

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

growth, but still relatively sparse marine life. The Blue Hole Dive is a big waste of time. You will see 4 or 5 big stalactites and maybe some gray reef sharks, but that is it. Half Moon Wall and the Aquarium are great dives at Lighthouse Reef. Nitrox is virtually impossible to get at the San Pedro dive shops. I dove about 20 times with Ambergris Divers. Their divemasters (Jerome, Adolpho and Gilbert) were relaxed but still attentive. The office manager, Kelly, and the owner's wife, Karen, were friendly. And Roberto, the owner, was a true professional. Amigos Del Mar is a much larger operation, and I found their staff to be aloof. When I said "Hi" to them in the morning, they would hardly respond. They are professional; however, with the exception of one divemasters, who was a grouch. It turns out that he had been fired by Ambergris due to his bad attitude. Amigos had a male diver die of a heart attack in the Blue Hole on the day between my two days of diving with them. Amigos uses their 48 foot Miss Mel boat to get out to Lighthouse Reef, and this is a comfortable boat for that trip. Ambergris has the 45-foot Jenny, and she is fine, but not as comfortable as Miss Mel for such a long trip. San Pedro was amazingly laid back, with its dirt roads and calmly quiet friendly atmosphere.

**Aqua Dives, Sunbreeze Hotel, Autumn 2001, Carla Wiesend.** Hotel charming and set up quite well for divers. The dive operation was first rate, nice boats, helpful staff, and a tightly run operation. All dives were

led by local divemasters who made sure you saw the local wildlife. Francois was our favorite divemaster. All the dive sites were 5-10 minutes from the dock. Duane at the bar was a great guy. One evening at a local bar/restaurant, Sharks, a young local guy started bothering me and would not leave even when told to do so in no uncertain terms by my husband and our friends. After we left the place, we walked down the beach and when we were just past the Sunbreeze, the guy from Sharks and another guy confronted us. The other guy had a PVC pipe with which he hit our friend and my husband. There was a lot of yelling and then they finally ran off. The "guard" at the Sunbreeze watched this transpire and did nothing. The next day we went to Sharks to tell the owners; the guy who had been bothering me was there. When I pointed him out to the owner, he said, in a shocked voice, "Robby?" I knew then that we were wasting our breath. All the locals are not friendly, though almost everyone else we encountered in San Pedro was nice. The area was un-touristy and vendors did not pursue us like some other places we've been. (Ph: (501) 226-2634; e-mail [ambergrisdivers@btl.net](mailto:ambergrisdivers@btl.net); website <http://www.ambergrisdivers.com>)

**Aqua Dives, Sunbreeze, July 2002, Mike Johnson, Decatur, GA.** Vis: 40-100 ft. Water: 84 F. Dives accrued: 1000+. Large rooms with tile floor. Plenty of closet space. Good a/c. Great hotel restaurant, bar, no bugs. Rough go out through breakwater — ok once through. All drift diving. Blue Hole —

20+ sharks — some bull sharks (at 110-130'). Great divemaster, Donovan and boat captain, Nigel. Most restaurants had good food. 3 boat dives a day. (Ph: 800-641-2994 or 501-26-3415; e-mail [aquadives@btl.net](mailto:aquadives@btl.net); website [www.aquadives.com](http://www.aquadives.com))

**Aqua Dives, Tropica, December 2001, R.H. Wilson Jr.** ([rhw4301@aol.com](mailto:rhw4301@aol.com)) Midland, TX. Dives accrued: 4369. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 76-80 F. No Nitrox available on San Pedro island. Aqua Dives was first class. The divemasters allowed our group to dive their own profiles. We saw considerably more, large grouper, on this trip than two years ago.

**Bottom Time Dive Shop, Banyan Bay Resort, February 2002, Earl E. Carpenter Barrington, IL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. Great experience for our experienced group of four men. San Pedro is small, laid back and friendly. It's not the place for Mrs. GotRocks to walk with their noses in the air and be the ugly Americans. Banyan Bay Resort was comfortable and accommodating. Papi' Diner: the menu was surprising and the food was even better. The prices are "local" and the setting, relaxed. Rudy Duran and Carlos at Bottom Time ([rudy\\_duran@hotmail.com](mailto:rudy_duran@hotmail.com)) have great service, attitude, attended to our well being and they care for the reef. They handled, setup and cleaned our BC's, regs, fins and weights. Below the surface Rudy was constantly checking on each diver's needs. Finger canyons were dramatic and awesome and for

the most part filled with corals and activity. Numerous sightings of rays, nurse sharks, barracuda, lobster and a few turtles. Large schools of fish were best observed at the "Hol Chan Marine Reserve" a shallow and simple dive that is worth far more than the \$5 charge by the Reserve. (Ph: +501-226-2014; e-mail [holiday@btl.net](mailto:holiday@btl.net); website <http://www.sanpedroholiday.com/dive.html>)

**Bottom Time Dive Shop, Banyan Bay Villas, February 2002, Paul J. Richardson, Mesa, AZ.** Dive accrued: 26. Vis: 60-90 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130. Bottom Time 800-382-7776, fax: 281-337-1168. Rudy (divemaster) and Carlos (boat captain) were excellent. Rudy was detailed on the dive plan, water and current conditions, what he was going to show the group, sharks, lobsters etc. First time I have ever rubbed a shark's belly or barracuda. Tropic Air has frequent flights from Belize to San Pedro Island. Round trip under \$90 U.S.A. Two tanks at \$60. Great diving along the reefs.

