

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

dives. Vis: 20 to 45 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Coco View continues to get better; rooms are basic, but clean; maid service good. Food continues to get better. Boutique, dive center and photo center provide excellent service. Dive boats being renovated, makes diving easy with ladders and center ladder. Lots of room on the boats. Each diver has a locker area for their gear; tanks are geared up for you. If possible, get on the boat captained by Reuben and Jesse as the dive master. Briefings are good; Reuben very helpful; Jesse makes the dives safe and fun; finds the small stuff for the photographers without neglecting the other divers. They have respect for the reefs and the divers. Internet available. Entire staff has a great attitude. Though it rained the first few days and the viz was pretty bad in the "back yard," it is still great fun.

CoCo View, December 2006, Dean Knudson (deanknudson@yahoo.com), Golden Valley, MN. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 83 F, calm. The diving at this resort is extremely convenient. There are two walls, both extending several hundred meters, in opposite directions, directly in front of the resort. The accommodations, while not luxurious, are certainly adequate. There is no television, no telephones or WiFi access in the individual cabins and rooms. The air-conditioning is powerful and reliable. There is purified water in all the rooms, and there are small refrigerators. There was fresh fish, steak, fresh vegetables, and lobster. While it is possible to dive five or six times per day, there is only one unique boat dive in the morning, and one unique boat dive in the afternoon. The second dive in the morning and in the afternoon is conducted on one of the two walls directly in front of the resort.

There is excellent structure, and plenty of small to medium-sized creatures on both walls. The visibility deteriorates after approximately 50 meters as one approaches the resort from either end of both of the walls, and the visibility on the wreck, which is directly in front of the resort, between the two walls, is only fair. The best strategy on the drop-off dives seemed to be to linger for 20 to 30 minutes on the first 50 meters of the wall, exploring several depths, and then to spend 10 to 20 minutes on the wreck before taking a safety stop on the way back to the resort. Wall diving in front of the resort became rather routine in the last three days of the week. It might be best if the dive operation were to offer two unique boat dives each morning and afternoon on the last two days of the week, and to skip the nearby walls at that point. I noted that one of the groups was able to convince the dive master and boat captain to do this. I do not know if a tip was involved in that decision. The other two dive boats were not offered this option. The boats are very convenient and spacious. There are plenty of exit and entry points. Despite the large number of divers, there was never a problem exiting or entering the boat. Most of the dive sites were within 20-minute boat ride. The dive storage lockers were convenient and secure. This resort is rather isolated from the mainland, requiring a short boat ride. This, combined with the distance to the west end, a 45 minute cab ride, greatly limited the amount of island sightseeing that was possible, although it certainly increased the security and privacy of the area. Theft appears to be uncommon; many divers left computers and regulators out in the open, or in the open and unsecured storage lockers. There were no opportunities to shop for wine and liquor prior to arriving at

the resort. Purchase wine or liquor in the United States prior to departure, and to pack it along, if weight permitted. The trip from the airport to the resort is rather rushed, and one cannot count on visiting any liquor store. The only other option is to purchase all beer, wine, and liquor at the bar in the resort, which can easily add a hundred dollars to a dive trip. No one could understand or comprehend the owner of the resort's decision to soak all of the main floor of the dining and bar area with diesel fuel on Thursday morning. This produced a nauseating stench in the entire building for the next 72 hours, making meals and recreation quite difficult. It was assumed that this was done to preserve the lumber. It made many of the guests sick. Although I will probably go to this resort again, I will make a point of asking, in advance, whether this practice will be repeated during the time of my intended visit. There is free WiFi in the main building. We found that it worked well with our Skype software equipped laptops, allowing telephone calls to the states for two cents per minute, provided one had a microphone headset for a laptop. There was live entertainment on two of the seven nights, but, otherwise, the complex was fairly quiet after 8 p.m.

CoCo View, March 2007, Michael P. Risolo (prisolo@yahoo.com), E. Patchesogue, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm. The dive crew, Marco, divemaster and Gringo, boat captain were outstanding. When Marco set out to find something specific, he did so doggedly. He showed us a pair of white seahorses. Roatan abounds with small fish and critters. Banded coral shrimp abounded in the barrel and tube sponges. Green morays and lobster were plentiful. CoCo View Wall, with a proliferation

of various colorful corals and the wreck of the Prince Albert, offers great beach dives a short swim. When returning from a boat dive, there is often the option of being dropped off at the CoCo View or Newman's Wall to do a third dive for what would have been a two-tank boat dive. The resort is a dedicated dive operation. The accommodations are not posh but they are comfortable. The rooms are air conditioned. Keeping the doors and windows open gave us enough of a breeze so that the air conditioner wasn't needed. The room had two comfortable double beds. There was a porch overlooking the ocean and it was pleasant to sit there and watch the Caribbean. Food is good and there was always plenty of it. Staff was a bit slow at times, but always friendly and eager to please. Upon departure, when I arrived at the airport one of my bags was not with the others. When all of the bags were claimed by owners, one remained which was vaguely similar to mine. The ladies from CoCo View who were coordinating the departure looked all over the terminal then took identity from the bag remaining and queried all the airlines to see if that person had checked luggage. Sure enough, they discovered bags checked in. The person was located and she was able to verify that she must have checked someone else's bag. The CoCo View ladies went over to the specific airline counter and did not budge (about one hour) until my bag was retrieved.

