

THE BAHAMAS

The Bahamas are easily accessible from Florida and excellent for long weekends, with pretty reefs, decent tropicals, and plenty of resorts that feed sharks. . . . Keep hurricane season, June through October, in mind; winter weather from December to March means mid-70s, chilly water, and sweaters in the evening; average nighttime temperature is in the mid-60s, but can drop into the 50s if winter air blows off the continent. . . . Out-island are resorts small and personal, but the best diving is now being reached by live-aboards.

Abaco

Walker's Cay, September 2000, Bert Hubby, (berthubby@aol.com)
Gordonville, CA. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Shark chumcicle dive was well worth the trip. Did this dive three days in a row. Three dives available per day and one dive available on day of arrival in afternoon. Few fish on reefs. Saw eagle rays on couple dives. Reefs did not have colorful sponges or anemone. (Ph: 800-327-8150, 954-462-3400; Fax: 954-462-4100; e-mail info@NealWatson.com; website <http://www.nealwatson.com/WalkersCay.html>)

Walker's Cay, April 2001, Jerome Hobart (bjhobart@aol.com)
Ransomville, NY. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm. Dives logged: 150. Dive restrictions: No areas over 100 ft., 1 hour. Went for 7

nights. Could see everything there was to see in 2-3 days of diving. Sharks are exciting, but rest of diving is nothing special. Nice opportunity to combine diving in morning and deep sea fishing in the afternoon.

Walker's Cay, April 2001, Jim Culp, Iva, SC. Vis: 40-50 ft. Water: 75-77 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 88. Dive restrictions: 500 psi. Walker's Cay is known for its "Shark Rodeo" (a shark feeding operation wherein the sharks feed upon a frozen block of chum). Phenomenal! The rest of the diving was below my expectations (i.e., corals, reef Fish, etc.) Gary Atkinson's lecture about sharks and shark behavior was terrific! He also arranged an encounter with bull sharks that was incredible! The Walker's Cay Resort offers great food, acceptable clean accommodations and a laid back atmosphere. There is little else to do but dive, eat and relax. The generally shallow dives made for long bottom times and you could follow the dive-master or go on your own. Just be back around 50 minutes with 500 psi. Saw sharks on every dive (rodeo or not), large spotted eagle rays, southern sting rays, nurse sharks, moray eels (green), crabs, lobster, etc. Many swim-throughs and interesting underwater topography made up for the lack of colorful corals, sponges and reef Fish. Good to excellent for the newly certified.

Walker's Cay, May 2001, Guy Johnson (siberia@netexpress.net)
Coal Valley, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 35 to 50 Feet. Water: 78 F, surge. Nice to get off the plane and have the staff remember our names and faces

from last year! Phillip does all he can to show the divers what they came to see. Very friendly and professional. The food is five star in quality, quantity and selection. No TV's or phones in the rooms. Gary Adkison is a great host and gives a great shark awareness presentation that really shows his concern and affection for sharks. There are three dive boats, each well suited for diving. On the first dive we had three spotted eagle rays staying close by. Shark dive is great. 100-150 reef, black tip, lemon and nurse sharks. Not a frenzy but a very organized social feed. Big guys each first and so on. We made five dives and we encountered moderate surge on all. The only complaint was with the folks in the sales office. I always felt they were making me jump thru their various hoops because they could. Not very customer friendly.

Walker's Cay, August 2001, Gregory McGowan (divin2thdr@aol.com)
Plainfield, IN. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 82-84 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 175+. Dive restrictions: 500 psi dive within computer. First class operation. Accommodations clean and adequate (no phones/TV in room). 2 tank am, 1 tank pm. Shore diving — entry can be tricky. Numerous octopus, eels at night. Shark Rodeo — excellent. Food is best I have had in my dive travels. Little to do for nondivers, except relax by pool. Small gift shop.

Walker's Cay, August 2001, William Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol)
Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 90 Feet. Water: 82 to 87 F, calm. There is a \$47.60 "departure fee" that Chalk's Ocean

Airlines charges you at the gate. This is something no one at Neal Watson mentioned. Max. bag weight of 60 pounds, that was not relayed to us. Despite the ostensible 50 pounds/person bag limit, there was no charge for the overage when we went. But note: We went on the Twin Otter. The rumor was on the Sea Plane, that limit was enforced with a \$1 a pound surcharge. (You can book direct with Walker's Cay instead of going through Neal Watson.) Great place to go with the family and beginning and novice divers. My ten year old daughter just got certified and was making her first non-training dives. She made ten (including two Shark Rodeo dives) and loved it. The reefs are all shallow and, with a few exceptions, you'd have to dig a hole to get deeper than forty (40) feet. Advanced divers will find something for them also. The shark feeding dives are conducted at least three times a week. A swirling mass of Caribbean reef, nurse, black tip had black tip reef sharks devour a "chumsickle" suspended from a line. Dig for shark's teeth later in the sand. The reefs are fairly monolithic with some algae fish life is "modest," but the northern reefs are now a marine sanctuary. Brenda Atkinson, the manager, is a fabulous hostess. Barry Albury, dive shop manager and senior dive guide, and the entire dive staff are also outstanding. The black tie waiters are a nice touch and the dinners are excellent. Do the MAP because things are expensive. Two-tank AM dive and one tank PM dives. No shore diving really. No night diving as a practical matter because

they need eight divers to go and we could never find that many willing to forego dinner. The accommodations are clean and basic but show the wear and tear of the tropics. But, who rates a dive operation or the fun and value of a dive vacation on whether the sliding glass door to your patio works? Two nice dive boats including a newer "Pro 42." The personnel were uniformly enthusiastic, genuinely friendly, and all-around great people. A nineteen-year-old free-diver died while being resuscitated at the docks. They say he succumbed to shallow-water blackout, a sobering reminder to us that there is some danger to this sport. Overall a great trip: relaxing, energizing, and invigorating. Rinse barrel for cameras on the boats ostensibly for use of UWP only but used by everyone to rinse masks, etc.

Andros

Small Hope Bay Lodge, March 2001, Jim Filipczak (jfilipczak@erols.com) Columbia, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 73 to 75 F, Laid-back paradise for diving, fishing and hammock-hanging. It's a unique close-by retreat to meet multi-nationals, usually as couples, with no press of gorilla diver groups. Accommodations, ambiance, and food are super (without high cost or ostentation), particularly the nightly cocktail hours, professional UW lecturers, and seat-yourself round robin of dinner table experiences. Family groups with children taken under the wing of the Burch family staff. Two catamaran hull multi-outboard dive boats reached most sites in under 20 minutes,

usually with no more than 8-10 divers per trip (2 AM and 1 PM, with night and staged shark dives scheduled weekly). Compared with our last visit 11 years ago, the dive site locations hadn't changed, but coral and fish life seemed much depleted. Mike, the diver operator, offered that algae had taken over (as reported in 2000 Chapbook) after a coral die-back, but were cleaned up by recent storms. New coral growth was evident at most sites. Tech diving has become a strong point at SHBL, including both deep (185'), blue hole, and cavern locations (video of the caverns was spectacular). Fortunately, only inland river and deep-water fishing appears to be the norm. Boat staff were anxious to help hand cameras to divers and to retrieve them post-dives. Not much assistance locating underwater subjects. No rinse tanks on boats or special tanks on the dock. No E-6 Processing. VCR available for evening video reviews. (Ph: 242-368-2013, Fax: 242-368-2015, e-mail: shbinfo@smallhope.com, Website: smallhope.com)

