

**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](http://www.bid4vacations.com). Scuba Cancun an excellent operation, owned by a couple who moved from

Canada. Staff is efficient and helpful. We dove 4 days and had Abraham as a divemaster each trip. Nice reefs and an excellent wreck, recently sunk. We went to Isla Mujeres for one trip. The fish and coral were plentiful, but because there is so much less current than Cozumel you can appreciate them. Stored our dive gear in their secure gear room so that we didn't have to carry it on the bus. The Yalmakaan is 3 buildings of which the Blue Paradise is in one. These are timeshares; rent them for about \$50 more per week than the cast to those who own. E-mail Jorge at yalmakan@prodigy.net.mx.

## Costa Maya

**Maya Ha Resort, July 2000, Jackie Maciel, Franklin, MA.** Vis: 70-90 ft. Water: 82 F. Dive restrictions: Time, depth. Small resort 4 hr + south of Cancun. The accommodations and food are excellent. Fresh juices and fruit each day. We were part of a group so there was no choice of menu. The food was a major plus. There is a pool and nice rooms with ceiling fans, AC and TV. But since the resort must generate its own electricity AC and TV don't run during the day when everyone should be out diving and touring. They offer 3 tank all day 9am-6:30pm boat dives to the Chinchorro Reef (1 1/2 hour boat ride each way). The reefs are in good shape and the diving good, but not worth the long boat ride every day. The dive guides have trouble knowing which way the current goes and many times started the dives by going into the current. One day our group realized

this and refused to follow the leader, just hanging out near a coral head while our guide did his thing. The resort also offers a kayak/snorkel trip (more hype than anything else — 30 min. kayak, 30 min. snorkel, 30 min. kayak then lunch at 2:30 pm!). There was also a day trip to some great Mayan Ruins. 1 1/2 hour van trip to the river or ruins, with van drivers that drive 2 lane roads at 70-85 mph! On the days we did these trips the dive boat went to the inshore reefs and people swam with dolphins and a manatee(also a shorter boat trip). The diving is good from the boat, which is the best dive boat in the region, a 46ft. boat. Towels and lunch is provided on the boat, as well as snacks, water and juice. Shore diving/snorkeling was a 15 minute swim from shore. (ph: 877-443-1600 or 512-443-2977; fax 512-443-2978; e-mail mayaharesort@aol.com; website [www.mayaharesort.com](http://www.mayaharesort.com))

**Maya Ha Resort, November 2000, Mike Mullins, Woburn, MA.** Vis: 60-70 ft. Water: 80 F, calm and flat, choppy. Logged dives: 510 (13 @ Chinchorro Banks). Very remote, interesting land trip options. Chinchorro Banks are 1.5 hours away so if bad weather, no diving (night dive in shore okay). Rooms and facilities are pretty and very nice. Was a typical storm 2 weeks before, so water was cloudy and silt everywhere! Tried to "see" through it but there are just small coral sections then large expanses of sand, then a small coral section and more sand. My dive partner sat out the third dive because

reading was more interesting. What corals/sponges were there were huge! And pristine (12 ft. wide elephant ear sponge and monstrous barrel sponges). Not much fish life and this is the first time I've never seen a nudibranch! And it was expensive.

**Maya Ha Resort, November 2000, William Thomsen, Indianapolis, IN.**

Vis: 40-60 Ft. Water: 82-86 F, choppy surge currents. The house-keeping was adequate, however, the bath mat outside the shower was never changed. Every day while housekeeping was cleaning, they would leave the screen door open which let in flying bugs. The dining and bar area was kept relatively clean. The bar ran out of Coke. The variety of the food was marginal. The pool area appeared pleasant, however the water was always cloudy. Regarding diving we were dropped off on at least two drift dives below the dive site and had to swim up current. On one occasion the divemaster wanted to have us dive without the proper interval between dives (we refused). One day the dive operation accepted more divers than the boat was designed for (34 divers, plus 3 divemasters). On one dives we waited 30 minutes in the water to be picked up. On the next dive we waited 22 minutes to be retrieved. The navigation of the divemaster on our night dive was marginal. We navigated the dive site ourselves and found our own exit point. The rinse tank at the dive shop was always empty or just being filled,, so we ended up rinsing our gear in the room shower.

**Maya Ha Resort, January 2001, Phil Flynt (somissone@aol.com), Petal, MS.**

Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 76-79 F. Dives logged: 300+. Dive restrictions: Dive your computer. My family went with our local dive store, Sea Urchins. Because of choppy seas and a lot of wind we only made 4 dives at Chinchorro Banks. We dove local dive sites 2 days, real similar to Akumal, saw a huge stingray, lots of lobster, spotted eels. My daughter, Erin, finished her checkout there. Pretty resort, nice dive shop, 2 great boats with heads. Dive-master let you dive your own profile. I only made 9 dives average depth 52 feet, 54 minutes on computer.

**Maya Ha Resort, March 2001, Ken Paff, Detroit MI.**

Vis: 30-40'. Water: 78- 79 F. Divemaster chaperoned, but did not babysit. A disappointment. Some wind, so the boat took 2.1 hrs to Chinchorro (1.3 hrs return). On one day 4 of 7 divers over the rail seasick, 3 did not dive. Reefs, sponges in good condition. Few large fish. Reef fish and life varied; some schools; garden eels on all dives. Diving would probably be average or good by Caribbean standards if not for the long crossing and low vis due to wind. Don Higbie, who competently runs the dive operation and did the same at Cayos Cochinos, says diving is much better in July-August. It's very much a gamble. Dive crew nice and competent but missed one site, hurried-up another dive. and could be better at finding interesting critters. It tends to attract people looking for a luxury experience rather than serious divers, though surely some of the latter will

come to see the Chinchorro Banks. Facilities, food (except the crummy boat lunch), service, staff, management all good. Dinners excellent. They gave us a lovely beach front cottage at the back cottage price. The 4.2 hr drive from Cancun airport to Maya Ha is nice. With a car, we could also visit the Kohunlich ruins and Chetumal. Accommodations in Chetumal and Bacalar are inexpensive — hotel \$30.

## Cozumel

**Advanced Divers, The Careyitos, November 2000, Bob Puschinsky (puschinsky@aol.com) Seabrook, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy. We have been diving Cozumel for 25 years and always come back to Advanced Divers 011 987 - 21578, -23749. They take us to sites with no competing divers, 1st dive starts at 130 ft and evolves to 20', 75 minutes later. Maximum of 12 divers (usually 6) with 3 dive masters.

Novice divers are catered to separately when we bring a mixed group resulting in great dives for all. Saw turtles, several toad fish, clusters of lobster, many morays, eagle rays, sting rays, a couple nurse sharks, yahoo, dorado and a good population of other fish including quite large parrots, groupers and hog fish. The coral pinnacles on Columbia reef are spectacular.

Unfortunately, Santa Rosa reef is overwhelmed with divers so we don't get to it very often. Palancar and Santa Rosa looks like a boat convention at times resulting in our diving at Punta Sur, Columbia, Tunich, Cedral and others that don't draw as many divers

but offer excellent diving,. Experienced divemasters and crew. (Ph: +52 987-2-1578; fax +52 987-2-3749)

**Advanced Divers; Villa las Anclas, August 2001, Jack Gibson Dallas, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 125 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm currents. "Peaceful, Easy Feeling" I couldn't get the song out of my head as we drifted from Delilah to Cedral. By the time we surfaced 74 minutes later we'd seen three nurse sharks, an octopus, and a large lobster. We anchored and enjoyed a lunch of ham sandwiches, fresh fruit, and tostadas with fresh guacamole followed by a leisurely siesta for our hour and half surface interval. Las Paloma: nurse shark, several splendid toadfish, a large school of reef squid, and one crevice after another filled with dozens of lobster. We also came across several splendid urchins. And this dive lasted 95 minutes! Advanced Divers is an independent operation unaffiliated with any hotel or dive shop. The dive masters point out sea life but are otherwise unobtrusive. They will continue the dive until everyone is down to 500psi. When one diver gets low, they escort him to the surface while the group continues. The Careyitos is a 12 ft wide, 38 ft. long Bertram. She doesn't zip you out to the reef, but gives a comfortable and relaxing ride with a large sun deck above and shaded deck below. Generally no more than 10 divers. She is fully outfitted with safety gear, including life vests, flares, vhf and CB radios, and a DAN oxygen pack. Ricardo Madrigal and his team never

let us down. For a comfortable and economical place to stay, try Villa las Anclas, a seven-suite hotel two blocks off the main plaza. Each suite is a loft with bedroom and bath upstairs and kitchenette and living room downstairs. There is no pool, restaurant, or bar — but breakfast is delivered to your room and you are only steps away from all the hot spots. Paid only \$50 per night plus tax! Advanced Divers: phone 011 52 987 21578; e/ mail: [careyitos@cozumel.com.mx](mailto:careyitos@cozumel.com.mx), web: [http://www.cozumel-diving.net/careyitos/Villas las Anclas](http://www.cozumel-diving.net/careyitos/Villas%20las%20Anclas): phone 011 52 987 26103, email: [cozumel@lasanclas.com](mailto:cozumel@lasanclas.com); web: <http://www.lasanclas.com/Index.html>

