

safety stop and no lights. Being a PADI instructor myself my wife and I chose to make a three minute safety stop. No fish and the reefs looked extremely unhealthy. Diving at Run Away Bay at best is boring for the beginners and a total waste of time for anybody with experience diving.

MEXICO

Once Cozumel was visited mainly by divers, but now cruise ships daily disgorge great packs of shoppers who descend on the night clubs, restaurants and bars galore, and sidewalk hustlers hawking condos, serapes that are questionable bargains, and little plaster statues of guys wearing big hats leaning on saguaro cactuses. . . . Spectacular dives do exist, but many operators are reluctant to visit these sites, especially if the divers aboard have mixed experience levels, and rightfully so, because much of Cozumel's diving is advanced sites with deep or fast-current drift dives. Beginning divers should select other destinations. . . . Carry surface-signaling devices for both day and night (strobe, safety sausage, etc.) and stay with your dive guide or group. . . . Dive operators vary widely in quality and safety. . . . The best diving is in spring and summer; it can be rainy during the fall (hurricane season) and winter. . . . Cozumel is one of the biggest travel bargains, with accommodations ranging from the inexpensive downtown hotels to

diver hangouts to high dollar hotels . . . While there are dive operations up and down the Yucatan Coast, only Maya Ha is able to reach the only recently dived — though heavily fished — Chinchorro Banks. With a variety of activities and adventure tour offerings in addition to diving, the Southern Yucatan is an excellent choice for divers and nondivers alike looking for a unique vacation. . . .

Cancun

Solo Buceo, Royal Sands, November 2001, Peter Dillon, Westminster, MD. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 70 to 75 F, choppy currents. We were fitted with our rental equipment at the hotel and they provided transportation to the dive center. On our first dive, we saw 30 large spotted eagle rays at a Mexican navy wreck C-58. The current was very strong and we were required to stick to our dive master. My assigned buddy sucked his tank empty in less than 30 minutes so I had to ascend with 1200 psi left in my tank. A videographer from the dive center filmed our underwater experience: \$45. Later I was offered a rate of \$35. Our second dive was a drift along a small wall. The dive masters fed a nurse shark and she followed us the whole way. The boat crew was most helpful. They did everything from setting up our gear to pulling us out of the water. The theme park at Xel-Ha is a good place to introduce someone to snorkeling and maybe diving because the inlet is protected so the water is very calm plus there are lots of fish. **(Solo Buceo: Ph: 9-848-7070; e-mail**

**scuba@solobuceo.com; website
www.solobuceo.com; Royal Sands:
website www.royalresortscancun.com)**

Cozumel

Aldora Divers, Plaza Las Glorias Hotel, August 2001, Ed Gabe (sharkey@4scuba.com) Lexington, KY. Experience: 26 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Plaza Las Glorias was a very good hotel, comfortable with big rooms and great views. Aldora: steel 120 cu. ft tanks for greater bottom time, fast boats first on the reef, and smaller groups of divers. The staff really made the deal. Everyone we met was above average; Bill "Memo" La Rosa did a great job; professional and trustworthy, and seemed like everyone's dive buddy. I went through the Advanced Open Water course with Bill, and it was spectacular. **(Ph: (281) 338-9888 or 011-52-987-23397; e-mail RangerBob@Aldora.com; website www.aldoradivers.com)**

Aldora Divers, Plaza Las Glorias, December 2001, John & Verna Gross (gross@chaffee.net) Buena Vista, CO. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, choppy. Several businesses are no longer there after 9/11. We were surprised to have Daniel on a day of diving as he was on vacation. Alejandra showed up as a tourist! She is working on her Masters in Marine Biology in Mazatlan and it was such a treat to go in search of those sea-horses, pipefish and nudibranchs with her. The diving was great considering it rained every day! We saw seven

turtles on one dive at Punta Sur alone. We saw turtles on every dive and found the two large green eels at El Cedral. The reefs look great. We had Roberto for diving three days, Bill two days and Jorge one day. Roberto was great for finding small stuff. Bill was always successful at finding us sharks (I saw the most nurse sharks ever), turtles and larger stuff and with Alexandra along we found a tiny sea horse, black pipe fish and many nudi's. Roberto got a toad fish out of his hole for a beautiful photo! Huge school of silversides which according to Roberto only happens every three years. Watched groupers and other fish feed. Aldora is only running one boat at the time so we ranged from five to seven divers. All of us were advanced so the diving resulted in 80+ minute bottom time. La Choza is the only restaurant to make a decent margarita on the island! We are never disappointed at the French Quarters. Primo's was a huge disappointment. I got sick on the shrimp. Plaza Los Glorias services were good except the sewer smell common in all the hotels! New mall open now at the cruise ship dock and Carlos and Charlies and Senor Frogs have both moved there (atop the sewer pump station) and the smell is awful. Ernesto's downtown is gone. The prices continue to rise and Cozumel is no longer the bargain it used to be. However, the diving is great and we just avoid downtown when the ships are in.

Aldora Divers, January 2002, Terry Grainger (terry.grainger@mindspring.com) Carmel, NY. Vis: 80-100+ ft. Water:

81-82F. Dives logged: 200+. Aldora proves time and again why they are the best operator in Cozumel. They provide quality service, attention to divers special requests, long dives and fast boats.

Aldora Divers, Reef Club, February 2002, Paul McGahen (p_mcgahen2@hotmail.com) Dallas, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm. We dove with Aldora Divers based on the wonderful *Undercurrent* reports and were not disappointed as Aldora. They were first on the dive sites in the morning. On our first dive we saw four eagle rays and I'll bet the later boats did not see them. It rained and we had the unfortunate luck to stay at the Reef Club. It is way south of town and very close to the best dive sites but a \$10 taxi ride to town. The food at the Reef Club was inedible at most meals. We even ate at the "sit-down" restaurant and it was terrible. The only food that was average was the roasted chicken at lunch and few items on the breakfast buffet. The waiting line to the bar in the evenings was 15 to 20 minutes at times. The drinks were poor at best. The swim-up bar in the afternoon was very good and the only really decent service at the resort. We stayed four days and our room was cleaned once. We had to beg for clean towels and once I was forced to search the hotel grounds for a maid's cart just to get some toilet paper.

Aldora Divers, Costa Club, March 2002, Larry Peters (LPMcRags@aol.com) Bay City, MI. Vis: 60-90 ft. Water: 79-80 F. Dives accrued: 68. Dive

restrictions enforced: the usual for Cozumel — stay close to group and divemaster. Aldora has great people, the boats are fast with lots of room. The steel 120's cost a bit more \$79 US for a 2-tank dive but well worth the extra bottom time. The average dive time was over 60 minutes. Costa Club is clean with friendly people and a great pool. Not sure about the food we always walked to town and ate there. Food prices in town have gone up a bit but still a good value and the food/service is great.

Aldora Divers, Fiesta Americana, July 2002, Dale Treadway, Omaha, NE. Flat water 82% with mild to strong currents. *Undercurrent* research sold our party of six to book this dive operation and Aldora Divers did not disappoint. Take your gear to their shop and they handle and clean until you leave. Pick you up at your hotel pier. Fast, comfortable, safety equipped boats to sites that fit your skill level. Eight is maximum in boat so we six had the boat for our group. Topside interval as at beach site with all facilities including food, drink, rest rooms etc. Steel 120 tanks for men and steel 100's for ladies gives 60 to 80 minutes of bottom time even with dive time at 80 to 110 feet. Must dive computers and only three dives a day. Bob (brother-in-law of owner) handles office and PR (checking with divers to insure divemaster giving you good dives). Divemasters Bill(nite dive) and Jorge (eight day dives) are great finding creatures. I asked for splendid toadfish and seahorses and he pointed out one of each on two different dives.

The anemones were wonderful with green, lavender and pink tips. Topside Bill and Jorge had personality for fun while concern for safety. Wish I had a T-shirt with their name and logo on it so I could do a little advertising for them, but they don't sell them.

