

ly entertainment. Lots of Dutch. About 1/3 of the women were topless on the beach. Pretty nice snorkeling for non-divers. Seascope had a 42 ft Newton boat with the usual set up. Some days there were only 4 divers on board. Other days they went down to Lion's Dive and picked up a bunch of divers. On those days they catered to Lion's Dive and ignored the Hilton customer's requests. Two of Lion's Dive's three boats were broken. They made us get to the shop an hour early and ride down to pick up the other divers. One day we had to ride back in a truck because they kept the boat at Lion's Dive for an afternoon trip. After a serious conversation with the manager of the shop and the general manager of the Hilton they started focusing on the Hilton customer's requests and convenience. Shore diving was excellent. You must rent a car if you want to shore dive or go into Willemstad for meals. Good night life and lots to do topside.

Sunset Divers, Sunset Waters Beach Resort, July 2003, Bill & Martha Chapman, Alexander City, AL.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm. Mike and Michele Day of Sunset Divers did an outstanding job. Their staff of Wade, Kristen, and Carlos are knowledgeable divemasters. Always ready to guide divers to best locations on reefs or to allow you to dive own profile. New boats and tanks. Short rides to dive sites. Fresh fruit, water, and iced tea on board each boat. Reefs in good shape. Saw spotted morays, lobster, scorpion fish, squid, turtles, parrotfish, seahorses, schooling chromis, barracuda, etc.

We were traveling in a group and had boat to ourselves. Mike scheduled boat departures to fit our schedule. Did two tanks each morning and one night dive. Especially enjoyed Mushroom Forest and Harry's Hole. Sloping walls allow divers to maximize bottom time over reefs. Sunset Waters Resort offers all-inclusive plan that was excellent. Facility is clean, offers great beach with shore diving, good food. Jim Hunter, general manager, did excellent job coordinating our schedule requirements, i.e., food service with dive boat departures, etc. Delta has weekly non-stop flight from Atlanta each Saturday. (www.sunsetdiver.com)

DOMINICA

Dominica is arguably the best all-around adventure vacation island in the Caribbean, with gorgeous reefs, plenty of tropicals (though few of eating size), lush rain forests, hiking, waterfalls, warm water springs, splendid fruits and vegetables (prepared by great local cooks), modest hotels — and it's inexpensive to boot. ... No beaches, even seaside hotels are affected by the nearly continuous cloud cover over the mountains, and there's not much happening beyond polite residents leading their lives. The airport doesn't handle large jets, and there's little tourism infrastructure. ... Expect daytime temperatures in the 80s and night lows around 68 in winter and 73 in summer, although a few minutes up the mountain and into the cloud forest can change

all that. ... July to November is the wet season, but showers may occur anytime. Dominica's at the edge of the hurricane belt. ... The 13-mile, round-trip hike to Boiling Lake is worth getting in condition for. Dive operations usually offer two dives in the morning to allow time to tour in the afternoons.

Anchorage Hotel & Dive Center, September 2002, Leanne Wells (mwells42@wf.net), Mineral Wells, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm, no currents. Dominica (pronounced dom-in-ee-ka) truly lives up to its nickname as "Nature Island." No chains or high rises. No panhandlers. Populace is eager to attract ecotourism and is hospitable and gracious. Diving is effortless and relaxing, but there are high-octane, high-current dives available upon request by experienced divers. We had some inexperienced divers with us, so did not seek out the more challenging dives. Most of our dives were within a volcanic crater open to the sea on one side, so the sites were protected from surge and current. No large critters, no large schools of fish. Coral is healthy and there are large barrel sponges, big enough to accommodate a standing man easily. Some unusual small critters. Have never seen so many bristle worms! Sperm whales and pilot whales were spotted from our boat, and the sperm whales put on an aerial show, rising halfway out of the water and returning with a resounding splash. Several schools of spotted dolphin, but none stayed around long. We were aboard private sailboat and anchored

just off of the Anchorage Hotel and dive shop so had no use for the hotel or restaurant facilities. The dive shop personnel were friendly and accommodating. Pancho, who lives next to the dive shop, even picked up shopping lists from our catamaran and returned in his little boat with our groceries! Dominica has not yet sold its soul to the cruise ship/tourism dollar gods, and it remains a beautiful, lush, volcanic rainforest with pure waterfalls and rivers. Hiking is the only way to see much of the island, and knowledgeable guides are readily available. Or go by yourself! A wonderful family island with something for everyone to do: swim, snorkel, dive, hike, kayak, hire a driver and tour the easy way, or do nothing and enjoy the friendly ambiance.

