

computer. I did not experience much current at most dive sites. Some divers had problems with sea lice, so I recommend full 3 mm wet suit and a beanie, at least in late May. Divers store stuff between dives in a small laundry basket and then load it on the boat for each dive. Dive masters will set up your BCD each day if you desire. Resort restrooms are 50 yards away. There is a house reef with unlimited shore diving. Nitrox is an extra \$125/week or \$12 a la carte. Relatively shallow dive profiles. The dive shop is a full PADI training facility offering retail items. It has a separate convenient room to hang wetsuits and BCD/regulators with 24/7 access. On my dives, generally along a drop-off wall, I saw frogfish, several octopi, spotted eagle rays, scrawled filefish, drums, numerous moray eels of various types. Fish life is small but abundant, including lots of Creole wrasse and brown chromis on the reef. There were no large pelagics, no nurse sharks. Hard and soft corals are abundant and fairly healthy. Saw some large soft corals literally the size of small palm trees. Black and white banding disease is evident on brain corals on some dives. Sunset Waters Beach Resort offers good quality food on an all-inclusive plan. Typical offerings include salad bar, fish, chicken, pork, and beef dishes, and always club sandwiches, hot dogs, and hamburgers. There was a barbecue buffet some nights. Seafood is usually absent. The resort is open to locals on weekends for a discounted price; my weekend included 150 additional guests. Buffet and hotel facilities are crowded and stressed during this time, especially at breakfast. The crowds and noise were a bit of a surprise. The hotel staff was always friendly and accommodating. Wireless internet access, allegedly available in the bar area, was down.

There is one computer in the office where you can buy an overpriced online access card for \$10/30 minutes. The computer will cut you off when your time is up even if you are in the middle of an email. My cell phone/Blackberry with email would work by the dive shop. You must make prior arrangements with your cell service provider for international service. Otherwise there is a single phone outside the office where you can use a separately purchased phone credit card. I paid \$40 each way for cab fare (including \$5 tip). Transfers are apparently available sometimes at a reduced cost, though this is never mentioned on the web site. There are no other businesses within walking distance of the resort.

DOMINICA

Dominica is the best all-around adventure island in the Caribbean, with gorgeous reefs, plenty of reef fish, lush rainforests, hiking, waterfalls, warm water springs, splendid fruits and vegetables, modest hotels and restaurants — and it's inexpensive. Small seaside hotels and diver retreats are affected by the nearly continuous cloud cover over the mountains, and there's not much happening beyond residents leading their lives. Expect daytime temperatures in the 80s and night lows around 68 in winter and 73 in summer, although a few minutes up the mountain into the cloud forest can change that. July to November is the wet season. Dominica's at the edge of the hurricane belt. The 13-mile, round-trip hike to Boiling Lake is worth getting in condition for.

Cabrits Dive Centre, Calibishe Lodges,

February 2007, Francis and Deb Bollag (debbollag@earthlink.net), New Rochelle, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm, no currents. Diving the boulder-strewn, northwestern sites are pristine, uncorrupted by human civilization. Besides the usual suspects, it's easy to spot strolling octopus, squid, friendly balloonfish, flying gurnards, frilly nudibranchs, beautiful crinoids and more during the day. Cabrits' two-tank, twi-night dive trip is icing on the cake. At night, we saw many species of cardinalfish, a multitude of hunting trumpetfish, scorpionfish, colorful stars, tube-dwelling anemones and huge coralymorphs. Currents and surge are a rarity on sites that are primarily sloping drop-offs and are interesting at all depths, right up to the 15' safety stop. Cabrits is run by Helen Repp, an energetic Brit who offers her encyclopedic knowledge of the area at a mile-a-minute pace. If you want to know where to eat lunch, ask before your mind is dulled by nitrogen. Service is topnotch. The store offers a dry changing/clothes storage room, bathroom, fresh-water outdoor shower and secure storage for gear and valuables. Reef ID books are available. The full-service shop also sells cold drinks, including Kubuli, the outstanding local brew. Cabrits will set you up with anything you need: Lodging, take-out, laundry pick-up and more. Helen offers a combo scuba school/babysitting package. The pier is a short drive away via one of the shop's vehicles. The staff takes care of gear transfers, setup and rinsing. Helen prepared hot tea (with milk and sugar) and cookies for the chilly SI. Groups were small and the divemasters allowed us freedom and max. bottom time. The hotel is close to Melville Hall airport on Dominica's eastern shore.

