

underway. Marine Park orientation was required, regardless of prior visits. Mandatory shore dive is also required, which is slightly less convenient since the dive shop is a fair distance from the beach/dock. Boats tended to feel crowded with 12-16 divers and gear stations fairly close together. Rinse facilities were adequate, but storage was a little cramped, and the resort frowned upon taking any gear to the room for rinse/dry. Personnel in both the resort and the dive operation were helpful and pleasant. Fish life was plentiful — turtles, morays and a number of seahorses. Never saw a lobster, crab or green moray as in previous visits. Other divers made the same comment. Very uncrowded shore dives (except for Hilma Hooker), and plenty of nitrox available. Divemasters tried hard to locate critters if requested, or allowed us to wander on our own. Dive time was limited to one hour, but not enforced rigidly. Bonaire is just a great place to get in a lot of dives, and Plaza Resort is one of the nicer places to stay — a little upscale from Buddy's.

## CAYMAN ISLANDS

While diving on the West End of Grand Cayman has succumbed to the travails of the tourist industry, the North Wall and East End still provide good diving. However, it's become extremely expensive so many divers head to the sister islands and even better diving. Arguably the best diving is on Little Cayman and boats from the Brac make regular trips, though at times winter weather prevents the journey.

## Cayman Brac

**Brac Reef Resort, November 2006, Blaine and Marian Browne (bt-browne@bellsouth.net), Lighthouse Point, FL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. There is a trade-off in Caribbean diving in November: while temperatures are more moderate, one runs the risk of less-than-perfect dive conditions. Winds and clouds were the rule. One could dive on the lee side with only minor annoyance from the northerly wind. Brac Reef Super-friendly staff, clean, spacious rooms and well-kept grounds. The food was superb, lots of it and much variety. The dive operation was user-friendly. Spacious, well-maintained boats and the crew does everything but put you in the water. Diving the Tibbetts wreck on the windy north side, we faced one of the most challenging entry-exits we've encountered, with huge swells that wildly tossed the 46 ft boat. Ron and BJ provided careful briefings about reboarding, reassured the anxious, and got all back on board with no problems. Great visibility and some larger fish on the wreck. Currents caused some hatch doors to swing back and forth, emitting eerie, audible creaking noises. Wilderness Wall was arguably the most spectacular dive, with many swim-throughs and beautiful corals and sponges. We saw no turtles or sharks, but others reported sightings. Because of the wind, dive sites were limited during our stay, but those that we saw generally ranked up there with most in the region. One can also explore the island by foot, bike or car, hike various trails, explore the bluffs on the east end, and investigate caves, which are home to bats. The island is more developed than Little Cayman, with a surprisingly large

airport. Cayman Airways will charge you for excess weight. Divi Tiara shut down unexpectedly in October and is boarded up.

**Brac Reef Resort, November 2006, Suzi Mein (suzimein@charter.net), Grand Haven, MI.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. "Valet Diving." You only touched your gear when you put it on at the back of the boat (with their help), underwater, and exiting the water. They took care of almost everything for you. The boats are in great condition and well maintained. The staff was accommodating and when a few people got sea sick after our 1st dive, they went into the dock for the surface interval. While we were there, it was windy and rough so we were not able to get to the east side of the island and the shipwreck Tibbetts or Bloody Wall. The resort was exceptionally maintained, rooms were clean, and the staff nice and laid-back. The food was outstanding, and for a buffet they had a great variety for all tastes. We loved the hammocks, the bikes were nice to have, but no frills, and free wireless internet in the lobby that you could also connect at a few of the seats in the bar. When you handed your camera up, the staff would rinse them with the fresh water hose. They did have a camera table, not large but suitable. Good facilities at the dive shop.

**Brac Reef Resort, January 2007, Gary Malinowski (mali@mailbag.com), Oconomowoc, WI.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, choppy, surge, no currents. Brac Beach Reef Resort is a great value, but flights getting to Cayman Brac from Grand Cayman can be limited. Most flights are small commuter planes, so make sure your checked

luggage is not overweight. The rooms at the resort are basic, but clean and roomy. The grounds are nice, with a pool, hot-tub, tennis courts, large beach area with many hammocks, and a large dock. It's easy to find a quiet spot on the beach to be alone. The food is excellent, fresh, hot and different selections each day. The dive operation was fantastic. Valet-style diving, with the divemasters catering to you. They set up your gear on day one and you leave your BC and reg on the boat and the divemasters rinse it each day. The divemasters were friendly, outgoing, and helpful. Great dive site descriptions. They are the last ones into the water and the first ones out, so they can help the divers in and out. You can dive your own profile, or have the divemasters guide you. However, they are only in the water for about 25 min. When they head to the boat, you and your buddy can continue diving. The diving was nice, but the fish life seems to be down a bit. The coral looked healthy, but you can see some damage from Hurricane Ivan. On our last day we saw a large hammerhead shark. Lobsters were abundant and we saw several turtles and moray eels. The weather was nice, mostly sunny days with only a little rain in the morning of one or two days. Highs in the mid 80s and low in the mid 70s. Most dive sites are a 10-15 minute boat ride. The staff of both the resort and the dive operation were fantastic. For an all-inclusive, I was impressed with the food.

**Brac Reef Resort, March 2007, Bob and Betty Barada (bbarada@pacbell.net), Walnut Creek, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 81 F, calm, choppy. The resort is clean and comfortable. I would describe it as a top quality motel by US standards, with large rooms, large baths, good air conditioning and TVs in the room.

Exercise facilities and rudimentary spa offerings. Food was buffet style and plentiful. Some excellent, all good. Lobster thermidor, chicken cordon bleu, prime rib, pastas, and excellent salads. You can eat inside at tables with air conditioning or in a screened in patio. Karaoke night, movie night, happy hour night and manager's night all brought people together. Pool and hot tub available. Nice pier to hang out at night and watch the eagle rays, sting rays, tarpon and other fish life beg for handouts. Service was excellent. Diving was easy as pie — my wife calls it “princess diving,” where they collect your gear from outside your room the first night and they handle it all week. They rinse it and hook it up for you on the boat before each dive. We did three dives a day, but skipped the night dives. The boats are roomy and stable custom designed Newtons. Dive crew and captains are funny and knowledgeable. They are flexible as to what you want to see and dive. We had high easterly winds the first few days so seas were running pretty high for getting back on the boat. They hung out a current line and had you take off your fins before you approached the ladder. They held the ladders down while you come up, grabbing your gear immediately. We had a fairly novice diver experience an anxiety attack on the current line and one of the crew entered the water immediately to calm her, take off her gear, and escort her to the ladder. We hadn't been to the Caymans since 2001. The coral here was in fairly good shape, the sea life diverse and plentiful. We swam with eagle rays and sting rays, numerous turtles, occasional nurse sharks, juvenile spotted drums, and the usual tropical fish. Spotted numerous large lobster and crab. One large grouper fell in love with my wife and followed her

everywhere, occasionally stopping to be petted.

**Brac Reef Resort, April 2007, Paul Johnson (pajkotwf@aol.com), Santa Rosa, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Water: 80 F, choppy, no currents. Brac Reef Beach resort is a attractive, all-inclusive dive destination. Rooms are comfortable and quiet except on Wednesday nights for the weekly karaoke (apparently everyone on the island, except me, attends). It was the only night we had to put on the air conditioner. At about 40 or so rooms, nothing was ever crowded. The resort staff was helpful and the rooms were kept clean, but the best was the fabulous food. All meals are serve-yourself, buffet-style but the quality was better than in many sit-down restaurants. Breakfasts were outstanding. The bar was fun and well-stocked, but understanding what was and was not covered on the “three drinks a day” plan was a confusing early on. Most nights there is some after-supper activity including the and movie night but the best of these were the photo presentations of the local photo pros. The resort has an attached spa and I indulged in several massages after a day of diving. Lots of turtles, occasional nurse sharks, plenty of barracuda, spotted eagle rays, sting-rays and tarpon. The walls and corals remain fairly healthy and with a few exceptions (e.g., Staghorn Forest), did not appear to have been substantially damaged by recent hurricane activity. All the usual suspects were in attendance: jawfish, tilefish, angels, filefish, squirrel fish, parrotfish, spotted drums, chromis, anthias, etc. The first week the seas were 5 to 8 feet. Lots of mal de mer. The 46-foot Newton dive boats were seaworthy, comfortable and, since they were rarely full, spacious almost all the time. Reef Divers ran a good

operation in spite of the less-than-ideal conditions. The best dives were at Little Cayman. It's hard to beat Blood Bay Wall.) Visibility was good despite the sea conditions and on some of the walls was in excess of 100 feet. Donnie and Chris ran a great show. Diver safety was their first priority but enjoyment was a close second. We dove our computers, and although depths and times were recommended, computers were not checked by the dive staff. Good check-in and check-out procedures on all dives. The night dive was a disappointment and cost an additional \$60. Nitrox \$12 per tank.

**Brac Reef Resort, April 2007, Laura Cook, Westfield, MA.** Experience: 300+ dives. Vis: 50 to 60 feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm and flat, choppy, no currents. Resort had many activities. Nice, clean rooms, the best food! Gregory is a fantastic chef. Reef Divers once again took great care of us, especially Miss Vicky, Donnie, Jason and Manny. Relaxing island — quiet, make your own vacation.

