

dive. And no matter how many, they got on the boat. The Manta Lodge is lovely. Don't take the meal plan; only eat breakfast. You can eat for 1/2 price (and tastier) at Jemma's and Birdwatcher. But the staff of Manta will go out of their way if you request something. **(Dive Tobago: Ph: 868-639-0202; fax 868-639-7275)**

World of Watersport, Hilton, October 2000, Tom Kelly D.D.S., Irmo, SC. Vis: 100 ft. 4.5 hour flight to Trinidad from Miami, 2 hour lay over for flight to Tobago. Took all day to get there from South Carolina (10 am till 8pm). Ten of us lost luggage because we didn't know to pick-up our luggage in Trinidad and go through customs and immigration there. BWIA gate agent told us we were in transit and would go through customs immigration in Tobago. Stayed at the Hilton opened 6 months earlier very beautiful resort. Constant "blast" of wind off the Atlantic Ocean is uncomfortable. I would estimate a 25-30-knot/hour breeze. Waves on Hilton's Beach rough. There wasn't any swimming and snorkeling, also no sunset from this side of the island. World of Watersports runs the dive operation. They have an office at the Hilton but the Dive boat is docked at Pigeon Point 20 minutes away. The Diving on Mount Irvine Wall Buccoo Reef Maverick Wreck was terrible with poor visibility and few fish (Very Disappointed). Then we went to Speyside and dove around Goat Island and Little Tobago. I've dove 24 islands through out the Caribbean, the visibility and fish life near Speyside

ranks close to the best. It's a 1.5 hour car ride on winding roads from Scarborough, but it's interesting. The Blue Waters Inn is the nicest resort up this way. If all you want to do is dive this is the place but your wife may not be happy with the seclusion and dining the same place all the time (There is no shopping in Speyside). Except for Jemma's kitchen Restaurant there are no other nice places to dine. Also the Dive shop at Blue Water Inn had the largest and nicest dive boat in that area. The other shops from Buccoo Bay (The South side of island) would make arrangements with a Local "fisherman." You would "roll off the small open boat to enter the water and later trying to pull yourself into the boat, falling on the floor boards (no ladders, very ungraceful entry). This also put a 3 inch rip in my BCD and I didn't realize this on the next dive till I was 80 feet down! After looking at the Grafton Beach Hotel` Grand Courlon` Mount Irvine Hotel` Kariwok Hotel` Rexturtle Hotel` I thought the Coco Reef Hotel was the best. I would also go to Speyside from Scarborough for 3 dives/daily forget going to Mount Irvine Wall. Speyside is drift diving and novice divers should not have any problems diving as long as they stay with a dive group. A strict buddy system should be enforced for safety. **(Ph/fax: 868-660-7234)**

TURKS AND CAICOS

These islands, situated south of the Bahamas and north of the Virgins, feature awesome walls

and clear water. . . . South Caicos wall, off Cockburn Harbor, has a stone arch at 50', a lip as sharp as a knife, and a breathtaking vertical face. . . . Provo, the glitzy island, has spectacular beaches, but it's at least an hour's boat ride to the better diving of South or West Caicos. Grand Turk, on the other hand, is a funky, laid-back island that has a wall right offshore. Salt Cay has a guest house and decent diving; West and North Caicos have no dive facilities . . . Bring a long-sleeved shirt during the winter; it can get cool in the evenings. . . . The flight to Provo from Miami is a little over an hour. . . .

Grand Turk

Blue Water Divers, February 2001, Richard Connell, Devon, England.

Vis: 20-60 ft. Water: 70-72 F. Dive restrictions: Not over 32 meters. Pleasant recreational diving, 1930's atmosphere, uncrowded boats. Good company with high number of repeat customers. Surprised by first whale shark in memory. Humpback whales romping with returning dive boat. Dolphins regularly playing boat tag. Salt Raker Inn usual simple pleasant and friendly. Food is best that any small island can put together. Water's Edge Pub now in new friendly ownership. Ex-patriots and divers readily mix. Grand Turk is permanent fixture in three dive holiday per year schedule. Perfect for couples of mixed ability. Nothing for non-divers. (Ph: (649) 946-1226; fax 809-946-2432; e-mail blueraker@aol.com; website www.microplan.com/bl04015.htm)

Blue Water Divers, Osprey Beach Hotel, June 2001, Kim Devoe

(devoeks@earthlink.net) Loveland,

CO. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 82-84 F, calm & flat. Logged dives: 98. Dive restrictions: none were enforced, but max depths were stated. Blue water divers is a good dive operation.

Colleen helped a great deal with all the unknowns of booking the best accommodations for my family and also accommodated all my requests for which dive boat I was on. She even took my non-diving wife and son out to buy provisions, and showed them around town. Mitch was funny and full of life. He dives in the morning (over 6,000 logged dives), runs Blue Water Divers in the afternoon, and plays guitar and sings almost nonstop every Sunday and Wednesday night. Make sure you do some diving with Mitch, he is entertaining and educational. The Osprey Beach Hotel is in transition. After the disappointment of being shown to the deluxe suite with the plywood flooring and microwave on milk crates, we settled on a standard suite which was bigger, had a full kitchen, and was recently renovated. I was at first irritated at being charged \$50 more per night for an unfinished deluxe suite, but Colleen corrected our rate and the rest of our stay there was fine. We should have brought more food to cook in our room. In general, the restaurants have good food, but dinner service is almost unbearably slow, and under-staffed.

Blue Water Divers, Salt Raker Inn, August 2001, Anthony Dresden,

Arlington, VA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm no currents. Tenth trip to Grand Turk. I have always stayed at the Salt Raker and dived with Blue Water Divers, still at the top of the class. Mitch Rolling, the owner, has made over 6,000 dives on Grand Turk yet still maintains an enormous enthusiasm. With a brand new boat and a crew of excellent divemasters, he seems rejuvenated. Mitch runs a very safe and efficient operation (tanks always 3,000 psi) and he and his divemasters make the extra effort to find the critters. The reefs and walls are incredible and unspoiled with plenty of turtles, though no mantas this visit. At the Salt Raker I enjoy the laid-back atmosphere, good food and friendly staff. Jenny Smith, who runs the Salt Raker, has also totally refurbished the Osprey Beach across the road. This was once the Kittina — one of the true dumps of the Caribbean. The transformation is remarkable — beautiful ocean-front rooms with tiled floors and furniture from Indonesia. There is talk about building a large resort on Grand Turk.

Oasis Divers, Island House, July 2000, Helene & Al Dummer, Hartsdale, NY. Vis: 70-120 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Dive restrictions: 130' come up with 500 psi. Folks are friendly and both Colin at Island House and Dale and Everett of Oasis made our stay comfortable and our diving 100% enjoyable. (Ph: 800-892-3995 or (649)946-1128; e-mail oasisdiv@tcitway.tc; website www.oasisdivers.com)

Oasis Divers, Arawak Inn, November 2000, Gregory McGowan (divin2thdr@aol.com) Plainfield, IN. Vis: 100 ft. Water: 82-83 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 150+. Dive restrictions: 500 psi within dive computer. Excellent shore diving, easy entry, swim to wall from Arawak Inn. The rooms were clean and spacious, relaxed atmosphere. The food — minimal choices (a little pricey) only one restaurant within walking distance. Full kitchens, market food expensive and limited choices. Dive operation — great. Maximize bottom time. Crystal clear water. Mosquitoes are awful! Bug spray expensive on island. Minimal activities for nondivers. No shopping. I found the diving very good. We had disastrous problems with Sky King (shuttle flight) — they run on their schedule and do not have planes available at time promised — even if you have tickets and boarding pass in hand.

