

Blackbeard's Cruises, January 2000, Larry Hufty

(lhufty@iname.com) Bel Air, MD.

Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 71 to 72 Fahrenheit. The trip was okay overall. The weather was not only cool, but also not diver friendly. And the boat captain wasn't willing to be flexible, which cost us an afternoon of diving. Spent 3 days in port. The boat is small, don't pack many clothes, but take two towels. Expect a lot of sand in your rack by the end of the trip. And you just have to hate those marine toilets. (305-888-1226, 800-327-9600; Fax 305-884-4214; e-mail capthook@blackbeard-cruises.com; website www.blackbeard-cruises.com)

Blackbeard's Cruises, Sea Explorer, April 2000, Guy Johnson, (siberia@netexpress.net) Coal Valley, IL.

Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80° F, calm. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: usual 130 foot depth limit, stay within computer limits. Made 3-4 dives each day. The vis was great as were the air and water temps. A shorty of 2 or 3 mm was great. Air fills were 2900-3100. The meals were simple fare but with a good selection and quantity, no one goes hungry on Blackbeard's! Capt. Steve gave us briefings of possible weather fronts reviewing all the options to us. We avoided all the bad

weather and continued our diving. He would travel to good weather locations while we slept. The first few days we stayed in the Bimini area, the off to Andros and finally the Berrys. Lots of huge turtles this year. We even filmed a pair on the surface doing the wild thing. The next day we had a trio going through the courtship stage! The shark dive was better this year with more than 35 reef and nurse sharks, most in the 8-10 foot range. Saw the largest lobsters we've ever seen and a nice squid about a foot long! It is truly "camping on a boat" but for the money, it's tough to beat. The crew was great with advice and assistance. No problems of any kind!

Blackbeard's Cruises, Cat Ppalu, May 2000, Lyle Helm, Calhoun, GA.

Vis: 40 to 60 ft. Water: 76 to 78 degrees, choppy, no currents. The captain and crew were excellent. The cook, Peggy, did vegetarian meal for our party and they were delicious. The wall dives were great; probably would have seen more if better vis. Nice swim-thru. Lots of fish and critters on shallow dives; nudibranch, crab, eels. Dive master gave good briefings dive with drawings. Only restriction was 130'; never checked computer or tank for 500 lb. Gave new divers as much help as they wanted and experienced divers all the freedom they wanted; 4 dives a day.

Blackbeard's Cruises, Morning Star, June 2000, Henry Campbell,

Tacoma, WA. Vis: 20 to 60 ft. Water: 81 to 84 degrees, light currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: back with 500 psi. Our travel agent

described these cruises as camping on a boat; I agree, but for the money spent it was a good trip. You need to be able to set up all your gear, plan your dive and dive with a buddy. Divemaster gives sight description and direction, but does not dive unless requested. We did a shark feed dive that was real neat; I would go back on the 3-4 days trip (that's what this was) 6-9 days on 65' boat with 19 would be too long.

Blackbeard's Cruises, Cat Ppalu, August 2000, Lee Hempel (Hunddoc@aol.com), Lexington, KY. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, choppy no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: Buddy, safety stops. My second time aboard with Capt. Mark Bailey, very knowledgeable about the area and makes everyone happy. Brad Steele, the divemaster made sure everyone was aware of the safety aspects of the dive, but let everyone dive at his or her own skill level. We saw lots of barracuda, jack, and several white tip sharks. Large rays on each dive, plenty of nurse sharks. We had one rough day due to the hurricane coming by, but it did not keep us from diving. Holly Chenel was our wonderful cook. Always fresh snacks and great meals! The guys caught 21 lobsters and we had a beach cookout one night that was a blast. Rooms are small but comfortable. Heads were kept spotless, and we had movies and lots of good books. Wonderful trip and with just 12 guests; like a family affair after a few days. There is plenty of room to get away if the mood strikes.

Blackbeard's Cruises, Morning Star, August 2000, Becca Guthrie, Pelham, AL. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 84 degrees. Free to dive our own profile! Service was the best ever! Rusty the cook made tons of delicious food. Got to go buggin' and had a great cookout with steak and our fresh lobster that we speared. Dive briefings were very thorough. We felt well taken care of, but were ensured of freedom and comfort to do as we pleased. Accommodations tight (camping on boat), but a great value.