The property is beautifully landscaped and maintained. Each unit is a one-bedroom suite with living room, kitchenette and front porch. Full breakfast is included in the rate. Units are not air conditioned but there are fans in both the living room and bedroom. Beds are equipped with mosquito netting which wasn't used because tradewinds fresh off the Atlantic kept the room cool and bug-free. There's a pool and good bar/restaurant. A small market for staples is a short walk away. Fresh produce and other items are readily available near the dive shop in Portsmouth. The drive to the dive shop takes 25-30 minutes. The northern half of Dominica has many unique sites to explore, including some nice beaches. Car rental is a must. We rented from Courtesy and were extremely satisfied with their rates, service and quality.

Dive Dominica, Fort Young Hotel, November 2006, Cindi and Bob Robertson (uzisu@aol.com), Interlochen, MI. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. American Airlines has one flight into and out of Dominica daily, so that means an overnight stay in San Juan, Puerto Rico or Miami. We chose to stay in San Juan, which gave us a few hours to explore Old San Juan and the forts. San Juan airport has a hotel. Give yourself at least two hours in San Juan to get through customs. We never lost any luggage on either the arrival or the return. Be sure to check the weight requirements for your luggage before traveling. Dominica has its own restrictions. After the arrival at Melville Hall Airport in Dominica, it is a 1-½ hour van ride to the Rousseau, which is on the other side of the island. Our dive package included the airport transfer. Most of the roads in Dominica are one-lane "zigzags" up and down the

mountains and through the rain forest. We stayed at the Fort Young Hotel after being told Castle Comfort was full. The original fort was built in 1761 and part of the old walls still remains. It has recently been remodeled and the facilities were very nice and clean. The hotel has its own pool and hot tubs (which were never hot), Waterfront Restaurant, which was very good, dive shop, exercise room, wi-fi hot spot, massage, waterfall and resident hummingbirds. Ken's Hinterland Tours is based out of Fort Young. Dive Dominica usually came over to the dock at Fort Young, around 8:30 a.m. All the dive sites are within 15 to 20 minutes of Castle Comfort's dock. Dive Dominica has several 35' boats complete with head, covered tops, and fresh water for the cameras. We had anywhere from 3 to 12 divers and the boats never felt crowded. We only dove the south end of the island and they began repeating dive sites. I asked about going north, and they blew me off. There were always two divemasters in the water on each dive — one leading the dive and the other in the back keeping an eye on the stragglers. Jaime would take care to make sure you understood the briefings and would work extra hard to point out critters in the water. The other divemasters were more reserved. The first dive was limited to 100 feet for 60 minutes with an hour surface interval. The second dive was usually 50 feet for another 60 minutes. Some people were diving in shorties. We wore 5/4 wet suits. You have to set up your own tanks, switch tanks, and rinse your own gear. Ken would let the suits drip dry and then put them into the shop at the end of the day. Sponges of every color, corals, and crinoids. Diving is a mixture of large coral mounds, swim throughs, a few walls and some sand. There were barrel

sponges everywhere, and they were huge. Fish life was plentiful, but mostly small fish. After reading other reader reports in Undercurrent, we didn't expect to see large fish. We did, however, see a few nurse sharks and a big grouper down deep. There were schools of brown and blue chromis, sergeant majors, grunts, and wrasse. We saw many eels including green and spotted morays, several sharp-tail eels, garden eels, and a many-tooth conger. There were spotted drums of different sizes. We also saw a few octopus, seahorses, flying gurnards, squid, jaw fish, electric rays, several turtles and a large school of sennet. The frog fish were elusive — nobody could find them, including the other dive operators. We were told the batfish were under the dock at Castle Comfort; however, you are not allowed to dive their dock unless you stay at Castle Comfort. It doesn't matter that they were full when we booked our trip, and it doesn't matter that we were diving with Dive Dominica. I was told no insurance liability. I had my camera set for macro, and I wasn't disappointed: basket stars, brittle stars and spiny urchins were everywhere. Fire worms, arrow crabs, banded coral shrimp, Pederson cleaning shrimp, banded clinging crab, red banded hermit crab, slipper lobsters, channel clinging crab, red banded lobster and an unidentified crab that instantly buried itself in the sand when it saw the camera. We booked all of our land-based tours through Ken's, a very professional outfit, very knowledgeable, personable, and the vans were comfortable. One afternoon was spent on a whale watching boat. We were only out for 20 minutes when a pod of sperm whales was spotted. They really put on a show for us! Breaching — sometimes two at a time, tail slapping — over and over,

