

This was our 8<sup>th</sup> live-aboard. Some bunks are too short. Crew was very accommodating to accompany new divers. Diving at five fixed times per day, several lost and broken moorings resulted in too many repeat sites. I made 22 dives, including 5 night dives. Could have made 26. Sarah at the Texas booking office is great. Trip preparation material and Website are very good. Lunches and dinners were very good. Larger, hot breakfasts every day would be nice. Saba not as good as 1989 on the shallower sites due to sand/silt. Boat is well-worn but very clean throughout. Land tours on Saba, St. Kitts, and Statia very reasonable and led by colorful locals.

### TURKS & CAICOS

**Aggressor IV, July 2000, Preston Westmoreland, Carefree, AZ.** Vis: 25-80 ft. Water: 80-81 F. Our first live-aboard trip. Enjoyed diving on West Caicos and French Cay. Good coral and especially lush around French Cay, although viz dropped to 50 ft. Reef fairly deep (50 ft.) on all dives. One woman got bent after three days and had to be evacuated to Providenciales. Sea flat, little current, except around French Cay. Make sure you get cabin assignment in writing. We booked early to get a large cabin, and got switched into the smallest at the last minute. The ship's cook was on vacation the week add we thought the food could have been better. Saw one nurse shark, jacks, but reefs fairly light in sea life. (Ph: 800-348-2628 or 985-385-2628; fax 985-384-0817; e-mail [info@aggressor.com](mailto:info@aggressor.com); website [www.aggressor.com](http://www.aggressor.com))

**Aggressor IV, Nov. 2000, Ian T. Ogden ([iogden@home.com](mailto:iogden@home.com)) Abbotsford, BC.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F. Crew the friendliest. The boat owner (captain) and his wife were the best, very personable. Piers is a great photographer and offered limited advice. Heated towels after every dive. Food was plentiful and good. Wine with every dinner, available to people doing night dives which I don't agree with. Room number one is next to the generator area — we couldn't sleep some nights due to the noise. Staterooms are quite small for 2 persons, upper bunk is a good storage area. Annette showed me how to edit video. We visited sites that are seldom dived, the sea was like glass. Took boat excursions to islands and to French Cay. Crew took photos of passengers and did a slide show then gave the photos to everyone. Lots of sharks on most dives. Scooters and rebreathers for rent. A first class operation with conscientious crew! Large camera table and rinse tanks. Rentals of housed Nikon cameras.

**Aggressor IV, June 2001, D. Demming ([Demmingfsc@aol.com](mailto:Demmingfsc@aol.com)) Hudson, OH.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 125 to 150 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm no currents. Efficient well run boat. Capt. Piers is outstanding. Food was OK. Diving is very diverse with sharks on almost every dive as well as hammerheads and eagle rays. Dive profiles were deep and we fully

utilized the benefits of Nitrox to complete 5 long bottom time dives/day. French Cay has some of the most pristine reefs in the Caribbean.

**Aggressor IV, July 2001, Tony Falso (tfalso1@tampabay.rr.com) Palm Harbor, FL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy. Great boat and crew. Capt. Piers and his crew went out of their way to accommodate everyone. Diving was first class with numerous reef sharks at French Cay. Eagle rays, turtles and a pod of spotted dolphins. Loosely enforced diving limits — they treated us like adults. Good food and clean accommodations. French Cay was spectacular — particularly the reef sharks, of which there were many in very close range. Moderate currents and good viz. Nice camera table and rinse tank, daily E-6 processing, slide shows, video production, photo pro on board.

