

an advanced dive. My impression is that some operators will take any level diver into the Blue Hole, and it can be dangerous. Taking the boat tour to the Mayan ruins in Lamanai was a great excursion. The food in Belize City is uniformly bland, and can get expensive without much increase in quality. (Ph: 800-815-1304 or (605) 578-1304; fax (605) 578-7540; e-mail vacation@tflats.com; website www.tflats.com)

## BERMUDA

Despite Bermuda's pricey, elegant hotels and British manners, it's not a decent dive destination, even for beginners. Reefs are thin and there's sparse fish life. . . . From January to March, the average high is 68 degrees, the low around 58. Summers are balmy, waters chilly. Bermuda's in the hurricane zone, around the same latitude as Charleston, South Carolina. . . .

**Blue Water Divers, September 2000, Nicholas A. Musashe, Winter Park, FL.** Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 81 F. Dives logged: 60. Dive restrictions: Return 300 psi. Blue Water Divers has three dive operations on the island, so at least one of them can find good diving conditions each day. They go out of their way to find the best sites each day, but are very receptive to requests from divers. Knowledgeable, helpful, and friendly staff at all locations. (Ph (441)-234-1034, (441)-232-2911, (441)-232-2909; Fax (441)-232-3670; e-mail bwdivers@ibl.bm or bluewaterdivers@newsteadhotel.com; website www.divebermuda.com)

## BONAIRE

In 1999, hurricane-driven waves damaged, even destroyed, many of Bonaire's beautiful shallow coral gardens, ruining snorkeling in many places. Still, Bonaire is a diver's island par excellence, with easy diving that's especially well-suited to beginning divers or those returning to the water after a long dry spell. Superb year-round weather, with lows around 74° at night and daytime highs around 89°. Expect some rain from October–January, but, since Bonaire lies outside the hurricane belt, dives are rarely canceled. . . . The dive industry here's thoroughly organized with many excellent operators and lots of places to rent tanks or book boat dives. Although the island's been heavily dived for the last two decades, its unusual coral formations harbor a wide range of tropicals and, while there are sharks or pelagics are rare, shore diving in front of every hotel is rewarding. . . . Savvy divers rent a vehicle to shore-dive the island (reserve ahead of time, or you may be out of luck — and don't leave valuables in your car). . . . The southern end of the island is often rough, but worth diving when conditions are favorable. . . . Avoid meal plans to take advantage of the many restaurants within walking distance of most hotels (and so you don't get stuck if your hotel chef is on leave). There's overnight film processing, good

gear rental, and repair facilities. . . . Everyone speaks English. . . . Because of the terrible service of ALM airlines, there is an excellent chance your luggage will be delayed and your trip will be delayed one way or the other by as much as a day.

### **Blue Divers, Palm Studios, October 2000, Ezra, Staten Island, NY.**

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 90 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm.

Large, clean apartment with all utensils necessary, though the fridge electrocuted me depending on how I opened the door. Five minute walk to the water. Blue Divers is the in-house dive shop. One dive instructor, one guide. For 3 days I was the only diver — friendly staff. The dive instructor, Isabella, is enthusiastic, accommodating, and professional. Diving was easy, fun shore dives in calm water and decent to good visibility. Shallow reefs basically gone, but at 30 ft.+ all is well. (Ph: 599 717 6860; Fax: 599 717 6865; e-mail: [info@bluedivers.com](mailto:info@bluedivers.com); website [www.bluedivers.com](http://www.bluedivers.com))

**Buddy Dive Resort, August 2000, Charles Garvey, Knoxville, TN.** Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Dives logged: 100. Dive restrictions: 130 ft sport limit, we dove computers — no real limits. Staff helpful from accommodations to working out requested dives. Boats were small, couple real slow, so faster boats from other resorts beat us to some sites. Food was excellent, cheeseburger equal to Green Parrot's. Maybe best food deal on island. They have a new dock and hope to upgrade boats (check first).

Room was good overall, main room not air conditioned but bedrooms are. We took a new 10 year old diver and the staff finished him up superbly and he dove with us the rest of the week. They took us to the Hilma Hooker (long trip for a slow boat. They shuffled schedules or added boats to keep our group (8 divers) together when we wanted it. The storm surge has wasted shallow coral but only on the areas facing the surge. In front of the resort it is OK after 30 ft or so, and big areas of Bonaire and Klein Bonaire facing away are untouched. Tanks are left out for night diving (Nitrox too) when requested. All were 3000+ full tanks and the drive through station is convenient for shore diving. We dove our own profile and divemasters were helpful but did not interfere. Night diving brought out big tarpon (4-5ft.) that followed us around. The bad was mosquitoes in the common room of the condo — we left the doors open for the breeze — and ate dinner outdoors. Repellent helped. Boats were adequate and not overcrowded, 8-12 divers. The condo/apartments are good if a little old, but all of Bonaire is trying to upgrade and rebuild after the storm. Crews were working every day we were there putting in new sidewalks, etc. and hope to have the main dining area back open soon. The outdoor dining under the stars, with pounding surge under the cliff was fabulous though. Expect some level of housing or services below premium U.S. levels. The dive shop also needs to assign lockers or hanging pegs for gear. Would make keeping track of your

gear location easier. Gear room also needs more ventilation. (Ph: (599-717) 5080, Fax: (599-717) 8647; e-mail: [info@BuddyDive.com](mailto:info@BuddyDive.com); website [www.buddydive.com](http://www.buddydive.com))

