

dive seem like fun. Eighteen minutes into one dive, a diver the size of a line-backer frantically gave Bob the "low air" sign. It was obvious that Bob never even considered taking the guy up. Instead, he put the panic stricken dude on his octopus and towed him around thorough the tunnels and swim-throughs which even the other two divers refused to go in to. When Bob got low on air, he just passed the giant off to me and my octopus and we managed to get a respectable 45 minutes out of that dive. The big guy came up raving about the cool tunnels. Northern's shop is on the main drag of Sosua and is well organized and equipped. The dive boats depart from Sosua Beach a three block walk from the shop. Rendezvous at the shop at 8:30 a.m. for the dive briefing for the 9:00 a.m. dive. Then walk the three blocks to the beach. After the first dive, the boat returned to the beach, you walked back to the shop and then cooled your heels in a clammy wetsuit there until the briefing for the second dive at 11:45 a.m. I suspect that the odd hour for the second dive was to accommodate the late night party people. In summary, there are a handful of dives sites in the D.R. which would satisfy all but the most demanding hard core diver, but the handful of good sites are spread across a wide geographical area. If one were to travel to the D.R. with the intention of staying in just one spot, the good diving would be exhausted in a couple of days.

(www.dr-protravel.com/Diving/Scubafun/scubafun.html,
www.northerncoastdiving.com)

Casa Daniel, Coral Canola, June 2002, Lynn Pardo, Baytown, TX.

Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 76 to 81 F. Dives accrued: 500+. Dive restrictions enforced: time, 45 to 60 minutes. Nice mix of non-Americans: Germans, Russians, Spanish, etc. I liked the staff at Casa Daniel, which was Swiss, German, American. This was not luxury diving, but they aimed to please. It reminded me of diving 20 years ago. All sitting around the diver's living quarters, using the hose to rinse off. (www.casa-daniel.de/index.htm)

HAITI

Kaliko Beach Club, January 2003, Sue Sepelak (sepelak@erols.com), Columbia, MD. Dives logged: 560+.

Vis: 60 to 85 feet. Water: 76 to 78 F. Pristine reefs, colorful varieties of coral and reef fish. Spotted morays, puffers, wrasse, and squid were abundant. Resort was almost empty — testament to lack of tourist infrastructure in Haiti. Drove from Port-au-Prince to the resorts along Cote Des Arcadins. It was a long trek due to lack of paved roads. Very friendly staff at resort and dive operation (adjacent to the resort). Pegasus Services is probably one of the few remaining dive operations in Haiti. Operation run by Nicole and Jose Ray (509-558-5368). The diving is well worth the adventure you will have getting there. (www.kalikobeachclub.com)

HONDURAS

All dive resorts are on the Bay Islands: Roatan, Guanaja, Utila, Cayos Cochinos, and other small

cayes. ... Honduras is home to aggressive no-see-ums; they bite, bite, bite, and many people have serious allergic reactions. Those who are unprepared — meaning DEET — often find their vacations ruined. ... The diving features great walls, offshore seamounts, and excellent coral and gorgonians, although there are few large fish or lobsters due to overfishing. ... Whale sharks are seen near Utila, while diving on Guanaja falls short. ... There's limited access to beach diving except at CoCoView and Fantasy Island on Roatan, and Plantation Beach on Cayos Cochinos. ... The rainy season is October through February, and northers can disrupt the diving. ... Carry essentials as TACA loses or delays luggage. ... Spanish is spoken on the mainland, English in the Bay Islands. ... Classic Central American jungles and Mayan ruins inland make great side trips. ... Malaria protection is advised.

Guanaja

**Posada del Sol, February 2003,
Jeffrey Fischer, St. James, NY.**

This resort is not in good shape, and the diving was weak at best. The majority of the group felt the place was “fished out.” I don't think they protect Guanaja like a marine park, and clearly the island still has not recovered from the devastation of Hurricane Mitch. The resort is in a beautiful tropical setting. The guest rooms were adequate but need to be

refreshed/reconditioned. The dive boats were in terrible condition and are in need of replacement. There were no ladders, and several of the group had a difficult time getting back onboard the boat. The boat had no lighting or navigational running lights for night operation, making them a safety hazard and most probably illegal. There was no dive shop and any rental equipment offered was in terrible condition. The dive operation was not good, but the dive staff was eager to please and was helpful. The marine life in general was sparse. There was no real beach area, and the bugs were horrible. Most people had diarrhea/intestinal problems. Could it have been the water? There was no gift shop or place for guests to buy sunblock, T-shirts, or bug spray. The food was adequate, with breakfast being the best meal offered. The dining room staff was good. Resort management was disorganized. Even though arrangements had been made for a late morning departure from the resort to get the group back to San Pedro Sula, everyone was made to leave the resort at 5:30 a.m. This made for a long lay-over in San Pedro for most people. The tipping policy was offensive to some of the group. I realize that this is meant to be a guide and is not required, but it is not generally customary for the guest to feel obligated to tip the chef, office/hostess, or general fund. These people should rely upon their salary as their compensation. (Ph: 800-642-3483; email: pds@roatan.com; website: www.posadadelsol.com)

