

second dive around 11:15. Short rides to all sites. Boats have shade. 20 dives and had 4 night dives during the 8 days. Tanks are available for shore dives. Snorkeling is excellent as is photography or beach lounging. No night life except at the only operational restaurant in town, The Blue Mermaid. Michelle does an excellent job of everything and keeps everyone entertained. It's quiet. Only about a dozen divers on the island when we were there so everyone got to know everyone. Diving was excellent for beginners. Advanced divers can go down the wall to explore. My nine-year-old did a scuba experience and my wife got in her first dive as well. Currents were either light or nonexistent.

**Salt Cay Divers, Tradewinds, August 2000, Harold and Jan Bedoukian (araratrug@videotron.ca), Montreal, QC.** Water: 83-85 F, calm no Currents. Dive your own profile. Allowed to dive our own profile, within the limits of our computers. Third trip to Salt Cay in 2 years. The Dive operation is still top notch. Debbie and Ollie accommodate their divers. They do trips to "The Wall" off Grand Turk, The Endymion and they even did a dawn dive, which was the best dive of the week. The vis was not as good as usual. Tradewinds is a few minutes walk to the Salt Cay Divers' new dive shop. We had initially been concerned about the eating establishments since two of our favorites (Mt. Pleasant and Miss Irene's) had closed. Miss Pat (Miss Irene's sister) has opened a restaurant in her home. She serves food with an island flare. The Blue Mermaid has a more "American-

ized" menu. Both are excellent. Flights to and from Salt Cay need to be confirmed and reconfirmed. Divers do manage to get off the island but there can be a few tense moments before the plane arrives.

## UNITED STATES

### Florida

#### Boca Raton

**SCUBA Referrals of South Florida, July 2000, Jason DeSalvo (desalvo@concentric.net), Montclair, NJ.** Vis: 35 to 45 Feet. Water: 78° F, calm currents. They are geared toward recreational divers as opposed to the dive-industry training crowd (800-585- 483). One call to them with the dates of your desired dives and you'll be provided with a meeting place and time, asked about what equipment (if any) you need to rent, and everything else is taken care of for you. A two-tank boat trip cost \$65 for the diving and approximately another \$35 for rental gear that was all top of the line, well-maintained Sherwood equipment. When we arrived at the dock, they had already brought our gear onto the boat, set it up and was ready to review it with us. The boat was well maintained and uncrowded, although there was no rinse tank available for photographers. The run out to the first site (off the coast of Boca Raton) was 30 minutes. When booking, we had requested a site that had interesting topography and excellent marine life. Fink's Grouper Hole more than fit the bill. Under a bright sunny sky, they gave us

## Wider Caribbean

a detailed briefing, given a surface float to enable us to drift dive and were sent over the side with the only restriction being that we return to the boat with at least 500 PSI. Visibility around 40 feet and there was a nice 1-1/2-knot current. In spots, the reef-top rose like a mini-wall 15-20 feet off the sandy bottom. We saw huge schools of grunts, Blue Tang and Doctorfish along with many large Blue Angelfish, Reef Butterflyfish, Grey Angelfish, Queen Angelfish, and Rock Beauties. An 8-foot Nurse Shark scurried away from under a ledge as we approached and guided our view to a 6-foot Southern Stingray out over the sand. We saw a higher quantity of fish (also including Sea Bream, Pinfish, Spanish Grunts, Porkfish, Black Margates, Blue Hamlets and Highhats) than I usually see in four or five Caribbean dives put together. Following a forty-five minute surface interval, we were ready for our second dive at Moray Bend. The reef here sloped much more gradually and the current was only about 1 knot. This reef was covered with gorgonians and what the site lacked in quantity of fish. It made up for in uniqueness. We saw a Yellow Stingray, Guitarfish and a small Hawksbill Turtle. And a massive Loggerhead turtle, around six feet long.

### Boynton Beach

**Aqua Safari Adventures, August 2000, Ed Godfrey, (edgodfrey11@aol.com), Atlanta, GA.** Vis: 50-110 ft. Water: 82-77 degrees. Dive restrictions: none. Dave Ochs is a good tour guide. Very thorough, attentive, professional. He uses dive boats out of both

Boynton Beach and Palm Beach. The crew out of Boynton was great and very adaptive to requests.

### Crystal River

**American Pro, Cottages of American Pro Diving Centre, February 2000, Georgina Wiersma**

**(gwiersma@caiwnl) Monster, The Netherlands.** Vis: 20 to 60 Feet.

Water: 74° F, calm. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: None. We rented a cottage from American Pro, on the shores of Homosassa River. Great value: clean, roomy, kitchen. Our goal was to snorkel with the manatees. Due to the extremely cold weather (air as low as 24 degrees!) the water of the Gulf was low, which made the manatees migrate to the rivers in great numbers. We saw 50 to 60 of these gentle giants in one morning dive! Absolutely fabulous! Rented our own boat, as the group trips organized by American Pro were O.K., but not great for UW photography. Also did some cave diving. Blue Grotto, Devil's Den, which we found commercial and disappointing. **(800-291-3483; 904-563-0041; Fax 904-563-5230)**

**Plantation Inn, November 1999, Michele Goldman, New York, NY.**

Wanted to encounter manatees and did! One of my best u/w experiences. We just snorkeled but that is all that is necessary. Place was very nice, great for golfers. The manatees are the sweetest, dumbest creatures. You can scratch their bellies and they roll over. Too cute. I've dived with hammerheads, mantas and sharks and dolphins

and this is a must. Good to encounter early in am while they are just waking up. (800-632-6262; 904-795-5797; Fax 904-795-0074)

Ft. Lauderdale

**Pro Dive May 2000, Jason DeSalvo (desalvo@concentric.net) Montclair, NJ.** Dive your own profile: no. My day of diving on this very capable vessel with its very capable crew was marred by the fact that Pro Dive caters to the dive-training crowd at the nearly complete exclusion to the needs of recreational divers. Our 2-tank trip left the dock at 1:00 PM and returned at 5:00 PM. The basic fee was around \$60 for the dive, tanks and weights. Since I was on a two-day business trip and didn't want to pack much, I forked over another \$35 for a full set of well-maintained Scubapro gear and a 3 mm wetsuit. The first dive was the 150-foot wreck of the *Tracy*, just sunk about 18 months earlier. It's a really nice beginner's wreck that sits upright in 75 feet of water. The vis was around 40' and the water 77 degrees. The 3—5 foot swells claimed several sea sickness victims of the 30 on board. The second dive was in 10—20 feet of water at a site named Panama Reef. The vis here was 15—30 feet and there was a moderate amount of surge. Dive restrictions on the first dive were a maximum bottom time of 35 minutes and absolutely no penetration of the wreck. A fact I became aware of not from the otherwise thorough pre-dive briefing, but instead by a divemaster's wagging finger following my emergence from an 8 foot wide ambient light passage through

the wreck's rear cargo hold. They allowed us one hour of bottom time at the shallow site, but I'd challenge anyone to find enough of interest to stay that long. The wreck dive was a surprisingly good site and is already covered with a patina of sponge and gorgonian growth. There was a massive school of Tomtates, a decent sized school of mackerel scad, a five-foot barracuda and numerous other small tropicals. After being down only 18 months, this wreck is already more interesting than the Russian Destroyer off Cayman Brac! Witnessed two Porcupinefish courting. If you're in south Florida and get a chance, do a few dives, you'll probably be pleasantly surprised. But do it with a dive operation that caters to recreational divers. (800-772-3483, 954-761-3413; Fax 954-761-8915)

