

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)

Sandals Negril, May 2001, Gerald Canning, Reno, NV. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, choppy no currents. We had low expectations. The waters off Negril have been heavily fished. We saw many traps — but the pickings were slim. The corals were ok — just not too many fish to see. There is a major downside to a “no tipping operation.” It matches a no service shop. If it was rainy, the dives were canceled. The divemasters provided no assistance other than to keep us together on our short dives. The 30 minute maximum bottom time was matched to the 63 cu ft tanks. The accommodations and food, on the other hand, were superb. There were several specialty restaurants and a comprehensive buffet. The food was ample and excellent. The accommodations were large, clean and air conditioned. Dive shop was not set up with the idea that someone would want to take pictures. In truth, there wasn't much to see.

MEXICO

Once Cozumel was visited mainly by divers, but now cruise ships daily disgorge great packs of shoppers who descend on the night clubs, restaurants and bars galore, and sidewalk hustlers hawking condos, serapes that are questionable bargains, and little plaster statues of guys wearing big hats leaning on saguaro cactuses. . . . Spectacular dives do exist, but many operators are reluctant to visit these sites,

especially if the divers aboard have mixed experience levels, and rightfully so, because much of Cozumel's diving is advanced sites with deep or fast-current drift dives. Beginning divers should select other destinations. . . . Carry surface-signaling devices for both day and night (strobe, safety sausage, etc.) and stay with your dive guide or group. . . . Dive operators vary widely in quality and safety. . . . The best diving is in spring and summer; it can be rainy during the fall (hurricane season) and winter. . . . Cozumel is one of the biggest travel bargains, with accommodations ranging from the inexpensive downtown hotels to diver hangouts to high dollar hotels. . . . While there are dive operations up and down the Yucatan Coast, only Maya Ha is able to reach the only recently dived — though heavily fished — Chinchorro Banks. With a variety of activities and adventure tour offerings in addition to diving, the Southern Yucatan is an excellent choice for serious divers looking for reefs where few divers have fanned as well as divers who travel with non-divers.

Cancun

Scuba Cancun, Blue Paradise Resort at Yalmakaan, January 2001, Steve & Kathie Payne, Richland, IN. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water temperature 80-84 F, feet. Purchased the trip on an internet auction site — www.bid4vacations.com. Scuba Cancun an excellent operation, owned by a couple who moved from