

**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

were extremely friendly and showed a genuine interest in making sure we had a memorable experience. They are knowledgeable about the sites and provide good leadership. They both lead dives and leave the boat unattended during the dive. Given the roughness of the seas and the distance from land, it is only a matter of time before there's a bad situation. The soft coral life is healthy and abundant, especially the amount of Black Coral at the appropriately named "Black Wall". The site "Trenches", should be avoided. The walls and coral rival any place in the Caribbean! Villa Parguera is very clean and quiet, with a beautiful view of the bay. The food is pretty good but I would recommend La Casita. La Pared Restaurant rivals anything in San Juan. Dinner for two about \$100 at La Pared vs. \$45 at Villa Parguera or La Casita. This is a honky-tonk kind of town, which is a nice break. (Ph/fax: (787)899-7611; e-mail [dive@coqui.net](mailto:dive@coqui.net); website [www.paradisescubapr.com](http://www.paradisescubapr.com))

**Paradise Divers, January 2001, Nancy B. Burns, San Juan, Puerto Rico.** Vis: 100+ ft. Dive restrictions: maximum depth 109 ft. Dive Site: The Black Wall. Boat Captain/Dive Instructor: Kiko. Dive Instructor: Milton. Dive Master: Randy. Although the boat ride can be rough, the diving is great. Kiko and/or Milton take the time to tell you about the site and what you might see. They also tell you how to enter and exit the water. They also tell you about the safety

equipment on board and where it is located. When you sign up at the dive shop, you show them your c-card. They help you on with your equipment and ask you to hang on the line until everyone has entered the water. All follow along, although those with computers can do their own profiles. They are very conscientious about not touching or taking but don't miss an opportunity to point out something of interest, be it a turtle, shark, eel, or a coral formation. Randy usually carries a slate and can answer your questions "on the spot". During the dive, the leader will ask about your air pressure and if you are okay. We always do a safety stop at 15 feet for 3 to 5 minutes. One of the dive instructors will get out first to help the divers with their gear as they come up. As you get back on the boat, the instructors change your gear over for you. Sandwiches, beverages (usually soda and water although they sometimes bring lemonade as well) and cookies during the interval. Saw a nurse shark several good size queen angel fish, in addition to many other fish. The coral is also very healthy. Diving is relaxed. They know where everyone is at all times and never leave the dive site until everyone is safely back on board.

**Parguera Divers, Hotel Posada Porlamar, October 2000, Bill & Mary Beth Bright, Raleigh, NC.** Vis: 80 ft. Water: 78 F. and calm. Dove 3 consecutive days. Dive your own profile, no restrictions other than 500 lbs of air and 3 min safety stop. Dive operation now owned by Angel Rivera. Diving was excellent, and we have never had a dive operation more

anxious to see that your trip was excellent. Boat always left on time, equipment already on board for you to set up. Crew (always Angel himself and his very nice and attractive wife, or another first mate) pleasant and helpful, without being obtrusive. Complimentary lunch between dives. Excellent walls, very good fish life, eels and macro critters. Note that all diving is 60' +, so this is not a beginner's paradise, but neither was it really difficult — no current, good vis, etc. Air hose w/reg at 30' and spare weights always hanging and available. Hotel Posada Porlamar, 30' from the boat. Very good accommodations — quite small rooms, but clean and comfortable, with phone, color TV and A/C. Continental breakfast included in room price, which is very reasonable when purchased as a “dive package”. In-house restaurant is superb (4-star), but certainly not cheap. The town contains a number of other restaurants, and colorful local bars. (Ph: (787) 899-4171; fax (787) 899-6023; e-mail [divepr@caribe.net](mailto:divepr@caribe.net); website <http://netdial.caribe.net/~divepr/>)