Florida Keys

**Aquanuts, Looe Key Divers, Reef Raiders, Southpointe, May 2000, John Withrow, Lexington, KY.** Vis: 10 to 30 Feet. Water: 85 to 90 F, calm. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: time limit of one hour from time they said, not time into the water. Spent a week in the keys. Went down to Key West. Stopped at Kelly's On the Bay and did a two-tank dive. Depth only 35-30 feet. Reef in terrible condition but lots of fish rate as 5 out of 10. In Key West dove with reef raiders. Put us on with snorkelers and took us to two shallow (less than 20 feet) locations. Reef sucked and diving sucked. Would not recommend this outfit. Did two tanks with

Southpoint Divers. First dive Joe's tug at 65' poor reef marginal wreck vis about 20-30' second dive at shallow reef 20-25 feet. Bad coral and not much fish. Then up to Looe Key with Looe key divers. Three tanks; first on A Busch at 90' vis about 20' but nice finally to get some depth. Next two dives in Looe Key Sanctuary. Fair reef and vis 20'. Would recommend Southpoint, Aquanuts and Looe Key but not Reef Raiders. It seems like the diving in the keys is either 20-25' or greater than 60'. Is there nothing between 35-50'? **(Looe Key: 800-942-5397, 305-872-2215; Reef Raiders 305-293-9611)**

**Inner Space Dive Center, Big Pine; Abyss Dive Center, Marathon; Tavernier Dive Center, Tavernier; John Pennecamp Dive Center, Key Largo. La Concha Holiday Inn, Key West; Gulf View Motel, Marathon; Frank's Key Haven Lodge, Tavernier, June 2000, Jerry and Lynn Mountjoy ), Granite Bay, CA.** Vis: 25 to 40 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy surge currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Any dive restrictions: Up at 600/700 lbs. or 60 minutes. Began at Key West and worked our way back to Key Largo, staying at several resorts and using several dive centers: Inner Space, Big Pine. Boat too cramped for four divers. Captain's main role was to ask for gratuities. DM okay. Wouldn't use them again. Abyss (Marathon) and Tavernier (Tavernier) were quality operations, as was John Pennecamp's dive operation. We would use any of these three again. Hotels/lodges: The classy La

Concha Holiday Inn is right in the middle the old section. Neat place. Both the Gulf View Motel in Marathon and Frank's Key Haven Lodge are owner-operated and set-up for divers. They are both maintained-well, are reasonably priced, and have kitchenettes. Dive sites: they reported clarity better for the upper keys but we didn't find it so. Typical vis was 25-30', about the same as the average depth (25-30'). Surge and current ranged from mild to very strong, and wave action ranged from 2-4' (most dives) to 4-8' (last dives). Florida is taking strong action to preserve the ecosystem and captains and DM's strongly support it. Like elsewhere, they're a day late and so a lot of the coral we saw is already dead or seriously damaged. But at least they've started and seem serious about it. From what we saw and what other divers told us, there are an abundance and great variety of fish on the reefs. Reefs we dove included Looe Key (25' d, 25' vis, rate ok), End of Night (50' d, 40' vis, rate good), Hens and Chickens (20' d, 25' vis, rate ok), Margarites Ledge (65' d, 30- 0' vis, rate good), Davis Reef and Molasses Reef (25' d, 25' vis, rate probably good, but very strong currents kept us from venturing far). Did no boat dives or night dives because of poor visibility (per dive center recommendations). Maybe it was just a bad ten days. We're glad we went, but likely won't return. **(Abyss 305-451-6030; Tavernier Dive Center 800-787-9797, 305-852-4007; Fax 305-852-0869; Pennekamp Coral Reef Park: 305-451-6322)**

# Islamorada

**Lady Cyana Divers, April 2000, José Kirchner, Carmichael CA.** Vis 25 - 40 ft two days after extensive rains/flooding, partly cloudy, breezes, water temps. 76° F., near flat calm, some strong currents. Restrictions: Recreational dive limits, stay with/ascend with buddy, back with 500 psi. No rush on dive times. Wreck penetrations for properly certified only. Adequate briefings. A REEF field station, hospitable, well-run. Waivers signed, c-cards and logs examined at check in, cards retained until check-out. Scubapro rental gear, full tanks, Nitrox, range of instruction services. Dive guides available on demand. Two boats: large, stable utilitarian Lady Cyana III (smaller capable Lady Cyana IV) with all safety equipment, drinking water onboard, cabin and shelter, head, good ladders and dive deck layout; capable crew. Giant stride out gate amidships. Camera gear can be stored below decks, dedicated dunk tank on board (no dedicated camera tables). Lots of fish life in SPAs (protected no-take areas)- plentiful nurse sharks, morays, turtles, etc. and interesting topography. Dive sites also include wrecks of the Duane, Bibb and Eagle. Good shallow sites for second dives. AM or PM two tank boat dive \$40. Packages including lodging available. Everything easily arranged in advance via Internet (or phone, fax). Good dive operation, decent and varied diving. We were impressed longtime Keys diving denizen best known as "Crawdaddy" chooses to dive with Lady Cyana. Bustling "Fish House" restaurant in

nearby Key Largo best seafood in area- (but their Key lime pie not their best dish). 80 miles from Miami International airport. **(Lady Cyana Divers, Mileage Marker 85.9 / P.O. Box 1157, Islamorada, FL 33036. 800-221-8717 - or local: 305-664-8717, e-mail: ladycyana@ladycyana.com, web www.ladycyana.com)**

**Lady Cyana Divers, Lime Tree Bay Resort, May 2000, Steven W, Carey, Piscataway, NJ.** Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 74 to 77 F, choppy. Dive restrictions: Buddies in and out together, 500 psi back to the boat. High quality operation; everyone there seems to enjoy working together and is interested in the customers enjoying themselves. The keys can be very spotty in conditions and these folks let you know that seas and vis changes without putting a down on the trip. They will run the boat with only 2 people! Boats are in reasonable shape even if not pretty. Plenty of assistance is available without interference. Compared with some I've seen, this operation has it all over them. I will return there when in the keys. Lime Tree Bay Resort is about 16 miles south of Lady Cyana. I stay there whether or not I'm diving (for about 20 years). It's not fancy, but has a variety of accommodations, including cottages, efficiencies, motel rooms, etc. Pool, hot tub and dock on premises. It's a quiet place and has a lot of families staying there.

**Lady Cyana, June 2000, Capt. Jim Davis, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL.** So

what happens when your tank and reg fall to the deck of the boat on the way to the dive site and the reg yoke is bent? (Not the fault of the crew). If you are diving with Lady Cyana in the Florida keys, which we were, the DM lets you use their spare they carry on board. We have dived with Lady Cyana a few times and every time is enjoyable. Gloria Teague, the owner, chief cook and bottle washer among her other duties, as a great staff and reminds them that their number one business is keeping the customer happy.

