

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

unexplored reef structure of Chinchorro Banks off the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula has become accessible to divers this year with the opening of the first of the region's planned resorts, Maya Ha, south of the Sian Ka'an biosphere along the coast road down to Xcalak, with other resorts either planned or completed but not yet open. With a variety of activities and adventure tour offerings in addition to diving, this region is an excellent choice for serious divers looking for reefs where few divers have fanned as well as divers who travel with non-divers.

Cancun

Aqua World, Westin, February 2000, M. Cichon (mcichon@snip.net)
Sicklerville, NJ. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water choppy surge currents. Dive your own profile: no. Given the strong current, I had no intention of straying far from divemaster. Westin Regina service is horrible. I brought their beach towel to room and the maid took it out with daily cleaning. When I requested a new towel, front desk referred me to Police (otherwise I'd have to pay \$25 to replace) then concierge made me meet with hotel security to get a towel without paying the \$25 replacement cost. Also, prices for a burger \$10. We fought with waiter to reduce our burger price to \$10 from the regular dinner fare of \$16 because we ordered our meal during "dinner hour." The dining room is always near empty (probably

due to their exorbitant prices) yet when we did eat there, service was extremely slow, if existent at all. Rooms lacked balcony to dry equipment. Hotel is far from main attractions, shopping, dining. Horrible place. As for diving, currents were strong, Aqua World provides a good package of 3 dives (2 tank each of nite, reef, and cavern) for \$120. Best dive was cavern Chokmool. Reefs look a lot the same but this is an outstanding, easy, inspiring, fun, you won't forget this dive outing. After this dive, all I can think about is another cavern dive.

Aqua World, Crown Paradise, June 2000, Kerry Smith (ksmith@corp.darwin.net), Louisville, KY. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, choppy. Dive your own profile. They told us when to get out of the water. I came up with more than half a tank of air. We spoke to the dive operator before we left for the trip. Aqua World confirmed everything I had ever read about regarding dive operators who work out of resorts. They told us there would be no more than 10 divers. Groups no larger than 4 would be accompanied by 2 DM's. Groups were organized by skill/comfort level. My wife and I have just less than 100 dives, our son 25. Poor briefing, they did not tell what us to look for. The group before us clearly had three first time divers grouped with experienced. The beginning divers were back up in less than 3 minutes. The crew offered no help or encouragement. Just before going in I had to ask who our DM was. My son took about five minutes equalizing,

the DM offered no help. The DM left us in the ocean (on a drift dive!) and continued with the three other divers. Just before inflating my safety sausage I saw another group from our boat going by and we joined them. The DM pointed out nothing. On the second dive my wife and son did not go because they were too cold and angry. I came up with more than half a tank of air. Aqua World was unable to find a manager when we returned to the dock and never returned a call when we tried to call to complain.

Scuba Cancun, November 1999. A. F. Graf, San Antonio TX. Vis: 40-50 ft. Water: 78 degrees. Luckily I used my own equipment. Rental equipment in sad condition. Dive boat clean but rundown. Very good staff used equipment to the best of their ability. Tank filled to 2900 #HL 80s. I would not recommend the operation. Reefs in very good condition considering their usage. (Ph: 011-529-8831011)

Scuba Cancun, Club Med Cancun, February 2000, Beth Carey (betty@slack.net), NY, NY. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80s. choppy. Light to moderate currents, sunny. Restrictions: Group dive, surface as a group even if I have lots of air left. Scuba Cancun is the only dive op that Club Med guests can book through the CM excursion office. DM Briana is a really nice woman to dive with, I would go back just to see her. Other divers were nice civilized people. (an appeal of these dives was getting away from the loud resort.) 1 hr. boat ride to sites. Overall these dives were

much better than I'd expected re: marine life. 1st dive at "NoName. " Viz. 50'-75'. Moderate current, had to hold onto descent line to pull myself down but it wasn't a problem. We sat/kneeled on the sandy bottom in light current w/ our hands tucked under our arms while instructor Stephano fed the local nurse sharks. I touched one as it passed. It was great fun. Then over reef we saw the local large green moray and lots of average fish life. A very nice dive. They were a little over-safe with an hour plus surface interval between dives though our computers said it was OK to dive. They also made sure each person individually was OK at every stage. 2nd dive at "Arestos. " Viz. 75'-100'. Huge, concentrated schools of fish, nice colorful corals and tunnels through which I followed the DM. The reef was not as expansive as Coz or Belize so maybe that's why all the fishes were crowded. I was able to spend most of this dive swimming amid these schools and I was happy as a clam for a long time afterwards. Club Med Cancun — the most fun I had was getting off the resort to dive. The snorkeling area at CM, which they call a reef, is damaged and has few fish. It's impressive to people who do not dive. The Club Med compound is loud, with constant almost annoying activities and cheerleader-like social directors, somewhat frathouse-like. I felt like I was in the 1960s British TV show "The Prisoner," it has an air of artificiality, surrounded by the crass over-development of the Cancun Zona Hotelaria. CM is not handicapped-accessible though they say they are.

The main restaurant is only accessible via 2 flights of stairs. The CM compound is expansive and they do not have local transportation for people who have trouble walking, which would have been great for my handicapped dad who was with us. The food was fantastic, and the fitness center that overlooks the lagoon is very nice place to work out.

Costa Maya (South of Tulum)

**Maya Ha Resort, December 1999,
Eric Schroeder, M.D., Olathe, KS.**

Vis: 50-100+. Dive restrictions enforced: use own judgment. Minimal restrictions, 160 ft on cenote dive. Outstanding operation. Dive guides extremely professional. Safety conscious but open to our suggestions re dive sites, maximum depth etc. Dove with computers exclusively. Boat captain/divemaster Don Higbie did everything within his power to get us to Chinchorro Bank despite marginal weather. Twenty mile trip (1 hr. ride) not at all bad — super boat. Chinchorro banks absolutely spectacular, beautiful tropicals, giant sponges, and black coral, hundreds of eels, dolphins and shipwrecks. Nice side trip to Lake Bacalar to dive cenote, eat lunch and tour fort/museum. Brand-new resort. Very nice rooms, great bar/lounge for socializing. All water in resort is purified (reverse osmosis) and is delicious. Staff is very friendly and helpful. My buddy and I truly were made to feel like one of the gang. (877-443-1600 toll-free; 512-443-2977; Fax 512-443-2978; e-mail mayaharesort@aol.com; website www.mayaharesort.com)

Maya Ha Resort, April 2000, Sig Sigerson, (sigerson@perris.k12.ca.us), Morneo Valley, CA. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm choppy no currents. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: The divemaster chaperoned us as a group. With a 42' dive boat, we sometimes would put up to 14 divers in the water; it was not large enough to change camera gear. While my buddy and I dipped down to 120, they expected us to stay with the group which they told to stay at 80'. There were occasions when a drift dive was executed but once in the water, I did not think the current warranted it. There was no opportunity for night diving as the boat had a long transit back across the channel to the resort before dark; usually took an hour to 1.5 hours to reach the bank from the resort buoy. No cenote diving. We learned, however, that there was a large cenote outside Carrillo Puerto, an hour and half from Maya Ha. Maya Ha did not offer Nitrox. What I liked most was remoteness; once we landed at Cancun, it took 4 hours in a Van to get to Maya Ha. Airport transport service of \$100 per person is well worth the comfort. Chinchorro Bank itself; in 6 days of diving, we only had a brief encounter with one other dive boat. The ride was a rough son-of—. Main attraction to me was the pirate Galleon wrecked there. My buddy and I took pictures of us hovering over clearly visible cannon. Being so far removed from the plastic tourism centers, we had a sense of “real” Mexico. Maya Ha is just south of Mahahual and just north of Xcalak. Maya Ha Resort was

beautiful. A separate building serves as the dining hall, bar, and veranda; guests stayed in separate bungalows that were very private. The rooms afforded plenty of space to spread your gear out and there was maid service every day. The facility is new; one section is slated for additional bungalows. The day we left, final touches were being added to the separate dive shop. The Maya Ha staff seemed very focused on making our stay enjoyable. The one day we were blown out by the weather, they put together a Van excursion to the ruins of Kohunlich. My only negative about Maya Ha is that they did not allow more advanced divers to do different profiles, etc. My buddy, a NAUI Instructor, and I, Cave and Tech Certs, had to stick with guys who were putting their regulators on backwards!

Maya Ha Resort, April 2000, Mike Carter, Azle, TX. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 82 degrees. Beds too hard to sleep on. The diving was OK but nothing great. We paid \$3200 for an all-inclusive trip, except for alcohol. But cokes are \$2.50. When you eat in the lodge you get one plate and that's all. First day was diving for beginners, nothing fun. Second day first two dives OK but nothing great. Plus there were 21 divers too many, so they hurried you through the dive and back to the boat then you finish the dive at or around the boat. Last dive of the second day, we got to see some cannons from an old wreck. It was OK but not that great. We left the next day. We stayed 3 days we paid for seven. It wasn't worth it. (I think your reports

are very good). Our bottom time was 1 HR 15 min to 1-1/2 HR that they did not like, so the second day we did not get a full tank. Then we made (a drift dive) against the current (what a joke. We still stayed down 1 HR.

Maya Ha Resort, May 2000, Arthur Graf, San Antonio, TX. Vis: 30-60 ft. Water: 75-82 degrees. Diving Chinchorro Reef 1.5-2.5 hrs. out to sea. Very choppy first hour out if wind is up. Reef pretty well fished out but very spectacular corals. Many wrecks. Four hours by private bus South of Cancun. Good road until last turn off, 5 miles of pot holes. They are building the resort and water is good to drink and veggies can be eaten raw. Good staff. Wade out to boat. Good boats, lunch on board could stand improvement.

Maya Ha Resort, July 2000, Roger and Donna Soape, Houston, TX. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 83-84 degrees. Restrictions: keep some of the group in sight. New resort (about 1 year) about 4 hour drive south of Cancun. Dives Chinchorro Bank, hour plus boat ride out and back for 3 tanks off 42 ft. or 48 ft. Pro jet dive boat —nice boats! Dove 6 days with groups ranging from 8 to 17; well handled by competent and courteous dive masters/boat crew. Boat anchors, rather than follows, more than we hoped but had one 4+ knot speedy drift dive. No vertical walls but lots of thick, pristine corals and sponges. Many tropicals with good sized snappers, etc. Beautiful! See it now as airport and cruise ships are coming. 17th century cannons slowly “disappearing.”

Cozumel

Advanced Divers, 2000, Jack P.

Gibson, Dallas, TX. Vis 75–100 ft.

Dive your own profile. Restrictions: Agree with divemaster on the profile before the dive and then stay with the group for the drift dive. Diving for beginners: Don't go, dive with Aqua Safari. Diving for experienced: As good as Cozumel offers. Advanced Divers is the best-kept secret in Cozumel. Imagine a 75-minute dive without seeing any other divers -1- just nurse sharks, hawksbills, angels and groupers. That's what you get when you dive with Ricardo, Simone, Tony, and Susan on the Careyitos. Advanced Divers is an independent dive operation that does little advertising and is not affiliated with a hotel or dive shop. We've been diving with this professional team twice a year for seven years, and they've never let us down. They don't just let you dive your computer, they teach you safe breathing techniques to help you maximize your bottom time! They also know how to get you in the water at great sites when no one else is around. You leave around 9:00 AM. The Careyitos is a 12 ft wide, 38 ft. long Bertram with twin diesel Perkins (115 hp) engines. She's not the fastest boat around but she's plenty comfortable with a large sun deck above and shaded deck below. After your first dive, they'll pull into San Francisco or another beach and serve up ham sandwiches, fresh fruit, chips and homemade guacamole for lunch. After an hour and half, you'll do your second dive for an hour or more. The

Careyitos is outfitted for 20 divers, but they carry only 10 unless clients' request otherwise. They outfit her with safety gear, including life vests, flares, VHF and CB radios, and a DAN oxygen pack.

Aldora Divers, Aqua World Fiesta Inn, Sol Caribe/Crown Paradise, December 1998-January 1999, Carl Rutherford, Redmond, WA. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80 degrees. Sunny, dry, flat and calm, currents varied from dive to dive. Used Polartec with hood. My family went down with a professional group. This group prearranged all the diving, transportation and accommodations. Representatives of our group were in Cozumel a week before make sure they arranged everything properly. They were told all arrangements were in order. But on the morning of the groups arrival, they told our representatives we had no rooms but they would put us up in another hotel. Of course, our meals and diving were at the Sol Caribe. We stayed in the Fiesta Inn one night. We had a poor room right next to the hotel entrance on the street. Most of the rest of the group never got a room at the Sol Caribe. We found out that the Sol Caribe had sold our rooms to guests that offered full fare. We had prearranged a discount six months before. The hotel continued to sell our rooms to walk in guest even after we had arrived. I would not recommend this hotel especially during the holidays. The rooms we had were ok but had no places to hang our scuba gear. The meals were good with many places to eat. The grounds were nice. There was

a 'disc jockey' at the pool who thought he had to entertain everyone. He was asked a number of times to turn the music down and refrain from using the microphone so much but he ignored everyone. My 19-year-old son especially enjoyed unlimited alcoholic beverages at the three bars. Aqua World was only ok. They run a cattle boat operation and don't deliver what they promise. Our divemaster, Jose Luis, was good and would like to dive with him again but with another outfit. We had a diverse group in experience and he did a good job. I asked for Nitrox several times that they said they would get, but each time they had an excuse why they couldn't get it. We ran late on one dive, they had to get tanks from another boat, and ended up doing a night dive without lights. Aldora was excellent. Horascio was an excellent DM. He was teaching those who needed it, finding small things with his magnifying glass and inflating a surface sausage when we started to come up. 120s allowed us long bottom times. Fast small boats and surface time spent on the beach at Playa Sol. Third time at Cozumel and I think the fish life and reef are still great. The last day we toured the island via car. We were stopped by the gas station in town by a police officer. He wanted money or he would take our drivers license. We paid him. We learned that another member of our group had been stopped at the same place and had to give the police officer money. (Ph: 281-334-3003; Fax 281-334-3103; e-mail: 102142.3237@compuserve.com)

Aldora Divers, Fiesta Inn, December 1999, Deborah Hargy and Ed Malloy, Gladwyne, PA. Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 80 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. max. Fiesta Inn: Beautiful pool area, however hot tub not heated and pool water colder than ocean. Beach area ok, but no food/drink. Rooms good, would have liked a refrigerator; clean. TV in Spanish except CNN. Aldora: the best dive operation, period. Small fast boats, max 6 dives. Plenty of air, guys; 120s @ 3500 psi. Ladies: 100s @ 3500 psi. They will adapt your reg to din or give you one. Knowledgeable captains and divemasters. Early am start puts you on the reef before the cattle boats scare the big stuff away. Air in tanks was good compared with another operation which needs better compressor maintenance. A couple at an all inclusive paid extra to come with us and avoid their prepaid operator. Only thing that needs improvement: More accommodating attitude regarding night dive schedules for those of us that fly in on a Wednesday and leave on a Thursday.