Oasis Divers, Turks Head Hotel, December 2000, Kevin Harvill (harvill@gte.net) Flower Mound, TX. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 81 F. This elegant old house built around 1840 was very comfortable and the staff very friendly. Our large second story room came with a nice balcony overlooking the deeply shaded courtyard. We found the courtyard a restful place to relax with a book. Most evenings we spent on the large second story terrace with piña colada in hand watching the sunset. The food is good if somewhat expensive. Within 100 yards of the hotel are a couple of

other restaurants. The Water's Edge is a comfy little place right on the beach. We ate most of our meals There. Great food at reasonable prices. A terrific place for a beer and conch burgers. across the street from The Waters Edge is Oasis Divers. From the owners Dale and Everett to Norway the canine mascot, they do it all well. Paul the divemaster gave good briefings and allowed us freedom with our own profiles as long as we didn't get too crazy. Expatriate and fellow Texan, Derek works as an instructor and appeared to be very patient and helpful with divers taking advanced courses. Not much to do on the island except eat, sleep, and dive which we did in copious amounts.

Oasis Divers, Turks Head Inn, February 2001, Jim Adams, (cadams@monad.net) Peterborough, NH. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 77-79 F. Dives logged: 70. Best overall dive trip I have had! Oasis was fantastic. My wife who has been very anti-diving — from fear — got certified with confidence thanks to Instructor Derek. All of the divemasters and the managers were very skilled and service oriented. We fed southern sting rays, played with groupers, dove with dolphins, and snorkeled with hump-back whales. On our last night, as we were watching a beautiful sunset with a cruise ship in the foreground, we spotted whales on the horizon. Everett and Austin from Oasis quickly got about 10 of us (including non-Oasis clients) on a boat and we chased the whales for 20 minutes. I tried to tip them but they would not accept it. Turks Head Inn was

also very good — beautiful courtyard and balcony. I thought I was in New Orleans. Food was good and owners very service oriented. They continue to work to improve the hotel. Their food was best we had — the people were friendly. The weather was excellent.

Oasis Divers, Island House, March 2001, Raleigh & Lynne Audette, Alamo, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm no currents. Island House was the best dive accommodation on the island, and the best we have stayed in. Colin (owner) did everything to make our stay enjoyable. Our studio suite was first class. And having a vehicle supplied with the room was convenient and enabled us to get anywhere on the island in a few minutes.

Oasis Divers, Island House Hotel, April 2001, Robin Abrahamson Masson, Ithaca, NY. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 72-78 F, choppy, calm and flat. Logged Dives: 150. Oasis was a superb operation. 24 foot Carolina skiffs held 6 to 8 people plus divemaster. They put you in the same boat with same divemaster all week. They handle gear. Divemasters are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and willing to take it slow. Good rental gear, prompt departures. Wall is 5 minutes boat ride (at most from shop which is on beach). Return to shop between dives in AM. Divemaster's eager to chase migrating whales and dolphins so we could swim with them, even when running late. Most dives close to 1 hour long! Island House is 10 minutes from "town" and dive shop — they give you a truck, jeep or golf cart to

use for the week. Clean well-decorated and maintained. Friendly staff and cats. Both are first class. Island very mellow. Food so-so.

Sea Eye Diving, Arawak Inn, October 2000, Pam Rudy, San Jose, CA. Vis: 80-120 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Sea Eye Diving was the most accommodating, enthusiastic group we've ever encountered. 80 minute dives. Arawak Inn was great until it rained (first rain in seven months) and then we had an infestation of mosquitoes. They enveloped us getting out of the water on a night shore dive. The island ran out of mosquito repellent. Thank goodness for the spacious air-conditioned rooms! (Ph/fax: (649) 946-1407; e-mail ci@tcitway.tc; website www.reefnet.on.ca/grandturk)

Sea Eye Divers, Osprey Beach Hotel (formerly Sitting Pretty), February 2001, Mark Thorne, Raleigh, NC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, calm, no currents. Used 24 ft. Carolina Skiff boats that held a maximum of 8 people. Back-roll into water. Sea-eye Dive Shop handles gear all week. Dive masters were helpful as needed but basically let divers dive within their own limits. Dive operation across the street from Osprey Hotel (ocean-front). Boats picked you up right in front of the hotel for a 5-10 minute boat ride to the mooring. All wall dives start around 25-30 feet and drop off to the abyss. Constant whale songs on every dive. Laid-back atmosphere and friendly locals. Felt very safe walking around. Do not need car. Beautiful sandy beaches with no piers,

no jet-skis or other tourist type activities. A constant breeze with temps in low 80s and no humidity. Evening low 70s. Minimal bugs. Sea-eye Divers have excellent service. Connie, Cecil & Mackie were top notch and work hard to be sure that everyone is having a good time. Very accommodating. Best dive trip ever with seeing whale shark, humpback whales, pod of dolphins, hammerhead sharks, turtles, grouper, crabs, lobsters, rays, etc. Food expensive but good. Most hotel rooms have refrigerator. Limited grocery stores.

Sea Eye Diving, Osprey Beach Hotel, April 2001, Mare and Bob Simpson (mareshark@hotmail.com) Llano, TX. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 77-80 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 150+. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. or slightly more for experienced divers. The small island made us feel like one of their family. This island seems to have stopped in the 1950's and that is fantastic. The Osprey Beach Hotel is absolutely beautiful and Sea Eye Diving caters to each and every whim of the divers. Connie and Cecil of Sea Eye were very helpful in making our arrangements. Since the island is small, we became on a first name basis with all. Jenny, who operates the Osprey and Salt Raker Inn, joined us around the pool several nights. Smitty of Sea Eye Diving is the ultimate divemaster. Our night dive to the Library was an awesome and very spiritual experience. We were even welcomed at the Anglican church by Bishop Berns. I have never experienced such exquisite food at every

rest. Do the snorkel and BBQ trip with Smitty!

Sea Eye Divers, Turks Head Inn, July 2001, Alan Fischl and Barbara Fischl (fsc864@aol.com) Great Neck, NY. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm no currents. Sea Eye Divers very nice and the dive masters were knowledgeable and interested in sharing their knowledge. While all of the dives were led, you were free to dive your own profile. For good, easy, low voltage wall diving, which is a half mile from shore on the lee side of the island. All sites have moorings. The Turks Head Inn is the most upscale of the hotels on the island. If we wanted to veg in the afternoons, we needed to cross the road and carry our snorkeling gear and chairs to the water. People on Grand Turk are warm and friendly and island itself is like going back a century in time.

Sea Eye Diving, Turks Head Hotel, July 2001, Leigh Vinzant (lvinzant@msn.com) Lakeland, FL. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82 F, calm & flat. Logged dives: 250. Dive restrictions: follow computer. Hotel provided taxi to and from airport. Very friendly and helpful. Accommodations were clean and comfortable. Close in location could walk anywhere we needed to go. Bring all your own medications, stores are hard to find. Food was excellent. Dive operation went out of their way to ensure us a great vacation. After initial check out, we could do our own thing as long as we followed our computers. Divemaster took care of our gear all week and

was always in the water for safety. Divemasters enjoy their jobs and it shows!

Sea Eye Diving, Osprey Beach Hotel, August 2001, Martha and Bill Silva, South Lake Tahoe, CA. Vis: 60-90 ft. Water: 80-82 F. We had good diving conditions: calm water. Our room was charming and comfortable. The hotel is undergoing renovation and the upgrades are good additions. Staff made every effort to correct any problems. Jenny Smith, the owner, was very accommodating. When one of our group of 13 was dissatisfied with her room, she was given a reimbursement and was happy with the arrangements made. The entire staff of the Osprey Beach Hotel and Salt Raker Inn was helpful and courteous. Sea Eye Diving: While we enjoyed the diving, we would consider either Blue Water or Oasis Divers for a next trip. Cecil Ingram, who was our dive master, seemed inattentive underwater. Fortunately for us, our group has dived together for several years and we looked after one another. We saw beautiful, healthy soft and hard corals, lots of small fish, many groupers, turtles, eels, and a friendly nurse shark. The members of the group who did the ray dive excursion were delighted with the trip.

