

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**

**(tdwyer@bigplanet.com) East Norwalk, CT.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 90 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm no currents. The web site was informative and the office staff helpful because we had to change our reservations due to Sept. 11th attack. Trip was a great one. We made four to five dives a day and spent the remaining time relaxing and over eating. The food was great! The staff was attentive and friendly, professional. The number of divers on board was light. The crew was experienced working with UWPS. (Ph: 800-932-6237 or 305-669-9391; fax 305-669-9475; e-mail [dancer@peterhughes.com](mailto:dancer@peterhughes.com); website [www.peterhughes.com](http://www.peterhughes.com))

***Antares Dancer*, March 2002,**  
**Richard R. Gala, Royal Oak, MI.**  
Water temp: 78 F. Visibility: 20-60ft. The *Antares Dancer* was refitted in July 2001. It holds twelve divers in six rooms with a crew of seven. Half the crew spoke some English and they were friendly and helpful. The dive master, Juan Carlos, and the captain, Tomas, were fantastic. There are twin beds in cabins 1-5 and a bunk bed in cabin 6. All rooms are comfortable except cabin 6. Request a room different from that one. I had Cabin #1. Rooms with twin beds have three draws under the bed to store your stuff. In many cabins there is no closet and only one hook. The crew took your suitcases and stored them elsewhere. There is a shelf at the head of the bed and a good reading light. It would have been so easy to put up four more hooks/room to hang up wet bathing suits, etc. There is a TV in

each room for personal VCR viewing. The air conditioner worked fine most of the week. Each room has its own large bathroom with a large shower that at times did not work well. Hot water is either too hot or not hot enough. I burned myself taking a shower. Bathroom sink does not have a stopper so bring your own if you are afraid of dropping your contacts lens down the drain. The meals were plentiful, varied and quite tasty. Breakfast and dinner were served while lunch was buffet. Special food preferences were always accommodated. Diving was off a chase boat that had adequate room for our gear that stayed aboard for the week. The water exit ladder was two steps deeper in the water than most with true steps and had handrails all the way up including on the boat. Exceptionally easy exiting from the water with your gear on. The chase boat also had a hang bar on the side of the boat that could be used when traffic to board was heavy. All diving was drift diving but there was almost no current. The coral was as pristine as I have seen at the best places in the world. Fish were plentiful but not large. However, I did see a large green moray, maybe 7 ft + long and as big around as a truck tire. The best diving was La Cocina at Dos Mosquies Island. It was crawling with large schools of many types of fish and I saw a barracuda so deep-bodied that initially I thought it was a shark. It was at least 6-7 ft long. Visibility was only 20-30 ft. but you hardly noticed it with so many fish and fantastic coral heads. Eric the

engineer, took me bone fishing, but instead we brought back a bucket of fish, which the cook, Rafael, made into a fantastic dinner. One night I hooked into a 30-40 lb. tarpon off the back of the boat that broke my fishing rod and Tomas, the captain, let me use his fishing rod for the rest of the trip. Juan Carlos saved my life. While hanging at 15-18 ft for my safety stop after descending to 90 ft, my regulator exploded in my mouth after an inhalation. I was engulfed in bubbles from it free-flowing and lost my orientation. By the time I found my Air-Two the tank was empty. My buddy was facing the opposite direction and did not see what was happening but Juan Carlos came to my rescue. My buddy, who I have dived with for ten years and is a great buddy, did not know that anything happened until he saw us at the surface. It happened that fast. If this happened five minutes earlier, I would probably not be here to tell you the story. My local dive shop improperly serviced my regulator when they did their annual service. Scary huh!

**Antares Dancer, May 2002, D. Demming (Demmingfsc@aol.com) Hudson, OH.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Boat just came out of a drydock and was not working properly when we came on board. Their compressors where down. Peter Hughes flew down a technician to repair it the next day. Only one engine out of two for the entire trip, not a problem since the distances were short. The boat is

showing its age but the crew was helpful and pleasant though only the divemasters were fluent in English. The condition of the corals is the best in the Caribbean. Dives became repetitive since we stayed on several sites for several dives. Visibility was limited and a chilly 79 degrees for our five dives a day. Raphael the cook provided lots of good but not outstanding food. As the days progressed the dives began to merge more so than most dive trips due probably to the absence of high intensity sightings. No special arrangements for photographers.

**Antares Dancer, June 2002, Erika Rogers (eprdesign@earthlink.net) Las Vegas, NV.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 Feet. Water: 78 F, choppy. The service and crew were excellent. With good visibility it would have been wonderful diving. The constant strong winds were the cause given for the poor visibility. The tanks and gear were kept on a separate dive boat. The gear was always set up correctly. The crew helped in taking cameras and gear from divers before getting out of the water. Small dry camera area.

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