

nothing like the open ocean, calm seas, cold beer, and the frenzy of a wild bite on tuna to start the stories rolling.

So, getting a bit bored with tame fish, group dives, and the same old, same old? Get the adrenaline flowing by leaving the tanks behind and heading out on the *Horizon*, where you can be a hunter and perhaps even hunted.

-- P.I.



Divers Compass: The *Horizon* runs trips to Mexico's Islands from June to November. For seven days figure \$150/days; because of reduced passengers, our trip was \$1,400. The *Horizon* offers 1-3 to California destinations for \$100-\$120/day (food included)... The 10 trips to Mexico this summer have been chartered by various groups, including dive stores; call 858-277-7823 or go to www.horizoncharters.com to see bunk layouts, prices, schedule, biographies of crew, as well as

photos of the boat. The *Horizon* is based in the San Diego harbor, five minutes from the San Diego airport ... they arrange Mexican fishing licenses; its boat does not land in Mexico so passports are not required ... they did check c-cards. Bring all your gear, with backups; including a weightbelt. Nothing but tanks are available on board. Daytime temps were mid 70s, the nights are cool, so long pants, sweat pants, a sweater, a lined windbreaker, even a wool-watch cap can be helpful if the Pacific fog comes in. If you want to bring fish home bring a large ice chest. They freeze the fish on board, and ice and dry ice is available at the landing. You can exchange your fish on the dock for smoked fish (and a fee). Expect to catch albacore, yellowfin and blue-fin tuna, yellowtail, and dorado.

Marine Parks, Arrogant Management, Seven-Mile Beach

Important updates in land-based operations

Changes are ever occurring at diving destinations worldwide. Since we completed the 2001 *Chapbook* we've learned about a few new diving possibilities and changes in operations that might affect your plans. Here's the latest:

The Yap of Luxury

On Yap, located in Micronesia, the new hotel Traders' Ridge is getting great reviews. Teryl and Keith McLane, there in October said, "Traders' Ridge was a million times nicer than Palau Pacific. We were absolutely spoiled and it cost less than Palau's PPR. Our dive buddies got booked into the Manta Ray Bay Hotel and were depressed after they saw where we were staying. Everyone was incredibly nice. When you get back to your room at night not only has your brand new, king-sized bed been turned down, but there are fresh flowers scattered over the bed-

spread." Kirk Faryniasz, Yigo, Guam, says "Traders' Ridge is marvelous and the food fantastic. Wonderful chef. Beyond the Reef is a small

"One night down the road, the festival boomed music so loud that we felt the bass in our beds until 2:40 a.m."

operation but gets you to some of the best dive sites." Less than PPR, but still expensive at \$175/room/night an up. www.tradersridge.com.

Statia Marine Park

When we reviewed the Caribbean's St. Eustatius years ago, we found the diving mediocre, but reports of a rebound of fish, thanks to a protected marine park, ought to merit a revisit. Statia is a small Dutch island between Saba and St. Kitts a

30-minute flight from St. Martin. Terry and Karen Plaxton (W. Bloomfield, MI) there in September stayed at The Old Gin House. "Fourteen rooms, AC, very nice private pool, great dining room and bar, directly across the street from the waterfront. Lots of good healthy coral, fairly good tropicals, tons of lobster and rays. No sharks. Some turtles. Most diving is within the Marine Park so there are large filefish, queen and French angelfish goldentail and spotted morays, flying gumards, spotted drums. Golden Rock Dive Center is very 'user friendly' and a lot of fun. Dive the Blue Bead Hole — if you find a blue bead it's a real treasure and keepsake." www.oldginhouse.com

Bad Deal in Dominica

Two recent comments would surely make me avoid the Castaways Hotel in Dominica. Dave Kasper (Ann Arbor, MI) took a group of

14 and “although we loved Dominica and its diving and hiking we felt ripped. When we booked our rooms in August, the one price for the package was \$997, which included diving, double occupancy lodging in one of their 26 rooms and breakfast/dinner. Al Harris, the longtime owner, recently passed away and left the hotel to his three daughters. When we arrived, we got stuck in the ‘cheap’ rooms, that hadn’t seen maintenance for several months if not years. The Castaways website and their brochures have only one price listed for all 26 rooms and the pictured room is a dreamboat compared with what we got. The photo includes TV and telephone — not for us poor folks in the cheap rooms. Working hot and cold water; not for some of us — the sinks leaked so bad the our cold (and even the hot in the men’s lounge bathroom) had to be turned on and off under the sink. Windows, if you were lucky to have a full complement, rarely could be opened or closed. Our rooms looked like someone had been selling the furniture because each room had a different assortment of furniture; for example ours was missing both night stands.”

