

UNITED STATES

Florida

Crystal River

Air Tank Divers, February 2001, Gina Wright, Citrus Springs, FL.

Manatee tour with Capt. Don Robertson. He fit us all with wet suits and snorkel gear then showed us a state mandated video. He reminded me of Crocodile Dundee. We went through an eerie narrow canal like the swamps of Louisiana and pointed out all kinds of wildlife. The canal opened up to big hole with manatees playing around. The vis was wonderful and the water temp was 72 degrees. The manatees actually nudged us to pet them. At one point I had one on either side of me that I was petting and what I thought was a big rock underneath me was a 2 ton manatee named of "Miss Kissypoo." Capt. Don got in the water and taped our experience. He only does 6 people and he let us stay in the water as long as we wanted. Tons off schooling fish due to the warm water in the spring — mullet, reds, jacks, sheepshead, and turtles. You can only see the manatees in the cooler months. We also did a drift dive down the Rainbow River and that was great too. My bubbles hit the belly of a surfaced alligator, that was cool. Air Tank Divers at (352)628-6151 or (352)212-8721. His web is www.manateetours.net. (Ph: (352) 564-2528; website www.manateetours.net)

Destin

Scubatech, Holiday Inn, May 2001, Rick Dekreek, Nashville, TN. Vis:

40-50 ft. Water: 70-75 F. Diving restrictions: 500 psi. Logged dives: 34. Nancy (owner) and her entire crew were the friendliest and most helpful we've encountered yet. (Ph: 850-837-2822; fax 850-654-5755; website www.scubatechnwfl.com)

Fort Lauderdale and Miami

**Coral Island Charters, April 2001,
Rob Dobie (rdobie2082@aol.com)
Charlotte, NC.** Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 77-80 F, calm and flat. Dives logged: 36. Dive restrictions: time limit for each air and nitro. Coral Island Divers was fantastic. They were very helpful and their pre-dive information was great. Since all dives were drift dives the divemasters pointed out a great deal of sea life. (Ph: (888) (889-3483); e-mail emailus@coralislandcharters.com; website www.coralislandcharters.com)

**Dive Charters Intl., January 2001,
Keith A. Trimels (trimbus@asus.net)
Cheyenne, WY.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 F, choppy currents. I have been diving with DCI for 5 years, Capt. Leo and Capt. Doug are good and let divers with computers dive their own profile/times. No computer — 60 minutes down, 60 minutes surface interval, 60 minutes down. Two newer boats about 16 person capacity each, marine head, dry storage area. Pretzels, water and sodas provided — ice chest provided for your own drinks. The diving is drift diving in the Gulf Stream north of Ft. Lauderdale. Couple of artificial reefs (wrecks) Divers set up equipment, although DM can help new divers. Group diving (2-4) with no

DM guide. Very good lobster hunting and fair spear fishing. Majority vote of divers generally determines dive locations. Freedom to use your gas and computer to maximum advantage. Company motto — 2 show, we go means few canceled dives. Rental equipment, about \$75/2-tank air, \$80/2-tank Nitrox. Morning and afternoon dives, night dives on request. Both boats have freshwater rinse for photo/lighting equipment. Several dive/photo shops within a short drive. (Ph: **888-340-DIVE or 561-734-3818**; e-mail dc@deeper-dci.com; website www.deeper-dci.com)

Dry Martini, Divers Unlimited, Wyndham Resort and Spa, July 2001, Morten Winckler, Atlanta, GA. Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, choppy currents. Wyndham Resort and Spa is west of Ft. Lauderdale, a 15 minutes drive to Seafair Marina. Had booked via expedia.com and got \$80/weekend and \$60/weekday for 4 persons in same room (weekend before 4th July holiday). Nice and new resort, which pools, spa, adjacent golf courses, thus something for couples/groups with non-divers. Had booked diving the day before over the phone. None of the two operators had opening for both AM and PM, but Dry Martini could take us AM and Divers Unlimited for PM and they docked next to each other at Seafair Marine. Dry Martini captain had accepted far too many guests, beyond comfort. Had 18 divers, incl. 6 kids and group of students, plus a few snorkelers and non diving parents. 12 divers should

have been max. Not all divers could sit down and gear up at the same time and we had to go down in smaller groups, interrupted by 12-14 year old kids, who were falling down on the deck with equipment on, due to rough sea. In the water, the captain turned on the music of the underwater speakers, enabling divers to dive to music. This underwater PA came in handy, as we heard captain yell over the speakers: “Hector (divemaster diving on the wreck) we just lost a tank off the boat — will you please pick it up from the bottom.” One of the full tanks on boat had jumped out of the rack, bounced on the deck and dropped in the water at the back of the boat where divers re-enter. When we went up the anchor line, we met Hector with the ‘rebellious’ tank. We enjoyed the wreck of Hogheaven, which was a capsized barge and adjacent steel structure. Depth was 70' and viz not much more than 30' at the best. Safe to penetrate the barge and there was lots of big barracudas and big spadefish standing at the steel structure and over the barge. With the fear of more tanks flying overboard we re-entered the boat and joined the rest of the divers pushing and showing to get to their equipment and change tanks, while the young, female divemaster went to the front of the boat to rest after having partied too much the night before. 2nd dive was shallow off Ft. Lauderdale, which was nothing to write home about. The underwater music made it difficult to decide whether we should stay down on 30' with bad viz or join the crowd on top, with kids that had now joined the female divemaster and

gotten sick (though more likely from the rough sea). Divemaster Hector was very professional and helpful. Although the boat was old, it did seem to be safe, had oxy-box, plenty of life vests and all other required safety equipment. Divers Unlimited: just before leaving the pier, a female diver started argument with divemaster Liza, apparently over pricing, as being local. She left the boat, while verbally abusing Liza, but just to return right behind her. Then a wrestling fight broke out and ended with the 2 women in the water and was only stopped by policeman that happened to be at the marina. We got off the marina with delay of about 1 hour, after police report had been filed and Liza was now down on normal level with adrenaline. It served as a good icebreaker and inspiration of jokes among the different groups of divers that did not know each other. The boat, long and wide, with plenty of space for the 10 divers, incl. one guy with spear gun, underwater scooter and big plastic box for gear. Doug left it to the guests to agree on which wreck we wanted and we ended up with the Rebel, based on comment from local, who said this was better than Mercedes. He was right. 150' freighter, sitting upright in 110' of water and could be safely penetrated. viz up to 50'. 2nd dive was 'drift' dive, however not that thrilling. Basically no drift in the 60-70' of water we were dropped on and hardly anything to see as too deep. Ft. Lauderdale is not as good as Palm Beach or the Keys. (Ph: (954) 942-7333)

Divers Unlimited, Biscayne National UW Park, August 2001, Brad (breyn@texas.net) Austin, TX.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Water: 84 to 88 F, calm currents. With exception of "The Wall," sites are patch reef in 20-25 fsw. Reefs in ok condition considering hurricane damage in 1992. Visibility at the shallow sites was only 30-35 feet. Less fishy than comparable reefs in the keys. The misnamed dive operator, Divers Unlimited, is the sole concessionaire for Biscayne UW National Park. Dive trips conducted only on weekends, morning and afternoon 2 tank trips. The shallow sites are comparable to those in the upper and middle keys, and dives to these with this operator are not a good value (40 minute dive time). The Wall is a Gulf Stream drift dive along a steeply-to-moderately sloped coral wall that drops from 70 to 105 fsw; visibility was 60-70 ft and current about 4 knots; shoal of 1000 small fish (herrings or anchovies or silversides) on wall lip, several ceros, also a few little tunnies. Reservations required (305-230- 100). Dive here when The Wall is scheduled; otherwise skip it. (Ph: (888) 232-7234 or (305) 230-1100; fax (954) 430-2757; e-mail dvrsumlm@bellsouth.net; website www.diversunlimited.com)

Under Pressure, April 2001, Jim Brown (scubadaze@yahoo.com)

Greenville, SC. Vis: 40-75 ft. Water: 77-80 F, choppy. Dives logged: 200+. Dive restrictions: buddy diving. Cleanest, on-time, best laid out for up to 6 people 6-pack in South Florida.

Every facet of the operation is highly professional. Safety and ability is noted by Randy first and foremost. Listen to him the first time and your dive will go much better! Florida Keys.

The Keys

Cudjoe Key

Florida Keys Reef Divers, April 2001, Ivo Meisner (imschamp@aol.com) Edgartown, MA. Vis: 20-60 ft.

