

CAYMAN ISLANDS

Grand Cayman is Americanized and crowded, with traffic, Burger Kings, Ramadas, Hyatts, and relentless cruise ships. And it's expensive. ... There are a seemingly endless number of safe and well-organized dive operations, but most enforce restrictive depth and time limits. Some responding to the needs of more experienced divers. ... Avoid pre-paying a dive package so you can switch if disappointed. ... Dive quality is declining due to development, and Seven Mile Beach reefs are beaten up. To avoid crowds, endless youths, and Cayman Cowboys, stay on the North side or the East End, where you'll find the best diving and fewer people. ... Brac diving is not up to the best of Cayman, but it's more laid back, and Brac outfits make frequent trips to Little Cayman from April to November. Rough water often prevents trips at other times. ... For Caribbean walls, clear water, and beautiful reefs, Little Cayman is nonpareil, but a dozen dive boats a day can visit a two-mile stretch. Winters can be cool in the Caymans, and the islands are in the hurricane belt.

Cayman Brac

Brac Reef Beach Resort, October 2002, Gil Macali Jr. (gilmacali@earthlink.net), Niles, OH.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to

150 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. The service was great. The staff at Brac Reef Resort and Reef Divers was incredible. You put on your mask, weight belt, and fins, and they lugged your tank and helped you put it on and then you fell into the water. It couldn't have been easier. You only handled your gear once, and they did the rest including tank changes. There were three dives a day plus night dives on Tuesday and Thursday. I was able to do 18 dives over six days. They had 32% Nitrox on tap; I dove the second two dives each day with it. They took us to Little Cayman for two days on Bloody Bay Wall. The food was plentiful, tasty, and good variety. My room was just steps from the pool. Long layovers in Grand Cayman (seven hours each way). The best diving I've done even with having been to Bonaire and Cozumel twice each. They have great hammocks. (www.bracreef.com)

Brac Reef Beach Resort, March 2003, Steve Clawson (steve@fragileocean.com), Perrysburg, OH.
Experience: Over 1,000 dives. Vis: 150 to 300 feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm. Arriving two hours late for our third dive trip to the Brac due to our aircraft. Still found cold drinks were ready for the guests as manager Peter transported everyone's photography and dive gear to our pool view rooms. The kitchen stayed open to allow our group to get a good dinner. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were all served buffet style with food groups and deserts to suit the most demanding eaters. Departure day began at 4 a.m. Peter was wide-awake, serving fresh brewed

coffee and sweet rolls while he loaded all our gear in the hotel pickup for transport to the airport. Rooms at the Brac Reef Beach Resort were decorated in the typical island theme, well kept and clean. The daily maid service did a great job of keeping our room neat and restocked with fresh bath towels. Pool and spa were clean, and the surrounding grounds nicely manicured. Pier was the hotspot for nightly fish watching and just sitting in the swings looking up at all the stars. Reef Divers: Martin Van Der Touw runs a tight ship with excellent, happy dive staff. Our dive boat crew for the week consisted of: Craig Burhart-Boat Captain/TDI/BSAC Instructor — the senior dive staff employee with over six years employment with Brac Reef Diving. Chris Roenspiess-Boat Captain/PADI/NAUI Instructor is second senior dive staff, working three years with Reef Divers. Vicki Kaiser-SSI Dive Master is the newest member of the dive staff having only been with Reef Divers for two months. On our first dive day we put all our gear in the supplied numbered mesh bag and placed it by our front door by 8 a.m. for transport by the staff to the dive dock and our boat *Little Sister*. After breakfast our group met at the dive shop to sign in and get weights and belts. On the boat all our gear was set up on tanks at our assigned seats. After we were moored there was an informative dive briefing. Take your mask and fins and have a seat on one of the benches at the rear of the boat and one of the dive staff would bring your BC. After an easy giant stride off the boat, one of the dive staff brings your cam-

era and you are free to dive. Returning to the boat after your dive finds a staff member ready to help with camera gear and assist you back on the boat. You then have a seat on the bench where your dive gear is removed and placed in the tank rack; your tank is changed for the second dive. No walking about the boat deck in choppy seas with dive gear on helps to prevent falls and injuries. All dive gear is left on the boat, set up during your diving week, and is rinsed with fresh water daily by the staff. Air fills were always 3,000 psi or better and all tanks were recently inspected, indicated by the tank labels. We found the boat to be clean and neat every dive day morning with lots of fresh ice water and cups, and plenty of munchies and fresh fruits for between-dive snacks. Included in our package was a two tank Little Cayman trip to Bloody Bay Wall and a custom video by the resident photo pro for all our group members. *Little Sister* had a large, double shelf camera setup table that made film changes between dives easy. The dive staff was professional and knowledgeable in handling our equipment. The lack of a camera rinse tank proved not to be a problem as we kept our rigs damp with a wet towel between dives and then gave them a good soak in the camera rinse tank at the photo shop. It is dive shop policy to not put cameras in rinse tanks to prevent damage to equipment. We would have to rate Brac Reef and Reef Divers as one of the top five resort/dive operations we have visited in our 30 years of diving and traveling throughout the Caribbean. Seventeen dives in seven days.

Brac Reef, Cayman Breakers, June 2003, Toren Smith (t0r3n@mindspring.com), San Francisco, CA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, surge. I'd dived Cayman Brac many times, but always stayed in the resorts, usually the Divi Tiara. This time I booked into a new condo development on the East End (farthest from the airport) called the Cayman Breakers to do some serious shore diving. I did a few boat dives with Brac Reef — not exceptional, but I'd need to do more diving with them to have a firm opinion. The Breakers were a real find. Yes, you'll need to rent a car to get out there, but that's not a problem and not expensive compared to some places. Being out on the far East End was nice and private, and the condos themselves are brand-new, immaculately clean, and of superb construction. Robert and Nina Banks built and operate the Breakers and are wonderful folks. Both have been diving for a dog's years and have been on the Brac for more than ten. Nina is a gold mine of info. about local shore sites, and each unit has a list of locations to get you started. www.cayman-vacations.com/ and read all about the units there. They are diver friendly. The "3" rating above for food is due to my own inadequate cooking. Aunt Sha's is just ten minutes down the road and has great seafood. Despite the weather being stormy while I was there, opportunities to shore dive were plentiful. In fact, if you have experience in surf entries, there is a reef and wall site right off the Breakers that I loved. It is rarely dived and the critters (including lots of turtles and a way-too-friendly nurse

shark) seemed to regard me with astonishment. The reef is pristine as the site is not moored and Nina figures it's only dived a few times a year. This held true for all the shore dives I did here — pristine and untouched. You can borrow a "diver down" float from the Breakers. Most of the moored dive sites, such as the Tibbets destroyer, are easily accessible from shore with a reasonable swim (even some of the walls) should you wish to "join the crowd." I dived new sites every day the whole time I was there and barely scratched the surface of what is available. I'm coming back with a GPS unit and a notebook! A dive kayak would really open up some opportunities. Note that the Breakers is on the windward side of the island (good points — no mosquitoes, and a nice cooling breeze) and so sites along the main road west from there are surf entries. While the surf is generally nothing to get excited about (at least to this Monterey diver!) the entries can be over jagged ironshore, which makes hard sole booties and great care necessary. Shore dives on the leeward side lack the surf but the ironshore still needs to be respected. Just in case, I wore a pair of gloves with kevlar palms for the shore entries and exits, and will probably bring a 1mm full-body suit next time. However, there are several sites with easy sand or pier entries.

Brac Reef Beach Resort, July 2003, Craig & Ruth Campbell, Long Grove, IL. Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 83-85 F. Dives logged: Craig 310, Ruth 270. Dive restrictions enforced: Do not exceed 110 ft, complete a safety stop on each dive at 15 ft and return to the boat

with about 500 psi. First Class operation offering three dives a day on 42 ft Newton boats carrying up to 20 divers. Boats are well equipped with a DAN Oxygen unit, first aid kit, ship to shore radio, fresh water rinse hose (but not tank for cameras), and marine head. Reboarding is easy via deep twin ladders. We found our dive masters friendly and professional. They gave pre-dive chalk board briefings and roll call after every dive. BCs and regulators are set up on the boat for the first dive of the week and there after the dive masters set up and rinse (hose off) on a daily basis. All other gear is carried by divers after each day's dive to a rinse tank and drying shack on shore. Set up gear was brought to each diver at the stern platform for each dive. Dive Master Craig was extremely tuned into the needs of the divers on his boat. During the week, he went out of his way to try and find sites which would provide the type of diving experience requested. On this trip, we stayed and dove at Grand Cayman, Little Cayman, and Cayman Brac. The Cayman Brac reefs were much healthier than those on the other two islands and while we saw few large critters, we believe that the reef fish are more abundant at Cayman Brac also. The Resort was well laid out, with clean comfortable rooms, a good swimming pool for after dive relaxation. While we were there the kitchen & dinning area were being remodeled and the food was more limited than we expected.

Brac Reef Beach Resort, August 2003, Charles Levine, Red Lion, PA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm.

Diving was effortless and spectacular. The boats were well proportioned. Even with 16 divers, one didn't feel crowded onboard or underwater. The DM's were professional, well-informed, personable, and hard working. Visibility and variety was superb; saw seahorses in several sites, but didn't see enough large critters. Snorkelers were disappointed by inability to see much from the surface, but were encouraged to take up diving on return to the States! Several topside attractions in the brochure haven't existed for several years, leading to disappointments among the nondivers. The resort was clean, food was good to very good, and it was quiet and relaxing.

Brac Reef Beach Resort, August 2003, William and Frances Ungerman (elitecorps@aol.com), Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 800-1,000 dives. Vis: 70 to 170 feet. Water: 82 to 87 F, calm, choppy, surge. The resort is well-sited amongst a palm tree shrouded beach. It's an easy walk to any facilities. Request a room with a patio or balcony for drying your suits or whatever. The dive personnel pick up your equipment the first day and you never have to worry about it again. They rinse (perfunctorily for some people's taste) your equipment and change tanks between dives for you. The dive-masters are attentive but not overbearing. Craig was a standout, contrary to the opinion of a Chapbook past-issue contributor. The diving was surprisingly mediocre with the exception of the Russian Frigate which is now broken in two. Nonetheless, it's an impressive dive. Visibility on this dive was so

good, from above you could see both ends of the 333 foot long ship. The two dives at Little Cayman were also very good, reminiscent of Cozumel's Palancar and Colombia walls. Overall, the diving was somewhat midrange on a Caribbean scale, surprising inasmuch as we expected better from Cayman Brac. However, visibility and water temperature was outstanding. Watch out for the sea wasps on night dive. Our twelve year old daughter got severely stung making her night dive debut. That said, the dive crew was professional and the staff was cordial. We dove Nitrox at \$10/tank extra; steep but worth it for the way you feel after a day of diving. Three dives a day offered with the package we opted for with night dives extra at \$40.00 (U.S.) a whack. Tip pressure was minimal. The dive boats are 46 foot Newtons and are made for diving. A wetsuit drying area is provided. Now, what was exceptional was the food. You definitely want to invest in the FAP. The cuisine — and that's it exactly — was superb. We have never experienced the quality and variety of food as served up here. The desserts were varied and amazing. No cruise line or five star hotel ever offered more. The resort is showing wear but seems to be bearing up better than Divi down the road. The tropics take a toll on these places. There is a nice pool and bar, but watch the splinters and nails from the boardwalk. One of the downsides of the Cayman Islands of course is the negative monetary exchange rate, i.e., 80 Cayman to \$1.00 U.S. That hurts! An island tour is available as well as a well-received Karaoke night. Bicycles

and kayaks are available without charge. There is even a nice tennis court. We booked the trip through Caradonna and they were courteous and helpful. Make sure you get everything in writing. The dive shop tried to charge us extra for one daughter's snorkeling when we had already arranged for that in advance. No rinse buckets for camera gear on board the boats, although space provided for equipment on table.

Divi Tiara, December/January 2002-03, Samuel B. Johnson (sjohnson@eureka.edu), Eureka, IL.

Approximately 215 dives logged. Vis: 50 to 60 feet. Water: 80 F, half the time fairly calm and little current but half the time quite choppy. Relatively few significant currents. Wet suit: 3 mm. Most other divers were comfortable with much less, down to several with only swimsuits. Dive one's own profile: yes. Restrictions: Dive with a buddy. Stay above 110 feet. No one policed depth limits. My first Cayman's experience, and I was reasonably satisfied. Temperatures were warm out of the water and 80 degrees in the water. Part of the time there were moderate winds, cloudiness, and rain, though some days were sunny and beautiful. The wind was enough on two days to cause cancellation of all dives at the neighboring resort, Brac Reef, but only of some night dives at Divi Tiara. All diving is boat diving and requires navigation out of the lagoon through a narrow, cut channel in the reef, which can be tricky in bad weather. The coral is in moderately good shape, reasonably healthy but not

what I would call flourishing. Some impressive stands of elkhorn coral. I found fewer small critters than from my diving in, say, Roatan. I commonly saw many fish which were only occasional in my experience elsewhere, e.g., queen triggerfish, hogfish, greater soapfish, porcupinefish, white-spotted filefish, and balloonfish. I saw several spotted scorpion fish and my first ever sailfin blenny. I saw many rays (yellow, southern, and one spotted eagle) and many hawksbill turtles. The dive operation is well run. Every day there are boats for two tanks of diving in the morning and a one tank dive trip in the afternoon. Weather permitting there are night dives Tuesdays and Thursdays. The dive staff are remarkably friendly and helpful. Very easy people to like. They competently helped me make a small repair on my equipment. None seemed to help divers spot interesting sights. There's always a dive staff member in the water with the divers, but generally they were off on their own. The dive staff do all the lifting and carrying. They bring you your BC and tank after you're seated at the stern, and they take the BC and tank off you at the stern and switch it to a new tank for you, when you come out of the water after the dive. They also carry all the equipment, except weights, to the dive boats in the morning and set it up with tanks, and then back to the storage sheds upon return, after a quick dunk in a freshwater tank. Some divers might find that service luxurious and desirable. The boats are small enough that divers wearing BCs and tanks would have to be careful of each other. Nonetheless, I find the sys-

tem not ideal, mostly because I like to see the dive staff as mentor divers, not as body servants. I met a number of family groups, and the operation seemed to be serving them well. The rooms are reasonably clean and in decent shape, reminiscent of U.S. motel rooms. The food is excellent. Cliff, one of the cooks, is particularly cheerful and helps to get everyone's morning off to a good start. There is little to see on Cayman Brac on land, and the little that is available is hard to visit without a rental car. There is no "in town" to visit. Also, I didn't find any alternatives for meals; I would advise buying the complete meal package, including lunches.
(www.divitiara.com)

Divi Tiara, March 2003, William Cecil, Jefferson, MD. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm, choppy. Resort caters to divers, and once you check in your dive gear you don't have to touch it the rest of the trip. Dive operation needs another boat, as the resort is full. They have to lease another boat to provide enough space for divers, and the one boat is on its last leg. Trips to Little Cayman were great and food was the best of anywhere I've been. Divemasters and general manager are excellent and will cater to your needs and wants. Resort could use some updating in certain areas but meets your needs. Saw marlin on Tiara wall. Dive in front of the resort which was highlight of dive.