**Sea Dancer, October 2000. Ray Mars, Scaggsville, MD.** Twenty-four dives, 3 night dives, during a great week aboard the Sea Dancer. Temperatures top side hit 95 or so, unseasonably warm. Water consistently ran 85 degrees at 60 feet. Visibility 50-70 feet with varying degrees of suspended matter. First live-aboard trip for myself and non-diver wife. Food was outstanding and plentiful. Stanley, cook, has 14 years on this boat and ran a tight kitchen. Excellent selections. Post-dive snacks and munchies always out. Captain Ian and crew were friendly, professional and fun. Crew shot good slides and video of everyone on trip. Slides were

free and video ran \$60. Accommodations were tight — leave the hard suitcases at home and pack light. I only needed 2 swimsuits, 3-4 T shirts/tank tops and clothes for return trip home. We went barefoot all week. Shower on the dive deck and towels after each dive. Bedrooms/berths well air conditioned in contrast to dining and general seating area. There was a TV, VCR, CD/tape player and slide projector. (Bring your own CDS unless you have wide music appreciation.) E6 film processing. Divers on this trip all had print film and didn't use boat services. Boat easily handled 17 divers. More would have been crowded on dive deck. Gear station for each dives and used same tank all week. Nitrox/air fills via whips usually 2800-3000. Amount of diving made up for the few low fills and pushed nitrogen limits anyway. Rinse tanks for wetsuits (used lycraskin most of the time and added 3mm shorty for night dives), tank for gear, tank for cameras and separate buckets for masks. Large central table dedicated for UW photo equipment. Several divers brought their own tracker devices and boat had no problem hanging them over the side. We had coffee brought to the room at 0630 and breakfast at 0700. Dives at 0830, 1100, 1400, 1700 and 2000. Lunch was usually at 1230 and dinner 1830. Wine with dinner if not going the night dive. Were off the tables after the first dive and impossible to track if doing more than 2 or 3 dives a day without computer. I sat out several dives. First dive of the am and PM were usually over walls (bottom off

the walls at 7000 feet), shallower 2nd, 4th and night dive although you could dive a wall on almost every dive. Most of my dives were 40-50 minutes, 5 minute safety stop and got to hang bar with 500 lbs. One slip at Highway to Heaven and my computer flashed deco dive after dip to 123 feet. I ended up on that dive with a lot of time at 40 feet. Crew treated everyone like adult, responsible divers and no checking of depth or air remaining after you got on board. One of crew usually dove if you wanted a guided dive. Daily dive briefings were good and usually encouraged depth limit to 100 to 110 feet. I had several dives in the 120 foot range and one to 145. Nurse and/or reef sharks on every dive. Many eagle ray sightings, southern stingray, green moray, snappers, grouper, Atlantic spadefish, cero and rainbow runners. Night dives were filled with squirrel fish and cardinal fish. Wide variety of hard and soft corals and many black corals on the walls. Huge barrel sponges but few elephant ear sponges as written up in some of the dive articles. Crew said most had died. Recompression chamber in Provo. They treat 25-35 divers a year, about half from the Live-aboards. Physicians there attributed many problems to fast ascents during the last 20 feet of the dive. Not happy with PH Office folks: I had a hard time getting payments "done" due to office people losing at least two faxed payments and one person saying they could take the charge over the phone which is against Hughes policy. Despite verbal statements and our clear instructions when we made flight arrangements for

the trip, the PH person had us returning to a different airport than our departure airport. When they made the change, after we noticed the screw-up, they hit us with a \$75 per ticket charge. PH representative said they'd refund the \$150 to me, after I complained about their error. Boat folks were much more responsible and responsive and made trip great. Tipping was mentioned at the beginning and again at the end. They pass out envelopes on the last day to everyone and PH has guidelines written on the envelope for tipping. Ten percent was recommended and the boat crew earned every bit of it. I never felt any pressure to tip. (Ph: **800-932-6237 or 305-669-9391; fax 305-669-9475; e-mail [dancer@peterhughes.com](mailto:dancer@peterhughes.com); website [www.peterhughes.com](http://www.peterhughes.com)**)

***Sea Dancer, January 2001, Joseph Chudacoff, Redondo Beach, CA.***

Vis: 50-110 ft. Water: 78-82 f. Logged dives: 1500+. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. max., 500 lbs. back on board. The Sea Dancer was a great boat with a great crew and excellent food. I have been on five of the Dancers, four of the Aggressors, LCD II, Nekton Diver, Matagi Princess and most of them as repeats. Peter Hughes "Dancers" are consistently the most professionally run live-aboards. The crew was outstanding and Jeff went out of his way to fix/repair whatever was needed, including guests problems, i.e. zippers, valves, regulators, etc. Stanley (Chef) continues to produce quality meals, often under adverse conditions.