**Brac Reef Resort, June 2007, Charles Levine (cblevine1@comcast.net), Red Lion, PA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm, surge. My fifth trip back and it's like coming home to family! Our family of 6 were warmly greeted, accommodations were clean (and appeared to be freshly painted), staff were their usual friendly selves. Three non-divers in our group had the pool, beach and docks/hammocks at their disposal as well as bikes to roam the island. The three divers had superb diving with BJ (born and raised on the Brac) and Donnie (Scottish), both of whom gave complete and amusing dive briefings. Reef Divers II valet diving is marvelous. After initial equipment setup, the DMs make certain that a full tank of air is

on your back at each dive site. Entries and exits are easy off the dive platform of the Newton 42 or 46 boats. Optional guided underwater tours with a DM in the water, or dive your own dive. Corals and sponges looked healthy and abundant this year. little bleaching was noticeable, and the small critters in the sands were bountiful. Saw quite a few southern and spotted eagle rays and turtles, though no sharks at all this year. Schooling fish were noticeably more prominent but blennies and similar were in shorter supply. Viz was easily 100+ feet at most site, somewhat less on Little Cayman. Three boats went out 4 of the 5 days that we were on the Brac and yet we didn't feel crowded or rushed. Food was good, albeit still too spicy at lunch for those of us contemplating afternoon dives. There was a "GI bug" affecting half of the resort, hospitalizing some of the staff but none of the guests. Ed Beatty's dive shots and video were masterful as ever. Cayman Airways Express was timely and all of our bags made it to and from the Brac.

**Brac Reef Resort, August 2007, John R Blanks Jr. (jbscuba@mindspring.com), Macon, GA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm. Took my family, 4 divers, 2 non-divers. Brac Reef Resort is a good facility for divers and mediocre for non-divers. The rooms were clean, roomy and well-maintained and the food was exceptional and plentiful. The food improved drastically since the last time. Most of the night life occurs at Brac Reef for divers and locals; it seems to be a favorite watering hole for the residents as well as a favorite for Sunday buffet. The diving was good, with great boats and the dive masters, Mannie and Phil, were accommodating and great at finding stuff, particularly for photography. The dive on the Tibbetts was great,

and what can you say about Bloody Bay except it's fantastic. Lots of fish life with some large, friendly groupers, top hats, file fish, puffers, loads of French and queen angels, and many varieties of butterfly fish. Fish, as always, seemed less skittish at Little Cayman than the Brac. All in all, a tremendous week for experienced, intermediate, and advanced beginners. UW Photography Comments: There was no separate wash for cameras, but there was a camera table that provided somewhat adequate space for 4 to 5 cameras, not video cameras.

**In Depth Watersports, Tiara Timeshares/Featherstone, May 2007, John Thurber (new23home@aol.com), Tallahassee, FL.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 110 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, choppy. Timeshare accommodations clean. Everything neat. Hotel still looks good even though closed for six months. Beach was raked and some beach chairs available for relaxing. Staying in the time shares necessitates the need for a rental car, unless you want to walk the half mile to the Captain's Table or to Brac Reef for your meals. I found the former great for lunch outside at the bar with an après dive beer. Diving with In Depth was the best I've had in more than 20 trips to the Brac. No crowds, free nitrox, drift dives, and new sites. Craig Burhart, the owner of In Depth, is a superb dive boat skipper. He is friendly and helpful and quick to respond to the needs of his guests.

**In Depth Watersports, June 2007, Al Jones (aljonesmgrfedex@aol.com), Henderson, NV.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 200 to 300 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm, currents, no currents. In Depth Watersports has taken up the void left by the closing of Divi Tiara on Cayman Brac. They are located on

the old Divi dock, and run by long-time Reef Divers and Divi instructor, Craig Burhart. Craig and his two other instructors, Katie and Rory, cater to all your diving needs. They offer valet diving, and even wash your gear for you at the end of each day. Craig will arrange for private housing for you in any of the many private homes that he manages for the absent homeowners. Total luxury to economy accommodations are available. It is an island, so bring what you need. There are a few markets buy food, but bring any specialty batteries that one might need for electronics. Good restaurants include Aunt Shaw's, Captain's Table, and Brac Reef Beach Resort's dining hall with chef Gregory and head waiter Dennis. UW Photography Comments: The dive boat goes out with a max of 10 people, so there's plenty of room for people and cameras alike.

**In Depth Watersports, The Breakers, September 2007, John Thurber (new23home@aol.com), Tallahassee, FL.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 25 to 110 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F, choppy. In Depth continues to provide superior valet diving service while seeking less-used dive sites. The Breakers has the best condo facilities on the Brac. It has a handy rinse tank and hangars for dive equipment available near the well-kept pool. Property manager, Nina Banks, is available to advise and assist. She will even take you diving. The Captain's Table features an outstanding luncheon menu at the bar or inside if you prefer. Try the mango shrimp.

**Reef Divers, Private Residence, April 2007, Jerry Hobart (bjhobart@aol.com), Ransomville, N.Y.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm, choppy, no currents. Coral was in good health, but

there were visible signs of hurricane damage (sand blown on coral, etc.). Newton dive boats were in excellent condition and crew (Barbie and Chris) were experienced, helpful and enthusiastic. For an inexperienced diver (guide in water on every dive and “valet service”) as well as the diver with 400 dives (excellent three dimensional maps of dive sites with accurate dive briefings and being allowed to do your own thing), Reef Divers does a good job of pleasing everybody. Divers were allowed input on choice of dive sites and it appeared weather (wind and/or choppy water) was the only thing that prevented divers from getting their choice. Crew was safety conscious and took roll call seriously before departure and after each dive. Boat had all safety equipment and even a new emergency underwater recall device. Beautiful walls, good visibility, and a wide, plentiful variety of fish (including nurse sharks, many turtles, spotted eagle rays, southern stingrays, tarpon, eels) and coral made diving Cayman Brac enjoyable. For those looking for topside activities, the Brac provides hiking trails, rock climbing (bring your own equipment), and is a major bird sanctuary. Also it would seem that bicycle enthusiasts would enjoy pedaling around the island. Night-life and evening entertainment is sorely lacking. Reef Divers has large two-shelf camera tables on Newton 46 dive boats. Fresh water hose is used for rinsing cameras when you get out of the water and large fresh water rinse tank is provided on dock. Photography shop on premises that rents cameras and will shoot personal pictures or video.

## Grand Cayman

**Dive Frontier, Compass Point,  
September 2007, George P. Corydon,**

**Carmel, IN.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. The accommodations are wonderful large, immaculate condo. The dive operations are the best. Great boat crew. Large boats with small groups (largest was 10 on a boat set up for 18). We were offered guided tours at every site or could, in most cases, go on our own. Everyone was experienced and we were allowed to dive our own computers without undue restrictions. Tanks were at least 3000 psi and often close to 3200. I'll never dive with anyone else on Grand Cayman.

**Divers Down, Grand Caymanian,  
February 2007, Paul Lima (plintn@  
hotmail.com), Christiana, TN.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, no currents. We did a 2-tank dive. We were picked up at the condo and driven to 7 Mile Beach, where the boat was waiting. The boat was adequate but would not have been able to handle rougher seas, being open and low to the water. We were promised the North Wall but were taken a few minutes away to the West Wall, the Sand Chute, was not my idea of a wall dive and was a disappointment. There was only one crew member on board and he dove with us on the first dive, leaving the boat unattended. The second dive was the Oro Verde, a nice wreck with lots of tame fish life and opportunities for close-up photos of French angels, queen angels, etc. For the money we could have done shore dives every day and had a much better experience and we did and had great experiences with a number of different dive shops. DiveTech had a great, shaded set-up area, nice diving with lots of tarpon and scorpionfish and a great bar to end the dives. Grand Cayman is a great place for extremely convenient shore diving but you need a car. We

were warned about going to George Town when the cruise ships are in, but the tourists do not impede traffic significantly, although they do clog the stores. The Grand Caymanian Resort is nice, quiet and relaxed, although far from the beach. I had a great snorkel off the ironshore in front of the resort, seeing diverse life from a turtle to sting rays to lobsters to various shells in the grassy flats, but it is not what most would think of as a "beach" and I did not see anyone else in the water during the week.

**DiveTech, Plantation Village Beach Resort, September 2006, Richard Rodriguez (richrodjr@sbcglobal.net), Arlington, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 85 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm. DiveTechs Jay Easterbrook and his staff went out of their way to accommodate any requests we had for dive sites, shore diving, and to just sit around and talk about diving. The Ten Ata and Atatude are both great boats setup to accommodate large groups, but DiveTech limits the number on board so there is plenty of room. The variety of sites in Grand Cayman make this a prime spot for both advanced and new divers. Going deep is not a problem where you can find huge sponges and turtles, but neither is maxing out bottom time on shallower reefs where the schools of fish and macro life are abundant. The shore diving from Cobalt Coast and Turtle Reef is the best on the island and included free with boat diving. The night dives are spectacular and sea life is abundant. Tarpon Alley, Ghost Mountain and Leslie's Curl are just a few of the sites not to be missed. The Turtle Farm, Pedro St. James Historic site, the Botanic Gardens (cool blue iguanas), Hell, and the Cayman National Museum provide great surface interval diversions. Restaurants are

expensive so make accommodations at a timeshare with a kitchen. Grocery stores are closed on Sunday. DiveTech allowed me to plug in and use my recharger for the camera and flash batteries.

**DiveTech, Cobalt Coast Resort, February 2007, Joe Spears, Conover, NC.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 65 to 90 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm. Boat was clean and organized. One day they missed the count on the number of Nitrox divers and were short on Nitrox tanks. Dive site explanations were good and not too long. Some newer divers on the boat were disappointed in the amount of service by DiveTech. I prefer to set up my own gear so I had no problem. We dove along the North Wall and diving was good for winter diving. The water was among the calmest I have ever experienced for boat dives. No big creatures but lots of small fish and many juveniles. Many great photo opportunities.

