

made the diving exciting and enjoyable. One of them (Eddy, Nestor, or Sasha) always went on the dive to point out the critters, most of which I probably would never have found. Although you can dive your own profile, I found it worthwhile to follow them. Miss Candy prepared excellent meals and snacks. A continental breakfast was available at 6:30, with a hot breakfast served at 7:00. Fruit was always available. Lunches included a delicious homemade soup and a make-your-own sandwich or pasta. Dinners were a meat or fish dish followed by a unique desert. Some meals were barbequed and served on the sun deck. Morning snacks (between dives) were usually brownies, cookies, or muffins. Afternoon snacks were usually chicken wings, conch fritters, and the like. Hot cocoa was served after each night dive. The crew served wine and cheese to the guests the last night (Friday) aboard. John kept the rooms clean and tidy. The first dive of the day was at 8:00 A.M., followed by a mid-morning dive about 10:30. The first afternoon dive was about 2:00, and the second afternoon dive about 4:30. The night dive was after dinner, usually about 7:30. Utila and Roatan are especially good for macro photography. We also saw scorpion fish, green and spotted moray eels, octopus, turtles, nurse sharks. The Captains log, prepared by one of the divemasters at the end of each trip and posted on www.aggressor.com, provides a detailed description of each days diving during the week. Utila Aggressor is an excellent value.

Utila Aggressor, September 2007, Danee Hubbs, Seattle, WA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. Captain Eddy, Nestor and Sasha, were a delight. When we didn't particularly enthuse over a site, Captain Eddy was

willing to find us a better spot unfailing cheerfulness. Whichever of the crew dove with us, and often 2 went with us, they stayed with us the entire dive, pointing out the tiniest little critters. Nestor even found us a southern stargazer, which gave him a nasty shock. Talk about taking one for the team! The cabins were clean and comfortable, though the showers are a bit tight. Dive platform has 2 hot water showers. Beds were comfortable. When we had trouble during the night with the A/C, someone from the island came out in a boat to get it fixed. Miss Candy and John provided us with enough food to keep us going and the quality was high. UW Photography Comments: The crew consistently found good shots for me and helped me get into position frequently. They showed me a lot about my camera that I hadn't known before since this was only the second trip I had used it.

Utila Aggressor, September 2007, Gabriel I. Peñagaricano (guigo34@hotmail.com), Guaynabo, PR. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy. Even though the trip was cut short by the arrival of hurricane Felix, the facilities were fine. The crew was unparalleled in its attention and competence, and one would be hard put to find a better skipper than Captain Eddie. The hurricane evacuation was expertly managed and the owner of the vessel, Troy Bodden, attended to the transportation of all 12 passengers from Utila to the mainland.

SABA/ST. EUSTATIUS/ ST. KITTS

Caribbean Explorer II, December 2006, David McDougall (dmcdougall@ncbb.net), Newcastle, CA. Experience:

251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, choppy, surge. Dive crew were excellent, very accommodating and helpful. Cooking was phenomenal, Tony (the chef) was outstanding, catering for the several vegans/vegetarians onboard. Dive briefings were professional and informative. Accommodations were small but adequate. Macro life was a little limited. State of the reefs in some areas was quite poor. Captain Ian Marriot was excellent.

Caribbean Explorer II, May 2007, Russell Lido (rlido@comcast.net), Sterling Hts., MI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy. Total of 27 dives offered. Most coral was in good condition, especially the marine park at St Eustatius. Saba dive sites are deeper but also nice. Most of marine life Macro type. easy diving. The afternoon land tours of each island were informative, one of the high points of the trip. The ship's crew was in transition so many of them are gone now. They were helpful but lacked the enthusiasm were used to from other live-aboards. The cabins were clean and kept up daily. The food was just ordinary menu items, nothing to write home about. Maybe the new cook will be better. Overall, it was a good trip. The boats underwater camera was out of order. Take your own camera if you want UWPs. They were supposed to send me some stock video of the dive sites but they never did. They wouldn't even answer my e-mails.

