

the only divers on the boat. They did this by scheduling more dive trips in the morning or afternoon, splitting up the divers, so they weren't crowded on the boat. Great service! The guides were very helpful and knowledgeable. The visibility was 50-60 ft. due to the rainy season (July to Oct.). Most of the dives on Boss reef and Northern Exposure are drift dives. Flamingo Bay and Dragon Bay are protected reefs. Saw the most schools of fish and lots of small marine life here. The ocean temperature was above 80° so algae blooms were covering a lot of the coral. Hurricane Lenny ruined a lot of the soft coral, but it finally started to come back. The couple of dives on the Bianca C, the largest wreck in the Caribbean was awesome. The Bianca C is a true world class dive — 600 ft. long at a depth of 135 ft. Simply amazing! Large cruise lines no longer dock here, resulting in many shops and boutiques going out of business. Of course this eliminates those novice cruise line inexperienced divers tearing up the reef! (**Coyaba Beach Resort, 809-444-4129; Fax 809-444-4808**)

HONDURAS

All dive resorts are on the Bay Islands: Roatán, Guanaja, Utila, Cayos Cochinos, and other small cayes. . . . Honduras is home to the world's most aggressive no-see-ums; they bite, bite, bite. Although Skin-So-Soft works for a few, most people need DEET, and some have serious allergic reactions to the bites. Those who are

unprepared often find their vacations ruined. . . . The diving features great walls, offshore seamounts, and excellent coral and gorgonians, although there are few large fish or lobsters due to overfishing. . . . Whale sharks are seen occasionally near Utila. . . . Cayos Cochinos is excellent for diversity of macro subjects. . . . There's limited access to beach diving except at CocoView and Fantasy Island on Roatán, Bayman Bay on Guanaja, and Plantation Beach on Cayos Cochinos. . . . The rainy season is October through February, and northers can disrupt the diving. . . . TACA often overbooks, so reconfirm flights (which may not help) and carry essentials as TACA loses or delays luggage. . . . Spanish is spoken on the mainland, English in the Bay Islands. . . . While there's little night life or shopping, classic Central American jungles and Mayan ruins inland make great side trips. . . . Malaria protection is advised. . . .

Cayos Cochinos

Plantation Beach Resort, February 2000, Marsha Green, Morris, N.Y.

Dive restrictions: none Food and accommodations were good, although the facility could have been managed more efficiently and effectively. I was not picked up upon arrival at the airport, despite previous arrangements. I spent the first night on the mainland. The water was cold — 72 degrees — and silty-poor visibility.

Went to the same dive site every afternoon, some dive sites were better suited for snorkeling-very shallow. Fish life, in general, was sparse and while some of the coral was beautiful and healthy, some sites not characterized by healthy appearing reef. **1-800-628-3723; Fax/Phone: (504) 442-0974; e-mail: pbr@hondurashn.com website www.plantationbeachresort.com)**

Guanaja

Bayman Bay Club, August 2000, Stephen and Lori Dorsky, (SDORSKY@aol.com), Birmingham, AL. Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 80-83 degrees. Max depth 130 ft. We had been at Bayman Bay in 1989. It was gorgeous then – it's now a different island due to Mitch. It's growing back and is still pretty, but the power of nature is awesome. The reef looked like it had benefited, almost as if it were washed clean. Healthy coral, large pillar coral and plentiful, staghorn and elkhorn, lots of small stuff — tunicates of all varieties. Resort in pretty good shape. Still rebuilding but fully capable. The food was great and plentiful. The staff, though sometimes behind, was always ready to get you what you wanted. **(Ph: 305-370-2120, Fax: 305-370-2276, Fax: 011-504-454179, e-mail: info@baymanbayclub.com, Website: www.baymanbayclub.com)**

Posada Del Sol, May 2000, Steve Giles, Camarillo, CA. Vis: 50 to 100 ft. Water: 79 to 81 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. They suggested limits however those with

computers were given freedom to do their own thing. Absolutely beautiful setting, the accommodations and grounds of Posada Del Sol are first-rate. Everything about the hotel is excellent. The hotel staff spoils you with morning coffee and juice delivered to your room each day, evening hors d'oeuvres, and three great meals. The dive operation is efficient and the staff very helpful. Divers who wanted individual attention by the divemaster were provided it; they allowed experienced divers the freedom to explore on their own. Some reefs show damage caused by Hurricane Mitch in 1998, however most are pristine and beautiful. A planned trip to Barbaretta Island had to be canceled due to rough sea conditions. An excellent dollar value for all levels of divers. Sand flies were a problem, but not as bad as anticipated. **(800-642-3483; 561-624-3483)**

Posada del Sol, May 2000, Shari/Wayne McCague (wsmccague@earthlink.net) Toledo, OH. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy surge. Dive restrictions: 100 foot restriction. Dives were set at a depth and time restriction. Posada del Sol was a beautiful resort and great food. Service was excellent. The no-see-ums were terrible and made it hard to enjoy the pool or beach areas. No A/C but ceiling fans did a pretty good job. There were only 6 divers so there was lots of room on the 46 foot dive boats. Separate rinse bucket on the boat but no worktable. 3 dives per day and very conservative profiles. Not much fish life at all but lots of soft corals. The

wreck Jado Trader was a highlight as it is a feeding station. Huge groupers, a large green moray, and the biggest crab I've ever seen. "Black Rock" lava dive was excellent as well with beach picnic afterwards. We enjoyed a hike to a waterfall in the mountains. Strenuous but worth the trip. Saw a school of at least 15 dolphins. Still lots of hurricane damage on Guanaja. Very secluded and quiet island.