**Rainbow Reef Dive Center (MM849 Islamorada), April 2000, Scott Greenhall, Forked River, NJ.** We've dove in many areas with many operations and found Rainbow Reef to be among the best. New owners, Greg and Sue, run a great, small operation. Capt. Dave friendly and knowledgeable. Small boat holds approx. 10 divers and super clean. Will also give 'buddy passes' to dive other locations if needed. We dove 7 days, 14 dives and never returned to the same place. Great reefs from 20' to 70'. Also dove the eagle at 100'. Saw abundant tropicals, many nurse sharks, morays, lobster, grouper, snook. The topper was a manta ray, a turtle and a hammerhead. An added bonus was sodas, oreos, and fruit available after dives, compliments of the staff. Nice shop, training, rentals, etc. (800-457-4354, 305-664-4600; Fax 305-852-0850)

Key Largo

**Amoray (Amy Slates), July 2000, Bob Lamb (Kavadiver1@aol.com) Tinley Park, IL.** Vis: 15-50 ft. Water:

85 degrees. Dive restrictions: Very shallow, just 1 hr bottom limit. The dive staff is great. Tried to dive the Duane, but the mooring balls were submerged due to very strong current. Saw one manta (6—1/2 ft) by the Tonawanda wreckage, lots of nurse sharks, barracudas and some huge schools of minnows. As usual, Goliath, the huge green moray, was hanging out at the Benwood. (800-426-6729, 305-451-3595; Fax 305-453-9516)

**Amoray Dive Resort, August 2000, Rob Michaels, Andover, MA.** Vis: 40-50 ft. Water: 86 degrees. Dive restrictions: 110 ft., one hour back on boat. My whole family dives and we travel with my brother and his family and father and mother who also dive. Dive boats were right next to our very good accommodations. Drawback to the Keys: long boat rides to the reefs (30-45 min. or more).

**Aquanuts, Kelly's on the Bay, January 2000, Jeanette and Kathi Raver, Tijeras, NM.** Vis: 25-40 ft. Water: 72-74 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: time. Excellent overall operation. Accommodations and dive boat were simply wonderful and an excellent staff. Wish we had gone here for the whole week and not wasted our time in Key West. (800-226-0415; 305-451-1622; Fax 305-451-4623)

**Aquanuts, Kelly's on the Bay, March 2000, Linda/Jim Hersey, Waldorf, MD.** Vis: 20-40 ft. Water: 72-74 degrees. Could dive own profile

within established constraints: return to boat within 1 hour window or @500 psi, whichever occurred first (most dive sites. We planned this 6-day dive trip to provide my recently OW certified son with an intensive dive experience in good vis/warm water...it certainly met the mark! Dive, Dive, Dive, eat, sleep, repeat. Kelly's/Aqua-nuts is an outstanding operation. Rooms are relatively small (Florida Keys style) but adequate. Continental breakfast was great for pre dive carbos. The 30-foot dive boat was a spacious pleasure. No moos here... it was never more than 1/2 full. Dive briefings were excellent, to the point, and information filled. Captain Bob gave accurate site descriptions, current predictions and recommended compass bearings to get the most enjoyment out of each dive. He and Divemaster Eddie were always most helpful, and did their best to fill dive site requests. They conducted a post dive roll call religiously after each dive (A good practice, possibly tightened procedures due a couple of divers recently being left overnight?) Mid day turnaround between trips was brief, so the crew ordered our choice for lunch by phone from the boat.

**Aqua-Nuts, Kelly's On The Bay, May 2000, June Webb, Laurel, MD.**

Vis: 80-90 ft. Water: 79-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: 60 ft unless OWA Diver. Great waterfront resort, great crew, great boats. You can walk out your front cabin door, have breakfast at their open center restaurant, grab your gear and walk own to the dock where the crew is waiting to help you

with your gear and load it onto the boat. The crew is very helpful with diving gear and the change over for 2nd dive. Divemaster very knowledgeable about currents, reefs and sea life. Divemaster advised us that the currents were very strong on "Molasses Reef" however, once down about 55-60 feet, saw beautiful coral, large fish, turtles, no sharks, some eels. The current carried you along with no effort on your part. Had 5 great days of two tank dives and one night dive. Aqua-Nut had (2) 42' boats with twice daily departures and scheduled night dives. Once back on dock crew had rinse tanks ready for your gear. The dive shop works hard to make sure you have a good dive day. Great restaurant right next to Kelly's. Food is delicious and reasonably priced. There are a lot of other restaurants farther down the road, but you do need a car to get to them. The cabins are very clean with T.V.

**Divers City, April 2000, J.P. Davis.**

Vis: 40-50 ft. Water: 77 degrees. Divers City is at Mile Marker 104 in Key Largo. This is a full-service dive shop staffed by incredibly-knowledgeable, friendly and helpful folks. Their dive boat (wide-beam; capacity of 14 divers MAX) has all necessary equipment in case of emergency, and the divers are briefed on what this equipment is and where to find it. These folks impress on each diver the need to be aware of the reef and its inhabitants. They ask where the divers would like to go, what they would like to do or see (photos or lobstering or drift diving, etc.). They use steel tanks and are careful to see that each diver is

weighted properly. They also provide Nitrox (\$5 extra per tank). If the conditions at a particular chosen site are questionable, one divemaster plunged in to check out current, vis, surge, etc. If conditions are not conducive to having a safe and pleasant dive, an alternate site is decided upon. Divers get a very good briefing of the dive site — what to look for, what to be careful of, etc. When the boat returns to the dock, the staff takes all the gear back to the dive shop and sees that it is rinsed carefully and is hung up to dry. They return the gear to the boat on the next day's dive. Each diver has only to don skins or wetsuits, slip into BC's/tanks and just enjoy the diving. Air temp was 84 degrees, water temp was 77 degrees. Seas ran from 1-3 feet. Vis was 40-50'. We dove "The Elbow" (surge was VERY strong), Molasses Reef (two different sites here) and the Benwood Wreck, plus a drift dive on French Reef and a night dive on the Benwood Wreck (HUGE, beautiful green moray eel). I like the fact that they are not a "party boat," and I enjoy the benefits of their expertise on dive sites and what can be found there. We stayed at Island Bay Resort, not a new place but is very clean and comfortable. The kitchens are very small and not well-stocked with utensils, pots and pans, etc., but we made do quite well. There is a small beach there with a dock. There are picnic tables and grills for each room. It's location is Mile Marker 92.5 in Tavernier. **(800-649-4659, 305-451-4554; Fax 305-451-5251)**

**HMS Minnow, March 2000, David Lindaman, Kansas City, MO.** (dwindaman@mailcity.com.) Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 72-74 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: back on board with 500 psi. Capt. Jeff Jarvis, owner operator of the HMS Minnow, is very professional, friendly and safety conscious. He gave very thorough briefing and was very patient with new divers while guiding the experienced divers to more challenging targets. He helped with numerous gear problems, even lending his own when a hose went bad at sea. His vessel is a very nice six pack, much more economical and enjoyable than the large operations that drop up to thirty divers at a time and charge you in advance with no refunds even for bad weather. Contact Jeff and his most excellent first mate Betty at: Mr. Jeff Jarvis P.O. Box 1104 Key Largo, FL 33037 USA Telephone (305)451-7834 Toll Free (800)366-9301 Fax (305)453-0819 <http://www.hmsminnow.com> **(Telephone: 800-366-9301 or 305-451-7834; Fax: 305-453-0819; e-mail: hmsminnow@msn.com)**

**HMS Minnow, March 2000. Gary Cowden, Kansas City, MO.** Vis: 35 to 60 ft. Water: 74 degrees, choppy. We all had computers and were allowed to base our dives on them; be on the boat w/500 psi. Jeff Jarvis runs a 'six pack' dive boat from the canal behind the Holiday Inn. Our group consisted of 3 divers, with experience levels of a recently certified first-timer, a seven-year veteran with approx. 150 dives and a 10+ year veteran with more than 300 dives. Jeff treated



everyone on the boat with genuine interest and concern for their safety and tried to provide the best dives possible. We did 9 dives in 3 days, including 6 reef dives and 1 wreck dive (Benwood) of less than 60 ft. and 2 105' dives on the Duane. Saw a variety of fish life and morays and spotted eels, stingrays, lemon sharks, large crabs and lots of lobsters. We were all very pleased with the H.M.S. Minnow.