**DiveTech, Cobalt Coast, April 2007, Robert E. Lipka (cdrfrm1@aol.com), Cedars, PA.** Experience: 74 dives. Vis:

50 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, choppy, surge, strong currents. Most of my diving is done in the Caribbean, and Grand Cayman was the worst ever. The coral was unhealthy or dead and wildlife virtually nonexistent. Unable to shore dive off Cobalt Coast due to strong currents and surge. Never made it to the wall but tried. Dove only the NW end. All dive masters at DiveTech have never seen a frog fish, seahorse, etc., in past 6 years. Wish I had known this before I booked. My daughter and I love underwater photography and received honorable mention in last years Scuba Diving Magazine contest. The crew at DiveTech was safety conscious and the resort facilities excellent. The

manager, Arie, was gracious. However, the diving stunk. 1.5-inch baby scorpion fish made the trip.

**DiveTech, Cobalt Coast, May 2007, JoAn Ferguson, Herndon, VA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: 82 F, calm. About five years ago we were certified by DiveTech in Grand Cayman. We decided to return to DiveTech, not only because they certified us, but because we liked the idea of a combination of morning boat dives and unlimited shore diving available from their two locations. We dove on their larger boat, the Atitude, which could hold up to 22 divers, but was never full — usually about 13 divers. Lots of room on the boat. Each day there was a mix of staff as captain, divemaster, and shop help. All seemed friendly and knowledgeable. Typically morning routine for those staying at Cobalt Coast was meet up at 7:45 am, put gear in a truck, get in assigned van, drive to boat dock, carry gear to boat, and start gearing up. This isn't valet diving. You carry your gear and set up your own tanks. Dive sites were often just a few minutes away. They are clearly set up for technical divers, rebreathers, and free divers. But most of the people there during our stay were recreational divers, although most used Nitrox. One family that didn't use Nitrox decided to get the training so that they could enjoy the long bottom times like everyone else. We watched some folks training for free diving — cool to watch below (as I enjoyed my deep breaths!). Also a few people with rebreathers. Cobalt Coast is next to DiveTech. Good package deal combining room, breakfast, two-tank morning boat dives, and unlimited shore dives. We were only there for four nights, so opted for one of the smaller hotel-style rooms. Plenty of space in the room, lots of storage,

refrigerator, and roomy bathroom. We were also only a few steps away from DiveTech in one direction, and food/bar in the other direction. Unlimited Internet access at no additional charge. Its wireless and is available around the bar and pool. Our room was close, so if we put the computer near the window, we could access the Internet from our room. I used Skype to call home every day. Cobalt Coast breakfast was good and convenient before diving. Lunch was also good — but expensive. Most sandwiches about \$10.63 US. Yikes. But it was convenient! The meal plan for \$55 per day would be worth it. We went to Pappagallos for dinner, a short drive from Cobalt Coast. pleasant setting and good food. Also expensive. We did 11 dives in our 3+ days of diving. They encourage you to do your first shore dive on the day of arrival. That was fun! Diving was pretty deep — max depths between 60 and 100 feet. Typical dive times of 45 minutes to an hour. Saw lots of turtles — both hawksbill and green sea turtles between 18 and 24 inches in diameter. Other cool sightings — spotted eagle ray, juvenile spotted drum, southern stingrays, and breeding behaviors during afternoon shore diving. Dives at the North Wall, where you gaze into the abyss, are not to be missed. Camera-only tanks on the boats and at the shore diving locations. Soft table on the boat for cameras to set on. Divemasters carefully handed down cameras to divers.

**DiveTech, Cobalt Coast, September 2007, Chuck Wohlust (gchas1@aol.com), Winter Park, FL.** Experience 230 dives. Vis: 100 to 120 feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm and flat, no currents. First time on the North Wall and the diving was excellent. Tarpon Alley, Leslie's Curl, Lemon Reef and Black Forest were all great dives. Excellent boat but

if you like to be pampered by the staff, this is not for you. You are responsible for all your gear and all your setup (not necessarily bad if you haven't done it in awhile). On the plus side, those without computers were given one free for use so bottom time was increased, making for much longer and more enjoyable dives. Kitchen was being renovated so no dinners, but they paid cab fare to take you where you wanted to go to eat. Overall, a nice, relaxing experience and the resort staff worked hard to make your stay enjoyable.

**Don Foster's, February 2007, Stephanie (slewis@altazip.com), Central Valley, UT.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Both my husband and I felt like we were cattle. We were given a briefing on the boat. It felt like we were children being told the rules and if we broke them we would be punished. We were told what not to do, not given any info on what to look for. The dive master just floated in the area where we were diving looking like a teacher who is bored and waiting for someone to do something wrong. The dive boats were broken into which cruise ships you were on. Our boat had 20 divers while the others had only a couple of divers on them. It would have been better if they would have split the divers evenly among the boats. We felt like they were there to get in and out of the way as fast as possible.

**Eden Rock Diving Center, Sunset Divers, Sunset House, April 2007, Paul Selden, Portage, MI.** Experience: 100-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75+ Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm to 3 ft waves; little to no current. I squeezed 12 dives into 3 diving days during a week-long vacation, with site-seeing and snorkeling in between. Wanting to improve my underwater photography skills, I began

the week with a lesson in the water at Sunset Reef from Cathy Church that proved to be worth its weight in gold. (I recommend a session with the energetic, patient, and inspirational Cathy Church or from her able assistants, Kat or Lara, to anyone looking to upgrade their skills or equipment.). Though hurricane Ivan had completely submerged the island in 2004, the reefs were filled with abundant life, beautiful corals, and colorful sponges. You haven't lived until you are swimming through a cave, and dozens of big tarpon decide to glide silently past! Trinity Caves and Orange Canyon were among the top "must-see" deeper dives. Bullwinkle's and Japanese Gardens were shallower gems. Staying at Sunset House puts some wonderful shore diving within easy reach: great reefs for photography are found all along the stretch from Sunset Reef to Eden Rock. Eden Rock Diving Center was fantastic. Their multi-dive package rated a "best buy," plus, understanding my need to tightly schedule, they were willing to commit to afternoon boat dives when most others would not. The owner, Stuart Freeman, kept his word to take me out one day, even though I was the only paying diver on board! Roger, his son/boat captain, made every effort to go to requested sites. Divemasters were patient with photographers. There was always a bucket of fresh water for cameras. I've read complaints about dive boats on Grand Cayman limiting boat dives to 45 minutes, but I never felt hurried (especially when cruise ship divers were not with us), and in any event logged an 89 minute shore dive from the shop. Sunset House Dive Resort was wonderful. Our spacious room was a good value, and the staff was friendly and helpful in retrieving a camera I left in our cab from the air-

port. Their house restaurants and bar serve tasty food that is quite reasonably priced (for Grand Cayman), perhaps explaining why their “My Bar” is so popular with locals. Town is within easy walking distance, but the sidewalks are narrow or nonexistent. US visitors need to be especially careful, since traffic moves on the left. Grand Cayman offers many shore activities for the non-diver/snorkeler. We used Captain Marvin’s snorkeling operation to Stingray City, and loved every minute of our trip, which took us to two shallow reefs and the sandbar where the stingrays are located. The Turtle Farm was interesting (get discount tickets at your hotel before you go), and the Atlantis submarine adventure was amazing. It’s not every day you get to go down to 100 feet in a working submarine. Many great restaurants are too far to comfortably walk. I was somewhat nervous anticipating my first experience driving on the “wrong” side, yet within about 60 seconds behind the wheel, my concern gave way to excitement. My mental trick was to imagine that I was simply driving in the left lane of a one-way, and the rest was relatively easy. Roundabouts were tricky during rush hours, but everything ended up great. We went to Calypso Grill in Morgan’s Harbor, strolled through the Queen Elizabeth II Botanical Park, saw the beautiful homes on Rum Point: Don’t worry if your favorite dive shop doesn’t boat dive in the PM. The shore diving is so good that a sound, safe dive plan is to boat dive the deeper or less accessible sites in the AM, then dive shallower sites from shore, in the PM. Make sure you have close buddy contact when doing swim-throughs in Devil’s Grotto, and never try to squeeze through a tight passage (even when it looks like daylight is just above you). I heard from one diver who

once had to remove his tank and BCD to extricate himself.

**Neptune’s Divers, Aqua Bay Club, June 2007, Marjorie Griffing (mjgriffing@comcast.net), Norcross, GA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm, surge. The Aqua Bay Club is not a diving resort, but the location at the North end of Seven Mile Beach was good and the large screened balcony made a good place to store soggy dive gear. The condos are large with fully equipped kitchen. Maid service was spotty — we repeatedly asked for extra towels and usually didn’t get them; frequently maid service was completed around dinner time. Food on the Cayman Islands is expensive, both in the grocery store and at restaurants. That said, we had several really good meals. The dive operation was wonderful. No more than 8 on a boat. They picked us up at the designated time at the Aqua Bay Club. When we were diving consecutive days, they stored gear over night. They chose locations each day so that no dive sites were repeated during our entire week and, given the weather, the best diving was chosen. First dive was typically to 100 feet. A DM guided the dive, although we were free to go our own way. They specified a time limit but said that those with computers could come up per their computer and air limits. Second dive was typically after a 40 minute surface interval and to 50 feet. The DMs were really good at identifying the various fish and pointing out difficult-to-find critters — blue cleaner shrimp, scorpion fish, etc. We usually surfaced after about 45 minutes on the first dive and after an hour on the second dive with plenty of air. Specified time limits were usually 25 minutes and 40 minutes respectively. Even though we were last on board, they still waited

for us to have the 40 minute surface interval. We typically dive Nitrox on the first dive. Nitrox fills were spotty — even though we ordered 32%, tanks sometimes analyzed at 26%. We were not charged for Nitrox when the tanks were light on the O<sub>2</sub>. Georgetown and SMB area have been restored after Ivan. East End is another story. About half of the properties were for sale and many had not been repaired.

**Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, September 2006, Tom Higgins/Trisha Barkley, Galloway, NJ.** Experience: 375 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, choppy. Participated in “Digital Madness.” Speakers and instructors were Cathy Church, Steve Frink, Daniel Brown and Dr. Alex Mustard. It was very informative and fun. The dive-masters were extremely attentive and accommodating. Dive sites were full of canyons, tunnels and swim-throughs. The resort was all condos. The one we stayed in is for sale for US\$475,000. We never touched our gear until the day we left. Best accommodations and dive operation we encountered in 10 years diving the Caribbean.

**Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, February 2007, Howard Kaiser.** Vis: 75 to 100 feet. Water: low 80s F. My wife and I have been going to Grand Cayman; I figure around 17 or 18 trips by now over fifteen years or so. Most Undercurrent readers are familiar with the postings from East End, particularly for Compass Point and Ocean Frontiers. Knowing the owners and staff, Jean and I like to bring down the Chapbook reviews for them to see every year. The postings have always been overwhelmingly positive for this operation and our review is not different in that regard. What prompted me to write this year was one of those

events that come around occasionally that compel the need to spread the word further. We booked our trip in February by calling Leslie at OF and reserving a one-bedroom ocean-front condo at Compass Point. This place is beautifully done with TVs in both the living and bedrooms, CD/DVD player and two fold-down Murphy beds in the living room. Please don't bring kids ... this ain't Disneyland. There are great bathrobes in each unit, along with microwave, dishwasher and a full kitchen including all utensils, pans etc., plus a stacked washer/dryer unit. Each condo has a balcony perfect for early coffee or evening adult beverages — seats 4 comfortably and overlooks the dive boats. Handy for hanging skins, drying booties, etc. One constructive point — balconies could use some hooks. We depart from Kansas City on US Air through Charlotte at 6:40 AM and on-island by 2 PM. We always stop at the new Hurley's on the roundabout in Red Bay. We buy breakfast and lunch fixings and will generally cook a few dinners as well. Oh yeah, also beer and wine can be bought next door to Hurleys in the shopping center. Cayman continues to get more expensive. After four dives a day, we're just not real enthused about schlepping out to eat. Two in the AM, pop up to the unit — grab lunch and dry booties/skins, head back on the boat. We don't go deep on the first dives, preferring to do our own thing on the edge of the wall above the guided tours through such great spots as The Maze, Jack McKinney's, etc. We are conservative divers, despite the number of dives we do. This time, 20 dives in 6 days, none under 100 fsw. Fish life seems to be returning post-hurricane. Unfortunately, I noticed extensive algae growth on the southerly shallow sites, including Crushers wall area and High

Rock. We were fortunate enough one day to have in excess of 100-foot viz on Babylon, the best dive on the island. Saw sharks on seven or eight occasions, including a few nurse sharks. No eagle rays for the second year in a row. Turtles on just about every dive, sting rays in the sand flats and tarpon holed up in the caverns and swimthroughs. Lots of queen and French angels, small schools of chub and snapper, black durgon marauding in packs on the shallow reeftops and blue chromis stringing along in file ... seemed to have been a large number of juveniles on most sites, including a number of smallish grouper. The walls and canyons, especially at Babylon, are the real attraction out here. The 4th day, I woke up with my left arm aching a bit. I've had problems including surgery on my neck so I figured I'd slept on it wrong. Got in the water and it seemed to get better, so I completed my 4 dives. The next day, it started up again, but again, after getting underwater, the arm felt better. Bad idea. The next morning, we finished our last two dives and my arm was so heavy I could barely lift it. I knew I was in trouble. Marty at DAN answered my call to their 800 number and after hearing the details suggested that I get into Georgetown to the Hyperbaric Chamber immediately. Since we were due to fly the next day, I suggested that perhaps a few minutes of pure oxygen would suffice. When I went into the office, Louise and Kaz and Fraser nixed the idea and immediately packed me into the rental car and off we went. By the time I got to the hospital parking lot, I couldn't walk — my right leg had given out. Jean was panicked and upset — Fraser and the staff went out of their way to help her reschedule her flight, extended my stay at Compass Point and checked up on me during the next

three days. I simply can't say enough about how they responded. I also want to mention the folks at the Hyperbaric Services in Grand Cayman, Dr Denise Osterleh at Georgetown Hospital and her staff. DAN is worth every penny. I ended up with two sessions of 5 hours each in Grand Cayman, then two more sessions at home 3 days later of 3-hour durations. I still have a few numb spots on my right leg and get the occasional twinge in my left shoulder, but hope to start diving again this fall. As near as we can tell, I had 2 instances of rapid ascent from 15 feet to the surface; I had surgery on my back last February and scar tissue buildup and dehydration may be the reasons for the Schedule 2 hit I took. Jean did the identical dives without incident, except she was diving Nitrox and I was breathing air. After taking a ton of abuse from the chamber attendants over two days (at Jean's instigation), I took the Nitrox course. Okay, closing the barn door a little late, but that shows growth, doesn't it?

**Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, March 2007, Brent Barnes (bbarnes380@aol.com), Edmond,**

**OK.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Ocean Frontiers offers a truly superb dive trip experience and is a first-class dive operation.. Lesley, of Ocean Frontiers, was prompt in responding to all our emails and questions. We rented a car from Andy's at the airport. Excellent car rental; we were quickly on our way. Driving is on the left. This can be a little bit stressful when making many turns and driving in high traffic areas but traffic is light on the east end and easy. Compass Point is an outstanding resort and built specifically for divers. They have one- and two-bedroom condominiums that are beautiful and well-maintained. All are ocean-front

and have fully functional kitchens, cable TV in living area and bedrooms. Ocean Frontiers plays video from the previous day's dives on one channel throughout the resort. There is a small beach and small pool. There is now a grocery store on the east end about a mile away; it is not large, but will have all the basics for making meals. There are several excellent restaurants on the east end, both casual and upscale. We ate at Portofino's, the Reef Restaurant and Over the Edge, is an outdoor restaurant/bar, reasonably priced with relatively quick service. Ocean Frontiers runs three boats; we generally had 8-12 divers on board, though one dive had only 5. Never felt crowded. I set up my gear the first day and never touched it after that. After final dive of the day, a large plastic box was provided in which you placed all your dive gear. It would be fully rinsed and set up for you before your dive the next day. Average time to dive site was 5-20 minutes. Ocean Frontiers dives the north side, east end and southeast sides of the island. The dive sites seem to be more healthy with less diver damage than the west end. The wall sites tend to start at 60-80 feet, so the diving is a little bit more advanced but certainly not difficult. In the winter and early spring, brisk winds are continuous from the northeast, making it rare to dive the north side during that time of the year. Dive sites were chosen based on diver requests, previous sites dived and conditions. Ocean Frontiers is famous for their divemasters' detailed drawings of each dive site. First dive of the morning or afternoon was almost always a wall with a maximum depth of 100-110 feet. The East End walls are incredible, with multiple large crevices, tunnels and swim-throughs and some pinnacles off the walls. Healthy coral on the walls, with good fish life. Saw

several Caribbean reef sharks at the Maze, including one swimming into the large crevice we had dropped into to swim out onto the wall. Three Sisters, Crusher's Wall, Pat's Wall and Mckenedy's Canyon were all outstanding wall dives. Second site of each 2-tank dive was a more shallow reef, usually with depth of 50-60 feet with nice tunnels and swim-throughs. Large numbers of tarpon seen at Ironshore Gardens. The average diver at Ocean Frontiers tends to be more experienced than most dive operations I have dove with, and that is how they treat their customers. The first dive is loosely guided for the first part along the wall. Divemaster moves group back towards the boat after 20-25 minutes, points out where the boat is and waves goodbye as they surface. You are then free to dive the remainder of your dive as you wish. The second dive is unguided, though divemaster does dive and offers to act as a guide for anyone who wishes to be guided. Time and depth limits are suggested but not strictly enforced and you are given a great deal of freedom on the dives. Ice water and Kool Aid were on the boat and fresh fruit was served between dives. Usually we were back at the resort by noon and had 45 minutes to an hour to fix our own lunch in our condo. Afternoon dives were back by 5:00. Night dives are available twice a week or so, but we did not do one as we did 4 dives each day. Rum Point is a beautiful beach with water activities and is about a 20-minute drive.

**Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, April 2007, Glenn Gracom, New Smyrna Beach, FL.** Experience: 550 dives. Vis: 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, no currents. Resort and dive operation are first class. All rooms overlook the ocean and have patio on balcony. Put dive equipment outside room, in basket

provided, upon arrival, and never touch it the rest of the trip. The Nauti-Cat had the best ladder of any boat I've been on. Diving was relaxed and enjoyable. Great restaurants in area but not a large number of them. We ate breakfast and lunch at Compass Point (had full kitchen in each room) and had dinner out. The east side of the island is quiet but a great place to get away from it all. The dive staff and resort staff were great.

**Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, July 2007, Marc and Anne Bressman (mbressman116712@comcast.net), Cherry Hill, NJ.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F, calm, no currents. Water too hot for wet suits. Fish life is not as prolific, and coral not as healthy as in past years when we dove with Cayman Dive Lodge (which we miss!). Only one dive site out of ten was above average and it was newly opened to divers. Ocean Frontiers took care of equipment, cleaned and stored it, set it up before and between dives. Boats clean, comfortable, and easy to get into and out of water. Divemasters and boat crew competent and helpful. Only complaint about dive operation is failure to offer one-tank trip in afternoon; only two-tank trips mornings and afternoons. The condos are the nicest accommodations we've ever experienced at a dive resort — kitchen well-equipped, and all rooms comfortably furnished. Small swimming pool on premises, but water was too warm to be refreshing. Restaurants in East End are just OK; no restaurant on site. Mosquitoes and no-see-ums were just fierce, especially in evening and on beaches.