**Discovery Dive, Amigos Divers, Royal Palm, October 2001, Lee Sessoms (lsessoms@lucent.com) Lawrenceville, GA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 84 F, choppy surge no currents. The hotel was old but Phil, Gene, Dwayne and Betty took good care of us. The Sea Wolf is a 35-foot, open boat. Capt. Wolf, Carl and Chet knew the area and were helpful. At least one of them dove with each group as we were doing swim/drift dives and the

seas were a bit rough. As you completed the dive you would head up for a safety stop and then pop to the surface. The boat would quickly pick you up. Wolf setup a fishing, conch, lobster beach bar-b-que on our off day. Got to snorkel with a free-swimming, 6-foot, green moray. Took Amigos Divers to the Blue Hole. A slightly larger boat with cover (although you couldn't sit under it because the surf would throw you up and crack your head) and a rinse tank. 20 large reef sharks at the Blue Hole then dived Half Moon Caye. Wonderful lunch on the island and then one more dive before heading back. A professional group. (Ph: +026-2882)

**Gaz Cooper's Dive Belize, Playa Blanca, November 2001, Steve Lang (steve@divetahoe.com) Carson City, NV.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, choppy surge. Diving was good, not great. No shore diving; the reef is half a mile out. Had 6' waves, causing a couple of us to vomit through regulators; it does work! Surge was 2 feet at 60 feet deep! 3-4 divers with Andy as the guide. He was rather ambivalent about most of the dives, just cruising along glancing back occasionally to see if everyone was within sight. His ability to spot any critters was pretty limited. When we did spot a group of five lobsters together, he spooked them by grabbing at them before everyone had a chance to see them -- an act of an unprofessional. The seas calmed as the week went on, making the safety stop less of a roller coaster ride. All safety stops were made

hanging in open water. Spotted one turtle, a few of morays, one nurse shark (night dive), the usual reef suspects. Coral and fish didn't compare favorably to either Cozumel or Bonaire. Playa Blanca Resort has four condos and a penthouse, clean and well maintained. Gaz is a gracious host. The resort is 6.5 miles north of town, with the only accessibility to San Pedro being walking (if you do so, you must ford a chest-deep cut across the island -- more entertaining at 2:30 AM while heading home) or taking an expensive water taxi (\$10 US each way/person except late at night when it went to \$12.50 US (if they give you a ride at all) or catching a ride on one of Gaz's boats, which were available if they weren't used for something else. He charged \$5 US each way/person. Hotel food was really good and expensive. A shrimp dinner with 6-8 shrimps cost \$20 US. Condos have a full kitchen, so getting groceries and cooking your own is an option. Restaurants range from cheap and good to expensive and run-of-the-mill. Watch out for a constantly drunk ex-pat in town named "Doc!" Overall, the experience was good, not great. No accommodations for cameras on the boat or at the resort, other than kitchen/bathroom to rinse out gear. No processing available. (Ph: 501-26-3202; Fax 501-26-2892)

**Hustler, Sundiver Beach Resort, May 2002, Mary Davis, San Marcos, TX.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Villas associated with the Sundiver

Hotel. The villa was outstanding but the resort and the dive operations need tuning up. We were placed with Hustler Divers by the resort. The boats are poorly equipped. A back-roll entry is fine but getting back into the boat was a real hassle. Had the seas been rough I am not sure if it would have been possible to climb the small ladders. A woman had been really battered on a day when the winds were high. On our last dive, several of us spotted bubbles from other divers under the boat. After several forceful requests to the boat captain he finally got the idea that running the boat back and forth over them was not acceptable. After two divers entered the water, the boat captain decided he needed to reposition the boat and started the engine so he could back it up. Rather unnerving. The divemaster was good but he could have made some safer decisions. The reefs are in bad shape and we saw little marine life. If we hadn't dove Hol Chan, I am not sure we would have seen anything that would have made it worthwhile. We made six dives and decided we were better off saving our money and diving another place and time. We were glad we didn't have an all-inclusive dive package. Island is beautiful, laid back, Belizeans are wonderful. (Ph: 800-523-3350 or +501-226-4137; e-mail [hustler@btl.net](mailto:hustler@btl.net); website <http://www.scubadivingbelize.net>)

**Larry Parker's Reef Divers, September 2002, Michael Stanfield** ([mstanfield@kc.rr.com](mailto:mstanfield@kc.rr.com)) **Grandview, MO.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis:

