

the low around 58. Summers are balmy, waters chilly. Bermuda's in the hurricane zone, around the same latitude as Charleston, South Carolina. . . .

BONAIRE

In 1999, hurricane-driven waves damaged, even destroyed, many of Bonaire's beautiful shallow coral gardens, ruining snorkeling in many places. While the tourist industry has done a fine job of keeping potential travelers ignorant of the damage, our readers here provide a detailed report. Still, Bonaire is a diver's island par excellence, with easy diving that's especially well-suited to beginning divers or those returning to the water after a long dry spell. Bonaire boasts superb year-round weather, with lows around 74° at night and daytime highs around 89°. Expect some rain from October–January, but, since Bonaire lies outside the hurricane belt, dives are rarely canceled. There's arid cactus-covered terrain topside; on the leeward side, expect calm seas, little or no current, and water temperatures in the low 80s most of the time. . . . The dive industry here's thoroughly organized with many excellent operators and lots of places to rent tanks or book boat dives. Although the island's been heavily dived the last two decades, its unusual coral formations harbor a wide range of tropicals, excellent guides to point out

unique critters (although there are few sharks or pelagics), and shore diving in front of every hotel. . . . Savvy divers rent a vehicle to shore-dive the island (reserve these ahead of time, or you may be out of luck, and don't leave valuables in your car). . . . The southern end of the island is often rough, but worth diving when conditions are favorable. . . . Avoid meal plans to take advantage of the many restaurants within walking distance of each hotel (and so you don't get stuck if your hotel chef is on leave). There's plenty of overnight film processing, good gear rental, and repair facilities. . . . Everyone speaks English. . . . Because of the terrible service of near-bankrupt ALM airlines, there is an excellent chance your luggage will be delayed and your trip will be delayed one way or the other by as much as a day.

Bonaire, January 2000, Mike Chambers, Strongsville, OH. I am puzzled over the silence and lack of information concerning the effects of hurricane Lenny on Bonaire. I realize the Bonaire Board of Tourism and Operators will down play things somewhat. I was there this past New Year to ring in the new millennium. 25' under Salt Pier at Midnight ringing it in! I shore dived all week from north to south making 21 dives. If you just dove from Margate Bay and south, you wouldn't find much damage. The same goes for Karpata, 1000 Steps and Ole Blue. Some sand has been

pulled down over the reef at depth, but pretty much the same great sites. Only two words can describe the rest of the sites from 40' to the surface—"Total Destruction." We were unable to go to the park and dive Slagbaai Bay or Nukove Beach because these sites do not exist anymore. From Pink Beach (south) to Captain Dons (north) 40' to the surface is gone and below this depth tons of sand has been deposited all over the reef. At some sites as far down as 80'-90'. All the beautiful coral, fans, and elk horn that Bonaire is known for is bleached white and laying in huge mounds on shore. Most of the heavy growth on the pilings at Salt Pier is gone. Going down the ladder at Buddy's, I almost had to abort the dive because my mask was flooding, not from sea water, but from tears! Just wide open sand flats and broken up coral rubble. No living coral! On one of my past dive trips, I made 7 dives off Buddy's dock with my Nikonos and never made it below 35'; there was no need to. Now, after the last dive trip to Bonaire, I must say "don't waste your time." The one good thing that came out of all of the destruction is the fish life is more abundant than ever. Perhaps fish were always there, but now they don't have anywhere to hide. Bonaire went from being one of the best snorkeling destinations in the world to don't bother packing a mask, fins and snorkel if that's all you are going to do. I can only hope the major publications start telling the facts and stop misleading people into thinking hurricane Lenny wasn't much of a storm. I am not a marine biologist, but I

do know the shallows will not regrow and flourish the way they once were in my lifetime or my children's'. But as I stated before, the greater fish life is enough of an attraction to entice me back to Bonaire for the next 30 years.

Black Durgon Inn, March 2000, B.J. Mauer, Genesee, WI. Vis: 80 to 100 ft. Water: 76 to 79 degrees, no currents, except end of island. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: none. Shore diving. We do our own planning. Water colder than usual. Some graying on reef taking place. Weather not as warm as usual. Too much rain for dry island. Reef needs time to recover. (800-526-2370, 599 599-717-5736; Fax +599 599-717-8846)

Buddy Dive Resort, October 1999, Prof. W. Patrick Resen, Walnut Creek, CA. So much good diving we couldn't get too much of what we wanted to do in 6 days. Dive operation good. Divemasters helpful though light on marine biology info. DMs pleasant and helpful. Scheduled 3 boat dives a day (8:30, 11:00, and 2:30) so not hard to get a boat dive in then head off for shore diving. The 8:30 fills up fairly quickly but we had no trouble. Even when scheduled full two or three people dropped so don't know anyone who didn't get on the 8:30 if desired. Two boats, though one broke down. 6 Boat dives and unlimited air \$200/week. Free to dive your own profile. DMs did keep track of the divers, though. Restaurant good and reasonable. Diving with dolphins one day off Klein Bonaire. Great fish life at every site. Mosquitoes some

problem but a little “Cutter” solved it. Bedrooms AC, but not the sitting room-kitchen. Water conditions ideal, shore a bit hot half the time, perfect the other. Excellent for beginners — my wife even got comfortable this, her 2d dive trip. A vehicle a must, though you can find someone to pair up with. Good value for the money. The Town Pier night dive is overrated — not what it used to be. Some good small crabs and different coral but crowded in a tight area. Not worth it. Buddy reef nice and right off the site. Good for night dives. (Ph: 011-599-7-5080; fax: 011-599-7-8647, e-mail: buddydive@bonaire.net, Website: www.buddydive.com)

Buddy Dive Resort, October 1999, Deb and Dave Smith-Craine, Kutztown, PA. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82-85 degrees. We requested a two-bedroom condo, but were given two one-bedroom condos. We were with friends from far away and wanted to live together for that week. Three days later they moved us to a three-bedroom condo that was much nicer. We purchased a dive package that included 6 boat dives and a special dive safari. The safari never happened because we were the only divers who bought that package. I think they should have accommodated us. We did one boat dive that was boring and skipped the rest. The shore diving was wonderful. We did numerous dives at the resort and never got bored. We preferred the food at the Green Parrot and at Captain Don's rather than that at Buddy's, but the breakfasts at Buddy's were good. There were cold cuts available to make sandwiches for

lunch. The staff was helpful and friendly.

Buddy Dive Resort, November 1999, John Chmelicek (jtcddmc@netdoor.com), Hattiesburg, MS. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. Some of the best diving I have done, unfortunately we went after the hurricane and Buddy's sustained much damage and their facilities were limited. Essentially no boat diving available. The shore diving was very good, we got to dive the east side a lot because of the wind change. Reefs were in good shape, great pics. Real shortage of tanks...we had paid for “unlimited shore Nitrox” and they were usually short and we had to wait for a “refill.” I understand the hurricane was responsible for messing up the islands dive business but if you pay for unlimited that is what I expect. Trip was excellent, great diving. We saw no theft problems as reported, we felt safe, we had our 2 kids with us. My biggest beef was with ALM. We got to Bonaire Ok, but on our return trip, they canceled our plane, after much confusion they rerouted us to Miami then to Atlanta. It took a 5-hour delay. When we arrived in Miami, we found out ALM made a mistake and could not get us back to Atlanta for 2 DAYS. They repeatedly lied to us, paid for no expenses, just made lots of promises. To this day April 2000, we have sent more than 9 letters and email to ALM and we have yet to hear even an acknowledgment from them. Good news — they did not lose our luggage.

Buddy Dive Resort, January 2000, Dale Musser (Remoc@primenet.com), Oregon, OH. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: return to boat with 500# of air. Dive Master in water with every dive but you did your own thing. We had the best trip in years, we had 3 couples and split the cost of three bedroom/bathroom condo. The only bad part; ALM. All flights went when they wanted no matter what was scheduled. Lost one large bag with all diving gear for two people. Buddy's loaned that couple all the gear they needed at no cost. The bag showed up 4 days later. Buddy's is top rate and the people that work there could not do enough to keep you pleased, (especially the dive shop). The diving was great but no large animals. Six days of diving and 15 total dives.