**Ocean Frontiers, Compass Point, September 2007, Ron and Dawn Steedman (rlumenator@aol.com), Cape**

**Coral, FL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, choppy. The rooms were great, and included wireless connections. Everyone was helpful, had a smile and a cheery word, and the divemasters called you by name from day 1. We were to have gone three weeks prior, but due to Hurricane Dean, we delayed a few weeks. Even though the resort told us all was well the day after (they had lost their dock), we decided to wait. The dive crew concurred with our decision when we arrived there. A word to the wise — sometimes dive resorts bend the truth in order not to lose customers. The dive profiles were 100 feet on the first dive and 60 feet on the second. (I wish there had been an afternoon 1-tank dive.) The briefings are superb, and there were 2 dive masters in the water with us. Our group was never larger than 9, and dive times were unrestricted — at least an hour each dive. Small Nitrox tanks are available, The walls are pretty, with many swim-throughs. Beautiful sea fans, sponges, and gorgonians. Fish life not as diverse and abundant as Bonaire, but the walls make up for it. Our favorite area to dive was the north shore, our favorite site Babylon Wall. On the other side, Snapper Hole — one of the swim-throughs there was so thick with silversides that the vis. was one foot! Tarpons were hanging out in their midst — it was ethereal. Restaurants were all good: Over the Edge — excellent grilled lobster and shrimp, Lighthouse — excellent suckling pig, Portofino's — grouper. Vivine's Kitchen — honest food for an honest price. No problem with bugs or mosquitoes.

**Red Sail Sports, Morritt's Tortuga Club, October 2006, Ginny Shaw (ginny1945@comcast.net), Citrus Heights, CA.** Experience: 400 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy.

Coral suffered horribly from Hurricane Ivan. Dive master forgot his wetsuit first day and limited us to 35 minutes – resurfaced with 1500-1700 psi. Hit a big wave while returning from diving on second day and I lost my balance and fell to floor of boat and broke my right ankle. My sister and significant other dove the next day and the boat crew joked about “guess we’ll have to file an accident report.” They never bothered to come to my room and question me. I emailed Red Sail corporate office and they claim an accident report was filed. I wonder!

**Red Sail Sports, Hyatt Beach Resort, May 2007, Marty Giesecke (thegieseckes@mindspring.com), Houston, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 81 F, calm. The boat departed from the beach in front of the Hyatt at around 8:00 a.m. and always stopped at the Westin to pick up more divers before heading out to the dive sites. On the return, the Westin divers were dropped off first, followed by the Hyatt divers. If you want to sleep in, stay within walking distance of the Westin. Most days we were back around noon. Only one boat (Reef Spirit) was in operation on the four days I dove with Red Sail, and on one of those days 22 divers aboard was too crowded. The custom-made, flat-hulled boats are relatively well set up for divers, with divers and their gear situated along the perimeter of the deck, a table in the middle for cameras on the top surface, dry storage of towels and T-shirts (and life jackets) below, two rinse tanks — one for cameras only and one for masks, two fresh water shower wands astern, and space beneath the benches for a gear bag — it will get wet. The dives were pretty much limited for computer divers: the first dive was 100 feet for 35 minutes; a 45-minute

surface interval; a second dive to 50 feet for 55 minutes (computer divers); a safety stop of at least three minutes was requested for every dive. Table divers had their bottom times appropriately limited. After three days of seeing me dive, the guides did not really make a fuss on the last day when I was first in the water and last out, with dive times longer than those stated. Cylinders are 72 cubic feet. The dive guides were professional, safety conscious and helpful. Especially good dive guides were Gerald, James and Mark. Nitrox is available — my mixes were consistently 3% to 32%. Back at the Hyatt, there are two additional rinse tanks, one near the check-in window and one near the locker room — the water in the latter looked a bit funky a couple of times. The dive shop personnel were helpful and friendly; still, when I asked what time to show up for the night dive, I received a different time from each of three individuals. The crew did their best not to repeat any dive sites for the divers who expressed an opinion. We visited Big Tunnel, Sand Chute, Trinity Caves and Northwest Point as deep dives. All had swim-throughs in the wall; the deepest, on Big Tunnel, exits on the wall from about 104 feet to 120 feet. Large tarpon and schools of horse-eye jacks were seen at these sites, along with the occasional large schoolmaster, dog snapper and tiger grouper., Northwest Point was the most pristine from the coral health point of view. It is a slightly more challenging dive, with current and exposure to wind and wave action. Here we saw three turtles and scores of nesting ocean triggers. Shallow dives were done on Bolero (Red Sail called it Polero), Aquarium South, Lone Star Ledges, and Royal Palms Ledge. The typical shallow reef life was seen on these dives — spiny lobster,

the occasional small hawksbill eating a sponge — always accompanied by one or two French or grey angels, sergeant majors guarding egg masses, and nearly the entire range of Caribbean parrotfish. On a night dive at the Oro Verde, a large black grouper was hiding beneath the now fallen-to-the-sand hull plates. Many adult rainbow parrotfish and a large green moray also chose this area to spend the night hours. On the nearby reef, a large hawksbill turtle slept on the sandy bottom beneath a coral overhang. Red Sail offers single boat charters for small groups wishing to do their own thing.

**Sunset House, January 2007, Jerry Hobart, Ransomville, N.Y.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm, no currents. Sunset House has a great location, allowing it to dive the West side and South side as well as Stingray City. Was surprised that there were no afternoon dive boats other than Stingray City one or two times a week. Was told that there needed to be at least 4-6 people for an afternoon boat dive. This is unacceptable. If there was a boat, divers would come. Also, I have never been on a dive boat where all crew and Captain went in the water, leaving the boat unattended. This happened regularly. Mike Pennington (Dive Shop Manager) and his staff were friendly and helpful. House Reef was excellent for a check out dive, but got tiresome after six afternoons and nights. Cathy Church Photo School on premise and excellent instruction available. However, I watched a divemaster in training rinse her BC in the camera barrel on boat. No camera table on boat. Guides did a nice job of finding subjects for photographers.

**Sunset House, June 2007, Mike Cardwell (mikecardwell@comcast.**

**net), Sacramento, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm. We've dived many places with many operations and this was one of the best — especially for u/w photographers. Accommodations were great, food delicious, and service wonderful. Divemasters Mike, Pete, Emma, Jaxx, and Kevin were safe, knowledgeable, and friendly. Boats are well maintained and comfortable for the short rides to the dive sites. Shore diving is easy and rewarding behind Sunset House, with the wall, a sunken WWII landing craft, and mermaid statue all an easy swim from the entry. Tanks are available for unlimited shore diving there or elsewhere. The coral and sponges along the west side of Grand Cayman are not what they were 20 years ago, but there is lots of recent growth (hurricane damage from Ivan?). Tropical fish and invertebrates are abundant and varied as they have always been — still a great place for macro and 'normal' lens photography; nice wide angle shots full of large, healthy coral and sponges are less abundant. Saw more turtles during this visit than ever before, averaging > 1/dive, plus the usual tarpon, great barracuda, etc. Vis was 150+ feet, except during a 2-day bloom of some sort of organic turbidity that reduced vis to about 50 feet. Weather was sunny and in the 80s F, with lots of big clouds, occasional rain, and high humidity. This is Cathy Church's operation, so photographers are welcome and well served. Large padded tables on boats, as well as separate freshwater rinse tubs for cameras are provided both on the boats and on the dock. Cathy's shop is on-site, with a wide assortment of batteries, parts, repairs, rentals, and sales of u/w photo gear, film, and accessories.

**Sunset House, July 2007, Ron, Austin, TX.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. Excellent location for a family of divers. Great shore diving and great photo ops. Healthy corals off the resort and lots of critters. The sea pool is a great place to play with the kiddos or start a dive. The dive operation has professional, knowledgeable and friendly staff. Boat leaves at 8:15 a.m. and returns about noonish. First dive is a wall dive. Saw turtles and eagle rays on several dives. Several sites offer large swim-throughs that bring divers out onto the wall. The second dive is a shallow reef or wreck dive. Lots of critters and reef fish. Healthy reefs. My Bar is the best bar/restaurant in the Caribbean. Delicious food, good service and a great place to meet other divers and locals. We stayed in a suite this trip and have stayed in an ocean view room in the past. The rooms are clean, with a great view of the water. Cathy Church's photo operation is a great place to get info on what and where to shoot pics. She offers 1-day courses and rentals.

**Sunset House, September 2007, Mal Patterson (captmal@comcast.net), San Francisco, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, no currents. Searching the internet, I found "fantasea special" offered by Sunset House, Grand Cayman, 7 days, 6 days 2-tank diving, free full breakfast, courtyard view room, \$1253.00 diver/\$758.00 non-diver. The reception area was small, but the gal on duty was nice and helpful. She signed us up and gave us the key to room #203, directly behind the reception area. The 200 block was a 6-unit building, 3 units down, 3 up. 203 was down with a small shared patio that fronted the parking lot (far from a courtyard). There were two pickup trucks backed up to the patio area, blocking access to

the 3 steps leading to the room. After navigating around and over the trucks (no easy task when hauling dive gear and luggage), we reached the room; it was small, musty smelling, and dark, with no rear exit. I have had better rooms and views in "no-tell motels" than this courtyard view! I returned to reception and voiced my dissatisfaction to the manager on duty. After some "gee we really don't have anything" and my then we will find accommodation elsewhere, she found that room 412 was available (although I only counted 7 rooms in use the whole week). 412 was upper level, with a slight ocean view, but was large enough for two people to move around in comfort, and 100% improvement over 203. There was a small refrigerator. Sunset House is a much older hotel, kind of hodge-podge in its layout and in need of some major renovation. Sunset Dive Shop: Robb, Mike (two Brits) and Jaxx (a Canadian gal) were terrific, They were fun, helpful, gave great and informative briefings, even drew little maps of the reef, allowed you to dive your own profile or tag along on a guided tour. The boat was equipped to carry about 20 divers but the max on one day was 11. The hotel has its own restaurant with marginal food and menu selection. Sunset House is just enough off the beaten track to require a taxi to town, \$25 round trip). Its own bar with happy hour from 5 to 7 and draws a lot of locals for a couple of hours and got quite rowdy on a couple of nights (but fun rowdy).

