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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

approach divers and snorkelers. Stayed with us for whole dive. Jason and Becky excellent divemasters. Three nice roomy dive boats. Accommodations very good. Food good, not great.

Brac Reef Resort, April 2000, Laura Di Tomasso, (ldito@yahoo.com), Mahwah, NJ. Vis: 100-150 ft. Dive restrictions: depth and time. The dive operation was top notch. Good service. Organized and knowledgeable. The diving is wonderful for tropical calm dives but not for the wreck diver (not deep) except a couple of dives. Food at the hotel not great but area restaurants good. Bring lots of macro lens. Small stuff is great. Also wide angle for your encounters with "Spot" the dolphin that hangs out off the shore. Very friendly dolphin lets you get close.

Brac Reef Resort, July 2000, Mike Garrison, Leawood, KS. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 86-88 degrees. Dive restrictions: Essentially none. Was on Nitrox and one control freak tried to ruin this. Beautiful walls, particularly Little Cayman. Excellent service from Martin's operation. Rigged our gear, rinsed it each evening. I dove Nitrox for 9 days, 28 dives with Nitrox computer and experience level they left me alone. All female crew absolutely the best, Becky and Chris. Make sure you get on their boat. Boats were spacious, 42 ft. Newtons, 10-12 divers. Food and room were very good. Nothing else to do except dive, but that's ok. Bad: One bad apple in a good barrel, Craig. The worst dive-master I have seen in 10 years. He's a

control freak. Come up with 61 minutes, 480 psi, he is all over you. Stay off his boat. He stalks you in water to look at computer.

Divi Tiara Beach Resort, August 1999, Donald E. King (xcoach55@aol.com) Fremont, CA. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 84 degrees, choppy, no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 130 feet, back on boat with 500 psi. Better than 1st time in May 1996 because weather and water conditions much better. Dive site just outside harbor entrance called Anchor Wall: single dolphin stayed with us during entire dive, seemed to enjoy being touched and just being with all the divers, even followed us to second dive site where she stayed with us again for the entire dive, going from one group of divers to the next. My partner loves dolphins and could not believe that we were able to interact with a wild creature in the open ocean. Service and food at Divi Tiara Resort were both outstanding. (Ph: 809-948-7553 or 800-367-3484, Fax: 809-948-7316)

Divi Tiara Beach Resort, 2000, Herb Craddock, Earlysville, VA. Vis: 80-110 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restriction enforced: 130 ft. Our second trip to Brac was as good as the first. It took time for them to get everyone from the airport to hotels, but not bad. Resort was clean, friendly, food was great (a nice variety each day). Good friendly dive operation. We found "Spot" the dolphin one afternoon and I held it in my arms and hugged

it. Then it laid across my arm and I rubbed its belly for a while.

Divi Tiara Beach Resort, April 2000, Delf and Kathleen Hedde (KDHEDE@slip.net), Santa Clara CA. Dive restrictions: 40 m. There as part of Nikon Photo School. Very good service. Separate boat for photographers. Crew very helpful. Kitchen staff accommodating when we were late for lunch (most of the time). On site E-6 processing. Great photos. Dive with "Spot" the dolphin was incredible! Wreck of Russian frigate alone would make the trip worthwhile. Did 2 trips to Little Cayman to dive "Bloody Bay Wall." Most beautiful wall we have seen in the Caribbean.

Divi Tiara Beach Resort, Nikon School of UW Photography, May 2000, Kathleen Hedde, Santa Clara, CA. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F. No deeper than 130 feet, no deco dives, max 1 hour dives. Nice, quite beach with palm trees, sun chairs and beach bar. Small but adequate pool. Meals are buffet style, food is plentiful, fresh and varied. Always fresh fruit and veggies available. Rooms are simple, functional and very clean. Adequate storage for 2 people. Could use a little renovation. Staff always helpful and friendly. Great operation, great staff. Very knowledgeable and helpful, but never baby anybody. They handle the dive gear, and set it up. The you sit at the dive steps, and they put the BC and tank on you from behind and then you just get up and jump in. Drinking water and fresh fruit on the

boats. Very good with camera handling before and after the dive. Boats fast and functional, not styled for comfort. Our group did Nikon School (16 students), so we had the same boat and staff for the whole week. They were covering a lot of territory (the entire set of lenses for the Nikonos V) in one week, it might have been a bit much for people who have done no photography before. We had both shot about 50 rolls each before going there. A lot of the classroom sessions were repetitions, but it was worth it just for the practice we got with 3 rolls of film a day, seeing the results the same day and getting photo critique. Nikon School does not include the following: E6 development at \$10 a roll (not even for the 10 included rolls of film), batteries for the strobe. Bring your own, preferably rechargeable Batteries on the island are \$10 for 4AAs, and you'll need one pack a day for the strobe. Film included — 10 rolls — so bring some with you. Boat has fresh water tank. Staff will dunk camera after dive, and hand back to you. No camera table on the boat, during the boat ride they store cameras under benches, on top of life vests. Rinsing tanks at the dock, water change daily. Knowledgeable photo and video staff, store "Photo Tiara." Rentals, E-6 daily.

Divi Tiara Beach Resort, June 2000, Rick Rusher, Anderson, SC. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 83-85 degrees. Restrictions: 110 ft. One of the nicest experiences I've had in the six years I've been leading dive travel. The accommodations were good and the

service and food are excellent. Our boat crew was great and the diving was easy. During our week we made two trips to little Cayman to dive the walls, 2 night dives and a nice dive on the Russian Destroyer.

Divi Tiara Beach Resort, June 2000, Brenda and Duane Leake, San Diego, CA. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 78-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: 110' w/safety stop. 500 PSI. Divi is still trying to improve the resort repairs seem to lack the funds and are accomplished on "Cayman Time." Don't expect a Five-Star resort because this is strictly a dive location. Dive shop personnel are helpful and friendly. Good briefings and stay out of your way but seem to be nearby if you need them. Shore diving is not Bonaire but has a few good spots; definitely need a car. Many people complain about the condition of the Russian Destroyer. We find it more interesting now than when it was upright and in one piece.

Divi Tiara Beach Resort, July 2000, John Bell (9Johnb@DHC.Net), Dallas, TX. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 86-88 degrees. Restrictions: 110 ft./computer. The dive staff and conditions of the boats were excellent. The divemasters were well informed and tried to accommodate our group each day. We spent one day diving and playing with "Spot," a 5-year-old male dolphin that has been around Cayman Brac and Little Cayman for the last year. The resort is clean and well maintained. Plenty of food each day and the staff is friendly. By the second

day several of the staff knew you by name. There is a photo shop on site with processing. They offer Nikon classes periodically as well. They will provide Nitrox for a minor charge, but they get it from another operation and the mix typically was 33-34%.

Divi Tiara Beach Resort, July 2000, Bill Chamberlian, Southold, NY. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm choppy. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 100 feet depth. Wish we had known that unless you purchase a full prepaid dive package, you likely would not be able to dive, even though Dive Tiara is only available for Divi Tiara guests. Food much better then last time though breakfast was nothing special. Although we had booked a timeshare condo with Divi, they gave us a hotel room, which is even more run down then the last time we were there. It rained in our room when it rained! Also, we would not go in the pool as it was a disgusting algae-filled mess when we arrived though it was cleaned the next day before a big dive group came in — YUK! Beach towels were not available for much of our trip so bring your own. Also, bring you own soap and shampoo. Those supplied by hotel in dispensers smell like disinfectant! Spring for a fridge (costs extra)— rum punch at bar served in a small disposable plastic cup was \$10 us! Make your own and save! Eat at Aunt Sha's at least once — yummy and not overly expensive. We saw no turtles or rays our entire trip — strange for the Caymans. Saw young manta ray on one dive on the

north shore of the Brac. Not as good as 5 years ago.

Divi Tiara Beach Resort, July 2000, Becky Kelly. Hospitable dive operation. The staff/dive masters were terrific. The crew assembled tanks/regs/bcs, dive bags were rinsed and stored, and all equipment carried to the boat. As soon as divers surface the crew help remove the equipment and set it for the next dive. Dive boats leave at 9 a.m. for a two-tank dive and again at 2:30 p.m. for a one tank dive. Three dives per day are \$71 U.S. Night dives Tuesdays and Thursdays for an additional \$40. They also offer a two-tank dive on Little Cayman if three or more days of diving are purchased during your stay. This is about a 45 minute boat ride. The walls on L.C. are no better than Brac. The vis at the time we were there was less than 30 feet. The reason to go to L.C. is to see Spot, the famous local bottle-nosed dolphin who loves swimming with divers. Unfortunately Spot was elsewhere when we went to L.C. Make sure you ask about Spot — the dive boats will try their best to moor in the area he was last seen. The diving staff consisted of about 15 people, all of them smiling. The dive operation had 5 boats, and all were in use. An average of 15 to 20 divers per boat was the norm. Most boats were equipped with a safety stop bar suspended at 15 feet. All boats suspended extra weights and spare air at about 20 feet. The best dives on Brac are the walls. They start at about 50 feet. These offer many swim thru tunnels and spectacular vertical drops.

Swim-thrus start at about 100-120 ft. and rise to 70 feet or so. Giant sponges abound. Small fish are the norm — but a few large fish were seen. Not many morays but turtles on every dive. The wreck — a Russian Destroyer named 356 — can be penetrated. This is NOT for the faint of heart or beginners. Very tight hallways. The best shallow dives on Brac are Butterfly Reef and Elkhorn Forest. The coral was typical for the Caribbean but the sponges were huge and unscathed. Some of the barrel sponges were 6 feet across and 7 feet high. The soft corals were abundant. Great care was obviously taken by preceding divers not to touch or disturb anything. No broken or damaged corals were seen. All boats tie up to moorings that are attached to cement blocks on the sea bed, consequently no anchor damage. This also helps with safe ascents if your weights aren't perfect. Regarding the Divi Tiara, the food was fabulous. Cliff, the ex-Bostonian, was a wonderful cook. The accommodations were unremarkable but cozy and quaint. We saw an ant or two in the room but nothing a swift stomp wouldn't take care of. Meal package (Full American Plan) includes breakfast, lunch, and dinner for \$56/per day. They offer a 10% discount if you book the meal plan within 24 hours of your arrival. There are no close restaurants or grocery stores within walking distance. Divi Tiara is a well-run dive operation with a courteous staff and offerings of wonderful dive spots. My husband and I each dove 19 times in one week.