**Buddy Dive Resort, September 2000, Billy Volner ([volner@castlegate.net](mailto:volner@castlegate.net)), Mims, FL.** Diving great. Pleasantly surprised at the Condo, food and diving accommodations at Buddy's. Some of us upgraded from 6 to 11 boat dives for an additional \$75 dollars. If someone didn't use their boat dives they let anyone that wanted, provided there was room on the boat, to take theirs. The Condo's were much better than the Sand Dollar. We arrived at 4:30 p.m. got in 2 dock dives the same day. Everyone went out of their way to make our diving pleasant and enjoyable. Divemasters were great and entertaining. Don's Habitat had a better lunch menu. You could walk between the two through the courtyard that had additional benefits of sunbathers around the 2 pools. Most of us after finishing a boat dive grabbed another tank and did a dock dive. Sea critters were everywhere. The dive masters pointed out several Sea Horses and Frog Fish. The night diving was outstanding with lots of large Tarpon to play with and lobster to see. Walking 50 feet from your condo and jumping in the water made diving a very enjoyable experience. 30 dives during the 7 days.

**Buddy Dive Resort, October 2000, Kris Syers, Reston, VA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. We have to

Bonaire many times but never to Buddy's. We reserved a 3 bedroom condo for 3 couples but Buddy's would only provide 2 keys for the six of us. We all got locked out for extended periods. It got worse when someone misplaced a key and we were down to 1 key. 2 room safes in our condo but they did not have a key to one and the 2nd was broken yet they tried to charge us for lost safe keys when we checked out. The AC in my bedroom did not work and I had to request a fix everyday because it would only work 6 hours after they "repaired" it). Unlimited shore diving only if you could convince someone to fill an empty tank. They would fill only enough tanks for the dive boat and stop. We had to beg them on several occasions to fill a tank so we could do a shore dive. They'd fill two tanks for us but did not fill any additional tanks for the next diver. If we wanted to do any diving from 4p.m.-9a.m. we were told to just put the needed tanks in equipment room. We tried to but the tanks would disappear before we got to use them. I saw the staff gather them up one afternoon, place them in lockers and lock them up just before they closed. The staff was friendly and the dive boats enjoyable but they were almost always too busy to fill air tanks. Their drive-up air station always had air and it was a great convenience when we wanted to drive to another site but overall I was very unhappy with the operation.

**Buddy Dive Resort, December 2000, Bill and Phyllis Dobbin, ([dobbin@telocity.com](mailto:dobbin@telocity.com)) Libertyville, IL.** Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F.

Dives logged: 150. Dive restrictions: Back on boat in 1 hour. Makes every effort to make your stay a memorable one. Even the restaurant has improved its service and quality of food.

**Buddy Dive Resort, December 2000, Marc Zimmerman/Brenda Hopkins, Frederic, MD.** Vis: 70-110 ft. Water: 78-81 F, calm and flat. Dives logged: 71. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. If you're looking for a place to go in the middle of the winter, Bonaire is it. The slow pace and the ease of diving can't get any more relaxing.

**Buddy Dive Resort, January 2001, Jim and Kristina Blum (k-jblum@mindspring.com) Roswell, GA.** Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 79-81 F, calm and flat. Shore diving is the way to go. There is nothing better than not hearing that dive bell @ 7am. Bonaire is beautiful and varied with salt ponds to the south. Town is the center and the national park to the north. The park (Slagbaai Nat'l.) cannot be missed. Playa Furchi was the best dive I have done thus far. Easy diving combined with fantastic coral and fish makes this a definite return trip.

**Buddy Dive Resort, April 2001, Scott Chaffee (scottc@brcrubbergroup.com) Fort Wayne, IN.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, no currents. Smooth operation, no complaints with staff or boats. Short rides to sites. Most sites are sloping walls which usually start around 20 and go to 200+. Frogfish, seahorses, sharptail eels. Efficient diving operation, with tanks available 24 hrs a day. They dedicated all of the

afternoon dive boats to large groups of people who were at the resort ; diving by myself it forced me to find people to shore dive or do solo dives. More amenities at either Harbour Village or Plaza Resort. Buddy dive is for the true diver that doesn't require much. Boats did not have camera tables, but did have cameras only rinse bucket which divemasters strictly enforced.

**Captain Don's Habitat, November 2000, Jessica Donnell, Swansboro, NC.** Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 76-82 F. Dives logged: 50. My husband went with a group of 10 others from our dive shop. We were assigned the same boat with the same crew for the whole week. The crew got to know us and took extra time locating rarer fish. We observed many seahorses and a few frog fish. Night diving is spectacular right off the house reef. The bugs were terrible and couldn't even feel them making a nasty, wetting mess of my legs. Take bug spray! ALM: No problems and they seemed to go out of their way to please. (Ph: 011-599-717-8290; Fax: 011-599-717-8240; e-mail: [Bonaire@HabitatDiveResorts.com](mailto:Bonaire@HabitatDiveResorts.com); website [www.habitatdiveresorts.com/BonaireHome.html](http://www.habitatdiveresorts.com/BonaireHome.html))

**Captain Don's Habitat, December 2000, Owen Schmidt, Hermosa Beach, CA.** Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 75-80 F. Dives logged: 1,500+. Bonaire offer a diverse eco-system featuring excellent wall diving with large sponges, sea fans and eel. In front of Capt. Don's is an old power boat with a 12ft. green moray eel. The bar, dive shop and restaurant are great. Down-town is clean and there is plenty of

shopping. Petty theft is a concern — on one dive, the parked car next to ours had the windows broken out and several objects were stolen.