(www.anchoragehotel.dm)

Anchorage Hotel & Dive Center, December 2002, Robert Ewald (rewald@bellsouth.com), Louisville, KY. Experience: More than 1,000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Outstanding divemasters. Carefully cleaned all gear every day and gave extremely good service. Roomy boats with small number of divers. Large garbage can filled with fresh water and dedicated to cameras. Large sheltered areas available on boat for maintenance between dives. Some of the most colorful reefs in the Caribbean; healthy with good coral and sponges. Plenty of frog fish and sea horses. Reefs are now protected from fishing and larger fish are coming back. Dive sites no more than 10 minutes from the dock. Calm waters, easy diving, yet interesting life for the expe-

rienced diver. Divemasters good about finding critters and followed our requests. On the whale watch we spent 30 minutes in the water with a 20- to 25-foot, two-year-old sperm whale. She was curious and allowed us to touch and interact with her. I've been diving for 40 years, and this was one of the greatest experiences. Hotel is clean and comfortable, but not luxurious. Food is adequate and plentiful. Staff friendly. Outstanding opportunities for land based eco-activities.

Anchorage Hotel, March 2003, Tim Corwin (corwintcor@aol.com), South Hampton, NY. Vis: 100 feet.

Water: 78 F. Dives logged: 865. My wife and I vacationed in Dominica 3/18-3/25/03. Castle Comfort Lodge next door to Anchorage Hotel. We watched the Dive Dominica/ Castle Comfort cattle boats load to capacity, while we boarded our larger, totally uncrowded boats. The maximum we had was eight divers on a 40-foot boat. One morning, my wife and I were the only divers, and we had the whole boat to ourselves. The dive masters at Anchorage could not have been more helpful, and they ran a professional, on-time operation. Our dive package was \$585 each and included 10 dives, unlimited shore dives, full breakfast, and an air-conditioned room with cable TV overlooking the pool and the Caribbean. The on-site dive shop was good but lacked decent repair facilities. The restaurant was just okay but definitely not haute cuisine. It is a quick trip to town (75 cents on the public minibus), and there are many good restaurants, some of which are reason-

able. At Chef's restaurant, across from the IGA supermarket, dinner for two was only \$12US, including drinks and tip. Anchorage Hotel specializes in whale watch cruises. We watched the 30-foot whale watch boat next door fill up with about 20 people while we leisurely cruised away with only a dozen on the Anchorage's 60-foot luxury power catamaran. Anchorage claims to have a 90% success rate with their whale watches. In 3.5 hours, we saw eight whales, including a mother and calf. As for the diving — it was spectacular!! The walls are truly vertical, plunging into the abyss, often only a few hundred feet from shore. The visibility is an honest 100 feet, and the corals were the healthiest I've seen. There are huge barrel sponges, and the macro life was phenomenal, with sea-horses, frogfish, lobsters, clouds of silversides, anemone fish, grunts, morays — the list goes on and on. However if you want to see any fish larger than about 12 inches, stay home! The islanders survive by fishing, and there are absolutely no large fish to be seen, except maybe in their nets. Still, the diving made up for the lack of larger creatures. One site, appropriately named "Champagne," has underwater hot springs, where bubbles and water almost hot enough to burn gush forth and, within a few yards, is an ancient shipwreck with visible planks and coral covered cannons. Explore the island as it is incredibly beautiful. The island is mountainous and covered in rain forest, with lush vegetation, waterfalls, and streams everywhere. Do not rent a car — the roads are too treacherous — instead, hire a guide. If you are

short on time, skip the rest of the attractions and visit Spanny Waterfalls. Most of the locals don't know where this is, so look for a taxi driver named Dale (of Chip and Dale Tours), who hangs out by the cruise ship dock. Bring a small umbrella with you, because it rains a lot, although only five minutes at a time. One of the greatest things about this island is you can drink the water. You can buy bottled water in town, but they just take it from one of the many local springs. I have been diving for nearly 40 years and have been getting to the point that one reef looks a lot like any other, but I will venture to say that Dominica was different. If you want to see little critters and lots of them, fantastic hiking in the rainforest, and standing under pristine waterfalls, all at reasonable prices, Dominica is definitely worth the trip.

Anchorage Hotel, April 2003, Carol Moon (clm@mmmlaw.com), Atlanta, GA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm, currents. Experience: 26-50 dives. Any dive restrictions: Depth limits, but only somewhat restrictive. Two of us were the only passengers on the dive boat! Saw a seahorse and a large turtle, plus numerous tube sponges and gorgeous underwater topography.