Roatán

Anthony's Key Resort, February 2000, Patrick Wikstrom (mrpat@webworkz.com) Warne, NC. Water: 74 to 78° F, calm. Dive restrictions: 130' max, back on board with 500 psi, they prefer you to follow the leader, but after you prove yourself they'll let you off by yourself. No one checked our computers. Dolphin dive begins with a crash course in dolphin sociology and physiology conducted on a floating platform in the dolphin pen — how to touch the dolphins, where they don't like being touched, and gave us an opportunity to hug and kiss her smiling cetaceans. We motored to the dive site and went to 50 ft. sandy bottom, and wait for the dolphins and trainer. These dolphins are free to do whatever they want. Our pair descended with their trainer, blasted out across the sand bottom and disappeared. We waited for 15 minutes when we spotted a medium sized eagle ray just a flapping his way as fast as he could across the sand heading toward us. Flying along in hot pursuit were our two dolphins. After this grand entrance they proceeded to

put on a half-hour display of unbelievably graceful movement. The AKR staff meets you at the airport, escorts you through an abbreviated immigration and customs inspection and hustles you off on their bus to the resort. The resort is split between the 40+ cabins on their private island, Anthony's Key, and remainder of the dwelling units and main facilities perched up and down the hillside of the mainland. The feel of the place is jungle rustic with everything made of wood and tucked into the foliage in as unobtrusive a way as possible. My unit was one of the newer air-conditioned cabins up on the hill on the mainland. I liked the quiet and jungle ambiance, but our friends with the sunset view cabins on Anthony's Key itself thought they had gone to heaven. A/C worked fine (only about half the units have it and it costs extra), hot and cold water was there when you wanted it, rooms were spacious and cleaned daily, and the hammocks hung outside under the wooden palapas were a pleasant place to relax while waiting for the afternoon boat or the start of the evening meal. Meals were served in the large open sided main dining hall. Standard American style breakfast fare was on the menu, with choices of eggs, pancakes, French toast, and omelets most mornings, along with sausage, bacon, or ham. Lunches were a mixed bag, with some days offering up chicken, beef, or fish entrees and other days presenting us with burgers and dogs or standard hoagie sandwiches. The evening meals ranged from acceptable to scrumptious, with a choice of a local fish dish or a

beef, chicken, or pork entrée. The diving gets kinda boring on the package plan. By midweek you'll be begging them to let you chuck in a day of diving and pay a \$75 to \$110 premium to take the special trips on their better boats — to the better sites on the other side of the island. There isn't a week of great diving within 20 min of the dock and that's what they'd like to get away with. The usually terrible Bay Islands sand fleas were not really a problem. The dive operation at AKR is a professionally run operation. During our stay they used three old local clunkers and two of their new Pro 48 boats. The Pro 48s are only used for visiting dignitaries, the aforementioned "extra cost" all day dive trips to Cayos Cochinos and Barbareta, or groups affluent enough to pay extra. One of the best dives was Bear's Den. Our dive master, Ricardo Calderone, had checked us out enough to take us through a series of narrow cuts and tunnels. He led us on a gentle tour, stopping to show us Flamingo Tongues, Nudibranchs, and Sea Horses. We ended this dive in a wonderful twisting tunnel that slid through the reef and dumped us out onto the wall looking out into the deep blue. We rounded up enough other divers willing to pay the premium and booked a Pro 48 for an all day trip to Barbareta. Our first dive was on Morat Wall. The coral and sponges was much brighter and more vibrant than what we had become used to. The various gorgonians were larger and healthier than seen around AKR. The fish life was also more plentiful. We spotted two Nurse Sharks. Our next

dive at The Elbow was a wonderfully exhilarating drift dive that moved along at a good clip for most of the time. After The Elbow we motored back toward Roatán but stopped in the lee of an incredibly beautiful little palm-covered island. They served lunch aboard the boat and consisted of a huge platter of fried chicken, various fruit, potato salad and assorted cake and cookies. Then we were off on a five-minute ride to Pigeon Key Reef for our third dive. While not quite as spectacular as the first two sites this was still a very fishy dive with lots of healthy gorgonians. (Ph: 800-227-3483 or 305-227-3483, Fax: 305-666-2292)

Anthony's Key Resort, April 2000, Annette and Bjorn, Tampa, FL. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 80-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. limits. Dive spots very alike, dive operator seemed to choose the nearest reefs, even if dove before or same day. Divemasters a bit "burned out." Barbareta the best dive spots on our week long stay! Diving w/ dolphins or Dolphin Specialty Course a must! Great sunsets and cozy cabanas — book cabanas on the key just off the pier — mosquitoes terrible on mainland. Try horseback riding on the beach!

Anthony's Key Resort, May 2000, Steve Neal, Fairfield, TX. Vis: 100 ft. Water: 81-84 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 ft. but most stayed 80 ft. or less. Dove two tank w/ AKR off of cruise ship. They had 42 ft. prop. dive boat. Did two wall dives. Too many divers to suit me. All divers bunched in one general area. They could have at least divided us into two

groups and went separate ways. We went to AKR Pier between dives to off gas. Water and O² and Big DAN kit on board. Saw crabs, lobster, tiny juvenile trumpet fish. Large parrot fish. Did not see near as many fish as in 1996 when we spent a whole week here. Both walls were covered with hard and soft coral. Seemed to be in good shape.

Anthony's Key Resort, July 2000, Sean Bruner, Tucson, AZ. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 84 degrees.

