

that it had been like that for a while and didn't seem to be a big deal. On the only calm day we had, one diver threw-up only because of the fumes. On another day we showed up to do a shore dive, and all the tanks were missing. When we asked where they were they told us that their compressor was broke and that they had to take them to another dive shop to have them filled. At that point we just had to laugh and shake our heads. It was a comedy scene everyday! However, it was one that the entire shop seemed to be use to. The divemasters were all very nice. They offered guided dives off the boat, or you could dive your own profile. That was nice. They helped everyone into the water, but not so much out of the water, which was needed on the second dive we did with them since the seas were a little rough. The Princess Beach Resort was a nice overall, but does have its good and bad. Our room flooded early into the trip and they had to move us. The rooms were nice and very clean but smelled a little mildewy. In our flooded room we had hot water for showers, in our second room the water was lukewarm at its very best. The grounds are kept exceptionally clean as are the pools, restaurants, and bars. The staff, especially at the bars and restaurants, were exceptionally nice. The food was excellent everywhere in this resort. However you are going to pay for that good taste. I liked Curacao as an island a lot. The diving is comparable to Bonaire, and there is a lot to do topside. (Ph: 5999-461-8131; Fax-5999-461-8581)

DOMINICA

Dominica is arguably the best all-around adventure vacation island in the Caribbean, with gorgeous reefs, plenty of tropicals (though few of eating size), lush rain forests, hiking, waterfalls, warm water springs, splendid fruits and vegetables (prepared by great local cooks), modest hotels — and it's inexpensive to boot. . . . Go forewarned: there are no beaches, even seaside hotels are affected by the nearly continuous cloud cover over the mountains, and there's not much happening beyond polite residents leading their lives. The airport doesn't handle large jets, and there's little tourism infrastructure. . . . Expect daytime temperatures in the 80s and night lows around 68 in winter and 73 in summer, although a few minutes up the mountain and into the cloud forest can change all that dramatically. . . . July to November is the wet season, but showers may occur anytime. Dominica's at the edge of the hurricane belt. . . . The thirteen-mile round-trip hike to Boiling Lake is worth getting in condition for. Dive operations usually offer two dives in the morning to allow time to tour in the afternoons. . . .

Anchorage Hotel, June 2001, Regina Cohen, Chatham, PA. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 79-82 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 700. Dive restrictions: depth 100 ft. Magnificent sponge that rivals Pacific. Super cuts through pinnacles.

A soft coral wall as good as Fiji, great white but smaller. Current at some sites. Bleak shore dive off hotel but frog fish, sand snake eels, electric rays and lots of interesting critters if you got beyond the unattractive geography. Geography in park spectacular and varied. A dive with venting volcanic bubbles. Dive master Reggie was quiet but skilled with much island lore between dives. Capt. Filbert shared knowledge of flora and fauna between dives spotting interesting bird behavior and trees with ships binoculars. Divemaster Dave keeps track of the pet frog fish off the hotel dock and gives a nice tour of his zoo. Lobster and large crabs everywhere and often innumerable lobster on the ceiling of caves. Not the typical Carib underwater scene and a pleasant change. Personal attention on dive boat which was never crowded and always accommodating. Old-fashioned hotel that was clean, neat, functional and updated. Food is plain and simple except for exceptional BBQ one night per week. Yachts are welcome so there are plenty of sailing yachts. Beautiful spot. **(Ph: (767) 448 2638/1; fax: (767) 448 5680; e-mail: anchorage@cwdom.dm; website www.anchoragehotel.dm)**

Castaways Beach Hotel, January 2001, Dave Kasper, Ann Arbor, MI.

Took a group of 14 and, though we loved Dominica and its diving and hiking, we felt ripped off by the hotel. When we booked our rooms in August, there was one price for the package (\$997) that included diving, double occupancy lodging in one of

their 26 rooms and breakfast/dinner. Al Harris, the longtime owner, recently passed away and left the hotel to his three daughters. We got stuck in the “cheap” rooms, that hadn’t seen maintenance for several months if not years. The castaways.dm website and their brochures have only one price listed for all 26 rooms and the pictured rooms is a dreamboat compared to what we got. The photo includes tv and telephone — not for us poor folks in the cheap rooms. Working hot and cold water — the sinks leaked so bad the our cold (and even the hot in the lounge men’s bathroom) had to be turned on and off under the sink. Windows, if you were lucky to have a full compliment, rarely could be opened or closed. No one was able to fix these problems Our rooms looked like someone had been selling the furniture because each had a different assortment of furniture, for example ours was missing both night stands. The Rodale’s travel special mentioned Castaways had just completed a \$1.5 million renovation and advertised the special dive package of \$997 exclusively. When we complained about the drastic difference between what was advertised and what we received, we were told that the beautifully renovated rooms (about half of the 26 rooms) were actually \$200 more; we had the \$997 specials. That moment was the first news of any difference in pricing or rooms! A classic bait and switch. The breakfast was okay but the dinners only occasionally were remotely edible. The tuna sandwich I had for lunch was better than any of the dinners. I was given French fries