Dive Dominica, Papillote Wilderness Retreat, November 2002, Laurie Gneiding (lauriERG@eclipse.net), Lebanon, NJ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. We stayed at the Papillote Wilderness Retreat and went diving

with Dive Dominica. The Papillote Wilderness Retreat is nestled in the Roseau Valley (a short 20-minute taxi ride from Dive Dominica) and a wonderful experience away from the ordinary. Anne Jno Baptiste has situated the retreat in a lush rainforest surrounded by a tropical botanical garden, a terrific bonus as we are also avid birders. Papillote has its own waterfall and is a short 15-minute walk from Trafalgar Falls. The meal plan (breakfast and dinner \$35/day/person) was a mixed blessing. Breakfast is early enough to get to the dive boat on time, and it's filling (the pancakes with mixed fresh fruit were terrific!). Dinner is usually local fare (e.g., dasheen puffs, callaloo soup), except Wednesday: BBQ. Servings are generous; however, there are only one or two entrees from which to choose and no choice of side dishes. The entree's were mostly fish. Sometimes chicken is available, but beef is nonexistent. The alternative local dishes included crapaud (i.e., frog legs, aka mountain chicken) or rabbit. Sometimes difficult to leave the table satisfied. We also went birding/hiking with Unique Tours. Alfred Rolle is a self-taught naturalist and was wonderful in pointing out birds, mammals, plants, and entire ecosystems, as well as showing off the beautiful scenic views of Dominica. Dive Dominica boats leave promptly at 9:00 a.m., C-cards are a must, and DAN cards are advocated. Dive Dominica has several boats to separate the cruise ship divers from the rest of us. Both boats used during our dives were well suited — lots of room (12 divers + crew and equipment with lots

of room to spare), on board head, easy access in and out, and freshwater tanks for cameras. Back at the shop, all your equipment is stored in a common locked area and carried to the boat (although this arrangement did cause confusion when grabbing weight belts that look alike). While turning my air on for my first dive, my high-pressure hose developed an aneurysm, and Dive Dominica quickly gave me a spare and was able to repair the hose. They also have extra weights on board. The not-so-good stuff on Dive Dominica is don't expect a full service crew. During our five days, divemasters changed three times. Pre-dive briefings are the name of the site, depth profiles (follow the divemaster, depth < 100 feet, turn-around at 2 tank), and where to meet underwater (but no suggestions to protect the coral or marine life), then the divemaster jumped in. You were left to pull your equipment together by yourself and most times haul yourself in/out of the boat. The only refreshment offered during the surface interval was a five-gallon jug of freshwater. The divemaster did little to search for critters. Several divers in our group were photographers, some of whom went for the shot regardless of what damage was done to the reef or aquatic life or if it meant kicking other divers. Other divers yanked arrowhead crabs off the coral and lobsters out of their holes without a peep from the divemaster. In fact, he was party to the critter abuse throughout the week. We signed up for the 10-tank package. The first eight dives were pleasant. Huge basket and tube sponges, plentiful soft corals, lots of arrow crabs and cleaner shrimp, and

even seahorses! Golden-tailed, spotted, and snake eels. The hugest crab (>3 feet across) I've seen in all my diving years. Sea robins, huge drums, and huge schools of squirrel fishes. Not many large fish but lots of juvenile fish, which may become larger fish now that Soufriere/Scotts Head has been designated as a marine preserve. The dive site called Champagne was over a volcanic vent; the bubbles tickled! Many portions of the reef are badly silted and visibility was only around 40 feet. Our last day of diving was nearly disastrous. We were to dive on the Atlantic side of Scotts Head. Inquiries regarding currents resulted in the reply that it was unlikely. Actual conditions were not tested. Sure enough, there was a strong current, far worse than any current experienced during several trips to Cozumel. Bad enough that two divers (including my husband) did not continue the dive and bad enough that most of us should not have. Those of us that did had to kick like crazy to drop below the current at about 35 feet and sucked up lots of air. This reef was also silted and a slight current to swim against. When returning to the boat, the current was again at 35 feet but the mooring line was barely visible. We were led in the general direction of the mooring line but due to the current, several of us overshot the line. Somehow we managed to kick hard and grab onto it before being swept away towards Guadeloupe. The decompression stop meant grabbing a hydroid-encrusted line with both (bare) hands and hanging horizontally, literally for dear life. Entry back into the boat was done by going up the moor-

ing line and yelling for the captain to grab you as you kicked as hard as possible to maintain your proximity to the boat. Needless to say we were exhausted after such an ordeal. My husband suggested a refund for the dive to the management. They retorted that the divemaster should not have chosen the spot. No money was refunded. We'd probably not dive with Dive Dominica again, but we'd go back to Dominica. The people were incredibly friendly, and the island is incredibly beautiful. (www.divedominica.com)