Aldora Divers, Iberostar, July 2002, Duane Hill, Beaumont, TX. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 25 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, currents. Aldora's operation was a little bit rocky to start, however, they got their act together. Divemaster (Omar) was good and the 120 cf tanks allowed an amazing bottom time. On the first day a woman required a lot of air. We surfaced within 35 minutes on the deep dive (the shortest of the week) with over half the air remaining. They moved us to a different boat that had more experienced divers from the second to the fifth days and we averaged well over an hour for bottom times thereafter. When told to be at the dock by 8:00 a.m., we were never picked up before 8:20. When I asked about this, I was told "remember we are on Mexican time here." I found the manager to be interested in how things were going, and a desire to make things good for the divers. The repeat divers were all very experienced and would not think of diving with another dive-op. Iberostar beach was great, food was pretty good (all-inclusive resort) and our rooms were fine. Some people on the top of the two story buildings had leaky roofs when it rained. We got a great last minute deal using funjet.com. It was far from downtown, but we only went to town twice for shopping.

Aldora Divers, Fiesta Americana, August 2002, Larry Pepper (triathlon@attbi.com) Alpharetta, GA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 65 to 110 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. 5th trip to Cozumel and my first with Aldora Divers. They are the best operation I have experienced. Aldora provides a toll-free number manned by Toni who was helpful. Once you drop your gear to be fitted for the steel 80-120's, it is set up for you each morning and after each dive and everything is rinsed and stored at night. No lugging gear! Dive Masters, Bill, Jorge and Roberta were fantastic. I have done Devil's Throat several times, but Jorge made it a new experience that was an order of magnitude better. Bill was great helping me identify the critters and was there with a magnifying glass to see macro life. They left you alone once they knew your capabilities. Dives are a minimum of 70 minutes including deep dives thanks to the steel tanks and computers. Surface intervals are at a great beach restaurant and Bob Thayer (one of Aldora's owners) usually meets you there. He is a great guy.

Aqua Safari, Plaza Las Glorias, September 2001, Jenny Smith, San Diego, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm. Aqua Safari is a reliable, on-time operator with great boats and divemasters and a superb dive shop staff (El Pedio, Sergio, Angel, Donna). Of course their bigger boats are crowded and the downside is that there are a lot of beginning divers who

can't help but kick coral and perhaps even you! However, en route to the sites, we always make new friends from different places (Colorado, New York, Chicago, Minnesota, Netherlands). We also enjoyed the Aqua Safari fast boat, Belinda on our last day. Since we are cold water divers, we truly enjoy the freedom from our usual 7 mil suits. We dove in our swim suits! If you plan to dive 3-4 dives a day, never stay at an all-inclusive that is not a dedicated dive resort. Bring lots of \$1 bills for tips so cab drivers can't keep your change. Bring bug spray, and "sink the stink" for your dive suits. Tune down your "uptight" attitude, buy bottled water at Chedraui supermarket our first day in, and take tours the second day before we're too tired from diving 3-4 tanks a day! (Ph: (52) 987 20101; e-mail: dive@aquasafari.com; website www.aquasafari.com)

Aqua Safari, Plaza Las Glorias, February 2002, Ron & Sherry Smith, Levittown, PA. Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 76-80 F. Dives logged 146. Our 5th year in Cozumel. Visibility is always great (more than most places we've been). Diving is great. See lots of fish (small and large), tons of turtles — almost every dive. Topside the island is getting a little too "touristy" and crowded, because of the cruise ships.

Aqua Safari, Cozumel Condominiums, July 2002, Jerry & Kathy Bird (Hrly99cstm@aol.com) Kingwood, WV. Experience: 26-50 dives Vis: 75 to 120 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, surge. A pleasure from booking online

on the web site through the wonderful service we received both from the condo manager (Sara) to the staff and owner of Aqua Safari (Bill). Our boat captain (Chylonga) and dive master (Miguel) made our dives safe and enjoyable. Currents were extremely fast, maybe more than we were prepared for but Miguel kept a close eye to ensure we were not swept away. Safe, quality and fun diving were their priorities. The Palancar Caves were fabulous. Turtles, a nurse shark, eels, large lobsters, crabs, sting rays, large groupers, a toad fish, plate size angle fish, coral shrimp, parrot fish and many species of small tropical fish. Our last dive seven large playful Bermuda grunts stayed with us the whole dive. One attempted to bite one diver on the head. Night dive was an awesome experience. Three dive masters and we were broken into three smaller groups that worked well. Many crabs, an octopus, several sharp tail eels, lobsters galore and a very large grouper. Our day trips were on the fast boat that only held eight divers and was comfortable and friendly. Our condo was a twenty minute walk from the dive shop. Our gear was taken to the dive shop. The condo was comfortable with a beautiful view. The condo had most anything you would want. We missed a TV to keep up on the news and a phone. We used the condo computer daily to check email. There were 30 iguanas living on the lot next door that we enjoyed feeding. The back of the shop had a rinse tank with shelves and a rack to hang gear on to drip dry. It was a short walk across the street to the dock

to board the boat. A fabulous trip the price was very decent and Aqua Safari allowed us to adjust our dives to accommodate our vacation time. Thanks for a wonderful honeymoon.

Aquaworld, Moon Palace, August 2002, Vicky Walker, Lodi, CA.

Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 84 F, currents. Moon Palace was pricey, but all inclusive. Snorkeling was easy from the beach. Service was impeccable. Sea turtles were hatching on the beach. Aquaworld has huge facilities and enough resort personnel to support us English locked divers. The dive support staff were courteous, helpful, engaging, professional, and entertaining. Excellent predive instructions. Not much flexibility on diving, but we were not looking for independence at this point. Many tours for wreck diving, cave diving and other locations available. Drift diving at No Name Reef allowed for relaxing and viewing. Saw a manta ray, moray eel and a spiny lobster, huge variety of fish. (Ph: +52-9-8488326; e-mail info@aquaworld.com.mx; website www.aquaworld.com.mx)

Cabillito Del Caribe, Plaza Cozumel, April 2002, Larry Day (lday@ghg.net) Houston, TX.

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm. The travel agency that we have used numerous times before, went out of business just before our trip. They sent us our tickets and a voucher for a much lower priced hotel than the one we had paid for. They have yet to be found. It was Mexico Wholesalers,

aka Fun and Sun Travel, aka Caribbean Wholesalers, based in Houston. There were six rooms reserved for our group. We figure that there was about \$1,500 total price difference. We are attempting to dispute the credit card charges for about \$250. The replacement hotel was the Plaza Cozumel, a block from the plaza in San Pedro. Though the room was Spartan, everything was immaculate. The staff did everything possible to provide superior service. We had the rooftop pool to ourselves during the day and evening. These accommodations are not for everyone. Not many amenities and not luxurious, but if you want some place clean and convenient, then this will work. This was my third time diving with Caballito Del Caribe. Our divemaster was Adrian and he suggested a series of dives that was new to everyone in the group. Everyone was very pleased with our diving and the excellent job of Adrian and Caballito Del Caribe. One of our traditions is to visit Carlos and Charlie's on the last night in San Pedro. Their new location in the cruise ship mall was a disappointment. With the rapid commercialization of Cozumel, it is becoming less and less of a prime diving venue. The residents are still our good friends and we will continue to visit them at every opportunity. (Ph: 987-2-14-49)

Careyitos Advanced Divers, Villa Las Anclas, January 2002, Michael Pement (mpement@aol.com)

Tigard, OR. Experience: 101- 250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm currents. Cozumel

diving is along the western edge with the prime reefs and walls located toward the southern half. The current runs perpendicular to the shoreline then splits north and south with upwellings and downwellings to add a little extra excitement to the diving. Careyitos, captained by Ricardo Madrigal, is a 38' Bertram with 12' beam crewed by Ricardo, dive masters Tony and Susan, the boat driver and two helpers (who were great with gear and diver pickups) and up to ten divers with plenty of room for pelican cases along with the rebreather and gear bags. The boat dives steel 120's and their mission is to provide long bottom times. Dives are led in a casual way with the group strung out and roaming around within sight of the leader while a divemaster follows up in the rear. With 80' to 100' vis this didn't seem too restrictive, but those of us with cameras found we were always farthest back and sometimes swimming hard to rejoin the group. Those who ran short on air were instructed to ascend directly over the lead diver and maintain an approximate 20' depth for the duration of their "safety swim" during which time the boat put a swimmer with safety sausage in the water and picked up divers one by one as they surfaced. Consequently we always dove the extent of our air and even while on pinnacles or walls in the ninety-foot range were getting seventy-five plus minute bottom times. We would tie up between dives at the local beaches and have an hour and a half surface interval while the crew prepared lunch that included (everyday) the best