**Aldora Divers, Fiesta Americana Resort, August 2000, Dawn Scott & Dennis Little, Portsmouth, OH.** We missed one day's diving because of the late flights and had no gear when we arrived 13 hours after our scheduled arrival. Thankfully, the gear did come the next afternoon. We chose Aldora Divers because of Undercurrent reviews and were not disappointed. We had called in route and told them we would be late. The following morning they checked in on us at our hotel and even offered the free use of their phone so we could make calls to home, travel agent, etc. (Phone calls to US from Mexico aren't always easily made.) Aldora is the only dive operation using steel tanks and our bottom times ranged from :59 -1:36 minutes. All this while carefully monitoring decompression limits. They require computers, and if you don't have one they provide you

with one! The extended bottom times gives you a much better diving dollar value. The divemasters (two are marine biologist) — Alejandro, Jorge, Bill and Roberta were excellent. We dove mainly with Alejandro, a biologist with additional classes in marine biology. She was adept at finding critters including the tiny pipehorse and the endemic splendid toadfish. The reefs are amazingly healthy considering the traffic the island gets and the swim throughs there are such fun. When you arrive in Cozumel, you take your gear to Aldora, and that is the last time you have to touch. They set up your regs with DIN connectors and when they arrive at your hotel pier in the morning all your gear is set up and ready to go. After diving, it all goes in a bag with your name on it and they take it back to their shop for rinse and hang. Take your skin and wet suit back to the hotel with you — it will dry better there. Aldora was always one of the first three operations at our pier in the morning. The boats are fast and nice, but not too roomy, but they normally only take 6 divers or less and everybody gets a vote on the dive site. If you've been there — they don't go back unless you say it's o.k. Only one boat had a rinse tank for cameras. They leave their dock at 7:30 a.m. for the morning two tank. We always had our choice of uncrowded dive sites. They also do a two tank afternoon, and on Wed. and Sat. a twilight and night dive! Jorge found a juvenile Bandtail Searobin on our twilight dive. This critter was not supposed to be in Cozumel! The cruise ship crowds are

overrunning downtown — there were four in one day, so we found the underwater night life more enjoyable! Resort is far south of downtown and loved it! Our 7th floor room (\$20 extra per night) had a great ocean view balcony, hair drier, big closet, drawers and snack mini-bar. The resort and it's restaurants were spotlessly clean and we found the food to be delicious. We should have taken the meal plan — a 25% savings. There are two pools, one next to the beach, the other has three levels and a swim up bar. Beware: the bottle on the shelf may say Jose' — but that may not be what's in your drink. I became violently ill from bad tequila. Fiesta offers many children's activities and we were surprised at the number of children there. However, they did not "ruin" the atmosphere for romance seeking couples, they just made it better. Don't miss La Choza (the best) and El Gapi Navigante downtown for great dinners. Pack a picnic and take a ride around the island to experience the residential areas of the island. We especially enjoyed people watching at the grocery store on the south end of downtown where shopping is for the entire Mexican family! We booked our trip through Tropical Adventures (Angela) and they handled everything very professionally. Angela even checked in after our trip to see how things went. **(Ph: ( 281) 338-9888 or 011-52-987-23397; fax (281) 332-6152; e-mail RangerBob@Aldora.com; website www.aldoradivers.com)**

**Aldora Divers, Costa Club,  
January 2001, John Horan,**

**(johnhoran@aol.com) Denver, CO.**  
Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dives logged: 50. Dive restrictions: Stay with divemaster. Aldora Divers is an excellent operation. Superb divemasters, especially Jorge, are devoted to pleasing you. Small groups, fast boats, and steel tanks for added bottom time are also a big plus. Costa Club rooms and pool are good, but food is "OK" at best. Jorge went "above and beyond" in administering the PAD/Advanced Open Water Program.

**Aldora Divers, Fiesta Americana Reef March 2001, Ron Rudnick (hangglider@compuserve.com) Mead, WA.** Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 77 F, calm. Stayed at the Fiesta Americana Reef and couldn't have been happier. We had 2 rooms on the 6th floor overlooking the ocean and pools. There is little road noise from a new roadway behind the hotel relieving traffic from in front. The rooms were large, marble floored, large bath-rooms, but had weak air-conditioning. Food is not cheap, \$11 for a cold morning buffet for example. Snorkeling in front of the hotel was good (go south). Fresh water showers rinsing. We ate in town every night. Our recommendations from best to least: Santiago's, Pancho's Back Yard, El Moro, Ernesto's Fajita Factory (downtown), Choza, and finally Guido's. Zermatts is a great bakery for sweet rolls, muffins, and breads in the morning before diving. Aldora uses high pressure, 120CF steel tanks which means we averaged nearly one hour a dive. The boats had twin 150s

to speed us to sites. Never more than 7 divers on the boat and Bill(divemaster) was not only fun but very thorough. We got cold! We had 1/2 mil skins and would recommend adding a shorty for added warmth. We saw all that we hoped to see plus we dove on the wreck.

**Aldora Divers, April 2001, John Thurston (jthurston@direpc.com)**  
**Golden, CO.** Vis: 100 ft. Water: 80 F, choppy. Dives logged: 120. Dive restrictions: dove as a group of 5 or 6, to stay together. Diving was fine, but there were a lot of boats and divers at all of the dive sites. Aldora is a good dive organization.

**Aldora Divers, Bahia Hotel, July 2001, Susan Sampson, Renton, WA.**  
Vis: generally 100+ feet. Water: low 80's. Aldora provided good service and used acceptable equipment. The divemaster would go into the water first to check the current. Dives would not exceed 130'. The first diver to reach 1000 psi would signal the dive master, and he would start the gradual ascent. The captain would toss out a floating line for divers to use to approach and reenter the boat. One day Jorge didn't check the current and we swept along way too fast to appreciate the coral formations. We sunk low and ducked behind coral heads to escape the current, but were tumbled like tumbleweeds crashing into the reef, with hoses catching on corals then breaking loose. I needed to hang on to my dive buddy to avoid being swept away. The sand was washing over the reef in a visible down current quickly sunk us to 80

feet. I was only 23 minutes into the dive when I hit the 1000 psi, so I signaled Jorge, who offered me his octopus. I wasn't out of air, I just wanted to follow the plan, get the hell out of there, and start up. I shook off his offer; but he did not start up. I signaled that I would stay with my buddy. When Jorge continued to point to some creature under a rock, my buddy pointed to the boat overhead, and we started up. It wasn't our boat, but the captain whistled to the Aldora boat, which picked us up. Despite wearing a skin, I came up stung with sea lice. It was then that I noticed that my tank was smaller than everybody else's. The divemaster explained that was because I am so short (5'2"). But, if a small person uses a small tank efficiently and big people use big tanks efficiently, the small person is going to run out of air first. We tipped Jorge anyway. The next day Arturo led us on a leisurely tour of the reef; our downtime exceeded an hour. Roberto was the best of our dive masters. He explained that if anybody ran low on air too fast they could use his octopus to extend the dive unless they wanted to go up, in which case the whole group would. (Oh, that's what Jorge meant.) He allowed us much flexibility in a drift dive profile as he could. And with me back in a big-people's tank, the last dive on our last day lasted for an hour and a half! We delivered our gear to the firm's store in downtown Cozumel before our first dive, and it was refitted for use of DIN and big steel tanks. Since the tanks were not pumped to more than 3000 psi, that was a wasted exercise, but

Aldora explained that everybody uses the same filling station and it won't fill tanks above that. The tanks were coated with heavy paint, so it was not possible to read any engraved maintenance criteria. Partial shade was provided by a canopy. Each diver was issued a bottle of fresh water, but there was no head, no towels, and no tank for cameras. A DAN safety kit was on board, but one divemaster argued that there was no need to administer oxygen in case of accident because the chamber was only 30 minutes away. The surface interval was at a beach club that offered toilets, showers, recreational facilities, hammocks, plus lunch for a reasonable fee. Cozumel has changed. Gone are the taxis with steaming engines and exploding tires. Instead, orderly Nissans line up at the airport and a maitre de directs tourists into the right van to go to the right hotel. Gone are the kids selling Chicklets, but still present are the vendors: "Lady! Lady! Almost Free." The Kentucky Fried has been replaced by a store selling diamonds and tanzanites. The prices are not a bargain. Our suite at the Bahia couldn't have been nicer. The hotel is across the street from the Aldora dock. It was spotlessly clean. We had a living room, bedroom, and bathroom featuring a huge Jacuzzi that was great for dunking dive skins. The outdoor balcony was good for drying equipment, but the temperatures and humidity were too high to sit outside and enjoy it. We must have had the honeymoon suite, because the maid folded our towels into forms of romantic, if not erotic, cuddling swans

whenever she performed the turndown service. Salsa and chips came with every meal, and we tried local fare, which proved very good, at La Mission, El Capi Navigante, La Choza, La Veranda, and Yucatan fare from Restaurante Denis. We caught a ferry to the mainland "Mexican Riviera" to visit Mayan ruins at Tulum, then finished the day at a water park, Xel-ha, that offered unlimited good food and drink and snorkeling down a quarter-mile river to the sea populated by the big parrot fish, and where the river meets the sea, a small school of tuna.

**Aldora Divers, Villa Selva, August 2001, John Isbister, Ellicott City, MD.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to Feet. Water: 85 F, calm. Villa Selva is a 2 bedroom house in town, 3 blocks from the ocean. Great house with a delightful pool and garden, convenient location. Rented by Tropical Island Connections, [www.cozumelvillas.com](http://www.cozumelvillas.com). Very economical. We went to the market, and ate in for breakfast and lunch. Restaurant recommendations: Ernesto's for fajitas; Italian, Guido's and Prima; seafood, El Capi Navegante. Best restaurant for its setting, service and food, but expensive for the island — La CoCay. Aldora is terrific. You pay a little more, but everyone, from the people in the office to the guys on the dock, the dive masters and boat captains strive to make your dive great. Fast boats, and an early start, make sure you get to the good sites before the other boats. The largest group on a boat was 7 divers.



You dive with steel 120's, so the dives are all long, even if there is an air hog in the group. The surface interval is at the Playa del Sol Beach Club with shade (or sun if you want a tan), beach activities, a restaurant, pool and restrooms. The DM's are pros. Very safety conscious, and make sure you have a good dive. They ask what you want to see and show you the good stuff. During one dive, my daughter's mask was fogging. She became frustrated, and was about to surface, when the DM, Roberto swapped masks with her, and the dive continued. Fantastic night dive on Paradise Reef, a dozen octopus; Devil's Throat, a deep, challenging dive excellently and safely led by DM Jorge; Dalila, our last dive of the trip led by DM Bill — we asked for sharks, and he found four.

**Careyitos (Tony Perez and Ricardo Madrigal), January 2001, Larry & Pat Bailey, Eldon, MO.** Vis: 90-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F, strong currents. Logged dives: 95. Dive restrictions: computer. Small operation, open to destination suggestions. We were anxious to go north where the current is generally strong and today was no exception at Barracuda Reef. About 3 knots. Our dive time was 75 minutes; max depth 85 ft. 17 eagle rays cruised with the current. Ricardo and Tony are very professional and safety oriented. There were 5 divers on board, excluding the crew; 6 max. The dives are a little more expensive than the customary \$50 2-tank dive. However, the efficiency and professionalism of the crew and the wonderful lunch served during surface interval make it well worth the price. The entire

Careyitos crew is fun and adventurous! (Ph: +52 987-2-1578; fax +52 987-2-3749)

**Aqua Safari, Vista Del Mar, January 2001, Tim Valdez, College Station, TX.** Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 79 F. Dives logged: 188. Dive restrictions: Depth and time. Had worst room of our group. I didn't like our lobby it was part of the attraction. Also being constantly asked to come into a shop. The locals kept change as a tip and when I asked for change I was shortchanged. Boats were prompt but are pretty far from reefs. Will try not to go with photographers, they are constantly, touch, bumping and crashing to the reefs. (Ph: (52) 987 20101; fax (52) 987 20661; e-mail: [dive@aquasafari.com](mailto:dive@aquasafari.com); website [www.aquasafari.com](http://www.aquasafari.com))

**Aqua Safari, Plaza Las Glorias, February-March 2001, Ron and Sherry Smith, Levittown, PA.** Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F, choppy. Logged dives: 96. Dive restrictions: 80 ft. plus, set time (depending on depth of dive). Fourth year in Cozumel. Punta Sur was excellent, going through a maze of caves and out to the wall through the "Devil's Throat" at 126. When coming up through the caves, where the tunnels split is an amazing coral formation in the shape of a cross. Maracaibo was amazing, large forest-like coral gardens. We saw lots of spotted eagle rays, sharks, and turtles. During surface interval we spotted a group of stranded divers drifting away. The Dive Paradise boat captain was asleep! Our divemasters woke him and pointed the direction of

the divers, which were far away from the boat!