Aldora Divers, Fiesta Americana, January 2000, Ben Glick, Williamstown, MA. Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Follow guide, no depth limit. Fiesta Americana a good choice on package out of Boston. Food at resort mediocre but restaurants in town were excellent. PRIMA had great Italian food. Aldora was wonderful to dive with. Found 1" baby flounder and 1/2" baby scorpion fish on night dive. I asked to see a splendid

toad fish, they found me these. Two beautiful eagle rays up close after exiting Devil's Throat at 130 ft. on wall. Set up all gear and cleaned it after last dive. One of the finest operators I have seen in 25 years of diving.

Aldora Divers, Costa Club, February 2000, Ray Mars, Scaggsville, MD. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 77-78 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Group had to stay together. Stayed at Costa Club south of town. New name for Fiesta Inn under new management. Rooms and pool great but bar service almost nonexistent. Aldora still good operation but saw several problems. Another operation that took two days to get my Nitrox requests filled despite advanced notice. I ran into this all the time. On two trips they missed loading another diver's fins/mask gear. They got it fixed pronto but upsetting the diver and delayed boat. Aldora seems to be the first boat out so that really was small problem. They still use 120 cu. ft. tanks and computers with long, shore safety stops so you get maximum dive time. We saw three mantas on first day, two nurse sharks, three turtles and the usual assortment of Caribbean reef fish. Full moon during trip and currents stronger than on prior trips. No rain but vis down over past years and I believe due to moon phase. Jorge and Alahondra great divemasters and pointed out seahorse, pipehorse, toad fish and many small critters. Dive to Punta Sur spectacular.

Aldora Divers/Yellow Rose Divers, Fiesta Americana, April 2000, Roger and Pam Smith (rps8@home.com),

Birmingham, AL. Vis: 100 to + Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: No bottom time limits due to computer diving, depth limits depended on site but were within reason. Fiesta Americana — really liked it. The rooms were average size, the air was cold and the water was hot with good pressure. The staff was the best that we have had in Cozumel. The food was okay. We typically ate breakfast and snacked there but went to town for dinner. We had not been to Cozumel in four years and the reefs were the same as we remembered and we saw more turtles than we have seen in the Caymans. Also saw nurse sharks and large green eels. San Miguel was another story; the influx of cruise ship tourists is making the place unbearable. The salesmen were much worse and got rude a couple of times when we said "no thanks." Aldora Divers was one of the best operations that we have encountered. We averaged an hour on each dive due to the steel tanks. They pick you up early to beat the others to the reef. The boats are small but okay with 6 divers. We liked spending the surface interval on a beach...no rush. They let the divers pick the sites. Some of the best divemasters around. Yellow Rose Divers was also topnotch. They let you dive your computer and do not set limits on bottom time. We dove the north sites of Barracuda and San Juan with them. More fish life and stronger currents made for exciting diving. Yellow Rose typically does 3 tank dive trips from 8:30 - 3:30. They have a new 48-foot jet-driven boat. The

service and lunch were great. See the Feb. 2000 newsletter for more information (that's why we dove with them and agree with the report). Next time I would take a hood to protect from the thimble jellyfish and to keep from getting cold. With hour long dives, the second dive was chilly in a full 3/2 suit.

Aldora Divers, Costa Club, May 2000, Randy and Nina Hodge, Orlando, FL. Vis: 90 to 125 ft.

Water: 81 degrees, choppy, mild currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: none. Aldora is the only way for an experienced diver to enjoy Cozumel. Steels 120s and 100 substantially exceed bottom time. Our group of 6 did many dives in excess of 1.5 hours. Roberto and Jorge lead aggressively, but safe, dives and each excel at finding the small critters (a huge seahorse and numerous pipe horses). Fast boats leave before the rest of the operators with a maximum of 7 divers so you always get the site you want. The sites include some not everyone gets to — Barracuda/San Juan and El Islote. The sign on the wall of the shop says it all, "the answer is yes, now what is the question?" Prima restaurant is not to be missed. El Moro and Guido's should also be on your list.

Aldora Divers/Dive Paradise, Costa Club, May 2000, Richard Litsch, Santa Rosa, CA. Vis: 60 to 80 ft.

Water: 82 to 84 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: none. My first trip to Cozumel, after diving many great locations in

the world. Diving better than expected, but certainly not the South Pacific. Similar to Belize. Did six dives with Dive Paradise. Boats always late by up to 45 minutes. Enforced group diving, some dives as short as 30 minutes. I came up with 1500-1800 psi consistently. Fast boats are fast, but so what if they leave up to an hour after the slow boats, dive masters safe but uninterested in finding us great stuff. Did six dives with Aldora which, on the other hand was excellent. Boats always on time and faster than Dive Paradise fast boats. Roberto, our divemaster, was great, going out of his way to find things. Splendid toadfish, seahorses, pipefish, dwarf filefish, flamingos tongue. Nothing seemed to escape his keen eye. Night dive was excellent with the biggest lobsters and crabs I've ever seen. Long dive times dues to large steel tanks, some up to 80 minutes. No rush to get home. Converting to Aldora's DIN adapters was a pain, but they made it work with no extra costs. Once I forgot a valuable piece of equipment on board, after calling the office, it wasn't ten minutes later I received a call back saying they had it. Rare indeed for Latin America. Office staff top notch. Costa Club was great with no problems to report. However, on checking in we were informed Tropical Adventures had not paid them for our room yet. This increasingly common event is horrible and needs to stop. Dive wholesalers, I ask you, is three extra days of interest worth it? Cozumel was great though.

Aldora Divers, Hotel Vista del Mar, May 2000, John Thurston, (jthurstn@ottglobal.net) Golden, CO. Vis: 70 to 100 ft. Water: 80 to 82 degrees, choppy, strong currents, no currents. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: 125 max, stay with divemaster. Vista del Mar is 4 blocks from Aldora pier. Hotel is \$40/night. Flew Suntrips airline direct from Denver to Cozumel for \$200. Aldora uses 120 cu. ft. tanks which permits 1 hour and stays in water. A good operation for a single diver. Dive couples were picked up at resort piers south of town.

Aldora Divers, Melia Mayan Paradisus, Villa Las Anclas, May 2000, Richard A. Jones (rajones@icx.net) Oak Ridge, TN. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Restrictions: Safety stop @15 feet. Make sure computer in the green. Aldora divers was every good thing the contributors to the chapbook said it was. Most efficient dive operation I have ever encountered. Took Nitrox course from extremely patient instructor. Dove with four different divemasters. Each was helpful, informed and safety conscious. They took us wherever the group wanted to go. 120 cf. tanks gave even this air hog over an hour bottom time average per dive. Plaza Las Glorias and the Melia Mayan Paradisus very nice places but also very pricey. This time stayed at the Villas Las Anclas. One third the price and the facilities were as nice as the higher priced operations. No beach or restaurant, but you are in town where the action and lots of good restaurants

are. Also looked at the Suites Bahia and the Colonial Hotel. Even lower cost and the rooms are more than adequate. Also the Vista Del Mar looked very good. My non-diving wife also thought they were very nice. Next trip I will go for two weeks and spend my money on diving and good food.

Aldora Divers, Casa Mexicana, June 2000, Jill Rain (jrain@lopez.wednet.edu), Lopez, WA. Vis: 20 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F. Dive your own profile: no. Stay with divemaster. Hotel Casa Mexicana brand-new, downtown San Miguel, ocean-view, surprisingly quiet, competitively priced. No AC for 2 days but otherwise good accommodation and service. Excellent breakfast buffet included. Aldora's niche: fast boats, small groups, early departure, steel tanks and safety-conscious. 3-6 divers per dive, got to sites first, long bottom time even considering conservative 15 minute safety stop. Most divers were experienced, which gave us greater freedom and dive time than usual for follow-the-divemaster drift dive. Long surface interval on shore in hammock. Currents unpredictable but with small group of divers who knew what they were doing, this was more fun than a problem. At one 60' site, our 6 laid low in sand behind a coral knob (along with a French angel) for a few minutes to let several large groups of out-of-control divers get swept by overhead, cart wheeling, dragging and bashing coral. On surfacing, there were divers all over, in 1's, 2's and 3's, separated from their groups and boats. While we were alone when we

descended, there were 15-20 boats at most sites when we came up. Currents took us a little too close to a cruise ship once (luckily the props were off), on a night dive — with Coz currents and the constant coming and going of cruise ships now, I'd avoid the dive sites around those docks altogether. Cruise ship culture has made San Miguel aggressively commercial and expensive — look hard for moderate eating and shopping. Yes, Coz is very crowded, but there's still very fishy diving and the underwater topography can't be beat. Aldora costs a little more, but you get a significantly better diving experience.

Aldora Divers, Costa Club, June 2000, Mark Goldsmith, Livingston, N.J. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80-84 degrees. Costa Club new name, same excellent value. \$80 US/night for a large clean double shared with my dive buddy. AC still provides Arctic chill. San Miguel schizophrenic as always. Entirely different and more pleasant atmosphere when cruise ships are at sea. Aldora did their consistently good job after they put us with divers of similar ability. Should supply dust covers for their DIN first stages. Their divemasters and boats make the operation great!

Aldora Divers, August 2000, Helen and David Dornbusch, Oakland, CA. In nearly 200 dives worldwide, I feel they gave us the best dive experience we have had for the money. Fast boats, small groups of three to seven, competent and personable dive masters, attention to divers' special requests, and daily washing

and storage of our dive gear was terrific. Marcy also gave us excellent restaurant recommendations. The Cozumel reefs have magnificent corals, intricate swim-throughs, and a very interesting variety of fish — though not in great abundance. Aldora's steel tanks allowed us an average of more than an hour on every dive. For the first morning dive, we'd usually spend about 20 minutes at 80-90 feet, then another 20 minutes at 50-60 feet, finishing the dive cruising between 30-40 feet and up to a safety stop, usually surfacing with about 1,000 psi. We'd usually take our computers to two or three clicks into the yellow zone then gradually work our way up. The second morning dive always followed a 60 to 90 minute surface stop at Play Sol — a convenient and fairly comfortable beach "playground" with a restaurant, pool, and even a small zoo. The stop would have been much more pleasant if we could have gotten them to turn down the much-too-loud music. My requests did nothing. (They probably couldn't hear me.) But, unplugging the nearest speaker seemed to work for a little while. Though we were there in the off-season, many dive sites were way too crowded. To avoid the crowds, Aldora took us out a half hour earlier than everyone else, picking us up at 7:45 each morning. But the large groups did manage to find us from time to time. Emerging from one swim through, my exit was blocked by a conga line of about 15 divers all head to fins, and lead by a divemaster who loudly banged his tank every few minutes to keep his herd together. We

had a spectacular night dive, seeing four rather large octopi, and some huge crabs, among other critters. But lights from about 40-50 other divers all around us were distracting. And when some groups crossed our path, I had to concentrate more on the location of our divemaster than on the nightlife. The Costa Club provides adequate lodging, acceptable food, and a huge pool. But, don't accept a room facing the street, which tends to be noisy, or a room that adjoins another, unless you book them both for your group. The connecting doors, though closed, let through every sound from the adjacent room. We had to move. Have dinner at Guido's for sure. Order the catch of the day! For Mexican food, go to El Moro and La Choza. Spend a couple of hours at the museum.

Aqua Safari, Plaza Las Glorias, February 2000, Ron and Sherry Smith, Levittown, PA. Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 76-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: 80 ft. Took our advanced course. Teaching skills were excellent, they key on navigational skills. Alex, our instructor was great, best dives were with him. He took us to great places and showed us special things. One dive we observed spotted eagle rays up-close, which were undisturbed. Many splendid toadfish, many spotted eagle rays, turtles, and 2 extremely large barracudas. Had a great time with Pedro — the divemaster, and Carlos the video photographer. Angel at the dive shop was very friendly and helpful. (Ph: 011-52987-20101, Fax: 011-52987-20661)

Aqua Safari, May 2000, Brian Willsion. Plaza Las Glorias was very nice. The room was large and clean. All rooms face the ocean and have a nice balcony. The location is very convenient — a 10 minute walk to town. Service was good and the staff was friendly and helpful. Aqua Safari is in the hotel so you only have to walk 50 feet to get on the dive boat. The shop staff is pleasant and very helpful. The boats are large and very nice. The divemasters were excellent. Two dive masters for each group of divers. One in front and one in the rear. They were very safety conscience but not too restrictive. The size of the dive group varied, but mostly there were less than 10 divers. My wife completed her open water dives here. She had nothing but good things to say about her instructor Alex. On her first dive after certification, the divemaster held her hand and guided her during the entire dive at Santa Rosa Wall. Since the drop off looks endless, the care taken by the divemaster was greatly appreciated!

Aqua Safari, Presidente Inter-Continental, June 2000, Stan Sanford, Huntington Beach, CA. Vis: 60 to 80 ft. Water: 78 to 80 degrees, choppy, no currents, not much drift diving. Dive your own profile. Divemasters preferred all remain at 80 ft. but you could go deeper. Hotel swimming pool with green algae. Rate Aqua Safari A-. Cool, wish I had known about water temp. Aqua Safari is the best, and I had dove with others since I was here 4 times before. Considering the

expense, I was disappointed with the Presidente Hotel. Initially they assigned me to a poorly located room with poorly operating shower. I complained and had to pay a charge to move to another room. Though, as a single you pay a supplement, your accommodations are not the best. Most of the hotel employees are fine. There is a reluctance of the hotel to provide a copy of your charges when using their restaurant or facilities. I had to insist on a copy each time and wait until they provided a copy. I think Presidente is too expensive for what they provide. At the airport in Cancun, I changed \$20 U.S. for 10.5 pesos to \$1. Qt., the hotel, I changed \$100 U.S. into 9.6 pesos to \$1. The clerk explained that the hotels on Cozumel have an association that prescribes the exchange rate so that all are in accordance with one rate.

