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.

Cancun

Manta Divers, Gran Caribe Real, September 2007, Perry (unclepooty@yahoo.com), Weatherford, TX. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Water: 80 to 88 F, choppy, currents. We booked the Gran Caribe Real through Funjet Vacations, and were pleased with both operations. The resort is in excellent condition and the food and drinks (AI) were good and plentiful. We were there for a family wedding, so dive time was limited. The owners of Manta Divers (John and Mimi Dykes) picked my wife and me up from our hotel. The boat was small, but we dived with 3 others and had plenty of room. Trip to site was quick and briefing was thorough. Swells were sizable and motion sickness became an issue. Once below, we saw many barracuda, parrot, trigger, and butterfly fish. There was a big spotted eagle ray hovering over the wreck, which was literally full of grunts and snappers. The current was strong and water was warm from 0'-20'. Water only on the boat during SI. El Tunel was a shallow coral garden with some rocks and ledges. More parrots, a green moray, and a camera friendly nurse shark made our bottom time seem to fly by. Photographer dived with us. Pictures and/or video available after dive. They were well done. Take snacks and extra water on dive boat. Medicate for sea sickness as required, and be prepared for current at wreck site.

Cozumel

Aldora Divers, Aldora Villas, December 2006, Bill Mosel (billmosel2@yahoo.com), Rockaway, NJ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 90 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F, currents. This was my 2nd trip with Aldora. 1st was in 2003. You can see that there was damage to the reefs from Wilma and the vis was not as clear. However, it was still great diving. Aldora is the best operation I have yet to encounter. Mateo, the DM, was fantastic. We went with 2 friends who are beginners. After the 1st day, Mateo saw that they needed extra help so he brought along a DM in training to give those 2 one-on-one help. There was only the 4 of us on the boat with the DMs. At no time during the 2 weeks diving with them did the boat have more than 6 customers. Tanks were 120 steel filled to a minimum of 3500 PSI. All dives were at least 65 minutes and some as long as 90. The villas are managed by Greg and Kay, who met us at the airport and helped us get organized, gave us lifts into town which was only about a 3-minute ride. You could walk it in about 20 minutes. On calm days the boat would pick you up at the villas and on rough days they would hire a cab to take you to the main pier.

Aldora, Hotel Aguilar, February 2007, David A Harper (kentmorrdave@hotmail.com), Stevensville, MD. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 20 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, choppy, currents. 1-31-07 Off at 7:30 on the Aldora 5. Just me and Sherwood from Villa Aldora today. We are in the water by 8:30. Columbia regular. We get started in a beautiful swim through and are greeted by a hovering green moray. We have a relaxing 67-minute cruise. We drift north over the bricks, caves and horseshoe. Beautiful heads of coral one after another. 1½ hour SI at Playa Mia with cold rain, then sun. Crazy weather all week. San Francisco for the second dive. We start off with a baby pipe seahorse. We then get to see a beautiful drum fish, followed by a parade with a black grouper and nurse shark. This was the first dive of the week without a

turtle. Sabores is only open 12-4 p.m. Almost all meals are under 50 pesos. For instance, tacos de pollo, chicken soup and a fruit drink. That's for 4 tacos! As I am leaving the place the cheese guy walks by hollering Queso Oaxaca! A nice, Cozumel experience. Hotel Aguilar is located on Calle 3 Sur, just up from Melgar, the ocean front road. It is $45 USD a night, which includes tax. It has two double beds, a small refrigerator, small bath, and good air conditioning. My dive shop stored my gear but I think gear storage would be a problem here. Lots of hot water for showers. Very basic, pretty clean. It has a pool but I never saw anyone use it. The pool could be better maintained. The office is staffed 24 hours per day and they are friendly. The hotel is just around the corner from Aldora, and just up the street from their dock.

Aldora Divers, Hotel Barracuda, February 2007, Karen Gordon (kgordon@mosquitonet.com), Fairbanks, AK.
Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 90 Feet. Water: 81 F, calm. Personal attention, fast boats, no more than 6 on a boat, early departure schedules to minimize dive site crowding, they rinse and store gear (not wetsuits/skins), they use big 100 or 120 cubic foot tanks to assure no air hog limits your dive, staff consists of educated and articulate divemasters (our hero is Mateo), and they are willing to dive the site you want. Computers are mandatory, and we dived them exclusively. With long bottom times, doing so was compulsory. If you don't have one, they will provide one free of charge for your use. The staff, whether it was the boat captain, divemaster, or the staff in the office, were always helpful, kind, patient, and knowledgeable. Memo Mendoza, one of the owners, was generous and a genuine man with a fine sense of humor. Likewise, our divemaster, Mateo, was a perfect joy and enhanced our whole dive experience by discussing the natural history of the area and the reefs as well as giving a fantastic dive briefing on the cenotes. Mateo has been cave diving for many years and has even done some research on the cenotes of Cozumel. We wanted to go cenote diving, and it was arranged. Mateo and Mostro were our divemasters, and we dove Kukulkan and Chak Mool, which had less stalagtites and stalagmites than Dos Ojos, but exhibited more dramatic and huge rooms with lots of crystals. Sitting on my balcony after my dives, watching the bovine boats come unload their herds on the hotel dock, I was thankful to have been diving with Aldora. Aldora's rates are not cheap at $87 a day for 2 tanks. You can get much cheaper, along the lines of $65 or so, depending on the operator, and with that you get 80 cu. ft. aluminum tanks, shorter bottom times, and spending your dive with 15 other people. The Barracuda provides a balcony for every room, I got the best deal through www.travelnotes.cc at $85 per night plus tax. The hotel's rate is $99. I really appreciate the help and information Jidan provided on the front end! We stayed two weeks. The room was basic but clean. Dive boats can pick you up right at the Barracuda Hotel dock. The swimming pool is attractive and has a swim-up bar. The rooms are a good value. Where else can you get a view room on the water for $85 in San Miguel? It is close to Chedraui, the local supermarket. And being so close to town, is a $2-3 cab ride to most of the best restaurants. Our room's balcony was wonderful, providing a 180 degree perspective of activity on that exquisite azure Cozumel ocean, including the transit of cruise ships daily except

Sundays. Wireless internet was available at the No Name bar that sits between the hotel and the ocean next to the pool, allowing us to keep in touch with family, friends and work. The shower had almost no water pressure, but was scalding hot and difficult to control the hot/cold ratio that dribbled out, but hey, we did fine just the same, it just took longer to shower. The Barracuda has those famous rock-hard beds we read so much about in Cozumel. It was only slightly better than sleeping on the floor. The noise from the bar floats up to the rooms during the day, but seems to carry worse at night. The bar generally shut down by about 11:00 pm or so, so for those who were getting up for a 7:30 dive boat pickup, the bar music and the loud voices could be bothersome. But for me the balcony view was worth the bar chatter. Take ear plugs. To some degree the air conditioner helped muffle some of the sound. One of the best things about Cozumel is the wide variety of food choices, both in price and in culinary styles. From roadside taco vendors to elegant fine dining. With all that Cozumel offers in terms of food, however, it is almost a crime to use an all-inclusive on Cozumel. Rock-n-Java has coffee drinks, sandwiches, huge salads, a fantastic peanut butter milkshake, and a great trading library. They also are a "front" for the Cozumel Humane Society, and appreciate folks who bring books or good clothes to donate so they can raise money to help fund the animal shelter — a worthy cause worth supporting, so bring extra books and clean clothes to donate. Fill that empty space with souvenirs going home. UW Photography Comments: The compromise for having a fast boat that only holds 6 people is that there is comfortable room for the divers, but no room for a rinse bucket. I imagine that if requested, Aldora would provide a bucket for cameras.

Aldora Divers, Suites Bahia, February 2007, Buzz Waterston, Wallingford, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. Suites Bahia a little Spartan, but right in town (about $70/night). Small kitchenette with a decent-size refrigerator. Rooms on the fourth floor the most quiet —42, 44, or 46 have balconies for drying your stuff and looking out obliquely over the water, without the noise of being right over Avenida Rafael Melgar. Free internet access in the lobby. Aldora Divers' fast small boats get you to the sites before they're mobbed. My son (12 dives before this) and I dove Punta Sur, and I did Maracaibo last year. It was lobster mating season, so we saw some huge males out in the open looking for babes. My son saw his first shark, a 7' nurse shark free swimming in front of us for about 100 yards. Saw huge groupers in the 4-5' range, 5' cubera snapper, 3' porcupine fish, rays, and turtles. Favorite dives were Palancar Gardens for its wonderful swimthroughs, and Tunich/Yucab for the fish life (including a splendid toadfish). The dives site seemed less sanded-over than last year, and the island is completely rebuilt since Wilma passed over it a couple of years ago. Playa del Carmen is worth a ferry ride and a day on the beach (tops are optional there; lots of Europeans) but is no longer a charming little village. There's even a Wal-Mart there now. Go to the municipal mercado where the Mexicans eat delicious fresh lunches for $4, and explore Avenidas 15, 20, and 25. It feels much more Mexican than it does closer to the water.

Aldora Divers, Aldora Villa, April 2007, Preston A. Ball (mdleather4ev-

er@yahoo.com), Flowery Branch, GA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 110 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm. They have fast boats, dove in small groups, took us to sites we requested, and didn't try to baby-sit us. The level of service is far above average, with deep long dives (our last day's dives were 80 and 90 minutes underwater), timely transport, long, relaxing surface intervals at Playa Mia or Playa Sol, and parkas for wind protection after the dive. They group divers according to skill and experience, and those with experience and air/buoyancy control were free to dive without being restricted by others. Aldora Villa — quaint and personal touch added by Greg and Kay. Nice, clean, quiet accommodations just north of town; sunning area/shore entry/palapa/dock pickup/small pool on the premises. No town, cruise ship, or tourist noise. Free wireless internet in your room, free internet phone calls, cable TV in rooms. Room service breakfast for 5$. Going into town is a 3$ cab ride. Gear rinsing/drying area on premises. Small boats had no camera rinse tanks and wouldn't be a friendly environment for opening housings, changing batteries, memory cards, etc. My simple system did just fine for the two AM dives without having to be opened or otherwise manipulated.

Aldora Divers, Fiesta Americana Dive Resort, May 2007, Jeffrey France (jf850@aol.com), E. Stroudsburg , PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy, currents, no currents. The diving was nice; food was pricey without the all-inclusive option, especially breakfast. We would just have coffee before our dives and eat during our surface interval. Aldora does intervals onshore at a nice restaurant on the beach. The reefs; they were pretty much dead in my opinion, not much life, not great coral and much covered in sand from last years hurricanes. The best diving was the many swim throughs; Devils Throat and Daves Throat were must-dos. Overall, we loved the island and the people, had a great time but would not return for diving.

Aqua Safari Diving, Safari Inn, December 2006, Norris Boone, Taylors, SC. Professional groups, led by a group of veteran dive guides that are always looking out for your safety without interfering with your diving. The diving in Cozumel is drift diving. Unfortunately, the reefs took quite a pounding from Hurricane Wilma last year and are not as I remember them from past years. A lot of sand coverage and damage, especially of the more shallow areas. They are recovering, but it will take time. The dive boats are not fast, but are steady and being larger, make nice dive platforms for us older divers. They are not crowded, and are easy to exit and have a stable ladder. There is always a guide left on board to help you with equipment. The rooms are large and very clean. The beds are made daily and there is a bathroom with plenty of hot water for showers post-dive. I did miss not having a television, radio, or telephone. Everything is concrete covered with mats where needed. My wife commented that this must have been how the Flintstones lived. It is oceanfront and did withstand the hurricane. You are staying directly across the street from the dive boat dock, with an easy access to your dive equipment. Also you are staying in town, with a lot of nice restaurants and shops within easy walking distance. Cozumel has become a cruise ship port, with 3 or more cruise ships coming each day with their hoard of passengers to explore the town. It has certainly changed the quaint little town

that I remember from years past. The package price using the Inn makes this a very affordable and enjoyable trip.

