

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't 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

plan on putting it back in for a few days. Green Monkey dive shop was happy to accommodate us. We were in the water within a few hours of landing on the island. (Sea Wolf was even a little confrontational after learning we had decided to dive with Green Monkey, but the Green Monkey boat is much better suited for diving). The water was murky, but Troy at Green Monkey was up-front that the visibility wouldn't be good. We dove for three days. The first two the visibility was poor, but on the third day it cleared up to close to normal. Even with limited visibility we had great diving and on the last day the diving was fantastic. Due to the lack of tourists, the reefs are in perfect condition and the wildlife is not used to human interaction. We saw a pair of 5' stingrays that were content to sit and watch while I was swimming around. I live in Dominica and am used to the smaller fish; compared to Dominica, the fish were larger. Many larger parrot and trigger fish much bigger than the ones I see in Dominica. I didn't see a single trap but I was amazed by the dive guide trying to catch a large lobster we saw for dinner. Troy and Melody run a good operation. They have a good, clean boat and shop. We took our own gear, but our friend rented gear and it was well maintained and in good working order. Our dive guide, Ned, was great, showing us all kinds of critters. We stayed at Bunkum Beach House, owned and operated by Sun. The rooms were large and clean and the pool was a great way to spend the afternoon. She even bought breakfast for us when she found out that we were delayed, because all the grocery stores are closed on Sundays. There are lots of other activities on Montserrat like hiking and the Montserrat Volcano Observatory, where you can get a good look at the

active volcano. Minibuses run regularly and will get you pretty much anywhere you need to go. We used a taxi driver named Winston, a former police commissioner knowledgeable about the island. We were the only tourists on the island.

NICARAGUA

Corn Island

Casa Iguana, December 2006, Wayne Warren-Angelucci (wayne.warren@gmail.com), Rancho Santa Fe, CA.

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 40 Feet. Water: 85 F, choppy. Windy and unsettled. Water choppy and stirred up since diving is shallow at Little Corn Island. Casa Iguana under new management —, basic. Felt that they should be charging less for their accommodations — they were overpriced compared to their competition. Dive Little Corn is owned by Casa Iguana owners. Seemed well run, but hard to tell since there were not many divers in December. Week before I arrived, the 45-minute open 30' 'ferry' from Big Corn Island was not able to run for 6 days because of rough seas. I was booked for 9 days but left after 4 because of poor diving conditions. Would not return to Little Corn because it's too shallow. However, the natives there were friendly.

Casa Iguana Resort, February 2007, Kyle O'Malley, Le Center, MN.

Experience: 140 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 feet. Water: 80 F, choppy. Booked the trip on articles from Undercurrent. Those past reports were accurate. Casa Iguana is an inexpensive, no luxuries "eco-lodge" on a fairly remote island on the Caribbean side of Nicaragua. "The cabanas are tin-roofed sheds on raised/stilt floors