

the day after a hurricane (8-21-2000) brushed the north side of the island, when the visibility was down to 40 ft. and the surface was choppy.

Guadeloupe is a French department (similar to a U.S. state) so the roads, water, highway signs and all infrastructure are first class. Since my dive buddy was my French girlfriend, I do not have a good idea of how easy it would have been to try to operate in English. There are many good restaurants that combined local ingredients with French style cooking. The islands of Grand Terre and Basse Terre are separated by a hundred yard salt water channel bridged by a highway. Most resorts are on the more populated Grand Terre. Basse Terre is more uninhabited with the volcano, Mt. Soufrieré, dominating the interior along with an extensive rain forest. It has black volcanic sand beaches and small towns around the periphery of the island. Our resort on Grand Terre (Auberge de la Vielle Tour) was not dive-related. It was near the airport and the center of commerce so we walked most nights for dinner. There is a very nice aquarium in the same area. Many nice sites on the coast worth driving to see. (Ph: 0590 98 86 63; fax : 0590 98 77 76; e-mail heusaine@outremer.com; website www.heures-saines.gp)

Private Yacht, March 2001, Stephen Cushman, San Diego, CA. We dived from our yacht at Pigeon Island and the Cousteau Preserve. We dove there several years ago and loved it, but the locals have destroyed the area by using gill nets in the preserve and by

multiple boats fishing on the dive moorings. There is now little to see and makes me sick. We left after two days. I have since talked to Jean-Michel Cousteau about this problem. He said that his Dad once dove there and they named the “preserve” without his permission or concurrence and we should write magazines about this problem.

HONDURAS

All dive resorts are on the Bay Islands: Roatán, Guanaja, Utila, Cayos Cochinos, and other small cayes. . . . Honduras is home to the world's most aggressive no-see-ums; they bite, bite, bite, and many people have serious allergic reactions to the bites. Those who are unprepared — meaning DEET — often find their vacations ruined. . . . The diving features great walls, offshore seamounts, and excellent coral and gorgonians, although there are few large fish or lobsters due to overfishing. . . . Whale sharks are seen near Utila. . . .

The rainy season is October through February, and northers can disrupt the diving. . . . TACA often overbooks, so reconfirm flights (which may not help) and carry essentials as TACA loses or delays luggage. . . . Spanish is spoken on the mainland, English in the Bay Islands. . . . Classic Central American

jungles and Mayan ruins inland make great side trips. . . . Malaria protection is advised. . . .

Bay Islands

Guanaja

Bayman Bay Club, November 2000, Jamie Moon. Based on the brochure, website and e-mails, we expected more. As expected there was still severe damage from hurricane Mitch. As depicted in the brochure and the website, the wonderful waterfall is gone. This should no longer be advertised. The hiking trails were pretty much nonexistent. We were not able to leave the club. Our cabana had no hot water or electricity so we changed cabanas — same problem. Hot water and electricity were finally repaired. The power is turned off from 9pm - 9am. Our cabana was dirty. “Housekeeping” only made the beds. Our sheets were never cleaned, there were stains on them from day one, the floors were never swept. The smell of sewage was constant from our cabana. The main clubhouse was rundown, dirty and the second level with the “nice” pool table, reading area, etc., stunk. There were no buffets or nice meals. Prison quality food : rice, beans, lettuce. We informed the staff that we did not eat seafood. One night, only seafood was served. We had to eat....rice, beans, lettuce yet again. The next three nights we had a side plate of pork chops. There was no fresh fruit, no fruit juices. You pay for soft drinks. We only received 11 out of the 18 dives and no night dive, mainly due to dive boat problems. The dive boat was in very bad shape and was not

working several days. The battery used for the dive boat was also used for the club. The majority of the dock pictured on the website and brochure is not there. Guanaja has been overfished; therefore, there are hardly any fish. Some of the coral was nice, and we were able to see a seahorse, but this should not be a premiere dive location. Majority of the staff was unfriendly and unhelpful. We realize that Guanaja is recovering from the hurricane and needs work, but what was portrayed and advertised is no longer true and that should be told to the guests. Bad management and food has no relation to the hurricane. We rarely get vacations and this trip was a waste of our money, frequent flyer miles for the airline tickets and our time. Bayman Bay Club did offer a free return trip, but then they also proceeded to deny all of these events and the nonexistent club manager while we were there proceeded to attack our character in responding to our complaints! Why would we return there? **((800) 524-1823 or (954) 472-3700; fax: (954) 723-0044; e-mail info@baymanbayclub.com; website www.baymanbayclub.com)**

Bayman Bay Club, March 2001, Bob Brinson (BBRINSON@RHRLAW.COM)
High Point, NC. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy no currents. Darien, the divemaster, was the saving grace for a week long trip. He was competent and accommodating and flexible once he assessed r skills. Darien made the diving pleasant and

enjoyable, despite the conflict of interest with other staff “borrowing” the dive boat to go to town. Certainly there were some very impressive dives including “Black Rock” which was a nice twisting swim through and “Big Jim’s Silver Lode” where we saw spotted eagle rays and spotted eels. The “Jado Trader” is an interesting wreck because of the reef relief. After the first day the quantity and quality of the food seemed to diminish exponentially! The food was barely marginal to just plain bad, though the owner was present on the island. The rooms were exceptional for being out island cabanas and weathered very nicely. Some minor problems with theft, presumably by staff. Unresolved, of course. Nitrox was not available. It was apparent that the resort and the island was still rebuilding from the hurricane damage, but this should not affect food and service. This can only be attributed to lack of management. The water was advertised as “safe;” however, the majority of the group stayed afflicted with general dysentery either from the food or the water. BBC is very remote and somewhat primitive which gives it a 1970s ambiance and the feeling of “Don’t Stop the Carnival.” The diving was good, the beer cold, and the sunsets spectacular without the overload of too much civilization. Not the place to honeymoon. Air service was reliable both in and out of Guanaja.

Bayman Bay Club, September 2001, no name, NV. We were the only guests our first two days. Meals consisted of cold canned beans, rice,

and either bacon or thin pork chops. There was never fresh fruit or juice. No sweet rolls, bread, cake or pies! Requests for something more substantial, were met with weak excuses — the supply boat only comes once a week. The management was aware of our arrival weeks in advance. Money paid up front. A dive club from Ohio arrived on our third day. They were assigned cabins without hot water, and one with no water. Towels were one size (bath) no wash cloths or hand towels. No towels for the beach or diving — excuse was trying to save water. Flashlights had to be requested, the paths and many steps would have been impossible to negotiate at night without them. Mice urinated and defecated on clothing hanging in our room. We complained about the cats and dogs that were always present during our meals. Under the table, or in a vacant chair besides you. Licking their butts or rubbing against your legs. The management condoned this, and participated in feeding the animals from the table. We dove from an old boat (the only one working). It was overcrowded with 15 divers. The engine was never shut down, battery would not hold a charge, alternator wasn’t working etc. Consequently divers waiting to board via swim platform (no ladder) were subjected to a good shot of carbon monoxide. We handed up our gear, then kicked and bellied up over a splintery platform, that was too high above the water for the ladies. We always surfaced with 1200 psi. This allowed a more rapid refill of the tanks between dives. There were not enough tanks

for back to back dives with 15 divers. The diving was repetitious and boring. Fish life almost nonexistent. Dead coral prevailing at all sites, due to storm 3 years ago. Never encountered anything this shabby.