Aqua Safari, June 2000, Frank Stile, Canyon Lake, TX. Weather was sunny and the water was variable currents. Visibility 30-120 feet. The boat was diesel powered but sloooow, (usually last on the reefs), equipped for 16 divers and usually full; drinks and they furnished snacks. The park reef \$10 charge was not include in the \$295 charge for 15 dives. The advanced dive at Punta Sur cost an extra \$10. Though our group of seven were skilled computer equipped divers, they instructed us to surface with 700 psi or follow the divemaster to the safety stop. They planned all dives for depth, time and to follow the divemaster and his assistant. With one exception, I always surfaced with over 1000 PSI,

usually being the first in and last out. On dive 3, the plan was to dive Palancar Reef, (for the second time that day), 40' for 40 minutes. The new divemaster announced that a student would be making a first open water dive which made a shallow dive necessary. The dive began near the L-head cruise ship terminal with the current flowing southbound. About 25 minutes into the dive, the current reversed and the water clouded. At 40 minutes into the dive, a loud clanging was heard. It was the divemaster's assistant signaling "up." I noticed a huge black object that turned out to be Carnival's "Impulse." Five divers surfaced within 50 feet of the ship. Another diver went under the pier and ship and was picked up by another dive boat that also lost their divers under either the ship or pier. The next morning, when our group complained to the dive shop owner, we learned that the divemaster was blaming our group for not obeying signals. (This was a dangerous situation where the divemaster lost control. Mexican police consider divers nearby a terrorist threat; and another adjacent ship had just sailed a short time before.) A compromise was reached when they assigned us Miguel, the dive shops "best divemaster." The remainder of the 12 dives were made with Miguel and the same assistant. They reaffirmed our capabilities as safe and able divers. Both tried pointed out interesting things and took us to our choice of sites but the dives continued with the extreme restrictions.

Aquatic Sports, February 2000, Gary Nagel (garydives@earthlink.net) Greenfield, WI. Vis: 75 to 100 feet. Water: 75 to 79 degrees, strong currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 130 feet. (+52 9872-0640; Fax +52 9872-0640)

Blue Bubble Divers, Bahia Hotel, December 1999, Dale Brenner (brenner@apk.net), Novelty, Ohio. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm currents. Dive restrictions: Varied w/dive. Usually specified max depth and return w/700 lb. Blue Bubble Divers were tremendous. Maximum of six divers on very fast boats. Had a night dive with only 3 of us! At all times they were courteous and helpful and knowledgeable. The reefs of Cozumel are hard to beat! My wife and I have dived 60 tanks apiece there! The Bahia Hotel is clean and has a fridge and electric range along with two separate Queen beds. House keeping was excellent and the rooms themselves cleaner and in better condition than the more expensive Plaza Las Glorias. Food service is not available but it is in the center of town and restaurants of any price and quality east to find. The food was wonderful and inexpensive. One upscale location is Pepe's (10% discount for Bahia guests) downtown where you can easily spend \$50 per person if you care to. (You can get 2 filet mignon steaks for \$28 also) They have a great wine cellar and AC in extremely gracious surroundings including a wine steward. Another fine choice is Prima "the best Italian Restaurant in all Mexico" (Frommers

98) The have homemade pastas and brick oven pizza El Guacamayo north of town by taxi is great! The food is marvelous and the ambiance great with entries from \$8 to \$22. (Their conch chowder and shish kabob are great!) La Choza, in town, is good with orange margaritas and flan. Ernesto's downtown has \$8 fajitas and you can sit and watch the tourists drinking con dos equis chilladas. Las Palmas has native lunches for about \$3. Their chueleta ahumada (smoked pork chops-\$6) is good! (Ph: 405-878-8853, e-mail: blubub@aol.com)

Blue Bubble Divers, La Ceiba Hotel, January 2000, Aaron L. Wiltfong, Gunnison, CO. Vis: 60-150 ft. Water: 74-81 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 ft. 750 psi or maximum times on tables. Water was cool! 3-8 ft. eagle rays and only one large fish. Punta Sir North to Paradise Reefs are showing a lot of wear and tear. Obvious deterioration of dive sites over the last three years. Large pelagics are occasional at best! \$2 a day "park pass" goes to the government and not the Reef System! Blue Bubble is still great for small fast boats. Nitrox and large 100s are available. However, they do not go North or farther South than Maracaibo! However, Vickie will help you arrange for advanced diving. Crazy George is no longer with Blue Bubble and can be found at DIMI Divers. Geovonie is at the Sand Dollar! Elvis is a good D.M.. La Ceiba is a good dive resort and Del Mar Aquatics is still having problems even after they got rid of the old manager. If

you like cattle boats that dictate dive sites and when you go then DMA is the place to dive with! If you want faster, smaller boats and want to say where and when you dive then contact Blue Bubble. Watch out for the shop folks in town. They are becoming aggressive! Reminds me of Cancun! Sorry but the old Cozumel is slowly dying.

Blue Bubble Divers, Sol Cabanas del Caribe, July 2000, George Miller (sensei@triton.net), Wayland, MI.

Vis: 150 to 200 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F. Depth limited by Divemaster. Leave bottom with 700 psi. Time limits set for each dive before leaving surface even though most divers carried computers. Blue Bubbles is a good dive shop providing experienced dive masters and a good trip. Deal made with another dive shop before leaving home went sour. Dive Shop Manager didn't want to honor deal made by owner. Too many shops to waste time arguing. Went to Blue Bubble and stayed with them until the last day. Negative side, they didn't go to shore between dives. Surface interval was on boat and lasted 45 minutes to an hour. Often felt a little more time was necessary before safely beginning second dive, especially since several dives exceeded 100 feet. I dive conservatively. They stored my gear, rinsed it and delivered it to the boat each day for a slight charge. Would have been even nicer if they had arrangements to pick up the gear and take it back. Also dive with Chino's Dive Shop. Chino was our guide and did a great job. Small group and Chino took time to find small marine life for

me to photograph. Had beverages aboard and even a snack for between dives. First class operation. Took a reasonable shore break before 2nd dive. Rent a motorbike from Isla Rentals on Calle 7 Sur near Avenue 5 for a week for \$100 USD. When the first moto died one evening, a phone call was all it took for two employees to leave home and come get me with a new moto. They even tried to refuse a tip! Moto's beat cars, because there is very little parking near the downtown area, but finding a spot for a moto is easy. Photo shop on main street near Prodiver Pier should be avoided. Didn't process film properly or adjust for underwater photography. Mostly a quick turn around for the tour boat crowd. Found a good photo shop on Calle 1 Sur near Avenue 5 (Fuji Film). Did good and tried hard to adjust colors.

Blue Bubble Divers, Casa del Mar, July 2000, Rollie and Denise Matthews, Elberfeld, IN.

Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 85-87 degrees. Room at the Casa del Mar was somewhat small for three people. However it was clean and the staff was friendly, helpful and the food was good. Third trip to Cozumel. On the second day we scheduled a morning and afternoon dive trip but the boat never showed up for the afternoon dive. After a call to the downtown dive shop and a considerable amount of arguing, they called one of the staff to take us out. On another dive at the Maracoba Wall all was going well then the divemaster signaled to start up. Instead of going with the current and along the wall, he went over the top of the wall and

across current for about 100 yards causing most of the divers to consume large amounts of air and causing them to ascend before they should have. This made for a short dive for some. Divemaster Elvis is a 10 in my book.

Club Divers, Club Cozumel Cariba, June 2000, Kathy Eisner, Highlands, NJ. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80-85 degrees. Hotel: nice, all-inclusive but no phones, no radios, and no T.V. other than one off the lobby. Beds were comfortable, rooms clean and we had hot water but heard other guests complaining that they did not. Food and drinks were included but the food was not that good with the exception of breakfast which was great. Hotel's public bathrooms were repulsive. I have been to Cozumel 6 times and have never seen a worse run dive operation! The man that ran it, Steve, was arrogant and borderline rude. The other man was badly crippled with the bends but he hadn't lost his manners. The boat was old and very slow and was crammed with 30+ divers a day. Every morning Steve tried to talk people into changing to the afternoon dive that rarely returned before 6 pm. We were broken into 3 groups but experience made no difference as to which group they put you into. Dive masters were horrible! We were always rushed back into water after 30 minutes and never allowed 1 hour between dives. My dive buddy and I and another couple got lost from group and left behind 3 times because divemaster went so fast. He never stopped to look at anything and forget about pointing out critters! Another

time 2 people in group (including divemaster) computers went red. Although mine did not, I still got a mild case of the bends and had to spend 10 hours in the chamber! Another day the boat started to leave with 1 diver still in water doing safety stop. Club Divers gets a big thumbs down! (800-327-2254, +52 9872-0065; Fax +52 9872-0288)

Deep Blue Dive Company, August 2000, Robert Myers (robryan@erols.com), Takoma Park, MD. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 85 F, choppy currents. Great for advanced divers (We made 25 dives in the 9 days of diving. Gabriel knew where to find marine life and did his best to accommodate requests from divers. Tried to make up groups with similar levels of competence. If they must include inexperienced divers in the dive party, the divemaster did a good job of managing the differences in buoyancy control, air consumption and bottom time. Experienced divers did not have to baby-sit beginner divers. The Owners Deborah and Matt helped us have the diving experience we wanted — i.e., arranged cenote dives with the best company, planned an itinerary with us for the southern advanced dives, helped us manage the gear storage (we did not have to lug it back and forth to our hotel each day), anticipated needs like using their VCR, giving us an early ride to boat pier. Owner worked hard to accommodate our requests for a particular divemaster and itinerary while balancing the needs of their staff and other clients. It was disconcerting to

note that few divers tipped the divemaster even when they agreed he lead an outstanding dive. Our divemaster was attentive to our interests in finding unusual and rare life, often locating and pointing out macro life. He even accomplished this at times when there was a swift current of several knots and in the darkness of a night dive. Notable finds included 10 octopus on one night dive, several large hawksbill turtles, a 4-500 lb leather back, miniature sea horses and several 6-7 inches long and a male caring young, sleeping nurse sharks, spaghetti worms, flamingo tongue snake eels, eel fish (garden eel) a dancing clam. Schools of queen angels and French angels, squid, hermit crabs, brittle star fish. Sand dollar, giant star fish, an older octopus with silver dollar size suckers, huge barracuda, garden variety reef fish, drum fish, jackknives, pelagic jacks at Punta Sur and a Jew fish. Sting rays, two inch flounders. Great decision to do the cenote dive on the last day to allow for shallow dive, off-gassing, rinsing of gear. Even if you are a gorilla diver, it certainly is worthwhile to take a day to explore the windward side of Cozumel with its rugged and wild coast, jagged coral interspersed by sandy beach coves. Prevailing easterlies bring continuous surf. Blowholes in the exposed coral roar with each surge, inhaling and exhaling in a breathing rhythm. Several beach bars offer a place for lunch with margaritas or cervezas. Couldn't praise Deep Blue enough for the wonderful dive experience we had.

Del Mar Aquatics, Le Ceiba Hotel, October 1999, Doug and Laura Young (oceanlakescuba@aol.com), Waco, TX. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. Stay with group for drift diving purposes. Don't go below or ahead of divemaster. Reasonable. Del Mar Aquatics ran out of weights so divers could not shore dive until they brought more. Shore diving from Le Ceiba is always good. This was our 10th return visit. Del Mar divemasters and counter staff helpful. Le Ceiba enjoyed by all. Receptionist had all our room paperwork and keys filled out for us before we arrived so check-in was very speedy. Drank water from faucet and felt fine. Economical dive vacation. (Ph: 800-621-6830)

Del Mar Aquatics, Le Ceiba Hotel, March 2000, Richard A. Staton, Fort Smith, AR. Vis: 100 to 150 ft. Water: 79 to 80 degrees, slightly choppy. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: 80 ft. Went with a large group. Love diving Cozumel. Del Mar's boats were very adequate and the staff was helpful. I do not like the 80 ft. limit and the lack of self-guidance. I like the drift diving. La Ceiba left a little to be desired.

Del Mar Aquatics, La Ceiba, March 2000, Peter Burgher (Pete@MARELCO.com), Captiva, FL. This trip seemed cheap at \$1200 for a week of diving but it turned out to be no cheaper than a trip to Cayman Brac or Bonaire because the price did not include food. Not that food in Cozumel is so expensive. It is actually quite good (especially at our hotel Le

Ceiba and Ernesto's fajita factory across the street). It's just that six days of three meals a day adds up to about \$300/person as opposed to the \$125 American plan at, say, Divi Flamingo. The "cheap" transportation on ATA occurred at ridiculous times — e.g., scheduled home at 2:30 AM, actually arrived at 7 am in a rattletrap ex-Eastern Airline's L1011. La Ceiba has aged gracefully since we were there 9 years ago and the staff was all as friendly and helpful as could be. They now farm out the dive operation to an island mega-dive outfit, Del Mar Aquatics. They had uniformly good people including one divemaster named Ruben whom everybody loved. Since their headquarters and boats were all stationed elsewhere there was confusion every day about who was to go with whom and interminable waits occurred. The package included only one 2-tank dive per day. A more normal four-dives would have cost \$250 more and Del Mar wasn't really organized to provide it. So we spread a two-day dive cycle over a week. Palancar reef has come back big time. Big corals are back and each day's first dive included roaming pass throughs on the wall from 80 feet up, some deeper. The inner portions of the reef included overhangs and hollows harboring all manners of creatures. Twice I photographed the elusive splendid toadfish, found only on Palancar Reef. Huge groupers approached unafraid, no fishing allowed. At the town wharf fisher plying reefs far offshore offered fresh snapper and hogfish. Every dive is a drift dive for there is always a current

of some sort. Even shore diving off the hotel was at times difficult due to current. The shore dives turned out to be only worthwhile at night when squid, octopus and light avoiding varieties come out. Drift diving can be easier than still water if you put your mind to it — relax, move as little as is possible and go with the flow. Tank pressure of 2700 (rather than 3300) PSI made one hour dives next to impossible. Our group included too many students and inexperienced divers so my adage "first-in, last out" was forced to shorten by having to take a down to 500 PSI diver to the surface several times. No fun for me. Guides surfaced twice with an out of air diver. Divemasters were very good at finding stuff. Two-tank morning dive that took four hours (hour long boat trips on both ends) had only two 40-50 minute dives with a 30 to 40 minutes excursion in the middle to pick up more tanks. At times there were twenty dive boats within eyesight. This meant there were many more divers than the reef could tolerate and signs of diver damage were everywhere. This same overpopulation extended to the hotel where the overflow from as many as four massive cruise ships moored at the adjacent public docks. The beach became crowded with ugly, garbage strewing, loud talking tourists. Downtown was elbowroom only. Elinor, ("mi esposa") and I walked the downtown one afternoon, looking for bargains. There were none. Prices were 1/3 less a block away from the main drag but T-shirts were for sale on the ferry to Playa del Carmen for 60%

of the off street price. We snorkeled one afternoon and found the near shore fish were poor compared to even the first 15 feet at Bonaire.

