

diving but some fishermen were also staying at the Ocean Haven. I only had the breeze and ocean sounds to lull me to sleep. South Caicos is a haven. Enjoy a cold Heineken at the two stools at Trench Town Bar a block away. Sometimes the students (or profs) from the university outpost may dance on the tables when the going gets too boring. I hiked to the house atop the hill, three hours there and back. I enjoyed the changing flora and fauna. Very hot, like a biblical patriarch walking in the desert under the broiling sun! My spot on the beach in front of the two cement buildings saw no one else but me for the time that I was there. The low tide walk through shark bay was interesting but beware the unevenness of the sand bottom. Adventurous time with superb diving. You lose a day coming and going. Beware of baggage delay on Sky King to and from Provo. No photo processing, no specific camera table. You could arrange your own water bucket but nothing specific on the boat. Cameras were handled with care.

Ocean Haven, August 2002, Ed Cortes (oceansailor@bellsouth.net) Slidell, LA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 65 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. Ocean Haven reminds me of hotels I stayed in during the late 70's before the explosion of deluxe beachfront resorts and dive ops — when you negotiated with the local fisherman to take you out on his boat for the day. The rooms are basic with no fancy artwork or plush towels, yet the a/c works, there's plenty of hot water and the linen is

clean. The food is plentiful and good. Deserts are outstanding. The large upper and lower decks provide for plenty of space to catch a few rays, read a good book or experience a great view of the solar system at night. The dive sites are less than ten minutes away by boat and all world class, with plenty of sharks, turtles, jacks, rays, and tons of macro life to satisfy any diver. Bring any unique items you may need during your stay. Supplies are limited on South Caicos.

UNITED STATES

Florida

Florida Keys

Lower Keys

Bonsai Divers, March 2002, Clinton Jones (clint@eggsav.com) Virginia Beach, VA. Vis: 30-50 ft. Water: 74-76 F. Dives accrued: 238. Peter, the captain, was nice and the 6-pack boat was in great condition. The rental BC had a leak in the bladder. The rental tanks that my wife and I used both had bad o-rings. They did not have the proper o-rings to replace the bad ones. The first dive was 60' on a wreck. We saw four free-swimming green morays, the second dive was on a reef in 30'. We saw two nurse sharks. Diving was good for beginners. (Ph: 305-294-2921 or 305-296-6301)

Paradise Divers, August 2002, William & Frances Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol.com) Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Water: 84 to 88 F, calm, choppy, currents, no currents. Dove the

Adolphus Busch, Sr. This dive operation was very good. Linda, an owner, took my diving wife and daughter and our snorkeling daughter and one other diver to the wreck. Great dive. 70 foot viz, moderate current. Second dive at Looe Key (West End) and not to be missed for a great reef. Turtles, lobster, morays, lots of tropicals. 80-90 foot viz. No tip pressure except for a modest sign on the boat. (Ph: 305-872-1114; e-mail paradivers@aol.com)

Southpoint Divers, August 2002, William & Frances Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol.com) Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Water: 84 to 88 F, The shop is on Duval Street in downtown KW. Nice facility that caters to the tourist crowd, but that's what's in Key West. They dock the boat at the Hyatt and someone forgot to mention it's \$15 to park there (no where else to park). We dove "Joe's Tug" at 65 feet in 50 foot viz absolute but the crew kept insisting it was 100 feet. Maybe their girlfriend's believe their measurements. The wreck bereft of marine life. Second dive on Western Sambo - Haystacks. Nice little cruise around some spur and grove coral formations. Lots of damage, some fish. On return subjected to major pressure for gratuities and had to face a virtual gauntlet of staff personnel confronting you between your gear and the dock. Some divers ignored the pressure. I folded. This is not a bad operation, it's just a cattle boat. Typical Keys dive rate is around \$50-\$60 per two tank trip plus your tanks which they never

include. \$5.00-\$10 per tank. Snorkelers - \$25-\$45. (Ph: 800-891-DIVE)

Middle Keys

Bud n' Mary's Dive Center, August 2002, William & Frances Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol.com) Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 85 to 87 F, They were willing to take the four of us to the Eagle wreck. The current was strong on the surface and worse as you descended. By the time we got on the wreck the current was a liquid tornado coming from every direction. There was no ducking into a covered area or eddy. This is a great wreck dive but I was more interested in getting back to the buoy line with enough air to get to the surface. I hanged like a pennant in a hurricane on the line. Wear gloves. The steel cable will lacerate you otherwise. Second dive was on Samantha's Reef. Nice dive, no current. Shallow with lots of life including the largest eagle ray in the world. Saw a stingray, moray, lobsters, myriad tropicals. Jan the DM snorkeled with my youngest and was a sweetheart. Absolutely no tip pressure but grateful when we did. (Ph: 800-742-7945 or 305-664-2461; e-mail bnmf@budnmarys.com; website www.budnmarys.com)