**Aqua Safari, April 2001, Blaine Baker, Scottsdale, AZ.** Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 77-81 F, choppy. Dives logged: 60. Dive restrictions: 80 ft., 40 minutes. Aqua Safari divemasters and crew were excellent. "Punta Sur Dive" was spectacular. Great drift diving and night diving. Crew was very knowledgeable and friendly — other than one day when the boat was late due to a bad water pump, we were impressed with the boat.

**Aqua Safari, Plaza Las Glorias, May 2001, Ted Godek, Port Saint Lucie, FL.** Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80-82 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 64. Dive restrictions: 60-80-120. My sixth trip to Cozumel, Mexico with the Blue Planet Dive Shop with owner/instructor Kirk Neville. I did one dive to a depth of 124 feet — three s to eighty to ninety feet — with the other six dives to fifty to sixty feet. We did five days of diving from May 9th through May 14th. I had ten fantastic dives, with corals, fishes and turtles beautiful as ever. With reference to your question still diving at 70 - Undercurrent May 2001, in 1996 at the age of sixty-nine I had my first scuba lesson — open water diver certified in 1997 — Nitrox certified 1998. Also, I am a below knee amputee with prosthesis made for swimming. Scuba diving has become a great new experience.

**Aqua World, Fiesta Americana, December 2000, Ned Miller (nedcam@theramp.net)**

**Libertyville, IL.** Vis: 200 Feet. Surge currents. Last dove Cozumel 10 years ago and much has changed, downhill. This time have 2 teenagers. When I first arrived to Aqua World's dock I thought I had made a huge mistake, cattle boats servicing the cruise ship crowd. Seemed hectic and crowded. However, for the beginning diver their operation is perfect since they separate everyone into small groups and cater to beginners, so I felt my son was in good hands. Very well organized and professional. I would not recommend them for the advanced diver but they are great for families. Clean boats, good rental gear, excellent DMs (we had Antonio), in fact on one dive my son had an ear problem and instead of us both surfacing Antonio rope towed him at 15'. Scuba and snorkeling for my daughter. Dove Santa Rosa wall down to 65', Paradise a couple of times at 40-50'. Strong current, warm water, great visibility, not much for fish. Employees very friendly and helpful. Fiesta Americana, great clean modern facility. Food is so-so at F.A. I would now recommend going all-inclusive unless your hotel is close to San Miguel. A cab ride for a family of 4 round trip was \$16 so every time someone wants a snack it gets expensive! Rent a casita for privacy, ocean view in Cozumel usually means you'll hear the highway. Ate at 2 good places, La Choca and La Mission. Although the reefs are gorgeous and visibility is unlimited I noticed there aren't any fish! Ten years ago there used to be much more. With all the damn cruise ships now arriving there are many new restaurants serving fish.

The Galapagos has a 40 mile fishing ban around it, Cozumel doesn't. The only time I saw a lot of fish is when a pro photog came around when we were snorkeling in Chankanab and fed them! The cruise ships have changed the character of the island and town for the worse. They disgorge thousands of people intent on shopping and I feel this has led to an increase in prices and gouging. Don't get into a cab without agreeing on the final fare! Everything is extremely expensive now, worse than Hawaii. Bought my wife a small paperback in the Cancun airport where we were stuck for 5 hours and it cost \$12! While stuck there the baggage handlers broke into my daughter's suitcase and ransacked her little jewelry box. (Ph/fax: 52 987-2-1210, Ext. 237 or +52 987-2-0700, Ext.237)

**Blue Angel, La Ceiba, July 2001, Steve Woerner (swoerner@att.net) Huffman, TX.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. La Ceiba hotel is always diver friendly and comfortable. Access to dive sites and town about equal. Good shore diving location. Blue Angel (Alex and Alex) did a very good job with our group of 36 divers. We were split into 3 groups, according to skill level. Each boat determined dive sites for the day and set suggested diving parameters in discussion with our dive shop leaders. (there was one on each boat). All divers were on computer. Blue Angel did an excellent job of taking care of this large group of divers ranging from novice to expert. A very professional operation. (Ph: (011529) 872-1631; e-mail:

**waterworld@yahoo.com or alexalex@cozumel.com.mx)**

**Blue Bubble Divers, Plaza Las Glorias, November 2000 and January 2001, Terri Prillwitz, Eau Claire, MI.** Vis: 100-200 ft. Water: 80-82 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 998. Dive restrictions: dive your plan. I have been diving for 11 years all over the world. My best location has been Cozumel They are a great staff at BBD and I enjoy the relaxed feeling of the island. I spend 4 to 8 weeks in Mexico every year, and dive every day the weather will let us out. (Ph: 800-878-8853 or (9872-7723; fax (9872-1865; e-mail vicky@bluebubble.com; website www.bluebubble.com)

**Cabillito Del Caribe, Plaza Las Glorias, August 2001, Larry Day (lday@ghg.net) Houston, TX.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. Group of 10 divers with diverse experience ranging from less than five to more than 100 open water dives. Cabillito Del Caribe provided an extra divemaster and larger boat for the first day at no additional cost and to give everyone an extra measure of assurance. Throughout the remaining diving, Adrian, the divemaster, made sure that everyone was not encroaching on the reef and dive profiles were appropriate for the individual diver's capabilities. He was cognizant at all time of remaining air. (Ph: 987-2-14-49)

**Caribbean Divers, Cozumel Vacation Villas, November 2000, Gabriel I. Peñagaricano (guigo34@hotmail.com) San Juan, PR.** Vis: 75-200 Feet. Water:

79-81 F, calm currents. Caribbean Divers International (Tel. 011- 529-872-1145; email:caridive@cozumel.com.mx) is a small, first-class operation. The boat, although slower than average, was very comfortable. There were never more than 8 divers on board. Usually 5. The divemaster Rubén was knowledgeable and accommodating. If there were divers of different skill levels, then another divemaster took care of the less experienced ones. The lodgings provided by Cozumel Vacation Villas (1-800-224-5551; 1-303-442-7644) were exquisite. (Ph: (987) 2-10-80 or 2-11-45; e-mail: caridive@cozumel.com.mx; website www.cozumel-diving.net)

**Caribbean Divers, Hotel Bahia, November 2000, Bert Hubby, (berthubby@aol.com) Gordonville, TX.** Water: 82-83 F. Dive restrictions: Stay with group for ascent. Have been diving Cozumel since 1979 with last visit in June 1993. Whereas in past saw green morays on every dive didn't see one green moray on eight dives. Fewer mid to large size grouper and only saw one queen trigger fish. Abundance of sponges and healthy reefs at Colombia and Santa Rosa. Several anemone with small critters. Several toad fish. Unfortunately 4-5 cruise ships a day and hotel in town was congested.

**Cha Cha Cha Divers, El Presidente, June 2000, Robert Frets, Sequin, TX.** Vis: 100-175 ft. Water: 80-84 F, choppy. Dives logged: over 500. Interesting stuff right off El Presidente included octopus, seahorse, slipper lobster, etc. Edmundo does good job with small groups ("6-pack"). Took us

to Maracaibo Deep and Barracuda. Sharks and mantas at Barracuda and San Juan, these areas are less heavily dived compared to the southern reefs. Essentially no restrictions once he's comfortable with your diving skills. (Ph: 987-2-23-31)

**Cozumel Equalizers, Blue Angel, Pro Scuba, Casa Mexicana, November 2000, Deborah Gregory, Harrison, AR.** Vis: 80-120 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 172. Dive restrictions enforced: follow computer. Cozumel Equalizers left on time, gave us choice of sites, etc. Blue Angel was completely accommodating. Blue Angel is now run by Alex and Alex who will do their very best to accommodate special requests and needs. Dove first day with Pro Scuba. Surly boat captain and DM. Asked for one site took to another but told it was where we asked for. This was our tenth trip to Coz so we knew it was wrong site. Confronted them later and they admitted it. Casa Mexicana is a great place to stay. Wonderful breakfast included in price and a staff that bends over backwards to be nice. (Ph: 987-2-35-11)

**Del Mar Aquatics, Casa Del Mar, October 2000, Doug and Laura Young (OceanLakeScuba@aol.com) Waco, TX.** Vis: 50-80 Ft. Water: 82-84 F, calm choppy surge. Hurricane Keith stalled in Belize and we got some rain. Still sunny at times. Harbor closed for safety in case Keith came north and currents got strong. Visibility was not as good as usual. Great shore diving: very calm and clear. Casa Del Mar remodeled and is much nicer than typical. Got free breakfast

buffet daily which was extravagant.  
**(Ph: (+52) 987-2-19-00, 9872-0644;  
9872-1833; fax (+52) 9872-0065)**

**Del Mar Aquatics, Costa Club,  
June 2001, Gerald F. Janert  
(gjanert@satx.rr.com) San Antonio,  
TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis:  
80 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F,  
currents. Costa Club, all inclusive  
deal. All meals came from buffets. At  
breakfast you could order omelets.  
Fresh fruit was outstanding, cantaloupes as sweet as honey, great tasting watermelon, sweet pineapple, fresh fruit juices. For lunch: barbecued hamburgers, or chicken or Fish with vegetables, green salads and freshly prepared soup. For supper chicken, pork, fish, and some beef. Each night it was prepared with a different flare, Italian, Mexican, American, salads, and fresh bread, delicious deserts. Service was excellent. Del Mar Aquatics is a professional outfit. Ramon, Mario, Roman and their boats captains were very efficient and tuned to the needs of their customers. Our first day two divers were making their first blue water dives. They assigned a divemaster to them. The rest were experienced. They stressed staying together as a group. As one dive master said "Its okay to do your own thing but when they pick you up in Cuba ...." the currents one day running very fast, I could easily see a group getting scattered. One dive operation lost a diver, he was picked up several hours later by another boat. Dive sites were outstanding. Shore diving off Del Mar and La Ceiba were very interesting. When those big cruise liners come in or

leave it offers some very interesting sounds as well as effecting the current. We got in 14 dives in six days. Few large fish, however, a plethora of lobster, eel, and small to medium size Fish. Generally the coral reefs were in good condition. We did see one turtle in the 100+ pound class. One very large green eel maybe 8 feet. One crab in the 10 to 20 pound class. Night diving you had a wide range of critters from goat Fish to toad fish, a wide variety of different colored eels, lobster of all sizes and small octopus.