Buddy Dive Resort, Capt. Don's, Lions Resort, January and April 2000, Terry Erhardt Truckee, CA. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F Dive restrictions: 130 ft. return with 500 lbs. In January our daughters received open water cert at Buddy Dive, with Martin, great instructor. Boat diving poor, boats poor, constantly breaking down. Shore diving pretty good, takes some getting used too. Rain the whole trip in January, poor vis, Hurricane Floyd in 99 completely killed all coral from 0 to 35 fsw, real sad! Dive operation limited from storm damage, Buddy Drive Thru Air refill station — Great and Fast "Aldin" gives great fills sometime to compressor limits 3300 lbs. 80 cu.. ft. tanks. We returned with

friends in April, stayed at Lions with our RCI membership trade, great rooms, best place we saw, weather much better, Vis much better, water temp same. Went with Buddy one day on boat drive, they had new capt. We had 5 snorkelers on board with divers, bad decision, dive turned bad — very strong current, snorkelers returned to boat, divers didn't know, divers surfaced — no boat. Boat finally came to look for divers but couldn't get close because of high seas and wind, the worst trip I have ever been on. I think they got quite an ear full when we returned to the resort. Helma Hooker, 1000 Steps, O'le Blue. Karpata, La Dina's Leap, all still good shore diving, but only after 30 40 ft. down. Some fish still around, some sponges OK but No big Stuff, only 2 small reef sharks at 140 ft. one day out of 14 dive days. There are better laces to spend money.

Buddy Dive Resort, February 2000, Rolf and Doreen Sullivan (mouseink@aol.com), Bloomington, MN. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 77 to 80 degrees, choppy, surge. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: deco stop at 15, 20 ft. For 3-5 min. Island is beautiful. Food was excellent and reasonable. Trouble with 2 of our group who had e-tickets. Had to get paper tickets reissued in Aruba. Would not recommend using e-tickets for his journey. Be prepared to deal with lost or damaged luggage as it is likely to happen. Great destination.

Buddy Dive Resort, February 2000, Kim and Russ Brungraber, Green Bay, WI. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 78-81

degrees. Really enjoyed the 24-hour unlimited shore diving. Our package at Buddy Dive included a four-ton pickup truck that came handy for shore diving. Wouldn't stay anywhere else. Everyone fantastic. Hurricane Lenny last October did a lot more damage than what was advertised. Coral reefs at 10-20 ft. totally destroyed. The fish are back. But the shallows are sad to see. Great place for a macro lens, I took some great pictures. You could dive your own profile on the boat dives. Visibility was low because of 20 inches of rain in January.

Buddy Dive Resort, March 2000, Linden Brown, Seattle, WA. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78° F. Did only shore dives. I wish the resort were honest about the state of the reefs and resort post hurricane. They had lost their dock. When we talked to them, they said it was done — well, when we arrived there was no dock — just the bare bones of one being started. Most of the shore-based facilities were under repair and there were no dunk tanks or storage facilities. There were no rinse areas for cameras. The kitchen was still outside (this was reported as done also). Many basic services we had come to expect from the resort were curtailed or not available. They certainly were trying but why can't they just be honest? Be honest about the storm damage to the reefs — Nukove is gone, there are no two ways about it. Many shallow reefs are in bad shape but still divable, just let us know. ALM changed our flights 3 times in the last two days before travel. We were delayed 6 hrs and

some bags went missing for a couple days. The resort was closed by the time we arrived and had we not flown in earlier than the rest of our party, they would have been stuck without a room or way to get into the resort at 2 am. On the return, a direct flight turned into a stopover in Haiti so part of our group missed their connections home. I love Bonaire — even with the reef damage, but until I can get there without using ALM I won't be back.

Buddy Dive Resort, April 2000. Jonathan Schlosser, Kenmore, NY.

Vis: 40 to 60 ft. Water: 78 to 80 degrees, calm and flat, no currents. Dive your own profile. A macro photographers dream. Buddy Dive is so accommodating to divers that you feel like a kid again; the shore diving is unparalleled and the east side of Bonaire, which gets some bad press due to rough entry and currents, is the place to see larger pelagics. A trip to Washington-Slagbaai park is a must as the diving on the northern end is wonderful. If you like go at your own pace type diving with no extrinsic bothers, Bonaire is the place.

Buddy Dive Resort, May 2000, Rhonda and Ken Kossman (nekossa@iwon.com) Red Feather Lakes, CO. Vis: 80 to 100 ft. Water: 80 to 82 degrees, calm and flat, choppy, no currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: none. Our 1999 trip to Bonaire and Buddy Dive was great but 2000 was even better. Buddy's strongest point has to be its staff in both the resort and restaurant. Everyone seems eager to

help you have a wonderful stay. We feel right at home.

Buddy Dive Resort, June 2000, Sherry and Jeff Hotham, Phoenix, AZ. Vis: 60-90 ft. Water: 79-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: 1 hr time limits. I was not disappointed; in fact I saw more in variety and quantity of both vertebrates and invertebrates than my previous 2 trips. Buddies Dive is still short on boats. (Did they ever really have more than 1?)

Buddy Dive Resort, June 2000, Craig Gordon, Tucson, AZ. Vis: 65-85 ft. Water: 80-81 degrees. A lot of sites suffered significant wave damage in November '99, but only to 20-30 ft. Snorkeling hurt much more than diving. Buddy Dive rebuilt its dock and was ready for 4th annual Bonaire Dive Festival that provided ecological photo workshops and nice evening parties (including food and drink). Shore diving is really the way to go on Bonaire. We did not rent a car but were easily able to team up with others at the resort. Entries were gentle, little current and lots to see. Great for beginners or experienced divers.

Buddy Dive Resort, June 2000, R. Moore (padidm@earthlink.net), Vista, CA. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: No. Nice rooms but they need more boats. Would fight for a spot everyday. Food is expensive everywhere in Bonaire. Dive operation had great staff but when we saw Capt'n Don's boats leave every morning and we waited to

see what they had scrounged up for us it hurt. Spend the extra money and go someplace that has boats.

Buddy Dive Resort, June 2000, Irv Kaplan (CPT-Diver@yahoo.com), Henderson, NV. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: None. Great condo and restaurant, excellent vehicles for rental. Dive operation indifferent. Took a long time to sign in and get weights. Nitrox tanks had to be hauled from drive-thru to dock. Nitrox fills were unreliable as to mixture and psi. Half the time boat left from marina (had to drive there) rather than dock. Squid, sea horses, spotted ray, many spotted drums out and about lots of eels and tarpons. Town Pier and salt pier aren't the dives they used to be. Fresh garbage, less fish. Wind caused us a number of times to change dive sites. Wear hard sole booties for entry.

Buddy Dive Resort, July 2000, Sean and Danaka DeGeest, Des Moines, IA. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 81 degrees. Dive restrictions: Don't touch anything. We will never fly United or ALM again. They canceled flights that were confirmed, lied to us and are just plain rude. Dive when and how you want to, off shore, in Bonaire. Buddy Dive make it so easy for you to do what you want to. They have equipment, rinse tanks, lockers and trucks waiting. The whole experience made us wiser travelers and better divers. Most of the shallow reefs (less than 15 ft. deep) were destroyed in the November storm.

Buddy Dive Resort, August 2000, Clay Coleman (clayco@mindspring.com) Baton Rouge, LA. My 4th trip to Buddy Dive. Buddy Dive has grown up-nice landscaping, new floor in the "Dock of The Bay" bar, new and spacious open air front office. Stable 110 power in the activity center for charging batteries, same day E-6 processing if in by 10 am. The old restaurant is not open, but excellent food in the bar. Friendliest dive staff in the Caribbean. New pier/ Shore diving still convenient with tanks and gear storage only a few feet from the pier. 24 hour dives possible. The wave event destroyed the shallow staghorn growths near the pier, but jawfish and octopus now inhabit the rubble. The reef seems to be recovering quickly at depths of 30 feet and deeper, and seems to be in better shape as you swim northward toward Habitat. Still, an excellent, very fishy dive. Most Klein sites are still pristine. Small boats but crew cheerfully and carefully handled my heavy housed camera and strobes.

Buddy Dive Resort, August 2000, Alison Stenger (astenger@pcez.com), Portland, OR. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water 84 F, dangerously strong currents occur daily, though they only last about 20 minutes. Then all is calm until the next current. No restrictions enforced. First visit back since Hurricane Lenny. Although the shallow reef areas of the island's central dive sites are devastated, the deeper reefs everywhere are still fantastic. Windsock and Pink Beach no longer have shallow areas of

beauty, but Old Blue and Karpata are still wonderful. Big animals have moved in. Turtles pose for photos, spotted eagle rays cruise leisurely, and bigger specimens of the usual fish now abound. This trip we also encountered a Bull Shark running 14', a fish that swam and looked like a Mola Mola, about 3.5' in diameter, and the usual array of tarpon and snook. The BAD news was current; morning and early evening. Some divers ended up over a mile away, and the divemasters kept busy hauling people out. We have never before even heard of current on the sheltered side, but this current was too swift to swim against. The other problem (we also encountered this years ago was little biting bugs were everywhere, and daylight didn't slow them down. Noticing other people when at the airport to go home, most of us looked like measles victims. Take bug spray, and don't go into the water until after the current passes. UW Photography comments: Rinse tanks, well marked and cleaned often. Access to dock from water is awkward for people with heavy or bulky cameras and strobes.