Coco View, April 2007, Karen Card (karencard@clarionmortgage.com), Laguna Niguel, CA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 F, calm. I was certified last year in SoCal and had only 12 dives so this was a brand new experience for me. 18 dives in a week made me so much more comfortable. My partner has well over

250 dives and he was pleased as well with the whole dive setup and specific dive sites. Reefs/coral appeared to be in pristine condition with amazing numbers and colors of fish and sea life. Accommodations were average. This is an older property but everything was clean and comfortable. We stayed in a private home adjacent to the resort property and loved the privacy and oceanfront views. Food was buffet-style with hearty breakfasts including made-to-order omelets. Lunch and dinner always included salad bar, lunch meats and hot protein dishes, soups and vegetables. Lobster, shrimp and conch were on the menu. Full bar was reasonable, with great Argentinian wines. We took a shark dive through a separate operator and saw about 20 black-tipped reef sharks being fed at 70 feet near the edge of the ocean shelf. Training and cameras were available. There were two photographers on our boat for the week and they seemed pleased with their results. The divemaster was great at spotting unusual critters for them to film.

CoCo View, August 2007, Sandra Oliver (sconsetscuba@comcast.net), Agawam, MA. Experience: 300+ dives. Vis: 30 to 60 feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy. Second trip to this resort with 30 divers/non-divers from my local dive club. Diving was easy for all levels but a bit rushed on both our dives and surface intervals. Hurricane Dean only ruined a half-day of diving with wind, rain and rough seas. However, shore diving visibility suffered on the Prince Albert and both the walls (CoCo View and Newman). Food and service were only fair this year. Dive shop (Mark) and new puppy were wonderful, as always. Equipment problems were taken care of immediately. The highlights of the trip were the shark dive with

Waihuka Adventure Diving and the dolphin dive at Anthony's Key. Both excellent operations.

Fantasy Island, October 2006, David Cuoio (giantstrideproductions@msn.com), Boise, ID. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 84 to 88 F, calm. The all-inclusive package was the cheapest I have ever seen, so my expectations were very low. Everything topside was either very nice or more than acceptable. A storm had come through the week before, and the vis never did improve. I did not see many fish, and certainly no big animals. (Ironically, my best fish experiences were at the Atlanta aquarium on the trip home. I saw only one very small area of bleaching and the underwater landscape overall was wonderful and very healthy. We had 9 to 15 divers on our boat during the week, but the setup on the boat enabled us to generally keep from bumping into each other. Of course, it didn't hurt to show up early and grab one of the two front positions to get a little more elbow room. Regarding our DM, Mark, I thought he was one of the most safety-conscious and helpful divemasters I have ever encountered. On a theoretical basis, it would be better to have two DMs in the water with 15 divers. I don't think any of us ever felt as if we were in an unsafe situation with Mark around. He was very willing to visit specific dive sites when we asked him to do so. The Fantasy Island dive op has a large indoor area devoted to dive gear storage, and it was nice to be able to leave my reg, BC, and wetsuit there. The resort delivered more than I expected, and certainly was a great value for the money. UW Photography Comments: There were separate tanks on the boats and in the dive shop area for underwater photo and video gear, but there was not enough room

on the boats for those who preferred to keep their photo or video gear on the deck.

Fantasy Island, November 2006, Christopher S. Mohr (cmohr3@columbus.rr.com), Dublin, OH.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, choppy. We averaged 8 people on the boat for morning dives and 6 for afternoon dives. Our divemaster was Derry McLaughlin. Derry was a dive master worth following. We saw so much life with Derry it truly was remarkable. In the 6 days of diving we dove 17 dives. Nearly 3 a day and they all were very good to excellent. At Mary's place Derry pointed out a frogfish and 2 yellow seahorses. At the Missing Link (40 foot Wall) we saw 3 green moray eels, two of them were swimming around the coral heads and schools of 100 or more horse eyed jacks. In all we counted seeing over 12 seahorses in various colors. We saw red, yellow, orange and brown seahorses and one was nearly 10 inches tall. We saw a frogfish, 10 green moray eels, several spotted brown eels, over 30 lobster, 5 large channel crabs, a spotted eagle ray, 4 octopus (during 2 night dives) one had tentacles of at least 2 feet, a couple schools of over 100 large horse eyed jacks, numerous large dog snappers, small crabs, a large wall of buttercup corals on a night dive by the Dive Site Chimneys, and literally mountains of very healthy coral literally 15 minutes from the dock. We did an optional shark dive and swam with a school of at least 16 gray sharks ranging in size from 5 to 9 feet long. Derry found incredible stuff big and small on every dive. They had hired a new chef. We had no trouble finding something good to eat at all 3 meals and we had no trouble at all with stomach cramping or other less-than-fun anomalies that