60 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm. Dive guides were informative and reminded us that to get on the same depth level or a little below when around eagle rays, allowing us to spend an hour between three dives just hanging out while the rays fed. We were within 30 feet or closer most of the time. We did several shore dives and though the swims are longer than a typical shore dive in Bonaire, the walls were well worth the extra swim. We saw turtles and rays on almost every dive. Lots of blennies at Radar Reef. Saw five sail fin blennies putting on their show. (Ph: (501) 2-63134; e-mail [larry@reefdivers.com](mailto:larry@reefdivers.com))

**Ramon's Resort, July 2001, Sheryl Loux, Kalamazoo, MI.** Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 150+. Dive restrictions enforced: follow guide, keep in sight and dive no deeper than guide. Ramon's was a pleasant accommodation with air conditioning and fresh water pool (a rarity anywhere in Belize). Dive operator was intolerant of beginners and were allowed to break all the rules without being stopped. Thought we would lose several beginners due to embolism. Underwater terrain was deep canyons of sand bottoms with coral ridges that sloped quickly to depths >150! Tops of ridges at 60-90' required constant vigilance of depth gauge. Sight of an eagle ray swimming within four of us and returning about 20 minutes later was unforgettable. Shark Alley snorkeling area not to be missed. Tikal in Guatemala was worth the one day fly over but carry a lot of cash for Belize and Guatemala.

Departure taxes for the one day (\$120/person). Had airlines hold scuba bags and luggage for Tikal trip. Belize zoo was great! (Ph: 800-MAGIC 15 or 601-649-1990; e-mail [info@ramons.com](mailto:info@ramons.com); website [www.ramons.com](http://www.ramons.com))

## Blackbird Caye

**Blackbird Caye, March 2002, John Mulholland, Oakville, ON.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm no currents. When wind dies, what we call horse and deer flies moved in with mosquitoes big time. Off works, but it takes lots. Cabanas are comfortable/ mosquito netting removed when A/C installed. Well run operation/staff extremely accommodating. Apparent shortage of dive staff lead divemaster to state dive profile for all divers. Blue Hole is popular dive site, but now the big boats are chumming, so we saw 6-8 Caribbean Reef sharks about 20 feet from us. Night dive almost not worth the effort. However, "Jack" the salt water crocodile shows up most nights and provides excellent entertainment. (Ph: 888-271-DIVE; website [www.Blackbirdresort.com](http://www.Blackbirdresort.com))

## Glover's Reef

**Manta Resort, July 2001, Sheryl J. Loux, Kalamazoo, MI.** Logged dives: 150+. Dive restrictions enforced: Group dive follow guide, all drift dives, 40-45 min. (90' max usually, must not go deeper than guide), no shore dives. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. great resort. The staff was friendly and competent. They accommodated a complete certification

course for my 14 yr. old son. The boat and dive guides were excellent even in the extremely choppy (3-5') waves. Currents were present always from mild to very strong. Coral sand fingers interspersed the coral from near the drop off to the shallows. The terrain was mostly flat with a few shallow ravines. The tropical fish were steady, though not abundant. Nurse sharks and turtles were often seen on the bottom or under ledges. Eagle rays were seen at drop off. Colorful tube sponges were present but not abundant. Sea fans were few. Trunk fish were large and abundant. Cabanas were cozy, air conditioned with private baths. No-see-ums were treated for regularly, but still got many ankle bites even with repellent. Recommend wearing socks to avoid bites. Money's worth. (Ph: 800-326-1724 or 501-231-895; e-mail [info@mantaresort.com](mailto:info@mantaresort.com))

## Lighthouse Reef

**Lighthouse Reef Resort, February 2002, John Rogers (jrogers@pclink.com) Coon Rapids, MN.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, choppy. After a 20 min. ride from Belize on a 12-seat Cessna to private airstrip. The staff delivered luggage to our assigned rooms while we were greeted by Brett, the manager, and given complimentary Rum punch. The luggage was also picked up and loaded on the plane at the end of the trip. Being advised from previous *Undercurrent* I came prepared with Deep Woods Off. We were swarmed by large numbers of bugs during the

welcome. After covering myself with bug spray I returned later that evening for dinner and was pleased to discover few if any of the bugs still around. A steady breeze seemed to keep most bugs away the rest of the time. While there was no shore diving, they would take us out snorkeling between dives. The package included 3-dives per day, three of which were all-day trips due to the distance some sites were from the resort. The boat was fast and included a head. The distance from resort to dive site seemed to be no more than about an hour travel time and often less. Lunch was provided (cold meat or fish pockets, pasta dishes). The food on board and at the resort I found exceptional or certainly better than average. The rooms were air-conditioned and about as spacious as I have stayed in. Plenty of room for two people -- each with our own double bed. The showers had good water pressure and I never ran out of hot water. The tap water was potable. We had about 17 divers that may be too crowded if the divers were not compatible or lacked experience. Many had cameras and the crew was good about handing them to divers. While they had two rinse tanks for cameras, the number of cameras crowded these tanks causing our cameras to get knocked about. The plastic water cooler fell from its shelf and landed in the rinse tank with our cameras. Found my camera controls and strobe to have been moved out of position at least twice. Both times this included my 35-mm lens being twisted on its mount so that its locking pin was out of the groove. I noticed