**Wall to Wall Diving, 7-Mile Beach Resort, May 2007, Jerry Lucas (glucas12@earthlink.net), Dothan, AL.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. Wall to Wall diving; always on time, good dive site selection, professional. The three-tank dive to the east

end is worth it; the road less traveled. The wall diving was awesome. Beach diving is great day or night, especially the Turtle Farm. UW Photography Comments: Cathy Church's on Grand Cayman was a great help in replacing a camera after the housing flooded; great price and technical help.

## Little Cayman

**Conch Club Divers, Paradise Villas, January 2007, Susan Durchslag (suedl@cebridge.net), Newbury, OH.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, choppy. We arrived at 5:30 pm — just enough time to do a little grocery shopping. We were very pleased with the accommodations at Paradise Villas. All units are ocean front with porches looking out to sea. Each had a bedroom, kitchenette and sitting area besides. The location was great, right next to the airport and next to the small shopping area. Bicycles were provided for island exploring. The units were very comfortable, clean and quiet. Marc, the manager, goes out of his way to have a smooth-running operation. Even the snorkeling was good right off the little beach to the left of the property (lobsters, flounder, squid). Diving was with the Conch Club Divers. 2 am dives and afternoon dive was their schedule. A night dive could be arranged with another dive operation. Three dive masters on a boat and the number of people varied from 15 to 20. Even with 20 people, everything was well managed. Anne, Ben and Tim were excellent in the water, finding small and unusual fish. We were lucky to dive the North side on all 6 days, which is unusual for that time of year. (This is the site of Bloody Bay Marine Park.) We usually ate at the Hungry Iguana (resident Iguana Janet usually

there). The food was good to very good, often with leftovers for lunch the next day. We did go to Southern Cross for the Friday barbeque and it was excellent. Also, Little Cayman is home to the red-footed booby and there was an area to observe them which was a 3-minute bicycle ride away at the Trust House (don't miss the ice cream there).

**Conch Club Divers, Paradise Villas, April 2007, Michael Zagachin (zagachinm@hotmail.com), Peabody, MA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 F, calm, choppy, no currents. 6th time Paradise Divers. Combination of Paradise Villas accommodations with Little Cayman diving is nothing less than perfect diving vacation. Stunning wall diving, peaceful setting, terrific views, great food and friendly locals makes it the best. Light or no currents, great visibility and abundant marine life with nurse sharks, turtles, eagle rays, moray and spotted eels, and lobsters make up for the lack of really big stuff. Paradise Villas is the best accommodations on the island if you are after comfortable and spacious efficiency unit with stunning views, superb room service and quiet surroundings. Ocean is the only noise you will hear. We usually had breakfast and lunch on the porch of our unit. The convenience store is next to the resort. Dinners are at Hungry Iguana restaurant on the premises and the food is delicious. Managers of Paradise Villas, Marc and Sabine, take such good care of all your needs that you feel like an old friend. I am not sure if the word no even exists in their vocabulary. Paradise Divers lately combined their operation with Conch Club Divers. Conch Club Divers uses comfortable, uncrowded 42' Newton boat, with head, fresh water and camera table. Regulators and BCs are staying on the boat, and wetsuits,

bins, masks are stored in the shed at the end of the pier. Ann is arguably the best divemaster you ever wish to have; we try to make sure she is on the island when we come. Bill, the boat owner and divemaster, runs precise operation. Atmosphere on the boat is easy, laid back, full of jokes and laughter, but everything works like clockwork. In our opinion diving it is better than anywhere we have been in the Caribbean, Australia, Thailand, Bali. Cayman Islands are not cheap, but you are getting what you paid for.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, January 2007, John Bittner (jebittner@austin.rr.com), Cedar Park, TX.** Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy, no currents. Top of the list for diving, resort accommodations and food. Rooms are comfortable, but the housekeeping seems to have slipped a bit since our last visit. Mostly, the maids changed the towels and washed the floors. That was about it. Some little maintenance issues with our room need to be addressed before they turn into "big" maintenance issues. The grounds need some work. In previous visits, the sand was raked long before the first person stirred. This last trip, we rarely saw the sand being raked. I'm certain this counted for the unprecedented quantity of bugs. When it was calm outside, you were hard pressed to sit through all the bug hits. The bugs were much worse than what we had ever experienced at this resort. The diving remains excellent; same with the dive operations. They know they have the best diving in the whole area, and continue to take care of what they have. The boats were excellent, and I'm continually impressed by some of the dive crew who have remained a part of this operation over the years. Ron and Dotie are here, continue to display a level

of concern and expertise that is not equaled anywhere else. Food continues to be excellent. The chef still puts out three meals a day that are the highlight of the whole operation. Plenty to eat. And of course, the desserts are the highlight. Still one of the better overall operations we've been too, but management needs to keep an eye on some of the fundamental building blocks of the operation to assure that it doesn't slip into a little bit of disrepair.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, April 2007, Jerry Hobart (bjhobart@aol.com), Ransomville, N.Y.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm, no currents. Since Jan. 2007, I have dived all three Cayman Islands. Based on my observations, The Little Cayman Beach Resort and Reef Divers are the best of the lot. Also, the reefs on Little Cayman are in much better shape than Grand Cayman (fewer divers, less hurricane damage, and less algae), and turtles, rays, and fish are more abundant. The physical plant (rooms, buildings, etc.) at Little Cayman Beach Resort is in excellent shape and until you dive with Reef Divers on Little Cayman or their sister shop on Cayman Brac, you don't know the meaning of the expression "valet diving." Once you arrive, the only equipment you handle is your wetsuit, fins and mask. The first day gear is picked up at your room and transported to the boat. Tanks are switched for you and BCs and tanks are brought to you at the back of the boat just before entering the water. At the end of the day, the boat is hosed down and left on the Newton 46' over night. The first day boat I can remember that has a toilet that really works. Crew members Ron and Sunny added just the right amount of experience (Ron) and youthful exuberance (Sunny). Each

day the divers got to choose the sites they wished to visit and one morning two-tank dive anybody could pay \$25. extra to cross over to Cayman Brac and dive the Russian Destroyer. A few cable channels, a bar that closes at 11 PM, a pool and a hot tub. Bring a good book for there is no nightlife. Food (served buffet-style) is good and provides enough variety (chicken, steak, pork, pasta, and plenty of fish). Also, the desserts are to die for. Since small airplane is the only means of arrival, you will have to master the art of packing within a 70-lb. limit (including carry-on which is weighed). Over weight bags get left behind and will probably arrive one to two days late. The secret — wear bathing suit and t-shirts 24/7. Reef Divers does not have a rinse bucket on board for cameras, but does have a fresh water hose and 2-tier camera table. Not having a rinse bucket took time getting used to, but because of some of the huge professional cameras that were on board, there was no way a rinse bucket would accommodate the big cameras and strobes. However, there was a large fresh water rinse tank on the boat dock when you exited the boat. Cameras were always handed to you after getting in the water and taken before climbing back on the boat. Twice during the week there was a video professional on board making a video of the dive (\$40. US) and he was more than willing to offer photo advice if requested.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, April 2007, Curt Andrus (curt.andrus@fmr.com), Lewisville, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy, no currents. Reef Divers is a well-run operation. You set up your gear once and that's the last time you generally have to touch it. They bring it to you and cart it away at the beginning/end of each dive.

This would be a big plus for someone with limited mobility or trouble lifting things. Dive briefings were thorough and included underwater landmarks and a suggested route. DMs led divers along the stated profile but you were free to follow your own. Although DMs were in the water with each dive, they were fairly hands-off as far as showing things to divers. Boats were well-maintained and spacious. Camera tables were available. Fresh-water rinse hose, towels, water, fruit, and snacks were all onboard. Boats returned to shore for lunch. Rooms were average. Water ran out one day but was promptly restored. Room was not cleaned twice during a week. Food was good and abundant. Everything was served buffet-style. Bikes were available. Pool and hot tub were both clean and in good shape. Resort grounds were well maintained. The diving was good by Caribbean standards. A number of large groupers (Nassau, yellow-fin, and goliath) point to a healthy reef. Hard and soft corals were abundant. Sponges galore. Some damage from previous hurricane/storm surge but nothing devastating. The usual assembly of reef fish, eels, crabs, lobsters, and turtles everywhere. Barracudas, jacks, permit, and the occasional tarpon. Only nurse sharks. Cayman Airways have a monopoly on flights among the Cayman Islands and are not concerned with helping passengers. Our departure from Little Cayman was moved up 7 hours just 3 weeks before the trip and they did nothing to help minimize the layover in Miami (which they caused). 2 emails to Cayman Air before the trip produced nothing — not even an auto-reply.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, May 2007, James A. Heimer (jmsjnk@earthlink.net), Houston, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 150 Feet.

