

seen by the odd diver from time to time. The schedule called for two dives on one site in the morning and three dives at a second site in the afternoon and night. Some sites were ho-hum; if we hadn't been anchored there, we wouldn't have done them twice. The trick is to get away from Grand Turk to Salt Caye or, preferably, South Caicos. We were there during a windy spell and the crew was reluctant to face seas of 4-6 feet to make the trip to South Caicos. One morning we woke up at 6 AM, the sea was flat, they told us we were going, but first we were going to have one morning dive. By the time we were all back on the boat at 9:30 the wind was back and we had missed our shot. We felt the crew was under orders to provide five dives a day and not to upset the guests with rolling seas. But for a two-hour crossing, we could have easily lived through a few bumps for better diving. Next time, Peter, start the bloody engines early and GO.

UNITED STATES

Florida

Ultimate Getaway, April 2000, Trey Dawson, Palm Harbor, FL. Vis: 40 to 60 ft. Water: 73 to 76 degrees, choppy, strong currents. Done it before-always good. Capt. Rick and Second Capt. Doug very capable. Tough on semi-vegetarians, but I got by. I got the cook, to pan fry some fish for me. Unusual current, so Capt. Rick afforded us many drift dives; not an easy task w/a 100' boat! Always feel safe on this boat, good crew. I see a little degradation of coral

and fish. Spear fisherman's wet dream. Enjoy your publication very much, no B.S. Keep that real sh-t coming. **(941-466-3600; ultgetaway@aol.com)**

Texas

M/V Fling, July 2000, Edwin L. Granite, D.M.D., P.A., Wilmington, DE. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 81-85 degrees. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. max. no drinking. Disappointing. No large animals. Spoke to another diver who had been 5 times, he saw no large animals (although one whale shark was reported sighted). Oil rig dive was interesting. Worth the trip but disappointed. "Cramped" quarters — Spartan conditions is understatement (29 divers-3 toilets). **(409-233-4445; Fax 409-233-0040; e-mail rinn@republic.net; website www.rinnboats.com)**

M/V Spree and Fling, August 2000, Jill M. Haley, (JMHDiver1@aol.com), Edmond, OK. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. depth limit. A pretty good operation. Definitely "no frills." Not much privacy for dressing because all the bunks are together. Good food and diving! I would bring a pillow and not so many clothes. **(409-233-4445; Fax 409-233-0040; e-mail rinn@republic.net; website www.rinnboats.com)**

M/V Fling, August 2000, Clem Clapp, Maplesville, AL. Vis: 60-85 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. depth and 500 lbs. on board. First live aboard — two days. Good group, no cowboys or

asses. Good crew, a bit conservative. Good food and plenty of it. Spartan conditions but acceptable. Nitrox course ok. A bit crowded but managed well by crew (34 divers). 100 ft. boat was stable in calm seas but in moderate seas could be a chore. \$300. Overall: A very good trip.

M/V Spree, August 2000, Mark McAlpin (markmack@cox-internet.com), Tyler, TX. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, choppy. Dive your own profile. Crew, especially the divemasters were great! The accommodations are not luxurious but they are comfortable. The food is not gourmet but is plentiful and good. Very professional and safety conscious operation that allows you to dive according to your abilities with the one 100 foot limit restriction. Because of moderate to strong currents and because all the diving is 60+ feet deep, the Flower Gardens and Stetson Bank are best for intermediate to advanced divers. Good trip.

M/V Spree and M/V Fling, August 2000, Jim Parkhill, McAllen, TX. Vis: 70-130 ft. Water: 83-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: Max. Depth 100 ft. No deco diving. Minimum sit: 2.5 hours. No alcohol between dives. Marine life, as good a diving as I have experienced anywhere in the Caribbean. A 2 day, 8 dive trip gave us 2 whale shark encounters, a manta, sharks, turtles, spawning sponges, schools of barracuda and an abundance and variety of reef fish. Healthy corals at Flower Gardens. The Boat not luxurious, but more than adequate

and comfortable. Great dive check. Ultra professional crew. Rinn could teach the *Aggressor* and Hughes fleets a lesson in how to achieve a happy balance between the ultimate in a safe operation without being overly restrictive. The depth limit of 100 ft. was no problem because there is little reason to go deeper. The floor is usually 75-85 ft. Since all dives are square profiles versus multi-level, even with 100 ft. Max depth, most dives had computers at borderline no deco limit. Thus, 2.5 sit times reasonable and didn't interfere with schedules. Entries and exits strictly monitored and recorded with divers name, bunk number, entry and exit times and profile. Break 100 ft. max rule and skip next dive. After dive, DM makes the round with chart to account for every diver and asks "How do you feel." Given the distance from shore and medical treatment, those precautions appear reasonable even for experienced divers and don't really preclude a diver from diving his own (reasonable) profile. The only other restriction is Nitrox mix limited to 32%. Cost: At \$325 for 2 days, 8 dives, all food and cabins the *M/V Spree* and *Fling* trips are a great bargain. Booking this trip can be a bit of a crap shoot since trip cancellations due to rough seas are a somewhat common occurrence.