Divi Tiara, June 2003, David Posner (pozz4123@hotmail.com),

Reisterstown, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 feet. Water: 85 to 88 F, calm, choppy. I have been there a lot. Max is doing well as the manager. Timeshare rooms need improvements. Staff friendly and helpful. Among the top few of the places I have been diving. Photo Tiara is helpful with suggestions and critiques.

Divi Tiara, June 2003, David Smedley (dpsmed@adelphia.net), Rialto, CA. Experience: Over 1,000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 feet. Water: 82 F, calm, no currents. I have been going to Divi at the Brac for more than 10 years. They are redoing everything. Don't go there if you're not diving, there is no downtown and only two resorts on the island. The staff — Manager Max and his wife Liz are the best. The food is great and if on the meal plan it's all you can eat. All types of film developing. Next day service. Nice viewing area for slides.

Divi Tiara Resort, June 2003, Jerre B. Sadler (jerlynsad@aol.com), Bartow, FL. Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 60 to 150 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. My fifth visit to the Cayman Islands, my first staying with Divi Resorts. Hotel staff are top notch and sensitive to their guest's needs, and food quality and quantity are excellent from breakfast through lunch to supper — no "turista" here. Dive operation from the well-appointed boats to the onshore staff and the onboard crew are excellent and helpful at all times; equipment repair and rental is available, camera and computer rentals are available, film processing

and camera repair is available. Resort management staff are always on site (ask for Max) and are concerned for their guest's needs and satisfaction. Our boat crew consisted of Canadian captain, Ken, and Brit divemaster, Richard, and they made it their mission to ensure that our Central Florida dive group (Neptune's Underwater Tours) dove the best sites with the best conditions available. Each site was described in detail by our boat crew with one or the other of them on the dive with us. We were fortunate in being able to cross to Little Cayman three times to dive the incredible Bloody Bay Wall and Jackson's Bight during our week's stay, and tanks were always available for day and night shore dives. Your gear is set up on a tank for you for each dive from the boat, and you use a resort provided mesh bag to transport it for shore diving activities, coordinating that with the boat crew so that your gear is back on the boat for the next day's dives. You get as much help as you want on the boat, a fresh water rinse is provided, a water cooler and ice chest is on board for fruit and snacks between dives. Car rentals are available on site or close by, and an island tour is recommended to learn more about the Brac and its citizens. Sea Itch was bad while we were there so be aware of it and take whatever steps you normally take to protect yourself from it. Bugs are not a problem except at dusk if the wind is down. Excellent visibility, no currents, normally stable weather, beautiful corals and psychedelic tropicals, numerous shark and turtle sightings, and the "Big Blue" diving the walls have made me a

repeat visitor for 15 years. If power shopping is your bag, do it on Grand Cayman as you transit through. Thankfully there are not a lot of shopping opportunities on the Brac yet. There is 110v current on the island, so no converters are needed. UW Photography Comments: Dedicated rinse tank provided for cameras only, crew sensitive to photogs' needs, no work area provided on board, film supplies and processing provided on site, instruction available if needed, rentals available, videos and slides available for purchase, slide and video shows during week in evening.

Divi Tiara, June 2003, Jill Crocker (crockerjc@aol.com), Austin, TX.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm. Everything was perfect! We had a group of 17, four of whom were in wheelchairs. Divi took great care in making sure we were treated with superb assistance. We lacked for nothing from the food, to the rooms, to the diving! Max is a top notch manager, and he was with us from the moment we arrived. His staff is superior! We enjoyed Cliff's cooking as well! In our opinion, this place deserves five stars! When you can get 17 people to agree that this place rocks, you've accomplished a lot!

Divi Tiara, July 2003, Greg and Nan Froemming, Orlando, FL.

Dives logged: 101-250. Vis: 40-70 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: depth/time. We would suggest that serious divers not waste their money, but spend the money to stay on

Little Cayman. Little Cayman's wall and reefs were far superior. By staying at Divi Tiara, we were only able to sign up for the boat trip to Little Cayman one time in 5 days. The boats were crowded and slow. The worse part was waiting for the chance to reboard the boat because the dive instructors took the time to tear down each diver's gear when they reboarded. At times we waited 10-15 minutes on the surface. Lucky for us it was calm seas. If it had been rough seas this could have been dangerous for some. We do not enjoy having to "stress out" about getting back to the dock to sign up for the next day before all the boats are full. We paid \$100 (U.S.) for a video of our dive which was promised to be mailed. It's now Sept. 15, 2003 and we do not have the video yet.

Divi Tiara, July 2003, Ken Metz, Cincinnati, OH. Dives logged: 500+.

Vis: 75-100+. Water: 82-84 F. Dive restrictions enforced: First dive: 110 ft. Second dive: 60 ft. Attended the week long Nikon School of Underwater Photography. It turned out to be one fantastic school for which I have nothing but praise. The dive sites around Cayman Brac are awesome, which of course, added to the experience. The reefs and walls are in great shape with a fantastic abundance and diversity of life, although not many pelagics. Bloody Bay Wall, near Little Cayman, is an experience every diver should pursue. Throw in a couple of picturesque wrecks like the 356 Russian Destroyer and the world class Cayman Mariner, and you will agree that reef and wall diving couldn't get much better than

this. Unfortunately our experience with the Divi Tiara Beach Resort was not a pleasant one. We were really surprised and disappointed based on the reputation they supposedly enjoyed in the past. We stayed in their best grade of room, but found it only average. In fact the whole place appeared to be rather run down and shabby, as if maintenance had not been a priority for some time. The resort was over booked to the extent that they were trying to handle twice what they claimed was the normal diving load. This resulted in boats designed for a maximum of 16 and normally carrying less, being often jammed with 20 and 21 divers. If that wasn't bad enough, on the afternoon dive the staff insisted on pre-loading the gear for the next morning dive resulting in even more crowding, not to mention the abuse of the equipment. The morning boats had to leave a half hour earlier than normal to allow additional time to get divers on and off the boat on site, thus further inconveniencing the guests. One couple were told that there was no room on the morning boats for them. When they asked for tanks for shore diving they were informed that all the tanks were on the boats. The dive staff tended to be a bit short tempered with the crowding. The briefings were generally pretty good and they normally had a divemaster on the dive for anyone who wanted a guided tour. They strongly encourage valet diving which involves complete handling of your gear for you, but I observed a lot of rough treatment including one instance of actually tossing the gear bags off the boat. At one point they ridiculed us for asking for a new tank O-ring because it

wasn't leaking enough. Our package included a Friday afternoon dive which we intended to do since we had a late afternoon flight out the next day. Most of the other guests were leaving early in the morning so were not doing that dive. As a result, the dive staff didn't want to go out because there weren't enough divers. We had to talk to the general manager, Max, who finally delivered on the dive but pretty much blew us off otherwise. The next morning they pounded on our door at 5 AM just to ask if we were leaving. On a positive note, the food was excellent. This week may have been a fluke or, on the other hand, Divi might really be going downhill. We would love to dive Cayman Brac again, but will stay at one of the other excellent resorts down the road.

Divi Tiara, July 2003, Mike Garrison (mgarrison@gbutler.com), Leewood, KS. Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 84 to 87 F, calm, no currents. Cayman Brac has some great walls and good reefs. Unfortunately the Divi staff would return to the same dive sites numerous times, did not do the walls, and kept to shallow reef dives. Even with a boat load of experienced divers with computers. The dive crews were top notch, Carey and Suzy were terrific and the boats and equipment were good. I was disappointed that we didn't see some variety and some of the Brac's walls. We stayed in the time shares and they are not on the path of the maintenance people. They are in bad condition, fans don't work, light switches don't work, sliding walls don't slide etc. You need to get real familiar with your towel because you

will use the same one all week — there is no maid service. You will also get to know your trash, it will be there all week. Food is excellent and so out of character with the facilities of Divi Tiara. You should dive Cayman Brac but not with Divi Tiara.

Divi Tiara, July 2003, Tripp Jones (Tjones@sc.rr.com), Columbia, SC. Experience: Over 1,000 dives. Vis: 60 to 125 feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm, no currents. Very nice trip with our dive shop (Wateree Dive Center in Columbia, S.C.). Diving was very nice, good viz, good weather, and nice critters, small and large. Saw good many turtles, small and adult. Divi Tiara has put money into upgrading the facilities on shore and rooms were nice and food was outstanding. The dive staff was excellent (Daniel and Nicky).

However, they need to put money into the boats. Daniel was under contract for a month with his own boat from Grand Cayman and his was excellent with 16 divers. However, the other part of our group (32 of us in all) had problems with their boat about every day. One boat was in the anchorage with an engine pulled and the other one was on its last leg, it seemed. The staff did their best with what they had to work with and it seems the problem is with the central office, not on Cayman Brac. These were the same boats we were on here 9 years ago. Cayman Airways from Cayman Brac to Grand Cayman is a study in inefficiency. UW Photography: Good setup: Barbie was excellent.

Divi Tiara, August 2003, Ann

Mcgrath (amcgrath@att.net), Alexandria, VA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, choppy. The staff is very good. They make it easy for you by having you sit on the dive platform and bringing your gear to you. You never have to walk anywhere with your gear on. The boats do not have heads, however, and the trip to Bloody Bay Wall was rough. We dove the same sites more than once because of current, and were blown out one morning by a storm, but it was hurricane season. The rate for the package was good, but we were told there was unlimited shore diving at the resort, and there is none. The “unlimited shore diving” involves renting a car, etc. So we chose to buy the single afternoon dive most days. This drove up our cost significantly. Nitrox was \$12 a bottle. The restaurant is fabulous — we had prime rib, lamb, baked ham, lobster and steak, crab legs, homemade soups and desserts. That was the best part of the trip! The resort is badly in need of renovation, and was undergoing renovation while we were there. They have added a new beach bar, which is nice. We spent most of our evenings there, unless it was raining! Rinse bucket on the boats for cameras, but other than that, no accommodations for UWP.

Reef Divers, Brac Caribbean Beach Village, July 2003, Bob & Doris Schaffer (seamom@earthlink.net), Fallbrook, CA. Experience: Over 1,000 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm, no currents. Usually prefer live-aboard operations, but Reef Divers does a wonderful job. Very effi-

cient getting divers in water and knowledgeable and friendly dive captain and guide (Jason and Vicki) were with us for the entire week. Provided facility to rinse and store dive gear near the boat. Boats are in good condition and no dive site more than a 45 minute run, but a bit crowded (can take 20) which isn't too bad until all divers on boat are on the same dive site at same time. Tropical Storm Claudette had just been through the area which probably affected visibility. Camera table on the boats a bit small; the care and attention given to equipment by crew was excellent. There were spectacular moments of video and photo opportunity but they were too few and too far between compared to other areas of world by reason of diminished amount of sea life in general and particularly the larger, more interesting species.
(www.866thebrac.com)

Grand Cayman

Cayman Divers Limited, 7 Mile Beach Resort, September 2003, Richard & Heidi Comstock, Lisbon, NH. Dives logged: 250. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 84-85 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 100'-25 min. , 50'-40 min. We were diving hurricane season but weather was good. Resort was a place to sleep — fair accommodations. Dove with Cayman Divers Limited — fantastic service. Dives were great — eagle rays, turtles, one hammerhead, lobsters, eels. 7 divers was largest group, just 2 on one day. Personal assistance and service from dive staff. Older more mature divemasters — really made you feel wanted and

respected. (www.caymandiver.ky)

Cayman Dive Lodge, October 2002, Robin Masson (ram@wigginsandmasson.com), Ithaca, NY. Vis: 40 to 100 feet. Water: 82 F. Dives logged: 200. Dive restrictions enforced: 500 psi at end. Basic accommodations — could use an upgrade to match the excellent service. Great DMs who clearly love to dive. Reefs on south/East End are healthy, lots of fish, great swim-throughs on the wall. End each dive on top at 30 to 40 feet. Long dives — some one hour. Excellent food served family style — hot lunch waiting after two a.m. dives. Boat went out for p.m. dive even if only one diver. Daily dive report on Internet had pix of divers and what they saw — great for family and friends at home. 45 minutes from “town,” so rent a car if you don't want to be stuck at East End.
(www.divelodge.com)

Cayman Dive Lodge, November 2002, Phil & Pam Corbin, Urbandale, IA. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F. Dives logged: 140. Dive restrictions enforced: 110 to 130 min. (computer). You would be hard pressed to find a better staff in all of the Caribbean. Accommodations are clean and comfortable with every effort made by the staff to make things run smoothly. The atmosphere is laid back and comfortable, making it easy to interact since everyone eats and dives together. The food is well prepared and abundant and is served buffet style at breakfast and lunch. Dinner follows hors d'oeuvres and is served by the dive masters and owners. We were there for

The Wider Caribbean

Thanksgiving, and quite a feast was prepared with five different turkeys and dressings with all the trimmings. The groups of divers are small, and the two boats allow easy entry and exit from the water. The boats are fast getting to and from the nearby dive sites. The dive sites include many swim-throughs out onto walls, lots of interesting corals, sponges, and healthy sea life. We saw our first shark, spotted eagle ray, and many turtles, one of incredible size. Stay away from Seven Mile Beach area and dive this East End.

Cayman Dive Lodge, February 2003, Richard Visser (rviss@aol.com), Caledonia, MI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, choppy, surge. Very good diving. Reefs on the East End are in great shape. The operation is top notch. Friendly crew. One divemaster even let us use his own car for a day trip into Georgetown. We saw several sharks — some up close and personal — cool. Swam with a school of about 20 tarpon. Large school of silversides in a swim thru. The sites were about 15 to 20 minutes from the dock. A digital camera comes along on all a.m. dives and six to eight pictures are posted on the resort website every day so your friends can see you diving with the sharks. They also can send you envious e-mails which you can retrieve on the resort computer — fun. It was somewhat choppy at times, and a couple of people got seasick during the week. (My scopolamine patch worked great for me.) You don't touch your gear all week. Everything is set up for you including rinsing your gear at the end

of each day. The food is to die for. Chef Julia fixed dishes like Cornish game hen, sesame encrusted salmon, fresh caught (that day) tuna, etc. The 5 p.m. snack one day was sashimi. The accommodations are Motel 6 type rooms, but they're decent and cleaned daily. There are no phones or TVs in the rooms. The resort is small and quiet. One day we were the only two people present. The days that other guests were there, we got to be good friends since the resort is small and everyone eats together.