Bayman Bay Club, September 2001, Mike Wolff, Oregon. We've seen many wonderful ads on Bayman Bay. The three of us work in a dive shop that takes groups to destinations so we were scouting out Bayman Bay. Shortly after arriving we realized that we had been mislead. Yes, we understood that the resort ran on generators, but generators so antiquated that they didn't work most of the time. If we had power there was no water. The resort is dilapidated, the two dive boats so old it is amazing they still float. One boat only in working order. Tanks were limited because the majority were out of hydro so our group of 12 divers had to come in between each dive to refill tanks and thus did not venture far from the resort. The dive boat was also the supply boat so we missed a few dives because the boat was needed for other errands. The resort had everyone's reservations confirmed in July. Yet they did not stock up on food and beverages for the week. Some of us went into town and bought our own supply of beverages for the rest of the week. The local staff was fabulous. It is a shame they kept having to apologize for something that was out of their control. It seems that the American owners are not sending enough funds to run the restoration any respectable manner.

Posada Del Sol, January 2001, William A. Thomsen

(bill_thomsen@kawneer.com)

Indianapolis, IN. Vis: 30 to 60

Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy surge. I have visited Posada three times and enjoy the ambiance.

However, the dive operation needs a complete overhaul. No life jackets, no emergency oxygen, no bathroom facilities on any boats, no first aid kit. The engines are in bad shape.

One time we waited two hours to get a tow because of generator problems. Another time we limped to the dock with low oil because of a leak. After Hurricane Mitch in 1999 the ownership has done a tremendous job in restoring it to its original glory. The reefs near the resort are in bad shape due to pollution. Also, pollution and overfishing have restricted the amount of wildlife and what is left is juvenile. Jado Trader wreck and Black Rock are the only worthwhile dives. It's sad!! There is no camera rack on any of the boats only the top of the engine housing. The rinse tank was being used for goggles, face washing and in some cases rinsing of diving equipment. **(Ph: 800-642-3483; fax:352-588-4158; website pds@roatan.com; website www.posadadelsol.com)**

Roatán

Anthony's Key Resort, July 2000, Theresa Marsh,

(diving_dogs@hotmail.com) San

Mateo, CA. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dive restrictions: 50 mins. The best thing is the children's dolphin camp — kids are occupied all day

while we dive! And they love it! Kids in camp are only \$500 — all inclusive. (Ph: 800-227-3483 or 305-227-3483, Fax: 305-666-2292; e-mail: akr@anthonymskey.com)

Anthony's Key Resort, December 2000, John F. Stapleton, Chaska, MN. Vis: 60-120 ft. Water: 76-80 F. Dives logged: 40-45. Dive restrictions: 150. The resort is excellent. Since Hurricane Mitch much has been rebuilt and there is a new fleet of dive boats. We had lots of rain which made the visibility poor but the staff moved the boats to the other side of the island where conditions were better. Since the weather did not cooperate we all took the next level of certification.

Anthony's Key Resort, January 2001, Frances Jones, (fjjojo@aol.com) Bronx, NY. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 70-78 F. Dives logged: 24. Well-run, friendly and accommodating. January, however, is chancy — we missed one day due to snow in New York, and the sun only shone 1-1/2 days while we were there. I am a beginner diver, and felt well looked after while diving. The divemaster was good at pointing out interesting critters. The staff was extremely helpful in getting us up out of very choppy surging seas. The food is fantastic; my only suggestion to them is to have more activities available from late afternoon on (or be sure to bring your own books or games).

Anthony's Key Resort, January 2001, Mike & Linda Suter-Gibson (msutergib@qwest.net) Denver, CO.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, calm. All inclusive resort. Food and service excellent. Dining room and dive operation bent over backwards to be helpful. Very friendly. 6 new Pro 42 dive boats about 3 months old, 3 Pro 48s about 3 years old. Great dive sites. Excellent dolphin education program. Photo shop with pro and processing onsite.

Anthony's Key Resort, April 2001, Ann Kuffner Brunette (kuffnera@quixnet.net) Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Logged Dives: over 100. Well run operation. Great boats. Short trips to sites. Some divemasters better than others. Mark was great. Very helpful and always pointing out/looking for unusual fish and turtles. Overall, the weather and water conditions were very good. Some pica pica on one day required precautions, but we were briefed on how to deal with it. The resort is very nice and the food and service was good. It is a good place to go if your spouse isn't a diver as there are other things to do. We enjoyed the dolphin encounter and swimming. However, the "no-see-ums" were very bad.

Anthony's Key Resort, May 2001, Jack Tuttle, Healdsburg, CA. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: choppy, calm and flat. Logged Dives: 207. Dive restrictions: 500 psi. Anthony's Key Resort is top notch. They go out of the way to serve you. The new dive boats have got to be the best in the Caribbean. The divemasters were outstanding and the restaurant food and staff are also outstanding. The diving was good, the dolphin dive and dolphin encounter is a must do. The wet gear

room needs fans to circulate the air. Nothing dried out and the gear stunk. The resort needs drying racks at the rooms. The no-see-ums made their mark but DEET took care of it.

Anthony's Key Resort, May 2001, Craig Young & Sharon Busey, Menomonee Falls, WI. Water Temp 84-86°; Visibility 30-100ft. Resort very quiet. New deluxe key units with air conditioning, mini refrigerator, hair dryers and private deck (which are features not found in most of the units). There are no tubs and no in-room safe. Electricity is 110V. Water is chlorinated. No-see-ums can be bad — if you have a bad reaction to insect bites, talk to your doctor about starting a non-sedating antihistamine before coming. It helped me — I got a ton of bites and hives, but no itching. The dive shop and boat staff are fantastic — very professional and very helpful. They'll set up all your equipment once it's on the boat. They have a locked equipment storage area, but no individual lockers on the dock. Rental equipment was in good condition. Tank fills usually 3200+ psi. No deco dives — ok to follow your computer, return to boat with 500 psi. They encourage you to stay within sight of divemaster's bubbles. Most dives were drift dives (in very slow currents). Huge camera rinse tanks on boats. Boats are brand new custom Pro 421s (all less than 6 months old). Large coolers of ice water on boats. Sites are 5-10 minutes away — so you spend your surface interval back at the resort. Occasional 2 tank dive to more distant sites. Night dives twice a week.

Free buoyancy control workshop and fish ID seminar available. Had great fun with people we met on boat — ended up hanging out together in the evenings. Reefs were ok, fair variety of fish, but not large numbers. Lots of turtles — we averaged 3 or more a dive. Spotted eagle rays on most dives. On many dives, large friendly black groupers would follow the group for the duration of the dive. Upside down jellyfish, scorpionfish, seahorse, and a huge garden of hundreds of brown garden eels. On night dives, lots of large crabs and lobsters as well as Caribbean octopus. Dolphin encounter was definitely worthwhile. The swim/snorkel with the dolphins was less exciting. New shore dive site off the north end of Anthony's is available from 3-9 pm. Snorkeling is pretty good in this area and off the west end of Bailey's Key. Saw reef squid and baby purple mouth moray. Dining rooms are nonsmoking. Food was excellent. Breakfast always had buffet of fruit, cereal and muffins plus you could order eggs, French toast or pancakes off the menu. Lunch varied between buffet and menu. Dinner always had seafood, beef or chicken and you could order the surf and turf which meant you received one full portion of each main dish. Very good fish, filet mignon, etc., personal very friendly and very helpful. They whisk you and your luggage through immigration and customs. We flew TACA with no luggage problems. Direct flight from Houston saves hours.

