

found the crew to be the absolute best on any of the thirteen live-boards we have been on. The cabins are relatively spacious. We felt the policy of setting the clocks back an hour (“Nekton Time”) to be pointless other than to create the illusion of getting in the night dive at a reasonable hour. Having a nightly PowerPoint presentation on reef creatures or turtles is fine, but do it after the night dive. The dive briefings were excellent and the crew would do anything you asked and at times it was like having your personal valet. The trip video produced by “Divin’ Ivan” was the best ever seen. My family of four has seen better diving but never a better crew or atmosphere; a great time was had by all. Dive table and air hose available, also rinse barrel.

R/V Coral Reef II, October 2006, Lloyd Schwengel (swendiver@aol.com), Brea, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm, no currents. This was my 5th trip with the New England Aquarium on the RV Coral Reef II. It is a collection trip so not oriented towards U/W photo. The rooms are small but adequate and bath facilities generally shared except one room. Food is excellent and plentiful. You are expected to help out with some of the chores on board since only three crew, two captains and a chef. They supply collecting equipment, two nets, catch bag and probe stick. Short demo on collecting. Helps to have experienced ones along. Sites are picked for types of fish or inverts to be collected and weather. A lot of camaraderie develops among the participants. The swim step has two ladders for easy exit. Most sites shallow for easy collecting, with little or no current. The boat has several tanks to keep the collected fish in, which doesn't make for a lot of room but does not

seem crowded. There are the crew, three aquarium divers, and 9 others. Equipment is kept under two hanging tables and tanks in a box on each side. Entry and exit are from the rear swim step via stairs. One sits out as safety observer each dive. Usually a few beach seines for small juvenile fish, along with a visit to Alicetown one evening. Last day back at Miami is packing day. Everyone works hard this day to prepare, package, and ship the animals to Boston. There is oxygen and safety equipment on board and two outboard inflatables for that wayward diver, although seldom needed. Only a few mild currents and shallow sites. You have to know fish ID and habits to really help collect. UW Photography Comments: U/W photo is only a side activity. Few facilities, are able to charge bats, rinse tank and air available. Keep equipment in your room. You can get some good photos on a few dives.

BELIZE

Belize Aggressor III, September 2007, Lisa Vitale (ldvital@yahoo.com), Austin, TX. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 F, calm, no currents. Fantastic trip! On Saturday we were met at the airport by one of the divemasters. The ride to the boat took about 30 minutes through Belize City. We had two divers whose flight was canceled and were to be in the next day and brought to the boat by water taxi. If an airline has more than one flight per day, there is a chance the second will be canceled. The cabins are fairly spacious, with a double bed with a twin bed bunk and a private bath. Two drawers to store clothes and room under the sink to store toiletries as well as a space under the bed to store some smaller luggage

or other personal items. The salon has a large couch, TV, DVD player, etc., and there is a separate dining area. There is a large sun deck (half is covered) with a hot tub (interesting being in the hot tub with the boat gently swaying!). The beer tap and soda dispenser are also on this level. There is a smaller deck above the sun deck with additional seating; nice to look at the stars. The food was good and there were always snacks after dives. Couple times lukewarm food. Wine, beer, sodas, iced tea, lemonade always available. And you were allowed to raid the pantry/frig whenever you wanted something. Two hot freshwater showers located on the dive deck; they had shampoo, conditioner, and body wash in dispensers. And someone always there to give you a fresh, warm towel. After every night dive there was hot chocolate and warm cookies! The crew were Captain (Jay), instructor (Juan), divemaster (Bart), chef (Anna), stewardess (Lourdes). They all worked as a team, were well organized, and everyone helped each other out. The captain handed out snacks, guided dives, etc. The large dive deck was set up well. They were waiting to get a replacement part so Nitrox was not available. The camera table is a three-tiered, large table, with several power strips for recharging batteries on the second tier. There is a large tank at the back of the boat for cameras, a mask bucket, and a large trash can to rinse gear. The dive platform is spacious; 4 divers at a time could be getting on their fins, which were kept on the dive platform. 7 A.M. Breakfast, 8 A.M. first dive, snack, 10:30 A.M. second dive, 12:30 P.M. lunch, 2 P.M. third dive, snack, 4:30 P.M. fourth dive, 6 P.M. dinner, 7:30 P.M. fifth dive (night dive). Water temperatures were a constant 84 F. I used either a fleece-lined or 3-mil suit. With 5 dives a day,