**Captain Don's Habitat,  
January 2001, Minh Nguyen  
(minh@mninternational.net)**

**Belmont, CA.** Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. Cool place. The cottage had 2 air conditioned bedrooms, the rest are non air condition: 1 toilet, 1 shower, fully equipped kitchen, and a large outside porch/deck for sitting or drying out your stuffs. Everything is great except the clogged/slowly drained shower where we gave up on asking them to fix it They have more luxurious cottages on the sides of the resort and in front of the swimming pool. The restaurant served excellent...California cuisine? They have nightly activities like slide shows and music. Capt Don's slide show is on Tuesday night. He is a character and his stories are interesting. Dive operation is well run. The dive masters let you dive your own profile. Boats are very crowded: up to 20 people per boat. Three boat dives a day, but this is 24 hrs diving! Grab a tank and dive anytime you want to. The corals here are spectacular. There are not much in terms of large marine life. School of tarpon each 5 feet long. Lots of little critters. The marine life is not as abundant as other places I have been to. Terrain above the water is desert like, and terrain below, with those cactus like soft corals, looks also like the desert. Town pier's my favorite night dive.

**Captain Don's Habitat, March 2001,  
Rupert L. Poston, Long Valley, NJ.**

Vis: 30- 50 ft. Water: 77-79 F, calm and flat. Dives logged 75. True diving freedom for the experienced shore diver and guided boat diving for the inexperienced diver. The paucity of large marine life is more than compensated by the ability to dive your own schedule and profile in a wide variety of sites.

**Captain Don's Habitat, April 2001,  
Will and Pam Winslow, Ballwin,  
MO.**

Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 78-80 F, choppy. Dives logged: 350. Dive restrictions: 100 feet, dive your computer. Good — updated rooms, addition of phones, TV's and new air conditioners. Bad — need coffee makers in rooms! Very accommodating — let us move to our requested room on our second day. Food and service at Rum Runners much improved from two years ago. Some of the same dive staff was still there. Dive staff very good — found sea horses and dolphins for us and were very helpful on the boat.

**Captain Don's Habitat, June 2001,  
Dennis Brower, Silver Springs, MD.**

Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 85 F, calm and flat. Diving restrictions: 130 ft. Logged dives: 375. The "Home of Diving Freedom." Treated us like responsible adults. At each dive we were briefed on locations and conditions. A divemaster went in water and were invited to tag along, or could go our own way and be back at boat at 500 PSI. No hassles. Took tank out at back of boat. Very helpful. Always on time. No one ever asked for tips.

Unlimited shore diving included and some of best dives right in front of hotel dock. Accommodations and food were good, not real fancy, but clean and if you needed anything only had to ask. Diving was great. Visibility very good. Lots of fish you could get close to. Saw 5 turtles on one dive.

**Carib Inn, August 2000,**  
**Richard W. Zuckerman**  
([rwzuckermanesq@home.com](mailto:rwzuckermanesq@home.com))  
**Peoria, IL.** Vis: 50-100 Ft. Water: 78-80 F, calm. Third trip to Bruce Bowker's Carib Inn. Wife was newly certified and was comfortable diving these waters and with these people. Heard of a lot of reef damage. Did not observe it. More barracuda than we had seen in previous years. Juvenile hiding areas were not as plentiful so the fish were out in the open. Reefs were in good shape. Diving is dependable and boats were in good shape. Some new divemasters, but in the Bruce Bowker mold of watchful but not overbearing. Flew ALM. While we only encountered one problem getting home a number of people were stranded for days. (Ph: 599-717-8819; Fax 599-717-5295; e-mail [Info@CaribInn.com](mailto:Info@CaribInn.com); website [www.caribinn.com](http://www.caribinn.com))

**Divi Flamingo, September 2000,**  
**Patricia Angel-Kimmell, Olathe,**  
**KS.** Vis: 70-90 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Diving was decent, however, I notice a decline in several species over the years. My first trip to Bonaire was in 1985 and this being my 7th trip, I notice a decline of yellow tails. Bonaire used to be loaded, in fact, they used to be a nuisance. Also, no

lobster and very few arrow crabs. However, tons of banded coral shrimp and many spotted drums. (Ph: 800-367-3484 or 599-717-8285; Fax: 599-717-8238; e-mail [divibon@bonairelive.com](mailto:divibon@bonairelive.com), website [www.divibonaire.com](http://www.divibonaire.com))

**Divi Flamingo, December 2000,**  
**Stan Post, Holbrook, NY.** Water: 80 F. 1st trip was in February 2000. Refurbishing in progress. Room was fair for 2 guys, my wife would have been unhappy. Diving, 15 dives in 6 days, was great. Water around 80 degrees, no currents of any consequence, plenty of fish and the coral was mostly unharmed by the Nov. storm. The sites were mostly in the 20 to 70 foot range. The staff very nice. 8 days, 7 nights, 3 boat dives a day + unlimited shore diving, breakfast and dinners (no lunch) \$975 + airfare. Jamaica air \$550 from NY. You must be at the airport 2 hrs. before flight time (I know not why). Then the flight was late arriving and we missed our connections to NY. The 3 hr. wait to go to Newark was a mess. When we arrived at Newark, Jamaica Air personnel didn't even know we were coming. They took about 1 hr. to get us transportation home to our door. We got home at 5 AM. instead of 9 PM. Rooms very nice completely redone (still no room phones or alarm clocks). NO currents—easy diving, wonderful array of small critters and thousands of school fish, angel fish, parrot fish, sponges, corals and small critters. Many varieties of morays, some barracudas, 3 frogfish, 2 turtles and some saw a few small sharks and

a manta ray. 17 dives in 6 days. We dove mostly with Rufino and Luty who were both excellent. Some dive rules were given, 70 ft 1st AM dive...50 ft 2nd AM dive. 50 Ft PM dive. They were not enforced. You could dive with the DM or a buddy, your choice. Only 1 dive boat is allowed at each site and there are about 85 sites. Weather 82-84 some rain mostly at night in December trip. None in Feb. We found no crime. Locals very friendly.