Water: 77 F. Dives logged: 31. Dive restrictions: 500 psi on exit. Good: the attention and concern of Captain Jim Wyatt and his wife Gwen who really tried hard to make the best of adverse circumstances. Nice apartment at marina/dive base. On one off day gave us boat tour of Keys "back country" with a nice picnic. Bad: The wind, which blew for the whole week, made the diving difficult; in 5 days we only managed diving, on two days two dives each; Looe Key very shallow (20-30 feet), strong surge; Adolphus Busch wreck excellent diving, but not for the faint of heart that day. Jim Wyatt (master instructor) got me certified in Nitrox and underwater videography. Jim led on the wreck dives and let me breathe from his octopus during ascent to increase time; all dives were on Nitrox 32. (Ph: 877-886-6621 or 305-515-2750; e-mail info@reef-divers.com; website reef-divers.com)

Duck Key

Tilden's Dive Center, Hawk's Cay Resort, May 2000, Chat Watts, PADI master Scuba Diver, Tucson,

AZ. Water: 79 F. A large, upscale (expensive) establishment on Duck Key, close to Marathon Key. The accommodations, ranging from single rooms to villas, are excellent as are the two restaurants on the property. In addition to a salt water swimming lagoon, there are two swimming pools, one pool for adults only. Tennis courts, a gymnasium, a sailing school and a marina where slips for private yachts and boats can be chartered for fishing. Dolphin encounter where guests can interact closely with one of several research dolphins resident in the lagoon. Tilden's Dive Center is first class (305-289-4931. Reservations for Hawke's Cay can be made at 800-432-2242). The dive shop is compact and efficient with a full line of gear for rent. The boat is immaculate, well maintained. There is ample space, part of it shaded, but no camera table. Fresh water shower, ice water and soft drinks are provided. The crew is most attentive. No matter when or where we surfaced after a dive, there was someone on the boat making eye contact and awaiting our OK signal. Captain Pete was accompanied by divemasters Amy or Randy. All three are NAUI-certified instructors. Essentially no restrictions except that on shallow dives we were requested to return after about 50 minutes so there would be time to visit another site. Shallow dives (20 to 30 feet) are scattered around Coffin's patch reef, including the scattered remains of the wreck Adelaide Baker. Deeper dives are at the Gap, at the reef's edge, and for experienced divers Tilden's offers tours of the Thunderbolt, a cable layer

sent down as an artificial reef in 1986 that now sits upright at 120 feet. It was easy to see the full length of the Adelaide Baker's 77-foot mast. At some of the sites there was a modest current. Abundance of the usual reef fish, sometimes in large schools. Moderate-sized turtle and several four-to-five-foot nurse sharks. The reefs were in generally good condition, with live hard corals, tube sponges and gorgonians in great profusion. (Ph: 877-Fun-Dive or 305-289-4931; fax 305-289-4932; e-mail contact@tildensscubacenter.com; website www.tildensscubacenter.com)

Islamorada

Bud n' Mary's, June 2001, Paul Garde (ttaxusii@aol.com) Indianapolis, IN. Vis: 35 ft. Water: 86 F, choppy, surge. Logged dives: 82. Dive restrictions: first dive 110 ft., second 35 ft. The morning dive was more professional. The elder captain and Don was much more responsive and responsible. The afternoon dive was captained by the son who was nice yet irresponsible and inconsiderate to other boats. 14 divers and 4 staff on a boat where no more than 8 divers should go. Water was choppy yet diving was pretty good. Large schools of grunts and snappers, nurse sharks, hawksbill. dove USS Eagle and nearby shallow reefs 10-30 ft. (Ph: 800-742-7945 or 305-664-2461; e-mail bnmf@budnmarys.com; website www.budnmarys.com)

Lady Cyana Divers, Islamorada Motel, May 2001, Larry & Fawn Lovecchio, Ignacio, CO. Good shop

and location, great gear storage and a large 55' dive boat, however we didn't like all the rules (posted next to the tip jar onboard) implied or enforced. Dive and return with a buddy, be back on boat with no less than 500 psi or there would be a \$5 inspection fee, and you must dive with a snorkel. We were told all divers were experienced only to find a certifying class onboard. The first dives they took us to were very shallow sites and the bottom was only 19' deep and still in the surge zone. Only dead coral or an occasional piece of fire coral or some scattered clumps of sea lettuce. The second day was markedly improved with mid depth reefs in the 60-80' range entitled "Hammerhead Reef" and "Victory Reef." Although we didn't find large fish, we did encounter numerous nice tropicals and healthy coral growth including nice barrel sponges. Even the briefings were better (where the boat sat depth wise, location of reef and type of terrain, and what type of terrain to expect if we were to overshoot the boat on our return). The Eagle Wreck is a great wreck dive! The coral encrusted 287' freighter was sunk in Dec. 1985 and sits broken in half on its side in the 110' range. One mooring buoy marks the bow while another the stern and due to the immensity and depth of the wreck, it would be difficult to do it all in one dive. A Jewfish estimated at 400+ pounds which we saw usually hangs around the cargo hold at the break in the boat. Truly a sight to behold. The Islamorada Motel is clean, economical, not luxurious but

good enough and has friendly owners. The road noise is a problem as it's located on the main highway. (Ph: 800-221-8717 or 305-664-8717; e-mail ladycyana@ladycyana.com; website www.ladycyana.com)

Lady Cyana Divers, May 2001, Guy Johnson (siberia@netexpress.net) **Coal Valley, IL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 35 to 50 Feet. Water: 78 F, choppy surge currents. Middle of the week; the boat was not full. Only the four of us! The diving was kinda poor due to 2-4 ft waves, currents and surge but these guys did all they could to please us. They helped us out of the water and made the trip a real joy. When we signed up in the shop, they asked how much weight we each needed. Never gave it any more thought until we climbed on board. There were two tanks for each of us, labeled with our first names and on the deck in front of the tanks were weight belts with the required amount of weight, also labeled with our names, nice touch I thought! They have a fresh water rinse tank and gear storage at the shop.

Lady Cyana, Cheeca Lodge, August 2001, Irwin Danto (irwindanto@aol.com) **West Bloomfield, MI.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F, calm currents. Cheeca Lodge, 20 miles south of Key Largo, is your basic 5-star resort. We had a bungalow right on the beach, a short walk to the main facility. Nice to dive with an experienced, mature operation. Owner Gloria Tiege runs a laid back but tight operation. The reef diving was great — it was like diving in a swimming pool. Our trip

to the Duane wreck was greeted by a 1.5 knot current on the descent line. There were schools of barracuda all over the ship which is filled with fish. Night dive at Davis Reef was surreal. Great trip!

Key Largo

Amoray Divers, June 2001, Keith A. Trimels (trimbus@asus.net) **Cheyenne, WY.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 20 to 25 Feet. Water: 81 F. Dive operation is welcoming. Catamaran boat was nice since water was choppy. DM/Capt very informative on dive briefing. Molasses Reef (moderate to much soft coral) and French Reef (minimal to no soft coral — mostly hard). Price for a 2-tank dive fair. Pennecamp is nice but was rough and low viz. diving is more geared toward beginners, but intermediate and photographers can enjoy and you can dive "Caribbean-type" environments with a short drive from Miami. (Ph: 800-426-6729; fax 305-453-9516; e-mail amoraydive@aol.com; website www.amoray.com)

Aqua-Nuts, Kelly's on the Bay, April 2001, Stephanie Scott (scubasteph@aol.com) **Naples, FL.** Water: 76-78 F, choppy. Dives logged: 24. Fabulous hotel and dive operation. Staff is accommodating and knowledgeable. (Ph: 800-226-0415 or 305-451-1622; fax 305-451-4623; e-mail info@aqua-nuts.com; website www.aqua-nuts.com)

Aqua-Nuts, Kelly's on the Bay, June 2001, Elizabeth Russell and Linda Natho, West Mifflin, PA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm surge no currents. Fifth trip to Kelly's/Aqua-

Nuts and it's like coming home. The staff is friendly and helpful. While the accommodations are not luxurious, they are nice enough and they are right next to our Hobo's, our favorite restaurant in Florida. There were too many people on the boat. Many had no idea of boat courtesy and stepped all over everything and everyone. I put my video housing on the back shelf and every time I went to check on it, it had a new pile of clothing, towels, and flip-flops piled on top of it. The reason for our trip was to take a newly certified friend for her first ocean dives. The deepest we got was 41 feet. Most dives were shallow with little or no surge or currents. The visibility was good. Most of dives were on wrecks so navigation was easy. We were concerned on one dive because a couple surfaced after the crew had pulled up anchor and started the engine, but then we realized that their teenage sons had answered "Here" for their parents when the roll call was taken. They need to check the DAN tags from all passengers before leaving in the future. Overall, good, enjoyable diving.