Bay Island Beach Resort, October 1999, Marv Hagstrom, Reedsburg, WI. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 83-85 degrees. Dogs, cats, flies and fleas in dining area. No attempt to control either. Some animal fights in dining area. A-1 dive crew and other personnel. Boats need help. (Ph: 800-476-2826 or 561-624-5774, Fax: 561-624-7751, e-mail: deepted@aol.com, Website: www.bibr.com)

Bay Island Beach Resort, February 2000, Don Fisher (dfisher@ncounty.net), Wrentham, MA. Vis: 20-40 ft. Water: 75-78 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 90 ft. rest stop, 15 ft. 3 min. Accommodations were just ok. Food better but not great. Plenty of diving but nothing spectacular. Beach looks good but bugs (biting) make it not usable. Water very shallow for long way out. Reef (spooky channel) right off beach is good but not easy to get to. Night dive (only one in regular dive package) produced best pictures. Dive operation very good and you can dive a lot.

Bay Island Beach Resort, July 2000, David Behrman (davebehrman@hotmail.com), West Chester, OH. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, surge. The dive-masters were attentive, especially Carlos. He did his best to find the critters. Shane was also fun. Did our advanced open water with him. The boats are old, small and cramped. Very little room to gear up. No table for cameras. Boat broke down on special trip to other side of island to dive Mary's Place. The word "resort" in the name is misleading. Rooms in the house are not ice. Exposed wires on the walls, one room down stairs had three beds as its only furniture. The room did not even have a window. BIBR advertised that they had a restaurant and beach bar/grill. The restaurant no longer exists. It is a lounge/game/TV room in the main house used mainly by employees. Food served by beach. Sand fleas vicious. Did not make vegetarian fare (except for the daily salad and black beans and rice) even with advanced notice. Food for everyone else ranged from good to poor. Staff member complained about a request for a grilled cheese sandwich when the meal was just plain bad. Biggest complaint was that the office staff lost my house and car keys in the safety deposit box. Our money was there but not the keys. We were told by the owner "Cam" that it was our fault for not following procedures. We would have followed these procedures had they been told to us. Cam did not seem concerned, and said about the missing keys "What do you want me to

do, cry about it.” We did receive \$40 cash for a car rental. Unfortunately, it cost us \$216 for a rental car, hotel room, and a locksmith to break into our house.

Bay Island Beach Resort, August 2000, Kim Camp (dacamps@msn.com), Glendale, AZ. Vis: 80-110 ft. Water: 82-85 degrees. 130' max, 24 hr before flying. Diving was very good. We could dive with a group and dive master or go on our own. They provided table profiles, or you could do your own. Dive staff was good as were the boats, but dive groups were a little large (9-10). 3 dives for 5 days plus one night dive was part of the package. Nitrox was available. Accommodations were simple but adequate and food was very good.

Bay Island Beach Resort, August 2000, Sands Robnick, Oxford, OH. Water 30 deg C. Wetsuit: shorty 3 mm. Visibility: 100 feet +. Dive your own profile. Don't go below 130' and end the dive with 400 psi. Well-run dive operation. Couple of turtles and a few large morays. The reefs were the healthiest I have seen anywhere in the world. Great fish life and the largest variety of healthy corals in the Caribbean. Great service, rustic, but clean, comfortable, A/C rooms with hot water showers and clean bathrooms. Food was plentiful and well prepared, with lobster nights and other featured meals. Breakfast @ 7:00 and boats leave @ 8:30. 150' from breakfast table to boat. Dive ops people polite, enthusiastic and helpful. Boats crowded and generally old and worn out. They are clean and have a

good coat of paint. Ugly: The bugs. After 35 years in the Marine Corps and duty in various jungles around the world, I am done practicing being miserable. The bugs were overwhelming, persistent and always present. I swear some could hold their breath and were underwater with me. In short, nothing worked. Deep Woods OFF, Cactus Juice, you name it. The bugs left hundreds of bites and welts on everyone. I am still scratching and I anticipate I will be for another week. Normally, I would say “put some bug juice on and stop whining.” Here, given the boring nature of the diving and the tenacity of the bugs, there are too many other great spots in the Caribbean to waste your time on a bug feed.

CocoView Resort, August 1999, Debbi Connelly (dgmaples@concentric.net) Knoxville, TN. Vis: 70 to 80 feet. Water: 78 to 82 F calm and flat. Dive your own profile. Excellent resort catering to divers. Appreciated separate locker areas for each boat and that we had the same divemaster throughout the week allowing for us to get to know him and vice versa. Day trip to Utila is so wonderful we took it both days it was offered. On that trip we swam with both manta rays and whale sharks. Service and attention to detail were fantastic. Only downside was the high salinity of the resort water. Be prepared to stay sticky all week till you get home for a freshwater shower. (Ph: 800/282-8932 or 352-588-4132, Fax: 352-588-4158)

CocoView Resort, November 1999, Doug and Laura Young

(oceanlakescuba@aol.com), Waco, TX. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, choppy. Had to do a check out dive with dive staff. Had bungalow over water — nice. No air conditioning but did not need it. Food was buffet and tasty for Americans including a salad bar. Can eat well. Crab races and local children dancers for nightly entertainment. Fun place. Dive operation blew horn to come to boat for boat dive. Boat would do a 'drop-off' dive for your second boat dive in the morning and afternoon. Could see seahorses and bat fish on shore dive. Prince Albert was an added plus for shore divers. Overall excellent experience.

CocoView, December 1999, Randy Beckmann, Austin, TX. Vis: 75 to 125 feet. Water: 77 to 78 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile? Diving restrictions: 130 feet. Travel agent said water temp same as in summer, since we'd never been in December we were not prepared fully for 77 Ft water. It was cold on cloudy days and we had to layer 3 mm. and 2 mm. Not a big problem. We should have done the research instead of trusting the travel agent. Coco View excellent as always. Request Osmund as your divemaster. He's the best.

