdoor showers. Have excellent boats and gear. The dive masters and all support staff are superb and eager to please. The number and locations of the dives are programmed, with few options other than as scheduled — generally two to three dives/day. They do only one night dive per week, but it was not available during the time we were there. They do not diving on Sat-

urday. We might have opted out of the Blue Hole trip and dived the local sites instead. But that would have meant giving up Long Caye, which was the best dive of the trip. During all dives, we were allowed to continue our dives as long as we liked, well past many in our group finished their own dives, as much as 20 minutes longer. The cabins were nearly full (softline(capacity is about 40 guests), but it didn't feel crowded. Food was decent, plentiful, but not exceptional. However, they had a tasty and extensive barbecue on Friday night.

**Turneffe Island Lodge, April 2007, Lin Gitterman (m.l.gitterman@sympatico.ca), Toronto, ON.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 75 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, choppy, surge. Well-run operation, safety-focused with good, attentive dive masters and staff. Excellent food, housekeeping and ambiance. We were a little disappointed in the reef (are we spoiled now after Indonesia?) as much of it was broken (hurricane damage?), but our dive master showed us lots of things. Divers the previous week saw +15 sharks but we had a bad "shark week." Fresh warm towels on the dive boat along with oranges, water, etc., and divers are assisted to the utmost. You set your gear up on the first day and never have to do it again — it is hosed down daily by the staff and washed at the end of your trip. Lots of turtles, jacks, frog fish, parrot fish, etc. Rooms have been refurbished and are really nice but the cabanas could do with a bit of a facelift — apparently planned for next year. Note — you are dropped back in Belize by 9 in the morning so a later flight makes for a long wait in the airport.

**Turneffe Island Lodge, May 2007, Bill McGrath (wfm3@cornell.edu), Chandler, AZ.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F,

calm. This is a well-run, guest-oriented establishment with well-maintained facilities, good food, a caring staff, and good diving. The place is idyllic; a small, private island 30 nm off the coast of Belize. The guests were an agreeable bunch, ranging from solo fishermen to couples with young adult children. Set your gear up the first day, and it magically reappears for each dive. The boats are relatively small, with few divers, so it's not crowded at all. The protocol calls for playing follow-the-divemaster, so independent divers might be disappointed. We did the Blue Hole one day; a real disappointment. We descended and came right back up without seeing a thing. An over-rated dive in my opinion. All in all, a delightful place with friendly people, sunny skies, and good chow. Wine list needs work, though.

## BERMUDA

**Dive Bermuda (formerly Nautica), September 2006, Paul Martin (Paul.Martin@GrammarSmith.com), Arlington, MA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, choppy. Dived out of Hamilton at shop accessible through a fancy hotel lobby, but nobody seemed to mind us passing through in wet swim wear and T-shirts. The first tank was a shallow (45 feet) coral shelf, with no special features to bring us back. After a short ride (and short interval, but sufficient since so shallow) we dived a double wreck. The Montana was a Confederate States of America gun runner, a steel paddle wheel steamer that sank in the 1800s. That wreck still has a lot of vertical structure to enjoy, including some of the paddle blades and the boiler. Scattered on top and adjacent to this the Constellation, a 1943 wreck