Captain Don's Habitat, August 1999, Bill Choppe, Modesto, CA. Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. There were 6 in our group. We rented a "group A" vehicle from ABC Rental. It turned out to be a 6-passenger pickup truck and was perfect (ABC fax: 011-59975034) The cost for 7 days was \$288 US. Sending faxes from Capt. Don's was \$5 first page and \$3 for additional pages. No charge for receiving faxes.

Didn't see anything big. The ALM flight from Miami to Bonaire left a lot to be desired. ALM chartered the flight to Pan Am which doesn't have landing rights in Bonaire so we were flown to Aruba and got a connecting flight to Bonaire. The plane was too small to accommodate all the Miami passengers and their luggage so the plane had to make two trips. (Ph: 800-327-6709 or 011-599-7-8290, Fax: 011-599-7-7346 or 305-438-4220, Website: www.bonaire.org/habitat)

Captain Don's Habitat, March 2000, Rob Michaels, Andover, MA. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78° F. My family and I visited Bonaire for the second year in a row. We are six certified divers (three generations!) and 4 non-divers/snorkelers. As there were 10 of us, we rented several villa units on the water edge, which have kitchens. There was usually something going on at the Deco Stop outdoor bar every night. There was live music and dancing which was lots of fun for the family. Captain Don still gives his Thursday evening slide show. Habitat lost its docks (papa dock and baby dock) and they are still not rebuilt. There are some wooden steps leading into the water but it was not as easy as baby dock. To do boat dives we had to be shuttled to the Harbor Village marina, adding 15 minutes of wasted time (i.e., island time) to each dive. Habitat dive staff was helpful and friendly but didn't intrude on your dive plans. We took most meals at the Habitat Rum Runners restaurant whose food was fine but the service was slow (island time again). This was

sometimes a problem when various family members were rushing to make boat dives or instruction; but then again island time applies everywhere in Bonaire. The flip side is that you never feel rushed by the staff to eat up and leave. Rum Runners shrimp jerba hole was good. We had expected to find massive reef damage but only noticed reef rubble in the less-than 30-foot depth. It was a little disappointing for the snorkelers in front of Habitat. There were plenty of fish to see. I also noticed more silt in the water when we did the Hilma Hooker but that may have just the conditions that day. We did the Hilma Hooker as a shore dive and the entry was easy. We also did a couple night dives in front of Habitat. One evening we hired the Sea Cow water-taxi to take us to Klein at sunset and prepare a bar-be-cue for us on the beach. It was great and Jerry did a fine job cooking sausages, steak and fish and salads. Jerry and the others working with him were friendly. \$35/person. The Sea Cow is easy to find, as it is white with black splotches. It leaves from the main marina, across from the Its Raining Fishes restaurant. Did a drift snorkel with the Sea Cow the next day. \$15/person. The idea was that he drops you off at one end of Klein and you drift with the current to the other end where he picks you up. Unfortunately, the time we did it the current was going the opposite direction so we had to swim against the current! Jerry was apologetic and charged half rate. One family member who just turned 12 took the PADI OW course at Habitat taught by Carlos. He did a good job and she finished in four

days. Several of us took an Underwater Naturalist PADI specialty class at Sand Dollar taught by Jerry Ligon. It was very good. He is actually a biologist instead of just a scuba instructor who paid the PADI fees to become a specialty instructor. Jerry showed us slides and explained reef ecology to us before we did the two dives. The Sand Dollar also had kayak classes that were quite good. A family member went with Sand Dollar in a van to Lac Bay for instruction and fun. Another day she took an intensive clinic right off the Sand Dollar dock. Sand Dollar has more courses to take than Habitat whose dive operation seemed to have an instructor shortage. One family member went windsurfing over at Lac Bay in Sorbon. Rental is \$20/hour. Lac Bay is protected, shallow, with a nice breeze. The outdoor Hang Out Bar has food and drink and friendly staff and parrots. There is a small, but nice beach to hang out before and after and watch the windsurfers and kayakers. Rented mountain bikes from Cycle Bonaire. They are Trek's but bring your own toe-clips because they don't have them. They do not allow you to bike in Washington-Slagbaai Park unless you go with a tour so we just biked the island on the main roads. A nice loop is north along the Marine Park, turn right at the storage tanks toward Rincon. You will pass lakes with flamingos. From Rincon continue to Kralendijk. Go early in the morning when there is not much traffic and you will see the sun come up over pink flamingos. Washington-Slagbaai roads are in rough shape. Other restaurant tips:

The Rendezvous, right downtown, serves seafood and meat with an international flavor. It was excellent. Den Laman serves seafood and meat, and was excellent as well. It is an open-air restaurant near the Sand Dollar. Our table looked out over the water.

Captain Don's Habitat, March 2000, Paul A. Johnson, Santa Rosa, CA.

Viz 60 to 100 ft. Sunny to cloudy, occasional light rain. Water: calm and flat, no current. Water temp 80. 3 mm wet suit, No large critters seen (but lots of mosquitoes) I booked a week long stay so that the non-diving members of my family could enjoy what we had heard was the best snorkeling in the world. Alas, it was not to be! Through the effects of Hurricane Lenny, the shallow portions of the reef have been savaged, and all one can see without tanks is a sand desert of calcium. Once below 40 feet on air, however, we got a sense of how good it must have been last year. My daughter and I did all of our dives from shore and most of them just in front of Captain Don's, and never tired of the scene. The dive operation is aid back but helpful when needed. We began with a good briefing from the divemaster and then were requested to do our first dive in the backyard. I don't know whether we were being observed from shore, but we survived and from then on, we dove whenever and wherever we wanted. The boat signups were quickly filled but that didn't matter. The dive op leaves full cylinders out 24 hours a day and we picked one up whenever the mood struck us. Apparently, Captain Don's

used to have a great dock for giant stride entries but that is also demolished thanks to Lenny. In its place is a rickety wooden stairs with an even less sturdy handrail that made for some interesting entries and exits. Even with the desolation, the diving was excellent. I am unable to say the same for Captain Don's itself. Our suite was badly in need of paint and was never adequately cleaned. The nondive staff was not helpful and we had to make several phone calls to get enough pillows. The bar was great and the restaurant (Rum Runners) was fine especially for breakfast, but we found several much better restaurants in town (Richard's, Mona Lisa, Zeezicht). Several landmark restaurants such as the Green Parrot are also now piles of rubble thanks to the ubiquitous Lenny. Do everything in your power to avoid ALM. If their safety record is anything like their service record, it is a risky journey indeed.

Captain Don's Habitat, March 2000, James McCord, N. Ft. Myers, FL. Vis: 30-50 ft. Water: 77-78 degrees. Dive restrictions: Max. 100 ft. That reef was torn up down to 40 ft. from Hurricane last November, no docks at dive resorts. Sand in water so bad it was hard to photograph. The dive staff at Habitat was not helpful, very anti photographer and I would never recommend Captain Don's Habitat. There are several other resorts that we checked out and found them to be very helpful, one of these was Bruce Bowker's Carib Inn.

Captain Don's Habitat/Lions Dive, April 2000, Terry Ekdahl

(tekdahl@voyager.net), Oscoda, MI. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 Fahrenheit, calm. Some coral damage in shallows from Lenny, but overall not a lot of change from our last trip. We did shore diving at Capt. Dons and took tanks to dive elsewhere. We dove with Carib Inn where my wife and daughter took their advanced AOW course. I also completed a divemaster course with Carib. Their staff and operation are well organized and first rate, especially Larry. The bugs were certainly more noticeable on this trip than prior ones, but the precipitation also brought the flamingos closer to town. Bonaire still is our favorite dive destination, and we will return.

Captain Don's Habitat, April 2000, Ken Holmes, San Rafael, CA. Vis: 40 to 70 feet. Water: 76 to 78 degrees, calm and flat no currents. Restrictions: Depth, min.psi. Hurricane Lenny wave action diminished the shallow coral habitat. Capt. Don's and their dive operations are good. But watch out for their "deco stop bar" happy hour. Fast talking lady bartender ended up charging us \$10 per "cut rate" rum punch.

