

roomy vessel with an enthusiastic and accommodating crew. Experience will improve their familiarity with the underwater terrain. The diving is great when the weather is fine, which was most of our trip and rare calm seas enabled a visit to HMS Endymion, foundered warship in 1790. One of my best dives ever (of 250

worldwide) despite a long swim (due to hazard) and current. S. Caicos, Grand Turk, Salt Cay were all healthy with abundant and various fishes and coral and sponges. Tony's cooking was the best! Amazing ability to meet our group's special dietary requirements and impressive culinary skill! Cabins were too warm at night. (Ph: 800-932-6237 or 305-669-9391; e-mail dancer@peterhughes.com; website www.peterhughes.com)

Wind Dancer, November 2001, Ed Cortes, Slidell, LA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 75 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy surge. We had recurring problems with the head office. They did not return phone calls, nor did they answer some e-mails or provide the service we had previously experienced. While larger than the *Sea Dancer* in Provo, I felt more confined in my cabin on *Wind Dancer*. The *Wind Dancer* can berth a maximum of 21 divers and was fully booked the week we went. The dive deck is the smallest I have seen on a liveaboard. We learned to gear up at least 10-15 minutes early to avoid the crush at dive time. The diving was just plain sad in Grand Turk. The week before our arrival there had been high winds and lots of rain that made for poor visibility. We did three dives

on a site where the top of the reef consists of nothing but ballast stones and little life. South Caicos diving was spectacular. Eagle rays, sharks (two baby reef, adult reef and blacktips), turtles, and incredible macro life. Overall the experience was disappointing. The excellent food and \$500 trip discount helped to ease our pain.

UNITED STATES

M/V Fling, August 2001, Richard Kongable (rkon@ev1.net) Austin, TX. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, choppy. We were there for the August coral spawning and Mother Nature delivered! The spawning was prolific, happens about 9:45 p.m.; you could actually smell it once it hit the surface. No current, so spawning was a photographer's dream as the egg sacs and sperm left the coral en masse and slowly drifted upward. Several divers were intimate with sharks and turtles; one turtle bumped a diver's fins and small sharks came close. Accommodations are basic but fine. Food is good and there's plenty, snacks and drinks always out, soft drinks and beer for sale. Rules are there for a reason; Captain Phil explained them thoroughly in the initial briefing and they were reinforced by the divemaster briefing before each dive. 100' depth limit but no limit on dive time. Mandatory 2.5 hour surface interval between dives. Divemasters check conditions before each dive. Accounting procedures consist of a DM checking your bunk number and documenting time in after checking

gear, on exit you supply bunk number, bottom time and maximum depth, and once everyone's back on board, a DM does a double-check to make sure everyone's back on board and feeling fine. Several divers broke the 100' rule and had to sit out some dives. They refused to accept responsibility for their actions (110-112' feet was their max depth) and complained so much that it affected others' enjoyment. Both the East and West Banks of the Flower Gardens are 60-70' and pretty flat, so if you follow the sideline to the mooring line, and down the mooring line to the U-bolt, it's hard to get below 100' anyway. Stetson Bank: found a large sleeping turtle. Not much coral, tons of fish and critters. Wall drops off to deeper water so have to watch your depth. Since the fish, eels, and critters have nowhere to hide, they're almost friendly! Boats have Nitrox produced by a membrane system; tank fills were consistently 3000 psi. Nitrox use costs extra but the boats supply the tank and the fills are \$65 for eight dives. Cameras are lowered to the diver once in the water, line at the back of the boat allows clipping the camera to the line on exit. Crew pulls the camera up and places it in rinse buckets. (Ph: 979-233-4445; fax 979-233-0040; e-mail info@rinnboats.com; website www.rinnboats.com)

***M/V Fling*, September 2001, Jill (crockerjc@aol.com) Austin, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 90 F, calm. We broke 100' on the first day of a four-day trip to help a disabled diver

and they banned us from diving for the remaining three days! No towels, share two bathrooms/showers with 36 people, freezing cold tiny room, leaky a/c. Horrible trip. (Ph: 979-233-4445; e-mail info@rinnboats.com; website www.rinnboats.com)