**HMS Minnow, May 2000, Nick Pastushan, Salem, NY.** Vis: 75 ft. Water: 77-79 degrees. We flew into Fort Lauderdale and drove down to Key West. Thanks to some reports in *Undercurrent*, we chose to dive with the HMS Minnow. 6 pack boat, friendly, helpful owner/captain. He met our requests for deep morning dives so we could see the Duane and the outer part of the reef. We will not dive with anyone else in Key Largo, highly recommended. Duane; mild current made for a very enjoyable dive. Kept at main deck level (105') or higher to max the bottom time. Real nice wreck dive, especially liked the orange cup corals growing on the port side amidships one deck above the main deck. Molasses reef best reef dive of the trip, a good amount of live coral and some nice sponges and lots of tropicals. Afternoon dives were 30' reef dives. One highlight was a nurse shark swimming by my head. Second day was only a 2-dive day as the boat was booked for the afternoon. Did the Duane in the morning because the mooring was off the Bibb. Much stronger current that day, burned a good amount of air getting down to

the ship and to the superstructure area where we were sheltered. Saw 2 large sharks by the stern on descent. Stuck to the middle of the ship where the current wasn't so bad. Saw lots of fish in the bridge and around the masts, and drifted back and caught the mooring line at 85'. At this point we saw other divers descending. The first 2 passed us as we were going up, but did not look happy with the current. By the time we were at 30', we could see that those 2 had aborted and were coming back up as the rest of the cattleboat was coming down. Here are the 2 of us approaching our safety stop with our other 4 divers starting up the line, the 2 divers aborting and passing us for the second time and 14 other divers coming down the line, what a mess! One descending diver had a fin buckle pop loose and was carrying the fin down with him to repaired it out of the current. We got bumped around a lot by all of the divers going up and down over us. Heard the next morning that some master instructor and divemaster guys thought they could leave the line and swim the last bit of the descent, missed the ship and were retrieved halfway to Molasses reef in the afternoon trip. Second dive at French reef featured a Jewfish. Third day was amazing, on the first dive, a deeper drift outside Molasses reef, 20 Eagle rays right below me. Barrel sponges were spawning. The second dive had another group of 5 rays and one huge solitary one. Third dive was on the Benwood wreck where I found a real big nurse shark sitting under the deck plates. The last dive's highlight was a

turtle. Holiday Inn was surprisingly good, and Snook's Bayside is a nice place to have dinner and watch the sunset.

**HMS Minnow, Holiday Inn, July 2000, Robert, Manassas, Va.** Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm no currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Return to the boat with 500 lbs. Excellent tank setup. Made for easy equipment change between dives. They provided ice water and a cooler for lunches. We could choose the location we wanted to dive. Captain Jeff Jarvis was very courteous, and thorough on his briefings. We had problems with our regulator so they lent us one at no charge. When we returned from our dive Jeff had fixed ours. Weather was great.

**Island Reef Diver, June 2000, Kathy Riddle, Enon, OH.** Vis: 40'-60' Water: choppy Be back on the boat with 500 psi. HMS Minnow full so they referred me to another 6-pack, Island Reef Diver. Staff helpful with directions, rental equipment was topnotch, and boat clean and well organized. Capt. Skip took just my husband and me out for the 2 tank afternoon to Molasses and French Reefs and then again for a night dive. Small operation working hard to compete with the cattle boats. [www.islandreefdiver.com](http://www.islandreefdiver.com) 305/453-9456.

**It's A Dive, Marriott Key Largo, April 2000, Kyle Kutach, Peachtree City, GA.** Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F, choppy. Dive restrictions: 1 hour or 500 psi remaining. PADI 5-star shop associated with the Marriott

resort. Dive operation is absolutely first-class. Large diving barge (Sea Star) is modern and well-equipped with marine head, O<sub>2</sub>, coolers stocked with soft drinks and can handle up to 30 divers. Separate rinse tanks provided for cameras and other gear, dip tanks sufficiently large to accommodate video rigs. First dives included my wife's group of 7 OW students, another group of 5 advanced students, and about 15 "fun" divers, and an assortment of snorkelers. Boat was crowded (max capacity) making it difficult to gear up and suit up. Crew is experienced, personable, and answered any questions. Most dives are about 35 feet, viz was quite good. Abundant and wide variety of sea life (more barracuda than I've ever seen), coral formations (both spur and groove and patch) small compared with what I've seen elsewhere, but in very good condition. Dive on the Benwood wreck is excellent...an UW photographer's dream. On night dive, crew brought fried chicken and sandwiches for the divers. Resort is very nice, rooms are comfortable but lack accommodations for hanging and drying wetsuits and room cleaning service leaves much to be desired. The dive shop provides rinse tanks for equipment and lockers so you don't have to lug your equipment back to your room. Restaurants are quite good but a bit pricey. Personnel from the dive shop itself are a bit surly and the dive shop is basic and small and more of a t-shirt shop than anything else, but other dive stores in the immediate area make up for it. **(Telephone: 800-934-8377 or 800-809-9881 or 305-453-**

9881 or 305-451-2377; Fax: 305-453-0093)

**It's A Dive, August 2000, John Stuart, St. Joseph, MO.** Vis: 40-100 ft. Water: 84-86 degrees. Back on the boat in one hour or 500 psi. Located at the Key Largo Marriott MM 103. The owners and staff are professional and very customer oriented. They have 3 boats of differing size to meet a variety of diving needs. Family diving does not get any better than this.

**Paradise Charters, January 2000, Kathleen Fenton, Stony Brook, NY.** Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 73 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: one hour. I was attracted to Paradise Charters by the "six diver max" promise on their website. They were true to their word. Their boat is fast, comfortable and new with cold drinks (juice, water, soda) and fresh water showers. They detailed dive briefings were complete and not too long. The surface interval was too short (I was cold on the second dive) but the rough water may have influenced this. (800-921-5549, 305-453-0909; 305-453-4307)

**Quiescence, Largo Lodge, May 2000, Terry Hansen (wloquasto@bigfoot.com), Tallahassee, FL.** Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 1 hour and 500 psi. Dive operation is a 6 pak with on site repair facilities best I've found in keys. Nitrox is available and fill area is clean enough to "eat off." Boats not new but more than adequate. Captain takes you to

noncrowded places and due to size of boat can anchor if needed. Staff is willing to accommodate. Good for budding photographers to practice on lobsters in various hole, morays, and small to medium fish. Dived with these people for 5 years and keep going back. Largo Lodge is 6 duplex bungalow style lodge, bayside with great dock to watch sunsets. Rooms are clean, vintage 60s with 2 double beds, living room, kitchenette, and shower only bath. AC is in wall and NO phones (great), cable TV. Great place to get away from the crowd. Rose the owner is an interesting lady. (Ph: 305-451-2440)

**Quiescence, Marina Del Mar Bayside, July 2000, Ray Mars (marsrp@earthlink.net), Scaggsville, MD.** Vis: 25 to 40 Feet. Water: 85 to 88 F, choppy surge. Restrictions: 500 lbs. and 55 minutes but were liberal if you had air left. 3 days of diving and 4 nights hotel accommodations set up through Quiescence. Hotel and Dive operation were great. No Divemaster on dives but boat captain, Ron, gave good dive briefing and made sure everyone had buddy. Did allow solo diving if comfortable with you. Nitrox available. Tanks full, some more than 3000. Used compact 80s that reduced the weight needed. Kept cameras on padded engine compartment and advised other divers but not strictly. No rinse tank on boat but used freshwater sprayer to hose off after came out. Adequate freshwater rinse. Only put 6 people on boat so plenty of room. Switch tanks for you after you

get out of the water. You load and unload tanks from short walk at end of the dock but not a problem. Visibility was down but still great trip. Boat captain kept same folks on boat so no duplication of dive sites. Saw many Nurse Sharks on several dives and huge Green Moray on one wreck. Short sit intervals due to shallow depths. Got to 45 feet on one dive and that was unusual. Most are 25-30 feet. Boat leaves about 9:15 am and usually back by 12:30 or 1:00. Hotel accommodations fine and price was reasonable. Available at dockside.

