

Riding Rock Inn, April 2002, Bill Shepherd (Chorsejbs@aol.com)
Satellite Beach, FL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm no currents. My wife and I have been to San Sal 16 times; great wall diving with variety of corals, tropical fish, and occasional big fish. Divemasters let you dive according to your abilities with emphasis on safety. Most sites within 15 to 30 minute boat rides. Staff takes care of gear that is left on boat. Boats are showing lack of preventive maintenance. 1 of 2 operational, hopefully one will stay operational but it needs fixing. Dive shop has only bare essentials. Staff turnovers in summer 2002 affecting normal quality of dive operations. Accommodations are excellent and meals are typical Bahamian-American with plenty to eat. Staff does an excellent job of caring for divers and their needs. Great value. Lack of experienced photo assistance with departure of Chris McLaughlin. No promotion of photo opportunities by current staff.

Riding Rock Inn, May 2002, Tripp Jones MD (Tjones@sc.rr.com)
Columbia, SC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm no currents. Excellent dive staff, flexible and patient with new divers. Stan was excellent with all divers and eager to satisfy the customers. The boats need some work, but the diving was fantastic with viz of 80 to 150 feet. Saw one hammerhead, moray and variety of smaller critters. Wet suit was comfortable for early May. The food was plentiful and good and the

Inn was clean and comfortable. We took the charter from Ft. Lauderdale and this was better than traveling Bahamas Air. Owner needs to put money into boat maintenance and upkeep.

BARBADOS

Barbados is busy and crowded, with lots of fast traffic, big splashy resorts, and restaurants galore. . . . There's ordinary Caribbean diving with tropical fish, although big ones are rare, but it's fine for beginners or for a dive or two on a golf holiday. . . . You still can find century-old bottles in the harbor and the wreck of the *Stavronikita* is interesting, but jammed with tourist divers. . . . The average daily temperature is in the mid-80s year-round; there's considerable rain from June to January, and it's important to watch for hurricanes. . . .

The Dive Shop, Cacrabank Apartments, April 2002, Byron Yost, Castle Rock, CO. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Haroon Degia, Managing director and dive guide recently added "The Wet Shop" to his operation. Included was the 42' Bubbles, a catamaran that can accommodate 10 divers easily. Rinse tank for cameras, a dry storage area and shelves under the seats for personal items, adequate shade on the main deck and a sun deck on top. Haroon and the other dive guides were not overly restrictive and let us dive our computers. The reefs are lush and

healthy, but there is an obvious lack of large fish. We were told that the locals are allowed to fish out the waters and the government is reluctant to do anything about it. There are lots of turtles. The boats hook-up to mooring lines rather than toss an anchor down that might damage the reef. The two best dives were the *Stavronikita* wreck, a Greek freighter deliberately sank in 1978 and the antique bottle dive. Haroon will lead the divers through the many openings in the wreck! On the bottle dive we were allowed to keep any old bottles found. My buddy and I brought up two bottles dating back to the 1800s, but other divers were not so lucky. The search for bottles was great fun! Some dive sites have a current, but the dive guides tell you of this in the pre-dive briefing and adjust the dive plan accordingly. (Ph: 888-898-3483 or 246-426-9947; Fax 246-426-2031)

BELIZE

Inside the world's second-largest barrier reef, English-speaking Belize sports three major atolls-but not much in the way of beaches. . . . Most of the good diving is reachable from live-aboards or from resorts on the offshore cayes. . . . The deeply-cut, spur-and-groove coral reefs of Ambergris Caye, the largest and most developed of the Belize's cayes, are interesting, but not as adrenaline-producing as the rugged underwater scenery of the outer cayes, where the walls are among the more spectacular in the Caribbean. There's a chance to

see large schools of fish, a big one here and there, and large nurse sharks. . . . On mainland, you can visit Mayan ruins, the Jaguar Preserve, or take river tours. . . . Belize is only two hours from Houston and it's simple to fly to Honduras for a second week. . . . Avoid Belize City at night - it has a reputation for serious crime. . . . Belize lies at the edge of the hurricane belt, and Ambergris Caye took a hard hit from Keith in October 2000 while southern Belize got blasted in October 2001, when Hurricane Iris took down the *Wave Dancer*, with 18 divers and crew drowned and two others missing.

Ambergris Caye

Ambergris Divers, Amigos Del Mar/ Paradise Villa, July 2002, Douglas Peterson, LaGrange Park, IL.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. Paradise Villas is a wonderful small resort just on the north edge of San Pedro "downtown" with great manager husband/wife team, Josh and Joanne. Local diving was average due to a lot of coral damage and white fuzzy algae. Marine life is fairly sparse. However, still had fun on these dives, especially because the local reefs have a lot of channels and swim thought, and Ambergris Dive Shop was just so enjoyably laid back. Hol Chan Marine Park, which is shallow but a lot of fun, and don't miss its night dive Lighthouse Reef. The best diving but it takes 2 hours one way by boat. It had excellent soft coral