guacamole made fresh as the boat made its way to our first dive site and served it along with fresh bread and meat and cheese and fruit etc. during our break. The boat had a sturdy canopy over the aft deck and after lunch most of us would lay in the sun on the upper deck in the midst of that blue ocean with the waves gently rocking the boat. Did a night dive with a "fast boat" operation called Blue Angel in the Chankanab Lagoon where I could get a nice shot of the elusive Cozumel toad fish. Saw everything from great squadrons of eagle rays to nurse sharks and great barracuda, to the normal abundance and variety of angelfish and parrotfish, to sea turtles and spiny lobster and green and spotted moray and big groupers, the little guys like spotted drums and butterflyfish and damselfishes. We saw triggerfish and trunkfish. Traveled by ferry to the mainland and did two days of Cenote diving along the Mexican Riviera. Dove with Yucatech, at the Cenotes Chac Mool and Taj Mahal not too far south of the town of Akumal and Hidden Worlds, at the Cenotes Dos Ojos and Cavernade Murcielagos (Bat Cave) farther south in the area just north of Tulum. These four dives were awesome. You enter the Cenote (sinkhole), in some cases by climbing down a ladder, into a cavern carved in the limestone by the action of millions of years of erosion by the system of underground rivers. During the time of the ice ages the caves are dry and so are decorated with mineral deposits and stalactites and stalagmites. Now the caverns are filled with fresh water

so clear you have the sensation of floating in air. We were led down passageways and into rooms lighted only by our flashlights. The caverns are partially explored and the teams who map the system have strung yellow rope along the passageways to guide divers away from the side routes and dead ends. We discussed emergency conditions like silt-out or flashlight failure and went by the rule of thirds like in wreck diving to insure enough air for a safe return. We seemed to do hundreds of feet of penetration and were squeezing through openings or swimming along switchback routes that had me completely lost. When we reached the "light zones" it was very cool to see shafts of light penetrating the water bounded by the ragged edge of the cavern opening with vine laced trees visible in the jungle beyond. Small catfish and crawdads in the caverns but for the most part there was very little visible life. Hotel Villa Las Anclas is a gated compound of seven suites just a block off the plaza in San Miguel. It is owned and operated by Pedro Almada and Eyal and caters to divers. There is a rinse tank and secure area to hang and dry gear. Pedro and Eyal are attentive and gracious hosts. They bring breakfast to your suite at your convenience. You can spend \$250 a night and more, Villa Las Anclas is a bargain at \$50 a night. Dive packages can be combined with Blue Angel. The Careyitos and the Anita are best for UWP's. Long bottom times and room for gear are no problem on these boats.

**(Careyitos Ph: +52-872-1578;
careyitos@cozumel.czm.com.mx)**

Careyitos Advanced Divers, Casa Quetzal, April 2002, Chris Morrow (chmorrow@netzero.net) Thousand Oaks, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 250 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. Very friendly and knowledgeable about the local marine life. I choose this operation based on *Chapbook* reviews and was completely satisfied. In six days of diving we never visited the same site twice and dive briefings were well done. The boats were always full of advanced divers leading to several great dives. We did three dives between 130 and 205 feet where the additional depth was worth the reduced dive time. Most dives were 75 minutes. The boat stayed with the group the entire time and was always close by when we surfaced. This was not SOP for other boats and on three different days we had to radio dive boats to come pickup divers separated from their boat. The Careyitos boat was a little slow but had plenty of room to spread out. Surface intervals were often spent on the beach and were long enough to avoid required decompression on the second dive. Lunches were always the same but still good. Facilities are acceptable for UWP, however the currents can make it very difficult.

Careyitos Advanced Divers/Reef Club, June 2002, Alana, Spring, TX. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm, currents. Ricardo Madrigal and his crew encourages you to dive your best

under excellent safety and unobtrusive divemasters, Tony, Susan and Cielo (Ricardo's son). We have improved our skills and had the most relaxing, most interesting dives possible. Our last vacation (third with Los Careyitos) was excellent — dive times exceeding 60 minutes, with 3-4 divemasters in the water, even for our group of less than eight. These folks are not obtrusive, but point out anything you might have missed. Departure is from the marina south of town and the first dive lasts 'til lunchtime. Lunch is — the best guacamole on Cozumel, with great make-it-yourself sandwiches and tostadas, and lots of fresh fruit. After a surface interval long enough for a siesta or snorkeling, the second dive begins with long bottom times and expert, but relaxed, guiding. Ricardo insures you visit uncrowded sites, both topside and underwater. Their boat is well set up and roomy with a nice sun deck, a head and a good shaded area for setting up your gear. The captain and crewman are efficient and quick to help. Reef Club is all-inclusive, south of town. Los Careyitos picked us up from the dock. The food was more than adequate and varied, the accommodations were clean and new, nightly entertainment was fun, and free Dos Equis on tap most of the day?

Careyitos Advanced Divers, Park Royal, September 2002, Ellen Adams (scubacats@earthlink.net) Francetown, NH. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm, currents. Communication before

arriving was excellent thanks to Desire Sanroman. We knew from Desire that Careyitos is a small operation, they request payment with travelers checks, pesos or cash. Credit cards and personal checks cannot be accepted. Careyitos has a nice roomy boat with head, radio and oxygen on board. Nice sundeck and ample shade below. They limit divers to 14, but we never had that many. Dives last 75 mins. or 500 psi whichever comes first! Dives are always led by Ricardo, the owner, or Divemaster, Tony. If Ricardo led the dive, Tony was in the water at the rear, making sure everyone was OK. They also had a safety swimmer on the surface with a safety sausage to pinpoint where the group was for boat pick up. Captain Victor did an excellent job getting to us quickly. We had surface intervals 1.5 hours or more, during which time we feasted on a fabulous lunch. Sandwiches, salsa, chips, fresh fruit, sodas and plenty of purified water. Their guacamole is to die for! Roger and Aaron change tanks, break down gear after last dive. After lunch, another fabulous 75 minute dive. Tony, our divemaster, was great fun. Found three different types of shrimp we had never seen before. He gave great briefings and was helpful teaching breathing techniques to help extend bottom time. Since Careyitos has no shop, there is no place to rinse or store your gear, so we had to rinse it at our hotel.careyitos@cozumel.com.mx

Cozumel Equalizers, Hotel Pepita, January 2002, Norman Ross, Abilene, TX. Experience: 101-250

dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, choppy. Hotel Pepita is clean and has ceiling fans, AC, refrigerator and cable TV for \$31/night double or single. Cozumel Equalizers is a first rate operator that allows you to dive your own profile as long as it is reasonable. They are fun to dive with. (Ph: 52-987-872-3511; e-mail darwin@cozumel.com.mx)

Cozumel Equalizers, Villabanca Garden Hotel, July 2002, Michael Igoe (mike_igoe@estreet.com)
Aurora, CO. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Cozumel Equalizers professional, conscientious, accommodating. The program is run by Darwin Zapata and his wife, Norma. The destinations were decided upon by the clients, and there were never more than five divers. Several trips consisted only of my dive partner, the boat driver (Felix), the guide (Luis, an instructor) and myself. No delays, no disappointments, no unpleasant surprises.

Deep Blue, Playa Azul, August 2001, James Blazier (jblazier1@home.com)
Fort Collins, CO. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 83-85 F. Logged dives: 17. Dive restrictions enforced: time/depth/air. The Playa Azul is wonderful, quiet north end, natural beach, friendly, attentive staff, good food and relaxing beach front bar. Short cab ride to downtown. Rooms were bright and comfortable with special touches. Deep Blue operates small fast boats, handled all equipment and set-up. Through pre-dive instructions, let group select dive site, all computer

diving for max bottom time, though the first to 750 psi sends the group to the top. Divemaster "Pepe" did a great job finding me my first seahorse, also first spotted eagle ray and turtles. Safe, courteous operation, talk with Deborah and Matt (owners) and they will do what it takes to give you the diving you want. (Ph: 52-987-872-5653; e-mail deepblue@cozumel.com.mx; website www.deepbluecozumel.com)

Deep Blue, Puesta Del Sol Condominiums, March 2002, Jan and Mike Krueger (mvkrueger@hotmail.com)
Fargo, ND. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Deep Blue specializes in advanced dives for qualified divers. We dove sites I had heard about but never been to. At one they hoped to find spotted eagle rays and found 11. Came back to same site in March and observed six. They match divers by ability and then take advanced divers to advanced sites. Many operators claim to do this; Deep Blue actually did. Dive masters were very good -- but also expected that advanced divers were capable. Don't claim to be advanced if you're not. They do an excellent job with beginner to intermediate divers. My daughters had an excellent experience. Fast, small boats. Excellent rental equipment including computers for every diver. Cost was less than other operators I've used with comparable service. In January when west side was closed because of high winds, Deep Blue took people to other side by jeep to do a shore dive in calm water. www.deepbluecozumel.com