Grand Cayman

Abanks Divers, January 2000, Pat Copeland (PGC929@aol.com), Sylvania, OH. Vis: 80 to 100 feet, Water: 78 to 80 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: Yes. Dive restrictions: 110 feet. We have dove in Cayman for 12 years and have owned a condo, so we like Cayman a lot. However, we have seen a lot of changes in the reefs and a decrease in the number of large fish. We still feel overall this is the most comfortable destination for diving. (813-963-2306 (US Reservations); 345-945-1444 ; Fax 345-945-1872)

Aqua Adventures, February 2000, Clark Bentley, Muskegon, MI. Rob Wakley and Aqua Adventures (345-949-1616) is a great operation! Have dived with him many times. . .we had a blast! Rob has the ability to dive both the north, west, and south sides. He has an 8-passenger maximum policy. The boat is a 28' Dusky. Aqua Adventures is a solid operation and Rob Wakley is a quality guide and instructor.

Aquanauts, Sunshine Suites, June 2000, Cedric Eisner (sedrate@hotmail.com) Houston, TX. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: calm, no Currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: Depth limits 100 feet. Computer profiles permitted. Sunshine Suites are across the street from the Westin that I've stayed at and rooms are better at Sunshine, brand new, extremely clean, and excellent for light cooking. Excellent lockable area for divers gear. Small pool but best stretch of 7

mi. beach across the street. Best Price. Who needs a full service hotel when you never use it? Aquanauts: best boats, best staff (esp. Karen), will accommodate you and never rush. Will help with cameras and dive profile friendly. Never treat you like a 2-year-old. (888-786-6887; 345.945.1990; fax: 1.345.945.1991; e-mail: aquanauts@cayman.org; Website www.cayman.org/aquanauts)

Bob Soto's, Treasure Island, April 2000, Chris Skillern, San Diego, CA. Water: 78 degrees. Vis. 50-125 Ft. I was wary of Soto's ostensible cattleboat operation, but divers numbered 6-10, divemasters 1-2. Advised first dive 100 ft. limit, #2 60 ft., both strictly guided, bottom time from tables, up at 1000 psi and on board at 500. In fact, supervision commensurate with observed and apparent capability/experience. Dived to 120 ft. and followed computer. Always last on boat with no questions and no pressure checking. 15 ft. stop emphasized and followed. Very courteous; helpful with equipment if requested; gear assistance on and off boat; full dive video (\$50). Fourth day dive should have been redirected: six ft. swells made 4 out of 10 sick, with departure from, and recovery onto, boat a challenge. Lodging at Treasure Island only ok. Dated and overpriced, but everything on Cayman is expensive. (Ph: 800-262-7686 or 345-949-2022, Fax: 345-949-8731, e-mail: bobsotos@cayman.org, Website: www.bobsotos.com)

Bob Soto's, Treasure Island, July 2000, Joe Stehn, Belle Mend, NJ.

Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 86-87 degrees. Restrictions: 100 ft. but allowed to dive own computer profile. TI Condos improved since summer of 1999 but AC was barely adequate — had to call for service which was prompt but result was marginal improvement. Nice pools, poor beach, expensive. Soto Diving much improved since 1999. Replaced some staff that had "attitude" Now all were a pleasure to deal with. Boat dives were great. Captain "Sandy" best we ever had! New operation at Sea view Hotel now owned by SOTO was outstanding for shore diving-great night dive from shore. Alyissa was great in service and advising best sites at that location. Getting too expensive!

Bob Soto's, Seaview, August 2000, Doug and Laura Young (txowsi2@aol.com), Waco, TX. Vis: 20 to 100 Feet.

Water: 76 to 78° F, choppy. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: Watches and gauges had time limits (some of these divers did not even have a watch!) but they gave computer divers more time as a guideline, not absolute. Seaview very economical but sufficient. Clean. Shore diving was fantastic with 1-6 turtles per dive guarantee. Restaurant handy, good and fair Cayman prices. Chose due to shore diving and dive boat pickup at hotel. Check around when renting a car — only about \$20 per day. We used public transportation (the bus) to see the sites (turtle farm, hell, botanical gardens). Bus drivers were accommodating. Pick up bus at main

'station' downtown. Bob Soto's diving operation spectacular. Our group had a dedicated dive boat that picked us up at the Seaview dock (my request). Only 10 people on a boat that easily could have handled 25. Captain Sandy Sondrol and divemaster/second hand David Howarth were kind, got to know you and got us to good sites. Even got a third boat dive one day without asking or charge. Plenty of drinks on boat. Staff gave excellent briefings to the dive site. Very knowledgeable. Separate 55 gallon container on boat for dedicated camera use. Boat staff would kindly handle photo equipment when asked.

Bob Soto's, Treasure Island Resort, August 2000, Amy Bradley, (ScubaBubbl@aol.com), Metairie, LA. Vis: 80-150 ft. Water: 83-86

degrees. Depth limit of 110 ft. Love Gold Card program. After being checked out on first dives get a gold card from then on get off the boat first and can dive your own profile (must have computers). Fantastic dives ...Soto's goes to East, South and North Walls in addition to West. Resort needed work. Very poor air conditioner. Water was out one night till next morning!

Cayman Diving Lodge, December 1999, Lawrence Moser (MOSERL@MUSC.EDU), Charleston, SC. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water:

75 to 78 F., choppy no Currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 100' to 110' limit. Back on the boat with at least 500 psi. Able to dive own profile once divemasters were

comfortable with your skills. Small resort and dive operation. About 12 rooms. Clean and comfortable with all the necessary conveniences. Food well-prepared and served in a casual atmosphere. Honor bar. Bicycles available. The dive staff is great. They take care of just about everything — even the cooking. Food very tasty and creative. Special requests honored if possible. Boats are roomy and fast. Pro 48 and another 41 footer. Most dive sites within 10 to 20 minutes. Forty-five minute surface interval required. East End conditions somewhat rougher than West End of Grand Cayman, but the diving is worth it. Seven Mile Beach just another area crowded with tourists. (Ph: 800-852-3483 or 809-947-7555, Fax: 809-947-7560, e-mail: divelodge@aol.com)

Cayman Diving Lodge, January 2000, Sue Morrison
(hjdane@iglobal.net), Denton, TX.
Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 75-78 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 ft. max. Staff was magnificent - professional, courteous, attentive. Wish advanced divers would have had the option of going to 130-150 ft. These walls are too pretty for the restrictions. Wish advanced and novice divers would have been separated. Overall, though, fantastic and personalized service in all other areas superb.

Cayman Diving Lodge, March 2000, Robert Praisner, Bedminster, N.J. Vis: 60 ft. Water: 80 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. The best dive resort and boats on Grand Cayman. Friendly,

helpful crew; circled boat for 1/2 hr. for hammerhead.

Cayman Diving Lodge, September 2000, Keith and Ellen Irwin
(kirwin@wenet.net), San Jose, CA.
Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 100 feet. First dive each day is guided. This is a great place to come for serious diving. East end provides easy access to spectacular north walls, swim throughs and crevices. The staff is friendly and helpful. Rooms are Spartan but comfortable. Rob and Scott prepared wonderful meals. Rob's sauces are first-rate. Other than diving and relaxing, there is not much else to do. Camera table and separate rinse tank on the boat. E-6 processing at Ocean Frontiers. Video playback equipment didn't work and no one seemed anxious to fix it. Significant turnover of staff and the few remaining "old timers" Mickey, Marc, and Jayne will be leaving by year end. The new staff is eager to please but is still learning the dive sites.

Dive 'N Stuff Resort, February 2000, Tim Lee, Monroe, MI. Vis: 70 to 100+ ft. Water: 79 degrees. Sites: Trinity Cove, several shallows. Water clear, warm and calm off 7 mile. Lots of fish, one very large grouper, close to 100 lb. Got within 10 ft. on a cleaning station. Sand Chutes stunning; watched a Hawksbill eating sponge on shallow dive. Doug and Paul possibly the best operation on 7-mile. Funky little boat that is fast and stable. We were able to leave the dock on our time, not any set schedule (we

like 11:00 -11:30 AM. Shove-off. Good underwater guides made it feel like an adventure, but not too risky. Asked what we wanted to see and worked hard to deliver. Small group (6 or less), personal service. (Ph: 345-949-6033)

Fisheye, Marriott Resort, October 1999, Ray and Teresa Mars, Scaggsville, MD. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 86 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: no more than 100 ft. Could extend your bottom time. Ads for Marriott show beautiful sand beach. This was the second year it had washed out. Cayman is expensive to eat. Hurricane Irene had just gone through and water still sandy. Corals on West side and North side showed bleaching and damage and few soft corals. Fish life parse. East End much better for both corals and fish. Hard time using Nitrox meter may have been due to high humidity. Fisheye staff friendly and cooperative. Camera table and separate rinse tank for cameras onboard as well as fresh water shower, small fresh water rinse for gear at shop and difficult to use. StingRay City good but snorkel trip to StingRay Sandbar better and closer experience with stingrays. Fisheye helped switch gear and helped with camera on entry and exit. Marriott not good choice for diver. (Ph: 809-947-4209, Fax: 809-947-4208, e-mail: fisheye@candw.ky)

Morritt's Tortuga Club, August 1999, Mitchell Wallace, Davie, FL. Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 82 degrees. Crowded dive operation. Must reserve space well in advance. Dives, however were well organized. (800-447-0309;

345-947-7449, 813-559-8813 (US Reservations); Fax 813-559-9705 (US Reservations))

Morritt's Tortuga Club, May 2000, Jeff Kugler, Hicksville, N.Y. Vis: 50 to 100 ft. Water: 78 to 81 degrees, surge, no currents. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: time, depth.

Ocean Frontiers, Marriott Resort, October 1999, Mr. Ray P. Mars, Scaggsville, MD. Vis: 40-50 ft. Water: 86 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Advised not to go below 100 ft. but allowed 110+ if on computer and to extend bottom time. Diving better on East End. Beautiful swim throughs and tunnels. Many soft corals and gorgonians. More fish life than other end of the island. Fresh towels on boat and fresh water shower. Fruit between dives. Very careful to log each divers dive depth and time after each dive. Good, friendly divemasters guided small groups on first dive, one guide for second dive on day or go by yourself with buddy. Prompt pick-up service from Seven Mile Beach. Main boat had problems two of three days and had arranged for another boat. Only one rinse tank and kept mask defogger bottle on edge so people got mask defogger in camera tank. They said that Defogger was baby shampoo but bad example. Short boat rides. Overall, good dive operation. Visibility down due to hurricanes. ((800) 544-6576; Cayman office: (345) 947-7500; Cayman fax: (345) 947-7600; e-mail oceanf@candw.ky; website www.oceanfrontiers.com)

Ocean Frontiers, Turtle's Nest Inn, November 1999, Robert Kinney (edenview@aol.com), Mesilla, NM. Vis: 70 to 90 Feet. Water: 80° F. Stay with buddy; return to surface at 500 psi. Turtle's Nest Inn is a fantastic, small Inn on Grand Cayman's East End. Run by Alain and Marleine, two French Canadian expats, it is newer, less expensive and more comfortable than the more popular West End hotels. Alain provided free shuttle service to the airport at 5:30 a.m., and was a tremendous host. It boasts a private beach, pool, and is served well by Ocean Frontiers, the best dive operation on the Island. Dive staff very helpful and non intrusive. The solo diver was welcomed and they made every effort to accommodate both skill level and desires of the divers. Boats were large, with easy entry and fruit with juice between dives. Saw 10-15 turtle and several rays, all with energetic assistance of dive guides. Turtle's Nest and Ocean Frontiers are a class operation at a reasonable price.