**Parguera Divers, January 2001,**  
**Nancy B. Burns, San Juan, PR.** Vis: 75 ft. Dive restrictions: maximum depth 70 ft. Angel does a very thorough briefing, including where to store your dry gear after you have set up your equipment. You are also told about the safety equipment on board and where it is located. Next you hear about the dive site and what you can expect. Then you sign a waiver and show your c-card. At

the dive site they help you on with your equipment. They do not like you to change your equipment after the first dive as they prefer to do it. You are also instructed as to how to enter and exit the water and you hang on the line until Angel enters the water and leads the dive. You are initially told to let him know when you have 1000 psi left, but that is not the end of your dive. He keeps track of everyone in the water and also takes the time to show you whatever sea creatures may be around. He is also a touch but don't take type of diver. A safety stop is done at 15 feet. Either Angel or one of the three gentlemen assisting him will help you back on to the boat. After the first dive, you have a surface interval and have sandwiches, soda, and cookies. They brought a gallon of drinking water on board but it might be better to bring your own supply. Although more experienced divers would feel that the briefing is geared towards novice divers, it isn't so long that you could fall asleep during it! Saw several eels (both green moray and spotted) and a sting ray.

**Parguera Divers, March 2001,**  
**Ismael Garcia, Alexandria, VA.** Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 78-85 degrees, calm, no currents. Sunny. Only required to take a 5-minute stop, and return with 500 psi. Angel Rovira and Robin Camacho (Dive Master) make the diving relaxing and fun, allowing for the appreciation of the underwater scenery. Wall diving along with diving locations such as The Forest, Coral Garden, and

The Star are among the most popular. These sites are provided with beautiful coral arrangements and Fish-life such as princess parrotfish, yellowtail damselfish, blue chromis, and black surgeon. Also, is not uncommon to see great barracudas, sharks, green morays, lobsters and turtles. Great diving!

**Sea Ventures, Fajardo, January 2001, Richard Foote (footemail@prodigy.net), Lakewood, OH.** Vis: 25 to 50 Feet. Water: 82 F, calm. PADI 5-star shop located in large Puerto del Ray Marina. Friendly and helpful in shop and on board; had a spare regulator on board. Only one of two 38-ft. boats working, so 18 divers plus divemasters squeezed on for 10:00-3:30 2-tank trip (nice lunch between dives and help-yourself soft drink cooler). Guided dives in groups of 4 or 5, or do your own thing. Roll call before leaving each site. Unfortunately, sites near Fajardo had low vis.(25-40 ft.), algae, few soft corals, some fish (did see spotted eagle ray). Damage caused by anchor drops. All-day Sunday 2-tank trips to Culebra or Vieques islands are somewhat better. 2.5 hr. boat ride to 1st Culebra dive site. Only 11 divers plus divemasters; supposedly for more experienced divers due to 90 ft. 1st dive, but there were new divers with instructors. Slightly better vis.(50 ft.), but not as expected as there is no surface run-off. Soft corals much better, including huge purple sea fans studded with nudibranchs. Large lobster, barracuda. (note, see Culebra web site for guest houses and dive operations; 20 min. flight from San Juan but small planes with few seats). We stayed 20-min. drive from shop at La Paloma

Guest House (lapaloma@coqui.net), very quiet with beautiful view overlooking Fajardo-Ceiba coastline. Spacious 2-bdr. apt. with sat. TV and pool, good value. Friendly owner Nilda invited us to dinner one night; she will meet you at highway exit if you call when you're close. Hiking at nearby El Yunque rainforest. Fly nonstop to San Juan from several US cities. (Ph: 800-739-3483 or (787) 863-DIVE; fax (787) 863-0199; e-mail seaventures@divepuertorico.com; website www.divepuertorico.com)

**Sea Ventures, El Conquistador, June 2001, Michael Igoe (mike\_igoe@estreet.com) Aurora, CO.** Experience: 501- 000 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy surge. I wouldn't choose it solely as a dive destination. Sea Ventures is well run, safety conscious, and patient with beginners. Pleasant personnel. Prices are on a par with Fajardo, east end Puerto Rico.

## SABA

South of St. Maarten, Saba is one of the more adventurous and exciting Caribbean destinations, both on land and in the sea. . . . Pinnacle diving begins at 70 feet, with good fish life and occasionally sharks and bigger fish. . . . All accommodations are in quaint villages at 1000 feet and above. . . . Although there are no beaches or night life, Saba has delightful people, a few good restaurants, and a cool, pleasant climate at altitude. It's also in the hurricane belt. . . . Some divers