

\$50,000. And planes have been known to sit on the runway until they receive cold, hard cash—or a payment guarantee they're willing to rely on. But if you're not a member of DAN, or if you are unsure if your medical insurance will cover chamber treatments (chambers run in the \$375 an hour range—but often repeat treatments are necessary) and feel you need supplemental coverage, which policy is best? Again, that depends on your needs, but DAN's Master Plan has several obvious strengths. Its lack of depth

limitations is certainly one. This might not seem terribly important to recreational divers who have no plans to dive below 120', but remember that the nature of emergencies is that they wreak havoc with the best-laid plans. For example, what if a diver is caught in a downcurrent, attempts to rescue a buddy who has gone too deep, or simply passes out and sinks? In these cases, DAN's Master Plan would provide coverage.

DAN's Master Plan has other

features that make me lean in its direction. It's the only plan providing coverage for deeper, technical dives, it has adequate financial limits (\$100,000 for medical evacuation and \$125,000 for decompression illness and in-water injuries), and it is backed by an A+ rated company. Of course, if your health insurance already provides some benefits, you may wish to go with a smaller, backup plan like DAN's Standard, PADI'S Silver, or DSI's mix-and-match policies.

Travelin' Divers Update

What to watch for . . . and watch out for

As we review our readers' comments, talk with our writers, and conduct our own research, we're taken by how much little things count in making a good dive trip. At home, for example, one can expect battles over the thermostat between kids and parents, but you'd better watch out when it happens on a live-aboard.

Chuck and Janie Garrett (Warrenton VA), who joined the *Bay Island Aggressor II* for a December cruise in Belize, told us that the captain "insisted on maintaining a 65-degree thermostat setting for all enclosed areas of the boat. Our direct complaints that we were freezing fell on deaf ears, as did the not-so-subtle picture of his passengers wearing double and triple T-shirts as well as anything else that we may have had in our belongings. His intransigence was, and is, unfathomable." (800-348-2628 or 504-385-2628)

That's not all. Here comes that age-old live-aboard complaint, (which seems more common to

Aggressors than other vessels): passengers not only resent the pressure for 15% tips, but are absolutely infuriated, after they have begrudgingly coughed up those tips, by the ship's policy of making them unwelcome on the boat after 8 a.m. Saturday morning, as well as by the rude way that policy is enforced.

Also watch out for one of those other little things that show up down **Honduras** way: no-see-ums. Reader Bruce Gillespie, a well-traveled diver from Houston, writes that "as I type this memo to you I am scratching all of the sand flea, mosquito, and no-see-um bites." Some people swear by Avon's Skin So Soft, but bring along a DEET product.

While his multiple bites certainly got his attention, Gillespie was really writing to comment on **Fantasy Island**. "We purchased an upgrade (deluxe room) package (\$200 more), but it turned out that the standard rooms had essentially

the same view: trees and shrubbery with the ocean barely visible. For a few square feet more, the value received for the cost incurred is minimal and the upgrade, therefore, is inadvisable."

While in Honduras, Kevin Frazer (LeClaire IA) tells us that he was glad he kissed off the *Wind Dancer's* last night's meal at Anthony's Key. "Go to new the restaurant, "The Iguana," run by a recent Spanish émigré: outstanding."

Big things are important for divers, too, and, as we reported in our feature article this month, they were missing along the Pacific Coast this winter. Aboard the *Galapagos Aggressor* in January, Lois Zarka (Brooklyn NY) says "El Niño reigned. Very few big things in water. Sharks more than 150 ft. down." Regarding El Niño, the waters of Peru, which are used as a benchmark, were nine degrees warmer than usual this winter, but by early April the differential was only three degrees. Hopefully, the big fish will be returning soon. (800-348-2628 or 504-385-2628)

Of course, the big things are still in **Palau**, but watch out for that Continental cattle run (via

Welcome to the Caribbean Sea Lice Season

Every year more than one *Undercurrent* reader writes us about painful days on Little Cayman or misery in the Florida Keys. The problem -- called Sea Bather's Eruption -- is a nasty rash under their wetsuit or skins, leading to an itch so severe it's

almost enough to drive them crazy. The season? March to August.

