

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

LTA flights that sometimes are not reliable, making the quality and range of offerings uneven. Wine and beer were available with meals at the end of the dive day (night dive was done after dinner) and a cooler on the upper deck was always stocked with cold water, sodas, and beer. Diving from the *Antares Dancer* is via a fine new tender, the *Akuena*, ample for 12 divers, and dive sites were occasionally distant from where the AD was anchored. Once equipment was set up on a tank on the tender, it was not removed for the remainder of the week. The dive crew rinsed the equipment with fresh water when requested periodically. Diving was capably run by Juan Carlos (whose English was excellent) and Jose and the *Akuena* was driven most skillfully by Raul who was always waiting when we surfaced from drift dives. Entry was by backroll over the side of the *Akuena* with equipment being handed up to the crew at the end of the dive and aside ladder used to climb aboard. Sites were preselected and varied in depth and type with thorough dive briefings including maps of the sites by Juan Carlos on the AD before boarding the tender. The DMs did not restrict the divers. There was a large number of fish, rays, eels, lobster, etc. as would be expected in the protected waters of a marine preserve but few large pelagics and no sharks. Some dives were done in swimsuits without skins or wetsuits. Next time, I would take more swimsuits as they were worn all day and got wet from the diving faster than they could dry out. Late on the 3rd day of diving (after 14

dives), we were caught in the effects of Hurricane Lenny to the west, requiring a nighttime move due to rough water and cancellation of the diving for the rest of the week due to zero visibility. Although this could have been a disaster for the avid divers aboard (and obviously reduced the data collected by DAN), Wade Hughes and the rest of the staff smoothly worked to keep the passengers happy with loads of food and drink while we lay in the sun, read, listened to Wade's CDS, or watched videos. I usually do not take trip insurance but was happy that I did this time since those of us who did receive a partial refund for the interruption of diving from Access America. (The suggestion that Peter Hughes offer the divers aboard an incentive toward another live-aboard trip, however, went nowhere.) I had chosen to go to Venezuela in November since this is neither the time nor the place for hurricanes, but I have learned that anything is possible with the weather and strongly recommend that divers consider carrying trip insurance.

***Antares Dancer*, November 1999,**
Dale Treadway (trdwy@tconl.com),
Omaha, NE. Vis: 60-120 ft. Water: 79-81 degrees. Partly Cloudy and Dry Water calm. Restrictions were time and depth but not enforced as no one went to extreme. *Antares Dancer* is smaller than some boats at 85 ft that makes for a smaller dive deck, and camera space. Very comfortable for 12 divers that is max for boat. All dives are done from the 30-foot chase boat where all dive gear is taken care of by

the crew. Diving is easy drift dives with light or moderate current. Back roll entry to water, quick pickup by chase boat and gear off in water before reentry to chase boat. Chase boat had only one engine as 2nd engine was in for replacement or repair as was frozen up prior week when run without oil in it. All ended ok. Underwater was wonderful with all typicals in great supply. So many in fact that unless you took very close-up, you always had several species in your frame. Schools of yellow tail snapper, large # of parrotfish including huge "Midnight Blue." Lobster under every ledge. Filefish and porcupine fish in your face as well as angels and butterfly. Much life in Bonaire but much more in Los Roques. Mini walls and coral in fine shape with lots of small stuff for Macro. Didn't see another diver except ours.

Antares Dancer, November 1999,
Robert Anoff, Glencoe, IL. Vis: 30-100+. Water: 80-85 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Suggested depth limits. Small live-aboard could only accommodate 12 divers which was fine. Crew of six, only two spoke English, no problem. Divemaster and diver of dive tender were excellent. Great coral, fantastic fish, quantity, size and variety. Dive profiles all somewhat similar as we were diving mini walls (slopes). Great unspoiled diving. Boat still working out a few minor problems.

Antares Dancer, December 1999,
Rosemary Kurtti, NY, NY. Vis: 30-60 ft. Water: 80-84 degrees. Great fish and corals. Schools of rainbow

parrots and midnight parrots. Two and three nurse sharks cuddle up under the corals. Lots of schools of fish. Abundance and variety of fish in top 5 in Caribbean (and I have been all over the Caribbean and the world in 25 years of diving). *Antares Dancer* not luxurious. Accommodations are basic. Dive deck, nonexistent. Staff service outstanding! Dive from tender.

Antares Dancer, Los Roques,
February 2000, Stanley Cohen
(Stanleycohen@hotmail.com) Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 Fahrenheit, choppy surge. Dive restrictions: No limits but suggested 40 to 60 ft. as that was where the divemaster said all the good stuff was. Overnight a Catia del Mar — Best Western — 15 minutes from the airport. Watch out for cab drivers! Charge should be 5000 Bolivars (\$9) but usually get away with charging 10,000 B. Nice hotel in the middle of a slum. Los Roques is not the quiet, laid back little village that they want you to believe it is. Busy! Small Airport never stopped humming with all manner of flights coming and going, not a quaint sleepy little place with some residents laying around in hammocks. Diving is O.K. with nothing dramatic. There are some caverns that go nowhere, there are many juvenile tropicals, some eels, some of this and that but you have to look for everything and be lucky. In the Exumas for instance there are the dramatic walls, real chance to see "real" sharks all in all not as intriguing as other places. Boat staff paid special attention to all dietary requests from