Captain Don's Habitat, June 2000, Gary Simms (GSimms@TempleSinaiDC.org), Chevy Chase, MD. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F. The "tidal waves" from last season's hurricane did MAJOR damage in the shallows. But by 30 feet or so, there was no significant loss and there has been a huge spurt in fish life — a huge increase in smaller species. First trip to Captain Don's. The facilities were fine nothing fancy, but clean,

comfortable. They have replaced dive docks, and are restoring the kitchen. Still, a bit of construction going on. Next door at Buddy's, they are putting in a new jetty and dock. Will be noisy 7 am to 7 pm, probably through the summer. Stay in the villas on the north side of Captain Don's and it will be fine. Shore diving was excellent — but make sure you have hard sole booties — or wear your tevas. The trek to the beach can be long, and most entries are pretty rocky. With 3 boat dives a day (and sometimes 4) at Captain Don's, we didn't do much shore diving anyway. Easiest entry for shore diving is probably Pink Beach and the Salt Pier (need a permit). Dive the Hilma Hooker — excellent cargo wreck, coral just starting to form. 60 feet to 95. Dive operation at Habitat quite good. Excellent rental equipment (BC's and regulators). They really let you do your own thing, but give advice when asked. Divemasters were pretty short on the briefings about particular sites, and rarely pointed out the "good stuff." Try to dive with Marceau — he rounded us all up to look at seahorses and swarms of squid. Crime is a problem — but for tourists, it's basically theft from cars. Note: never lock your rental, and never leave anything in it. They'll smash your windows for a T shirt, let alone a camera especially when you're out shore diving. Rent a truck (cheapest and best) from AandB — kind of a rent-a-wreck, but serviceable (about \$225 a week). Decline the insurance — your credit card or home policy probably covers accidents, and the rental insurance they offer does not

cover theft damage (like a broken window). Food at Rum Runners is good — especially breakfast buffet. Dinner is good but \$20-\$25/ person. Try Richards for dinner (more pricey but better — and bring mosquito repellent!) or Capriccio's (more expensive still, but the locals claim it's the best). Bonaire has some of the best diving (especially fish and sponges) anywhere. After 16 dives in 6 days, we can't wait to go back. This is a wet suit diving area for most of us: water temps in the low 80s are still chilly. As a new diver (now with 36 dives), it's clear that I must have a computer — the dive tables (which I follow carefully) really don't give you enough BT when you're doing 3 or 4 dives a day.

Captain Don's Habitat, August 2000, Glenn Leneker, Vancouver, WA. Vis: 60-40 ft. Water: 86-82 degrees. Vis was less than previous years.

Captain Don's Habitat, August 2000, Ron and Sherry Smith, Levittown, PA. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 82-86 degrees. Recommended limits and times, but you decide. Great resort. We had a great view from Jr. Suite overlooking the pool and ocean. Very diver friendly, treat divers with computers like they know their limits. Could follow the divemaster, or do your own thing. Due to hurricane Lenny dead coral washed ashore made entry difficult. After day of shore diving (though once in the water it was great) we took the boat dives that they included in our package. Damage to coral was evident in shallow water, but there were areas the coral was

beautiful. Not a lot of big fish but many smaller critters. Hilma Hooker was excellent w/2 large tarpon. Food was great everywhere, with the Blue Moon being the best.

Captain Don's Habitat, August 2000, Russclay Langley, Charlotte, NC. Vis: 50-120 ft. Water: 82 degrees. To simplify your travel situation fly direct from Miami to Bonaire on the week-ends; otherwise, you will catch a small plane in Curaçao Monday through Friday. This seems to be one of the safest Islands I have visited. On an Island like Bonaire, any petty theft makes big news! The parking areas at the shore dive sites are usually in clear view of passersby and typically there are one or more cars in the area doing the same thing you are.

Carib Inn, January 2000, Tony Selby, Evergreen, CO. Water: 77 to 78 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. We have not experienced any thefts in our 3 visits to Bonaire but it is necessary to take precautions. Carib Inn is a well-run operation; this was our 2nd. visit; rooms were large and clean. (Ph: 011-599-78819, Fax: 011-599-75295, e-mail caribinn@bonaire.com)

Carib Inn, July 2000, Scott Bennett (scott@bennettoons.com) Washington, D.C. Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 80-85 degrees. The Caribe Inn rocks. Get the three bedroom house. Bruce and his people are first rate, competent, professional and friendly. They care deeply about Bonaire's ecology, environment, your personal comfort and diving needs. The hotel itself is

quite comfortable w/excellent diving facilities. Shore dive at will and the boat dives are terrific. A splendid time. The Mona Lisa is fabulous restaurant.

Dive Inn/Bonaire Town Homes, May 2000, Carlos Ferraro, Caracas, DF. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 80° Fahrenheit. I've been to Bonaire since 1991, nine trips. I am a naturalist and I am critical of the reef condition and the visibility. Since 1995 the reefs have shown a constant strain. Showing more and more damage and less visibility than the preceding years due probably to the human contact and the natural processes. In this trip, however, the reefs showed a large destruction in many areas where the tail of a hurricane struck last year. Many sites have been practically devastated and others have suffered different levels of damage, especially on the 30 feet and up depths. Very little information has been transmitted to the public and this is why I am writing this commentary get all the info. you can before you plan your next dive trip. (800-367-3484, +599 7-8761; Fax +599 7-8513)

Divi Flamingo, February 2000, George A. Bogard, Rockwall, TX. Vis: 75-80 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 1 hr. time limit. The Divi is a rundown dump, even the time shares are not well maintained. The food service was poor, they even ran out of wine the second day. (Ph: 800-367-3484 or 011-599-78285, Fax: 011-599-78238)

Divi Flamingo, July 2000, Theresa Morris, Brownsville, TX. Vis: 60-

150 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: depths, time. Accommodations were so bad. Construction noise. Attitude, staff could care less we were there. Restrictions on diving were too restrictive. I went to Captain Don's habitat and took a rebreather course. Enjoyed Captain Don's. Divi Flamingo has agreed to refund me. It took 6-7 phone calls and a lot of aggravation. No refund yet.

Divi Flamingo, July 2000, Doug and Laura Young (oceanlakescuba@aol.com), Waco, TX. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 Fahrenheit, calm. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: could choose your depth on each dive. Try to limit to 100 feet due to fairly short surface interval. In the middle of renovations this time but we got newly renovated pool view rooms. Very nice, new and clean. Had TV. No alarm clock. The second dive dock was still not repaired from Lenny so we had a short walk to the dive dock in use. Restaurant on premises is very good. Prices better than Cayman. Would have liked more seafood dishes. Dive operation knowledgeable. Saw 4 frog fish and 1 or 2 seahorses and several turtles. Pleased with the Orlando and Rofino ability to find rare marine life. Excellent shore diving from the hotel. Bazillions of fish. Easy diving.

Harbour Village Resort, September 1999, Gale Anne Hurd, Beverly Hills, CA. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 84-86 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 feet for the morning dive and 60 feet for afternoon boat dives, unlim-

ited shore diving unrestricted. Unless you purchase a 7-night dive package, this resort is simply too expensive for what it offers. Its brochures promise a great dive and spa experience from a first class hotel. The beach is small, the food unexciting with few selections and the spa equipment hasn't been updated in years. There was one masseuse so it was almost impossible to book a massage. Fitness classes were scheduled to conflict with boat dives and both cost extra, though I was already paying \$490/night for a room straight out of a Ramada Inn. Even suites had Holiday Inn style bathrooms. Great Adventures Diving has great dive guides and a wonderful dive boat, but since the hotel seems to prefer its guests to shore dive, the offerings are limited to one tank boat dives, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. There is one night boat dive per week. The mosquitoes are a real problem after sundown especially since the hotel restaurants are all outdoors. (Ph: 800-868-7477 or 011-599-7-7500, Fax: 011-599-7-7507 or 305-567-9659)

Harbour Village Resort, April 2000, Michael Tell, Grapevine, TX. Vis: 60 to 80 ft. Water: 80 to 81 ft., calm and flat, slightly choppy, no currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 1 hr. time limit and 500 psi; 130 ft. max. on first dive; shallower on second time. Bonaire is a good, not great, place for a dive vacation. The diving, although not the best in the Caribbean, was easy and enjoyable. There are lots of species of fish, but few big ones. Visibility was