we had read some travelers suffered there. At lunch they served the best French fries I have had and the local catsup is incredible. The rooms were about a 3 of a 5 rating, but we spent most of all our time outdoors. They had a little refrigerator in them to chill some beverages. No-see-ums were pretty bad unless you covered yourself with DEET. The bites were still on us almost a week after we returned home. The locals had a repellent that is in a brown bottle and smelled like Citronella. It was the most effective we used. The resort has a hyperbaric chamber and a full-time doctor on staff 24/7. They ask for a donation of \$2 a day to support the chamber and doctor and in exchange you can visit him anytime for free. My daughter came down with an ear infection. The doctor diagnosed it and we had Cipro antibiotics delivered to her in less than 30 minutes. She sat out one day and dove the rest of the time because of the doctor. The wildlife they had roaming around was another really nice feature of Fantasy Island. We fed spider monkeys and Watusies (little South American rabbits) every day. The water temp was 84 degrees at depth. I typically wore a skin or a 2 mill wetsuit. A 3 mill would have been too much for me.

Fantasy Island, April 2007, James Fillmore (fja17@aranath.net), Post Falls, ID. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. Good value. The airport transfer went fairly well (for those of us who didn't have lost luggage). Our room was remodeled, so it was fairly spacious. Meals were adequate buffet food. The dive operation is only good for beginners. They put 15-18 divers per boat, with one divemaster. Our divemaster only pointed out a few critters; I heard other divemasters were better (they

have 5 boats). But either way, that's a lot of people to be in a dive together. We typically went away from the group on our own, to have less crowding. The boat goes back to the marina after each dive so they can swap tanks (and have a bio-break). Thus, they don't go far from the resort, not the typical longer distance out on the first dive, and have a 2nd dive on the way back. Thus, although the diving is pretty good, it's repetitive. They did provide water and good fruit on every dive. Corals are pretty good, good wall diving.

Fantasy Island, April 2007, Liz Morini, Plymouth, MA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: choppy. The beach was great, the resort grounds were kept beautifully, the monkeys did something to make us laugh every day, the food was decent but not inspired, the hotel and wait staff were accommodating and pleasant, the civilities desk had some great off-resort adventures, 2 PCs were located in the lobby with free internet service, small fridge in our room. Saggy mattresses, our room (located in Building 4) had the worst bathroom (the tub and toilet seat were painted with white paint, making them look dirty), if you want a remote control for your TV, you must leave a \$20 deposit at the reception desk. Ditto for the beach towels. I was less than impressed with the dive operation. From the too-long dive orientation on Monday morning, to the rush to wait in line with 100 other divers for weights, to there being too many divers for too few lockers, to the rusty ladders with rungs missing, it was a disappointment. Our boat captain was annoyed with his job most of the time. We dove Marys Place, a supposedly must dive site. It's a swim through beginning at 90 feet and rising to 40 feet. The appeal was lost on me since I was at the tail end of the group, with a lot

of silt and sand stirred up by the time I entered. Also dove a wreck named Mr. Bud; look for the bicycle and radio on the deck. You can penetrate the wreck, it's pretty wide open. My favorite dive was 40 Feet Point because we saw some free-swimming green morays at the anchor line. Someone had baited the anchor line with fish heads which attracted the morays plus a large grouper. Seas varied considerably during the week, sometimes calm, sometimes rough. All in all, it was a good (not excellent) trip. Some money needs to be spent on the dive boats and most of the dive staff need attitude adjustments.

Fantasy Island, May 2007, David Pex (dave@pex.net), Portland, OR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, calm, no currents. Fantasy Island is a dedicated dive resort that someone invested substantial funds in, but the facility has suffered badly due to poor maintenance. The air compressor broke down and the resort depended upon the nearby Coco View Resort to fill tanks. Our dive boat broke down exchanging tanks at Coco, and had to be towed back to the dock. The A/C unit on the room above mine dripped through most of my stay onto my A/C unit, providing a new form of water torture that maintenance could not fix. My bathtub drained poorly, and some of the public toilets did not flush effectively. Sadly, the pool, while heated and with circulating water, had a totally ineffective filter, resulting in pool water that was too cloudy for use, and the pool bottom was coated with sand and dirt. No one ever used the pool, and the pool bar looked like it had not been used in months. The Dive master was negligent in safety briefings, never referring to minimum PSI or safety stops. I got a low fill on one dive, alerted my DM, and kept him aware of my low

air situation. However, I surfaced with only 250 PSI! He said “I know how you breathe,” and it was only my third dive! Not believable!