**Dive House, Fiesta Americana,  
December 2000, David Funderburk  
(rcrus@attglobal.net) Greeley, CO.** Vis: 90 to 120 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. We keep coming back. The dive masters are knowledgeable and safety conscience. They allow us the freedom to dive our own profiles. Most dives lasted 50 minutes to an hour. My wife and I both are underwater photographers and we have found Cozumel to have some of the best colors in the Caribbean. After each dive, personnel took our equipment, washed it and then placed it in our locker. At the end of the week they cleaned our equipment and brought it to our room. We are impressed with the friendliness of the staff of the hotel and the Dive House. One of our waiters in the restaurant even invited us to his house for lunch and to meet his family. Prima's, in town, is one of the best restaurants you will find anywhere. **(Ph: (+52).987.21953;  
fax (+52) 987-23068 e-mail  
dive@divehouse.com; website  
www.divehouse.com)**

**Dive House, Fiesta Americana, January 2001, Wayne Hurst, Bethesda, MD.** Vis: 80-150 ft. Water: 76-78 F. Dives logged: 240. Hotel staff excellent. Divemasters and boat operators super people. Weather was perfect. Cozumel natives very friendly.

**Dive House, Fiesta Americana, March 2001, Alan G. Mack, (AGM313@aol.com) Marina Del Ray, CA.** Vis: 90-140 ft. Water: 79-80 F. Dives logged: 360. Dive restrictions: Punta: 130' — other sites 90-80'. Fiesta Americana: Indifferent service, overpriced food, not on the beach. Not diver friendly. Screwed up the bills for me and my dive buddies. Dive House attempts to group by experience. Fast boats but no shade or tables. DMs mediocre. Seemed uninterested and did bare minimum except for Eddie who was excellent.

**Dive House, Fiesta Americana, March 2001, Russ Lido (lippy18182@aol.com) Sterling Hts, MI.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, choppy currents. Took 9 divers, booking a charter package which included 11 dives and lodging. Had our own boat for the week and divemaster took us to all the spots on our itinerary. Boat was great, glad we didn't pick one of those dinky canoes (e.g. Blue Bubble) that some dive operators call dive boats. I sent e-mail to Dive House and everything was set for us when we got there. Nice facilities to store dive gear so you don't have to carry it back and forth.

Coral is in decent shape and the fish life seemed less abundant than our last trip three yrs. ago. Lots of lobsters and some big groupers. Fiesta Americana was the place to be. Far enough from town to be away from cruise ships but 5 min ride by taxi. Closer to the better reefs which cuts down on boat time. The rooms were clean and all faced the ocean. Don't stay in cabanas too many bugs and long way to walk to everything and no ocean view. Fiesta was more expensive but worth it.

**Dive House, Fiesta Americana, March 2001, Martin Giesecke, M.D. (mgiesecke@heart.thi.tmc.edu) Houston, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 100+ Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm. Dive House is my favorite operator in Cozumel. Fiesta Americana Cozumel Reef is well appointed and well maintained. There was a decal on the balcony door requesting that wetsuits not be hung on the balcony railing, but most divers found this the best place to dry gear. The Dive House shop, on the resort's beach front, stocks mostly t-shirts and small items. Full rental gear is offered. Nitrox (32% and 36%) for a minimal charge. C-cards are checked. The beach dive is reasonable to check out buoyancy, as there is plenty of life. A friend and I had taken our Draeger Dolphin rebreathers and Dive House provided supply bottles of 27 cubic feet filled with 40% Nitrox and 13 cubic foot pony bottles for the bail-out circuits. Soda lime was available, but it was not Draeger DiveSorb. The diving was typical Cozumel drift diving, with some currents stronger

than others. The usual northbound current was reversed for most of the trip, except for one or two dives. One unexpected upwelling current was encountered, lifting even experienced divers fifteen feet in seconds. The boat captains do an excellent job of following the bubbles of open circuit scuba, but the reduced bubbling from a rebreather makes it tougher. Play it safe and take an inflatable sausage and one of the low pressure inflator hose air horn type signaling devices. The maritime park seems to be working out well. There is plenty of fish life to be seen and the corals appear healthy. Lots of spotted and goldentail morays, but no green morays. Saw reef squid; scorpion-fish; tarpon being cleaned by juvenile Spanish hogfish; bluethroat pikeblennies showing off their dorsal fins; bottlenose dolphin; yellow and southern stingrays; splendid toadfish; Cubera snapper (about four feet long); nurse sharks; bluespotted cornetfish; an eagle ray; several black, yellowfin and yellow-mouth grouper; slipper and spiny lobster; and several octopi. The Chankanaab wreck, ex-Mexican Navy 53, is beginning to see the growth of marine life. Resident glassy sweepers and thousands of tiny hermit crabs are eating the algae that has grown on the wreck. Penetration is easy with many large holes. The wreck and the surrounding coral heads of Chankanaab shallows make a wonderful dive. Each boat had a single fresh water rinse tank shared by all the masks and the one camera housing on our trip.

**Dive House, Fiesta Americana, April 2001, David Messa, Gulfport, MS.**

Vis: 100+ ft. Water: 80-81 F. Dives logged: 110. Dive restrictions: depth and time. Typical Cozumel dive profile, first dive 80 ft. for 45 minutes or 700 psi. Second dive 60 ft. for 45 minutes or 700 psi. Fiesta Americana very nice, had all-inclusive package that saved all the running into town. Dive house very professional — took Nitrox course while on site. Gave you as much freedom as possible. Groups never larger than 12 to a boat. 2 divemasters to watch over the group, one ahead and one behind.

**Dive House, Fiesta Americana, July 2001, Minh, Belmont, CA.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, choppy currents. Only one other restaurant (breakfast and lunch only) close to hotel. There are 3 restaurants at the hotel, and they are all expensive: \$10 for a cheeseburger! The food was somewhat average. Getting into town is \$5/\$6 taxi each way. It is a great location; it took only 45 minutes to get to Punta Sur. Other places would have taken another extra 20-30 minutes. Twice, I couldn't get the weights I need because they ran out of those sizes. They don't mark their weights, so you have to take their word that what they give you is what you have asked for. I was constantly too heavy, too light, or lopsided. They take back the weights at the end of the dive, so you have to go through this adjustment every time. Divemasters could use some improvement. On July 18 they left one diver behind. Luckily one of the other passenger saw the diver before the boat went too far.

Nobody on the boat even notice the diver was missing. During our Punta Sur dive, the divemaster took us through this one opening that was so tight, that the guy in front of me almost got stuck in there. The guy kicked up so much silt that everyone behind him decided to abort the entry, by the way, this was happening at 136'. The divemaster was kicking up silt because he was using the wrong fining style, even though he told us right before the dive not to use that style. What's up with that? Weird dive buddy practice where they buddy you up near the end of the dive by matching remaining air. Unfortunately they don't take into consideration the decompression level; so just because we have the same remaining air, it doesn't mean our decompression levels are the same, especially when we are not using the same kind of dive computer. Whatever the case, I ended up by myself at the end of the dive. What's up with that? Getting parts for your equipment on Cozumel is a big deal! So bring your own. I wanted was a replacement pin/spool for my pressure gauge, and I couldn't get it after visiting 5 different dive shops. What's up with that? And they all claimed to be 5 star Padi shops. Dive House office crews and boat handlers are very helpful; they are always on time; and they have the fastest boats around. You can see them catching up and passing other dive boats on the way to the sites and back. Diving wise, the reefs and corals are just as spectacular as they were 10 years ago, unfortunately, the marine life is not the same any more. Gone are the 300

pounds groupers, the 6 feet green moray eels, and schools of fishes. I guess it really doesn't matter to me, since I am there for the topography, and I loved all the overhangs, tunnels, caverns, and valleys. I would love to spend a couple of hours at Punta Sur or Horseshoe. Large critters count: three 5 feet long nurse shark, two 3 feet long turtles, 4 sting rays, and two 4 feet long lobsters.

### **Dive House, Fiesta Americana, July 2001, James Mallory, Santa Fe, NM.**

Vis: 60-120 ft. Water: 82-84 F, strong currents. Logged dives: 153. Restrictions: depth and time limits. Diving was great. Warm water with superb visibility. Schools of tropicals everywhere. Lots of eels and a huge turtle. Typical Cozumel diving with nice weather. Fiesta Americana was a disaster! There were no rooms available when we checked in at 10 pm. Upgraded us to a suite at \$50 per night additional. Food was marginal at best. Some meals were not what we ordered. Breakfast buffet is terrible and expensive. If you dive both morning and afternoon, you have to order a take out lunch. Barely edible hamburgers with greasy fries were \$11. Service at hotel was very indifferent. Almost arrogant.

### **Dive Palancar, Michelle's, RZ Chankanaab, Allegro Cozumel, August 2000, Jerry Donohue, Columbia, MO.**

Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 28. Dive restrictions: 85'. Dive Palancar — cookie cutter dives. Michelle's — better diving, boats a little shaky. Ramon Zapata Chankanaab —



excellent shore dive. (Ph: (+52) 987 2-34-43; fax (+52) +52 9872-5094)

**Dive Palancar, Allegro, September 2000, Sam Furrow, (dreamscuba@aol.com) Pasadena, MD.** Vis: 75-125 ft. Water: 80-85 F. Dive restrictions: 80 ft. Dive boats are excellent. Dive master relaxed control as he became familiar with your diving experience. Off season accommodations adequate but disappointing. Resort excellent for children. Dove new wreck sunk this year. It has narrow passages, sharp edges and head knockers. Lead line kept you on course, very tight control, 2 divemasters, 6 divers.

