

THE BAHAMAS

The Bahamas are easily accessible from Florida and excellent for long weekends, with pretty reefs, decent tropicals, and plenty of resorts that feed sharks. . . . Keep hurricane season, June through October, in mind; winter weather from December to March means mid-70s, cooler water, and sweaters in the evening; average nighttime temperature is in the mid-60s, but can drop into the 50s if winter air blows off the continent. . . . While Nassau is surrounded by expensive hotels and restaurants, readers report occasional surly behavior by locals. . . . Out-island are resorts small and personal. . . . Of the islands with land-based resorts, San Salvador offers the best diving.

Abaco

Brendals/Treasure Cay, July 2000, Stuart Carroll (stuart@travelroom.com), Potomac, MD. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 84 F, calm no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: Sort of shallow dives. Treasure Cay Resort reminded me a lot like being in South Florida. Nice resort with big marina (boating is the thing in Abaco), decent restaurant (expensive), tennis, bar and great beach. They have a dive operation, but not dive master, so I had to take cabs/ferry to Green Turtle Cay. This cost more than \$40, so I didn't go back a 2nd day. Brendals was 1st rate operation and there are 2 facilities at

Green Turtle (Green Turtle Resort and Bluff House) which are nice. Brendal kept group together. Since I was by myself, I just hung with the dive-master instead of exploring on my own. 1st dive was in 59 ft. reef called the "ledge" with good — 80 ft. — viz. Lots of variety. Saw blue parrot, midnight parrot, French Angel, Large crab, moray eel and much more. 2nd dive was site call "coral condos." Viz was horrible at 30 ft. max, but we swam a cavern filled with silversides that was definitely worth the price of admission! Make sure Brendal blows his "air rings" for you. (800-780-9941, 954-467-1133, 242-780-9941; Fax 305-467-7544)

Froggies, July 2000, Elaine Morse, Boulder, CO. Depth shallow. We were looking for a good family vacation place where our daughter could snorkel offshore. We were also looking for isolation. We found a wonderful house to rent in Shorecrest II. It had a small patch reef offshore, but we found nice snorkeling at the other end of the island. A development is going in, so I don't know how long it will last. The coral and small fish and turtles were much better snorkeling than diving. The new diving operation on Guana, Froggies, has a lovely couple, Troy and Maria who took care of everything. Maria snorkeled with our daughter while we dived. They feed the critters in the same place every day, so they are big. Saw very large groupers, very tame sharks, eagle ray. Good photo opportunities with the large groupers, large triggers. Probably could have rented

tanks to take photos offshore, but we had our daughter. The first dive was my 100th, so I had to go diving whether it was great or not. **(242-366-0431; Fax: 242-366-0024; e-mail froggies@batelnet.bs; website www.oii.net/froggies)**

Andros

Small Hope Bay Lodge, June 2000, Linda and Marty Hodgkins, Juno Beach, FL. Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: Depth. Repeat visitors. We appreciate the rustic nature and staff of the lodge. Food was excellent. Lodging is simple — no phones, TV, A/C, etc. Excellent dive staff — diving for all levels of experience. No shore diving, but shore snorkeling is fun. SHBL is small and intimate — you have the opportunity to meet and get to know other visitors. **(Ph: 242-368-2013, Fax: 242-368-2015, e-mail: shbinfo@smallhope.com, Website: smallhope.com)**

Small Hope Bay Lodge, August 2000, David Yard, Santa Fe, NM. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 84-87 degrees. Dive restrictions: Time and depth on 1st dive of day. Good coral life, well-run dives small boats <10 divers usually on a boat. Good fish life. Dive master and assistants all smoked unless underwater, smoked while filling Nitrox tanks? Stupid eh!

Small Hope Bay Lodge, August 2000, Jason DeSalvo (desalvo@concentric.net), Montclair, NJ. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm.

Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: Time on the deep dives. Back on boat with at least 500 psi. With me on this trip were my wife, son (5), daughter (18 months), sister-in-law and her three kids (12, 9 and 7). At the start of the trip I was the only diver, although they successfully introduced both my 12-year-old nephew and my sister-in-law to diving through small Hope Bay's very liberal resort course diving policy. Overall, you couldn't design a much better place to have a family dive vacation when there are young children involved. However, the Small Hope Bay experience was a mixed bag. Small Hope Bay Flight Service (RT from Ft. Lauderdale ran \$220 PP for adults and \$170 PP for kids more than 2) was a fun part of the trip as the planes used were seven and nine seaters! Trips must be planned so that the plane can make the entire trip to and from Andros during daylight (flying time was one hour in each direction). Unfortunately, they did not make us aware of this until we showed up at the designated departure point for our flight at 4:15 PM (1:15 late due to our flight to Ft. Lauderdale arriving late) to find out that our flight had been canceled! Since we were the only people on the plane and we had called ahead about our late arrival, we assumed they would leave when we arrived. Instead we spent the first night the Best Western in Hollywood, Florida. After some significant complaining on my part, they did moved up the next day's 1:30 PM scheduled flight to 10:30 AM so we could get to Small Hope before lunch. They did not charge us for the night