Water: 81 to 85 F, calm, currents. The connecting flight from Grand Cayman to Little Cayman limits checked luggage to 55 lbs and one carry-on of 15 lbs, and all gear is weighed. Overweight is allowed, but charged at \$.50 per pound. If there is a lot of luggage (each of our group had one dive bag, one bag of clothes, and one or two carry-ons for cameras and housings), some will be left behind for delivery the next day. As a result, about half of the group either had to rent dive gear for the morning dives the first day or were unable to take photos until their gear arrived. Nothing got lost or damaged and the Little Cayman Beach Resort handled getting all the luggage from and to the local airport. On the way home, as much luggage as possible had to be shipped out at 3 pm the day before departure to make sure it was in Grand Cayman for connecting flights to the US. Inconvenient, but it worked. The dive operation (Reef Divers) was exceptionally well run, with a boat captain dive master and second dive master on board. Kudos to Ron and Sunny and Alex, who all worked our boat. Boat was large enough for our group of 17 to comfortably get to the dive sites (20 minutes to the farthest Bloody Bay wall (which is the North side of Little Cayman) dive sites, and even the trip to Cayman Brac to dive the Tibbetts (Soviet warship) was not unbearable. Divers take a seat at the stern with weights, fins and mask, then dive staff brings BC and tank and helps the diver strap in. Cameras are handed over after entry. The procedure is reversed for exiting. The dive briefings were thorough, and one of the dive masters was in the water to conduct tours or spot the good stuff. We had rain for an hour or two every day, but that didn't affect the diving. Night dives were canceled due to rough

water (only at night), so our routine was two morning dives, lunch, and one afternoon dive every day (morning only on last full day). Corals were in good shape, especially the soft corals. There was an abundance of the usual tropical fish, though large fish were scarce. Three "domesticated" groupers that followed the divers around on a couple of sites. Turtles were abundant — we had four in sight at once at the end of one dive. Sailfin blennies, jawfish with eggs, sting rays, and lobster seen on most dives. Saw one eagle ray while diving the Tibbetts and one nurse shark (one black tip also reported) on BB wall. Thousands of photos were taken by our group. The accommodations were motel grade, clean, but lacked some light. Maid service daily. Wireless available for \$25 per week. The food was outstanding. The chef must be in the witness protection program after a mob hit at a popular NY restaurant. Massive breakfast, lunch of soup, sandwiches or a choice of hot entrées, and dinner with at least two meat dishes, one fish dish, potato or pasta, salad bar and dessert bar. Wine, beer, and cocktails available for purchase from the bar, and there are a nice pool and hot tub. Group consisted of 17 members of Houston Underwater Photographic Society, all with large underwater housings and strobes; two tier camera table in front of cabin supplemented by storage on forward shelf was adequate, but left no room to work on gear. No camera rinse tank on board; large dedicated camera rinse tank at dive shop on pier available at end of dive trip.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, June 2007, Rick Hart (rick-hart@tx.rr.com), Richardson, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 85 F, no currents. There was no current and the walls were in good shape, with lots of

swim-throughs. Little Cayman Beach Resort was in good shape. The rooms are large and maintained well. The 42-foot Newton boats were spacious and easy to get back up the ladders. The dive staff is competent and had great personalities. They get your gear the first morning of the first dive and take care of your BC and regulator from there on out. You will be given a mess bag to keep the rest of your stuff in. Everything other than BC/reg is taken with you after each day's diving. I was surprised that on our last day/dive we were told to take our gear and clean it ourselves. Hmmm, not the best way to end a trip that you will be tipping on. Cayman Air Express was fine on schedules, but US Air was the pits. The food was buffet-style and the chef (Anthony) did a good job with wonderful desserts!

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, June 2007, Jill, Vancouver, BC.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. We pre-booked an oceanfront on second floor, but no guarantees on the floor so we were lucky. Boats are the best and they do great pictures of dive plan. Great buffet for meals with variety in main courses, salads and desserts. Nice bottled wine selections. Great outdoor bar, pool, jacuzzi and nice sandy beach. Also nice local shopping if you have room with fridge (oceanfront rooms) and nice decks to relax. Diving is great for a relaxing dive holiday but not adventurous. Boat moored often at about 18-20 feet, so safety stop is also a nice swim around fish and coral to finish off your air. UW Photography Comments: on-site facilities and consultant; fun "best picture" competition.

**Little Cayman Beach Resort, July 2007, Tripp Jones (Tjones@sc.rr.com), Columbia, SC.** Experience: 501-1000

dives. Vis: 70 to 125 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm, no currents. This was our dive shop's (Wateree Dive Center, Columbia, S.C.) 5th trip to Little Cayman Beach Resort. The resort is clean and well-manicured. The rooms were clean and comfortable. The food was plentiful and quite good — better than the last two times we were there (2001 and 2004). The bar is OK, with pricey drinks and beer, but good, nonetheless. There was plenty of time for eating and getting ready to dive without being rushed to get to the boat. The dive operation is excellent. Briefings were well presented and the maps/diagrams by the staff were helpful. The boats, Newton 46s, were clean and well maintained and we had no problems during the week. The staff would allow you to dive your own profile, but were available to show critters to those interested. Phil and Adrienne were excellent. We saw turtles about every dive, and also reef sharks and nurse sharks. Rays were seen frequently. It was good to see more grouper now than in the past two visits. There was no current, bottom times were adequate and we felt not rushed at all. LCBR and Reef Divers are a great combination and we look forward to returning in a year or two. Grand Cayman's airport is always a hassle, but that's the only way to get to Little Cayman.

**Pirate's Point, May 2007, Nancy Olah and Bill Pace (nancyolah@parker-poe.com), Fort Mill, SC.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Outstanding diving, fabulous food, and caring staff in a lovely, unspoiled setting. While the accommodations are a little rustic, they were more than satisfactory. My husband, 14-year-old son, and I were impressed by the quality and professionalism of their dive operation. Gay,

Ingrid, Peter, and Ash are all excellent dive masters, and they were especially helpful in assisting me with my dive gear on the stern platform. (I had a back injury and need to be careful not to re-injure myself.). I was in such good hands with the Pirate's Point dive team that I dove 12 times. We saw hawksbill turtles on almost every dive, schools of squid, sharks, eels, eagle rays, and abundant fish and coral. After diving in other locations with bleached coral and fished out reefs, it was immensely satisfying to dive in such healthy conditions. We met interesting and congenial fellow divers — some of whom have been coming for up to 18 years! Each meal was exceptionally executed by Cam, Dave and Debbie, usually centered around various themes. Lunch would be piping hot when we got back from diving around two, and had such stand-out menus as homemade pizza, bee-battered snapper, or beef curry with coconut rice and mango chutney. Several hours later (after hanging out in the hammock, riding bikes around the island, or shooting darts in the bar), the dinner bell would ring for another great meal. Whether it was fajitas, roast beef, barbecued chicken and ribs, paella, or perfectly grilled tuna, the main course (like lunch) was always accompanied by at least three vegetables or side dishes, and fresh leafy salads. Dinner was served with wine, and was followed by gut-busting desserts: peanut butter pie, strawberry shortcake, fresh mango over sponge cake, or key lime pie. My son gained 8 lbs. in one week, despite making twelve dives, playing Frisbee on the beach, and riding a bike over 22 miles around the island. The staff was extremely accommodating — especially to my son, who was the youngest person there. Gladys Howard, Pirates Points legendary owner, was

gone for most of our visit, so we really cherished the fun champagne party they threw at her lovely home when she returned. Gay, who efficiently manages Pirates Point, has written a hilarious book about her experiences on Little Cayman, and is a dive master beyond compare, and Ingrid, a lovely former attorney from Wales with a sparkling wit, who chucked it all six years ago to travel around the world.

**Pirates Point, June 2007, Vann S. Johnson (johnson@capital.org).** Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 82 F. Gladys Howard and her long-service staff put on a great show! The diving was spectacular for the Caribbean, the accommodations were super, the cuisine was 5 star, and the beer was always cold. My wife, son, and daughter-in-law arrived on Sunday, June 3rd, after spending Saturday night at a fine overnight stop at Turtles Nest in Bodden Town. Gladys met our twin Otter at the airstrip and got our gear loaded for the two-minute ride back to Pirates Point. Gladys came to Little Cayman back in 1986 and had a vision of establishing a place where I can cook. The food turned out of her kitchen is outstanding in every regard. The portions are as generous as they are delicious, but save room for the gourmet desserts. Divers return year after year to stay with her at Pirates Point and benefit from her efforts to keep the diving pristine, the food bountiful, and the island infrastructure sound. Staff has little turnover. Gladys not only has a gift of discerning what her guests want, but also for making those around her feel like a part of the family. The staff: Ash, Cam, Dave, Ed, Gay, Ingrid, Martha, Peter, and Veema, are dedicated to making the guest experience first rate. Bloody Bay Wall on the leeward side of the island consists of numerous dive sites, and each one has its uniqueness

pointed out by the dive masters in their pre-dive briefings and excellent guided tours of the reef. The reef is in super shape and the critters were plentiful.

**Pirates Point, August 2007, David Reubush (davereubush@cox.net), Toano, VA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 85 to 86 F, choppy. This was our ninth trip to Pirates Point since 1995. We now come every year for 2 weeks. The diving and food at Pirates Point are perhaps the best in the Caribbean. Besides the normal number of nurse sharks and large variety of reef fish, we had a pair of reef sharks that stayed at Mixing Bowl for the whole 2 weeks. There were 2 seahorses, the first green turtle I have seen in a number of years, and only the 3rd Goliath grouper I have ever seen. Large number of hawksbill turtles. The dive masters, who went beyond the call of duty to help a single diver who, on his first dive, obviously needed help. The dive masters took turns being this diver's buddy/teacher so that none of the other guests had to deal with trying to accommodate this diver's needs, and by the end of the week, the diver was a much better diver. UW Photography Comments: New, larger rinse tank on boat. First week there were 5 housed SLRs on the boat and the camera table was a bit crowded.