**Dive Palancar, Allegro Resort, October 2000, Steve & Kathie Payne, Richland, IN.** Vis: endless to 50 feet. Water temp. 84-88 F. Great service at Dive Palancar. Your gear is stored in secure lockers just a few steps from your room. Purchase your dive package prior to arrival and get 2 free dives — 12 dives for less than \$300; night dives are additional. One tank trips depart at 8 and 9:30 a.m. and 1 and 2:30 p.m. 2 shallow and 2 deep dives each day. Once the divemaster was comfortable with our skills, we were grouped with other advanced divers. We made 15 dives over 8 days and dove Maricabo Deep, Punta Sur (Devil's Throat) and the newly sunk wreck. Divemaster Jordan was excellent at pointing out the unusual. Turtles, eels, critters of all colors and stripes and vibrant corals, whips and fans. The resort informed of what the plan would be if the hurricane south actually approached the

island. Originally, when the storm was predicted to strike the island, the boats were taken to the mainland and the diving was shut down from Saturday at noon until Tuesday. Allegro was very nice — everything except the food. Over two weeks the menu, which wasn't much to begin with, became repetitive and tedious. However, the grounds are gorgeous, rooms clean and well kept (we requested ground floor as we had heard that the thatch-roofed upper floors were prone to leak when it rained — proved to be true!) The staff was courteous. All spoke enough English to assist and the bar and wait staff spoke excellent English. The tequila seminar was a hit! Sample various tequilas — find out about the grading and distilling of the liquor. Entertainment nightly, the shows were fun. The beach and pool activities each day from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Disco club starts hopping following the nightly entertainment.

**Dive Palancar, Allegro Cozumel, January 2001, Ralph Naruszewicz, Elgin, IL.** Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 78 F. Dives logged: 100+. Dive restrictions: Depth, time, follow the leader.

**Dive Palancar, Allegro Diamond, April 2001, Amanda Veazie, Buffalo, NY.** Vis: 100-200 ft. Water: 81 F. Dives logged: 33. Dive restrictions: stay with divemaster. We had not experienced strong current drift diving before. I would have liked a briefing on technique.

**Dive Palancar, Allegro, April 2001, Elizabeth Hiltcher, Oak Park, IL.** Vis: 90-120 ft. Water: 80-82 F.

Logged dives: 165. Dive restrictions: 130 ft., 500 psi remaining. Allegro and Dive Palancar which are both adequate, but neither is great. Of all the other various Caribbean, Florida and Palau dive operators I've been with, Dive Palancar is at the bottom of my list. Cozumel has such good diving that it's hard to have a bad time there, no matter who you dive with.

**Dive Paradise, Costa Club, August 2000, Connie Kleysteuber, (conniekley@hotmail.com)**

**Peachtree City, GA.** Vis: 100 ft. Water: 83 F. Dives logged: hundreds. Dive restrictions: 500 psi. Was with a group of 15 divers and occupied entire roomy boat all week. Picked up punctually at pier across from hotel — dived 3 tanks/day and 1 night shore dive at Villa Blanca Pier; Dive Paradise has a small shop there where tanks and wts were provided. Enjoyed diving Felipes wreck of Chankanaab St Pk) a C-53 WWII boat sunk only 3 months earlier. Little growth yet, but the head area provided interesting video shots! Cut-out areas make this wreck suitable for the claustrophobic! Divemasters Hermán and Marcos pointed out seahorses, Cozumel toadfish, lobster and other interesting creatures. Some large groupers and morays at Paso el Cedral, c 60' deep. Don't travel without Pepto-Bismol (or something stronger). I religiously munched the tablets before meals the entire trip and dived all dives. But most of our group had at least minor (tho the hotel was good) intestinal problems there. Perhaps I should have continued the tablets for a few days after returning home. Contracted parasites or

bacterial infection and made many trips to the doctor thereafter. (Also dove Cozumel in 1974 and 1988 — sick each time, with this one being the worst. Doesn't faze some visitors though.) Ate at various restaurants in San Miguel. Value for \$ — excellent. (Ph: +52-987 2-51-61; +52-987 2-10-6; e-mail [info@diveparadise.com](mailto:info@diveparadise.com); website [www.diveparadise.com](http://www.diveparadise.com))

**Dive Paradise, Barracuda, September 2000, Kendall Botellio, Phoenix, AZ.** Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 80-83 F. Dive restrictions: dive computer. Barracuda is great for the price! Dive paradise is awesome. Very in tune to divers needs and allowed us to dive responsibly without being babysat. The dolphin experience at Chankanaab is excellent!

**Dive Paradise, La Ceiba, January 2001, Mel Cundiff (cundiff@colorado.edu) Boulder, CO.** Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 79-81 F. Dives logged: 1200+. I have done a week of diving in Cozumel every year since 1984 and have used Dive Paradise for the last ten to twelve years. They have provided us with excellent boats and crew and treated our group with total professionalism. I have stayed at six different hotels, but have been at La Ceiba for the last five years because of its access to the best shore diving for coral reefs.

**Dive Paradise, Villa Blanca, February 2001, James Hagedorn, Marco Island, FL.** Vis: 100+ ft. Water: 78-80 F, strong currents. Logged dives: 500+. Dive restrictions: yes. We have been at Villa Blanca Many times. Excellent hotel for diving. Manager

(Benito) very pleasant and helpful. We always request Alfredo as our divemaster. One of the best divemasters I've been with in any location.

**Dive Paradise, Costa Club, July 2001, Ray Pettigrew, Napa, CA.** Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 83-85 F, strong currents. Dive restrictions: Depth/time/air. First time with Costa Club and Dive Paradise. Costa Club is a large hotel across the road from the beach and pier, south of town. The hotel was clean, well run and dedicated to divers. The staff was good. The restaurant was adequate, though on island time. The dive boat had 21 divers with only a five gallon bucket for 7 cameras. Dive Paradise staff kept promising more and bigger buckets but never delivered. The land staff was unimpressive but the boat crew, especially Jaime and Giovanni, gave good briefings and pointed out a lot of small critters. We took a "fast boat" to Punta Sur/Devil's Throat, a great dive, entering a series of swim-throughs at 85 ft. and coming out a wall at 120 ft. After one night at "Carlos and Charlie's" we opted for the more authentic restaurants away from the commercial area. I recommend "El Moro" and "Los Moros Del Morrito".

**Dive Paradise, Costa Club, July 2001, Roger Mader and Jenni McMonigle, Corydon, IN.** Vis: 60-150 ft. Water: 82-85 F, strong currents. Logged dives: 120. Dive restrictions: depth and time limits. Costa Club was well kept and clean, with large freshwater pool surrounded with shady palms. A nice place to hangout. Beach towels and lockbox at

front desk. All inclusive plan worth the money. Meals were buffet; breakfast and dinner in the dining room, lunch on the covered pool side veranda. Lunches included a soup, salad, and fish, chicken or beef in various sauces, and various cakes/pastries. Dinner items included salads, vegetables, breads, chicken, pork, beef, fish, etc. and more desserts. Sandwiches, nachos and other snacks available at the beach bar were also included in the all-inclusive plan. Alcoholic drinks were also included — "domestic and house brands" only — but Sol and Dos Equis were good substitutes for Coronas. The Sangria was especially good. The dock and the Beach Bar are across the street, but are easy to access through the hotel's tunnel to avoid the speeding taxis. Dive Paradise has an office there with convenient check in and rinse tanks. Lockers are available. We paid \$5/ diver more for a "fast boat" — worth the money. The small 20 ft. boats had 2-115 HP Mercruisers and we were always first to our site. They were uncovered, so we chose morning dives to limit the sun exposure. Our divemaster, Gregorio Chan (Gollo — sounds like Goy-o) was great! He located several pipehorses and a 6-inch seahorse. The coral and sponges were very colorful, and we saw 4 or 5 splendid toad fish, several turtles, tons of eels, huge groupers, barracudas, colorful tropicals and large queen and French angels, a monster lobster. First dive each day was a wall dive to 80-90 feet, second dive a reef dive to 50-60 feet. All dives are drift dives — we drifted 2-3 miles down the coast

several days. Night dive — our best ever! Saw tons of morays, a slipper lobster, school of squid, crabs, two octopus — one tried to wall himself off from us under a coral head with rocks and shells as we watched. We shut off the lights, looked up at the stars through the clear water, and watched the sparks flying off our bodies as we swam back to the boat. Downtown San Miguel is walking distance. Check out the spray paint artists on the square.

**Dive Paradise, Suites Vima, August 2001, Ann Stadler, Amarillo, TX.**

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy currents. We stayed “off the beaten path” and it was quiet, clean, and had plenty of hot water. We enjoyed the walk to our dive pier each morning and had a great divemaster.

**Dive Paradise, Fiesta Americana, August 2001, Chet Goodwin**

**(chestrgood@aol.com) Salt Lake City, UT.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. currents. The Hotel was average. The divemaster for Dive Paradise was very good. He was aggressive in having us dive through a lot of swim throughs and honored our specific requests for dive sites, and a night dive just with us. The owner of Dive Paradise, “Apple”, paid special attention to us and partnered us with more experienced divers. The boats were a little cramped and we had boat trouble one day delaying our third dive for an hour. The dive conditions, and the quality of reef and sea life were excellent. We saw

barracuda (5-6') octopus, spotted eagle rays and turtles. Dozens of large lobster and crabs, along with some eels. The beauty of the Palancar Gardens and the Santa Rosa Wall were awesome. Chankanaab Reef was in great condition considering the thousands of divers that dive in Cozumel each month. In comparison to Cayman, the diving was about as good as far as visibility, color of coral. The marine life in Cozumel was better.

**Dive with Martin, Casa Martillo (private home), July 2000, James Snowden (scootgooch@cs.com)**

**Longview, TX.** Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80-85 F. Dive restrictions enforced: time 800 psi. Had used Dive Paradise five previous years and never experienced a problem or had a disappointment. Dive with Martin was late, discourteous to customers and failed to give promised refund for my wife who canceled fifth dive a day in advance. I learned a lesson that when satisfied with an operation like Paradise, don't change. **(Ph: 800-518-0932 or 52 987 22610; fax 972-288-2122 or 52 987 21340; e-mail dwm@cozumel.com.mx)**

**Dive With Martin, Palapas Amaranto, December 2000, Mike Frayn (mfrayn@bigfoot.com) Little Rock, AR.** Vis: 60 to 100 Feet.

Water: 78 to 78 F, calm. Well run and focused on customer service. This was my third trip to Cozumel and my second with Martin. Since Scott has left the operation, Martin's brother has taken over managing the shop and scheduling the diving. Martin's boats

are not the fastest or the best but they are more than adequate for drift diving. The boats left on time. There was ample space and bottled water on each boat. Dario was our divemaster for the week. He provided excellent dive site briefings and was focused on diver safety and enjoyment. Dario offered appropriate suggestions to those who were a little rusty but focused on leading enjoyable dives. We requested dives on Maracaibo and Punta Sur and were able to dive both sites. We did longer surface intervals on shore after both of these deep dives. Our gear was rinsed at the end of each day and waiting for us at the shop in the morning.