Small Hope Bay Lodge, May 2001, Vlad Pilar (pilarvl@netcom.ca) Toronto, ON. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, choppy. 3-5 ft. swells outside the reef so boat did not go out on several occasions. Diving was quite unexciting. Both hard and soft coral in good shape. Very few fish either small or big; saw a number of turtles otherwise not much there. The dive operation was rather lax with the person running it more interested in his tri-mix students than in the other

divers. On several occasions Nitrox tanks were not filled in time for departure of boat, so boat was late leaving. Once there was no Nitrox. Very little surface time between dives. However divemasters knew their job and were pleasant. The resort is tired and needs renovations. Overall service was efficient and pleasant. Food average American/Caribbean. One plus — childcare service with children not being allowed in the dining room at meal times.

Small Hope Bay Lodge, July 2001, Russ Langley (brlang@bellsouth.net), Charlotte, NC. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm no currents. Restrictions: Control, Control, Control! Too much on depth and time. The boats are adequate, but we had anywhere from 15 to 20 divers on each boat. I understand the rationale for control, but little if any effort is put into recognizing the advanced from the inadequate. I come from the school of private boat diving the Carolinas' (30 plus miles offshore, current, low vis, thermal clines, rough seas, meat-hunters). We don't have anyone leading us by the hand and frankly I resented the way this was handled. I've paid my money and dues to the dive industry, all I want is a boat ride....period. However, for my wife who is comfortable with 1 or 2 dives per day to 70-90 feet, this place was great and that made me happy. She is comfortable with 2 divemaster's overhead keeping us all in the box. The 3 dives per day in the package range from 100 feet depth limits early

in the week to as deep as 180 feet later in the week. That may sound extreme but remember the wall drops to 6000 feet and sometimes it's 140 feet to the edge. The second dive of each day is ridiculous. They are dropping you in max 40 feet of water with perhaps 10 minutes of surface interval to get back for lunch. Here's a tip for the second dive, swim 50 yards north and the wall is right there. It's the only time they leave you alone. Frankly, it can't get any easier than 100 foot plus vis, no current and they drop a hook on a wall that runs east and west. Anyone can find their way back to the boat and if you can't, so what, it's not like you're 60 miles offshore in 6 foot seas. It's flat, clear and calm. I, along with a number of other experienced divers, had had all we could take of the vanilla (2 tank morning) and (1 tank afternoon) dives. If you are an advanced diver, the only dives for you are the Specialty Dives. You are charged about \$85 for these dives on top of the all-inclusive dive package. Even if you go for the Specialty Dives your skills are still not evaluated clearly. They dive the profile of the specialty dives (as written in their book) without consideration for how much, skill, time or gas you have. The analogy is, they would say, "we will now walk 2 miles and turn around, whether you are tired or not, this is all you get." These guys talk to you all week like you just came out of a beginner class. Many of the specialty dives are as much as you want, so even though you are capable of much more, they do take you to a few places you could not do by yourself without

some logistical support. It's a great all around vacation with your wife or girlfriend, but for you hardcores only concerned with diving, this is definitely not the "home of diving freedom." The food was very good, the staff was excellent, that includes the shore staff and dive staff. Everyone was friendly and happy. This is the best run Bahamian operation I have seen. The accommodations were nice. It is very quaint to live all week in the open air with no shoes. Like going to the beach when you were a kid. If you need A/C go somewhere else. If you need A/C, the rest of us would rather you go somewhere else. Beautiful beaches and relaxing. The bikes are in terrible shape. You would think they would come up with a few bucks and keep the bikes running.. "Jeff, it's your guests only means of cheap transportation. Goodwill in the USA gives bikes away in better shape than yours and you have a private plane to fly them in."

Bimini

Bimini Undersea, The Complete Angler, July 2000, Sonny Walton, Greenville, SC. Vis: 80-150 ft.

Water: 82-86 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130', 500 psi. Most of the lodging was of the low C class motel except The Big Game Marina. We ate in their restaurant and meals and service was excellent. The Complete Angler is old, but for three guys just here to dive, it was great. We ate breakfast at CJ's Deli, and it was good. Every time we went to The END of The World or Sand Dollar restaurant, they were always out of

what we ordered. Keefe's Bimini Undersea is a well-run organization. The 2 boats are roomy and easy to operate on. The 2 female boat captains are good looking. Kristal was our boat captain, she was on the dive site in minimum time, her briefings were very informative and precise. Even though she knocked us off of the "Dolphin Dive", but later searched us out at the bar and put us back on the boat, Alan was Kristal first mate and he lead some of our dives. He was very helpful with equipment and led us on some beautiful dives. (Ph: 945-462-3400, Fax: 954-462-4100, e-mail: nealwatson@aol.com, Website: www.nealwatson.com)

Bimini Undersea, Compleat Angler Inn, July 2001, Mark & Lynn Thorne (thorne@mindspring.com) Raleigh, NC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F. The Compleat Angler is a rustic, historic inn known for Ernest Hemingway. Stay on the third floor — loud music coming from first floor bar. Lot of stair climbing in dark corridors. 5-10 minute walk to Bimini Undersea. They keep your gear in mesh bags overnight, however, they did not rinse our gear. Diving was enjoyable and relaxing with something for all experience levels. Schools of fish were great for photos and video. All the usual suspects but no large critters. The dolphin excursion: the dive operator cares about the welfare of the dolphin. Minimal human interference. If dolphins appear, they are free to stay or leave. They appear to relish human contact. Great

getaway for the diver who has limited funds and who wants a short trip from the East coast.

Scuba Bimini, Bimini Yacht Club, June 2000, Nancy Ruth, Upper Marlboro, MD. Dive restrictions: Time. Couldn't drink the water. You can fill an in-room pitcher at the bar. Bug spray mandatory. Cattle boat very crowded. No room for extra gear or cameras. The best diving I found in the Bahamas. Lots of fish, healthy coral, turtles, eels, lobster, etc. The most attentive, helpful people (hotel and dive shop). The beach is a short walk away. Broken glass, concrete, rocks along the beach — shoes all the way. I felt safe as a single female. (Ph: 800-848-4073 or 242-347-4444 or 954-462-3400; Fax 242-954-4624100 or 954-462-4100; e-mail: info@scubabimini.com, website: www.scubabimini.com)