Ocean Frontiers, Dive Tech, Treasure Island Resort, December 1999, Roger and Pam Smith (rps8@home.com), Birmingham, AL. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy surge. Treasure Island could use some renovations but is okay for the price (considering you are on Grand Cayman where everything is pricey). The staff is in slow motion but the rooms were clean. This was our second trip diving with Ocean Frontiers and we had no regrets. The service is great and east end diving is

much better than the 7-mile beach area. Awesome walls and healthy reefs. We saw reef sharks on most of the first deep dives. They escort the first dive and the 2nd is on your own. Dave and Delwin were excellent divemasters and gave thorough briefings. We did some shore diving with Dive Tech, next to the turtle farm. There are two walls off of their pier, a mini and deep. The mini is a short swim and the deep takes about 10 minutes. This is great shore diving and the cost, about 10 dollars for tanks and weights, is hard to beat. They also rent water scooters that help get you out to the deep wall. Dive Tech instructors are friendly and professional. They give you a complete briefing of the site on your first tank rental. Nice facilities with clean rinse tanks.

Ocean Frontiers, North Point Condominiums, March 2000, Thomas A. Daly (oilertom@aol.com), Hudson, NH. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 degrees. Water: choppy surge. One of the worlds best dive operations! The new dive center is open and is beautiful. Owners, Mo and Steve are always there making sure everything runs smoothly. The staff is top notch with a can do attitude and the authority to do what it takes to make your experience top notch. They tried to accommodate dive site requests, weather and conditions permitting. We even got in a drift dive! The dive sites are pristine with lots of macro opportunities and there are even sites where you will see reef sharks on a regular basis, groupers and schools of tarpon...all without having

to leave the east end. The staff really loves what they do and it shows. They show up on their days off to dive. That says something! Very well organized on boat for u/w photographers. A separate non-slip camera table for cameras and computers only. A rinse barrel for cameras and computers only and another barrel on board for masks and other equipment. If all ten divers showed up with cameras though, space would be limited. There is a table by the shop for on shore camera work and they have on site E-6 processing as well as an on staff photo professional. For rent there is a Sea and Sea Motor Marine Mx-10 with Ys-40 flash. I wish I had known that the water was a constant 78 degrees. I also wish I had known that ten days are not enough to experience all the diving at the east end. Night dives are great photo opportunities, saw squid, lobster, octopi, huge puffer fish, spotted drums, basically everything you can see in the Caribbean, you see on these night dives. North Pointe condominiums are in Northside a 30 minute drive from the dive shop and between 30 minutes to two hours from Georgetown depending on traffic. There is excellent snorkeling right out front, an in-ground swimming pool with deck and a beach right out front. The downside is that trash from cruise boats and Cuba frequently washes ashore. Information about the condos can be found on the web. Fantasy tours with Captain Dexter still has the best and least expensive tour of stingray city. His catamaran trip is not to be missed...beats the cattle boats any day! Traffic on Grand Cayman

gets worse and worse and the Cayman government seems not to care. It took more than two hours to get from Northside to the Cayman Yacht Club.

Ocean Frontiers, Morritt's Tortuga Club, May 2000, Carol Thompson (baricat@aol.com), Shrewsbury, MA. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: depth limits. Stayed at Morritt's, but elected to bypass the on-site operation, Tortuga Divers, which appeared to us to be a cattle-car operation. Went a few miles down the road to Ocean Frontiers, and we were happy. Max 12 divers on a boat, caring staff. No objection to diving one's own profile, if diving by computer. Deep dive always guided, but offered the option of unguided on the shallow dive. Great pre-dive briefings, including drawing of what topography and critters to expect. Staff ecology-minded. No help with set-up, unless requested. When I suffered from seasickness, staffer was solicitous, and got me in the water before the briefing, where my husband and I waited for the rest of the group. Operation seemed to cater to more experienced level of diver. Will discount significantly with number of dives purchased. Most astounding? The word "tip" was never mentioned once in a 2-week period! That, alone, earned them some extra money, which was added to the tab on request. Topnotch, knowledgeable, friendly staff earns this operator a solid A+ rating! Morritt's was lovely. Two pools, one unpredictable Jacuzzi (hot one day, cold for 4, tepid another.)

Oceanfront accommodations both weeks. Cooked in, so can't speak about David's, the on-site restaurant. Daily housekeeping, which is unusual for a timeshare. You are told how much to tip the housekeepers (didn't care for that!) Charge for use of beach towels, also unusual for a timeshare. Desk staff there is a bit on the cavalier side, earning this an A- rating.

Ocean Frontiers, Morritt's Tortuga Club, June 2000, Ricky Camp.

Sharks on three different dives. Ocean Frontiers has the diving on the East End at it's best. Morritt's Tortuga Club is very nice. We dove from shore one day with Dive Tech they have one of the most colorful reefs I have seen. Three octopus and a lobster in the open. You have to climb down a ladder into a three ft. deep surge pool covered in sea urchins. StingRay City this is always a must.

Ocean Frontiers, Fisheye (North Wall/StingRay City). Eden Rock, Discovery Point Condos, May 2000, Joe Ruf, Vineland, New Jersey. This is my 8th trip to the Cayman's — 4th to Grand Cayman. The growth on the main island is amazing. New Ritz Carlton (with another golf course) is coming. New deluxe condo's going up all over (\$1m +). I believe that the condo with another couple or two is the way to go. You can save a few bucks with some meals in as it will cost you big time to eat out. The locals are still pleasant, but the traffic during rush hours is something to see. I saw a 5-mile backup coming into Georgetown from the east and

between 7-8 AM the traffic is bumper to bumper from the west. Discovery Point is a small (30+) complex at the west end of 7 mile beach and near the good snorkeling. Saw an octopus right out front of my condo! Snorkeling is excellent. Condo is very comfortable and staff helpful (and on site). Food is expensive! Expect to pay \$50/person for a decent dinner. Even booze is expensive (\$6 + Cayman for a glass of wine). Remember all pricing is in Cayman C\$1=US \$1.25. Beware: most restaurants add the 15% tip. There are Burger King, Outback, etc. but they aren't U.S. prices. Diving is mixed. Expensive \$75-85 for a two tank dive trip. Ocean Frontiers was great. Good boat, excellent equipment, super staff and best of all good nice reefs and plenty of fish life including sharks on both dives. Briefings were well done and all sites were within 10 minutes. The only negative is that it is a 50-60 minute drive from 7 mile beach. But worth it. I tried to get another day's dive but they were booked. Fisheye: Started out on a north wall dive (1st) and StingRay City (2nd). The shops regular boat was down...(of course no one told us) we were taken to another operators boat...17 divers, seating for 8. A 1/2 full jug of water (no ice and no cups) no rinse tank for anything, no water and the first time in 20 years on a dive boat with a bucket for cameras. I was extremely disappointed, last minute or not, these are items that could have been provided. The north wall site (Eagle Ray Pass) was poor, viz of about 40-50', drab coral and little fish life (I didn't take one picture).

StingRay City was excellent. 2nd days dive with Fisheye was on 7 mile beach with their flat bottom boat. Much better set up. Ample seating, good rinse setups, including rinse hose in back. Good storage. Unfortunately, the diving was disappointing. Viz on both dives (Trinity Caves/Spanish Anchor) was 40-50' and not a lot of fish life. It was disappointing! Eden Rock Dive Center: My wife and I hadn't ever done a shore dive in Grand Cayman so figured after the 2nd and 3rd days of diving how bad could it be. For \$18.50 (US), for tanks and weights, it was a real bargain. The sites weren't two bad, max 40' with swim throughs and no more of less fish life than I saw at Eagle Ray Pass. To sum it up.....if you really want the diving.....go to Little Cayman. If you want comfort (at a price) and great food (also at a price) (although the food at Little Cayman Beach Resort rivals any food on Grand Cayman) than go to Grand Cayman.

Ocean Frontiers, Dive Tech, June 2000, Thom and Betty Hall, Myrtle Beach, SC. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 79-82 degrees. Boats and personnel were excellent. Dive briefings were right on. Staff was friendly and courteous. Also dove with Dive Tech on opposite end of island. We did a "resort rebreather" and it was fabulous. We were able to "mingle" with the schools of fish. Their diving is primarily "shore and technical diving." Cayman prices are still high and traffic is worse.

Ocean Frontiers, Royal Reef, July 2000, William D. Barnett Sr.,

LaPorte TX. The weather was mostly sunny and dry with a couple of short, pleasant afternoon showers. Calm to slightly choppy with slight to no current. There was quite a surge on some of the shallow dives (40 to 50 ft.) because they were so close to the shore line. The water was a comfortable 84 to 86 deg. F, some people wore light suits or skins and some of us needed only a T-shirt and shorts. On the 100 ft. and wall dives, the visibility rated a good 100+, shallower diving was possibly 40 to 60 ft. Diving with the group was mandatory on the deeper dives and optional on the second if you had a dive partner and both had computers. Three minutes at 15 ft. after a slow ascent was strictly enforced. They drew an underwater chart on a remarkable board of the sites to illustrate what we will encounter. No shark sightings. The operation said that the water was too warm and they had moved to deeper water. Saw two turtles on the large side of 300 pounds at the surface doing the nasty. On many dives, there were schools of large tarpon that were not easily spooked like years ago. They held their ground long enough to take close up shots. East end has great diving and a great dive operation in Ocean Frontiers. My dive partner had a death in the family and had to fly home early, Ocean Frontier refunded him for the unused dives that we paid in advance. Would probably not happen for just changing your mind. A room with a furnished kitchen is mandatory in my book for the east end. There are not many places to eat out and like everything else in the

Caymans, it's expensive. A huge savings was realized by going to the grocery store in Georgetown and buying food and snacks for the stay. Georgetown is a forty-minute drive from the Royal Reef.

