

slow and disorganized, and we were hustled for tips even though Habitat added a mandatory service charge to the bill. The highlight of the culinary experience was a fire in the kitchen during one breakfast. It didn't do much damage, but it slowed the staff down. I was glad I didn't have a morning boat dive to make.

The Bottom Line

By and large, the new Habitat is very similar to the old Habitat, but a great deal more comfortable. In the old days, a hard-core diver wouldn't have considered taking a beginner to Habitat, let alone a non-diving spouse or children. There just wasn't anything to do there but dive, and it took a 4-tank day to make you tired enough to eat whatever the restaurant flung at you.

That's changed. As before, Habitat is an economical place for serious divers to dive their brains out without anybody bugging them, but now there's a swimming pool to lounge around, reliable hot and cold running water in the rooms, and much more luxurious accommodations. The place has been refitted to cater to families, rather than just to those of us with salt water in our veins. The next time I go, I'll probably take my wife and kids, even though they won't see me for more than the minimum surface interval between tanks.

Most wholesalers book Habitat. Our 8-day, 7-night package, included lodging double occupancy in a cottage for four, breakfasts, weights, transfers to and from the airport, and all the tanks we could burn from

the beach for 6 days. Cost was around \$500 per person. The same package in a condo for two added about \$20 a day per person. Boat dives were an extra \$15 per tank above and beyond the basic land diving package. Since most of Bonaire's dive sites can be reached easily by car, I suggest doing what old Habitat guests favor: hit the beach for most of your dives, and buy a few morning boat trips to sites on Klein. Airfare runs about \$540 from Houston, \$620 from Los Angeles or \$370 from Miami. You'll want a rental car to get to decent restaurants — the Green Parrot at the Sand Dollar is the best nearby bet — or shop for food, and of course to hit shore diving sites.



Time to Spare?

Go by Air

I've always heard that LIAT, an airline that connects a great number of Caribbean islands, stands for "Leave island any time," but none of my experiences on LIAT can match those of In Depth readers Greg and Nancy Earle. Traveling to Dominica, they enjoyed the diving and the island, but as you will see from their account below, their trip there and back pushed the limits of even the most experienced dive travelers.

Dear *In Depth*,

By far the worst aspect of the trip involved the flights on LIAT airlines. Avoid them and

fly on Winnair if at all possible. As you'll see in what follows, in all we were robbed by LIAT airlines to the tune of over \$300, plus a day and a half of wasted vacation time sitting in airports. It's a long, sad story, so you may want to sit down and get comfortable before reading further.

In essence, LIAT didn't have us in their computer system for either leg of our trip, and despite our printed tickets stating "status OK," they refused to recognize us as valid passengers. Unfortunately for us, we didn't find this out until

we hit St. Maarten. As a result, LIAT would only put us on standby for the flight to Dominica and book us on a return flight one day earlier than planned. One day of vacation shot already, plus \$50 to change our American Airlines reservations, and we hadn't even arrived in Dominica yet. On top of this problem, the scheduled LIAT flight from St. Maarten to Dominica never arrived, so we had to stay overnight in St. Maarten and fly standby the next day. No effort was even made to let passengers waiting at the gate know that the flight was canceled; we all found out only after going back through security to the ticket counter. LIAT's stated reason for not making an announcement was that the PA system was broken! Even though they knew 13 people were waiting at the departure gate, they never

came out to inform any of us about the cancellation.

Because we weren't in their computer, LIAT refused to put us up in a hotel for the night or pay our cab fare, despite the fact that they reluctantly did so for the other 11 people holding tickets for the same flight (who *were* in their computer). We tried begging, pleading, and threatening, but nothing got the attention of the counter personnel. We were repeatedly told that there was "nothing they could do." Each time they made that statement, the next step was to avoid eye contact and completely ignore us. I have never been treated so poorly by an airline, and I will never fly on LIAT again. Eventually the ticket agents actually closed up the counter and went home, despite the fact that we were still pleading with them to acknowledge us. Luckily, after paying for our own cab fares, hotel, and dinner, we did eventually get to Dominica at about noon the next day (an-

other half day of vacation shot).

The return trip was nearly as bad — while waiting at the departure gate at noon, we were informed that Canefield airport was closing due to high winds, so our flight to Antigua that afternoon was canceled. LIAT personnel informed us about an hour later that there would be a flight to Antigua leaving from the other airport on Dominica (Melville Hall), which was about an hour away by car. Again we had to pay our own cab fare, since LIAT's policy doesn't include paying for "natural disasters"! We dutifully took out our wallets and paid \$20 to get to the other Dominican airport, where a LIAT plane eventually did take us to Antigua late that day.

Unfortunately, by the time our flight arrived in Antigua at about 7 p.m., we had missed the last American flight from Antigua to San Juan, so we had

to find and pay for a cab and a hotel in Antigua, buy our own dinner and breakfast, and pay our own cab fare to return to the airport the next morning. We killed the entire day sitting in the Antigua airport waiting for our American flight, because Antigua's airport was crowded with British cricket enthusiasts who had come to see a tournament, and they had completely filled the two earlier American flights. We did get seats on the last flight out of Antigua, so we finally got home at 11 p.m., completely exhausted.

We're in the process of attempting to get reimbursed through LIAT's customer service office and the travel agent who booked our flights, but the mental anguish and wasted time involved in this trip nearly spoiled our memories of the good time we had on Dominica.

— Greg & Nancy Earle
Sterling, VA

Batteries Not Included

Portable Power to the People

As divers, we're used to dealing with consumables. We work hard to get the most out of a tank of air — sometimes to the extent of concocting special gas mixtures. We mark our dive time against the incessant clock of no-decompression limits. But there's one consumable that gives most of us fits: batteries! I, for one, find it far easier to calculate multilevel mixed-gas no-decompression limits than to try to calculate

my battery needs on a long dive trip. This is complicated somewhat by the fact that I seem to carry yet another piece of power-hungry gear on every trip.

And things are not likely to improve in even the distant future. Even Captain Kirk seems to drain his phaser batteries on every episode. Knowing that the portable power problem is likely to be

with us for some time, we should examine our options.

Measuring Up

One factor that determines the suitability of a battery to a particular application is its voltage output over the life of its charge. A nickel-cadmium battery, for example, delivers a relatively constant 1.2 volts until it suddenly quits. Alkaline voltage output declines more