Anthony's Key Resort, July 2001, Ilene Haykus, Pagosa Springs, CO.

Vis: 80-100+ ft. Water: 79-81 F. Dives logged: 52. Dive restrictions: 130-300 psi. I introduce my daughter "Aliya", age 11, to tell of our vacation at Anthony Key and my wife, Ilene. From Ilene (wife and mom): One of our best family vacations. Those diving (my husband, brother-in-law and his wife) liked the warm waters, pristine reef and absence of strong currents. Mary's Place got particularly good reviews. As a nondiver (and prone to seasickness), I appreciated the variety of things to do. A wonderful taxi driver named Victor took me on a land tour of Roatán. Another day, he took us all out to shop for souvenirs. I signed up to go horseback riding along the beach with a stop at the Bird Park to see their collection of rare and endangered parrot species. The resort sponsored a picnic on Tabyana beach. Idyllic emerald water, white sand, and plenty of hammocks hanging between palm trees so we could get out of the sun. The dining room staff was very friendly and the cook easily accommodated our request for vegetarian fare. Our air-conditioned unit on the Key was nicely appointed and private. I spent much time simply admiring the view. Also enjoyed the dolphin encounter families with participants in the kids program got to experience. Our daughter had spent time with captive dolphins before, but this was her first try at scuba. She loved it. From Aliya (11 years old): The diving had very nice reefs and lots of sea turtles. The kids' program for diving and dolphin research had very nice teachers and wonderful instruction.

Dining hall staff and boat drivers were very helpful. In the kids' program, we played interesting games, and a man came to talk to us about sea turtles. We went horse back riding twice and the guide was very nice to talk to and the horses were fun, especially for galloping. We went to a Bird Park and got to learn about different kinds of birds and got to hold them and feed them. The cabin we stayed in was on the Key, right next to the water and it was very comfortable. It had air conditioning which was nice because there were lots of no-see'ums and they would bite you up (especially at night it there was no air-conditioning). There is a lady who braids hair there who does a really good job. (Ph: 800-227-3483 or 305-227-3483, Fax: 305-666-2292)

Bay Island Beach Resort, September 2000, S.G. Martin, Boulder, CO.

Vis: 70-85 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dive restrictions: 130. This was an OK third world class resort. Staff worked hard to please. Boats needed help. (Ph: 800-4-ROATAN or 561-624-5774; fax 561-624-7751; e-mail bibrusa@aol.com; website www.bibr.com)

Bay Island Beach Resort, October 2000, Harold Rudinger, Avinger, TX.

Vis: 100-125 ft. Water: choppy, 80-85 F. Dives logged: 3,000+. Dive restrictions: Was taking Technical Diving Class — Tri-Mix depths and times set. Worst dive boats on island — - short ladders, had to roll off boats. Small boats, especially for tech. Diving, with all divers wearing

doubles and pony bottle. Been diving there for years — better resorts on leeward side (CoCo View or Fantasy Island) and more macro shots, spotted eagle rays and occasional whale shark, and the best boats. Was told it was the best month for diving, fell for it 2 years in a row.

Bay Island Beach Resort, March 2001, Barbara Melby, Arvada, CT.

Vis: 30-50 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Dives logged: 25. Dive restrictions: only ones I set, but 110' was suggested. Bay Island is wonderful. Dive crew were fantastic. Allowed snorkelers on dive boat and also took good care of these beside divers. I have ear problems and they let me take as much time as I needed. Also they carried anything heavy to the edge of the boat. Cam and Ted were great hosts. Cam gave a wonderful history island tour. Food was average but the beautiful view and beach and laid back atmosphere was super.

Bay Island Beach Resort June 2001, Jill (crockerjc@aol.com) Austin, TX.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 78 F, calm no currents. I knew to bring lots of bug spray Our group consisted of a majority of handicapped divers, and we were treated with 5 star treatment. Food was excellent, the staff was helpful, friendly and fun, and the diving was calm and relaxing. Great trip!

CoCoView Resort, February 2001, Michael Harrison

(mjharrison@usa.net) Vancouver, WA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm choppy. Set up like a summer camp

with small houses that are shared by about 6 people. There is a central dining hall where the food is good (not gourmet) and plentiful. The outer houses can be about 2 miles from the main area and bicycles are provided so you can ride from your cabin. There is no AC, but it was not needed when there is a strong breeze every night. During the summer when the temperatures are warmer and there is apparently no breeze it would be oppressive. Boats are taken out in the morning and afternoon. There is one dive site done with the dive master and then on the way back you are dropped off at one of two walls and you swim back to the resort. This same process is repeated for afternoon dives. Shore dives are unlimited and there is a nice wreck 100 yards out directly in front of the resort. There were at least 6 boats available, only three were used with a dozen or less people on each boat. Each went to different dive sites each day and never overlapped with the other boats. The visibility was a little disappointing as was the fish life. We did see file fish, a sea horse, numerous spotted drums, several green moray eels, a squid, and the usual reef fish common to the Caribbean. The reefs themselves were in reasonable condition but the marine life was sparse. I saw many more fish in the Florida Keys. The staff was always cheerful, eager to help and really first rate. The price was also quite reasonable (Less than \$1900 including air fare). This was a package deal through our dive shop and was all inclusive (Nitrox was \$100 extra for the entire week). (Ph: 800-282-8932

or 352-588-4132, Fax: 352-588-4158; e-mail: ccv@roatan.com; website www.cocoviewresort.com)

CoCoView Resort, February 2001, Phillip L. Howard, Harrison, OH.

Vis: 25-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F, calm and flat/choppy. Dive restrictions: maximum 120 feet recommended if planning to go below 100 feet, submit written profile to divemaster before you dive. 1,056 logged dives. Dive your own profile/plan solo or go with group. Total freedom of choice. Shore diving available 24/7. Shore diving in front of resort excellent. No need to go below 65 feet and lots to see much shallower. Many interesting fish/critters in 6 feet or less. Boat dive depths range from 15 feet to as deep as you want to go. Boats have best system/setup I've ever seen. Divers never have to handle tanks, and staff puts your B.C. on tank at your favorite spot on boat! Divemasters go "out of the way" to find interesting stuff. Both dive and resort staff extremely nice people. All meals buffet style and food good and plentiful. Have never left the table still hungry. Except for beach houses (bicycles furnished), the resort is compact without the "crowded" feeling. Rooms are simply furnished but clean and comfortable. Resort is secure and requires boat ride from island and grounds are patrolled at night. Dockside Dive Center (separate operation) is well stocked and prices — while higher than in U.S. — are not the typical "scalpers markup" I have seen elsewhere. Tim Blanton (photo pro) is very knowledgeable and a whiz at making personal videos. He is also

very free with advice — doesn't require you to take course before answering questions. Has N-Vs, MMX and video for rent. The resort boutique is run on the honor system — go in, get what you want, write it and price on sales slip and they add it to your room tab when you check out. Bar is run on tab as is dockside — no need to carry money unless you leave resort. Most AM and all PM boat rides short — leave dock at 9:00 AM/2:00 PM and be in water at 9:15/2:15. Some AM dives to more distant sites about 25 minutes. 2nd AM and PM boat dives your choice — boat stops in front of resort at your choice of 3 sites, jump in, boat leaves and you swim (easy) back to resort. Take plenty of bug repellent with highest DEET % you can find — no-see-ums fierce! Weather and water conditions can be unpredictable so be prepared for chilly conditions. Coolest surface temp I've seen is 65 F, and on cloudy/rainy days, boat rides can be uncomfortable without light jacket/wind-breaker. Excellent for experienced divers (50+ dives) and heaven for us divers — dive to the limits of your energy, computer, or whatever!