**Divi Flamingo, January 2001, Frank Kratovil, Upper Marlboro, MD.** Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Diving restrictions: depth. Logged dives: 100. Outside temperature 82-84 F. Stiff breeze slight chop on some dives, coral appeared somewhat damaged from hurricane. Fish life small and pretty good — lots of moray eels — no big stuff. A few turtles. Visibility was fair. Resort renovated — good — service good. But dinner, arrived 7PM, finished 10PM! Need more waiters, food very good — 1 mile to town and stores (open 9AM, close 12, open 2PM, close 6PM).

**Divi Flamingo, March 2001, Victoria Wells-Manlandro, North Wildwood, NJ.** Vis: 65-95 ft. Water: 78-80 F, choppy. Dives logged: 100+. Dive restrictions: not strict, just careful. Bonaire is like being on a progressive desert island (small feel, but internet access, and educated people). Wish I had warmer wetsuit. Everyone else had full 3mm to 7mm suites. I brought my 3mm shortie, deceived by published temperature. Everyone was friendly, accommodat-

ing, and authentic. Affordable, except plane fare is high.

**Divi Flamingo, May 2001, Henry G. Koc, Grafton, WI.** Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 81-82 F. “Divers Paradise” may be heading for “Paradise Lost.” Why? Because the big attraction for me is the shore diving. Almost all drop-offs are a short easy swim from safe shore entries. Safe, that is, from all save the local car thieves’ vandalism. If you lock your vehicle, they use the coral missile entry system, through the window. If you leave the windows open, do not bring a cooler with drinks and lunch. They will dine on you. Squint at the beautiful Caribbean sun all day and while driving because they will have your sunglasses. Don’t leave clothing, reading glasses or any extra dive or camera gear, it will be gone. Where are the police while this is happening to divers and tourists? At their air conditioned office writing out the daily quota of theft reports. When I went to pick my report up the next day (after having the skip the next dive to report my broken window and missing dive light, backpack, chipped reading glasses (tossed out of the pack) sunglasses, etc. there were 5 more waiting for pickup by other unhappy tourist-divers. Diving is good enough to keep me coming back. I just wish it could be as it was; safe easy diving and crime free. We asked the ALM rep to change my wife to an earlier flight but the cost would be 25 guilders, the rep did not have the cash box key. The next day another ALM rep had the key but now the charge was \$25. Then I

found my return flight later in the week canceled. I asked if ALM would pay me \$25 for having to leave a day early. She said I would have to see ALM. This from a lady in an ALM uniform. See ALM in Curacao she advised. I did. Results — nada!

**Divi Flamingo, June 2001, Michael (stmagk@juno.com) Lorton, VA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 90 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm choppy surge no currents. Dive masters had outstanding attitudes and personalities. Food at the resort outstanding. Food service outstanding. Resort good. (had what they called an ocean view room but had to stand on a chair to see it.) Resort staff disappointing. (Didn't ask if I had a good time or tell me to enjoy myself. Didn't even wish me well at departure time.) Spent 3 days unable to dive because of a rash, but I managed to squeeze in 30 dives during the two weeks. Attended the Dive Festival. Most speakers were brilliant and entertaining. I would suggest that Osha Davidson take a course in speech writing or public speaking. And the Cousteau grandchildren should learn to speak about something more important than the lives of children of the Cousteau name. If they had talked about the accomplishments of the father and grandfather or the importance of the work they are trying to accomplish, I would have been impressed. The only thing they were prepared on was a slide show about them (very sad). Bonaire is not for shoppers and landlubbers. That is good for us divers. Outstand-

ing for print and slide media. Most people not set up for digital media.

**Divi Flamingo, June 2001, Jude Hoffner (jlhoffner@yahoo.com) Sausalito, CA.** Water: 80+ degrees Air: Hot and dry with a merciful breeze. 5th annual Bonaire Dive Festival, a great event from top to bottom. Divi bar and restaurant staff and the dive staff were superb. Helpful and informative, all with a kind attitude punctuated by copious smiles. The hotel staff was a bit ornery, and only as helpful as minimally necessary, mostly without the smile worn by their peers. The hotel was recently redone, and some work is still ongoing. Stayed in a studio time-share room. Very clean, private, although not secluded, porch overlooking the comings and goings around the dive shop. The kitchenette was fully equipped and cleaned every day. It's a 5 minute walk from Joke's corner store, and a 10 minute walk from center of town, so you can stock up easily. Traveling alone, I prefer the proximity to town, if only for an occasional stroll in the afternoon to see some unfamiliar faces. There's a small casino which was open later than I was on most nights. I threw a few sheets with the party crew one night, and lasted long enough to enjoy one free drink before I'd burned a hole in my bathing suit pocket. The reef off Divi is nice, similar to most locations on the leeward side of the island. Boat trips depart twice a day for various locales. Klein Bonaire was my preferred boat destination (saw a 7 foot green moray out and hunting on a