Chankanaab had a fine botanical garden with thousands of orchids and a large collection of artifacts (portions of temples and buildings). It also had a dolphin pool and snorkeling beach.

The high point was a trip to the mainland for “cavern diving” in the cenotes (“sen-oh-tay”), limestone sinks and caverns carved by water erosion millennia ago before the land subsided to present level. Cave divers may go for hours, out of sight of light and require cord reels and special markers. Cavern diving — one specialist divemaster to no more than four divers, not more than 100 yds. from a visible outlet. We took the ferry to Playa del Carmen and were met by a chauffeured van and rode 40 min. to Cenote “chac mool” (Mayan for tiger god). Our guide Juan Carlos Carillo explained standard signs, dive protocol (1/3 in, 1/3 out and 1/3 remaining air) depths, routes and procedures (ex. frog kick to avoid kicking up sediment). He made a special point of buoyancy control. Indescribable beauty. Variety beyond description. And the sight of emerging from the depth to a pool of glacial blue sunlight coming from above 50-75 yards away cannot be put into words. Stalactites, stalagmites, ribbon forest, pyrites gleams, enormous fallen roof domes, occasional open air caves. “Taj Mahal” was breathtaking. In the deep there were twice as many formations. We once came up in a pool where palm trees above were

silhouetted on the surface like a Gauguin painting. In another we rose slowly to see sharp beams of sunlight streaming through 3 inch portals in the cave roof to refract at the water’s surface 45° and continue 40 feet to the bottom of the floor. The water was so clear at first we thought we were to descend into a dry wash, we couldn’t see the surface — until a tiny fresh water catfish ambled by. About 40 feet down there was an obvious thermocline. One diver penetrated and kicked up a hazy mist of swirling fog. I noticed my computer which read 70° F. on the water’s surface jumped to almost 80° F below the clearly defined thermocline line. It was saline below and totally fresh above. Underground rivers connect a vast region of caves, sinks and depressions. Salt water evidently intrudes from the shore miles away held down by its greater density creating a temperature inversion of ten or more degrees. The number of divers per guide rule was honored by some Italians we met and another group of Americans but the same was totally spoiled by the arrival from a nearby Club Med of a bus load of 30 garbage strewing, loud talking and inconsiderate people. The 30 had only one guide who basically brought up the rear. Lunch was something special — behind the previously referred hovel was a Mayan household settlement from which fresh fish cooked over a wood fire emerged. Served with it were rice, avocado, lots of limes and superb pico de gallo.

**Del Mar Aquatics, Casa del Mar,
March 2000, Ben and Lyn Smith,
Mount Airy, NC. Vis: 60-150 ft.**

(mostly 80-100 ft.) Water: 78 degrees. Dive restrictions: depth limit for first dive was 80 ft. (exception: Punta Sur @ 120 ft.). Food at Casa del Mar was "fair." Dive operation ignored our requests to dive with specific dive-masters. The boats were good and fast. We had a good experience with all divemasters but one. Each divemaster was limited to no more than six divers. Cold water was provided between dives. They did a good job of matching divers with similar experience levels.

Del Mar Aquatics, Casa Del Mar, July 2000, Greg K. Webster, San Diego, CA. Water 80+, Visibility 100+. Operator tried to accommodate computer divers but more often they restricted everyone to table dives of 80' and 30 minutes. Disappointing. Operator was understaffed and boats were very full. Often 15 to 20 divers in each boat. Lots of beginners and no attempt to separate advanced divers from others by groups. After first day we requested specialty dives (additional \$15 per diver, usually smaller groups of 4 people) Operator canceled 3 out of five requests due to inadequate staff. Staff was excellent, Captain Juan, mate Carlos, Dive Masters Joaquin, Rubin, and Ricardo attempted to accommodate advanced divers but were obviously directed to do certain dives close to home that would get them back on the docks quickly. Barely got 1 hour surface intervals due to hurry to get back. Boat ran out of gas on one dive. New Navy wreck excellent with large holes in numerous section to allow ingress and egress at virtually any deck level

of the ship. Maximum depth 80' and top decks at snorkeling depth. Coral has deteriorated significantly due to diving pressure since my last visit 3 years ago. Huge numbers of divers kicking up sand and this operator failed to eject one diver who was all over the coral. They did take his knife away after seeing him use it on fish and coral, but they should have denied him further diving as he was unsafe. Wish I had known before I left home that other operators had smaller boats and were licensed to go to more advanced dive sites not listed on recreational charts (such as Barracuda Reef on the north end of the island) No complaints about the rooms at Casa Del Mar or La Ceiba, but avoid the "all-inclusive" rates as there are better places to eat. Easy access and direct flights from Houston via charters (check out \$99 round trip specials).

Del Mar Aquatics, Casa Del Mar, August 2000, Jim Rosenthal, Longmeadow, MA. Vis: 75-125 ft. Water: 81-83 degrees. My wife and I first dived Cozumel. Returned with our teenage sons, one just newly certified. We were struck by the growth — 3 times the population, and now hosting 2,000 divers a day. We were pleased to find the reefs in generally good shape, and the fish very approachable — for example numerous angel fish swim right by you on most dives. Cozumel may not have all the strange creatures you see in the South Pacific, but it is still excellent diving close to home and at a very reasonable price. Also, lots of night life in town makes teenagers and non-divers happy.

Discover Dive, August 1999, Cynthia E. Ledbetter (msled1@dallas.net)
Dallas, TX. Vis: 80 to 100 feet.
 Water: 78 to 80 degrees, strong currents. Dive restrictions: depth/time. Since 1990 costs have increased and attitudes toward tourists have declined due to the number of cruise ships. However, the reefs look healthy and there are abundant fish. Discover Dive is still an efficient safe operation but the turnover in divemasters and crew seems rapid. We'd never met any of the staff prior to this visit.

Dive House, Fiesta Americana, 2000, G. Sharp, Hendersonville, TN. Vis: 100-130 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees.
 Dive restrictions: depth. Food expensive at hotel, we had all-inclusive package so it was no problem. Dive operation was excellent, good boats and divemaster. On site gear storage was lockable (need your own lock). Hotel was a \$7 ride in cab from town that was a small hassle. We had the cabin units that had large baths, sitting area and large bedroom. Also had lockable, outside closets ventilated to dry dive gear before packing. Divemasters requested max depth of 80-85 feet, but sites had plenty to see above that depth. (+52 987-2-1953; Fax +52 987-2-3068; e-mail dive@divehouse.com)

Dive House, Fiesta Americana, June 2000, LeRoy Anderson, Salt Lake City, Utah. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet.
 Water: 78 to 80 F. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: 80 feet, 35 minutes. My first few dives were quite well planned and supported, and

the Divemasters seemed quite attentive to my 12-year-old son who was making his first ocean dives. Palancar Gardens and Palancar Bridges were spectacular dives, Palancar Caves and Santa Rosa Wall somewhat less so, with Paraiso Reef and Yucab Reef in between. Gross deterioration in the quality of diving in terms of reef quality and fish life from 1995, especially with the new pier constructed over the previously most beautiful spot in Mexico (Paraiso Reef), a real crime. During a night dive on Paraiso Reef, the divemasters dropped us too close to the pier as a group, allowing us to drift underneath the cruise ships. Fortunately they did not turn on the props, and when they picked us up around the cruise ships the divemasters were all in a panic. They hurried back to Fiesta Americana without saying anything, dumped us and our equipment off as quickly as possible, and beat it to points unknown. They offered no explanation or apology.

Dive House, Fiesta Americana, July 2000, C. Broughton, Rockville, MD. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80-83 degrees.
 Dive restrictions: depth limits. Great dive operation; always had on divemasters in water at front of our group and one at the back; found "critters" for us. Didn't think a "herd count" was a good way to check that everyone was back on boat – too easy to miscount with everyone moving around. Showers at dive shop only worked some of the time. Rinse tank water needed to be changed more than once per day. Needed another rinse tank. Twenty people rinsing gear in

tank about 7 ft. long by 3 ft. wide!
Fiesta Americana: Part of pool area under reconstruction; rooms clean and comfortable; bathroom (shower and toilet area) too small. I'm 5'2" and my knees almost touched the wall when sitting on toilet! Staff friendly. Food in restaurants very expensive. Did not eat at hotel but 2-3 times.

Dive Palancar, Allegro Diamond Resort, November 1999, Darlene Shimada, (Trigerfast@aol.com), San Jose, CA. Dive restrictions: deep dive (like 80 ft) first, surface time + shallow dive second w/decompression at 10 ft on deep dive. The diving was real good, nurse sharks (10+feet) and dolphins. Turtles and sea horses. We liked our divemaster, Miguel, but we had one problem with Dive Palancar. My husband bought a T-shirt for \$12 on his credit card. When we get the bill, it was for \$112. After a few attempts to correct the number of people in our group and who was paying for their own room before arrival, they still had it wrong. They put us next to the sewage treatment plant and our married friends got a room w/twin beds. They never showed a reservation for this couple. We made reservations a year in advance and we had receipts. If you rent a car, check it our first to make sure it is safe. Ours did not have seat belts, the emergency brake did not work, the brakes did not work well and only one headlight worked. The rental company is at Allegro Diamond Resort. (Ph: 011-52-987-23433, Fax: 011-52-987-25094, e-mail: divepal@cozumel.finred.com.mx, Website: www.dsi.divetours.com)

Dive Palancar, Allegro Resort, April 2000, Richard A. Powers, Haslett, MI. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 80-81 degrees. Dive restrictions: Depth, time, follow the divemaster. Resort good for families. Nice beach. Quality of food has decreased. Still plenty of food and can always find something good. Dive operation excellent. Jorge and Gustavo are excellent divemasters. Manager Dino handles everything. My daughter needed an inflator hose — they replaced it free. They try to accommodate requests for dive sites close to dive sites — most only 5-10 minutes. Reefs are in very good condition. Numerous large fish, several nurse sharks, large grouper, turtles, morays, splendid toadfish. Many angelfish, filefish, trigger fish. Currents generally mild.

Dive Palancar, Allegro Resort, June 2000, Bob and Pat Thompson (scuba_thompson@juno.com), Hatfield, PA. Vis: 75 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm currents. Fairly new well-outfitted dive boats and knowledgeable divemasters who pointed out things that we would have not found alone. The divemaster polled the dive group as to which sites people had already dived and tried to accommodate all. Our favorite dive was La Francesco. The Allegro resort is a beautiful, all-inclusive resort, with plenty of activities for divers and nondivers. The resort is very family friendly and a good value. Our room was showing some wear but the resort is in the process of refurbishing the rooms one cottage at a time. Would recommend the second floor rooms as the thatched roof adds to the

ambiance and the height makes the room more spacious. Overall the resort is wonderful and having Dive Palancar on site is a definite plus. Weather was warm and partly cloudy with short afternoon showers.

Dive Palancar, Allegro, July 2000, Mike Karon, Lubbock, TX. Vis: 100-125 ft. Water: 80-86 degrees. Bottom time set but not enforced. Allegro was great, food was the best we have had since going to Mexico yearly. Rooms were plain not too much fun. Resort was very good. Dive Palancar was excellent. Had a great time.

Dive Palancar, Allegro Resort, August 2000, Richard A. Powers, Haslett, MI. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: Time, depth, follow the divemaster. Resort is family friendly. Rooms are comfortable and clean. Staff is friendly and helpful. Food is fair, close to all of the good dive sites. Excellent beach. Dive Palancar is a great operation. Good, stable boats. They try to accommodate requests for dive sites. Current's mild. Excellent night dive — octopi, pufferfish, crabs, lobsters, eels. Many turtles. Large fish (grouper, nurse sharks, barracuda common.) Jorge and Gustavo are excellent dive masters. Jorge treated our 12-year-old daughter very special. Instructor Alison is great with children. My daughter did the resort course and a shore dive. Then Jorge arranged an ocean dive to Columbia Shallows for us.

Dive Palancar, September 2000, Bob Hill, Apopka, FL. Water: mid 80s.

mostly sunny but some rain and thunderstorms. Seas: mostly calm and flat but one day strong current and choppy seas. Dive Palancar is at all-inclusive resort, Allegro Resort, at the southern end of Cozumel with many of the better and more popular dive sites located within minutes of the boat dock. Dive Palancar is a fairly well-run operation though their sign-up and daily check-in procedure could be streamlined to alleviate having to stand around so much. They have eight boats of various sizes with many carrying no more than 6-8 divers. Return to dock between each dive that was not a problem since they are so close to many good sites. They limit most dives to 130 ft but do permit a couple of deeper dives for experienced divers with computers. Most guides very helpful, knowledgeable, point out photo subjects, but have shortened dives more than would have liked. Dive Palancar "attempt" to group divers on boats by level of experience, however, sometimes get "newbies" on your boat that takes away from the dive. (Diver probably was not truthful about level of experience). Can request a particular Dive Palancar dive guide for each day you dive if there for multiple days. Lack of larger fish, pelagics, etc., smaller reef fish in good abundance and variety. Night dives at Columbia Shallows were awesome. Great variety — many octopi, squid, crabs, big nurse sharks feeding on the reefs, banded shrimp, arrow star, brittle star by the gross, etc. Very good coral structure and health. All dives but night dives more than 60 foot. Water clarity outstanding.

**Dive Paradise, Fiesta Americana/
Barracuda, July 1999/March 2000,
Jason Dunlap, Kansas City, MO.**

Vis: 75 to 100 ft. Water: 75 to 80 degrees, strong currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: none. How dangerous the currents at Cozumel can be. (Ph: 011-52-987-21007, Fax: 011-52-987-25161, e-mail: appledp@cozumel.czm.com.mx, Website: www.dparadise.com)

Dive Paradise, Plaza Los Glorias, August 1999, Rick Cavanaugh (rickcavanaugh@earthlink.net), Ellicott City, MD. Water: 80-82 degrees. Sunny, Dive restrictions: 80 foot max. Could not dive own profile. Very limiting. The hotel was at one time very nice. They need updates and repairs. Still one of the better hotels. Paradise boats are slow and not comfortable. The divemasters were not very good. They dove off the reef and then tried to fight the current to get back to the reef. That was not easy. I would recommend diving with an outfit that has 'fast boats' with only a few divers. Cozumel's cheap prices appeal to the beginning and infrequent divers. We dove with several individuals who should have had their c cards revoked. With the fast boats you deal with fewer people. Paradise would only dive the close sites due to their boats being slow. We tried to get to the more remote and less dived sites and they would not take us. The locals are getting much more aggressive trying to get you into their stores or restaurants. It is worse when the cruise ships come in. Cozumel does not have the Caribbean feel but it has the high-

pressure-lets-make-a-deal feel of Mexico.