Blackbeard's Cruises, Morning Star, August 2000, John Baumann (JBaumann@janics.com) Carthage, MO. Vis: 100-120 ft. Water: 82-85 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. Conducted pre-trip briefing and helped us settle in. They held a bar-b-que and gave everyone a chance to meet. The captain held a short meeting to introduce the crew, orient everyone to the boat and cover a few necessary rules. We left promptly at 3:00 for Bimini so that we could clear customs the next morning. Diving started at 9:00 the next morning with some 30-35 depths to make sure everyone was comfortable and then you were pretty much on your own to dive your own profiles. Dive briefings were excellent and safety was a concern. It was a great trip and the crew made sure you were comfortable and enjoyed yourself. The information provided by Blackbeard's accurately described the trip and we were totally prepared for the weather and type of accommodations. The boat was in good shape

though a little sprucing up would be nice. Food was plentiful and very good. Hurricane Debbie allowed us to sail several times that we really enjoyed. Diving was excellent with great sites. My newly 14 year old certified daughter had her introduction ocean diving. Beautiful reefs and plentiful marine life. Averaged 4 dives per day. Four night dives, one fast paced drift dive. Shark dive was great, saw reef sharks on at least 7-8 dives, lots of rays.

Gulfstream Eagle, May 2000, David Gouge, Kissimmee, FL. Vis: 40-100 ft. Water: 75-78 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. 500 psi. Good: three dolphin encounters. One pod of 10-12. Saw sharks on many dives. Good shark feed by captain. Did not allow it to get out of control but kept it exciting. Air fills always 3000+. Cook was graduate of Florida Culinary Institute. Bad: Camera table was a catchall table. Dive briefings vague to nil. Sometimes had to track down a captain and ask for info. Dives scheduled immediately after meals. Cabin was stuffy and hot. Crew frequently sat in deck chairs and watched divers struggle with gear and cameras as we climbed onto the dive platform. Captain told us not to touch the coral yet impaled it with the anchor on every dive. Go figure. Heard grumbling from several crew members about wages and other crew. I am a great fan of live-aboard diving and have several experiences with it. This was my first trip on a Florida live-aboard and other divers told me that this was one of the better Florida boats. However, it is NOT a world

class live-aboard. It is a dive boat that provides transport to dive sites, air, a bunk, and meals. Do not expect service — only basic provisions. **(800-488-3483, 561-575-9800; Fax 561-743-5747; e-mail gseagle@gulfstreameagle.com; website www.gulfstreameagle.com)**

Easy Goin', Paradise Charters, June 2000, Cal Sprik, Wausau, WI. Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 84-86 degrees. Dive restrictions: depth limits. Second trip on *Easy Goin'*. Peg and Chuck provide personalized diving. Maximum 6 dives and their divemaster "JB" — gave us the best diving experience anywhere, schools of sharks, spotted eagle rays, logger head turtles, dolphin pods; food was terrific and plentiful. **(800-921-5549; Fax 305-453-4307; e-mail paradisekl@aol.com; website www.paradisearcharters.net)**

Nekton Pilot, October 1999, Jennifer McCurdy (jmccurdy@texas.net), San Antonio, TX. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Weather: windy, rainy, cloudy. Water: surge, currents. Dive Restrictions: No deeper than 130 feet. I've been aboard both the *Belize Aggressor* and the Peter Hughes *Wind Dancer* and I believe that both are superior to *Nekton* in several ways. The boats were in better condition, the crews were professional and uniformed, and the food was out of this world. *Nekton* did a pretty fair job, the cabin was clean and larger, the crew was very experienced and friendly, but the *Aggressor* and PH give their clients a far superior experience. If

you're the type of person who doesn't like to be in a big crowd (30 passengers plus), then stay away from *Nekton*. (800-899-6753, 954-463-9324; Fax 954-463-8938; e-mail info@nektioncruises.com; website www.nektioncruises.com)

Nekton Pilot, October 1999, Bill Harvey (billharvey@21stcentury.net), **Chicago, IL.** Vis: 40-100 ft. Water: 82 degrees. Diving restrictions: depth limits, dive with buddy, no diving after alcohol. Good dive operation — quality service, good accommodations, safety conscious. Always a divemaster on lookout when divers in water. Let us dive as we wanted to. Boat staple and comfortable. Food good. Cabins clean and comfortable. Each cabin had private head and shower. They picked good sites for diving though at end of week weather got worse and viz dropped. When we had a weather problem (hurricane-related) that prevented us from getting back to Florida, the crew and office staff re-booked flights, made and paid for hotel rooms while waiting for new flights, and chartered planes to fly us from Bahamas to US. Definitely top notch operation.