Cayman Dive Lodge, March 2003, Steve & Cathy Mason (slm1@up.net), Sault Ste Marie, MI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm, choppy. I look for top notch diving with lots of life and a quiet tranquil location to relax and let the stress of work and life flow away. We had avoided Grand Cayman, since it seemed over dived and too touristy. Then I read about Cayman Diving Lodge on the East End; we have been missing one of the best places anywhere in the Caribbean. The East End is paradise found. The diving was fantastic! Tons of fish life, healthy reefs with lots of coral and sponges. I can usually tell the reef condition by the sea fans. In the heavily dived spots, the fans are knocked down first, then the coral and sponges get beat up. I was amazed at the number of large fans standing on this windward side of the island. We swam with Caribbean reef sharks, turtles, tarpon, giant snapper, all the usual fish in abundance. In the beautiful elkhorn stands we found red lipped blennies in three color phases, octopus

in the day, candy striped shrimp, lots of macro life, and scorpionfish, wrasses, damsels, angels, and gobies. There were fish and critters everywhere I looked. Not only were the dive spots full of life, but they also have interesting topography, awesome vertical walls that drop thousands of feet (we love wall dives), mini-walls at 40 to 60 feet, caverns, canyons, pinnacles, shallow barrier reefs, and swim throughs on almost every dive! Staff and lodge were excellent. Jim, the owner, takes time to meet the guests and makes you feel like a friend rather than a customer. The divemasters did an excellent job. The boats were top notch with a Pro 48 jet as the main boat. They were always ready to go the extra mile and even did an afternoon dive with just the two of us, when the others opted to stay on shore. They arranged to get us to Stingray City — that was a blast to do once (kind of like Belize's Blue Hole, you should experience it once). Their customer service was extraordinary. Our room was on the balcony with a beautiful view of the ocean, clean, roomy, and well furnished. Sheila and Roy cooked meals to die for; we actually started asking what was for lunch after the second dive in the morning. A small, quiet resort you can enjoy with other divers and relax. We were in bed most nights by 8 p.m.; one night a bunch of us decided to get crazy and stayed up until almost 9! Homemade desserts and chocolate chip cookies are irresistible. This is one location we will return to; soon I hope. It is snowing out my window right now. Camera tables and rinse tank on boats; instructed everyone not to use camera rinse tanks

for masks or anything other than camera or computer. Very camera friendly; handed to divers and helped with handling when boarding. They use UW cameras and video so they know what they are doing.

Dive 'N Stuff, January 2003, Joan Hoeck (Joenc927@aol.com), Louisville, KY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, choppy. Saw turtles on every dive, over three weeks. Diving the north side was fabulous! Spotted eagle rays two separate days! The fish life is in abundance on the west side, as well as the north and south. If you want to take pictures, services are available. (www.cayman.org/divenstuff/)

Dive 'N Stuff, Victoria House, July 2003, Steve Dingeldein (sdingeldein@triad.rr.com), Burlington, NC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, calm. Third trip to Grand Cayman, our second stay at Victoria House and our first experience with Dive 'N Stuff. We have dived twice before with the sister operation to Dive 'N Stuff in Little Cayman, Conch Club Divers, and loved the personal service given by that operation. We assumed, rightly it turns out, that the operation in Grand Cayman would be good. There were a few good reviews each year in the Chapbook and *Undercurrent* had given Dive 'N Stuff a good review several years back. Paul Deegan was as good as a divemaster could be. He was laid back but paid attention to each diver's skills. He is readily available via his cell phone while you are there and

flexible. Most of the divers were repeat customers of Dive 'N Stuff over several years. We met Paul each morning at the public beach at 7:40 AM. Other divers he picked up before us at the beach of their condos and others after us. We were always the first boat out on the west side and thus had the pick of dive sites each day. He was more than willing to set up the tanks himself, and was remarkably efficient getting everyone ready. He then led the deeper dives after giving excellent dive briefings. He didn't go in on the shallower dives unless he had a resort diver, but that was fine with all the divers on the boat. We dived 2 tank dives in the mornings, one tank most afternoons (he would do two if we asked) and did one night dive on the Oro Verde. We didn't dive the North shore because visibility had been poor the weeks before. Paul took us out to Stingray City at our request and got us there during the lunch hour when there was no one else there. By the time we left 3 or 4 boats had arrived with more on its way. It was nice to be at Stingray City without it looking like Grand Central Station. Paul has a great sense of humor and gave us our best tips on restaurants on the island. We particularly enjoyed Neptune (my wife said it was nice to be treated special as we were there even though we were not special) and Calypso Grill at the Northeast Tip of the Seven Mile Beach end of the Island. At each restaurant I had one of the best meals I've ever eaten. We enjoyed the Wharf, too. I really like Victoria House, as did the two other families who had not been there before. The rooms were nice, and

the ladies who cleaned them each day did a great job. The beach is fantastic with the large Casuarina trees and hammocks. The location is far enough up Seven Mile Beach so as to be past the worst traffic. Many days we felt like we had the beach to ourselves there. Plenty of room on the westside pontoon boat to set up if need be. Paul puts out a separate rinse bucket for each person with a camera so all the cameras are not piled on top of each other in a single bucket.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast, November 2002, David Van Ryn, Elkhart, IN.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 150 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. We had a group (18 divers) travel to Grand Cayman for an educational program. The resort and dive shop is on the extreme northwest point of the island past the turtle farm, far from the "crud" on Seven Mile Beach. We were close to the north wall and also close to the harbor for departures. A rental car is a must. The resort is two years old and run by an enthusiastic Dutch fellow who is eager to please. There is a pool, hot tub, and on site dive service. There is shore diving, and, with a ride in the zodiac or the use of a scooter, the wall can be reached from the pier. The food is good and there are many amenities for divers (lockers, rinse tank, setup area, etc.). The dive-tech folks are "tech" oriented and specialize in Nitrox, etc. Several of us took Nitrox courses. They have two boats and seem eager to please. The sites they usually dive are the north wall, northwest point, and the northern sections of the west wall. They seem most oriented to

advanced divers and less comfortable with newer divers. They offer underwater scooter rentals at both locations. The north wall reefs seem in good shape with lots of healthy and new coral growth. We saw lots of eagle rays and turtles but no sharks or other pelagics. Very nice people, comfortable boats, short rides. (www.divetech.com)

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast, November 2002, Ken Cohen (klcohen@earthlink.net), Woodbridge, CT. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F. Dives accrued: 200. Dive restrictions enforced: 120 feet. Staying at Cobalt Coast definitely opt for package including rental car. If the wind comes from the northwest-northeast, you can't shore dive there. Also far from any restaurants other than hotel. Dive staff was great about finding someplace to go diving.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast, December 2002, Lisa Sanford, Willmar, MN. Vis: 50 to 60 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F. Dives logged: 120. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 feet, 45 min. max., every time. Let me start by saying that Aire who owns Cobalt Coast is wonderful! He made us feel welcome. Resort was on the northwest tip and gets the brunt of the wind. There is no sandy beach. Not a lot for children to do here. The rooms are nice and spacious. Food was very good. The service was slow at times. I was disappointed in Dive Tech. They do not help you with anything! You have to do everything yourself all week. Good place to get certified though. I was told that is what they specialize in. All the divemasters had attitudes and would not engage in any

sort of conversation with you. I think they have a lot of nerve asking for tips. We did not give any. There were some obnoxious people from Long Island, N.Y., on our boat who were using cameras. They were boasting at what great divers they were but seemed oblivious to their fins hitting the already delicate coral heads in Grand Cayman. One of them was resting his knee on some brain coral while harassing a green moray eel for practically the whole dive. Divemasters seemed not to care about this.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast Resort, January 2003, S. Lee Bowden (bowden@thesagamore.com), Bolton Landing, NY. Dives logged: 1,000+. Vis: 80 to 120 feet. Water: 72 to 78 F. This was a second visit. Purpose was to take a course in advanced nitrox. Cobalt Coast was, as always, a treat. Arie and Dora were most welcoming and wanted to know where my kids were on this trip. Other staff was fabulous. Food was terrific, and the accommodations are a delight. Nancy and the crew at Dive Tech were super. The class was excellent. Nancy was quick to accommodate a request from my dive partner for a different instructor and a smaller class.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast Resort, February 2003, Dawn Elliott & Mike Riggle, Elkhart, IN. Booked though Ultimate Dive Travel and Ken led us in the right direction as to where to stay. We wanted something more personable and away from the crowds as the West side is way over dived. Cobalt Coast Resort owner Arie was

waiting to greet us as if we were his only guest and treated us that way. We have done a lot of diving for years, from live-aboards in Galapagos, Cocos and Palau and many resorts. Even though Cayman of course was not the best diving, Cobalt Coast was the best and most personable resort I have stayed in. It is a little more windy on the Northwest side but the hospitality and resort makes up for it all. Arie went out of his way to make us feel at home. We rented one of the condos and I had asked for a grill to cook out. Not only did Arie get us one to use he even dropped off charcoal and lighter fluid. We did eat there a couple nights and the food was wonderful. Dive Tech was the dive shop and they were just as personable. The North Side of Cayman was actually more than I expected.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast, July 2003, Mark McAlpin (mark@dlcoffee.com), Tyler, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm, currents. Cobalt Coast is a very nice dive resort that is fairly isolated on the North shore. The food is very good and the meals-inclusive option is a good choice if you don't have a car because there are no other restaurants or shopping within walking distance and the taxis are expensive. Dive Tech is a good dive operation with a great staff that is clearly focused on making sure everyone has a good time. The divemasters are safety conscious but allow a reasonable amount of freedom. The first dive is guided and divers are asked to limit their depth to 100 feet. On the second, shallower dive you have the

option of going with the divemaster or doing your own thing. The shore diving at both of Dive Tech's Cobalt Coast and Turtle Farm is excellent, although it is a bit of a surface swim to get to the main wall. The current can also be a bit strong at times, so caution is needed to not use up all one's gas swimming out and back underwater to the deep wall. There is good diving closer in if you don't want to go all the way out to the drop off. Tarpon Alley stood out as did our trip to Stingray City, the latter largely due to a very friendly green moray that the crew coaxed out of its hole. We dove the *Carrie Lee* wreck using Trimix since Dive Tech is one of the few operations that will accommodate technical divers. It is a great deep dive (165-230 fsw) but was a bit of a challenge because of the current. The wreck rests upright with the bow hanging over the drop off. Very cool. Mike Lucas, our divemaster, and Gary Nightingale, our captain/safety diver, did an excellent job making sure the dive was controlled and safely executed.

Dive Tech/Eden Rock, Morritts Grand, August 2003, James A. Heimer, Houston, TX. Dives logged: 251-500 dives. Sunny with some clouds and rain. Calm and flat to choppy. Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 82-86 F. 3 mm wetsuit. Dove own profile (with computers) — unsupervised shore diving. Our timeshare is on the East end of Grand Cayman, far from the popular, "over-touristed" Seven Mile Beach. Only boat diving is possible on the East side; the price of a two-tank excursion can exceed \$100. Packages

and discounts of 20% were available (Treasure Island Divers and Tortuga Divers), but that still puts the cost of diving up there with a daily lift ticket at a premium Colorado ski resort. We decided to investigate shore diving and there are enough to keep you entertained for a week or more. A big “but” — they are all on the West side of the island, and we put 400 miles on our rental car during the week going back and forth. Rental cars are relatively inexpensive — about \$150 plus \$50 for two tanks of gas to cover that distance. If you’re staying on Seven Mile, you are within minutes of most of the shore sites. There were five diving, two had 250 plus dives, two with 50 plus 100 dives, and one had just been certified. We dove at three locations — Eden Rock just south of Georgetown and two DiveTech locations at the Turtle Farm and at Cobalt Bay, both on the northwestern tip of the island. A dive shop is adjacent to the entry point services at these locations. There are tables for gearing up, lockers for storing the stuff you don’t take with you, a rinse tank, a shower, and limited parking. You rent your tanks and weights at the dive shop, and outside equipment is not allowed. The cost is about \$8 per tank plus a nominal fee for weights. Eden Rock charges by the pound and adds an extra cost for the belt. Eden Rock diving is at two sites — Eden Rock and Devils’ Grotto. Both are in 50 ft of water, and entry is via a four-foot ladder into shallow water. It is a moderate swim (50 yards) to the buoys that mark the drop down point for either site. Both areas feature clump coral, swim-throughs, the usual tropi-

cals, small schools of 4 ft tarpon, the odd turtle, and as reported by other divers — the occasional shark. Some divers and snorkelers feed the fish, so yellow tailed snappers and a particularly curious French angel will accompany you. We were able to get a good hour of bottom time. The water was about 86 degrees with 50 plus feet of visibility. Eden Rock is one of the closest operations to the cruise ship landing, so it can get crowded when the “fleet” is in. We also did a night dive here. It was remarkably barren of fish, but we did see squid, lobsters, a complacent crab, and an octopus. Although a tremendous storm had whipped through the East end that day, there was a dead-flat calm on the West side and no noticeable impact on the diving. DiveTech next to the Turtle Farm features a number of options. Entry is by a ladder, similar to that at Eden Rock with a swim to a buoy about 20 yards out. After dropping down, you follow a ledge out another 20 yards to the “mini-wall” that drops down to 60 feet. You can go either toward or away from the Turtle Farm along the wall, and come back across the top at the end of the dive. These sites feature schools of large tarpon, turtles, lobsters, rays, and a good cross section of tropicals, which are more abundant than at Eden Rock. You could also swim out across the sand flats (or on the surface). The sand gently slopes from 60 feet to 85 feet at the main wall, which drops off to about 6,000 feet. This is a long swim recommended for fit divers — if you do it underwater, there would not be much bottom time for exploration. Both this and the other DiveTech location