Dive Paradise, Plaza Las Glorias, December 1999, Charles Nash, Bakersville, NC. Vis: 70-100 ft.

Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: don't drown. Experienced dive program is as good as it gets. Small fast boats with 6 divers. The divemasters were outstanding in knowledge of deep complicated dives. Devil's Throat was memorable. During a surface interval a 10' manta came up to the boat. I saw a giant seahorse, two splendid toadfish, two nurse sharks on one dive.

Dive Paradise. Plaza Las Glorias, February 2000, Karen Sepko (porsche1st@aol.com), Holland, OH. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80 degrees. Great trip! We made arrangements through Bay Adventures (competitive hotel/dive pricing and use of charter airlines...keeping the overall travel package the lowest I was able to find; \$799 hotel/dive and \$485 air charter from Detroit to Cozumel. Our plane was 5 hours late taking off, however, we did get into town soon enough to take a check-out dive at the Plaza Las Glorias. Aqua Safari is the on-site dive operation at the Plaza Las Glorias and they charged \$5.00 for a small 60 AL tank. We dove 5 days (two-tank dives) with Dive Paradise and we hired our own divemaster, Nacho Sandoval, who was excellent! Nacho helped my husband with his buoyancy control and reviewed basic skills. All that really made my husband(and myself) feel comfortable and confident for his first ocean dive.

Nacho was determined to make our trip enjoyable as he requested specific dive drop off locations just for the three of us, pointed out creatures we would have normally missed, and took us through some swim throughs at Palancar Horseshoe. We were always first off the boat and first to be picked up...no waiting in the water! We dove in the mornings...between 98' — 40' deep, current was medium most of the time (3 knots). Our dive sites were: Paradise Reef, Bolones de Chancanab, Palancar Cave, Yucab Reef, Palancar Horseshoe, El Paso Del Cedral, Palancar Bricks, Tormentos Reef, El Paso Del Cedral, and Las Palmas. We saw three spotted eagle rays the first day at Bolones de Chancanab, 2 nurse sharks the last day at El Paso Del Cedral (one was 8 ft!), and one huge eagle ray at Las Palmas, tons of angel fish pairs, parrot fish, large (2' — 2.5') lobster, Jewfish, Grouper, French grunts, jelly fish, moray eels, black corals. the wall....Deep abyss... What a charge that was to see! Lunch on the boat was plenty: ham and cheese sandwich, 2 tangerines, 1 orange, 1 banana, 1 egg, 1 cookie, and soda, juice or water. Nacho invited us to his house to meet his family and we ate tamales and drank Sol Cerveza. On our diving day off, we went with Nacho on the Ferry (Mexico III is the fastest, most stable Ferry — \$7 one way) to Playa Del Carmen rented a car (\$85 for a Volkswagen Golf at National) and went to the Maya ruins in Tulum (\$3.50 entry fee and definite tourist location) and the Grand Cenote (\$8.00 entry fee) on the way back. We bought confections from a street

vendor, drank milk from a coconut and ate the meat with a coconut shell spoon. When we returned to Cozumel that evening we treated Nacho and his wife to dinner at El Moro...great food in a local's residential area (dinner for four \$45). The Plaza Las Glorias was great, with marble floors, great AC, and a refrigerator. We had a beautiful corner suite with a panoramic view of the ocean. We really enjoyed the relative quiet location of the hotel with the convenience of a short walk to town.... and right across the street from the grocery store. Room service coffee arrived exactly on time! Café Java, a great breakfast place, was really close to the hotel and Dive Paradise opens at 7:00 am which can be a drag for those people like us needing a cup of coffee at 6:00 am. Next time I'll bring my own portable coffee cup that plugs into a U.S. outlet. Ne never once had anyone approach us to purchase a timeshare. Several individuals in town tried to give us a Jeep for \$10 if we would go to the Reef Club and have lunch which we avoided. Room safe cost \$2.50 and maid service cost \$5.00 per day. These charges are added to your bill on check out. Keep your towel chip...to get your deposit back at the end of your stay. The dive rinse tanks are filled with fresh water, and the lockers are convenient to the boat dock... thank goodness we brought our own locks though...the hotel only had a few to lend. We spent most of our evenings in town. We ate at the Mission (\$110 for 4 people), Ernestos for fajitas (\$60 for 4), La Choza (\$60 for 4). We also went to happy hour at

the Plaza Las Glorias (6:00 — 7:00 pm) and had \$1.20 Sol Beers — 50% off!....and — grouper with garlic sauce (\$80 for 4)! One day, we rented ATV's and went on the wild tours (\$96 for two on one ATV) to the north east part of the non-populated jungle, interesting trip but very dusty. Silver was a great deal, rings for \$14, bracelets for \$20. I learned the Mexican silver is approximately \$1.00 per gram, Italian silver is \$1.50 per gram. stores all charge different rates (\$1.00 — \$2.50 per gram Mexican silver) depending upon the work involved in the piece.

Dive Paradise, Villa Blanca, February 2000, Ken Bailey, (kbailey@mcn.org)
Gualala, CA. Vis: 100 to 200 feet: Water: 78 to 80 degrees, calm and flat, moderate currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 120 max. Fifth trip to Cozumel. It's getting crowded and with that goes the "I can leave my stuff lying anywhere and it will be ok" attitude, replaced with "let's lock everything up and hope to get a taxi to town before the next cruise ship lands." Still a nice winter getaway, but I'm looking around.

Dive Paradise, Costa Club, March 2000, Richard Lehach (lehachrw@hotmail.com), Larchmont, NY. Vis: 70-120 ft. Water: 76-77 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: time and depth. Costa Club formerly Fiesta Inn was a good quality resort property. Room not perfect but well maintained. Walking distance to town. Dive Paradise is worst operator I have experienced in the last 5 years (more than 450 dives). Wasted 8 hours on the

dock waiting for late boats, 7 hours wasted on slow boats in 5 days of diving 3 tanks/day (2 a.m. 1 p.m.) Diving severely limited by depth and time, averaged on board with 1300 psi, leave your computer at home (conservative square profiles). Worst boat fleet I have ever experienced slowwww, bad exit, entry. On one they could not stop the engine so the propeller turned at 60-100 rpm while picking up and dropping off divers. One diver was hit by propeller when captain turned stern of boat into diver. Luckily only minor cut on leg.

Dive Paradise, March 2000, John Flick Thornton, CO. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F, currents. Dive restrictions: deep dives 80 ft.; other dives 60 ft. We were informed by the divemaster that if we went below him or in front of him, we would not receive any help if we ran into trouble. Dive Paradise abandoned 3 of us in strong currents. Their divemaster went ahead with the rest of the group and was out of sight before we reached the bottom. Their divemaster remarked after the dive that he "didn't know who all was in his group so he left". Dive Paradise left 14 divers underwater at a dive site and had their boat drop off one of the girlfriends of their staff at a hotel. For 10 minutes we had no surface support available (had an emergency occurred). Dive Paradise would not allow us to dive our computers. The forced a max limit of 38 minutes on each dive. Their briefings consisted of "60 feet for 38 minutes. If you get below me or in front of me, and run into trouble, I will

not help you.” When people wanted to go to the hotel rather than do the 3rd dive, they would not take them there. In one instance several members of the party had to walk 1/4 mile carrying dive gear to get to the road and catch a taxi. Dive Paradise does not care about customer service. They are a high risk operation. Costa Club (formerly Fiesta Inn) was the same as always — reliable, friendly, clean. No hesitation in recommending them.

Dive Paradise, Isla Mar Vacation Villas, May 2000, James Norvell (jameslynette@man.com), Fairview, TX. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 78 to 85 F, calm no currents. Depth and bottom time controlled by divemaster on board. Isla Mar vacation villas are a fine place to stay. Staff is very helpful, the rooms are just great and cleaned daily. It is a short walk to the square and many good eating places. Dive Paradise will pick you up a almost any hotel dock south of the square. Our divemaster “Nester” is one of the best and safest have ever been in the water with. Dive Paradise has a first class operation. Our rooms were well priced and the diving was the best. Lots of help finding good subject matter was provided by my divemaster.

Dive Paradise, Iberostar Hotel Cozumel, June 2000, Warren Sprung, (wcgb@wt.net), Houston, TX.. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm choppy. 9th trip to Cozumel for my wife and me since starting diving in 1987. There were newly certified divers in our group as well as very experienced ones. Didn't

pay much attention to photography this trip, I was looking after newbies. Dive Paradise turned out to be the best dive operator in all those years and dives all over the Caribbean, Red Sea, Palau, Yap, etc., even more accommodating and tuned into the divers than Peter Hughes on 3 of his boats we've done! Owned by Rene Applegate (“Apple” to everyone), this op. was truly there for us. The Iberostar is a lovely resort, but too far from town and very expensive by cab. Their dive operation (what we saw of it each morning as we walked out to meet our boat) consisted of a cattle car operation and some young European woman working behind the counter who was constantly snapping nasty remarks to clients and employees alike.

Dive Paradise/Dive with Martin, Presidente, June 2000, Ted Shieh, Chicago, IL. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: depth and time. Presidente is a pleasant place with excellent service and all the necessities. Dive ops pick us up at our dock at the Presidente so minimal equipment schlepping is needed. Rinse tub at Presidente and shower near the pier made this land-based dive trip doable. Dove two days with Dive Paradise's fast boat; which cost “extra.” Divemasters were excellent and one promised a sea horse on a particular dive and found it, eager to please and with the boat limited to 6, camera didn't get in anyone's way. Dove another two days with Dive with Martin. Better bargain (if you don't have a group to pay for “extra”). All boats are fast and

divemasters too eager to please. Watched a divemaster torture a puffer fish so that I, with the camera, can take pictures of this. Would go back to both dive ops, without reservation, except next time I'll ask the divemasters to just point things out.

Dive Paradise, Costa Club, July 2000, Walt Walker, Marietta, GA.

Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: General depth limit — time to correspond with depth. Diving with Dive Paradise for 10 plus years. The operation is well run and the owner (Apple) is very safety conscious and very responsive to customer concerns. Does a good job of handling beginning to experienced divers. Greatly prefer the small boats (max 6 divers) for getting there quicker and ease of ingress and egress. Costa Club was nice and clean with great pool, OK tennis court and a reasonable walk into town. Restaurants are good, reasonable, and plentiful.

Dive Paradise, Costa Club, July 2000, Thomas and Betty Hall, Myrtle Beach, SC. Vis: 60-100 ft.

Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: 120 ft. deep. Diving continues to be very enjoyable for fish and coral. The restaurants in town are great. French Quarter just off the square was outstanding. Costa club shows definite signs of better housekeeping and attention to maintenance.

Dive Paradise, Costa Club Cozumel, August 2000, Bill and Martha Chapman, Alex City, AL. Vis: 150-200 ft. Water: 83-84 degrees. Dive

restrictions: 80', 30 min (1st dive). 2nd time w/ Dive Paradise. Excellent operation. "Tango" an outstanding dive boat w/large bow for sunning. Orlando and Naun are top flight divemasters. Went extra mile to show small critters, good swim throughs. Allowed three tanks on each trip. Night dive especially enjoyable.

Dive with Martin, Allegro, December 1999, George Knight, (floridaknights@mindspring.com), St. Petersburg, FL. Vis: 100+ ft.

Water: 75 degrees. Dive with Martin in Cozumel is far superior to the best in Florida, at a comparable price (\$45 for two tanks). Max of 8 divers per boat (with two dive masters) Roomy, if not pretty boats. Orlando as DM is calm, very attentive but non obtrusive. Very good with young, small and inexperienced divers. Great underwater guide. Sets up gear well and reliably. Wonderful operation. (U.S.: 800-518-0932, Fax 972-288-2122; Mexico: +52 522-2610 or 281-859-0700, Fax: +52 522-2610 or 281-859-7720)

Dive with Martin, El Presidente Hotel, May 2000, Royce Mueller, Littleton, CO, Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 78-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130'. Great experience with Dive with Martin. El Presidente was wonderful.

Dive with Martin, May 2000, Krystal Norberg (gabelong@rof.net), Basalt, CO. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F. Dive restrictions: depth and bottom time. Second trip to Cozumel. Currents were significantly less than

last September. Saved a bundle by staying with friends but missed a/c at night. Martin treated just like family, or better depending on your family. Dove with small groups, flexible scheduling did morning afternoon and night diving. Highly recommend the afternoon trips as most the cattle boats are done in the morning. Divemasters were all very helpful creating safe dive plans and really went the extra mile assisting new divers and conveniently stayed out of the way of more experienced buddy teams. Really enjoyed the deeper section of Colombia reef around 80 to 100 feet. Coral formations covering three story rock towers. Saw a turtle everyday but one out ten dive days. Dove with Martin personally on Barracuda and San Juan. Divemasters Jesus and Dario seemed to know the address of all the fish colonies in the park. Free video and night dive. Martin had a larger boat for a group of ten that insisted diving together and arranged special trips at no extra charge for more experienced divers wishing to go to Punta Sur and Barracuda.