CoCoView Resort, March 2001, Cheryl Morgavi Mire, New Orleans, LA. Third trip to Coco View. We became Nitrox divers and Ory received his Rescue Diver certification. Had 37 people in our group from Caribbean Dive, so TACA promised to treat us like a tour group and guaranteed a speedy delivery of all dive gear marked with a special red ribbon. Of course, they also said we could have a

carry-on bag, but the staff at the ticket counter demanded that virtually everyone check their carry-on luggage or dump the contents into a shopping bag — provided by TACA B so they would have their essentials at trip's end. I got all my gear, and Ory got his for the afternoon dives the first day. Close to perfect as a dive vacation can be. The cost of travel, food and 22 dives is just under \$3,200 for two of us. The accommodations are basic, but the gear arrangements are truly ideal. Each diver has a personal dockside stall complete with hangers for spare wet suits and shelves. The adjoining dock has 8 rinse tanks for gear and 8 more for cameras. Nitrox sign out is very convenient, and the staff hooks the gear up in your selected spot on the boat. After the dive, wet gear is hung on sturdy clotheslines with pegs for booties or gloves. We had three boats, each with 4 separate entry areas and the special center ladder for easy entry at the end of the dive. All boats have camera tables and rinse tanks. Boats begin departing at 8:30 for the two morning dives. Everyone is back at dock for lunch at 12:00 and a quick nap or attempt at a suntan. Boats head out for the afternoon dives at 2:00, returning by 5:00 with very hungry divers. Drop off dives serve as the 2nd and 4th dive of dive day. As many times as we have done Newman's Wall or Coco View Wall or the Prince Albert, I still consider these some of the most special dives of the trip. Resident puffer fish, coral banded shrimp and huge moray eels are an automatic. This year we were treated to some seahorses and large groupers.

Many divers return to the Prince Albert or the walls for a shore dive at night. Diving was a challenge because of strong currents and an almost constant wind. Calvin's Crack is our personal favorite, but Mary's Place was also as lush with coral as ever. Forty-Foot Point and the Chimneys stand out as good sites too. French Cay is showing a great deal of wear and tear; divers should avoid it if they can. Marine life was scarce on most sites, but I appreciate the diversity of coral. The reefs are thriving. We saw schooling squid on nearly every dive. At the Chimneys, we saw a rare red-lipped batfish out on the open sandy bottom. At Forty-Foot Point, I saw two trumpetfish having quite a fight. We saw several turtles, one very large hawksbill who hung around for photos. Food was exceptional. Fresh soup at lunch every day, but the group vote would probably be for steak and lobster on Friday night. Remarkably, we never gain weight on these trips with four dives a day, but it's not for lack of trying. I haven't eaten pies like that at home since I was a child. Most of the people in our group are from the New Orleans area. We leave town for Mardi Gras, but we have to take a little bit of carnival with us for our version of a parade. We have our own king and queen, complete with a crew of bead throwers and second line umbrellas. The other guests from Ohio and Michigan weren't sure if the local native dancers or the folks from N'Awlins were the main show that night. The signed banner of the Krewe of Coco View hangs just above the ping pong table with the king's crown and scepter.

CoCoView Resort, March 2001, Fran Macintyre (jennienik@netzero.net) Albuquerque, NM. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm. Fifth week I've spent at Coco View Resort in the last year. Wall diving is fantastic! Mary's Place, Chimneys, Connie's Dream and Iron Shore. The staff is always friendly and helpful. Whatever nondive activities guests wish to engage in are made available upon request: car rental, island tours, shopping, trips to the mainland. Sea lice one week and thimble jellyfish the second week. Nearly everyone ended up with huge amount of sea lice stings and were greatly challenged in finding itch relief. I now travel with a well-stocked itch relief kit. I've also discovered a product called Safe Sea (Nidaria Technology Ltd, www.nidaria.com) which claims to keep divers safe from a variety of stinging critters such as sea lice and jellyfish. Thimble jellyfish were all over the top 10 feet of water which made night time shore diving a real challenge. After one sting apiece, my dive buddy and I found that if we kept our eyes open and blew air towards the jellyfish as we were passing through them, we were left alone. No-see-ums: apply a bug repellent before leaving the airplane since the no-see-ums appear to have access to plane arrival times and are on hand to greet the tourists. I use Cactus Juice, a non-chemical, all natural bug repellent that originated in Roatán, (www.cactusjuicetm.com). Care given when handling our cameras. Divemasters had no problem waiting while we took pictures. (Ph:

800-282-8932 or 352-588-4132, Fax: 352-588-4158)

CoCoView Resort, April 2001, R. Van Jones, Punta Gorda, FL. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 80 F, calm and flat. Dives logged: 500+. Great "laid back" resort for serious divers. Package includes 2 dive master led boat dives plus 2 drop offs on wall outside of resort where you can do your own thing. Staff at hotel and dive operation are all very friendly and helpful. Dive boats are spacious and well equipped for divers and photographers.

Fantasy Island, November 2000, F. Ward, San Diego, CA. Airport to the hotel takes about 20 minutes. What is included in the all inclusive package will be an issue, with about half the staff trying to charge for drinks while the other half is assuring that the drinks are included. This can be a major irritant at check out time, when the argument starts about this issue. The rooms are clean, spacious and the air conditioning works well, although it makes quite a racket. Hot water is plentiful. The formal dining room in the main building was closed and under repair although I never saw any work take place. All meals were outside, which means that bug spray become an appetizer or you will be eaten alive. If you wear sandals, spray your feet — I failed to and was bitten pretty badly. The food is terrible and the same food was served every day at each meal, such that by mid week everyone can tell what is in each steam tray by location —which matters, since everything tastes the same. The fish is just a different color

from the other meats. My time at sea in the Navy had better food by far, and I never thought I would ever say that. Even the coffee is awful. The dive shop is run by an affable man named Hank, who makes great promises but not much happens after he speaks. There are four dive boats, one of which was so poorly maintained that we were towed back four times because it could not be started and that was known when we left the dock. One of these was at night and I became very cold while we just sat there and waited. The general plan seems to be to stay very close to the resort and multiple trips to the same site are common. The shop will resist any attempt to take divers to the north side, saying it is too rough, but non divers were able to go over and take a glass bottom boat out, so I think this is false. Lastly, about the shop — walking to it from the hotel front entrance takes you by several buildings, one of which offers up the stench of human waste and is nearly overpowering. Not great first thing in the morning. The dive masters are friendly in fact, everyone was — but only one of the two on my boat knew what he was doing, while the other was clearly not an experienced diver. Dive briefs took about 60 seconds and were not all that informative. There are no limits on time or depth, but the intervals between dives force time limits anyway. Minutes were wasted looking for the correct site from time to time. The dives are at 9, 11 and 2:30, so the surface interval in the morning is very short unless the boat ride is only 10 minutes. The first dive

should be at 8, I think. If anyone needs any real help with photography gear, they should go over to the CoCo View resort nearby, as the folks at Fantasy will just try to rip you off. Someone thought they had flooded a Nikonos camera and the Fantasy shop suggested \$85 to do anything — slowly, while the CoCo View shop was simply reassuring and charged little if anything for the service. The dive boat often does not reload towels and water between dives, so the later dives in the day get a bit less care than that first dive. Most of us eventually started getting our own towels and liquids once we figured this out. The diving itself is only fair at best. The coral is not healthy and there are no moderate sized or large fish to be seen. Water temp is 84 degrees and the visibility varies from 25 to perhaps 80 feet. There are a remarkable number of sponges — some more than 6 feet across the mouth and numerous walls, so it is not all bad. For the week, we saw four sharks, three rays and five medium sized grouper-otherwise everything is in the macro photography class. (Ph: 800-676-2826 or (504) 455-5222; fax:(504) 455-5268; e-mail fantasy@bonnebeach.com; website www.fantasyislandresort.com)