this problem at the end of each dive and it seemed to be related to the build up of pressure in the camera (Nikonos-V) sufficient to push the lens forward enough to disengage the locking pin. This combined with the rough handling caused the lens to turn. The water can be choppy so bring motion sickness medicine if this is a concern. Due to the wave conditions, number of divers, and the lack of baby-sitting mentality of the guide, the diving might be difficult for novice divers. The crew was good about explaining location of the wall relative to our boat, and what to look for. I don't recall them ever not sending a guide down on a dive. They would always suggest a deep to shallow repetitive dive profile, and would dutifully record our Max. Depth and dive time after each dive. There was seldom a dive time limit imposed, except on one or two dives when they wanted to get back to the resort before dark. We were allowed to dive our own profiles and not penalized if we occasionally went deeper than they requested. A number of the sites had disappointing visibility due to sand being stirred up and drifting down the wall, but many had well over 100 feet. The water was cool. I found my full 1/4" wetsuit top to be just right but I like it warm. These reefs have seen a lot less traffic than many other locations. A number of them had more schooling fish than I have seen in years. Several times we came upon lobsters out in the daylight. I saw about four to six spotted eagle rays throughout the trip -- one of them while snorkeling in shallow water! Twice I saw large

free-swimming green moray eels, and several times a number of our group saw sharks (both nurse sharks in the coral and some free swimming sharks). I even snorkeled with a dolphin during a lunch stop -- anchored in shallow water near one caye, but wouldn't come closer than 5 feet. The night dive was disappointing, and I didn't see much. I like creature comforts and I would give Lighthouse Reef Resort a "Thumbs Up" overall. No guest is obligated to tip anything, however they offer suggested amounts for the different staff classifications (the total of which is \$130). Those in my dive group that I spoke with were so impressed by the service that they gladly paid the suggested amount for the entire staff as did I. (Ph: 800-423-3114 or 941-687-4593, Fax: 941-687-9428, e-mail: [wwalt@aol.com](mailto:wwalt@aol.com) or [larci@att.net](mailto:larci@att.net))

**Lighthouse Reef Resort, March 2002, Hollie Lindauer** ([hollielindauer@attbi.com](mailto:hollielindauer@attbi.com)) **Salem, OR.** Vis: 60-120 ft. Water: 80 F. Dives accrued: 250. Dive restrictions enforced: Depth limits. Dive staff records depth and time and does safety checkout. They do not guide or take you to favorite haunts. My husband and I really enjoyed the remote location — Gilligan's Island style. No shoes from the moment you land lifestyle. The rooms aren't great, but adequate. The food is plentiful, not gourmet, staff was delightful, things were clean (not the flies previously reported). The vis was not fantastic. It was quite calm and easy for boat access. The dive guides have routine

stops — some that are poor with little to see but it is fun diving.

## **St. George's Caye**

**St. George's Lodge, January 2002, J.W. Duncan.** One of the most interesting dives I've had in thirty years and something like the tenth time we have returned to Fred Good's little paradise. St. George's Lodge provides creatively gourmet fare, lovingly comfortable accommodation, and careful attention to the details of diving by a man who has spent more than two years of his life submerged. The weather was nippy (as cool as 70° on land, 79° underwater) and the sea was choppy our first few days. Had to go south on the reef for longer hauls (as much as 1/2 an hour rather than the usual 10-20 minute boat rides). Pumice-like silt covered the bottom of our old favorite northerly-situated sites, which reduced visibility when stirred up by unsettled seas. The fish were not quite as abundant, but Fred, with his baton (a chopstick he uses to tease into view minute creatures like the lesser sponge crab or the cryptic teardrop crab out of sponges. The next several days of our ten-day visit were incredible. We had some outstanding dives in the south with calm weather and visibility (80-100') seeing southern stingray, nurse shark, moray, and tons of the usual grouper, grunt, triggerfish, butterfly, parrot, angel, bar jack etc. On a day-trip to Turneffe, we visited the spectacular Black Coral Wall with its dramatic 110° overhang and 80-foot free-fall approach. At Little Finger, after a typical twenty-five minutes of 100+ foot



Nitrox diving, we came onto a clear sand bottom at 60 feet and an 8-foot bottlenose dolphin about thirty feet away. Five of us happily clapped, then resigned ourselves to a wistful goodbye wave as the dolphin sped out of view. Two minutes later, I looked up and "Holy smoke! Here come the Blue Angels!" Four mature eight-foot dolphins flew toward us in perfect diamond formation. (Yes, I'm an old Navy jet-jock.). There were two males and two females cavorting, rolling in the sand, making mating thrusts, and swimming in pairs and as a foursome close to us. These shenanigans continued for an honest thirty minutes, and they were obviously enjoying us as much as we them. One insisted on making Veronica passes at me, and although I am a strict "no-toucher," I had to reach out just once. Fred and I stayed at 60 feet while the dolphin surfaced for air and quickly sounded back to our depth for more play. The other divers who were on smaller tanks hung out at twenty feet on the anchor line and watched from above. Finally, Fred returned to the boat, and I happily did a long safety stop at 15 feet, not so much for safety, but mostly to continue watching the play. The dolphin came to check out my noise maker (a Cuban-made rattle), and the biggest male did a flyby, turning just as he passed to release a large plume of excrement in my face. It almost seemed to have a message of "naughty voyeur" in it. The dolphin followed us halfway back to the Lodge, swimming along side the bow. Then, as we pulled away, one of them leapt almost all the way out of the