Sea Eye Diving, Osprey Beach Hotel, Turks Head Inn, 2001 Brian and Gayla Snell Dallas, TX. Sea Eye Diving, good operation and good people. Thank you Connie and Smitty for your hospitality. Weather caused the visibility to be 60 to 80 feet on a couple of the sites, 30 to 50 feet on others.

Normal Caribbean creatures, didn't see any pelagics. Osprey Beach Hotel (formerly Sitting Pretty), what a disappointment. When the taxi stopped in front of this hovel in desperate need of repair, I thought to myself "this is not good". As I trudged up the stairs to the room, the overpowering smell of mold and mildew flooded my nostrils, and I thought to myself "it has got to get better". When we opened the door to the room, and the first thing I saw was a painted sub-floor I thought "I can't believe they would rent out an unfinished room". As my wife and I were unpacking, the sweat ran faster down our faces, and the air-conditioner was not getting colder, I thought to myself "I'll be damned if I'm going to pay this much money for a piece of crap room, in a dumpy little hotel", so we called downstairs. The next room we were led to was better. No bad smell, tile on the floor, and the air-conditioner worked. After the third day of morning dives, the owner Jenny, informed us that we had to get out of that room because "it was booked by other divers coming in tomorrow". I asked her where we were going to be moved, and she said "back into the original room". I then asked her if someone fixed the air-conditioner, and she said rather curtly "it's new and works fine". I then told her I didn't want that room, I wanted a room with tile on the floor, and she said "you paid for a standard room, the room you are staying in now is a deluxe room". She then informed me that our original hell hole was an upgraded room. So I used Texas tact and told her "if your upgraded room is a painted sub-floor with bad smells and no air-conditioning, I'd hate to see

your standard room". She then invited me to leave her hotel. Thanks to the Turks Head Inn for letting us stay with them. Class act and classy owners.

Turks Head Inn, July 2001, Vlad Pilar (pilarvl@netcom.ca) Toronto, ON. We had a specific room reserved for 8 months and were asked to change to another room so that a honeymoon couple could have ours. We complied provided that our new room would not be over the kitchen. When we arrived our new room was directly above the kitchen. The manager refused to change our accommodation. We went to the Osprey Beach Hotel. While this is an upgraded motel we were given a very comfortable room. They also have a good dining room at the Salt Raker Inn nearby. (Ph: 649-946-2466; fax 649-946-1716; e-mail tophotel@grand-turk.com)

Providenciales

Beaches, November 2000, David Van Ryn, Elkhart, IN. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dive restrictions: 100 ft, dove with group but allowed computer is asked. Beaches Resort is a cruise ship that doesn't leave shore. Great resort, food and facilities. Lots of people the week our group was there. Dive service is geared to beginner level, but they agreed to dedicate a boat to our group of 25 divers. The corals were in unbelievably great shape. Saw single sharks on lots of dives. Overall health of reef is fantastic, almost no damage. Dive sites are generally far from hotel. But great walls, soft corals, etc. Had scattered rain and some strong surges

on some dives. Almost no shore dives and/or night dives. All diving is free with paid stay. (Ph: 888-SANDALS or 305-284-1300; fax 305-667-8996; e-mail info@beaches.com; website www.beaches.com)

Beaches, December 2000, Joel Goldman, Kingston, NY. Each diver is required to do a check-out: 1. Giant stride into pool 2. Mask removal 3. Regulator 'loss' and retrieval 4. Fin pivot 5. Oral inflation of BCD. After this, you can sign up for either 8:00 AM 2 tank dive or 10:00 AM 1 tank dive. 2 tank dive goes to West Caicos or outside resort reef. 10:00 AM dive goes inside reef near resort. Once 8:00 AM boat is full, you're stuck with 10:00 AM boat or not diving. Boat limit is 20 divers. Must be there at 8:00 AM to sign up. Depths are 80 feet 1st dive and 60 feet 2nd dive. Max bottom time is 30 minutes. Plus 3-5 minutes safety stop. Large numbers of yellowtail snappers on every dive. Few eagle rays and sharks. Reefs in pretty good shape compared to number of other places we've been. Dive masters not very helpful or friendly. Stayed amongst themselves on boat unless you approached them. Food on 2 tank dive plain sandwiches and fruits. OK, but not like sister resort of Sandals. Resort very well laid out and even with 400+ rooms, never felt crowded even though resort was supposedly full. Try to get room near dive shop or you're lugging equipment back and forth as they do not have lockers. Echoing another reader in the past, the child strollers worked well to transport

dive gear back and forth when you could find them.

Beaches, May 2001, Gerry Lauro, Wyckoff, NJ. Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 75- 78 F. Dives logged: 140-150. Dive restrictions: one profile for all dives. If you dive with Beaches, you only have yourself to blame. Arrived on Saturday and was not allowed to dive on Sunday until I had passed their "skills" test, despite my C-card and own equipment. Since the first "skills" (take off mask underwater, take regulator out of mouth under water) class was after dive left, I was out of luck. They dive one profile every day, no matter what. Up to 30 people in boat, you need to wait on line every day to sign up — it was horrible! Do not go to Beaches for diving!

Beaches, May 2001, Eileen Roach, Germantown, MD. Vis: 60-70 ft. Water: 75-79 F, choppy. Logged dives: over 200. Dive restrictions: 80 ft. first dive, 60 ft. on second. Decent snorkeling spot about 200 yards up the beach for the resort. One day it was fairly calm with moderate currents, another time was very rough and high current. We dove the west Caicos area - 1st trip very rough — some were injured when we hit almost the "perfect storm" wave on our return to the resort. But — once down below beautiful sponge barrels on/off the wall. Not as many schooling fish, but corals were very colorful and plentiful. Second trip (toward end of our stay) the conditions greatly improved and had a wonderful wall dive. Saw an old Spanish anchor. We had a pleasant stay. Lively resort and pools/swim up

bars, but caters a little too much to kids (was an all-inclusive family resort) and sometimes had to get in the 5 or 6 restaurants early to avoid lines.

Blue Hole, Parrot Key, May 2000, Lisa Samuel, (lsblndvixn@aol.com) Ponte Vedra Beach, FL. Vis: 20-50 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Dives logged: 50+. Resort advertises as luxury accommodations catering to every need, however, no dive boat, arrangements for dive made 1+ mo before. Were lost despite confirmation, allowed diving with “buddy” that wasn’t divemaster. Accommodations run down, meals very limited, service poor — owner doesn’t respond to correspondence — all for the bargain price of \$1,000++/nite/couple (diving, spa extra).

