

livid when the engineer admitted he'd left the advertised party favors, bubbly and chocolates in Florida. At midnight, the nicest guy aboard, our divemaster stayed up so we could dive. During dingy transfers, its prow repeatedly smashed into the metal transom and almost maimed a guest. The "highlight" of our voyage was the arrival of a 40' day boat from Brac, they expected us to provide lunch for their divers. Within minutes, this vessel, also run by LCD, sank right alongside us because its seacocks were left open. We rescued all aboard and got to dive the new wreck and recover the gear of the unfortunate divers. (800-544-2722; Fax 813-264-2742; e-mail admin@littlecaymandiver.com; website www.littlecaymandiver.com)

Little Cayman Diver, May 2000, Roger C. Dennis and Ruth Rouse, San Jose, CA. The operation had a good year in 1998 and in 1999 saw a lot of crew turnover, including captains. Current crew excellent. Some crew complaints about difficulties getting needed repair supplies — ice maker still not working after 6 months waiting for fittings to recharge with Freon. The boat is due for a major maintenance. We had the luxury of only 6 divers and 4 crew members (2 cooks). They normally operate 3-man crews for small groups, 4-man for full loads. The owners need to pay more attention to the "burn-out" factor facing the crew members — these people had been aboard for more than 3 months with only one day off in that entire time. Excellent live-aboard converted from a private yacht. They have repeat business, competitive prices, and one of the

best diving areas in the world for most all their dives with no long boat rides getting there. We are glad to have *Chapbook* information in pre-planning our dive trips.

Little Cayman Diver, May 2000, Jeff Kugler, Hicksville, N.Y. Vis: 80 to 150 ft. Water: 80 to 82 degrees, calm and flat, no currents. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: time and depth; very liberal.

Little Cayman Diver, May 2000, Mike Kaluza (mdiverk@aol.com) Lyndhurst, NJ. Vis: 80 to 200 ft. Water: 81 to 83 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile, 133 ft. limit. The boat was in OK shape. It needs some work done to it, mainly minor stuff. Air condition works. Plenty of fresh water for showers. Bathroom facilities are in working order. No major problems with anything. They told me that film processing during my trip will not be a problem but it turned out to be so. Very good live-aboard vacation.

CUBA

Oceanus, May 2000, Mitzi and Bill Martain, Lexington, NC. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Fantastic opportunity to dive pristine, huge reefs. Virtually forests of black coral. 100+ hagfish and groupers. Flew into Cancun, cruised to Maria la Gorda, Cuba (12 hours). Crew all spoke English, food fantastic, divemasters terrific. Opportunity to tour inland schools, towns, rum and cigar factories with English speaking guide in

big air conditioned van. Heard big pelagics cruise by other months of year. Boat can take shark cage, jet ski, kayaks. Bay is calm and protected-diving easy. Caves and swim thrus make diving exciting! (800-738-2343; e-mail info@oceanus.net; website www.oceanus.net)

***Ocean Diver*, May 2000, Water temp: 80–82, name withheld.**

Arranged trip via Scubacan in Toronto (www.scubacan.com) I flew to Havana via Cancun (1 hour flight). No problems getting in or out of Cuba. Other passengers flew in and out of Cuba using Nassau as their “gateway” city. Some were delayed upon return; passports photocopied. No major problems. Suggest staying a few extra days in the “gateway” city after trip to Cuba to alleviate any issues in transit from Cuba back to the USA. Flew into Havana’s fancy new international terminal (a joint venture between the Canadians and Cubans). The terminal rivaled any US airport. Met upon arrival by Scubacan’s local representative. He escorted me through customs and made sure that my visa, not my passport, was stamped. My guide was an engineer but made a lot more money in tips, as a tour guide, than as an engineer (\$18/month). Next stop, the run down old domestic terminal. Scubacan charts a plane for the *Ocean Diver* passengers, for the short flight to Cayo Largo where they dock the boat. Hearty old plane (vintage 1940), though I thought it was on the runway as a museum piece rather than an operating aircraft. When we arrived in Cayo Largo they escorted us to the

Cuban version of the Red Carpet Room where we went through another round of immigration/registration. The boat captain and crew met us there. The boat is a typical *Aggressor* boat, still owned by *Aggressor*, but somehow leased or franchised to avoid issues with the USA. It was previously operated as the Belize *Aggressor*. Very well equipped w/outstanding photo facilities, equipment and resident photopro, underwater scooters, Nitrox, emergency equipment, Jacuzzi that actually worked, fax machine, e-mail access, etc. The cabins were moist, dark little holes below deck with a washbasin and basically no storage space (even by live aboard standards). Three heads on the boat. Meals were pretty bad; attributed to both availability of food and someone disguised as cook. Beer, wine, soda and no-name booze available at no cost. Crew was helpful, hardworking, friendly and generally top notch. The diving was good by Caribbean standards and easily compares with Cayman’s though no big stuff: Not a single shark and only an occasional turtle. The diving was 100% pristine. I do believe I dove on sites where no person had ever been before. The sites we went to are only reachable by boat, probably multi day boats. The *Ocean Diver* is the first and only live-board in Cuba and it has only made a handful of trips since it began service early 2000. Beautiful untouched coral and sponges made for good wide-angle shots. Lack of macro subjects. Lack of lot of interesting fish compared to Indian Ocean, Coral Sea or PNG, but definitely worth the easy