Aqua-Nuts, Kelly's on the Bay, August 2001, Joel Feldman (mdfeldm@earthlink.net) Troy, MI. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm currents. Aquanuts took great pains to make sure all divers were accounted for. Nothing is foolproof though as one rookie diver got on the wrong boat while his gear was on the other. Kelly's was just another motel on the strip that just happened to have a dive

operation out back. Guest Dive Locker was just hangers in a locked area — no shelves or tables. Breakfast should be skipped as it was stale bagels, microwave pancakes, and something that I swear was Tang — in Florida yet! Current was stronger than expected on a few dives but other than that, it was pretty easy diving. Visibility was poor, coral was almost nonexistent, sponges and other life were trying to make a comeback. Fish were abundant though. Go low and slow and you're bound to see plenty. I was pointing out baby rays, lobsters in crevices, and even a mostly buried full size ray that no one else noticed. Dive boats are large (42' Newtons) with a lot of power. Makes it easier to get to more distant dive sites. They have a camera rinse bucket, a mask rinse bucket, two fresh water showers, and a marine head. Only had about 15 divers on the boat so there was plenty of room. It's a good operation.

Aqua-Nuts, Kelly's On The Bay, August 2001, Bill Ferris (Ferris2@enter.net) New Tripoli, PA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80-84. Took my 16 year old son (advanced open water — 2 years experience) for a week long orgy of diving and male bonding. The staff at Kelly's and Aquanuts was professional and friendly and helpful. We attempted to dive the Duane but the dive was aborted because the current was so strong the mooring buoys were submerged. Later in the week we able to get to the Duane, though still a

ripping current. We did our safety stop hung from the mooring line like flags in the wind. It was a memorable dive. Aquanuts was organized and diligent in making sure they had everyone accounted for. Their dive boats were spacious, well maintained and expertly staffed.

HMS Minnow, Marina Del Mar, February 2001, Richard Visser (rviss@aol.com) Caledonia, MI. Vis: 60-80 ft. We last visited the Keys (Islamadora) 8-9 years ago and were disappointed in the diving. We were pleasantly surprised. The fish population is alive and well. Molasses Reef was vibrant. We saw large schools of various fish. We saw lobsters, turtles, balloonfish, filefish, cowfish, and the usual Caribbean cast of thousands. We saw one pack of 23 barracudas at the wreck of the Benwood. I did a swim through at French Reef through a cloud of glassy sweepers. We saw a 6-7 ft. free swimming green moray there too. We always research our vacations with Undercurrent and the Chapbook. Thanks to you we discovered the Minnow and Jeff Jarvis. He takes no more than 6 divers (one day we were the only two on the boat and had the dive site all to ourselves!). He leaves at 8 AM, before the others, so there is no mooring at the dive site when you arrive. He has diagrams of each dive site and goes through them before every dive. He gives as much assistance as you might want. He doesn't charge any more than the cattle boats. Marina Del Mar is a good, clean resort. My wife has allergies so we appreciated the fact that there was no

mold or mildew. It has been recently renovated. The breakfast buffet is sparse, three types of bagel, OJ, and coffee. If you plan to dive with the Minnow, ask for the discount available, because they won't offer. The Minnow is a 2 minute walk from Marina Del Mar. Café Cubano on Hwy 1 has great Cuban sandwich. The Fish House also has a great fish sandwich. (Ph: 800 366-9301 or 305 451-7834; fax 305 453-0819; e-mail ; website www.hmsminnow.com)

HMS Minnow, March 2001, Tim and Mihee Jordan (finatic@totcon.com) Deland, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 71 to 73 F, calm no Currents. A six-pack dive operation, run to perfection, by a professional diving couple, for divers at all skill levels, catering to all types of diving including wrecks and lobstering. Captain/Dive Master Jeff Jarvis and his wife Betty are a pure pleasure and are totally committed to seeing that each diver has a great time, which we did! Six dives (one trip with only my wife and I diving) looking for lobsters and we could not have asked for a better operation. Lots of tropicals and lobsters as well. The HMS Minnow is a very easy platform to dive and recover from. Briefings were complete and accurate. Dive you own profile, 500 psi upon return, no lobsters with eggs, or "shorts."

HMS Minnow, Marina Del Mar, March 2001, George Fell, (gfell@aol.com) Hiawasse, GA. Vis: 15-40 ft. Water: 72-74 F. Dives logged:

11. Dive restrictions: Return 500 psi. We chose to dive with Capt. Jarvis/HMS Minnow due to comments in 2001 Chapbook. It was the right decision. During 6 dives he was always aware of us immediately when we surfaced. I believe we got the most bottom time possible for the conditions. We left dock before head boats and returned later. Marina Del Mar is a short walk to our boat and nice accommodations and staff. Staying bay side because the extra cost isn't worth the convenience.

HMS Minnow, May 2001, Tim

Jordan (finatic@totcon.com)

Deland, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm no currents. Great for those who want to get away from the big cattle boat operations. This 6 pack is perfect for diving the Keys and goes to ALL of the major spots the larger operations go to as well as some spots the bigger operations do not. Great dive briefings and area knowledge.

HMS Minnow, June 2001, David

Lindaman (dwlindaman@lycos.com)

Kansas City, MO. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 45 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm choppy. Second year with Capt. Jeff Jarvis, captain and owner of the HMS Minnow. he coordinated my diving with a local PADI instructor allowing me to earn my advanced certificate. He has a personal dive operation, taking no more than six divers, yet keeps his prices competitive with the big cattle boats. He leaves the dock 30 minutes before the cattle boats, so we beat a cattle boat to the USS Duane mooring ball. Jeff is concerned about diver

safety and gives very detailed briefings. He strives to ensure that all divers get to the sites they want. He even assisted me in finding a suitable dive partner as I was with my nondiving wife. Jeff will not BS you about dive conditions and the weather, if they are not good, he will tell you and not charge you if you don't make the trip. He also won't back out on you if other booked divers cancel. Jeff has a good sense of humor and an excellent first mate, his wife Betty. Contact Jeff at (800)366-9301 or (305)451-7834 or his webpage "www.hmsminnow.com."

Irma Woodward, Florida Keys Divers/Silent World, November 2000,

Bill Mashek (rubicon@sonic.net)

Forestville, CA. Vis:20-30 ft. Water: 74-76 F. Florida Keys is nothing spectacular. Most dives shallow which is ok for bottom time. None of the boats offered snacks or drinks. Florida Keys Divers charged me\$63. Silent World was \$50 through Irma Woodward, cheaper if you do at least 3 days of diving. My son (just turned 11) took a discover diving class with Irma (IRMADIVE@aol.com). She was patient and competent. (Ph: 305-451-0330; e-mail irma@pennekamp.com; website www.pennekamp.com/irma)

Island Ventures, Rowell Marina,

June 2001, Bob Emmerich

(robertemmerich@hotmail.com)

Patchaque, NY. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Logged dives: 65. Good: Big roomy 30 ft. Island Hopper with canopy for shade, fresh water rinse tank and shower. Took out just my buddy and me for day and night dives.

Took us to moored and unmoored sites. Drift dive at Dana's Ledge — saw reef shark. Snappeo's Ledge — thousands of grunts and yellowtails. Molasses Reef saw a turtle, eagle ray, morays along with the usual array of fish on same dive. Laid back operation that will accommodate your wishes. Oranges and cold drinking water available. Because we were diving with them for 3 days we could leave our equipment locked up in their storage area. (Ph: (866) 293-5006 or (305) 451-4957; fax (305)-453-0121; e-mail Dive@islandventure.com; website www.islandventure.com)

It's A Dive, Marriott Key Largo Bay, July 2000, Dan Hagen, (dhagen@aol.com) Charlotte, NC. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 80-85 F. Dive restrictions: 1 hour. Took my family down for a week, my daughter just got certified (11 years old). It's A Dive is very professional, friendly and helpful. The only negative was too many snorkelers. The resort is fabulous! (Ph: (305) 453-9881; fax (305) 453-0093; e-mail itsadive1@aol.com)

It's a Dive, Hampton Inn, June 2001, Lee Sessoms (sessoms@lucent.com) Lawrenceville, GA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. The nicest people. The Captain was helpful and even got into the water to find sea life for my two kids who where snorkeling for the first time. The dive sites are 15 min. boat ride and shallow, about 25-foot max. They are very flexible on the dive sites and will work with you to meet your needs. The boat is a nice, little six-pack but they will l go out

with only two divers if needed. The sites tend to get crowded. There was a lot of small life and some groupers, nurse sharks and other medium size fish. A lot of lobsters. Very good for beginners.