60 to 80 ft. range; water temp. 80-81 degrees. Underwater highlights, one dolphin, a pair of mating stonefish, 2 seahorses and extra large green moray eel. Harbour Village is not a resort for the 'dive your brains out' vacation but it is for couples who want to dive and relax in semi-luxury. The marina-view rooms were a terrific deal, as your patio is only a few feet from the water and is only a short walk to the beach. The room, though smaller than the deluxe oceanfront rooms, was clean and adequate. The price was half the luxury oceanfront, a real value. The restaurants at Harbour Village were from excellent, Kasa Coral to just ok, Spanish and Mexican restaurants, but the meal plan did not save any money. Food is moderately priced, and much less than Grand Cayman and downtown is 5 minutes away by car with good restaurants there. The dive operation, Great Adventures, ran adequately, although different from most places we've been. You must sign up every day for the boat and they go for 1-tank dives, at 9, 11, and 2 or at 9 and 1:30, depending on how busy the resort is. Boats are good, especially the Newton 42', and dive sites are 10 minutes, Klein Bonaire, to 20 minutes, northern or southern Bonaire, away. You set up your own gear and return it to your locker on the dock. Tanks are available 24 hrs. And the shore dive at the resort is a decent one. They lock up lockers at 5 pm so you must plan to get your gear for a night dive. One night it was teaming with fish and lots of eels and the consistently good diving on a nice, safe, friendly island. We flew Ameri-

can Airlines from Miami to Curaçao and the ALM, a 15 minute flight, to Bonaire. There were no baggage problems and no delays either way. Make sure you reconfirm your ALM flights 3 days before departure or they can give your seat away. (Ph: 800-868-7477 or 011-599-7-7500, Fax: 011-599-7-7507 or 305-567-9659)

Harbour Village Resort, June 2000,
Jason DeSalvo (desalvo@concentric.net)
Montclair, NJ. Vis: 40 to 120 Feet.
Water: 81 F, calm. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: No deeper than 130 feet, return with 500 psi, allowed us to dive solo. Everything about this resort and the dive operation is classy. The nicest property on the island and is relatively reasonably priced for the quality and service approximately \$850 PP, double occupancy for a Marina View room including breakfast, six boat dives and unlimited shore diving. This resort (and Bonaire in general) is a fantastic getaway for a diver with a non-diving spouse provided the non-diving spouse is interested in eco-touring and spa-based activities. Activities include kayaking through pristine mangroves, great snorkeling, full service spa on site, mountain biking through desert wilderness, exploring a gorgeous national park (that covers 1/3 of the island!) or just relaxing on one of the island's nicest beaches right at your doorstep. The hotel offers a fabulous beach dive featuring an unbelievable variety of macro critters within a 10-minute swim of the dock. Swim to the left and follow the guide rope across a small

channel (at a depth of 30 feet) and you're diving at a site named Something Special, a very healthy sloping wall starting in 10–15 feet and dropping away rather steeply to around 110 feet. Besides lots of healthy star coral, gorgonians and sponges, we also saw Longlure Frogfish and Spotted Scorpionfish here on every dive! Try to catch this dive on an incoming tide as visibility is much better (80+ feet during high tide and 50-60 feet at low tide). But the real prize for the shore diver is the "muck dive" right in front of the hotel. Surrounding the dock and just off the beach is a coral rubble environment that you could spend hours in at depths between 3 and 15 feet. Some of the critters you're virtually assured of seeing include: scorpionfish, tons of giant anemones, banded coral shrimp, spotted cleaner shrimp, scarlet striped shrimp, Pedersen cleaning shrimp, squat anemone shrimp, arrow crabs, free-swimming sharptail eels, spotted morays, chain morays, Caribbean reef squid (a whole family of them!), sailfin blennies (doing their mating dance every afternoon), redlip blennies, mantis shrimp, yellowheaded jawfish, garden eels, schooling palometas! Three single-tank boat dives daily (two in the morning and one in the afternoon) and night dives twice a week assuming there were a minimum of 6 divers. The boats were well-maintained Newtons that were never crowded and had nice facilities for photographers. Dive briefings were thorough and the dive staff is very careful to stress the importance of buoyancy control.

Every diver must do a checkout dive from shore before going out on a boat, although this dive is unsupervised and seems to be primarily for personal fine-tuning. Divemasters were in the water for every dive offering a guided option, but you are more than welcome to dive with a buddy or go solo. Except during brief periods when the winds die down (or reverse direction), virtually all of the diving is done on Bonaire's west side and around the small offshore island of Klein Bonaire. The diving is relatively similar – sloping walls with excellent coral growth, lots of schooling small tropicals and gorgeous gorgonians in the shallows. The main differences on the main island are that the southern sites tend to be a longer swim from shore before you reach the drop off, which in turn tends to be more of a gradual slope ending in sand at roughly 100 – 130 feet. The northern sites on the main island (and at the sites we visited around Klein Bonaire) have much steeper walls that bottom out deeper than their southern counterparts. My favorite boat dives on this trip were Ol' Blue and Witch's Hut – both fairly far north on Bonaire's west side. Food was absurdly overpriced. Perhaps this is one reason they can offer rooms so inexpensively at such a high-end property. We took to eating only breakfast and an occasional lunch at the hotel (breakfast was included in our package). Although the food prepared on the beach side deck for lunch was quite good, the menu is limited and it was common to have to wait close to an hour for a hamburger. The rest of the time we got in our

rental car (a must for shore diving, touring and eating out!) and took a five-minute drive to one of the many excellent and reasonably priced restaurants in Kralendijk.

Harbour Village Resort, August 2000, Nancy Olah, Fort Mill, SC.

Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 80 degrees. Great Adventures at Harbour Village is a great dive operation in a beautiful, well-maintained resort. We enjoy staying at resorts that are first-class and we love to dive. Harbour Village gives us the best of both. Marc, Tom and Julie are all phenomenal people and we learned a lot diving with them. Marc's special Town Pier dive at night was well worth the extra cost. We skipped renting a car this year and took cabs or walked when we wanted to eat outside Harbour Village. It. Rains Fishes, Capriccio's, Den Lamon's and a little gem called Swiss Chalet were all super places to eat. We got a free "divers massage" in our package and Frank the masseuse in the Soa was the best we've ever had.

Lions Dive Hotel, December 1999, Ms. Jennifer Belote, San Diego, CA.

Vis: 20-30 ft. Water: 80 degrees. Bonaire is no longer a "snorkelers dream." All coral to about 30-50 ft. is destroyed from "Lenny." Oceanfront restaurants and dive shops wiped out. Doing everything out of tents. All you can see is staghorn and elkhorn rubble on shallow bottom. Fish life is good, but without coral, not too exciting. Went to ten different sites and all coral destroyed. A couple standing elkhorn at 1000 steps. Disappointing. (+ (599-

717) 5580, Fax: + (599-717) 5680; e-mail info@LionsDiveBonaire.com; website www.lionsdivebonaire.com)

Lions Dive Hotel, February 2000, Jim Morus (jimorus@ameritech.net)

Kirtland, OH. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 Fahrenheit. I realize that there was a hurricane surge in November, but these people had done little beyond emptying the gutted dive shop. Access from the resort's dock was worse than anywhere else on the island. They answered questions about the dive sites around the island with, "I don't know, we have not been there yet." I thought that they were supposed to know what was going on. Rinse facilities consisted of several 5 gallon buckets and a cut off plastic drum. The water was changed every morning whether it needed it or not. The rooms were nice and clean, but since you had to rinse your gear in the shower, the floors were always wet and slippery. The boat dives were much too crowded, and the boat captain failed to notice that the alternator was not charging the batteries and the boat failed to leave the dock for the scheduled night dive, no power to turn the engine over. Glad it was at the dock and not out at Town Pier. Drive through tanks from Buddies were 3000+ fills and readily available, they had a reg to check the tanks, use it, as some customers will leave empties in with the fulls. Had I known what a pit Lion's was, I would have stayed at Captain Don's or Buddy's, the resorts to either side of this one. Shore diving was great, spend the extra bucks and get the

truck, the mini vans are difficult to load and unload and smell terrible. The restaurant at Lion's was destroyed along with the dive shop, but there is a gate that allows you to go to Buddy's or Captain Don's to eat without driving out. The restaurant at Captain Don's was clean and recently rebuilt and while damage at the dock was visible, they attempted to bring the property back to a serviceable level. The proximity of town made dining in town really easy and the prices were within reason. Shore entries around the island were not too taxing and the dives were not strenuous. The dive just off the resort can have some interesting things going on. Several tarpon will hunt with your dive light, you feel them go by and as quickly as you turn to see what brushed you, they consume what you had been looking at. Don't miss Karpata or Thousand Steps and Blue Hole was really nice too. On the other end of the island try to dive the Salt Pier. We had the worst dive of our lives at Pink Beach. We went out 200 yards and the water was 9 feet and the sand bottom was desolate. The dive master from the resort recommended this dive. Lucky they took a tip from our package, as the only help I would have tipped was the janitorial staff, as they did a wonderful job of cleaning up and keeping a stock of towels. We will definitely return to the island but will not even consider Lion's Dive UW Photography comments: There were no rinse tanks on the boats nor were there clean rinse tanks at the resort beach entry. (011-599-9-461-2100)