Caicos Adventures, Club Med Turquoise, February 2001, Lani Seltzer, Winston-Salem, NC. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 74-76 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: more than 150. Dove West Caicos everyday (6 days) which is a long boat ride but well worth it. Spotted eagle rays on almost every dive. Walls are spectacular and pristine. Humpbacks surfaced very near boat during surface time. If you’re into the little stuff it is boundless here. Fifi aims to please and is very accommodating while keeping safety a priority. The boat captain, Laurent, is professional, skilled and extremely nice. This dive operation is one of the best! Club Med: We stayed here because the non-diving couple we went with preferred accommodations with planned activities. Rooms are adequate but have poor plumbing. Staff is rude

and bored. The food, however, is really good. Staff did not like the fact that we booked our dives outside of resort. “all-inclusive” does not mean “all-inclusive”. (Ph/fax 649-941-3346 ; e-mail divucrzy@tcway.tc; website www.caicosadventures.tc)

Caicos Adventures, Comfort Suites, March 2001, Courtenay (em2court@in.net) Indianapolis, IN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, calm choppy currents. Best dive operation I have encountered. All wall dives around West Caicos. Owner, “Fifi” was on board with two other dive masters. Martin (a dive master and Captain recently moved from Grand Cayman) worked his tail off keeping everything in order. Laurant was the boat captain and dive master. He was doing final PADI check outs for beginners and never got in the way. The boat was crowded (16-20) divers, but we experienced divers either got in first or waited. Easy pace and only requirement was to swim against the 1-3 knot current until 1500# and then return. Dive Masters were excellent at spotting rays, sharks. I buddied up with same experienced divers. One was a video taker and only kicked one piece of coral. First time I have ever seen so little damage. Eagle rays, mating dolphins, sharks, crab with hand-sized pincers, lots of lobsters, tons of sponges, schooling cromis, jacks.

Caicos Adventures, April 2001, Gerry Lauro, Wyckoff, NJ. Water: 75-78 F, choppy. Dives logged: 140-150. Fifi Kunz is an excellent operator. I booked him after two days at

Beaches, and it was well invested extra money. Fifi works hard for his customers, and combined with his 15 years on Provo is as good an operation as you can find anywhere. An excellent operation in one of the better Caribbean dive sites.

Caicos Adventures, Ocean Club, April 2001, Gary (mali@mailbag.com) Milwaukee, WI. Experience: 101- 50 dives. Vis: 70 to 120 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm no currents. Caicos Adventures is excellent! Philippe is very knowledgeable and my dive buddy and I were able to dive our own profile the whole week. He's also great at pointing out creatures (like sharks) during a guided dive. Max of 18 divers on boat, but usually only 12 divers. Usually dives West Caicos, which is an hour boat ride from Provo. If you like wall dives, very clear water, no currents, no other boats, and sharks, then it is well worth the long boat ride. Sharks on almost every dive. Sandwich provided on the boat between dives. Will pick you up and drop you off at your hotel on a bit of a run down bus. The ride is not very comfortable, but the diving is well worth it! Ocean Club is a great resort. Very clean and service was good. We were upgraded from a basic room to a suite without asking. Resort is on the beach, 2 pools, 2 large grills for cooking out, a convenience store and several restaurants on the property. Ocean Club is several miles from the main town, so you need a cab ride into the main town or grocery store. Provo Turtle Divers has a shop on the property. Camera table and rinse tank

on boat, but that's about it. Caicos Adventures was very helpful to anyone who had cameras.

Caicos Adventures, May 2001, James Robs (eroby@sonet.net) Haleyville, AZ. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 75-80 F, choppy. Logged dives: 149. Dive restrictions: computers — 5 min. DC. "Fifi" Kunz and Caicos Adventures is a five star dive op — very efficient and orderly. They take their diving seriously, but make it a most enjoyable experience. They are mindful of and respect differing skill levels. "Fifi" runs a great operation and is a genuinely good person. Rented a villa from provovillas.com. Good choice for us. IGA has a good selection of groceries. Many great restaurants, much less crowded and less hectic than Grand Cayman. A great trip.

Caicos Adventures, Comfort Suites, July 2001, Roger C. Dennis and Ruth Rouse (rcdennis@worldnet.att.net) San Jose, CA. Caicos Adventures (<http://www.caicosadventures.tc>). Comfort Suites is only a block away from the Caicos Adventures dive shop. Philippe "Fifi" Kunz, the owner of Caicos Adventures, picked us up at the hotel at 8:10am. After several more hotel stops for divers, went to marina. After briefing all the divers and signing the usual waivers, Fifi took us over to West Caicos for wall diving on the west side of the island — an 80 minutes boat trip each way. Two dives per day for four days with a night dive option on the first day if there are were enough interested divers to make a second trip to West Caicos for at

twilight-light dive and a night dive. It was a long day and we did not get back to our hotel until about 11:30pm. Fifi took us over to French Cay for our two dives because the weather was favorable. Peter Hughes and Aggressor live-aboards were in these same areas. Although we have been diving in the Caribbean for many years, we had never seen sharks, except for a few nurse sharks. At both West Caicos and French Cay you could expect to see gray reef sharks. We also saw turtles, stingrays, eagle rays, moray eels, spotted eels. The waters around TCI are just beautiful to look at, so blue against the white sand bottoms.

Caicos Adventures, Comfort Suites, August 2001, Bob Lamberton (rdlamber@artsci.wustl.edu) **St. Louis, MO.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 88 F, choppy. One 2-tank trip with the memorable Fifi to West Caicos after a week on Wind Dancer at the other end of the archipelago. All the great things Undercurrent subscribers have said about him are true. A full boat, but organization was exemplary and we never felt crowded. Two dive leaders in the water, one with the more experienced divers, the other with the less experienced (categories that seemed to be pretty much up to the divers). After chatting on the trip out, Fifi gave us the option of joining a group or buddy-diving on our own (which we did). He hopes to have his new boat, a large catamaran, by the time this Chapbook is out, and plans to do day trips as far as South Caicos.

Club Med, January 2001, James Thomas, Mendham, NJ. Vis: 80-90 ft. Dives logged: 65. Dive restrictions: 130 1st dive, 60 2nd dive. If certified and had no buddy, they matched us up. They seemed to prefer you go buddy rather than group dive. All buddies I was matched with were experienced and worked out well. One tank dives were close to resort and shallow. Better dives were 2 tank dives, farther from resort and a bit deeper with better visibility. (Ph: (888) 800-932-2582 or (649) 946-5500; fax (649) 946-5501; website www.clubmed.com)

Dive Provo, August 2000, Roger Atwood, Tulsa, OK. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 150+. Dive restrictions: time. Dive boat was not crowded. The service on the boat was exceptionally good. Getting on and off was very easy and had good briefings. (Ph: 800-234-7768 or 649-946-5029; fax 649-946-5936; e-mail diving@diveprovo.com; website www.diveprovo.com)

Dive Provo, Comfort Suites, October 2000, Steve & Barbara (mims_84093) Sandy, UT. Vis: 50-100 Feet. Water: 81-83 F, calm choppy no currents. Group of 10 couples/friends. Comfort Suites nice but institutional, could have been in Provo, Utah, if not for the palm tree outside the window. Staff/pool/bar very nice, "light continental breakfast" very minimal. New mini-mall next door has 3 excellent restaurants, convenience store, car rental, gift shops, and Dive Provo "not a dive shop" according to woman staffing it,

about a .5 mile walk from beach/boat dock. Some thought dive shop staff surly; I thought she was frustrated due to lack of full-service and lack of customer understanding of same; she gracefully arranged for boat to go to lee side of Provo to visit French Cay on day 3, after many of us got seasick and dehydrated on 2.5 hour slow diesel cattle boat ride over rough seas to Northwest Point on day 2. Day 1 was two tanks in Grace Bay, short boat ride, spur/groove coral showing significant wear/death/algae, but reasonably profuse tropical fish population, large So. stingray and hogfish. Heavy weather from Atlantic precluded further diving on that side of island, no great loss. Toured the island by car, a worthwhile half-day excursion. Dove off French Cay the next 3 days, G-spot was one of the best walls we've ever seen, fantastically encrusted with hard and soft corals, giant barrel sponges, huge horizontal orange elephant ear sponge. Close encounters those days with 5 ft. reef sharks, spotted eagle rays, impressive large swirling aggregate of horse-eye and black jacks under the boat, with central lurking 4.5 ft. barracuda. Saw ocean triggers and ceros hanging out on 15 foot safety bar (spare air also hanging, never used). Dive guides were pleasant and helpful Brits and Canadians, very little advice or supervision above or below water. One dive guide in the water with group of 20 divers, most just did there own thing. No appreciable current on walls, although last dive was a group drift dive the staff would deny if asked (not supposed to do drift