CocoView Resort, February 2000, Alan Thayer, Commerce, MI. Vis: 40 to 70 feet. Water: 76 to 77 degrees, calm and flat. Restrictions: no limits, just notify d.m. if going deep. Beginners should go with an experienced diver due to the great amount of freedom afforded. Not much hand-

holding here. Experienced divers should enjoy macro stuff, i.e., spending time hunting for juveniles and small critters and observing behavior, not a lot of big stuff hereabouts. Buy Nitrox by the tank at \$6 per tank you must do 17 dives to break even. Resort is still a well-run operation with good food, helpful staff. Cactus juice in the boutique is a healthier alternative to DEET for no-see-ums. Downside: seems to be fewer fish. Mitch? Overfishing? Upside: still the most dives for the best price around.

CocoView Resort, February 2000, Jim Jamison, Kiln, MS. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 76-80 degrees. Essentially the same relaxing dive vacation as we've had in the past at CoCo View. Four boat dives/day. Excellent food, plenty of it, and they're experimenting with new menu selections for variety. Took two photo courses from Ivor at the on-site photo center and they were excellent. Great service and help from the dive shop and dive staff. Don't forget bug repellent (DEET) as no-see-ums are sometimes persistent.

CocoView Resort, February 2000, Karen Groshong (kgroshon@co.tillamook.or.us), Tillamook, OR. I read your "Central American Tip" re: TACA Airlines just hours before flying to CocoView about TACA's delayed luggage stipend policy if this should happen to me. TACA did not disappoint me, nor 20 or so other divers. Our luggage did not arrive with us; some arrived the following day and others waited as long as three days for their dive

gear. Upon departure, after checking my luggage and confirming my seat, I asked to speak to the manager of the Luggage department. The young guy who stated he was the manager was the same fellow who took our delayed luggage information upon our arrival. I indicated to him that I wanted to file a claim and he reluctantly provided the paperwork, realizing he was going to be no match for this middle-aged tyrant. I then turned around to the 40 or so others in line to check baggage and asked loud enough for everyone on the mainland to hear if there were any others who wished to file a claim — the going rate was \$9.07 per pound per day for delayed luggage. (This statement is made under Liability on the ticket folder) no others were willing to come forward. Then our luggage manager disappeared behind a closed door and returned saying TACA would refund each of us a \$25 stipend, per day, for delayed luggage. As the issue was not the money, and we knew once we walked out after filing the paperwork, we would never hear a word from them, we accepted. It took just a few seconds for those standing in line to see that we had been “cashed out” on the spot and decided they too wanted a piece of the action. In the space of about 20 minutes, TACA shelled out about \$500. The diving was everything it’s cracked up to be.

CocoView Resort, March 2000, John G. Williams, Ocate, NM. Vis: 40 to 75 feet. Water: 78 to 79 degrees, choppy no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 130 air, 110 ean. Great team work, reefs silted and dingy, fish

gone, sea fans blighted, poor diving said to see the Caribe is on the way out, worst diving snorkeling, woe is us. Mary’s place again open, fair, poor vis.

CocoView Resort, March 2000, William H. Wallace, St. Charles, MO. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 84° F. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: Less than 130 ft. Without dive master notification Wind speed, direction and sea/wave/serge conditions expected at CocoView would have been nice to know before choosing this resort. The prevailing Southeast winds cause the South side to be the rough side of the island. Several days of 6 to 8 ft. Waves made the boat trips very uncomfortable. Medium to heavy surge above 25 ft on every dive. Some dive sites including Mary’s Place were 25 minutes away, Too long to sit on a boat with that much wave action. The only saving grace was Mr. Evans’ invention of a boarding ladder right in the middle of the boat so that reboarding was much easier than it would have been had you tried to reboard from rear ladders. (Impossible!) The shore dive out to the wreck is one of the best our group has experienced. As good as most of the Bonaire shore dives. Each dive site has a place mat at the dinner tables that pictures the dive site giving layout, depths, sights expected. These same drawings are used at the dock to illustrate where the boat is going and small versions are available for purchase as souvenirs. Good boat table and camera rinse tank on boat. Two rinse tanks for cameras at dock. Good camera supplies, reasonable

priced film. Excellent advice from uwp pro. Best resort our group has visited. Very special pleasing experience. The entire staff and the owner are professional responsive, flexible, Lauray, activity director, is great, Janeth's food is great and her deserts are sinfully good. Beach house #7 was great. Any need was taken care of by Chou immediately. Roatán is experiencing an excess of population with the sewage running onto the reefs, which had good deal of algae on them. The population may be overfishing the reefs; we saw no large fish. Group TACA did a good job of service and baggage for us. Check in two hours ahead of flight time, because they do overbook and the later you appear, the more likely you are not to get on the flight. The island is very trashy, and needs a good clean up if they expect to attract and keep the tourist. Because of this, we would not return to Roatán.

Fantasy Island, September 1999, Terri Yoakum, Albuquerque, NM. Vis: 50-60 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. The dive operators were fairly lazy. Wouldn't go out very far each dive. Three dives daily. Did same areas over. Divemaster really good about pointing out creatures. Resort staff: Some excellent. Some very poor! Clean accommodations. No see-ums really bad! (Ph: 800-676-2826, Fax: 813-353-0154)

Fantasy Island, January 2000, David Messa, Gulfport, MS. Vis: 50 to 100 ft. Water: 78 to 80 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: none. Excellent

dive operation; they couldn't have been nicer. The hotel, however, was rough. They had not been keeping the place up; the service was very poor. They bussed cruise ship passengers in for lunch and the staff was not able to or would not handle the extra load. New management in Feb. 2000. Wait and see how things go.