Lions Dive Hotel, June 2000, Steven Y. Davidson, Columbus, GA. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 82° F, calm no Currents. This was my sixth trip to Bonaire. I was surprised to see the damage that Hurricane Lenny did to the reefs. The reef off Boca Slagbaili was destroyed. The reef off Play Fuchi was 60% destroyed. The dive guides told us that the Washington Park reefs were not worth diving anymore but I had to see for myself. On Bacaslagbaili the entire shallow reef was dragged on top of the slope. It looks like a war zone. The sites from Karpata south to hotel row seem to be the most unaffected. The Windsock area sites had only minor damage but on around to the Hilma Hooker, Toris Reef and Pink Beach sites the soft corals and staghorn coral that used to grow in the shallows are gone. The reefs are still healthy though from about the 20-foot curve on down. Old timers will immediately notice the difference, divers new to Bonaire probably won't. Klein Bonaire seemed to be in excellent condition, but locals said the north west side of the island is damaged pretty bad. Lions Dive restaurant was closed due to hurricane damage. We ate at Buddy's Dive Resort once. Nasty. We ate more often at Capt. Dons Habitat next door. Pretty good. Food on Bonaire has dramatically improved with several extremely good restaurants available, but pricey. Of course, Richards is always a good choice. Capriccios is a great Italian restaurant, Mona Lisa is good. The Green Parrot is gone as is the old location of Sand Dollar Diver. The dive operation is operating out of a

location between the resort and the restaurant next door. The Green Parrot will not reopen. The dive operation at Lions dive was disappointing in that they didn't get in the water with their divers and point out the sea horses and frogfish. They also only had one boat for the entire resort that held 12 divers. Woefully insufficient. Nice people and air was always available but not helpful. No setup for underwater photographers other than a rinse tank by the fill station. I used the swimming pool. The condos at the resort were very nice. A/C worked well enough to cool the bedrooms and the living area. That has always been a problem with the Sand Dollar units.

Plaza Resort, October 1999, Brent Kluksdahl (bkluksda@kmart.com)
Royal Oak, MI. Water: 80 to 85 degrees, calm and flat, no currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: depth 100 ft. Very accommodating dive operation. Extremely efficient. Clean comfortable boats; 10 or 12 dives max. Rinse tanks and lockers were extremely convenient. Come and go as you please. Great tank service for shore diving. Resort was very nice; good beach; the rooms were large. The food service was quite slow and they have some training to do with the staff; food was ok. **(Steve Jevon, Toucan Diving Bonaire (at the Plaza Resort Bonaire), J.A. Abraham Blvd. 80, Kralendijk - Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles; telephone 011 599 7 2500; fax. 011 599 7 7133; e-mail Info@ToucanDiving.com; website: www.toucandiving.com)**

Plaza Resort, November 1999, Peter Wright-Clark, Wilson, WY. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 84 degrees. Dive restrictions: Common sense. We were caught in "Lenny." The shop Toucan gathered up all the divers and took us to the east side of the island. They were just great — towels, food (hot), drinks, transport — they did it all. I have never seen such an effort by any resort, anywhere, for anything! What annoyed me was the inability of certified divers unable to cope with shore entry and lack of surface abilities. A lot of people were unable to perform without the boat — not a good sign!

Plaza Resort, May 2000, Tom Dolezal (dolezal@insync.net), Houston, TX. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 Fahrenheit, calm. Shore diving can't be beat. Boat diving gets you access to Klein Bonaire (island off Bonaire) and tougher shore sites. Massive numbers of fish, but in number of species and quantity. A photographers dream. Saw all the usual plus frog fish, lots of scorpion fish, turtles, lobster, crabs, starfish, sea horses, octopi (2), one spotted eagle ray. Pier dives (Salt Pier, Town Pier) are amazing for variety of critters. Night diving brings out even more! Recent wave action from Hurricane Lenny — damage obvious up shallow at some sites (litters of coral all over), but no damage below 20/30 feet. Not a problem at all, really. Otherwise, reefs in fine shape. Fish life appears unaffected. Excellent boat captains and divemasters. Crew willing to take us anywhere we wanted to dive. Provided a specially-

chartered 43' boat for our group of 19. Top-notch dive shop with Nitrox always available. All workers do most tasks... bent over backwards for us. Have trucks to carry gear/tanks from shop (on lagoon behind hotel) to waterfront sites (2) at hotel beach. Huge lockers can store lots of gear. Big and plentiful rinse tanks. Snacks, water, towels on boat too. Full gear shop. Just first-rate all around. Best operation I've dived with anywhere in the 23 years. Kudos to Steve (runs the whole thing) and Sylvia (divemaster). Plaza Resort — huge rooms with big closets and lots of shelving/drawers. Refrigerators that get cold. Quiet and comfy. A/C's work well. Good maid service. Large grounds, large beach, well-kept. Some plumbing work kept them turning our water off from late evening to early morning most days (a pain, but tolerable — wish they'd warned us though). Only fair food on site... better to walk to nearby restaurants ("Richard's" especially!) or walk/ride into town. Casino on site, but sparse and limited. Marginal service at bars on site — have to beg to be noticed by servers. High prices for drinks... but we toted our own wine and champagne in with no objections. Good value overall. UW Photography comments: Huge camera buckets on boat, full photo shop next to dive shop — rental equipment (cameras, lenses, etc.), developing, repair available. Well-run.

Plaza Resort, June 2000, John Sweeney, (jtsweene@bechtel.com)
Crosby, TX. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: 100'

— not strictly enforced. Plaza is large, upscale, nicest resort for the \$ with good shore diving from their large sandy beach. Toucan on premises did 2 tank morning dives, leaving afternoon for shore dives. Divemasters Jackson and Carlitos lead us to frog fish and seahorses, lead the must-do night dive "town pier." Efficient and well organized with good boats, rinse tanks and lockers. Abundant marine life, large schools of fish, saw a manta ray at shore dive (Ol' Blue). Rent a car for the week for shore diving, touring the island and don't miss the great restaurants in Kralendijk — Richard's, It Rains Fishes, Carpaccio's and for lunch — the Dome. ALM canceled our return tickets (along with 4 other Americans) blaming AA for improper computer entries despite confirmations. They put us on standby along with a dozen other stranded passengers from the day before. The next flight with openings it was in 3 days — which we booked — they insisted on charging us \$50 a piece for flight change, which later got dropped. The single agent out front escorted us to the back to retrieve our own bags — there we saw a half dozen ALM employees either sleeping, eating, or doing nothing — we got some nasty looks. Went back to Plaza 3 more days and tried to chill out. ALM couldn't care less.

Plaza Resort, June 2000, Lee Royer, Harrisburg, PA. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 F, calm currents. Dive your own profile. Standard lecture before hitting the water: 130 ft. max, return with 500 psi, no deco dives, not enforced. 6th trip to Bonaire; this year

we were accompanied by our 17 yr. old daughter and 14 yr. old son, both of whom had logged about 25 dives. Most of the dive sites were closed because of the storm that battered the island last year. I think we only made 2 dives off Klein Bonaire because most sites were closed. The rest of the boat dives were shore dive sites. What we saw was sand on the reefs, hardly any fish (at least by Bonaire standards), and not-so-great visibility. We dove the Salt Pier one afternoon and I was astounded at the lack of fish. There were strong currents on most dives, something I experienced only once before on Bonaire at the Red Slave dive site. On our 2nd boat dive of the trip, the divemaster announced that we were going to do a drift dive. My kids' faces got a sudden panicky look; we had never prepared them for a drift dive — I never thought we'd do one in Bonaire! Shame on me for not getting them ready, but bigger shame on the divemaster to not inquire if all on board were comfortable with it. When I objected he got huffy and told me that if we all didn't drift dive then it would ruin it for everyone else. (I took the kids aside and explained drift dive procedure to them and they handled it well). This attitude prevailed throughout the week. He repeatedly took us to sites with strong currents and rough surf entries. It is very disturbing to have the rental car company tell you that you can purchase insurance with a \$500 deductible, and it doesn't cover glass breakage. At the resort, there was a guard posted outside the guest rooms while the housekeeping staff was

cleaning. Plaza Resort is a bit worn. The safety chain on the front door was broken, light bulbs were burned out, cockroaches were in abundance. One evening a circuit breaker tripped in our room knocking out some lights and the TV. There was a soda machine outside that was wired through a hole in the wall to one outlets in our room, and the receptacle caught fire. One day we returned from dinner and discovered that insecticide had been heavily sprayed in all our rooms. We all woke up the next day with sore throats. We ate at Capriccio Restaurant one evening. My kids each asked for special preparation of their entrée, and the manager told us her chef would not allow anyone to alter his cooking. At Richards at least we didn't get insulted; it's a fun place to eat. But the menu hasn't changed in years and the food preparation wasn't up to par. The best dining experience we had was at Bonaire Bayside downtown; great food and friendly people. The food at the Plaza Resort is good, but it's expensive.