the 3 mil really came in handy. Most dives there was no current. Entering the water was easy from the dive platform, just a giant stride off the boat. Exiting the water was easy also via two ladders. Juan, Bart, or Jay were always there to take your fins and assist you. A regulator from the boat was placed at about 15 feet just in case anyone ran low on air and a triangle bar for safety stops. We started off on Turneffe Island Atoll then moved on to Lighthouse Reef Atoll after our two stragglers arrived. 27 dives were offered. All sites are wall dives. We dove two dive sites per day, one way one dive-the other way the second dive. Half Moon Caye Wall was the best Caribbean dive I have done. The reefs are healthy, but I did see some coral disease. Reef fish are plentiful, pelagics are few, but there were lots of large grouper, snapper, and tarpon. We saw turtles, spotted eagle rays, white-spotted toadfish, green morays, spotted morays, lots of small sea life. The Blue Hole had great visibility of 80 feet! To off-gas from this deep dive, we took a tour to Half Moon Caye to see the red-footed booby birds and magnificent frigate bird. The Captain took video during several dives and put together a CD for purchase. Pictures were also taken throughout the trip and the CD was given to all the passengers. We arrived back in Belize City at 1 P.M. on Friday and went cave tubing at Jaguar Paw Resort. That evening the crew puts on a wine and cheese party before we went to dinner at a local restaurant. Several of us had late flights out on Saturday, so we took a zip line tour at Jaguar Paw. The tour guides would narrate all the way, telling us interesting things about Belize. UW Photography Comments: There was a large camera table, 3 tiers, with power strips on the second tier for recharging batteries and a large freshwater tub to put cameras.

Nekton Pilot, January 2007, Jerri, Kerrville, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 70 to 78 F, choppy. Southern Belize itinerary. The critters were thick, lots of big fish ... saw nurse sharks, morays, turtles, huge groupers, cuda, etc., plus tons of tropicals. No problem diving air 3-5 dives per day. Food was filling, staff was very attentive and helpful and the cabins were good-sized ... appreciated all the windows and the private bath. Only negative: The Princess Hotel, where we waited for our evening pickup for the boat, smelled really bad and there was no hot water. Belize City is not a good place to visit; walked a good chunk of it and it was pretty grungy and dismal. The special price on our January departures a good value for Caribbean diving.

Sun Dancer II, December 2006, Darren Sieck (dsieck@skybyte.com), St Charles, IL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. We arrived in Belize City via Continental from Houston. PH staff greeted us outside the airport and had a cool bottle of water for us. We were shuttled via an air-conditioned van to the SunDancer II's Pier. The ride from the airport to the pier takes approximately 20 minutes and we were handed cool towels to "freshen up" during the ride. Upon arrival, our luggage was brought to the boat by PH staff and we were given a cold drink and asked to finalize some paperwork. We were given the most detailed safety orientation that I had ever experienced on a live-aboard. We were in stateroom #5 located midships on the port side. The room was spacious, clean and quiet. We also had a private bath, with full size head and good-sized shower for a marine installation. Noteworthy are the large picture windows in the deluxe staterooms.

Our rooms were kept clean by the very capable and pleasant staff. Beds were turned down nightly and treat left on our pillows. Carlos, our chef, did an excellent job accommodating our dietary needs. Not being big fans of chicken, we were served an alternate. Breakfast was cooked with eggs to order with different breads available, and choices of other side dishes such as bacon or sausage. There is also a large continental breakfast set out every morning along with the "hot" breakfast. Lunches and snacks were great. We had a lot of homemade breads. Dinners are excellent and served in courses. Usually a soup then salad, followed by the entrée, coffee, and dessert. We were always offered two choices for the entrée. There is a soda machine with 5 or 6 choices, bottled beer, water, and several kinds of juices. We also had ice tea and lemonade. Liquor is included, bottled beer is available, wine, and even draft beer — a local Belizean brew. Some of the healthiest reef and walls that I have seen in the Caribbean. Monster sponges and lots of healthy sea fans. A few turtles and small sharks were seen. We saw lots of Jacks, tuna, tarpon, and plenty of reef fish. Diving is relatively shallow unless you decide to spend time on the walls. The best of the dives are done on the walls. Dive deck is large and well organized. It has two warm water showers that feel great post-dive. Dive briefings were very thorough. The Captain did a great job all week and is an excellent captain. All the support staff have great attitudes and are a joy to be around.

Sun Dancer II, March 2007, Jeff Robertson (fantasea@surewest.net), Roseville, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, no currents. We had 12 passengers on a boat that would accommodate 20. We had an excellent staff

and crew. The accommodations were the best I'd had on a live-aboard. The food was topnotch and there was plenty of it. Fresh fruit and snacks whenever you wanted it. A first class operation. The reefs we visited were healthy and in surprisingly good shape, though an absence of large animals. There were lots of reef fish, gorgonia, sponges, corals and critters. Thorough dive briefings were given before each dive. Every dive was led by a crew member, or you could dive your own profile. No babysitting here. The crew paid special attention, which made for good fun and an overall feeling of camaraderie. In the water near Lighthouse Reef for a couple days we encountered some kind of stingy stringy thingys that we couldn't identify. Almost everyone got stung. I captured a couple on digital photograph, but still haven't been able to find out what they are. The crew was awesome and supplied vinegar and topical treatment for us that helped. Though they were not set up for digital photo transfer or CD burning, though Captain Mike generously offered using his own personal computer.