“Rodale’s travel special mentioned Castaways had just completed a \$1.5 million renovation and advertised the special dive package of \$997 exclusively. When we complained about the drastic difference between what was advertised and what we received, they told us that the beautifully renovated rooms were \$200 more; we had the \$997 specials. That was the first news of any difference in pricing or rooms! Dinners were only occasionally edible. The tuna sandwich I had for lunch was better than any of the dinners. They gave me french fries that I had seen rejected by a customer (because he hadn’t ordered them) over an hour earlier. One day, we were literally smoked out of our rooms by rubbish being burnt beneath our cheap rooms for about eight hours (could close the win-

Dump Valve Danger in AERIS, Sherwood and Genesis BCDs

models shipped since July of last year. If the problem were to occur in a shoulder dump valve, it would make the BCD impossible to inflate. In a lower dump valve, the BCD would still retain some buoyancy even with the OPV stuck open. A complaint from one diver, who was upset but unharmed when his OPV failed, led to an investigation which uncovered a problem with defective molding on some recently shipped parts.

AERIS, which only recently began offering the BCDs, has issued a safety notice to dealers requiring that all OPVs be updated with new assemblies.

Sherwood and Genesis have gone a step further, initiating full product recall for specific models:

Sherwood Silhouette, Magnum, Avid, Luna, Outback and Freedom models purchased after September 1, 2000 with a serial number between 21280001 and 22010740.

Genesis Cayman, Cobra, Athena and Phantom models purchased after September 1, 2000 with a serial number between 21280001 and 22010740.

Talon and ReCon models purchased after July 15, 2000 with a serial number between 20520001 and 22010740.

Serial numbers appear twice on most BCDs: on the white “IMPORTANT NOTICE” tag, and permanently printed onto the aircell.

If you have a Sherwood or Genesis BCD which is affected, please take it into your Authorized Dealer for a free OPV replacement. For further information, check the companies’ websites: www.diveaeris.com, www.sherwoodscuba.com and www.genesscuba.com.

dows that we had). One night down the road, there was a festival that boomed music so loud that we felt the bass in our beds until 2:40 am, but we couldn’t shut out the sound — windows again.”

John Bockis (Valley Cottage, NY) was there in February and said, “The dive shop at Castaways did everything they could to make our diving pleasurable, but Castaways Hotel has a lot to be desired. If you ask to have hot water, and clean towels, the owner Miss Harris will ask you to leave and go to another hotel because you’re never satisfied! The food was bad the first few days, until they got a different cook who really saved the vacation.”

Red Sea Resorts

We covered diving the Red Sea by boat earlier this year, noting that to get to the better diving go south. The same holds for diving from

Sheico, the San Diego company which manufactures BCDs for a number of scuba equipment lines, has uncovered a potential problem that could cause overpressure valves (OPVs) to stick open in specific

land. Long time *Undercurrent* correspondent Peter Louwense (Gibelhof, Switzerland), has dived the Red Sea for 10 years and has this tip. “With more than 130 hotels in Hurghada, diving has exploded to an extent that makes diving some previously unmatched reefs virtually impossible, due to the number of dive boats. Soma Bay, South of Hurghada and North of Safaga, opened last year. The Sheraton, one of two hotels in operation, is absolutely first class. Operations from Safaga also visited most sites, with sometimes six boats at one reef. Dive boats usually carry up to 20 divers, have no facilities for photographers and lack navigational equipment. Dive World is well organized. The dive instructors (one German, one Italian) competent. We had problems with an Egyptian dive-master who planned his dives according to his 24-year-old endurance and air consumption, which was considerably different from my 63-year-old values.

We reneged on the guided dives and went our own way. The weather was excellent, as it usually is in October — temp. in 90s, water temp. about 80° F. Some sites are close to shore and remarkable for the variety of fish life. Some are 1.5 hours by boat — always East, and with prevailing winds from the North that can make for a lot of seasickness! These were excellent, with healthy corals, coral fish and several sharks (one hammerhead). We also dove the wreck of the Salem Express, a ferry from Mecca to Safaga that went down in 1991 with 700 passengers, of whom only 200 were saved. The wreck is at 100 ft., with little coral encrusting. Around the wreck lie suitcases and shoes and we believe it isn't really appropriate to dive such a recent wreck with so many casualties still in it. Next time we'll go even farther South in search of pristine reefs."