Dive with Martin, LaCeiba Resort, June 2000, Charles Bottarini, Sandpoint, ID. 12 days of some of the best service I've encountered. Our rooms, in the old section, third floor, were clean and comfortable, basic, but geared toward divers. This section is closer to bar, pool, restaurants, etc. The tower is new; rooms are nicer and a better view, but we don't sit in our room anyway. Hooks for hanging gear on patio, AC. Cruise ships proved to be no problem as most people went to town to shop and eat. Only a small

number of passengers made use of La Ceiba. The food was as good as you will find on Cozumel with a few exceptions. We ate a fair number of meals there and were most pleased; prices are moderate. The staff works long hours and even at the end of a very long day managed to find a smile when giving service. The facility was neat as a pin. The grounds are very pretty and with two main pools, a bar pool, lots of lounge chairs, some hammocks and a cold drink, what more to ask for? Never concerned about our gear as their security around the facility, lock boxes at the desk for passports, plane tickets, cash at no charge. Martin picked us up at La Ceiba dock. Martin runs a tight ship and expects the best from his staff. He runs small groups and except for one divemaster I enjoyed them all. There were 11 of us on the night dive but he broke us into 2 groups and it went smooth. The diving went very well but the currents kept changing direction and it stirred up the bottom; max vis. was about 100', down to 40-50' at times. If you have a camera expect to be watched like a hawk as they don't like photographers. I got a bucket of rinse water; out of 7 days they had to be reminded several times. Otherwise, Martin is a good bet. He will do everything to make it an enjoyable experience. LaCeiba is at the south end of the island, putting them minutes from most dive sites. As the boats are small this was of importance. Even a short ride could be a long one in rough water. LaCeiba 4.5 out of 5. A noisy fan and slick floors when wet were my only complaints.

Dive with Martin, Dive Palancar, Allegro Resort, June 2000, Pat Wikstrom (mrpat@webworkz.com), Warne, NC. Vis: 75 to 85 Feet.

Water: 80 to 81 F, currents. Dive your own profile: yes. With computer — no deeper than 130', let DM know when you hit 1000 psi, back on boat with 500 psi, about 60 min max.

Partly cloudy during the day rain most nights, some brief rain showers during the afternoons but we never lost any diving. The weird filamentous algae that had started to cover so much of the reef for the last few years was being overgrown itself by lettuce leaf coral along with several other species of coral and sponges. New stands of young Sea Whips, Plumes, Sea Rods and Fans were grabbing a toe hold and starting to sway in the currents. The Boulder, Brain, Star, and other hard corals seemed to have arrested their multi year decline and had a healthy look about them. Allegro Resort: we got a fabulous package price from Fun Jet — \$729 per person — air and 8 days — all inclusive (advertised in the Atlanta newspaper) The Allegro really is a very nice place. There's a new activities building down at the poolside bar, and they've added a gymnasium near the front entrance. Selection and quality at the main buffet restaurant was fantastic, and the three specialty restaurants (Chef's Table-International, Mexican, and Italian) were Epicurean delights. Johnny took a quickie course in tequila tasting one afternoon and for the duration of the trip he requested and was given shots and drinks made from tequila that would cost \$30-\$60 a

bottle back home. The palm thatched roofs over the eight unit guest houses need repair. We could see light through the roof and one of the girl's rooms had a water stain on the mattress from roof leaks. The smell from the sewer treatment plant was a factor in the afternoons for those in the 20, and 40 series units. And the on site dive operation, Dive Palancar, has gotten so busy that you've really got to plan a day ahead to get yourself on the morning boats. Even the two afternoon trips filled quickly so some of my; last minute; buddies missed a couple of dives due to their lazy nature. Dive with Martin: Christy at Splash Tours was very professional, took my credit card over the phone, and set me up with one of Martin's package plans. Everything was handled by phone and fax. Two divers, four days of AM two tank trips— total 16 dives cost \$400. Martin's boats were all six pack style with twin outboards and a sun shade cover over the middle of the boat. Boats flew across the water and never had more than eight divers aboard, one day we went out with five. They had lots of bottled water aboard, fresh fruit after the dive, and filled up a plastic bucket to hold my camera between dives. guides gave good briefings, were friendly, and had intimate knowledge of the sites and how to best dive them. We did our surface intervals on shore at one or another cement piers along the southern side of the island. Dive sites were picked on board by the assembled guests, however when less experienced divers were aboard the DM's tended to lead the group through

a more conservative tour. They allowed us to break away from the group, go a little deeper, and hang out over the wall as long as we kept visual contact. With the vis being down around 75; some of the spectacular formations were less dramatic than usual but we had turtle sightings on two of our four deep dives. Our profiles were in the 95 to 116' range with bottom times close to 50 minutes. Martin's employees didn't seem to be in a rush to get the day over with. We regularly had 50-60 min surface intervals and they allowed us to run just over an hour on our second dives. Dive Palancar: They've snagged the lion's share of the divers there at the Allegro, they're picking up a goodly number of folks from the Iberostar and they've got a thriving snorkel tour business going. Some of the personal service and desire to please seem to have gone out the window with their success. They're just too busy and they're getting bored. On my arrival day I went down at about 12:30 hopefully to sign up for both the 1:00 and 3:30 afternoon trips. They were booked solid. No problem. We agreed that my buddy and I would do a welcome tank shore dive and sign on for both trips the next morning. The sullen manager passed their reservation book across the desk while holding on to the uppermost corner and we signed up. Later that day when my family made it down to fill out the paperwork and sign up for the morning dives they were told that they signed up neither Johnny nor me for the next day. To make a long story short — the mgr. had held his hand

over the date on the upper corner of his date book and led us to believe that we were signing up for Sunday when we were really signing up for Monday. The Sun morning dives had already been packed full. That's when I called up Dive with Martin and asked him if I could start diving with his operation a day early. No problem. So I dove four tanks a day for the first four days. Two in the morning with Martin and two in the afternoon with Dive Palancar. They've got pretty good facilities: a substantial concrete dock with room for six boats to tie up at one time, a reasonably stocked dive store, gear lockers that consist of big plastic milk crates that are locked in place on concrete racks, three rinse tanks and a dockside shower handle the cleaning of people and gear. They've got a large number of rental regs, BC's, and suits available as befits an operation that does most of it's business with new cert referrals, newbies, and resort courses. But they also offer more advanced courses, have got Nitrox (at \$5 per tank), and are offering training in the Atlantis rebreather. Dive Palancar has got a small fleet of four 38 to 45 foot long converted fishing boats. During our stay they left the dock with anywhere from 10 to 22 divers aboard. Boats returned to the dock during the surface interval to change out tanks and divers. Staying down south you can truly do four dives a day and still have time to eat all your meals and party some at night. I logged eleven boat dives with these guys and their DM's were really a pretty competent lot. They gave decent dive briefings, were genuinely

friendly, and passed out bottled water after each dive. One fellow is taking some of his groups to a new shallow site just between Delilah and Paso del Cedral. This seems to be the place where the big grouper have all moved to after they quit being fed at the old regular sites. On another dive, La Francesca Wall, we jumped into a ripping current that quickly broke our group into three separate pieces. Weird down currents caused me and my wife to abort the dive, but the poor DM chased the other two sections of our party all over the wall, brought up half the others after 10 minutes, and went back down to find the last few folks and get them back safely. He really earned his tip that day. Generally they geared the tours to the lowest common denominator. Dives were for 30 and 50 for 40 although they let me exceed! Both depth and time by a little bit without freaking out. I've got to admit that my favorite dive of the week was with DP late in the afternoon, while diving with my wife on Columbia Shallows. This site is really shallow, you'd have to break out a shovel to get below 29. But coming off the sand to within 7 of the surface are some of the prettiest formations of healthy coral I saw on the whole trip. first turtle, a nurse shark laying under an outcropping, a couple of truly Great Barracudas, and a close up sighting of an Eagle Ray.

Dive with Martin, Crown Paradise (Sol Caribe new name), August 2000, Angel Carpenter and Stacy Byous, Duluth, GA. Vis: 100+ ft. Water: 82-85 degrees. Crown Paradise all-inclusive: Beds were

hard but after diving morning and night you can sleep anywhere. Food was O.K. Nothing fantastic but plentiful. Service was good and employees were helpful and happy. Rooms were clean and big enough to hang dive equipment to dry. Dive with Martin -- 1st time March 2000. Had great time. Everyone very helpful and happy in their work. 2nd time August 2000. Despite construction they were still happy, caring, and professional. Jesus was our divemaster for 7 dives and we couldn't have asked for anyone better. Outstanding! He had a great way of making everyone relax. Really took care of business, fast and knowing where to find all the interesting underwater life. All boat captains helped with equipment both putting on and taking off. Very careful with new divers and older divers -- made diving a pleasant experience for everyone.

Eco Divers, Seabreeze-Premier Cruise Line, May 2000, Steve Neal, Fairfield, TX. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 ft. max. Computers: stay as long as you had 500 psi and no deco. Lots of arrow crabs, goat fish, grey, French and Queen angels. Saw a spotted yellow stingray. Lots of large anemones, interesting dive throughs but sadly a lack of large fish or creatures. Carlos good divemaster, watched whole group, didn't rush like most seem to nowadays. Dove from open panga, no cover, got sunburn between dives. Were told we would have covered boat at cruise ship dock but not so. (+52 52-9872-5628)

**Flash's Adventures, The Reef Club
Isla Cozumel/Sun Trips, November
1999, Deanna and Hal Colvin,
Boulder, CO.** Vis: 120-180 ft. Water:

80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Computer. Sun Trips: a very nice, affordable trip through Sun Trips (www.suntrips.com or 1-800-786-8747). The direct flight from Denver on an A-320 Airbus was only 3 hrs. and 40 min. The crew was friendly, and a meal and movie were offered, which made the flight go quickly. There are flights out of several major cities and different packages; airfare only, or an airfare/hotel package with or without meal plan. We chose an all-inclusive package during the "non-peak" season at the Reef Club Isla Cozumel (there's a choice of 9 hotels and meal plans, with varying costs). Cost per person was about \$850 for 8 days/7 nights, which included airfare, hotel, transfers to/from the hotel, hotel taxes, departure taxes, gratuities, and all meals, snacks and drinks. We arranged our dive package directly with Flash's Adventures. Cost was considerably less than others: \$276/person for a 6-day, 2 tank package + 1/day for Hyperbaric chamber insurance; night dives were an extra \$35. Flash's caters to groups of no more than six and provided excellent services. Our divemaster, Gabriel, spoke English fluently and was very knowledgeable and eager to please. He was safety conscious, but didn't restrict divers, encouraging us to dive our computers. We were picked up at a pier an easy 5-minute walk from the hotel, so we didn't need to rent a vehicle. The hotel

is on the southernmost end of the island and closest to the reef, so boat time to and from the reef ranged from 5-15 min., depending on the isle. Bottom times were 50-60 min. Divers who didn't want to dive that long ascended sooner and were picked up by the skipper. Surface intervals were on nearby beaches during which the crew switched our tanks, and they offered us drinks, food and wind breakers. After diving, we left our B.C.s, wetsuits etc. with the crew and they rinsed them, so we didn't have to haul our equipment back and forth! The reefs were in great shape with little bleaching, lots of sea life, and beautiful coral. Out-of-the-ordinary included the Splendid Toadfish, indigenous to Cozumel; a visit by two bottlenose dolphins; sea turtles; giant crabs, lobsters and grouper; nurse sharks; rays and the usual. Vi 120+ ft. Due to constant currents, and waters temps were 81-82°. We were drift diving, with currents of 0-3 knots. At times there was a bit of chop, which made it difficult for the skipper to locate us and pick us up quickly. The Reef Club has 240 rooms and many do not have ocean views. The downside of a package deal is that you can't request (and expect to receive) upgrades. Our room had a king-size bed, A/C, satellite TV, an outdoor patio and daily maid service. Only complaints were that the patio door did not have a screen, the bedding and linens were pretty "worn," and the hotel was understaffed. There are several pools, a gym, activities, entertainment, and a very nice beach (but watch out for No-See-Ums!). Meals

were buffet and quite good, but lacking in variety at breakfast. The meal plan wasn't requisite, but only cost about \$100 per person Extra for 8 days! \$10 for a taxi ride (each way) into town to eat at a restaurant, so it was a great value, not to mention convenient after a day of diving! (flash@cozumel.to OR http://cozumel.to/scuba_dive/OR 011-52-98-72-0570)

Flash's Adventure, Cuesta del Sol Condominiums, February 2000, Dean Knudson, Golden Valley, MN. Vis: 120 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. maximum, use computer. Flash (Oswaldo) now has a strip mall office location near the large supermarket in town. His wife and web site (managed by her) were very helpful. We dove with him before, pleasant, relaxed, humorous attitude. He will pick you up at your condo by boat (within reason) if your group is large enough. Three people died in Cozumel Jan-Feb 2000 related to strong currents and a health condition. When the Harbormaster closes the harbor, think twice before going out anyway. Flash was very safe in this regard. His best boat is getting a bit old, but he's a good value and very friendly fellow. (e-mail: flashadv@xaac.com, Website: www.xaac.com/flashadv)

Flash's Adventure, Costa Club, August 2000, Doug and Paula French, Princeton, IN. Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive your computer. Our third time with Costa Club (formerly Fiesta Inn) and Flash's Adventure. Costa Club staff very friendly and helpful. Flash: excellent

divemasters! Small, fast boats. Never more than 6 divers. We were the only 2 divers for 2 days. We pick the dive sites and dive our computer for more than an hour per dive. Almost complete freedom!

Marine Sports, Costa Club Hotel, July 2000, Richard Erickson. Vis 100-150ft. Water 84 degrees. Took an Internet deal through applevacations.com and the package deal: airfare (charter, American TransAir), hotel (Costa Club) all meals and drinks was less than most round-trip airfares alone. ATA air was as good if not better than a major carrier. Apple Vacations had people on the ground to direct you to your transfer connections at Cancun and ground transfers at Cozumel. Costa Club (formerly Fiesta Inn) was about 3/4 of a mile south of San Miguel, within walking distance if you were in the mood but otherwise, a \$5 cab ride to town. The restaurant "Prima's" in San Miguel was incredible, the best lobster tail I've had. The hotel was large but uncrowded. Staff was very accommodating and friendly. Very large pool. Hotel across the street from the beach where it had a nice sandy beach facility complete with daytime restaurant. Shoreline was rocky with steps to the water. Lots of fish around the docks and rocks. Marine Sports (ph: 987-2-50-62) maintains a shop, dive lockers and dock pickup at the hotel beach. Small, fast boats going to different dive spots each day. Divemasters lead the way but you were on your own to dawdle. Divers surfaced at their discretion. Since everyone dived computers, you

were down until 500 psi was reached, the divemasters respected experience. Divemasters helpful in pointing out marine life and very enthusiastic. Marine Sports is a small operation but very diver friendly. I didn't know whether my daughter wanted to dive the three day package deal so we bought one day at a time. Marine Sports however, gave me the three-day discount price anyway after three days. Very nice experience. (+52 9-872-5062; +52 9-872-2922, Ext. 2035)

Papa Hogs, Villa Blanca Garden Resort, October 1999, Lisa Hinderlider (shark1@uswest.net), Westminster, CO. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 84-86 degrees. Sunny, rainy. Water: calm. Restrictions: limits set to 100 ft, but we only went to 95 on 1 dive, most sites were good at 70-80 feet. Could use a bigger rinse bucket for cameras. My husband and I were set up with Papa Hogs by our travel agent because we wanted small fast boats. The hotel was adequate with a very nicely kept courtyard. The divemasters were very good with their briefings and we were at the dive sites in no time flat. They also were aware of our dive experience and let us do some of the more advanced sites right off, Maracaibo shallows, Tormentos wall, the reefs looked very healthy and the corals were awesome! We saw nurse sharks, lots of turtles and even a manta ray off Playa Del Carmen on a day trip we took there. There were large schools of Horse-eye jacks that were huge, with some Tarpon mixed in. Captain Mike pulled in a 4-ft. Wahoo on our surface interval! He

then radioed ahead and had his cook meet us and they cooked the fish for us and made a very nice meal. Muy Delicios! Shore diving was really pretty decent too. Especially at night! (+52 9872-1651; Fax +52 9872-4465)

Paradise Divers, August 2000, M. Thomas, St. Cloud, MN. Vis: 50-150 ft. Cozumel has become WAY over dived. Too many people and a third cruise ship dock going up! No more slow unspoiled town or diving — we have jaded them.