we missed (although we had to pay for the night at the Best Western). The Lodge is set along an unbelievably beautiful stretch of beach that we had almost completely to ourselves though the resort was full. The accommodations are rather rustic and there is no air conditioning (not a problem). Each family had their own two-bedroom, one-bathroom cottage that cost \$160/adult/night, \$80 per night for teens (12-17 years old) and \$50 per night for children (2-11 years old). The diver's rate added \$60 per day to the above numbers and provided you with one two-tank morning dive and an afternoon one tank dive each day plus one night dive. The rates mentioned are all-inclusive. The dive operation harks back to the early days of diving. As an experienced diver I enjoyed this breath of fresh air. For beginners, however, Small Hope Bay could be downright dangerous. Logbooks were never checked (though they ask everyone despite experience to gear up, jump off the dock and demonstrate that they can clear their mask and regulator). Buddy diving is allowed and there is no pressure to stay with the group. They offer a free 2-hour "resort course" to non-divers (just a short lecture on the dock and then a "dive" in the 6-foot deep water). The boats are funky homemade affairs, but they functioned well and there was ample deck and storage space even when full. Underwater photographers beware however, as the only rinse option is one small cooler that can fit two small rigs at best. While I'm on the subject of rinsing, the only gear rinse bucket offered is one 55-gallon

PVC drum on the dock – hardly enough for the 25+ divers returning from the morning dive! Much to my amazement, within a couple of days, several resort-course divers were participating in all kinds of dives including deep dives (some to well more than 100 feet), cavern dives, night dives, etc. Of course the choice to make these dives was a personal choice and there were resort divers that opted to limit themselves to the shallow dives that were usually less than 25 feet. During a one-week period I witnessed more near miss accidents than I have in my last ten years of diving! These included a teenage resort diver whose mouth-piece fell off his regulator while buddy diving with his father at 50 feet resulting in his shooting to the surface in an uncontrolled ascent. He was unhurt and back in the water the next day. On a deep (80-90 feet) swim-through/cavern dive, another young diver who had completed his classroom work for certification but had yet to complete his check-out dives, attempted a rather tight swim-through, got nervous and became positively buoyant resulting in his becoming wedged against the roof of the passage. His father/buddy was nowhere to be found. An alert dive-master noticed huge, stationary clouds of bubbles coming from within one swim-throughs and was able to pull him out. The same young diver then proceeded to run out of air later in the dive and needed to be brought to the surface by another divemaster while breathing from the divemaster's octopus. Suffice it to say this is not a

place to take young and inexperienced divers unless you are prepared to set strict limits and personally provide adequate supervision. I took my son snorkeling one morning shallow dive (10-15 feet). Also on our boat were three resort divers who had each logged perhaps four dives in their lives. While this group was very safety conscious and experienced in other potentially dangerous sports (two were skydivers), they were given a ten second briefing and told to be back on the boat within an hour and sent over the side – completely unsupervised after just four dives! The diving opportunities on Andros are wonderfully unique, the best diving I did were “geological formation” dives. The underwater topography of Andros is riddled with blue holes, caverns, swim-throughs and sheer vertical walls dropping off into the 6,000 foot deep Tongue of the Ocean. A massive bleaching event that occurred two years ago has left most of the coral between 40 and 90 feet dead and covered with algae. Interestingly, the coral on both very deep and shallow dives seemed to be much healthier.

Wire Whip Wall – A deep dive (130-140 feet) along a sheer vertical wall next to the Tongue of the Ocean. On one side of you is an absolute indigo-colored abyss, on the other a vertical wall densely covered in countless colonies of wire coral (bring a light to see the amazing variety of colors).

Ocean Blue Hole – we did the “first level” of this blue hole dive that maxed out at around 125 feet. This is a truly remarkable dive covering a small portion of a 400-foot diameter cavern

whose top caved-in allowing divers to swim in a surreal cavern-like environment. This dive is a follow-the-leader dive and was executed beautifully.

Alec’s Caverns – An outstanding swim-through dive. Depths run between 80 and 90 feet and all of the major swim-throughs have lines running through them so that you do not make any wrong turns. Many passages open up into caverns filled with silversides and shrimp. Note; Some swim-throughs get really tight.

Peter’s Mysterious Spot – This was the best (and only truly good) shallow dive of the week. With a maximum depth of around 35 feet, the coral and sea fans were healthy, there were many large groupers, two Hawksbill Turtles and a bunch of Queen Triggerfish.