That might very well be Mangrove Bay, a two-hour drive south of Hurghada. Says Alex Thiermann, there in August, "The resort is ideal for serious divers. No shopping, good food and excellent diving. It's in the middle of the desert, a self contained 40-room resort. Clean rooms with A/C; food, buffet style. The diving is from two excellent boats leaving as well as unlimited diving from the pier. Some of the best Red Sea diving is right out of your room. They have a Zodiac that will take you whenever and wherever you want. Due to its remoteness it has untouched coral, great fish, including shark, turtles, even the elusive and endangered Dugong (sea cow). The dive shop is managed by Germans. It is very professional as well as providing lots of freedom to advanced divers. The only limitation is a 100-ft. maximum depth limit. Rental equipment is also available.
www.redsea.com/ducks/queseire.html.

Israel has a slice of land on the Red Sea, in the town of Eilat. Long

time *Undercurrent* correspondent Mel McCombie (New Haven, CT) was there in November and says: "I would not recommend it as a diving-only destination, but an enjoyable break in a larger cultural experience. The patchy reefs offshore have been loved nearly to death. On a day trip to the Egyptian Coral Island, we saw much healthier stony corals and more fish — anthias, blue spotted rays, varieties of eels, great anemones, and bold varieties of lionfish hunting in broad daylight. Siam Divers is well located on the water in an unprepossessing ramshackle grouping of small buildings. The staff of young, athletic Israelis exudes confidence and casualness. We found the female staff members to be exceptionally cheerful and helpful, and the guys considerably less so.

Israeli regulations require that divers present their c-cards, logs, and proof of insurance (like DAN); one must purchase Israeli insurance if you don't have your own. We rented their equipment, and it was pretty shabby. Leaky second stages, cracked and mismatched fins, 5mm suits that had compressed to 2mm, lights with nearly dead batteries. I had brought my own 7mm suit and hooded vest and was fine in the 70-72 degree water; but my husband and son were freezing in the rental gear. If you are in Eilat just to dive, stay on the side of town where the dive operations are located (near the Egyptian border). If you want more variety or have nondiving folks with you, the side near the Jordanian border is best."
www.Siamdivers.com.

Seven-Mile Beach for Experienced Divers

Jean Kirkpatrick (Russellville, KY), who has taken many of her 975 in the Cayman Islands, says she was determined to find "a small dive operator who allowed me to dive my computer. Dive 'n' Stuff was the first operation I tried and the only

one! The eight divers usually were experienced divers who had been with this operation for years. Newcomers (like me) became part of the family and were soon being kidded like everyone else. The atmosphere was totally relaxed, but they stressed safety and reef protection. The only restrictions were a three-minute safety stop and a return to the boat with 500 psi. Nitrox was also available — a bonus! If you want a small dive operation with excellent service, and freedom balanced with safety — this is it. I hate to tell my secret, as I don't want them to get too crowded!" They are located in downtown Georgetown and serve the west side of the island, only. www.cayman.org/divenstuff.

Rural Roatan

The Reef House has always been one of Honduras' best kept secrets. The family Blair (Oklahoma City) said it was their best dive trip ever to Roatan. "On first dive we came back through a large school of spinner dolphins. Food, staff and accommodations were excellent. Only disappointment: I had the impression the resort was off by itself, but a town surrounds it. Location on offshore Cay still meant decent beach and town noise was not evident." Samuel B. Johnson (Eureka, IL) says, "I've experienced five Bay Islands Beach Resorts and Fantasy Island Resorts, and without any doubt, Reef House is the one I'd recommend most highly. It's rustic, small and simple, the opposite of luxurious, but it's clearly committed to giving you a great vacation, and it's small enough that they pay attention to every individual diver. David, the divemaster, is very sharp eyed. He found two seahorses, a well camouflaged scorpionfish, and a large eye toadfish. The shore diving can be a little awkward since it's relatively shallow for a long distance from shore, and the coral shows significant hurricane damage." Seven-night dive packages, double occupancy, food included, \$775/person. 1-800-328-8897
reefdiving@aol.com.

Next issue: Live-aboards