Lady Cyana, December 2001, Jason Maddox (jasonsmaddox@hotmail.com) Miami, FL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 55 Feet. Water: 73 to 75 F, calm no currents. Prices high for the dives. Sites were not much different from Key Largo. The night

dive was great but the day dives were the same as diving in the Upper Keys. They charge for tanks (\$8 each) and \$43 for each trip -- so it runs you \$59 for a two-tank trip. Key Largo and Marathon ops are cheaper. They are an ok operation -- professionally run and competent. They did make an exceptionally long run to some dive sites that are typically not visited (done largely for a group). They did have separate buckets for cameras and masks. Subject matter was better on the night dive -- large parrot fish and five types of moray. They anchored at almost every site. Too much coral is being destroyed -- get mooring balls set up! Charging a few extra bucks for diving would offset the cost involved (and this cost would be acceptable to most divers). I would do six-packs out of Marathon (Capt. Morgans) or Key Largo (Paradise Charters) before I went back to Islamorada. Lady Cyana runs trips to suit most diver preferences regarding depth. They have deeper dives, mid-shallow are 40-80+/- ft. and shallow are 40 ft. or less. Most of our dives were 45 ft. or less. One mid-shallow got us to 67 ft. (but we could have gone deeper). The night dive was 25 ft. for 1 hr. 29 mins. Their afternoon reef dives were typically 20 ft. — like an extended safety stop. We stayed at the Conch On Inn (yes it sounds cheesy) but it is a basic hotel on a canal bayside. We saw manatees in the canal 50 yards from our room. This is a basic hotel and is \$83 with tax for New Year's weekend. Room #1 is small. (Ph: 800-221-8717 or 305-664-8717; e-mail ladycyana@ladycyana.com; website www.ladycyana.com)

Middle Keys Scuba Center, August 2002, William & Frances Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol.com) Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Water: 84 to 88 F. Dove with Richard Boileau proprietor and video master. We dove the Thunderbolt wreck, again with just the four of us and one other diver. Must-dive spot when in the Keys. Tarpon, jacks, the ubiquitous barracuda. Lots of bait fish. Groupers and a huge Goliath grouper on the wreck. Dolphins feeding on walls of silversides. Stiff current that would tear your mask off if you turned sideways. Strong armed your way on the granny and down lines. Second dive at "Rocky Top." Nice reef, no current. Outstanding Keys viz and good marine life evident. After the dive, ask Richard to show you his videos! He has an incredible collection (more like the Smithsonian) of u/w footage that will blow your fins off. You will never see stuff like his marine life interactions anywhere on Discovery or any channel. He makes Spencer Slate look like a piker. (Ph: 305-743-2902; e-mail RBoileau@aol.com; website www.divingdiscovery.com/)

Never Enough Charters, Bud 'n Mary's, Seashore Motel, Hampton Inn, August 2002, Richard Comerford, Montgomery Village, MD. Capt. Banny of Never Enough, has a small 23' cuddy with a single Yamaha 200. He gets you to the sites in a no-nonsense manner and puts you right on using GPS and sonar. He provides bottled water and sugar donuts. The trips are a little hurried

because he is docked at the Seahorse Motel, quite a distance from the Vaca Cut which is the ocean access. Some ops like Capt. Hook's are right at Vaca Cut. Entry is by back roll. We dove the Thunderbolt which is interesting, the most interesting part being the sudden current that got us just as we were finishing the dive and approaching the up line. Rocky proved her Force Fins are as good as Jetfins in a strong current. Gasp! We cut our stay at the Seahorse Motel short. We don't recommend it. We moved to Islamorada and the Hampton Inn which at \$109 a night was vastly cleaner and nicer. It has a great hot tub, complete continental breakfast. An Outback Steak House is on the property, the best part being a "Billabong" tiki-bar on the beach. It's-A-Dive has a shop in house, but their boat was available for shallow reefs only. So we dove with Bud and Mary's 100 yards up the street. Great op. Nice big boat. We had bad seas in the 6' range and the DM called our planned Eagle dive due to the seas and ferocious current. The seas went up to 10' after a while. The high point was a deep reef dive, when we saw an enormous spotted eagle ray at 40' which glided right beneath us. We compared the two VersaPro computers to each other and got consistently matching readings except the water temp. which differed by a degree or two at times. We also matched them to the old Data Pluses which now do backup duty in our consoles. They were in sync as well. Other good eatin' places: Key Colony Inn and Castaways in Marathon. The

Islamorada Fish Co. is not only a great place to eat, it has the best happy hour around. (Ph: 305-743-7265; e-mail captbanny@aol.com; website <http://thefloridakeys.com/captbanny>)

Tilden's Scuba Center, Hawks Cay, April 2002, Jon Lamos (jlamos@pol.net) Estero, FL.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy. The emphasis on safety and efficiency was superb. Professional and personable. The staff was friendly and eager to help. Sally and Tilden, the owners, are very experienced and run a top notch operation. Pete, the boat captain, was great as was Sarah behind the desk and Joe/Wendy/Amy on the boat. My wife and I dived on our anniversary and were greeted with an anniversary card and small gifts on our return. All fills to 3000+. On deeper dives to the Thunderbolt, depth 120, the fill was 3500 intentionally. Good rinse tanks available and will store equipment over night in the locked rental equipment area. The boat will accommodate up to 24 divers, but most trips with around 10 divers. Most reef trips are within 30-45 min boat trip. The Thunderbolt, the more advanced, 55 min by boat. The current on the T-bolt is negligible except during the full moon time frame. There are schools of fish on this wreck, including some nice sized jewfish aka: Goliath grouper. The reef trips are mostly shallow 30 ft or less with some in the 40-60 foot range, but the condition of the reef makes it worth the shallowness of the dive. Great resort for families. Scuba Rangers in the