dusk dive) while the Hilma Hooker was fine as wrecks go. Divi is also close to the various piers in town which offer excellent “urban diving” alternatives to the relatively pristine reefs both day and night. Get permission from the Authority. I checked out other resorts on the island, and came to appreciate Divi a lot. The layout, the location, the accommodations ... all really top notch as dive resorts go. I did take one night dive off Captain Don’s on his reef, followed by a long night of carousing with one of the Festival’s guest speakers and my dive buddies. Bonaire Dive Festival has, for 5 years been organized primarily by the Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL), and sponsored by other diving interests from magazines to gear manufacturers. The participants range from novices to 5-times-a-day divers, so you’re bound to meet someone who dives like you do. Optional activities abound each day ranging from equipment demos to dives led by local naturalists. There’s even an amateur photo contest where all the film you can shoot is provided free. Each evening a different resort hosts a two hour cocktail party (a couple of free drinks at each comes with your \$75 festival fee!) with excellent guests such as Stan Waterman and Steven Frink strutting their visual stuff. It’s also a fantastic vehicle for meeting people. I netted myself a few rides to dive sites in the back of trucks throughout the week, and even a swung lift to the airport at 4am (someone needs to tell American Airlines about island time) from a fellow festival-goer.

**Divi Flamingo, July 2001, Gary Sharp, Hendersonwell, TN.** Vis: 75 ft. Water: 82-84 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 210. Dive restrictions: suggested time or depth. Divi has largely remodeled and further renovation is ongoing. Very friendly people, very competent dive and hotel staff. Super place for a dive base for shore or boat dives. Good food.

**Divi Flamingo, July 2001, Doug & Laura Young (oceanlakescuba@aol.com) Waco, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Divemasters (Enrique Molina and Orlando Thomas) and dive service. Excellent at finding rare marine life and sharing with everyone. Fantastic diving. Restaurant service due to the 15% service charge is already added into your bill. No incentive to serve better. Have to ask to have water glass filled and divers need to stay hydrated. Bring a collapsible cooler and buy drinks at grocery store. Expensive at bar. Bring alarm clock, none in room although the resort does offer ‘wake-up knock. ‘No bugs! Photography comments: camera table and rinse bucket on boat. DMs glad to hand equipment to you. Had 60 Hz outlet at dive store to recharge equipment (Bonaire runs on 50 Hz). Had camera rinse bucket on dock as well.

**Divi Flamingo, August 2001, Mimi Greensburg (ltlmi@aol.com) Los Angeles, CA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. I did 18 dives and never got a tank filled above 2800. Not unusual to get 2600. Dive masters are polite but

indifferent. The hotel service is nonexistent. Wake up calls came at the wrong hour or not at all. Staff is passively hostile toward guests. None of the handicap accessible rooms have been refurbished. Meals are more expensive than local restaurants unless you purchase their meal plan. Best part of trip — seahorses and two squid between 3 and 5 feet long swimming together the two weeks I was there.

**Harbour Village Beach Resort,  
January 2001, Fred and Sue  
Howarth, Pacific Palisades, CA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: calm no currents. ALM totally ignoring its schedule and lost my luggage. My husband's planned 6-hour layover in Aruba turned into an 8-1/2 hour layover, partly because ALM was unwilling to allow him to use his Aruba to Bonaire ticket to fly Aruba-Curacao-Bonaire. Ultimately, when his scheduled flight experienced mechanical difficulties, guess what the solution was? They flew him Aruba-Curacao-Bonaire — and lost his luggage. I avoided the luggage issue by (1) having him schlepp all of our dive gear (he had 2 weeks; I had only 1) and (2) by gate checking my luggage. The gate checking system works exceptionally well: luggage is tagged just outside the plane, on the tarmac. At the other end, it is received just outside the plane, on the tarmac. There seem to be no limits to size or number of pieces that can be checked in this way. The only potential issue is that if connecting through Curacao, one would have to "claim" the luggage in Curacao and

recheck it to Bonaire — all on the tarmac. As for my flight schedule, my 7:20 flight from Curacao to Bonaire actually left Curacao at 7:05! Dive operation was very good. While they only offer two one-tank boat dives (one at 9:30 a.m. and the other at 2:00 p.m.), on several days we were able to lobby the divemasters to schedule a 2-tank morning boat dive for the following day. Marc, Jules, George, and Martin were all both pleasant and knowledgeable, and made our dives enjoyable. Daniel was a whiz with equipment. Marc has a permit to lead dives of the town pier, and he usually schedules a dive once or twice a week. It's fascinating! See Marc's pre-dive slide show. Seahorses; we found two, residing on "Bonaventure": one yellow, and the other black and white striped. Fish life was plentiful, but mostly small. We also saw dolphins — probably 40-60 of them! While motoring between sites the divemasters took their time and followed the dolphins for about 30 minutes. Divers are required to do a shore-based checkout dive before going on any boat dives. This usually means that you miss the morning boat dive on your first day. With advance planning, one can make arrangements to do it at 8:30, when the dive shop opens, and still make the morning boat dive. Harbour Village was a wonderful resort for those who are NOT hard-core, nothing-but-diving-matters travelers. The spa is very nice (try the "Tropical Touch" massage) and there are tennis courts. Of the four restaurants on the property, the Admirals Tavern has very tasty Spanish fare, La

Balandra is great for lunches (be sure to ask for lettuce or cantaloupe to feed the 4 resident iguanas), and Kasa Coral serves an acceptable breakfast buffet. However, Compadres Mexican restaurant leaves a lot to be desired — it tends to be a noisy local crowd.