logging and just hanging out by the boat. We saw at least 20 sperm whale and at the end a beaked whale blew his spout. During our surface intervals, the spotted dolphins would often leap 15 feet into the air, riding the waves in front of the dive boat. We also hiked to Tit Tou Gorge, Trafalgar Falls and Sari Sari Falls. They were all fabulous! The hike to Sari Sari made us all sore the next day, but what a gorgeous waterfall — all 120 feet of it! In addition, we also went North to the Morne Diablotin National Park. Our guide, Lambert, was very knowledgeable. We were able to see about a dozen jaco parrots; however, we only heard the indigenous and elusive imperial parrot. Our dive package included breakfast. We walked to the local 7-11 grocery store to pick up lunch supplies. After diving, you really do not have a lot of time to eat lunch before going out on the hikes. Dinners were often late due to the hikes, so we either ate in our room, or at Fort Young in the Waterfront Inn. The food was good and reasonably priced. They stopped serving the local mountain chicken due to the government banning the hunt due to overkill. One night we ate at Robe Creole which was within walking distance. The food and atmosphere were very good.

Dive Dominica, Fort Young Hotel, January 2007, Jeanne Sleeper (jsleeper@jbsassociates.ws), Laguna Beach, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, no currents. American Eagle luggage weight is limited to two total checked bags with combined weight of 70 lbs. and one carry on that must fit in the small under seat space. No option to pay for more baggage count or weight. Airport runway extension is under construction, so by end of 2008 things may change. Melville Hall airport is on

one side of the island and the hotel is on the opposite side in Roseau with a mountain in between. Allow 1.5 hours for the hotel-provided van or bus ride on a “not quite 2 lanes wide” road through the magnificent rain forest reserve. Tell the bus driver you want to stop at “Shorty’s house” on the way and try his spiced rums ... or a soda if rum and winding mountain roads don’t suit you. Electricity is 240 — bring converters and adapters. Fort Young Hotel has wonderful, new, large, ocean-front rooms with balconies. Nicely appointed. Their original rooms are smaller, but comfortable and less expensive. Lunches in the bar are US \$10-15 and the main restaurant offers “dining” with dinner taking 2 hours and costing US \$35 - \$50. Hotel wireless Internet works fine and Cingular GSM phones work on the island. Verizon phones are dead. Hotel staff are unfailingly courteous and welcoming. Ken in the Diver Center takes great care of diving logistics and Dive Dominica boats pick you up at the Fort Young pier. The tour desk has afternoon activities such as rainforest hikes to Titu Gorge and a swim upstream to the source waterfall pouring out of the ground. Not often I am willing to do 2 AM dives and then shift to land afternoon activities. Here it is fun. Hikes (easy or advanced), kayaking, island tours, local culture, market day shopping, sperm whale watching trips — plenty to keep you busy for a week. Martin, the tour guide, is a walking encyclopedia from history to Latin plant species names. This island is a botanical paradise from roadside wild orchids, ginger and antheriums to coffee and cashew trees. Diving the reefs and vertical walls loaded with barrel sponges, crinoids, cruising turtles, seahorses, frog fish, puffers, indigo hamlets, trumpets, damsels,

angels, trunk fish, soldier fish, grunts, eels, hinds and nudibranchs was wide angle to macro photo fun. Most sites are less than 20 minutes from the Fort Young (yes it really used to be a British fort). As a 35-year dive T-shirt collector, I could not find a single shirt to buy that I would ever wear. They need dive apparel art and production CPR. Crew is good about carefully handling photo gear — loading boat or handing to divers in the water. On shore, photo gear goes directly back to your hotel room.