Brad’s Mountain – The best dive of the trip (by far). This site is a large coral “mountain” rising from the bottom at 50 feet or so, up to its top in around 20 feet. The rise in the ocean bottom that forms Brad’s Mountain acts like a magnet to surrounding marine life. Schooling Atlantic spadefish, Bermuda chubb, horseeye jacks, Creole wrasse and blue chromis, seven reef sharks (4-6 feet) swam around the site during the entire dive! Add to this a baby Nurse Shark and Hawksbill Turtle. Supposedly you are almost guaranteed to see sharks at this site because the organized shark dive takes place just another mile or so down the coast and the sharks swim over to this site when they hear the boat engines. Since the resort charges an extra \$85 for the organized shark dive (which occurs in a boring sand patch), save money and go to Brad’s

Mountain where you can see the same sharks in a more natural setting. Non-diving activities alternated between the beach, snorkeling, nature walks and just plain lazing around. There were lots of kids to entertain each other and a great rec-room with all kinds of games, arts and crafts and a ping pong table. They offer babysitting at the nominal rate of \$4 per hour virtually anytime day or night. The food was adequate although the chef did not prepare enough at four of the nine lunches during our stay that was a significant problem for those divers returning late from the morning dives. Although no one thing about the place is overwhelmingly great (except maybe the beach), the entire package is damn near paradise and will leave you feeling warm and cozy all over long after your trip has ended.

Bimini

Bimini Undersea, Seacrest, April 2000, Jon Lamos (jlamos@polinet), Oviedo, FL. Vis: 50 to 75 ft. Water: 79 to 81 degrees, calm and flat, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: up, incl. 500 psi. Excellent dive operation. Good site briefing, primo dolphin excursion, school pods, close to 30+ dolphins, both spotted and bottlenose. Fantastic staff. No rinse tanks. Would have to carry equipment to hotel to rinse. Spartan and rundown island. Best dives were about 1 hr. boat ride. Bill Keefe and staff one of the best. (Ph: 945-462-3400, Fax: 954-462-4100, e-mail: nealwatson@aol.com, Website: www.nealwatson.com)

Bimini Undersea, May 2000, Fred A. Herdrich, Lake Villa, IL. Vis: 75 to 100 ft. Water: 80 to 85 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: rec. depth and time limits only. Nowdla, Melony and Krista were informative in their briefings and helpful with gear setup. Boat was not crowded; they made us feel as part of the family. This was the third diving experience with Keefe's and we will continue to go back; we stayed at Weech's Bimini Dock; accommodations basic, clean, and friendly. Food at local restaurants. Traveled and dove with 9 members of West Shore Divers.

Scuba Bimini, South Bimini Yacht Club, May 2000, David and Debra Batzer, Belair, MD. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 77-79 degrees. Dive restrictions: We did shallow dives, dive the computer. We are experienced divers that have dived half way around the world and found South Bimini to be one of the best diving trips we have taken. The fish and corals are healthy and abundant. The sites are diverse to accommodate the novice to the more experienced. The accommodations are spacious, comfortable and clean. The food and service were excellent and reasonably priced. For night life or shopping take the water taxi to North Bimini. This island is quiet. The beach is within a 5 minute walk. Percy and Bobby, the owners, were attentive to all of our needs. (Telephone 800-848-4073 or 242-347-4444 or 954-462-3400; Fax 242-954-4624100 or 954-462-4100; e-mail: info@scubabimini.com, website: www.scubabimini.com)

Scuba Bimini, Bimini Yacht Club, July 2000, Joe Damone (joe@therhythmdogs.com), NYC, NY. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 87 Fahrenheit, calm currents. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: Despite what I was told when I booked trip dive master dictated bottom time even if you were diving computer and were good with air but after I told them I was unhappy with this they loosened up a bit. Good: food, restaurant staff, clean rooms, diving (once you get in water). Bad: Boat was late at least 1/2-1 hour every trip with divers sitting in bug-infested hot boat. Because boat was so late getting out, they rushed dives so we could get back to eat lunch before restaurant staff was off. A lot of tanks had shot o rings. Air fills were not great about 2500 psi Boats were slow and in need of an overhaul, deck was littered with not being used gear/old o-rings/garbage. Must speak up to dive your computer and remind them you wanted to get more than a 35-40 min dive. Local tap water is high in salt content so rinsing camera may not be doing a lot of good.

Grand Bahama Island

Grand Bahama Scuba, Ocean Reef, October 1999, A.W. Edwards, Lewisville, TX. Vis: 70 to 80 feet. Water: calm and flat, no currents. Since we were experienced divers we were at our discretion. Grand Bahama Scuba was excellent. The operation is right at the Ocean Reef and Yacht Club. Walk out of your condo onto the dive boat. They cater to small groups

which is exactly the way my wife and I want it. Being experienced we could do our own things. We do love the Bahamas especially the sharks where you can dive shark junction. The only drawback is that there is no shore diving. Grand Bahama island is a fun place with lots of activities plus good food, friendly people and lively bars. **(242-373-6775; 242-373-9791; Fax 242-373-9792)**