Blue Angel, Caribe Blu, November 2006, Bob Rollin (bobrollin@comcast.net), Saratoga, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, currents. I did 21 dives in 9 days including one twilight and two night dives. Our group initially consisted of 7 divers and we received a dedicated dive boat. During this period we had four different dive masters and all were excellent. Dive boats were reasonably comfortable and very fast. Boat drivers did a great job of following our drift dives. Dive masters were willing to take us to distant sites including Punta Sur and Tortugas (mainland). Some reefs have significant sand coverage due to the hurricane but there was lots of sea life including "plate-size" tropical fish, tons of turtles, a few morays and a few nurse sharks. Caribe Blu Hotel affiliated with the Blue Angel Dive Shop. It is a small 22-room hotel; the rooms are large and austere but they have a nice balcony overlooking the pool and the ocean. Rooms have cable TV with about a dozen English-language channels and some have small refrigerators. The front desk staff is friendly and helpful and they will loan you a computer to check your e-mail on their wireless network. Hotel items needing improvement include more hot water (generally lukewarm after dives) and refrigerators in all rooms (our room had one but many don't). Overall, they provided an excellent experience. The restaurant above the dive shop does a fine job with breakfast and lunch; freshly prepared food at very reasonable prices and a $1 beer special. The hotel is a moderate walk from a large grocery store. The "non-tourist" restaurants are generally several blocks away from the main square. The taxi ride from the hotel to the restaurants was $4 or $5 each way but the restaurants were very good and very reasonably priced, making the journey worthwhile.

Blue Angel Diving, Caribe Blu Dive Hotel, March 2007, Frank Evans (frankevans@charter.net), Rochester, MN. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy. Fun dive operation. Dive masters Jorge, Matt, Jose are customer-friendly. Cozumel reefs are recovering from Wilma and many are in good condition with just a few showing continual obvious damage. Reef fish everywhere. Small critters like drum, splendid toadfish, arrow crab plus the usual reef suspects in abundance. Saw lots of reef sharks and turtles. Two seahorse and a pipe fish were bonus. A few eagle rays. Columbia Shallows is one of the best shallow dives anywhere. Extended bottom time 80-90 minutes. Do it as a night dive and the "wow" factor is high. Another must-dive is Tortugas on the Playa side. Huge schools of bigger fish including tarpon, but the highlight is all the turtles ("tortugas"); counted 27. Stronger current so you move along and the turtles just come at you the whole dive. (Saw a bull shark on this dive a year ago.) Large school of 100 plus Atlantic spadefish was a bonus. Shore dive at Blue Angel Reef is fun. The reef is coming back and they have added piles of rock to attract critters. Look for the reef squid that will approach you if you stay in one spot after sighting them. Find the resident seahorse and several octopus. Caribe Blu Hotel is basic dive lodging, clean, comfortable and with great view. The little restaurant is reasonable and food is good. Walking distance to some great eating spots downtown. Blue Angel treats you like a diver. safety conscious,

friendly, and always willing to go where you want to go.

Blue XT Sea, Hotel Barracuda, March 2007, Tom Carlson (tcarlson06@gmail.com), Tacoma, WA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm, choppy, currents, no currents. This was our first trip to Cozumel. Blue XT has a six-pac and an eight-pac. They have wonderful dive masters and boat captains. Our first day with them was a shore dive at Sunset Beach with Arturo, a scuba instructor. We asked for this because we wanted to check out weights and figure buoyancy. We received excellent site briefing and dive plan. Excellent viz (80+ ft.). Max depth we hit was 35 feet. We saw yellow sting rays, rainbow parrot fish, blue parrot fish, glasseye snapper, blue chromis, clown wrasse, yellowhead wrasse, reef butterfly fish and sergeant majors, to name a few. Sunset Beach is about a mile from where we stayed at the Hotel Barracuda and has facilities for showering, changing, and rinsing, and a restaurant/bar for hanging out and enjoying some sun. The next day we did two-tank morning boat dives on the Shamu, a small and fast six-pac but it was only us and one other diver besides the dive master, Juan. Juan was also a great dive master, pointing out many interesting creatures and letting us dive our own profiles. Our first dive was a drift dive at Palancar Gardens, Viz 80-100+ feet, 70 max. depth for a bottom time of 55 minutes. We saw hawksbill turtles, palometta, king crab, black grouper, lobster, many of the same tropicals as the day before and many more. Wonderful corals and sponges. Following this was a surface interval at a beach by the lagoon and fresh pastries and fruit for snacks and fruit juice and water to drink. They provided dry towels and had a thermal shower like you would bring camping. We spent a nice interval on the beach hanging out while the other diver and boat captain waded into the lagoon to look for crocodiles. Our second dive of the day was at Columbia Shallows and was incredible. Excellent viz, 100+, almost no current and many tropicals and wonderful corals and sponges. We also found several nurse sharks, squirrel fish, yellow stingrays, more king crabs, and barracudas. No rinse tanks on these boats! Our Second day diving we were on Shamu again with Fernando as the dive master. Not as good a site briefing or dive plan as the previous day with Juan. With Fernando we really couldn'tt dive our own profiles to the extent that we wanted. We did a dive at Palancar Caves; max. depth was 90 feet. and viz was 100+ feet. There was definitely a current that moved us along. Bottom time was 45 minutes. Towering coral formations and full of caves and swim throughs. The colors, are simply astounding. The current literally pushed us through these canyon-like formations of coral that were loaded with sponges, hawksbill turtles, lobsters, spotted morays, blue and rainbow parrot fish, many blue chromis, many different types of wrasses, reef butterfly fish and many other colorful tropicals. Surface interval at another beach, no facilities and had excellent fresh pastries and fruit for snacks. We went to Palancar Bricks. Max. depth we hit here was 60 feet for a 50-minute bottom time. I had 1100 psi when I got back on the boat. I think there was an issue with the DM getting cold. We saw many more incredible corals and sponges, lobsters, palometta, barracuda and many tropicals. Our third day of diving was on the Bandida II, which is an 8-pac and had six total divers on it. Arturo lets you dive your own profile. We hit Paradise

Reef first, 88 feet max. depth, 55-minute bottom time. We saw a couple king-size black grouper. Our second dive was at Santa Rosa Reef. This was a shallow site with a max. depth of 44 feet for a bottom time of 60 minutes. Nice and easy drift along a finger reef. Hotel Barracuda, a divers hotel and inexpensive compared to some of the larger places. Its is on the waterfront, all rooms have views and there is a pier onsite for boat pickups. There is also a nice series of steps right down into the water. The Barracuda has a pool, swim-up bar and rinse tanks by the beach to rinse your gear. The rooms are clean, have AC and ceiling fans, and the beds are very firm. We had a small fridge and a large shower. We originally requested a room upstairs. They attempted to put us into the infamous Room 104, right next to the bar, but we refused and firmly told them we had requested and needed a quiet room. They then offered us a room on the second floor. There are plenty of restaurants near the hotel with lots of dining options.

Blue XTSea, May 2007, Thomas Witte (tswitte@prodigy.net), Salinas, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm. Our first trip to Cozumel in 8 years, but our 7th trip overall. Only subtle down current in a few breaks in the Palancar chain that were manageable by all divers. First time diving with Blue XTSea divers. Small operator with two boats that run fast with small groups. Briefings and surface interval dialogue with Divemaster Arturo were informative. Pedro did a great job as DM and has a knack for finding the small, interesting animals. Seahorses are his specialty. Dives are well paced — you let the Cozumel current do the work and maximize your bottom time. The boats get to the reefs early enough that you are among the first on the dive sites. Only once in two weeks did we encounter another dive group while down on a dive. My buddy has a camera rig, and once the divemasters saw we were comfortable on the dives, we had plenty of independence to drag back a bit and focus on photos of interest. During one surface interval, Hector, our boat captain, did a 20-minute magic show with sleight-of-hand coin and rope tricks. He was good. Christi, the owner, contacted us at our unit mid-trip to check in and see how we were doing and how the dives were going. She extended her home phone number to help us reschedule one morning dive that we missed due to a late night mopping up water from a big storm that blew into our condo unit. Safe, fun, informative diving for divers of all levels who are passionate and focused on the enjoyment of bottom time.

Cozumel Scuba Dogs, Hotel Cozumel, May 2007, Ron Clark (rbclarkconcrete@shawus.com), Willis, TX. Experience: 50+ dives. Vis: 50 to 70 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, strong currents. I was impressed with Cozumel Scuba Dogs. Erick, our divemaster, had a custom dive plan for our group of 8 beginners to Advance/Rescue. He brought in another divemaster to allow me and buddy to dive Devils Throat while he stayed with the wife and kids and other friends. The boat was clean and comfortable, with a bathroom. Erick was strict with depths and his 5-minute safety stop.

Del Mar Aquatics, Hotel Cozumel, February 2007, Dan LaDue (danjr@mchsi.com), Carl Junction, MO. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. We were picked up at our dock about 8:15 AM every morning (OK, sometimes

8:30). The crew from Del Mar Aquatics told about several options each day on where would be good places to dive; they listened to our suggestions on what where we wanted to dive. Once or twice in the 25+ dives did the crew ask us to change our destination because of weather or water conditions. The dive briefing covered where we were and what we'd see, and gave us good bottom times. Most of our dives were in the 50-60 minute range (sure beats the 30-40 minute dives you hear about). Oftentimes our group spilt into shallow (less than 80 ft.) and deep groups. We never lost the divemasters and they never lost us. They were there to show us what we wanted and there for any problems that may have occurred. The boat crew helped everyone out of the water, handled our cameras and other gear with care. They assisted anyone who needed any help with getting to their seats or getting to the water. Mario, Alex and the rest of the guys are wonderful to dive with.

Dive House, Fiesta Americana, May 2007, Don Reed (DReed1209@aol.com), Hilton Head Island, SC. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, currents. We have been to Fiesta Americana (FA) and Dive House (DH) many times because they are dependable. FA is about 5 km south of town (about $5 for taxi each way), on the beach, and DH has its facility there, although its main office is on the square in town. We usually do the 2 morning dives (on Nitrox) and hit the beach in the afternoon. Reefs and fish have made good progress recovering from the hurricanes, but damage is still clear. Diving is pretty simple drift diving. FA has an all-inclusive plan, but we always eat dinner in Cozumel proper; the costs are slightly greater to eat in town. There are many excellent restaurants (Wyndham, Onsu, Primavera's, La Mission, La Choza, as well as Carlos & Charlie's and Senor Frog's). Not sure where Margaritaville fits in that scene, but food and drink there were good. There are many local restaurants a few blocks off the water where the prices are a lot cheaper. US divers have essentially imposed a US economy on Cozumel, so don't expect cheap. But the people are all friendly and helpful, and that makes up for the prices. We splurged and ate at the top end restaurants. Estimated dinners (food and at least one bottle of wine each night) for two was about $800 total for 8 nights, but some friends were included in that amount to an unknown extent. Hotel (including breakfast, lunch, beach bar, and gratuities) was $1600, and the diving was $1000, including Nitrox on all dives.