**Dive With Martin, Iberostar Resort, May 2001, Gar and Emily MacRae, Culver City, CA.** Overcast all week. Rained heavily at times. Water visibility 50- to 80. Water 78 to 82 F. Every dive a great dive. Oodles of turtles, barracuda, multitudes of reef fish. We also saw a couple sharks and a large spotted eagle ray. Drift diving was effortless and delightful. It made for more bottom time and less air consumption. All types of underwater topography: swim throughs, walls, coral gardens. Dove to depths of 95. We dove with Dive With Martin. Excellent operation. Small dive groups of 5 to 7 people. They picked us up and dropped us off at our resort. They also set up and stored our gear. Martin also distributes clothing for needy people in Cozumel, so bring some extra clothing if you choose to dive with him. Iberostar Resort which is 5 minutes

from the dive sites. Beautiful grounds and buildings. It is all-inclusive with massive amounts of food and drink all day and night. They also offer lots of above water activities. There is a dive operation at the resort, Dressel Divers but it looked to be a cattle boat operation. Our stay at Iberostar was that our thatched roof leaked onto our bed and we had to tough it out because they didn't offer us another room. So bring a poncho.

**Dive with Martin, Hotel Bahia, June 2001, Rickie Sterne, Elkins, AR.** Vis: 80-120 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Logged Dives: 40. Dive restrictions: time, safety stop, buddy diving. We booked our airfare, hotel and diving through Diving Adventures, and the trip was a bargain. We enjoyed staying downtown in Cozumel, because access to stores and restaurants was easy and we felt like we were in Mexico. We stayed out of the big tourist restaurants and ate delicious local dishes at very reasonable prices. Thanks to Casa Denis we came in under budget for food. Dive with Martin had small, fast boats. We dove in small groups. We dove in the afternoon whenever 4 or more divers wanted to. We dove the shipwreck and Punta Sur at no extra charge. Most dives were led by Jesus or Dario, who were good with beginners and experienced divers alike. Dario led an afternoon dive over a sandy area. By pointing out urchins, conch, and conch eggs, Dario made the dive as interesting as one over a reef.

**Dive With Martin, Iberostar, July 2001, Joe Mazieka (Ja2maz@earthlink.net)**

**Naples, FL.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, choppy currents. Dive With Martin was a first class operation. Divemasters and boat captain were knowledgeable and very competent. Dive costs were very reasonable and if you booked for 3 or more days, rental gear and a night dive were free. Shop was at the cruise ship pier. Didn't have to go there, they would take care of everything at the hotel pickup. We stayed at the Iberostar and were picked up each day within five minutes of schedule. By staying at Iberostar, we only had a 5 to 10 minute ride to the dive sites. Picked up at 8:30a.m. and back at the dock by 12. Dove Palancar Gardens, Palancar Caves, Palancar Horseshoe, Santa Rosa Wall, Paso del Cedral as well as others. Palancar dives were best for scenery and Paso del Cedral best for wildlife. Iberostar was terrific. Took wife, 15 year old daughter and 14 year old friend. Dive with Martin great with inexperienced divers. Girls did minimal diving, made friends at resort and had a great social time. Food was exceptional for an all inclusive. Rooms great with minibar and great A/C. Only shortcoming was that main dining area was not A/C'd. Made for some uncomfortable meals. All beverages included, no extra charges for minibar or imported alcohol.

**Dressel Divers, Iberostar, June 2000, David Rosen (Drosen4@Compuserve.com)**  
**Chesterfield, MO.** Vis: 100-125 Ft. Water: 80-83 F, calm. Stay with the divemaster and do not go deeper than

the divemaster. The Iberostar is new, and very nice. Service was excellent. Nice pool and beach area; Spanish operation catering to Europeans, so some nudity on the beach which was interesting to explain to my 6 year old. The is one main restaurant and pool side facilities, all of which were very good. Rooms were clean, nice sized, and contained a safe and a fridge. which was kept stocked with water on sodas at no cost. Visitor services were easy to use, and side trips were no problem. This is definitely a place you can take the whole family. We booked a fixed number of dives which we were allowed to use for day or night diving, and if you did not use all the dives you booked, you did not pay for the ones you missed. They had an English speaking divemaster, and another for the non-English speakers. Most of the divemaster spoke at least 4 languages. As they were new to the area, their knowledge of the reefs was not great, but they did find good dives. They were not yet diving Punta Sur and some other sites, but were planning to add them soon. They also hope to have their own boats in service soon. The water was warm and clear, but there were unusual currents going up and down the reefs. The day before we arrived, an upwelling current had caused a group of divers to rocket to the surface, ending the days diving. The divemasters warned us of the currents, and we were able to handle them, but used a lot of air fighting currents that wanted to push us down the walls. The fish life is still good, and the reefs are very healthy.

Dressel was using another operations boats, and they were not well equipped for photographers. No camera tables, and sometimes no rinse buckets. (Ph: (+34) 963561496; fax (+34) 963557510; e-mail [dresselcentral@retemail.es](mailto:dresselcentral@retemail.es); website [www.dresseldivers.com](http://www.dresseldivers.com))

**Flash's Adventures Scuba, Sunshine House Bed and Breakfast, February 2001, Dean Knudson** ([deanknudson@yahoo.com](mailto:deanknudson@yahoo.com)) **Golden Valley, MN.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 70 to 120 Feet. Water: 77 to 82 F, choppy. Flash was attentive and gracious. There is bad gasoline on the island and he scored the cylinders on both his motors but stayed up much of the night getting them ready for the next day, so no actual diving was missed. Flash will provide free Mayan language lessons during the surface interval, if you are so inclined. The bed and breakfast was cheap and clean. Flash is an energetic and very good humored fellow, and he will dive the northern reefs and the opposite side of the island upon request. Very enjoyable trip. (Ph: (+52) 987-2-05-70)

**Flash's Adventures, Fiesta Americana, March 2001, Stephen Huntwork, Roseville, MN.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Fiesta Americana — lovely grounds, clean hotel, good AC, no knee room on the toilet, lousy and expensive food — other than breakfast. 4 days diving with Flash. Fast 6 pak, bit difficult to get back into but great and accommodating staff. 3 different DM — really good at finding critters — stone fish, toad fish,

lobsters the size of the DM. Only 1 dive had strong current, got to dive on the recently downed wreck. 1 day went out with Tarzan Tours to small northern ruins on day when west diving closed due to high wind so east side was calm — good snorkeling on shallow reef. Flash gave wonderfully personalized service and Angel the captain and Sergio the DM were kind to my wife who tried her first dive since her accident but found she wasn't ready for diving yet.

**Iberostar, July 2001, Mary Davis, Roswell, NM.** Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80-85 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 30. I wish I would have started taking antibiotics a day before the trip and while in Mexico. Several of our group got sick on the food and had to get medicine while there. Highly recommend the resort. (Ph: (+52) 987-29-900; fax + 52-987-29-909; e-mail [iberocozumel@correoweb.com](mailto:iberocozumel@correoweb.com); website [www.iberostar-cozumel.com](http://www.iberostar-cozumel.com))

**Michelle's Dive Shop, Bahia, December 2000, Carol and John Stoveken, Monroe, CT.** Vis: 80 ft. Water: 79-81 F. Dives logged: 150 each. Dive restrictions: Drift diving with group. Sandro at Michelle's is a very good divemaster, able to spot many creatures. The night dive at Paradise Reef was terrific; 2 octopi out hunting, bioluminescence and lots of squid. El Foco is a wonderful place to eat and drink, not open for lunch. Located at 5a Av. Sur #13. Try to attend the Saturday festival in the town square.

**Michele's Dive Shop, Costa Club Cozumel, June 2001, Ed**

**Vaillancourt (edvaill@aol.com)**

**Albuquerque, NM.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet.

Water: 82 to 86 F, calm currents.

Cozumel is being loved to death. After many years of traveling there, it's beginning to get too commercial for my taste. On busy cruise days, the thousands of visitors are changing the economy. They even have a Mexican version of a Walmart next to a movie theater. Restaurant prices are much higher now, even allowing for the decrease in the value of the dollar against the peso. Costa club is a beautiful property with a large fresh water pool and a small beach right across the street. No complaints other than the usual higher priced restaurant food, but the hotel is within walking distance of town. Diving with Bob McPhearson's operation located in Michele's Dive shop was a pleasure. Bob is very helpful and runs a small operation that caters to small groups rather than the cattle boat crowd. Fast small boats with sunshade but no frills; get you there in a hurry. We had easy surface intervals on a nearby beach with outdoor restaurant and then on to the second dive. Divemaster confirmed our dive skills on first dive, then left us alone to do our thing. Drift diving still requires hanging together in a reasonable range, but our group of four never had more than two other divers added and we called the shots on where to dive. Coral reefs were covered in a lot more sand than I remember, but are still pretty healthy. It also seemed like a much smaller quantity of fish overall than in past years. Dive guide says, "it's because

we stopped feeding them, but I wonder. Didn't see the schooling fish or any large grouper as in the past. But wonderful Cozumel currents and clear water make it still one of the best drift diving areas for beginners and experienced alike. New divers will think it fine, but the old Cozumel is disappearing. (Ph: (987) 2-09-47 & (987) 2-64-88; website [www.islacozumel.net/services/michelle/](http://www.islacozumel.net/services/michelle/))

**Papa Hog's, Casa las Flores, February 2001, Carol Riehlman, (Cajar@aol.com) New Castle, NH.**

Vis: 40-50 ft. Dives logged: 75-80.

Dive restrictions: Safety stop w/700 lbs and depth limits that were not terribly restrictive. The private villa, Casa las Flores was fabulous. Four bedrooms, five baths, spacious living room, dining room, kitchen and patio areas. Freshwater pool between villa and shore. Rugged, rocky access to sandy bottom waterfront. Maid service daily, meal preparation available. Located 8.5 miles south of San Miguel and minutes from dive sites. Too much fast boat traffic in front of villa to afford comfortable snorkeling location. Papa Hog's fast 6-pack boat picked us up at our villa each morning. Wading out to the boat was no problem. One morning the swells were a bit too much for the pick up and the dock at Hotel Casa del Mar was used. Pick ups were around 8:15 AM and we would be back to the villa by 11:30 AM. Jose, our divemaster, was friendly, knowledgeable and attentive when assistance was required. Our group varied in ability and experience from a seasoned diver with over 400



dives under his belt to a new diver having his first Caribbean diving experience. This was the first time most of us had been drift diving. No one had any problems or negative experiences. Small, fast boats a MUST. Visibility was disappointment. (Ph: 877- 389- 3629 or 52- 987- 21651; fax 52-987-24465; e-mail [diving@papahogs.com](mailto:diving@papahogs.com); website [www.papahogs.com](http://www.papahogs.com))

**Pepe Scuba, October 2000, Vic Skarohlid, Savage, MN.** Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80-85 F. Dives logged: 99. Dive restrictions: Depth limits. Weather was outstanding. Dive operation very good. Let us pick dive spots. Great service. Outstanding night dive. Current strong to weak during week's stay. Operation has 2 fast boats. Boats accommodate exp or beginning divers. Domingo, DM, did a great job. (Ph: +(52) 987-2-67-40; fax +(52) 987-2-28-00; e-mail [pepe@cozumel.net](mailto:pepe@cozumel.net); website [www.cozumel-diving.net/pepe/](http://www.cozumel-diving.net/pepe/))

**Pepe Scuba, Coral Princess, November 2000, J. Ashby Marshall Aliquippa, PA.** Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dives logged: 25. Dive restrictions: Depth/time. Met some great diving comrades. Traditional reefs e.g. Palancar Santa Rosa were great despite weather — mild to moderate current. Good vis. great night life and restaurants. Too many cruise ships! Very good bargain. Divemasters were attentive for us as beginners doing our first drift diving. The only problem was one divemaster wanted to put my weights for my Zeagle ripcord BC in the pockets

instead of the weight release pocket. Dangerous!