***Sea Dancer, February 2001, Bradley Wm. Bowen, Farmington, UT.***

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 150 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm. Light winds and overcast skies the first two days, and the boat did rock a bit. 26 dives were possible, but I only got in 23 as I don't dive on Sunday. I mentioned to the captain, Ian, that I would probably wake up early on Monday, not be able to go back to sleep and would want to dive. He said it was fine, and to just wake a member of the crew as a crew member had to be on the dive deck whenever someone was in the water. I awoke a little before 5:00 a.m., suited up and knocked on Ian's door. Thirty seconds later he was on the dive deck and I was in the water looking at a 7-8 foot long nurse shark, 3' black jacks, large schools of bar jack and yellow snapper and two circling reef sharks. The crew made it clear that we were certified divers, were responsible for ourselves, and that they were not the "diving police." The crew emphasized safety but allowed experienced divers to make their own choices. Was able to dive alone. Were told: "Don't go any deeper than the bottom and come up before your air runs out." My dives averaged an hour and I was always doing a safety stop by the time my air hit 500 psi. I wore my 3 mil on the early morning dive and 2 night dives when the wind was blowing and I felt a bit of a chill. I wore my polar fleece dive skin on all other 20 dives and was never chilled. I did wear a polar fleece hood on every dive. The boat holds 18 passengers and we had 17 on our trip. Take a warm pullover, sweat shirt or

jacket for between dives and evenings. All divers except for one couple were very experienced divers. 3 of us were diving Nitrox for the first half of the trip, but 5 others got Nitrox certified. Everyone was considerate of the other guests. Age range was 40 to late 60's. Walls generally start around 50 feet. Most of the dives had slight to moderate current. Underwater navigation skills are essential, although the dive masters were willing to lead dives. Only 4 to 6 of us did the night dives. Though we only saw a few moon jelly Fish, Jeff (the dive master) had a sea wasp on his wetsuit after exiting one of the night dives. Much of the diving was spectacular and pristine. Both French Cay and West Sand Spit were high profile reefs with huge barrel sponges, lots of large gorgonians and the largest stands of pillar coral I have seen. We had a couple of reef sharks on several dives, an occasional nurse shark and sporadic spotted eagle rays before reaching French Cay. At French Cay we had six reef sharks making close passes to divers, huge schools of horse eye jacks, yellowtail snapper, bar jack, Creole fish, and boga. Had an eagle ray almost run into us at French Cay. Had a bonnetmouth approach to within 2 inch of my dive light. Lots of fairy basslets, bicolor damsel Fish, porgy's, cero, various snapper, Nassau grouper, hundreds of garden eels, various bass and barracuda, including many large barracuda down to schools of 20 or so 8" barracuda. Observed an octopus feeding with a Nassau grouper and a goldentail moray feeding with a grouper and bass Saw a

school of 40 Atlantic spade fish, a turtle, one wahoo, a 10 foot hammer-head shark. Saw humpback whales, a pilot whale and dolphins from the boat. Some dives were exploratory. Some very good, but a couple were on very low profile reefs that looked to have suffered damage, had a significant amount of algae growth. The boat was renovated in mid-1999. Although the staterooms are still potential "freezers," the crew was quick to place duct tape over the vents. The vents should be "closeable" so that it's not an "all or nothing" choice on air conditioning; the hot chocolate supply was completely exhausted by the second day; the boxed milk did not taste very good; we had requested lots of juices as we don't drink alcohol or carbonated beverages, and we quickly tired of orange, grapefruit and apple juice; there were only two salad dressing choices, Thousand Island and a vinaigrette, neither of which I cared for; and the between dive snacks could have been better. Kool Aid was provided with several lunches and disappeared rather quickly. We were served filet mignon twice, which was done very well. Menu choices included duck (absolutely outstanding), chicken, roast beef, and Fish. Desserts were very good, and I think many of us would have liked a second helping. Lunches consisted of two salad choices with barbecue ribs, burgers, sandwich meats or meat loaf. The first couple of days the lunch food was too spicy. A "five star lunch" was jumbo fried shrimp which was done perfectly. The ribs were excellent. Other lunches were only average fruit,