Fantasy Island, January 2000, Jan and Chuck Simonds, Houston, TX. Vis: 80-100+. Water: 78 degrees. Weather: mostly sunny. Water: calm and flat (some surge occasionally). Back to boat with 500 psi Fifth trip to Fantasy Island. Although we dive all around the Caribbean, we keep returning to Fantasy Island. The wall diving is consistently good, easily accessible (5-20 minute boat rides) carefully monitored, and usually not crowded. (Stay away from spring break.) Three boat dives per day with the morning surface interval at the dive shop — with a bathroom. Water and fruit on board sturdy, comfortable boats. Option of diving the north side twice per week which gives added variety to the diving. (Unfortunately the north side was too rough this January.) Divemasters are excellent at finding critters, know their fish, and are genuinely enthusiastic about diving. They are careful with beginners, but do not interfere with the experienced divers. We saw three sea horses, pipefish, huge crabs, lobsters, groupers, lots of parrotfish. Angelfish, 2 turtles, spotted drum, scrolled filefish, scorpion fish, and a bridled burrfish. Some dives do not have many fish but the coral is beautiful.

End of dives are often at lettuce and elkhorn coral reefs at 20-15', or sea fan and gorgonia-covered flats at 25-40. ' Accommodations are the best we've had — refrigerator, telephone, TV, hair dryer, large rooms, balcony. Island is beautiful and setting on crescent beach is lovely. No-see-ums are a problem, use lots of repellent and be consistent about it. This resort attracts nondivers, and families, as well as divers. The president of Honduras was a guest last time we were there. We had a mix of very experienced and beginning divers on our boat. (But that didn't limit our diving.) Night dives available twice a week and a skiff is ready to take people to gazebo for drop-off on near by wall diver-prepared ship. TACA connections use small planes from Belize City, San Pedro de Sula and La Ceiba, if you use these connections, pack critical dive gear in a carry-on. However, the dive shop will lend spare regulators/BC's till luggage arrives.

Fantasy Island, February 2000, Kerry C. Thomas, Falls Church, VA. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 75-79 degrees. I wish I had known the resort pumped its effluence into the sea, or that the water in the rooms would make you sick. The food was cold, my bags and equipment lost by TACA, the resort smelled like a sewage treatment plant. In all, the whole trip stunk, literally. Oh, the dive captain and crew were pretty good.

Fantasy Island, March 2000, John Orange, Irvine, CA. Vis: 50 to 100 ft. Water: 80 degrees, calm and flat,

choppy. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: 100' depth. The Resort was very comfortable; a/c did not work, hard to sleep; needed fan as well as a/c; clean; food was ample. Entertainment 2 nights a week. Dive op a notch below Cozumel's. Little supervision, beginners not recommended. Wish I'd known about jellyfish before my 1st dive. Everyone got stung but I developed an allergic reaction. Handy clinic at the recompression chamber. Desk service poor, confused our directions for land tour to Copan; mixed up our tour operator; no problems with TACA.

Fantasy Island, March 2000, Clay Nicholson, Greenville, MS. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 70-80 degrees. The people on the island were very nice. Scenery was beautiful. Lots of construction, which interrupted morning meditation. Insects were really bad. Very nice trip for the price. 6 nights, 7 days, all meals for only \$1100, including airfare. Unlimited shore diving (sunken ship and airplane).

Fantasy Island, August 2000, Marilyn Hegmann (mhdiver@aol.com) Marco Island, FL. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 84-86 degrees. Sunny, windy in AM's. Choppy, no currents. Stay in vicinity and depth of divemaster (usually between 60-85 ft). Turnaround on wall when first diver reached 1500 psi Permitted to remain on reef in vicinity of boat until 500 psi Turtles, large lobsters and king crab, grouper, yellow tail snapper. No problem with TACA flights out of Miami Int'l. They now contract with Miami Air (which

we flew). Friends advised us to be there 3 hrs. prior to flight to insure not getting bumped. No lost luggage going or returning. Flights on time. Resort had a rep. at the airport to greet you, clear you through customs, get your luggage. Air-conditioned bus to the resort. Fantasy Island is meticulously clean both inside and out. Huge staff constantly raking, sweeping, cleaning gardens, beach, walkways, etc. Rooms are large, great view, tv, a/c, refrig. Beds are comfy, hair dryers are provided. Meals are excellent, varied and plentiful. Lobster shows up just about every day; so does fresh grilled fish. Soups are delicious. Friday night is filet mignon, shrimp cocktail, lobster night. Desserts are yummy. The cheesecake and flan pie were my favorite. Oscar was our favorite waiter. The diving was also excellent. Belize is my favorite dive location, but Roatán runs a close second and San Salvador, Bahamas is my third choice. Dive boats are sturdy, roomy, easy off/on the boat. Large camera rinse tank. Fresh fruit and bottled water on each trip. Boat goes out 9 am, 11 am and 2:30 pm. Fits in nicely with meals. No having to get up at the crack of dawn and then rushing around to eat and dive. Robert the DM made the dives interesting and relaxing. I was never at a loss for objects to photograph. Walls are ablaze with color. Great amount of fish life. Fantasy dives on the north side and has a boat docked there. You go by bus — 10 min. ride. Northside dives are 2-tank dives. Different from southside — mountains of plate coral. Shore diving was a disappointment.