Dive Palancar, Allegro, September 2006, Cindy Cook (ccook@bgsfirm.com), Fort Worth, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 83 F, calm, currents. The rooms have been updated since the hurricane and were comfortable. The staff did not hesitate to upgrade us to a room closer to the beach and dive shop. We even did a late checkout at no additional cost. The food was basic but reliable. Never got sick, even ate salad; they use filtered water for ice and serve bottled water in the restaurant and provide bottled water in the rooms — we used it to brush our teeth. They have reconfigured the poolside lunch setup so you order from a menu and the lunch was better than the main buffet. The beach service was also reliable — hardly had to get up from the lounge chair if I didn't want to. Dive Palancar is a wonderful outfit. We paid one of the staff $20 for the week to hump our gear; it was rinsed at the end of our

dive day and after the last dive it was thoroughly washed and hung to dry before having to pack it. We kept our regulators with us. All the dive masters are great but we preferred Jorge — he's been there a long time. Alfredo is our second choice. The reef is 5-10 minutes away and there are 4 departure times. The night dive was great. They have large, comfortable boats and they limit to 8 divers but we usually only had 6. Buy a package and they will bargain with you and after a couple of dives they tend to put more experienced divers together — this may have something to do with sticking with the same dive master. Tip the dive master, who shares the tip with the boat captain — can't believe how many divers never tipped — we have learned that tipping does pay off. You can definitely see the effects of the hurricane on the reef but the marine life was abundant. Saw the biggest shark I've ever seen. I wore a light wet suit because I get cold even in warm water but my husband and most others were comfortable without. The coral was damaged horribly but is already showing rebirth. Quick, inexpensive dive trip from the Dallas/Fort Worth area — 2-1/2 hours direct flight and we are on the beach!

Dive Palancar, Allegro, April 2007, Craig Mathews (craigm@zebra.net), Mobile, AL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 150 to 200 Feet. Water: calm, currents. The Allegro is a great all-inclusive 15 minutes south of town. The dive operation is on site and well run. Two of us were experienced and enjoyed the dives and short boat rides. The corals have taken a beating from storms and are nowhere near as good as in years gone by. Two of our party did their open water dives to become certified; Karin was professional and accommodating. We also had two 14s do the resort course and were able to do a 40' drift dive together. The resort was the best part. Great food and plenty of activities for everyone. Rooms were clean with cold A/Cs. TVs and phones in each room. Make sure you upgrade when making your reservation. UW Photography Comments: Did not have a separate water bucket, had to share with the one that held the masks and served as a rinse for mask fog.

Dive Palancar, Occidental Grand, June 2007, Ed Stevens (Angelfish@aol.com), Austin, TX. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, currents. The Occidental Grand was fabulous. Food, accommodations, and service were first class. The dive operation was well run and the divemasters were friendly and eager to point out hard-to-find critters. There were usually two groups (each with a divemaster) on the boat. The groups were small and the boat was large. Usually, experienced divers were grouped together. My only complaint was the rigidity of the dive profiles. Last year my wife and I were allowed to remain below until we reached 700 psi. This could sometimes extend the dive time to one hour. This year, the length of the dives was 35 to 45 minutes. All divers were required to ascend at that time. We sometimes came up with 1500 to 1700 psi. We found this frustrating. Both of us are experienced divers and we are good on air consumption. On one dive, the divemaster (Pingo) did set a profile of "remain until 700 psi." This dive lasted for almost one hour. We saw large nurse sharks, free-swimming green moray eels, lots of turtles, beautiful large angelfish, and lots of other reef fish. The corals and sponges were covered with some sand (due to the storms that have ravaged Cozumel).

There seemed to be a lack of color. All in all, the vacation was wonderful.

Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, December 2006, Paul Schmieder (pschmieder@sbcglobal.net), Bellville, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, choppy. Using Al Bay of Bay Adventures, who has never failed to give excellent, attentive service. Hotel Cozumel offered a good room and dive plan in conjunction with Dive Paradise. Having read past reviews of Hotel Cozumel, however, we opted to forego the all-inclusive meal and drink plan and were instead offered a Euro-plan, which provides breakfasts only. This worked out well since Hotel Cozumel allows an easy walk to town and we enjoy trying different restaurants for the sake of variety. Casa Mission was outstanding for food and ambiance and is only a short cab ride away. Topside, the trees took a beating after the October 2005 thrashing by Hurricane Wilma and I noted a submerged palm while doing the check-out dive aside Hotel Cozumels pier but, otherwise, the vegetation is returning. We began our week by engaging dive instructor Ramon Flores Guerrero of Dive Paradise for a one-day, two-dive Peak Buoyancy Performance certification. Well taught and spent mostly underwater with refinement of breathing and weight balance techniques. After the course I was able to drop 2 pounds of weight. Our diving experience was generally good even though the weather was a bit unstable with patchy clouds, wind and a few rain squalls that seemed to undermine Cozumels usual high degree of clarity. We found the dive sites to be in relatively good shape, though perhaps a bit reconfigured. The swim-throughs along Palancar Reef were delightful and the regular dive sites along the main wall remain consistent favorites. Abundance of sand coating the tops of the reefs and shallower second-dive sites such as Tormentos, Villa Blanca, Yucab and Paradise Reefs. The fish life appeared healthy. There were relatively fewer divers so our dive masters were forced to group experienced with inexperienced divers. DMs did a nice job of sending the heavy breathers to the surface once they reached the minimum, low air reading on their gauges and so allowed those with ample air to continue diving according to the pre-dive briefing profiles. My dive times averaged 50+ minutes.

Dive Paradise, Barracuda Hotel, December 2006, Joe DelGuidice (joe@mercurypersonnel.com), Boxford, MA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm, surge. My third visit to Cozumel was terrific. I saw the splendid frog fish on 3 separate dives! You feel that diving is still the king there, even though the high-end condo boom and resorts are all around. I went solo, which allows immersion into diving and a sense of freedom that makes a week seem longer. Travelnotes had great deals. The Barracuda Hotel was perfect: low money, great views, lots of divers, hard bed, but OK, small fridge. No one has ice, you cannot buy ice, even supermarkets. I made ice around the clock and kept the ice in a gallon baggie. The No Name Bar at Cuda gets quite crowded with younger, wilder types than the middle-aged divers, like me who are actually staying at the hotel. I would go down there and have a drink and seafood soup and watch the scene. Like something out of Miami Vice. Difficult to get a piece of land to lay a towel down. And the music is blasting, appealing to the young patrons with money to burn. They all clear out by late afternoon. I rented a car at "Less Pay Car Rental." They are

next to the Barracuda and the price was great for the week, with airport transfers, and you can call the States with their cordless phone for free! Dive Paradise is on the premises and the package was great, but I had different DMs most every day. I regret not spending the extra $ to dive with Aldora. DP did have fast boats and had good diving and 1 or 2 DMs were good — Jorge was great. There were days I got stuck with a few obnoxious divers and DMs who were disinterested. The coral and sea life in general was good, but of course, not like 20 years ago. The night diving off the pier at the barracuda is fun. You get your tank right there with DP. In 20' of water I saw numerous octopus, eels, larger flying gurnards with wings extended, radiating brilliant greens and blues. With my light I could mesmerize squid in 4' of water and have them turn colors, moving back and forth, and they even let me rub their bellies. Lots of rebar and crap off there, big boulders and a sandy bottom. I did see quite a few fish night and day. The step entrance to the water is also cool! The restaurants I sought out were good at each price level. At the best places, the prices were similar to the States, but the lobster, and seafood in general, is worth it. Capi Navaganti Restaurant stood out for seafood. I took the ferry to Playa del Carmen and then a $3 public bus ride south for an hour to Hidden Worlds Cenote Diving. Off the coast road, they gave me a buggy ride in the jungle to a '4 X $' hole in the ground. I descended a 2-story ladder into a cavern and it was truly a hidden world! Once in the cavern, we put our gear on and submerged in cool 78 degree water — a hood woulda been good. Other-worldly. Matt was my DM, and he was topnotch! You glide through tunnels around 6 feet in diameter for 50 to 75 feet or so — a little freaky, pitch-black and no escape but forward or backward. The tunnels always lead to a cavern with open surface. Bat Cave (25 for 45 min.) was the first dive — the stalagmite and stalactite formations were unbelievable. The best part was approaching a cavern and the natural light increased as we got to the center — so beautiful! The second dive was Dos Ojos (2 other diver joined us), which was deeper and had less natural light, but the environment was like snow and ice. For a brief moment you pass through the fresh/salt water mix (halcyon), and it is trippy! The fresh water is crystal clear! Carlos and Charlie's have been replaced by a Hard Rock Café. The music was good!

Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, March 2007, Paul Schmieder (pschmieder@sbcglobal.net), Bellville, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm. We booked it as an all-inclusive over a long, get-away 4-day weekend because of the value of the overall package that was still being offered, again with Dive Paradise. The Hotel Cozumel staff was as friendly as before, the rooms are clean you walk across the street (or through their tunnel under the street) to the dive shop and pier. All meals are served buffet-style and I enjoyed the morning omelet station with freshly cooked eggs and lunchtime grill offering burgers and fresh fajitas. For dinner there was an attended pasta station and all the sides, breads and deserts you could want. Though tasty after about 3 days the food begins to look all the same. Dive Paradise does a good job with attending to diver needs and preferences. Dive Paradise staff will try to group all divers with similarly skilled others. Also, there is an option to sign up for their fast boats which are smaller, usually carry a half dozen divers that are typically

more experienced and, though these boats lack commodes, are able to arrive at the southern dive sites more quickly and so ahead of the rush of all other dive operators. Pre-dive briefings set the limits on depth and describe how long the dive should last, but time underwater will be enforced according to how much air you or your dive buddy have left in the tank so that safety stops must commence as soon as 700 PSI is reached. A fresh water camera rinse bucket was offered on each boat, but no pre-dive instruction was offered so that new divers, who didn't know better, were using the camera rinse bucket as a mask rinse bucket.