that I had seen rejected by a customer (because he hadn't ordered them) over an hour earlier. There doesn't seem to be any money or leadership for maintenance. There are great restaurants in pockets around the island, but every meal will include a taxi ride and charge. On one day, we were literally smoked out of our rooms by rubbish being burnt beneath our cheap rooms for about 8 hours (could close the windows that we had). One night down the road, there was a festival that boomed music so loud that we felt the base in our beds until 2:40 am, but we couldn't shut out the sound — windows again. Many a cranky, sleepy diver the next morning. Dive Castaways was a good operation with great personnel. We saw about a dozen seahorse and half as many frog-fish during our week stay. If someone wants to stay in the Layou River Valley area, which is nicely centralized around many of the topside activities, they should stay at the recently built Sunset Bay Club and dive with Dive Castaways. (Ph: 888-227-8292 or 767-449-6244/5; fax 767-449-6246; e-mail castaways@cwdom.dmwebsite www.castaways.dm)

Castaways Beach Hotel, February 2001, John Bockis, Valley Cottage, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm currents. I was disappointed to see so much garbage all over the island. The inner island and rain forest was beautiful. The shoreline, and beaches were covered with old broken ships, and allot of garbage. A hurricane had

passed through a few years ago, and had left some hardships, maybe it's time to clean up the beaches! The dive shop at Castaways did everything they could to make are diving pleasurable, the Castaways Hotel has allot to be desired. If you ask to have hot water, and clean towels, the owner Miss Harris will ask you to leave and go to another hotel because you're never satisfied! The food was bad the first few days, until they got a different cook who really saved the vacation.

Dive Dominica, Castle Comfort Lodge, May 2001, Elfriede Moore (elfriedem@aol.com) Washington, DC. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 78 F, choppy. Diving restrictions: 100 ft. 55 minutes, not enforced. Logged dives: over 100. This was my second time. I had reserved via e-mail, called in my \$100 deposit and did not have to pay the balance until I left. I had an ocean front room with balcony in the new building, which was very quiet, had AC and cable TV. This is a good place to go when alone as the meals are taken on long tables on their balcony. The food is Caribbean home cooking, with 2 choices, Fish or meat. Great dive operation. Two dives in the morning, and 2 night dives (the second one costs extra). There are beautiful sponges, corals and lots of Fish. One day the others took a walking tour to Boiling Lake and I was the only diver. I was treated like the queen of Sheba, asked where and how deep I wanted to dive. My favorite site was "Champagne." The whale watch was also very enjoyable, we saw one sperm whale, which came

very close to the boat and looked us over, also two large schools of dolphins. Island tour was great. I had missed a dive, because my back was hurting me (I'm getting on in years), which was deducted from my bill when I checked out (never before had I gotten credit for a missed dive on a dive package). (Ph: 888-414-7626 or 954-351-9740; e-mail dive@cwdom.dm; website www.divedominica.com)

Dive Dominica, Castle Comfort, June 2001, Dave Reubush, Hampton, VA. My son and I and a couple from North Carolina were the only guests. We would dive two dives in the morning, eat lunch, and go off on some adventure. Whale watching one afternoon. Real mountains with beautiful waterfalls as well as hikes through terrain with interesting flora and fauna. Staying with the dive masters had very real benefits. We saw more frog fish and sea horses in one dive than I had seen in 300. They are not rigid with the requirement that you stay with them; just stay in the vicinity. The dive off the shore is basically rock, however, there are lots and lots of interesting things. With the short time between the return from the morning dive and the afternoon activities we ordered lunch at breakfast and it was ready when we got back. Breakfast was typical fare and very good, but for dinner I ate a lot of stuff that I had never tried before. It was Dominican food, but was always well prepared and most was really quite good. I did not sleep as well as I would have with a good mattress.

Nature Island Dive, Gallette Cottage, November 2000, Mike de La Chapelle, Seattle, WA. Flew in a large America Eagle turbo prop plane from San Juan to Melville Hall Airport on the North end of Dominica where we rented a 4-wheel drive vehicle. The roads are extremely narrow, very steep, and driving is on the left hand side of the road. There are people, dogs and other cars to contend with when passing through the many small towns. Typically, there were short intense down pours followed by sunny periods, the cycle repeating often. We rented the lower of two floors of the Gallette Cottage, which can comfortably accommodate two couples, and has a full kitchen. The view of Soufriere Bay is stunning and the cottage is so close to the water that waves were lapping on the stone beach just below the large deck. Nature Island Dive had just finished restoring the lower unit, but a loose wire caused us to spend the first 2 nights without electricity, and there was an island-wide power outage on the third, so we ended burning candles and using flashlights. It was hard to sleep during the first couple of nights with the noise of the surf breaking on the beach and several intense rain squalls. The cottage had no air conditioning. The first morning we awoke to the sound of fishermen laying a net in front of the cottage and a beautiful rainbow over Soufriere Bay. A three-minute drive to Soufriere from the cottage brought us to Nature Island Dive. The first dive was with a group of 12 or so divers off a large comfortable catamaran. The ride to the