pool, resort courses, SNUBA, and diving all available. If SNUBA divers on the boat, you will be taken to shallow reefs only, ask before you go. Good night diving. Ask if the "inner reef" is clear enough to dive. The vis here is often too low to dive, but when available opens up some amazingly healthy reef. After diving all over the World, I found the inner reef (dived about 10 times a year) to be some of the most healthy anywhere. These inner reefs were close to 85% healthy and loaded with soft coral and associated schools of fish. The way the Keys used to look. Hawks Cay is one of the nicest resorts in the Keys, but wait for the specials or it can be pricey. (Ph: 877-Fun-Dive or 305-289-4931; fax 305-289-4932; e-mail contact@tildensscubacenter.com; website www.tildensscubacenter.com)

Tilden's Scuba Center, Hawks Cay, August 2002, T. Wolfe, Norwalk, CT. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 85-89 F. Dives logged: over 100. Excellent resort (pricey). Dive boats were quite well designed. Staff was good. Water warm and calm. About 30 min. to dive sites. Diving in 10-20 ft. Great for beginners.

Upper Keys

Amoray, June 2002, Alex Slocum, Bow, NH. Vis: 30-60 ft. Water: 85 F. Dives logged: ~100 in last 3 years. Nice resort, large catamaran (30 divers) but only on Saturday was it full. Good Florida diving, all shallow sites because deep sites only dove on Tuesday and Thursday (weekends are

on the Pennekamp Reefs). The Minnow caves are world class, a must see spectacular place (spring/summer). (Ph: 800-426-6729; e-mail amoraydive@aol.com; website www.amoray.com)

Aqua-Nuts Divers, Kelly's on the Bay, March 2002, Guy Raymond (gwr0113@earthlink.net) Bronx, NY. Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, choppy no currents. First class diver support and training. Accommodations are modest but you roll out of bed onto the boat and into the water (after a 30-45 min ride). This was our first unescorted dive (myself, my wife and son, age 12) so a bit apprehensive. Biggest problem was finding the boat among other dive boats -- recommend divers be familiar with compass bearings. Waves 2-4 ft and much easier traveling back to boat below. Bring Bonine or other seasickness remedy along. Great fish, many barracuda, swam with a turtle. Provided training for uwp and were helpful. (Ph: 800-226-0415 or 305-451-1622; e-mail info@aqua-nuts.com; website www.aqua-nuts.com)

Conch Republic Divers, February 2002, Patrick Wikstrom (mrpat@webworkz.com) Warne, NC. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100+ Feet. Water: 68 to 72 F, choppy currents. A geriatric bus trip to Tavernier netted eight decent dives with Conch Republic Divers, the friendliest dive operation I've used in the Keys. Truly family style reception. Art Bowlings was courteous, efficient, and professional. He was patient and

helpful with the newbies. He traded stories and showed respect for our veteran divers. He even shared his personal stock of beer after our dive day was over and lent us his pick up truck. Other employees shared Art's positive spirit and laid back attitude. The female dive instructor who performed open water referral certification was systematic and thorough. Captain Dave who commanded the dive boat, Republic IV, was the perfect mix of experienced old salt and bubbling exuberance. Our maxo-dive package had us going out Friday and Saturday for both the morning and afternoon two tank trips. The first day was all shallow diving, so the referrals and refreshers could get their skills together. They turned my buddy and me loose after thorough and entertaining dive briefings and we logged an hour plus per dive without anyone batting an eye. We felt chilled between dives with the air temps between 65 and 70 degrees. I should have brought a dive parka. Although the 25ft depths on all four sites precluded any massive coral relief or giant sponge structures, big schools of mixed grunts paraded by or hovered around in their coral grottos. Blue tangs marauded over the algal plantations while sergeant majors and damselfish tried to drive them off. Creole wrasse cruised through in long streams while parrotfish munched away on chunks of coral. Trunkfish and honeycomb cowfish wiggled their silly little pecs while the queens of the reef, both angels and triggers, wandered by serenely. I stumbled upon big spotted drums and a big yellowheaded

jawfish pop in and out of his hole. On Davis Ledge we ran out and back past three moored sites, rubbed the Buddha, and got chased away from a cleaning station by a giant green moray. Outside Conch Wall we did a couple of gentle drift dives. Although they asked me to drag the flag I begged off with the standard photographers lame. 100 ft+ visibility off the mini-wall looking down 90 ft into sand channels, spur and grooves; lobster hunters working the crevices, newbies flipping out over a hawkbill. After lunch and a three hour surface interval we were loaded up with the Dixie Divers, who had driven down that morning. We had 22 customers aboard, and while pretty tight, everybody could manage to gear up. Dave divided us into three groups and dumped us off in rotation at the Eagle. Pretty good penetration potential but our dive plan called for just a quick swim through the main hold and then a gradual tour of the deck before our bottom time was over. As we climbed aboard the seas had picked up and several divers were blowing chunks. They hustled us to Crocker deep for the last dive. The vis on the outer wall was down to about 75 ft, but it was still an excellent view of the spur and groove reef structure. Climbing aboard after this final dive we were confronted with a hefty female who was laid on her side, buried in towels and assorted laundry, and was sucking on a DAN oxygen kit. She had performed a conservative dive with an Instructor, came up and not felt well, skipped the last dive, and gotten progressively worse. Everybody gave

her as much space as possible and let the team of O2 providers and dive professionals work her over. During our transit back to the marina the sky opened up and anyone who wanted to rinse their gear had only to lay it out on the deck. At the dock we were greeted by police and EMS who had to wade through a lake in the parking lot to haul off our stricken compatriot. The crew of the Republic IV, the local authorities, and the principals in the Dixie Diver crew all handled the situation professionally. The next day we heard that the lady was OK. She had been run through the chamber and that her symptoms were probably non-DCS related. (Ph: 800-274-DIVE or 305-852-1655; e-mail dive@conchrepublicdivers.com; website www.conchrepublicdivers.com)