**Sea Dwellers, Island Reef Divers, Ocean Divers, Holiday Inn, Jason S. Maddox, Hebron, KY.** July and August 2000. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 84-85 degrees. Dive restrictions: one hour dive, return with 500 or 700 to boat, 1/2 way through dive, check boat's location. July 2000: Dove a total of 4 dives with Sea Dwellers (2 2-tank trips). Nice boat, well equipped for divers. Not a cattle boat in our opinion. "Action" seat at rear of boat is better than trying to walk that far with fins on. Marine life was good at all 4 sites (varied sites on French and Molasses). Saw 2 green morays (both 4-5 ft long), several hawksbill turtles, midnight blue parrotfish, rock beautys, all kinds of angelfish, and barracuda on every dive. Was very surprised at the good condition of the reefs and the variety of marine life. July — Did a night dive with Island Reef Divers in Key Largo. Not far from the Holiday Inn at Mile Marker 100. Holiday Inn is a little pricey for what you get. The boat was smaller, but sufficient for the

5 divers that went out. Dove Twin Sisters - was a great choice for a night dive. Depth on all these dives did not exceed 45 feet. At twin Sisters saw a stingray (5 ft across), many smaller stingrays, lobster, crabs, and passed within a couple inches of a sleeping hawksbill turtle (smiled enough to make my mask leak). Also saw a spotted moray, but he would not come out of his hole after he saw me. Dive operation was professionally run and smaller than Sea Dwellers but very competent. They expressed concern with the environment and reminded a diver in the group to stay off the bottom and not touch coral. Also let my wife borrow a wetsuit (free) when she forgot hers. Tugboat Joes is a lot cheaper place to grab dinner than the restaurant next to this operator. Tugboat's is across the street. August — Did a few dives with Sea Dwellers. Saw a good sized spotted eagle ray on one dive and the standard fare of critters: barracuda, lobster, snapper, etc. No morays. Did a night dive with Ocean Divers. They typically don't go out for less than 4 divers, but they took 3 of us out on their 46' Newton. Staff was competent and helpful. DAN first aid kit was visible and easily accessible. Stingrays (smaller — 9-12 in across), a squid, spotted moray, and some crabs. Dove pickles reef on this dive. Ocean Divers did have a camera table and separate rinse tanks. Shower with shampoo + conditioner. Sea Dwellers and Ocean Divers seem to be geared to larger groups of divers whereas Island Reef Divers seems to be best-suited to smaller ones. (Ph: 305-451-3640)

Key West

**Captains Corner, Harbor Inn Key West, June 2000, Denise Krol, Southampton, PA.** Vis: 50 to 60 ft. Water: 82 to 84 degrees. Asked around before going to Key West to dive and was told it was good diving. Coral was in poor shape all around. Dove the Cayman Salvage Master; told it had a 1 knot current. It was more like 4 knots. Saw 1 barracuda and 1 permit and a school of blue striped grunts. That was about it. Overall, fish life was minimal; saw 4 lobsters, 1 moray eel more than 4 dives. Very disappointing dive trip. Boat crew of Captain's Corner very nice and helpful. Dive shop another story. People at the shop were not a friendly lot. They actually asked us to leave because they were busy cleaning screens on an outside porch. We had some questions about the dives beforehand and they had no time to answer any of them. Dive shop has little booths around town where you sign up for the dive boats. The people manning these booths are not a good source of dive info. Told everyone one morning that dive visibility was about 100 to 125 ft. Got on the boat and the captain says vis. is about 60-65 ft. Key West can be a fun place but don't go there to dive. You will be very disappointed. (305-294-5863; Fax 305-296-1271)

**Captain's Corner, Joann Kansier, Silver Spring, MD.** Have been a faithful subscriber to your publication and never envisioned complaining. It is hard for me not to react to your September 2000 "bum trips." Differ-

ent people have a variety of experiences and would have left it at that until I got to your depiction of Captains Corner as Scam. They are a PADI 5 STAR dive operation. Both my Husband and I received our Advanced Open Diver Certifications with them. We have been back 3 times, for a total of approximately 15 dives and have always found them friendly, accommodating and professional. The fact that they have a kiosk, and a shop with a private swimming pool, does not make an operation a scam. I also do not believe that someone giving an estimate on visibility one day, which is not as good the next day qualifies as having a "bum" trip. May all my trips be at 60-65 ft. vis. I hope you will publish this rebuttal. Captain's Corner has been an extremely proficient dive operation on every occasion we have dealt with them. Although I can understand someone being disappointed when offered 125 ft. vis, the name calling in your publication was excessive and unwarranted.

**Dive Key West, Southernmost Motel, February 2000, Clare Petosa, Summit, N.J.** Vis: 25 to 40 feet. Water: 70 to 72 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile. Restrict time on wreck dive. The staff of the dive shop was amazingly helpful. Knowledgeable and safety conscious. Key West diving itself is not terribly exciting and were there more for the topside activities than anything else. (Telephone: 800-426-0707 or 305-296-3823; Fax: 305-296-0607)

**Key West Dive Center, February 2000, David Austin, Ontario, NY.**

Vis: 40 to 50 ft. Water: 70 to 75 degrees, choppy, strong currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: none. All around a good trip. (800-873-4837, 305-294-7177; Fax 305-294-7612)

**Southpoint, March 2000, Larry Johnsen, Le Claire, IA.**

Vis: 10-25 ft. Water: 76-78 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Bottom time was limited to accommodate the boat's schedule. This is a cattle boat operation on a tight schedule. Forget diving your profile. Cayman Salvager wreck site was limited to 20 minutes bottom time, Nitrox or not (although they did try to get the Nitrox divers in first). Their schedule limited second morning dive time, bottom time,. They had to be ready for the 2 p.m. dive run. An experienced diver would lose about an hour of dive time in the morning. No variety. They have two primary wreck sites for a first dive and then followed by a shallow reef dive. The staff is friendly, experienced and very helpful. These are great people working for someone trying to cram as many people as possible on a dive boat. Is a very nice boat. Stayed at the La Concha Holiday Inn. Good but not great. (800-891-3483, 305-892-9778, 305-292-9778; Fax 305-296-6888)

**Southpoint Divers, August 2000, Lee and Stacey Monsein (lhm2@erols.com), Washington, DC.**

Vis: 10 to 20 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 20 minutes at 60 feet, 60 minutes at 20

feet. The Hyatt is pricey but has an excellent location for sightseeing, has superb accommodations, and has Southpoint Divers on site. The Casa Marina is a grand old hotel in a quiet residential neighborhood but is a long walk from sightseeing. Southpoint divers positives: Nice guys (esp. Chip, Mark, and Eric), very prompt, very helpful in the boat, great location. Negatives: "The only jet drive boats in the USA" was misleading. Their only boat was being repaired so a slow, smelly, prop diesel was used. The dive staff and a few guests were spearfishing on the dives with us. At one point a spear gun was aimed at us. The dive staff was too "time oriented." The boat was never half full but they rushed us in and out of the water. They chewed out one pair for being 10 minutes late because they were disoriented. Before heading back after each pair of dives, we got a lecture about how our "generosity" (ie. tips) was "necessary to allow the dive staff to continue" since "us tourists had made Key West such an expensive place to live." Little assistance in the water. We were fortunate to have a super instructor in training (Adam) volunteer to help us without us asking.