Dive Dominica, Castle Comfort, January 2003, Ann Mcgrath (amcgrath@att.net), Alexandria, VA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy, no currents. This was my third trip to Dive Dominica. Since they created a marine park in the area where most of the dive sites are, there are more eels and fish than on previous trips. Still no really large fish, but saw one huge turtle eating (right off the pier from Castle Comfort and flying gurnards and sea-horses are all over the place). Also incredible batfish off the pier. Spotted drums are everywhere, as are every type of eel. Also found yellow headed jawfish with eggs. The staff at Castle Comfort/Dive Dominica are the best. They are happy and professional, and they remember us when we return. This is our favorite land based dive operation in the Caribbean, and we've been to a lot of them! Although you can't get E6 processing at the resort, you can in town. Most of us were using digital, so it wasn't a problem. The divemasters rinsed our cameras

after each dive, and our rooms are close enough that we could carry them to the room after diving.

Dive Dominica, Evergreen Hotel, February 2003, Anne & Fred Straus (straushaus@cinci.rr.com), Wyoming, OH. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 78 to 81 F. Dives logged: 500. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 feet with comp. Island hard to get to. People from Europe got there quicker than we did, with direct flight to Martinique. Evergreen Hotel is small, family-owned, and friendly. Jenny Alleyne at evergreen@cwdom.dm promptly returned all e-mails, made diving reservations for us next door with Dive Dominica (there is a gate between the two resorts), and even helped us with flights on LIAT. Diving was good, but no big stuff. Breakfast at Evergreen was slow! Order the night before and advise them to have food on table by 7:30 as you have to be at dive shop by 8:45. We had "Honeymoon Hut" at regular sea view rate, which was an added bonus. Jenny was friendly and knew the names of all in our group of ten by week's end. Good macro location. Saw sea horses, frog fish, scorpion fish, and eels on most dives. Night dive is a must. Saw fair-sized octopus and a wall of lobsters on a night dive. Dive Dominica, owned and operated by Derek Perryman, is well run. Boats are about 45-foot catamarans. The max number of divers we had on any trip was 12. Only one dive, Cachacrou Pinnacles, had any current, but it was one of the better dives. One of our better finds was a great guide for afternoon trips, all around the island.

He's charming, well-educated, a professional photographer, and loves the island and its people. Contact Clem Johnson at (johnson@cwdom.dm) or 767-448-3190. He has a web site, www.islandlocations.com.

Dive Dominica, Castle Comfort, June 2003, John Sweeney (jtsweene@bechtel.com), Crosby, TX.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm, no currents. Beautiful rainforests and some of the best diving we've done. Not much big stuff (other than a spotted snake eel and some large turtles). Variety of coral and macro-life was exceptional. Many frogfish, seahorses, scorpion fish, crabs and lots of small critters provided outstanding photo-op's. Derek at Dive Dominica was accommodating and helpful, as was dive staff. Dive boats were excellent — a couple days took 12-14 divers and were a little crowded. Castle Comfort rooms and food were good, not fancy, but a nice local feel. Used Ken's Hinterland Tours for hikes and transportation — recommended. Driving on the unmarked 1-1/2 lane wide mountain roads ourselves would have been a hassle — each oncoming car involved mini-game of "chicken" to see who would pull to the side first. 3 nights at Papillote Wilderness retreat — a little more rustic than expected, but a beautiful, relaxing place. Dominica is tough to get to in 1 day. Overnight in Miami or Puerto Rico. If overnighing in Miami, recommend the Miami Int. airport hotel located in terminal E. Nice, super-convenient, and well-insulated from airport noise. U/W photographers

— if you don't have a macro lens, buy one for this trip!

