

sphere. UW Photography Comments: Rinse tank for cameras available on the boat. Crew would hand down you camera once in the water; however, one diver complained that he did not get to shoot one dive because no one handed his camera to him.

Texas

Out to Sea Adventures, June 2007, Rusty Hubbarth (osohub@austin.rr.com), Austin, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, choppy. Captain Mike Miglini runs a professional spearfishing operation. Went out 26 miles to the oil rigs and filled our locker with snapper and amberjack. The “Orion” is a state-of-the-art 38-foot charter boat, with AC, shower, and plenty of berth spaces. The focus is on safety, and as usual, we had a great trip. Last trip, in October 2006, we swam with a whale shark at 100 feet for a whole tank. This trip is great if you are not a spearfisher, as the amount of fish around the Texas rigs is truly incredible. In the past we’ve seen Goliath grouper, tarpon, turtles, ling, reef sharks, and a bull shark. We always see dolphins. Pt. Aransas is just outside Corpus Christi.

VIRGIN ISLANDS – BRITISH

Patch reef diving on these closely grouped islands is easy, pleasant, and fairly similar despite which island you choose. The islands are small, friendly, and great getaways.

Anegada

We Be Divin’, Anegada Reef Resort, July 2007, Allison Scheflow (ags1013@

bellsouth.net), Hollywood, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, choppy, currents. Anegada is the only coral island among the other volcanic islands. The beaches are beautiful, practically deserted. The Anegada Reef Hotel is ‘60s style motel-type with clean rooms and friendly employees, great food and cold beer. There was no mention of a room key when we were delivered to our room (no problem). We had a great time there except for the diving. The reefs are in poor condition, little living hard corals; some areas of OK soft corals. All diving is beach diving that is accessed by taxi (they come back at a specified time so you’d better be there) and is done with a DM who is experienced and capable. But there are only 2 or 3 dive sites, all on the Atlantic side. No mention of Caribbean-side diving. Go there for the food and drink and get to Virgin Gorda for the diving.

Cooper Island

Caribbean Sail Divers, Cooper Island Beach Club, June 2007, Mark Thorne (thorne@mindspring.com), Raleigh, NC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Beautiful tropical surroundings with picturesque views of the British Virgin Islands. This is for divers who love to dive but prefer to stay in a laid-back, non-tourist type location. Wake up and fix your own breakfast. At 8:30 am., Caribbean Sail dive boat picks you up from the Cooper Island Beach Club pier. Do two morning dives at various and diverse dive sites. Back to the dock by 1:00 pm. Have a wonder lunch at the covered outdoor restaurant that overlooks the British Virgin Islands. If you are so inclined, do a 3rd dive at 2:30 pm from the dive boat. Or choose to do a

shore dive, snorkel, or just sit back and veg out on the shaded beach and read a book or take a nap. Caribbean Sail Divers is a safety- and service-oriented first-class dive operation. They will pamper you as little or as much as you desire. Their boats are modern, well equipped and made specifically for diving. This was my 5th year in a row to Cooper Island Beach Club and Caribbean Sail.

Tortola

Blue Water Divers, Long Bay Beach Resort, October 2006, Harold and Jan Bedoukian, Montreal, QC. Experience: 400 dives. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm and flat, no currents. For a week of relaxation, good food, uncrowded beaches and easy diving, Tortola is a great place to go. Easily accessible with flights every few hours from Puerto Rico. We stayed in a condo at the Long Bay Beach Resort and rented a car for getting around the island. There are numerous good restaurants in Road Town as well as other areas around the island. Supermarkets are well-stocked, with food as well as liquor. Blue Water Divers were accommodating. They only do two morning dives and were back at the dock between 1:00 and 2:00 every day. Their boats are large and not crowded. Diving is typical Caribbean diving and the wreck of the HMS Rhone is a must-dive.