For decades, an old wives' tale warned Bahamians against ocean swimming between Mother's Day and Father's Day because of the nasties. Yet it wasn't until 1992 that marine biologists at the University of Miami determined that the cause was not "sea lice" but stinging cells called nematocysts, most of which come from the larva of thimble jellyfish.

According to Boca Raton Community hospital researchers Mary T. Russell, R.N., and Robert S. Tomchik, M.D., the organism, which looks like a speck of finely-ground pepper, floats near the surface and gets "netted" by wetsuits, skins, and bathing suits. Friction between the apparel and the skin caused by pulling off a wetsuit, simply sitting down, or even rinsing with fresh water with your suit still on can trigger the nematocysts to fire.

It may take up to twenty-four hours to feel the first prickling sensation, which can be followed by intense itching, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, muscle spasms, a sense of malaise, and trouble sleeping.

To treat, apply an antihistamine, such diphenhydramine hydrochloride, followed by 0.5% hydrocortisone cream. DAN suggests beginning with a rinse of vinegar or rubbing alcohol and notes that calamine lotion may be soothing.

Unfortunately, the only way you'll know that the larva are present is by observing an eruption in one of your fellow divers. To make sure that first-erupting diver isn't you, Russell and Tomchik recommend you slip out of your dive apparel as soon as possible, then shower off loose larvae. If you must wear your suit again, try to wash it out with detergent and heat dry it. Air-dried nematocysts still have the ability to fire.

Honolulu and Guam) that runs \$1700 and requires a hotel layover. Check for better deals, says Jeff Davis, who purchased a discounted fare (\$771) on Philippine Airlines' nonstop SFO to Manila from Travelfast International in SFO and Air Micronesia from Manila to Palau (\$450). "We left SFO at 11:30 p.m. I slept the whole flight and arrived in Manila at 6 a.m. The flight from Manila to Koror left at 10 a.m. and took two hours, and I arrived fresh." Smart guy.

Last June, you may recall, we jumped all over the **Cousteau Fiji Resort** as overhyped, both because the food was lousy and because they failed to attend to details. Some of our readers thought we were off the mark, but Mike Steffenson (Davenport IA), who was there in November, said he learned that our "description of the situation was accurate before Ben and Verena Burgoon arrived on the scene as the new managers to clean up the mess. . . The garden bures were spectacu-

larly beautiful and serviced twice a day. The employees speak to you by name! The food was wonderful and the service and personal accommodations by the kitchen and service staff were first-class by any standard; I was surprised that only 20% of the resort's guests were divers and that the owners were focusing on eco-tourists rather than divers. Nevertheless, we were quite satisfied with the dive operation and had nothing but good experiences." (800-246-3454 or 415-788-0150)

A full-service dive shop in **Cozumel**? That's what Sheila McIntyre of Innerspace Divers (Brunswick OH) calls **Dive Paradise**. "One of my divemasters wanted to renew his marriage vows, and he wanted to find a gold angel pin for his wife and keep it a surprise! Renee Applegate mobilized her crew; they found a jeweler who made the pin and made arrangements with a local English-speaking priest to conduct the ceremony and kept it secret until the couple arrived at the church. My hat is off to Applegate and her caring staff." (011-52-987-21007)

But, if you're visiting Cozumel, watch out for those "ceiling-mounted vegomatics that pass for fans at the **Scuba Club Galapago**." Reader Paul Ramer said while the "rooms are perfectly designed for accommodating piles of wet dive gear, those steel-bladed beasts are mounted low enough so that anyone over 5' 8" can easily touch the blades. I learned the hard way by getting a deep gash in my thumb while changing my shirt."