Room service is open to 10:30.

Service in the restaurants was friendly, but not fast. Everywhere on the island, the culture seems to dictate that the check will not be presented until you ask for it. One of the best dinners we had was the pasta buffet served weekly at La Balandra — your choice of red or white sauce, and your choice of ingredients to flavor the sauce, including shrimps, scallops, calamari, clams, veggies, etc. Excellent restaurants in town include Mona Lisa, Richard's, and Crocantino (in our order of preference). Our oceanfront suite was excellent: barely 100 yards from our door to the water's edge.

Because we were on the ground floor, we had a hammock on our patio, where I spent my afternoon naps. Bathrooms in the suite were rather small and not very well appointed, but having two in a one-bedroom suite somewhat made up for the size.

Lighting is limited: two lamps in our living room, and two in our bedroom, left large areas of the suite under-lit.

Our suite was a middle unit in its building, and therefore the only natural light was from the sliding doors in the front. End units have windows along one side. There are separate thermostats to control the air conditioning, and these seem to be hidden in unlikely places, like the bedroom closet, about 5 feet off the

ground. (Ph: 800-424-0004 or 305-567-95-09; fax. 305-567-9659; e-mail [reservations@harbourvillage.com](mailto:reservations@harbourvillage.com); website [www.harbourvillage.com](http://www.harbourvillage.com))

**Lions Dive, May 2001, Theresa A. Ritz ([tas@ovnet.com](mailto:tas@ovnet.com)) Wheeling,**

**WV.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 85 to 80 F, calm. Few fish and no large animals. The diving became terribly boring, viewing the broken, crumbled, bleached coral rubble over and over. The boats were so crowded that conditions were unsafe. It was nearly impossible to gear up without falling overboard and equipment was damaged in the crush. There were no camera tanks and other divers placed masks with no fog on top of cameras in the only fresh water bucket. There was no separate place to store camera gear and one was likely to find someone's weight belt thrown atop the camera case after the dive. The dive staff were accommodating, knowledgeable and helpful. The onshore storage facilities were convenient. We were duped into paying an extra \$15 for a night dive on the town pier. The site was so crowded with divers that it was impossible to see, especially with every diver shining a dive light into someone else's eyes. The clanging of tanks hitting in the overcrowded environment was deafening. While there were some beautiful soft coral formations and a few small marine animals, there was a lot of garbage and the smell of diesel fuel permeated the water. At Lion's Dive, Kirk, the chef is truly gifted. Each meal we ate at the newly built restaurant was an

extraordinary experience. (Ph: 866-LIONS DIVE or + (599-717) 5580, fax: + (599-717) 5680; e-mail: [info@lionsdivebonaire.com](mailto:info@lionsdivebonaire.com); website [www.lionsdivebonaire.com](http://www.lionsdivebonaire.com))

**Photo Tour Divers, Happy Holiday Homes, February 2001, Julian MarDock, McKinney, TX.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 Feet. Water: 75 F, calm. My ALM flights were less than 45 minutes late. I didn't see any crime. The shallow coral is over 90% dead. I went to windsurf (that's incredible), so I only took two boat dives, but the water was calm and the coral beautiful. Actually my best underwater experience was snorkeling in Lac Bay, where I found two octopuses, one eating a conch, and a stonefish. I found a 3 bdrm house on the water (you can walk down the stairs to the ocean) for \$1350 a week. (Ph: (599) 717-3460; fax: (599) 717-5363; e-mail: [info@BonPhotoTours.com](mailto:info@BonPhotoTours.com))

**Plaza Resort, Lagoen Hills Bungalows, February 2001, Robert Goodman, Weymouth, MA.** Vis: >80 ft. Water: 79 F., choppy. 1000 dives. Made 30 dives on this trip. Slight southward currents at Karpata and almost always had a bit of a surge. One day Karpata had a Vis of over 150 feet! Permitted to dive our own profiles and the only dive restrictions were that spear fishing was not permitted, nor was the wearing of dive gloves, as well as the removal of anything from the ocean. No sharks, mantas, dolphins, or seahorses seen. First time in nine trips here that I did not see a single octopus! Coral was in excellent shape at Webber's joy, 1000

steps, Ol' Blue, and Karpata. Coral damage at most resort dive sites. Large schools of intermediate fish. Diving at Bonaire is rarely for the very experienced divers unless you run into a strong current or dive at the Windjammer or Blue/White holes. Accommodations at the Lagoen Bungalows very satisfactory. I had a studio, which included a kitchen, but no oven. The bungalow also had a nice porch with a ceiling fan which is where I ate my breakfast and lunch. There was a swimming pool across from my bungalow. The bungalows are 7 minutes from the town of Kralendijck Saw a spotted eagle ray, schools of squid, two snook, many Flamingo tongues, a cleaner shrimp on almost every anemone, many cuboidal-shaped jellies a slipper lobster, 2 small golden eels, 4 Hawksbill Turtles, large green moray eels, several tarpon. the car next to mine was vandalized at Karpata and the couple chose to ignore the advice they were given about vandalism and therefore their video camera was stolen from their locked car while they were diving. I did parasail for the first time very and it was a blast! I finally met Bert at Wannadive dive shop to see if he could take me on his boat to dive at the Blue/White holes, but his boat was out of the water. (Ph: 599 717 2500; fax: 599 717 7133; e-mail: [reservations@plazaresortbonaire.com](mailto:reservations@plazaresortbonaire.com); website [www.plazaresortbonaire.com](http://www.plazaresortbonaire.com))

**Plaza Resort, January 2001, Richard Jaros, Attleboro, MA.** Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 77-80 F. Logged dives: 105. Made 6 trips to Bonaire. Don't

know where you can find better shore diving. Restaurant food is very good. Prices are average for islands.