Deportes Aquaticos, Fiesta Americana, July 2002, Mike Kwas (kwasjazz@comcast.net) Andalusia, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, currents. 5th trip to Cozumel and Deportes Aquaticos. Sergio Sandoval, Sr. has been diving these waters for 30 years. He is always excited to hunt for some critter to show you. I shoot underwater videos and he sends me into swimthroughs ahead of the other divers to set up shots. His son, Sergio Jr. is also a divemaster and has a relaxed calm demeanor, and finds the critters. The boat is slow and small, ten people max, but there is usually plenty of room. We were picked up at the Fiesta Americana pier at 9:00 and returned at 2:30. After the first dive we have lunch near shore or at a remote beach. They give you plenty of time to snorkel, swim or sleep — 1.5 hours. Deep sites have incredible coral formations and walls where you can usually run into turtles and rays. The shallow sites have coral, a large diversity of fish life and macro. You may even see a nurse shark or two. **(Deportes Aquaticos: Ph: 52-987-872-0640; e-mail aquatics@cozumel.com.mx)**

Dimi Dive, Casa Del Mar, February 2002, John R. Swanberg, Coon Rapids, MN. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 79-84 F. Dives accrued: 5000+. Hotel clean and well kept. People friendly and helpful. No elevator only draw back. Dimi Dive operation wonderful. Miguel and Diana did everything one could ask for. Dive crew Pingo, Carlos and Carlos were great. As a PADI, SSI, DAN inst. I've seen good and bad, Dimi was excellent.

New divers would be best to avoid the strong currents on North end. **(Ph: 52-987-872-2915; e-mail dimidive@cozumel.czm.com.mx)**

Dive Aventuras, Puerto Aventuras, August 2002, Bill Boswell (wfboswell@marklang.com) Millersville, MD. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F. Mike and Karen have an exceptional operation. Friendly, knowledgeable and accommodating staff. Good equipment, good boats (with shade). Short boat trip to the dive sites. Dive sites are great. Very little current, slow (nice) drift diving. **(Ph: 011-52-98487-35031; e-mail info@diveaventuras.com; website www.diveaventuras.com)**

Dive House, Fiesta Americana, October 2001, R. Preissig (JJJRS5@hotmail.com) San Antonio, TX. Vis: 60-150 ft. Water: 75-78 F. Dives logged: 800. Dive restrictions enforced: group dive. I arrived at 12:30 PM and they fit me onto the 1:30 boat. They "split" one (overcrowded?) boat into two boats of eight. Hotel was very nice. **(Ph: +52-987-872-1953; e-mail dive@divehouse.com; website www.divehouse.com)**

Dive House, Fiesta Americana, December 2001, John Healy, Delmar, CA. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 80-83 F. Dives logged: 300+. Dive restrictions enforced: 80 ft. too short time. Hotel almost empty week before Christmas. Food very expensive. The two mission restaurants in town and El Capi Navigante very good — service

great, but \$14 round trip taxi. Dives too short. All time between dives spent on boat. Boats uncrowded — used two boats when they could have crowded one but I will use *Chapbook* next time — no multi-day discount. \$55 for two dives, \$6 to store dive tank. \$17/day BC and regulator rental. Safety conscious.

Dive Palancar, Allegro Cozumel, November 2001, Bob & Lynne Lauer, Ft Myers, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm. Allegro Cozumel (all inclusive), nice grounds, rooms adequate and clean, staff friendly and helpful. Desperate shortage of light bulbs over 25 watts. Couldn't read anything. Needed shower repairs and that was done within minutes of request. The food: let's just say the stale sandwich on the return flight was a godsend. Dive Palancar, a large and busy operation, ran 5-6 boats all week. You may want to tip daily as you may not get the same dive master and crew each trip. Dive Master Irene was excellent. Pre-dive briefing gave you everything you needed to know. The staff and crew were helpful with anything you needed, except diving your own profile. They offer a 10-dive package for \$250 and it's worth it, even if you have to follow the dive master. Loved the dive operation, however, Allegro needs to do something about that food! (Ph: 52-987-872-3443; divepal@cozunet.finred.com.mx)

Dive Palancar, Allegro, February 2002, Rick Bondar, Corona, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to

100 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, currents. The Allegro has a beautiful garden setting, and decent cabana type "eight plexes." All-inclusive food was OK for a quick breakfast and lunch, but got boring for dinner. 30 minute/\$30 round trip cab rides to town -- a lot to do, good restaurants, etc. Roseanne and Raymond Chang from Atlanta, who operate the Asian Garden Chinese restaurant in the town Square were awesome. Get pesos before flying in, and save 15-30% because you get nailed on "rounding up" to dollars and the exchange rate on the island. The resort is a big 300 room "cattle operation" where management "okey dokes" any service you need, like not fixing the phone, no hot water half the time, having to scrounge for towels, TV remote broken, etc., but that's really minor. The people actually working there were great. I got the vibe that the reception/management people have a chip on their shoulders and aren't thrilled with handling so many ugly tourists. Diving was great. Dm's Luis, Georgie and Edgar were first class. The boats were all fine, and it's really convenient to be on the South part of the island near the long reefs, and have very short boat rides (in exchange for the 15 minute cab ride to town). The Dive operation is close to the cabana's, with lockers, etc. The 9:00 and 2:00 are the 80/35 minute "deep" dives. Lots of strong current, and swimming through interesting formations. The reef looked great, giant coral heads, nothing appeared dead like in the Cayman's, maybe it's the strong current. The 10:30 and 3:30 are the

30-60' "shallow" dives where we saw a tremendous amount of critters, and got some good photos are great video. Wish we could have stayed shallow longer than the strictly enforced 40 minutes. Make sure you have enough weight not to blow through your safety stop, there's a lot of boat traffic.

Dive Palancar, Allegro Resort, February 2002, Richard Powers, Haslett, MI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80-100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F. This was our eighth trip to Cozumel and the Allegro Resort. The resort has gone steadily down hill. The service and food quality have deteriorated significantly. The desk clerk was rude. The staff tends just to go about their business. The resort recently changed owners. The food was bland and always the same. They used to have several fresh made Mexican dishes and chips/salsa with each meal, but now have much less. Dive Palancar is still a good operation but their level of service is also slipping. The owner is overbearing and treats the staff like slaves. There is a noticeable difference in staff attitude when the owner is present (quiet and nervous) versus when he is not (much more friendly). Their boats are slow but stable. The diving in Cozumel is still super. The reefs are varied and the coral is in great shape. The fish populations are healthy with many large fish. The diving is on the west(lee) side of the island, so the seas are generally not too rough. However, a north or south wind can result in heavy seas. Dive Palancar is close to the best dive sites so the boat rides are

generally only 10-20 minutes. The currents were generally mild (for Cozumel) this trip.

Dive Paradise, Costa Club, September 2001, Richard Mellem (firedick@earthlink.net) Palos Verdes, CA. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 75 F. Dives accrued: 50-60. Dive restrictions enforced: group. Costa Club had a major problem with their a/c. If you left your balcony glass door open, you got so much condensation that it puddled on the floor. Staff told us just to keep the doors closed. Who wants to do that? Otherwise Costa Club was great. (Ph: 52-987-872-5161; e-mail info@diveparadise.com)