Roatan

Anthony's Key Resort, December 2002, Roberta Levin (roberta@red-dog.net), Boulder, CO. Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 30 to 70 feet. Water: 80 F, calm, choppy, surge. Xmas holiday and the resort was full. Everything ran smoothly from the dive operation to the dining room. We had our two eleven-year-old kids with us. They were not signed up for the dolphin camp because we arrived mid-week. We had not planned on them getting certified, but the situation was perfect. They had an instructor and an assistant for the two of them alone. It was a fantastic experience. They got top-notch instruction in a wonderful environment. The resort is well-designed and user-friendly. Laundry is available six days a week for a nominal fee, and there is a doctor on-site, which is handy. The staff really goes out of it's way to make you happy. Beware of the parrot, Paco; he's cute, but he bites! (800-227-3483, www.anthonyskey.com)

Anthony's Key Resort, December 2002, Skip & Mary Harutun, Carbondale, CO. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: Rec. limits. Dives logged: >1,000. We've stayed at Anthony's before, and, while the resort/dining room staff is helpful and pleasant, the dive operations have become Cozumel-like. Very rushed, same old-same old, let's-get-going-so-we-can-get-back. Very reluctant to dive anything new, i.e., if it is Tuesday it must be The Eagle Wreck or Mary's Place. Sadly, it's time for experienced divers to move on.

Anthony's Key, January 2003, Haykus Family (haykus@frontier.net), Pagosa Springs, CO. Dives logged: 75. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 74 to 76 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 120 feet, 500 psi. Great vacation. Second time to Anthony's Key Resort. This time rain and wind (last time sunny and calm). We loved it so much we bought a three-bedroom villa at Turtle Crossing on the SW side of the island for part vacation and rental. Our highlights were: first real deep dives for Aliya (age 13), plus diving with the A.K.R. dolphins and the fantastic family affair at A.K.R. Due to the weather everyone was delayed three days at least on the island. At A.K.R. we stayed at no extra cost, but others coming from Fantasy Island Resort were complaining about being charged extra. Plus A.K.R. being on the north side (wind and surge) had to bus everyone over to the south side for dives, which was super accommodating, fun, and we got to see other areas of the island. Check weather reports before going, DAH! Surely attitude is everything! We went with the flow and loved it. Getting more familiar with the island residents, culture, and ways won us over. If you want to know more about our rental villa contact Cathy & John Parkman: haykus@frontier.net, Parkman@hondusoft.com.

Anthony's Key Resort, January 2003, Henry Ziller (cziller@angelfire.com), Conifer, CO. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. Boats (9) are all in excellent condition with heads on all, separate camera rinse,

water for drinking. Short boat ride to dive sites (they return to the dock after dives to refill the same tank you just used) unless the site is on the South side, but some of the best sites are on the South side. There was slight current on only a few dives. You do a checkout dive, flood and clear mask and retrieve regulator off the boat while at the dock. Free buoyancy control lessons offered daily. Swimming with sharks and dolphins are offered for a price. The dolphin show, horse back riding, bicycles are all free. Since the ocean was extremely rough on the North side we were transported by bus to the South side for diving and unfortunately missed three afternoon dives and two night dives (They include 3 dives a day, plus two night dives in the standard package). The storm also stopped all shore diving because it is on the North side. The rooms (cabanas) are well arranged, but only have the necessities, bed and bathroom with shower, but what else do you really need?

There are some with A/C, but we chose one without. We feel it is too dehydrating and the breeze is always there.

Maybe not in the summer months though. They take you and your bags follow by boat to the island, a 30 second ride in an open skiff. Take an umbrella or waterproof jacket, we had disposable plastic ponchos and everyone asked us where they could obtain one. We bought them at home for a dollar. The night life at the bar was great, although it would be nice to bring them a CD or two as they have a limited selection. The large screen TV does not always get good reception.