**Subtropic, January 2000, Jeanette and Kathi Raver, Tijeras, NM.**

Vis: 25-40 ft. Water: 72-74 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: time. Boat crew was very nice and friendly. Rough water was hard on everyone. Back on shore, the shower was very cold, no refund on unused Nitrox tanks, we (two women) were locked out of the store in the dark while the staff

bullshitted inside and we had to change into dry clothes in an alley. We won't bother them again, ever. (888-461-3483, 305-296-9916; Fax 305-296-9918)

**Subtropic Diving, Key West, February 2000, Mark Rosing (rosingm@yahoo.com), New Rochelle, NY.** Vis: 15 to 50 Feet. Water: 55 to 70 F choppy surge. Dive restrictions: Short time limits, could use hardly any air. Came up with up to 1200 psi. Poor conditions, poor vis, poor planning, short dives, shorter intervals, cold. Got buddied inappropriately with diver without enough weight and spent the whole (shallow so couldn't overcome buoyancy for too long) dive pulling her down. Wasted dive, wasted money, no attempt by operation to compensate.

#### Marathon

**Never Enough Charters, Wellesley Inn, May 2000, Paul Schilter, (PSCHILTER@aol.com), Rochester Hills, MI.** Vis: 10-50 ft. Water: 79-81 degrees. Max depth was 30 feet (bottom). Dove with Capt. Banny upon rec. scuba locations recommendations. \$50/ day hotel was good. Only four divers on 22 ft. Cris Craft. Good first time experience. We left from behind Wellesley Motel. Marathon area has good restaurants and bars for entertainment. (305-743-7265; Fax 305-743-8156)

#### Tavernier

**Conch Republic Divers, February 2000, Gregory Scott Schneid,**

(icurok@midlink.com) Indianapolis, IN. Vis: 15 to 35 ft. Water: 73 to 76 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 500 psi. Very nice dive operation. (800-274-3483; 305-852-1655; Fax 305-852-1655)

**Conch Republic Divers, Bay Breeze Motel, March 2000, Greg Stevenson (gregory\_stevenson@praxair.com), Amherst, N.Y.** Water: 70 to 73 degrees, 1-2 ft. seas. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. limit; must dive with a buddy. Bay Breeze Motel excellent, low key, lush, secluded grounds; nice pool and small beach food for snorkeling; saw fish, including juvenile barracuda and 2.5 foot long scrawled filefish under dock. Motel clean and quiet. Conch Republic Divers: a very good operation, but was undergoing change in ownership. New owner messed up registration for one afternoon dive and they bumped me. It wouldn't have been a big deal but I had rented an u/w for the day and missed out on 2 dives of video opportunity. To make matter worse, the afternoon group ended up at the USCG Duane where they saw a 30-foot whale shark. I could have been on that trip, and I was furious. No compensation offered, but then again I didn't ask for any. Dove Davis Reef (S.P.A.), swarming with fish but coral is mostly dead; great day dive but poor night dive. On 3 dives on Davis saw 2 nurse sharks swimming, 2 large green morays swimming, several in crevices, and one green sea turtle. Dove Conch Ledge -drift dive- Crocker Ledge, the Elbow. Only 2 or 3

large black and Nassau grouper; evidence of heavy fishing; lots of grunts, snapper, balloon fish, sergeant majors, parrotfish, large barrel, vase and tube sponges. Coral is healthy in half the places, dead in the other half. We chose to charter the smaller boat, 6 passenger max, other boat carries 24. Capt. Dave is excellent. Very knowledgeable, helpful and courteous. Gave as much as little assistance as you needed. Never rushed or babied us. Heads on both boats did not work. This was highly annoying; it's anyone's guess when they'll be fixed. For advanced divers only; strong currents and deep dive 100 ft.+. Dove the USCGC Duane-excellent fish life, but little growth on wreck, probably due to divers climbing around on it. Saw schools of barracuda hanging in current. Jack's darted around the wreck and us; saw turtle at depth. In blue water, vis was 100 ft. +. Dave dropped us a stern mooring ball and we descended, drifted along wreck, and ascended bow mooring line where Dave met us. No fighting the current and saved our air for dive; excellent dive.

**Conch Republic Divers/Lady Cyana Divers, Chesapeake Resort, June, 2000, Kathy Riddle, Enon, OH.** Vis: 40'-60' Water: choppy w/ surge, about 80 degrees. Be back on the boat with 500 psi. Crew stays with boat and no divemasters are diving unless you hire them. Stayed at the Chesapeake Resort, which was beautiful and expensive (\$150/night for basic room). Every amenity you can think of, but after a full day of

diving you are too tired to use. Had planned on diving for four days with Conch Republic Divers upon recommendations in *Chapbook*, but due to scheduling misunderstanding could not dive with them our first afternoon there. Jennifer went to great lengths to get us on another boat for the afternoon dives and then Conch Republic took just 3 of us for a night dive. We dove the afternoon with Lady Cyana. It was full with 28 divers but after the initial chaos of getting on and geared up things settled down. Helpful staff got us in and out of the water with no difficulty and the diving was typical Keys. Well organized and safety conscious. After those dives we were back with Conch Republic and they have earned their #1 rating in *Rodale's*. The boat captains were knowledgeable, very helpful, and cheerful. Geared dive sites to level of experience on the boat. The most divers we had were 8 and usually just 3-6 which made for a very comfortable boat. Rental equipment was good and well maintained. They gave us a bin and hangers to store our gear at the store overnight. The diving was ok with a couple of outstanding ones. Hurricanes have done their damage and the corals have silt and areas of rubble, but the fish life is prolific. Diving the Duane was an exciting initiation into pennant diving with huge barracuda and amberjacks. The dive at Davey Crocker was 20'-30' with several nurse sharks, one reef shark, a turtle, and literally thousands of schoolmasters, grunts and snappers that formed a beautiful rolling canopy



of yellow and white over our heads. Numerous midnight and blue parrotfish. Chesapeake Resort: mm 83.5 800/338-3395. Conch Republic Divers mm 90.8, phone 800/274-DIVE [www.conchrepublicdivers.com](http://www.conchrepublicdivers.com)

**Conch Republic Divers, Bay Island Resort, July 2000, Ken and Katrina Newman (knewman@surf.free.com) Waleska, GA.** Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. Dive your own profile. No limits were set. The hotel was certainly not a luxury hotel; however, it was clean, quite and comfortable at \$90/night with a kitchenette. The people and service at Conch Republic Divers were excellent! The captain took us to areas where no one else was. Part of the attraction is the drift diving along Conch Wall and shallow reefs that have an abundance of life! My wife and I wanted to do our first night dive and when no one else booked they took us out by ourselves! [www.conchrepublicdivers.com](http://www.conchrepublicdivers.com) or at 800-274-3483.