Dive Dominica, Castle Comfort Inn, July 2003, Ginny Z. Berson, Oakland, CA. Experience: 251-500

dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, no currents. American Eagle typically leaves lots of luggage in San Juan because of weight problems. In our group of nine, five people did not get their luggage until late the next day. So carry on your mask, reg, bathing suit, shorts, toothbrush, etc. Whatever you can't do without for the first 24 to 36 hours. The flight out of Dominica typically leaves late, with many passengers missing their connections. You might want to build in an extra day to get home. I have nothing but high praise for the dive operation (maximum eight divers per boat) and the diving in Dominica. Huge hawksbill turtles, frogfish, flying gurnards, seahorses, squid, and a veritable nursery of trunks, trumpets, files, drums, angels, damsels, etc. There are nine kinds of eels and we saw them all, including some pretty rare snake eels. The whales and dolphins were encountered on a separate whale-watching trip run by Dive Dominica. It was pretty spectacular.

Nature Island Dive, Gallette Cottage, December 2002, Gloria Jean Ehlers, Madison, WI. Vis: 60

to 120 feet. Water: 80 F. Dives logged: 167. This was our second trip. Karen and her staff extremely helpful, diving and setting up daily trips. Even though two cruise ships arrive weekly, Nature Island has separate dive boats for "reg-

ulars.” Small groups, we had seven max in the two weeks we were there. The Galletta Cottage is right on the ocean between two small villages. We prefer the upper unit. Plenty of sea horses, frog fish, scorpion fish, spotted drum, wide variety of eels. A fantastic variety! Coral is healthy and colorful. Strong currents on Atlantic side; always calm in the bay. All sites five to 15 minutes from dock.
(www.natureislanddive.dm)

Nature Island Dive, Itassi Cottages, April 2003, John G. Herring
(jgh@mindspring.com),

Alexandria, VA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 82 F, calm, choppy. Nature Island Dive is a terrific, small operation with well-trained, experienced divemasters. It's the perfect place to dive the Soufriere Bay area, as the boats have only a 5-15 minute ride to the sites; surface intervals in the beautifully maintained courtyard of the dive shop are nice. The boats are small aluminum pontoon craft with awnings: perfect for the short trips, and great for keeping the groups small. The corals in Soufriere Bay are the healthiest I've seen in the Caribbean, and the diversity of species of small reef fish is amazing. The bay is a collapsed volcano with the center going down at least 2,500 feet. The sites are around the edges (inside and out) and include walls, pinnacles, and an amusing “champagne” site with sulphurous bubbles filtering up through the sand. Big schools of black-bar soldierfish in swim-throughs, a few arrow blennies, lots of crinoids, lobsters at night, and all the usual denizens, in

colorful profusion. Having Nature Island rinse, store & set up our gear was welcome. We stayed at Itassi Cottages in Roseau, about a 25-minute drive from the dock. The accommodations there were spacious and well-equipped, the view was out of this world, and the price was low, but some travelers may find it more rustic than they like. Don't leave your fruit out on the kitchen counter unless you don't mind sharing it with the birds. No A/C, but a nice breeze; mosquito nets in both bedrooms. Great market in town and a few good restaurants.

Nature Island Dive, Herche's Place, June 2003, Rick Cavanaugh
(rickcavanaugh@comcast.net),

Ellicott City, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, surge. Nature Island Dive is an excellent shop with excellent divemasters. Most of the week we were the only two divers on the boat! Most dives lasted over one hour and one night dive lasted 1 2 hours! The dives in the Soufriere Scott's Head Marine Reserve are some of the best dives I have done in the Caribbean even though the visibility was only 30 to 50 feet. There was a rare plankton bloom that limited the visibility for our entire trip. The reefs were much more colorful due to the amount of sponge life and healthy corals. What was strange was what was absent. The more common fish found through out the Caribbean were missing. We saw few angel fish, butterfly fish, and no sharks of any kind. What we did see where not as common. We saw many basket stars, golden crinoid's, magnifi-

cent urchins, frog fish, sea horses, lettuce sea slugs, leech head shield slug, bat fish, red banded lobsters, slipper lobsters, Pederson cleaner shrimp, spotted cleaner shrimps, squat anemone shrimps, scarlet striped cleaning shrimp, octopus, squids, scorpion fish, and much more. Simon Walsh, the owner, is an avid photographer, and he and his staff are dedicated in finding the little stuff. On many dives they asked us what we wanted to see, and they would take us right to it. They are an excellent choice for photographers, as all of the surface intervals are back at the dive shop. This made it easy to change film, lenses, and ports. Simon has big plans to improve his dive shop with the addition of a large, three-story building behind his shop. When the economy improves he wants to have a small restaurant, E6 processing, plus more. His plans for those are on halt until things change. There is a \$2 Marine Park fee per dive. The trip from Dominica's north end airport to Scott's Head takes around 1 2 hours. My original intention was to rent a car and drive myself to save the \$60, one-way taxi fare. After taking a taxi, I was happy not to drive across the island. The roads are narrow with hairpin turns and cliffs. The roads are not marked, and it would be easy to get lost. If you are interested in renting a car, rent it from the other side after you have traveled by taxi to the other side. The center of the island is beautiful. Very high and steep mountains with waterfalls, and lots of small rivers surround you as you travel across the island. There are many day hikes into the rainforest. We took a 45-minute muddy hike to