dives apparently). Visibility was pretty poor, made it difficult to find the boat at dive's end, usually anchored quite a ways from wall on flats; Had to be attentive to computer/depth gauge, as walls go down 7000 feet, 70 ft looking the same as 120 ft. According to our dive guide, a 60 year old overweight smoker died on the G-spot wall that week on the sister boat from Dive Provo, found floating after an unwitnessed out-of-air situation and suspected heart attack. My wife, an experienced diver and physician with 200 ocean dives, got bent on our last day there. On the boat ride back to Provo she got muscle aches; at the dock developed headache and visual disturbances, and then a painful rash at the hotel (cutis marmorata, apparently diagnostic of DCS). From the hotel I called DAN, they directed us to the excellent local clinic, where Dr. Steve Bourne, ex-Royal Navy dive doctor/general practitioner, confirmed the diagnosis clinically. Barb began a Table 6 recompression on 100% oxygen mask for 6 hours within 4.5 hours of surfacing, improving rapidly under the direction of Dr. Bourne and technical diver John Garvin who ran the chamber. As a landlocked ER doctor, I learned a lot about hyperbaric medicine and DCS from these pro's. I felt like I should be able to write off my trip as continuing medical education. Barb had to have 3 more treatments the next 3 days, finally getting off the island by pressurized Lear Jet to Ft. Lauderdale, where we stayed the recommended 72 hours at sea level before returning home to Salt Lake City by commercial air. Dr. Bourne

recommended a brain MRI scan (normal) and an echocardiogram upon return, which showed a tiny hole in the wall separating Barb's right and left atrial chambers (known as a patent foramen ovale, PFO, apparently present in 30% of the general population and presumably divers, too). She had 3 separate dive docs say her condition was an "undeserved hit" after reviewing her dive profiles, which averaged two 80 ft dives with an hour surface interval five out of six possible dive days. The presence of the unsuspected PFO allowed some of her admittedly significant nitrogen burden to cross over to the arterial side rather than be filtered out by the lungs. I was impressed with the accessibility of consultation with DAN dive docs (Dan Nord) and managers, as well as with their interest in followup on Barb's condition. She now faces an important decision about the safety of future diving, possibly returning to shallow non-exertional diving on Nitrox. DAN standard insurance apparently will pay for any balance of the hyperbaric treatments that Blue Cross doesn't cover (I paid the \$7200 charge to Dr. Bourne by credit card before leaving the clinic), but they will not cover the \$4600 pressurized Lear Jet charge to get back to the USA, which I also put on plastic. We will upgrade our DAN family insurance before going to Curacao.

Dive Provo, Big Blue/Caicos Adventures/Canapro, October 2000,
Susan, Long Beach, CA. Vis: 60-80
Ft. Water: 84 F, calm. Reserved 3 days
with Caicos Adventures 2 weeks

before arriving in Provo because we wanted specifically to dive West Caicos/French Cay. Fifi picked us up the first day and delivered us to Dive Provo. Fifi's boat was being repaired so he'd made alternate arrangements and not told us. We learned after diving with Fifi that he is the only way to go, but on that first day, we weren't happy. Dumped onto the Dive Provo cattle boat, we counted 23 paying divers, 4 diving staff. It was the only bad weather day of our trip; Dive Provo still made a 1.25 hour trip out to Northwest Point. We weren't required to do a guided dive. Divemaster briefed us and gave us a compass setting for the wall, which was supposedly just a few yards off the bow. Things deteriorated from there. After 20 minutes of swimming in the direction we were given and no wall, we headed back for the boat and ran into a divemaster leading a group back. They had not found the wall either. Furthermore, the divemaster couldn't find the boat (we could)! None of the divemasters had found the wall and only 3 divers 27 in the water did. What a relief to get on Fifi's boat the next day. French Cay was awesome, healthier flora than Cayman, lots of sharks, many other nice mid-size Caribbean species, decent viz, tons of dolphins on the boat ride back. Fifi's boat was booked one day so we ended up with Big Blue. Big mistake. Captain was pandering to a group of dive shop owners from the States. Originally promised a trip to West Caicos, but he changed that because these dive shop owners had to complete their dives in time to catch

an afternoon flight to Miami! The dive shop owners had some pre-dive beers while we did a supposed deep dive. Bad conditions, dead coral, no fish — why were we wasting our time? The intention was for Big Blue to ferry the dive shop owners back to the dock after their dive, and then we'd go out again for our 2nd tank. We conferred with the captain and decided to cut our losses and go home. Stick with Fifi and reserve your diving at least a month in advance. Canapro, our rental house was incredible. Great location on the beach, all rooms opened to the ocean, huge decks on both floors, great ground floor facilities for washing/hanging dive gear. Rent it from Turks and Caicos Realty. One of the most affordable houses, but still one of the nicest! Had fun and great food at Sharkbites, very close to the house.

Dive Provo, Allegro Resort, December 2000, Jim Payne (jimp10150@aol.com) Waukesha, WI. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy surge. A second honeymoon with a nondiving spouse who is exceptionally accommodating turned into a wonderful second honeymoon with very little diving. The length of the boat trips strained even the most forgiving when I returned at 3:30 p.m. from an 8:00 a.m., two dive departure. So, considering the diving and weather were less than spectacular I decided to alter my focus. And to my great pleasure an island fairly devoid of tourist entertainment value transformed into a delightful trip. The resort and food (all inclusive) were very enjoyable and the

service excellent. A New Years eve party at the resort was top notch with great food and enthusiastic entertainment. A snafu in room assignments was handled very well but should never have happened. Dive Provo is efficiently run with some nice if not enthusiastic people. The boat accommodated the 15 divers as well as could be expected. I was less than awed by the diving, however. Very healthy, but sparse. Skip Grace Bay and go right for the long boat rides. What the locals called the worst bout of clouds and rain (5 of 7 days) in a long time may have had a dampening effect on my opinions. A too small fresh water chest didn't accommodate all the cameras which were numerous.

Dive Provo, Comfort Suites, May 2001, Mike Saffas and Lori Falls, (zbung@lvcn.com) N. Las Vegas, NV. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 79-81 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 100+. Dive restrictions: 100 ft., 45 min., return with 500 psi. Comfort Suites very nice, best value on island even though not on beach. Dive Provo top notch. Went to all dive site's around island. Coral very healthy along with a wide variety of sponges, and seal life, very nice wall dives. Spotted many sharks (reef, nurse, hammerheads). Plenty of turtles, spotted eagles, stingrays, morays, and groupers. Large schools of jacks, spadefish, etc. Lots of dolphins to and from sites. Horseback riding on beach, see "local artist" studio on main road. Conch farm very interesting!

Dive Provo, Allegro, May 2001, Carol and Randy Thompson

(baricat@aol.com) Shrewsbury, MA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 80 to 90 F, choppy. Long boat rides, lots of chop. Ride to marina, over wash-board road (sometime — we went out of 2 different marinas). Day went from 8:30 am to 2:30-4:15 pm for 2 tank dives. Longest day was for ride to West Caicos. It's good diving, but not much remarkable seen during the week. Best sighting came on our boat ride back from West Caicos — a sunfish at the surface. Other than that, very uneventful and disappointing. Remember the Transderm Scop patches — long, bumpy rides. Dive Provo insists on putting your gear together for the first dive. They won't even allow you on the boat while they are doing it. One day the divemasters arrived after we had been standing around at the marina waiting for them for almost a half hour. Another half hour to put the gear together, and a long boat ride afterward. Not our idea of a good time.