Fantasy Island, May 2007, John and Marilyn Walker (videodiver@aol.com), Castro Valley, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm, no currents. Unfortunately, the resort and dive operation suffers from lack of maintenance. Three of the four compressors were down — we missed dives because they could not fill tanks! Nearby Coco View resort filled Fantasy Island tanks, but sometimes they filled short, presumably to make sure they could service their own guests. Nitrox was in even shorter supply, and when we could get it, was frequently short in O₂, EAN 30 instead of 32. Since their sniffer was unreliable, we cannot be sure what the real measurement was; I worried about the reliability of their nitrox generation since so much else was in poor condition. In future dive trips we will bring our own analyzer. The rooms have many problems with low water pressure, broken toilets, damaged air conditioners and small breakages that contributed to the impression of a third-rate operation. The resort was full, so the reputation of Fantasy Island has apparently not caught up with its current reality. Food is abundant and varied but often excessively salted. Flies crawl on the salad and fruit and pastries. Our room had a notice that the tap water is not potable. Filtered water is supplied via a single refrigerated pitcher filled by the housekeeper from a jug. Strangely, not all rooms had the notice concerning the tap water so many people do drink and brush using tap water. We don't know of any specific tap-water related illness in our party of 17, although several people

did experience digestive upset. Smokers ruin the atmosphere in the lobby and bar and even in the restaurant; there are no non-smoking rooms, but ours did not smell bad. The king-sized bed was uncomfortable, transmitting every twist and turn from one spouse to the other so disturbingly that sometimes relief was found on the floor. They have wi-fi Internet in the lobby, which worked OK. The island in general features many biting insects; we slept with the air conditioner on and sprayed with DEET but still have red, itchy welts. It was not whale shark season, and to their credit, they raised no false hopes of sightings. I was all cattle boat diving, 20 guests to a dive guide, all crowding around to see what he could point out. The moorings tend to be close to the resort so the runs are short, but there was usually another boat just leaving or on another nearby mooring. No chance of an undisturbed dive site and pretty frequently not just 20 divers but two or even three boat loads on the small stretch of reef. The iconic “Mary’s Place,” a deep swim-through, is dived on so tight a rotation that while one boat is finishing up on the top, a second group of divers enters the crevice. Fish are small and scarce except where they are being regularly fed by the dive guides. Feeding is probably necessary; otherwise, the place seems fished out. There is no marine park to protect the animals, and we saw a huge fishing fleet docked in town. The rinse tub aboard the boat had clean water daily, but the basins on shore were empty. We dunked our two housings in the crowded boat tub but did not leave them there, fearing damage from the other heavy camera gear, preferring to carry mine on my lap while in transit to keep it out of the sun. The boat driver and dive master were careful handling the cam-

era gear. We had to charge batteries in our room due to lack of camera work room. Happily, the room electricity was stable though outlets were few. Bring a multi-plug power strip. Photographic subjects were disappointingly scarce. The off-resort, costly shark-feeding dive excursion prohibited video cameras, so we did not go.

Fantasy Island, May 2007, Pat Sinclair (psincl5611@yahoo.com), Tampa, FL.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy. For some reason, getting the shuttle to Fantasy Island took over 2 hours. The heat was oppressive, and my usual nice demeanor went south. The shuttle was cram-packed with people and the a/c did not work, so the trip from the airport was not a pleasant one. Our room was clean and neat with hair dryer, TV and alarm clock. Since we have been here 3 times before, the morning “check-in” was waived and we were assigned to the boat with Pedro (Captain) and Manuel as the DM. Did our checkout dive. Our 2nd dive was at the Mr. Bud, a small wreck of a tugboat. We found a large green eel on the wreck. The reef after the wreck had large schools of Creole wrasse and many, many blue chromis everywhere, as well as the indigo hamlets. The 3rd dive was Inside Out Reef. I observed lots of new growth on the corals here and there was a massive swarm of blue tangs. Day 2, Day 3 and Day 4 — I was sick, so I could not go diving. Day 5 — I did the 3 dives this day, but never wrote down the reefs we went to, nothing other than the depth and the viz. Day 6 — First dive was to “40 foot ledge” — depth was 65 feet and we saw two yellow seahorses. There were two boats’ worth of divers, and everyone was congregating around those poor two seahorses; major mess.

Way too many divers in a small space. The second dive was at “Doc’s Dive” — depth was 69 feet and there was lots of coral and bleaching was evident on this reef. There were fields of dead antler coral. The 3rd dive was at “Little French Cay Wall;” depth was 61 feet, and again there was evidence of coral bleaching; however, we did find an area in which antler coral was regrowing. On almost every dive there were three or more large black grouper or one or two large snappers hanging around like puppy dogs under the boat. Occasionally they would even stay with us for the entire dive. We saw the occasional great barracuda, but we never saw any sharks of any kind or any rays of any kind during the whole week’s diving. There were lots of macro life (cleaner shrimp, secretary blennies, etc.) and tons of fish life around on the reefs. The turtles were wonderful to see and swim with. My husband and I agreed that the walls on this end of the island are spectacular. However, on this end of the island, it is all walls all the time; not much else for someone like me who is more interested in the shallower reef diving.

Inn of Last Resort, February 2007, Wayne Warren-Angelucci (wayne.warren@gmail.com), Rancho Santa Fe, CA.

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 120 Feet. Water: 81 F, calm. Was impressed with the friendliness and service of the staff and owners (Donna and Andy). Rooms are extremely large, food was good — not gourmet but plenty of variety. Restaurant and bar staff friendly and helpful. Ambience is laid-back but everything ran well. Nitrox for \$125/wk. extra. Divemaster (Willie) recognized that we were advanced divers and left us to our own profile and dive. However, he was always willing to point out critters, turtles, etc. Perfect level of interaction.