Nekton Pilot, June 2000, Chip and Susan Scarlett (chip@sensusc corp.com), **Austin, TX.** Vis: 30 to 120 Feet. Water: 79 to 83 Fahrenheit, calm no Currents. Our fourth trip on the *Nekton* in 3 years, this time repeating the Bahamas Adventure itinerary with our 15-year-old. Boat leaves Ft. Lauderdale. We were delayed by 6 hrs on arrival due to airline difficulties,

but a smiling crew member met us at the airport and got us to the boat at Port Everglades in 10 minutes. Although well used (as usual, sold out months in advance) boat in very good condition. Musty odor gone from heads/showers, carpets replaced, all mechanical equipment in good working order. Mike and Steve, the Engineer and Asst. Engineer, have kept everything tiptop. New mooring lines at every site! The *Nekton* is a luxury experience, and one of the safest, most professional live-aboard operations around. Crew older than in the past, very experienced, and seemed happy and engaged. Chris (relief Captain), Paula, Mike, Nick, Mikey C, Nicole and Steve all aboard from between 1-4 years. Two Belizean divemasters (Bet and Tisa) brought up from Belize to learn the *Nekton* system — will return with the boat to Belize for the winter season. Family atmosphere for those of us (50+%) who were multiple-repeat guests. Safety is the *Nekton's* priority — when a couple surfaced 250+ yards downwind in whitecaps on the last dive of the day, the bubblewatcher on the top deck had them in 10 seconds, and a tender was dispatched immediately for the pickup. Computers quietly checked to enforce the 130 ft. max rule. No diving after first drink rule also quietly but vigorously enforced. Ditto the 24-hour rule before flying. UW Photography comments: Two large camera tables; airhose; two rinse tanks on dive deck, one on camera deck — all for cameras only. Full Nikonos single-strobe (SB-105) setups (20 mm, 35 mm, 1:1, 1:2, 1:3)

available for rental (\$225 for whole week; they'll change lenses as often as you like); "photo-pro" ranges from excellent to workmanlike, depending on which crew is aboard. E-6 processing on board — only had one disaster in 4 trips. Food was plentiful and tasty, with great variety. Nicole was cooking this week (like every crew member, she's also a certified instructor) and turned out well-appreciated meal after meal. The cabins are spacious, comfortable, and have air conditioning that works very well. The *Nekton* will rock and roll, especially on the Gulf Stream crossing, so don't throw out your Dramamine/meclizine, but it is a much gentler motion than other boats, and never wallows in the troughs like a monohull. Of course, how many other 95 ton dive boats are there? And it's big — we had a full complement of 32 divers + 10 crew (which is 2 short, but we never missed them) and I never felt crowded. Since everyone dives their own schedule and profile, dive deck was rarely crowded. Hydraulic dive deck raises and lowers means your giant stride is about 2 inches off the water at all times — couldn't be easier. Our daughter did her advanced open water certification during the trip — with divemaster Mike doing a great job of instruction and checkout dives and a 10-year-old did his checkout dives complete his open water certification. The advanced course was \$175. The "Bahamas Adventure" itinerary covers the northern Bahamas, beginning with clearing customs at West End Sunday morning, and ending up Friday night off Bimini. Good, varied diving for

the Bahamas — from several ultra-shallow dives (*Sugar Wreck*; wreck of the *Hesperus*; both 15-20 ft) that were like diving in an aquarium with massive numbers of French grunts, turtles, barracuda, etc. to several deeper dives (up to 130) off mini-walls (Thumbnail) or wrecks (Theo's wreck) in 100+ vis and deep, deep blue water. Gingerbread grounds good for juveniles and some small critters, and lots of large (6-8 ft), pot-bellied reef sharks at Shark Junction, where UNEXCO feeds them 3 times a day. A dolphin snorkel with wild Atlantic spotted dolphin is a highlight of this trip — we (and other dive boats) got skunked on our trip (Captain Chris' first time being skunked) but the previous trip they had 24 dolphin playing with guests for 2+ hrs. Up to 5 dives a day are possible; night dive each night at the afternoon site. Except for first day where you're stuck off West End for all dives (and an uninspired, if safe, site it is) boat moves each night and at lunch — so there are two AM dives at one site, two PM dives at second site, plus after-dinner night dive followed by boat movement most of the night to next site. Each night before the night dive there is an ecologically-oriented marine biology slide show, except one night on our cruise when Mikey C did an outstanding magic show (Dad and Granddad are professional magicians), and the last night when the photo contest is held. The *Nekton* is perfect for new and relatively new divers. Most divers in our 4 cruises typically have between 25 - 100 prior dives, and generally take one live-aboard trip a