Ocean Divers, March 2001, Martin Raffauf, San Carlos, CA. Logged dives: 130. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 75-76 F. Sunny. Water: Choppy, surge, high current on USCG Duane — 4 ft. seas. Wetsuit — yes 3mm. Own profile — pretty much — air limited. Good safe operation. Good briefings. Do not have prescription masks for rental which put one of our party in a bad way. Conditions a bit rough — 3-4 foot seas at the Duane. Current on the line was 3-4 knots, anyone losing hold of the line was headed for Bermuda. Several did not attempt the dive, and several got sick due to the rough conditions. Fish life on the wreck was down from the last time I remember. Saw several large barracuda and other fish. No sharks. Second Dive at Molasses Reef - Fish Bowl - conditions choppy, lots of surge. Reefs in great shape, lots of Fish. Key Largo diving very much dictated by water conditions. Rough, choppy seas make it more intermediate and advanced. Calm conditions — easy diving. USCG Duane is a great wreck dive — 100 ft to main deck. Advanced certification, or logged dives to 80+ required to dive (or you need to hire a guide). Ocean divers only provide divemasters for an extra fee. Plenty of hotels, restaurants close by. (Ph: 800-451-1113 or 305-451-1113; fax ; e-mail Info@oceandivers.com; website www.oceandivers.com)

Ocean Divers, Marina del Mar, April 2001, Jill Glassco, (jdglassco@earthlink.net) Austin, TX. Vis: 30-60 ft. Water: 75-78 F, choppy. Dives logged: 166. Dive restrictions: Back on boat with 500 psi. Ocean Divers was adequate, crew pretty nice. One of the few dive boats I've been on where they don't switch your gear to a new tank. Getting Nitrox tanks kind of a hassle and adds time to preparing for dive. I used Nitrox as an edge on safety since I did multiple repetitive dives on my trip. The diving was very nice but we got a little tired of doing Molasses and French reefs over and over — although Ocean Divers did try to take this into consideration. Ocean Divers takes snorkelers too and on one trip there were probably 15-20 snorkelers on boat.

Ocean Divers, May 2001, Guy Johnson (siberia@netexpress.net) Coal Valley, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 35 to 50 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, choppy surge currents. First dive was a night dive. Divemaster told us to come to the surface and give him a lighted "ok" signal and that they would return same and pick up divers if they needed it. At least five divers gave the signal but none received any acknowledgment, nor did they get a pick up as promised. Made a difficult swim back in heavy surge. The next day we went out for two a.m. dives, the first being the Duane. Same dull dive briefing and crew attitude. Insisted we do a surface swim in heavy choppy seas to the float before descending. 4-5 divers were beat up after trying that. The drift line went

under the boat which also made for an "interesting" surface swim! A rival operation had an emergency medical situation and had to head back to shore, leaving two divers in the water down on the Bibb. We headed to the site and waited for the divers to surface and picked them up. They were surprised to see their regular boat gone and us waiting instead. The crew talked a great act while at the dock but could care less once we were at sea. We have dove with Ocean Divers several times in the past and loved them. Maybe the crew just had a bad day. They did have a separate rinse barrel and table for cameras.

Paradise Divers, Howard Johnsons, January 2001, Steve & Cathy Mason (slm1@up.net), Sault Ste. Marie, MI. Vis: 15 to 30 Feet. Water: 73 to 74 F, choppy surge. Excellent Dive Operation, courteous crew and a great captain(Mike). Captain Bob Binder, the owner, setup all our dives and accommodations. Paradise runs a "six pack" One of the cleanest, best organized operations we have seen. April goes in with you and shows you the interesting spots; she did a great job! First day 50 degree weather, high winds and terrible visibility. The crew made the best of it and we did 3 dives the first day. Overnight the weather got worse and our 2nd day dives were canceled. Captain Bob refunded our money with no problems and apologized for the weather! We really enjoyed the relaxed diving at the Benwood Wreck and Molasses Reef. All the diving here is pretty shallow without a lot of coral, but lots of fish.

(Ph: (305) 872-1114 ; fax (305) 872-5430; e-mail paradivers@aol.com)

Scuba Network, Ramada Inn, October 2000, Rosemary Kurtti, New York, NY. Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Dives logged: 2000. Dive restrictions: 130. Scuba Network has two spacious boats. Safe operation. Attentive to customer needs. Lots of good restaurants in the area. Coral minimal but fish life was very good. Saw large parrots (e.g. rainbow parrots) and large groupers. Ramada Inn rooms spacious and clean. Pool on premises. Dive boats on premises. **(Ph: 800-935-DIVE or (305) 451-2225; e-mail sharkys@scubanetwork.com or info@scubanetwork.com; website www.scubanetwork.com)**

Sea Dwellers, June 2001, Gregg M. Gaylord (gregg1954@aol.com) Sheboygan, WI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. I dove 4 dives while my 11 1/2 year old son did his open water certification. The boat was a good size with "near" crowded conditions but tolerable. There was fresh water available and a toilet and shower (both simple but effective). The crew was friendly and the staff at the office accommodating and helpful. At first I was very concerned that my son was not getting a good test of his skills or learning much. Apparently PADI has the instructors swim around without instruction the first check out dive. After that though, he had a good time and got his skills checked with some good tips from two different instructors. The coral reefs in John Pennekamp State Park are in good shape and there is lots of fish

life. French Reef and Molasses Reef, both excellent. I was pleased with the relaxed style of diving. I am sure the Aquanauts problem led to heightened awareness of the "lost diver" phenomenon as the divemaster and captain did a very thorough check at roll call time. I would recommend Sea Dwellers for families that aren't afraid to dive without much guidance. **(Ph: 800-451-3640 or 305-451-3640; fax 305-451-1935; e-mail sdwellers@aol.com; website www.sea-dwellers.com)**

Sea Dwellers, Holiday Inn July 2001, Sandy Robinson, Moultrie, GA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 25 to 35 Feet. Water: 82 F, choppy. The crew was professional, helpful, and courteous. They did an excellent job in the pre-dive briefing discussing current, visibility, depth, the area to be dived and a suggested dive plan. New tanks were set out while divers were in the water. Old tanks were removed by the crew upon return to the boat platform making the switch and the walk to your seat easy. On one dive, a combination of a sudden current change and a mistake on my part caused me to drift behind the boat in a fairly strong current. The crew saw what was developing and attached an extra line and buoy to the float ball. With assistance from a Fort Myers dive instructor, I was able to reach the float ball and pull myself in. My appreciation goes to the crew and the instructor. Otherwise, I'd have floated to Miami. Holiday Inn was OK. Rooms were clean. The pool was great — especially for the children. Breakfast in the restaurant was average but

the service needed improvement. We were chastised by the waitress because we helped ourselves to the continental breakfast from the buffet rather than ordering it from her. However, we had not been instructed otherwise. The same waitress informed us that tips were not included on the free continental breakfast — a tacky comment at best. Also, we were hassled when trying to get a coffee (allowed on our continental breakfast) to walk across the street to Sea Dwellers before coming back for our breakfast. The staff wanted to charge us because we were not Priority Club members and were leaving the premises. We had to get several charges removed from the bill that were included in the complimentary breakfast.