Dive Dominica, Fort Young Hotel, July 2007, Diane Lake (dianelake@earthlink.net), Mt. Center, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 25 to 50 Feet. Water: 82 to 82 F, calm, surge. Dominica is a beautiful island, lush and mountainous. Fort Young Hotel is nice enough. Clean, with a/c, TV, and phones, drinkable tap water. Nice courtyard bar with good rum punches and friendly barman. Their restaurant was all right, but split into smaller groups for dining to get faster service. Breakfast was an excellent buffet, served in their wonderful veranda upstairs with ocean and town views. Sampled restaurants around town for there were quite a number of interesting and tasty places from low dollar up. The dive operation left a lot to be desired. Dive guides, Reggie, and Jeff, and captain Gus were friendly and enjoyable, and when underwater the guides were fine ... but they did not put gear together or change over tanks after first dives. There were no drinks (except water in a large igloo) or snacks of any kind offered, though we were on the boat for two dives with the surface interval as well. The first day the head reeked worse than an overused outhouse. It was much better the following days. The boats were large enough to be comfortable for our group of 22. Upon returning to the dock, we had to

haul all our gear off the boats down the pier and wash and hang it. At least we didn't have to haul it back to the room too. Coral was generally healthy, there were plenty of barrel and tube sponge, crinoids, anemones with their crabs, squid, morays, lots of spotted drum juv., a number of seahorses, rays (one electric), scorpionfish, butters, angelfish, octopus and wrasse. Vis was not the greatest, but never terrible. Overall I would rate the diving only OK, but I am spoiled by my trips to Indonesia. Do a few land trips. The gorge and also Trafalgar Falls are both beautiful and fun to experience.

Nature Island Dive, Gillette Cottage, April 2007, Tom Bartlett, Aurora, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm, no currents. Dominica is a beautiful island with some of the healthiest reefs we have ever seen. We saw 50 to 100 urchins every dive, including the red heart urchin. We saw the usual Caribbean fish, corals and creatures, such as arrow crabs the size of our fist. We also encountered large schools of squid and barracuda, scorpion fish, juvenile drum fish, juvenile trunk fish, flounder, flying gurnards, parrot fish and queen angel fish. One cleaning station had an eel being cleaned. There were many eels, including green morays, spotted eels and a sharptail eel that looked like an old rope. At Champagne Sand Dive we saw 3 seahorses, 2 bat fish, 3 flounder, grape cluster nudibranch, flying gurnards, garden eels, a juvenile eel about 2' long, French angelfish, conch, green feather algae (which looked like yellow feathers growing out of the sand), red-lipped blenny, 2 leech head shigla slugs and bumble bee shrimp covering a sea cucumber (not even found in Humann's book). The boat was roomy, especially when it was only the 2 of us on 4 dives.

Our dive master was Tony — knowledgeable, friendly and accommodating. Don't worry about being on time for the first dive of the morning — 9 a.m. means 9:30 or so Island Time. The boat ride was never more than 15 minutes to any sites. We had cruise ship passengers join us for a couple of days — they entertained us with heated debates over the World Cup tournament, which was taking place in the islands that week. Nature Island Dive owns a duplex situated about 1/2 mile south of the dive shop and 1 mile from Scott's Head (where the road ends). The upper unit is the better, with a deck running the entire length of the house and facing west over the bay. Fantastic sunsets and billions of stars every night. The cottage is clean and nice, with everything you need. We had a bike to ride back and forth, but one day they needed them for a cruise ship excursion. Nature Island Dive arranged a driver to pick us up at the airport and stop at a grocery store in Rousseau to stock up on food and beer for the cottage. We found Tony's Restaurant in Soufriere and ate lunch or dinner there every day. The choice is limited — no menu needed. Either chicken drumstick or mahi-mahi with French fries or rice. The food was so good we didn't even search for the one other restaurant. There were vendors in town selling "Bakes", which are deep fried bread stuffed with tuna, cheese, or just plain. Delicious. Four "Bakes" and two cans of pop — less than \$4. Everything in Soufriere is closed on Sunday, so we walked to a restaurant in Scott's Head, but the food was not fresh and disappointing. The boat had a nice large carpeted area for cameras or small gear (masks, sunglasses, etc).