**Tavernier Boat Rental, Ocean Pointe, December 1999, Paul Jenner (pj@pjtech.com), Pompano Beach, FL.** Vis: 50 to 65 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm choppy noncurrent. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: Rented a boat and did our own diving! Ocean Pointe resort is in Tavernier Key in the beautiful Florida Keys. We rented a boat and docked it at the marina at the resort. Dock master was very helpful for dive sites and conditions. We had an excellent weekend of diving on the beautiful

Florida Keys wrecks and reefs. We dove the wreck *Eagle* and the reefs Molasses, Conch, and Davis. We highly recommend this resort to divers wanting to stay in the middle Florida Keys.

**Tavernier Dive Center, July 2000, Stewart Kaslow, Maplewood, NJ.** Vis: 50 to 80 ft. Water: 82 to 84 degrees, calm and flat. Dive restrictions: 500 lbs. on boat. A camera only rinse bucket was provided and two buckets for masks, with a no fog solution. Boat was comfortable, tanks on board with your name; Captain and divemasters were safety conscious, downlines, and trail lines in the water. They required Buddy pairs. Pre-dive briefings were accurate and good. Although boat held 24, it was never full and there was plenty of room and time. Nitrox a small additional fee. You could dive your computer, only request was not to exceed decompression limits. When current was stiff, they brought our floats and lines and let groups of 2 or 4-dive with adequate instruction. Dove the *Eagle*, and different reefs and ledges every day. They track the locations so they don't repeat locations for the divers. There was drinking water, a cooler for all, and fresh water showers. Saw sharks, nurse and hammerhead, tarpon, barracuda, eels, green spotted, and golden, lobster Caribbean and shovel nose, coral crabs, and shrimp. Also saw all the usual suspects, angels blue, French, queen and grey. Boat leaves at 8:30 am and 1 pm, café next door opens for breakfast at 6:30 am. (Ph: 305-852-4007)

**Miami**

**H<sub>2</sub>O Scuba, April 2000, Guy Johnson, (siberia@netexpress.net), Coal Valley, Illinois.** Vis: 25 to 35 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, choppy. This was on the famed "wreck trek" off Miami, Florida. The first dive was on a small tugboat. The briefing was nothing more than a look at a hand-drawn sketch of the area. Once in the water we followed the mooring line down to the wreck sitting at 60 ft. The vis was poor with lots of matter in the water. Nothing but vast white sand surrounded the wreck. Lots of small fish on the wreck and simple penetrations was fun. The next dive was a more northern reef dive. Again the vis was poor but still lots of small fish. The reef itself was somewhat dead but full of nooks and crannies. The boat was small and a bit full with 13 divers and their gear. I was a little concerned to see another diver in the group with a speargun! Not a big deal but I was a little concerned for the two brand-new divers, a husband and wife, about wounded/bleeding fish in the water with such poor vis! The guys at the dive shop were great but the ones on the boat seemed more like they were just going through the motions. Next time I'd book with a dive operation closer to the sites. **(305-956-3483, 305-861-6873; Fax 305-956-9405)**

**Panama City**

**Hydrospace, Scottish Inn, March 2000, Gary Covington, Jacksonville, FL.** Vis: 30 to 50 feet. Water: 61 to 65 degrees, calm and flat slight currents. Reader tip: Don't go to Panama City during spring break.

Even if you do find a hotel with vacancies, they will charge double what they advertise. Scottish Inn was the least expensive one close to the dive shop. The rooms showed why it was so cheap. Cobwebs in the corners, fungus in the shower and I didn't know what kind of stains was on the carpet but the sheets were clean and the mattress wasn't lumpy. Hydrospace has a great location in town with a shop on the bay and a staff that is friendly and helpful. Did two dives offshore on one of their well-maintained aluminum crew boats. Dive briefings were short but thorough and they let you dive your own profile. The fish life on the artificial reefs was incredible. Had a school of cigar minnows swimming over the wreck of the Black Bart so thick that it got dark on the bottom. Next time I'll listen to their recommendation for a hotel and not try to find one myself. **(888-874-3483; 850-234-3063)**

**Pompano Beach**

**Aqua View, August 2000, Bob Hill, Apopka, FL.** Water: 84 degrees. Conditions: sunny, some rain. Seas calm and flat, little current. The Aqua View is a flat pontoon like double-hulled boat. Can hold up to 20 divers, however well designed so did not feel cramped. Will carry divers of all level of experience — some on check out dive, others quite experienced. Will split up divers in many groups as so do not feel "cattle operation." First dive anchored on barge (part of artificial reef program). Crew member carried chum ball to sand bottom beside barge. Many large stingrays,

several nurse shark and a huge variety of fish come to the chum, swimming over, around and through the divers. Great photo opportunities. Two large Jewfish in category of 250 pounds swimming in the area but could not get real close to them. A number of large green moray free swimming around the barge and other sunken debris. Additional good video. Very enjoyable dive and what a check-out dive for a beginner! Depth was 74 feet to sand. Second dive on another reef was equally enjoyable.

**Under Pressure, August 2000, Bob Hill, Apopka, FL.** Vis: 80 ft. Water: 84 degrees. Weather: cloudy some rain and thunderstorm. Water calm and flat, little current. Well laid out 6-pack dive boat with a knowledgeable captain. Diving is drift diving on your own carrying float ball. Dive own profile. Reefs all extremely nice, in very good shape with good coral and fish life. Multiple dive sites, each as good as the others. Have no complaints about the boat, captain, or dive sites.

#### Venice

**Florida West Scuba School, June 2000, Jonathan Haraty, (jharaty@massed.net), E. Longmeadow, MA.** Vis: 10-15 ft. Water: 84-86 degrees. Steve runs a fossil dive out of his well-equipped shop. It is a six-pack boat the "Hammerhead." You dive in 24 ft of water off the Venice coast. The object is to find large prehistoric sharks teeth. We are talking 3 to 5 inch megalodon. Also fossilized mammoth teeth and

whale bones. It is a two-tank dive and the amount of small critters can become distracting (too much to see instead of looking just for teeth). Steve is a retired geologist and really puts you on some great spots.

#### Weeki Wachee Spring

**Neptune Divers, May 2000, Bruce Lewis, Park City, UT.** Vis: 150 to 200 Feet. Water: 75 F, calm currents. Dive your own profile. Depth limit — could not go into spring's mouth unless cave diver certified. About an hour's drive north of Tampa, this spring is the underwater stage for the "Mermaids" show that dates to 1949. The show is still active (though attendance was sparse on an early May weekday), so you dive around the shows. They have only allowed public diving since last fall. Spring flow is one million-plus gallons a day, all up from central vertical shaft in center of pond. Normal weighting is OK when swimming around the periphery; swim into the upwelling without going negatively buoyant and you will pop to the surface within a couple of seconds; I found the 2 extra pounds of weight, combined with venting all air from the BC when the upcurrent is felt allows one to counter it and descend into the spring opening. "Floor" is set at 40 feet; spring goes down 80-plus feet to first bend, then continues to more than 200 feet deep. During May, early afternoon sun lines up with shaft, allowing visibility all the way down to first bend. one manatee remained in the area from the two dozen or so that park operators tell us winter-over when ocean and river

temperatures drop. Manatee was friendly, curious and accustomed to divers' bubbles, directly opposite what "knowledgeable" area divers told us. He came right up and gently inspected us. Neptune Divers helpful, experienced pair of people. NITROX available by ordering ahead. Most gear available for on-site rental; Neptune will find a way to make it happen for you — they are that kind of people. If you're going to Tampa, well worth taking your dive gear (or rent some) and making the one-day side-trip.