Marathon

Abyss Dive Center, October 2000, PJ Ryan (pjscuba@rochester.rr.com) Hamlin, NY. Vis: 20-80 Ft. Water: 76-82 F, choppy no Currents. Bill and Heidi Farrell run a super and safe operation. Two members of their staff, Margo and Larry, are great instructors and share a love of the ocean. The entire staff is there to please. I took two novice divers and three experienced. All had a great time. (Ph: 800-457-0134; fax (305) 743-7081; e-mail info@abyssdive.com; website www.abyssdive.com)

Abyss Dive Center, October 2000, Ken Jones, Olney, MD. Fourth time diving off the Vitamin Sea. Extremely well run operation with lots of personal attention (maximum of 6 divers), the staff are always friendly

and helpful, and the equipment rentals are in excellent condition. Very safe diving environment. 8 dives at 7 sites. All were relatively shallow due to better visibility at those sites than deeper ones. Captain did considerable checking with other operators to find best visibility. On our last day, we dove first at Elbow Reef, where the visibility was less than 30 feet (our worst of the four days). But then, just a few miles away at Samantha Reef, we encountered visibility better than 60 feet. An underwater garden, a variety of coral formations teeming with an abundance of colorful reef fish along with a couple 7-foot sting rays and a turtle. Boat was captained either by the owner, Bill, or his captain, Randy. Both gave explicit descriptions of what to look for and the best courses for seeing the most. They anchored carefully off the reef so as to not cause any damage to it. (Telephone: 800-457-0134 or 305-743-126; E-mail: info@abyssdive.com; www.abyssdive.com)

Aquatic Adventures, Key Colony Beach Motel, March 2001, Doug Daza (ddaza@evansville.net) Evansville, IN. Experience: 51-100 dives . Vis: 25 to 30 Feet. Water: 71 to 73 F, calm. Good dive operation. 34 Foot clean and well- maintained boat, head on boat, 6 divers max. The owners were friendly and worked hard to ensure a good trip. Paid close attention to dive conditions to chose the best sites. Excellent safety and briefing. Dove Pillar Patch, Porkfish, Donut, Samantha's and the Thunderbolt Wreck. Saw nurse sharks on

Samantha's — one followed us. Pillar Patch and Donut were beautiful reefs w/lots of fish. Schools of sgt majors, grunts, green morays, spotted morays, stingrays, parrotfish. Pillar coral was interesting. Large brain corals, sea fans everywhere. All were shallow dives 10'-25' so lots of bottom time. Thunderbolt wreck was great. Dozens of large barracuda, a number of big amberjack and permit and several schools of grunts and sgt. majors. Easy penetration of the wreck, large green moray inside. Had to pay for divemaster (\$40 divided by number of divers) and limited to 15 minutes bottom time. Still a great dive. Key Colony Beach Hotel was inexpensive and comfortable. New pool and nice beach. Rooms small but clean and well maintained. Only 2 minutes from the dive boat. (Ph: 800-978-DIVE or 305-743-2421; fax ; e-mail aquatic@aaquaticadventure.com; website www.aaquaticadventure.com)

Captain Morgan's, Hidden Harbor, May 2001 Jason Maddox. Vis: 35-50 ft. Phone is (305) 289-0905 or 888-986-DIVE. website is <http://thefloridakeys.com/cal2tainmoroan>. Boat is a 30 ft. six pack and was fine. In three trips we had the boat to ourselves. It could handle six divers and gear. We were given the option to choose our sites but deferred to the captain and were happy with each one. The Tower is a no-take area with lots of fish life. Dived a wreck — open structure with a lot of life. In 40 ft. of water. Saw pods of dolphins. No real restrictions on the dive and no rush — each one was an hour. We surfaced

with plenty of air — 700+. Depth was never more than 45 ft. Sites not more than 20 or 30 minutes from the dock. Hidden Harbor (1-800-362-3495, (<http://thefloridakeys.com/hiddenharbor>) is next to the Turtle Hospital, which helps injured turtles that are brought in — some injuries are the result of boaters, and some from sharks, trash, fishing line. They use part of the funds from the hotel to support the hospital. The motel itself is not the Ritz, but it supports a great cause. Around 5:00 pm, they feed the turtles and visitors can enter the recovery area to see the turtles. Local volunteers help. Most the hotel rooms are efficiencies and there are grills outside. (Ph: 888-986-DIVE or (305) 289-0905; e-mail Morgansdiving@aol.com; website thefloridakeys.com/captainmorgan)

Middle Keys Scuba, March 2001, Edward Noga (ednoga@prodigy.net) **Akron, OH.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 15 to 30 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm. They cater to the lobster hunters, going to some visually less-than-impressive reefs that had ample quarry. In three days the lobstermen collected a dozen or so. However, if your intent is to play with or take pictures of the pretty fishes, this isn't the best choice. We dived some shallow, beat up reefs that offered a few eels and nurse sharks, an octopus and some smaller tropicals but not a lot. We dived the Thunderbolt, at 120 fsw, which was fun. An enormous Jewfish awaits the divers, a school of large barracuda hangs around the mooring line. The crew is very friendly and safety conscious, more so than other Keys operators I've used. Six to eight

divers aboard, and its boat easily accommodated them. Nice Web site, too. (Ph: (305) 743-2902; e-mail RBoileau@aol.com; website www.divingdiscovery.com)

Never Enough Charters, January 2001, Sam and Phyllis Major (hbillygirl@aol.com) Knoxville, TN.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 70 to 72 F, choppy no currents. This was the second vacation we have spent with Banny Thorne and Never Enough Charters. We only dive with other dive services if Banny doesn't go there, such as the wrecks of The Eagle, The Duane, and The Bibb. The boat is small, limited to 4, 5 if a couple are small. He will get you out 5 miles to the Thunderbolt wreck in less than 15 minutes; other boats take 40-45 minutes. He runs a prompt service, Banny stays on the boat, you dive your own computer profile, and are not rushed. We have also done enjoyable night dives on "The Barge" and "The Donut" with Never Enough. Rules are simple. If you let a tank fall on your toe, you get a black toe. If it falls on Banny's toe, you get a black eye. For those of us who are navigationally challenged, don't wander further away from the boat that you are willing to swim back, 'cause unless you are in trouble, Banny ain't wasting his gas coming to get you. You can reach Banny @ 305-743-7265. (Ph: 305-743-7265; fax 305-743-8156; e-mail captbanny@aol.com; website thefloridakeys.com/captbanny/)

The Diving Site, November 2000, Frank Shoemaker, Palos Park, IL.

Vis: 30-40 ft. Water: 70-75 F, choppy. Logged dives: 82. Youngest grandsons first dive and other grandson, father and grandpa. (Ph: 800-634-3935 or 305-289-1021; e-mail diving@divingsite.com; website www.divingsite.com)

Plantation Key

Lookout Lodge, August 2000, Peter & Marilyn Harrington (pharring@netzero.net), Kenner, LA. Delightful two-person operation on the gulf side of the Keys highway. Owned by Mike and Angie Sheen, the dive operation and rooms are located within 100 feet of the dive boat. Outdoor grills and picnic tables. Service is extraordinarily "down home and friendly." The well-appointed boat holds only 12 divers, and Captain Mike is one of the most knowledgeable and accommodating dive masters we have been with. There is no food service at the lodge, but the highway is littered with restaurants within walking distance. The rooms are spacious, each with a kitchenette, and all that one would need. Water was in the high 80's. Nurse sharks everywhere, along with large schools of barracuda, numerous turtles, and great numbers of the large stingrays. Lookout Lodge offers a wide variety of dive sites, with extremely varied topography, and Mike's only directive is that you follow safe diving practices. (Ph: 800-870-1772 or 305-852-9915; fax 305-852-3035; website www.lookoutlodge.com)

Sea Raven Divers, Lookout Lodge, March 2001, Jacque Moore

(seanerd@eudoramail.com) Port Charlotte, FL. Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Water: 73 to F, calm choppy. Second time diving with Sea Raven Divers, which is located at Lookout Lodge (mile marker 88, Plantation Key). The Lodge is small, with clean, comfortable rooms. It is located on the Florida Bay side, and has nice views of the bay and great sunsets. Service was fine, with good housekeeping and attentiveness. Close to good restaurants and shopping. Minimum stay requirement if you are not diving with them. The Sea Raven is a 30' Island Hopper with padded and covered seating. They will not take out more than 10 divers. Water temp was 73, and we probably needed a 5 mil wetsuit to be comfortable. The first day of diving we encountered choppy seas and 30-35' vis. We were the only two divers and requested shallow sites where we could shoot photo/video. Mike, the owner, already had some sites in mind. He knew the reefs we had already visited. Our first trip was to a little known reef that Mike had "discovered," and it was excellent for photos. Lots of crevices and ledges full of big green moray eels, small tropicals and lobsters. Larger fare included some big groupers and barracudas and several cleaning stations. Our second dive was to The Maze, a large circular reef with green morays and lobsters. Saw a nurse shark under the dock that afternoon. Second day calm seas. Visibility 35-40' at Davis Reef. We encountered spotted and golden tail morays, a large southern stingray, several balloonfish