Dive Provo, Allegro Resort, June 2001, Tommy Viola, Bellerose NY. Resort comfortable, food and drink plentiful. Good resort for nondiving partners. No panhandlers on the beach. The staff was friendly and accommodating. On beautiful Grace Bay. Dive Provo at the Resort. Boats comfortable and quick to get to West Caicos and North West Point. Pristine wall diving at its best. Recreational limits with computers. go on your own or with instructor. One instructor in the water on every dive. Crew handles

all your equipment from set up to change over to breakdown rinses it and stores it for next day. One 2 tank dive in the morning and afternoon. On the second dive of the day in 60 feet of water I saw a couple struggling, tapping on his tank with his knife to draw attention. the man signaled to me that his wife was out of air. I took my octopus's and shoved it in her mouth. Got her calmed down, and ascended slowly according to her computer dive profile. On the surface signaled boat for help, boat did not respond. I towed her back to the boat 100 yds, while her husband carried her weight belt. Back on the boat Captain and Dive Master did not seemed concerned. Apparently her tank was not changed for the second dive. I am a firm believer of setting up my own equipment on each and every dive. Both the Dive Master and the diver were at fault and I was shocked at the non caring attitude of the crew.

Flamingo Divers, Ocean Club, May 2001, Gerry Keavany (mcttelecom.com) Warner, NH. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 76 to 79 F. Flamingo Divers has a completely new staff, headed by Brian and Jill, a young husband and wife team who provide outstanding service. They are joined by another husband and wife team (Wayne and Lynn) who owned their own dive shop in the US for 30 years. They take a max of 8 divers and provide pick-up and drop-off service at any hotel. On the day before my departure, I drove my rental car to the dock to pick up my equipment and skip the dives due to

a sore back. When I couldn't resist the chance for one more excursion, Wayne and Jill volunteered to take my car back to the hotel so my wife could use it while I was out diving! The winds were strong and reversed from the normal trade winds, which limited our choices of dive sites. The staff did everything to get us to the best possible sites but I was disappointed with the coral life on most dives. G-Spot was simply beautiful! One dive provided a view of 2 hammerheads and 2 huge spotted eagle rays! On another dive, we were circled for 10 minutes by a Caribbean Reef Shark and a black-tip shark within 5 feet! Ocean Club was pretty good but could get a little noisy. It's next door to Club Med, which is a different experience in it's own right. Next time, we will stay at The Sands on the most beautiful section of Grace Bay, which is far more beautiful than 7 Mile Beach. **(Ph: 800-204-9282; phone/fax 649-946-4193; e-mail Flamingo@Provo.net; website www.provo.net/flamingo)**

Ocean Vibes, Turtle Cove Inn, July 2001, Michael and Nancy Marmesh (memarmesh@aol.com) Miami, FL. Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 83-85 F, choppy. Logged dives: 220. Dive restrictions: time, with 4 beginners out of 6 divers. Turtle Cove Inn runs on island time. Had to change rooms because our a/c didn't work in first room. Had a 3 hour power outage. The Terrace Restaurant at the inn was excellent. Nearby restaurants fair to good. Turtle Cove room was comfort-

able. Ocean Vibes has a small boat that carried 6 divers. They had scooters to rent. I was able to catch up to a pair of spotted eagle rays by finning with the scooter at full bore. Downside is that you zip by interesting small stuff. At the "shark hotel" we saw the promised residents (nurses) resting under ledges. Also a big hogfish, maybe 3 ft. long. They can arrange Nitrox. **(Ph: 877-426-7626 or (649) 941-3141; e-mail oceanvibes@tcway.tc; website www.oceanvibes.com)**

Provo Turtle Divers, Clean Vibes, Flamingo Divers, Turtle Cove Inn, July 2000, Jackie Maciel, Franklin, MA. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 82-83 F. Our reservations were made through Island Dreams for a second floor pool view room for 2. When we arrived they told us that there was an error, we were not a party of 3, so we could not have the room we wanted and they would upgrade us to a 1st floor marina view room. There is no way our agent made the mistake. They gave our room away to someone from a large dive group that was there for the week and arrived on Saturday. We arrived on Monday for 6 nights. Turtle Divers was booked for the week and had a second boat on loan to a dive shop. A staff member referred us to Clean Vibes. We had 2 great personal dives in Grace Bay. Lots of schooling fish, some sharks and turtles, and Elvis a very large barracuda. The dive sites had good coral coverage, not much current. They were very relaxed dives. Flamingo Divers dove West Caicos, a rough ride. Pathway to Heaven had a

fair amount of current. Jamie was our dive guide and swam quickly all around the reef. I thought he was on a Navy Seal mission. The second dive was a drift dive. This was a little better pace, but was a little short. There was no shallow reef shelf to degas. Smith's Reef was a 10 minute walk from Turtle Cove Inn. But a nasty dog lives along the way. He charged out into the road one afternoon, so we never got to explore the shore snorkeling. No small stores to buy fruit, snacks, etc. within a short walk from the Marina. (Provo Turtle Divers: (Ph: 800-833-1341 or 649-946-4232; fax 649-941-5296; e-mail ProvoTurtleDivers@Provo.net; website www.provoturtledivers.com)

Provo Turtle Divers, Turtle Cove Inn, November 2000, Scott Burrows (scotttyb@texas.net) Spicewood, TX. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy no currents. Having read Undercurrent's August issue, I chose to stay at Turtle Cove Inn. We rented a suite which made for more room and included a kitchen. The inn is more than adequate and clean and much less expensive than some accommodations along Grace Bay. Diving with Provo Turtle Divers makes it even more convenient since their shop and boats are there at the marina. Turtle Divers are very professional with nice boats and staff. They try to get you to the good dive sites, weather permitting, and dive Grace Bay as little as possible. The real diving is at Northwest Point, West Caicos, or French Caye, but we couldn't get there due to the weather. We dove West Caicos one

day only, and it made for a rough and wet ride with very little relief from the wind while anchored. Walls at Northwest Point and West Caicos were terrific, the corals were nice, and the fish were OK. I saw one scrawled filefish at Northwest Point, the size of any that I've seen before. We like to dive 15 to 20 dives in a week and found this to be almost impossible while in Provo, having logged only 10 dives for the week. Dining out is very expensive but very good, along the line of Grand Cayman. We bought groceries but literally paid double or triple for them. I would suggest packing as much non perishable stuff. Service is slow but steady and some patience will go a long way. Their larger boat has a nice camera table but tends to get cluttered with other items, even though being told that it is for cameras only.

Provo Turtle Divers, Comfort Suites, January 2001, Kent McBride (Kent@watsononline.net) Warner Robins, GA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, calm no currents. Comfort Suites billed as diver friendly and close to the beach with a section for the resort. Fact is this three story hotel has no elevator, hauling dive gear and luggage up the stairs can be challenging. No balcony to dry wetsuits and equipment. The beach is approx. a 2-3 block walk with a few lounge chairs on a small portion of the beach. Do not dare use the Allegra resort portion of the beach or you will be chastised by security guards. The continental breakfast included 2 kinds of juice,

croissants and a cake of questionable type. Coffee was not drinkable but the room had a coffee maker, bring your own coffee. All good dive sites 45 min to 1.5 hr boat ride. Unfortunately the engine mounts broke on the boat broke the second day of diving. We were shuffled over to Dive Provo. They were able to find room on the boat for 3 of us but did treat us like somewhat of an annoyance. The large group already booking the boat was treated well, the staff set up their equipment. We were given left over space and no assistance. With 21 divers on a 36 foot boat space was at a premium. I kept my camera stowed. The crew seemed overwhelmed. We were relieved when we opted to dive as a separate group away from the 18 other divers. This also kept us away from the resort course and open water students. All boats had dedicated camera buckets. Crowded conditions and number of novice divers put gear at risk i.e. the weight belts placed on the camera table. Grace Bay, coral is dying or dead from over diving of several resorts which offer resort courses and I assume pollution. Night dive overpriced at \$64 all the coral appeared dying, few fish and little marine life. Northwest point a 45 min boat ride can be rough even on good days. 3 days diving this area was enough. Duplicate dive site visits. Nice wall and healthy coral. West Caicos-1.5 hr boat ride from Grace Bay. Caicos Adventures leaves from the south side of the island and it takes them only 45 minutes. They also offer a 2 tank night dive. The best diving with great wall and coral, great marine life.