One our favorite dive resorts in our many years of diving. Diving is mostly walls with interesting wall tops and caves. Saw two interesting shipwrecks that are deep (however, close to the wall/reef so its easy to get in a full hour of diving).

Inn of Last Resort, May 2007, Keith Davies (topdiver1969@yahoo.co.uk), Englewood, CO. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. After 6 years, the resort is the same, great rooms and comfortable, hot water and AC units with fans and 3 beds. There is a safe in every room as well. The monkeys are in their cage, the birds are there as well, as are the dogs. Donna and Andy are the best hosts you are going to get in any resort; they are your mum and dad while you are away from home. The food is excellent. Donna's recipes never get old, and seconds is always waiting for you. There is a larger deck and bar and they have a good cookout on Fridays. When we arrived, Ed, the maintenance guy, gave us the resort speech of what to expect. there will be no picnic on the beach on Mondays because he doesn't like doing them, doesn't matter what the guests want (check out there website — still says they do them), and if we tip a member of staff individually, then that person will be fired; all tips must go into the pot at the end of the week. I like to tip people who have gone above and beyond and not let people take more of the cut just for turning up for the dive. On the dive operation I was disappointed with the staff. We had the marine park speech from DM Kirk, don't touch anything, chase turtles, or take anything home; if we are caught then we will be thrown off the boat. The dive staff will change our gear over after every dive and wash the gear and put it on the boat in the morning;

please recheck you gear after every tank change, the tank strap was left undone twice on mine and your gear was never put back where you left it; when I did try to wash my gear, they told me off. The diving was poor; 2 turtles and 3 rays, 2 scorpion fish and a couple of morays; small critters were lacking, as were the bigger fish — even the groupers. This was the worst reef I've seen for critters in years. It didn't help when the DMs didn't really point out anything for you to look at. Kirk would spend nearly every dive on the wall and then look at nothing on the top of the reef and at the end of the dive just hang at the mooring line until the dive was over. He lay on the coral to take a photo for a guest and stuck his hand into a couple of holes trying to pull out a green moray so people could take a photo. Wille was the dive shop manager; he showed us a lot more, but chased a turtle around in circles for at least 4 minutes so people could get photos; the turtle was not happy and shot straight to the surface afterwards. Kirk wants you to do a night dive without lights; there are strings of pearls here in Roatan, luminescents in the water, great for 5 to 10 minutes to look at but 50 minutes, no way; finally we decided on out with lights and back without. A 60-foot dive on the wall, everyone knows there's more life on top of the reef than the wall. We saw nothing really special, only had 20 minutes to find something. We had a diver on his first-ever night dive who was not spoken to about concerns of night diving, especially without lights; night dive on a wall is never good, one diver got disoriented and went down to 90 feet; anyone who knows Bear's Den dive site, he took 16 divers in the cave at one time, with no explanation of what to expect or how tight it is and what happens if you

panic. This is why I tip personally and I do not want my money to go to people who do not warrant it. There's no dive times on most dives; means that boat can leave at different times and lunch is cut short some days. Tommy, the old boat captain, helps divers on and off the boat every time, great asset at the resort. 5-minute drive to west end and 20-minute walk UW Photography Comments: separate rinse tank on the boat for cameras, somewhat dry area to work on camera on boat, no table on dock, back after every dive so back to the room if necessary.

Pura Vida Resort, May 2007, Steve Neal (stevenal@aol.com), Fairfield, TX. Experience: 345 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm and flat. Huge barrel sponges and brain corals. Coral in good shape. Fair number of tropicals and pelagics. Three regular dives daily. Five instructors on site. Saw turtles regularly. Saw eagle rays at dusk daily off dive shop pier. Boat captain fell asleep on one drift dive and we were rescued by a fishing boat before he woke up and came for us. Plentiful green morays, lobsters, grouper, snapper, one pipefish.

Reef Gliders, Hidden Garden Cabins, February 2007, Dawn Neely, Livingston, MT. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, choppy. Reef Gliders is owner-operated — a professional, friendly, laid-back dive shop. All dives are right out the back of the shop and most are within 5-10 minutes by boat. The boats carried a maximum of 10 divers, including guides. Everyone was really nice, helpful. They sent out one instructor or divemaster for each 3 divers and sometimes several small groups would go together on the boat but dive separate areas; this always worked out

perfectly. Some dives were done with the boat moored but many were gentle drifts through reef channels and along walls. The water is a crystal turquoise blue, the air temps were 80- 86F, with sunny days and light island breezes. Not as much fish life as I expected for a marine preserve. Colorful Caribbean reef fish, banded coral shrimp, porcupine fish, porgy, spotted eels, big green moray eels, lots of lobster, channel king crab, box crab, neck crab, arrow crab in colorful fields of coral, anemones, a variety of sponges, sea feathers and sea fans. We saw hawksbill turtles, eagle rays, nudibranchs, lizardfish, octopus, toadfish, and fireworms. On boat trips we sometimes saw flying fish, and a couple of times we saw Anthonys Keys dolphins out for a romp. Also dove Anthonys Key Resort specifically to dive with their dolphins. The dolphin swim and snorkel is better. Dove with Subway Watersports at Marys Place — good outfit; divemaster opted not to take us thru tempting channels as two of the group did not have good buoyancy. Stayed at Hidden Garden Cabins — clean, secure, good value. Sand flies and mosquitoes easily deterred with DEET; bugs were much worse on other side of the island. I ate with caution and had no problems; only ate salads, fruit, etc., at restaurants that the dive shop recommended — great food, good prices. Cooked foods good everywhere. Other divers were not as fortunate; about half I met had some gastrointestinal upsets during their vacations.