The channel was pretty disturbed and vis. was maybe 30 ft. The sand fleas, or no-see-ums were out in force. We used insect repellent but got bit anyway. The general reaction is a small round red blotch that goes away in 24 hrs. or so. My being allergic to bites, they swelled up, itched and lasted for 2 weeks. Used Benedryl, cortisone anti-itch cream and tablets and managed to get through the week. Be sure to spray before getting off the dive boat to rinse your gear. I think this is where we got most of the bites. Don't use the beach cushions provided for the lounges. The little critters are in the cushions and do a number on your back without your knowing it. First class dive vacation destination.

Fantasy Island, August 2000, Cathy McCue, Phoenix, AZ. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: depending on divemaster, time. Restaurant was closed for remodeling so they served all meals buffet in an outside area. Food was uncovered, cold and the same day after day. A large tour group from El Salvador came and it went from bad to worse. Staff had no clue. They ran out of food consistently and had to buy more for the next days meals. Nowhere on any paperwork from their USA operation was any mention of the dining room being closed, in fact it said the restaurant was the best on the island. Chef mentioned that they were going to use menu's on restaurant when it opened with same buffet items, but at least they would be hot and not with flies on them. Since it was an all-inclusive pkg – with meals included, it

was not good. Room was great. Air cond. Good bed. Dive operation. We were with 2 “divemasters” on our 8 days of diving. Nelson was nice, but didn’t ever check on divers. He went down, swam straight ahead. At 30 minutes, he turned around and did multi level back to boat. If he saw something he shook a rattle. One diver used octopus from another diver for 10 min and he never knew. Another couple were going to 180+ feet and swimming up rapidly (bounce diving). He had a pacemaker and said he was checking it out for diving. Nelson never addressed these issues. He did take us to other side of the island when it was very rough and diving was good there. Robert, second D/M. Dove without computer so was going for 20 min, then returning. He least checked divers, though chastised several for going over tables and would not let them do third dive. He never told them to monitor tables. He really didn’t want to dive and it was just a job. On one dive, he said it would be drift, but in reality they dumped us in, went along wall and in over reef to where boat was anchored. If we had not followed him we would not have found boat without surfacing, because we assumed drift meant surface when done and boat will pick you up. Staff at front desk helpful. Staff at Fantasy Bar, Restaurant staff was the worst. Often had to get your own water. Found out 3 days after arriving that I could order toast, but many staff were primarily Spanish speaking and since I asked in Spanish they were able to accommodate. Diving on that side of island is great –

good walls, sea horses, rays, eels — but not good enough to counter the food and D/M issues.

Inn of Last Resort, November 1999, Scott Burrows, (scottyb@texas.net), Spicewood, TX. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy. Rooms were simple but comfortable with adequate bathrooms and good air conditioning. The staff was very friendly and professional and Donna, the owner/manager, makes you feel like you are old friends. They served the food hot and promptly and was delicious, bordering on gourmet. Turkey and fixins for Thanksgiving to allow everyone to have a traditional meal with the leftovers for sandwiches the next day. I would have liked to see a little more local flavor in the meal. The dive operation is adequate too good with helpful and friendly staff. They offer assistance gearing up on as needed while allowing those who choose to do it themselves. The boats are large and roomy but slow. Most of the good diving is within 30 minutes or less, usually 5-10 minutes. The dive masters loosely enforced the rules, (heavily enforced by our own group leaders), and they allowed individual pairs to venture off after an adequate pre-dive briefing. The Nitrox is \$100 flat rate for the week but the mixes are inconsistent. Take your own tester for your own peace of mind. The diving was very good but visibility was lower than normal from runoff caused by nearly 3 weeks of continuous rain. Most of the sites appeared untouched, however a few have some damage from previous storms. About the “no seums.

” The key word here is DEET. Use it in the AM and again in the PM. Forget the other home remedies. Toward the end of our stay, I became complacent because they aren’t biting me. I paid dearly after returning home with a couple itchy, sleepless nights. (Ph: 011-504-445-1838 or 1-888-238-8266, Website: www.coral.net/innlast.html)

Inn of Last Resort, March 2000, Wendy Schuett (ears@oneimage.com), **Estes Park, CO.** Vis: 100 to 120 feet. Water: 79 to 83 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: depth/time suggested. Great service, food and diving. Almost like being on a live-aboard because dives were 5-15 min. boat ride; we literally came back to hotel after each dive to relax. Coral ranged from flat to 50 foot towers, lettuce/cactus coral abounded. Night dive saw 2 octopuses, puffer fish and lots of others, dive thrus and caves, shipwreck. No complaints.

Inn of Last Resort, May 2000, Tom Bartlett, Aurora, IL. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 78-84 degrees. Caesar knew the areas to take us to. He pointed out many species; juvenile drumfish, hound fish, spotted eagle rays, cleaner shrimp, octopus, sea horse, flying fish, porcupine fish, spotted scorpion fish, giant anemone. The boat captain, also named Caesar, could glide we right alongside the dock and stop it on a dime. The rooms were very clean and large. They varied and well cooked the meals.