Wonderful meals at upscale resorts. The only thing worse than the roads was the rental car from Budget. Expect at least one flat tire.

Sands Grace Bay, June 2001, Henry Miller, Dallas, TX. We take one big diving vacation each summer and spend a lot of time and effort researching a resort and making certain that we get exactly what we want and are willing to incur the expense. Our number one priority is for it to be ocean front, unobstructed view, the water is right there. We called the resort manager to make certain that we were getting an ocean front room. Upon our arrival, we escorted to an "ocean front" room, and our view was of a vacant lot on which they were building a new wing. Not only were we privileged to watch their construction, but they were nice enough to wake us at daybreak when they began their work. the shower was stopped-up and there was no water pressure. Despite our rational argument that the only ocean view we had from our room was if we pressed our heads against the screen on our enclosed porch, they insisted that it was "ocean view." They even offered the number of another resort and said we could leave if we didn't like it. Their attitude was that we should feel privileged to spend our hard earned money and stay at their resort. The next day we were able to downgrade our room to a garden view which had a pleasant view of the ocean beyond the pool and garden. The manager refused to allow us any refund for the downgrade. We went from a horrible "ocean view"

room at \$240/ night to a much nicer (good water pressure and drainage) garden view room (from which we could see the ocean) for \$185/night. (Ph: 877-77SANDS or 649 946 5199; fax 649 946 5198; e-mail vacations@thesandsresort.com ; website www.thesandsresort.com)

Salt Cay

Reef Runners, Mt. Pleasant, January 2001, David Dori, Pasadena, MD. Vis: 30-75 ft. Water: 76-80 F. Dives logged: 360. Dive restrictions: 130 feet. Whales had not arrived yet. Weather was marginal but we only missed one dive due to rough waters. Tim and Jonathan Dunn made our stay very pleasant. Very relaxed, trusting atmosphere, locals very friendly. Grand Turk diving accessible during better weather. (**Reef Runners:** Ph: 649-946-6927; fax 649-946-6960; e-mail reefrunnersgh@aol.com; **Mt. Pleasant:** Ph: 649-946-6927; fax 649-946-6960; e-mail mtpleasantgh@aol.com; website www.mtpleasant.tc)

Salt Cay Divers, Tradewinds, November 2000, Joe Puglia, (jpuglia@aol.com) Orlando, FL. Vis: 60-90 ft. Water: 78 F, calm, flat and choppy. Logged dives: 250. Dive restrictions: 500 psi. Debbie and Ollie are great hosts! Only beach is on north end of island. Our resort, on the south end, was on the water with rocky shore. Everything was close, just a bike ride away. People were friendly and added a lot of fun to trip. Endymion was a great dive but a rough ride. Island is very laid back.

Porter served a great Thanksgiving dinner.

Salt Cay Divers, January 2001, Bill Schlegel, Jefferson City, MO. Just returned from a week in Salt Cay. Salt Cay Divers is a small operation. They have a “what do you want and when do you want it” attitude that makes the whole thing work. Debbie, along with divemasters Ollie, Lance and Carl work hard to give you a good vacation. Little restriction except to try to surface with 500 psi. Dive boats are Carolina 24' skiffs, fine for flat water. The diving is good as far as the reefs are concerned and very good as far as encountering large animals such as nurse sharks and turtles. Saw large turtle — very friendly. Lots of sting rays, eagle ray sand the usual reef players. Mid sized reef fish are somewhat less common Coral is in fair condition. The 1790 wreck of the 44 gun man-o-war, HMS Endymion, is the only wreck of its kind easily accessible to sport divers that I'm aware of. Humpback whales — only saw a few in the distance and was given conflicting stories about why they weren't around in numbers. It seems that either they were already past and already on the Silver Banks or that they hadn't arrived yet. Was told by several of the locals that the first week of February to the first of March is the peak for whale migration past the island. We were there in mid January, advertised as prime whale season. The accommodations on the island are “bed and breakfast” with several places (Tradewinds, Mt Pleasant, Smugglers Inn, Pirates

Hideaway, Sunset Reef) taking between 2 to 4 members of the group. The Mt Pleasant and Tradewinds are close to the dive operation, walking distance. Others are up to mile away, shuttles available. Food was quite good. The “boys” at Mt Pleasant were willing to put on a show almost every nite with live music. Jonathan is fairly good violinist and others entertainers were Jimmy Buffett style. Nice, friendly, accommodating feel overall. Grand Turk which is about 10 miles north and has impressive walls, as does Salt Cay itself. Biggest minus is that Nitrox is something that you can order but shouldn’t count on.

Salt Cay Divers, February 2001, Dan Schettles, St. Louis, MO. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: choppy. Dives logged: 300+. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. Salt Cay Divers is an excellent operation. Debby runs a well-organized business and she caters to the needs of her customers. Part of our group swam with humpback whales — quite an experience.

Salt Cay Divers, March 2001, Che & Stephanie Rudko, Montclair, NJ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F calm choppy surge no Currents. Very good dive operation. Debbie and Ollie warm and welcoming. Ollie, our primary divemaster, was relaxed, helpful, and professional. Conditions generally excellent, though recent storms had kicked up sand and compromised vis. Water colder than expected — bring a hood or extra

layers if you’re diving this time of year. Skiff rides to dive sites can be bumpy, windy, and wet — so bring a rain poncho and something to cushion your butt. Most sites are a very short ride, however. No currents, but some strong surge. Made no dives deeper than 80 feet — depth jocks can go deeper if they wish, but no point really. Fish life very good — usual Caribbean suspects. Some turtles, one great cruising eagle ray, couple of nurse sharks (other divers spotted a hammerhead), good assortment of odd-shaped swimmers. Coral healthy. Whale watching excursion: numerous humpbacks and were able to snorkel briefly near mother with calf, and two sets of juveniles. (Whale songs are audible on almost every dive!) Endymion wreck (a longer boat ride) very interesting (found a red-tipped sea goddess!), but beware of rampant fire coral. Day trip to Grand Turk wall was a highlight, reminiscent of Little Cayman. Stingray-feeding excursion to Gibb’s Cay a must (not a Grand Cayman tourist trap!). Also shallow dive at Point Pleasant yielded scrawled filefish to free-swimming octopus. Compass Rose (a private home), excellent. Has full kitchen, so bring and cook your own. Water conservation strictly observed. Blue Mermaid Café serves excellent breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but service gives new meaning to “island time.” Island Thyme restaurant is good, but more expensive — need reservation, as well. Enjoyed the island’s wild life blizzards, horses, chickens, cattle, cats, dogs, and donkeys (who provide daily wake-up calls).

Salt Cay Divers, Tradewinds, March 2001, Rob and Judy McDonald, Cambridge, MD. Vis: 50-100 ft.