**Plaza Resort, February 2001, Jason DeSalvo (desalvo@concentric.net)**  
**Montclair, NJ.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 78 F, calm no currents. My wife and I with our son, 6, and our daughter, 2, had 2-bedroom villa for significantly less than 2 adjoining rooms at Harbour Village. Spend the extra money and go to Harbour Village. Everything about the place is better than the Plaza. The beach, the rooms, the food, the service, the dive operation, and even the shore dive (as long as you don't mind a 5-10 minute swim). The Plaza Resort's beach dive, 18 Palms, is a decent sloping wall that starts a short swim from the dock and slopes to over 100 feet. I do solo dawn and night dives to minimize the impact on family time. Although no one at Toucan Divers (the on premises dive operation) had a problem with solo diving, it did require planning the evening before as the shore dive entry was much too far from either my room or the dive shop to carry my gear back and forth comfortably. Toucan Divers solves this problem nicely by offering a complimentary shuttle service (via golf carts) from the dive shop to the shore entry point during shop hours (8:00 am-5:00 pm). You can store your gear by the shore entry in one of several large wooden gear lockers. I never tired of the shore dive as I was routinely able to watch several large tarpon hunting silversides, reef squid in the shallows, two frog fish at 40

feet and the usual host of Caribbean tropicals set against a background of healthy hard corals/gorgonians. It was amazing to see how well that shallow reefs are recovering from Hurricane Lenny two years ago. I saw several large turtles, and routinely saw eagle rays. Saw a three foot long red spotted siphonophore (a funky kind of jellyfish) twisting off the wall at 1000 Steps. Town Pier One of the best night dives in the world! You make arrangements through your dive operator (Bonaire law prohibits anyone from diving the Town Pier without a registered divemaster). There is no charge for this per se, but a generous tip is customary. All the pier's pilings are covered with orange cup corals and sponges of every shape, size and color. We saw decorator crabs galore, adult spotted drums, honeycomb cowfish, tons of spotted morays (including one eating a crab), cryptic teardrop crabs. Boat diving was a rewarding affair with sign-up for the next day's dives occurring automatically the day before based on the dive package. They offer both one and two-tank trips in the morning and afternoon, though I found it darn near impossible to get on the two tank trips. Apparently my package was for 6 single tank boat dives, and although they're willing to let you swap two one tank dives for a two tank trip, I was only able to accomplish this once. I had emailed ahead to get a personal dive guide for an afternoon so that I could dive on the island's windward side and snorkel in the mangroves. Though the windward sites were too rough to dive during this trip, the

mangrove snorkel went off without a hitch and I recommend it as something different. I had finally managed to get on a two-tank boat and for the first dive we were taken to the wreck of the Hilma Hooker (which I really didn't want to dive, but was out-voted). Since my buddy and I had just dove the reef adjacent to the Hilma Hooker the day before from shore, we told the dive master we would like to follow a different profile, but we were told that the whole group must descend together, stay together and return to the boat together. Had I gone to sleep and awakened in Aruba to dive with Red Sail Sports? There was simply no reasoning with him so we followed the group, had a 35-minute dive and came up with over 2,000 psi in our tanks. The next dive of the morning was off Klein Bonaire and no restrictions were placed on us. We had an outstanding hour and fifteen-minute dive. Flew Air Jamaica with a change of planes in Montego Bay, Jamaica. The flights were on time, the service was great and the price was right!

**Plaza Resort, April 2001, David Haupt (dbhaupt@yahoo.com)**  
**Louisville, KY.** Experience: 101- 250 dives. Vis: 60 to 75 Feet. Water: 79 to 79 F, no currents. Toucan was a first rate dive operation, however the boats got crowded. I was disappointed with the visibility. Lots of small fish and eels. DM's were friendly and informative. Well run dive operation with 4 large rinse tanks at the dive shop, lockers to store your gear and unlimited Nitrox for only \$20 extra. E-6 not done on-site but had a one day turn

around. Nice light tables and loupes for viewing. Boats only had a 5 gallon bucket for a rinse tank which was fine if I was the only photographer. Divers used same bucket for masks. The Plaza was a nice place having large and clean rooms. Several really good restaurants (Kon Tiki, Rendezvous, Mona Lisa).