Scuba Bimini, July 2000, Bill Weisenheimer (scuba@hamburg.heartland.net) Percival, IA. Vis: 50-60 ft. Water: 84-86 F, choppy. Dive restrictions: Skill level. Logged dives: 500+. Dive 1: Start 4:33 pm. End 5:12 pm. Max. depth 55 ft., average depth 37 ft., water 83 F, air temp. 93 F. Green moray, lobster, grunts, squirrel fish, big eye also, wrasse, jacks, tarpon, grey reef shark, golden spotted sting ray, scorpion fish, grey and French angel fish, hogfish, Spanish hogfish, Caesar grunts, parrotfish. Dove with 2 teenage girls and their dad. One knew it all and the other knew nothing. Dad has his hands full with those two. Asked divemaster to switch me to the

other boat. All the beautiful schools of fish I remember on Bimini, fish very friendly, not afraid, I swam with hundreds of grunts all around me. Instructions from the staff: Restaurant opens at 7:30 am, breakfast at 8:15 am, dive boat departs for victory reef at 9:15 am. What really happened: Restaurant opens at 7:50 am, breakfast served with instant coffee at 8:30 am, at 9:15 am staff is oiling up the engine on one boat and filling tanks for both boats - 9:30 am airing up tanks - 9:45 am we are told that the boat will leave in 2 minutes. 10:00 am filling tanks continues. 10:15 am last tank partially filled is loaded on board. 10:30 am clear channel and head south along the coast. 10:48 am exit through reef and accelerate for 1 hour trip to Victory Reef. 10:53 am OOPS! Boat will only accelerate to 8 knots. This will turn our 1 hour trip into a 2+ hour trip to Victory Reef! Captain decides this won't work return to Bimini and do a local dive. (It was later determined that this boat fully loaded would probably only make 8 knots. Little Caverns, start 11:37 am, finish 12:17 pm, average depth 50 ft. max depth 73 ft., dive time 39 min., water temp. 84 F, minimal current. Patch reef with several short swim throughs — REEF could use this site for a complete fish ID course...it did include the jawfish with eggs! This was a good location considering my group consisted of teenagers with the usual spread of maturity and experience. Porkfish, goatfish, jawfish damsels, sergeant majors, sailors choice, jacks, grunts (thousands) barracuda, rays, eels, lobster, parrotfish, gobies, sponges

(most types) soft corals, and trumpetfish (juvenile). Dive 2, Rainbow Reef, start 1:03, finish 1:38, 35 minutes, average depth 20 ft., max depth 26 ft., water temp 84 F, no current. Not the thousands of fish as in past years but more than enough to entertain and educate. Two of the biggest and most elegant barracuda I have ever seen. Dive 3, night dive Kinks, start: 8:27 pm, finish: 9:07 pm, 36 min. dive, average depth 39 ft., maximum depth 52 ft., water temp. 84 F, divemaster Jay. His patience in waiting for dusk to begin the dive paid dividends with a wonderful night dive: octopi, parrotfish, shrimp, sea cucumbers, lobster, eel etc., until the gauge hit 900 PSI. Dive 1: I visited with the captain of the boat I was assigned to. He asked "how long are you going to be here". I replied until Sunday, I leave at 1:00 PM. I told him that the airline (Bimini Island Air, not to be confused with Island Air) would keep the aircraft under 1,000 feet. If we could do 30/40 ft. dive and 20/25 ft. dives, I should be ok to fly providing we left on schedule. He agreed. Come Sunday and the appearance of Sarah, Jay's significant other and summer organizer, the captain's story changed. He never said he could get me back in time for my departure so....no diving for Mr. Bill — Oh No! Mr. Bill.

Cat Island

Hawk's Nest Resort, July 2001, Jean & Bob Kirkpatrick (bojean@logantele.com) Russellville, KY. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 84 F, choppy. Logged dives: 1,000. Great small resort with a very relaxed, laid-back atmosphere. There

are 10 large, a/c rooms — ocean-front — and a 2 bedroom a/c cottage. The central dining room, lounge, and bar is spacious (and being enlarged August 2001), with table-size backgammon and chess and a TV. Rooms have VCRs, and there's a large tape and book library. Fresh water pool is outside, and view is of beach with hammocks and thatches. Beach is long and beautiful, but most is too rocky to walk. Meals are amazing for a remote spot — 4 courses, served at individual tables, at dinner — staff very friendly and eager to please — no real dive operation when we were there, but a 27 ft. boat and 2 divemasters will be there in November. They took us to reefs in small boat — long, rough rides, but worth the trip! Beautiful and healthy coral formations with schools of reef fish — saw 2-3 sharks, a 4 ft. wahoo and a midnight parrot. Patch reefs on 40 ft. sand bottoms were jammed with fish and fun to dive. We spent 45-50 minutes on 1 coral head. We were there with a family group of 19, ages 5 and up. (Ph: 800-688-4752, 242-342-7050; Fax 242-342-7051; e-mail info@hawks-nest.com; website www.hawks-nest.com)

Grand Bahama Island

Grand Bahama Scuba, Ocean Reef Yacht Club, July 2001, Mary Wicksten, Bryan, TX. Diving from boat with head, stern ladder and platform, no camera bucket or table. Drinking water provided for divers. Dive guide gave quick profile for

dive, put out current line if needed. Decompression stops on line on way up enforced, but divers free to dive their own profile according to computer — no forced time limits. Shop has rental gear, storage shed to leave equipment overnight, rinse tub. If you need anything extra, UNEXSO has just about everything (at a price). Storm and squalls stirred up water, dives canceled for one entire day. Visibility at deeper sites (Theo's Wreck, Gayle's Grotto) OK—maybe 50 feet or so. Snorkeling impossible. Shallow dives with bad visibility and so many particles that distance photography was difficult. Rides on boat very bumpy. Too bad some folks did not take precautions against sea sickness! Only one person at a time could come up boat ladder, but some impatient folks got themselves bruised trying to scramble aboard. Startled to see children as young as 10 going out on reef dives on rough days. One boy could not control his buoyancy on the way up, and went sailing toward the surface alone until the dive guide grabbed him. Two kids went down to 106 feet deep on Theo's Wreck. In neither case were the parents along. As a vacationing diver, I don't want to act as an unpaid safety officer. Went on "Dolphin Swim" with UNEXSO. Swam with dolphins in Sanctuary Bay, watched them play tricks, listened to echolocation and squeaks. Cute and harmless activity. Water too murky for photos in bay. For dolphin dive, they go out to sea. Lots of well fed fish at dive sites. Reef sharks cruised by with entourages of remoras and jacks. Eagle ray only five feet away! Also

spotted moray, yellowfin grouper, tiger grouper, southern stingray, nurse shark. Some very pretty swim-throughs and cracks with lush sponges and small fish, much cleaning activity. One hawksbill turtle. Best dives? Gayle's Grotto with diverse fish, Theo's Wreck very spectacular. Got to visit Ben's Cavern, where the water shifts abruptly in temperature and salt content. Watched schooling snappers, saw pillars, stalagmites, stalactites and other rock formations. Fabulous visibility, easy diving from base of stairs. Ocean Reef Yacht Club is on a harbor. Too far away to walk around extensive harbor to reach beach. Rental units clean, well-supplied. You can stock up and cook for yourself, but you'd miss some good food. (Stoned Crab — lovely view, great food). Has 2 pools, snack bars, small store, can arrange for side trips. Lots of activities for nondivers: golf, hiking, bird watching, horseback riding, and shopping for local crafts or imported duty-free goods. (242-373-6775; 242-373-9791; Fax 242-373-9792)