Sunn Odyssey Divers, Lucayan Hotel, May 2000, Vic Bary/Maureen Strazdon, Cranford, NJ. Vis: 50 to 75 ft. Water: 76 to 78 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile. Our second stay at the Lucayan and diving with Sunn Odyssey. Both continue to delight with their friendliness and level of service. Grand Bahama offers sandy beaches, good restaurants and friendly people. Dive sites like Pygmy Caves and Hydro Lab offer large pelagics; because of nearby shark feeding, you can count on seeing a number of large reef sharks on every visit. **(Telephone: 242-373-4014; Fax 242-373-4014; e-mail sunnody@grouper.batelnet.bs; website: www.bahamasvg.com/sunnodyyssey.html)**

Sunn Odyssey Divers, Bahama Princess Resort and Casino, June 2000, Mike Wilson, Huntsville, AL. Vis: 100 ft. Water: 75 degrees. Sharks and ray and abundant life. Sunn Odyssey is great. They are a family operation, very safe, accommodating, and well equipped. One morning no one showed up except me, but they took me out anyway. It was

great! The hotel was not elaborate at all, but was clean and cool! I recommend it for the price.

Sunn Odyssey Divers, June 2000, Belinda Joyce, Boardman, OH. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Visibility 80-100 feet. Temp. 82-84 degrees. You are treated like you are a student, not permitted to follow your own computer profile and guided by 2 divemasters on a reef with 100+ vis. It did not matter that I was a divemaster candidate because they had not evaluated my skills. Dive operation runs from a Home Depot-type shed began our adventure. No boat or site orientation. One of our group got a rental regulator with a bit off mouth piece and was told to use the octo instead but got a mouth full of muck. He had to insist that the owner give up his own reg on the boat. No big pelagics. Not taken to the sites we requested when booking the day. Seas were unusually rough. A novice diver was thrown from the transom and hit the side of the boat with her tank. Nick had been helping her gear up and walked away to another diver without her knowing and the boat was rocking heavily. We were lambasted for participating in the shark feed dive the day before and given an angry lecture on this practice. Ironically, Sunn Odyssey offers a "shark encounter" that just happens to be near the other operators' shark feed site. We only dove one morning with them and continued the rest of our dives with Xanadu. After leaving my booties at their dock, I was unable to reach them by phone to retrieve them until late the

night before our departure flight. They would or could not return them to our resort that night nor the following morning. They became verbally abusive when we expressed our disappointment in their services. After receiving my Visa statement, I found that they had charged us an extra charge for using the credit card. They did not tell us of this when we paid.

Sunn Odyssey Divers, Ritz Resort, July 2000, Dennis Bludnicki, Bridgeport, CT. Vis: 70-90 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Restrictions: 45 minutes, check with buddy at 1500 psi and return with 500 psi, 15' safety stop. Donna and Nick run a small but personal operation. Donna offers pick up from your resort (\$20 for 3 days of 3 2-tank dives) at competitive prices. I tried them over UNEXSO because of the article in your book and the article was accurate; I did find them to be personal and the other 6 divers experienced and friendly. Nick was the divemaster with a new staff member Bill. Both knew the water very well. I do photography and they accommodated me by choosing water that had good wide angle shots, i.e., sharks and turtles.

Sunn Odyssey Divers, Rental Condo, August 2000, Sharon Rapacz, Rochester, IL. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 84-86 degrees. My daughter and I had a bad experience diving off Panama City in 1999. On our last day of diving, the dive master had us diving in a strong current and poor visibility. We got separated from the group underwater and couldn't get the

attention of the boat crew on the surface. When we were rescued by the Coast Guard 3 hours later, they questioned "why we were diving in such poor conditions." We chose to dive our next vacation with Sunn Odyssey wanting to dive with "experts" who placed safety first. The dive groups were small (5-8 divers). The boat was comfortable and they had us use a line to descend and ascend, which I find easier. Nick and Don were in the water on all dives to guide and point out the natural wonders of the Bahamas, plus they allowed us to dive our own computer. Manta, Caribbean reef shark, nurse shark, huge grouper and super-male parrots, Eels, lobster, barracuda and all the usual reef fish. We accompanied Nick on a lobster hunt/shore dive and came back with dinner. We had 5 days of great diving without a single problem.

UNEXSO, November 1999, Jeff Weimer. The first time in my diving experience that I did not tip either the Captain or the divemasters. In 5 days of diving with UNEXSO, all treated me as an amateur, and made me feel like I was nothing more than an irritant and that they were doing me a favor by giving me a ride to the dive site. I hate to give a bad rap to UNEXSO, but they scored about a D. This was the first ever dive trip where I did not tip a dime. (I am usually excessively generous). I must give credit to the operators of Sanctuary Bay. The trainer that accompanied us was outstanding. It made the whole trip worthwhile. I will be the first person to heap praise on a dive

operation, but I feel that I must be honest for the same reason that I subscribe to *Undercurrent*. (Ph: 800-992-3483, Fax: 954-351-9740)