Middleham falls. We also visited Trafalgar Falls, which was a short, five-minute walk from the parking lot to the falls. Upon arrival into Roseau, you enter into the largest city on the island, and it is typical of Caribbean cities in construction and appearance. Scotts Head is approximately 20 minutes past Roseau. Scotts head is a fishing village and is not attractive. The town is run down. This is where Herche's Place is located, a small, economy-style hotel with about five rooms available. One week was \$636 and included a basic breakfast of fresh fruit and bread. The rooms are sparse and small. Ours had an A/C unit that kept the room cold as the thermostat did not function properly. The room was so small that the bathroom door would not close unless the bed was moved. The area was not attractive and run down, as compared to other islands in the Caribbean. There are not many other hotel choices in the Scotts Head area. When we return to Dominica, we will make sure that we stay at Dive Dominica's "Cottages" which were booked during our trip. We did not see the interior of the "Cottages" but from the appearance of Simon's dive operation, I am sure they are significantly better than Herche's. The final insult from Herche's place was the unauthorized additional charge of approximately \$380 that showed up on my charge card after leaving! The main attraction of Herche's place was that there was a restaurant with a good reputation for fine food located at the hotel. Barbara Herche's husband, Greg, had the reputation of being the best chef on the island. Unfortunately he is now work-

ing for the Anchorage Hotel. What remains of the Herche's restaurant is an average restaurant the frequently ran out of many of the items and was over priced. However, there are not many other choices in Scotts Head. The only other restaurant was Roger's Place, which was a basic restaurant with not much of a menu. Fish, egg sandwich, ham and cheese sandwich, burgers and such were the only choices. One restaurant worth going to is Andre's Rainforest Bistro. Reservations are required well in advance, as you will probably be the only customers. The meal is large and reasonably priced. Choices are fish, chicken, or vegetarian. The meal comes with many varied vegetables grown on his farm. It is a must if you are on the side of the island. Andre will pick you up at your hotel and drop you back off for no extra charge. UW Photography
Comments: No good E6 on island.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

While few American's visit, it's a popular and well-developed tourist destination for Europeans, with plenty of all inclusive hotels on nice beaches. While there are a few good dives, it's generally mediocre and for experienced divers, generally insufficient for a week's trip.

Spring 2003, Jim Parkhill, Edinburg, TX. The four dive areas are far apart, but I dived them all. On the Southeast coast an hour and a half from Boca Chica is Bayshibel La Romans. Here I found the best diving including marine

life, visibility, calm seas and the diversity of dives. Bayahibe consists of about eight square blocks of dirt streets. It boasts two real restaurants and a handful of open air food stalls. There is one modest hotel and an odd assortment of cabanas or pensiones. The best meals were at the beachfront Bahia Restaurant where I could get 30 grilled shrimp, a mixed salad and two frosty Presidente beers for US\$13. Within a fifteen minute drive of Bayahibe are 5-star all inclusive resorts (Dominicas Palace, Iberostar, Coral Canon, Casa del Mar) that fill with Italians, Germans, French and Spanish. In three weeks I met or dived with only four Americans. The Dominicas was the based for the ill fated free diving incident that claimed the life of Audrey Mestre in front of Bayahibe. The Casa de Campo complex boasts five 18 hole golf courses and a mind boggling marina packed with yachts from all over the world. Catalinita Island — hour boat ride includes a short cut through mangrove lined canals out of an Indiana Jones flick. A drift dive follows the part of the wall exposed to the open sea. The first dive we saw the dolphins soon after we backrolled in and the second time the dolphins came around us while on the safety stop. One nurse shark and small ray, abundance of small spotted eels, trumpetfish and barracuda. The hard corals show a lot of damage but the site is full of sponges and fans. Max depth 75-80 feet. La Parguera: good assortment of the usual reef fish and critters, La Parguera gave us the largest barrel sponge that I have ever seen and a free swimming moray. Max depth 65 feet. The *St. George*