Inn of Last Resort, June 2000, Leslie and Michael Barbell, New Milford, CT. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water:

80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. /60 minutes. My husband and I spent 2 weeks and love it! Getting there with TACA is everything everybody talks about, Hassels! We each had a well-packed carry-on and were able to survive until our luggage arrived. The resort lent us gear until ours arrived. The resort is well laid out and laid back. Three meals a day included and all were good. They were able to accommodate my dietary restrictions without much trouble. Drinks and the gift shop are on the honor system. You sign in a notebook when you get a drink, so no need to carry any money. The rooms are clean, neat and large, yet rustic with wood paneled walls. The staff are all very friendly. Dress is casual. No shirt, No shoes, No Problem. T-shirt and shorts at dinner was the norm. The diving was the best. Three single tank boat dives a day, with 5-10 minute rides to sites. Boat night dive once a week. We did one two-tank boat dive and had snacks on the West Bay Beach for the surface interval. The reefs and walls are beautiful. Chock full of life. Saw turtles, spotted eagle rays, moray eels, a hammerhead, and a variety of fish, sponge and coral. Keith, the dive-master, was great, always pointing out unusual creatures. The dive boats are large with underseat storage, 2 rinse tanks (1 for cameras) and a large dry storage area as well as a dry box with towels. The top of the boats are flat and you can get a little sun if you desire. The boat captains are helpful as you get in and out of the water. Entry is by giant stride and there are 2 ladders for returning. You set up your

own gear and leave it on the boat all day. After each dive you unhook your tank and they replace it with a new one. They have 4 fresh water rinse tanks on the dock. The dive shop has a large open room for gear storage, with each room number having 4 pegs and lots of floor space for gear. The shop is staffed all day and locked at night. Nice lagoon for snorkeling that leads to a dive site called Fish Den. The lagoon is a short walk with your gear, but just let the dive shop know ahead of time and they will have tanks there. It is a great spot for a night dive. Not a lot of divers anywhere. We only had 2 days with 15 divers, a week of 6-8 divers and 6 days of just the 2 of us. We learned about the ILR through your chapbook. Thanks for leading us down the road less traveled.

Reef House, May 2000, Russ, Beeville, TX. Vis: 60-90 ft. Dive restrictions: Dive safely. Best kept secret in the Caribbean! Dive boat never crowded. Dives guided for those preferring it. Experienced dove their profiles. One hour bottom time is normal. Three boat dives and all the shore diving you want. Scenic drive to East End of Roatán. Seldom see another dive boat. **(Ph: 800-328-8897 or 011-504-452297, Fax: 011-504-452142)**

Utila

Laguna Beach Resort, September 1999, Jim and Debbie Mercer (jcdd@lcc.net), Montgomery, TX. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Sunny, no currents. Dive Restrictions: 130 feet maximum depth and safety

stops. Bring DEET. When the wind quits the no seeums have a party. Great diving experience. Liz was a great manager from the word go. She treats you like a guest and respects that you are card-carrying diver. After a dive with John the divemaster, you can dive your own profiles either with him or without him. If you go with John you will surely see more than on your own. Diving with Liz is like diving with a good friend not a dive resort manager. They ask all dives to be no deeper than 130 feet and do a safety stop. The boat Capt. Wagner and is very good at his job and at finding whale sharks although we only saw one and saw a large manta ray; we came for the walls were not disappointed. The town was quaint and the people very nice. The rooms were large and comfortable with lots of hot water and cool breezes at night. The resort is reached only by boat so it is secluded and quiet and unlike all the other dive resorts in the harbor the beach dive visibility is better. The dive boat is large and has a covered area. There is a Canadian doctor in town. **(Ph: 800-668-8452 or 318-893-0013, Fax: 318-893-0013, e-mail: awhite@utila.com)**

Laguna Beach Resort, October 1999, Jim and Brenda Hamon, Heartland U. S. A. We enjoyed the seclusion. The food was just great and was given a recipe for Key Lime Pie. Our hostess Liz was very informative about the different sites. We had six sightings of whale shark's, even saw a pod of dolphins. You just couldn't ask for better dive masters and captains, John, Andy,

Eric and Ole' Wagoner. And when they were looking for the whale shark's there was such an excitement when they said Go! Go! Go! We also observed sea-horses, eagle rays, lot's of juvenile fish. The bungalow's were very private and kept very clean. We have traveled throughout the Caribbean for many years, but by far this is the best place!

Laguna Beach Resort, December 1999, Bill Harvey (billharvey@21stcentury.net), Chicago, IL. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm no Currents. Dive your own profile. Depth limits, no diving after heavy alcohol, sometimes wanted us back on boat in one hour due to scheduling. Good operation overall, decent but not great food, good service, friendly people, accommodations basic but clean and comfortable. Dive operation very flexible and accommodating. Nice uncrowded boats. Captain willing to hunt for whale sharks if divers wanted. Swimming with whale sharks is awesome experience. Resort designed for diving and relaxation-very casual. Can easily do 5-6 dives/day. People very flexible; took us to town to "shop" several times. Bugs worse than expected — take DEET.

Laguna Beach Resort, March 2000, Joe and Melisa Hancock, Manhattan, KS. Laguna Beach is a lot of fun. After landing on the postage stamp-sized runway, we stood in the shade of the tin-roofed shack used for a pseudo-terminal. A fellow said "Laguna Beach, get in the truck," a broken down pick-up held together by

rust and bailing wire. . . We love this kind of stuff! The truck took us to the small village of Utila and the folk from Laguna Beach carried our gear to the dock, we loaded it into a small boat, and away we went. Laguna Beach Resort is on the tip of a small peninsula, about a 5-minute boat ride from the main pier of the village. We checked into our bungalow (very nice with A/C), had our briefing, and organized for diving the next morning. Our first dive was on the leeward side of the island, mediocre diving with lots of dead coral. But, during the surface interval we hunted whale sharks, cruising about looking for bait fish churning up the surface. Predators herd them to the top of the water, and pick off the poor little fellows as they blast through the school. We were waiting for the big, brown shadows of whale sharks planning to cruise through with their mouths gaping open. Once a monster was spotted, our skipper would yell "Sit down" and stomp on the gas to run near the shark, cut the throttle, and yell "JUMP!". Everyone would pile in the water (snorkel gear only), scan the area for the shark, and swim like crazy to get close. The slightly annoyed sharks would gently cruise into the abyss. This would take a couple minutes and we would rush back to the boat, take a quick head count, and start the hunt again. Organized chaos, great fun, and a bit of a rodeo. The rest of the week was spent diving the leeward side (pretty mediocre) and occasionally the windward side at the National Park. I wish we had spent a few more dives at the National Park (world-class walls

with great visibility, lots of critters, and healthy coral), though it was a long boat ride to that side of the island.