Dive Paradise, Barracuda Hotel, April 2007, David Sifre (dsifre@gmail.com), Bronxville, NY. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 175 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm, currents. One or two divemasters were excellent, and appeared to love their jobs, eager to point things out and make sure everybody was okay. The rest gave the impression they were working for a living and not particularly interested in making the dive pleasurable. The "slow" boats literally take an hour to get to the first dive destination. On our first day, the boat did not return from the second dive until 2:15 — the afternoon dive was scheduled for 3 pm. The second day we made it clear we did not want to get back so late and were told, "Relax, its your vacation," as if taking a dive vacation meant we ought not be concerned about missing the third dive of the day! Finally, since 7 of the 14 people on the boat had a 3 pm dive, the crew did not go as far as it had originally intended. They really don't care if you miss your afternoon dive — in fact, maybe thats why they scheduled things that way, in the hope that people will cancel their prepaid third dive rather than get their gear off the boat, get food, and get their gear onto a second boat within 45 minutes. Dive Shop discouraged my buddy from renting a dive computer, saying it was not necessary. They suggested sharing my computer. I said no. Finally they relented. They advised others that a dive computer was not necessary as well. The rental gear was not well-maintained. Gauges did not work for one person on three occasions. My buddy's first stage was "popping" at the surface before they replaced it. They set your gear up for you if you rent. And they set it up between dives. But they don't do a great job of it. One crew member was advised a tank had 1500 psi when they were supposed to be at 3000 psi. They swapped the BC, left the tank and shortly thereafter put somebody else's tank on the half empty tank. She was a new diver. She discovered the problem only after her family jumped off the boat. The crew acted quickly to swap out her tank but we were far from the divers by the time it was accomplished due to the current. Then we left her in the water to get to the second drop off for the rest of the divers. She had a hell of a time, but was eventually linked up with the divemaster and reunited with her family on the dive. Person next to me did not have the air turned on and only noticed it because the pressure gauge read low (no excuse for his failure to turn the valve himself before putting his BC on, as he was an experienced diver). My buddy's tank slipped off the BC at the beginning of the dive. Fortunately she was able to get my attention, convey the problem, and I was able to slip the strap and tighten it for her. Essentially, buddy checks were difficult to do. And it was rushed. Despite the hours ride out to the dive site, once they told us to "suit up" they practically threw everybody off the boat,

making errors and mistakes common. This is a mediocre dive operation for an experienced diver and a poor operation for a beginner. Little hand-holding and support. Only one divemaster required people to "shut up" during the dive briefing. There is an option to pay an extra $6 to get on a "fast boat" which has no sun protection and no head. All of the boats (I was on a total of 4 or 5) had a camera bucket. Sometimes it was literally a bucket not large enough for anything but point and shoots without external flashes, and once it was an actual plastic garbage can which was plenty big (ironically, only point and shoots made it into that bucket). Crew was helpful in terms of handing gear to divers after giant stride entries, and was quick to take the camera upon exiting water — they almost always placed camera in the bucket). Unfortunately, defog (soap only it appeared) was tied above camera and mask buckets and both buckets were full of suds by the time the first dive started). No camera tables.

Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, May 2007, Craig Cook, Rockaway, NJ. Experience: 300+ dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm and flat. Hotel Cozumel was a nice resort., but when you're in Cozumel and you can't get a decent plantain, the food is bad! Breakfast was always cold, and if the omelet chefs went any slower, they'd be going backwards. The food at the waterfront restaurant was mediocre at best, and only open for lunch. Dive Paradise was another disappointment. Although the entire staff was friendly, helpful and knowledgeable, their whole setup needs to be reorganized. Each morning was complete chaos. You never got a rhythm going because each morning and afternoon dive we were on a different boat, with different crew and different divers. We were told to be at the dive center at 8 a.m. At 8:50 a.m. we were still waiting our turn to get on our assigned boat for the morning dive. Boats were coming in and out and only picking two of us or four of us at a time, with divers from different resorts. After lunch, it was back to the same chaos getting on the afternoon boat. Going to dive sites was by majority rule. Since we weren't with the same group of divers all week, we wound up going to the same dive site three times in one week. And to top it all off, we were coming up with 1500-1800 psi! This trip really tested our patience each morning and afternoon. Not what we want on our vacation, but you know the saying … a bad day diving is better than a good day at work. Dive Paradise needs to get its act together.

Dive Paradise, Hotel Cozumel, September 2007, Michael J. Millet (michael.millet@comcast.net), Dublin, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, currents. Many reefs are not only still covered with sand; the sand is actually imbedded into the coral. The currents seem to be running a bit stronger. All manageable, but tough for photography. Lots of eels, turtles, and reef fish. The service, facilities and food at the Hotel Cozumel have definitely declined since 2004. The rooms need to be refurbished and the food lacks variety and quality. The operation seems generally disorganized and mismanaged. We did not have phone service for the entire 10 days of our stay. The hotel blamed it on an electrical storm. I don't think so. It took 2 days to get another chair for our room (the room was initially short some furniture). The Dive Paradise operation is also a bit disorganized. Since it relies on the telephone service of Hotel Cozumel, it too did not have

any phone service for our entire stay. Thus it could not take any credit cards for dive expenses. Had to walk about 10 minutes to the operation's main office to use a credit card. Paid for several Nitrox tanks but did not get to use them all because on a couple of dives the operation forget to load the Nitrox on the dive boat. On another dive, 36% was loaded instead of 32%. It was for a shallow dive so it worked out, but it's still an indication of the overall unreliability. Had to constantly ask about the Nitrox to be sure it was on the boat. The regular dive package includes the slow so-called Caribbean boats. We booked the fast boats, which are a better deal. Dive Paradise does not offer a one-tank PM fast boat trip — only the slow boats in the PM for one tank.

Dive with Cristina, Fiesta Americana, January 2007, Tom Cook (tcook@cancercarecenter.org), Jackson, TN. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 50 to 90 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, choppy. Cristina Roman first checked out our skills and then we went diving according to them. Toward the end of the four days we were diving in more arduous areas, but still within our expertise. She let us dive our computers and seems to know a great deal about the water, currents, fish, fauna, etc. She has been diving for over 25 years. Luis, her husband, was the instructor for the two referral divers in our group and did an outstanding job. After he finished with the referral divers, he went back to his fishing boat and Jaime joined us. Cristina's boat is not the newest, but worked well and had plenty of shade, fresh water, and a good bathroom. Fiesta Americana was very good. The rooms were clean and we did the all-inclusive. The food was above average, but a little limited. I would probably not do the all-inclusive again (would want to go to town and try other restaurants and, since I don't drink alcohol, wasn't a great deal.

Dressel Divers, Iberostar, September 2006, Wayne Warren-Angelucci (wayne.warren@gmail.com), Rancho Santa Fe, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 88 to 89 F, calm. Lots of large grouper, sharks, lobster. Iberostar is at the south end of the reef where all of the best diving is — most boat trips only 5-15 minutes. Easy to return to resort between morning dives. Three restaurants at resort, two of them with gourmet quality food. Dive/Accommodation rates give a lot for the money. Free Nitrox.

Living Underwater, Casa Mexicana, September 2006, Bill Stalter (wastal@swbell.net), Overland Park, KS. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. A late September trip found Cozumel very quiet. Casa Mexicana location was perfect for walks to downtown San Miguel for lunches and dinner. Casa Mexicana provides a breakfast buffet that was excellent. The room was spacious and clean, with free high speed internet access. While the weather included brief rain showers each day, the diving was excellent. Jeremy, Living Underwater's owner, met with us at our hotel to discuss our diving preferences. While Living Underwater usually requires 4 divers to take a boat out, Jeremy did not hesitate to take my wife and me out. In 4 days of diving, we covered both ends of the island, from Isolate to Barracuda. Jeremy was very adept at finding tiny critters like sailfin blennies and ghost pipehorse fish. One dive was capped by a visit from 3 small blacktip sharks. The diving was excellent, and the service superb.

Living Underwater, Hotel Cozumel, January 2007, Kim Lachman (Lolafin@aol.com), Libertyville, IL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, currents. They cost more than almost all dive operations in Cozumel and for good reason! Fast boats! Small groups with the max being 6 divers. High service level of Jeremy and his captains. They set up all your gear and store it overnight. Cozy long jackets for service intervals. Fresh fruit and cookies and water for service interval and after dive. Jeremy is a wonderful divemaster! He is safety conscious, a super small critter finder and highly customer oriented. You get more bottom time with Living Underwater than any other operator on the island because of the steel 120 tanks and mandatory computers. He also took us to the north end of the island. After 6 trips to Cozumel this was the first time we had been there. Most operators won't take you. We saw the eagle ray migration there! This operation is not for beginner divers but for experienced divers who want their every wish to come true.

Living Underwater, Caribe Blu, March 2007, Larry Trott (trottl@comcast.net), Mt. Pleasant, SC. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 120 Feet. Water: 72 to 75 F, choppy, currents. Caribe Blu was reasonably priced with nice rooms with balconies, a pool area overlooking the water, a beach entry for shore diving or snorkeling, and a dock where dive operators can pick you up. The motel was a 15-minute walk north of the downtown plaza. A small restaurant was on the property and served hot breakfasts and lunches. A motel-affiliated dive operation was also on the property and offered boat and shore dives but we elected to dive with "Living Underwater." We were on the fourth floor and there were no elevators. I got over it, though, when the owner had all of our luggage and gear delivered directly to our room. Living Underwater was incredible! The owner, Jeremy, was efficient, friendly, and professional. His original boat was damaged in the hurricane so he was leasing a 26' boat and limited the number of divers to 6. Julio, the captain was proficient. Jeremy would lead the dives. We dove with them for four days, three dives per day. On day one Jeremy assessed our skills on typical Cozumel wall, reef, and drift dives. On day two through four we were treated to walls and reefs on the north end of the island that were amazing! The currents were much faster, around 7 mph, than the southern end but the rides and scenery were worth it. Living Underwater provided us with new steel LP 120s so we could dive our limits. Our typical itinerary would be: Jeremy would pick us up promptly at 7:45 a.m. at our motel dock, make one dive then bring the boat to a beach for our surface interval while he changed everyone to fresh tanks. We'd make the second dive and then take the boat to one of the beach resort restaurants for a leisurely lunch, Jeremy would again change the tanks and then join us for lunch. Around 1:30 p.m. we'd make the third dive and Jeremy would have the captain drop us back to our respective docks between 3:30 and 4:00 p.m. Jeremy would provide refreshments and fresh fruit on the boat between dives and would take our gear home with him each night to rinse it for us. The Cozumel reefs appear to be slowly recovering from the hurricane. We noticed a lot of broken coral on the bottom and the quantity of sea life on the reefs has not fully recovered yet. We were, however, treated to large eagle rays, dolphin feeding on the reef, big groupers, large morays, many green

turtles, lobster, and a variety of reef fish. I've been diving for 35 years and there are only a handful of operators that I've encountered at Jeremy's level of professionalism, and few of them are located in tourist resort areas! He is truly a delightful young man.

Living Underwater, Presidente, March 2007, Jeff Bennewitz (jeff@thunderscientific.com), Albuquerque, NM. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy, currents. Jeremy. the owner/dive master excellent! He is from Minnesota, been in Coz for 7 years, he will have a brand new boat summer of 07. Cozumel is in great shape after the storm of 2005, turtles, big eagle rays, 2 dolphins. Reefs are showing some damage but should repair with constant current flow. Enjoyed diving the northern sites, winds made if difficult to run south most of the week. Jeremy was a pleasure to dive with. Brand new 120s marked for NITROX 2250 PSI always analyzed before each dive, consistent 02% each day. Fast six pack boat, on time every morning, no complaints, can't wait to dive with Living Underwater again. Stayed at the recently renovated Presidente, all new. Topnotch service; hotel was only 30% occupied during our visit. Restaurants all serve better tasting guacamole than we get here in New Mexico.