Sunn Odyssey/Mayfield Beach and Tennis, December 2000, Edward Bowie (ECBUI@AOL.com) San Luis Obispo, CA. Vis: 40 to 70 Ft. Water: 72 to 76 Ft, calm. Nick was a marvelous guide. 1-5 divers on the boat. Was willing to guide or let us do our own thing. Nick was very good with my wife, who had not dove in three years. More fish and color than Hawaii. Local population very warm and friendly. No accosting in the streets by the vendors! (Telephone: 242-373-4014; Fax 242-373-4014;

e-mail sunnody@grouper.batelnet.bs;
website: www.bahamasvg.com/sunnodyssey.html

Sunn Odyssey, March 2001, Jeff Holloway, (IsellJH@aol.com) Ft. Lauderdale, FL. Vis: 70-80 ft. Water: 76-77 F. Dives logged: 20. Took Sun Odyssey on Undercurrent report! We were (myself and fiancée) the only ones booked. Could go anywhere we wanted. Choose shark dive at Hydrolab. Saw 5-6 gray sharks 5-7 feet long! Divemaster did not feed. We found out later the impact of feeding causes more sharks to come to the reef and in turn reduces the number of fish on reef. Service was exceptional! 2nd tank dive in 70' of water at Moray Manner — small tropical fish, 2 barracuda, corals were in good shape. Thanks Undercurrent for your reports!

Sunn Odyssey, Bahamia Country Club Resort, May 2001, Tom Beach (tbeach@ispchannel.com) Lewes, DE. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. Nick and Karen operate a customer oriented operation. They provide land transportation and will stop at the grocery store on the way home. Very safety conscious and patient with beginners. Bahamia Country Club was great and the people very accommodating. Continental Airlines: flying from Ft. Lauderdale was a nightmare between canceled flights and delays.

Sunn Odyssey, Island Seas Resort, May 2001, Brian and Gabriele Spencer, Ortonville, MI. Vis: 50-60

ft. Water: 78-80 F. Logged dives: 69. Dive restrictions: Be on board with 500 psi. Sun Odyssey is a very friendly and accommodating operation. Small operation but Karen and Nicholas make you feel like part of the family. They had many repeat customers. Boat is adequate with room for 12 but operation only takes out a max of 8 divers. We dove with 5-6 total divers. This is not a cattle boat operation. Briefings were good. Treated divers like adults, not children. Once we set up our equipment, they carried it to us at the back of the boat. Dive guide was helpful in finding critters but not overbearing. The Island Seas Resort was nice. We enjoyed the remoteness away from the crowds. Has a beautiful beach and all the amenities. All rooms have kitchenettes. Bring your own beach towels.

Sunn Odyssey, Island Seas, July 2001, Jeff Bloomer (jlbdiver@aol.com) Columbus, MS. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 81-83 F, choppy. Logged dives: 160. Dive restrictions: time. Karen, Nick, and Don at Sunn Odyssey tried hard to accommodate our group. They took us to the type of dive sites we wanted. 3 great days and 3 average days. Very few critters so little to impress the newbies or interest the old salts. The restaurant at the resort is pricey but there are plenty of good, reasonable restaurants around the island. Simply Native and The Stoned Crab are on opposite ends of the spectrum but both offer good food at a reasonable price.

UNEXSO, Royal Islander, October 2000, Downing L. Smith

(dls5b@cms.mail.virginia.edu)

Charlottesville, VA. Vis: 50-100 ft.

Water: 75 to 80. I found your book and newsletters very helpful in choosing my first diving location. My son Russell and I were certified last October. We got a package deal from Grand Bahama Vacations. \$669 for flight, taxes, airport transfers, and 7 days and nights. Was fine; Royal Islander was ok but 3 nights there was a noisy group that kept us up until 3:00 am and the motel management wouldn't do anything about it.

UNEXSO is very commercialized with a big store that has lots of hats and t-shirts with the UNEXSO logo. Also they had a sophisticated video operation and ran trips of non divers to Sanctuary Bay for the "Dolphin Experience." The boats and rental equipment were in good shape. All kinds of instruction available. As Russell is 13 we were limited to 80 ft. So we did all medium reef dives down to 60 ft. This wasn't really a problem but there was one dive (Theo's Wreck at 100 ft) that we wanted to do but couldn't. Shark dive and the dolphin dives were more expensive but are worth doing once for novice divers like us. My wife Gail and older son Brian went snorkeling then took an introduction to scuba and were able to do 2 shallow reef dives and one medium reef dive. Woody, Johnnie, and Jamie were particularly helpful to us. Tipping was not expected but we did. They didn't seem to have a repair person. They had two divemasters on the boat. One went down with us and the other stayed with the boat. Lots of small fish, occasional barracuda,

spotted ray. Wonderful first time experience. Next time I would stay in the Port Lucaya rather than downtown Freeport. **(Ph: (800) 992-DIVE or (954) 351-9889; Fax: 954-351-9740; e-mail info@unexso.com)**

UNEXSO, Lucayan, April 2001, Ken Davis (kjdm@aol.com) Scotch Plains, NJ. Vis: was fair 50-75 ft.

Water: choppy, 73-77 F. Dives logged: 60. Could dive own profile, time restrictions but not particularly enforced (not applicable on shark and dolphin dives). On the dolphin dive we sat on the sandy bottom at 45 ft and interacted with 2 trained dolphins performing 4 behaviors including touching and "kissing". Obvious artificial but still fun. Shark dive was high-voltage and very exciting, shark feeding by divemaster 8 to 10 feet from kneeling line of divers. Wear extra thermal protection. When you're kneeling and not moving, that 75 degree water seems much colder. Free eats also brought out large groupers, trevally jacks and a huge southern stingray. Divemasters/safety divers were terrific. UNEXSO's front desk staff was not particularly nice, and caused me to miss a scheduled night dive. At check-in, in the afternoon, no one told me that I had to take my gear out of the equipment room and put it on the boat. When I returned for the dive, I couldn't get my gear. The divemasters (James and Christina) tried to fit me with their own gear, but couldn't find a wetsuit to fit my large girth. I did get a refund, however. Theo's wreck dive was canceled because of rough surface conditions

— did 2 tank shallow reef dive instead. First dive was OK including large shark, but 2nd sight had nothing to see. Lucayan is brand new, huge, lots of good restaurants, but spotty service, especially the maid service — some days no bath mat, some days not enough towels, some days no tissues in the bathroom despite specific request. Fun shopping and dining across the street in Port Lucaya area.

UNEXSO, Our Lucaya, May 2001, James E. Davis, Jr. (jdavis0001@mediaone.net) Pointe Vedra Beach, FL. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 77-79 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 500. Dive restrictions: Buddies. We went on a fam trip. We had not been to Freeport in 3 years and were favorably impressed with the changes. The hotel was very nice. The grounds, pools, restaurants and staff very friendly and accommodating. UNEXSO's operation has expanded. The divemasters were great.

