

prizes.” While Higgs said that the prize money for the first competition came from local businesses, neither the rules nor the contest organizers confirm

what prizes will be given this year or who will provide them. Winners will probably receive a stamp and be able to point to their name in the website’s list

of winners, but beyond that it remains to be seen whether they will receive much at all.

— the Ombudsman

The Trouble with Going to Bonaire and Curaçao

getting there is the hardest part

Caribbean airlines have been a perennial reader complaint over the years. While TACA is seen by many as the worst, my hunch is that ALM’s service into Bonaire and Curaçao is a strong contender.

Reader Peter Hartlove (Longmont CO) described his trip last year: “ALM, even with an added flight, overbooked by 80 seats. We stood in line 2.5 hrs. the night before to ensure a seat!” As of this February, things apparently hadn’t changed much. Reader Scott (Round Lake Beach IL) described an otherwise great trip, “the only problem being with ALM Airlines. They lost 6 travel trunks with all our equipment in them (for a group of 4). On the return it took almost 90 minutes to check in four people. Then our connecting flight was canceled and we were laid over in Curaçao for five hours.”

While you can’t control late departures, ALM’s Miami Station Manager Glenno Frans says you can help ensure your bags arrive with you. He says that because ALM often does not receive the bags from the connecting carrier in time, you can improve the odds that your bags will arrive with you by allowing at least two hours to make connections. Perhaps, but

for some travelers that would necessitate overnighing in Miami.

There are options. Ann Caradonna of Caradonna Caribbean Tours (800-328-2288 or at www.caradonna.com) says Air Aruba does offer some direct flights. Furthermore, she said, Air Jamaica will be offering regular Saturday-only service to Bonaire through Montego Bay

from most of their gateways, including Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, New York/Newark, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. Connect times will be short with early afternoon Bonaire arrivals.

Another possibility (and a way to use your frequent flyer miles) is to fly a major air carrier into Caracas and then catch a flight to Bonaire or Curaçao; there are several a day. While you may have to overnight in Venezuela, there are hotels near the airport, or a few miles away, at the Sheraton, there’s a nice stretch of beach, and a number of fine seafood restaurants are located nearby.

— J. Q.

Flotsam & Jetsam

NON DIVING/NON SMOKING PILLS: If you’re popping pills to keep from smoking, you may be taking an unnecessary risk while diving, says *Underwater* magazine, a publication for commercial divers. Zyban, Wellbutrin, and Wellbutrin SR cause difficult breathing, shock, and seizures in as many as 3 out of 1000 people, making them risky drugs for divers.

FLYING FIRST CLASS: I’m getting too old and cranky to fly in cramped, stiff, and unpleasant coach-class when my destination is 14 hours away. But I found a

way around the high price of international business and first-class travel — getting two business or first-class tickets for the price of one. It’s one of many benefits available to anyone sporting the American Express Platinum Card, which carries a pricey annual fee of \$300. So where can you get the twofers? Anywhere Air New Zealand goes, any time of year (Fiji and Tonga, for example). Same for Malaysia Airlines, Cathay Pacific to Hong Kong, or Aeromexico. If you don’t care about diving, then Aer Lingus, Air France, Aitalia, Iberia, Lufthansa,