Dive Paradise, Plaza Las Glorias, November 2001, Jeff & Laura Krause, Wellington, OH. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Dives accrued: 150+. Dive restrictions enforced: 130'. This was our first visit to Cozumel. Ten divers: three "beginners," two "intermediate," two "advanced," two divemasters and one instructor in our dive shop group. Cleveland to Atlanta to Cancun; take Shuttle to Playa del Carmen; luckily caught last ferry to Cozumel; then taxi to motel. Rooms at Plaza Las Glorias Hotel were more than adequate. Clean, air conditioned, with a refrigerator in-room, and a nice balcony for drying dive gear. We strongly suggest using the in-room safe (\$2/day) as housekeeping liked to help themselves to food, spare change and toiletries (but nothing big). Aqua Safari is the dive operation next to the hotel. However, they scheduled our tour to dive with Dive Paradise, about 1/2 mile up the road. They dispatched

the dive boat to our dock for pickup. Apple, the owner (originally from Ohio), runs an efficient business. Initially, she came across as unyielding and unable to deviate from our itinerary. But, she “loosened up,” making sure that we were 100% satisfied. Apple even coordinated two boats for our ten divers, to allow the more advanced of the group to go to the “better” sites. “Cock-A-Doodle” dives were a three-tank trip, leaving at 6:00 AM. We had two dives in before others were even on the water. Lunch (included), was eaten on a surface interval, before going to a secluded beach for rest/relaxation. After a third dive, we were back to the motel by 12:30. Geovany was very adept at finding marine life, and on a night dive, he found a frogfish, which in 12 years of diving Cozumel, was his first sighting. Juan was very efficient in following dive groups, tending to surfacing divers, taking care of gear switch over, etc. We were pretty much allowed to “do our own thing,” but with the current, we stayed together. They restricted diving to 130 foot depth/500 psi surface. I was comfortable in a 2mm shorty. Laura was nice and toasty in her 3mm suit. We saw nurse sharks on most dives. Other groups claimed manta ray sightings, dolphin and whale shark sightings, but none were had by our group. Southern stingrays, spotted eagle rays, ALL angels, turtles, etc., were sighted on just about every dive. We did one wreck dive on a newly scuttled ship. Coral growth is just starting, but the wreck is readily penetrable, making for interesting photography. The reefs

were the most pristine that I have seen in Belize, Grand Bahamas, Grand Cayman, Roatán and Utila. We dived in Dos Ojos Cenote, in Akumal, on the mainland. Pretty cool, but I would have preferred staying on the reefs. Everything on the island is a little more expensive than what it would be on the mainland, but, bargains can be found, if you deviate from the beaten path. This destination is suited to intermediate or better divers, as the current is constant -- from a minor push to a four-knot ride. The aquatic life was plentiful. It was like swimming in an aquarium on every dive.

Dive Paradise, Costa Club Cozumel, May 2002, Billy Haggerty CRNA (billy.haggerty@cox.net, Midland, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy currents. Costa Club: Nice all inclusive. Breakfasts are the best meal with omelets as you like them. Large assortments of foods. The lunch is by the enormous pool. Dinner is varied -- Mexican, Italian, etc. Food is great, for the price. Very friendly staff and front desk personnel. The all you can drink bar has great bartenders. Fantastic enormous pool and adequate hot tub. Well maintained grounds and hotel at the Costa Club! Dive Paradise -- friendly divemasters on all boats. They pick you up promptly at the Costa Club private beach and pier. Great area to shore dive and snorkel. 2 tank morning dives with snack and sodas between the dives. Sites vary depending on the divers' requests. Long slow boat rides to the reefs but it gives you time to talk to the other

divers and the divemasters and captains.

Dive Paradise, Costa Club, August 2002, Al Krenz (akrenz993@aol.com) Countryside, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, calm. Dive Paradise boats left the dock around 8:30 a.m. and, for the most part, were not too crowded. They filled tanks to 3000-3200 psi. You could dive your own profile but were instructed to begin ascent at 700 psi (not enforced). Between dives, divemasters offered soft drinks, fruit and other snacks. The same fish as other Caribbean dive venues only bigger. Groupers were huge! Saw several splendid toadfish and a sea horse and eagle ray. Hotel was very nice and the food (buffet style) was good.

Dive Paradise, Costa Club, August 2002, Randy Van Lit, Metuchen, NJ. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 84-86 F. Dives logged: 50+. Dive restrictions enforced: depth and time. Part of a group of 40 divers organized by Ocean Explorers in Edison, N.J. It was well organized. Cost Club is a five star resort. Dive Paradise is a decent operation and they try hard to accommodate. Divemasters were helpful and attentive, friendly and tried to get to know everyone. In the water they constantly observed you. My tank was slipping too far down at 100 ft. and instantly they were there to help me. It was mostly drift diving, sometimes in strong currents and when you were low on air, you had to surface with your buddy and they sent up a sausage to notify the boat and always it was

within 50 yards and came to you for a pick up. Good trip and good food at local restaurants, especially El Moro.

Dive Paradise, Plaza Las Glorias, August 2002, Mark Wilkerson (mwilkers@smithsys.net) Smithville, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm, choppy. Crew and divemasters were knowledgeable and helpful. Most trips had two dive masters and two sailors to assist with gearing up and to help with getting in and out of the water. Dive briefings were complete. Divemasters familiar with the reefs. Sea horses, large groupers and lobsters. We even saw a swordfish. Divers can vote on reefs they wish to visit. These boats are fairly slow so don't expect to visit far away reefs unless you pay additional for their smaller "fast boats," but the reefs aren't any better than the closer reefs. "Punta Sur" and the "Devil's Throat" you will need to hire a "fast boat." Apple runs this operation and she is friendly and helpful. Boats are on time. They pick you up at your resort or at a prearranged location. My wife had problems clearing her ear and the second divemaster buddied up with me so I could finish my dives for the day. Apple's operation puts safety first and follows proper dive procedures. The prices are fair. The best deals run from April 16 through December 15.

Dressel Divers, Iberostar, July 2002, Craig J(jordison@kdsi.net) Oskaloosa, IA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 90 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm, currents. Booked with

Dive with Martin. After one day we canceled and signed up with Dressel Divers. Dive masters informative and played to the experience level of the group. Good job working with the currents. Excellent video taken by Dressel. Summer time seems to bring nightly rains. Look for vis to be less than desirable. Macro will have more success than wide angle

Dive with Martin, Coral Princess, July 2001, Brad Baron, Austin, TX. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: calm. I have always appreciated *Undercurrent's* straight forward talk. I was in Cozumel with my girlfriend just for two days of diving so each day is important. The Dive with Martin divemaster refused to take us to any wall although conditions were perfect, light current and sunny. He insisted against the wishes of everyone in the boat to dive only shallow reefs. On the second day after the dive my girlfriend and I surfaced about 50 yards from the boat. They let us drift to the boat versus coming to pick us up. This left us bobbing in the water to 15 minutes. When we stopped to let off two divers, my girlfriend got off to quickly use the bathroom. The boat pulled off and left her. I complained to the divemaster he told me she could walk back to the Dive with Martin dock where they were going. I then showed them her sandals that were in the boat. My further requests to not leave her went unanswered. When we docked, I gathered both of our dive bags and walked out to the street and hailed a cab. I found my girlfriend wandering the

dock almost in tears not knowing why they left her behind. Dive with Martin should not abandon their divers in the water or at the docks. (Ph: 800-518-0932 or 52-987-872-2610; e-mail dwm@cozumel.com.mx)

Dive With Martin, Casa Cascada, January 2002, Scott Kuhr (Skuhr@uneedspeed.net) Flagstaff, AZ. Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: surge. First class operation. Package is \$50 for two tank, including rental gear and wet suit. Fast boats, great DMs and Martin is super. You don't go to advanced locations until you have made a couple of dives with his operation and then no additional charge! Overall great. House in town OK, not great. Something close to Plaza LG would be better, close to grocery store and dock for Martin to pick up (only picks up as far as PLG to the north, anything to south).

Dive with Martin, Hotel Bahia, February 2002, Rickie Sterne/Chrisanda Button (rickandchris@alltel.net) Elkins, AR. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm choppy currents. Second trip with Dive with Martin. We were taken to a variety of sites, from Punta Sur in the South to San Juan wall in the North, at no extra charge. When I experienced gear problems, Martin handed me an adequate BC and regulator, at no charge. The boats were fast and left on time. A norte blew in one day, and Martin rented a large boat to get all three groups of divers out to the reefs. The ride back was cold and slow, but

no one missed any dives. As relatively new divers, we have always felt safe with Martin's divemasters. We have done deep dives and swum in challenging currents with them. We had some stellar diving this trip. We encountered a squadron of ten eagle rays sailing along the San Juan Wall. Our night dive on Paradise Reef was a checklist of everything one wants to encounter after dark. We had a long encounter with a dolphin, which examined four of us at some length. The rooms at the downtown Hotel Bahia are huge and immaculately clean. We had a kitchenette with dishwashing service by the hotel maid. Mi Chabilita became our favorite comida economica.