UNEXSO, July 2001, Gerard McCloskey (g-mccloskey@hotmail.com) Madison, CT. Vis: 60-100 ft. 82F. Dives logged: 500. Dive restrictions: 100 feet for 20 minutes. Theo's Wreck a guided dive. Good briefing. Good dive. DM moved too quick for my "macro" photos. Theo was on our boat and was going down to see his handiwork once again. He tells an interesting story about the planning and execution of the sinking. Pretty easy dive but a bit deep for true beginners.

UNEXSO, Sunn Odyssey, Pelican Bay, Ritz Beach Resort, August 2001, Linda Turner (atochalt@aol.com) Hurricane, WV. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 84F. Dives logged: 500+. Dive restrictions: depth and time. Pelican Bay accommodations and service excellent. Very convenient to UNEXSO, shopping, food, and entertainment. Shark Encounter and Dolphin Encounter basically to 45 ft. and sitting still. Some staff were helpful and informative and others just wanted to flirt with my 16 year old daughter. Ritz Beach Resort: Rooms were large but not clean (used bar soap in soap dishes, hair in shower trap, crumbs throughout the first level, no pillowcases on pillows). Many items were missing (clock radio, dishes, dish towels). We were assured they would bring these items but we never did receive them. Ferry service to Port Lucaya was convenient (\$25 for one week pass). Dove with Nick and Karen at Sunn Odyssey. Very well-run operation. Made you feel like you were part of the family. Even gave us some key limes off the tree in their yard. They were very flexible in accommodating special wishes. We had no more than 10 divers each trip. My daughter took her Advanced course and received one-on-one instruction from Nick. They have dive/accommodation packages available. We rode the ferry from the Ritz to Port Lucaya and Karen picked us up and returned us to the ferry dock. The reefs weren't that great but saw some nice stingrays, couple of large grouper, some spotted eels and a good variety of small reef fish.

Xanadu, March 2001, Chris Ballas, Spring Lake Heights, NJ. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 76-78 F, choppy. Dives logged: 250. Dive restrictions: time and depth, stay with divemaster. The shop and 3 boats (only one was running!) were in poor condition. Staffing was inadequate. I was asked to take 3 divers with me and look after them while the divemaster taught a student. The boat broke down twice and one of the passengers and I helped fix it! The ship owner was a great guy as well as a couple from the U.K. who worked there — but the whole operation needs help! (800-327-8150; 242-352-3811; 242-352-5856; Fax 242-481-5630)

New Providence

Dive Dive Dive, October 2000, Rick Shaw, Whitby, ON. Vis: 50-100 Feet. Water: 82 F. The reefs are poor, lack of fish on some sites, but others were excellent. Dave's drop off great vertical wall, lot of fish, 2 dolphins, 4 large eagle rays. Bahama Mama good for the shark beginner but the shark alley dive was worth the trip. Awesome experience. The accommodations were excellent, private bungalow 30 feet from the dock, great staff, many returning divers. Dive restrictions: Depth 130, allowed to make own buddy teams, dive master was assigned to inexperienced divers. Suggested dive profiles only. (Ph: 800-328-8029 or 809-362-1143)

Dive Dive Dive, Divers Haven, Stuart Coves/Atlantis, October 2000, Steve Moore (stephenfmoore1@aol.com) Mechanicsburg, PA. Vis: 35-45 Feet.

Water: 80-82 F. Choppy. Atlantis on Paradise Island. Very nice, a Las Vegas style hotel. The onsite underwater park is worth the trip. The prices at the Atlantis are brutal. I dove with Diver's Haven, the dive shop associated with the hotel on one day. Dive guide and boat/shop facilities were fine. However, they pick up divers at cruise ship pier which led to a significant delay. Diver's Haven dives sites on NW of island. Really not worth diving when better sites available on SE side. Changed over to Dive Dive Dive on SE side of island. Nice small operation. Friendly staff and fine facilities. Dove a shark dive. Was a lot of fun. My last dive I dove with Stuart Coves. Large busy operation efficiently run. However they were sending boats out with 16 divers. I managed to get on a small boat with 6 divers and had a blast. Kenny and Dwight, the captain and guide did a nice job. Sharks everywhere. Overall, the reefs were in tough shape.

Dive Dive Dive, Radisson Cable Beach, 2001, Mark Strobel, Orono, MN. Logged dives: 75. Well-run dive operation with clean, spacious boats and friendly divemasters. Our 13 year-old did his open-water dives and we were very pleased with the attention he got. Dive shop is a 20-minute drive SW from Cable Beach and further from Paradise Island. Then, a 15-minute boat ride to the closest sites. Very little live coral or small critters. Reef and nurse sharks got up-close and personal. They find you on the way down and stay the entire dive.

Kneel on the bottom, stay still, and they'll swim within 3' of your mask. Rise tank provided for cameras. Water was provided during surface intervals. Allowed more experienced divers to do our own thing and follow our own computers. Radisson was nice but we felt like we were being charged extra every time we turned around: mandatory energy surcharge, bellman and maid gratuities, etc. Expensive drinks and food at the beach. Rooms are in need of maintenance but hotel grounds are gorgeous. Good beach and Marion next door was convenient for restaurants, casino and shops.

Nassau Scuba Center, Nassau Beach Hotel, June 2000, Nancy Ruth, Upper Marlboro, MD. NSC not as attentive as they had been 3 years ago. I was accompanied by my friend who had just completed his check out dive in a quarry. No extra care was taken as I had experienced in the past. Fewer sharks, eels and lobster, fewer fish overall. Found a great Italian restaurant down the street from NBH. Safe trip for single females. (Ph: 800-327-8150 or 809-362-1964)

Nassau Scuba Center, Radisson Cable Beach, March 2001, David Vickery (twodivers@att.net) Hoboken, NJ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 77 F, calm. Computer divers were allowed to dive to the 130 foot limit, unless their Nitrox mix limited their maximum depth. Our second trip with Nassau Scuba Center, and they afforded us a maximum amount of freedom, telling us after the pre-dive briefing, "you guys can do what you

want." The reefs still have a lot of algae on them. The further out you go from the island, the less algae you will see. There are still reefs like Pumpkin Patch or Southwest Reef that are relatively algae-free, but these are the exceptions. However, Nassau Scuba Center regularly makes the trip to some of the more distant reefs like Razorback or Arena, which are worth repeat visits. Lots of sharks for a Caribbean destination; mostly Caribbean Reef sharks, but a few nurse sharks. Nassau Scuba Center dives some of the shark-feeding areas in the morning when no feeds are taking place, and you get to dive with the sharks without all the chaos. The new wrecks sunk recently are mostly ho-hum. The one good size wreck is the 'Ann' which starts at 80' and goes down to 180'. We were unable to visit it because Nassau Scuba Center will only dive this site if the all divers on board are experienced, and there were some students on our trip. Be sure and schedule all your dives for the morning. In the afternoon, the cruise ships drop off their Discover Scuba students, and you learn the real meaning of 'Scuba Zoo.'