UNEXSO, Island Seas, May 2000, Ron Boggs (ronboggs@calibresys.com), Burke, VA. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 Fahrenheit, currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: depth and time were stated ... but not checked, hence not enforced. An earlier *Undercurrent* article prepared me for problems, but this operation was well orchestrated for both groups and small numbers. My son and I are moderately experienced divers and we found the diving okay to good and Theo's wreck in heavy current a challenge. Missed the plethora of fish as in Cayman and Bonaire ... but it was still good. Staff was helpful and attentive, but not too much (as in with hands out for tips). Supervisors running the staff were great! Exceptional was the referral certification instruction and individual attention by Mickie (Michael Williamson — 7 yr. veteran instructor). His care of a frightened newbie (my wife of 30 yrs) was beyond compare, trying every way possible to get her to enjoy the sport while ensuring she passed all the skills to his satisfaction... just one time to meet the requirement. His care to try and ensure she would not someday panic if something happened in the future (i.e., mask knocked off) was impressive. I give the UNEXSO crew and boats my highest recommendation. We over planned/scheduled dives for family members and received a refund.

UNEXSO, The Lucayan, August 2000, Winston and Rebecca Reed, Milford, CT. Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: 1st dive 100 feet/20 mins (2nd dive — your computer). Only one other diver on boat for 2 days and 4 others on one day. DM, Fernando very helpful and did excellent tour of Theos Wreck — did more than the usual engine room and hold.

Xanadu Undersea Adventures, June 2000, Belinda J. Joyce, Boardman, OH. Sunny conditions overall. Water choppy, 80-82 degrees F. No wetsuit — dive skin only. No mantas, dolphins, whale sharks or whales seen on this trip. Turtles and sharks-yes. Dive crew very professional and fun. Wilfred, Chris and Ralph entertained divers after dives with witty stories. Excellent customer service with a personal touch. \$66 for 2 tank dive trip. Boat roomy. Only one trip was the boat full but never felt crowded. Deck covered with outdoor grass carpet making slipping near impossible. Large rinse tanks at the dock. Shark dive, super. Very safe. More than adequate crew. Briefings thorough and educational— done well: Husband apprehensive before shark dive. Spoke with, divemaster Chris. Very good rapport with divers and helped to relieve the stress. Stayed near my husband during the shark feed so he would feel more at ease as well watching for anxiety. Xanadu Ledge abundant with healthy corals and tons of tropicals. Own computer profile allowed except on shark dive. Seas unusually choppy making time on the surface rough. Exits more difficult for novice

but assistance right there. Theo's wreck a must. Resort has very beautiful grounds and pool but rooms need updated. Mostly vacant during our stay so we got an ocean view suite for the standard price. No activities. Dead atmosphere day and night. Restaurant had poor attitudes and service from most except one male server. Food was very good though expensive. Conch chowder was great. No frozen drinks at the bar! Shocking as we were on an island vacation and I couldn't get what I could in Ohio. They didn't have a blender. Go figure! Some taxis in poor condition. No A/C. Tail light hanging from one. Never a shortage so insist on a safe one. Very expensive. Attitudes poor from a lot of locals. Xanadu beach is beautiful. Straw market on beach, vendors a little pushy and annoying. Bands play at beach bar in the day — frozen drinks are available here. Resort has a great location for divers and those who just want to chill out at the pool or beach. No variety of, dining, options. Giovanni's café at Port Lucaya had the best food and service during our stay and reasonably priced: Xanadu Undersea Adventures divexua@batelhet.bs (800-327-8150; 242-352-3811; 242-352-5856; Fax 242-481-5630)

Long Island, Bahamas

Stella Maris, February 2000, Lada Simek, Ossining, NY. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 70-75 degrees. Resort, food, service and facilities outstanding. Diving is average, shark dive and blue hole (1 hour by bus) are the only noteworthy dives. Dive trips begin with a five-mile ride by truck or school but to the dock, followed by

3/4 hour trip to all dive sites on a slow but comfortable 50 foot boat. This is not really a dive resort. Food excellent but expensive with few other restaurants, none nearby. (Ph: 800-426-0466 or 809-336-2106 or 305-467-0466, Fax: 305-359-8238)

Stella Maris, June 2000, Jeff Rappin, Chicago, IL. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 79-85 degrees. Good resort. Doesn't just cater to divers, usually a small number of divers with experienced and friendly divemasters, Omar and Robert. Three dives a day, on the boat all day, good picnic lunches. No other dive operations so we had the reefs to ourselves. Coral heads started at 30 ft. so we had plenty of underwater time. Always safety stops, did two shark dives that were terrific and expertly handled. Good food and good staff.

Stella Maris, July 2000, James Heckelman, (hectorjd@dacor.net), Norwalk, OH. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 84° F. Though could dive own profile, dive bottom time was limited to what divemaster wanted — like 50 minutes. After discussions with one of the owners (Peter), we were able to dive our own profile and bottom time, within reason. We kept our bottom times to 60 to 70 minutes. The accommodations were very good. The service outstanding. Peter Kuska (one of four owners/operators, all from Germany) part in daily hotel and dive operations. He went to great effort to make sure that everyone, including the nondivers, were satisfied and our accommodations were satisfactory. Peter arranged land and sea excursions.