eggs, ham, English muffins, bagels and cereal were always available for breakfast, with French toast and pancakes being offered on a couple of days. Muffins (many times), mini-pizza's (once), chips with avocado/bean dip (once), freshly baked cookies (once) and hot wings/drum sticks (once) made up the "prepared" between dive snacks. A large container was always filled with Chips Ahoy cookies; three separate containers contained Cheetos, peanuts, and another chip selection; and a fruit basket was always available. There was time for reading books, naps and sunbathing in between dives. This crew was enthusiastic and friendly, always eager to please. Jeff and Roxy did a great job with photo's and video, and everyone was always asking if they could "get us anything." They were quick to fix minor equipment and camera problems, with never any thought or indication that there would be any kind of cost associated.

***Sea Dancer, June 2001, Sherwin Isenberg, MD, Los Angeles, CA.*** Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 80-83 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 400. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. Good: Excellent service. The crew went out of their way to go to French Cay where the diving was superb. Great walls, sharks. Bad weather made us turn back after one day. Cook was great. hey could have used one more crew member in the water, but those there did well. The boat has been extensively remodeled and is in excellent shape.

***Sea Dancer, July 2001, Cathi Sumner (dive@terraworld.net)***

**Fredonia, KS.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 F, calm. Diving from the boat was a breeze. Got to French Caye for 2 or 3 dives each at all 4 moorings there. The reef is in excellent condition with only a slight current on each dive and more on some others. We even got to go to West Sand Spit. The crew were excellent and friendly and humorous and good-natured. Stan's cooking was superb. The sharks were many and photo opportunities abounded.

**Sea Dancer, July 2001, Roger C.Dennis and Ruth Rouse** (rcdennis@worldnet.att.net) **San Jose, CA.** Four tanks during the day and a night dive after dinner. A dolphin joined us on one dive on French Cay. We had to be careful when jumping in so as to not jump on top of a shark swimming by near the ladders. Most of the dive sites being used have moorings. For reef diving/wall diving both areas tended to stretch us as the reef was usually 40-50 feet below the boats. We were forced back to the surface by our computers showing us we were at the end of the "green" area, not because of being low on air. Most of the time we were back aboard with 800-1000 lbs of air. Not much to do or see hanging around the 20-30 ft levels.

**Sea Dancer, July 2001, Michael and Nancy Marmesh** (memarmesh@aol.com) **Miami, FL.** Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82-85 F, choppy. Logged dives: about 220. Dive restrictions: Only those required for using Nitrox — I did 6 solo dives (including 2 night) out of 25. We read

your article on live-aboard diving and still over packed. Sea Dancer is the oldest boat in the Hughes fleet. Refitted within the last 2 years, she is in good shape. Nitrox tanks are differentiated only by a green dust cap — regular air has blue caps and on one fill both my wife's and my tank was filled with air. Use the O2 Analyzer. 4-1/2 of the diving days to be spent at West Caicos and French Cay. Saw 2 to 4 reef sharks on most dives here, also nurses. Lots of large grouper, also octopi, channel crabs and spotted eagle rays. On a solo dive, I had a dolphin check me out complete with circling and nose stands. The captain said it was too far from Grace Bay to be JoJo. The corals were in excellent shape. Saw a blue finger coral I hadn't seen anywhere else in Caribbean. On the wall north of the "chimney" on Provo, there is a 100 ft. wide u-shaped indentation. It looks like an awesome china shop at 110 ft. — plate coral stacked from 120 ft. to the top of the wall (from the top it doesn't look the same). Stanley, the cook, has been with the boat for 10 years and does an impressive job. Catch Jeff, the photo pro, perform his rock and roll sing-along at the Banana Boat during the last night in port.