Water: 70's F. Logged dives: 120 each. Dive restrictions enforced: 130, up with 500, not rigid. We were at Salt Cay to see the whales. Had several e-mails back and forth with Debbie and they had a lot of whales. This is not the optimum time (mid February is) and we saw no whales. It was a disappointment but with Debbie and Ollie the diving, as always, was great. If you want good diving, great for beginners as there are no currents (except maybe on the Endymion wreck), lots of rest and relaxation, good food and the accommodating people. Food is getting much, much better. Used to be mainly Mt. Pleasant but you must try Island Tyme and Blue Mermaid as they are excellent and owners go above and beyond to make sure you get what you want, Tradewinds was new and very comfortable, air conditioned, roomy, easy walk to dive shop, on a beach (lots of rocks and very shallow), great hammocks and Debbie will bring in anything you want to special order from special cookies to drinks, etc. Diving as always was good, lot of fish, nothing really big. There was a coating of sand on a lot of the coral from a storm that had gone through. One of the best dives was Mt. Pleasant Pt., very shallow but saw a lot including a big nurse shark, remnants of a wooden wreck, swim through to an area where you are surrounded by silver sides. Debbie and Ollie are an accommodating, friendly and knowledgeable couple.

Salt Cay Divers, Tradewinds, August 2001, Mike & Pam Bell, Robinson, IL. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy currents. The rooms were not luxurious, they were clean and nice. Food can be had at one of several restaurants; Island Thyme Bistro, (loved the lobster, conch chowder and rum cake, also the whelk soup); Pat's Place, (loved the cracked conch, & the fish w/tomatoes and onions; Teddy's (loved the cracked conch and the curried conch). We bought some of Miss Netty's home-made bread and had peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch. Everyone on Salt Cay is as friendly and helpful as can be. Most of the dive sites were pretty good and some were right up there with Bloody Bay Wall on Little Cayman. One day we saw a 12' hammerhead and the next we saw five blacktip sharks and a nurse shark with a huge turtle and lobster thrown in. Debbie, Ollie, Craig and Mike at Salt Cay Divers made this trip a very nice experience.

South Caicos

South Caicos Ocean Haven, November 2000, Chris Pflaum (pflaum@aol.com), Overland Park, KS. Vis: 80-100 Ft. Water: 81-83 F, calm. My fifth trip to South; I brought 18 divers. The hotel/dive operation is in its second year under Bob Musselwaite and has turned the corner after a tough first year. Bookings are up and the operation appears to be financially stable. In my opinion there is no better diving in the Caribbean than on the miles of virgin walls and

reefs of South Caicos. In our twenty odd dives over an eight day trip, we regularly encountered sharks, turtles, massive southern sting rays and schools (as many as 25 in a group) of eagle rays. There were also all the usual suspects of the smaller variety. Most of the diving is along the walls and fringing coral on the south side of the island and the walls are spectacular. The walls of Little Cayman pale in comparison to those of Shark Bay on South Caicos. Little Cayman is easy (walls start at 30 fsw) but the deep walls of South (start at 70 fsw and deeper) are simply the most kick-ass in the Caribbean. The coral is healthy and varied. Some walls are just layers of huge plate coral. There are gardens of finger coral and, on the East side, there are canyons of finger coral. There are also numerous other types of corals. The sponges at South are simply incredible. Seven and eight foot high barrel sponges are fairly common; five foot long purple and yellow tube sponges hang from the walls in tremendous numbers. Deep water gorgonians are stunning and black coral is abundant. Last year, Bob and I explored shark bay and found some lost dive sites that I remembered from previous visits. This year, we explored further and found the rest. South now has over 25 identified and mapped dive sites. There are also some unidentified sites for particularly advanced divers. The diving is from 23' Carolina skiffs. Backroll in, off gear and climb in on transom ladder on return. Most sites are a five to ten minute boat ride from the dock and the boat comes back to

the hotel between dives. We did dives at 8 a.m., 11 a.m., and 3 p.m. giving us plenty of off gas time to compensate for the relatively deep diving. The hotel is clean and the air conditioning works. There is no TV nor are there telephones in the rooms. It is simply clean, comfortable accommodation, not quite up to Motel 8 but adequate for hard-core divers. There is a pool but there is no beach. There are sea kayaks for exploring the mangroves and Long Key across the harbor. Food was very good and abundant. We had grouper, lobster (twice), pasta, chicken, goat and other good stuff for dinner. There was always a salad at both lunch and dinner. Lunch was typically cold cuts, salad and fruit. Breakfast was eggs, pancakes or French toast (and cereals) with plenty of fresh fruit. The hotel is a bargain. 7 night/six days of diving package is \$799 and extra dives are \$28 each. The package includes dbl occ room, all meals and two dives per day. The airfare to South from Providenciales is \$99. (Ph: (649) 946-3444; fax (649) 946-3446; e-mail divesouth@tcitway.tc; website www.oceanhaven.tc)

South Caicos Ocean Haven, June 2001, Walt and Angie Redmond, Austin, TX. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm. The Undercurrent article on South Caicos Ocean Haven in the May 2001 issue was right on target. The diving was superb. We saw Southern stingrays on almost every dive, lots of fish, occasional turtles, eels and sharks. A real highlight was seeing 16 eagle rays at one time. Our favorite

dive sites were the Arch, the Plane, Spanish Chain and the Grotto. Accommodations were basic but clean. We enjoyed the salt water pool. The food was good, three meals a day were included. The kitchen tried to oblige special dietary needs, especially those they knew about in advance. Two small well-stocked grocery stores are on the island where you can buy snacks and necessities. Beer is available at the resort but if you want wine, bring it with you as the resort and the island have a very limited selection. As usual, once you start drinking, there is no more diving for the day. Bring your walking shoes and explore the island. Friendly locals, try a meal at Mama Love's or a beer at Eastern Inn. Watch out for the free roaming horses, cattle and pigs! Dive shop has rinse tank, no facilities on dive boats but trips to dive sites are short. No E-6 processing. No tables provided for cameras. Cameras easily taken care of in room.

**South Caicos Ocean Haven,
July 2001, Stanley Cohen
(stanleycohen@hotmail.com)
Dollard-Des-Ormeaux, Quebec.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm no currents. Arriving on the Island of South Caicos and wending my way to the lodge was a triumphant battle against free ranging sows, piglets, horses, dogs, and goats a virtual natural petting zoo. Greeted by about twenty buff divers I immediately jumped into the pool after being greeted by the affable owners Bob and Diane who were right in the spirit of

things. Throwing caution and clothes to the wind I had a jolly time until the divers left the next day. However, having come for the serious diving I wore a 5 mm wetsuit at least while diving as I did three dives a day — one more than those offered each day (\$28 per extra dive). The wall diving was dramatic with "The Cone" being the best and deepest. Ben, the dive-master, had no problem going deep and made good suggestions on nitrogen and time management. The corals were in the best condition that I have seen in a while, with actual blue sea fans. Spadefish, eels, turtles, spotted eagle rays, Caribbean reef sharks, it is all there, as well as the small stuff — groupers being cleaned, 2 inch file Fish, all the tropicals. Bob has a new V hull, the other boats are flat bottomed with 75 horsepower Yamahas — a bit bumpy in the high waves. Sites are just a few minutes away. There is no camera rinse bucket or fresh water on the boats. The accommodations are simple but clean, good filling food with chicken, some Fish, veggies, salad, fruit, great deserts, honor bar, all good. Air conditioning, if you need it works well. The island is a treasure with secluded powder white beaches a twenty minute walk, see the flamingos, visit the research school next door at the old Admiral Arms Inn, it is a small village center but there are cars and cell phones but to what purpose I can't fathom as everyone knows everyone else and their business — there are no secrets here. Terrific trip at excellent value.