(cool eyes!), a scrawled cowfish, two scrawled filefish, gray angels, huge schools of grunts). Hens and Chickens, is in a preservation zone. The health of the coral was much better, with star coral and sheet coral building large coral heads that reached 20' high. Remains of an old shipwreck makes for good photo opportunities. Several barracudas, Atlantic spadefish, queen angelfish and the ever present grunts. Lots of Christmas tree worms, fanworms and two small basket stars. This area of the Keys has lots of Fish life, but the coral is not in great shape. Much of the existing reef is dead, and soft corals, sponges and gorgonians predominate. There are some really nice large barrel sponges and pretty azure vase sponges. The great dive operator makes the trip easy and enjoyable. Boat captain is also a photographer, so is sensitive to the needs of UWPs. Captain brought 5 gallon buckets on board for use as rinse tanks. Not large enough for my husband's video gear. Very conscientious about handling equipment, pointed out best places to get good shots, and selected sites based upon photo ops. (Ph: 800-209-7038 or (305) 853-0625; e-mail info@searavendiver.com; website www.searavendiver.com)

Ramrod Key

Looe Key Reef Resort, August 2000, Nicola Nelson, Chantilly, VA. Vis: fair. Dives logged: 216. Very shallow. Very regimented boat — I had to buy gloves — but very safety conscious. Very "friendly" reef shark. I would rate this diving not great compared to Caribbean or Mexico. (Ph: (305) 872-

2215) (Ph: 800-942-5397 or 305-872-2215; fax 305-872-3786; e-mail lookeydiv@aol.com; website www.diveflakeys.com)

Looe Key Reef Resort & Dive Center, August 2001, Jason Maddox

(no city, state). Vis: 50 ft. They are located at MM 27.5 in Ramrod Key, (305) 872-3786 or 1-800-942-5397. Site is www.diveflakeys.com. 45 ft. catamaran with three tanks. They saved our (wife and I) collective asses when we forgot our masks on the boat. They did not charge us for the mask rental on those dives. Runs a trip to the Adolphus Busch You need a computer and some sort of cutting tool (shears or a knife) to dive this wreck. We had shears but needed one computer (\$10 to rent one for the day). Little current. Max depth 85' for 30 minutes (could go deeper). Saw two huge Goliath grouper — big enough to eat small children (no BS). Schools of large tropicals, gray angels. Two dives were in Looe Key sanctuary. Nice coral formations and a lot of sea life. Big green moray, schools of fish, and a reef shark. Maximum depth was 40 ft. low 80's for temperature. Spotted eagle ray, bait ball, lots of grouper, nurse shark and almost collided with a 5 ft. reef shark. This outfit charges for tanks and weights. They provide sodas, hot dogs, and candy bars for \$1 each. Boat leaves the dock at 10:00 am and returns at 3:00 pm. You are issued a number on a lanyard that becomes your number for the roll call for that day's dives. Boat carries more than 24 divers and snorkelers, but was not too crowded. The captain was a

little anal about the duration of the dives — giving a Dick Clark-type countdown to the boat's departure. As we boarded, he was yelling toward the divers in the water "three minutes." Calm down. On these dives my wife had problems clearing her ears, so she remained on the surface above me (while I was 20 ft. below her). He proceeded to lecture her about staying with her buddy. I did not appreciate the lecture and did not tip on that trip either. The captain on day 2 was much better and a little less rigid. Both captains emphasized safety, gave good briefings, and conducted the boat without incident. There is a hotel on the premises, but it is overpriced. Nothing to write home about. Forty minutes from Key West.

Tavernier

Conch Republic Divers, Bay Breeze Motel, September 2000, Frank Hall, Floyds Knobs, IN. Vis: 40-70 ft.

Water: 82-84 F. Back on boat with 500 PSI. The diving is excellent for beginners, but there is plenty to see for everyone. Conch Republic runs a safe operation and the captain gives good briefings. Each day Captain Dave asked us where we wanted to go and then let us dive. On 2 trips we were the only divers. Some operations shuffle you off somewhere else because they don't want to take only 2 divers out. The head on the small boat wasn't working. We saw a lot of varieties and sizes of fish, but the coral and vis were a bit lacking. The highlight was an encounter with 4 spotted eagle rays in 25 ft of water. Cottage at the Bay Breeze Motel:

small quiet place, very clean and has beautiful grounds. (Ph: (305) 852-1655; fax (305) 853-0031; e-mail ckandtom@fla.net)

Conch Republic Divers, August 2001, Brad (breyntexas.net)

Austin, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 88 F, calm no currents. Offers dives to the Duane, the Bibb, and the Eagle wrecks; drift dives along reefs in 60-85 fsw; and shallow patch reef dives. Friendly, competent personnel. Solicitous of diver requests. Nice, spacious boat, certified for 20+ divers, but never more than 5 during the weekdays. Small boat for maximum 6 divers not in service. Will go out with as few as 2 divers. Store your gear at the shop overnight. Nitrox in custom blends as well as standard 32% & 36% mixes (in fact they require use of 27% blend for the 133 fsw dive at the Bibb).

Coral Island Charters, July 2001, Paul Osmond (posmond@rim.net)

Westland, MI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 65 Feet. Water: 77 to 81 Fs. Much improved over their already impressive service. New shop, which is very nice, is central in West Palm not far from their boat. I have dived this operation five times over the past 12 months. The boat is a custom 48' boat and is well suited to 20+ divers without being restrictive on personal space. Wide dive platform at the stern, with three Christmas tree ladders for reentry with fins on. Operation supplies towels and after dive snacks (fruit or cookie choice, Pepsi products and fresh water). Also supply shampoo, conditioner, soap and

sun lotion for your surface time and after dive shower (2 shower heads on board). Crew is always fantastic. They have extended their recommended bottom times for all depths, which still continues to allow their policy of minimal surface time while not having people come up with half a tank of air. If you want additional bottom time for a dive, you just inform the crew so they know when to look for you — most all diving done in West Palm Beach is drift diving. Briefings before each dive on a whiteboard. Divers are separated into groups with buddies and each group has a divemaster with a float ball. They are not there to make the group stay together, but help the boat find divers quickly when you surface. Great dive operation and the diving is some of the best in Florida. Almost guaranteed to see several turtles and large green morays. Generally find nurse sharks. I have seen golden spotted eels, spotted eagle rays, guitarfish. Current can be anything from almost nothing to ripping, but normally smooth with few up swellings. Reef is in good health, especially when you look closely at some of the small life to be found on it. Water temp is around 80 degree during summer and closer to 70 degree during winter. You can wear a 3mm year round, or opt for a light skin or similar during summer. Area has sea lice so have good body coverage. I have been in vis as low as 30' after bad weather, but as good as 200' if there is a good spell. Boat has a tank for camera's only, but no camera tables set aside for cameras — have to make room in the dry area. (Ph: 561-745-9286)

Florida Keys Dive Center, Ramada Inn, August 2001, Harry Cure, Jr. (harry@curelawfirm.com) Fort Worth, TX. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 84-85 F, no currents. Logged dives: 1,500+. Lobster catching trip. Ramada nice clean rooms, breakfast included. Dive Center friendly, no frills service, adequate boat. (Ph: 561-745-9286)

Tavernier Dive Center, May 2001, Doug Matasol, Hayward, CA. Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 77-79 F. Dives logged: 32. The staff was very knowledgeable and very accommodating. Captain and divemaster were safety conscious, and pre-dive briefings were accurate. Down lines and granny lines on all dives. They required buddy diving and no solo and decompression diving allowed. Took advanced open water certification — instructor was very knowledgeable and took time to go over book material. Made the class fun and relaxing. Captain gave a ten-minute warning before reaching a dive site to allow time to get ready. Boat was on time leaving the dock every day. (Ph: (800)787-9797 or (305)852-4007; fax (305) 852-0869; e-mail tavdive@tavernierdivecenter.com; website: www.tavernierdivecenter.com)

Tavernier Dive Center, July 2001, Stewart M. Kaslow (smkaslow99@netzero.net) Maplewood, NJ. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. No currents. Roomy dive boat with fresh water rinse, wide deck, twin ladders. Safe operation, roll calls any time the boat moves, from the

dock or dive sites. Down lines and trail lines always there. Nitrox available. Always working to find the best viz or critters for you. They make repeat guests feel like part of the family, and most divers are repeat guests. When we got back to the dock on my last day of diving, they had cake and champagne for the guests, an anniversary celebration for a diving couple.