***M/V Spree*, July 2002, Steve Pittman (ib4thec@yahoo.com) Tulsa, OK.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, choppy, currents. The bang for the buck is terrific. The operation was sold by Gary Rinn to guys that are out on the water all the time, and they have tweaked a few things to make it better. Accommodations are basic and somewhat crowded, but clean and comfortable. The food is plentiful and they do an excellent job in the small galley. The dive operation is outstanding. The conditions can be difficult in the Gulf, and these guys are set up to handle it. We had the roughest seas I have had in eight trips, but all went smoothly. The staff is friendly, but firm on what their expectations are of the divers. The manta rays put on an incredible display on this trip. We had plenty of sharks, including an up-close encounter with a hammerhead, and lots of turtles. We spotted the first known frogfish in the Gulf. (Ph: 979-233-4445; fax 979-233-0040; e-mail info@rinnboats.com; website www.rinnboats.com)

***M/V Spree*, Guld Diving LLC, July 2002, Norman Ross, Abilene, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm. You

leave Freeport at 9:00 p.m., arrive at Flower Gardens the next morning and make your first dive at 7:00 a.m.. The surface current is moderately strong, so you follow a line down. You are limited to the area right around the buoy line because you have to come back up the line due to the current. You make two dives on the west bank then move to a production platform for your next dive and again you are limited to the area inside the legs of the platform. After making two dives on the east bank, you move during the night to Stetson Bank where you get two more dives before heading home. The crew was great, the food was good, but not fancy and the accommodations were good. The problem is you cover a limited area. There are plenty of fish, especially the schools of barracuda and an occasional manta ray.

Sea Searcher II, Aqua World,
March 2002, Mark Walden
 (dfwmw@aol.com) **Garland, TX.**
 Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80
 to 100 Feet. Water: 68 to 70 F, calm
 no currents. Saw hammerheads on
 almost every dive. (Ph: 800 396
DIVE or 972-524-6820; e-mail
dive4kixx@aol.com; website
www.geocities.com/seasearcherii)

Sea Searcher II, August 2002, Larry
Day (lday@ghg.net) Houston, TX.
 Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to
 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, calm,
 choppy, surge, currents. The *Sea*
Searcher II operates out of Freeport
 and makes runs of 100 miles to the
 Flower Gardens Marine Sanctuary.
 Departures are Friday evening with

return Sunday evening. Up to eight
 dives at four locations that included
 The Flower Gardens East bank,
 Stetson Bank and a deep oil rig.
 Stetson Bank had unique geology and
 the wall diving. The crew did every-
 thing to make sure we had a safe and
 enjoyable trip. We were briefed before
 we left the dock and there was a
 thorough briefing before each dive.
 They issued us a number tag which we
 wore on our BC and was used to
 monitor entrance and exit times,
 depths, and air consumed. Our
 nitrogen loading was estimated since
 we were doing eight dives over two
 days. The dive deck had fresh water
 shower with plenty of water and
 cold drinks. The boat was immacu-
 late and roomy for up to a maximum
 of 16 divers. Four to a cabin with
 fresh linens, towel, and pillows
 provided. Food was well prepared,
 varied, and plentiful. The conditions
 can quickly vary from dead calm to
 strong currents, surge and 5-6 foot
 waves. The giant stride entrance is
 6-8 feet above the water. Naviga-
 tional skills are essential for safe
 diving. A zodiac is used to retrieve
 divers that get carried away from the
 mother ship. The crew said they would
 rather pick you up than have you try to
 stress yourself to swim to the boat.
 This was a very enjoyable trip. July-
 September is the preferred time for the
 trip with the coral spawn being in late
 August full moon.

VENEZUELA

Antares Dancer, October 2001,
Tom and Jo Anna Dwyer