“claim” to run a ferry service to the outer reef (you swim back), but on every occasion we were there, either the boat or motor were out of service. The DiveTech location at Cobalt Bay around the point to the North from the Turtle Farm features a long pier with the entry ladder at the end. You can swim out 50 yards or so to the first buoy and drop down and follow the bottom to the “mini-wall,” or undertake the 200-yard swim and drop down within range of the outer wall. Coral covered rock fingers reach out from the shore, with much of the same marine life we encountered at the turtle farm. Both DiveTech locations offer a “scooter safari” escorted dive using underwater scooters between the two DiveTech locations. It takes about an hour and allows some of the inlets between the two locations to be explored. Anticipating that we might do that, all five of us rented scooters for one dive (\$25 each) to try them out. They were easy to use, once you adjusted your buoyancy for the added weight (about 1.5 pounds negative underwater), but on the basis of our experience, we passed on the safari. Even though they are electric, they make a bit of noise underwater and, at 2 knots, are not suitable for a leisurely and detailed tour along the reef, which is what we enjoy doing. All locations are near restaurants (the Cracked Conch at the Turtle Farm DiveTech is especially good), where you can catch lunch between dives or enjoy an après diving libation. We found the shore diving to be an enjoyable, interesting, and much less expensive alternative to the boat diving routine.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast, August 2003, Michael Marmesh, Miami, FL.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 feet. Water: 78 to 85 F, choppy. Sounds like whining, but average viz of 60 ft. is not that good for the Caymans. Viz near surface often 30-40 ft. but improved below 30 ft. Corals atop wall had some muck-brown algae type material amongst them. All diving done on the North Wall. Assorted grouper and snapper were approachable. At Tarpon Alley saw 10-12 spotted eagle rays, hammerhead and bull shark, but no tarpon. I'll take the trade. Eagle rays on many dives. Third time in The Caymans and finally did Stingray City — not just a tourist hype — a real blast. Besides friendly, curious rays, got bitten by a mutton snapper, petted a 6 ft. green moray, checked out peacock flounder and scoped out a scorpion fish. Two a.m. boat dives — 1st dive was always led and followed. Six to 14 divers on boat. Maybe I'm getting old and cranky but since 1st dive is always a wall dive, I'd just as soon be allowed to follow my own profile. On 2nd dive you could do your own profile if you had a computer and a buddy. From dive operation's point of view, clients' range of experience varies widely. (Returning from one dive my wife was asked, “What's that fish pictured on your T-shirt?” answer — barracuda.) Boat crews were good but rotated every couple of days making it more difficult for them to get to know the skill levels of the divers. On website, despite the picture of the dive shop and dock at Cobalt Coast, boat diving was by truck to the yacht club. Shore dive is 270 yds. from the end of the dock to the mini-wall, 70

yds. more to the deeper formations. DiveTech has 2nd shop at Turtle Reef. Mini-wall there is great for day or night dive. DiveTech offers opportunities to learn free dive techniques, Nitrox, advanced trimix certification and rebreathers. I took a rebreather intro course on Draeger semi-closed system with shop owner Nancy Romanica. First in-water attempt at Turtle Reef could've gone better. Developed a headache and got to practice two out-of-air protocols. Nancy offered a 2nd opportunity the following day — fantastic. Stayed at 60 ft. for 60 minutes. Snuck into a school of tarpon, close to garden eels, arrow crabs and coral shrimp. Held baby skate and pulled hook out of grouper's mouth. Still returned with 1500 psi in a 50 cu. ft. Nitrox tank. Photo pro Chris diving on Inspiration rebreather gave me a severe case of equipment envy. Cobalt Coast is a exceptionally nice resort. Rooms clean and well appointed. Dining by the pool, facing the sea — food excellent quality — mix of traditional meats and chicken along with Caribbean flavors of conch, lobster, shrimp, and fish soup with callaloo. Owner, Arie Barendrecht, really cares about guests' comfort. Willing to offer help and advice. Old world style where running a hotel is not just a job but a valued profession. Best host in all my dive travels.

Dive Tech, Cobalt Coast, September 2003, Thom Dasher (dashlaw@texas.net), Austin, TX. Dives logged: 500. Vis: 150-200 ft. Dive restrictions enforced: shore diving — self imposed. The reef off Cobalt Coast is two tiered — one at 70 ft. and one at 100 ft. The

dives originate from Divetech (Trimix, rebreather, scooters) allow exploration of areas never before seen. Cobalt Coast is gorgeous and the managers, Dora and Arie are terrific. Dora is a Trimix diver and plans great dive vacations for you.

Fisheye, Wyndham Sunshine Suites. June/July 2003, David Kupersmith (thekupe@hotmail.com), Melville, NJ. Dives logged: 500+. Water: 80-84 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 100-110. Sixth trip to Grand Cayman. Sunshine Suites is across from Westin Causarina. No beach but has pool. Rooms well equipped and clean. A bargain at \$155/night including a rental car for the week and continental breakfast (juice, muffins, fruit, cereals and coffee). Fisheye is a great operation. Boat pulls up to beach about one mile west of facility on 7 Mile Beach. Dove some sites I have done numerous times before but never tire of — Trinity Caves, Orange Canyon and Aquarium. (www.fisheye.com)

Morritt's, August 2002, James & Kandace Heimer (mango9@earthlink.net), Houston, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm, no currents. We do little boat diving because we find the shore diving to be good and much cheaper. The Grand Cayman boat dives are expensive, even when you get a package. We avoid them except to get to the north wall or for a few wreck dives. We prefer Tortuga Dives at the Tortuga Club next door to the Morritts Grand, where we have a timeshare. We have tried the much

praised and nearby Ocean Frontiers and found the dive staff to be more interested in keeping divers off the coral than in ensuring they had a pleasant dive, so we go with Tortuga. We have also used Treasure Island Divers on Seven Mile Beach, but the quality of their dive staff is not as high (cursor-y briefing, little assistance or guidance during the dive) as has been our experience in the past. The best shore diving is from the Dive Tech shops at Cobalt Bay or the Turtle Farm. The first wall at 60 feet is an easy swim (easier at the Turtle Farm) from a ladder leading down to the water from a location near the dive shop. It costs about \$7 to rent a tank. To reach the outer, deep wall, you can do a long swim or take the Dive Tech shuttle boat for an additional \$7. They also have UW scooters for rent, and you can tour between the two dive shop locations, both of which are on the NW tip of the island. Other shore dive locations abound south of Georgetown, like Eden Rock, and these locations are also good for night dives. We use the standard references (Cayman Divers Guide, Guide to Diving and Snorkeling) for site information. Of course, you do need a rental car, especially when staying out on the East End of the island, as we do. By the way, the East End is much quieter than the touristy Seven Mile Beach, and there are several good restaurants nearby, like The Edge. It is also close to Rum Point. The diving is also more unspoiled, with generally better soft corals and fish life. (www.morrittsggrand.com)

Ocean Frontiers, Royal Reef Resort,

February 2003, Peter Dollard, Kennebunkport, ME. Experience:

101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet.

Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy, surge.

Ocean Frontiers was exactly as said in your newsletter. They were perfect.

The facilities were excellent, but the staff is what makes them outstanding.

Every single person we interacted with went out of their way to be helpful and seemed genuinely interested in making sure we had a good time. They were receptive to requests for dive sites and seemed as excited as the guests after good dives. We stayed in the East End of Grand Cayman at the Royal Reef Resort, which is a top of the line time-share. The reefs were in excellent condition — as good as any we've seen in the Caribbean, including the Belize Atolls. Good walls, a few sharks, and eagle rays. What I really enjoyed were the shallow dives where the topography included canyons, numerous swim throughs, and small caverns filled with silversides. Very satisfying diving compared to the reef devastation we've seen in other parts of the Caribbean, such as Honduras. The resort was beautiful — setting, grounds, and buildings. Problem was the rooms were only cleaned on Sat and Wed unless you wanted to pay \$50 extra per cleaning. At one point we asked for clean sheets, and they just dropped them off at the room instead of changing them. Divers had to eat breakfast at the room as breakfast (served next door at Morritts) started too late. This actually worked out well, and we came to like having breakfast on our porch. Food in Grand Cayman is outrageously expensive though of gourmet quality

(Portofinos and The Lighthouse). You need a car at the East End which is 45 min from Georgetown.

(www.oceanfrontiers.com)

Ocean Frontiers, Reef Club, March 2003, Randy Nelson, Evergreen, CO.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm.

Ocean Frontiers is as good as reader reports in *Undercurrent* lead us to believe. It was easy and efficient to book our week of diving and accommodations at the Reef Club through them online. After a 10-minute drive from the Reef Club to Ocean Frontiers headquarters (we had a car rental but OF provides free shuttle service) all you had to do was check in at their office and walk down to the boat where they would have all your dive gear on board and set up. Boat rides to many dive sites are short, and they dive both the north and south sides of Grand Cayman. First dive was an escorted 100-foot wall dive. The walls have healthy sponge and coral, but are lacking in larger fish life. Second dive was either an escorted or unescorted (your choice) 50-foot dive with terrific topography (lots of swim throughs, caverns, etc., to explore with lots of small fish and critters. Saw one reef shark, two turtles, and one large green moray, but lots of smaller reef fish, spotted morays, massive schools of silversides, and of course 20 to 50 tarpon on the shallow dives. The dive briefings were detailed including large, detailed maps of the dive sites, which made unescorted diving the obvious choice. When you return to the dock, OF provides plastic crates at the boat to put

your gear into. They will then rinse and store your gear and have it set up on board for your next dives. Only complaints about the diving would be the limited bottom times (35 min on deep dive, 50 min on shallow dive) and the lack of larger fish. (But this is an island of over 30,000 people and lots of fisherman.) I would rate the diving a notch or two below Little Cayman for that reason. Accommodations at the Reef Club are four-star with newer, nicely furnished beachfront condos, pool, a decent restaurant, and beachfront bar. The staff was helpful. Lots of families with small children, but our all-adult group was comfortable there also. Only complaint would be that the restaurant didn't open until 8 a.m., which meant you had to cook breakfast in your condo every morning if you were diving. (But this did save quite a bit of money as Cayman restaurants are expensive.) It was an easy drive from the East End to a number of fine restaurants for dinner. \$\$\$\$=Portofino, The Light House; \$\$\$=The Edge; and we even went into Georgetown for dinner one night. A good compromise between out of the way hardcore diving and U.S.-type quality accommodations and dining.

Ocean Frontiers, March 2003, Randy and Carol Thompson, Shrewsbury, MA.

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, choppy, surge. Comprehensive pre-dive briefing, choice on second dive of guided or buddy team, profiles recorded then printed out upon leaving with names of dive sites visited so that they may be recorded in your log book.

Fresh towels, hot chocolate on night dives, super-friendly and accessible staff — from the office to the boat — make this a stellar operation. Saw many turtles this time, both free-swimming and eating, two spotted eagle rays, and first hammerhead ever! But the corals are the real star on the East End. Incredible variety, almost none dead. The profusion of colors is mind-boggling. Many great photo ops, even if there had not been any critters. Caught one of the biggest adult spotted drum we have ever seen. Separate table and rinse bucket.

Ocean Frontiers, Morritt's Tortuga Club, April 2003, Wayne Breitbarth, Mequon, WI. Water: 80 to 84 F. Dives logged: 80. Ocean Frontiers is simply the best! Great pre-dive briefings, input on dive site decisions, snacks, always a guided dive available but can dive your own computer. All this and the highest level of safety concern and friendliness. Went on a super night dive. We stayed in the new Morritts Grand, and it is really super. Snorkeling under the dock is the best fish sanctuary I have ever seen in two to eight feet of water.

Ocean Frontiers, Royal Reef Resort, May 2003, Bradley Bowen, Salt Lake City, UT. Experience: 251-500 dives. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy, surge, currents. Third trip to Grand Cayman, and second trip with Ocean Frontiers. Consistent, outstanding service. Book and pay for all dives you plan to do in advance as this operator often does not have any open spaces on its dive boats. We did four dives per day on 32% Nitrox, paying for all

dives in advance, and never encountered any problems. Other divers were not able to dive as often as they had hoped. Crew is great at accommodating experienced divers entering the water first and exiting last who want an hour of bottom time, but you should alert them of your desire at the time of booking and discretely remind both crew members when you board the boat. Absent such a request, dive times are typically no more than 45 minutes on the first dive and 35 minutes on the second dive. Don't be shy about telling the crew what you want to see. They will dive the South East end every dive if weather permits because the sites are close. These are where you will see Caribbean reef sharks and spotted eagle rays, as well as great walls with swim throughs. Shallow sites are a bit hammered, but a lot of fun to dive because of tunnels and caves with huge schools of glassy sweepers and other bait fish, with tarpon, grouper, and parrot fish lurking about. If the weather is bad, they dive the North East end, which has great walls and where you are more likely to see turtles. Wall dives are comparable to Little Cayman, but with fewer huge barrel sponges. Never saw any pelagics at Little Cayman. Had bad weather the first three days and dove the North side. No pelagics, but wonderful walls, pinnacles and turtles. Weather improved and we spent the next three days on the South side. Reef sharks on half of the South side dives, both this trip and our trip two years ago. Had nine spotted eagle rays on one dive with a large female Caribbean reef shark following three of the rays. Had glimpses of spot-

ted eagle rays on several other dives. Night dive spots are not good. The staff was great at providing us with a map and instructions on locating the Babylon dive site from shore. We left a strobe on the shore about fifteen feet up the bank. The dive site is about four blocks from the shore and takes around 15 minutes or so to swim to at a leisurely pace. Do not use the air in your tank swimming out until you are at a depth of around 20 feet, or you won't have any air left to dive the pinnacle, which is just to your left as you come out onto the wall. We discovered that the cut through the reef out onto the wall was several hundred feet down the shore from where we had entered the dive site. Having a strobe high on the shore is critical to navigating back to the shore entry point as it is impossible to distinguish between the street lights at night. The swell, even on a calm night, makes the strobe difficult to see above the water, so place it high on the shore. We found this site safe and fun to dive on a calm night with these precautions and careful attention to navigation. Although our group of four experienced divers on Nitrox and computers was allowed to dive its own profiles with no interference, we suspect that Ocean Frontiers persuaded one of its former dive masters to come along to do the first dive of the afternoon on a deep tunnel with an entrance at 110' on the wall. This diver said he didn't have a buddy and asked to join our group. He stayed deep the entire time, looking for the entrance to the tunnel, which was tough to find due to the thick coral growth. At the end of the dive he discretely pushed on the

back of my wife's tank as she was swimming against the current returning to the boat. During the surface interval, we learned that this diver had formerly worked for Ocean Frontiers as a dive master for several years. When we suited up for the second dive he made excuses not to go. Just one example of the courtesy and professionalism we have encountered diving with Ocean Frontiers. Although Stingray City may seem a little cliché for experienced divers, we decided to do the trip with Ocean Frontiers and found it much better than our prior experiences. In addition to the stingrays, we got numerous close-up photos of several chain morays and goldentail morays. The twelve foot green moray is like a puppy dog that followed us around, and allowed everyone in the group to pet and "hold" it as it slipped through their arms. Ocean Frontiers does not encourage tipping and changes the boat crews around so that it is difficult to keep track of who you should tip. Of all the live-aboards and dive operators with whom we've dove, none were more deserving of a tip than the people at Ocean Frontiers. We kept track of all the people we dove with and left tips for each of them in about a dozen of the small envelopes that Ocean Frontiers provided upon request. Only a small camera table for underwater photographers, and on some dives it was filled to the limit.

Ocean Frontiers, Turtle Nest Inn, July 2003, Craig Neal (canfsa@rit.edu), Pittsford, NY. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Dive operation has

not lost a step, since we last dived with them in 2001. Certified our 2 daughters, 13 and 11. Great experience and they came through with flying colors. Walls still great, 10 minute boat ride, water a little rough. Claudette went by during our stay and shut down operations for a day. Turtle Nest Inn is quiet, classy, affordable, intimate, friendly. The owners make you feel like family and you are removed from SMB craziness.