Sea Searcher II, April 2000, Mark Walden, Garland, TX. Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 70-72 degrees. Seas 0-2'. Current 0-1 kt. Dive restrictions: 130' and 500 psi. Hammerheads, Silkys, rays, eels, swirling schools of African Pompano

and more, not bad for Texas diving. Capt. Kevin slid us in and out of Stetson Bank around the weather for some great diving. DM's Bruce and Al set up down lines to make it simple to descend to 70' and begin your dive, and they kept the tanks full back on the boat. Surface intervals can be spent eating, sleeping, sunning, or talking tech with owners Harold and Chris. Good diving, food, and company make this a fun trip. The 95' *Sea Searcher II* still carries a maximum of 16 passengers who are treated as diving friends. 800-396-3483. (800-396-3483, 409-230-0333)

***Sea Searcher II*, July 2000, Jimmy F. McMurrian Jr., Glenpool, OK.** Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: No dives beyond 130 ft., must be on the boat with 500 psi. My weekend live-aboard on *Sea Searcher II* was an amazing experience. Although I'm not well traveled, I know what I like. The crew was delightful from the owners to the captain. Briefings were detailed, accurate and most of all short. Dive limitations were few, but safety was no. 1. Food and beverages were plentiful and satisfying. Sleep accommodations meager, but clean and comfortable. We saw both Stetson and the Flower Garden Banks. We also dove on an oil rig the last day. For more info: call 1-800-396-DIVE or www.seasearcherll.com.

***Sea Searcher II/Advanced Diving*, August 2000, Mark Walden (dfwmw@aol.com), Garland, TX.** Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 86 F, calm. Dive your own profile: yes.

Restrictions: 130' and 500 psi. Great trip again. I saw manta, southern stingray, spotted eagle ray, black tip shark, green moray, spotted moray, goldentail moray, several schools of fish, and an encrusted barrel sponge spawn at 8:30 am. We got back to harbor a little late due to the goodwill of Captain Kevin and the owners Harold and Chris, by pulling in a stranded boat that was 40 miles out. But that was tempered by the fresh shrimp dinner Chris cooked that Bruce bartered off a shrimp boat 100 miles out. The crew — Bruce, Al and Larry — kept everything running well and on time.

Virginia

Adventure Diving Co., Chincoteague Island, VA, August 1999, Jim Boone, Alexandria, VA. Vis: 25 to 40 feet. Water: 65 to 68 degrees. Dive restrictions: Don't run out of air. Excellent trip. Chincoteague Island old fashioned. Lots of good restaurants. Diving was aboard the Wreck Master, 55 footer. They offer wreck, night, and overnight trips. Air Nitrox and argon. Dove the nightship wreck and the Bone, 37 miles off coast. Vis 25 to 40 feet. Was able to dive own profile, spear fishing allowed. Lots of big sand tiger sharks, schools of large amber jacks, plenty of black sea bass. Cold water lobster in wrecks. The Bone covered in soft white corals; hull upside down in 200 feet. Seas 4 to 5 feet. Captain Conway and mate excellent. Vessel has bunks forward, very comfortable. Bring your own gear or can rent. Looking forward to

returning. (757-336-6818; e-mail capt.john@adventure-diving.com; website www.adventure-diving.com)

VENEZUELA

***Antares Dancer*, August 1999, Alan and Barbara Fischl, Great Neck, NY.** Vis: 60-80 ft. Water 82-84 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 130. Los Roques, off the north coast of Venezuela, is interesting. The archipelago itself is very beautiful. There are lots of small tropicals on almost every dive. Drift diving and all dives are made from a tender that follows the dives, led by an instructor and picks them up at the end of the dive. However, the current, if you can call it that, is between 0 and 1/2 knot, and on most dives, if you don't fin, you won't move much, if at all. The boat is a bit small and not quite up to the standards of Peter Hughes' other vessels, but the food is good and the crew was outstanding. The diving is nice and easy and there are lots of fish at Los Roques, but if you're looking for high voltage diving or pelagics, this is not the place. (800-932-6237; 305-669-9391; Fax 305-669-9475; e-mail dancer@peterhughes.com; website www.peterhughes.com)

***Antares Dancer*, November 1999, John Foster, Waterford, CT.** Vis: 25-75 ft. Water: 85 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Back with 500#, no deco. A week was spent on the *Antares Dancer* as part of a DAN Aging Diver study group of 11 experienced divers, all of whom dived with personal computers besides the

DAN computers given us. The ordeal of getting from international to domestic terminals in Caracas was made easy by a Peter Hughes representative who met us outside Customs as we had been told and there was no need to use any of the multiple people offering to assist travelers for tips. Baggage was carried between terminals by porters for about \$1 per bag, a bargain considering the distance between (the very beautiful modern) terminals. The LTA flight to Los Roques left reasonably on time but they made announcements only in Spanish and multiple flights were leaving from the same gate, making for some confusion. Initial impressions of the *Antares Dancer* weren't great. The living areas needed some paint and general fixing up and the lower cabins were filled with diesel fumes on arrival, soon to be replaced by water covering the deck and soaking the rugs (the faucet in one of the upper cabins was left running, causing the gray water containment tank to overflow). The dining area is not air-conditioned but in November it was not a problem. There was sufficient hot water for showers but water was never hot enough for shaving and the lighting in the bath was poor. The food was varied and well prepared throughout the week and an attempt was made to accommodate divers with special dietary needs. Breakfasts always included wide range of choices such as pancakes or French toast, eggs cooked to order, and cereals. Surprisingly little seafood was served for sit-down dinners. Supplies for the AD are mainly dependent on the Saturday