dive site was less than 5-minutes. The underwater terrain on the south end of the island was interesting, with many steep walls descending into the abyss, pinnacles, and a few nice caverns and arches. The coral is abundant and healthy, with lots of large and colorful sponges. I would rate the diving as the best in Caribbean (and I have been to all the major destinations), except for the lack of fish, and particularly big critters. Lots of fish to see while diving on the south end, but big schools were rare and big fish over 18" were almost nonexistent. We did find a 4 ft nurse shark and a large turtle. On most dives we encountered large fish traps carelessly thrown by locals on top of healthy coral. However, Soufriere Bay is an underwater park, and enforcement of fishing bans is supposed to begin. My favorite dive was at night at a location called Champagne, because of the bubbles produced by volcanic vents. The dive masters located two frog fish, one yellow and the other black, in shallow water. The intense light from all of our flashlights must have spooked the yellow frog fish because he fell off the wall and began to sink to the bottom. I gently caught him and placed him back on the wall next to his buddy. Nature Island Dive is a well run family dive operation. The head dive master and partner is Simon Walsh, who has trained two capable dive instructors, Weefy and Tony. Tony's parents are owners of the business and his mother works at the front desk. Tony's father is a physician in Roseau. They have good quality, well-maintained boats; friendly hard-working

staff; and a prime location across from the beach in Soufriere. The diving is as easy as it gets, almost no current, visibility >80' and calm conditions within the bay. Ideal destination for new or inexperienced divers. On the first dive my buddy and I were gently scolded for straying from the pack. Thereafter, they split off our small group of four on to a separate boat. The staff takes care of all your dive gear, including changing tanks between dives, and rinsing and storing the gear in the evening. Nature Island Dive facility was neat, clean and organized. Free use of kayaks in our package. We paddled below the cliffs of Scott's Head and turned the corner into the Atlantic, but high wind and waves made it unsafe to continue further. The condition of the kayaks was not up to standards. Took a short hike into Trafalgar Falls and climbed up to the companion falls and swam in the pools beneath the falls. The Boiling Lake hike is long and strenuous but worth the effort. We went on a particularly nasty day with heavy rain and high winds. The trail is very steep both up and down, and it became slippery and muddy from all the rain. We started out hiking upwards through dense tropical rain forest until we crested at a clearing on top of a ridge and then we descended into the Valley of Desolation, where there are steam vents, small geysers and boiling pools. After another short uphill climb, we made it to the rim of the crater containing the boiling lake. There is so much steam coming from the boiling lake that it is difficult to see the water. Our guide Stanley claims to

be the only person who fell into the lake and lived to tell about it. A client dropped a video camera that ended at the edge of the lake. Stanley used a rope to lower himself down; he picked up the camera, and then climbed back up the rope. As he reached the rim, he lost his grip on the rope and fell 50' into the boiling lake, somehow landing on his feet. In a pain-crazed delirium he waded out of the boiling water receiving third degree burns up to his crotch. He quickly went into shock but someone pulled him out of the crater and a rescue helicopter was called, but the helicopter couldn't land near the lake so they had to carry him up to the ridge top flew him to Martinique where he spent 6 months in a hospital recovering from third degree burns. He showed us his badly scarred legs. On the way back there is a warm volcanic stream in which we stopped to swim. We spent some time walking the streets of the capital city, Roseau. The town has little charm but it is clean and safe. There's not much for handicrafts. Some very aggressive panhandlers, perhaps the result of so many cruise ships coming into port. The people of Dominica are poor, most making a subsistence living by fishing or farming (usually bananas), and the people look quite healthy (much more so than the typical North Americans), neat and clean (aside from a few scruffy looking Rastafarians). The island is also quite clean, both on land and in the water. On several occasions we were stopped by Dominicans who just wanted to give us a lecture on the beauty of their island. The favorite pastime of men

was Dominos, usually played in the evening on a makeshift plywood tables. We drove around ends of the island, and looping back through the center of the island. We passed many small fishing villages along the coast and small farming communities in the mountains, along with countless rivers and streams. (Ph: 767-449-8181; fax 767-449-8182; website www.natureislanddive.dm)

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Despite the recent flurry of advertisements touting the diving on the reefs of Dominican Republic, we have yet to hear from a well-traveled diver who thinks much of the diving.

Aquatic Adventures, Best Western Metro Marine Hotel; March 2001, John Wesolowski, (Jweso@home.com) Columbia, MD. Vis: 40-90 ft. Water: 81-85 F. Dives logged: 49. Aquatic Adventures owners Dave and especially Darrick run a first class dive operation. Divemaster Javier did an exceptional job of safely and comfortably guiding me wherever we went. He helped me safely dive my limits without ever making me feel I was endangering myself or others. great inclusive package. (Ph: (305) 827-0211; fax.(305) 827-0212; e-mail whales@aquaticadventures.com; website www.aquaticadventures.com)

David Castillo Diving, Playa Naco, February 2001, Craig Brown (cbrown4756@msn.com) Mason, OH. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm. All