Living Underwater, Villa Miranda, November 2001, Larry Lozuk (larry@lozuk.com) Allen, TX.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm. Villa Miranda is a nice house two blocks from Plaza Las Glorias. It has four bedrooms, each with private bath and a private pool. We enjoyed everything about the house -- until it rained. The entire open-air downstairs area flooded, and it took quite a bit of time to get the water out. The house has great gear/camera rinsing facilities and an outdoor shower. <http://www.rentcozumel.com>. Living Underwater is a new dive operation. They have a refurbished Aldora boat (the number 2), brand new 120 cubic foot low pressure steel tanks and will dive anywhere around the island, any time. Oracio Martinez, previously the senior divemaster at Aldora, runs all

diving. You see more and get more dive time for your dollar than with any other operation on the island. Expect to routinely do 90 minute dives each time you hit the water. We did one that was 110 feet for 164 minutes, hitting all of Palancar's dive sites in one single-tank dive. <http://living-underwater.com>. Living Underwater provides facilities onboard to keep cameras wet between dives and for the trip back. Villa Miranda has a wonderful freshwater rinse tank and large dry table that can support multiple camera/video setups. **(Ph: 888-546-7281 or 52-987-872-2085; e-mail info@living-underwater.com; website www.living-underwater.com)**

Living Underwater, Palapas Amaranto, June 2002, Mike Frayn (mfrayn@bigfoot.com) Chapel Hill, NC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 110 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. LU is operated by Oracio Martinez, former Aldora dive master. LU is more expensive than some operations but worth it. Their dive masters, Pierre and Gabrielle, are concerned about safety and a pleasurable dive experience. LU uses 120 cu ft steel tanks for men and 95 cu ft steel tanks for women. We averaged 90 minutes per dive. We always took long surface intervals on shore and had a relaxing lunch. The dive masters hang up your wetsuit during surface intervals so you have a nice dry suit for the second dive. There are dry towels on board. We never touched our gear after the first day. The DM's packed and unpacked our gear every

day. They washed our wetsuits every night. Oracio constantly asked for feedback and suggestions on how he could make our dive experience better.

Living Underwater, Coral Princess, June 2002, Hank Martin, Boonton, NJ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 85 F, calm, currents. Fifth Cozumel trip. Chose Living Underwater after Oracio departed Aldora and set up his own shop. Could not have been happier with the diving. We basically dove wherever we wanted, including Barracuda and San Juan. Living Underwater uses low pressure steel 120's that they over pressurize, resulting in about 150 cubic feet of air. The tanks are so negatively buoyant that you can drop 8-10 pounds of lead. It is easy to be overweighted the first time using them. They also give bottom time that is unsurpassed. It was great to have enough air to do Punta Sur and have meaningful bottom time, rather than doing the throat and heading up. We went into deco, but had enough air to hang as long as we needed. We dove with Gabriel for most of the trip. A colorful and confident diver, he was willing to go anywhere. The dive he led to Barracuda had current of 2.5f knots, running along the wall at 120 feet with the sun highlighting the fish above us. Magnificent. From making arrangements stateside to having all our equipment handled while there, everything went smoothly. Oracio only has one boat. So, if you want a twi-nite two tank, you need to go with the boat to the marina and wait as they

gas up. If he has a large group he will contract with another boat, so there is never more than six people. Coral Princess: liked the room — a great ocean view, but need to take a taxi into town. Staff is nice and try to accommodate all requests.

Living Underwater, July 2002, Phil Hamilton (jeepster@scubadiving.com) Sugar Land, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 120 Feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, calm, currents. Outstanding operator. Eight divers max on the boat, and with full load, can get a bit tight. Steel tanks, so one can get incredible bottom times. Boat leaves at 8 a.m. and usually goes to Nochi Cocom beach for a surface interval over one hour. Back out for second dive around noon. We watched a nurse shark patrol, and catch a meal in front of us. The boat is stocked with beverages, snacks, and even some repair parts. O2 on board. DM Carlos used an SMB with a weighted line for safety stop — divers could float free, or use the line — good idea, considering the increased traffic in Cozumel. Second dive was on Paseo del Cedral, steels allowed 1 hour 22 minute dive at max depth of 66 feet. Saw a turtle, huge parrotfish, all varieties of angels, triggerfish, scrawled filefish, cowfish, tangs, jacks, and snapper — a plethora of sea life. For moderately experienced to advanced divers. Boat has soak tub for cameras.

Living Underwater Hotel Barracuda, September 2002, Clem Clapp (cclapp@aol.com) Maplesville, AL.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm, currents. Good Dive Operation. Liked those 120 lb. low-pressure steel tank. Got an hour plus on all dives. The small, covered, fast (twin 150 hp outboards) got to the site fast. Nice restaurant for the surface interval. Good divemasters. Owner was flexible on our dive trip changes. Boat did not have camera rinse tanks. Hotel Barracuda was a clean and adequate facility. The restaurant was not open for three days. Desk staff could only shrug when asked why. The hotel was convenient to other places to eat and the downtown area without being too close. The onsite dive, Dive Paradise, was not open to discussing dive information when they found that we were diving with another shop. Kinda silly. They were agreeable to renting us tanks for a shore dive at the hotel.

Palancar Diving, Papa Hogs, Allegro, February 2002, Tim Jones (timjones@canada.com)

Mississauga, Ontario. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to F, calm choppy. One of the Dive Palancar staff came around canvassing for a night dive. One guest next to us said he'd love to try it, but wasn't certified to dive. This staffer, to our amazement, said "Don't worry, you don't have to be." Even if the individual was O/W certified, he'd still have to do a specialty dive with an Instructor to do the dive. If he were a resort diver, there was no way he could go on the dive, and if he were just plain not certified, then that's just irresponsible marketing in the danger Zone. The next day I asked Dive

Palancar to rent two tanks (and weights) to shore dive with an open water student. I'd been certifying three divers off the Papa Hog shore, who were absolutely great. (Papa Hog picked us up on the Allegro dock all week long, saving us some US\$40 in cab fare on a return trip -- there were eight of us). The DM said I wasn't allowed to work in Mexico. I explained that these divers came with me from Canada, and that I'd been assured by a Palancar representative that I could teach off the Allegro shore. This DM said absolutely not. An assistant manager said sure you can dive, for \$15 each. Papa Hogs had rented us a two tanks and weights for the price of air (\$6). Comparing the cost of cabbage into town, we agreed. But then they insisted on American cash -- a cash grab. They had little tins up everywhere asking for tips. They charged \$270 US for a referral. The resort rooms contained one bed cemented to the floor, and one tv. No desk, no chair. You could hear the guests in the next room making love, arguing, etc. Though most of the staff at the resort were polite, the staff working the two specialty restaurants were arr-o-gant! At the Italian restaurant, they didn't tell you until you got there -- if you could get a reservation, that shorts were not allowed. I'm on holiday and have to brave the winter of Canada when I get back, and I have to wear them in a tropical restaurant. No excuses, just nope, you can't come in. Then, of course, you're late for your seating, and they cut short your dinner for the next seating. Although the beef was

very tender, it was incorrectly cross-cut, making it tough. The manager of the Mexican specialty restaurant told us, "Sorry, you're ten minutes late. I don't know if I have space for all of you." Food is institutional food, but these folks didn't go out of their way to spice it up any. The best item was the omelette, made before your eyes, but fried on cooking grease. The only redeeming feature at the pool bar (the pool water was frigid and very uncomfortable), was a beer pull, that the guests could help themselves to. Papa Hogs Dive shop went out of their way for us, and if we went back to Coz (this was my third time), we'd again dive through Michael and Margaret at Papa Hogs. **(Palancar Diving: Ph: 52-987-876-8180; e-mail rosendo@cozumel.net)**

Papa Hog's Dive Shop, January 2002, Ron Reed, Billings, OK.

After three days of diving, my wife's dive buddy wanted to see more of the island. So at Papa Hoggs they sent a local dive master with her. Gabriel Silva, during this dive, the divemaster/buddy, started to remove his air tank. Thinking that her buddy was in trouble my wife started holding the divemasters gear. A little yellow sub, started to come near them. Gabriel pulled his shorts down to moon this little sub. They told me this is a life or death sport. Why would a divemaster represent a dive shop [Papa Hoggs] like this? I e-mailed Papa Hoggs Dive Shop to ask what kind of outfit they ran there. The owner was upset with me because I asked him on the net. I

then asked what action they took about their divemaster? I never got an answer. **(Ph: 52-987-872-1651; e-mail diving@papahogs.com)**

Papa Hog's Scuba Emporium, Reef Club, July 2002, Jay (jwv@door.net) Lubbock, TX. Experience: 26-50 dives Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy, currents. Dive boat was crowded with children. Reef Club is just okay. Had to change rooms three times because air conditioner not working. Food was okay, but as an all-inclusive resort, it was very repetitive. Their "Italian restaurant" was pure "Mexican Italian." Strong currents made it difficult to photograph anything especially small critters.