Nassau Scuba Center, March 2001, Jim Meere, Spring Hill, FL. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 75 F. Dives logged: 450 last three years. Dive restrictions: 130' computer, 80' no computer-30 min. Booked thru Neal Watson's Undersea Adventures. Liked the personalized service. Dive boat crew — fantastic, friendly, laid back — load your gear — great guides. Divemaster "Neal" was best of the 6. Hotel — Orange Hill — basic — circa

1960 — acceptable — property is tired but great if budget is tight — clean — 1000 a day view on large hill overlooking water — dive shop schedules need “tweaking”. Don’t fly American Eagle to Nassau. Nassau Airport staff “sucks”. Poor service — treated us like cattle. Arrived at airport 8:15 am finally got out 8:30 pm. Had to stop at Miami, then Tampa, got home 1:30 am (17 hours). Also lost my luggage for a day. P.S. Love your newsletter.

**Nassau Scuba Center, May 2001,
Carol Thompson, Shrewsbury, MA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 25 to 60 Feet. Water: 74 to 76 F, choppy no currents. Instructors and divemasters we dealt with were great guys. Antonio did one-on-one OW certification instruction for our daughter and did a superb job. Neil was excellent at finding little critters, including a nudibranch, and was always fast with a smile. Claudy who drives the boat, was accommodating about going somewhere good our last day since the diving the first two days was lousy. The boat was fast and stable. Dual ladders in back. The bus that transports divers from hotels to the pier was prompt, with the exception of the third day, when they forgot us. Sharks. Lots of them. Some excellent sites. Well-ventilated place to store gear and hang wetsuits. They pulled Antonio from accompanying my daughter on her last two check-out dives, because “he is the only one who can drive the bus.” This left my 19-year-old daughter extremely apprehensive, as Antonio had been with her throughout the classroom process, and

had dove with her for her first two dives. Although I went to speak to Antoine, the Frenchman who mans the desk, he was unrelenting. The impression I got from him was, “Too bad about your daughter’s discomfort. I need Antonio to drive the bus, so that’s what’s going to be — end of discussion.” The pinch-hitter, Kenya, did an admirable job, fortunately, and our daughter passed. When the cruise ships come in, the boat becomes absurdly full. Fortunately, it was only a cattle boat on one of the four days. Most likely to happen in the afternoon than the morning. They take you to some really lousy sites. Cessna Wall, the site of the plane used as a prop in the 4th Jaws movie. The site is just as forgettable as the movie. Propeller Reef, where there was almost nothing to see — a little sand-covered coral, a few prosaic reef fish. We went to two of the most colorless and unmemorable wrecks I’ve ever seen in 10 years — the Sea Viking and Carib Breeze. When we went to surface after the Carib Breeze, the boat was gone. It did return eventually. We had seen the anchor being pulled through the sand earlier. They give you absolutely NO service. This is the very first time I was left to fend for myself after the dive, having to make my way back to the tank slot with no help. Most operators help you not to fall, assisting you in getting your tank secured. They have a dispenser of lukewarm water. That’s all the refreshments offered. Although we begged to do Razorback Ridge they consistently declined to take us there. They put certification

trainees on with certified divers, and will only go to sites that are less than 60' in depth. That happened every day but the last. We observed some Instructors wearing gloves and touching the reefs. They do not stress ecologically-minded practices in their briefings. The shortest surface intervals I have ever encountered. If we didn't have computers, I would have been very nervous about it. Personally, I don't think it's fair to push the envelope, just so that they can make it back in time for the afternoon dive. Their main virtue is in their dive staff and their super-fast boat.

Sandals, September 2000, Kim and Rob Segers, Glendale, AZ. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 82-86 F. Dive restrictions: Strict depth limits and strict time limits even when diving with computer. Excellent boat and rental equipment — new and in great shape. Boat was late leaving most days so dives were cut short to stay on schedule. Strict time limits on dives regardless of how much air you had left or what your computer allowed. Most dives were in less than 60 feet with 30-40 min time limits. Were forced to stay in group regardless of dive ability or experience — one day group was 16 divers! Divemasters were not knowledgeable about dive sites and were not good at spotting critters. Also no mask or camera rinse tanks on board and very nice camera table always had lots of other junk piled on it. I was there on a site inspection as a travel agent. Would probably not return as a dive or send other divers. **(Ph: 888-SANDALS or (242) 327-6400; Fax: (242) 327-6961)**

Stuart Cove's, January 2001, Adrian & Julie Vanderkroef, Newtown, CT. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 74-76 F. Dives logged: 560. Dive restrictions enforced: 30min/70 ft. The dive operation predominately services the one time visits from Nassau's cruise ships, mostly the skull and thrash crowd. Reefs are not in very good shape, but there are many sharks which are fed regularly. Shark dive is a thrill. Divemasters are pretty much all new-grads, just doing it by the numbers. Briefings concentrated on how much your video would cost and when the slides they take of you will be ready. They attempted to enforce a 30 minute/70 foot bottom time until we reminded them who the customer was. Clarion was excellent. Food prices outrageous. Get a meal plan if possible. Airport transfers with Majestic Tours were terrible. If you have a day or two to kill in Nassau then the shark dive is worth it, though not as satisfying as free range encounters with North Carolinas tigers. **(Ph: 800-879-9832 or 954-524-5755, Fax: 954-524-5925; e-mail info@stuartcove.com; website www.dive-bahamas.com)**

Stuart Cove's, Clarion South Ocean, March 2001, Kendall Botellio, Phoenix, AZ. Vis: 70-100+ ft. Water: 74-76 F. Dive restrictions: dive computer. Get ocean rooms at Clarion! Well worth extra \$\$.

Stuart Cove is an outstanding dive operation! Dolphins, sharks, marlin — awesome! Drift dives, wall flying with scooters, out island trip all were excellent. Shark dives are out of this world!

**Stuart Cove's, Clarion Hotel Resort,
May 2001, Dale Treadway
(trdwy@tconl.com) Omaha, NE.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 72 to 73 F, calm no currents. Shark dives were excellent. 7 to 10 foot Caribbean reef sharks up close and personal. As many as 35 on one dive. Good place to finish certification and get some dives logged as a beginner. Dive shop was professional, good boats, well organized, on time, helpful and did all possible to make experience a good one. Clarion Hotel beach front units are the best with very nice views. Condition of reef is poor. Gray haze over all, not sure if it is algae, sand on reef, bleaching etc. Few tropical fish and are skittish. Hotel food only OK and service is only fair. Schedule the shark dives 3 or 4 days and skip the regular package dives. Rinse bucket on all boats, help with camera (into water etc.), Photo staff and shop ashore, very good facilities overall, contracted for personal video on shark dives(6), good footage but editing not very good.

**Stuart Cove's, Clarion, June 2001,
William Chilcote, Cleveland, OH.**

Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 78-80 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: about 50. Dive restrictions: Depth and time — back on the boat time. Stuart Cove's dive operation is very good with friendly helpful staff. Most boats leave with 15 people, 2 or 3 divemasters and sometimes a photographer. They offer a variety of diving experiences. The dive operation is adjacent to the Clarion Hotel. This is a mediocre hotel at best. Most people diving AM and

PM don't require much in the way of rooms but they do need to eat and the food is very poor. There is only one restaurant and the hotel is far from town. It does not have a very nice beach and is not a children friendly hotel.