**Plaza Resort, May 2001, Petra Israel (BBBPetra@aol.com) Annapolis, MD.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 Ft, calm. Still a shock to see the hurricane Lenny destruction both in and out of the water. Many divemasters from Sand Dollar have joined the Toucan Diving team. Jackson took a personal interest in making each dive enjoyable. He found a sea horse and lead us to two frog fish under the town pier which remains a premier macro photo destination. He was vigilant for everyone's safety and success. The boat captains, dive masters, and instructors perform with humor, patience and professionalism. The boats were clean, safe, comfortable and fast. The equipment was well maintained and our gear was handled with care and respect. Plaza Resort was the greatest disappointment. The service and accommodations were far from the five star we had been promised. We were ignored, forgotten and treated as though we were a huge imposition. The rooms were not as they had been represented to us. The appropriate accommodations would of course cost more money. Towels had to be called for and then four hours

later had still not been delivered. Front desk staff were not available and according to the ten year old boy occupying the concierge desk, they had all gone to dinner. Many of the facilities were closed or in such disrepair as to be unusable. Shore diving was extremely difficult and gear transport ended at 5:00 p.m. so night diving was out of the question unless we were willing to haul our own gear over the long distance from dive shop to beach. The dive shop staff was poorly trained, incapable of giving information or even selling something without first consulting a manager. Most of the items for sale in the shop had no price tags and the staff didn't know the prices or had to look them up. The staff represented as management was rude and later turned out to not be managers at all. The photo shop was rarely open and the first opportunity to speak with the photo pro ended poorly when one of our group asked a Nikonos question and he replied with "Didn't you read the book?". Film processing was unreliable and when several of our rolls had been damaged the choice by Toucan Diving staff and the photo shop was to lie to us. Clients were treated as impositions and ignorant louts complete with eye rolling and shrugging from several of the dive shop staff and the photo pro. We registered our complaints with management who deny any wrong doing, lied in their response and then ended their condescending letter with an invitation to join them again on our next vacation. Lenny was an unfortunate natural disaster. Plaza Resort is a

man-made, deliberate disaster. Combine the two and there is no reason to waste your time or money.

**Plaza Resort, June 2001, Craig & Dora Kippola (CKIPPOLA@AOL.COM)**  
**Houston, TX.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 70 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy. Plaza Resort first class, Jr. suites had large clean rooms. Picked up your luggage at airport and delivered it to your room, conversely picked up at your door and delivered to airport. Food was pricey but good variety and excellent. Toucan Diving cared and was fun to dive with. We did have a large number in our group, but they took good care of us. We weren't just another bunch of divers to them. (Ebby the divemaster and Erwin, the captain, did a great job). Great variety of fishes and sites. Had a lot of dive freedom except drift dives when necessary to stay together. We did 14 dives and loved 1000 steps and night dive at the town pier. Dove Nitrox all week at a very good price. Tanks always available for shore diving. Not much for large fish, but the variety of sea horses, some turtles, tarpon. Visibility was not great, but the coral and variety of fishes make up for it.

**Plaza Resort, July 2001, Wayne Hurst, Greenbelt, MD.** Vis: 70-120 ft. Water: 80-82 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 250. Best dive operation and resort I have ever been to. I will return. True 24 hour diving. People were great on the whole island. Things could not have been better.

**Sand Dollar Resort, August 2000, Paul Russell, Doylestown, PA.** Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives

logged: 22. Diving for beginners was excellent! Visibility, temperature, surface conditions made diving easy. Lots of tension at this dive operation as they try and rebuild from the '99 storm. This resort is the last to get their dock rebuilt. The shuttle to another resort for boat access is OK, but very time consuming. Almost nothing (except shopping) for nondivers. We were a family — 2 kids do not dive and they were very bored. (Ph: 800-288-4773 or (599-717) 8738; fax (599-717) 8760; e-mail: [info@sanddollarbonaire.com](mailto:info@sanddollarbonaire.com); website [www.sanddollarbonaire.com](http://www.sanddollarbonaire.com))

### **Sand Dollar Resort, February 2001, Shirley Westcott, Washington, DC.**

Vis: 80 ft. Water: mid 70s, calm and flat. Dives logged: 113. Dive restrictions: 1 hour, 100 feet. Sand Dollar has still not rebuilt its pier, making boat diving far less convenient than at other resorts on the island. Boats are also small and aged. The on-site reef (Bari Reef) is one of the best shore dives on the island. Outstanding staff naturalist.

### **CAYMAN ISLANDS**

Grand Cayman is great for divers seeking familiar surroundings: it's Americanized and crowded, with traffic, Burger Kings, Ramadas, and Hyatts. And it's expensive. . . . There are a seemingly endless number of safe and well-organized dive operations; to the dismay of experienced divers, depth and time limits are generally enforced, though some operations show leniency to computer divers. . . . Avoid prepaying a dive package so

that if you're disappointed with cattle boats or site selection you can switch to someone else. . . . Dive quality is declining due to development, and Seven Mile Beach reefs are beaten up. To avoid crowds, endless youths, and Cayman Cowboys, stay on the North side or the East End, where you'll find the best diving and fewer people. . . . Brac diving is not up to the best of Cayman, but it's more laid back, and Brac outfits make frequent trips to Little Cayman from April to November. Rough water often prevents trips at other times. . . . For Caribbean walls, clear water, and beautiful reefs, Little Cayman is nonpareil, but a dozen dive boats a day can visit a two-mile stretch. Winters can be cool in the Caymans, and the islands are in the hurricane belt. . . .

### **Cayman Brac**

**Brac Aquatics, La Esperanza, July 2000, John Heiman, ([heiman1@juno.com](mailto:heiman1@juno.com)) Loveland, CO.** Vis: 60-120 ft. Water: 80-83 F. Dives logged: many hundreds Dive restrictions: 110ft.- 5-700#’s. Not strictly enforced — more requested. Three couples — 2 experienced divers, 1 doing o/w referral, 1 newly certified, 2 snorkelers. We had 40ft. boat to ourselves all but 1 of 9 deep diving. Scott, DM, very thorough in o/w checkout and allowed checkout to be fun dive. Mixed skills in our group restricted the two experienced but still made dives fun for all. Exp did own profile with computers. Very laid back