water to say goodbye. None of my dives, not even the six foot goliath grouper or the 100-pound hawksbill turtle, scratching its tummy on a coral pinnacle at 120 feet as it was being pestered by two large gray angelfish (who wanted to move into that cleaning station), could better the Blue Angel show. Even King Neptune Good and his better half, Fran, were shaking their heads. (Ph: 501-220-4444; e-mail [aw2trav2bz@aol.com](mailto:aw2trav2bz@aol.com) or [info@gooddiving.com](mailto:info@gooddiving.com); website <http://www.gooddiving.com>)

**St. George's Lodge, April 2002, John E. Anderson ([jands@netrus.net](mailto:jands@netrus.net))**  
**Coral Gables, FL.** Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives accrued: 176. As reported by your publication, the food was outstanding. The service was friendly and good. Fred Good and Fran Chang are careful and competent divers. As expected Nitrox was promoted. I tried it, liked it and got certified for its use. The diving was comfortable and relaxed. The reported bug problem was highly exaggerated, at least during our stay.

**St. George's Lodge, May 2002, Dusty Roads & John Artim, Oakland, CA.** Water: 80 F. Dives logged: One is @ 130; one is at 10. We were the only guests except one day when two sailboats dropped by; one for diving and dinner and one for dinner. We thoroughly enjoyed the quiet atmosphere of the caye. It was a pleasure to visit a stunning location like Belize's barrier reef and have two such experienced guides — Fred has been diving the area for thirty years, Fran for thirteen years. As this was a

value week, we could have gone out three times a day. Because the wind was up and the swells with it, we tended to do two-dive days. The visibility varied with the wind and site. The worst was 40' and for only part of one dive. The best was 100'. We typically saw 60' to 80' of visibility. Tanks were either 80 or 100 cubic foot low-pressure steel with either air or 32% Nitrox fills. On our dives we would have Fred, and sometimes also Fran, as guides. They took us to see an amazing variety of reef life from minute invertebrates to nurse sharks, rays, and turtles. Both Fred and Fran are excellent naturalists and safe dive guides. We've never had dive partners who were so expressive underwater — not just the usual hand signals but vocal cues kept us aware of what interesting things were happening. The lodge is a comfortable place to hang out between dives. We had a windward room in the lodge and for the temperatures it was the right choice. It is a very intimate setting. Fred and Fran tend to be outspoken folks who enjoy a good discussion. We found conversation engaging and easy-going. They respected our privacy at every turn and when we wanted to be alone that was respected. However, you'll enjoy the week much more if you keep up your end of a discussion. Also, if you come looking for a more touristy experience and ask about shark feeding or other things you can expect a reaction, especially from Fred. One of us is an experienced diver (130+ dives in both the cooler waters of California's Monterey Bay and in the Caribbean and South

Pacific). Having recently brought a new camera, both Fran and Fred were excellent underwater coaches, modeling camera angles, how to approach fish all while constantly spotting wonderful things for me to shoot at. I took comfort in their advice that even for the most accomplished photographers, a couple of good shots per roll would be something to be excited about. After I got home, I realized they were right! The other of us just finished his first year of diving with the twelve dives in the cooler and much murkier waters of the Monterey Bay. As a beginner, I appreciated the individual attention. It was like having private instruction for a week — and from someone whose experience was obvious and appreciated. I ended up opting to do an advanced open water certification (SSI) while we were in Belize simply because the opportunity to do it with such private attention is so rare. I ended up doing Nitrox, Navigation, Deep Diving, and Computer Diving as the specialties. Of these, Nitrox and Navigation were the most informative. Fred does a thorough lecture on Nitrox use. Nitrox significantly reduced my post-dive fatigue that was especially nice because the 20 minute boat rides to and from our sites was a bit harder on me as a boat novice. The navigation approach Fred taught me was also well done. Fred's approach is to make use of and attend to the topology of the site (as opposed to use of compass headings). Though I won't be giving up my compass for Monterey Bay, Fred extended my skill's repertoire. One other byproduct was the opportunity to

practice air sharing, both as donor and recipient. Being able to swim freely and comfortably while sharing air and still be able to enjoy the sights was a good skill to practice. I was delighted at the difference an intensive week's diving made not only in my skills in the water but my comfort and confidence level. Though Fred initially comes across as a bit liberal as a diver, I soon came to see that his is an educated, well thought-out position. He is also very accommodating of folks, like myself, who are more conservative. I enjoy lingering over everything I see, both micro and macro, and can often be seen floating over some small invertebrate, peering at it at close range for what fm told is a long time! Fred and Fran quickly figured out what I like to do and left me to it. They would often have some new wonder lined up for me so that when I lifted my head — they would signal me to come look at something new! And the night dive was fantastic! We went in at dusk with plenty of light to orient by. When we left St. George's I felt I was waving goodbye to two good friends.