Plaza Resort, July 2000, Kandace Illgen (killgen@techsearchteam.com) Santa Barbara, CA. Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 78 degrees. Dive restrictions: 100' first dive, 60' second dive, total 60 minutes. Toucan Dive staff was helpful and tried to accommodate where you wanted to dive. Also very helpful with my husband who needed help getting tank in/out of water due to bad back. They have 1 and 2 tank boats going out each day. The beach dive at the Playa pier is OK especially for beginners, nice to do an extra shore dive w/out having to rent a car.

The staff brings a tank down for you to the pier. The Plaza had some service problems. We were given a villa with a myriad of problems, one of which was giving us the only key they had. For 4 adults, this was inadequate and a hassle. Getting there a nightmare. This time we tried Jamaican Airlines rather than ALM. We got stuck in Kingston for a full 24 hrs, having missed the only flight from Jamaica to LA. Our experience in our 1 day in Jamaica was not favorable. Really nasty attitudes overall.

Plaza Resort, July 2000, Cihangir Akyol, Los Gatos, CA. Vis: 40-0 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F. Mosquitoes were a problem. We got some bug spray for the room, and sprayed the room before leaving for dinner. However, because the rooms had no screens on the windows, it was difficult to ventilate the room afterwards. Hence, while we slept, it was a choice of getting gassed or being eaten alive! Our fellow vacationers complained of many things in their rooms being nonfunctional. Water would come and go, and so would the electricity. They were continually making repairs and looking for leaks. We had the room next door flood and water came through the adjoining door and flooded into ours. They had tennis courts, and theoretically a tennis program. We took our rackets, but no balls, figuring we'd get them from the tennis shop. Guess what, they didn't have balls, nor a tennis shop, and nobody ever answered the extension for the tennis pro, so we didn't get to play. Shore diving: poor visibility,

around 40 ft. The rinse tank was always filthy and actually had broken glassware in it, which we reported. It took two days for the glass to be removed, but the tank was still filthy. No giant stride entry available. They had wooden steps that were slippery and rotten from the Tipsy Seagull entry point. The gym closes at 9 PM. We had a minor eye problem and made an appt. with a doctor at the hospital. We waited 3.5 hrs, but no doctor showed. The hotel staff wasn't at all helpful. Racism? We found it odd that all the people in positions of authority were imports from Holland, all the way from Managers to front desk staff. They gave the locals the menial jobs. The locals were particularly hostile toward Plaza Resort, claiming that they brought people in from Holland and treated the locals poorly. Toucan Diving. We liked the dive crews. They were cheerful and helpful, and made the dive trips fun and interesting. They were always pointing stuff out to us, and were cautious and considerate with all the members of the party. The boats held 12 people max, and so we weren't particularly crowded. They gave us choices of dive sites and accommodated those that had been to more sites, and so variety was available. Always clean water in the rinse tanks and for cameras, dockside. Food: excellent. However, the meal plan is a total rip-off. We got the meal plan for breakfast and dinner as they led us to believe that the food was expensive and so a meal plan would be more economical. Here's the scoop on the meal plans. When you arrive they give

you vouchers, one for each meal you prepaid for. When you go to the restaurant the voucher is just worth its cash value though, like a poker chip, but you can't cash it in. For example, if you pay \$12 for breakfast and \$32 for dinner, that is how much you can order from the menu. If you go over, you pay the extra. So if the dinner is \$40, you pay the \$8 extra. However, if your dinner is \$20, they don't refund the difference. Also if you skip a meal, you don't get a refund either. So meal plans are a waste of time, and you can only lose money, or come out even at best. Drinks, even coffee is not included in the meal plan price either. We got separate checks while at dinner, one for food, another for drinks and another for coffee. Very strange. There was also a great confusion about how much the meal plan was worth. Although we paid \$32 per dinner per person, they only wanted to give us a \$20 per person limit. We had to argue over that one, and it took 3 days to get right. The breakfast buffet sucked, so-called room service! You can only order breakfast. You have to put out an order before 10 PM the night before. The choice is limited to 5. The only hot breakfast came cold. Overall we were disappointed with our stay. The diving was so-so, and we had hoped for far better. If the resort had been up to snuff, then it would have made a difference, but because the resort sucked, it tinted the vacation. The dive crew did make us feel welcome and they were helpful, so we made the best of the diving, took an u/w photo class and just tried to have fun, which we did.

Sand Dollar Condominium, August 1999, Bob and Pat Thompson, Hatfield, PA. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Odor of sewer gas was present in the bathroom of our condo all week. On the last day, the toilets backed up and overflowed. The smell was awful and thankfully we were leaving that day. Overall, a great trip. Excellent diving, great for beginners like us. (Ph: 011-599-75433, Fax: 011-599-75252)

Sand Dollar Condominium, November 1999, Pat Buccello (canyons@acadia.net) Bar Harbor, ME. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 78-82 degrees. Visited after Hurricane Floyd. Hotel, restaurant and dive shop were trashed though they did not tell us this when booking. 3rd trip to Sand Dollar and will not return. Getting very run down. Excellent dive instructor (Alvin Clemencia) for rescue and adv'd open water courses.

Sand Dollar Condominium, Pilot Fish Apartments, February 2000, Debbie Wetzel, Jr. (wetzel@sover.net). Shore dived only with tanks from Sand Dollar and rental Suzuki Carryall. Your recent report on Bonaire was seen through different eyes by my husband and me. Our 40 dives were great! We were fortunate to see 35' whale shark while diving site named Weber's Joy, returned there next day to be in the water with pod of 15 dolphins...and they say Bonaire never has anything big! The 10-hour wave storm has really broken all the corals in the shallows and changed patterns for the snorkeling, but also

brought fish never ID before, webbed burrfish, hairy blenny. We love the park! It is a definite off road driving and viewing experience not Disneyland pretense. Airport tax has doubled to \$20 pp and entrance to the park also doubled to \$10 pp. Docks at Sand Dollar and Cpt. Don's wiped out by storm but everyone is bending over backward to serve divers. Tanks sure easier to pick up now at new shop location. Lack of info on the storm damage by the tourist board not good idea. Better to have info than keep it from the buying public. Informed customer will still support Bonaire. Hate the cruise ships visiting the island.

Sand Dollar Condominium, February 2000, Tim Triden, Eugene, OR.

Vis: 80-150 ft. Water: 75-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: 100' plus 1 hr. Reef from shore to 40 feet — like diving on gravel road. Saw spotted eagle ray while snorkeling. United took carry-on to put in hold in Puerto Rico and left it on the run way! Once in Bonaire — no luggage (ALM). No diving equipment. Took 3 days to receive luggage from ALM. Sand Dollar dive loaned equipment at no cost. 3 days with no toiletries. 2 months later they returned our carry-on via Northwest/Horizon. To date United and ALM have no idea where that carry on is. They showed no interest in finding it. Still have no idea how Northwest came to have it — there was no identification on the outside.

Sand Dollar Condominium, April 2000, R. Gorji, MD, Jamesville, NY.

Vis: 80 to 200 Feet. Water: 78 to 83

Fahrenheit, choppy. Dive restrictions: Almost None. In my opinion the worse thing about the whole trip was ALM. They were disorganized and lacked either the will or desire to be organized. Will not go back to Bonaire unless can go with somebody besides ALM. The Bonaire people are nice and sweet.

Sand Dollar Condominium, May 2000, Bill McGrath, (zippy@bikerider.com), Scottsdale, AZ.

Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 Fahrenheit, calm. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 100 feet/one hour. Getting there was a pain. American Airlines got us to Miami late, causing us to miss the one daily flight to Bonaire. (They put us up, fed us, gave us each a \$200 travel voucher.) We arrived in Bonaire 27 hours late. Some lost luggage — not sure whether AA or ALM is to blame. One woman in our group lost her luggage, never to be found. Dive gear arrived with us. Once in Bonaire, all went well. Sand Dollar was fine, diving was good once past the shallow water devastation. Kralendijk has great restaurants at reasonable (not cheap) prices. I like the people — harmonious population, no racial antipathy. Every flight home was late, but we missed no connections.

Sand Dollar Condominium, June 2000, Peter Paul Haykus, Pagosa Springs, CO.

Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 79-81 degrees. Diving in an aquarium, safe, beautiful, no real rush! After Hurricane Lenny, 30 ft. or more deep is rubble — deeper is fine! Wonderful water, wind, sun and liquid sunshine!

Locals very friendly — clean and safe (relative to other places). No problem with thieves (we left nada in pickup) but plenty of broken car glass at sites. No police presence to deter thieves.

**Sand Dollar Condominium,
Bonaire Oceanfront Apartments,
June 2000, Charles W. Scogin
(cwscogin@mindspring.com),
Dallas, TX.** Vis: 50 to 100 Feet.

Water: 82-85 F, no currents. Restrictions: Suggestions were 100 feet max for first dive and 60 for second and third (they only offered 3 boat dives a day). They permitted me to dive solo once skills were demonstrated and since I am a repeat customer for 10 years. In three weeks made 53 dives. Hurricane Lenny sent up to 30 foot swells to the normally lee side of the island in November. The west side of Klein Bonaire was totally and destroyed. This is from Southwest Corner to Carl's Hill. A trip to this side of Klein Bonaire was reluctantly made for me where I took a tank and cruised the whole west side. It was completely scraped clean by the waves and tumbling corals. There is nothing but sand and rubble underwater. All the beautiful soft corals at Munk's Haven and Yellowman's gone; the towering hard corals at Southwest Corner completely gone. I really almost cried. From Carl's Hill to Sampler all of the hard and soft corals to about 30 feet are rubble. The rest of Klein is in good shape. The operators are having to dive the remaining sites on the windward side of Klein making it rougher for entry and exit. The whole north side of the island was

destroyed. From Boca Bartol to just north of Bopec destroyed. The buildings at Boca Slagbail were completely washed away. I did not personally dive these sites, but I understand from friends on the island that the big beautiful hard corals at Playa Funchi were destroyed. South of Andrea I to about Pink Beach the corals in less than 30 feet of water are rubble. Everything deeper is in good shape, but the shallows at sites like Invisibles that was so beautiful are destroyed. I personally dove many of these sites and was shocked. Most of the sand Pink Beach was washed away. Many soft corals there were also damaged. The Sand Dollar Dive and Photo are operating out of temporary quarters. Very good photo shop though Jim Brandon, the Sand Dollars long time resident photo pro, is no longer working. Still everything I needed was there when I needed to make some minor repairs. Their state-of-the-art facility was destroyed as was the Green Parrot restaurant. The operation has changed to three dives a day. Talking with the people this has just about ruined their business. The boats operate out of the marina and you are trucked from the dive shop. They now have Nitrox. It ran pretty smooth considering and you are now allowed to make all three boat dives in a day. Prices remain the same. I spent about \$1100 for the three weeks for diving and film processing. They clearly relax rules. In the past they watched me more closely and was not allowed to dive solo. I was never checked for depth or denied diving without a buddy. I routinely broke the suggested

depth limits and dived my computer sometimes to decompression obligations. I noticed with the reduction in number of available dive sites that many sites were occupied when we arrived requiring us to move to another. All other dive sites on Bonaire are in good shape and were not damaged. Clearly this is devastating to the island and its diving dependent economy. I am a long time fan of Bonaire and love the laid back and somewhat European atmosphere of the island. I will be opting for Curaçao in the future where the sites were not harmed.

Sand Dollar Condominium, July 2000, Ed Johnson, Bloomington, NJ. Vis: 60-75 ft. Water: 79-80 degrees. Restrictions: 100 ft. A.M. 60 ft. P.M. This was our 5th trip to Sand Dollar. The diving is just what we expected, even after the 25 ft. storm surge from the hurricane that devastated the water front at Sand Dollar and the shallow corals above the 30-foot depth across about 40% of the marked sights. The sites that were not battered and the rest of the reef below 30 ft. is as beautiful as ever and it is very interesting to see the algae eaters and juveniles re-inhabiting. Sand Dollar Condos, however, is beginning to get neglected! The furniture, screens, appliances are really showing their wear. The housekeeping has slacked off to our getting clean towels and a quick fluff of the beds. In previous years the housekeeping would spend a little time straightening the kitchen and bath and make the beds. Not anymore! We'll always

maintain our relationship with Andre, Leonel, Jerry and the terrific staff at Sand Dollar Dive and Photo, or whatever, but we'll be staying somewhere besides the run down Condos at Sand Dollar.

Sand Dollar Condominium, August 2000, Susan Molchan, Bethesda, MD. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 78-81 degrees. One hour time limit from time of last diver in. We lost over a day on either end of the trip due to ALM. They will not call you to tell you the plane will be late; we had to sit in airports for 5-8 hours. They lied to the person picking us up in Miami about arrival time. We will not return to Bonaire. Accommodations at Sand Dollar were spacious and clean. Sand Dollar Dive and Photo was a bit of a cattle-boat operation. Up to 16 divers on small boats. No tank racks. Often boats from other shops were moored at a site by the time we arrived. No photo processing.

Toucan (Plaza Hotel), Bel Mar Bonaire, August 2000, Warren Clark, Gainesville, FL. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Resort was excellent in all aspects. We could shore dive right from the resort. Tanks were available anytime. Most reefs were beautiful, with some have varying degrees of destruction from Nov. '99 storm. Crime continues to be a problem in Bonaire. It was recommended to us to leave nothing in the vehicles and to leave the windows rolled down while driving. There was evidence of broken windows at some remote sites. (Steve Jevon, Toucan

Diving Bonaire (at the Plaza Resort Bonaire), J.A. Abraham Blvd. 80, Kralendijk - Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles; telephone 011 599 7 2500; fax. 011 599 7 7133; e-mail Info@ToucanDiving.com; website: www.toucandiving.com)

CAYMAN ISLANDS

Grand Cayman is great for divers seeking familiar surroundings: it's Americanized and crowded, with traffic, Burger Kings, Ramadas, and Hyatts—and it's expensive. . . . There are a seemingly endless number of safe and well-organized dive operations; depth and time limits are generally enforced, with some operations showing leniency to computer divers (though others charge for special computer dives). . . . Avoid prepaying a dive package so that if you're disappointed with cattle boats or site selection you can switch to someone else. . . . Dive quality is declining due to development, and Seven Mile Beach reefs are beaten up. To beat crowds, endless youths, and Cayman Cowboys, stay on the North side, or north of Seven Mile Beach. Better yet, go to the East End, where you'll find the best diving and the fewest people. . . . Brac diving is not up to the best of Cayman, but it's more laid-back than Grand Cayman, and Brac outfits make frequent trips to Little Cayman from April to November; rough water often prevents trips at other times. . . . For Caribbean

walls, clear water, and beautiful reefs, Little Cayman is nonpareil; a dozen dive boats a day can visit a two-mile stretch. The water's under 80 in the winter, when days can be cool, and in the low 80s in summer. . . . The Cayman Islands are in the hurricane belt, and some of Little Cayman's reefs were battered by Gilbert in 1989. . . .

Cayman Brac

Brac Reef Resort, August 1999, Paul G. Carmignani (pgcarmi@aol.com) Naperville, IL. Vis: 75 to 100 ft.

Water: 85 to 88 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: 110 ft.-computer; 100 ft.-tables. As an intermediate diver who's career diving has been in Lake Michigan, the diving was paradise. The water was calm, warm and clear. Vis was endless. The wall diving was great, especially the two trips to Little Cayman. The resort staff was helpful and moved all equipment. The food was very good. I had a trip of a lifetime.

Brac Reef Resort, December 1999, Fred Levine, Mamaroneck, NY. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 75-78 degrees. Quiet resort, restful. Good diving. Better before X-mas. (800 327-3835, 813-962-2236, 727-323-8727; Fax 727-323-8827, 813-264-2742)

Brac Reef Beach Resort, June 2000, R. Sciortino, St. Louis, MO. Vis: 60-75 ft. Water: 83 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. Dove with Spot the dolphin three out of four days. Spot is very friendly and likes to