Conch Republic Divers, August 2002, Mile marker 91/88, Mike Hurney, Beltsville, MD. Vis. 30-75 ft. Water about 82 F and flat. Dive own profile; Restrictions 1 hr. and return w/500 lbs. in tank. Why would I dive there when I've been diving since 1974 and have been all over the Caribbean? Easy. It's cheap, (US Air r.t. from Baltimore to Ft. Lauderdale \$123), protected reefs, in the US, and safe to take two inexperienced divers and not have to worry. Conch Republic Divers has a six-pack for Penecamp and a larger boat for closer locations. Once the large boat was full and was still comfortable. There are deep dives especially on wrecks. However, I requested shallow dives since I had my two daughters who had not been diving for two years. Got an

instructor, Karen, from Lookout Lodge for PADI brush up course. Course included book review and escort on first day of diving. \$75/ daughter and worth it for quality and my peace of mind. Dive shop helpful. Art the owner always asked us where we'd like to go. Third day they took the three of us to Pennecamp reefs on the six pack with Capt. Scott. Excellent. Other Captains on big boat were also good. Good briefings on safety and the reefs. On Molasses Reef we saw nurse sharks, and black tip reef shark gave us a five minute show cruising around. Two separate squadrons of spotted eagle rays like the ones you see with Fifi at W. Caicos only not as deep. They give discounts after four days of diving. Lookout Lodge, room 106 was large w/stove, microwave, ref. and two good double beds, full bath, and bay view. Management helpful, nice landscaping, fish in lagoon to feed, great sunsets, and good outdoor eating area (though they spray don't forget to use DEET in the evening). Never saw it crowded. We've been in the Keys before, but this was the best time we ever had diving together. Conch Republic Divers, Inc. 1-800-274-3483/www.Lookoutlodge.com

Divers City, Bay Breeze Motel, March 2002, Chris Fleming, Ocala, FL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. Bay Breeze has pretty beach area and some snorkeling. Small pool and lazy tropical paradise. Diver's City staff and owners attend to you and your gear's needs.

Their restrictions are appropriate and they have a keen interest in diver safety and reef ecology. They will clean and store your gear for multiple trips. Nitrox and other blends available. They take you where the “other” boats aren’t. Schools of tropicals, school of grouper, jawfish, swim throughs, goliath grouper, nurse and other sharks, the Duane, French and Mo. reef and others. Separate large rinse tank for camera/video gear. (Ph: 800-649-4659 or 305-451-4554; e-mail Mail@Diversecityusa.com; website www.diversecityusa.com)

Dolphin Divers, Tropical Attitude, August 2001, Mark & Kris Ritchie, Littleton, CO. Dives accrued: Kris (PADI DM) 170, Mark (PADI Instructor) 190. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80-85 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 500 lbs. return. Catamaran is small, but nice. Owners were very accommodating in storing our large bags ashore. Took what was needed aboard. Dives were great fun. Lots of photo time. Long dives. Great wreck dives. Crew took us to totally deserted locations and we had the sites all to ourselves. Great vis! Snorkeling in between. Moved wherever we wanted. Food and snacks were good. Take your own alcohol. We ate dinners ashore. Next time will pay the extra and stay aboard — will get to sail more rather than motoring site to site. Other couple was getting their “advanced instruction,” so we managed a night dive too! Great fun — so relaxed. Asked the Captain to guide us thru the “Eagle” (120). Great dive, we are wreck

certified. (Ph: 242-427-9711; e-mail info@dolphindivers.com; website www.dolphindivers.com)

HMS Minnow, Holiday Inn, July 2002, Emma Weyer (EWeyer@twmi.rr.com) Northville, MI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy, surge. I used the 2002 *Chapbook* to research this week of diving as I was taking my 13-year-old grandson for his first tropical diving. The choice of HMS Minnow (a six pack boat) was perfect. I called several weeks ahead for reservations, which I was glad I had done, as Capt. Jeff Jarvis will take the boat to places the first reservationist requests. With my request for shallow dives befitting my grandson’s needs, we got what we asked for. For six mornings of two tank diving, Jeff took us to a different site each day, and to one that was a special request from my grandson. We saw many different fish, sharks, a turtle, scads of lobsters, spotted and green morays, and the usual sponges and corals. Jeff and his wife Betty were attentive to our needs and provided a wonderful experience for my grandson (and me!), with dive site briefings, helping with tanks, etc. They provided cold water, juice and fruit each day, and on-dock lockers to store our equipment overnight. The Holiday Inn was just fine and only steps from the boat. The month before, I had been diving in various sites in the Bahamas, where the corals were covered with an algae —

sad. I found the corals in Key Largo to be in much better shape. (Ph: 800 366-9301 or 305 451-7834; website www.hmsminnow.com)