Fantasy Island, January 2001, Mark Denietolis, Huntington Beach, CA.
Vis: 20-70 ft. Water: 73-78 F. Dives logged: 21. Fantasy Island is a hotel with a loose dive operation adjacent. I dove with two different crews and was very happy with the way I was treated. I have been diving for 30 years (on and off) and when they realized my

abilities, I was able to dive my own profiles. The reefs seem healthy and the sea life is abundant. Weather conditions were raining for the first couple of days and I could have used more rubber but the sun broke thru and it became windy. This eliminated the less adventurous divers and kept the groups small (nice). The resort itself was more upscale than I need but the price was unbeatable. Food was great and Roatán was as usual a friendly place to visit as before.

Fantasy Island Resort, April 2001, Thomas L. Berry, Princeton, WV.
Vis: 40-70 ft. Water: 86 F, choppy. Had the foresight to personally check luggage with TACA at Miami lay over; mine went to Belize for a day anyway. Confusion with the front desk delayed them another half a day. Otherwise, diving was good — three one-tank trips per day. “Shore diving” from gazebo or small outboard easily arranged. Food was plentiful; breakfast always good, lunch and dinner were hit or miss. Hot dogs substituted for sausages at breakfast one morning. Buddy down and very sick for 36 hours; no other guests had sampled the fish soup. For the same money, I’d give up the phones, A/C and TV, and stay next door at the “less commercial” CoCoView.

Fantasy Island, April 2001, Tim and Paula Pastushin, Mission Viejo, CA.
Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 78-80 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 450. Diving good, lack of big critters on south side. Lots of big grouper and turtles on trip to West End. Divemaster Robert found 2 seahorses in channel between

Fantasy Island and CoCo View. Food okay — rooms very nice with a/c.

Fantasy Island, September 2001, Stan Campbell (stancamp33@aol.com) Cincinnati, OH. All-inclusive resort that offers an optional dive package. Water temp 80F. Viz 75 to 100 feet but a few days were pretty bad with particulate matter. Three large, roomy, fast dive boats with a competent, friendly dive master and boat captain. Sites were not more than 15 minutes away. Excellent wall dives. Normal routine is two tank dive in am and one in pm. Night dives and shore dives are available. One day we dived the opposite side of island and crew took boat while we took short bus trip to meet the boat. Complete freedom to dive our own computer profiles with max of 130 ft. Good variety and quantity of marine life. Mary’s Reef is an exceptional dive/photo experience. The dive shack is well equipped and Nitrox is available. E6 processing unmounted for \$15. Other photo and video services are available for a fee. The operation is smooth and well managed. We left on time every day. Food is excellent, served in comfortable surroundings, buffet style with an impressive variety and unlimited quantity. The wait staff is excellent. This is a large resort and some rooms are better than others. Ours showed wear but it was clean and comfortable with A/C, tv, phone, refrig and everything worked. The ocean view was excellent. Take bug spray. We were there during the horrible attack on NYC and Washington. The hotel staff and management were very kind

and cooperative on adjusting travel and accommodations.

Inn of Last Resort, March 2001, Dick & Natalie Kneipp (kneipp@rockisland.com) Friday Harbor, WA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 55 to 85 Feet. Water: 78 F, calm. The service was excellent. The food was good and well served. The rooms were simple but comfortable and clean. Boats were wood and had a large amount of room. We never had more than 9 in our group. A couple of times there were only 4 divers. You return to the resort between dives. Once a week they do a two tank dive. Most dives are within 10 to 15 minutes. They have their own lagoon with the same fish as the dive sites. There is one dive site just over the reef from the outside edge of the lagoon. Temp was 82 to 84 degrees with a slight breeze. No-see-ums did not bother us only left a mark for about 8 hours. They did not cause us to itch. UW photography: They do not have any rentals or repair facilities. Tanks on boats to wash off and a large area to place your camera, however it is not exclusive area for cameras. (Ph: 888-238-8266 or 011-504-445-1838, fax 011-504-445-1848; e-mail information@innoflastresort.com; website: www.innoflastresort.com)

Inn of Last Resort, April 2001, Gunter Pilz (honguito@web.de) Guatemala. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 90 Feet. Water: 20 to 28 Celsius, calm. We were a group of seven; two were diving. The diving was excellent and so was the dive master Ingrid. Unfortu-

nately the resort management was not very interested in us, restaurant service was poor and the food very poor (we had chicken nearly every day, no seafood at all). Rooms were OK, but there is not one single room with sea view. In your room you had to draw the curtains because everyone passed by outside. If you pay using a credit card they add an extra 5% to your final bill. No sandy beach, but nice lagoon to swim and snorkel. Sand flies were not a big problem, I got bitten ten times in all the week and did not use repellent, but ate garlic every day.

Inn of Last Resort, May 2001, Bob Pringle (pringle789@home.com) Sparks, NV. Vis: 50-60 ft. Water: 79-83 F, choppy. Logged dives: over 200. Dive restrictions: follow guide totally. I rate Anthony's and CoCo Beach over Inn of Last Resort. Inn of Last Resort flat out tells you they will not let you dive if you drink beer between or before dives. Divemasters never checked anyone's air supply while under water or after returning to boat. Snorkeling very poor.

Inn of Last Resort, June 2001, Leslie & Michael Bardelli (lbardelli@snet.net) New Milford, CT. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm no currents. Our second stay at the Inn of Last Resort and I have nothing but praise. Our luggage arrived the same day, just several hours behind us. The resort is very rustic, set in a jungle like setting with 2 monkeys and a parrot around for atmosphere, yet with most of the

comforts of home. The rooms are large, clean, bug proof and well designed. Each room has a queen-size bed as well as 2 twin beds, lending plenty of space to spread out for the 2 of us. A large open shelved closet area with more than enough space for a 2 week stay. Each room AC as well as 2 ceiling fans for comfort. The food was great. Breakfast was whatever you wanted. Lunch and dinner were a fixed menu, but a great variety of food with a slight island flavor. Dinner included soup, salad, rolls (home made by Zemryn), main course with meat, pasta/potato and veg, then dessert. Appetizers at the bar. Drinks from the bar as well as item from the gift shop are charged via the honor system. Write down what you had. No charge for ice tea and the water is safe to drink.. Night life is nonexistent, but after a full day of diving, who needs it. The resort does have a satellite TV, VCR in the main lodge as well as a nice book library. Diving was great! 3 single boat dives a day, 8:30, 10:30 and 2PM. you return to the resort in between. The boats are roomy with lots of under bench storage. Separate rinse tanks for gear and cameras. Rides to the sites were on average 10 minutes. Leave your gear on the boat in between dives. Boat captains assist with getting you in and out of the water. Divemasters are great, knowing each divers strength and weakness and assisting as needed. They have a great understanding of the reef life and will look up a creature they can't identify. Once a week they do a 2 tank AM dive and go either to the other side of the island or towards the east end out of

the marine park. Once we had a picnic lunch at West Bay Beach, so a 2 tank dive around the 2 later dives. The dives are lead by a DM with max depth and time specified at the start of each dive. The pace is slow enough for photographers to click their cameras and still keep up with the group. DM's always pointing out unusual creatures. Reef's are teaming with life. Tropical fish are abundant. Lots of turtles, spotted eagle rays, several green and spotted morays and even a hammer head shark. They do a night dive once a week. You can shore dive from their lagoon. The dive shop is roomy with each room having 4 pegs for gear as well as lots of floor space. The lagoon is a great place to snorkel as well as watch the sunset. 2 weeks and 35 dives. The staff all make you feel like family. Boats have large dry storage in center can be used for camera set up. Separate rinse tank for cameras. No developing facilities.