He was usually present for the evening meal, conversing with the guests. The atmosphere was "family." The owners understand tourism and what is expected. No-see'ems and mosquitoes were controlled by using an insect repellent containing a high percentage of DEET. The full meal package (all inclusive) was a smart choice as individual costs for food and beverages are high. Telephone charges are high, and 800 numbers cost \$1 to \$2 per minute. We arranged for the Stella Maris plane to pick us up at Nassau. A bag was lost between Miami and Nassau. Peter provided dive gear at no charge. The luggage came the next day though there was a charge to pick it up at the airport. Most diving was off the North end, West side. The boat trip to the dive sites took 30 minutes to 1 hour. The boat left about 9:00 in the morning and returned about 4:00. A box lunch (which must be requested the day before) was taken along for the noon meal. Sometimes, the boat would anchor off a beach for lunch and short hikes. Depths ranged from 25' to 50', with most 30' to 40' maximum depth. Exceptions were the wreck *M.V. Comberbach*, 100', the walls of Conception Island, 100'+ and the blue hole, 100'+ . . . The coral on these shallow dives were like "islands" on a sandy bottom. Coral was average and often did not look healthy. Sometimes I was bored. The shark feed was worthwhile. More than 20 sharks appeared for the feeding. They positioned us on the sandy bottom below and behind the boat. After 10 minutes, they threw a bucket of fish

parts overboard. The sharks swam all around and came within inches of us. The wreck *M.V. Comberbach* is a worthwhile dive. A large Jewfish joined us, entering the engine room with us. The blue hole is a unique dive reached by a two-hour drive. Visibility was poor and there were very few fish. Conception Island takes more than 2 hours (one way) and the walls start at less than 50' and are gorgeous! Pristine diving, with many sharks, turtles, sting rays, barracuda, and other large marine life. The night dive was done off a beach on the East side of the island. There was a lot of surge, and the visibility was not good. Boat had no place to store cameras and equipment, and did not have a rinse tank. Shore had no processing and no rinse tank or other facilities, but did have a fresh water hose that could be used.

Stella Maris, August 2000, Alan and Barbara Fischl, Great Neck, NY.

Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 83-84 degrees. 130' limit. The diving is somewhat uneven. Because summer is the slow period, there were few other divers. That's the good news, because we can go to Conception Island and dive the wall. In 2 dives we saw more than a dozen reef sharks (black tips and Caribbean reef sharks) and about 6 free-swimming green turtles. Viz on the wall was excellent and because Conception Island is uninhabited and only occasionally frequented by dive boats, the wall is pristine and unspoiled. Our 2 dives there were as good as any place we've ever been, including the Coral Sea. But when there were other divers with us we

sometimes had to dive some shallow rather uninteresting reefs to accommodate novice divers. The fish life is good on Long Island and even some shallower reefs were vibrant with activity and not all fished out. The hotel was very nice, run by caring managers with an excellent kitchen. There is a blue hole south of Stella Maris that makes for a very nice dive. The hotel, while very nice, is not expensive.

New Providence

Dive Dive Dive, Marriott Resort Pleasure Island, June 1999, M.G. and Susan Grimes, Houston, TX.

Vis: 75 to 120 ft. Water: 80 to 84 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: dive the plan DMs described, 500 psi. A lot of coral had algae overgrowth. Saw lots of queen angels. Sharks on most dives (reef sharks). DDD had safe shark dive. Night dive was on a wreck w/out a lot of coral; no feeding and water clarity was poor. DDD did pickup at hotel on Pleasure Island, 45 minute ride. Offered lunch after morning dive, before trip back-good. Good place to hang gear, rather than take back to hotel. Had novice with us, thought dives were great—it's a matter of experience. (Ph: 800-328-8029 or 809-362-1143)

Nassau Scuba Center, Atlantis, July 2000, Joel Schilling, Darien, IL. Vis: 80-110 ft. Water: 80-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: depth and time. Excellent operation. Sensitive to divers qualifications. Controlled shark dive. Excellent positioning for taking

photos/videos. Wear skin — thimble jelly causes adverse reaction (seabather's eruption). Excellent accommodations and service at Atlantis. Nassau Scuba Center is first class service. They make the experience enjoyable for all levels of divers. (Ph: 800-327-8150 or 809-362-1964)

Stuart Cove's, Clarion's South Ocean, March 2000, Gail T.