Living Underwater, Reef Club/Sabor, March 2007, Steve Mason (smason@lighthouse.net), Sault Ste Marie, MI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, currents. We found Jeremy and Living Underwater in Cozumel when we came for a family vacation in 2004. If our air supply was good and our computers stayed out of deco there was no limit to the bottom time we enjoyed. We dove profiles starting at 90 and 100 feet with over an hour underwater, second dives of 50 to 60 feet lasted one and one half hours or more if we could stay within safety margins. It was like having a private dive guide to take care of all your needs. We just got back from our first Cozumel trip since Wilma. We were thrilled that Jeremy is still doing the same excellent job he was before! We were the only couple on the boat for the start of the week and he showed us the most unique things we have seen underwater. We were the first people out on the reef every morning and saw more big fish than I remember being on the walls of Cozumel. His calm presence underwater and ability to work the currents allow you to stop and "smell the roses." On one dive he stopped and showed us a pipe seahorse, pipe fish and a tiny dragonette, all in a 4 square inch depression in the sand down current of a coral head. We stopped and took our time to watch the pipe horse move around and feed. Jeremy uses a magnifying glass for his divers to see the tiny things. He doesn't need it to find minute things like fire crabs, but I can't see them without it. We stopped to watch a stingray feed in the sand for about 5 minutes and appreciate nature in action. We saw more turtles here than in Cayman last fall. They were on every dive, sleeping under ledges and in cracks and swimming around. It seemed that we would ask about something, dive in and there it would be. I joked with Jeremy about having a mechanical eagle ray since it seemed like they appeared on his command. Jeremy only takes out small groups and took the two of us out daily with no complaints. He uses a fast, uncrowded boat with shade, he has low pressure steel tanks that start with about 2,500 psi and never seem to run low. All the safety equipment including oxygen was

on board. We had water, juice, fresh fruit, cookies, towels and anything we could ask for. He picked us up at our hotel and dropped us back there every day. The surface interval is on shore at a playa with your choice of beach chairs or a covered restaurant to get out of the sun. They have a shower, bathroom facilities, food and refreshments (bring some cash in a dry bag). We had booked the Reef Club in the south with a beach and all-inclusive for our college-bound daughter who went with us. When we got there we upgraded to Sabor, the adults only section. We were glad we did. I would not recommend Reef Club unless you have small children and want the basic buffet food. We had a private area with a bar, nice pool and a splash pool outside our patio. Sabor has a private restaurant where you can order from a menu. We still went into town for some dinners and took trips around the island to enjoy the still wild and undeveloped east side. I would recommend Sabor to any adults who want the all-inclusive thing but dont miss everything there. Rent a jeep for the week before you go for the best rates.

Living Underwater, Aldora, Cozumel Palace, April 2007, David A Harper (kentmorrdave@hotmail.com), Stevensville, MD. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. 7:00 and we are out the door to breakfast. The hotel really has an outstanding breakfast buffet. Fresh juices, hot coffee and tea and all kinds of food and fruits. Plus, outstanding service. The girls tour leaves at 7:30 and I head to the dock to wait for the Alfa. The boat, Alfa, arrives and we head to Palancar caves on a simply outstanding morning. 80 minutes to 84 fsw. Arrow crab, pipe fish, 2 turtles and lots of beautiful views. Jeremy Anschel, a displaced Minnesotan, owns Living Underwater. His customers continue to return and dive with him. A 90-minute surface interval at Nachi Cochom. A nice place, mellow and clean. Second dive at Chankanaab Bolones. Lots of little stuff plus my favorite drum fish. 66 minutes at 80 fsw. Oh, by the way we also saw a submarine! The Atlantis cruised by us at about 70 feet. At the hotel showering at 1:30, then a great luncheon buffet with a huge variety of hot and cold and an ice cream sundae bar! Time for a siesta. A relaxing environment conducive to making friends, some for a lifetime. A 7:40 departure on Aldora 4 on a calm morning heads for Punta Sur, and the world famous Devils Throat. Aldora always takes advantage of good weather to go to the farther reaches, such as Punta Sur and Maracaibo. My first time through the Devils Throat leaves me with a slight tingle. You are in the tunnel so fast you do not have time to be nervous. Smooth sailing to the beautiful blue hole at the end. A quick u-turn and we head up the cathedral. This used to hold the cross sponge but Wilma removed it. I am glad I did it but the profile for the rest of the one-hour dive was spent cruising over some impressive coral heads. I prefer Columbia deep. We do see three turtles and the largest lobster I have seen, scurrying along at about 120 feet. Viz was at least 130 feet this morning. 1:45 SI at Sr. Sanchos. Drink service is excellent. Our second dive is to Dalila. Shallow profile with lots of nooks and crannies. Tons of tropical fish. This cool retracting soft coral, some one help with the name. 78 minutes and still 1200 psi. Diving with eanx 36 so not even a chance for no deco time.

Living Underwater, El Cantil, June 2007, John Howard (jumbojd@hotmail.com), Davidsonville, MD.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. The boat is specifically designed for divers and brand-new. Jeremy will only take a max of eight divers — we never dove with more than 6. Every design feature of the boat, from the tank racks to the non-slip surface, boat-length shade with convenient storage nets, is specifically built for divers. Jeremy is flexible, but if you will let him handle your gear like a Four Seasons, he'll take it the night before your first dive, wash and assemble it each day so when you arrive you just need to have a fruit drink and roll in. Dives are deep and long at whatever site you desire, including out-of-the-way dives. He goes out early so your first dive is without a crowd. Only computer diving; being safe is the only rule, and you are responsible, although he is around to help. Great in-depth dive briefings. You go to beach clubs for a gas-off in between dives, where pools, hot tubs and food are available. Jeremy is great underwater at finding small critters and out-of-the-way corals. We saw dolphins off Punta Sur. Living Underwater has ruined 90% of other dive operations for us, because from the boat to the crew, these guys make you feel like you are rediscovering diving service the way it should be. El Cantil is a little pricey, but the place to stay if you like to be near San Miguel for the food in the barrio and not tied down to an all-inclusive, plus it is really luxurious, clean, with great service and spectacular view. Great for little kids.

Living Underwater, El Presidente, June 2007, Renda Stalter, Overland Park, KS. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 125 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm, currents. While we had already been back to Cozumel three times since Hurricane Wilma, it had been two years since our last stay at El Presidente. An adult pool has been added to the grounds, and we took two of the cheaper pool view rooms, and could not have been happier. All of the rooms have been spruced up, and the beds have been upgraded to American standards. The staff worked exceptionally hard to please us. The shore diving was excellent before Wilma, but the coral heads took a beating. Found a large green moray, a number of nudibranchs, many eels and a juvenile drum fish. Jeremys new is 33 feet long, slightly longer that most fast boats. The boat is also a foot or so wider than the other boats, and these differences allow for a lot of space for divers to spread out before and after a dive. The boat also had a roof that allowed divers to store T-shirts and hats. Jeremy also uses low pressure steel tanks that really extend everyones bottom time. We didn'tt have a dive less than 60 minutes. Most dives were in the 80- to 90- minute range (including Columbia Deep). Jeremy found pike blennies, sail fin blennies, several pipe horse fish, juvenile drum fish, and juvenile nudibranchs. But Jeremy was outdone by our daughter, who found a juvenile octopus that had tentacles that only measured an inch long. Jeremy worked hard at improving our younger divers skills and comfort, and it has paid dividends in their enjoyment of the sport. Both now relish the prospect of a night dive, and the chance to find octopus, squid, lobsters and crabs.

Living Underwater, Caribe Blu, August 2007, Lee Fenner (hfenner89@sbcglobal.net), Beachwood, OH. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, currents. We chose Jeremy (Living Underwater) and the Caribe Blu based on Undercurrent reviews and completely endorse those reviews. Hurricane Dean's approach to Cozumel limited our diving to three

days since Jeremy prudently took his boat out of the water to prepare for the worst. We had eight dives over three days and have never had a better diving experience. Jeremy's fast boat is set up for a maximum of eight divers and you have a choice of low pressure steel 95 or 120 cu ft tanks. Jeremy visited us the afternoon of the day before we started diving to meet us and talk about what we would like to do. He picked us up at 7:45 at the hotel's pier and his helpful crew assembled our gear on our way to the dive site. Getting on and off the boat couldn't have been easier. Carlos put the tank/BC on the seat and assisted you into it. Then all together do a back roll into the 84-degree water. Once the dive is over, the boat captain, Fernando, throws out a current line from the front right side of the boat. You swim to the boat and he is waiting at an open door to take your tank/BC. Then, using a line tied to the side of the boat, you move to the ladder, pass your fins up, and climb aboard. Carlos offers water, snacks, and towels. Between the first and second dive on two days, we stopped at dock and you could get off and stretch your legs walking to a "rustic" bathroom area back in the brush. Between the second and third dives, you stop for lunch. Once we ate at a beach hotel and the other time at a little cafe in the small boat harbor. After a day of diving, the crew rinses your gear and will keep all of your gear, including wetsuit, for the next day. Jeremy takes the time to show you large and small marine life. He carries a magnifying glass, erasable slate, and used a lure to coax a splendid toadfish out of its den and found both a miniscule post-larval trunkfish and juvenile cowfish. There were just the two of us on the second three-tank day. Jeremy led us on an extensive tour around and through the wreck of C-53 minesweeper. I think we visited every compartment inside the ship. Our third dive started out with a seahorse hunt and in 30 minutes we found four. We had a memorable 74-minute dive. We paid $85 for two-tank dive, $55 extra for a third tank, and $10 per tank of nitrox (95 or 120 cu ft). The Caribe Blu is a great value about a 20-minute walk from downtown. The air-conditioned rooms are large and kept extremely clean. All face the ocean and have balconies with plenty of space for drying gear. There is a small restaurant above the Blue Angel dive shop next door with hours from 7 a.m. to about 5 p.m. Prices are reasonable. For dinner, we took a taxi to San Miguel and ate at great restaurants (La Choza, La Perlita, Primas, and Casa Denis). Cab fares ranged from $4 to $6 and no driver tried to overcharge. Jeanne at Caribe Blu was helpful finding us another hotel when we had to move out early due to the government closing beach-side resorts.

Living Underwater, Hotel Presidente InterContinental, September 2007, Matthew Radtke (MattRadtke@cs.com), Boulder, CO. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 200 Feet. Water: 79 to 83 F, currents. My partner and I recently escaped to Cozumel for five days of diving. Living Underwater picked us up at our hotel's dock. Jeremy (owner) and his team, Gustavo (dive master) and Francisco (captain), arrived five minutes early and greeted us with big smiles. We passed our gear aboard, and never touched most of it again until it was time to get in the water. The crew stowed our dry gear in overhead cargo nets, placed fins, booties and wet suits under our seats, connected our BCs and regulators to fresh tanks, and added appropriate weights to our BC pockets. After a con-

cise dive briefing from the DM (Jeremy on the first day, Gustavo for days 2-4), Francisco helped each of us into our BC, lifting the heavy steel tank up onto the seat and holding open the straps of the BC. When everyone was geared up, we just moved from the seat up onto the gunwale, and on the count of three did a backwards roll into the warm water. Jeremy and Gustavo like to take their time, patiently coaxing toadfish out of their holes, pointing out tiny pike blennies and pipe horses, and still keeping a keen eye out for turtles, rays, lobsters, eels and sharks — all of which we saw on a regular basis. The French and queen angelfish were amazing. Intriguing coral formations included tall pinnacles and easy swim-throughs. And all this is made more interesting by the ever-present current, which whisks you along your dive route with little swimming effort unless you want to stop to look at something. After a dive that typically lasted 55-75 minutes, we surfaced with the dive master. In most cases, the boat was waiting less than 50 yards away. We slipped out of our BCs while still in the water next to the boat. While Francisco pulled our heavy gear aboard, we were free to remove our fins and climb the aluminum ladder relatively unencumbered. As soon as we were aboard and had our wet suits unzipped, someone was always waiting to put a warm dry towel around our shoulders. Fleece-lined dive parkas were offered regularly as well. And once all the guests were situated, the crew brought out fresh fruit, cookies, cold water, and soda. At the end of each day, we left almost all our gear on board the boat. The Living Underwater team rinsed everything and hung it up to dry overnight, so when we got on board the next morning, everything was ready to go!