Ocean Frontiers, Royal Reef, July 2000, Daniel Spitzer. The West End feels the effect of too many divers — especially too many novices like me? — as well as damage from storms, runoff from the mainland and pollution, so I took to diving elsewhere. The East End of Grand Cayman attracts a more experienced crowd, drawn to the wall dives. I vowed to stay far enough from Georgetown and 7 Mile Beach to avoid the worst of what America has to offer — fast food joints, chain accommodations and t-shirt shops. I finally returned to Grand Cayman this July — after a nearly 8-year hiatus — and had a wonderful time on the East End, which is relatively undeveloped and far closer to the real Caribbean than the Americanized West End. A new Royal Reef — was offering introductory packages and had teamed up with Ocean Frontiers, which has a shop on premises, and will shortly have a dive boat on site. The Chapbook spoke well of Ocean Frontiers, so we were set. Royal Reef is new, clean, luxurious, and far more comfortable than home. All units face the beach and ocean beyond, and all have a Jacuzzi next to the king-size bed. (Question: What do REAL divers do in the Jacuzzi? Answer: Wash out their dive equipment — isn't that what it was designed for?) A mini-kitchen with

refrigerator and microwave occupies one corner of the tremendous room or suite, depending on the accommodation chosen, and a double sink setup in front of a giant mirror allows ample room for shaving. (Interestingly, since the spotlight is immediately over the space between the sinks, it's necessary to shave half of your face at one sink and the other half at the other sink — that must be why there are two sinks...) A small on-site store is well-stocked with breakfast and lunch fixings — which is fortuitous since the restaurant doesn't open until 9 am — and any self-respecting East End diver is breathing Nitrox by then! Ocean Frontiers (OF) is a first-class operation which goes out of its way to accommodate special requests. Cayman dive operations have the reputation for strictly enforcing arbitrary rules — (The first dive is to 40 feet for twelve minutes, and the second is to 20 feet for 18 minutes. If you go a foot too deep, go directly to jail and do not pass Go...) and indeed our first encounter seemed inauspicious. I find it frustrating to take a week of vacation time, travel several thousand miles, and incur the considerable expense involved in a dive vacation to need to surface with more than half a tank of air and nowhere near decompression on my computer. The first morning with OF involved just such a series of profiles, in large part due to the mixture of just-certified divers and the more experienced on the same boat. (It's easy to identify neophyte divers — they're the ones with the log books displayed the moment they surface, asking someone

— ANYONE! — to stamp a page for them.) Clearly the East End was no longer the domain of only those fearless denizens of the deep who had at least two thousand dives under their weight belts! And the night dive that evening — or actually what would be more appropriately called a twilight dive — was in all of 24 feet of water, on the inside of the fringing reef. Many of the divers that evening had never done a night dive before, and the generalized melee and fracas probably scared anything mobile, and not deaf, clear to Jamaica! (Watching divers in 24 feet of water run low on air and surface with nearly empty tanks reinforces the impression that certification standards for diving, as indeed for driving a motor vehicle, are far too lax.) Having been subjected to what passed for a night dive the day before, we elected to skip the next morning's dives and instead spoke with the owners of the dive operation about some changes that would tailor the operation's routine to the more experienced diver. They were eager to listen and proved to be happy to accommodate our requests. Since most large-boat dives were performed in two groups, we would gear up immediately and be the earliest of the first group in the water. The East End sports some interesting topography, and the superb of divemasters were wonderful, leading us through narrow swim-throughs and around wonderful coral pinnacles. After the deeper portion of the dive, we would ascend slowly and do our own thing, ultimately returning to the boat as the last of the second group was boarding.

Dive times were thus routinely 45 plus minutes on a first morning dive, and an hour or more for the second shallower dive. Better yet was the availability of a small but fast dive boat tailored for small groups. On several occasions, without asking and without additional charge, of gave us a divemaster and the small boat — The Catapult — allowing us to explore the North Wall, which starts around the corner from Royal Reef. The North Wall of Grand Cayman remains a superb site for diving — few experiences beat drifting over the lip and looking straight down into the depths, or poking through a swim-through and emerging from darkness onto the sponge-decked vertical face. One site was so new — the marker buoy had been dropped by the government just days before — that it was a new dive for the divemaster as well. We were all rewarded with a 10-foot stand of pillar coral and an untouched site. OF runs a safe and professional operation. The three dive boats are new, aluminum, and pristine, as well as fast and comfortable. There's ample space for stretching out or storing gear, and two rinse buckets are carried, one for cameras and the second for other gear. A second stage, attached to a tank positioned on the boat, is dropped over to the 20-foot mark for anybody needing air during a safety stop, and they suspend two hang lines off the stern of the boat, encouraging a safe and gradual ascent during the critical final 20 feet. A shark dive is organized once or twice per week. Consisting of an hour and a half lecture on sharks, their evolution and habitat, followed

by a dive under carefully controlled circumstances, this promises to become a real draw. Unfortunately, none of the usual guests showed up — though ironically we did spot Caribbean Reef Sharks on our first two dives of the week. The staff was apologetic, our cartilaginous colleagues were nonplused, and the management issued a refund of half the cost of the dive. Coral bleaching and storm destruction have hit the East End, much as they have hit most of the rest of the Caribbean, and indeed many of the oceans of the world. Pretty much all areas above 40 feet have been denuded of living coral, with the skeletons of all branching hard coral having been knocked over into the gullies and crevasses. The larger formations remain, though one wonders how long they will be able to withstand the erosive effects of waves and storms, since they are no longer growing and merely consist of porous, relatively soft rock. This problem transcends anything Grand Cayman — or any individual — can do, but as divers we are seeing the effects of global warming and oceanic pollution more clearly than almost any other group, and it's our obligation to our planet, and the oceans that we love, to try to galvanize public opinion. Hint: A car is a must on the East End. Rent one at the Airport upon arrival.

Ocean Frontiers, Morritt's Tortuga Club, August 2000, Jerry and Lynn Mountjoy, Granite Bay, CA. Sunny with occasional clouds. Water calm and flat with slight or no currents. Water temp: 80-83 degrees. No

wetsuit. Vis 80-120'. Dove own profile, up w/500 pounds. Saw lots of sting rays and a few turtles. Ocean Frontiers pampered us. We were free to dive our own plan or go with a guide (and the guides were liberal). There were always two divemasters for the maximum of twelve divers. They have two boats, both are comfortable and well equipped and they took us to great sites. Pre-dive briefings were exceptional, with great sketches of the reefs below, pinpointing highlights and where we might expect to encounter something special. At \$85 for a two-tank dive they are pricey, but comparable to other noncattle car operations; well worth the extra few bucks, and the price drops for planned multiple dives. We dove all sides of the island. The East is more pristine because it is harder to get to and less abused, but it shouldn't be missed. On the West end, we found some wonderful shore dives that had easy access and great sites. Though we saw no sharks, we did see great sea life including stingrays, turtles, a large hog fish, scrawled file fish, huge queen angels. Saw the popular sad face sponge at Anchor Point. A top dive trip.

Ocean Frontiers, Morritt's Tortuga Club, September 2000, Bobby Lamb (BobbyLamb@aol.com), Lake Wylie, SC. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80-82 F. Dive your own profile: yes. Advised not to go below 100 ft. but allowed 110+ if on computer. One of the best organized operations that my wife and I have experienced. The entire staff is friendly and very accommodating.

There were no tip jars anywhere on the boat nor at the shop. Nitrox is readily available. The "Nauticat" dive boat was well designed, fast, and could turn on a dime. The boat was very roomy for 12-16 divers, and a crew of two. Fresh towels, fresh drinking water, lemonade, ice chest, separate mask and camera rinse tanks, and other little surprises. The pre-dive briefings were very informative and they guide each dive. However, if you want to dive your own unguided profiles and you have computers, allow one day for the divemaster crew to get to know if you are a safe and hands-off-the-sea-life diver, then ask them if you can dive your own unguided profiles. They will let you jump in the water before the pre-dive briefings to allow you more bottom time. You may get a different crew in the middle of the week, so you need to make sure that the previous crew passes the word to the new crew that you are capable of diving your own unguided profiles. East End walls and reefs are in very good condition. These dive sites are great for experienced and conscientious divers, but beginner and damage-prone divers should stay away. If dive sites are too choppy on the South side, then the less choppy North side was only 20-30 minutes away. Accommodations at Morritt's Tortuga Club were excellent and the East End of the island is remote and away from mainstream Georgetown. Save money. Make arrangements to get a room with a kitchenette and rent a car for the week (Warning: they drive on the left). Go to the supermarket near the airport and

get enough groceries for your breakfasts, lunches, and dinners. Stay away from posh restaurants and even the fast food chains. Look for places to eat that the locals go to such as roadside pubs or outdoor barbecues, ask the dive shop for recommendations. One of my recommendations is Vivine's Kitchen that half mile from the dive shop. This is actually Vivine's house where you can your order at her back door and eat on picnic tables behind her house. Her prices were very reasonable for Cayman standards and a great place to have lunch after your morning dives. My wife and I love to try these places that are off the beaten path. By the way, we did tip the divemasters.

Ocean Frontiers/Royal Reef, Grand Cayman, September 2000, Susan Beck (pmol@mindspring.com), Dover, DE.

Vis: 65-100 ft. Water: 80-83° F., choppy, no currents. After 8 short-drive boat dives to 8 different sites, it all looked similar. Nothing spectacular, unless you count a completely silted up w/sand swimthrough full of narrow twists. No real wall dives as in other G.C.I. locations. Night dive at Sunset Reef was WAY too shallow, and coral showed the damage of frequent encounters with divers' fins. Otherwise, sites like Jack McKenny, Pat's Wall, Rivers of Sand, and Black Rock were as close to untouched as could be hoped for. Lovely; however, most sites were very similar. Never went to north side, but when vis or current wasn't the greatest, Ralph, the artist/Aussie who briefed, drove, and dove, just went somewhere else. Staff

superb; dive shop full; Anna fun and helpful. since we were there during hurricane season, it helped to see a daily weather printout. Fantastic snorkeling right off the nice beach (resident tarpon and snook, reef squid, the occasional peacock flounder, scorpion fish and sleeping nurse sharks). Dove w/Ocean Frontiers last year (got married on a beach barefooted, and this was a 1st anniversary) and found them informative, friendly, very safety-oriented, full of humor; they showed a drawn, diagrammed description during briefing. Boat was maxed out at about 16 people, but we never had more than 12. They now have a very thorough, fully ecologically minded, and sensibly arranged shark dive preceded by a long and informative classroom presentation. They only do that once a week so as not to turn into a stingray manipulation scene. Royal Reef brand new and really very nice. East End is a long way from the horrid traffic jams outside of Georgetown.

Photo Tour Divers, February 2000, Rob Schoenthaler, Highland Hts.