Pascual's Scuba Center, August 2001, Boyd Hedleston, Richmond, VA. Vis: 100+. Water: 82-85 F. Dives accrued: 100+. My wife enjoyed snorkeling above the divers at Palancar Reef. You could clearly see every detail 80 ft. down. **(Ph: 011-52-987-25454; e-mail pascualscuba@hotmail.com)**

Pepe Scuba, Coral Princess Club, October 2001, Steve Smallsreed Johnstown, OH. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Hotel is first rate. North of town. Rooms and accommodations first class. Hotel staff friendly and helpful. Great ocean view and one of the best beaches on Coz. If you get a jungle view room, ask and they will move you to an ocean view when one is available, usually only a day or two wait. Good shore diving — 10-20 ft but lots of great macro

critters. Pepe Scuba at hotel. Pepe is a great guy and runs a pretty good operation. Dive masters and Captains friendly, and assemble your gear for you. Boats small and fast, no cattle boats. While other operators will ignore harbor master rules and dive Barracuda, Pepe will not. You can't argue a safety rule. Boats pick you up in front of the hotel. No gear lockers. Scooter and car rental outfit at the hotel are rude, rip-off artists, and overpriced. Much better deals in town. Boats small and fast with no place to put cameras but in your lap. (Ph: +52) 987-2-67-40; fax (+52) 987-2-28-00; e-mail pepe@cozumel.net; website www.cozumel-diving.net/pepe/)

Pepe Scuba, Coral Princess, March 2002, Scott Hayward (warranty6@attbi.com) N. Attleboro, MA. Vis: 80-150 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dives logged: 110. Dive restrictions enforced: 80 ft. Coral Princess was a very nice facility. The staff was great other than the front desk people were indifferent. The rental cars at the facility were a bit run down for the price. The restaurant was good but I wouldn't eat there every night. Room service food was good and reasonable. Great fajitas. Good snorkeling off the sea wall. I first booked verbally with Manta Raya Divers as they don't take a credit card and it was too late to send a check. They blew off my reservation and cost me a day of diving! Ended up going with PePe Scuba at the Coral Princess. Owner is a nice fair man, good rates. Boats are typical six packs. Divemas-

ter "Domingo" very good, although a bit conservative for my taste. He seemed to push the shallower sights, but did indeed put us on good fish and critters. Saw three toadfish, two of them at Paradise Reef. Saw seven nurse sharks! Two octopus and a toadfish on a night dive at Paradise. Seven, yes seven turtles on a single dive at Columbia Pinnacles. Overall a great time. We traveled with our 17-month-old twins. The staff was very helpful and gave us lots of attention.

Reef Club, April 2002, Barbara Struber, Kalamazoo, MI. Experience: Over 1000 dives Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, currents. The diving is great. The dive crews were fine, helpful and knowledgeable and the boats were adequate with a rinse bucket just for cameras. The facility was limited as far as gear available for rent or purchase. They provided guests with small lockers for gear but no place to change wet suits to dry. We ended up carrying our suits back and forth from our room each day across the beach. Shore diving nonexistent. Only one night dive per week. The hotel was disappointing. All-inclusive week and the food was so bad that many people were spending extra to get a decent dinner in San Miguel. A taxi ride into town was \$30 US round trip. The plumbing backed up in both ours and our son's rooms and it took multiple phone calls, a visit to the front desk, and 24 hours to get a janitor with a plunger to grace us with a repair. When we complained we were told by the woman at the desk

that we weren't the only people in the hotel with a problem and we should wait our turn. We were on the third floor of a small building and the only exits were a wooden balcony and a set of wooden stairs, we felt like sitting ducks if there were a fire. The message on the room's table said be aware of the fire exits but made no suggestions as to what they expected those exits to be. The maids were endlessly taking the water bottles out of our room when they cleaned so we couldn't refill them. They even took bottles that were not empty and not in the waste basket. This meant we had to spend another \$4 in the gift shop for another bottle. No photographers on staff to help with problems and no photography equipment stocked in the shop for any repairs or replacements.

Rodolfo Soltero's Anita Divers, October 2001, R. Preissig (JJJRS5@hotmail.com) San Antonio, TX. Vis: 60-150 ft. Water: 75-78 F. Dives logged: 800. Rodolfo's is a big boat, not fast, that leaves from the harbor. You will dive a morning and PM dive with a nice lunch provided. Plenty of time to socialize, but you won't be doing 4-5 dives a day. Rodolfo often dives between the labeled dive sites, so the reef is in somewhat better shape. (Ph: +52-987-872-1542; website <http://jazzdiver.com/lss/anita.htm>)

Sand Dollar Sports, Reef Club Beach Resort, July 2002, Ronald Bailey (rlbailey@rbnet.com) Roanoke, VA. Vis: 80-150 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Dives logged: 1000+. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. for most

divers. Resort was all inclusive. Not diver dedicated. Resort was good for nondivers, okay for divers. Diving was typical Cozumel, but lacking in larger fish. Currents were moderate. Did see about six turtles. Night dive was one of the better dives. On site dive operation did an excellent job. Close to dive sites. Our group had a large boat for ten divers. Boat crew/dive guides let us dive till air was 500 lbs., sometimes 70 minute dives. (Ph: 888-737-6399 or +52-987-872-1303; e-mail infosds@sanddollarsports.com; website www.sanddollarsports.com)

Scuba Cozumel, Plaza Las Glorias, October 2001, Scott & Elena Marr, Glastonbury, CT. Vis: 150 ft. Logged dives: 130. Dive restrictions enforced: 100'. Uncrowded, relaxing trip. Although showing a bit of age, the Plaza Las Glorias is still a comfortable hotel and has the advantage of an easy walk to town. Humidity and air con. don't mix however. Keep sliding glass door closed and a/c on to keep things dry inside. Ocean view and pool side excellent. Diving, esp. with Casey at Scuba Cozumel (at Scuba Club Cozumel (formerly Galapagos Inn) was excellent as previous experience indicated. My wife did her open water checkout, her first boat dive and first night dive here. Can't say enough about the great experience with Casey and the shore diving was typical of my memories of Cozumel, but some big groupers were missing. Excellent overall. (Ph: 52-987-872-0627; e-mail scubacozumel@cozunet.finred.com.mx; web http://www.padi.com/dive/Scuba_Cozumel/Scuba_Cozumel.htm)

Scuba Club Cozumel, July 2002, Steve Griffiths
(spgriff@adelphia.net) Gettysburg, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm, currents. Accommodations were clean and well maintained. The maid service is excellent. Food was excellent, and the wait staff was friendly and helpful. The menu has plenty of variety. The dive operation and facilities were right on the money. Dive and boat staff were friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable. Currents changed hour to hour which made shore diving hit or miss. Currents on the boat dives were just as variable and at times quite strong. The dive staff should have checked currents at the dive sites and changed sites based upon the currents. Two or three dives during the week looked like an underwater sandstorm due to high current. One dive was entirely against the current. Most dives were what I would have come to expect from Cozumel diving. **(Ph: 800-847-5708; e-mail info@scubaclubcozumel.com; website www.scubaclubcozumel.com)**

Scuba Club Cozumel, August 2002, Doris & Bob Schaffer
(seamom@earthlink.net) Fallbrook, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 84 to 87 F, calm, currents. Package that included two boat dives each morning, unlimited tanks for shore dives, three meals daily and comfortable, spacious rooms. The food is plentiful and generally quite good, the service attentive and there are amenities like plenty of fresh towels daily and

convenient lockers. We last dove Cozumel in 1969, but despite the thousands of divers and a million tourists annually from cruise ships, the reefs are still beautiful and healthy. However, fish life has diminished considerably — the giant sea bass are gone and reef fish and other creatures are no longer abundant but we did see some nice-sized sea horses, a few turtles and a couple of small eagle rays. The diving is highly regimented. We could not dive our own profiles and were required to follow the dive guide at all times. It was the dive guide who determined where and how deep we could dive every dive. While the dive guide was excellent, knowledgeable, pleasant to be with and the dive sites chosen were good (for the most part), rules were rules despite the experience of the divers. Extra boat dives in the afternoon are available at an additional cost. One of those extra dives is a ship that was deliberately sunk and while it has not yet become an artificial reef, it makes a very interesting penetrating wreck dive. We dove Los Cenotes on the mainland in the Dos Ojos fresh water caverns. Scuba Club dive shop manager arranged it with an outside cave diving operator — an all-day excursion including the mainland ferry, two dives and lunch for \$135 per diver. It's worth doing once. The tipping procedure at Scuba Club is somewhat awkward with individual envelopes for each person and some people who should participate in the tips probably do not receive a portion. The boat crew is attentive about rinsing the camera housings and handing the

cameras to and retrieving them from the divers except that there's only one bucket so the cameras are all piled on top of each other.