my lactose intolerance to fish haters, to no spicy food, all posted on a board to ensure that the staff is aware. Good! Wholesome food with only some fried snacks. Great soups from various potato-like vegetable. Like the chef took all of his grandmothers recipes and left town. Nothing fancy but good — especially the paella. The captain kept insisting “this is an open boat, go where you like.” Very friendly as was all the staff, most of whom spoke English. Diving from the wooden chase boat a bit close. Watch the from two seats as the V made it tight with the fins on. Back roll in with help sitting up on the gunwale. Ladder entry into the boat was easy enough after handing up fins. No real turbulent waves. Pick was swift in most cases. Dives were about an hour but repetitive though the sites changed, the critters or much of the topography didn’t. The best were the pillars right at the beginning. The second day dives with the waves crashing on the rock wall shore was great. Little incentive for night dive as was chilled, some sun, mostly cloud and wind with a chill. There were two camera tables but crowded and small with other people putting their books, towels etc. on them. Maybe room for two big rigs. My small aqua shot fit fine. Rinse bucket on board the chase boat. Peter Hughes handled the connecting flight — went well. Call the Best Western from the boat. They will send a cab to get you at the airport to stay at the pools until the plane leaves. Good food. Open bar on boat with o.k. wine and beer plus alcohol of all sorts. Good all around trip but expensive for only good.

***Antares Dancer*, May 2000, Jane Woodward.** Vis: 70 ft. Boat is small, cabins not up to par but diving was pristine — more small fish, healthy coral and especially fan coral. The regular cook was off but the substitute did quite well. Lack of dive deck was made up for by crew taking care of all our dive gear on the tender. They even rinsed and hung up our dive suits. Hard to get to — 4 hours wait in Caracas airport each way.

***Antares Dancer*, July/August 2000, Don and Meredith Parker, Las Vegas, NV.** Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 85 degrees. Dive restrictions: depth and time was suggested but we were allowed to use our own computers and plan our dives. The diving in Los Roques was great. Thousands of fish with schools of Creole Wrasse, Blue and brown Chromis, Boga, Jack and Snapper. Eels and smooth trunkfish were abundant. The soft and hard corals went on forever with numerous nooks and crannies for lobster, shrimp and other creatures. With minimal currents, the drift diving was slow and relaxing. The Bad: the *Antares Dancer* does not come close to other Peter Hughes boats. There was no means of communication between the dive tender and main boat. Of the two outboards on the tender, only one worked and it was questionable. Hot water showers only twice during the week. Food was adequate but not up to Peter Hughes standards. Limited facilities for cameras.

***Antares Dancer*, August 2000, Gino Dubay, Pigeon Forge, TN.** Vis: 30-

90 ft. Water: 78-82 degrees. Sunny, windy, humid, dry...90+. Surge strong, current at times. Dive your own profile. Boat just out of refit of interior, everything bright and shiny. Accommodations clean, adequate except camera areas. Crew can be rough on equip. Keep your carry-on in your hands until you reach your room! A mask was smashed between the dock and the boat. Vanessa and Jose would not let anyone lift a finger to do anything. The cook was one of the best I have tasted. They should replace the rest of the crew. The "Engineer" could not be bothered to keep the outboards running. They gave us a lot of trouble on the dive tender. (New motors were to be installed the following week, but I don't know if they were). Los Roques has maybe some of the best and varied diving in all the Caribbean. Being a national park the life is abundant to say the least. Other than sharks or dolphins most everything else, large and small is here to see. There are lots of morays, turtles, stingrays, spotted drums and midnight parrotfish. We saw a large smooth trunkfish and filefish (18-24"+). The best diving was a drift at Cayo Sal Mini wall after a 3'+ turtle in a good sized cave at 80', we came upon a "lake" of mature bar jacks of over 1000. In the tight school about 20' X 50'. Only 2.5 hrs out of Miami...I'll be back.

VIRGIN ISLANDS, BRITISH

Cuan Law, August 1999, Tina Schmidt (schmidtco@ad.com) Glencoe, IL. Vis: 20 to 60 feet.

Water: 78 degrees. Dive your own profile? No. Dive restrictions: depth limit, dive buddy. We always charter the entire boat. We have always been very satisfied. I think Tanya Wohner was an excellent chef who always accommodated everyone's taste. Especially her desserts were quite amazing. Kiwi our divemaster was funny and had tons of patience for all the pre-teens and teens we had aboard. (284-494-2490; Fax 284-494-5774; e-mail cuanlaw@surfbvi.com; website www.bvidiving.com)

Cuan Law, December 1999, Vlad Pilar, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 78-80 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. maximum depth; 500 psi return, 3 dives/day (including 1 night dive). Dive boat in excellent condition throughout. Cabins large, bunks/beds comfortable. Very good food with lots of variety; wine served with dinner; bar (well stocked) an honor system. Crew very knowledgeable and very friendly and helpful. The 105 ft. trimaran actually set sail on several occasions during trip. Diving well organized, mostly from large rubber inflatables. Each diver has own pack brought up by dive crew. You get in your gear, go down steps to inflatable, put on fins and are ready to go. Trips to dive sites are 5-10 minutes. Unfortunately diving in B.V.I. is not world class. Most sites are very similar. No large fish, no pelagics. Some sting rays and spotted eagle rays and numerous turtles. The wreck of the Rhone though billed as spectacular was quite disappointing. Overall a