KY. Vis: 80 to 100 ft. Water: 81 to 83 degrees, surge. Dive your own profiles. Dive restrictions: none. Because of "Lenny," the reef on south end of island was destroyed in the 0-30' level; beyond that was fantastic and a lot of fish due to lost habitat in shallows. Shore diving allows a lot of freedom. Photo Tours was wonderful; they catered to all our needs.

Red Sail Sports, Don Foster's, Grand Cayman Marriott, May

2000, Gail T. Barranda, Whitestone, N.Y. Vis: 70 to 80 ft. Water: 82 to 84 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Depth limited to 100 ft. Red Sail picked up from the beach; large stable boats. Camera table, camera, rinse bucket, shower and fresh orange slices for in-between dives. Lots of divemasters on boat, helped you out of water. First dive is guided (seemed a bit rushed), second dive you're free to do your own thing. They grouped divers according to level. Turtles everywhere, thimble jellyfish plagued the surface. Rinse as soon as you get on the boat. Marriott is a great hotel. The pirate's buffet is worth every penny. Good food, a limbo dancer and fire-eater; proximity to town and bars; great beach; fish are used to being fed; gives snorkelers a treat. Don Foster's a good outfit. We had a small group and had the big boat all to ourselves; storage space for keeping stuff dry, camera rinse bucket, showers on board. Moke was great at pointing out all the little critters. Great dive briefings; they went out of their way to keep us happy. Only downside is a van picks you up in the morning to take you to Georgetown where the dive shop is. (Ph: 800-255-6425 or 809-947-5965, Fax: 809-949-8745, e-mail: redsail.com)

Red Sail Sports, Marriott, June 2000, Ron Good, Fairfax, VA. Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: depth limits, put in to group that you want. Was hesitant after reading Diver's Chapbook regarding Red Sail Sports. However, we were pleasantly surprised. Crew was attentive to individual needs and

tried to accommodate dive site request, though not always successful due to other operations already at the site. Red Sail operates out of Hyatt, but sent boat to Marriott and road shuttle out to dive boat. All in all had a great experience but bring a lot of money for other activities.

SeaSports, December 1999, Anne Warburton, Yorba Linda, CA. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 78-81 degrees. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. maximum. Grand Cayman is far too crowded. Have been going for 15 years, such a shame, looks like the islands we would not visit due to mass humanity with cars for years. Prices have gone up in restaurants. Butch, owner of SeaSports has small (one boat) dive operation and has for more than 20 years. Will pick up by boat on beach (7 mi.) wherever you're staying. Need own transportation to get to other dive areas with him North and South shores. Don't think he dives East as it's too far. Cemetery Reef on 7 Mile Beach is almost destroyed by locals as well as 3-5 ship loads dropped off 5 days a week. Hopefully, they will contain the growth and number of ships allowed in when elections take place. **(345-949-3965; Fax 345-945-6383)**

SeaSports, Plantation Village, January 2000, Linda Millisor, Breckenridge, CO. Vis: 100 to 150 feet, Water: 78 degrees, calm and flat. Dive restrictions: 110 depth/no decompress or computer. I will dive again with Butch and Neil at SeaSports. Small boat, no crowd, different dive sites every dive. They

keep a record of where they take you, helpful with gear. Pick up on beach and straight to diving. Don't start until 10 AM — able to sleep in. Went places other operation won't go north and west wall. Night dive great. Water was cold for January; could have used 5 mm. Karen sets up your schedule, very accommodating; great trip.

Sunset House, October 1999, Steve Pederson, Stevens Point, WI. Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 75-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. Good dive operation. Helpful. Signed up for East End Diving. They canceled. Spendy but worth it. Beautiful deep dives. Orange Mountain. I wish I would have bought camera and used on trip. **(Ph: 800-854-4767 or 809-949-7111, Fax: 809-949-7101, e-mail: sunseths@candw.ky, Website: www.sunsethouse.com)**

Sunset House, December 1999, Mike Gorman, (MGDives@aol.com), Springfield, IL. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. with computers; 80 ft. with tables. Great briefings before each dive. Oxygen on board. Diver head count; air/depth check before and after each dive. Dive staff friendly but firm about staying within the computer/no computer profiles and about keeping camera rinse buckets free of other equipment. Sunset Divers' staff added an extra boat one day so they did not inconvenience regular divers when people from the "Travel Channel" came on our boat with their dive and video gear to do a documentary. Jon Flasar with Cathy Church's Underwater Photo/Video shop taught a

great photo class. Sunset House sleeping accommodations were clean and well maintained.

Sunset House, July 2000, Tony Falso (tfalso1@tampabay.rr.com), Palm Harbor, FL. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet.

Water: 82 to 84 F, calm no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: Regular boats — 100 ft. limit, surface with 500 psi. On the Manta — 120 ft. limit, surface with 500 psi. Clean rooms, friendly staff. Convenient gear lockers and rinse tanks. Unlimited shore diving. Regular day boats only took you to sites just off the hotel. Manta took you around the island to dive the North Wall and East End. The Manta is an excellent boat and worth the upgrade. Experienced divemasters with excellent briefings. Let you do your own thing but kept an eye out for problems. Seaharvest restaurant was good for dinner, mediocre for breakfast. "My Bar" was a nice diversion after dives. Manta had nice camera table, rinse tank and dry area. Regular boats had small camera table with rinse tank. Cathy Church's shop is at the hotel.

Sunset House, August 2000, Randy and Linda Chavez, Cincinnati, OH.

Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 85-87 degrees. Dive restrictions: 95' depth limit. Sunset House dive operation is excellent! They do a great job! Weather was half sunny, half cloudy/rain, but the diving was still great.

Sunset House, August 2000. Susan Sampson, Renton, WA. Water: 81-82 degrees. Vis over 100'. My dive buddy is a certified master diver, I

have about 25-30. The reef and a wreck in front of the hotel offered diving that easy enough for me, yet was still an interesting and lively habitat for him, featuring corals, fish, turtles, squid and more. The sand falls between the fingers of the reef made navigation easy, and the white sand reflected enough light to enhance underwater photography. Right in front of the hotel is where we caught the dive boats in the morning for short jaunts off shore for dives along walls and among pinnacles, coral heads, tunnels and wrecks. The boats offered fresh drinking water and a dunk tank for cameras, and plenty of dry towels. Staff did a dive briefing and described a dive profile, but then let divers do their own dive; staff did an equipment check on every diver going into the water. Staff used a written check sheet to assure that everybody came back, cruised along under water to check how people were doing, and checked depths and air remaining as each person got back on the boat.

Bill Nadeau did a good job of getting me certified for Nitrox, Dive lockers: one was big enough for all the stuff we needed to stash for the two of us, and was equipped with broad-shouldered hangars for skins that we were trying to dry out. So what more could I wish for? Only tiny details. A surly guy in the dive shop was scary. I happen to be as buoyant as a hollow bubble of fat, so my buddy and I estimated that I would need to carry 14# of lead to be weighted for the end of my dive. But the guy told him (not me), "That's extremely dangerous. Do

me a favor, and don't dive off that wall out there, because if you put that much weight on a girl that size, you'll never see her again!" My anxiety level shot through the roof. We backed off, hung 12# of lead around my waist, and of course I came up light at the end of the dive. A fellow diver on her third ever dive trip followed the guy's instruction and disconnected her power inflator and removed seven pounds from her weight belt! We looked down from our safety stop and saw him grabbing Cheryl and fighting to keep her from soaring to the top. We would have liked lighting on the hotel grounds at night. Our room was nominally a nonsmoking room, but it reeked of tobacco and was equipped with ash trays. After the efficient air conditioning blew for a day, the tobacco odor disappeared and we became aware that the water in the bathroom had a horrible hydrogen sulfide stench. Eventually the maid brought in a chemical that dyed the toilet water blue and removed the stink. The sink and tub didn't have plugs, so we had to stuff them with washcloths. We had to buy enzyme packages at the dive shop for rinsing our gear because the tropical humidity did not allow clothing, swimsuits, skins or boots to dry out, and after a couple of days we smelled like sour dishcloths. We didn't find laundry facilities on site. The beds were standard "hotel double;" fine for me at 5'2", but my buddy is more than a foot taller so his feet extended well beyond the end of the bed. But everything else was fine. The on-site restaurant was good and the staff was

courteous, and they didn't have to be, because their 15% gratuity was included in the bill. The on-site bar, "My Bar" was a fun, with a friendly staff, delicious enormous lunches, and locals who assembled every evening to play "knockboard," domino games involving a lot of slamming of tiles on the table, cheers from the sidelines and long-necked beers.

Cathy Chu gallery of underwater photography in the basement under the hotel lobby was an interesting display, with cameras for rent and film and some underwater camera accessories for sale. Town was expensive. \$39 American for fish and chips, a stuffed baked potato, and two beers for lunch. That happened to be all the cash we had on us so we walked back to the hotel (no taxi money); and discovered no sidewalks, no shoulders to the road, and no paths. The resort will telephone for a cab that takes about 15 minutes to arrive. They arranged the cab for our 5 a.m. departure.

Sunset House, September 2000, Barry Lipman (b_lipman@hotmail.com), Brookfield, CT. Vis: 25 to 85 Feet. Water: 84 F. Cayman Islands depth limit of 100 feet, max 110. Most boat dives you had to be back in 40 or 60 minutes. You were supposed to have a buddy. Shore dives had no restrictions because no one checked. Fairly average Caribbean diving in areas where they obviously feed the fish. The fish often get so close you have to wave them away! Not many large fish, and not too much variety in the smaller ones. Pretty good invertebrate

life — I found two nudibranchs that aren't in any of my books. The corals are in decent shape, but not by any means pristine. The deeper you go, and the farther from the island, the healthier the reefs. On two trips to Stingray City we had either rain and chop or mostly cloudy skies, and the water was green instead of blue. It is the kind of dive you should do maybe once, just to see and handle the rays up close. Sunset House has excellent training facilities. Sunset Divers offers resort through various technical diving courses including closed and semi closed rebreathers, and they also do trimix diving. Cathy Church has a nice looking facility with lots of camera gear for sale and rent, and plenty of hands-on teaching with daily E-6 available. Sunset House is very camera and photog friendly, with cameras-only rinse tanks on the boats and near the dock for shore dives. You can dive 24/7 off the ladder near the dock, and they don't ask if you have a buddy or not. My first dive was a solo shore dive, no questions asked. They only supply aluminum 72s, but if you're OK on air consumption, that should be no problem. The food at Sunset's Seaharvest Restaurant is very good, and the food at the nearby Crow's Nest is excellent. Accommodations are simple and clean, more than adequate for a dive vacation. Camera rinse tanks on boats and at dock for shore dives. Carpeted camera tables on boats. If you didn't speak up during the briefing, you could get away without a buddy.