Caribbean Explorer II, August 2007, L. Smith, Williamstown, MA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, currents, no currents. Room and bed comfortable, food good — great chef! Plenty of hot fresh water for rinsing and showering including a shower on the dive deck. A/C a bit aggressive,

not adjustable, but not causing rain in the room, either. Quick tank refills between dives. Hot water poured down suit, hot towels, and hot chocolate after night dives were nice. Daytime current tended to quiet down at night, making night dives much easier. Boat motion fairly minimal and journey times usually quite short except for transit between St. Maarten and Saba. A good mix of wreck and reef diving — walls and pinnacle at Saba are particularly impressive. Good dive briefings helped with navigating the sites. Guided dives always an option for each dive. Smokers were permitted on both bow and stern, which engulfed the whole boat in the stench of tobacco smoke when the smokers were upwind (usually the bow). Yuck. The dive sites tended to be deep — not good for repetitive air profiles, particularly with a fairly tight dive schedule. Might want to do a nitrox course at home before booking this trip (can do onboard, but it's a waste of vacation time). A diver using their rental gear experienced an inflator hose failure. Also seemed to have received incomplete instruction on use of rented computer — got it locked out. We had not thought to bring camera cable to connect to their TV but one of the staff offered the chance to see our pictures on his own computer. Dives at Statia are all “guided dives” to comply with Statian marine park rules — not so good for diving at own pace and apart from the crowd. Statian marine park ranger a great guy — aware of what was going on. UW Photography Comments: Good setup with two dedicated camera buckets and a dedicated camera table with LP air hose and camera-only towels. Charging station near camera table. The position of the mask rinse buckets was such that some slop of mask soap into camera buckets seemed likely. The crew tended to pile all the cameras into

one bucket most of the time rather than distributing them between buckets.

TURKS AND CAICOS

Turks and Caicos Aggressor II, December 2006, Mark Tarczynski (to_da_moon@hotmail.com), Los Angeles, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 125 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Went on the Turks and Caicos Aggressor II for two weeks back-to-back. The weather was so good that during the Christmas week we were able to sail way out to West Sand Spit ... a dive site rarely visited ... the vis was 80 to 100 feet! Designed and built from the hull up by Captain Piers Van Der Walt, the T&C Aggressor II has every modern convenience a diver would want in a live-aboard dive ship. Yeah ... it's a little more expensive than other live-aboards, but it's worth every penny. Piers Van Der Walt is Owner, Designer, and Captain of the ship. If I'm not mistaken, there's a lot of pride-of-ownership visible in this operation! I've been on the T&C Aggressor for four weeks over the past two years. I marvel at Piers' ability to always have the best crews sailing the Caribbean.

Turks and Caicos Explorer, February 2007, T Griffin (trasea@gmail.com), Gaithersburg, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, choppy. 4 people were delayed due to weather and didn't arrive until the second day. The TCEII was captained by Jean-Francois, also known as JF, with an easy-going but hard-working manner that puts you at ease and gets the job done. The captain worked it out for us to stay at the dive site while they sent the tender to retrieve the 4 latecomers We did dive the same site all day, but that was better than not diving.

The boat's cabins are reasonably sized, with private bathrooms; there are queen or double beds in each room, and two suites upstairs. The dive deck itself was fairly roomy, although the actual setup areas was a little cramped. Fortunately, divers took turns in gearing up. The dive briefings were detailed: where to go, what to look for. The dive staff was also above average. A DM would be on every dive, and would lead a dive if you requested. Sometimes that is good, because trying to find that one blue anemone on that wall of coral can be difficult! Most of the dive sites were similar -type walls. West Sand Spit was pristine. A lone dolphin joined us for an incredible adventure. Later that day, we spotted whales and had an afternoon of whale watching from the boat. The Smoke Stacks — named for the huge barrel sponges found along the dive. Lush soft coral forest abounded on this drift dive. The food on board was average — no complaints here. We don't eat red meat, so the chef always had a separate plate prepared for us. There were mechanical problems, but we chose not to let it bother us and enjoyed our vacation for what we had. Departing TC, we chose a mid-afternoon flight, hoping to explore the town, but there really isn't anything to explore, and the boat is a long way from anywhere, it makes no sense to delay the departure. Take the first flight of the day — not as many people, no lines at security. UW Photography Comments: Has a separate table for photography, including a huge rinse tank for camera use only. We were able to leave our camera in the tank, and were lucky to discover a small leak before we took it down to depth.

Turks and Caicos Explorer II, April 2007, Eric Ault (EAult@comcast.net), Wheaton, IL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to