The water is safe to drink. There is not

much to go to town for, but a cab will take you there and they are always available at the resort. The week we chose was a rainy week and the airport was shutdown for a couple days when our trip ended. We ended up staying 9 nights instead of 7. Small planes can get in and out, but the large jets cannot. AK Resort was fantastic in accommodating our extra nights and days. There was no charge days and this was all inclusive. Other resorts did charge for the extra days. We (my wife) got about 20 bites from no-see-ums, but I only got a few. I used the cactus juice. We had no mosquito bites. We opted not to take malaria prevention.

Anthony's Key Resort, January 2003, Randy Feriante
(rferiante@aol.com), Palo Alto, CA.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Water: calm, choppy, currents. We were looking for an all-inclusive with something for our 4- and 6-year-olds. Their kids program was closed for winter, but they offered to find a sitter, who would take the kids to some daily activities while we dove. We never used this offer, since my wife chose not to dive this trip. It had rained for a month solid before we got there, but quit the day after we arrived. They had driven 20 minutes across the island to dive the other side during this time. It was beautiful during our eight days, then rained for a week after we left. Good timing. The food was fine. The facility was fine. Staff was fine. They put my wife's suitcase under the edge of the eaves when they delivered it to our cabin. It must have weighed 150 lbs. Her clothes were wet and muddy. They offered to launder them. The

brothers who operate AKR showed some concern for our 4-year-old after he was kicked by one of the two adolescent deer the first time he ventured out of our cabin. We were surprised they didn't offer to at least reimburse for the x-rays (16.75US). It took them days to finally catch the deer with horses on the close island part of the resort that has many of the cabins. They told us there were no mosquitos before we came. This seemed true until the last two days, when they came out in droves. We had to plug the drain in our cabin, since they used it for entrance. Our cabin was fine in January without A/C. It is a great dive resort. Great photo facility on dock. Helpful staff. They lent me a filter. They do a very nice job on their dolphin interaction videos.

**Anthony's Key Resort, June 2003,
Jeffrey R. Johnson (jrj72113@aol.com), Maumelle, AR.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Our second trip to Anthony's Key Resort. Still the reliable operation that we remembered. Well-maintained resort, excellent service, comfortable (if air conditioned) accommodations, good food for an all-inclusive package, complete dive operation with several large boats, enjoyable if not spectacular diving. Good place for families with the Dolphin Center next door, plus it is a good value. The negatives are the heat and no-see-ums. We had to upgrade to an air conditioned room. Nothing seemed to repel the bugs, but it was manageable. Boats come back to dock after each dive, and you can do three

dives a day. Also have night dives couple of times a week, and there is a shore dive area. Our divemaster, Dennis (who we also had on our first trip), was efficient and good at finding small critters. He set the parameters for the dive, kept an eye on everyone who stuck near him, but also allowed anyone to do their own profile. Didn't see much big stuff, several small turtles, but lots of fish species and beautiful coral. We particularly enjoyed the many swim-through opportunities. Two good wreck dives, the Aquilia and the Odyssey. Big green moray is active near the former. Particularly enjoyed being inside the bridge of the Odyssey and seeing a large barracuda watching me on the outside. Mary's Place is an outstanding, world class dive site with a good, descending swim-through and wall with big drop off. Saw a sea horse in shallower water on top of the wall. Also recommend Spooky Channel because it is a different experience — like being in a rocky canyon. Bears Den was another favorite because of swim-through.

**Anthony's Key Resort, June 2003,
Laura Todd (bucknsnoop@aol.com), Arcata, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy. I went here on the recommendation of a friend who visited at the same time last year and saw eagle rays, sea horses, turtles, nurse sharks, even orcas. I was disappointed at the lack of critters on my own trip — average of only two animals (other than reef fish) per dive. This is a well run operation with beautiful boats, good service, helpful staff, good accommodations,

above average food in a pretty setting, but all that stuff doesn't matter if there's nothing to see. The only remarkable animals from a whole week of three dives per day were distant eagle rays, one turtle, a sharptail eel, and the decent-size groupers that were usually hanging out under the boat. There are a couple sites with interesting topography: arches, caves, steeply walled coral mazes, but this doesn't make for a week of diving. Divemasters were only marginally motivated to find critters and limited all dives to a maximum of 45 minutes; I routinely came up with more than 1,000 psi. Tipping is expected. With the dolphins, picnics, snorkel trips, and horseback riding, Anthony's Key is a great place for families and groups; experienced divers will be bored. Underwater photography comments: Great facilities and service, if expensive. Unfortunately, nothing to take photos of. It's a bad sign when most of the trip video consists of shots of other divers.