HMS Minnow, Kona Kai, August 2002, Paul Morrissey, Summit, NJ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 50 Feet. Water: 88 to 82 F, choppy. My wife and I dove with Jeff Jarvis and HMS Minnow on *Undercurrent's* recommendation. He runs a clean boat with fresh water rinses and has water and snacks on board. Jeff tries to accommodate the wishes of all on board and lets you dive your own profile. He briefings are excellent with maps of the reefs and wrecks and he gives you great suggestions on the best way to navigate. The boat is small so if the water is choppy and you are prone to seasickness it could be a problem. Nevertheless, the upside is that you are only diving with six people on board. It gets to the dive areas quickly. Jeff leaves at 8:00 a.m. as to avoid diving the same spots with other dive boats. The Kona Kai resort is a quaint small hotel with immaculate and well-maintained grounds. The rooms are clean with air conditioning, TV and refrigerator. A great place to relax between dives. The owners, Joe and Ronnie, also run an art gallery in the hotel and make sure that all guests are taken care of. They have a rinse tank and outside lockers with a lock to wash and dry your scuba gear. There is no maid service so you had to make your own bed.

HMS Minnow, Ocean Point Suites, July 2002, David W. Lindaman (dwilindaman@lycos.com) Kansas

City, MO. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 30 to 90 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. HMS Minnow is docked at the Key Largo Holiday Inn. Jeff is the captain and wife Betty is the First Mate. Jeff gives you thorough briefings. Jeff does not put a dive master in the water with you; he treats you like responsible, adult divers and lets you do your own thing. Jeff's only dive restriction is that you are back on the boat with 500 psi. For an additional cost, Jeff will supply a local guide or instructor if you make prior arrangements. Exceptional trip. Seas were rough the first two days, Jeff made many radio calls and physically checked conditions at several locations to find the best locations. After the first two dives on the second day Jeff could see we were beat and though we had reserved his boat for the afternoon, he suggested we cancel and recuperate for tomorrow's diving when the weather was to improve. He did not charge us for the cancellation. When we returned to the dock from the second morning's diving, I two people asked if he had any openings for the afternoon, but though several other dive boats docked in the same area were signing up divers, Jeff told these people that the conditions were too bad to do any quality diving. By monitoring conditions and being flexible, Jeff could put us on the USS Spiegel Grove, twice with no current, 90' of vis, and not another dive boat in sight. When one person in our group had a high pressure hose fail, Jeff lent him his personal reg. set. www.hmsminnow.com, or (800)366-9301, or (305)451-7834.

HMS Minnow, Ocean Pointe Suites, July 2002, Gary Cowden, Kansas City, MO. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 25 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, choppy. We have spent week-long dive trips with Jeff or the past three years. Jeff and his lovely "Mate" Betty run a topnotch operation. They provide professional, thorough, honest and friendly service. Jeff always puts us on dive sites with the best conditions available and fewest boats above the surface. The tanks consistently start with 3000+ lbs. I particularly enjoyed Conch Wall, Snapper Ledge, the Spiegel Grove and the Duane.

Ocean Divers, Marina Del Mar, November 2001, Terry Rinkes, Beacreek, OR. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 20 to 75 Feet. Water: 68 to 75 F, choppy currents. Ocean Divers was expensive but offered the best service, well-equipped boats in good condition, friendly staff, and excellent briefing. Marina Del Mar had friendly people, gave easy to follow directions from Miami airport. But the resort is run down, has no sound insulation you could hear as if the doors and windows were open. The kitchen was a microwave, a sink and a refrigerator. Beds were comfortable. (Ph: 800-451-1113 or 305-451-1113; fax ; e-mail Info@oceandivers.com; website www.oceandivers.com)

Ocean Divers, January 2002, Captain Jim Wyatt (jim@reef-divers.com) Big Pine Key, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 80 Feet. Water: 70 to 72 F, calm currents. Dived USCG Duane and Molasses Reef. Both excellent dives. Very

strong current of the Duane and several divers could not make the dive. Coral at Molasses Reef is not in great shape but still a good dive. Boat crew courteous and professional. Boat in excellent condition. Dive briefings thorough.

Ocean Divers, Marina Del Mar, August 2002, Rosemary Kurtti, New York, NY. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 81-84 F. Dives logged: 1500+. Fish life was great. Schools of grunts, spade fish, midnight parrot, rainbow parrots, lots of barracudas. Unbelievable number of grunts! Stephen Frank Photo class was great.