**Stuart Cove's, July 2001, Brad
Bowen, Farmington, UT.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Water: 84 to 88 F. We were on three different boats, and none of them had any facilities for cameras. The boats were quite crowded. we did take our Sea and Sea MX-10 but not any of our other camera equipment due to the lack of camera tables and crowded boats. On the first day of diving we were required to initial a list of divers upon entering and exiting the water, which we thought was a good safety feature. The second day the boat was more crowded and this procedure was not followed. After the first dive I heard discussion among the dive staff as to whether everyone was on the boat or not. They waited about 15 minutes and eventually decided there were no more divers in the water due to lack of bubbles. I had discussed diving 5 star sites with the US booking office. They assured me they were able to dive all sites on the "Tongue of the Ocean" and said to just request the sites I wanted to dive with the boat captain. The boat captain and dive masters were unwilling to travel more than 15 minutes from Stuart Cove's pier. As a result, the three "deep dives" were all within 200 yards of each other. The reef was moderately healthy from 75' to the abyss. From 60% to 75% of the corals and sponges were dead and

covered with green algae in water shallower than 60' and within 150 yards of the mooring ball. Although visibility was not real good, the Carib Breeze and James Bond wrecks were worthwhile dives. Carib Breeze was heavily encrusted on masts, lightly encrusted on the body and easily penetrated in numerous spots. I took off my scuba gear and my wife snapped a picture of me sitting on the can. Moderate fish population with a big school at the stern, often behind the propellers. The scaffolding of the plane from one of the Bond movies is over 30 years old and heavily encrusted — very beautiful despite limited visibility. The “Thunderball” wreck is a short distance from the plane. It is not encrusted but can be penetrated for most of its length. Big school of silversides inside with a couple of bar jack always trying to feed on them. For our last shallow dive the captain made a half hour trip to a site called “donut hole.” This site was the best of all sites we dove. Although the deepest point on the dive was only 35', this site consisted of numerous coral heads on a sandy bottom 25' to 35' deep. Many of the coral heads towered to within 10' of the surface. Corals and sponges were quite healthy and most species of Caribbean reef fishes were represented in abundance, many in large schools. Visibility ranged from 20 to 70 feet'. Clearly evident from crew discussion that their primary concern was being back to the dock by around 4:00 so that they could go home on time, rather than giving divers a quality experience. Experienced divers should

have been put on a boat and allowed to dive advanced sites, with the newly certified and inexperienced divers put on a different boat. We had a crowded boat on all dives, and on one dive had two teenagers Stuart Cove's had certified the day before. If you are an experienced diver, alert the staff on your boat that you want to get in the water immediately upon arrival at the dive site or your first dive will be limited to 30 to 35 minutes.

San Salvador

Club Med, August 2000, Preston Westmoreland, Carefree, AZ. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 81-82 F. Dive restrictions: Computers, first dive 130, second 85 and third 60 ft. Disappointed to find algae growing out of control everywhere. It has coated all the beautiful coral and walls. Very little fish life left. Everybody was sad to see it. Even Frankie, the grouper, was caught and eaten several years ago. These used to be some of the most beautiful wall dives in the world. The resort itself is still wonderful except for the crying babies. ((Ph: 800-258-2633 or 809-331-2000, Fax: 602-948-4562 or 809-331-2458))

Club Med, February 2001, Lawrence Cohn, New York, NY. Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 70 F. Dives logged: 215. Dive restrictions enforced: 130-45 min. Mostly beginners. 10-25 divers per boat. Well maintained and organized. Always had at least 3000 psi. Fair diving — went because my wife, a non diver, needed something to do on vacation. Nice resort.

Riding Rock Inn, November 2000, Terry (thx1137@jps.net) Truckee, CA. Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 79-81, calm. Bahamas Air has no schedule, they arrive and depart at will. All our luggage made it to the island, though there were two late arrivers that never got their luggage or dive gear. The Riding Rock is an OK clean resort, the rooms are basic, nice beds, TV with lots of channels, the shower was POOR, one of those MIST heads, but had hot water most of the time. The water tastes bad, we brought a filter, but it didn't change the taste. The Diving was great from two old seaworthy boat, walls every day on all three dives. My favorite sites, just 20 min from the marina, were "Hole in the Wall" "Big Crack" and "Runway 10." No Nitrox. We saw the Club Med boats but they never dove the same sites. The dive staff is great. Our captain was Shawn, our divemaster Ray gave a tour of the wall on every dive site or you could go on your own, no problems, very competent. Both boat have freshwater tank for cameras and camera table. (Ph: 800-272-1492 or 954-359-8353, e-mail: ridingrock@aol.com)

Riding Rock Inn, March 2001, Blaine and Marian Browne, Lighthouse Point, FL. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 75-78 degrees. Dives logged: 50. Bahamas air flight plan alterations compelled by a major weather front, which resulted in an unscheduled stop on Cat Island, the birthplace of Sidney Poitier. At San Salvador, we were met by Clyde, the Riding Rock representative who greeted us in a friendly

manner, gathered up our baggage and took us by van to the inn, which is within sight of the airport. The Riding Rock Inn is comfortable, well maintained and staffed by friendly folks. Our second-floor room was modern and clean, featuring a refrigerator and satellite TV that broadcast, among other things, weather reports from Florida. Our room, which was only yards away from a beautiful, Caribbean-colored bay, featured a nice balcony. The island's water is potable, but not very pleasant tasting. The dining room serves bottled water and we ended up purchasing several gallons from nearby Cockburntown. Food was plentiful if not gourmet. Different fresh fish each evening. The service staff went out of their way to meet our requests. My wife inquired about getting a banana for breakfast one morning and when they discovered they had none in the kitchen, they actually sent someone out to obtain some locally grown fruit. An unceasing, four-day windstorm resulted, kicking up monstrous seas that I have only witnessed during tropical storms and hurricanes, making it impossible for any boats to leave the marina. For of the five days diving the wall was impossible. Divemaster Ray Gentile, a congenial of relatively subdued Canadian, did his best to keep us occupied. We toured the island (which is, of course, the site of Columbus' first landfall in the New World), explored the lighthouse, beach combed on the quiet windward side of the island and explored a fascinating limestone cavern. By Thursday, we were offered the chance to snorkel or

shore-dive in French Bay. We squeezed in three dives before we had to depart the next day. The boats, both of which were spacious, offered easy entry and exit for divers. Ray and Shawn, our Bahamian captain, set up and handled all our gear. They were informative and helpful. "Great Cut," featured some striking topography and coral growth, but visibility was at most 50 feet and a horrendous current. We were relieved to get back on the boat and all aboard panted and stared for awhile. "Shangri-La" was a nice wall dive and "Sand Castles" featured several friendly groupers, garden eels and tilefish. With a 3mm shorty wetsuit, the relatively cool water temperatures were easily tolerated.