Seaside Dive Resort, Sunset Bay Club, May 2007, Michael Judd (michael-evertjudd@copper.net), Oregon City,

OR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F. Best thing about Sunset is the location, along the shore in its own little valley. Rooms, all ground level, were OK, but not great. Hot water most of the time. Bed not too comfortable. AC would have helped. Rooms cleaned properly every day. The grounds nice, with one of the few nice sand beaches on the west side of the island. The restaurant had mediocre food, with the same few selections most days, but the service was good. The all-inclusive package was a bargain, if you're not looking for gourmet fare. The island is beautiful, with great green mountains and seascapes. We rented a car for the week, and found an interesting place to drive to most afternoon/evenings. Roads are in terrible shape, even by Caribbean standards, but it's not so bad if you think of it as a live video game or skiing moguls. Dominica is not yet over-touristed — not a single Club Med or Sandals yet. Dive operation gets mixed reviews. The two guides we had were pleasant, and one was knowledgeable. The boat was not comfortable or functional, especially when it had nine or ten divers; breaking out the second boat was apparently out of the question. Having the shop a few steps from the beach where the boat landed was convenient. We started out most dives as a group, but drifted apart, which was fine since there was little or no current on most dives. Most dives were in the 40- to 70-foot range, but we could go deeper if warranted. The fish life was nothing spectacular, but something interesting on most dives. Lots of stingrays and eels. Also a fine place for scorpionfish, if you're into testing your eyes. Good variety of corals, and impressive barrel sponges. Rodney Rock is a shallow dive with lots of interesting critters, notably a number

of large seahorses. Most of the big fish are fished out; something about people wanting to eat. From Sunset you mostly dive the central portion of the west coast, although they were talking about a trip down to the more popular Scotts Head area the day we left. All in all, not exciting, but every dive was enjoyable.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

While few Americans visit, it's a popular and well-developed tourist destination for Europeans, with plenty of all-inclusive hotels on nice beaches. Diving is subpar.

Northern Coast Diving, Club Residential, November 2006, Conrad Kantor (scubabuba@hotmail.com), Westlake Village, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 45 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 F, calm. Nice macro photo opportunities, crabs, eels, crinoids, barrel sponges etc.; a turtle. Some locations had plastic garbage, but not overwhelming. Large fish are in the restaurants. Dove from Sosua to Rio San Juan. 8 days with North Coast Diving, one of the best operations I have encountered. Briefing before you leave the dive shop, on the boat and radio calls to the dive shop after every dive. Safety conscious but free to do your own thing. They do all the work, you just roll in. Dive shop has every thing you need, showers, rinse tanks, repairs, etc. Locals are friendly, always singing, dancing to the merengue. I stayed at Club Residential. \$60 a night for a one bed apt with kitchen and living room 4 blocks from the beach. Pina coladas \$3.00 with a happy hour \$1.50 just as good as Cozumel where you pay \$7.00 Many Italians, Swiss come here to vacation so the restaurants are excellent. Outstanding dinners of fish. Best restaurant El Bat-

tey, moderately priced. Octopus, eels, crabs, drum fish, some of the largest barrel sponges I ever saw in the Caribbean. Most organized dive operation I have ever encountered. \$25 a dive. Local restaurants and accommodations reasonable. Locals are friendly and some of the most happy people I have met after diving for 21 years all over the Caribbean.

GRENADA

Hurricane Ivan wreaked havoc on Grenada in September 2004, but the infrastructure has been rebuilt. While diving is fine for beginners, some operators are trying to give more experienced divers a better ride. Grenada is the home of the most magnificent wreck dive in the Caribbean, the Bianca C, an Italian liner felled by fire decades ago.

Aquanauts Divers, True Blue Resort, July 2007, Norman Rainer, Richmond, VA. Experience: 1000+ dives. Vis: 40 to 80 feet. Water 84 F, calm. Departed from Baltimore BWI on Air Jamaica. Arrived in Grenada 6 hours later than scheduled because of unexplained departure delays in the originating flight out of Baltimore and connecting flight out of Jamaica. On the return trip, another unexplained departure delay caused a missed connection, resulting in an unanticipated overnight stay in Jamaica. True Blue rooms are in several buildings spaced horizontally and vertically on a large tract of land. My room required a climb of about 50 stairs up from the boat dock. After five days and ten tanks of diving, little worthwhile macro subject matter was seen. My wide angle shots had to be done at short distances because of low visibility. The dive boats were well