**9Scuba, Coral Princess Hotel, December 2000, Edward Noga (ednoga@prodigy.net) Akron, OH.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 F, calm choppy currents. Hotel on the northwestern side of the island. It's an outstanding operation, running a standard Cozumel six-pack, which meets you at the hotel. Divemasters Domingo and Miguel are excellent, taking you where you want to go. The restrictions are livable — we did some great walls, swim throughs, and outstanding coral reefs. At times the current zipped us along pretty rapidly, so people inexperienced at drift diving might be a little nervous. Divemaster always stayed close. The coral and sea life was brilliant, and the surface intervals on the beach beats just sitting in a boat. The weather blew up the last couple of days and the harbor master closed everything down. Pepe Scuba gave me a very fair refund without any hassle. Look for other boats when you're coming up. There's a lot of them. A woman was hit by a boat and killed while we were there. No rinse bucket on boat, though. Divemaster points out good photo ops.

**Rudolfo Soltero/Casa Mexicana, November 2000, Harry Cure (cure@onramp.net) Fort Worth, TX.** Vis: 80-90 Feet. Water: 83-84 F, calm. Rodolfo Soltero and the "Anita" gives wonderful service. We had 16 divers and he had himself and two other divemasters with the group or a divemaster for every 5 divers. You can dive your own profile if experienced. If

you are new he will put reasonable restrictions on you. You do your safety stop after a safety sausage is shot to the top on a line and you ascend on the line to insure safety from other boats and to insure the Anita is there to pick you up. The new downtown Casa Mexican: rooms are very nice and service is excellent. A nice breakfast is included. Close to the square.

**Sand Dollar Diving, Reef Club Beach Resort, October 2000, Laura Di Tomasso (ldito@yahoo.com)**

**Mahwah, NJ.** Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Dives logged: 165. As always the diving is great, lots to see even with the quantity of divers and boats. Dive operator was okay but a distance from the hotel. No place to dry equipment even at hotel. Had to carry gear back and forth on foot. Hotel and food were less than perfect. (Ph: 888-737-6399 or +52-9872-079e; e-mail [infosds@sanddollarsports.com](mailto:infosds@sanddollarsports.com); website [www.sanddollarsports.com](http://www.sanddollarsports.com))

**Sand Dollar Sports, Private House, January 2001, Scott A. Nill, Shirley, NY.** Vis: 60-120 ft. Water: 78-81 F.

Dives logged: 102. Dive restrictions: 100 ft on 1<sup>st</sup> dive, 70-60 ft on 2<sup>nd</sup> dive. We rented a home through At Home in Cozumel 1-800-833-5971; (<http://wlow.akumal.net>) It was Casa Iguana's Sur which is a beautiful 5 bedroom house with pool and Jacuzzi. It was 12 miles south of town, a little past Chancanaab Park. It was a beautiful setting. A little expensive but worth it. Sand Dollar Sports is next door. The diving was great, small fast boats. We had an excellent divemaster Rolando who showed us sharks, turtles,

eagle rays, great swim throughs on Palancar Gardens and caves. And great fish on San Francisco Wall. Great diving, great food, great weather.

**Scuba Club Cozumel, October 2000, Dave Brown, Punxsutawney, PA.**

Vis: 50-60 ft. Water: 81-83 F. Hurricane Keith was ravaging Belize. Therefore, the first four days were overcast. The wind, however was not really very bad. The chop was running about 3 to 5 feet for most of the boat dives; the first day boat dive was canceled by a state of emergency. They were less than honest about their answers to our groups questions concerning shore diving on our first full day. These waters were very calm and with many of our divers being very experienced (Three instructors, two dive masters and four divers with over two hundred dives) we were told we were not allowed to shore dive due to the weather conditions. We found out the reason we were not allowed out was since some operations did not have access to shore diving and all boat operations were suspended, it would be unfair for us to dive while others couldn't. On our first day of boat diving the chop was 3 to 4 feet and the current not bad, although the vis was only 40 feet due to sand and sediment being kicked up. One of our divers inquired about strong down wells. We were informed they were very minimal. At Santa Rosa Wall, three dolphins were swimming around our boat. The dive masters, wanting to get the divers in the water in a hurry so they might be able to swim with the dolphins, did not check for currents.

This dive profile was supposed to go no deeper than 80 feet to the top of the wall. Six of our bunch were using a Nitrox mix of 32 good to a max depth of 110 feet. The first group of eight divers managed to get over the reef despite a strong shore-to-open-sea current of about two knots. But, the other two groups got caught in a strong down well in which our bubbles were going down faster than the diver. It was hard for some to even see their gauges. Panic started to set in for some of our less experienced divers. Lucky for our group that they were all paired up with experienced divers or we could have had a disaster on our hands. The working dive masters gave up trying to keep the groups together and had to get their own situation under control first. After twenty or so minutes, we had everybody back on board. We had several divers go over 100 feet deep, including one Nitrox diver who went to 115 feet before heading up. Many were in the ninety to one hundred foot range. Six of our less experienced divers were so shook up that they did not make the next boat dive. One of our rookie divers would not go again and will probably never dive again. Two years ago at this location, four divers were caught in a similar down well and two female divers were never seen again. It is the responsibility of the dive master to check the water conditions prior to letting divers into the water and based on past history at this location, they were negligent in this duty. (e-mail [info@scubaclubcozumel.com](mailto:info@scubaclubcozumel.com); website [www.scubaclubcozumel.com](http://www.scubaclubcozumel.com))

### **Scuba Club Cozumel, November 2000, Mark Baker, Monument, CO.**

Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Logged dives: 100+. Great service. It was nice to see some of the same staff that we saw 4 years before.

**Scuba Club Cozumel, November 2000, Jill Guthrie & Mike Webber, Vancouver, BC.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 92 to 94 F, calm. We loved the atmosphere and the all inclusive hotel was very nice. Quiet. The only small complaint was the price of wine with meals. The rooms and dive shop were great and we came back here to dive daily even when we had to move to Plaza Las Glorias in our second week. One of the regular divers bought a TV and VCR for the place so they could watch their videos and it was a gift to the place.

### **Scuba Club Cozumel, January 2001, Karen and Fred Becker, Oxnard, CA.**

Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 77-79 F. Dives logged: 300. Dive restrictions: D.M. enforced specific times for specific depths but allowed some flexibility once they got to know your abilities (100 ft. max). All-inclusive resort. Schedule is comfortable. Breakfast between 7-9; boat leaves at 8:30. Two dives with hour surface interval on the boat (juice and water provided). Back for lunch, served between 12-3. Ample rinse tanks but with so many divers, could have used more), large lockers for storage (bring a lock). As many tanks as you want for shore dives — excellent house reef. Some of the best night dives ever — lots of macro critters. Dinner served between 6 and 10. Lots of food!

**Scuba Club Cozumel, March 2001, Bob & Betty Barada (bbarada@pacbell.net) Walnut Creek, CA.**

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm currents. A repeat trip to this resort. Clean, roomy accommodations.

Excellent service by everyone from the chambermaids and waiters to the dive operations. Room, meals and diving included in relatively low price. Best value in the Caribbean. 4 boats with more available. Our group had 7 divers so we had our own boat with lots of room, excellent dive guide and boat crew.

**Scuba Club Cozumel, April 2001, Josh Spector, (josh.spector@cliffordchance.com) New York, NY.**

Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F. Dive restrictions: 700 PSI, suggested depth limit on all dives — not strictly enforced. 91 logged dives. Great place and dive operation. Hotel is simple, but more than adequate — clean rooms, A/C, warm water, mini-fridge. Tons of food at each meal and all very good — most meals offered some Mexican choices, which were always excellent, as well as Americanized foods. Everyone — waiters, bartenders, room service, front desk, manager (Mario)— is great. The dive operation is very efficient and flexible enough to make sure you get what you want. Dive boats are nice — we were on a small one which was nice because there were only 8 divers, but the boat was noisy and not a ton of room to lay out during ride to sites. Other bigger boats would presumably have opposite negatives and positives. Dive guide,

Francisco, was great. Flexible in letting us dive own profile, but always watching us, and was always pointing out sea life we would have missed. Delta lost my bags for first day, rental gear from shop was nice: relatively new BC and wetsuit. The new wreck in Cozumel, the Felipe Xicotencat, is very easy, tons of cut outs in hull, swim-through is really interesting. Every week Scuba Club does Mexican fiesta night, with a huge buffet and a piñata!