Paradise Charters, Howard Johnson's, January 2002, Brian Willison (brianwillison@msn.com) Centennial, CO. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 70 to 72 F. The Howard Johnson's was OK. The room was large and clean with a microwave, small fridge and a safe. The room was not quiet if you had someone staying next to you. The breakfast buffet was poor. The grounds were good and we were entertained by four manatees in the bay behind the hotel. Did two dives at Molasses Reef with Paradise Charters (www.paradisearchters.net, 1-800-921-5549) run by Capt. Bob. Two tank dive with tanks was \$60 (\$49.95 if you had tanks). The boat was a six pac with only my wife and me, a captain, and a dive master. Capt. Bob has two smaller boats and one larger boat that will handle a group of 12 divers. Unlike most Keys operations, he provides a dive guide who did a good job of searching for and

finding critters. Three green morays, a turtle, some lobster and a large eagle ray, many fish. The coral and sea fans were mostly covered with algae so the color was not very good but overall the dives were pleasant. The dives are 20 to 30 ft so we hit the imposed 60 minute time limit before running low on air. Paradise Charters was a very professional, service oriented operation. The crew was very good and the boats were in great condition. Drinks were served between dives. I really appreciated was Capt. Bob's honesty. He canceled our first two days of diving due the winds. He said that the diving would not be good and he did not want us to have a bad experience. We talked to other people whose dive operators did not cancel and they had awful diving with 6 ft waves, surge, and very poor vis along with fish feeding over the side of the boat. (Ph: 800-921-5549 or 305-453-0909; e-mail paradisekl@aol.com; website www.paradisecharters.net)

Paradise Charters of Key Largo, Marina Del Mar, June 2002, James (jmarmyretired@aol.com)

Tallmadge, OH. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm. The divemasters made sure every level of diving was at the fullest. Did not over crowd the boat and made sure that every divers needs were met.

Quiescence Diving Service, Bayside Resort, May 2002, Eric Frick, Elmhurst, IL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, choppy. 3rd time with Quiescence (www.keylargodiving.com,

phone 305/451-2440). Great operation. Three 6-pack boats, each captain experienced. Not escorted diving. The capt. describes possible destinations and then assists you with your gear. Bayside Resort, formerly Marina Del Mar Bayside Resort, (www.baysideresort.us) is not plush but it is 2.5 miles from Quiescence and a good value. The complementary breakfast is just a small Danish, a few apples, coffee and juice. Call Quiescence for a quote but the typical rate is \$89/person/night, double occupancy. That gets you the hotel plus a 2-tank dive, weights, tanks and air. (Ph: 305-451-2440; e-mail info@keylargodiving.com)

Quiescence Diving Service, Ocean Pointe Suites, June 2002, Tom (ttrammel@comcast.net) Plymouth, MI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 25 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. My wife and son, a Swedish exchange student, both 16, stayed at the Ocean Pointe Suites (Tavernier Key) — very nice. large 2 bedroom/2 bathroom condo with a full kitchen and small balcony for \$150/night. The place was clean, had in-condo laundry set up, and continental breakfast included daily. Condo type set up, nice. About a 12 minute drive to Quiescence Diving. They did a really good job. My wife, son and the exchange student had a refresher/evaluation course. Neither my wife nor son has done much diving, and the instructors evaluation was that they shouldn't dive because they basically have forgotten what they had learned during certification 2 years ago. That

recommendation actually cost the instructor income because I had hired him to be a dive guide for my son and the student. So just Kris and I dove for several days together. The boat captains always asked where we wanted to go. They also kept us away from the cattle boats. Fourth time I've gone with Quiescence for personalized diving services in the upper Keys. The boat is a small six pack which is good, but as it is rather small, there is no dedicated camera facilities available.

Quiescence Diving Service, August 2002, William & Frances Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol.com) Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 85 to 87 F, calm, choppy, currents, no currents. Next to the Marriott. A fine operation. They took four of us and two others through the cut in the mangrove swamps to the Pacific side and we dove the Spiegel Grove, which pales all other Keys wrecks in size. 510 feet long, you can't see it all in a single dive; maybe not a dozen dives. An amphibious assault ship (LSD) used to launch landing craft for beach assaults, it hasn't much growth or attracted a host of marine life. Current stiff, but manageable (I was still thinking about the Eagle). Second dive on the nearby Benwood. Nice. The boat skipper refused a gratuity stating he was a professional and didn't feel the need to be compensated beyond his normal pay. Wow. Quiescence gets my vote for quality and professionalism. Upper Crust Pizza in KL reasonable with great pasta and pizza and a fine Czech couple running the place. The Florida

Keys are an ideal family dive vacation. Rent a minivan in Miami or Fort Lauderdale and trek on down. No need to book dives in advance. Do the Grand Slam wrecks: Eagle, Adolphus Busch, Sr., Thunderbolt, Spiegel Grove (ok, and the Duane and Bibb).

Sea Dwellers, June 2001, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX. Dives Logged: #9-15. Vis: clear. Water: 80+ F. The overall experience was good, though I didn't like the 2800 pound tank fills and hated being lied to! When I called ahead for reservations, I was assured that I would be accommodated on a night dive, but on arrival, the key words become "we'll try." Others on the "cattle boat" wanted a night dive, too. After six dives with the operator, I even asked if they could check with the little six pack boat that docked next to them, advising that I had one, three or five divers to go that night. They agreed, then later -- told me that had, but no good. When we got back to dock, I asked Jeff of the Minnow: "For three or five, no problem." It was certainly obvious that they had never called, as they didn't want to lose my business, even if they had to lie to me to keep it. We went out that night and enjoyed a wonderful experience compared with the previous days! (Ph: 800-451-3640 or 305-451-3640; e-mail sdwellers@aol.com; website www.sea-dwellers.com)

Sea Dwellers, Holiday Inn, March 2002, Mike Szathmary (szorro@scubadiving.com) Greer, SC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 73 to 75 F, calm.