Scuba Du, El Presidente Hotel, Scuba Du Dive Shop, March 2002, Jane L. Rimer (janerimer@att.net) Folsom, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Best service I've had in my dive years. They packed and loaded equipment for you, rinsed and re-packed for the next day's dive. The staff was terrific; knowledgeable, helpful and accommodating as to dive level. All my special requests were granted. The water temp was in the high seventies. As a female diver on the slim side, it was challenging. The dive shop had a female instructor, Lena, who was enormously helpful. I wore a five-mil suit and with the wind after the dives it was well worth it to keep warm. One day of choppy seas. Currents are always unpredictable and can be a challenge for the most advanced diver. We took a couple of trips north and saw a ton of spotted rays, although we were fighting a winning current. It's a little pricey. (Ph: +52-987-872-0322 ext. 6845; e-mail scubadu@cozumel.net; website www.cozumel-diving.net/scubadu)

Scuba Du, Presidente, March 2002, Thomas F. Sharp, Kirtland, OH. Vis: 30-50 ft. Water: 77-81 F. Dives logged: 102. Dive restrictions enforced: 80' depth limit. The airport operates very smoothly; we got through with a minimum of fuss. The Presidente is a wonderful place: we never encountered anyone who was

not smiling and friendly. It is, however, high-end. Be prepared to spend almost \$100 U.S. for lunch at the beachside restaurant. The indoor, formal restaurant is much more expensive. Our room was spacious and very clean, had a garden view on the first floor, was well air conditioned, and cost almost \$400 U.S. a night. We got a great deal. Our friends paid almost 2.5 times that for an oceanside. But they like going high-end. So every night we went out to eat in the more expensive restaurants: Guido's, Pepe's and Prima's. And the food was very good. But it was also very good at the Mayan Grill off Calle 3 Sur, one block from the main drag, and it was about 1/10 the cost. A great place to eat lunch, while pursuing the multitudes of shops, competing for your dollars. You will be amid the hustle and bustle of anywhere from 1-4 cruise ships a day. As for the diving, it was just O.K. There seems to be a scarcity of sites, because everyone ends up at the same place every day. So while we were in a boat with just three other people most days, at the site there were 30-50 other divers in the water. Hope you are on an early boat so the mandatory swim throughs are not too silted up. Not much can grow in and around them, they get pretty beat up by the uncontrolled and inexperienced divers before and after you. Nice sharks and turtles, a few lobsters, infrequent crabs, rare eels. Some mid size groupers, but the quantities and distribution of the smaller reef fish were wanting. The current made searching for the coral dwelling

macros an exercise in futility. The best dive I had was a solo in 20' off the hotel. That was where all the eels were. There also was an octopus, a seahorse, juvenile French angels phasing into adulthood, and scads of other fish, and lots of flamingo tongues, bristle worms, and fire coral. There is also an interesting wreck, with lots of resident grunts, etc. A great last dive. The amount and distribution of young black coral were very gratifying. It seemed to be everywhere from 30' down to the max of 80', which was all the deeper any diver was allowed to go. Overall the coral growth was prolific, and bleaching did not seem to be playing a major role in the development of the reef. Palancar Reef has some moun-tainous star coral that rivals that which grows off Pink Beach in Bonaire, and the only place I have seen better black coral was in the black coral forests off St. Vincent, which should be one of the wonders of the coral world. There is better diving in the Caribbean basin: St. Vincent (by far), Grand Turk, Bonaire (off Washington-Slaagbi Park); the outer reefs of Belize.

Scuba Shack, Hotel Bahia, 2002, Walter Steed, Moscow, ID. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Dives accrued: 200. Dive restrictions enforced: 60'- 80' on walls. Cozumel — as great as always. Saw more turtles than in 2001 with large groupers seeming to make a comeback after 2-3 years of seeing smaller population. Now have a few sea-horses. Way too many cruise ships

with their passengers clogging up the streets and restaurants. Food and margaritas great as always and Hotel Bahia and Scuba Shack both provided excellent service with lots of attention to their clients. 28 dives in 11 days including two nights. (Ph: **52-987-872-4240**; e-mail **scubas@cozunet.finred.com.mx**)

SeaScuba, Costa Club, February 2002, Bonnie Hirschhorn, Bayside, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm currents. David Tovar is a seasoned divemaster and professional with years of experience in Cozumel. He took us to Punta del Sur and the Devil's Throat on a fast boat so that we were finished with our extended dive before anyone else was awake! The personnel were helpful and set up gear and took it apart after each dive. Where we had planned to do seven dives with his operation, we wound up with 14 (for a total of 20 dives in six days!) The original six dives were on the "cattle boat" from Dive Paradise -- diving the time, not the site. SeaScuba took us to the north shore too, where we dove the Barracuda and San Juan -- two spectacular rides for experienced divers. Take a sausage -- the current can (and did) take us over a mile each time. The Costa Club has been redecorated recently but the best part is the long time staff still working there. Walking in after being away for two years, it was very nice to hear: Hi, you've been here before haven't you, from many workers. The friendliness and service are tops. (Ph: **52-987-872-5744**; e-mail **seascuba@cozumel.com.mx**)

Sea Urchin Dive, August 2002, Fred Teed (fredteed@compuserve.com) Atlanta, GA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. Rented an oceanfront private house (Villa El Dorado) from At Home (Fantastic 4 br/3ba with a pool and a maid. A private cook was optional. House was in great shape, clean, air conditioned and comparably priced to a hotel room. The property management company was attentive and immediately fixed a couple of minor problems. Dove on a six-pack boat with Sea Urchin Dive (www.cozumel-diving.net/sea-urchin/). The owner is Isidro Narvaez who is a lot fun, reliable, flexible with schedule and speaks perfect English. (Ph: 52-987-872-4517; e-mail diving@seaurchindive.com; website www.cozumel-diving.net/sea-urchin)

Puerto Morelos

Wet Set, Casita del Mar, December 2001, Jerry and Barbara Meral (bmeral@quiknet.com) Sacramento, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, surge, no currents. Paul Hensley and his wife Jennifer run a nice little dive operation next to Rancho Libertad. They make you feel welcome. While the diving is not spectacular, there are lots of fish. Diving is off 20 foot long small boats with an awning. Entry is a back roll, with a short ladder for reboarding. Not for beginners. You hand the gear up first. We advise diving only with Paul. Casita Del Mar: be sure to get a room with an ocean view. (Some other rooms dark.) Rancho Libertad also looked nice, but is farther from town.

Try Pelicanos for dinner: right on the beach. Puerto Morelos may be the last town on the Mexican Riviera not to go entirely tourist. Paul will go really deep (150+) to find the big fish, but we did not do that. Boats take no more than eight divers, which would push capacity. We were the only divers one day. Fewer currents than Cozumel and a lot less crowded. The small boats have no photo facilities. (Ph: 52-998-871-0198; e-mail diver@wetset.com; website www.wetset.com)

MONTSERRAT

Sea Wolf Dive School, Erindale Guest House, December 2001, Dwain Lovett (texbeachbum@earthlink.net) Rockwall, TX. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, choppy, surge, no currents. An Eastern Caribbean island with an active volcano on the southern end.

There is one dive shop run by a German ex-pat named Wolf Krebs. I brought my own regulator/computer and mask/snorkel but could have rented them. He is a PADI certified school and I took a Peak Performance Buoyancy lesson (went from 29 minutes at 24' to 57 minutes at 24' and dropped from 17# of weights to 10#). I am a beginning diver. These were both shore dives since Wolf pulls his boat for the winter months. During the summer the options for diving are greater. The first dive at Potato Hill Reef was easy and relaxed. The second at Woodlands Beach was more interesting but much more surge. The sand is black volcanic sand. The reefs are healthy and lots of fish. The