**Scuba Du, El Presidente, January 2001, Martin Staller, Dillon, CO.**

Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 75-78 F. Dives logged: 343. Dive restrictions: 80' mostly. Divemaster David at Scuba Du among the best, very good operation. Food was OK. Many grilled items, but ate downtown. Pizza Primo was best, Pancho's worst. Nice beach, great shore diving. (Ph: +52-987-2-03-22 ext. 6845; fax +52-987-2-41-30; e-mail [scubadu@cozumel.net](mailto:scubadu@cozumel.net); website [www.cozumel-diving.net/scubadu/](http://www.cozumel-diving.net/scubadu/))

**Studio Blue, Days Inn, June 2000, Jack Wilson, Tulsa, OK.** Vis: 100-200 ft. Water: 78-81 F. Dives logged: 215. Dive restrictions: 120', 1 hour. Days Inn is located 6 blocks from the beach. They have their own pool and large rooms that are a good value for Cozumel. They are within an easy walk to the playa and to the Barracuda pier for dive boat pick up. Studio Blue is very people oriented. We requested hour long dives and they made sure that almost every dive was that long. Weather and currents permitting, they will take you to the dive site you

request. You leave around 9 AM, have an hour surface interval, and return between 1-2PM. We've been to Cozumel 15 times in the last 6 years and Studio Blue is the operation we use most often. **(Ph: +52 (9)-87-24414; fax +52(9)-87-24330; e-mail studio-blue@cozumel.net)**

**Yellow Rose Divers, Costa Club, February 2001, Richard Moles (rich990@mediaone.net)**

**Bolingbrook, IL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm. Have to be among the best in Cozumel. 48 foot jet boat, never had more than 7 divers, some days just three. Could pick sites if you wanted to. Little restriction, flexible schedule — if you wanted two afternoon and night dives instead of morning dives — no problem. Did three dives per day snacks, beverages and lunch provided everyday. Costa Club — poor service, poor food. Rooms ok except for air conditioning. One room air conditioner only worked two ways — off or ice cold. Second room — air didn't work much at all. Limited menu, and surly help. Allegro is far superior. **(Ph: (888) 366-8708 or +52 987 20848; e-mail yrd@coz.net)**

**Yellow Rose Divers, Costa Club, June 2001, Mark Goldsmith (scubnski@aol.com) Livingston, NJ.** Experience: 101-150 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy currents no currents. Steve and Toni Owners, Carlos the DM along with Captain Moises "DIR" (do it right). This boat easily

accommodates 18 divers (44' 3 year old jet drive with double angled dive ladders, make exiting a snap — not having props, allows boat to back-up to divers without any danger — wonderful in a strong current). Were the only two divers on-board. Most Cozumel operators would have pawned us off on another dive boat, but not YRD. We were treated like kings with fruit, sandwiches, cookies and cake along with fresh towels purified water and soft drinks available all day long. The format is three AL 80's with on-board intervals at the dive sites of your choice. Pre-dive briefings were comprehensive given that we were diving advanced sites like Barracuda and San Juan (Barracuda lived up to its reputation with 4.5+ knot currents — incredible thrill). Carlos pointed out interesting stuff (toad fish) and then let us do our own thing. Steve trailed well behind as a safety "sweep" diver on the fast current dives. The profiles kept me well within the green on my computers bar graph as I was using EANX 32%. Good old dependable, reliable Costa Club is not looking any the worse for wear, well kept, maintained and meticulously clean rooms, although we had no working phones — who cares! The food should still be avoided except for the omelet station at breakfast. At \$80/night, the Costa Club is hard to beat. A new restaurant, the French Quarter, was excellent.

**Yellow Rose Divers, Costa Club, June 2001, Hank, Boonton, NJ.**

Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 80 to 90 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Steve and Toni McConkey, the owners of Yellow Rose, make sure everything comes together for the dive trip. "No surprises" is one of their mottoes. My buddy and I did a two-tank twilight/night dive and two 3-tank day dives during a long weekend. The almost new 48'jet drive dive boat is luxurious. Though we were the only two divers with them for the three days of diving, they kept their commitment and provided all of the amenities a larger group would receive. Pastries and warm towels are provided between the first and second dive, with lunch between the second and third. After being checked out during the twilight and night dives, we went north to Barracuda and San Juan the second day. No other boats and lots of sea life. Carlos the dive master was there to find interesting sea life — like the five splendid toadfish he found — but was completely unobtrusive. Steve followed as a safety diver, also unobtrusive. Nearly an hour of bottom time on every dive. The entire operation truly made us feel as though they were happy to have us aboard. The reefs were in great shape, and the fish life was great. San Miguel continues to grow, and there is a little more intensity to the street vendors when the cruise ships are in, but it is still a great town when one wanders a few blocks away from the square.

## Mayan Riviera

### Akumal

**Akumal Beach Resort, 2001,**  
**Richard Jones, PA.** Vis: 50 ft. Water:

79 F. Approx. 1300 dives, Windy with light waves and surge. Little in the way of large fish but good tropical fish. The reef structure was good fingers and chutes with swim thrus. The reef had an attractive potential but was covered in sand due to a Hurricane. The colors were gone and many corals were dead. Shallow reefs were broken and sand covered also. The hotel was a fine operation catering to Europeans. Service and amenities were very good as was the food and refreshments. Rooms and conditions were very good and everything worked and was on posted schedules. The dive operation was organized on land as far as the front office and schedules although no one asked for the C-cards. The boat was an open small craft we did back entries and undressed to reboard. The briefing was in Spanish so I only got part of it. The divemaster lead and I must have done something against his rules but I don't know what. I was safe at all times, but he kept banging his tank and waving at me. Controlled depth and bottom times, no options. He offered to take me to cave dive the Cenotes, as a cave diver I was interested until I found out he had only been diving 1-1/2 yrs. had no training and didn't know what the gold lines were for.

**Aquatech, Villas De Rosas, every year from 1995 to 2000, Maddy Madison, San Juan, PR.** Water: 75-80 F. Logged dives: over 2,200. Trained by Steve Gerrard in 1995, full cave. Have gone back every year since. If you are a technical diver and want to go for full cave certification, this is the place.

Training, equipment, cave masters are in a class by themselves. Nancy and Tony DeRosa (former skydivers) know the hospitality and diving business 100%. Chief engineer Wayne and his Mayan Indians keep physical plant, guest rooms, kitchen, bar, compressors, swimming pool, etc. in A-1 shape. Wayne also supervises fishing and open water diving. (Ph/fax: (52)(987) 590 20; (52)(987) 590 21; e-mail [dive@cenotes.com](mailto:dive@cenotes.com); website [www.cenotes.com](http://www.cenotes.com))

**Aquatech Dive Center, Villas De Rosa, 2001, Burton Barker** ([burtbarker@aol.com](mailto:burtbarker@aol.com)) **Atlanta, MI.** Vis: 200-400 ft. in caves, 80-100 ft. in ocean. Water: 76-78 F, calm and flat/choppy. Dives logged: 250. Dive your own profile if cave certified. The ocean diving is very nice with great corals close to shore with short boat ride but the best part is diving the cave systems if you have cave certification but great cavern and cenote diving for open water divers when the wind is too strong to go ocean diving. The dive guides at Aquatech are the best, no bull!

**Dive Akumal, Hotel Akumal Caribe, August 2001, Bambi Alexander Banys** ([Alexanba@bc.edu](mailto:Alexanba@bc.edu)) **Boston, MA.** Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F, choppy no currents. Not a full service dive shop. They sell bottom of the barrel fins and masks but no real gear. All service staff from dive center, to restaurants to hotel staff give the impression they wish you would just hand over your money and go away. The first response to most every request was no. Can I get the tank for

the included daily beach dive? No — you have to come back in 1 hour and see the dive master. But we have plans, can't I just get it out of the shed? Big sigh, long pause, finally turns over a tank. Not worth the effort since they forbid you from leaving their property with it and it's not worth shore diving on their property. Dive staff hurries you but are never on schedule themselves. We paid for Cenote dives and were told we had to drive! When we refused we had to wait an hour for them to get a van. The second one we drove to but were it not for the only friendly divemaster they have, we would not have known to insist on their standard discount for driving. Coral was average, no large fish, a handful of turtles, no rays, no mammals, few schools of Fish, unremarkable diving. Beach becomes unbelievably crowded when the tour buses stop. You can't even get a seat in the one open restaurant at lunch. In between the first and second dives there's no time to leave the property for food and none of their restaurants are open! Prices are often even more expensive, than the US but the quality and service are worse. Change \$ at the airport where they were giving 9.2 pesos to \$1, the hotels, banks, etc., give between 8.5 and 8.8. You need a car or you are trapped and will pay for it. 1 liter water at hotel was almost \$2, across the street it was under \$1. Eat at La Buena Vida, on the bay just down the road. Good food, good service and unique ambiance.

**Villas De Rosa, June 2001, Stephen Preston** ([Bigboofer@netzero.net](mailto:Bigboofer@netzero.net))

**McLean, VA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 200 Feet. Water: 78 F. Have been here many times. Cave diving at its best. New caves are being opened up so each trip is always special. Nancy runs a very good operation. Divers and guides are excellent.

# Playa del Carmen

**Carib Divers, Rui Playa, October 2000, Deb and Dave Smith-Craine (smithcraine@aol.com) Kutztown, PA.** Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 80-85 F, choppy. Logged dives: 81 and 84. Dive restrictions: drift dive, stay with divemaster. New resort. Nice beach. Only two sittings for dinner and men had to wear long pants. There was no pier for the dive boat. Had to walk out through surf with gear and climb on boat. Speedy drift dives past patch coral and sandy bottom. One dive we floated along at 80 feet for 20 minutes. Saw very little of interest. After four boring dives we sat the rest of the week on the pleasant beach.

# PUERTO RICO

Puerto Rico, long little more than a jumping off place where divers caught a plane to another island with diving, has developed a following among Undercurrent readers as a dive destination in its own right. If you don't mind occasional rough seas, Puerto Rico offers healthy reefs, plenty of fish life, and some excellent wall dives. Winters can be cool. . . .

**Ciudad del Mar, September 2000, James R. Bursley (jbursley@coqui.net), Carolina, PR.** Vis: 90 to 150 Feet.

Water: 84 to 85 F. Dive trip was limited to experienced divers, destination Sail Rock, St Thomas. Incredible dive, expert captain and crew. Two dives at Sail Rock, one at Culebrita on the return trip. Dive boat is a newly acquired Newton 46. Price was \$60.

**Culebra Dive Shop, August 2001, Alan/Barbara Fischle (FSC864@aol.com) Great Neck, NY.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Richard Cantwell couldn't have been nicer or more accommodating, and the boat was very nice, though it would have been easier to use the ladder exiting the water rather than having to hoist oneself up on the transom. The divemaster had no interest in the underwater scene, except for lobsters, specifically those that he could catch. Every dive profile was "swim until you reach 1800 psi, and then we'll turn around and head back." Every dive was a fast swim and nothing was ever pointed out to us. The seas ranged between somewhat murky to very murky and, aside from one day when we dove Culebrita, the viz was pretty poor. (Ph: (787)742-0566; fax (787)742-1953; e-mail [divecul@coqui.net](mailto:divecul@coqui.net); website [www.culebradiveshop.com](http://www.culebradiveshop.com))

**Paradise Scuba, Parador Villa Parguera, January 2001, Gerry Keavany (keavany@mcttelecom.com) Warner, NH.** Vis: 80-100 Feet. Water: 75-77 F, choppy. Undercurrent, thanks for the tip on this out-of-the-way destination! For experienced divers, who have the stomach for choppy surface conditions, this is a "must." Paradise Scuba guides