Inn of Last Resort, July 2001,
Judith Kratky (robjud@chaffee.net)
Nathrop, CO. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm no currents. Only eight guests. The rooms were fine, the air conditioning worked, but we kept the windows open and the fans running. The food was very good. Several felt that portions could have been larger. We didn't find out until the last night that we could have had more food, we only had to ask. The bar and gift shop were on the honor system. Diving was great. Reefs very healthy. Saw everything from tiny things up to 4 foot or so groupers. Saw two hammerhead

sharks, lots of turtles, spotted eagle ray, green moray eel, spotted eels, spotted drums. We also dove a wreck. The dive staff helped if you wanted help. You set up your own equipment. Someone was always on the boat. Easy entry and exit. Two ladders on the back of the boat. Safety equipment on board. Dive master, Keith, was always finding great things for us to see. We did three dives a day, with the longest dive site only 10 minutes away. We always returned to the Inn between dives, which kept peeing in my dive suit to a bare minimum. The last day we did a morning dive, and then went to Anthony's Key Resort (the Inn provided transportation both ways) and snorkeled with the dolphins. The only cons were the no-see'ums, the shower stalls could have been a tad larger, and it would have been nice to have more lounge chairs around the property for sitting outside the room to read.

Native Sons Water Sports, Mermaid Beach Cabins, December 2000, Walt Bolton (wbolton@teleport.com)

Prineville, OR. Vis: 25-50 ft. Water: 75-80 F. Logged dives: 75. Dive masters were liberal in allowing people to dive their own profiles. Expected everyone to surface within one hour. My wife and I enjoy adventure travel: We certainly found it with Christmas in Roatán. To dive with Alvin and Mish Jackson; the owners of Native Sons, and their crew of instructors/dive masters Tony axed Chris is to dive with family. Although the conditions were affected by the Arctic cold front which iced the

Midwest, the Native Sons staff went out of their way to accommodate our need to dive; even loading us into taxis and our equipment into Alvin's pickup and taking us across the island to get out of the waves! At times the boat seemed a little crowded, but the captain, Marco, was very skilled and we never felt uneasy, just woozy. Alvin's prices couldn't be matched in West End Village at \$150 for 10 dives with everything furnished! Dive masters/instructors Tony and Chris were very skilled and laid back. People were allowed to dive their own profiles without unnecessary restrictions. The sea life was great considering the weather was rough and affecting the visibility a little. We encountered abundant reef fish, spotted drums, nice barracuda schools, several turtles, and three dolphins swam around me within touching distance on two different dives. The reef seemed healthy and Tony had to search a little to find a spot to show me some bleaching. The sponges were abundant and colorful: A lawn of grass eels awaits divers at 110 feet at the stern of the wreck El Aguila. "Hole in the Wall" lets you feel the magnitude of the abyss of the Cayman Trench. The Mermaid Beach Cabins were a moderate accommodation. The house service was daily and thorough. Everything was exposed wood but kept very clean: All rooms have a small refrigerator and ceiling fans and some have air conditioning. Bottled water for sale at the office; I purchased a 5 gallon carboy and pack it to our room. (1/4 the cost)

We were told the tap water was safe, but we didn't take the chance. The cabins are built on the sand about 100 ft from Native Son's Dive Shop. Mermaid Beach has no restaurant, but great economical restaurants were within 5 minute walk. The island cuisine was a treat with prices any lower a gift. The sand flea horror did not materialize for us. I used DEET and Pat used some herbal soap. We each picked up a few bites, but not what we had expected. (Ph/fax: 504 445-1335; e-mail at mermaid@globalnet.hn or natives@hondutel.hn)

Native Sons Water Sports, Chilies, August 2001, Hank Richards, Aptos, CA. Vis: 70-110 ft. Water: 82 F. I've done 130 dives with owner Alvin Jackson, his partner Michelle Brit, divemasters Tony and Chris, and boat handler Marcos. A small operation offers individual attention, basic and advanced instruction with specialty courses, small groups usually 4-6, and the camaraderie only found in small locally owned operations. Enthusiasm, skill and knowledge, and a desire to provide an enjoyable experience are all here. Pick-ups and drop offs at your lodgings. First class treatment on a budget. New boat, corals, sponges, marine life beyond belief. Great degree of freedom afforded divers as well as input on choice of dive sites. 5-10 minute to all sites. Some drift dives available. Can stay at Chilies in budget priced rooms right besides dive shop on Half Moon Bay. Good equipment, experienced skipper stays awake on the boat. No charge for use

of equipment and shorty wet suits. Bring DEET! Phone 011 (504) 445-1335, 011 504)445-1214.

Oak Bay Resort, April 2001, Tim & Paula Pastushin, Mission Viejo, CA.

Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dives logged: 450. I suppose that Gary Kimball's Oak Bay "Resort" would be quite resort-like, if you were coming from, say, Murmansk. I contacted Mr. Kimball and found out that not only did they have a room available but that Paula and I would be the only divers. Flew TACA, the usual hassles over carry-on stuff but all our gear made it to Roatán unmolested. Though they still wake you up at 2am for dinner and cocktails. Try to give yourself at least two hours for the layover in San Salvador, just in case your first flight is delayed. Also try to take the direct flight from San Salvador to Roatán – the Boeing 737 was less than 25% full and no layover in San Pedro Sula. We were met at the airport by Gary Kimball and headed for the 45 minute ride to Oakridge where the "resort" was located. Two buildings comprise the "resort." The cinder block building that housed the compressor and the kitchen/dining room was dirty and airless, with a fine collection of roaches and lizards living in the rafters. The other structure was a plywood two story affair with four bedrooms and a balcony with some ramshackle lawn furniture. Our room on the first floor was well screened with several fans and some mildewy towels. The bed was comfortable but there was no privacy because of the foot traffic from locals passing by or

by Gary who occupied one of the other rooms. If we closed the curtains or blinds, the temp became unbearable. In front of the “hotel” facing the ocean is a palm frond screened area where Gary urged us to sunbathe naked repeatedly. This was a theme that was repeated over and over while we were there. He told us that he was used to taking people for naked dives. He’d point out all the beaches that he used for skinny dipping with other guests. One word: Ewww! But hey, we’ve stayed in worse places. In fact, our favorite hotel in the Caribbean is made of plywood and tin with no screens or air-conditioning. Lunch consisted of warm lunch meat and stale bread with some dubious mayo and potato salad for extras. Beverages consisted of sodas by the bottle or kool-aid the food continued to be horrible during our stay. We got the impression that Gary was feeding us on about \$2/day. Gary told us that he didn’t actually own his own boat. He leased a boat from one of the local fisherman when he had divers. Huh? That’s not what he’d told me over the phone. The boat would be there at 1 pm. In the meantime we could set our stuff up on what was left of the pier, post-hurricane Mitch) and then lounge in splendor at the picnic table, which sat on the dirt ground above an ant colony, listening to Gary expand on the delights of his “Resort”. He had nothing good to say about the other dive operations on Roatán. None of the divemasters were trained properly, the hotels catered to the riff-raff. Sounded like envy to us. Finally the boat showed up at the dock and we