### Southern Belize

**Hamanasi, September 2001, Jim Watkins, (jrwatkinstw@cs.com), Berwyn, PA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 Fahrenheit. Resort is beautiful: rooms spacious, with AC and ceiling fans, very clean. Food is the best I have had at a dive resort. Topside attractions are numerous: jungle tours, kayaking, hiking, caving, Mayan ruins. Diving the barrier reef was only

“good.” Glover's atoll was great. One dive boat was out of commission. The one we used could accommodate 8-10 comfortably, 12 in a pinch. One dive we had 14. Bottom time is limited by tables (even if you had a computer) because every dive was a drift dive. Sand flies were horrible! Twice as bad as in Roatan. Overall I really enjoyed Hamanasi. (Ph: 501-5-12073; e-mail [info@hamanasi.com](mailto:info@hamanasi.com); website [www.hamanasi.com](http://www.hamanasi.com))

**Hamanasi, October 2001, Sally Svoboda, Youngstown, OH.** Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82 F. Logged dives: 90. Dive restrictions enforced: set at each dive (usually 60 ft.) relatively new establishment. The accommodations were nice. We stayed in a “treetop cabana” which was wonderful. Dive operation good. DMs know the dive spots. This was rainy season — two days the dives were clear — 100+ ft. visibility. Last two days, after storm at sea, visibility dropped to 50 ft. Large schools of fish, nice variety of usual Caribbean corals and sponges. Saw eagle rays on almost every dive. Nice place for tropical rain forest land adventures also. Take bug spray!

### Placencia

**Sea Horse Dive Shop, Harry's Cozy Cabanas, May 2002, R. R. LeCompte, Lafayette, IN.** Dives logged: 175. Full Moon. Seeking whale sharks. We flew into Belize City without reservations for a car. That gave us great bargaining power as all the rental places are across from the airport. You are better off with a

car because there are things to do an hour away that would cost silly amounts to tour with and, like many things in Placencia, subject to change. Vis was from 40 ft to 80 ft. OK reefs, nothing spectacular. Bull head sharks on one dive. Most unhappy with Sea Horse. Crowded boat. No john or ventilation. Dive briefing was sparse. First day dove for whale sharks in deep water — saw nothing. Ran into whale shark investigators from England and they said zip was around but the timing was right so we opted to reef dive. The divemaster gave no briefing. During the dive she lost her dive computer. We dove the reef the next day and she had not arranged for one. Took us into a deco dive and did not even know it till we showed her on our computers. The next day back to hunt whale sharks. Were told to go buy our own water for the trip! Sea Horse never asked for C cards. We noticed a young girl and asked how many dives she'd had: three! In a lake! This is an advanced dive! Clueless about neutral buoyancy. I informed the divemaster and he said he'd buddy up with her since he had no idea about her inexperience. At one point I had to go after her as she was sinking, sinking, sinking. I caught her at 124 ft. Back on board he had been totally unaware of her plight. The next dive he was going to "watch her." She ran out of air and he did not know it nor did he make arrangements to send her up with someone. Fortunately my dive buddy did. The other "resorts" in the area that advertised diving would send people to Sea Horse if there were not enough for them to go out. The

price they quote you is not necessarily the price you get and the surly staff wants to argue about everything. The good news is on the last day we swam with the whale sharks. 6 of them. It was grand. Harry's Cozy Cabanas. On the beach and cheap. Highly recommend Harry's. Cold beer in a cooler on the honor system. Placencia has not recovered from the hurricane in 2001. Town rolls up at 10 for both food and drink. **(Ph: 800-991-1969 or 501-6-23166; e-mail [seahorse@btl.net](mailto:seahorse@btl.net); website <http://www.belizescuba.com>)**

## Turneffe Island

**Turneffe Flats Resort, July, 2002, Harry Pearson, Cape Canaveral, FL.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, surge. Caters mostly to fishermen, so there is normally a small group of divers and you are well pampered by the Dive-master and boat staff. There also may be people doing combos -- fishing or diving. Twin cabanas, with AC and fans. Excellent food is served family style in an AC Lounge, which also includes a bar. Smoking is not permitted in this area. Some dives were difficult, due to unusual surges and currents. However, the resort has an ideal location, with access to dive sites all around Turneffe Flats, so we could always find calm water and good dives. A trip to Lighthouse Reef is included in a week of diving, with dives in the Blue Hole, a visit to the Bird Reserve on Half Moon Cay, followed by dives at Half Moon and Long Cays. I have been coming here for years. I have always found a

welcoming staff, skilled divemaster and great diving. However, the new managers, a British couple who classify themselves as dive instructors, lack people skills and their interactions with me were quite unpleasant on several occasions. **(Ph: 800-815-1304 or 605-578-1304; e-mail [tflats@rapidnet.com](mailto:tflats@rapidnet.com); website [www.tflats.com](http://www.tflats.com))**