Treasure Island Divers, Coconut Harbor, December 1999, John Foster, Waterford, CT. Island Dream suggested using Treasure Island Divers and staying at Coconut Harbour, since it would be possible to get the "Maxi Dive" package of unlimited boat dives being offered as well as able to do shore dives from the hotel. We got in 27 dives in our 5-1/2 days of diving (all but 2 boat dives) with me to take advantage of the topside activities. All 3 boats were in great shape and despite being capable of holding 30 divers each, we never had more than 14 (except for StingRay City when the boat was filled since SC had been undivable for over a week and everyone wanted to go). Due to weather, diving all week was from the West side. Treasure Island is of setting up a small dive shop at Coconut Harbour and transportation between CH and TI's shop was sometimes by van and sometimes by boat without any apparent plan but without delays. Divers staying at Coconut Harbor were usually on the later boat (of 2) leaving the TI dock and earlier boats often had already filled the best dive sites. The TI staff took us to requested sites whenever possible, and often waiting until a desired site was cleared by a boat already there. Divers were not grouped by ability or any other basis except order of sign-in but a DM was in water for every dive to give tours or help divers. Experienced divers with computers could dive their own profiles with extra time. There was obvious concern for safety with roll calls before and after every dive and thorough dive briefings on the

sites. They gave divers mesh bags to store their equipment and equipment in bags was rinsed by the staff after the last dive of the day. Equipment storage was possible at TI Divers or in lockers at Coconut Harbour. Divers set up their own equipment and the mesh bags left at TI were waiting on the dock or boat for every morning. Coconut Harbour is a basic motel-style accommodation with beach diving via a cut through the ironshore and is on the opposite side of Georgetown from Seven Mile Beach and most of the dive operations. The Blue Parrot had good (and typically priced) food and is a popular site with locals and tourists. The rooms have no TV but have small kitchenettes to make lunch sandwiches to be eaten on picnic tables at the Treasure Island headquarters. A farewell dinner at the elegant and expensive Grand Old House restaurant just down the road from CH on our final evening was a total bust, due to incredibly poor service and badly prepared food. (Ph: 800-872-7552, or 809-949-4456, Fax: 809-949-7125, e-mail: tividivers@candw.ky, Website www.deepedge.com/tividivers)

Treasure Island Divers, Treasure Island, December 1999, Walter Schwidetzky. Resort was okay. It could have been quieter, and the water in the bathroom tended to be rust colored, but the room was comfortable and had a refrigerator. It is within walking distance of Kirks, a large grocery store, as well as a number of restaurants and shops. It is between the beach the Treasure Island condos; it takes two minutes to get to the

beach. By Cayman standards, the resort was reasonably priced. The cheapest rooms have no view and are in the boonies. For a \$24 upgrade, we got a room with a balcony toward the pool. Ours was a corner room. Avoid that, since the part of the building it was adjacent to had not balconies, but a walkway, and everyone walking down could look onto our balcony. None have a great view of the ocean. It was close to Treasure Island Divers, though curiously, the in-house operation was Bob Soto (it used to be TI Divers, hence the similar names). TI Divers runs a very good operation, with boats on the north and west sides. The north side was not always available due to weather. The water was relatively cold, down to 76 degrees. The diving was typical for Cayman, nothing big, but I saw plenty of turtles, spotted lobsters on the night dive, tons of parrot fish, and a burr fish. I like the variety in the Bahamas better, but I like the quality of the dive operation in Grand Cayman much better.

Treasure Island Divers, Cayman Marine Lab, Sunset House. Georgetown Villas, June 2000, Gary L. Rea, M.D., Ph.D., Columbus, OH. The villas were adequate. The two-bedroom condominium was at the southern end of Seven-Mile Beach. Town was within walking distance. The two bedroom was a little small for two adults and three teenagers. Snorkeling off Georgetown Villas and Treasure Island was good. During the day we saw an octopus in the open and turtles. The small reef just out from Treasure Island has a good

collection of fish. Snorkeling at the Cemetery Reef was better. Most surprising place for snorkeling was the pier at Cayman Kai. Underneath we found a moray eel, multiple banded shrimp, 25 yellow stingrays, and a large number of chub. During two weeks we dove with three different organizations. The Treasure Island trips, all on the West Side, were well organized. The pre-dive instructions were good. The guidance was good and the emphasis on safety was good. The Cayman Marine Lab trips were fast, one could get to the site quickly, dive, take adequate off-gassing and dive again. You could get back almost an hour faster than with the other boats. The marine lectures while waiting to take the second dive were between good and excellent. Small boat and only one dive master on the boat. In one dive, there were five newly certified divers making their first boat dive, more than one dive master could handle. Also, when we called to make reservations, they said they couldn't make them several days before, so you had to call back the day before you wanted to dive. Not a boat for novices and the pre-dive instructions were poor. We dove several days with Sunset Divers on the West Side, they gave perhaps the best pre-dive instructions. The dive masters were not only instructive but also enjoyable. The dive on the "Manta Ray" was excellent. The trip was fast and quite enjoyable. The East End was spectacular diving, especially the coral. We saw Eagle rays on the North wall. It was an excellent trip. Sunset Divers' organization was truly impressive. We

also went to "StingRay City" with Captain Marvin. That was truly an enjoyable trip. We "captured" our own conch for an appetizer and saw the stingrays and snorkeled at several places. The picnic on the beach and the food was very good. Marlin and Captain Marvin were great hosts. There is clearly more traffic, more people on the West Side than we would like, but even diving on the West Side is great to us Midwesterners. The North walls and East Side, however, are truly spectacular.

Little Cayman

Conch Club Divers, Conch Club Condo., February 2000, John J. Wright, Phelps, NY. Vis: 60-75 ft. Water: 77 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 ft. We had an excellent experience with wonderful weather, accommodations and diving. The peace and quiet was relaxing and not overwhelming. The Conch Club condos were nearly new, well maintained, allowed for privacy, yet opportunity for social interaction. The Conch Club Divers provided a safe enjoyable experience. Bill Christopher and his staff give special attention to divers with focus on quality service and safety. A clean neat place to visit as well. Most diving at Bloody Bay Marine Park. (800-327-3835, 727-323-8727; Fax 727-323-8827; e-mail bestdiving@reefseas.com; website www.conchclub.com/dive.html)

Conch Club Divers, Conch Club Condominiums, June 2000, Steven Dingeldein (sdingeldein@triad.rr.com),

Burlington, NC. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 100 feet come up with 500 PSI. Conch Club condos are managed by the Little Cayman Beach Resort and are kept clean just like the resort. The Condos are roomy and in good shape. A washing machine and dryer are in each unit. Nice docks, beach and good snorkeling right out front. Biked back and forth to the Little Cayman Beach Resort to eat and dive. The food, as on previous trips, was great, varied and plentiful. Conch Club Divers might be the best operation I've dived within 6 years of fairly active diving. The 42-foot Newton boat is the best dive boat anywhere (similar to the LCBR boats) but in tip top shape. There is ample room, a great sun deck up top, plenty of snacks and fluids. The operation is run by Bill and Wes (owners) and Tim. They gave great briefings, were helpful underwater but didn't hover over us. They set your gear up the first day and you generally don't touch it again the time you dive with them. They are funny, friendly folk who clearly love diving. They go out of their way to satisfy your desires. They carry a maximum of 15 divers. We had a max of 13 one day and only 3 of us another day. The diving was outstanding and Little Cayman is everything it's reputed to be as a dive site. They don't do night dives but you can hook up with the LCBR staff who are also excellent. That is easy since the Conch Club boat picks you up at the LCBR dock each day and your wet suit and fins are stored in the LCBR storage facility. Nitrox is available from LCBR.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, November 1999, John Stuart, St. Joseph, MO. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: Back on the boat in a given length of time or 500 psi (100 foot limit was observed). The diving off Bloody Bay wall was awesome. We were also able to dive the Russian Destroyer near Cayman Brac. Taking the diving, dive operator, food, and lodging as a total package, this was the most spectacular week of diving I have ever had. (Ph: 345-948-1033, Fax: 345-948-1040)

Little Cayman Beach Resort, December 1999, The Romans, Douglas Manor, NY. My family and of four (including a 12 year old and a 16-year-old) went. Resort is pleasant, beautifully situated and well maintained. I recommend the beach front units; especially the newer ones near the Dive Shop. The greatest number of rooms is along a long L and appears dark and without charm. Dive Pluses: Excellent dive boats were never overfilled with divers. Well maintained, with easy water access and hot water rinse-off (albeit stingy on snacks). Wall dives were spectacular. On days that were too choppy for the 20 minute ride, we cruised 5 minutes away and had lovely dives with good visibility. Manager of the dive shop was terrific and personable and truly took an interest in assisting our 12-year-old new blue water diver. Dive minuses: Very poor philosophy of divemaster usage. I thought they were negligent in their daily routines. Most days, they would go out with only 2 divemasters, 1 of whom captained the

boat. Only 1, therefore, could enter the water and that person always exited, as prearranged, when only half the bottom time had expired. This left the entire group of divers, of various abilities, alone underwater for 1/2 of every dive. no matter what depth or visibility. Nor did most of the dive instructors seem overly interested in escorting or using their expertise to point out underwater sights. Food amazingly good. My husband and children were happy with the preparation, the quality and the variety. Special kudos to the pastry chef who overtaxed our svelte waistlines. Breakfast service hours are too limited! If you don't dive, breakfast still must be completed by 8:30 a.m.; not user friendly to nondivers. Also, poor planning during busy evenings resulted in long waits on the buffet line. They had woefully inadequate staff even to clear dishes during dinner. They never even contemplated a simple fix of running a line up the second side of the buffet table. Those who did work had obviously never received training. All dining room staff was personable. Management was cool and "hands off" (except Karaoke night). That same dispirit affected some of the front desk staff; not of the 'concierge mode.' Spa: Simple, refreshing with a very gracious staff. A splendid luxury at a divers' resort.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, January 2000, David Asch, (davidrasch@compuserve.com), Westmount, Quebec, Canada. Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 74-76 degrees.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, February 2000, Curt and Nancy Koch, Cincinnati, OH. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 76-78 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: No decompression diving. Recommended levels, but not checked. For buffet, food was very good; desserts excellent. The dining porch, new, enhanced evening dining. Indoor dining room gets a bit loud. Dive operations are top notch with boats in fine condition, excellent dive site briefings, complete with drawings of the sites. Divemasters Caleb, Elisa and Susan make each dive a pleasurable experience.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, February 2000, Mark S. Reckman, Cincinnati, OH. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 76-80 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 max. I love the wall diving on this island, both sides of the island! This trip didn't seem to give me quite as much fish life as last year. LCBR does a great job. The island has little to offer but diving, fishing and boating. Bring a book!