Barranda, Whitestone, N.Y. Vis: 70 to 80 ft. Water: 75 to 80 degrees, calm and flat with some chop. Dive your own profile: no. Had to stay with group; no deeper than 103 ft. Stuart Cove's runs a great operation. Must do the shark dive and get it on video. The James Bond wrecks were cool. Had the same divemaster for the whole trip, lots of sharks. If you like sharks, this is the place to be. Clarion's is in pretty bad shape. Bathroom fixtures need work; the rooms are worn; oceanfront rooms give you a nice view. The food at the hotel is horrible; small bar with limited variety of liquors. Best thing about hotel is its proximity to beach; it's a long and expensive cab ride to everything else. (Ph: 800-468-9876 or 809-362-4171, Fax: 809-362-4528)

Stuart Cove's, Clarion South Ocean, April 2000, Clare Petosa, Summit, NJ. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 72 to 74 degrees calm and flat. Dive your own profile? Yes. Dive restrictions: back on board w/500 psi. Dive shop was great. Accommodations were convenient to diving but not to anything else. They advertise 3 restaurants but the poolside restaurant

is only open for lunch; the other 2 are really 1 restaurant divided between menu and buffet diving.

Stuart Cove's, Clarion Hotel, July 2000, Robert Cottle (mongoose7@earthlink.net), Lisle, IL. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 84 to 87 F your own profile. Restrictions were really suggestions. I spoke w/ Stuart when making my reservation and I told him that we would be arriving at the Nassau airport at 12:30 pm (I knew from experience that his boats left at 1:00 pm) and his comment was: "Bob, I'll make it happen to make sure you get 2 dives in the pm." Plane did not arrive until 1:30 pm. By the time we got to the Clarion Hotel (next to Stuart's dive operation) and got a room it was 1:30 pm. I knew he was in his Fort Lauderdale office so I placed a call there and his words were: "Bob, I'm sorry, I forgot to tell my people, but you are going out at 4:30 pm on the 1st boat that comes back. At 4:30 pm we were leaving the dock and we came back at 7:30-8:00 pm after having done 2 dives that I would consider excellent. The next 2 days we made 4 dives each day that were better than the prior ones. I consider this guy a service oriented businessman and can understand why he is so popular. I did not do the shark feed this trip but on 2 of the dives still saw 3 and 8 Caribbean reef sharks up close and personal. Marvelous. animals to behold.

San Salvador

Club Med, April 2000, Trevor Shedon (WTSheldon@aol.com),

Chicago, IL. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F surge. I know it was Club Med, I should have expected it, but others told me it was more dedicated to divers than other Clubs! My biggest surprise was though we were usually only 15 to 20 minutes from the resort everything on the dive boat was rushed, the worst being practically pushed back into the water after only thirty minutes interval though the crew was aware most of us were going below 100 on our first dive. The 40 min. max for bottom time was not what I was expecting either. I got the feeling that it wasn't the staff's desire as much as it was management's rules. The entire resort had the feeling of being nickel and dimed to death. From the people I met who had been previously they all felt that the service and quality of the resort had seriously declined. Too bad because it is a beautiful property. (Ph: 800-258-2633 or 809-331-2000, Fax: 602-948-4562 or 809-331-2458)

Club Med, June 2000, Margot Siegel, West Hollywood, CA. Vis: 45 to 65 ft. Water: 79 to 82 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: depth and time; 100 ft. Apparent severe storm damage to 65' devastation of soft coral and fish, litter of broken hard coral. Did only a few dives; chose to do surface sports instead. Diving was boring. However, the boats were the best, very stable and since we never had more than 12 divers on boats set up for 40, it was great. 40 divers would have been a zoo.

Riding Rock Inn, August 1999, Patty Sullivan, Ellicott City, MD. Vis: 90 to 130 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 130' — not strictly enforced, 500 psi. Depth of first dive set recommended depth for 2nd and 3rd dives. Second trip to San Salvador. Mostly good both trips. Took the charter from Ft. Lauderdale, with no luggage problems. In '99, we had one dive with current, this year about half had noticeable current. We did 1 drift dive. Overall diving was good. Many more grouper this year than last. Some reef damage from Floyd. Overall diving was good. Had two unbelievable snorkeling encounters. On the way to Hole in the Wall site, Captain Bruce spotted a pod of about 20 pilot whales with a school of dolphins and we had several up close encounters. Heading into the marina, a manta was spotted in shallow water and was able to swim with for several minutes. Food was nothing fancy but good and staff accommodated special requests. Rooms clean and adequate. Dive operation great. They were accommodating, efficient and knowledgeable. Love not having to handle gear! Large rinse tank on board. Dive Master and Captain helped getting cameras to the divers. Shop had facilities to develop slides, not prints. DM gave pointers to new UWP. (Ph: 800-272-1492 or 954-359-8353, e-mail: ridingrock@aol.com)

Riding Rock Inn, January 2000, Adrian and Julie Vanderkroff, Newtown, CT. Vis: 50-150 ft. Water 75-77 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Asked to stay above 130 ft.

and return with 500 psi. Excellent operation, diving and service. Everyone helpful and made sure we had an enjoyable trip. Food and accommodations good; meals tasty and plentiful. Room clean and comfortable. Walls dramatic, loaded with coral, canyons and swim-thrus. Reefs plentiful with tropicals, reef sharks, turtles and rays. And ooooh— those hammerheads!