year. Also very common to have large groups taking up 10-20 of the 32 guest slots. The Bahamas Adventure (Northern Bahamas), Cay Sal Bank trip (south, to just off the coast of Cuba where the main draw are blue holes) and their Belize itinerary is good, solid Caribbean diving — a few pelagics (we frolicked with mantas over Christmas off Glover's in Belize), lots of tropicals, eels and turtles, pretty walls (esp. Belize) and, by the rest of the world's standards, easy, low-risk, warm-water diving. Plenty of diversions (2 VCRs, etc.) to keep both teenagers and adults happy and out of each other's way. Singles always seem able to find plenty of dive buddies, and if not, there is always a crew member (including the captain or first mate) who will dive with you. For the more experienced diver, or anyone who's been to the Pacific, well, it's the Caribbean, and a boat where both the diving and the mentality have been adjusted to the lowest common denominator diver aboard. So, if you're a technical diver bringing your own steel 120s for those deep dives (there were two aboard the previous week!), or a serious u/w photographer with housed SLR and dual strobes on a rare critter hunt, you will not have the experience you're looking for on the *Nekton*.

Nekton Pilot, July 2000, Stewart Kaslow, Maplewood, NJ. Vis: 50 to 80 ft. Water: 82 to 84 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 500 lbs. No deco. My second trip on the Pilot and the diving was even better than the first. Great value, clean and roomy boat, accommodating staff and compatible divers.

Easy to remember crew names, almost everyone is Mike. If you need help call for Mike. Food was good, plentiful and varied. Special accommodation for vegans or diabetics. No one went hungry. Pam was as sweet as her snacks. Cameras were available for rental as well as photo courses for the newbies. Cabins were more than adequate with a bathroom, shower and sink in every room. Two camera tables were carpeted, with fresh water rinse tanks and compressed air. Fresh towels for the dive deck and fresh water showers on the dive platform. Although the crew depends on tips to augment their salary, they were not pushy, just deserving. Each member worked their butts off to ensure the divers had a great time. Dive briefings were always accurate and timely. Night dives were at the same location as an afternoon dive. Saw nurse sharks, reef sharks, barracuda, turtles, dolphins, lobsters, crab shrimp, banded, cleaning, Peterson. The queen, French and grey angelfish, puffer fish and balloonfish, trunkfish, and cowfish. There was a library of fish identification books so you can learn what you saw on the dive. E6 slide processing on board. This year they moved the boat to a new dock so instead of boarding early as in the past you had to cool your heels until 8:30 PM when they picked you up. I think that the company should have secured a day room at a nearby hotel so it would be a better way to start the trip meeting your fellow divers.

Nekton Pilot, August 2000, Dr. Terri Hamilton (tahdc@msn.com), Helena, MT. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet.

Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 130 ft., dive within your computer's limits. After having done many live-aboard trips, mainly on *Aggressors*, I was apprehensive about 32 divers on a 78-foot boat. Happily I was wrong. Accommodations were wonderful — windows in every cabin are a great plus and the crew of 12 to service 31 did an exceptional job. One of our group was doing her check-out dives and got her certification on the boat, others of us were doing our 200 or 300th dives. All were happy with the selection of dive sites. Rocky Mountain High was incredible for macro and the Strip was Scorpionfish heaven! Excellent care of the many photographers onboard. Nick the photo pro was great, very helpful. Though many of us had camera trauma of one sort or another during the week, everyone felt like the crew did everything possible to help out. Although chef Pam is absolutely wonderful and the food is always good and plentiful, it's much more down home cooking than gourmet.

Nekton Pilot, August 2000, Phil Hampton, Merritt Island, FL. Vis: 25-100 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. An excellent operation. Our trip was shortened by 1/2 week due to tropical storm Debby. I liked the boat and crew, but was not impressed with the Cay Sal area. Got some great shark and remora photos. Rooms are enormous by live-aboard standards.

Nekton Pilot, August 2000, Kris Sawyers, Reston, VA. Vis: 50-100+ ft. Water: 72-76 degrees. Great trip. Boat very comfortable and crew was outstanding. We had one serious situation. Most of divers were in water at a very shallow site (18'), a storm came up suddenly and mooring lines on the boat broke. Crew responded instantly — extra dive masters appeared in water to secure divers safely while remaining crew worked above water to check on everyone and thing still on board. Boat had to move and bring divers back on board during lightning storm. We were very impressed with how they handled problem. Boat is showing wear. Frayed carpets, towels. Stained curtains and bedspreads. But overall a great trip. We were seasick for first few days. OK when boat moving but can be very rough when moored.