Red Baron, Plantation Village, November 2002, Greg Milleville, Brookfield, WI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, choppy. Nick and Pat of Red Baron are nice people and good divemasters. They worked hard to maximize our diving on a quick trip to G.C. The boat is smallish but comfortable for up to six divers. At eight divers (their max) it would be a bit crowded. Plantation Village was clean and bright with comfortable beds and easy walking to grocers and other stores. The beach though is virtually nonexistent even though it is "on" Seven Mile Beach. One must walk north a few hundred yards to get to good beach area. (345-945-4744, baronred@candw.ky or redbaron@cayman.org)

Red Baron, Marriot Resort, April 2003, Paul Jacobsen (pjacobsen@socal.rr.com), Torrance, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, choppy. The rooms and hotel have problems. The rooms are being renovated. Our room was renovated, but the air conditioning froze us out. Even with it turned off for two nights we needed

extra blankets. Maintenance fixed the A/C so that we didn't freeze but even with it off and the outside temperatures at 90+ degrees we never had to turn it on. The room was always cold. There was condensation that made the carpet wet around the A/C and the drapes had mold. The week before we arrived 30 of the staff had been laid off. The remaining employees were showing the strain. Don't expect much of a beach either, depending on tide levels there may not be one. (If you want a nice beach and resort hotel stay at the Westin.) The Marriott's pool area was adequate but overrun with kids, and closed several evenings for private groups. Two nights there was no water after 11 PM. Breakfast was too expensive. After the first couple of mornings, we opted to walk about 5 minutes south. Located in a strip mall Tortuga Tim's an economical place to eat breakfast and lunch with good basic food. I dived with Red Barons (\$75 per 2 tank boat dive, a savings of about \$25 from the Marriott's dive OP, Red Sail Sports. There's no advantage to using the hotel's dive op since you still have to get in a van to be taken to a dive boat). Red Baron's runs 2 clean and fast six-packs. They start earlier in the morning than other ops, so you get to the dive sites before the other operators. Nick (owner) was always right on time to pick me up from the Marriott. This was my first trip to Grand Cayman and I had worried about dive restriction that I had heard about. Not a problem with Red Baron, after my first dive, and they had a chance to see how I dived, they let me pretty much do what I wanted. The normal restrictions

are 100 ft max, back on the boat with 500 psi. However, if you have a computer and are a decent diver they'd let you go to the recreational limits. The first dive is a guided dive, the 2nd dive you buddy up, but since I was doing video I was allowed to go off on my own. I would just check to see when the DM would want me back, usually 50-60 minutes. My only two complaints about Red Barons are; being a six pack only a small bucket is provided for a camera rinse. Though they store your gear and have it set up on the boat the next day, the only rinse your gear gets at the end of the day is a hose on the dock, if at all. The gear is stored in a locked box on the dock or in the forward hold on the boat, which gets toasty in the hot Cayman sun. I contacted Nick via his website (www.redbarondivers.com) before the trip. Nick immediately answered my questions about the current conditions. He was flexible. My "first dive day" I decided to cancel because of sinus and ear clearing problems. Nick gave me the name of a good local diving ENT. The Doc was well equipped to check my ear clearing and said I was good to go. No hassles or worries from Nick for missing my first day. My first dive with Red Barron's, we had 9 on board (6 divers, 1 young diver, 1 for hire videographer, and the DM/Captain Patrick). It was a dance getting everyone into the water. Two of the divers had just finished their resort cert and this was their first OW dive. The guided dive was short, but Patrick quickly picked up on my ability and midway through the dive he pointed me through a swim through at 95 ft while he took

the rest of the group around. I was the last in the water and waited to be the last out and still got back on the boat with tons of air. The boat moved with a 45 min SI. The 2nd dive I asked to go without a buddy, which was no problem. I kept my dive to 60 minutes since I was the last back. The other days the boat had 5 or 6 divers, and they were more skilled divers than my first day's experience. But I'd end up doing the second dive by myself, and was always the last back, but no worries as long as I was back in 60 minutes. Also Patrick (DM) always did a good dive briefing. During the dives we saw turtles, spotted eagle rays, green moray eel, lobster, decorator crabs, and the Caribbean's usual cast of characters. If you had time to pick around there was interesting "macro" life to find too. The walls and reefs had good coral life that seems to not be too impacted. I chose Grand Cayman for my wife, a nondiver. This worked out well, I could do 2 dives in the morning and be back in for time for lunch while she could do other activities while I was diving. Being a six pack only a small bucket is provided for a camera rinse. The first day there was no water in the bucket for my housing. The next day I was last back on the boat and two other camera where in the bucket leaving no room for my video housing.

Red Sail Sports, Westin Causarina, October 2002, Bill Schlegel, Jefferson City, MO. The DAN Diving and Hyperbaric Medicine Course. Westin Causarina on Seven Mile Beach. Accommodations were very nice. Great pool. Great beach.

That's where the meeting was. Red Sails Sports is a large, multifaceted aquatic outfitter. Everything from tourist cruises to diving. Their dive-masters were professional. Did their best to give us the best diving that the west and north end of G.C. had to offer. Of note, they would not take us to any west end reefs (except for one night dive at the Oro Verde which was 1/4 mile off of the Westin) because they seemed a little embarrassed with the poor condition. The well-known reports of poor reef conditions are true, on the west end. The north end is a little better. Actually not bad. Tarpon Alley was a nice dive with about 100 tarpon in the crack in the reef. Other wall dives and reef dives on the north side (near Rum Point) were quite good. Sting Ray City and Sting Ray Sandbar were a lot of fun. Took almost an hour of video at the sand bar. Restaurants are very good. The Grand Old House (not far from Sunset House) is five-star. \$100.00/person. Sit on the edge of the pier and watch the Tarpon in the water under the lights. Calypso Grill (far north end of island) was fantastic and the rates were in the \$30-50 range. Smugglers Cove (downtown) was also to be highly recommended with what I'd describe as three-star dining and four-star food and atmosphere. Ask for a table near the water. The restaurant near Sunset House was quite good also. Grand Cayman's west end is not the best place to go for great diving. East End is a lot better. But, if you have some other reason (meeting, etc.) and need to take family along who want to enjoy great tourist beaches and fine dining, then this is the place if you

have the "bucks." Sting Ray City/Sandbar is great, even for the diver who has seen everything, and the kids can do it too. There were a lot of empty hotel rooms. Now, if they could only fix the west end reefs. (www.redsail.com)

Red Sail Sports, Marriott Beach Resort, November 2002, R. Moore Ph.D. (padidm@earthlink.net), Vista, CA. Vis: 50 to 100+ feet. Water: 82 to 84 F. Dives logged: 858. Dive restrictions enforced: Everything. Worst dive operation I've ever used. Unbelievably conservative restrictions. Never came up with less than 1,500 psi! Treated everyone like they were certified the day before. Marriott Beach Resort has no beach. It was washed away in the storms. Service at the resort was great but the resort was old.

Sunset House, Treasure Island Diver, October 2002, Don Roden, Huntsville, AL. No currents. Bathwater was rancid. No air-conditioning for two days; no ice chests for ice. Poor to nonexistent maid service. No sheet changes for the whole week. Pricey restaurant and far from other restaurants. Dive operators couldn't/wouldn't accommodate a junior diver 40-foot depth limit. Even with the three of us on five-diver boat trips. We wound up renting a car and shore diving at Eden Rock and Don Foster. We finally found Treasure Island Divers, and what a difference! The gang at TI went out of their way to accommodate our 10-year-old diver. Two tank shallow dives and always a different site. P.S.: If we had stayed at

Treasure Island, we could have saved \$400 by not needing a rental car. (www.sunsethouse.com)

Sunset House, November 2002, Joe Voss, Schererville, IN. Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, choppy. Waited a long time before my wife and I went to the Caymans because of the cost. Had the most fantastic experience working with Cathy Church. Cathy and Herb, her husband, are great people. The weather was bad most of the time. When we were able to go to any of the really good sites on the South side someone else was there every time so every dive was downgraded. Because of a tropical storm we were able to dive from the Mako on the North side for 3 days. The problem was extremely short surface intervals (30 to 40 minutes) after long deep dives resulting in less than 10 minute bottom times at 65 ft. on the second dive. You had to go that deep just to hit bottom. We started out with 12, but by the third day my wife and I and one other diver were the only ones left because everyone else went in to no decompression. When we asked for longer s.i. we were told "we all had computers and keep them in the green." The reason being that getting back to lunch was top priority. Said something to the manager and got the usual dance. Because of some heavy lifting restrictions we asked for some help with the tanks and gear. Not until the last dive did anybody offer help. A couple of the guys on the boat were pretty good. The shore diving was available only 1 day because of weather. Even though we thought the resort

was pretty pricey we went based on the glowing praises from the manager at a dive show. We were disappointed. Maybe they should change the motto "for divers, run by divers." I have been diving off and on since the 1967 and a current Padi instructor. My wife has been diving for 15 years. We know you have to take the good with the bad on diving vacations. That is why I have never submitted comments to any publication before this.

Sunset House, July 2003, Wayne Joseph, San Mateo, CA. Sunset House is old, and the Caymans are expensive. We enjoy Sunset House because the shore diving is easy. We stayed there to do a short photo course with Cathy Church. I really recommend her to anyone who really wants to learn how to do UW photography. I don't think there is anyone better. The grounds are maintained nicely, the room was clean (they replaced a broken shower head as soon as I told them about it), the dive shop is helpful, and the restaurant/bar has decent food at a reasonable price. The shore diving is not as bad as some people think. We saw a shark, squid, barracuda, and lots of little cleaner shrimp in just three dives. Also, the Naked Fish Restaurant at the Seaview Hotel (just down the road) has excellent food at reasonable prices.

Wall to Wall Diving, Sunshine Suites, November 2002, John and Anita Motard (mawandsam@yahoo.com), Irving, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 82 F, choppy, surge. This is our second time this year diving with Giles

and Deanna of Wall to Wall Diving. We have probably dived with every operation on Grand Cayman and have finally found the best. Wall to Wall caters to small groups of divers so everyone receives personal attention. They always try to find the best dive sites based on visibility, current, and surface chop. They allow experienced divers to dive their own profile as long as they can show some sense of responsibility. With a young diver (14) on the dives, Giles or Deanna would split the lead responsibilities on the deep dives, dividing the divers by experience level. Giles and Deanna are great at finding creatures both large and small. They are both still excited about getting in the water everyday. Wall to Wall picks you up at your hotel or condo anywhere on Seven Mile Beach. Due to strong north winds, we were not able to dive the north wall. However, we dove some great sites on the northwest side and made a trip to the south side of the island one day. Sunshine Suites is a fairly new Wyndham property across the street from the beach. We stayed in the middle size unit, which had two queen size beds and a kitchenette in one room. The larger units have a small living room separate from the bedroom. There was a rinse area for dive equipment, and a key entry building with dive lockers. The beach was a quick walk across the street. Sunshine Suites provided beach chairs and towels — of course Seven Mile Beach was perfect. Restaurants mediocre and expensive. The grocery stores are first class with anything you need available. One thing to try is one of the numerous “jerk”

places on the island. Locals set up a barbecue pit and sell jerk chicken or pork on the roadside. These were the best meals we had! **(345-945-6608 or 345-916-6408)**

Wall to Wall Diving, November 2002, Steve Silverberg (ssilver@ghg.net), Seabrook, TX. Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, choppy. In previous visits to Grand Cayman, we dived with some of the larger dive operators including Red Sail, Surfside, Parrots Landing, Fisheye, Ocean Frontiers, and Dive Tech. This year we decided to dive with Wall to Wall Diving based on positive reviews in *Undercurrent*, and we are glad we did. The owners, Giles and Deanna exceeded our expectations. Their boat is relatively large (42 feet) for the number of divers they allow (max of eight). Once or twice they ran the boat just for me. Another time they adjusted their schedule to allow us a little extra sleep. They made every effort to take us to the best north wall sites but took us west when the weather required that. Those wanting guided dives were always offered a choice of deep or shallow. We prefer to buddy dive, to set our own depth profiles, and to maximize bottom time for photography while respecting our computer's limits. Wall to Wall Diving allowed us this freedom. Our bottom times for the deeper dives were always at least 45 minutes with bottom times well over an hour at some of the shallower sites. This is nearly twice the bottom time we've been allowed with larger operators! Surface intervals between dives were at least 45 minutes and sometimes

an hour. We never felt rushed. Wall to Wall's prices seemed a little lower than some of the larger operations.

Wall to Wall Diving, Christopher Columbus, June 2003, Ched Miller (ched_d_miller@raytheon.com), Kingston, NH. Experience: Over 1,000 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 feet. Water: 80 F, calm. My son and I dove with Giles and Deanna, Wall to Wall diving, for 16 days. My son did his certification dives with Deanna and then we joined the rest of the divers for two weeks. The boat, which was the most spacious and comfortable 8 diver boat I have ever been on, and the diving were both handled perfectly with Deanna and Giles coordinating the diving with the divers and between themselves to ensure that everyone received the help they needed yet received that latitude to enjoy the dive as they would like. The first dive each day was on the wall where we went deep and then came up and worked the top of the wall around the boat until we hit 500 lbs and surfaced. Giles or Deanna would lead the dive while the other would stay on the boat or do a shallower dive with a student or a young diver. They always managed to get us up on top of the wall when we were at about 1,000 lbs which was no small trick since there were experienced divers and new divers. When we surfaced one of them was always there to help us up on the boat and the other was always the last one out of the water. The second dive was farther up on the reef and gave us all great bottom time and was a mending dive which you could go along with Deanna on Giles or loosely follow

at your own pace and interest. They were much better at spotting the unusual or unique undersea creature than the rest of us. The attention and awareness that Giles and Deanna had to what was going on with the divers in the water with them was demonstrated by a simple signaling process that us old divers use. They wanted to know when you hit 1,000 lbs and how I would do that would be to tap my knife on my tank. Sometimes on the second dive they would be 100 feet away and I would just tap the tank and on the first tap they would both turn around, meanwhile none of the other divers would even raise their heads, including my son who was right next to me. It is notable that I never said I would signal them that way and they responded to the signal the first time and every time. I was, and am, quite sure they had us under their watchful eyes but you would never know they did as you enjoyed your dive. The water was clear, the wall and reef beautiful, and the tropicals prevalent with plenty of morays, turtles and rays cruising the wall. The Christopher Columbus was great and Giles set us up for two afternoons of sailing on a great 34 footer with captain and crew.

Wall to Wall Diving, Marriott, July 2003, Robert Warner (rgw1207@aol.com), Atlanta, GA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 83 F, calm. My three children were all certified at ages 11 or 12. Dive operations must be able to accommodate their more shallow profile. I chose Wall to Wall Divers based on *Undercurrent* diver reviews. I found

Deanna and Giles to run a first rate operation. Their boat was fast, well organized, and could accommodate up to 10 divers comfortably. They were more than happy to take me and my 13-year-old daughter alone to Stingray City. On group dives, Giles and Deanna would split up and take one group deep and a second group shallow on the same wall. On the second shallow dive one could follow one of the two or dive more freely. Both were pleasant, efficient, and with a good sense of humor.

Wall to Wall Diving, August 2003, N Polifroni (npolifroni@aol.com), Westport, CT. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 ft. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm, no currents. A smaller, boat based operation that is extremely accommodating to everyone's needs. Grand Cayman Island is wonderful for food, relaxation, and even some night life. Very expensive, but you can avoid being ripped off. The water is the key. It is fantastic.