Laguna Beach Resort, July 2000, June M. Reinisch (jmrr@idt.net) and Leonard A. Rosenblum, Brooklyn, NY. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 84-86 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. Visited August 1999 also. Thoroughly enjoyed both trips. The diving operation is efficient, well run, diver-friendly and particularly exciting. On most days, between morning dives you search for whale sharks that come to feed in the waters off Utila. In August 1999, we saw two and this summer we saw five from 20 to 35 feet long. Swimming with them is spectacular and even the searching is fun because you see giant schools of tuna roiling around in the water and sometimes there are manta rays feeding at the top of the water too. One morning we met a pod of bottle-nosed Dolphins who played around the boat and after we jumped in the water around us. This year we also found an enormous group of squid from tiny to quite large who watched us for 20 minutes, hovering just a few feet away. There is a relatively new wreck just outside the harbor and if you get there early enough there is a 5-foot long Jewfish. He will let you come within inches. Off the pier every night are a large school of 4 to 5-foot long tarpon. Small mantas visit the pier at night too. Many Eagle rays in August 99 but only two in July 2000. Turtles are also a likely sight. The resort is small with only 14 rooms in cabins with decks over the water of

the Lagoon. There are 3 cabins with just one room and the rest have two. The rooms are wonderful, simply appointed with the most comfortable mattresses. Good reading lamps, plenty of hot water, the decks have hammocks and chairs and provide outdoor privacy for each room. Each cabin has its own little pier for docking your kayak or getting extra sun. The beach on the ocean side is crescent-shaped and private. The whole property is private; town is a 5-minute boat ride away. Food is home-style self-serve with plenty of variety, fresh rolls and home made cakes and cookies. They run the bar on honor. Insect repellent is a must although the bugs are not nearly as numerous as on Guanaja.

Utila Lodge, October 1999, Ben Dyess, Fort Worth, TX. Vis: 75-85 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130. Great operation, owners and staff, good accommodations (16 rooms) good food. Divemasters and captain did their best to find whales but no luck. Good value for the money. (Ph: 800-948-8452 or 011-504-453-143, Fax: 011-504-453209)

Utila Lodge, January 2000, Sharon Scott, Half Moon Bay, CA. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 79-81 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 130'— back with 500 psi. Utila Lodge a jewel over the water, accessible to everything on the island. Cabin like rooms with screened balconies attached, three ceiling fans and a hammock! Great views. Buffet style three meals a day. Coffee available 5 am for early risers.

Plenty of cozy places to relax between three dives a day. Willy, boat captain and Frasher, dive guide, a great team. Personal service, briefings excellent, flexible dives. Vis: 50-100 ft. Fish abundant. Reefs in terrific shape. Kayaks available. Horseback riding thru jungle to Pumpkin Hill Beach great fun. Staff and owners accommodating, available, ate meals with us. Lodge has pool table and pet parrots.

JAMAICA

A lovely island with plenty of hotel amenities (and lots of swinging-singles and couples-only all-inclusives), but the impoverished population (22 percent of whom are unemployed) eats anything a fisherman can scoop up, and you can hardly blame them. . . . Experienced divers will become bored on the first dive, but the diving's okay for beginners (although the local divemaster may be poorly trained. . . . Jamaica lies in the hurricane belt. . . .

Breezes Golf and Beach Resort, July 2000, Marcia Lithium and Roger Burnham, Orange, CA. Breezes is a beautiful resort with a friendly staff. Many went the extra mile to make our stay otherwise enjoyable. Unsafe diving: The no diving after drinking rule neither discussed nor enforced. Newly certified divers are routinely taken to 90 feet. Boat in poor condition. No area for dive gear storage (must use hotel room). Minimal (if any) pointing out of critters to divers. With one exception dive guides

largely ignorant of species identification. Almost every dive entails passing one or more large fish traps, making the cause of the total lack of fish of any size apparent. Marcia and I have more than 500 dive each. They give the dive staff a set of rules (for everything) to follow with no independent judgment encouraged. Diving is strictly by the tables, the dive master's watch, and by the group. Going one foot below the announced depth, lagging behind the group, not surfacing with the group, and any other attempt to dive one's own profile is an indictable offense (much banging underwater, verbal harassment above). The oft repeated excuse for most of this is that "Jamaican law requires every dive to be led by a local divemaster." All dives are drift dives: The boat follows and picks you up. Breezes' resort course is one of the better we've seen. If you need your hand held the entire dive, they will do it. As there is only one dive boat, about half your dives will be with a variety of resort students, resort course graduates and certified divers. About half the time, the 1:30 pm. dive was canceled and the (up to 4 or 5) resort students put with the 11:00 am dive. The beach dive from the resort is as good as most of the sites the boat goes to. In fact, the famous "Canyon" site is an easy fin from the beach. We ended up leaving early rather than continually fight them on any attempt to compromise the rules over bottom time, computer use, pace or extra dives. Breezes is an all-inclusive SuperClub, super resort. All one can drink is included, and, one could say