Papa Hog's, Villablanca Garden Beach Hotel, El Presidente, December 2006, Paul Selden, Portage, MI. Experience: 100-250 dives. Vis.: 40-60 feet. Water: 72-85 F, strong to no current, waves calm to moderate. Many interesting swim-throughs, the shallow reefs were filled with abundant fish, and the walls were a mural of sponges and coral. Current was rapid at the VillaBlanca Wall, sweeping me unexpectedly downward toward the edge of the 3000 ft. deep abyss (before I added air to my BCD) at one point. At dive's end I hung on to the huge chain to the VillaBlanca buoy and was blown horizontally like a flag in a strong breeze. Papa Hog's was great. Their small, fast "six packs" allowed small groups of like-minded divers to go to locations we could request by name. Dive masters were patient with photographers, permitting bottom times based on individual profiles. They picked me up at El Presidente after we switched hotels (for variety's sake, not from dissatisfaction). Papa Hog's is next to the Villablanca Hotel, and it runs its own café, which serves delicious burgers. Freshwater camera buckets on all boats. The Villablanca has large, clean rooms, a great value. Ours had a balcony overlooking the ocean, a refrigerator, and plenty of purified drinking water. It was close enough to walk into San Miguel and back for dinners. The sidewalks were wide to/from the Villablanca, and the entire feeling was one of safety even when after dark. Our El Presidente hotel room was beautiful (three separate showers!), with a great beach, and swim ladders to assist swimmers/snorkelers when entering and exiting over the coral. They're too far from town to comfortably walk, but there are wonderful restaurants on the property. We rented a car and toured the island, seeing the Mayan ruins at

San Gervasio and the beautiful beaches on the east side. The American breakfast "deal" at the Villablanca was worth it. Bring more cash than you think you will need; the bill can be less for using cash (vs. a credit card) at many smaller shops and restaurants. Be careful if you rent a scooter; we saw many accidents. Some reefs will not always be accessible due to weather and distance. A high-quality safety sausage and signaling devices are imperative. (A pair of experienced Cozumel divers told me they were once left behind in the water for five hours before being rescued.) A reef hook can help you stay in position while using a camera or when waiting for others. One of our dive masters used a coiled lanyard with a clip.

Scuba Club Cozumel, December 2006, Marc and Anne Bressman (mbressman116712@comcast.net), Cherry Hill, NJ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F, calm, choppy, currents. Currents were usually strong, and occasionally extremely strong on experienced boat. Divemaster good at keeping group together in strong currents, and finding unusual and interesting creatures. No diving on Christmas, which we wish we had been told before booking. Boat crew somewhat inexperienced with dive equipment. We had to carry gear off boat, rinse, store, and bring it to the boat next morning. Food generally good, especially Mexican dishes at lunch and breakfast. Rooms clean and comfortable. House reef in front of resort had nothing to see. Went to La Veranda for dinner and enjoyed an excellent meal.

Scuba Club Cozumel, February 2007 David Bader (davbader@aol.com), Norwood, NC. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 F, choppy, currents. Scuba Club is in walking distance to town and the supermarket. The food was excellent and Mario cooks up a mean banana flambé. Rock-hard beds. Some divers bring air mattresses with them to compensate for the beds. Dive operation and dive staff were friendly and helpful and professional in the water. The dive operation is onsite and boats leave from the resort pier every morning at 0830. Dive lockers and rinse tanks are readily available for cleanup. The dive package included unlimited shore diving but with the currents as strong as they were, I did only one shore dive. . There is still much sand covering the coral even at 80 ft. and much of the aquatic life has gone into deeper waters. There were no sightings of seahorses from any of the boats. Large numbers of juvenile fish including spotted drums, angel fish, eels, rays, etc.

Scuba Club Cozumel, April 2007, L. Austin, Fairfax, VA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 Feet. Water: 83 F, calm, currents. Cozumel is reasonably priced and easy to get to and easy to leave. Beware the "travel advisory," aka time-share salesmen, when you disembark. They are everywhere. We only walked into town one afternoon and it was awful. Every day there are numerous cruise ships in port — one day we counted six! Hordes of tourists and cheap shops and overly-aggressive shop employees: just how many Hard Rock Cafes does one place need? Ugh. We stayed at Scuba Cozumel for a week (all-inclusive with 6 days diving, 2 morning dives). We ate all our meals except one at the hotel. The food is adequate. Breakfast and lunch were fine, but dinner was invariably somewhat disappointing. The restaurant (and hotel) staff is helpful. Service was great. The beach party was kind of a bust, although the authentic Mexican buffet

was good. Most divers seem too tired to stay up past ten, although there were a few serious drinkers/partiers at the hotel. We much enjoyed the Mexican architecture at Scuba Cozumel. Lots of tile and white stucco. The rooms are comfy, large, clean, and nobody minds if you hang your wet stuff on the balcony. Yes, the beds are a bit hard, but the showers — ahh! — plenty of hot water. They do not supply you with beach towels, so bring your own. Not that there is a beach, of course, and the pool is barely bigger than a bathtub. I swam laps over the hotel iron shore reef; I also snorkeled there on several occasions and saw a needlefish, scorpion fish, flamingo tongue, juvenile angel, arrow crab, and other species. We were there during a busy week (Easter) so they frequently changed our boat and our DM. The DMs go from wonderful (Geiser!) to good and competent. The boats at Scuba Cozumel are slow. It takes about an hour to get to Palancar, for example. But there is a head on every boat, as well as a cooler filled with water and juice. No food is provided. Good crews. The reefs have sustained some lasting damage. In addition, there are many areas still covered with sand. We also found many of the reefs to have a noticeable paucity of fish. (I specifically noticed this at the famous Palancar sites.) We saw nurse sharks, a reef shark, dolphins, moray eels, monster parrots, lobsters, several splendid toadfish and seahorses. We saw turtles on nearly every dive, and gorgeous queen angelfish. The afternoon dive at Scuba Cozumel (extra) is for the wreck of the Felipe X. You can dive all three levels of the ship (with DM) but, unfortunately, most everything inside has been stripped except for the toilets. There is also a night dive and a combination dusk/night dive; we chose the latter and found it worthwhile. The hotel holds dinner for the divers returning late, which I call accommodating — although we were so tired we would have been happy with a bowl of cereal! Current went from negligible to ripping fun, unless you want to take a photo or swim back to see something you missed!

Scuba Club Cozumel, May 2007, John Crellin (john15237@yahoo.com), Wexford, PA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm, currents. Scuba Club Cozumel is a great resort for divers. The rooms are "Spartan," There are no TVs in the room. Each room has a small fridge and clock radio. The whole room is built out of concrete including the bed frame. The closet and dresser space are made of wood. The mattress is kind of hard but I had no problem sleeping. Outside your room, there is hanging space for your gear. Their hotel is gated and security is visible 24 hours a day. If your spouse does not dive this is not the place to bring them. The boat crews fall over themselves to help you gear up and get in the water. After each dive they come around with water and juice boxes. The divemasters are knowledgeable and try to find and point out critters and other stuff on each dive. I took 2 specialty classes and their Instructor, Raymundo, is fantastic. Each of the specialty dives not only covered the tasks but he made each dive unique. For the night diver specialty we did a different dive each night, even making a night dive to 60 feet and out to the wall. The hotel works as an "all inclusive." However, drinks are not included. Which was fine for me since I don't drink when I am repetitive diving. My bill for soft drinks for the week was $35. Make a trip to the market 3 blocks away on your first day. The food is good, not 5 star but good and filling. Breakfast is

buffet-style but there is plenty to eat. Lunch is off a menu and dinner is held in their dinning room and usually has at least 2 choices of "specials." They also seem to support special diet needs. Off their shore it never gets deeper than 20 feet in the "controlled area" but they put a bunch of "rubble" around the area for fish to hide in. I took pictures of many different types of fish right off their shore. Afternoon and night dives are available almost every day. They had a night dive operating one night for some AOW students and myself doing the night specialty. They welcomed all other guests to dive with the instructors and we ended up with 14 divers and a fun dive. The hotel is a 15-minute walk to town, so if you like a nice walk in 85-degree heat, don't waste $5 on the taxi. You can get cheaper flights into and out of Cancun; just allow 2-1/2 hours to travel on the bus and ferry to Cozumel, and if you travel home from Cancun, plan to arrive 3 hours before your flight. The Cancun airport is a tourist zoo. The Cozumel airport is small and fast to process through. Scuba Club is a outstanding value. The boats have a dry area where you can work on your camera, but they do not have "dedicated" camera tables.

Scuba Club Cozumel, May 2007, Fr. Patrick Resen (presen@juno.com), Morristown, TN. Experience: 141 dives. Vis: 40 to 90 feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm and flat. Conditions at Cozumel continue to improve. I was last there 15 months ago, a couple of months after the heavy hurricane damages. More fish, sand slowly clearing from reef top. Scuba Club is still a great place, with excellent food and wonderful service (except for the $100 stolen from my room by someone with a passkey use the save deposit box!). Dive operation does a fine job but too many time limits and often came up with 900-1200 psi.

Scuba Club Cozumel, June 2007, Robin J. Humphrey (robmarta@tampabay.rr.com), Crystal River, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm. Our family has been coming to Scuba Club Cozumel since the early 80s, when it was the Galapago Inn. Staff turnover has been negligible, and those who have attended to us, both in the diving realm as well as the hotel and restaurant, have become friends. So much so that our youngest daughter, now 33, who was once certified here at age 13, was married at the Hotel this year. The arrangements, including the minister, mariachi band, flowers, food, wedding cake, photographer and decorations made in conjunction with hotel staff and management were flawless, and the event was one that all 30 of us attending will likely remember as a unique, beautiful and moving one. The diving part of the trip was also well managed. The reefs of Coz seem to be coming back after hurricane Wilma. Lots of turtles, a few large grouper and a nurse shark or two were in evidence. Small critters under and around the rubble in front of the hotel make checking out the gear in shallow water more fun. Wireless internet connection is available in and around the hotel. Scuba Club has maintained an excellence, reliability and a quality of service hard to find for over 25 years for our family. UW Photography Comments: With housed digital photography now the norm, wash tanks on the boats are all that is really needed, as the photographer now carries all the tools he/she needs to effectively "do his thing."

Scuba Club Cozumel, June 2007, Bill Dausses (bill@dausses.org), Bartlesville, OK. Experience: 501-1000 dives.

Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, currents. A good dive operator, free shore diving, good food, close to town for nondivers, friendly and helpful staff, traditional Mexican setting, cleanliness, and security. The resort is laid out with courtyards and patios, colorfully decorated tiles, and tropical foliage. The rooms are spacious and set up for divers and wet gear. There are no carpets, phones, or TVs in the room. Beautiful tile is everywhere. There is plenty of hot water and towels, good air conditioning, and private balconies with a mesmerizing ocean view. The grounds include hammocks underneath palapas, shore entry areas to the ocean, and a nice pool. They even have outside lockers for storage of wet items after diving. Yes, the beds are hard, but that is Cozumel. All-inclusive package included three meals a day. The food was really good and tasty. Selections for lunch and dinner included a variety of choices for heavy carnivores, seafood lovers, chicken options, vegetarians and local cuisine. Breakfasts were buffet-style, with choices, both hot and cold, along with local fruits. The in-house dive shop dedicated a boat and crew to us for the entire week. They were safety conscious, totally helpful in gearing up and preparing for dives, and excellent in guiding our dives and showing the variety of marine creatures available. Our group was able to dive in buddy teams and surface as appropriate, not in one mass ascension, as we had heard about other operators. Boat pickups were handled safely and efficiently. Shore diving really was a blast. Spend $4 on a taxi, load up your gear and head south to the lighthouse, then spend a leisure fifty minutes drifting back to the resort. We did it four times and wanted more because of all the critters and marine life to be seen. The boat diving was really good but not great. It is fun to be part of the daily morning parade to the sites, but congestion and dive urgency is irritating after a while. Many sites also are still recovering from Hurricane Wilma two years ago. Sand abounds. There are many fish and critters, and it was fun to discover the local splendid toadfish, found only on the Isla. Still, the diving is best for those used to riding with strong currents and satisfied with a quick glimpse of marine life. The resort is a block south of the local version of Wal-Mart for cheap drinks, snacks, and cerveza. A few blocks further north and the shopping opportunities began. If you wanted a taxi, a scooter, or a rental car, the attendant at the resort gate could arrange it.

Scuba Club Cozumel, September 2007, Bob Murry (rmurry@sbcglobal.net), Hannibal, MO. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. First trip so I don't have anything else- site restaurant was good. Only had 1 of 21 meals I didn't like. Unlimited shore diving, tanks and weights. Great, easy access for shore dives to 25 feet. Lockers to store gear, extra tanks for shore dives. Was impressed with the marine life from my first checkout dive from shore. Saw a wide variety of fish, moray eel, southern stingray, and octopus on shore dives and it only got better from there. Divemasters are good at finding things for you to see. Good dives for beginners and experienced divers. Boats had plenty of space for your gear and tanks. No beaches, but a great waterfront view.

Scuba Du, August 2006, Lawrence L. Bellamy, Dallas, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 83 F, calm, currents, no currents. Everything we asked, they were willing to provide. Blanca is so sweet.

She makes you feel like you are part of the family. Although where we stayed at El Cozumeleno Resort (a beautiful, all-inclusive place with great food), far north of where they usually pick up divers, they willingly accommodated us. The small 6 pack boats were great; clean and comfortable, with twin 150 HP outboards, perfect for drift diving, and gave us an easy back roll into the beautiful turquoise water. Lots of bottled water and fresh fruit (watermelon, pineapple and cantaloupe) was provided at the leisurely surface interval and after the second dive. They even gave us warm, moist, mint-scented terrycloth towels after diving! Both the dive masters and the boat captains were friendly, professional people. They made everyone on the boat feel comfortable and right at home on the reef. The whole operation was safety conscious without being overly protective. On one day of our diving it was just my wife and me in the boat. Our dive master was Alejandro and the captain was David. Santa Rosa Wall was great. The corals and sponges were breathtaking. We saw a barracuda 6 or 7 feet long. Our second dive of the day was on Paradise Reef. It was a shallow dive (45 feet) but it had so many small creatures that it was fascinating. Here we also saw two splendid toad fish that our dive master gently coaxed out of hiding. These guys will find almost any creature you want to see if you just ask. Got a photo of a beautiful splendid toad fish.

Scuba Staff Divers, Bahia Suites, January 2007, Michael Judd, Oregon City, OR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. They were disorganized on the office end of things. On more than one occasion the 9:00 AM dive turned into an 11:00 AM dive; expected night or afternoon dives didn't happen; promised calls about whether a particular dive was going to occur never came. A typical experience: the group left the shop a half hour later than scheduled, made the 15-minute drive to the marina in taxis (a first for me), then all sat for another half-hour on the boat while we waited for one more diver. They wanted to get every last diver they could, and waited until the last minute to decide whether to go ahead with a dive or not. As a result, the "schedule" changed every day, often at the last minute. Part of this was a natural result of the clientele to which they cater, largely single day divers from the Yucatan mainland or the cruise boats. Many of these are inexperienced, which leads to the second problem: mostly short and shallow dives. On almost every dive we had people with a dozen dives or less, and the sites, times and depths were chosen accordingly. This got boring, especially since many of the shallower sites had extensive sand cover and other damage from Hurricane Wilma. The divemasters did do a good job of holding hands with the neophytes. They also were good at pointing things. Boats were small and fast but wet. Surface intervals were mostly on the boat, with nothing provided but a small bottle of water. It was not a surprise when one diver dropped her weight belt and there were no extra weights on the boat (the rest of us chipped in a couple pounds each and took shallower breaths on our second dives). Stayed at the Bahia Suites in "downtown" San Miguel. Big, clean, no frills room with a little kitchen and balcony (side street) for about $50 per night. Good basic accommodation if you like the buzz of the city.

Sea Robin Cozumel, Fiesta Americana Cozumel, August 2007, Karen Driskill (kdriskill63@yahoo.com), Torrance,

CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm, choppy, currents. We first met one of the owners and dive master, Eduardo Canche, at the 2007 Long Beach Scuba show. There were 5 divers in our group, 2 were DMs, 2 were AOW, and 1 was a beginner. Reservations were a simple process via email and local telephone calls. The Ballena, capable of holding 12 divers, is a small, fast, covered boat outfitted with all the standard emergency equipment, radio, and GPS. Most days we had only 5 divers on the boat. Dives are started in the back roll position but one of our divers (due to back issues) required an in-the-water setup, which was no problem for the outstanding Captain Choco and DM Eduardo. Cold water and snacks are provided for each surface interval. The crew is customer-oriented, even asking us if there were any snacks, in particular, we wanted for the next day. Ample wet and dry storage is available so that the towel you need for drying off stays dry. SI locations are chosen with the divers input. Our locations were diverse, including a deserted beach, a dock, kicking back on the boat or snorkeling around looking for the ubiquitous starfish or the elusive black tip shark near the south end lagoon. Choco, Eduardo, and Allen are all first rate. Eduardos knowledge of both on- and off-the-map dive sites insured each dive was a great experience. He was also vigilant of the beginner diver in our group, which was a great comfort to his mom. We brought our own gear but rental gear is available upon request. Allen wanted to meet us on the day of our arrival at our hotel and pick up our gear, but we convinced him that we would schlep it down to the dock in the morning. The first day we hauled our gear to the boat; after that we did not have to touch or clean it for the entire trip. Each morning, afternoon, and/or evening the boat would pull up (at our specified time) with all our gear clean, dry, and set up for our next dive adventure. Forgive the term, but we call this "Gucci Diving." Pretty much all we brought was a dry towel and cameras. We picked the dive sites daily and were able to dive our computers. Steel tanks were provided for the two big guys; the rest of us dove aluminum 80s. As a bonus, we also crossed the channel for a Tortuga Reef dive. Sea Robin Cozumel ended our dive vacation by cleaning, drying, and delivering our dive gear back to hotel the next day.

Huatulco

Hurricane Divers, Las Brias Oaxaca, February 2007, Suzi Mein (suzimein@charter.net), Grand Haven, MI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 70 to 73 F, calm. I would suggest a 5 mm or 7 mm wetsuit, or if you are wearing a 3 mm, make sure you have a hood and gloves. It was a little difficult getting back into the boat (small boats with only 6 divers), but the divemaster and boat captain were helpful. We saw a lot more than we expected. We were also happy that all dive gear (minus computer) was included in the price. Only doing one day of diving, we didn't bring our gear except for computer. Lots of starfish and ran into a school of spotted eagle rays. I would also stay in one of the two nearby towns next time. The food in town was delicious and affordable and it was safe to explore. We stayed at the Las Brisas on the western side of Tangolunda Bay. The resort was spread out and there were a lot of stairs, so people with bad knees beware. The hotel provided 24-hour shuttle service in oversized golf carts.

Isla de Mujeres

Coral Scuba Dive Center, Villas Punta Sur, December 2006, Tom Schaefer (ctschaefer@aol.com), Seattle, WA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, surge, currents. Despite its proximity to frenetic Cancun, Isla Mujeres feels a world away with its relaxed ambience and low prices. Coral Scuba Dive Center, one of the oldest dive charter operations on the island, offers two-dive trips each morning for the bargain prices of $41 US for close-in, shallow reef dives or $61 for more distant, deeper adventure dives. Their boats are simple open lanchas with twin outboards. Although each lancha can accommodate up to twelve divers, the maximum number on one trip was seven. When 12 divers showed up, they took two boats out, dividing the group according to experience and interest. The shops rental regulators and BCDs appeared to be in good condition, and their 80 cf aluminum cylinders all displayed up-to-date hydro and VIP markings. We were allowed to store our own gear in the same room where they keep their rentals. The diving is generally easy, although currents can make some dives much more challenging. The deepest of my ten dives was to a sand bottom at 82 feet. Dive sites are blissfully uncrowded, and we rarely shared a site with any other boat. The reefs are not especially impressive but do we regularly encountered schools numbering in the hundreds, dominated by several species of grunts and snappers. About half of our dives included encounters with bigger critters such as reef and nurse sharks, southern stingrays, and hawksbill turtles. We were generally pleased with the dive operation and the personnel: divemasters Enrique and Alvaro, boat captain Gabriel, and assistant dive guide Luis. On the most difficult dive we made, to the sunken naval ship C-58, we experienced unexpectedly strong current. Because the three-man crew spoke only Spanish, and none of the international (American, French, German, and Japanese) group of divers had good Spanish comprehension, we had not received an adequate pre-dive briefing. We were not aware that we would be ascending a buoy line nor that we might have to endure roaring current while doing so. The two least experienced divers got panicky, and one surfaced with an empty cylinder. Both were too shaken to make the second dive of the day. This dive occurred within a few days of a missing-diver incident at the same dive site (but not with Coral Scuba Dive Center, as far as I know), as documented in the February 2007 Undercurrent. All of the dive operators on Isla Mujeres are located in the town at the north end of the island. For anyone seeking night life, Playa Norte is where you will find it. Tino Caudana, owner of Coral Scuba Dive Center, also owns Villas Punta Sur in a much less populous area near the south end. My companion and I shared a clean, comfortable one-bedroom apartment there for a total cost of only about $30 per night. The feel of the place is rustic, remote, and quiet, with no telephone or television. Extensively refurbished since Hurricane Wilma in 2005, it features charming Spanish-style architecture, beautifully landscaped grounds, and views of the Caribbean from the balconies of slightly more expensive second-floor apartments. The apartments have no air conditioning, but large screened windows and good box fans kept us adequately cool during our December visit. Hot water for showers was in short supply. A small swimming pool appeared

well maintained. On an island that is only about five miles long, the distance between the lodging and the diving was not much of an issue. Because we were the only two divers staying there, Tino graciously allowed us to ride into town with him on his morning commute. Tino told us that he hoped to sell both the dive shop and the villas in the near future. UW Photography Comments: Boats do not routinely carry fresh water for cameras. At my request, the crew brought an ice chest filled with fresh water each day. The shop had no facilities for photographers.