loaded our gear on the boat. It was a breezy afternoon and there was a 1-2 ft. wind chop on a 2-3 ft. swell. No big deal except that the boat would almost swamp with every heave. With us was Gary and his new divemaster-in-training, Lisa, a twenty something from Puget Sound who’d gotten fed up with 9-5 life and headed for the tropics. She had one of the worst cases of no-see-um bites we’ve ever seen, some of them were clearly infected and getting bigger. Gary told us that she’d gotten them laying out naked in front of the rooms(sound familiar?). We asked Gary to take us to Calvin’s Crack, which was less than a mile from his place. He said that he’d rather show us one of his favorite sites. The site was unremarkable. Gary had told us to dive our own profile. He didn’t use a computer himself, saying that he knew better than a computer what his nitrogen loading was. So we did, dropping to 90 or so before working our way up the wall. We were planning to dive the wall in one direction for 1000 psi before turning back for the boat. We were surprised when Gary came swimming up to us 15 minutes into the dive and indicating that we should turn back. Huh? This would be a repeated pattern during our dives with him — we’d be told to dive our own profile, then he’d herd us underwater. After two mediocre dives with little fish life, we headed back to the “resort” for dinner. The cook was off until the next day and Gary would be cooking dinner. We rinsed our gear in a barrel of brackish water then hung it to dry in the compressor room. There were no

more than 15 tanks, none of which had either current hydro or vis. We tried to sit on the balcony and read but Gary couldn't seem to get the idea that we wanted to be left in peace. He just kept reiterating what a great place he had and all the diving he'd done and how the neighboring resort was ruining all the moorings and so on and so on. He's a nice enough guy [with the exception of the nudity thing that gave us the creeps] but sometimes you just want to be left alone. Dinner was watery spaghetti, with sauce from a can and more holding forth from Gary as chaser. We kept thinking that the food would improve with the arrival of the regular cook the next day. Unfortunately, not to be. At dinner, Gary had a couple of beers and confided to us that he was hoping Lisa would quit because of her bug bites so that he could replace her with a gal he'd recruited off the internet. No experience required just had to own her own dive gear. The following morning, Paula and I decided to snorkel out to the shore diving area. It was at least a 500 yard swim out to the wall, made hazardous by the heavy boat traffic in front of the "resort" and the commercial fishing fleet that uses the same channel. The "Unlimited Shore Diving" that Gary advertises on his website is BS. Gary gets most of his customers off the net where he boasts "the Lowest Price Dive Packages in Roatán." Caveat Emptor. We put up with the bad food and the herded diving and the incessant chatter until the third day. After another two crappy morning dives, we decided, for the sake of the vacation

and our marriage, that we'd leave and seek better accommodations and diving elsewhere. When we asked Gary for a prorated refund he hemmed and hawed before grudgingly agreeing to refund about 35% of our money, after 2.5 days of a seven day package. We were packed and gone in minutes.

(Ph: 504-435-2337; e-mail ah6pn@arrl.net; website www.roatandiving.com)

Reef House, November 2000, Steve, Cindy, Geoffrey and Joan Blair, Oklahoma City, OK. Vis: 30-100 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Dives logged: 250. My son's first dive trip. I think he saw everything on his wanted to see list except a seahorse, manta and turtle. By far my best dive trip to Roatán. On first dive we came back thru a large school of spinner dolphins (100+). Food and accommodations were excellent. Staff went out of their way to be helpful. This was critical since my mother broke her ankle the first night there (she doesn't dive and said she would be happy just laying around — I don't think she meant to do it quite like this). Only disappointment was I had the impression the resort was off by itself, but it is actually surrounded by town. Location on offshore Cay still meant decent beach and town noise was not evident. **(Ph: 800-328-8897 or 011-504-452297, Fax: 011-504-452142; e-mail reefdiving@aol.com; website www.reefhouseresort.com)**

Reef House, January 2001 Samuel B. Johnson, Eureka IL. Dives logged: 185. Vis: 20-50 ft. Water: 87-88 F. Weather: sunny. Water:

moderately calm, occasional strong currents. Dive restrictions: dive with buddy. I've experienced five Roatán operations: the Peter Hughes live-aboard, the Aggressor live-aboard, Bay Islands Resort, Fantasy Island Resort, and Reef House is the one I'd recommend most highly. It's rustic, small and simple, the opposite of luxurious, but it's committed to giving you a great vacation, and it's small enough that they pay attention to every individual diver. David, the divemaster, is an excellent buddy, and very sharp-eyed. He found two seahorses, a well camouflaged scorpionfish, and a large eye toadfish deep in its hole. He's happy to lead, follow, or get out of the way. The shore diving can be a little awkward since it's relatively shallow for a long distance from shore, and the coral shows significant Mitch damage, but especially at night there's good exploring possible. They're between managers, so while I was there the place was being run by the owner, Lucian, and part of my positive reaction may be a result of his clear attitude of making sure his guests are absolutely happy. The reefs of post-Mitch Roatán are far from what pre-Mitch Roatán was like.

Tropicana Beach Club, March 2001, John (jholder@gwe.net) Crested Butte, CO. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, no currents. Excellent lodge — treated like a guest in a friends home. Good food. Dive equipment and facilities good. Dive flexibility excellent. Divemaster lets you dive

your dive. (Ph: 504-445-1603; e-mail info@tropicalbeachclub.com; website www.tropicalbeachclub.com)

Utila

Laguna Beach Resort, Utila Water Sports, October 2000, Jim and Brenda Hamon (jbhamon@okplus.com)

Wewoka, OK. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. A really good dive trip. Snorkeled with whale sharks on 5 occasions. Seen three at one time. Lots of marine life, and healthy corral. The rooms were kept clean and the food was good. Our boat captain Wagner was really good finding the whale sharks. (Ph: 800-66-UTILA or 337-893-0013; fax: 337-893-5024; e-mail res@utila.com)

Laguna Beach Resort, October 2000, Walt Sommer

(divemon@i2k.com) Gaylord, MI. Water: 80 F. Dives logged: 526. Dive restrictions enforced: 130. A dive resort built by a diver for divers. Buddy Bob found a frog fish at Black Coral Wall. Even captain Wagnor jumped in. Spent 10 days, 3 dives a day. They will drop you off near channel for a 4th dive if you want. Food not fancy, but good and plentiful. Staff was great. Take a cloth, moisten with "Sportsman Deepwoods Off" and use it all week. Result: 3 bites in 10 days.

Laguna Beach Resort, March 2001, Joyce & Tom Schulke, Waupaca, WI. Vis: 40-150 ft. Water: 78-79 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: no deeper than 130 ft. Dives logged: 630+. All the way from manager, Liz, to divemaster to cooks, everyone

really tried hard to please us all. Wagner, is famed for his ability to captain his boat into perfect position for whale sharks. Spent the morning dive surface intervals cruising for whale sharks. Had wonderful encounters. Cabanas are great. Very comfy and quiet. Feel almost like you have your own little island. Only concern was sand flies. We were prepared with repellent and careful, so it was not bad.