trip from the states. The fish were curious and did not mind our presence. The full moon brought herds of schooling snappers and the "fleet" of Castro's rickety old fishing boats. Started the trip with 120 foot plus visibility. With the onset of the full moon, and the plankton bloom, visibility decreased daily to a low of 40 feet. Water temperature ranged between 80-82 degrees. I dove in a thick skin (just barely enough). All the other women dove in full suits, which I thought was overkill, given the fact I'm a wimp when it comes to getting cold. Recommend a thin nylon hood. The thousands of thimble jellyfish, (larva that typically doesn't sting) in large "schools," were somewhat disconcerting but basically harmless. We visited no villages along the way. I had almost booked a few days in Cayo Largo to do land based diving. After spending a night docked on the village pier, I am really glad I did not. I would, however, have liked to stay longer in Havana. The boat package includes one night in a Havana Hotel (adequate by US standards but a nice place by Cuban standards) and an escorted day tour. Havana must have been quite a beautiful city in its hey day. Buildings that looked like they hadn't been maintained since the 1950s. Classic old cars (vintage 1940 and 1950) are everywhere; quite a hoot. Locals are not supposed to engage with the tourists. Tourists see what the government wants you to see and typically don't get to look under the covers. The country is extremely safe (for obvious reasons). Bring extra medicines to give to the guides and

hotel staff. A serious need and a significant hit. Mosquitoes and sand fleas aren't bad and you can drink the water. I found it quite amusing that the Cubans use the US Dollar for currency, although Americans are not supposed to spend any in country. No US credit cards or traveler's checks are accepted. Bring a lot of one dollar bills for tips. Everything is prepaid through Scubacan. Changes to schedules are limited after you've cut the check. Suggest cancellation insurance. Scubacan is trying to make a go of this boat, however, they canceled a number of scheduled trips due to lack of a full boat. Suggest requesting Keith when booking. Less luck with other agents. Overall, a good trip. It was relatively painless and uneventful to get in and out of Cuba. Diving was pristine and pretty good, accommodations and services professional. Worth the money and the time. (888-799-2822, 416-927-1257; Fax 416-927-8595; e-mail info@scubacan.com; website www.scubacan.com)

Ocean Diver, August 2000, Ms. Mary K. Wicksten, Bryan, TX. Vis: 20-60 ft. Water: 85-86 degrees. Dive restrictions: Check in and out. "*Ocean Diver*" used to be the old "*Bay Islands Aggressor*" and is run the same way. On-board film developing + photo pro, dive briefings, rental gear and repairs available, big camera table. Diving was in the Canarios Archipelago — miles of small sandy islets and banks separated by sheer walls. Walls are lovely, lots of sponges, blackcap basslets, black corals. Some silt from rain — couldn't

see any “big boys” away from walls. Area is a reserve now, but big fish and conch populations are down. Best dive: Devil’s Hole, archway in reef opens on wall at 70-80 feet. Scubacan arranges legal travel to Cuba with visas, permits. But it can take 2 days (with overnights) to get there. Last leg of trip was on a DC-3! Cuba has shortages of batteries, food items, computer parts, so bring your supplies. Tour of Havana included. Eerie to see ancient cars, most buildings need repairs. Guides competent. Don’t let Cuba customs stamp your passport. If so you’ll “catch it” from some U.S. agents.

HONDURAS

Aggressor, May 2000, Brian E. Cartwright, Lawrence, IN. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 78-81 degrees. Dive restrictions: no reserve/130'. Getting food prepared the way I liked was a challenge for a few days, but they finally got it right. Capt. Monk and the crew made my trip comfortable, safe and unforgettable. Monk arranged sub rides to 500' down. I loved it! (**Aggressor Fleet 800-348-2628 or 504-385-2628 Fax: 504-384-0817; e-mail: info@aggressor.com; website www.aggressor.com**)

SABA/ST. KITTS/STATIA

Caribbean Explorer, September 1999, John Pierce (john@planetpierce.com), Denver, CO. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 78-82 degrees. Cloudy. Water: choppy. Dive Restrictions: No decompression diving, otherwise, freedom to do your own profile. Lots

of room for photography equipment. The crew of the *Caribbean Explorer* was just great; Sue, the hostess was extremely attentive. Karla the cook made 3 great meals a day. The divemasters were very attentive and everyone on the boat was friendly. The islands of Saba, St. Kitts and Statia are absolutely incredible. Take the island tours; they are all different and beautiful in their own way. Diving was excellent — lots of really nice coral and sponges — very fishy. We didn’t see much in the way of large fish. Two weeks after Hurricane Floyd and Gerty, so it did make our trip somewhat rough and rainy. The crossings from island to island were pretty rough and since they do it at 11:00 pm at night, sometimes it was rough getting some sleep. Cabins on the upper deck are nicer in that they have windows and good access to the sun deck, but if the seas are rough the people on top will get tossed around more than the folks in the bottom cabins. If you don’t want to worry about a bit of rain or wind, go in high season. We thought it was fine — my wife still got a fine tan! We had a wonderful time! (**800-322-3577, 903-887-8521; Fax 903-887-8526; e-mail info@explorerventures.com; website www.caribexplorer.com**)

Caribbean Explorer, October 1999, Walter Sommer (divemon@freeway.net), Gaylord, MI. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 86 degrees. Weather conditions. Sunny. Calm and flat. Restrictions 130 ft., must have or rent dive computer. No mistakes on the level of service, food