Little Cayman Beach Resort, March 2000, Jeffrey Clayton, Howell, MI. Vis: 80-150 ft. Water: 76-78 degrees. Dive restrictions: First dive 100 ft. for 45 min., second dive 60 ft. for 50 using computers. Little Cayman Beach Resort was run very well. The staff and management went out of their way to ensure a pleasant experience. The ocean front rooms are worth the extra money as all have a/c, extra sink, microwave, and small refrigerator with ice. The 300 building has the best ocean views and the 2nd floor units

include vaulted ceilings. The diving was spectacular especially on Bloody Bay wall. The corals are plentiful and healthy and full of life including Ben and Jerry, both groupers that you can pet and hunt for squirrel fish with by pointing. Dive master Gary (Gaz) was personable and helpful which I appreciated. The dive shop itself lacked in the equipment department. Too many T-shirts, not enough emphasis on dive gear. The Photo shop was accommodating as there are many photo opportunities both on land and water. I'm glad we dove the Russian frigate at Cayman Brac, but will probably pass it up next time. Overall experience, A minus.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, March 2000, Bill Lytle, Lincoln, MA. Vis: 60 to 80 ft. Water: 78 to 79 degrees, calm and flat, no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. One of our best dive trips in 10 years. Little Cayman Beach Resort is well managed and responsive to its customers. Our rooms were comfortable, the food was very good, too many desserts, and the facilities attractive. The dive operation was perhaps the best we have experienced. The boats were large and comfortable; the staff was easy going, humorous, and helpful in finding interesting critters; the focus on safety and environment was exemplary. The only drawback was the 20 minutes it took to get to the dive sites, but the wall is well worth the ride. Good photo operation.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, March 2000, Debra Lee Gaburo, Evergreen, CO. Vis: 60-110 ft. Water: 77-79

degrees. Dive restrictions: 100', 45 min. on computer. Second visit to Little Cayman Beach Resort. Not much has changed in four years (with the exception of a fire truck and a few more people on the island). Bloody Bay Wall is still number one and conditions were perfect. Great Wall East and Great Wall West are both sheer and spectacular – we cruised both in one dive because we couldn't get enough. Enormous lobster, spotted morays, numerous turtles, sponges and all the coral you could look at. Every dive site is incredible with few exceptions. Weather was partly cloudy but the sun came out by midday. Dive operation very helpful but need to lose the "tip your divemaster" signs on every boat. We were on the all-inclusive package. Food was very good although the bar needs some attention. Half way through our trip we realized that they were charging us additionally for call liquor (Absolut). This was not the case four years ago. The well liquor used is blended on Grand Cayman and totally undrinkable. Needless to say we were not happy with the additional bar bill. In the future we'll BYOB.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, May 2000, Phil Hampton, Merritt Island, FL. Vis: 40-100 ft. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. We returned to Little Cayman Beach Resort with 16 divers, most of whom were repeats from last year. Great dive boats, great food and good diving.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, August 2000, GiGi Wark (gg@alrcusa.org), Houston, TX. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet.

Water: 80 F, choppy. Dive restrictions: Divers with computers as well as tables were given the profiles. 3 boat dives daily: 1st dive deep usually something like 100 ft for 40 with computers, 2nd dive shallow after 45 minute top side 60 ft for 50 minutes. 3rd dive later in afternoon after lunch 60 ft for 50 minutes more or less! The accommodations excellent: comfortable bed, nice room some with sofa and a fridge, water pressure could have been better, but there was always a pool to rinse off in after a dive! The diving exceptional: swam with Spot the dolphin a dream come true! Lots of turtles. Reef sharks and nurse sharks most abundant. The sea life was exceptional, lots to see, lots of large fish, lobsters. Night dive had a grouper of unbelievable size and a Jew fish even larger. Lots of beautiful corals all types. One dive showed us the death of coral after a storm, coral graveyard, made you think and appreciate watch your buoyancy and fins! The dive staff was great. Lots of fun and personality. At the operational level some could learn to be friendly and maybe smile — helps customers and could only help them you would think. But when we left felt like the divemasters were long time buddies and not just for a tips sake! Resort well kept, food extraordinary: lobsters, fish, meats, and salads, soups variety. Thank goodness we scuba to keep weight down. Also ran a few miles each day just to help! Desserts out of this world and soooo much to choose from! Owner Mr. Tibbits always with a friendly smile and a kind offer to help you explore the

small island. Wish I had know about the bug problem. Boobie preserve nearby and when wind was still, bugs were not! Easy to take care of — spend time in pool when out of the sea!

Little Cayman Beach Resort,
September 2000, Barry Lipman
(b_lipman@hotmail.com),
Brookfield, CT. Vis: 45 to 100 Feet.
 Water: 84 F, calm choppy no currents.
 Dive restrictions: 40 minutes on first and deepest dive, 50 on the second.
 They have apparently not heard that DAN has rescinded the “first dive of the day is the deepest” doctrine.
 Absolutely no solo diving! The walls and coral formations are outstanding! There’s lots of swim-throughs and labyrinthine passages between deeply undercut fifteen foot tall bommies, mini-walls, chimneys. The corals and sponges are healthy, brilliant and colorful. The fish life seems not as abundant as in previous years, but I saw many turtles, a reef shark, and a spotted Eagle ray. Many purple sea fans are still really purple rather than algae encrusted as in many other locations. The diving is great, but there is a big problem for photographers. The dive guides won’t let you touch the reef — anywhere, at all, not one finger, period! No putting a finger or two on a dead spot and they don’t even want you to put a spare camera rig down. They told me that people can’t be trusted to know the difference between live coral, dead coral, and bleached but still live coral. They also told me that areas with no coral could grow coral if left undisturbed. One of the divemasters told me she’d give a

diver one warning and then not let them take a camera again on any boat with her if they touched the reef again! I don't know about your photo style, but I often touch a dead or algae covered spot for stability while shooting. I also like to take two or more cameras and place them in the sand while I use one. This met with strong disapproval! Also, none of the operators allow solo diving, so unless you bring your own buddy, you'll depend on luck as to whom you get stuck with. Some operators insist that all dives be guided dives. All these rules in such a gorgeous place for photography! The above refers to Pirates Point, the Little Cayman Beach Resort, and the Conch Club's dive operation. The McCoy's place was closed, but in the past they have (unofficially) let me dive alone both off their boats and from the shore. I have no experience with the Southern Cross Club. The food at the Beach Resort was very good and plentiful, if a tad expensive. A meal with Gladys Howard at Pirates Point is something worth doing for a night's diversion. The rooms were immaculately clean, with plenty of A/C and hot showers. This was my third time on LC, with two previous two-week trips.

Paradise Divers, Paradise Villas, January 2000, Mike Bray, Mission Viejo, CA. Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 77-79 degrees. Relaxed restrictions, no dives more than 100 ft. depth, one hour and bottom times with computer. Amenities at the villas have improved (fluffy towel, new bicycles, televisions in each room) and the dive operation has a larger pontoon boat. The staff

and dive crew are terrific. Dive guides Vinny, Harold and Ann always enthusiastic and helpful. Dive gear set up and switched by crew. New arriving divers closely observed; once checked out given freedom to dive own profile with dive computer. All bottom times and depths logged by crew. Eaglerays, sharks, turtles, lobsters, spotted drums, etc. pointed out by dive guides. Dive crew truly love diving and make it fun for guests. Pace of diving slow and safe. New pontoon boat very stable, ideal for anyone with a tendency toward seasickness. The best diving is on the north side (Bloody Bay, but diving on the south was excellent also. The resort is ideal for guests who want to have a few meals in their unit and order other meals from a restaurant menu. We had most breakfasts at our villa and all dinners at the Hungry Iguana Restaurant next door. The restaurant food was good, although some preparations spicy. The resort atmosphere is very casual; do not bring anything but casual attire and pack lightly as Island Air imposes a weight limit of 45 lbs. per passenger. Extra weight charged \$.50 a pound and they charged us on both ends of our trip. (Ph: 809-948-4550, Fax: 809-948-4550)

Paradise Divers, Paradise Villas, April 2000, Andy Molnar (lwisincctazm@aol.com) West Haven, CT. Vis: 50 to 90+ ft. Water: 77 to 80 degrees, calm and flat, no currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 110 max./60 min. max. Paradise Villas is a very clean, friendly and pleasant resort. Service is

very good and the people did their work efficiently. Paradise Divers is a different crew than on my last visit. This crew is more rigid and controlling of profiles and request that you abide by them; besides that, Harold, Vinnie and Anne are very friendly, accommodating and professional. And they are fun and enjoy diving themselves. They are still enthusiastic about finding and showing divers things. Anne is the little critters queen and will find an abundance of macro for her charges. The first 2 days we were unable to dive Bloody Bay Wall due to wind and surf conditions, so we dove sites on the south. I enjoyed the south side, less coral than the north side but we saw eagle rays, sting rays and nurse sharks every dive. I did not dive the south side the last trip, and it was not a disappointment. The north side is a vibrant, tranquil and life-filled place. Turtles galore; found a few scorpion fish, a fire worm, a couple of morays, and usual collection of arrow crabs, cleaner shrimp, etc. Anne, Harold and Vinnie and Sabine (when she could leave the office) complement each other well and try very hard to make the diving enjoyable for all skill levels; keeping a good eye on novices and more or less, letting the more experienced do their thing.