We were scheduled to dive with HMS Minnow but a family emergency forced them to move us to another op. Sea Dwellers had more of a cattle boat mentality and took us to sites to handle the lowest common denominator. Would have liked to do the Duane or Bibb; they stayed on the more common reefs. We did 10 dives with them in 2 1/2 days and they were mindful to try and not repeat sites.

Tropic Vista Motel, Upper Keys Dive Center, Tropic Vista Motel and Dive Center, January 2002, Bob Harris, Barnesville, MN.

I have been diving 25 years and finally convinced my wife to try it. She was excited and completed her PADI pool sessions here. It would be our first vacation in 25 years and our 25th wedding anniversary, and we had scrimped and saved. We settled on a little place in Islamorada at mile marker 90.5 on highway one. The brochures showed a beautiful quaint resort motel and dive shop with their own restaurant next door. It sounded grand. They required us to reserve the room and lock it in with our credit card. When we arrived what we found was a whole lot different from their brochure. The place was a dump, complete with roaches. The room was nothing like in their pictures and the whole place looked like it was ready to collapse. We had to pay for everything in advance. When the dive shop manager looked at our scuba equipment, he criticized everything as substandard, though I had our local dive shop rebuild both our regulators and do a

safety check on our gear. Our first dive was a disaster. The PADI instructor, Jason, was a hotheaded young man with no patience and less tact. He rigged up our rental weight belts but when we jumped in the water, (with no pre-dive briefing), my wife couldn't descend, so Jason grabbed her head and pushed her under the water twice. My wife nearly panicked but stuck with it. Next Jason grabbed her arm and pulled her down to 25 feet. She swallowed lots of water and couldn't equalize properly. Still, my wife, and I am proud of her, managed to complete several skills under those awful conditions. I know because I saw the instructor give her the "OK" sign and shake her hand after the skills. At the end of the dive he loudly announced to the entire dive boat "she didn't do anything right, she failed to meet the standards on anything." He said he wouldn't dive with her again until she had a "few" hours more of pool time. More \$\$\$. I could see the rip-off coming. Two nights later we ate at their restaurant. I got horribly sick and was up at 2:30 A.m.. I was too sick to go diving but they charged both of us for a dive trip though we didn't go — and two days before that Jason said he wouldn't dive with my wife again anyway. We checked out three days early and, though we paid early checkout fees for each day, the resort added another full day's charge for the room. I phoned the motel owner and dive shop manager, but neither was willing to talk about it nor tell me exactly what the other charges were, and became hostile. I have contacted my bank and they are

working on dispute resolution. (Ph: 800-537-3253 or 305-852-8799; e-mail Diving@TropicVistaDiveResort.com; website <http://www.tropicvistadiveresort.com/upperkeysdive.htm>)

Miami and North

Divers Unlimited, Dania Beach, August 2001, Nicholas Zacchio & Jennifer Aniskoff (no city, state). We have been diving a little over a year and picked this place to gain experience. The divemaster asked Nick if I were his wife or girlfriend and when he said “girlfriend,” the divemaster said “don’t leave her alone with me because I will take her away from ya.” Our first dive was a wreck dive, which was 72 feet. No one asked to see our dive cards. As I was ready to jump in Nick had gone ahead, so the divemaster said “why don’t you let him go and you and I can have a little fun.” In the water, one crew member who was supposed to be there for our safety was swimming around holding his tank, but no BC. How can this crew member help us if we were in trouble? Another crew member motioned for us to follow him to the next wreck, but ten minutes later he took off with the two other people and disappeared. We had taken a compass reading so we found our way back. Nick was on the boat first and he waited for me to maneuver myself on the boat’s platform. Because of the weight, I was only able to kneel on the platform; the divemaster said “leave her like that; she looks good in that position.” Nick told him that’s enough with the comments. The next dive was a reef at

30 feet and the current was strong. We drifted a good distance, eventually kicking on the surface to get to the boat. A crew member on the loud speaker said “Kick, Kick come on you can do it,” making a joke of it. Not getting closer, I finally screamed to Nick “I cannot do it anymore I am tired.” I am healthy and athletic and still had a problem. The crew mocked me over the loud speaker with my exact words. Then a crew member said “Hey I would have jumped on her and rode her in.” Nick yelled “Enough of that, come and get us.” They had the boat drift over and we made it, out of breath. They were still missing three divers. Two were about to be hit by an oncoming boat and the divemaster announced “these two are worse than the last two” (us being the last two). The two divers lifted their flippers to get the speedboats attention, which picked them up. An older lady was missing, so the divemaster asked if anyone had seen her and everyone said “no.” There she was, this little speck about 400 yards away. After picking up the two divers from the other boat we headed to the lady. The divemaster announced that she should have just swum ashore because she was closer to land. When we approached the loud speaker again, rang out with little jokes. Nick said “I do not see what is so funny about this, do you know how strong the current is? The divemaster asked, “was this dive too challenging for you?” We paid for our dives; nothing more was said and we went back to the hotel unhappy. (Ph: (888) 232-7234 or (305) 230-1100; fax (954) 430-2757;

e-mail dvrslunlm@bellsouth.net;
website www.diversunlimited.com)