Wall To Wall Diving, August 2003, William and Frances Ungerman (elitecorps@aol.com), Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 80 to 80 feet. Water: 84 F, calm. Deanna and Giles who run the operation were top notch and accommodating. Their Internet communication during the booking process was cordial and efficient. We read about this operation in previous Chapbooks and found the praise warranted. When we couldn't make it out of the airport in time because of long lines caused by the security measures, Deanna volunteered

to pick us all up (all four in the family) and transport us to the boat. She caretaker-ed the luggage. They contracted for us Michelle Smith to do a video at Stingray City, and it was the best commercial dive video I've seen. We did one dive with them only because we were on our way to Cayman Brac and wanted the kids to see Stingray City. Personalized service from people who didn't lean on you for gratuities.

Little Cayman

Little Cayman Beach Resort, August 2002, Barbara. Dives logged: 400+.

Weather: hot and sunny, clear except for one overcast day, minimal current. 100 feet depth and 500 psi not policed. Little Cayman has the best diving I have seen in the eastern and western Caribbean or Bahamas. The fish life is not as abundant or diverse as in Palau, but Bloody Bay Wall is as beautiful and dramatic as anything we saw there. The resort dive shop does two morning dives on the walls and then an after lunch dive on shallow reefs near the western end of the island. The afternoon dives tended to be average Caribbean dives, but the walls dives were all spectacular. We did not see as many large grouper and tarpon as we had two years ago, but there were enough rays, turtles, a spattering of sharks, medium-size groupers, and the usual menagerie of tropicals, to keep things interesting. I spent a fascinating time on one dive observing and being observed by a reef squid hovering in bright, sunlit water for about five minutes without making any attempt to leave. It went through its whole repertoire of patterns and colors and postures

that went from aggressive to lets-get-to-know-each-other friendly. The boat is comfortable, with a wide beam that makes it easy to get around even when there are a lot of divers on board. The crew was reserved but professional. They took us to every site we requested, they knew the sites well, and the briefings were some of the best I have seen. Little Cayman doesn't have a lot to do other than diving but the Beach Resort has so many amenities that you don't really need to leave. They have a nice pool and a great Jacuzzi next to the outdoor bar. There are a half a dozen or so hammocks under tiki huts on the water's edge. Thought about sleeping in the hammocks at night, but there were a few mosquitoes. The rooms were comfortable and clean although not elaborately decorated. The food was served buffet style and was varied and excellently prepared. The resort staff from the maids to the bar tenders were professional and friendly, going out of their way to make sure guest has a good time. (800-327-3835 or 727-323-8727)

Little Cayman Beach Resort, October 2002, Jeremy Ellis (jeremyellis@earthlink.net), Atlanta, GA.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. There has been a recent addition to the hotel and these rooms are much nicer than the other rooms. They are the 300s and all are beach front with nice balconies overlooking the lagoon. Large and have a great bathroom. The meals are at scheduled times during the day and there is a variety. My wife doesn't like fish and they accommodated her every meal with other foods.

The desserts were incredible. The dive shop is small, so bring everything that you need (i.e., film, batteries, lights, etc.). The staff was great and professional. They have 4 boats and made sure to balance the 4 boats so that no boat was crowded. They also tried to keep you on the same boat all week with the same staff so you could form a bond with the staff. They run 2 in the morning and an afternoon dive. Night dives are available if enough people are interested (usually 4). Small spa across the street from resort. Make reservations in advance of trip as it books up quickly. Not a lot to do on the island, but the resort does a great job of putting on parties, events, tours of island, etc. Since the resort is small, the staff is willing to go the extra mile to make you happy.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, November 2002, Steve and Cheryl [ThePirates] (slathrop@binney-smith.com), Coopersburg, PA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 feet. Water: 85 to 87 F, choppy. Lots of great dive sites to pick from that would take you a month to see them all. Mostly did the north side walls. Did south side when a front went through and produced some moderate seas on the north. Was glad the south side was nearly as good. Eighteen members of our Delaware Valley Dive club — most did Nitrox with computers, and we had all three tanks on board. The three rebreathers were kept center deck, and still had lots of room for more divers if needed. In a.m. or previous day p.m., check your O2 and label the tank with the dive boat and your name and it shows up in the

tank rack on board with your BC/reg put on for you. Confirm your equipment check, and you're off to the dive site you pick or let them recommend. While board briefings were excellent with lots of pointers and info, self-navigation was easy. Dive masters also offer guides/escorts if you like. Getting your equipment on when the waves were up was easy. They do it for you. Valet diving. You and your buddy carry your fins/mask, sit on two platforms on the stern and they carry your equipment to you. So equipment, self, and buddy checking must be done first and again in the water, but it still is great to be waited on if you like. You are free to dive your own dive profile within 100-foot limits and time [no decompression]. Extra hose with reg hangs at 20 feet if ever needed. Generally three tanks a day, two morning — lunch — one in p.m., and one or two night dives. Video of one of your dives included in our package of a week and three meals a day. We had such a good time and some fun with the dive staff. They even came to our party. The air sucking pigs showed up in costume and dove. The pirates were caught sporting their underwater flag for the video; all make great memories. Two reef sharks slowly cruised by for lots of photo ops. Walls are very good. Good fish populations and healthy looking big coral/sponges. No hunting so fish are friendly. I had a turtle swim right into my camera lens. Super shot. On shore great food, buffet style all you can eat. Plenty of cold drinking water on board, but take some fruit with you from breakfast to increase your after diving pleasure on the short boat ride back. Pool side and hot tub side liquid refresh-

ments from the bar gave us lots of time for discussing just how large that ray really was. Flowering atrium style layout of the facility has that relaxed tropical hideaway we really liked. Our group celebrated two birthdays and one anniversary, with cake the resort was able to provide. Also a VCR/TV for roasting the guilty parties. We had an evening port and starboard team competition and invited the whole resort to join us with the winning team sharing the liquid rum prize with the defeated. Over all a well-managed, friendly, safe, secure, and filled with pleased conveniences. I unknowingly left my VHF that I travel with on board and was happy to receive it in the mail. Dry table with two levels and railing was more than adequate; we were accommodated with the addition of a wet tank for slide/print camera, digital, and video.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, January 2003, Bill Schlegel, Jefferson City, MO. Total dives >500. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 81 F. Currents minimal. Waves and swells some days. Fifth time at L.C.B.R. 18 dives at L.C.B.R. with Dottie and Caleb. As usual, diving was good to very good for warm water, good visibility Caribbean reef diving. Diving arrangements continue to be "a well oiled machine" with three to four dives a day easily done all week (providing you use Nitrox or don't accumulate too much bottom time). The divemasters on our boat (they have three Newton 42-foot dive boats — excellent equipment) were a nice combination of supervision and suggestions along with tolerance and letting the more comfort-

able or experienced divers do their own thing. Some dives up to 90 minutes (shallow). The boats are clean and in good condition and have DAN O2 units. Dive shop is reasonably complete and the photo shop also. The reefs are in good shape. There is some bleaching, and some areas show dead coral with quite a bit of parrot fish damage in areas such as Bloody Bay and the southwest tip of the island. Don't get me wrong — the diving is still spectacular along the walls. One entry in the Chapbook last year described the coral as severely damaged. I do not agree. It is still beautiful, and the sea fans and soft corals are abundant and healthy. The divemasters noted that some of the damage occurred during a hurricane a while back. Our group also did a couple of dives on the southeastern sites such as Splitsville and Coral Cities that are not commonly visited. Dottie and Caleb had only been to this area three times in their five or more years on the island, which resulted in brief briefings. Such as: "It's about 50 feet deep here, not much current, we don't remember much about this area so go see what you can find, dive your computers, don't get lost and have fun — be safe." Some divers would cringe at such a brief briefing (and it contrasts with the detailed drawings of the usual sites), but it's O.K. with me. Some of the southwestern sites (Windsock, etc.) did seem to be more silted and sand covered than I remembered but we saw great stuff there: eagle ray feeding in the sand, lots of stingrays, hawksbill turtles, and the usual critters in abundant supply. Overall on these 18 dives I

saw several reef sharks, numerous nurse sharks including several free swimming, and a most curious group of four of them laying on the bottom nose to nose with one of them on it's back. Got pictures. Anyone know what this behavior is? There were jacks, horse eyed jacks, one pompano, zillions of yellowtails, wrasses of every description, jawfish, fields of snake eels, only a few moreys, and anemones, parrotfish, and damselfish all in great profusion, groupers including some friendly ones — you know the lineup. One diver in our group (not me) saw a quillfin blenny, which should satisfy even the most experienced naturalist. One thing that seemed at first to be a treat and later of concern were the Caribbean reef sharks that come to visit at one mooring on the Bloody Bay wall. I saw at least three at once and some thought there were perhaps as many as seven (versus the same ones circling around). Nice thrill for the divers on our boat and for the Yellow Rose (dive boat from Pirates Point Divers that went there next) along with others later in the week. Reef Divers photo-pro (Elisa) spent some extra time in the water and took some nice shark video. What was concerning was that some suggested that a live-aboard may be feeding the sharks at this mooring because this is where they usually moor when they visit and this is the only site the sharks are being seen. The resort itself remains great. The staff are, as a group, helpful and friendly. This extends from the maids that clean your room (and they are clean) through the dive staff, photo-pro, bartenders, etc., up to the manager.

Those of you who are repeat visitors may notice this as a change. By the way, repeat visitors get a free T-shirt. Chef Tucker continues to turn out a seemingly never-ending supply of great food and does so from early a.m. to supper. He is a true, trained chef with a large repertoire of great entrees and deserts that are made fresh, on site. His key lime pies are to die for. Lots of fresh fruit and salads. Great soups. All is served “help yourself” and “all you can eat.” The bar, pool, Jacuzzi, and other extracurricular activities such as sailing are far above average for a dive resort. There is internet access in the office. They have a high volume Nitrox system and an overall nice “gas” operation. This trip, I never left the confines of L.C.B.R. itself, having seen the rest of the island on previous trips.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, March/April 2003, Peter Hartlove, Longmont, CO. Vis: 40 to 100 feet. Water: 79 to 82 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 feet first dive and 60 feet second dive. Had a group of 25 (22 divers); they handled us well. In a week, we were only able to dive north sites Sunday, Thursday, Friday due to bad weather. South diving is OK, our vis. was poor. The dive crew overall was OK, not real enthusiastic. Had one of my best Caribbean dives at Randy’s Gazebo on our last day. The gazebo, mating smooth trunk fish, friendly turtle for awhile, yellow covey getting cleaning. My first rainbow parrot (don’t see many new ones), awesome! 3 feet and of course, the wall. The food was plentiful and varied, buffet style every meal, unlimited, three deserts every lunch and dinner.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, May 2003, Artie & Gerry Burke (scubadiver@houston.rr.com), Katy, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm, choppy. This was our second trip. Lots of turtles and groupers, several juvenile drums and nurse sharks, several anemones, saw two reef sharks on deeper dives. Little to no currents. Reefs in good shape — especially Great Wall (East and West). Easy boat diving and assistance by staff. Dive staff (Gary, Dottie, and Michael) were good and allowed divers to dive own profiles and not fuss if a couple of minutes late in surfacing. Several divers got bit by sea lice — looked liked large mosquito bites on neck and arms. Strange but only some divers got bit while others on same dive boat did not. Can be very itchy — bring medicine to stop itching. Missed one day of diving due to weather — lots of rain but it was windy and boats could not make it out of the cut in the reef. Reef Divers (after asking) gave us one day diving credit on next visit (no time limit). All meals were excellent — Chef Tucker is great — room was clean and maintained as was pool and other areas. On last two days it was the migration of little crabs — they were everywhere — even got into the room when the door opened. They were about 3 inches maximum — more of a nuisance. They covered the walkways and terraces. Flew via Miami to Grand Cayman on Cayman Air. Then Island Air to Little Cayman. All bags arrived OK (one on later flight but did not affect us), had to pay excess weight for over 110 lbs (two

divers) — both going and coming back. Boats have camera table, but no air to dry parts or to do any adjustments while on boat. Had to rely on other divers to assist with camera in and out of water, as divemasters busy with getting divers up and tanks switched.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, June 2003, Glenn Gracom, New Smyrna Beach, FL. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 81 F. Experience: 410 dives. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 feet, 50 minutes. Great visibility, sea life, dive boat, and operator. First class service on a great Newton dive boat. Sat down at transom and divemaster brought tank and BC to you and put it on for you. When dive was finished, they took off tank for you and carried gear to set-up area. No-hassle diving. Dottie and Gary were the best. The resort was fantastic. Was well maintained and clean. Food and service were first class. Beautiful diving.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, July 2003, Craig & Ruth Campbell, Long Grove, IL. Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 83-85 F. Dives logged: Craig: 310, Ruth: 270. Dive restrictions enforced: Do not exceed 110 ft, complete a safety stop on each dive at 15 ft and return to the boat with about 500 psi. First Class operation offering three dives a day on 42 ft Newton boats carrying up to 20 divers. Boats are well equipped with a DAN Oxygen unit, first aid kit, ship to shore radio, fresh water rinse hose (but not tank for cameras), and marine head. Reboarding is easy via deep twin ladders. We found our dive

masters friendly and professional. They gave pre-dive chalk board briefings and roll call after every dive. BCs and regulators are set up on the boat for the first dive of the week and there after the dive masters set up and rinse (hose off) on a daily basis. All other gear is carried by divers after each day's dive to a rinse tank and drying shack on shore. Set up gear was brought to each diver at the stern platform for each dive. Compared to our last trip to the Cayman Islands (Little Cayman — Bloody Bay Wall) in 1996, the walls are in serious degradation and the fish population is scarce. On previous trips the walls were vibrant with color: Large sponges, sea fans, hard & soft corals, now it appears that brown algae has taken over. Previously on any dive there were many angel fish, triggerfish, file fish, large groupers, and other reef fish. Now there were a few if any seen on a dive. The turtle population has significantly improved — they were seen on every dive. The resort has well maintained rooms, air conditioning & TV in each room. There is an outdoor freshwater swimming pool & Jacuzzi. The beach is not suitable for swimming; however, a number of water sport toys are available. Meals are very good, served buffet style in the restaurant and the chef went out of his way to meet our dietary restrictions.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, July 2003, Mark Boranyak (boranyak@aol.com), St. Louis, MO. Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 feet. Water: 85 to 86 F, calm. Fifth trip to Little Cayman Beach Resort. The resort