Tavernier Dive Center, Ocean Pointe Suites, July 2001, Alex and Cindy Rasi. Vis: 30-70 ft. Water temp: 82 degrees. Seas varied between flat calm to moderate current with slight chop. Only dive restrictions: Buddy teams and back on boat with 700 psi. We were very satisfied. Owners Mike or Wendy were present onboard daily. The entire staff was friendly, helpful, and professional. We appreciated the freedom to dive our own computer profiles. All divers assembled their own gear. This helped to attract a more experienced and self-sufficient diving clientele. The crew assisted with gear at the dive platform as needed. Good, accurate pre-dive briefings. Dive OP was safety conscious — weighted down line, drift line with float, and roll call after each dive. The captain used moorings or carefully anchored in sand to avoid damaging coral. After my computer flooded, Wendy loaned me a computer. The 40 ft. dive boat had shade and sun areas, drinking water, fresh water shower, separate rinse bucket for cameras, marine head, oxygen, and a large cooler for drinks and snacks. Freshly cut pineapple served after dives. Entries and exits were easy with

a sturdy ladder and dive platform. There were 2 large rinse tanks at the dock and free gear storage at the shop. Nitrox was an extra \$6 per tank. The coral was mostly low profile. Some reefs were in good condition, while others showed wear and tear from storms and human impact. We saw nurse sharks and large green morays on almost every dive. We also encountered turtles, spotted morays, barracuda, angelfish (blue, queen, French, gray), many lobsters, schools of grunts and snappers, large scorpionfish, butterflyfish, porkfish, balloonfish, scrawled filefish, honeycomb cowfish, Atlantic spadefish, and a few jacks and grouper. Twice we saw pods of dolphin, with 3 that played in the boat's wake. Wendy arranged our accommodations at Ocean Pointe Suites. These were nice condos with ocean views and all the typical amenities. There was a continental breakfast, large swimming pool, and small beach. The resort was quiet and spread out over 90 acres of mangroves. Recommended restaurants: Ballyhoos, Squid Row, Craig's Restaurant (famous blackened dolphin sandwich), and The Fish House. The Lorelei Restaurant and Bar had a nightly sunset celebration with live music. If time allows a visit to Key West, we also recommend a sunset sail on the historic 130 ft. tall ship Western Union. You can help hoist the sails, drink champagne, watch the cannon firing, and listen to a live musician play dulcimer and guitar as you cruise along under full sail. The narrated tours (12:00 PM and 2:00 PM) of Fort Zachary

Taylor are also interesting. 1-800-787-9797 www.tavernierdivecenter.com.

Tavernier Dive Center, Ocean Pointe Condos, August 2001, David Bryan (dabmushi@aol.com) Great Missenden, Bucks, UK. Spent ten days here with family — two nondivers, a newly certified 12 year old and myself who hadn't been in the water for two years. First dive we were required to have an instructor to check we were ok. TDC is a smooth operation and very friendly. 40' boat is well equipped and never more than 12 people on board for any of our trips. Cater to non divers as well so good for the family. Good briefings and we were allowed to dive our own profiles. Only restriction was 1 hour on the shallower dives. Reefs were in fairly good condition and there was plenty of life including nurse sharks. Ocean Pointe condos very pleasant. We had a two bed unit with a lovely ocean view. Prices quoted on their web site were considerably lower when I called them so it pays to make a telephone booking.

Tavernier Dive Center, Islamorada Motel, August 2001, Ray Mars (marsrp@earthlink.net) Scaggsville, MD. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm. Start of lobster season so every trip included bug hunters. I suspect this limited our site selection to accommodate them and we did not go to any wrecks. Dive operation good and very safety conscious. Did a voice roll call before left dock and after each dive making sure they got reply. Larger boat full on every trip except

night dive. Set up for 22 and it was full. Boat Captain, Mike, gave excellent site briefings and crew was attentive and helpful. Used Nitrox on almost all dives and shop blended their own. Schools of great barracuda (30 one time, 19 another). Saw one eagle ray, several yellow stingrays, scorpion fish. Fish life less than near Pennekamp farther NE. Still good outfit and location for newer divers or just relaxing diving. One small fresh water tank on boat for cameras.

Briefing one day skipped warning and other divers washed mask fogger off in tank.

Palm Beach

Scuba Adventures, November 2000, Bobby Lamb (lambr@bellsouth.net)
Lake Wylie, SC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, choppy. For the past 5 years, my wife and I have come back to Jim Abernethy's Scuba Adventures (888-901-DIVE, scuba-adventures.com). The diving conditions this time of year are unpredictable due to swells from storms. But when conditions are right, we always have a great dive with this friendly and professional operation. Large, comfortable boats. Fresh water, snacks, and sodas onboard. Prices are competitive, including Nitrox. We can either drift dive with the divemaster or do our own computer profile. Boat crew always set the boat in perfect position for every dive and gave us dive site choices. Sea life and coral formations are always interesting. Angelfish, large eagle rays, morays,

parrots, trumpets, groupers, puffers, and more. We have interacted with a large friendly green moray who comes out of its hole and swims around divers. Visibility changed minute-by-minute, but still we had some good diving. We watched the release of a rescued juvenile green turtle from our boat by a volunteer from the Marinelife Center. **(Ph: (561) 842-6356)**

Panama City

Pete's Scuba Center, Best Western Del Coronado, May 2001, Doug Daza (ddaza@evansville.net)

Evansville, IN. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 25 to 40 feet. Water: 71 to 74 F, calm. On the first day we went with 12 divers. Crew was friendly and helpful. Good briefing on the site and on safety. USS Strength good wreck but not many fish. Large school of amberjack but not much else.

Bridgespan #1 an interesting site, part of the old Hathaway Bridge, but again, few fish. Saw a batfish and several toadfish, some amberjack, queen angels and spadefish. Day 2 was better. 4 divers on a smaller boat. 3 crew members. Very friendly and very funny guys. Excellent briefing. First dive was stage 2, a dismantled navy dive platform. 106 feet to the sand with the top at about 60 feet. Looks like an oil rig. Totally encrusted with good macro-life. Small grouper, large amberjack and queen angels. More fish-life but still sparse. Back Bart; Upright ship at about 80 feet. Totally encrusted and a picturesque wreck but few fish. The personnel at Pete's were professional and the rates were

reasonable. Panhandle has awesome wrecks, fish everywhere, turtles, dolphin — some of the best diving I have had. (Ph: (850) 230-8006 ; fax (850)230-8007; website scuba7383@aol.com)

Prince of Tides, February 2001, Bob Brown, Marbury, AL. Great newsletter! Prince of Tides is the best cattle boat we have been on so far! 60' boat, lots of room, great for spear fishing and cameras. If the vis is bad Capt. Ruben Laural goes to another site. First mate Steve gives great briefs. Helps everybody and enjoys it. Good snacks between dives. They make you feel welcome. 1-888-801-1310, 850-867-5601. (Ph: 910-256-6324; e-mail jgrima7864@aol.com; website www.princeoftides.com)

Pompano Beach

Seahorse Divers, Holiday Inn, December 2000, Dean Knudson (deanknudson@yahoo.com) Golden Valley, MN. Vis: 30 to 75 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, choppy. Mike Halprin runs a nice little boat, berthed behind the Holiday Inn in Pompano Beach. The reefs are not special, but the wrecks are nice. Mantas are tame after feeding, spotted several eels, lots of small fish. Weather is variable in December. Boat is nice, captain is easy going. Good family spot. Nice beach, nice beach bar, good local restaurants a five minute drive away. Unlimited heated fresh water on the boat. Rates are a little expensive for dives, but reasonably competitive, given the service. Divemaster young, energetic and helpful in setting up the

dive, but wasn't in the water on the actual dive. 30 minute slow speed canal ride to the ocean inlet, than a 15 minute ride (choppy) to the dive sites, plan accordingly. Hotel is nothing special, but a good value. Lots to do in nearby. (Ph: 954-783-9300; website mike@diveseahorse.com)

West Palm Beach

Diving Solutions, September 2001, Michael & Lynda Evans (lyndaje@juno.com) Castroville, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, currents. The normal procedure for insuring that all divers were back on board before departure is a head count. Admiral Tracey was reluctant to perform a roll call, but agreed to do one, when we insisted upon it. She missed Lynda. The dive guides seemed uninterested in their charges. They seldom looked back to check for problems. They made no effort to interact with individual divers. The dives themselves were very pleasant and easy. (Ph: 800-797-7771; fax 561-640-4384; e-mail tracy@divingsolutions.com; website www.divingsolutions.com)

Kollers Reef Charter Boat, July 2000, Jerry N. Smith (jnsmith@duke-energy.com) Mt. Holly, NC. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 72-85 F. Rodney Lee Sr. (Captain). Dive within the tables. Drift diving at its best. Schools of fish, great wrecks, nice reefs. Three tank and lunch for \$75. Usually first dive is a 90-100' wreck followed by two 60' reef dives. All drift diving. Lunch between the two 60' drift dives. Great sub sandwich, soda

and chips with cake, cookies. Fresh water shower. W. Palm offers great diving and accommodations. Stay at Breakers or Inns of America on I 95. Full range of choices. Stay on the beach or off. (Ph: (800) 903-DIVE; e-mail rj@worldcruiser.net)

Scuba Club, October 2000, Geoffry and Phyllis Cohl, New York, NY. Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Good place with lovely people, for drift dives. Visibility and currents variable. Three dives daily, 9, 11, and 2. (Ph: 800-835-2466 or 561-844-2466; fax 561-844-8256; e-mail info@thescubaclub.com; website www.thescubaclub.com)

Scuba Club, July 2001, Norm Jensen, Boise, ID. Vis: 50 ft. Water: 80 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 45. Competent, well-organized operation provides one tank drift dives. The abundance and diversity of the marine life was surprising. The charges were reasonable.

