

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;

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VIRGIN ISLANDS, BRITISH

Patch reef diving on these closely-grouped islands is easy, pleasant, and fairly similar regardless of which island you choose, although the quiet British Virgins and St. John are far less crowded and more pleasant than the cruise ship havens of St. Thomas and St. Croix, where hurricanes and fishing have taken a toll. . . . BVI is a yachter's paradise with crewed or bareboat sailboats galore, and it's also served by several land-based dive operations. . . . BVI has nice little hotels, good restaurants, congenial surroundings, and British style.

Tortola

Baskin in the Sun, Prospect Reef Resort, September 2000, Rick Hindle, Keymar, MD. Viz 100+ ft., water 80-85 f., air 85-90. Prospect Reef Resort is undergoing renovations; although it caused some minor problems (no electricity on two different occasions, but quickly remedied) the staff and Chris Jarrett, the manager, are willing to fix anything for you, and cheerfully at that. Service staff at some of the eateries were surly and/or indifferent, as were half the islanders. Approximately half good restaurants are on hiatus due to hurricane season, many reopen in mid to late October. Better than average food and excellent service at Village Cay Marina. The

resort does have a wonderful salt water pool filled with plenty of small fish and critters (even one Green-Moray) which we both enjoyed daily. I did two 2 tank morning dives with Baskin from their 30' v-hull "Apache". First day dove wreck of the Rhone with the captain, a divemaster and four other divers. Second day was just myself, an islander who was doing underwater video project, and the captain. No one stayed on the boat, a standard procedure, weather and currents prevailing, and I did not feel this was an unnecessary risk as the boat was securely moored. Computer divers with buddies could dive their own profile, strongly urged 30 minutes and 500 psi, but allowed computer users to act like adults when gauging time. I buddied with the captain, Randy, who has lived on the island for 18 years and knows the sites well. Good dive briefings, excellent conditions. I only travel once a year and dive cold water in quarries the rest of the time, so I thought dives were excellent, I am sure seasoned warm water divers would be looking for more. Second day we dove Blonde Rock and Painted Walls, both excellent dives; I dove with Randy both days, he did fish ID at my request and counted over 80 species on second day's dive, including a golden coney. Only saw one nurse shark, one ray and one corvina but marine life otherwise is abundant and reefs are in good health. Excellent location for beginners and the dive op sits on the Prospect Reef property. (Ph: 800-650-2084; e-mail eservations@baskininthesun.com; website www.baskininthesun.com)