**Wind Dancer, July 2000, David C. Johnston, St. Paul, MN.** Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Peter Hughes \$500/diver first time discount. Five dives available/day. Miami airport closed during thunderstorms which happens every afternoon in summer. We lost 1 day in Miami — fortunately I purchased travel insurance. Peter

Hughes crew was fabulous — first cabin!

**Wind Dancer, September 2000, William and Frances Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol.com) Santa Ana, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 90 Feet. Water: 83 to 83 F. 110 foot length, 28 foot beam boat. It looks like the Andrea Gale, only bigger. Nice interior, though. Cabins small, but okay with small porthole. Cabin Three — where we bunked — below deck. Food excellent with Tony the cook and Franklin the Steward working hard. Sometimes snacks were short. Alcohol is part of the package and always available but “first drink is last dive,” as it should be. Concrete-covered dive deck with twin ladders. Two warm, fresh water showers. Nitrox was available if you were certified. Crew seemed a little burned-out but “Karen” one of the DM’s saved my marriage. My wife had just given me a Suunto Spyder computer and the band broke on a night dive on a patch reef with the boat swinging in a 180 arc from the mooring point. Karen, who was not scheduled to go into the water, donned her gear and somehow recovered that watch! I would have kissed her toes — or any other part of her anatomy she requested — for that effort. Michael-Ann (a female) was the skipper. She was the photo-pro when we dived on the Sea Dancer a couple years back. She did a good job. Grand Turk is in a marine park so no gloves allowed. The diving was average by Caribbean standards but after a couple of days, the area looked all the same. Made

three dives on Long Cay on South Caicos and one on Salt Cay. Rough weather and water conditions precluded staying longer, but I saw not that much compelling reason to stay anyway. On Grand Turk, the WD patrolled up and down the Lee side within site of the dock for the most part. Not a single dive was made that couldn’t have been done from shore. Dove “The Library,” which was supposed to be “the best night dive in the Caribbean.” I must have taken a wrong turn to that event. I would describe the diving as nice and pleasant with negligible currents. Not too much of an adrenaline rush, but you have to keep Caribbean diving in perspective, I suppose. Ate in town the last night. Pricey and the mosquitoes were formed into organized squadrons. Raw sewage runs down a small ditch on the side of the road which is something you don’t see everyday in Topeka. Diving, you see the usual tropicals and an occasional pelagic but for the most part this is a long way to come (and the total air package is hellaciously expensive when you live in California) to come for Florida Keys diving. You fly into Providenciales and take a puddle jumper to Grand Turk (a 40 minute flight). Over limits baggage never seemed to be a concern and we were definitely over limits. Peter Hughes runs a good operation for the most part and we’ve been on most of his boats (except Galapagos and Venezuela). This one is okay, but some of the others have been better.

**Wind Dancer, May 2001, Bethany Kolb (bethanykolb@earthlink.net)**

**Albuquerque, NM.** Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 250+. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. South Caicos diving delivers squadrons of eagle rays. Overall number of fish seemed low. Nice relaxing dive — not supercharged but solid on the Carib scale.

**Wind Dancer, May 2001, John Slattery (jamslats@aol.com) Palm Coast, FL.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm. Great boat — large and spacious. This was our 5th trip on this boat (once as the Truk Aggressor and four times as the Wind Dancer.) The dive deck can get a tight if everyone decides to dive at the same time. Had very good weather and were able to make the crossing to South Caicos and dive without the tenders. Large, multilevel camera table with charging station. Separate rinse tank.

**Wind Dancer, June 2001, Sharon Bormann (sharonbormann@yahoo.com) Shingle Springs, CA.** Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F, calm and flat. Dive restrictions: less than 130 ft. Typical Caribbean diving with the usual outstanding Peter Hughes accommodations. Calm waters, lots of critters.