**Reef Divers, Conch Club Condos, July 2007, Michael Marmesh, Miami, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm, choppy. Stayed at Conch Club Condos. (Managed by Little Cayman Beach Resort.) Food is expensive at the only local grocery, but still less than the resort's food plan. By not being tied to the resort (though dinner there was great), we had the option of trying other restaurants on the island. The condo

was well-equipped, the view from the 2nd floor master bedroom balcony was fantastic, and the extra space, when our daughter and her boyfriend came to visit for 6 days, was quite comfortable. Reef Divers is a capable, efficient and well-run operation. Nitrox (\$10/tank.) Procedure was to analyze, then label your own tanks the day before they were loaded on the boat. Our boat captain was 25 years old and the guide-crew was only 21. Still, they were careful, experienced divers, handling both a paraplegic diver and a bent Nitrox diver competently. They were knowledgeable of the critters and gave detailed, illustrated briefings. The diving was within the marine park. Mainly wall dives, many with swim-throughs. Coral heads or sandy flats and mini-walls to finish. The visibility was less than I expected for Little Cayman. There were turtles on many dives, a lot of large lobsters, and many groupers from small to Goliath with several Nassaus that could be petted. Also saw both southern stingrays and spotted eagle rays, as well as seahorses at two sites. The soft corals in the shallow dive areas were healthy. Did see ocean triggerfish twice and large horse-eyed jacks. The schools of snappers and grunts were smaller than when we visited the Brac and Little Cayman 15 years ago.

**Reef Divers, The Club, July 2007, Craig Grube (grube@cox.net), Virginia Beach, VA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, calm. We dove 6 days/17 dives, all on Bloody Bay Wall or Jacksons Wall. Reef Divers is an excellent operation with several large Newton boats that are safety equipped, have a camera table, fresh water rinse hose, cooler with snacks, water, and towels for each diver. You leave most of your gear on the boat and the DMs suit you up for the

dive and take your tank off when you are done and change them over. The DMs give excellent briefings, complete with hand-drawn maps of each dive site along with a proposed dive plan if you want to follow it. You can dive with your buddy or follow the DM. The walls, reefs and sand patches combined with their map and briefing make navigation easy. The DMs also are good at finding critters if that is your interest. They also have an excellent sense of humor and are pleasant. You show up at the civilized hour of about 8:00 AM and the boat rides are a relaxing 25 minutes; the 2-tank dive returns to the dock about 12:30 for lunch. The sheer walls are breathtaking and the fish life is pretty abundant. We saw sharks every day, including reef, nurse, lemon and one hammerhead. Stingrays are common, turtles and lobsters abundant. The fish have little fear so you can spend time observing the many types of angel fish, grouper, parrot fish, spotted filefish, barracuda, and many others. Amazing variety of sponges types, colors, shapes and sizes. There are also lots of sea fans. There is some, but not much, hard coral. Much is covered with algae. Reef Divers does a nice job of moving you around to a variety of sites and will solicit input from the divers. The morning dive usually had about 15 divers and the afternoon dive about 8. They give you computers so you can dive at your rate and pace so you can maximize your dive time if that is your desire. The Club condos are extremely nice and quiet. We ate breakfast and lunch in and dined in and out (The Hungry Iguana was good). The grocery store on the island has enough variety to make eating in pretty reasonable. Selection and pricing is not like home, but reasonable considering you are on a pretty remote island. UW Photography

Comments: Fresh rinse hose on boat and camera-only table. Dedicated rinse tank at dock.

**Southern Cross Club, October 2006, Carol and Roy Roberts (caroljroberts@cox.net) Spring Valley, CA.**

Experience 250-400 dives. Vis: 50-90 Feet. Water: 83 F. Some chop but divemasters always found the best conditions available. Lodging great; cabin number 6 had large living room, bedroom and bath, all cleanly tiled, double paned windows and reliable air conditioner; spotlessly clean. Food was great; orders taken in advance for most meals, several buffet lunches and dinners, but generally ala carte. We went to Pirate's Point for dinner one night, which was fun and different. Gladys was there and dinner was outstanding (though probably not any better than our best Southern Cross dinners). On booking our reservation, we were concerned that we had to send a check for the full amount, they would not take credit cards, but this was handled appropriately by their sales manager, Craig Buck. We were told that tips were included except for the divemasters; however, on check out we were told that the standard tip was 10% of the package which was spread to all staff. Two-tank morning dives, leaving at 8 a.m., and back at 12 or so, fresh fruit snacks, energy bars and a dry towel between dives. Afternoon dives were available. Excellent assistance with gear — once set up for first day, they handled it from there on, changing tanks, etc. The big disappointment on this trip, our third to the Cayman Islands, was the condition of the coral and lack of fish. There were one or two dives where we looked around and thought "is this how it's going to end — no fish, no other animal life"? Much of the coral was silted and dead, didn't see staghorn or elkhorn.

Didn't see the sparkling schools of reef fish, though there were a few moderate-sized groupers, a few lobsters and crabs, one sleeping nurse shark, a few barracuda. Other dives on the north side around Bloody Bay were some better, but nothing like our trips in 1999 and 2000. However, it was like the Emperor and his clothes — no-one wanted to discuss it, and when they did, it was attributed to ocean warming and/or the hurricane of 2004. Dive computers are really mandatory — we don't use them on escorted dives, but they did require them, pulled two ragged little bracelet types out of a tank and we stuck them on our wrists, knowing there would be a charge but expecting that it wouldn't be much. At the end of the week we found we were each charged \$15 a day for 6 days' use for a total of \$180. They graciously adjusted the bill to half that, but be aware of that possible expense and bring your own computers. All in all, a great resort, superb divemasters who work to find everything, cottages on the beach, open air bar, and friendly.

**Southern Cross Club, May 2007, Darren Dawson (darren.dawson@ces.clemson.edu), Clemson, SC.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm. Southern Cross is small and intimate, with a maximum of 24 on-site guests. It is an all-inclusive resort that includes lodging, meals, and diving (or fishing). The resort motto is barefoot elegance — Darren never wore shoes, even to meals, and we both dressed casually at all times. The staff members are all attentive and always greet you by name throughout your stay. The meals here are excellent. The seafood was fantastic, as were the homemade soups we enjoyed at lunch and all of the unusual salads and side dishes at lunch and dinner. Meals always included lots of delicious fresh

fruit and vegetables. And we can't forget the awesome lunchtime cookies and evening desserts. Breakfast and lunch were served buffet-style. Breakfast included meats, pastries, bread, bagels, fruit, and cereal as well as made-to-order omelets. Lunch was also served buffet-style. Homemade soup and fruit and salad were always included. Sometimes hot food was served (quesadillas or grilled chicken, etc.) and other times we made sandwiches with nice deli meats and cheeses. Dinner alternated between plated meals, which you selected from a menu during lunchtime, and buffets. Meals were all served in the main common building and guests had the option of eating in the indoor dining area or outdoors by the pool at breakfast and lunch. On Friday night, the resort hosts a dock party with an elaborate buffet served on the dock, and some local residents and guests from other resorts join the Southern Cross guests for this event. The rooms do not have phones, computers or televisions — this made our stay relaxing. There is a phone in the main office that guests can use; calls are billed on the honor system at 50 cents/minute, and there is also a computer with internet access set up near the office for guests to use free of charge. The air conditioning in our apartment worked well. Electrical outlets were standard US-type outlets. The tap water is potable. The dive operation at Southern Cross is definitely first class — the divemasters work hard to make the diving easy and fun for the guests. We completed 17 dives during our stay: 3 per day for five days plus 2 on our last dive day. We booked the dive package in advance when we made our reservation. The resort operates two nice dive boats that are spacious and well laid out for diving. The boats both have ample dry storage and camera rinse tanks

on board. The divemasters set up the guests gear each morning and switched tanks over between the two morning dives. Cold drinking water was always available and fresh fruit was always offered between dives in the morning. For the 2-tank morning dive package, the boats leave the dock by 8:00 and go around to the north side of the island to dive sites in Bloody Bay and Jackson Bay. Boat rides are about 30 minutes each way. On most days, the divemasters gave afternoon divers the option of an afternoon or a dusk dive, and we did the dusk dive on 4 of the 5 afternoons that we dove. These were definitely some of the best dives of the trip. There was a charge for the dusk dive (\$10/dive). The walls at some of the sites in Bloody Bay and Jackson Bay are absolutely breathtaking — sheer walls with lots of colorful sponges and corals. For the first few days, we experienced some rough waters (though not really bad), but the end of the week was remarkably calm — almost like lake water on the last day. Vivid clear blue water — almost surreal in some places. Diving in the Bay Islands is quite different from Little Cayman (more color and macro in the Bay Islands but more stunning walls in Little Cayman), but we rank them similarly in quality for different reasons.

## COLOMBIA

Two islands, while under the Colombian flag, are less than 75 miles off the coast of Nicaragua and have a strong Caribbean flavor. They do not pose the travel risks of mainland Colombia and you can reach them from Costa Rica. You may find good diving, though some operators may make no effort to take you to it.

## San Andres Island

**Karibik Diver, March 2007, David W Taylor (taylordw@mcmaster.ca), Hamilton, Ont.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, no currents. Werner looks after you, from the cold one on arriving at the airport, tank swapping, gear rinsing, a rum and coke on departing, to lots of entertaining tales. Usual profile is a 45-minute guided tour, then stay in the vicinity of the boat until you are ready to surface. I had several 75-minute dives. Dives along the coast ... jump in, come up when ready, we will find you. Great soft corals, not a large number of fish except at two shallow sites at the top of the island. One spotted eagle ray at a wall dive and a pair of juveniles at a marina used for the surface interval. Werner also feeds you well. I will go again, but it is not at the top of my list of repeats. Isleno, Aquarium, Marazul (all Decameron), in that order, would be better resorts, being closer to the dive shop, but Werner does cover travel to and from the shop.

**Poseidon Dive Center, May 2007, Terry Anderson (tha@tamu.edu), Bryan, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, no currents. Went with Poseidon Dive Center in Toganga, Columbia. This is not their best area. German-run center, good service, \$65 for 2 dives, 8 a.m. to 1.30, with a snack. Good rental equipment, new boat, DMs are friendly and experienced. We dove in two groups, beginners and experienced. All dives are along the coastline, so about 60 feet, 50 to 60 minutes. Saw lots of small fish, half-dozen eels, a hawksbill turtle. DM said that he had 2,000 dives in area and only saw one shark, a nurse. Pretty fished out, unfortunately.