Riding Rock Inn, April 2001, Susan Sampson, Seattle. WA. Vis: 100'+. Water mid-70s. Profiles: first dive 130', 3-min safety stop, return with 400-500 psi; second and third dives daily, more conservative. Charter out of Ft. Lauderdale, a twin-engine Cessna carrying five adult passengers and one baby. Our luggage was limited to 70# each, but folks we met who used Bahamas Air were limited to 40#. The Inn was clean and comfortable, and nearly empty. Meals featured huge quantities of American-style food. Breakfast was full a la carte; lunch and dinner always included conch chowder (tomato-based; dairy products are difficult to bring to the island); and offered a choice of two entrees, one of which was usually fish from the charter boats operating that day out of the marina. Dinner included a California jug wine and a wine glass

filled to the brim like beer. Food was so plentiful that we started asking for small portions. The inn was operating one boat and at the maximum, carried 7 divers. We did three tanks daily, including one night dive. Most rides were short. Divemaster Ray and boat Captain Sean handled all the gear, including air only, no Nitrox. The boat featured a generous platform for entries and exits, and carried oxygen, fresh water, towels, and a first aid kit. The marine head didn't work, but I've never met one that did. The diving was fantastic. The lee side of the island is bordered by a reef that starts at about 40' down and tops a wall that drops clear to the center of the earth. We saw sharks on most dives, including reef sharks and hammerheads. We also saw turtles and rays, both Southern rays and spotted eagle rays, and abundant other fish, corals, sponges, eels and conchs. We lost one days' diving due to bad weather. We were treated to a view of a natural phenomenon: huge waterspouts forming off shore and sucking sea water into the air through dark, twisting funnel clouds. Later on, the divemaster took us beach combing on the windward side of the island to make up for the lost dive time. The trip included a tour of the island that included climbing to the top of a U.S. Civil War-era lighthouse and a narrative of island history from Clifford "Snake-eyes" Fernander. The dive shop on site is small and pretty fundamental, and the photo shop did not seem to be open. Our room was a single-story unit facing the ocean, furnished with a sofa, refrigerator,

table and chairs, bed with good mattress, television and very effective air conditioning. The bathroom was small, shower but no tub, but fully functional. We had plenty of hot water and towels. The room came furnished with a large aerosol can of insecticide. We were cautious about bugs and sprayed ourselves with DEET after every shower and every dive, so I remained unscathed for the week. My buddy forgot his DEET once, and immediately collected 5 bites.

Riding Rock Inn, June 2001, Randy Dick (wathoni@aol.com) Augusta, ME. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 120 Feet. Water: 76 to 79 F, calm no currents. Wish we had known about algae problem. Very bad, covered most all of coral. Chris, Ray and Bruce are not suited for their positions as divemaster or boat captain. Not interested at in interacting with customers unless it is in a derogatory fashion. Burnt out would be my guess. Alex and Shawn were very nice, however and competent. Well suited to deal with clients. Your money would be better spent elsewhere.

Riding Rock Inn, June 2001, Gary De Barba, Southington, CT. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F, calm and flat, choppy. Logged dives: 250+. Dive restrictions: First dive 130 ft., second dive 70 ft., third 100 ft. Accommodations are no frills. The rooms are modernized, clean and have working ac and a refrigerator. The restaurant was not fancy but the food was very good and of sufficient quantity for even my hearty appetite. Breakfast

consisted of eggs, or pancakes or French toast, bacon, sausage, cereal, and fruit. Lunch and dinner was usually a choice of two entrees or sometimes a buffet. The inn provided us with a ride to "town" so we could stock up on water, juice, beer, and munchies. The bus tour of the island was interesting. Bahamasair inter-island flights do not run on schedule—allow plenty of time to make connections. The dive operation was well run, punctual and service-oriented. Divers set up their tanks on the first day and didn't touch their gear until the last day. The crew handled all tank changes and on-board gear rinse. Divers are assigned to a boat for the week. You are allowed to dive your own profile with limits of 130 ft. on first am dive and 70 ft. on second am dive. The afternoon dive is limited to 100 ft. The diving is typical wall diving with the top of the wall at 40 ft. and dropping below 130 ft. The reef was covered with algae but there were sufficient soft and hard corals to be interesting. Reef sharks, hammerheads and turtles were frequently spotted along with the usual groupers, flamingo tongues, puffers, eels, squid and other reef dwellers. The evening dive is worth it. There is no shore diving. One member of our group completed her open-water certification, performing her four open-water dives one-on-one with Chris. He gave her many underwater exercises and practices and did an exceptional job of working her through her nervousness. Beware of the no-see-ums at dusk and biting ants in the grassy areas.

Riding Rock Inn, July 2001, Stan Campbell, (stancamp33@aol.com) Cincinnati, OH. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Logged dives: 1000+ (diving for 45 years). Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. Dedicated dive resort, definitely no glitz but very adequate accommodations. Rooms are clean, comfortable with A/C, phone, refrig and TV. Bring bug repellent. No crime on the island. Food is good to excellent, served in comfortable surroundings. Daily conch chowder is out of this world. Wait staff is friendly and accommodating. Dive staff is competent, helpful and willing to assist when needed, such as spotting critters. No hassle diving your own profile to 130 ft limit. Very friendly attitude on board fast boats. Most dive sites less than 20 min trip. Standard day is two tanks in AM and one tank in PM. Boat crew takes care of everything. One night dive per week. No Nitrox. Every dive can be an excellent wall dive. Abundant small fish, but did not see very many large fish. Photo pro, Chris McLaughlin, provides daily E6 film processing and friendly, informal help to a/w photographers. Higher level of photo support and rentals are available for a fee. Great bang for the buck.

Riding Rock Inn, September 2001, Chuck Wohlust (gchas1@aol.com) Winter Park, FL. Vis: 100-120 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Dives logged: 217. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. first dive, 70 ft. second dive, back 500 lbs. "If you have time to spare, fly Bahamas Air." We were a day late getting into San Salvador and missed

our flight back to Miami. The diving and relaxation were all we expected. Chris McLaughlin and the dive crew were wonderful. Despite the algae we saw plenty of coral and fish. Besides how can you beat wall diving. Food was good and plentiful and accommodations adequate. Crowds minimal; lots of room on the boat.

BARBADOS

Barbados is busy and crowded, with lots of fast traffic, big splashy resorts, and restaurants galore. . . . There's ordinary Caribbean diving with tropical fish, although big ones are rare, but it's fine for beginners or for a dive or two on a golf holiday. . . . You still can find century-old bottles in the harbor and the wreck of the *Stavronikita* is interesting, but jammed with tourist divers. . . . The average daily temperature is in the mid-80s year-round; there's considerable rain from June to January, and it's important to watch for hurricanes. . . .

Blue Reef, July 2001, Philip Hamilton (jeepster@scubadiving.com) Sugar Land, TX. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm. John Moore runs an outstanding operation. We dove to the limits of our computers, and had an outstanding set of dives, considering the rainy weather and runoff making the water cloudy. Their shop is on the beach a few miles north of Bridgetown. He has an open boat which can hold six divers, and is knowledgeable about the area, both above and below the waterline. At Tropicana Reef the silty mess cleared