Starfish Enterprize/Splashdown, August 2000, Jan and Dave Smith, Mt. Carroll, IL. Vis: 60-75 ft. Water: 83-85 F. Dove with Craig — called him Fabio due to long blond curls — owner of Starfish Enterprize during opening of lobster season. He was great for trying to get you on the lobsters! Lots of help as needed with gear — very willing to please — worked real hard for everyone!

North Carolina

Morehead City

Discovery Diving, Buccaneer Inn, August 2001, Mike Szathmary (szorro@scubadiving.com) Greer,

SC. Experience: 101- 50 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. Wrecks were the main attraction. U-boat and Aeolus were great dives. No sharks on this trip, but a great white was sited a week before we went. Discovery Diving did a great job but avoid the boat Outrageous VI if possible- it's slow as Christmas. (Ph: (252) 728-2265; fax (252) 728-2581; e-mail dive@discoverydiving.com; website www.discoverydiving.com)

Olympus Dive Center, Caribe Inn, June 2000, Robert Goodman, Weymouth, MA. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 76-78 F. 14 hour drive from Boston. People at Olympus Dive Center were friendly and accommodating. Their main dive boat was great and the captain was knowledgeable and friendly. Boat had 15 foot safety-stop lines on each side of boat as well as 2 regulators hanging off the stern. One day of diving was canceled due to rough seas. Favorite dives were the wrecks Papoose and India. All dives were onto wrecks. Most dives took 2 hours to get to. Motion sickness pills were needed. Never saw more than 3 sand tiger sharks on each dive. Saw 2 Atlantic sting rays, tons of barracuda and schools of intermediate fish so huge you could not see through them! Caribe Inn was inexpensive and more than accommodating for divers not looking to be pampered. (Ph: 252-726-9432; e-mail olympus@olympusdiving.com; website www.olympusdiving.com)

Olympus Dive Center, May 2001, Trent Johnson, NJ. Vis: 20-80 ft. Water: 78 offshore, 67 inshore. Dives

logged: 196. Water conditions: calm and flat, choppy with mild currents. No deco diving, and return with 500 psi. Excellent captain, crew, staff, boat(65'Olympus), and overall dive operation. Briefings are excellent and are drawn for each dive site. Crew and staff are helpful and friendly. They have premixed EAN 30 for quick Nitrox fills. Weather in NC can be iffy, but we dove 2 out of 3 days in relatively good weather conditions. NC diving is awesome and with good viz! Large schools of large and small fish. Lots of tiger sharks, Atlantic spadefish, jacks and tropicals. The wrecks are great! Schurz and U-352 were especially enjoyable. Only complaint — the afternoon dive seems to only go to the Indus. Although a nice dive, another site would have been nice addition on successive days.

Seafox Dive Charters, June 2000, Rick Hindle (chefhindle@aol.com)
Keymar, MD. Vis: 10-20 ft. Water: 55-75 F. Dive restrictions: Return with 500 psi. Dives were in 80 fsw. Wreck dives off outer banks, North Carolina. Capt. Maddox has excellent website. Conditions were less than ideal due to storm activity two days prior but he is an excellent Capt./Instructor and will accommodate private charters.

Texas

South Padre Island

American Diving, Radisson South Padre Resort, December 2000, Dennis Smith (dewsmitty@aol.com)
Helotes, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 75

to 78 F, calm no Currents. One of the most well organized trips I have been on. They have a strong emphasis on safety, while allowing you the freedom to dive to your skill and experience level. (Ph: 800-761-2030; fax 956-761-6039; e-mail amdiving1@aol.com; website www.divesouthpadre.com)

American Diving/Diver I, July 2001, Jim N. Parkhill, Edinburg, TX. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 475. Essentially three dive experiences. One is a close in, newly formed artificial reef with a sunken tugboat which is too new and small to have attracted a large amount of marine life, but impressive and a fair assortment of smaller reef fish. The Iron Islands consists of several large working oil rigs with schools of look downs, mahi mahi, amberjacks and barracuda, angels, silversides and smaller reef fish. The pilings are alive with miniature blennies, shrimp and bristle worms. Most have one or two jewfish at 80 to 90 feet. Liberty Ships are not always diveable as they begin at about 85 feet and the visibility more often than not make these dives impossible. If the wrecks cannot be dived the fallback is a collapsed rig lying horizontally that has most of the marine life that the working rigs have. The latter two sites require a 2-3 hour boat trip which makes early morning departures necessary. The Iron Islands are generally a three tank trip whereas the Liberty Ships usually consist of two dives. American Diving's boat, the Diver 1, may be the least diver friendly boat in my experience. The suiting up area is in an enclosed below-

deck area lined with seats that make it appear more like a bus than a boat. The area is hot, cramped and smelly so one does not dawdle over the gearing up process. South Padre is not a diver's Mecca by any means but if one is in the area the dives are worth doing.

VENEZUELA

Horisub Dive Resort, August 2001, The Henke Family, Wichita, KS.

Vis: 80-120 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130 ft and 500 psi. Dive your own profile. I have been assigned by a US based company to Venezuela. I have lots of dives limited to the islands off Venezuela (Bonaire, Aruba, etc.). Arturo Barrios (Horisub@telcel.net.ve) the owner of Horisub runs several dive boats to the small islands of Mochima National Park, 2-8 miles off shore. The boats were never crowded. The divemasters were knowledgeable of the area and safety conscious. The routine is a 2-tank dive departing at 9:30 a.m. and returning before 2:30 p.m. Refreshments and lunch are provided. A lengthy surface interval is taken at one of the numerous paradise-like beaches in the park. Arturo will arrange a night dive if there are two divers. The park, roughly 950-square km of Eastern Venezuela, between Barcelona and Cumana, encompasses 32 islands and a adjacent mountainous terrain, which begins as gigantic cliffs devoid of vegetation and transition into lush rainforest with elevations up to 1,000-m. Dive sites include walls, wrecks, reef-crest pinnacles, caves, and typical Caribbean coral reefs. Los Beatos — a

fish watchers dream site, with over 100 different fish species identified. Schools of pelagics such as palometas, Atlantic spadefish, and rainbow runners. La Cathedral of Isla La Borracha — an underwater cave system that opens into a huge above-water chamber, "the cathedral," where rays of sunlight streaming through cracks in the rocks illuminate the interior. Las Burbujas — a unique site over a geothermally active zone. Millions of small bubbles rise from the warm ocean floor. Caracas Vapor — a steamship carrying coffee sunk over 80 years ago. Mabobo — a fantastic reef-crest pinnacle rising to within 6-ft of the surface. La Manta — typical of the many walls found in the park. Abundance of anemones. Most are host to small, multicolored shrimp, fish, and crabs. The end of July the water increases over 6 degrees F and the water becomes very clear. In some areas the visibility is well beyond 100 ft. It generally stays clear until early December (60 to 100+ ft visibility). Runoff from the local rivers only impacts a few of the sites during the rainy season (May to November). After December the water temperature drops into the mid to low 70's and the visibility drops into the 20 to 50 ft range. Each beach has its own unique character with sand color ranging from red on Playa Colorado to white on Playa Blanca. Huge iguanas were seen on some of the beaches behaving like pets looking for a food handout. Watermelon is one their favorites. (Ph: (5881) 814878 or (5881) 816755 or (016) 6803800; fax (5881) 814829; e-mail horisub@lrs.com.ve;