Jim Abernethy's Scuba Adventures, Marriott, August 2002, Joe Culhane (joedive2002@yahoo.com) Monroe, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, calm. Hadn't dove Fla. since I got certified there in 1990. I was amazed at how good the diving was. Water was beautiful, 85 and clear. Did wreck diving and reef diving. Was all drift diving, so a safety sausage was a good thing. Reefs were like Caribbean diving, though many people were going for lobster. Crew was helpful, and fun. Got to do some free diving between dives. Even got two of our girls to do a resort class, Erin-10 and Lauren-13. They loved it, pool one day, then shallow open water next day, 20ish ft. Morgan and Joel, were the instructors and were good, patient with the kiddies and me. Capt. Jim also took us on a tour of his live-aboard boat. (Ph: 888-901-DIVE or 561-691-5808; e-mail info@scuba-adventures.com; website www.scuba-adventures.com)

Living Sea, Epcot-Dive Quest, Orlando, January 2002, Ray Petro, Mottegan Lake, NY. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 78 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 27'. Dives accrued: 180. Nice dive. A lot of tropical sharks, turtles. Swim through corals. Three million gallon tank became part of attraction. Have to use their gear. About a 40 psi dive using a sorty tank. Depth 27'. Small groups. (Ph: 407-939-6244 or 407-939-7675; website www.disney.com)

Parrot Island Scuba Adventures, Pompano Beach, August 2002, Krystal Glavan (bloomnfool@aol.com) Golden, CO. Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 86 F, choppy. Finding the folks from Parrot Island Scuba Adventures made our vacation wonderful. Four of us headed to Florida to gain more diving experience. We first visited the people who responded to my e-mails. After several disappointing contacts, we found Parrot Island in the Yellow Pages. While other operators had been sarcastic, rude and uninterested (surprising since they stood to make some \$400 per day with four of us), Captain Jerry, wife and DM Kelly, along with their crew, were eager to take us out. They were far more reasonably priced, safety conscious, and accommodating. They accompanied us on eight dives in both Ft. Lauderdale and Pompano Beach. Both their boats are in good condition, though Fathoms of Fun is more pleasant — it has much room and a nice dive platform. Both boats offer fresh water showers and heads. Fathoms has a camera table. Most people don't think of Pompano as "the place to dive." I gotta tell ya, it was wonderful. Kelly and Jerry took us to two wrecks, the Sea Emperor and the Copenhagen. Both were great fun, lots of large fish at the Emperor. The reefs were great and the night dive was incredible. We saw sea turtles, eels, snooks, stingrays, Goliath groupers, puffers, trunkfish, trumpetfish, scores of parrotfish, urchins, nurse sharks, spadefish, butterfly fish, damselfish,

and more. I saw more here than I did in Mexico. Jerry and Kelly even helped the guys with everything they needed to go "bug hunting." They had a blast. One of the great things is the shallow reefs at the end of the day. There was much to see between 20-35 feet, our profiles allowed plenty of time to see it. I recommend the dives from Pompano Beach over Ft. Lauderdale. We had much better vis, reef color, sea life and far less boat traffic. Fathoms of Fun originates in Pompano Beach and offers a camera table and fresh water rinse buckets are available. Their other boat, Fishfood, travels from Ft. Lauderdale and is a smaller vessel without camera table. (Ph: 954-942-7333; e-mail jkturmaine@earthlink.net; website www.scubaexcursion.com)

ScubaTech, Destin, April 2002, Tom Chase (trchase@msn.com) Prospect, KY. Vis: 15-50 ft. Water: 63-68 F. Dives logged: 165. Dive restrictions enforced: tables for non-computer divers. Very good dive operator. Boat (Sea Cobra) well set-up except for photography. One of the most safety-oriented operators I have encountered. Dive staff and store staff were friendly and helpful and appeared genuinely interested in our well being. Dove limestone reefs twice and wrecks twice. Saw mostly game fish, caught shovel-nosed lobsters for dinner. Overall diving quality pale by comparison to Florida Keys. Last dive was a combination dive/snorkel trip to jetty. My kids snorkeled while I dove below them.

Good bargain \$22 included all gear (even wetsuits) for snorkel trip. Nitrox was available. (Ph: 850-837-2822; website www.scubatechnwfl.com)

Panhandle

Hydrospace, Panama City, April 2002, Timothy Corwin, Southampton, NY. Vis: 20-50 ft. Water: 60-64 F. Dives logged: 825. Went out first with Panama City Dive Center. 45' boat but slow and cramped. Dived same site both dives. All artificial reef diving. Next day, went out with Hydrospace. 45 wide beam with nice cabin and 20 knot cruise. Including crew, 16 people and lots of space. A well-run operation, but only allowed a 45 minute surface interval between dives because they were in a hurry to get back. Diving is ok for beginners, mediocre for experienced. Saw a lot of dolphins, but not while diving. (Ph: 888-874-3483 or 850-234-3063; e-mail dive@hydrospace.com; website www.hydrospace.com)

VENEZUELA

Horisub Dive Resort, December 2001, Sarah and Kevin Henke, Wichita, KS Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 82 F. Dive restrictions: 130 ft and 500 psig. Dive your own profile: yes. Horisub hosted Paul Humann and experienced REEF members for a week of underwater exploration to fill in fish survey blank spaces around Venezuela's Mochima National Park, which encompasses 32 islands and some of the adjacent mountainous terrain. This 950-square km national park in Eastern