Reef House Resort, April 2007, John Woolley (jtw@mac.com), Olympia, WA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm. Friendly, basic, diver-oriented experience. Saturday afternoon dive on arriving. Honor system bar. As 50-something divers, we were always too tired

to drink more than a few friendly beers with the other divers, but the relaxed environment made this a pleasant experience. Rooms were nice, food was good and filling. It was boat diving, but trips were short. The reefs in Belize are in better shape, as is the fish life. All the dives were enjoyable, as was the diving company, and the dive master was superb. Reasonable price. Roatan has a big issue with the health of its reef and the provision of basic infrastructure to its booming (Gringo-based) development. We felt totally safe at the resort and walking around the small town where it's located. This is not necessarily the case for the rest of Roatan: it has some troubles brewing.

Subway Water Sports, Palmetto Bay, November 2006, Dennis Lewis (basileuslewisd@msn.com), Fresno, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 75 to 79 F, choppy. The rain (off and on) and wind kept us on the south side of the island. Over the week, we saw few fish over a few inches. No sharks, rays or turtles. We did find at least one eel on each dive — two that were in the open. Prince Albert (just off shore from CoCo View) is a beautiful wreck. Structurally, it is still in good shape; it has been down just long enough to get a nice layer of growth and a lot of crabs and fish to call it home. Many good macro opportunities. We had the site to ourselves for about 10 minutes. Then, 15 or more divers hit all at once. Most had a camera in hand. We watched as they grabbed onto the wreck to steady for a shot of a shrimp or crab, full hands crushing whatever was there. Between the fin kicks, hand holds and simply rubbing up against the boat, the silt soon resembled a sand storm. One of their dive leaders would not stop banging on his/her tank in an effort to herd the group around

and around the site. In 15 minutes or so, they were gone. What had been teeming with life now looked like a brown cloud. Marys Place is unique. However, Valley of the Kings also had a nice cut and much more fish life. Just watch out for all of the fire worms and hunting eels. Subway Watersports has a fast, small boat that gets you out there quickly. No shade or place to put your camera on these boats. They let you dive your computer. The boat captain was friendly and always ready to lend a hand getting us geared up or to grab a weight pouch to help us back on the boat. The DM and three DMs in training were all friendly and helpful. Of our group of 7, 3 were relatively new to the sport (for one, these were his first post-certified dives). The general rule was that the DM (or DM in training) would take us out along a wall or such, and then back to the area around the boat. This would cover maybe 30 minutes. A wave and then they were gone. For 4 of us, this was fine except then we became the leaders of the other 3. Since we were all one group, there was no complaint. What if we were not traveling together? A DM should at least be in the water to watch over divers who are at the location for the first time. A couple in our group rented some equipment. In general, it was in poor shape. One BCD had a small leak in the inflator hose. They traded it out, no problem, except that the “new” one failed completely. Luckily it was near the end of the dive because the free-flowing inflator drained his tank in short order. Again, luckily, his buddy was experienced and calm enough to share her air and do the safety stop. We did one dive with Waihuka — a shark feed. safe. They get 4 stars. Palmetto Bay is a terrific eco-friendly resort. These are single family homes, not hotel rooms. Each

house on the property is different. My group split into two houses; each had three bedrooms, two baths, full kitchen, laundry and living area. A beautiful deck surrounded half the house. The furnishing and kitchen appliances were all first class. Each night we fell asleep to the sounds of the surf. reasonable prices. Note that the bar and restaurant always had problems figuring out the tab. Dont even try to pay as you go. Just let them add it all up at the end of your stay. Bar has a satellite TV. Good food. They even brought in a turkey from Tampa Bay for Thanksgiving.

Subway Water Sports, Barefoot Cay, July 2007, Kevin Harvill, Scott Pflifant (harvill@verizon.net), Flower Mound, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, choppy. Thanks to Continental Airlines, we boarded a flight at DFW airport at 8:00 and landed in Houston for a one-hour lay-over before proceeding on to Roatan for a 12:30 arrival. Since we were aboard 737s all the way, the airline allowed two 50-pound bags per person — twice as much as is allowed on the small puddle-jumper planes we usually have to take between islands. We were greeted at the airport by a friendly American named John who described his role with Barefoot Cay as “airport flunky.” Turns out he and his wife Melisse are the owners of this small property on the south side of Roatan and their attention to service is topnotch. With two one-bedroom bungalows and two two-bedroom bungalows, Barefoot Cay is intimate and quiet. The four of us were assigned the two-bedroom bungalow farthest down the beach. These accommodations are absolutely delightful. The bedrooms have large comfy beds, TV, cold air conditioning, and huge open-roof, Balinese showers. Separating the bedrooms is