remains top notch, but has slipped a little. Morale seemed a low for some divemasters. I heard they were being overworked even more than normal. Divemaster Liz Blengino was terrific, and I am glad she once again crewed our boat. Visibility was the worst I have experienced in Little Cayman. Some of the sites were covered in algae. The dive site, Joy's Joy, has been terrible for the last two trips and all dive operations should consider finding new dive sites to replace this one. One divemaster mentioned the need to place new moorings for additional dive sites. Little Cayman offers a lot of wonderful diving. Camera tables on all dive boats. Cameras were rinsed with a hose after each dive. Dive crew were careful in handling the equipment.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, July 2003, Wayne Joseph, San Mateo, CA. We spent five nights at Little Cayman Beach Resort. It's a nice place to stay. The rooms are spacious, clean, and decorated nicely (if that's important to anyone). The food is tasty, varied, and there's plenty of it. We dived with the Conch Club Divers as the Reef Divers had one boat out of commission. We dived with them on a previous trip and had a good experience. This time it was different. You get three dives a day, always the same profile: 100 feet for 45 minutes, 45-minute surface interval, next dive 60 feet for 50 minutes. Go in for lunch, then 60-foot dive for 50 minutes. It doesn't matter how much air remains or what your computer says. They give a briefing before every dive, including what to look for. They also tell you not to

touch anything. Silly me, I thought they meant not to touch anything that's alive. On my next dive I was taking some photos and using a two-finger touch (on dead substrate covered with algae) to steady myself in a cut in the wall, when the dive police came over and removed my hand from the dead coral. It seems they don't want us to touch anything, period. They said that even if the coral is dead "there may be just one coral cell trying to regenerate." They also advised us not to touch or lay on the sand as "there might be a jawfish you could hurt." I was not the only one reprimanded about this. The next day they joked about bringing machetes on board to deal with anyone who touches anything. I am well aware of the bad reputation UW photographers have trying to "get the shot at any cost." I try to be conscientious about what I touch and where I place my body when I'm doing photos. I have dived with marine biologists many times, and they have even commented how careful I am when taking pictures. There are many photos I have not taken because there were too many sea fans, soft coral, etc., in the way. But sometimes I need to use one or two fingers on dead coral to steady myself (esp. in shallow depths), when there is a surge and I don't want to crash into anything. I then realized after several days of this that as soon as the dive "guides" hit the water, they were only there to police us. They never tried to show us the pipefish or anything else they talked about during the briefing. I know many people don't like to be guided, but most guides give you a choice to follow them or go on

your own. But if you're going to brief us about small critters to see on the dive, at least show us where they usually hang out. Maybe I'm wrong in my thinking, but I really found these guys to be over the top in their zeal to protect the reef system. As my wife and I walked along the north shore of the island overlooking Bloody Bay, I was wondering why these dive operators don't do beach clean-ups to remove all the garbage that has washed up before it goes back into the ocean and damages the reef.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, August 2003, Bob K, Alexandria, VA. Just came back from a 6 day dive trip to Little Cayman and was surprised about the deteriorating reef & wall conditions. I had always considered Little Cayman diving as among the best in the Caribbean, and was eager to return after a 6 year absence. I loved the magnificent walls of Little Cayman, with their beautiful sponges & corals. However, I was surprised to see the considerable deterioration in the condition of several reefs & walls. Several (not all) of the dive sites were covered with algae which was literally smothering everything, like a heavy green carpet. I observed this on about 30-40 percent of the 12 dive sites that I dove on. When I discussed this with other guests at the Little Cayman Beach Resort, who dove there last year, they mentioned that this had started last year, but was much worse now. When asked about the cause, our dive master attributed this to an absence of sea urchins on the reefs. The fish life is as good as ever. We saw sharks every

day, as well as several large groupers, eagle & sting rays, numerous turtles, and numerous schooling reef fish.

However, one must wonder about the impact of the smothering algae on the future fish population.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, August 2003, Lori, Flower Mound, TX. Experience: 501-1,000 dives.

Water: 88 F, calm. The dive staff was polite, professional, and efficient, but not overly friendly. They would try to honor requests for specific dive sites. If you take your own gear, be prepared to pay excess baggage charges (both ways) on Island Air (50 cents per pound for anything over 55 lbs per person), and be prepared that it might arrive on a later flight. You can ask the Island Air counter person to mark a certain bag(s) (your clothes?) as "EXCESS" if you are over and it'll come on a later flight. Rooms were clean, but when we were there, there was often a pervasive odor from the nearby booby pond — perhaps due to the heat. (Avg. daytime highs around 95 degrees.) PM front desk staffer was unfriendly, AM person much nicer. Check your bill when you check out. We had another person's \$75 tab added to ours, but it was remedied when we pointed it out. (Bar prices were outrageous and not visibly posted — watch out!) If you want to hang out at the bar or beach after dark, bring mosquito repellent. We were somewhat disappointed with the quantity of fish, especially lack of big schools, but the reef sharks were awesome! Camera table on boat was adequate, but often max defog, etc., was stored there. No rinse tank on boat.

Little Cayman Beach Resort, August 2003, Phil Tobin (Philtobin6625@yahoo.com), Portland, OR.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm, no currents. Your luggage doesn't always arrive when you do. Inter Air airline took off 10 minutes early and our flight on American was 5 minutes late. 50lbs limit and they charge plenty for being over. Rooms were similar to motel rooms, but they were clean. Plenty of hot water, and the maid service was diligent. The ocean view rooms were much nicer. No fridge in pool side rooms. Food was outstanding. The deserts were to kill for. Good mix of local and American foods. Full breakfast, lunches, and dinners. Wines were overpriced. Check in was easy, but the staff was rushed and often made us feel uncomfortable asking for clean towels, like we were bothering them! Beach needs to be cleaned as well as the grounds. Lounge chairs were broken and rusted. Hammocks were always available. We rode the bikes around several nights after dinner. The pool was clean but way too hot. Reef Divers did a great job. Michael and Caleb took good care of us, although they rushed through their guiding to be on board to help divers coming up. They were great in switching our tanks and helping us with our gear. The night dive was not great and I would not do it again and save myself \$60 per person. We were slightly disappointed with the amounts of fish. The corals were in good shape. Lots of turtles, and rays, and a few sharks. Tables on board were used for everything along with camera equipment.

Paradise Villas, December 2002, Tim Phalen, Alpharetta, GA. Vis: 70 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F. Dives logged: 270. Best dive operation I have ever dove with. Friendly, knowledgeable, professional staff. Dive operation on site with accommodations. All dive sites within 10 minutes of each other. 6,000-foot vertical wall starts in 20 feet of beautiful coral filled water. Huge numbers of fish, saw sharks on every dive; eagle rays, turtles were usually always around. Vis was about 75 feet, but it's been 100 to 150 feet on other trips here. Very remote, walk or bicycle everywhere, so are the iguanas. Your own slice of paradise.
(www.paradise-divers.com)

Paradise Villas, March 2003, Michael Zagachin (mzagachin@hntb.com), Peabody, MA.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, calm. After 10 years of diving around the world, the last four years of diving my wife and I spent in this divers' paradise with Paradise Divers. "Perfect" applies to everything for this destination and dive operation. Accommodations: super comfortable, super clean, super quiet, the best view. Hammocks and a book are an afternoon attraction. Two free bikes per unit are your mode of transportation. Operation is one of the best, if not absolutely the best, I have ever experienced. Very unimposing, helpful, and a joy to be around. Vincent, Rod, Marc, and, missed very much this year, Ann made us feel at home on the boat and underwater year after year. They will watch you carefully on the first couple of dives, and then you are left

to your own devices, if they are convinced you know what you are doing. Usually we prefer to dive with them since they have incredible eye for things we would never find. When their new (the fastest on the island) boat is “crowded” with eight to ten divers (in four years we’ve never had more) we would go by ourselves, just letting the divemaster know. Briefings are so good, there is no need to dive, they told you everything already. My best dive: last year when I was the only customer one day and they took the boat out anyway. Two best divemasters and one client. Well, it wasn’t client but friends diving together. First dive with Ann, second with Vinny — it just does not get any better. Little Cayman diving is incredible. This year we observed tubular sponge spawning, incredible site. Green morays, turtles, big — really — big lobsters, huge crabs are regulars on every dive. Coral and tropical fish are in such abundance, that you start taking it for granted. Last year gray shark was almost on every dive, but only twice this year and both times on safety stop in 15 feet of water. Dinners are good either at the on-site restaurant or at adjacent resorts within a short walk or bike ride. Ever helpful Sabine will make reservation for you. Dinner usually cost about \$30 to \$40USD per person, plus drinks. We usually made our own breakfast and lunch. When lazy, go for a good lunch at the restaurant. Negatives: None for both of us, except 60 min dive time limit for me personally. Not that I need much more, but I just do not like restrictions. Looking for nightlife or shopping — go elsewhere; this place is

about peace and quiet. In four years we have never heard anyone complaining about anything. Cayman Islands aren’t cheap in general, especially food. Six pack of beer on Little Cayman is \$17.50USD in one and only store. On the other hand the cost of Paradise Villas’ superb efficiency accommodations is about the same or less than a bare motel room on Cape Code. Repeat customers get discount at Paradise. They do not nickel-and-dime you to death, like other places. We were willing to go diving this year to some other place and researched *Undercurrent* extensively. The result — Little Cayman Paradise Divers for the fourth time. Small wonder about 40% of their clients are repeats.

Paradise Villas, March 2003, Mark Hayward (hayward@pop.psu.edu), State College, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 130 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, no currents. First rate accommodations for persons interested in a low key and intimate setting. The service is top drawer — helpful, thoughtful, and not intrusive. Guests feel welcomed and appreciated. The 12 villas are aligned close to the shore. The units are nicely furnished and have kitchenettes. The grounds are well maintained, and the hammocks next to shore are seductive. Iguanas roam freely and add to the uniqueness of the resort. The Hungry Iguana — the restaurant adjacent to the villas — offers a fairly extensive menu and different specials throughout the week. The food and service were consistently good. The restaurant was so good (and convenient) that we had little incentive

to try the (few) other places on the island. Paradise Divers' boat was always the first boat at the major dive sites. The boat never had more than six to eight divers. The boat was spacious and well equipped. Divemasters were knowledgeable about the dive sites. Divemasters also were excellent observers of divers' abilities, aiding divers when necessary but not intrusive otherwise. Once divemasters had assessed divers' skills, (qualified) divers could dive their own profiles. The morning consisted of two tank dives with a surface interval on the boat. We also had the option of a third dive in the afternoon — which we did. Diving along Bloody Bay Wall and Jackson Bay was a delight in many ways. Wonderful coral, big fish, large lobsters, an occasional reef shark, and many turtles! Excellent visibility with little current.

Paradise Villas, May 2003, Suzanne Shuttters, Ft. Lauderdale, FL. The units are immaculate with a huge porch overlooking hammocks and the ocean. Bedroom, living area (futon), full bath, separate dressing area with large closet, small kitchenette, cable TV. A/C worked well. In 2003 the kitchens were remodeled, removing the stove tops, but you can ask for a hot plate. We would have breakfast and lunch in, most dinners out. We did some dinner take-outs from the Hungry Iguana Restaurant on site. Pizza night is best. They also had good pasta, chicken and fish dishes. It's just hard to beat sitting on that gorgeous porch at your cottage over a relaxing meal. Based on Undercurrent reviews years ago, we

learned to take a cooler of food with us along with a case of wine, and pay the extra baggage. There is also a well-stocked grocery just down the road. We turned "hammocking" into an afternoon sport, comparing the beautiful views from different hammocks throughout the property. There are also a nice fresh water pool, bicycles, and resident iguanas. Managers Mark and Sabine are delightful. As well as attending to every need, they are gracious hosts and will make reservations for you at local restaurants. Our favorite (isn't everyone's?) was dinner at Gladys' at Pirates Point. You're picked up at 7 and after dinner and shopping, they bring you back to PV. Most of the folks staying at Paradise Villas were return guests. We were there when the Caymans were celebrating their 500th anniversary, and were treated to a Little Cayman visit by Prince Edward. Paradise Divers is as good as it gets. The reason we chose them in the first place was Undercurrent reviews, plus we'd heard that you get more dive time. We found this to be true with long "safety stops" on top of the wall, back on the boat in an hour. All dives were on Bloody Bay or Jackson Wall. The waters (both years) were a little choppy getting around the island, but perfectly flat once you were at the walls. The boat was in good condition and quite comfortable. Rod, Vincent and Mark were the captains/divemasters. We had max of 10 divers, and for several days, just the 4 of us. Diving was great — fish, critters, sharks, turtles, octopus, world's largest lobsters, good coral life and beautiful wall structure. Jerry the

grouper is back, and loves to be petted. Dives ended beautifully on top of the wall. We did 2 morning dives, then an afternoon dive (yes, they took us the full way to Bloody Bay just for that one dive). We had a night dive instead of one afternoon dive. Once your gear is on the boat, everything is done for you. You bring your camera gear and wetsuit back to wash out, everything else stays on the boat, and at the end of your vacation your gear is washed and returned to your door. Water temp was about 82. We wore polartecs, shark skins or 5 mil suits. The island: There really is not much to do. We went to the bird sanctuary and rode our bikes to see the other resorts and do some shopping. Southern Cross had nice cottages, and kayaks, but the dining room was not air-conditioned. Little Cayman Beach Resort was nice — a compact resort revolved around a pool. Best shopping was just outside LCBR. Pirate's Point was nice, and a great destination for the food alone, but their diving schedule was just 2 a day.

Paradise Villas, June 2003, Douglas Hansen (mhel@pop3.concentric.net), San Jose, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. Dive restrictions (100 feet, 60 minutes) strongly enforced even for advanced and experienced divers. Diving is withheld for minor infractions such as going seven minutes past the 60 minute restriction. They did not explain thoroughly where safety equipment, water, and snacks are located. They spoke to us like children when restrictions were not upheld. The accommodations, however, were

good. Duplex cottages were kept immaculately clean. The cottages had one bedroom and futon in the living room, small kitchen with microwave and toaster, but no stove. All cottages are on the beach. We were told that there is no crime on Little Cayman, and we were able to leave rooms unlocked and dive equipment outside overnight. No rinse tanks on boat for cameras, no camera table.

Paradise Divers, Conch Club, June 2003, Tim & Jill Kolakowski (tkolakowski@ma.rr.com), Erie, PA. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 80 F. Experience: Tim: 122, Jill: 44 dives. Bloody Bay was all I've heard about; the wall starts at 20 feet, the swim-throughs, the coral mounds, the fish life, etc. We chose to dive with Paradise Divers based on Chapbook reports and they were great. We were always one of the first boats to reach the calm dive sites in the mornings. Rod was great at finding critters for us to see. Although we missed the sharks and the fish aren't as plentiful as some other places we've been, the walls and swim-throughs made the trip. Nancy's Cup of Tea, Joy's Joy, Lea's Lea's Lookout, Mixing Bowl, and the Great Wall were outstanding. Jerry, the grouper, came out to get petted. Since the dives start and end in the 20 ft area, each dive lasted 1 hour+. The Conch Club condos are beautiful, as is the beach behind them. The two pools were nice and warm, keeping son James entertained for hours after we got back from the dives each day at about 12:30 in the afternoon. And the march of the million red crabs late

each afternoon was real interesting. The island is beautiful — only a handful of other buildings and cars — gorgeous isolation! You know it's a deserted island when you land on a grass air strip. The one little grocery store on the island has a good selection. We ate at the condo most of the time. We also went to the Hungry Iguana — great jerk chicken. The cookout at McCoy's Dive Lodge looked good, but we didn't get around to trying it out. Crew at Paradise Divers showed us a great time and took extra time with Jill.