Yucatan Peninsula

Akumal Dive Shop, Las Casitas, June 2007, Dennis and Debbie Jacobson, Lakewood, CO. 5 days of 2-tank dives. Akumal Dive Shop is adequate as a facility, but personnel get top marks. The reef was in pristine condition and the dive shop is laid back. Boats are small — 4 to 8 on most runs, and you back roll off. A trip to shore for a change of tank before the second dive is standard. However, the feel is one of letting experienced divers dive, and of guiding, not herding, newer divers. Las Casitas offers 2-bedroom beachfront condos for $100/ day in this off season, and they are 5 star. 2 couples traveling together can have a economical and nice trip. Our foursome are all 50-somethings. Alternative activities include cenote dives, Mayan ruin tours, terrific snorkeling, warm bay water for swimming, and doing nothing. This quaint little village preserves the Mexico of 30 years ago.

Bahia Divers, Xpu-Ha Beach, Bahia Principe Tulum, January 2007, Peter Pola, Stratford, Ont. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 76 to 79 F, calm, choppy. We based our choice on a Chapbook review recommending Stefano Pedroni of Bahia Divers. He runs a small shop on Xpu-Ha Beach and uses small locally owned boats. Entry is by backroll and there is a small ladder for exiting the water. The big plus is that they take no more than 6 divers per boat and we were fortunate to be in a smaller group of 3 divers and one divemaster, which was great. Stefano is a most congenial divemaster and is both highly skilled and safety-conscious. Bahia Divers also offers guided snorkeling tours, cavern and cave dives. The business end of the operation is handled by his partner, Clare, who made us most welcome also. Bahia Divers took us to some of the better dive sites. Bahia Principe Tulum, a 5 star all-inclusive resort, was first rate in accommodation and food. Bahia Divers will pick up/drop off at area hotels. Note that the resort dive shop is also called Bahia Divers but is not the one run by Stefano and Clare.

Buceo Cyan Ha, Shangri La Caribe, July 2006, Justin (jrk78@comcast.net), Arvada, CO. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, currents. Overall, very good dive operation and resort. Knowledgeable staff and dive masters. Two dives per day, one at 9 am and one at 11 am. Night dives on request. Turtles and barracuda on every dive. Bull sharks have been spotted during the spring months, so we were a little late. Highlight of the trip was encountering school of 50-60 large tarpon. Food was above average. Breakfast and dinner were inclusive. Resort is located close to town, which was convenient for shopping and any non-divers.

Go Cenotes, February 2007, David N Scarborough (david@wan2dive.com), Douglasville, GA. Experience: 251-500

dives. Water: choppy. Wonderful dive operation. Friendly people. Made few days reef diving and four days of Cenote Diving. UW Photography Comments: Watch other divers about rinsing mask in camera bucket — locals do not understand why!

Hotel Faro Viejo, July 2007, Bob Speir (bobfmdc@yahoo.com), Falls Church, VA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 8 to 15 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. After 50 yards swimming as hard as I could, tucked behind the mouth of a 30-foot whale shark, I conceded that he could indeed out-swim me. I saw another coming right at me, swimming in formation with a giant manta with a 10-foot wing span. Three-day trip to Holbox — it was the standard format for every turn in the water for each of two three-hour sessions with the sharks and their friends. Most of the time, we were in the midst of as many as 20 whale sharks and 5 to 10 giant mantas feeding on the plankton blooms, with a few pods of dolphins nearby, attracted, I guess, by schools of bar jacks mixed in. It was not uncommon to get off one shark and see three more coming at you, or see a manta actually flopping a wing on an approaching whale shark. The whale shark spot is about a 25-mile boat ride from Holbox — 60-90 minutes in the fast boats that dock at the Holbox pier. The boat operators enforce the rules: two snorkelers in the water at a time with a guide, no touching the sharks, no diving beneath them and no flash pictures. The sharks and mantas are on top of the water feeding and the visibility is only 8-15 feet due to the plankton. Flashes are not useful due to the particle matter in the water, but I got a lot of good pictures without one. The logistics of our trip were, for the most part, arranged by René, owner of the Hotel Faro Viejo in Holbox (see their website) where we stayed. René had a nice van meet us at the Cancun Airport and transport us to Chiquila (2 hour ride), where we caught a ferry for the 6-mile trip to Holbox. From there, golf cart taxis moved people and luggage over the sand streets to the beachfront hotel. René took care of all transportation for one fee, although tips to drivers are in order. He also arranged the shark trips. Lunch and drinks on the boat were included in the price. The hotel is probably the nicest in Holbox — sort of like a second- or third-tier hotel in Cozumel. Clean, A/C in the bedrooms, TV, no bugs, sand courtyard and porch on 1st-floor rooms, etc. Good restaurant with breakfast included with the rooms, although if you are going to see the sharks, you may miss it. René also arranges one-day trips departing from locations as far away as Cozumel. The cost from Cozumel now is about $180p/p. You will spend at least 8 hours traveling to and from Holbox and 2-3 hours with the sharks. We took the more leisurely route and spent two nights at the Hotel Faro Viejo . Our total cost, excluding meals at night and drinks, was roughly $400 p/p, or about what it would have cost for two single-day trips.

Pro Dive, Reef Club Playacar, Villa Defines, August 2007, Paul Selden, Portage, MI. Experience: 100-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 150+ feet. Water: 78 to -94 F, calm to 1-foot waves; no to moderate current. This seven-day whirlwind dive trip, billed as the Best of Mexico, more than lived up to its name. Its mix of diving and snorkeling was perfect for my wife (a snorkeler) and me. The trip was organized state-side by Sub-Aquatic Sports & Service (Battle Creek, MI) and carried out in Mexico by Pro Dive of Playa del Carmen. The group was led by the energetic and positive

Rick Sass; Pro Dives divemasters accompanying our groups were on-time, professional and friendly. While in the Playa del Carmen area, we did our checkout dives on two of the most popular reefs, Tortugas and Barracuda. While visibility was limited to 50-70 feet by the abundance of spawn and plankton, it was clear enough to see many sea turtles, reef fish, and awesome large schools of tarpon. Water was approximately 86 F no matter what depth, with light currents offering effortless drift diving. Next was a pair of classic cenote dives at Chac-Mool. Visibility in the crystal-clear fresh water was like in the open air at night (viz. est. 150+ feet). Kukulkan cavern offered the chance to experience the visibility gradients of the halocline, while Little Brother cavern allowed us to surface in an air-filled underground cavern, the roof of which was pierced by columns of roots of trees leading into the water. The overall feeling was eerie and hauntingly beautiful, especially when looking up into the green jungles canopied, sun-lit openings framed by the dark cavern walls from the depths below. Dive day three took the group over to Cozumel on a comfortable high-speed ferry where the Pro Dive folks met us at the ferry dock with their own boat to take us to two classic Cozumel drive dive sites (viz. approx. 75 ft; water temp mid 90s at surface, 86 at depth). Palancar Horseshoe was impressive, with colorful towering columns of coral reaching from the depths upward. Santa Rosa Wall offered a living tapestry of coral and fish as we were swept along by the current. The next day was a long drive along two-lane roads from Playa del Carmen through the countryside to the ferry taking us to Isla Holbox. The next two mornings we swam alongside whale sharks passing by during their annual migration. We spotted 10 of them in the vicinity of our boat on the first morning. Protocol meant that only snorkeling (with mask and fins) was allowed, with just two swimmers in the water (plus a guide) at a time. The fish appear to be moving at a leisurely pace as they surface feed with open mouths on the plankton-rich waters, but in fact they are gliding along faster than all but the fittest of swimmers. The boat would position ahead of the whale shark. Upon the signal, the snorkelers would hit the water and swim toward and alongside of the fish as long as human endurance would permit. Visibility in the plankton filled green water was limited to 20-25 feet, enough to allow clear sighting and pictures (no flash allowed) of these majestic 15- to 20-foot-long spotted creatures. Accommodations while in Playa del Carmen were at the ocean front, all-inclusive, beautifully landscaped Reef Club Playacar. Rooms were clean and air-conditioned, the drinks bottomless, food decent, and staff friendly and helpful. On Holbox we stayed in individual, colorful thatched bungalows at the ecologically friendly Villa Defines. Bug spray defeated the ever-present no-see-ums, but the ceiling fans in the un-air-conditioned rooms were no match for the 90+ F heat of the night and their breeze was considerably tempered by the mosquito netting over the beds. Sleep was restless but eyes were opened each morning with the aid of in-room coffee makers and freshly ground coffee. Amazingly, the in-room eco-baños were odorless. Tips for this trip are fairly simple. Be sure to bring a top quality safety sausage with line for all dives in Playa del Carmen and Cozumel where drift diving is the rule and separation from your group and boat is an ever-present possibility. To reduce the amount of

juggling between lights and camera in the cenotes, I tightly attached my large dive light to my camera tray with thick rubber bands to shoot whatever was illuminated by my dive light. To extend your time swimming with whale sharks, get as aerobically fit as possible before the trip. Boats in Holbox didn'tt have camera buckets; to avoid fogging, make sure yours is not set in the sun. Take pesos to Holbox for dive tips, local meals/drinks, and shopping; credit cards and USD were not commonly accepted (except at our hotel at checkout).

XTC Dive Center, Hotel Tierra Maya, November 2006, Francis and Deb Bollag (debbollag@earthlink.net), New Rochelle, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 75 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, choppy. Strong winds blew every plan to visit Banco Chinchorro. XTC Dive was sympathetic, rescheduled the trip daily and took us on some fantastic local dives. The short boat ride to the sites was a bit cool and sometimes rough. The diving was spectacular, with max. bottom times. Outstanding sites were La Poza, packed with exciting finds, and La Chimenea, a deep, colorful gorge. We saw lots of eagle rays, tarpon, groupers and cero and were checked out by four dolphins at depth and a friendly brown booby at the surface. XTC uses its small boat for local diving. The boat is open and holds four tanks and a captain. DMs and boat captains are experienced and knowledgeable. Entry is by backward roll and exit is by ladder. All dives are drifts. The boat returns to the shop's dock after each dive. Since our first dives had heavy profiles, we took extra-long SIs to allow for more bottom time on our second tanks, which started at around 1 pm. XTC rinses and securely stores equipment. They prefer that divers retrieve and set up their own gear, which the shop staff delivers and loads onto the boat. The beachfront Hotel Tierra Maya is, nice. It offers air conditioning and the rate includes breakfast at the onsite restaurant. Due to the constant ocean breeze, we didn't need the AC. The restaurant is good — too much food actually — and serves as one of the town's gathering places so we were able to learn from the locals. Our room was huge and contained three beds and a hammock, a tiled food-prep counter with fridge and bottled water, dining table and 4 chairs, large storage area with safe-deposit box and loaner books, bathroom with shower and a large patio with a table and chairs. All rooms face the ocean. The hotel also has a good snorkeling beach often visited by turtles, a dock and plenty of outdoor seating areas for reading, relaxing or visiting with other guests. They also have kayaks and other gear for guests. You will receive a discount on diving and other services at XTC if you book lodging with bill-in-tulsa.com. Be sure to arrive in Xcalak with a full tank of gas, insect repellent and some groceries. There's a market in town but it might not have what you want and the nearest city is almost two hours away. Have dinner at the Leaky Palapa for terrific food and company.

MONTSERRAT

Green Monkey, Bunkum Beach House, August 2007, Brian Gibson (gibson1525@gmail.com), Springfield, MO. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 25 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy, no currents. We were scheduled to dive with Sea Wolf diving because of their good correspondence via email. However, upon arriving, we discovered that they had pulled their boat out of the water for the hurricane and didn't