

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

outfitted, including a head. Riding time was 30-60 minutes. Nitrox available at no extra charge. Very competent crew. No shore diving. Limited food menu. Very slow service. Hordes of flies at lunchtime. A day-long sightseeing trip on the island the day before departure was worthwhile. Notable stops were at the chocolate factory, rum factory, and fish market, where I saw medium- and large-sized fish unseen in the course of diving.

HONDURAS

All dive resorts are in the bay islands: Roatan, Utila, Cayos Cochinos, all home to aggressive no-see-ums — some people have serious allergic reactions. Those without DEET may find their vacations ruined. The diving features nice walls, offshore seamounts, and excellent coral and gorgonians, although there are few large fish. Whale sharks are common near Utila roughly February through May and boats from Roatan are chasing them too. Some Roatan resorts have easy beach diving. The rainy season is October through February, and can disrupt the diving. Spanish is spoken on the mainland, English on the Bay Islands. Classic Central American jungles and Mayan ruins inland make great mainland trips. Malaria protection is advised.

Roatan

Bay Island Beach Resort, February 2007, Michael Kreeger, Ocean Springs, MS. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 110 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm. BIBR was a wonderful place — the small

resort allowed you to have between 5 and 10 divers per boat. The DMs were great at finding little critters and after the first day, once they watched you dive, they let you dive your own profile. The rooms are all air conditioned and daily maid service kept the rooms clean. The grounds were even kept amazingly clean, with staff sweeping all walkways, raking the beach and grass daily. The food was consistently good — not great, but much better than you would expect in a 3rd world country. Cooked to order breakfast and lunch, dinner was a set menu but they would prepare substitutes for diet issues. The staff, both resort and dive, were extremely friendly and always looking to do things to make your trip better. I watched them send an extra DM out with a boat that had a new guest who was elderly and physically handicapped to make sure she had someone to help her. For nondivers or no dive days, the resort will handle booking activities all over the island and just add it to your bill. BIBR is a wonderful place for a diver looking to get 3-4 dives per day. The one shore dive site is a bit of a swim, so 5 dives would be a challenge by the end of the week. However, the 3 boat dives and a drop off dive at the shore site would be easy. Typical dive packages are for a week, 3 boat dives a day, one night dive per week. They offer special charters if guests want to get together to get more diving in or go to Utila. I imagine if you go with a group and take on the whole boat for the week, a deal could be made for 4 boat dives a day for a little extra \$. The resort has a real family atmosphere — everyone eats together and by the end of the week hugs, not hand shakes, are the norm.

CoCo View, December 2006, Ron Hyatt (rhscubadiver@aol.com), Arlington, TX. Experience: 51-100