a nice common area featuring a full kitchen with top-quality appliances and cookware, bar with stools, and sitting area. One entire wall “accordions” to one side, opening up a huge vista onto the patio, the beach and the sea. We took several evening meals right there on our patio. Earlier in the day we’d just let the kitchen crew know our wishes and they would bring the meal to us at about 7:00. Other evenings we’d secure the resort’s king-cab pickup and venture out to one of the local restaurants. The View was a particularly nice mountain-top eatery with a great view. The guys on the DIVE boat, Kelly and Ben, were great. They were a good Captain/Divemaster team. We had a great time with those two guys. (The owners of Barefoot Cay were in the process of finding a new operator).The snag? Just a dive operation owner who had terrible interpersonal skills. he tried to overload the boat a couple of times and held up our group’s excursion for an extended period of time while waiting for another group to join us. The extra waiting time precluded us from doing our planned land activities for the afternoon. All with a fairly surly attitude about the inconveniences. Diving was good. Mary’s Place is close to Barefoot Cay. Cracks, crevices, canyons, beautiful coral, sponges, lots of fish. We did this site three times and no one complained. A couple of nice wreck dives, seahorses, moray eels, friendly Atlantic spadefish, and clouds of silversides kept things interesting. Dolphin’s Den: A shallow dive, 38’ maximum depth, with a series of short tunnels and windows through which shafts of light illuminate the way. Each dive site is unique and possesses its own personality. We dove twice a day for seven days and probably only touched 25% of the available sites. The boat is docked right at the resort

and rides to the dive sites are short. Almost every surface interval is made on dry land, either at Barefoot Cay or at Fantasy Island, where a cold drink and restroom can be had. Barefoot Cay keeps those pesky no-see-ums under control. They rake the beach every day and spray some kind of bug-killing elixir when you're off diving. Two or three bites per diver all week. Then, on the last day, when we went to the other side of the island none of us went prepared and I had those itchy red sores for three weeks after we returned home. One afternoon we toured Gumbalimba Park. A beautiful, tropical forest filled with monkeys, parrots and gardens. But what we really went for was the zip-line canopy tour. Zipping through the trees at forty miles per hour and eighty feet in the air is an exhilarating and hunger-producing bunch of fun. There are several canopy tour areas around the island. A couple of things that Barefoot Cay could improve upon: the addition of a gear rinse tank and gear storage so you don't have to lug it all back to your beautiful just-cleaned room for a freshwater rinse.

Sueno del Mar, May 2007, Bill Edell (billedell@comcast.net), Lake Oswego, OR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 150 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm, no currents. On Roatan's west end. Comfortable, clean rooms ocean view with friendly staff. No restaurant but many within walking distance. Near night activities but quiet at night. Dived Mary's Place and Aquila, good experience, highlight Gio's in French Harbor and something truly special for Medical/dental personnel. While in Roatan, I volunteered to do dentistry at Peggy Strange's new clinic/hospital. Met many dedicated, enthusiastic young people visiting Roatan to do volunteer health care. The patients were appreciative, the staff friendly

and helpful, and all in all, I had a great week. The dental clinic is better stocked with instruments and equipment than other places I have volunteered at. Peggy has experience working at Ohio State University in their Oral Surgery Department. I would recommend those dentists and hygienists (especially) and medical doctors and nurses who enjoy great diving and want a rewarding experience helping those who really need you to consider volunteering to work at Miss Peggy's Clinica Esperanza. Contact Peggy at www.MissionRoatan.org, peggystranges@yahoo.com. Take your dive gear and favorite instruments, perhaps some supplies you can donate, and you will have what I think is a complete vacation; the patients are wonderful and Peggy is a true saint.

TGI Diving, Henry Morgan Resort, January 2007, Phil Riley (philariley@rogers.com), Richmond Hill, ON.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm. Henry Morgan Resort is an all-inclusive that seems to cater primarily to Italian vacationers. The staff are friendly, the accommodations are fine, and the food is pretty good, although a bit repetitious. The buffet offers good selections. TGI Diving is basically run by Italians, and as such, some of the staffs accents were hard to follow. However, all were friendly, and for the most part, competent. A white board is set up outside for customers to put their name against upcoming dives as they operate on a first-come-first-served basis. They require 24 hours notice in order to accept a cancellation without charging the customer. This was not mentioned to us when we first arrived and resulted in arguments later. A large rinse tank is available, although one afternoon it was left empty, and a storage facility is available for equipment to be left overnight.