**Wind Dancer, July 2001, Vlad Pilar (pilarvl@netcom.ca) Toronto, ON.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. A typical well-run, efficient Peter Hughes operation. All staff were knowledgeable, pleasant and friendly. The boat was comfortable, the cabins reasonable size for a dive boat and everything worked! Diving some of

the best in the Caribbean. Lots of critters small and large; lots of fish. No pelagics, no sharks (a number of nurse sharks). Most dives were wall dives with coral on top of the wall. The skipper tried to get to South Caicos but high winds intervened.

**Wind Dancer, July 2001, Alan & 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. Prototypical Hughes live-aboard with better than average food. The cabins were postage stamp size. The food was exceptional and the crew couldn't have done more. One day at South Caicos; no eagle rays at Eagle Ray Wall, and the viz was not nearly as good as it was at Grand Turk. Salt Cay diving better than South Caicos where we saw a good sized hammerhead! The diving off Grand Turk is nice, easy, with no current. Corals are healthy and the usual constituency of reef fish make the diving enjoyable but not electrifying.

**Wind Dancer, July 2001, Robin Humphrey, Crystal River, FL.** Vis: 80 ft. Water: 86 F. The Wind Dancer is okay, but ready for a good interior refurbishing. Mildew and moisture take over most olfactory senses below decks, but accommodations were Peter Hughes fine. Meals were good and plentiful, although the edible beef is often questionable. Captain Lochlin, Humberto Valle, Tony the cook and the rest of the crew did their best to please their customers. I would caution Peter Hughes on his selection of crew members based solely on their low labor rates. Although willing



and of a sweet and accommodating temperament, the folks from socioeconomic areas that do not even approach having the amenities we take for granted, have a difficult time relating to our idea of customer comfort. A lot more training is required on even basic tasks like making a bed and not picking up dirty dishes as a main priority when guests are eating. This should not be on the job training. The diving was very comfortable and safe. Weather was very kind, visibility a good 80 feet on most dives. Fauna was varied but not abundant. No big critters except for a pod of dolphins, giving some excited divers, turned snorkelers, a rare opportunity of about ten minutes to observe the pod within just a few feet. Threatening weather kept us away from South Caicos, and we missed the main reason for picking this dive venue. I think that the powers to be must provide more varied dive spots or moorings, as we dove some sites more than once because of the inability to go to South Caicos. Crew turnover meant their knowledge of the individual dive sites is limited in comparison with their shore based brethren, who live there year around. I use the Transderm Scop patch to reduce the risk of seasickness. Tends to fall off after a dive or during the post dive shower. Although not very classy, covering the patch with a small piece of duct tape, keeps it on as long as necessary.

**Wind Dancer, August 2001, Bob Lamberton**  
(rdlamber@artsci.wustl.edu) **St. Louis, MO.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82

to 86 F, choppy. Picked up a last-minute cabin, heavily discounted, on this trip that has been criticized in the Chapbook for lack of variety. Peter Hughes has responded to that criticism and added tenders that permit diving more sites at South Caicos. We had perfect August weather and were able to dive the Grand Turk Wall as well as Salt Cay and South Caicos — plenty of variety, and some of the best wall diving in the Caribbean (especially South Caicos, with Reef Sharks on most of our 6 dives). Our sixth live-aboard trip, first with Peter Hughes, and we were impressed. We've generally opted for more adventure and less luxury (the Fling, two Red Sea boats) but we enjoyed being spoiled. Tony the chef is a genius. Every meal was outstanding and carefully thought out, and not overly rich. Burning up calories at the rate consumed by 4 to 5 dives a day, I have little restraint at meals, but I didn't gain an ounce. Dive supervision is available, and briefings exemplary, but experienced divers are left to do as they please by a highly professional staff.

## UNITED STATES Texas

### Flower Garden Banks

**MV Fling, July 2000, Jimmy Payne**  
(payne@worldnetfla.net) **Fort Polk, LA.** Vis: 70-80 ft. Water: 82-83 F. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. depth limit. Great operation for power diving, 7 dives on 2 day trip. Accommodations aren't the Ritz, but more than adequate for the purpose of the trip. Excellent divemasters and crew. Stresses safety