Nekton Pilot, September 2000, Jason S. Maddox, Hebron, KY. First live-aboard trip. Great trip and provided what we were looking for. No problems with seasickness. I used the patch, which I didn't need (took it off after a day). One of the better dive trips we have taken. If you are looking for shallower dives and more bottom time, this is probably the trip to take based on their itineraries. Visibility in the 80 ft. range. Once or twice it was 50 ft. Water temp 85 degrees. At 82 ft. on a night dive, my computer read 79 degrees (that was the coldest). Fish life was great—sharks, dolphins, turtles (loggerhead and hawksbill), morays, stingrays. Food was good (home style and no shortage of it).

Snacks (cookies, wings, eggrolls) between dives were great too. Pam catered to folks who don't eat fish (made chicken instead). Plenty of fruit juices, lemonade, ice tea. Entire staff is friendly and helpful. Pack light — you don't need much besides t-shirts, and shorts. We didn't wear shoes all week. Presentations every night are worthwhile. You can't wear skins or a wetsuit back to your room, but there are hot showers and rinse buckets between the dive deck and the uppermost deck, and plenty of space to hang wetsuits and skins. Plan your trip so you can fly out Sunday (to observe the 24-hour flight rule). If you don't, you will have to cut your dives short Friday, and the Strip is not something you'd want to miss. Room is not posh, but it did provide ample space and enough privacy. From cabin #2 we only heard the crew tie up occasionally. Noise level was never really that bad except during the day when guests stomped around on the top deck; we had a room near the stairs and galley and it wasn't that loud. Once your gear is set up once (by you), you don't have to set it up again for the balance of the trip. They fill the tanks where they sit. steel 95s so you will need less weight. These are shorter tanks, but you get used to it quickly. I got tagged by some sea nasty — dragged my hand through. It burned pretty good and left some small welts. I mentioned it to one of the crew as I got up onto the dive deck and he promptly grabbed a spray bottle of vinegar and sprayed the spot—pain went away. These folks are on the ball.

Nekton Pilot, Cay Sal Banks, September 2000, Nick and Donna Southall, Mobile, AL. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. and no deco diving. Great trip, first class operation. Our first live-aboard. It will be hard to do shore based diving again.

Sea Dragon, July 2000, Edmund Doering, Jupiter, FL. Vis: 80+ ft. Water: 80 degrees. Dive restrictions: common sense. Four dogs on board, if allergic or don't like dogs, don't go. Food not up to *Aggressor* standards. Cabin cramped, no reading light but only 8 passengers so you can have whole boat with three other couples. Most dives around Conception Island in southern Exumas, great diving! Great people and great staff. (954-522-0161; e-mail CaptainDan@SeaDragonBahamas.com; website www.seadragonbahamas.com)

Sea Fever, 2000, John Kontnik, Lakewood, CO. Second trip aboard the *Sea Fever* (first under the new ownership) and it is the biggest bang for the buck in the Caribbean. The new crew was great, the food wonderful, and the diving very good. There were lots of sharks (reef and nurse), big turtles, large schools of fish (typical Caribbean), rays, and a staff that will knock your socks off. The chef (not cook), Redman was super. Amazed at the food that came out of the galley. The dive profiles were liberal and we were allowed to dive our computers. We also had several interactions with wild dolphin. Sugar Wreck is a must, I have never seen such a profusion of fish and Sherwood

Forest for the sharks. Overnights at the Howard Johnson on Alton Rd. Their airport shuttle service took 2 1/4 hours to pick us up and get us to the hotel) and they do not know what a wake up call is. (800-443-3837, 757-481-9116; e-mail seafever@seafever.com; website www.seafever.com)

Sea Fever, Lynn Haven Dive Center, March 2000, Bill and Sheila Kelley (drkelley2@cs.com), Chester, VA.

Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 78-82 degrees. Restrictions: Very open with experienced divers —generally 130 ft. max + 500 psi return. Good dive operation. Offered help for beginners, but let experienced divers do their own thing. Nitrox an additional cost. Rooms were about average with a nice dining area. Food was Excellent! Bring your own towels. Dive briefings and safety issues were well covered. Sometimes they seemed reluctant to move to new dive sites each day. Friendly crew. Considering price, ease of diving, crew, Nitrox, and food this was a good live-aboard value.