Each day the dive boat moored to a small pier located a small walk along the beach. The boat lacked a head and camera facilities, but otherwise was comfortable and clean. Fresh fruit and bottled water were offered between morning dives. The dive sites had good vis., with varied coral gardens, the usual array of reef fish and hawksbill turtles. The El Aguila cargo ship wreck made for some interesting video. The one incident that spoiled my dive week was the trip to the "Bear's Den" site. Our usual dive master had the day off and was replaced by the dive master with whom I had the argument earlier in the week regarding their cancellation policy. There were several groups of divers on the boat, each with their own instructor or dive master(s). In addition to a narrow swim through, the Bear's Den has a cave which gives name to the site. Here, one must enter and exit at the same point. There is a narrow slit in the roof of the cave itself, which allows some sunlight to enter, but one cannot exit at that point. During the dive briefing on the boat, our div master quickly described the site. I asked if there was a true cave or just swim-throughs, mentioning I was not certified for cave diving. He replied there was no cave, just swim-throughs. The dive masters on board did not communicate well with each other regarding their dive plans. Our dive master attempted to lead our group into the cave which has a tight 90 degree turn while three members of the first group were still trying to exit. We had to back out through this tight opening. Once inside the cave, I noticed some of our group were not with us and we found them huddled together halfway into the cave. They apparently were reluctant to continue since it was clear to them they were entering a fully enclosed area with no easy exit point

should the need arise. I asked one of the divemasters later why no special training was required, and was told the reason was the depth was only 40 feet or so. In my opinion, a cave is a cave is a cave, and this should have been made clear during the briefing. Prior to our second dive, our dive master started his briefing at one end of the boat without calling the rest of his group together. TGI Diving offers no camera table or rinse bucket on board the dive boat. I had a video housing and had to put it under the seat away from the sun (at the risk of being damaged by gear). Dive after dive, I had to repeatedly ask a crew member to hand my housing to me in the water.

Waihuka Dive Center, Las Palmas Resort, May 2007, Steve Neal (steveNeal@aol.com), Fairfield, TX. Experience: 345 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 82 F, strong currents. Best shark feeding dive I've ever done. I did it for the 6th and 7th time this May. 18-22 black tipped reef sharks 5- to 9-1/2 feet. All close (1 to 3 feet away). Efficiently and safely run in 70 feet of water.

Utila

Deep Blue Utila, August 2007, Chip Clay, Memphis, TN. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm, no currents. Literally one of the two people in the world to verify whale shark sitings is one of the owners. Utila is small enough that you can easily cover all the dive sites around the island and Deep Blue hits all of them. 3 boat dives every day, usually one on each side. Unlimited shore diving isn't just an ad; they have a prime reef right in front of the resort. Utila is known as one of the cheapest places in the world to get a certification, even through Instructor. Deep Blue has

a dive school like all the other operations if this is your focus, but if you just want to relax and dive, the resort is separate. At the resort, no training briefs and students, all diving. Resort is not in the town so it has greater security. With 10 total private rooms with A/C, you are recognized as a person and your needs and desires are heard and respected. Nitrox available by dive or by week. Wonderful owners and staff. Provide snacks on boat, 1-hour surface intervals. Good corals, smaller fish, etc., limited larger fish/deep pelagics on this trip. Awesome experience to swim with a whale shark, then go back to the resort for tuna sashimi from the tuna boil over the whale shark.

JAMAICA

Sandals Royal Caribbean Resort, March 2007, Larry Sensenig (LPSensenig@msn.com), Sioux City, IA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm. Charming self-contained all-inclusive resort. There are five restaurants serving good food and multiple pools (some with swim-up bars) on the manicured property. Trips to other island attractions are an additional fee. There was evening entertainment ranging from good to fair. Reading previous Travelin' Diver's Chapbooks gave an accurate picture of the diving experience. If you have not been diving in the past six months, you will have to take a pool refresher course. Diving took place off a beautiful 46-foot dive boat. Some trips had over 20 people on the boat, but dives took place with groups of four divers. The divemasters were competent, but not particularly helpful. Dive profiles were conservative, often surfacing with 1000 psi left in the tank. There was no shore

diving at the resort. Over five days of diving, no large schools of fish were seen. Individual sightings included two turtles, several sea cucumbers, flounder, star fish, puffer fish, French grunts, and a small sting ray. A wall dive and an old DC-3 airplane added some diving interest. The Sandals Royal Caribbean provides a nice vacation destination, but experienced divers will become a bit bored with the diving.

MEXICO

Cozumel and Yucatan peninsula diving took a big hit by Hurricane Wilma in September 2005 and diving is still seriously affected, as Chapbook reporters testify. Many operators cater to experienced, savvy divers — but some load boats with all comers. Much of Cozumel's diving is deep or drift dives. Carry surface-signaling devices (strobe, safety sausage, etc.). The best diving is in spring and summer. It can be rainy during the winter. Accommodations range from small, inexpensive downtown hotels to diver hangouts to high dollar hotels. There's a lot of partying, thanks to an overload of cruise ship passengers. Many divers take day trips to the mainland to dive the freshwater cenotes. Along the coast, there are dive operations from Cancun south, but the diving is mainly patch reef diving. Isla Mujeres, off Cancun, has some decent reef diving and a drift or two. Whale sharks spend several summer weeks northwest of Cancun, near the island of Holbox, where one can just about be guaranteed to snorkel with scores of the behemoths. See Undercurrent, October 2004, for a review of this new discovery.