**Turneffe Island Lodge, November 2001, Kathy McGowan ([kmcg3496@aol.com](mailto:kmcg3496@aol.com)) Eagle, ID.**

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm. The staff were superb, caring and capable, the food outstanding, the dives mixed -- some of my best ever and some of the least good. I was glad I'd read about the sand fleas and mosquitoes. DEET worked well. The diving was made easy by the staff taking care of gear, and supplying dry towels and fresh oranges on the boat, and homemade cookies after every dive. I got to touch a hawksbill turtle, and hold coral shrimp, arrowline crabs, and a sea cucumber. The staff was gentle and considerate with the creatures. Saw an octopus swimming, and crawling around. I enjoyed the lodge and the people. **(Ph: 800-874-0118; Fax 713-313-4671; e-mail [info@turneffelodge.com](mailto:info@turneffelodge.com); website [www.turneffelodge.com](http://www.turneffelodge.com))**

**Turneffe Island Lodge, December 2001, H. Wayne Ferguson ([wferguson@fergusonmetals.com](mailto:wferguson@fergusonmetals.com)) Lawrencebury, IN.** Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 76-78 F. Dives logged: 343. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. Picked us up in a new 43 ft. yacht with

Sherman the bartender offering his potent island potion. From beginning to end you were treated as a special guest by everyone there. Manager to carpenter. The day begins with coffee brought to your doorstep followed by breakfast that changes daily, at 7:30 AM The first dive of the day is at 8:30, between dives since the sites are so close, you can return to the Lodge for your surface interval. The second dive is at 10:30 followed by lunch and the final dive is at 2:30. The hard and soft corals are in good shape and due to the location, do not get over dove. We had the pleasure of watching a hawksbill turtle dive on a basket sponge one day. Another dive produced dolphins, spotted eagle rays and schools of jack and permits. First class facility whose new owner is going to great lengths to improve the physical plant. We stayed in the cabanas, steps from the beach with indoor and outdoor showers and an L shaped screened in porch. My dive buddy learned more in one week with Lizette, the Danish dive director, than he had since becoming certified.

**Turneffe Island Lodge, December 2001, Kathleen O'Connor ([montyoconnor@hotmail.com](mailto:montyoconnor@hotmail.com)) Va. Beach, VA.** Experience: 101-250

dives. Vis: 50 to 1100 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy no currents. Fantastic place to dive and get away from it all. The resort is the only occupant of the island -- no crowds, cars, noise, pushy vendors. Accommodations are nice, the food is fantastic and the service exceeds that of anywhere we have been outside Asia. The dive operation

is great -- new boats, new Scubapro rental gear, wonderful staff, and things run on time. They go to the best sites and are eager to go where the divers want. "The Elbow" is an incredible site, only a five minute boat ride from the Lodge. everyone wants to please you in every way (e.g., no dive guides with "attitude"). The resort manager is a marine biologist who is eager to share her enthusiasm for the reef and Belize. Great photo ops for large schools of fish, eagle rays, coral, tropicals.

### **Turneffe Island Lodge, January**

**2002, Sue Ann & Howard**

**Hackworth (sueannb@san.rr.com)**

**San Diego, CA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 65 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. This resort was amazing! 11 divers and one fisherman. Resort has 12 rooms, but they are slowly building more cabanas. The beach and grounds are beautiful. You could swim or snorkel (tons of eel grass). Nothing to do other than dive, lay on the beach, kayak around the island, and socialize in the bar. The bartender Sherman is fantastic and is an artist. We brought home one of his paintings and love it. Food was top notch, but they don't serve beef because you can't get decent beef in Belize. Excellent seafood (lobster, shrimp, snapper, crab), but I don't eat seafood so they cooked special meals for me. Great chicken and pork. Seconds and even thirds are no problem. The coconut creme pie is made from coconuts on the island and is to die for. Accommodations are great; spring for the cabana -- has

outdoor shower that leads into the bathroom and a screened in porch, French doors, 20 steps from the water. Dive operation was great. Three dives a day no matter how few people. Small fast boats took six divers on the five to ten minute rides to the sites. All drift dives, but easy. The Elbow was amazing -- huge schools of jacks, spadefish, eagle rays. Tons of fish at every site, huge stingrays, barracuda, eels, corals and sponges looked fabulous. Peters Peak (20 minutes away) is just beautiful! On Tuesdays everyone goes on a large, brand new, and comfy dive boat to the Blue Hole, Half Moon Caye, and Long Caye. Blue Hole -- we only had about seven minutes at 130ft. There is a party the last night, we all had some wine, did the hula, and had a great time. There is a bucket on the dive boat for cameras, no photo processing on island. Dive sites are only 10 minutes away and all surface intervals are on the island (except the one all day trip and that boat has space for changing film) so don't really need area for film changing. Three divers were a pain in the \*@!\*. They were very hung over and at the Blue Hole promptly drank beer when they surfaced (much to our dismay we found out that they had consumed the beer the other divers had ordered for the trip back while we were in the water on the next two dives). They didn't listen to directions and kept dropping below the dive limits even with two divemasters right with them -- the divemasters had to physically pull them back up twice. The third time the poor divemasters gave up and took us all up for our

safety stop. They drank heavily all the time and the folks at the resort on the second or third day had to tell them they couldn't dive if they were drinking. Crazy, but they thought this was ridiculous -- they chose to drink instead of dive pretty much from that point on. They would only do the middle dive and then drink all afternoon. One guy was supposedly a divemaster (he was a terrible diver with no buoyancy control who wouldn't follow directions and was always running into everyone and kicking coral). His wife just got certified and she kept having runaway ascents and he would counter what the divemasters were trying to teach her. When we went for a night dive he told the divemaster she didn't need her own light -- crazy! They insisted she have one of course. The resort handled it well, though these folks were quite a challenge. When they did dive the resort sent them on a separate boat from everyone else.