### North Carolina

#### **Divocean Dive Center; Sundowner Motel, July 2000, Scott and Kristen Burrows; Spicewood, TX.**

We reserved the boat for our Drag Boat rescue team. They operate a 40' extra wide beamed dive boat. With the six divers they limit themselves to, it's the most comfortable boat I have been on. Our first scheduled dive day was canceled due to rain and heavy seas (4-6). This was not a problem for our group considering our 2:00 AM arrival the night before. The payoff was two days of perfect weather, high 80s and virtually no wind with water temps of 78 - 80 degrees. The entire Atlantic looked like skiing water. The first day, we cruised 2 hours to dive the Aeolus. Vis was 60-80 feet. The wreck was a 426-foot WW II troop transport ship broken into large sections by Hurricane Bonnie. Depth was 90-120 feet with a mild current. Navigation skills are important to return to the anchor line for your ascent. The wreck is so enormous that we decided to dive it

for the second dive. You could probably dive it 8 times and not see everything. The second day we asked not to travel as far because we had a 4-hour drive that evening to get to the drag boat races in High Point, NC. Owner/Operators David, Bonnie, and Gary recommended the Indra, a 320-foot carrier repair ship sunk in 1992 as an artificial reef. It's about an hour cruise in 70 feet of water with vis 40 - 60 feet. As we descended we could see nearly the entire ship along with many great barracudas. The ship was entirely intact with many points for entry and exit to allow penetration without technical equipment. There is some coral growth beginning on the upper decks that attract many varieties of smaller tropical fish. After an encounter with a territorial 6 feet + barracuda guarding one hallway inside the wreck, there was no way we weren't going to do another dive at this site as well. Using Nitrox, and the wreck having upper decks in 40 feet of water allowing good relief, made for some nice bottom times. We didn't see the resident bull shark or any of the often seen sand tiger sharks; however, we did see one very large southern stingray. The food at the area restaurants ranges from average to good and is a bit pricey but there is good variety. If you like adequate, clean, well-managed accommodations, the Sundowner Motel across the street from the dive shop fits the bill. Pay the extra \$10/ night for the kitchenette with the full size refrigerator. It's a throw back to 60s style motels and they have their own marina outside for clients with boats. I wouldn't recommend the diving

for beginners unless accompanied by a divemaster or experienced diver, especially on the deeper dives or during rougher seas. Nitrox is almost important to maximize bottom times and add safety margins on most of the deeper dives. (252-726-3575)

**Outer Banks Dive Center, Sea Fox Dive Charters, June 2000, Rick Hindle, Keyman, MD.** Sea Fox Dive Charters, Captain Herman Maddox operates out of Nag's Head independently and in cooperation with Outer Banks Dive Center, Bill McDermott, owner. Captain Maddox has fast 48' USCG inspected boat — he either takes divers out who have booked through Dive Center or you can contact him directly to set up private charter. (252) 261-9788 or [www.seafoxdivetcharters.com](http://www.seafoxdivetcharters.com) I did two tank dive with him on the Advance, a WWII wreck sitting in about 80' of water. Viz 15-25', due to storms and water temp 56°F. Large school of Spadefish, tautogs, starfish and not much else. No sharks. Capt. Maddox, his divemaster Dan and Bill McDermott of OBX Dive Center are all knowledgeable divers who are willing to accommodate almost any request. Box Dive Center-[www.obxdive.com](http://www.obxdive.com) I forgot to thank you, Ben, for providing an informative, entertaining and educational read month after month and especially at year's end with the *Chapbook*. (Rick, thanks for subscribing. I appreciate your kind words — Ben)

**Outer Banks Diving/Bayou Runner July 2000, Heidi Sheltry,**

**Centreville, VA.** Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 83 F, calm no currents. Spent 5 days diving from the Bayou Runner out of Cape Hatteras with Capt. John Pieno and Phyllis, Milton and Bart as mates. One of the best dive boat/crew/operation I have ever encountered. The boat is 42 feet long with a covered, carpeted dive deck and the cleanest head I have ever seen. The crew and the diving were consistently fabulous. All diving was "Wreck Diving" at depths ranging from 85 - 120 feet. There was an incredible amount of schooling fish of every variety and size on each dive. On the wreck of the "Mirlo" a large Manta Ray stayed with us for the entire dive! What an experience! There were 8 - 12 foot Sand Tiger Sharks on almost every dive. Saw 2 Silkie Sharks, many giant Sting Rays, huge barracudas, lots of big toad fish, Tuna, Dolphin fish and tons and tons of schooling fish. The boat rides ranged from 1-1/2 to 2-1/2 hours, but the boat was so comfortable that the distance was no problem. This was a day boat, so, there were no setup facilities for photographers. There was a dry, comfortable cabin with 2 tables where you could work with your camera. Also, a rinse bucket just for camera's was always available and the crew would hand your equipment to you after you entered the water and took the camera when you returned to the boat. I was happy with their service. No photo processing is available, but you can rent Sea Life Camera's from their dive shop. Great Trip! (Outer Banks Diving 252-986-1056)

## **South Carolina**

**May River, Island Scuba Hilton Head Island, Comfort Inn Hilton Head S.C., June 2000, Joe and Mary Maxwell, Erie, PA.** Vis: 1-2 ft.

Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: permits, tubes and flags. Search for Megalodon and whale artifacts. Nice dive operation on island. The only one! 9 foot tidal change made for exciting currents! Very low vis. Max 3-4 ft. But, for the experiences diver, the thrill of finding a 4-inch megalodon tooth at the anchor was worth it!

Imagine anything on the bottom, not sand or shale bottom, should be examined! Shore diving is doable but boat diving is better and allows more sites to dive. You must buy permit before diving or face severe fines! Rental tanks should be arranged for on arrival or sooner. Filling only occurs once a day, in late afternoon. For safety, buddy ropes, tubes and flags, a must! A dive guide, a real plus, food, entertainment, accommodations, excellent!

## **VIRGIN ISLANDS, BRITISH**

Patch reef diving on these closely-grouped islands is easy, pleasant, and fairly similar regardless of which island you choose, although the quiet British Virgins and St. John are far less crowded and more pleasant than the cruise ship havens of St. Thomas and St. Croix, where hurricanes and fishing have taken a toll. (St. Thomas was trashed by hurricanes in 1995, St. Croix a few

years earlier.) . . . BVI is a yachter's paradise with crewed or bareboat sailboats galore, and it's also served by several land-based dive operations. . . . BVI has nice little hotels, good restaurants, congenial surroundings, and British style, but readers report that residents of St. Thomas and St. Croix are often surly. . . . There's warm, pleasant weather year-round. . . .

## **Tortola**

**Baskin In The Sun, Prospect Reef Hotel, December 1999, David Steinberg and Chatten Hayes, Portland, OR.** Mostly sunny and dry with 2-3 days of wind and rain. Water; Mostly calm and flat without current; choppy and current after rain storms. Arrived just four days after Lenny had closed everything. Wetsuit: 3 mm mini wetsuit and 3 mm long diveskins. Visibility 30-40 feet and improved during our stay to 80-90 feet. Dive profile: they always offered us the option of touring with the divemasters or diving our own profile. The divemasters were delightful for experienced divers, because they gave divers credit for having brains. Baskin instructors reviewed our qualifications and observed our skills on the first dive before deciding we were capable of choosing our own profile. They requested surfacing with 500 psi., but very long dives were possible within computer limits because of the shallow waters. There are just not enough good things to say about Rainbow Visions and Jim and Odile