Pepe's, Coral Princess, June 2000, Gery McAtavey, Roanoke, VA. Vis: 80-130 ft. Water: 80-84 degrees. Once the divemaster was comfortable with our skill level, no restrictions. 6th trip to Cozumel, 2nd at Coral Princess. Hotel accommodations and food 1st rate. Problem with large tour groups. Too many kids not enough chaperones. Had to call the front desk at 2 AM to have a noisy group quieted down. Hotel was quick to respond. Changed rooms the next morning without any problems. Would have requested a room on the top floor if we had known about the large groups in advance. Pepe's is still a well-run operation. Domingo is an excellent divemaster. With a small operation you have all skill levels on board. Limits where you can dive. Fast boats, most we had was 6 on board. Choice of AM or early PM dives, night dives available. Had a minor problem with another divemaster who chose to swim against the current instead of changing direction when the current shifted half way through the dive. Wasted a lot of

air. Spoke with Pepe, and had no further problems. Overall diving, experience was very good. We would return to the Coral Princess and to Pepe's. I have seen an increase in the "ugly" American tourist that has little or no respect and knowledge of another culture. **(Nohemi Lomas Claudio, Zona Hotelera Norte, Km 2.5, Cozumel, Cozumel, Mexico; Telephone 800-253-3702 or +52 987-2-3200; Fax +52 987-2-2800)**

Plaza Las Glorias, December 1999.
Orlando Blake, Fountain Valley, CA. Vis: 90-150 ft. Water: 80-86 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Follow divemaster. The resort was well managed! The rooms were attended daily! Divemaster was very friendly and safe. Fantastic for photography! **(800-433-0885, +52 9872-2000; Fax +52 9872-1937)**

Ricardo Madrigal, Careyotos, February 2000, Mark Berger, San Diego, CA. Vis: 100 to 200 ft. Water: 78 to 81, strong currents. Dive your own profile, come up with 500 psi. This is a small operation that is the best in Cozumel. They give excellent dive briefings and carefully watch you during each dive. But it is as if the divemasters are not there. They point out sea life but not bother you. The divemasters help you with becoming a better diver through coaching you on your air consumption. The dive profile is stay down as long as you can and come up with 500 psi. I frequently get dives more than 100 feet and times of 70-75 minutes. You dive your computer and make a safety stop with

twice the bottom time of anyone else in Cozumel.

Sand Dollar Sports, Reef Club, February 2000, Ernie and Marge Karalis, Algonac, MI. Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 90 ft. max. depth. Surface when 700 psi reached with your buddy. Second trip to Cozumel in two years. South end closer to the reefs. 5-20 minute boat ride to all locations. Absolutely fabulous. Sand Dollar Sports is an excellent operation. We did 16 dives in 10 days. They separated you according to your skill level. Never more than six divers with any divemaster. Five different boats. The largest held 20 divers. Never had more than 10 divers. Two divemasters took five divers each. More experienced in first. Then second group in five minutes later. Goevany and Rafael gave wonderful dive briefings. You and your buddy were allowed to explore, keeping divemaster in site. Palancar caves and gardens were fantastic. Saw reef shark, two hawksbill turtles. A first for us. Another group saw 12 ft. hammerhead at Punta Tunich. A wild ride if you like flying in a three-knot current at 70! Sand Dollar has videographer in house. Purchased our first dive movie starring us. They are just 50 yds. north of the Reef Club. Package dives \$50 per person per day, two dives. 80-90 ft. on the first and 60 ft. for the second dive. Had rinse bucket for masks and cameras and a cooler of water. No pop or snacks but everything else just great. Loved beautiful beach at the Reef

Club. Buffet restaurant open at 7:00 a.m. served everything. Three restaurants, take reservations. All casual dress. All inclusive, very reasonable. 10 days two persons including air \$2400 from Detroit -non stop to Cozumel. (US 888-737-6399; Cozumel 2-14-64 or 2-07-93; e-mail: sds@sanddollarsports.com or usa@sanddollarsports.com; website <http://www.sanddollarsports.com/Welcome.html>)

Sand Dollar, Reef Club, April 2000, Jim and Connie Molbeck, Racine, WI. Vis: 50 to 75 ft. Water: warm, choppy, strong currents. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: always with divemaster. They provided good drinking water, also the food and ice were edible. Downside: no Mexican culture; we could have been in US except for Spanish accents of waiters, all speaking English. Cosmopolitan food, American music; all were US guests (a few Europeans).

Scuba Cozumel, Scuba Club Cozumel, January 2000, James Lyle (jlyle@beachnet.com), Hermosa Beach, CA. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to F, calm currents. Guided dives; first dive 80-90 feet for twenty-five minutes second dive 40-50 feet for 45 minutes. The walls were great for wide angle. On the shallower reefs there were lots of opportunities for photos of fish. Macro was difficult due to the currents on most dives. Only eight divers per dive guide in the underwater park. Scuba Club Cozumel is an all-inclusive dive resort. There are no phones or televisions in the

rooms. The rooms are clean, spacious and comfortable. They change towels twice a day. They include meals that are tasty and ample. Unlimited shore diving in front of the hotel. Staff is friendly and helpful. You can't beat Cozumel and Scuba Club for the quality of the diving, the cost and the convenience. (Ph: 800-847-5708 or 011-52-987-21800, Website: www.scubaclubcozumel.com)

Scuba Cozumel, Scuba Club Cozumel, May 2000, Chris Cozzi (cdcozzicpa@aol.com) Rohnert Park, CA. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: generally 100 feet, 700 lbs to begin ascent to safety stop — 1st dive usually 45 minutes, 2nd dive 55-60 minutes 4th visit to Scuba Club. Staff turnover has been minimal and our arrival was like a family reunion. Accommodations, food and service were top notch as usual. This resort is set up for divers and everything revolves around diving and the dive schedule. Mario, the restaurant manager, accommodates the night boat divers who are late getting back, meeting us at the dock to let us know that we can still get dinner — if we are quick. No one went hungry. Dive operations is friendly and efficient. Boats are clean and in good repair. No boat was over crowded. Boats had table and dunk tanks. No on site processing. Town close by and prices reasonable for processing. Service and repair facilities available for Sea and Sea at La Ceiba Hotel. Boat crews were friendly, fun and helpful. Divemasters were great. Predive

briefings were informative for the most part. We dove with three Dms, Jesus, Miguel and Alberto. Jesus and Miguel were outstanding, Alberto is new and learning, but still very qualified. We saw octopus, seahorses on 3 occasions, spotted, golden and sharptail eels, eagle rays, a turtle, and a myriad of other fish and creatures. No green morays (where have they all gone?) Visibility wasn't unlimited as it has been on our other visits, probably 50-75 foot, but to Northern California divers, that's super.

Scuba Club Cozumel, May 2000, Barb Seamon, Strongsville, OH. Vis: 80 to 150 ft. Water: 82 degrees, calm and flat, strong currents. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: each dive varied; begin ascent w/ buddy when down to 500 psi; 750 on deeper dives, or specified time limit; preset depth/profile for group. We had a great trip. Group of 24, 2 non-divers. Had large boat and 3 dive masters to ourselves; split group into 3 smaller groups; we were a little chilly in skins-added hoods and vests. Lots of fish life, huge crabs and spiny lobsters (shellfish on steroids); turtles, nurse sharks, beautiful large eagle ray, tiny critters, sea horses, pointed out by our divemaster, Ramondo, who carried a magnifying glass. Lots of toadfish, splendid toad and drums. Highlight was Punta Sur and diving Devil's Throat that exits the wall at 120'. Excellent service at Scuba Club; only problem was some of the group on upper floors had water pressure problems. Great shallow night dives right off hotel pier; octopus, lobsters,

crabs, eels and the largest porcupine fish I've ever seen. Great dinner at Pepe's. Usually had moderate current but still got some good photos.

Scuba Club Cozumel, July 2000, Dave Foler, Amy Memis-Foler, Buffalo Grove, IL Water 80-84 degrees F., vis 100-150 ft. Refrigerator in the room, no TV or phone. Hang wetsuits on the balcony/patio. Lockers (bring your own lock) are by dive operation. Large rinse tank needed its water changed more often. The resort staff was very friendly and helpful. The food is good. They serve dinner at a leisurely pace. Orientation in a classroom. Two tank boat dives in the morning, back in time for lunch. You can pay extra for scheduled night dives or dive off the shore. Shore dives are unlimited. The house reef is rather skeletal. Took one shore dive at night and saw an octopus. The current, however, was too strong, and we ended our dive early. All the boat dives were drift dives. Outstanding coral and sponges at Palancar Caves. With 60 ft. high formations it is possible to dive at 30-40 ft. on top of the coral, or at 60-80 ft in and out of the swim throughs. The crew was friendly. They changed our tanks between dives, sometimes too quickly before we were able to read our air-integrated computers and record in our log books. We followed the divemasters on all dives. They enforced safety stops and surfacing with 500 psi. Our deepest dive was to 83 ft. They were always concerned about the strength of the current and our safety. Drinks and snacks on the boat. Plenty of shelf

space and area to move around for our group of 16. There was a head on our boat. Took film into town and developed our rolls at Omega, which provided one hour service.

Scuba Cozumel, July 2000, Fay Duckworth, Walnut Creek, CA. Vis: 100 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: 90'. Continental canceled for departure date from Oakland. Leaving Cozumel had us flying back into Oakland when we took off from SFO. Except for the airlines screw up we had a wonderful time.

Scuba DU, Presidente Intercontinental, June 2000, Paul Lemcke (HANNAHDOG@LVCM.COM), Las Vegas, NV. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 75-78 degrees. Dive restrictions: Guided. Our second trip to the Presidente. One of the world's most comfortable and well-managed dive resorts. We've enjoyed the same divemaster (David) on both trips. We dove a recently sunk Mexican warship in 40-80 feet of water in 150 + visibility — what a dive! Dove 4 times a day for 3 days, on a small 6-pack that flew to the dive sites ahead of the cattle boats. Only criticism? Fish life (especially grouper) seemed less abundant than 2 years ago. (Ph: 011-52-987-21379)

Scuba Du, Presidente Hotel, July 2000, Randy Preissig (jjrs5@texas.net), San Antonio, TX. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 F, calm. On their standard dive trips, 80 feet with dive leader. I swore off Cozumel more than 10 years ago because of safety factors. I personally witnessed bad equipment,

unbelievably bad chamber care, missed pickups, booze and pot offered before night dives, etc. This has changed — top notch equipment, knowledgeable and courteous divemasters, dive plans. I saw 150 pound groupers and much more, whereas 15 years ago you never saw anything big enough to eat (because it had been eaten!). The reefs are in BETTER condition than they were. Congratulations to Cozumel! Scuba Du is set up for intermediate non-photographer divers, but does an excellent job servicing these divers.

Scuba Du, Presidente Intercontinental, August 2000, Karen and Dale Alberston, Beverly Hills, CA. Vis: 50-150 ft. Water: 81-83 degrees. Dive restrictions: Depth limits, time limits, stay with divemaster. The Presidente was a first class hotel (for Mexico) with first class service (but don't be in a hurry during your meals). Fine restaurant at the resort. Be careful jumping off the northerly pier — shallow and one guest broke his knee. The scuba-diving operation at the resort was good once you figured out who the good dive masters were and which fast boat to request. Boat No. 3 was a good boat to be on with divemaster Alfonso. But it took us two of our five days diving to figure it out. Also request Punta Sur trip if you want to do a deep dive (120 ft.) Very nice dive. Ask the divemaster to show you the splendid toadfish. The night dive at paradise was excellent, saw two octopus, one shark, lobsters, crab, big green moray eel, etc. All dive sites were great, diverse and plenty to see.

Scuba Du, El Presidente, August 2000, George and Mara Chappel, Bossier City, LA. Vis: 100-120 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: depth and time. Our room was very clean, had plenty of room for dive gear, and the air conditioner worked great. Restaurants in the hotel served excellent food, but pricey. Scuba Du on the beach of the hotel. No room to store your gear at their little kiosk, so you had to lug your gear back and forth every trip. Diving packages were very affordable if you paid in cash, but if you charged it prices went up almost 20% by the time they added on all sorts of taxes and charges. Their larger boats were a bit on the slow side, but were reliable, had good shade, and an easy entry and exit. Appeared to only have 8 divers per boat. The crew provided bottled water before and after dives, and fresh fruit between dives. Changed gear over between dives. Unable to dive your own profile, but divemasters were flexible with bottom time and sent up dive buddies at 700 psi, allowing others to stay down longer. Divemasters were knowledgeable and led good profiles. Coral heads and swim-throughs were fantastic. Saw plenty of big groupers, huge lobsters, and a monstrous crab. Current was very cooperative.

Scuba Du, El Cozumeleno, August 2000, Lucien Gillham, Sherwood, AR. Vis: 70-80 ft. Water: 83 degrees. Sunny, dry. Seas Calm and flat, strong currents. wetsuit 1 mil. All-inclusive

El Cozumeleno was first class. Food and drink were great. Hotel and flight from Denver package from Sun Trips was a great buy. Don't use the call USA collect card they give you. It costs \$7.20 a minute. Scuba Du dive operation was competent, friendly and on time. Nitrox available. El Cozumeleno on the north end of the island required an extra boat ride to get to and from the dive sites but it was free and no problem. After the first day they moved experienced divers to a smaller boat. We dived computers after that, usually one hour dives. Divemasters Lena and Alfonso are very good. Saw four Splendid Toad Fish in 5 days, several large groupers, two turtles and lots of tropical fish. Currents were very strong on most dive sites. Stopping to look at anything was a chore and some days it was impossible.