**Turneffe Island Lodge, January 2002, Michael N. Hofman** ([mhofman@jmoyerlandscaping.com](mailto:mhofman@jmoyerlandscaping.com))  
**San Francisco, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, calm. It's a great Caribbean destination, relaxed island resort and well-run dive operation by Beau, the dive master. We had more than a few dives at the Elbow (or around it) where there are schools of permit and barracuda. Not as many large fish as in the past but wonderful small things to see. Everyone is extremely helpful and interested in making sure guests have a great time.

The new owner is spending a great deal to upgrade the resort without adding much capacity. The fishing (although we didn't go) was also excellent!

**Turneffe Island Lodge, March 2002, Ron & Sherry Smith, Levittown, PA.** Vis: 60-90 ft. Water: 76-80 F. Dives logged: 146. Great island, nice accommodations, great diving. Dive staff helpful, although it rained half our trip, they were still eager and enthusiastic about taking you out to dive. Food here is fantastic. Our second year here.

**Turneffe Island Lodge, May 2002, Susan Fuhs** ([fuhs@alumni.caltech.edu](mailto:fuhs@alumni.caltech.edu))  
**Hermosa Beach, CA.** Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives accrued: 450. Dive restrictions enforced: time, no more than one hour. Diving sites are close to the lodge so you dive from a small boat and come back to the lodge for surface interval. Diving was chaperoned — not too bad, but enough to notice. Dive guides were excellent at spotting stuff and there is a lot to see. None of the dives ended in shallow areas to do safety stops on the reef. Dive times were limited to one hour, a shame to have to come up so soon. One day the group takes the big boat to the Blue Hole (overrated — felt like Disneyland with group after group going down and coming back up like an assembly line). But the second dive, Half Moon Cay Wall, was awesome. A great wall and then could pop over to a sandy shallower inner area with rays, conch, huge hermit crab, and eel grass with lots of cool tiny stuff. Shame was that again

dive was only one hour. Turneffe atoll dives had huge schools of fish, a ray or two, a turtle or two, a shark, maybe a remora. Generally great diving and good crew. Food was quite good especially for being at the bitter end of the supply chain.

### **Turneffe Island Lodge, July 2002, Judy Kiracofe, Farmingdale, NJ.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F. Third trip to Turneffe Island Lodge. New beach cabanas are very nice! The staff is helpful and friendly. The food is great — 2nds no problems. You set up your tank and from that time on it will be on the boat ready to go — just bring your mask and fins. After each dive you're back on land for the surface interval — very nice! It's a great place to go with a spouse who doesn't dive — they can fish on the flats or deep sea fish or just relax! The new pro yachts are nice for the transfer from Belize City to the lodge 30 miles off the coast. They have someone meet you at the airport and they drop you back at the airport in plenty of time to catch your flight out.

## **BERMUDA**

Despite Bermuda's pricey, elegant hotels and British manners, it's not a decent dive destination, even for beginners. Reefs are thin and there's sparse fish life. . . . From January to March, the average high is 68 degrees, the low around 58. Summers are balmy, waters chilly. Bermuda's in the hurricane zone, around the same latitude as Charleston, South Carolina. . . .

### **Fantasea Divers, September 2002, Vic Bary/Maureen Strazdon (vbary@yahoo.com) Cranford, NJ.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 84 to 92F, choppy. Fantasea is a well run, responsive organization operating out of a major hotel. Friendly staff asks for suggestions before choosing a site and sets up equipment for second dive. 40' boat was never overcrowded. Local divers who have bought a season program augmented paid staff. They tally divers before boat leaves dock and after every dive. No storage facility for diver-owned or rented equipment (have to charge out fresh rented equipment each day). Dive staff could do more in the way of helping divers up onto dive step. Once you're on board, they are very helpful. No separate rinse tank for cameras. Inexperienced divers threw everything imaginable into one rinse barrel. (Ph: **441-236-1300 or 441-295-0460; e-mail info@fantasea.bm; website www.fantasea.bm**)

## **BONAIRE**

In 1999, hurricane-driven waves damaged, even destroyed, many of Bonaire's beautiful shallow coral gardens, ruining snorkeling in many places. Still, Bonaire is a diver's island par excellence, with easy diving that's especially well-suited to beginning divers or those returning to the water after a long dry spell. Superb year-round weather, with lows around 74° at night and daytime highs around 89°. Expect some rain from