Laguna Beach Resort, April 2001, Gregg Thomas and Carol Downie, Rochester, MN. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 81 F, calm and flat/choppy. Dives logged: 130. Dive restrictions: 130 feet, 1 hour.

Laguna Beach Resort, June 2001, Jean and Bob Kirkpatrick (bojean@logantele.com) Russellville, KY. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 82 F, choppy. Logged dives: 1,000. This was our 4th trip and saw a whale shark — we snorkeled 3-4 minutes with it — an amazing experience! Their dive boat is the best — well arranged, with a ladder at the angle of a staircase. The storage room is next to the dock, and the crew sets up your equipment, so it's almost as easy as a live-aboard. Resort is great — beautiful rooms with a/c, nice dining room and bar and lounge, with game room upstairs. Buffet style meals are very good. Reefs are healthy and have many fish. Also saw manta ray and eagle ray. Great macro critters. Wind made for choppy seas and less visibility — but kept away “Bay Islands Bugs” — the main drawback for this place. One of the best Caribbean spots.

Laguna Beach Resort, June 2001, Jeffrey Rappin, Chicago, IL. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm choppy. Good dive operation. The staff was cooperative, willing and friendly. Honor system at the bar, everybody was congenial. As part of a group of six we were always with the same divemaster and boat captain. The divemaster was competent but more interested in finding things on his own dive; he did leave us experienced divers alone. Wagner, the captain, was outstanding. Accommodations were first rate; the food was plentiful but mediocre. The no-seeums were a problem when there was no wind but each house had its own hammock and pier where you could veg out.

Utila Dive Center, Utila Water Sports Mango Inn, September 2001, Brenda and Jim Hamon, Heartland, U.S.A. Made our arrangements through Roatán Charter. Had to carry our dive gear and personal affects from airport to Mango Inn. Tropical setting and off of the beaten path. We had a room for triple occupancy with standard accommodations which was clean and tidy — ceiling fan not working and no bathroom window screen. We met Ben the manager of Mango Inn and Utila Dive Center moved us into a different room which did have an air conditioner and a TV with 2 double beds. The restaurant at Mango Inn was pretty and served good food, a little pricey, try the garlic shrimp. As for the Dive Center, it appeared to be a really fun and rushed place for younger people. We went out

for a day of diving, and everybody just left us with divemaster, Jeromey, he was quite nice and tried to accommodate us. After getting in the water it was like a fish race, a total work out. The boat was not clean and when you would sit down paint would be stuck to you. It smoked like an ole steam locomotive and the fumes made us very sick. So we went to Utila Water Sports. In the past dove with them and stayed at Laguna Beach Resort. Our ole' pal Captain Wagnertold us that the whale sharks had been scarce. We had really good dives and a good dive master, Neil. We did see a whale shark on the first day, beautiful coral, 30 squid hovering, a couple of black tip sharks. Visibility was about 100 feet. We wore a 2 mil wet suit. Also, my husband has special health needs and they were very accommodating on helping him with entering and exiting the water. A good place to eat on a budget is The Island Cafe. (Ph: 425-3335 or 4253327; fax 425-3327; e-mail info@utiladivecentre.com; website www.utiladivecentre.com)

Utila Hotel, February 2001, Jeffrey Domackowski, Syracuse, NY. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 78 F. Dives logged: 165. Dive restrictions: 130' depth limit and 500 lbs. Full dinner is \$4 U.S. Round of 8 beers is \$6 U.S. Diving with multi dive package was approximately \$12 U.S. per tank. This operator had the cleanest and nicest boats on the island and they catered to our group of 16. Don't need air conditioning in February. Muskol works great for bugs and is a must. Walls and spur and groove formations

are outstanding. As I read here in Undercurrent, getting there is a pain the ——! (Ph: 504 425-3340)

Utila Lodge, March 2001, Paul Seidenkranz (pjseidenkranz@qwest.net) **Golden Valley, MN.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, choppy. Our second trip to the Utila Lodge. Hosted a group trip. Great staff friendly, cared for all needs. The owners Jim and Kisty Engel make your stay memorable. Willy the Captain of the Sea Sprite has the eyesight of a hawk, if there is something to see during the surface intervals he will find it: whale sharks, spinner, and bottle nose dolphins, sailfish, tuna, and ever orcas! One day he spotted fruit and vegetables cast adrift. In fear of capsizing a supply ship had to off load the cargo during a crossing in heavy seas you name it we recovered it and ate well. All the above in two weeks! The diving is easy and great you never know what you are going to see. The dive staff is as professional as you will see in the Caribbean, they know how to attend to those who need help and let the seasoned divers do there own thing. The Bay Islands College of Diving is connected to the resort and provides quality dive education. Our group witnessed the staff tend to 4 divers from other shops on the island in the onsite decompression chamber! The Lodge provides great buffet style dining in a casual setting. Jenny, Queen Ann, Lewis, Willy and Ben all make you feel at home. The

rooms were clean and well kept. In the three weeks we've spent on Utila in the last 2 years we have had 7 whale shark encounters. (Ph: (800) 282-8932; (352)588-4132; e-mail: utl@roatan.com)

JAMAICA

A lovely island with plenty of hotel amenities (and lots of swinging-singles and couples-only all-inclusives), but the impoverished population (22 percent of whom are unemployed) eats anything a fisherman can scoop up, and you can hardly blame them. . . .

Experienced divers will become bored on the first dive, but the diving's okay for beginners (although the local divemaster may be poorly trained. . . . Jamaica lies in the hurricane belt. . . .

Negril

Beaches, August 2000, Mark Goldsmith (scubnski@aol.com)
Livingston, NJ. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dive restrictions: 90 feet 1st dive; 60 feet 2nd dive. Little regard for safety or concern for reef ecology. Resort divers were dangerous to themselves and reef. Allowed to rocket to the surface with no concept of buoyancy controls or inherent danger. Continuously crashed into reef upon descents. DMs didn't care! Diving in morning deep dive was pleasant and uneventful. Would be suitable for certified beginners. (Ph: 888-SANDALS or 305-284-1300; fax 1-305-667-8996; e-mail info@beaches.com; website www.beaches.com)

Grand Lido Negril, January 2001, Brenda Kowitz, Hutchison, KS . Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 76-78 F. Dives logged: 15. Dive restrictions: Must stick to dive plans, never exceed agreed upon depth — had to follow their profiles for night dives. Dive shop well run and very helpful — offered beginner, shallow, deep and night dives — all done from the boat. Went thru several caves, saw an airplane, etc. Randy and Keith both very familiar with area and were PADI certified instructors. Did have a divemaster bring us up in high waves with no way to signal boat. Resort is excellent all-inclusive. Sailing, snorkeling, wind surfing, glass bottom boat rides, scuba, etc. all included. Drawback was the abundance of marijuana. Excellent for all around vacation! (Ph: 800-330-8272)

Sandals Negril, December 2000, Kay Greeley, (kaygreeley@earthlink.net)
Simi Valley, CA. Vis: 80 ft. Water: 70 F. Dives logged: 1,000+. Dive restrictions: depth, time, guided. We didn't plan this as a dive trip, merely took advantage of what was offered at the all-inclusive resort. The divemasters have never been anywhere else and are over conservative given the easy conditions. They took good care of the beginners that they were certifying. They have a beautiful dive boat, but no camera set up (they weren't familiar with cameras). We did have a couple of nice dives, but overall it isn't really a dive location. (Ph: 888-SANDALS or 305-284-1300; fax 1-305-667-8996; e-mail info@sandals.com; website www.sandals.com)