Riding Rock Inn, April 2000, Lawrence Moser (MOSERL@MUSC.EDU), Charleston, SC. Vis: 100 to 150+ Feet. Water: 76 to 78, Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: Dive computer, 130 max, dive your own profile and back to the boat with 500 psi. Divemaster in the water at all times. Would take the group on a tour, but you could buddy up and go on your own. Dive crew was most accommodating. Once they were comfortable with your skills, you had all the freedom you wanted. Last trip was for 4 nights/5 days/ 9 dives. Very impressed with the entire operation. Still recovering from hurricane damage. Making great strides. Upgrading all rooms. The cottages will take much longer. Staff is well-trained, experienced and attentive to the divers needs. Rooms are not luxurious, but are comfortable. Rooms have small refrigerator and satellite TV. The food is great and they vary the menu. The conch chowder is some of the best I've ever tasted. Available daily at lunch. Breakfast is full service. Dinner ranges from buffet to menu. Everything prepared on the island. Service is friendly and with a focus to please, as with all other

service areas. If wine is your thing, take your own. What they have is plentiful, but not good. The island tour offered with the package is worth the trip. Clifford (Snake Eyes) is the owner of the only taxi service on the island. He is witty, charming and seems to serve as the patriarch of the island. His knowledge of the island's history is remarkable. The diving is some of the best I've encountered anywhere. The seas are calm, they seem surprised with more than 2 foot swells, little current and great visibility! Well populated reef from 25 to 45 feet, then over the edge to 6,000 feet and more. There are tubes to drop through, coming out at 110 feet to 130 feet or so. Interesting cuts, swim thrus, and great vertical walls. And the hammerheads are there as promised. Very curious and will come close to check you out. Corals on the wall are beautiful. Take loads of film. George the Grouper was on station as is his job, ready to play with the divers. Hard to believe that a fish will allow the handling by humans that he does. Makes for great photo ops. There are more than fifty dive sites and a variety of ways to dive them. You could visit a number of times and never get bored. They have a full photography facility. Rental, instruction, developing, video, slide shows.

Riding Rock Inn, May 2000, Gary Cowden, Kansas City, MO. Vis: 60 to 75 ft. Water: 76 to 78 degrees, calm and flat, no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 1st dive-130', 3 minute safety stop, on board w/500 psi; 2nd dive, 70', 5 min.stop,

500 psi; 3rd dive-afternoon; 100', 5 min. stop, 500 psi. San Salvador is a small island with approx. 900 residents. It has a low-key, non-touristy ambiance. Riding Rock Inn is a small, comfortable resort where you can dive, eat and sleep at a relaxed pace. The food is plentiful and delicious and the rooms are adequate; bring bug repellents; the dive staff is friendly, helpful and informative. After you set up your regulator and bc the first day, the crew switches your tanks and rinses your equipment the rest of the week. The wall diving is beautiful and hammerheads are impressive. Worth the money. Don't use the charter flight from Ft. Lauderdale; it's unpredictable. Fly Bahamas Air out of Miami.

Riding Rock Inn, June 2000, Michael Ford, Manchester, MO. Vis: 100 to 125 ft. Water: 80 to 81 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 130'. A laid-back resort, skilled dive operation, calm water, most dive sites close. Great visibility; saw many large hammerhead sharks on the walls. Hurricane Floyd did some damage to the reefs last fall, and there is some green algae on portions of reef. Great wall diving. Few mosquitoes and no sand fleas, noseeums. Food was above average for Caribbean dive fare and some meals were top-notch.

Walker's Cay

Walker's Cay, August 1999, Paul Williams (pwdiver@yahoo.com), Moscow, PA. Vis: 50-100 ft. Dive restrictions enforced: 60 minutes. Night dives off either the North end

near the restaurant or the South shore by the bar yielded octopus to batfish. Thick soled booties are needed to get you across the ironstone. It is well worth it. The dive staff is the best I have come across. Corals got beaten by Floyd and Dennis. (Ph: 305- 359-1406, Fax: 305-359-1414)

Walker's Cay, February 2000, Clem Clapp, Maplesville, AL. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 70-75 degrees. Dive restrictions: On board w/500 lbs. I was only diver on 2 trips. Told manager I wouldn't go but he insisted since I had pre purchased a package. Good DM's, one snorkeled with/my non-diving wife on surface during shark feed. Few people at resort, most for fishing. Very laid back atmosphere for customer. Employees very busy! Nice hot tub by the pool to warm up (w/drink) after dive. 100 acre island. Non-diving wife loved it for recharging.

Walker's Cay Hotel and Marina, June 2000. Jonathan Schlosser, Kenmore, N.Y. Vis: 30 to 50 ft. Water: 78 to 82 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: no depth limits, but surface with at least 1500 psi. They should rename this place Shark Island. You'll never see more sharks than here. On our worst day we saw 20 sharks, blacktips, Reef, Nurse, Lemons, Bulls and even an Atlantic Sharpnose. Other than the sharks, there are good swim throughs and caverns and the diving is shallow, usually less than 40 ft. Dive staff was fun and accommodating; the value was excellent along with the food.