Sun Dancer II, March 2007, Greg and Pat White (ga2607@cba.siu.edu), Cobden, IL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, no currents. Captain Mike Tougas and his crew work extremely well together. Comments in the previous Chapbook about problems with air conditioning, poor choice of dive sites, unfilled tanks, and restricted dive times were non-existent during our trip even though the boat was completely booked. All crew members were focused on meeting the needs of the guests. My wife and I routinely had dive times exceeding sixty minutes; we never had any indication from the crew that they were in a hurry or that we were holding

them up. Our tanks were always refilled before we even got our wetsuits off. Warm towels and an individual back rub (Anne Marie's are the best) were always waiting for us after every dive. Though we never felt rushed to finish our dives, the schedule is relatively tight in order to fit in five dives per day. Our routine on other trips had been to shower, relax, and take a nap before dinner, but because dinner is a sit-down affair served by the crew, everyone must be there on time, leaving no time for a nap, and often not enough for a shower after the last afternoon dive. One thing that impressed me was the strong focus on safety. We began the first night with an abandon ship drill and thorough explanation of the safety features and procedures of the boat. My wife, who is a nurse, and other medical professionals in the group were shown the location of all medical supplies and equipment on the boat and asked if they would be willing to assist if a medical emergency occurred. The cook, Jerry, prepared tasty and varied vegetarian meals for me and my wife. The carnivores in the group seemed happy with what they were served. I'm not sure I would classify the food as gourmet, but it was close. We even had baked Alaska one night! The food and drink were delicious and there was always plenty of both. We were somewhat disappointed in the sealife considering everything we've heard. There was not as much variety or numbers of fish as we've seen elsewhere, and the coral was also not as lush. The best dives we had were mostly at Lighthouse Reef. We did see many more eagle rays here than elsewhere and saw a huge loggerhead turtle, but otherwise most dives were relatively unremarkable. As one previous writer mentioned, the most interesting fish were often the ones that hung out in

the shadow underneath the boat. One previous writer also complained about squeaking of the bumpers, which are placed between the boat and the dock, during the last night on board. Our cabin was on the starboard side, right by the dock, and we heard no squeaking at all, so this problem also appears to have been fixed. The cabins are large and well laid-out. A/C in the cabin was easily adjusted to our tastes. Temperature in the main salon was kept colder than we like, so bring a jacket and long pants if you get cold easily. The price is higher than many other live-boards, but well worth it. Bring along a copy of the onerous release forms you have to fill out and send in. These forms are not forwarded to the boat, so we had to fill out most of the forms again. There are two large camera tables with compressed air, separate rinse tanks, and plenty of outlets for recharging. Computer facilities for digital viewing and editing appeared more than adequate.

CAYMAN ISLANDS

Caribbean Explorer II, November 2006, George Boscoe (fleetwood7@comcast.net), Orinda, CA. Thanks for the recommendation of CEXII for my first live-aboard. The experience was outstanding. The boat was well run, safe and clean. The food was outstanding, tasty and well prepared. The crew was very professional and safety conscious. The accommodations were clean, if a bit cramped. They do add on a few hundred dollars for marine park fees and fuel surcharges, a video(optional) and I think they could just include them in the base price. The diving was great, lots of marine life of good variety; the water was murkier

than I had seen in the Caymans last year but still able to get good pictures. The agency US Dive Travel required notarized releases and demanded the use of cashier's checks for payment. Only after I got on the boat did I find out I could have booked directly through Explorer ventures and avoided this hassle.

Cayman Aggressor IV, December 2006, Jeanette Jackson (JJProperties@nc.rr.com), Raleigh, NC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 75 to 79 F, choppy. We had to dive only on Grand Cayman because of the weather, but the crew made it so much fun you almost didn't mind not making it to Little Cayman. Captain Sam gave great dive briefings. Shaunah was the camera pro, and also very helpful with anything you needed. Shawn was a great divemaster — very easy going and fun. Yanis made wonderful food for us — lots of it! There were only seven guests on the boat, so we got spoiled having the whole boat to ourselves. The soda machine was not working and they did not provide sodas. I think they either should have purchased sodas to have on board, or let us purchase them on the way to the boat. Warning: The steps down to the diving platform and the staterooms are very narrow (about 1/2 normal size), so you must be very careful. We had some pretty nice dive sites for not getting to leave Grand Cayman. We were glad we were in a location that could still provide diving during bad weather — instead of being blown out completely and having to twiddle your toes for a week.

Cayman Aggressor, March 2007, Rainer and Kristin Farrag, Dundee, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy, surge. We were on Capt. Sam's last voyage. He is not people-friendly and was avoided