

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

without fear of contradiction, that most activities revolve around drink, which is easily and plentifully available. We were with four friends who took the resort course. Not once in class, nor during any briefing that we heard was the rule that once one starts drinking, diving is over for the day stated.

Fun Divers, Wyndham Rose Hall (Montego Bay), February 2000, Mark Strobel, Orono, MN. Vis: 60 to 70 feet. Dive your own profile: no. Fun Divers competent, very flexible with times, changes, etc. Allowed me and another experienced diver to use our computers and come up when we pleased. Not a lot to see, but a relaxed, pleasant experience, nonetheless. Wyndham has improved a lot since we last visited five years ago. New water park a big hit with kids.

Couples, Negril, June 2000, Edward F.V. Pietrowski (aqualovers@mindspring.com, Scranton, PA. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: 90 ft. and with divemaster.

MEXICO

On one trip to Cozumel, John Q. did a pirouette on the deck of the dive boat and counted 28 other dive boats. . . . Once visited mainly by divers, cruise ships now regularly disgorge great packs of shoppers who descend on the flashy night clubs, restaurants and bars galore, and sidewalk hustlers hawking condos, serapes that are

questionable bargains, and little plaster statues of guys wearing big hats leaning on saguaro cactuses.

. . . Spectacular dives do exist, but many operators are reluctant to visit these sites, especially if the divers aboard have mixed experience levels, and rightfully so, because much of Cozumel's diving (especially the advanced sites like Punta Sur Two, Tunich, and Barracuda) is deep or fast-current drift dives. Beginning divers should select other destinations. . . . Carry surface-signaling devices for both day and night (strobe, safety sausage, etc.) and stay with your dive guide or group. . . . Dive operators vary widely in quality and safety. . . . The best diving is in spring and summer; it can be rainy during the fall (hurricane season) and winter. There's better diving on the western side toward the southern end of Cozumel, with the eastern side generally unsafe to dive. Best dives include Palancar, Santa Rosa, Maracaibo, Punta Sur, and Colombia reefs. . . . Expect water temperatures in low- to mid-80s. Visibility is consistently the best in Caribbean. . . . Cozumel is one of the biggest travel bargains, with accommodations ranging from the inexpensive downtown hotel Bahia, to diver hangouts La Ceiba and the Galapago Inn, to higher-dollar hotels like El Presidente or Sol Caribe. . . . And, almost like having a new Caribbean dive destination, the immense