

ANTIGUA

Beautiful beaches and scenery, high-dollar hotels, and forgettable diving. If you find yourself here, avoid boats that take divers from the cruise ships, as they do only the close-in, shallow reefs.

Jolly Divers, Jolly Harbour, September 2000, John Feeney, (eapatton@erols.com) Sperryville, VA. Vis: 30-100 ft. Water: 80 F. Dives logged: 65. Dive restrictions: Start up at 1,000 psi. Antigua is not a prime dive destination — no wall diving. Some pretty corals, lots of spotted morays, trumpetfish. Saw a huge hog fish, several cuttle fish and nurse sharks. Boat holds 8-10 divers comfortably. They usually try to get 12+ aboard. GPS wasn't working for first day so the DM tried to position us by landmarks. He admitted later that he didn't know where we had been — but it was a good dive! Made 6 dives over three days. They dropped the anchor on a barrel sponge 4 times. Do you think they were aiming? Jolly Harbour is a beautiful resort — excellent services and amenities. Fine restaurants, sports bar, grocery store, bank branch, load of souvenir shops. Great beach, but the water is murky in the harbor area, so no snorkeling. (268-462-8305; e-mail: divemaster@kokomocat.com; website www.jollydive.com)

Jolly Beach Resort, March 2001, Jim Baird (jimbaird@sympatico.ca) Toronto, ON. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F. One instructor encouraged (as told by the victim) to descend though

she was having problems clearing. She ended up with a ruptured ear drum.

One of the poorest dive operations I have ever encountered. Jolly Beach Resort, on the other hand was excellent. (Ph: 268-462-0061; fax 268-562-2302; e-mail info@jollybeachresort.com; website www.jollybeachresort.com)

ARUBA

Just off Venezuela's Caribbean coast, Aruba has not been a prime scuba-diving destination, but bring your gear since some operators will take you to some pretty decent diving. . . . Miles of white sand, glitzy casinos, and beaches cater to windsurfers. . . . For the best deals on lodging and air look into gamblers' packages. . . . There are several good boat dives, such as the wreck of the Antilla, a German freighter scuttled at the start of World War II. The South Wall, past San Nicholas near the southern tip of Aruba, is also good. . . . Aruba lies south of the hurricane belt. . .

Mermaid Divers, Aruba Sonesta Resorts, June 2000, Stephen C. Cantelli, (scantelli@congressconstruction.com) Exeter, NH. Vis: 60-75 ft. Water: 80-85 F. Dives logged: 40+. Dive restrictions: 90 ft. Antilla great dive for beginners or experts alike. Lots of penetration, octopus, great vis all at 56' of water. Mermaid is a great dive operator. Everyone dives their ability and it is not a cattle car operation. (Ph: (297) 835546 or (297) 837525; Fax 297-8-35546; mermaid@setarnet.aw; website www.scubadivers-aruba.com)

Mermaid Divers, April 2001, Wm. Darrauld Atwood (scubaman02@aol.com) Oxford, CT. Experience: 501-1000 dives Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F. The weather was great, Mermaid Divers was terrible. The first day was ok, though no roll-call was done on the boat — a simple head count was conducted after everyone boarded, and after everyone was back on the boat after the dives. I was told that a roll call was done in the shop, (which we never went to as we met the boat at the dock) and there were no divers lost so therefore it was a safe operation. On another third day no divemaster; a diver on vacation (apparently a regular customer) acted as tour guide. One day we were told to be at the dock at 9:00 am which we were (8:55). The boat had left without us. when the boat had left without us, I was told that we were late, they had a full boat and couldn't wait for us. As we definitely were not late, I requested a refund. Carlos, the owner, refused stating they had a "no refund" policy. After much discussion, he offered a credit for the dives, but since we were leaving the island, I was unable to take the dives at a later date. A poorly run operation, in an area that offered little to see. The water was warm and the weather was pleasant. Having been an instructor for 5 years, I appreciate the need of operators to make money, but charging for services not rendered is unconscionable. I tried to protest the charges through my credit card company, but Mermaid Divers vigorously fought the credit, and my (now former) credit card company

charged me for the unused dives. Aruba is definitely not a "Dive Destination" due to the lack of marine life and color, but is pleasant enough to dive if you are there for other reasons.

