

accommodated all. During the dive, most reported seeing a hammerhead, turtle, and crab or lobster hiding along the wall. Not a bad dive at all. Sea lice were prevalent during the excursion's term of mid-June to early July. Water temps were about 80 F. Vis was good almost daily.

Riding Rock Inn, August 2003, Susan DeCanio, San Jose, CA.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 175 to 200 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm. Dive operation staff were outstanding! (Apparently new staff since March) Walls and visibility (200 ft!) are awe inspiring. Had the good fortune to see pilot whales from boat and dolphin while diving? Hammerhead and reef shark as well. Very eco aware (scientist from local field station came to give a lecture, guests made aware of preserving reefs, etc. Divemasters were experienced, helpful and fun! Service was topnotch! Staff were experienced but still full of enthusiasm for job. They were always available and accommodating to needs and requests. Hotel isn't run as well as the diving. Restaurant staff a bit slow but friendly.

BARBADOS

Barbados is busy and crowded, with lots of fast traffic, big splashy resorts, and restaurants galore. ... There's ordinary Caribbean diving with tropical fish, although big ones are rare, but it's fine for beginners or for a dive or two on a golf holiday. ... You still can find century-old bottles in the harbor and the wreck

of the *Stavronikita* is interesting but jammed with tourist divers. ... Keep hurricane season in mind.

Blue Reed Divers, April 2003, J. Kelley (ohchevy@aol.com), Natick, MA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 feet. Water: 82 F, calm. My best friend, a nondiver, and I went to a charity auction and bid on and won two American Airline tickets to the Caribbean, for \$550. Turns out for an April vacation, the only island that was available for our ticket category and travel dates was Barbados. I have never had a better experience with a dive shop, and I have almost 300 dives at many locations in the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. American Airlines overbooked the flight from San Juan to Barbados, and we were bumped involuntarily. The weather was great. The seas were calm on the west side of the island where I dove. The viz was about 50 feet, and the water temp hovered around 82 F. Mary and John Moore own and operate Blue Reef Divers on the west coast in Mt. Standfast, north of Holetown. The shop is right on the beach. Mary provides free transportation to and from your hotel. As I was staying on the south coast of Barbados, the ride was 40 to 60 minutes each way, depending on the rush hour traffic; Mary arrived each morning with a smile and an affable attitude. The rides were a treat as I got to see the island and Mary's island commentary and conversation were great fun. John handles the diving end of the operation. John is the divemaster, while a lifelong Bajan named Bob steers the boat and changes over your equipment between

dives. The boat is small, so the dive group is limited to a maximum of six. This makes for great diving as the group is small. And there was plenty of space on the boat for the group size. The dive sites were varied, and we did a few drift dives with mild current. The dive that most people like best is the wreck of the freighter *Stavronika*, which at its deepest point is in about 120 to 130 feet of water. John lead the group through some remarkably small swim-throughs that I wouldn't have tried on my own, but with John's leadership and knowledge of the freighter were perfectly safe and fun. There are other wreck sites, and we dove another one, which was shallower with lots of fish life. I found the reefs to be in good health with hard and soft coral with gorgonians and sponges. At most dive sites there were plenty of smaller fish, but larger fish were in shorter supply. Barbados had more turtles than I've ever seen on any other island. I did 10 dives and saw large hawksbill turtles on nine of them. On one dive I saw five of them. Many of the turtles in Bajan waters are tagged. I usually saw at least one spotted eel, and there were quite a few multiple sightings. There was even one huge green moray at the *Stavronika* who rivals Chester at the Habitat Curacao house reef in size. John was good at striking up conversations. He took a real interest in the people with whom he was diving. Both John and Mary are amiable, easy going, and good-natured. Although the diving on Barbados isn't rip-snorting, it's fine. There are a lot of things to do topside, including a tour of rum distilleries and a brewery. A visit to the wild

and less populated east side of the island was at the top of my friend's favorite activities. The island is loaded with pretty beaches and activities. The people were friendly and easy going and helpful in getting us to and from our destinations. Barbados has a good and cheap transportation system (although some of the small van rides can be hairy), so we didn't bother with a car and driving on the left side of the road.

High Tide Water Sports, Coral Reef Club, February 2003, Sarah Plummer (scubado84@hotmail.com), Boothbay, ME. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. Great wreck dive! Nice reefs. Mild current. The *Stavronikita* wreck is a 365-foot Greek freighter. The Stav. was gutted for divers then sunk in 1979 and has a good growth. The Stav landed "bolt" upright with the stern in 130 feet and the bow in 60 feet. You can go into and thru different levels of the wheelhouse. There are many different fish and turtles. The reefs are healthy with many different fish. I saw big trumpet fish, drum fish, spotted moray eels, and sting rays. High Tide Water Sports' boat is well maintained, and the crew is helpful. Juice between dives. No fresh water for cameras. There were a bit of "floaties," shoot down to avoid backscatter. (800-513-5763)

BELIZE

Inside the world's second-largest barrier reef, English-speaking Belize sports three major atolls —