Blue Water Divers, Village Caye Marina and Hotel, Myett's Hotel, October 2006, Jeff Robertson (fantasea@surewest.net), Roseville, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm, choppy. We are a diver and non-diver traveling together, We had no reservations other than our first night on Tortola, where we stayed in Road Town at the centrally

located Village Caye Marina and Hotel. The a/c rooms were nicely furnished, clean, and affordable and the staff was friendly and helpful. They have a good bar and restaurant overlooking the marina. The next day we rented a car and took off to explore the island. We ended up at Cane Garden Bay for the rest of our 2 week trip. Right on the beach in the middle of the quiet half moon bay was family owned Myett's Hotel. They have 3 rooms and a beach bar and grill restaurant that offer a surprisingly good selection of tasty, affordable fare. The staff went way out of their way to make sure everyone had a good time. By the end of our stay, we were on a first name basis with everyone. Blue Water Divers is based at Soper's Hole Marina on the western end of the island. It's a 20-minute car ride from Cane Garden Bay and we were on our own to get there. A couple of times Sandy dropped me off so she could have the car to shop in Road Town and Soper's Hole. The other times, I took the rental car as she was content to enjoy the beach in Cane Garden Bay. Blue Water Divers is closer to the dive sites so the boat trips were shorter — only 15 to 20 minutes. Brothers Mike and Keith from Australia came to Tortola 12 years ago, started a dive shop and have been running it well since then. They charge \$93 for a two-tank boat dive if you have your own gear. Blue Water Divers has a nice 34-foot dive boat with snacks, head, water and plenty of room. No more than 5 divers on any boat. Both ops dive the Salt, Peter and Norman Islands across the Sir Francis Drake Channel. The viz usually ran 60 to 80 feet, because we had breezy days. We saw lots of reef fish, turtles, sponges, Creole wrasse, gorgonians, lobster, morays and a couple reef sharks. The reefs looked healthy and in pretty good shape. I

also went out with We Be Diving who had a shop right in Cane Garden Bay. \$105 for a two-tank boat dive. They picked me up at Myett's Hotel for the 20-minute ride across island to their main shop at Road Town marina. Their boat was small, never had more than 4 people, including the DM, but there were also no O2, radio, head or drinks on board. DM Kate bought "Skittles" with her own money to share. We were allowed to dive our own profiles. The only limitation was to be back at the boat with at least 500 psi. We dove the HMS Rhone, known for its part in the movie *The Deep*. Between dives, the small boat had starter problems. Kate called the shop and they promised to send another boat. They didn't. After about an hour of fiddling with it, it finally started and we returned to the marina. We could use the ferry service to see the Baths on Virgin Gorda or cross over to Jost Van Dyke to have an "original" Painkiller at the Soggy Dollar Bar on White Bay. UW Photography Comments: Pretty much non-existent with Blue Water Divers or We Be Diving. We were on our own. We did find a fresh water hose at the BWD dock that we could use to rinse cameras, gear, etc., at the end of the day.

Blue Water Divers, April 2007, Brant Cheikes (brant.cheikes@comcast.net), Acton, MA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Blue Water Divers (BWD) was an ok operation. There were 6-8 divers per trip. Boat was adequate, but barely. Some reasonable shade. No head. Drinking water provided, no snacks. Cheap, watery beer was also available post-dive (but at least it was cold). All of the other divers were relatively new and inexperienced. Divemasters were capable, and I was more or less allowed to dive on my own (I was alone on

each trip) and on my own profile. No emphasis on diving in buddy teams. Dive masters focused on needs of the inexperienced. Fish life was rather dull. Dove the RMS Rhone; that was moderately enjoyable, but fish life seemed sparse compared to other islands. Corals appeared washed out. On first day of diving, BWD made special trips to nearby islands to pick up additional divers, which lengthened the dive day (two-tank dive lasted from 9 am departure to 3:30 pm return). On second day of diving, BWD spent 90 minutes between dives, at anchor, doing basic new diver training while other divers waited on the boat. Stayed at Sebastian's Seaside Villas. Accommodations were nice, but office staff wasn't friendly or helpful. Found plenty of nice places to eat on the island; most but not all of the restaurant staffs were friendly. Lots of nice beaches, but you really need a 4wd rental car. Really calm waters, nice swimming.

VIRGIN ISLANDS – U.S.

St. Croix is getting more attention from divers, thanks to its underwater topography and improved dive services. Once unfriendly to visitors, the Virgins are now a good tourist destination with decent Caribbean diving on St. Thomas and St. John.

St. Croix

Anchor Dive, Carambola Beach Resort, September 2006, Maria Smith (mesmith101@earthlink.net), Owensboro, KY. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 86 to 88 F, calm. The divemasters were very knowledgeable and on the lookout for everything under the water. They were