Pelican, Hyatt, November 2000, Ann Underwood-Burns (annb860@aol.com) New Milford, CT. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 75-82 F, choppy. Logged dives: over 150. Thanks to Undercurrent, we knew enough to stay away from Aquaworld and watched from our hotel beach as people were jammed onto their boats. There were 6 people on my Pelican boat. We did a 2 tank dive. The boat was nice — upper deck, 2 showerheads, 1 rinse tank. One divemaster for 6 people but he mostly stayed with the 2 people who wanted to photograph. Current was a problem for some. They gassed up the boat between dives meaning we sat on a dock for 2 hours! Very unprofessional! We were rushed on our second dive so the boat could get back to the dock by noon. Divers were encouraged to return to boat with as little air as possible. Dove Mango Halto, the Finger, the Antilla — saw bigger fish snorkeling at DePalm Island than diving those sites. (Ph: 1129-783-1228, 1129-782-4739; Fax 1129-783-2655)

Red Sail Sports, Hyatt Regency, November 2000, Ken Davis, Scotch Plains, NJ. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 80-82 F. I wore a .5mm wetsuit. Could dive own profile — turn around at 1500, try to be back on boat with 500 psi. You have underrated Aruba diving in your past issues. I did 7 dives and enjoyed them all; only one was disappointing. Pedernalis, a nice 25

foot tune-up dive, good for beginners, with a surprising variety of fish including a scorpion fish and lots of arrow crabs. Antilla is an impressive wreck with a large cathedral-like hold, easy to penetrate for a beginner wreck diver. Second dive (Arashi reef) was only fair — airplane wrecks had been pretty much destroyed by a storm, leaving only propellers or soft coral. South Coast reefs with beautiful healthy hard corals, and nice topography. Morays most every dive, one octopus, lots of trumpet fish, box and cowfish, some angels, lobsters, a spotted drum, huge school of Creole wrasse. Red Sail Sports was OK. Two boats, one larger with multiple entry points that went to the Antilla, and one smaller more standard dive boat with one platform. Both had working heads, water and iced tea; fruit was served between dives. Set up your own gear. Decent briefings; One guide pointed out scorpion fish, arrow crabs, looked under rocks; another(who I was following) got ahead of the group, lost sight of them, and was first on the boat. Shop personnel could have been nicer. The Hyatt is beautiful, with a gorgeous multilevel pool, a waterline, and a nice beach. Food is excellent but expensive. There's a TCBY on-site and a Dunkin' Donuts across the street if you don't feel like going for \$15/person for breakfast. (Ph: 415-743-5306; Fax: 415-981-6203; or Telephone 297-861603; Fax 297-866657, e-mail: info@redsail.com, Website: www.redsail.com)

Red Sail Sports, April 2001, Holly Hickman, St. Charles, MO. Vis: 30-

40 ft. Water: choppy. Logged dives: 102. Dive restrictions: depth, time. Without a doubt, the most indifferent, unconcerned and obviously bored dive operation I've encountered. They place a tip box obviously, but for what? Even with 10 foot swells coming over the ladder, divers are expected to exit in full gear with the only assistance being someone taking your fins for you. The advertised beverages, water and instant tea were in igloo coolers with spouts covered in green mold. Divemasters completely ignored divers and made no air checks on a 100 foot dive with several novice divers.

Red Sail Sports, Westin Cassarina, June 2001, Scott Reilling (wreilling@aol.com) **N. Brunswick, NJ.** Vis: 80-90 ft. Water: 76-80 F. Dives logged: 52. Teacher, boat and crew were great. Pick up at resort's beach. Return to same place. Lots of small fish. Great time!

Red Sail Sports, Caribbean Palm, August 2001, Rod and Chris Hatchett, Tulsa, OK. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm and flat. Dives logged: 24. Restrictions: 100 feet. Great place for shopping, eating and entertainment. Very cosmopolitan — pleasant people — nice accommodations. Our only regret is Red Sail. We expected equipment (rental) to function properly — BCD inflator connection failed repeatedly. Dive-master and group failed to notice our absence, and left my wife and me to fend for ourselves. Loss of air caused an early ascent and required a long to the boat.