**Paradise Divers, Paradise Villas,
July 2000, Rich Cavanaugh
(rickcavanaugh@home.com),
Ellicott City, MD.** Vis: 200 to 100
Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, no currents.
Dive your own profile. Cayman Law
limits to 110 feet, not enforced. Island
Air allows only 55 lbs. luggage/

person. This includes all carry on bags. If you are over, they charge \$0.50/lb. If the plane is full, you must decrease your luggage to the 55-LB limit. If you bring full gear (no tanks or weights) and camera equipment, you will be over the limit. Pack your bags in a way where you can leave 1 bag. It was easy for me, clothes, scuba gear or camera gear. The clothes lost. Island Air flights to Little Cayman were full in the afternoons. The morning flights were empty and your luggage will be there the next day. On the return the morning flights are full, so send you extra bag the previous day. Paradise Villas are right next to the airport. There are very few flights and they are all prop planes. It is still very quiet. The airport is not a negative factor. The villas appeared to have been renovated. The kitchen appliances are the only things that look old. The rooms are very clean. One evening we watched the cleaning staff clean a room (no night life, nothing better to do while drinking my beer) she spent 2-3 hours, cleaned all windows inside and out, aired out the room, she cleaned everything. Not the typical hotel 3 minute cleaning. I was impressed. Paradise Villas is next to one of two of the only real restaurant on the island. The resorts restaurants are dedicated to their guests though you can make reservations. The restaurant only serves breakfast on the weekends. A small grocery store is a short walk away. Chunky soup US\$5 6 pack of Coke US\$5, Beer US\$45 (ouch), Rum US \$33.00/liter. Restaurant prices are high. A new restaurant (Franky's) about 2 miles away has

some local food, it is slightly cheaper. They will pick you up if you call ahead. The diving is first class. Paradise Divers picks you up in a truck at 8:30 am and drives you to the other side of the island (Bloody Bay) and the 43-foot pontoon boat is beach-ready for you to board. After a 5 minute boat ride you are moored and ready to dive. All dives are on Bloody Bay and Jackson Bay. All other operators have long boat rides to get you to Bloody Bay. Paradise Divers does night dives on Bloody Bay. Our night dive including a short appearance by "Spot" the dolphin. The next morning "Spot" joined us for an hour dive. The dive staff was very knowledgeable. Most were relatively new. There seemed to be a recent change in management/staffing. Lots of large groupers, pipe horses, short fin pipe fish, garden eels, large lobsters, scorpion fish, puffers, octopus, turtles and the regular reef fish. The reef was healthy and colorful. The wall is magnificent, but not much life. The top of the wall is full of life. You can enjoy your dives without going below 60 feet. Supplied large rinse containers on boat. Very good at assisting with cameras in and out of water. No night life on the island. The beaches are not nice. The mosquitoes are terrible.

Paradise Divers, Paradise Villas, August 2000, Pamela Arms (divepam@home.com), Narberth, PA. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm. Dive restrictions: None specifically stated, though the did provide a recommended max depth for the 2nd and 3rd dive of the day. What

a terrific dive operator — my husband and I are experienced divers and this was one of the most relaxing and enjoyable dive trips ever. The dive-masters, Ann, Vinny, Todd and Carol were first class, they watched you for the first day and then said you could come with the divemaster or do your own thing. Although there wasn't a lot of big fish excitement, the health of the reef was evident, though there are some areas, especially on the North end, with a lot of algae spreading on the reef. I tend to get seasick, but the combination of the pontoon boat, some moderately flat seas, and the truck ride to the boat all made it a Dramamine/patch free week. They also gave us the option of doing three dives straight or going back for lunch and coming back out, everybody on the boat (never more than 8 or 10) all agreed on three straight, and they took anybody just doing two dives back to shore. This made for a dive day that lasted from 8:30 am to 2 or 2:30; but left the rest of the day for relaxing in a hammock or having a cold one at the Hungry Iguana. The Villas have all the luxuries of home: A/C, a mini kitchen with fridge and microwave, and cable tv. But the view from the front porch, mere steps to the ocean was breathtaking. Daily housekeeping was immaculate. Mark and Sabene run the office like a well-run boat! The Hungry Iguana served food that was consistently tasty, well prepared and the service was always friendly. No shoes required! If you are looking for a break from the Iguana, head over to dinner at Pirate's Point or to Little Cayman Beach Resort. This is a resort

and a dive operation for people who enjoy great diving, a good book, and eat when they feel hungry not when the bell is rung. My husband and I felt that there were hours when we actually forgot that we were parents and felt like our former adventurous diver selves.

Pirate's Point, November 1999,
Mark Hogan and Grushenka
Wolfgang (Hogan.mark@PRC.com)
Oakland, CA. Vis: 75 to 150 ft.
 Water: 77 to 79 degrees, calm and flat, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: none. Pirate's Point never fails to live up to its reputation, whether it is the great staff, diving, food, entertainment, etc. Besides the normal diving delights, we go to dive and snorkel with Randy, the dolphin that seems to go between the Brac and Little Cayman. (Ph: 809-948-1010, Fax: 809-948-1011)

Pirate's Point, March 2000,
Robert P. O'Hara, Elyria, Oh. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm choppy. Second trip to Little Cayman, first to Pirates Point; much preferred Pirates Point. Small resort and single boat (Newton 42) dive operation but still only a dozen or so divers. Boat has ample dry, shade, sun areas and is a very good dive platform. Two tank morning dives only, boat out at 9-9:30, back for late lunch by 2-2:30. Night dive if more than four divers. Boat carried safety equipment including O2 and the ice chest was stocked with canned drinks, jugs of fresh juice, fresh fruit and assorted goodies. DMs give thorough site and safety briefings for

each site and at least two DMs in water for all dives. Buddy team is free to dive within limits of CIWOA restrictions or you are welcome to accompany DMs on guided tour. DMs know the sites and are able to find and point out critters (white seahorse) otherwise likely to be missed. Coco (Mary Brown) now a DM here. Dive crew would suggest various sites but open to requests and went where the majority of guests requested. Resort clean, comfortable and very relaxing, had A/C in room but didn't run it after first day; screened windows allowed breeze and ceiling fan were enough. The resort staff is the dive staff and vice versa and they were just as good on land as in the water. They went out of their way to assist the guests. The pool and hot tub are very refreshing. Hammocks and lounge chairs are scattered across the grounds; the well-stocked bar is self serve and on the honor system for non-divers. All meals are buffet style and include wine with dinner. The food was delicious; did not have a bad meal and never went away hungry. Would almost come here just for Gladys' kitchen but the rest of the place is good also. Lunch was open air under the seagrape trees. Gladys capped the evening meal off with slide shows, stories and jokes, talent night, etc. All in all, a good dive trip combined with a very relaxing vacation. Gladys and the staff really made us feel at home and part of a family. No fresh water shower on dive boat, bar and dining room would benefit from better A/C.

Pirate's Point, July 2000, Willis and Sandy Flower (ffhwff@aol.com)

Linwood, NJ. Vis: 90 to 150 Feet.

Water: 82 to 85 F, calm. Dive restrictions: 100 ft dive #1, 60 ft dive #2, could dive own profile within computer limits, return with 500 psi. Best food of any resort we ever visited. Service by dive and resort staff excellent. Small resort, family atmosphere many repeat visitors. One two tank dive per day. Night dives on request. Dive staff very helpful, safety conscious, attentive and knowledgeable about sites. Wide variety of marine life. Reefs in pristine condition. Gladys, Gay, Martha, CoCo and Burt go out of their way to provide a wonderful diving and vacation experience. No Film Processing on premises, boat had camera bucket and camera table available on boat.

Pirate's Point, July 2000, Bethany Kolb (bethanykolb@compuserve.com),

Tucson, AZ. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet.

Water: 81 to 83 F. Dive restrictions: 1st dive 100' max, 2nd dive 60' max recommended, never checked, unlimited bottom time, 1.25 hr dives common. Since we generally favor live-aboards, we were worried about doing only 2 tanks per day. As it turned out there was little need for concern, the pace was casual and bottom time was only limited by air consumption and computers. Only the night dive was limited to one hour so the kitchen staff could get some sleep after holding dinner for the 3 night divers, who dined while the dive-master rinsed and stored their gear. The diving was very good on the

Caribbean scale although some areas had quite a bit of algae build up. Beautiful wall geography underwater, both the sheer Bloody Bay and more diverse Jackson wall have much to offer. Some of the healthiest coral on a shallow snorkel in front of the resort. Spent several hours spent playing with a lone male dolphin (rumored to be an escapee from Anthony's Key in Honduras). He played endlessly with both snorkelers and divers, mimicking every move we could come up with. The staff, from owner Gladys Howard down, was exceptional and made guests feel at home. Our party of 5 were the only ones who weren't repeat customers. The food is exceptional, plentiful and well balanced. Gladys tells stories, sponsors a talent night and has an annual contest for best found-object beach artwork — providing the overall feel of a grown-up summer camp. The boat was cozy with a full group of 20 divers, but since there was no imposed schedule there was rarely a stampede of divers. Briefings were comprehensive complete with critter highlights. Divemaster guided tours were available upon request. One dive-master was willing to provide consultation to a relatively new diver — she observed on one dive then offered some thoughtful advice for better buoyancy control and improved comfort in the water — Zen diving for slower air consumption. Staff were also always ready to help with on the spot repairs or loner gear at no cost. Our rooms (Maude's Manor rooms 5 and 6) were roomy, and breezy most of the time with fans, but had no A/C. If you

don't enjoy sleeping in warm humid conditions ask for a room with A/C — a limited number are available.

Southern Cross Club, October 1999, Sue and Jay Hopper, Woodinville, WA. Vis: 70 to 100 ft. Water: 80 to 83 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: none. From our first email with Peter @ Southern Cross the whole experience was wonderful. Very small operation but rooms, diving and friendly staff is the best I have encountered. It was very laid-back, no phones, no decisions, great rooms, very nicely decorated. Meals were varied and very good. Staff was above great. Storms affected diving, but that is typical in all of the Caymans. Still, the best for the Caribbean. For anyone who likes to dive, stay in nice places but knows how to be entertained by simple things like conversation and meeting new people; loved it. We were always the first in the water and the last out. Our last dive of the trip was 1 hour and none of those back on the boat complained. Dive staff was very respectful of our experience. They were aware but never rushed us. (Ph: 345-948-1099, Fax: 345-948-1098)

Southern Cross Club, December 1999, Bob Greaves, Bonita, CA. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: with reasonable limits, back with 500 #. Stayed and dove with Southern Cross in '92. The rooms and facilities are much improved. An enjoyable place to stay. In December air and water were both 80 degrees. Vis at max was 80 degrees.

Corals, sea fans, some black coral are in good condition. During my week max of six divers on boat. One day only two divers were taken to dive-masters special location (outstanding!). Dive facilities and personnel first class. San Diego to Little Cayman is a 2-day trip. One day made the trip to the Brac and the Russian wreck. Rather broken up and only so-so.

Southern Cross Club, May 2000, no name. Vis: 100 to 30 ft. Water: 81 to 83 degrees, calm and flat, choppy, surge. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: nothing past 100. Lots of bugs, (they were out of Avon's Skin So Soft); was told island fogger truck was broken; dining room way too hot; sweating at every meal. Not comfortable at all; such a shame.

CUBA

While American citizens can visit Cuba, passport warnings advise that it's "not recommended," and American companies cannot legally do business with Cuba because of a U.S. trade embargo. Most trips, therefore, are booked through Canadian or Mexican tour operators. Street signs in Cancun and Playa del Carmen offer four-day trips to Cuba for as little as \$300 U.S. . . . Dive operations are generally well-run, causing resorts on Cayman and Cozumel to shake in their fins at the thought of Cuba opening up to the U.S. dive market. . . .