Scuba Shack, La Ceiba, April 2000, Allen Garrison, Liberty, TX. Vis: 80 to 100 ft. Water: 82 to 84 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: safety stop at 700 psi. La Ceiba Hotel — room 23 bottom floor last room on end only good thing; was a/c, it was cold. Electricity went out at least 2 times daily. Couldn't use blow dryer at all; room could use a remodeling. Restaurant on premises gets better every year but you can eat cheaper and better in town. Scuba Shack very good. The boat was great, plenty of room, well setup. Divemasters gave good briefings. Good service from crew, gave help when you needed it, left you alone if you didn't. Diving was great,

Punta Sur, Maracaibo Deep Cedral Wall, Santa Rosa Wall and Villa Blanca wall as a night dive were some of the sites we enjoyed this trip. French Reef was where I got some of my best pictures. Once again, Cozumel proves it is a world class dive destination. (Ph: 011-52-987-20145)

Sea Scuba, Hotel Pepita, January 2000, Norman B. Ross, Abilene, TX.

Vis: 70 to 80 feet, Water: 74 to 75 degrees, choppy. Dive restrictions: Start up when you reach 500-750 psi. Hotel Pepita is 2 blocks from the plaza and is very basic. There is no phone or TV in the room although there is a refrigerator and air conditioner. The rooms are clean the bed is ok and you have coffee in the morning. Sea Scuba allows you to dive your own profile to maximize your bottom time. The shop is across the street from La Mission.

Sea Scuba, Yellow Rose Divers, Hotel Pepita, 2000, Norman B. Ross, Abilene, TX.

Hotel Pepita is 2 blocks off the square and charges \$25/night. The rooms are clean, air conditioned and have a refrigerator, there is no phone, TV or pool. Sea Scuba is across from La Mission and is one of the better dive companies in Cozumel. Sea Scuba has fast boats with usually 3-6 divers and they allow you to dive your computer. Yellow Rose Divers has a large boat with all of the amenities such fresh fruit, cold drinks, cookies and lunch. Carlos is a great divemaster. Yellow Rose Divers goes to the north end where the current is really ripping and when you come across something you do not have much time to look.

Water conditions were 84-88°F with 60-80 feet visibility.

Sea Scuba, Maya Cozumel, August 2000, Norman B. Ross.

Maya Cozumel down town for \$41 per night. Air conditioned, refrigerator and swimming pool, 1/2 block from Domino's Pizza. Sea Scuba one of the best dive operators in Cozumel.

T.T.C Divers, Del Mar Aquatics, Casa Del Mar, June 2000, Martin Giesecke, mgiesecke@heart.thi.tmc/edu. Houston, TX.

Vis: 40-100 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: The usual 60 ft./50 min., then 50 ft./40 min. Did two dives first afternoon with Del Mar Aquatics. Fast boat with twin outboards and onboard oxygen. Remainder of three day trip was with T.L.C. Divers. Slow boats; no oxygen — a blast to the past when two dive trip started at 9:00 a.m. and returned at 3 p.m.! Very strong currents some days resulted in some divers being separated by several hundred yards at end of dive. Take along signaling device. I wish they had not built the new cruise ship dock, but Paradise Reef survives. No more airplane off La Ceiba — first Hurricane Gilbert, then a cruise ship's prop — just rubble now. (TTC Dive Shop/Club Cozumel Caribe: +52 9872-4476; Fax +52 9872-0288)

TTC Divers, Club Coz. Caribe, August 2000, Pete Remneff, Truckee, CA.

Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. The resort was excellent — service food, hospitality. The dive operation was attentive and

courteous. Good service and set up. Boat was ok with 12 divers on board with 2 divemasters. Went out in 2 groups. Briefing was good. 1st dive Palancar Caves – once we got down to caves it was a speed swim. Couldn't keep up with divemasters, couldn't stop for pictures. At 92' only way to find D.M. was to go up a bit and find bubbles! One diver came up out of air with no D.M. around. Not fun in a beautiful spot. 2nd dive, the Cedra Pass was 48' in strong current – once down – small reef and then long swim across current for 200 yards to see a nurse shark in a hole. Extremely tiring and should not have been scheduled. Again, very poor D.M. support and hazardous for some of the group.

Yellow Rose Divers, Allegro Resort, April 2000, Mark Walden (dfwmw@aol.com), Garland, TX. Vis: 80 feet. Water: 79 to 80 F. Dive restrictions: Stay close to group, surface with 500 psi. Cleanest dive boat I've been on. Outstanding boat and crew. Unlike many Cozumel dive operators, the group did not have to come up when someone got low on air. It was nice to be to dive for an hour or so at depth. Dived the north end of the island. No other operators around and there were schools, repeat, schools of fish that I have never seen in Cozumel. We also dove a few of the traditional sites in the park. Very accommodating people. The Allegro was as usual, good for small groups, groups with none divers or children. Grounds still nice, rooms getting a little worn, food pretty good for an all inclusive. (888-366-8708, 281-754-

4119; Fax: 281-754-4119; e-mail mail@coz.net; website www.yellowrosedivers.com)

Yellow Rose Dive, Club Cozumel Caribe, June 2000, James M. Hill, (Jhill50842@hotmail.com), Ft. Worth, TX. Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 86 degrees. Dive restrictions: none. Yellow Rose is the Elite of the diving boats. Big, roomy, new, fiberglass hull. No propellers, jet engines – superior service on boat. Great dives. Dives were a little high but well worth it.

Yellow Rose Divers, Sol Cabanos, July 2000, Marilyn Koukol, APO, AE. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: not more than 120 ft. For the first three days, my buddy and I were the only divers on the 48' boat. We had nice and easy drift dives with lots of angels, grunts, parrots, and even the Cozumel toad fish. We saw a couple of nice eagle rays and turtles. Carlos and Pancho were great dive guides and Moses fixed our free flowing regs. Lunch was tasty, usually a build-your-own-sandwich or grilled chicken. Sodas and water too. The boat has a shower, a head, and fresh towels. It has a camera table, but I like to place my camera in fresh water between dives and the only water bucket was for masks. The last two days we were joined by 16 divers from Texas. This changed the entire dive profile and procedures. Most were new or inexperienced. Lots of time hanging out on the bottom waiting for those who couldn't get down. The groups were too large. Then when they

employed another dive guide, he was only concerned about one young girl. The boat, food, and crew were great. But I didn't like the crowded conditions. Toni, boat owner, was very helpful and hospitable. The Sol Cabanos was a nice quiet hotel a \$4 taxi ride from town. It was right on the beach and employees soon knew us by name. The ruins on Cozumel and those on the mainland were interesting and the river/ocean mixing resorts quite refreshing (Xiaha) (Xicharet).

Mayan Riviera (Cancun to Tulum)

Akumal Dive Center, Club Med Cancun, February 2000, Beth Carey (betty@slack.net), NYC. Vis: 100 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F. While staying in Cancun we rented a car and had a super day trip. Akumal is a quiet, low-key place with nice dive sites. The fewer people who go there the better. So don't tell anyone. 1st dive a 5 min. boat ride to a dive site in Half Moon Bay, Akumal. Viz. 100'. Water temp. low 80s. Rolling reefs as far as you could see! Not a plethora of fishes, but enough, the usual suspects. At the Dive Center the people were very nice, but the DM who took us out seemed a little burnt out and he should have paid special attention to two people who had just gotten certified and this was their first dive post-cert. I appreciated that he stayed down with me until I reached 500 psi. Nice dive. 2nd dive also w/ Dive Center Akumal, at Tajmaya Cenote. Viz. Unlimited?. Like something out of the X-Files, other divers look like astronauts in space. It was eerily still and quiet,

almost spooky, amazing. (**Akumal Dive Center: 800-351-1622, 915-584-3552, +52 987-5-9025**)

Dive Akumal, Club Akumal Caribe March 2000, Steve Mimnaugh (mims_84093@yahoo.com), Sandy, UT. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 78-82 degrees. Restrictions: time. Good: short boat rides, accommodating dive shop, up close large animal encounter with big friendly dolphin, many large turtles, novelty of scuba/snorkel cenotes, nonthreatening family diving, fine food and service for Mexico, fun bars (small, quaint, clean, friendly). Conspicuous security. Condos a little far from resort (but close to nice bars, restaurants), no shore diving, bug bites at night in condo on my daughter, very windy, very hot and humid, car required. Wish they had better kids program for 9 year old daughter so I could have dived more/kid-sat less. Mediocre snorkeling at condos and resort. (**Club Akumal Caribe: 800-351-1622; 915-584-3552**)

Mike Madden Divers, Oasis, August 1999, Ken Skitt, Greenville, RI. Vis: 80-120 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Good: Got to dive Cenotes. It was awesome. Madden has good Mexican guides who let you do your thing and watch you carefully. Accommodating and helpful. It was worth the trip. Saw many turtles, large fish, and got good pictures. Trip to Chitzenitza was great! (**+52 987-3-5147; Fax +52 987-3-5129**)

Wetset, Casita Del Mar, January 2000, William R. Nelson, Kelso, WA.

Vis: 40-90 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: None; Buddy diving, routine safety rules. Skilled divers may go deep with D. M. Divemaster Paul and wife Jennifer ensure satisfaction from the time they pick you up at the Airport, until they drop you off for your return flight. They have two dive shops in Pto. Morelos, a small, friendly fishing village about 40 minutes south of Cancun. The ambiance is a refreshing contrast to Cancun. The diving is the best I've seen, including many trips to Cozumel. It offers everything Cozumel does, plus much more. The reef is pristine, with a great variety of living coral. There are more fish, and they seem much larger than at Cozumel. It was routine to see turtles, sharks, rays, eel, etc. Of course, the day I left they saw a whale shark. Emphasis is on finding the larger animals, but all of the small fish are there as well. We stayed at Casita Del Mar, and small, new, and very clean hotel, walking distance from the center of town, and for us it offered everything we wanted. It has a family atmosphere, and the café is very good. We were good friends with them soon after arrival. Other hotels and rentals are available. Paul and his dive crew took the work out of the diving. They cleaned and stored my dive gear each evening, and picked me up each morning on the beach in front of the hotel. One of the crew snorkeled and kept watch each dive, and would assist me shedding my gear before getting back aboard. Paul is a world-class diving instructor, originally from Texas. We dove each morning, and

usually he teaches in the afternoon — advanced and specialty courses from him. Paul and Jennifer's Texas hospitality makes the experience unforgettable. Even my nondiving wife was anxious to go back again. In season, he offers a wreck dive at Chinchorro Banks, where there are more than 200 shipwrecks from Spanish galleons to modern warships and freighters. This is the almost unknown, fantastic diving experience you've been dreaming about. (+52 52-9871-0198)

Villas De Rosa, March 2000,
David and Nancy Smith
(davidalexandersmith@compuserve.com),
Cambridge, MA, Hotel complex consists of twelve condo-style apartments with beach frontage. Rooms large, airy, kitchens and bathrooms dingy but well-equipped, TV with one channel ("whatever my daughter's watching," but they turned to movie channels in the evenings). No restaurant but they serve breakfast/lunch/dinner in your room when you ask (works great). Meals a notch above the usual dive standard, with crisp veggies and overcooked meat,

If you're about to spend a few grand on a dive trip overseas, you ought to spend a few bucks to make sure you've picked the right place. Become an Undercurrent Online member:
www.undercurrent.org

free plentiful pico de gallo on request, \$5 guacamole well worth it. Service amiably chaotic but accommodating; they want you to have a good time. Open water diving (overall, inferior to Cozumel) from open high-gunwale 20' boat that leaves from shore 200 yards up the beach. Seats 6 easily, 8 tight. Entry simultaneous backrolls. Exit: hand up weights, shed BCD/tank, climb up aluminum ladder. Dives drift (fast current), boat chases bubbles, divers in a loose swarm (no strict Follow-The-Leader). Terrain long ridges and rills with sand chutes, few swim-throughs, could go hunting in chutes. Coral plentiful but often broken or sand-covered. Fish sparse. Fills 3200+, first dive typically 80-90' for 40, second 40-50' for 55. Water 79-80° (3mm full-body OK, less invites cold), viz limited (40-80' depending on chop and sunshine). Seas often too rough for boat to go out. Cavern diving (within 200' of light/ air) from cenotes are the reason to come. Load into van, drive 10-15 min then off road into jungle, park, suit up and go. Groups of 4 escorted by a very safety conscious guide. No tight spaces. Diving through living underground caverns and rivers – stalactites/ stalagmites galore, marvelous glowing blue light at entrance. Viz pristine (150+') as if the water were not there. Virtually no life (tiny fish). Water 77° (cold). Descending, you encounter the halocline, where lighter colder fresh water lies on top of warmer sea water: immiscible liquids, when kicked through, they swirl and smear, spectacular effect. Day-long excursions possible to Coba (large Mayan

city embedded in the jungle), Tulum (smatter site with a few well preserved ruins in a lovely seaside setting), with side jaunts to cenote Calaveras (10' jump-in snorkeling) and Playa Akumal (lagoon snorkeling, poor viz (silt, halocline) but fun nooks and crannies to explore and lots of fish (3 midnight blue parrot, 1 enormous rainbow parrot). Great place to find out if cavern/cave diving is your thing – don't go for open-water except as a break from the caverns. (**Aquatech/ Villas DeRosa: 52-987-59020, website www.cenotes.com**)

PUERTO RICO

Puerto Rico has always been a waypoint to other dive destinations in the Caribbean, but as dive tourism infrastructure develops, more divers are stopping to sample the reefs. While night life is abundant, crime is somewhat of a problem . . .

Aquatica Tour, Captain Elik "Finci" Hernandez, 2000, Luis Munoz, Chicago, IL. I saw in the July 2000 issue comments by Darryl and Trish Boyer (Lincoln, DE) about Mona and Monito Islands on the west coast of Puerto Rico. I bumped into them while diving with Parguera Divers run by Efra Figueroa. It just so happened that I and my dive buddy had dived Mona and Monito a week earlier. I went to Jose' Rafols from Aquatica in Aguadilla (787-890-6071, whom I've been diving with since 1993, and he referred me to Tour Marine Captain Elik "Finci" Hernandez (787-851-