Sea Fever, July 2000, Ray and Cheryl Stobaugh, Atkins, AR. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: Keep hydrated. Dive our computer, be on the boat with no less than 500 psi. Good value. Excellent crew, plenty to eat drink such as water, ice, lemonade on dive deck. The first day we crossed from Miami to Western Grand Bahama cleared customs + did 3 dives before bedtime. Most days 5 dives. An operation that concentrates on diving not shore excursions. We had a brief dolphin

encounter. The captain tried hard to locate. We covered a lot of miles to visit a variety of sites. Just before getting back into Miami a pod appeared. Wouldn't you know? 2 dives had strong current, 3 dives large spotted eagle Rays. A large nurse shark, a squid, octopus, turtle many barracudas, grouper, some stone fish, slipper lobster and crab. Coral and sponge good shape and colorful. Our third live aboard. The rooms varied. We had 2 double beds bunk style a good closet and under bed storage. Others we double and single and some just single bunks. 2 heads + showers for 14 passengers + 6 crew. It was not a problem. The boat offers 3 itineraries.

Sea Fever, September 2000, Frank Farmer (aa-diver@home.com), Sherman Oaks, CA. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: just suggestions, i.e., dive with a buddy, no deeper than 130 fsw. Under new ownership (Lynnhaven Dive Center, Virginia Beach, Virginia), the *Sea Fever* is a 90 foot converted aluminum crew boat, the best live-aboard to dive the Bahamas for reefs, wrecks, and walls. High standards. Excellent diving bang for the bucks. My third trip, it was the best. A+ operation.

Sea-Ray, July 2000, Alice Dawes (awdawes@yahoo.com), Setauket, NY. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82-84° F. Dive your own profile. Our charter was out of Georgetown in the Exuma island group. Most diving was off Conception and Rum Cay. A good

representation of healthy, large reef fish at both islands. Schooling sharks followed us on some dives at Conception. Turtles frequent at both islands. Saw school of dolphins at surface off Conception. The *Sea-Ray* is an independently owned live-aboard charter that works out of the Exuma and Abaco island groups. It accommodates twelve passengers with a crew of four. The week that we were on the boat there were five in our group and two marine biologists engaged in reef research and a crew of three. The weather was ideal. Our group of five basically had the boat to ourselves. The most comfortable, accommodating, enjoyable charter I have been on in the Caribbean! The crew was extremely friendly and engaging. The captain went out of his way to put us on good sites: beautiful walls, healthy reefs and even a fascinating wreck off Rum Cay that is not visited very often due to wind and current. The service for diving was the best. We never had to haul our equipment or change air tanks. We encountered some technical glitches with our regulators, and what couldn't be fixed was exchanged with rental equipment on the boat. Water level dive platform where we sat while the crew brought us our tanks. On surfacing, we handed up our weight belt, slipped out of our B. C. in the water, and the crew hauled it topside for us. Wonderful needle spray showers on the dive platform gave us warm fresh water. Cameras were stowed in a convenient fresh water barrel. A separate fresh water barrel was available for other equipment. Three excellent night dives and one night visited a marina for

a little 'shore excursion'. The other shore trip was to an archeological site to see cave pictographs on Rum Cay. Cabin accommodations were the most homelike and comfortable we have ever encountered, even in the most expensive boats. Ordinary flush toilet and tub/shower in the bath that we shared with two other cabins were not crowded. We had a real queen-size box spring and mattress bed, firm and comfortable. The lounge had three very large 'man-eating' sofas and a complete electronic entertainment system with the most complete selection of videos I've ever encountered! The bridge is equipped with computer-assisted navigation and GPS and Loran C. The captain, Ray O'Quinn, has extensive experience — twenty years of live-aboard charters. The boat is stable and comfortable under way. Food was good and plentiful. Homestyle meals of good variety were served graciously. Home made bread every meal! This charter was the lowest priced we've ever purchased — though we didn't have a full boat. My advice is to pounce! (800-856-5994; e-mail depewt@mindspring.com; website www.searaycharters.com)

BELIZE

Belize Aggressor, October 1999, Dan and Sheila Collier, Santa Barbara, CA. Vis: 50-60 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 max. Good: Blue Hole — Great dive (stalactites/stalagmites). Boat facilities (hot tub/dock/dive lockers). Crew (Capt. John and all). Organized events after we came to port (Jaguar Paw/Trip to Ruins). Diving: Very