(www.paradise-divers.com/index2.htm, www.conchclub.com)

Pirates Point, December 2002, Larry Wagner, McKinney, TX.

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy. Pirates Point gets lots of repeat guests — we were the only “newbies” during our stay. After a day we got into the swing of things, had a great time, and met some fascinating people. Food and service were excellent. Bugs were a nuisance mainly at dusk. Deep Woods Off — provided by the resort — was effective. The dive schedule is leisurely — depart about 9:15 a.m., return around 2 p.m. The four divemasters (Gay, Karen, Steve, and Bart) were skilled and experienced — not the usual 20-somethings. Bart was new to the resort and Little Cayman, but stated to have logged over 6,000 dives. He showed some of his video one night — very good and obviously professional. Could go with divemaster on a “guided” dive or dive your own profile with a buddy. SIs consistently over an hour. Boat had oxygen and a spare air regu-

lator at 15 feet. At descent, line was available but no hang bar. Very knowledgeable dive briefings given before each dive — especially from Gay and Karen. We dove the south side four days because of wind from the north. South dives are deep — the wall starts at around 70 feet. North side dives (Bloody Bay, Jackson's) are just awesome. Vibrant sponges, hard and soft corals on wall, lots of corals, and fish and critters in shallows. The one night dive we did was just OK — not many critters attended. Get to Little Cayman on Island Air. Baggage limit (including carry-on) is 55 pounds, and they do weigh everything. Extra luggage is 50 cents per pound, and not guaranteed to go with you. On our return trip, we were asked to send what luggage we could the afternoon prior to help assure it all got to Grand Cayman by the time we did. Rinse tank on boat, carpeted table for gear. No processing at resort. (<http://piratespointresort.com>)

Pirates Point, August 2003, David Reubush (David.E.Reubush@nasa.gov), Toano, VA. Experience: 400 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm, no currents. This was our fifth trip to Pirates Point. Gladys Howard has a unique operation in the dive world. Rather than having new staff members every time you go — most at Pirates Point have been with her for years. As a result, frequent guests are more like visiting family members and are treated as such. The dive masters know your capabilities and act accordingly. You are free to join the loosely guided tours or go off on your own. The land part of the operation is

equally as good. The food is great, and the whole tone is laid back. Great week of relaxation as well as great diving. The water was generally flat, warm, and the visibility was at least 80 ft. — often much greater. We saw the usual abundant fish life and turtles. What was unusual this year was the large number of reef sharks on every other dive. I even had one that allowed me to swim with it for about 10 minutes. All in all it was a great week. There was a camera table on the boat and it was restricted to cameras. However, the rinse tank on the boat was a converted cooler. It was good most of the week. I was the only person with a camera or there would not have been room to get everyone's camera rinsed.

Sam McCoy's Dive Lodge, January 2003, Jennifer Meriwether (jen@delux.com), Oakland, CA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, choppy, surge. We had a pretty bad time at McCoy's, and I would never go back, but other people don't seem to have had the same experience so who knows — buyer beware. We had read that McCoy's was "rustic," and we were prepared for that. The room and grounds were not bad — no frills, but clean. The problem was the attitude of Maxine and Mam McCoy, the owners/managers. When we checked in, Maxine told us we'd be diving with the Southern Cross Club for the first two days. We had no idea why, and no idea what would happen after the first two days. She was uncommunicative. We found out that the reason we were diving with SCC was that the McCoy's

divemaster had left the island over Xmas and still wasn't back (we arrived in the third week of January). We had booked just one week before, and they never bothered to tell us that they had no divemaster. Two days into our stay, Croy McCoy, one of Mam's sons, came to the island from Grand Cayman to do an underwater survey on grouper mating activities. He was drafted into being our divemaster. There were just two issues. First, since he was making three dives/day to 100 feet to monitor the groupers, he had no desire to get in the water with us. So he would take us out to the dive sites, tell us which way the wall was, and send us off. The second problem was that he and his colleagues were also using our dive boat for their work, so we had to fit in our dives around their work schedule. We are pretty flexible and like to dive on our own anyway, but what really got us upset was the way we were treated by Maxine and Mam. We were an annoyance that they had to put up with, not guests that were paying a large sum of money to stay there and that we had ruined everyone's nice plans regarding the grouper survey by showing up and needing to use the dive boat. We were completely ignored. We never even got a smile or a hello. Would have expected at least an apology, maybe an offer to take us over to the other side of the island where the little village was, something, anything, to make up for it. Certainly, I wasn't so stupid as to think they'd actually offer to refund some of our money. Instead, nothing, even though we were the only guests. We pretty much just hid in our room when we weren't diving because it was so

uncomfortable to be out on the grounds and run into them. The food was marginal at best, although Pam, the cook was nice. As if all this wasn't bad enough we really didn't feel that the diving was any better than the other places we've been in the Caribbean. The weather was so bad we were only able to dive Bloody Bay Wall for three days out of seven and spent the other days on the south side of the island, but still I was expecting more from Bloody Bay. Although the topography of the wall was great, the coral was average, there was a lot of algae, and the fish and critter life were less than we've seen elsewhere. Maybe it was just the wrong time of year.

(www.mccoyslodge.com.ky)

Sam McCoy's Dive Lodge, June 2003, David Andel, Athens, IL.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm. Little Cayman diving was excellent. The best wall diving, swim throughs and coral. Saw turtles on every dive. Nurse sharks and stingrays on occasion. Divemaster Lowell took our group where we wanted to go, helped on the boat and in the water. Family atmosphere, all meals included in package, served family style. Rooms were comfortable. Mary McCoy made sure you had what you needed. It's not a posh resort, but geared toward divers who want to be in the water.

Sam McCoy's Dive Lodge, July 2003, Brad Sims (bsims@wcu.edu), Cullowhee, NC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. My spouse

and I spent almost a week at McCoy's. Island Air transports you to and from Grand Cayman to Little Cayman and states that you have a limit of 55 lbs per person and excess weight is charged at \$0.50 per pound. It also said that your gear will make the flight if you pack under your 55 lbs per person, where excess will be delivered within 24 hours. Your luggage is all put in with all the excess and has no name associated with it to identify who it belongs to, only a number tag. We packed with no excess and received only one of our two bags on a later flight the same day and the second bag the next morning, taking away an arrival shore dive. When leaving Little Cayman, your gear should be sent to the airport the day before you leave to ensure your gear is waiting for you at the baggage claim when you arrive the next day. Others that left McCoy's after us even had to wait an extra hour, since the pilot flew a charter and then could not fly the normal morning flight. Make sure you do not make a connecting flight from Grand Cayman too close to your flight from Little Cayman on Island Air. Diving on Little Cayman from a boat or shore was good. There is a local eagle ray, sea turtles everywhere, and a friendly grouper that lets you scratch his chin. McCoy's Dive Lodge is basic, no frills, not too friendly owners, but the staff is OK. You are picked up from the airport in the back of a pickup truck, transported to the dive boat in the back of a pickup truck, and taken for a shore dive in the back of a pickup. The owners, Mary and her daughter, Maxine, drive fast while you hang on. I suggest riding in the back of

the divemaster's pickup, as he does drive a bit slower. Either Mary or Maxine will, hopefully, remember which flight you are supposed to arrive on (Maxine did not remember our flight) and meet you at the airport to collect you and your gear for the ride to the lodge, where they will back the truck up to your door and drop you off. From that point you go straight to the dining area to fill out your c-card info and told that a bell will ring for each meal and that your two-tank morning dive will be after breakfast. There is an outside bar that is open for guests and locals most all the time. A small freshwater pool that has probably never had the freshwater replaced from the day it was first filled. Shore diving off the back of the resort can be done, but it is shallow for a long way with a rocky, sea urchin filled entry. The divemaster will instead drive you in the back of the pickup truck to a good shore dive site and agree to a time to pick you up. When you are on your morning two-tank dive, you need to tell the divemaster how many shore dives you are planning on doing, as he will fill and set your tanks out. The small dive boat that is about a 10-minute drive from the resort is about 50 feet from shore so you have to carry your gear in about waist deep water to and from the boat every morning. If you are only doing the morning dive, you can leave your gear on the dive boat, as there is no theft, even your room has no key. Since Mary is frugal, the lodge, which is two small buildings, looks like it was built in the '50's and has had no money spent on it since then. The rooms seem clean and are sufficient with air condi-

tion units. Expect them to be turned down or off after your beds are made. The bathrooms are old, and you need to keep your lights on at night to stop the large roaches from visiting. The meals are simple but plentiful. The dining room is one large table and usually has only fans blowing and a few times has air conditioning turned on shortly during the meal. Don't expect to interact with the staff or owners, except on occasion, as they avoid this. There is a barbecue on Saturday and Wednesday night that is good and plentiful. Bring your bug spray. If there is no island breeze, expect to be attacked by the sand flees and mosquitoes. On the day you leave, Mary gets a little friendly and asks you to sign the guest book and say what a wonderful time you had before your ride in the back of her pickup truck to the airport.

Sam McCoy's Lodge, August 2003, Larry Simpson (larryws@earthlink.net), Sunrise, FL. Experience: Over 1,000 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 feet. Water: 85 F, choppy, surge. Our second visit to Little Cayman. The first was on the Little Cayman Diver live-aboard in 1997. Bloody Bay Wall (BBW) is still as spectacular and as awe inspiring. For sheer massiveness, there is not another wall in the Caribbean that matches it. The coral formations on Jackson Wall are impressive and definitely worth seeing. However, Hurricane Michele, which pounded the Caymans for three days with 25 foot waves about 2 or 3 years ago, really scoured the tops of the wall and stripped off many sponges. The good news is that just as the South Florida

reefs came back quickly after Hurricane Andrew in 1992, there are many new corals, both hard and soft, which are regenerating. Unless you specifically know what to look for, you will not even know that Michele hit it so hard. There are hoards of tropical fish and lots of small to medium size Nassau groupers populating the reefs. We saw about 15 spiny lobsters all of which were between 5 to 10 lbs. No I wasn't narc-ed; those guys were big! Cascades is at the North end of Jackson Bay with enormous coral heads. Some start around 80 feet but they are huge and healthy with lots of interesting formations. Let me include my dive buddy's description of them in a report to a friend, "The Cascades — oh my God I thought I had dived and gone to heaven — these huge glorious coral heads appeared out of the distance standing on a pure white sand chute like an offering from the dive gods to us!" Maybe her description is a little melodramatic, but they are definitely worth seeing. Lowell is the dive master for McCoy's Lodge and one of the best we have ever encountered at dive resorts. After determining that we were experienced, capable divers, he let us dive on our own and go where we wanted to. As we had a NE breeze most of the week we were there, the no-see-ums didn't bother us too bad. One morning there was no breeze and the "flying teeth" were out in force. The food was American style cooking and satisfying, but nothing to get overly excited about. This is a shore based operation. However, there were no special rinse facilities either on the boat or at the lodge for rinsing cameras or

housings. No film developing capabilities at the lodge, although there may have been some available on the island.

Southern Cross Club, March 2003, Gerry Keavany (keavany@attbi.com), Hopkinton, NH.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 110 feet.

Water: 81 to 83 F, calm, no currents.

Southern Cross Club was top notch in every respect. The food was outstanding, and the accommodations were clean, comfortable, and spacious. My wife, a non-diver, thoroughly enjoyed the serenity of the club and had the beach and pool to herself almost every day. Even though the club was fully occupied, it seemed like we had the resort all to ourselves because of how cabanas are so nicely spaced. There are no TVs, radios, telephones, or clocks in your suites. A place to relax and forget the hustle-bustle of the outside world.

The dive operation itself is superb!

These were the best divemasters (Henry, Jason, Mike, Max) that I have been with! Henry gave detailed and informative briefings. All DMs were extremely knowledgeable about all the dive sites, did a great job making you feel like one of the group, and were funny as all get-out. The coral life was in excellent condition, and there was plenty of small fish life. Visibility was great, and the wall is beyond description. Southern Cross is a more expensive than the other resorts on the island, but I would never go anywhere else! (www.southerncrossclub.com)

Southern Cross Club, May 2003, Marie Rose, Coraopolis, PA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to

100 feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, choppy, no currents. The service was quite extraordinary — in terms of dining, bar, room comfort and cleanliness, the dive operation, extras like fishing, and their contact with the local airlines to confirm flights. Not once was tipping mentioned or even subtly displayed (e.g., like a “Tip Jar”). I actually had to ask management on the last day — one of the few places to let you put tips on your credit card. Honor bar and honor shopping (if no one was in the shop). Food was absolutely delicious and plentiful, with meat and vegetarian choices all the time. The large beach is dotted with bungalows — all with lounge chairs. Hammocks and picnic tables here and there in the shade. The salt water pool is next to the bar and dining area — so you can eat wherever you want — alone or with the group. Fun stuff like Friday night BBQ on the dock — the locals also gather. We booked a three-tank per day package and so got in all the dives we wanted. However, if you don’t get this package, you’ll need four people for the boat to go out, or pay a fuel surcharge. We added some guided fishing — bone-fishing on the flats from a skiff — fairly inexpensive for four hours. Deep sea fishing is also available. For digital photographers, everything is great, rinse tank on the boat. No film processing available. Digital still photo rental available with transfer to CD for a reasonable price.

CUBA

To visit Cuba legally, American citizens must be licensed by the

Treasury Department, and ordinary tourists don’t get licensed. Big fines await those who are nabbed when passing through one of the gateway airports in Mexico and Canada. The U.S. government has been cracking down. ... Street signs in Cancun and Playa del Carmen offer four-day trips to Cuba for as little as \$300US. ... Dive operations are generally well-run, and the reefs are pristine.

Barracuda, Barlovento, October 2002, James Atkinson (yakpack@sympatico.ca), Toronto, Ont.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 10 to 30 feet. Water: 80 F, choppy. Traveling to Varadero was a last minute surprise, originally booked in to the El Colony on Isla de la Juventud; the hurricanes that week required a last minute detour. We did miss both hurricanes that hit the El Colony in a one week period, but we were on hand for the hurricane that hit Varadero halfway through our stay. As a result, we dove off Varadero three days, and the other two days were surprise dive days. The Barracuda dive shop has a bus that tours all the hotels on the peninsula to pick you up. On the first bad day when we were expecting to be stood up, they drove up to our hotel and informed us we were driving the entire width of Cuba to the south coast to go diving at Playa Giron on the Bay of Pigs. We drove out of the storm and then through quite astonishing small villages and thousands of acres of cooperative farms. The visibility at the Bay of Pigs was excellent and the two wall dives we did there were