And how about that romantic **Wave Dancer** crew in Belize? At their standard Thursday night dinner of lobster, steak, and

baked Alaska, the staff greeted Donna and Todd Teach (Columbus OH) with a big "Happy Anniversary" banner. The couple said that "the crew all signed a lovely anniversary card (with terrific pointers for a happy marriage). When we arrived back in our cabin, there was a bottle of champagne waiting for us in an ice bucket romantically illuminated by two Cyalumne glow sticks." Aaaahhh. (800-932-6237 or 305-669-9391)

Watch out for too much growth on **Grand Cayman**, which is battling diver traffic jams by adding ten new moorings along the North Wall. It thought it was battling automobile traffic by creating a bypass to channel airport traffic heading from Seven Mile Beach, but reader Mel Murray (Concord NC) reported that southbound traffic "backed up 2 miles during the day, making the trip from the west end an ordeal." Undaunted, Cayman officials have instituted free left turn on red if the road is clear.

Murray, who hasn't been diving at Cayman for seven years, said that "what we saw on the reefs off the west end was terrible. A lot of algae growing all over the coral -- sort of a loose mesh of green-brown material about 1/2 inch thick.

Boat Load of Trouble

1998 for one incident — and the latest involves a 29-year-old crew member diving with an Atlantis rebreather unit, who died near Cod Hole in March. He and three other divers were holding on to the shot line in rough weather. The three other divers surfaced, but he didn't. When his body was recovered it showed no signs of shark attack. In next month's issue we will take a look at the status of rebreathers in the sport diving market.

When the Aussie live-aboard, the *Reef Explorer*, was operated by Kim and Alan Payard, it was legendary for good diving. But the new owners have had a boat load of trouble — see *Undercurrent* January,

(Don Foster's Dive Shop pretty much blew me off when I questioned them about the algae.) Is it a temporary thing, or are the west end reefs beginning to die? Well, reef death is on the way, unless drastic measures against pollution — the major cause of algae growth — are taken. But development is rampant on Grand Cayman and Seven Mile Beach. The venerable Holiday Inn is getting the wrecking ball, soon to be replaced with a Ritz Carlton (and a new nine-hole golf course across the street). Tourism is over-

Goofy Dive Stunts

We've always thought the Brits were the world leaders in goofy dive stunts, and Margaret Scott, from Oldbury, West Midlands, did nothing to dispel that image last March when she celebrated her 72nd birthday by diving to 72 feet to knit a sweater underwater in hope of raising money for the Parkinson's Disease Society.

But I think the Aussies did her one up last year when the Diving Historical Society sponsored an underwater line-dancing contest. As you can imagine, the idea was cooked up in a local pub, but ten people wearing hardhats pulled it off in a Melbourne pool.

Now perhaps the Americans lead the way. When the Arizona Diamondbacks expansion team played their first-ever major league baseball game on March 31, two disk jockeys were on scuba in the centerfield bleachers. You see, this new park has a pool, and they had vowed to stay underwater until the Diamondbacks scored their first run. While they had enough air for 15 innings, they came up for fresh air in the sixth after the first run. P.S.: For only \$4000, you can rent the pool during a game for your own scuba stunts—and take 34 friends. No skinny scuba permitted.

whelming the island's infrastructure, and everything from toothpaste water to toilet water feeds the algae. Quite simply, we divers came to see the beautiful reefs, then showed our gratitude by crapping all over them. We are not optimistic about the Cayman government's ability to save the West End Reefs.

Of course, America's reefs off the Florida Keys are getting the same disrespect, so look for more adventurous diving at Palm Beach, a short distance north of Miami. **Gold Coast Charters**, says Eric Rokicki (Millersville MD), provides a "comfortable boat and places divers in two groups led by divemaster. First dive "Juno Ball" Reef 70 ft. at top and 90 ft. at sand, vis: 40-60 ft., water: 72 degrees. Drift dive. Large eagle ray (at least 10 ft. wingspan), 3 nurse sharks, free swimming moray. I was surprised how good the diving was in mid-January, even though *Undercurrent* said we would be pleasantly surprised." (561-842-6356). ■