CoCo View Resort, September 2002, Bill Stephenson, Beverly Hills, MI.

Vis: 80 feet. Water: 28 to 80 F. Dives accrued: 175. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 feet. Great place to go diving, especially if all you want to do is dive and relax. Good food, mixture of island recipes and general cooking. Divemasters are really great. They protect the corals at all costs. Good approach to new and experienced. Especially like the "drop off" tank on way back. Nice, leisurely way to end a day's diving. Shore diving (night) surge and low vis. but plenty of marine life. (No pelagics.)
(www.cocoviewresort.com)

CoCo View Resort, November 2002, Nikki Mahan, Bellevue, WA.

Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm, no currents. The no-see-ums will get you if you don't use bug spray. The diving was great for both experienced and new divers, my 13-year-old grandson (25 dives) thought he'd died and gone to heaven. The seahorses, eels, juvenile drums, eagle rays, pipe fish, the list is endless, were wonderful. The dive staff was good, needed to be prompted to help carry tanks, however. Food was good even though a few in our group had some stomach problems. The resort staff couldn't have been better, so friendly and accommodating.

CoCo View Resort, November 2002, Walt & Angie Redmond, Austin, TX.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, surge. Diving was good, although Roatan is over fished. We saw two barracuda the entire week, and the only turtles and tarpon we saw were during our island tour in captivity for the cruise passengers to view. Visibility was reduced considerably due to torrential rainstorms the week before, particularly onshore dives. Boat dives in a.m. and p.m. also dropped off for diving at Newman's Wall or the Prince Albert wreck with short swim back to resort. Mary's Place had reopened, but we thought Calvin's Crack was a better dive. Osman was a great divemaster — found seahorses on almost every dive. Not many large fish but plenty of moray eels, octopus, scorpionfish, groupers, and even some juvenile trunkfish, juvenile eel, juvenile spotted

drum. Boat dive sites rarely repeated. Dive boats were excellent: 15+ divers on board and not crowded; also covered so no baking in the sun. Storage facilities were also excellent — each diver has locker at dockside so no totting of gear! However, beware the sand fleas. Deep Woods Off was more effective than Cactus Juice but re-application essential, especially at dockside. Dive shop at dockside was well-equipped and helpful in making some minor repairs. Accommodations were average. Request an air conditioned room — helps prevent sand flea bites and beats the humidity. Meals were average, served buffet style with plenty for everyone. However, everyone in our group had a touch of “tourista,” which the staff claimed was being spread by cruise ship passengers. Take OTC remedies, drink only bottled water, and avoid the salad bar and any fruit you don’t peel yourself. The staff assured us everything at the resort was OK to eat or drink. As the resort is located on an island off an island, the only way to explore Roatan is to either take a cab ride, rent a car, or take a tour. We ate at a restaurant in town one night, which was a welcome break from the resort food. Also, took the island tour on the last afternoon to get a better idea of Roatan. Excellent camera facilities on boat — too bad some divers treated the camera area as space for weight belts, etc.

Coco View Resort, December 2002,
Dave White, Arcata, CA. Experience:

251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 feet.

Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. The diving itself was very good. The working staff at the resort were always pleasant

and helpful; however, the management had an indifferent attitude, and it showed in the quality of the operation. Nearly everyone (including some staff that ate at the resort) at the resort got some sort of intestinal sickness either due to bad water or poor food prep. The manager’s attitude was “it must be that cruise ship thing” and walked off. We had bad air on several days, bad enough to make people sick and cause dives to be canceled. The excuse: “a filter problem with the compressor, it won’t hurt you.” Most likely lack of compressor maintenance. On two occasions the boat wouldn’t start (at the dock, luckily). When they ran, the boats were good. Divemasters and boat crews went out of their way to make up for management indifference. The manager was always easy to find, look in the bar. The shore diving is good and gives some extra value to the trip. Macro life was good, as was smaller- and intermediate-sized fish. We saw a number of eagle rays. No-see-ums were a minor problem for us, although some people seemed to have more of a problem. Take DEET and some sort of anti-itch medication. Overall we had a good time, but it could have been so much better. We will not return, and, while we would recommend Roatan, we would stay away from Coco View Resort. UW Photography Comments: Designated camera tables and rinse tanks. Boat staff always willing to hand cameras after entry.

CoCoView Resort, January 2003,
Ken Paff, Detroit, MI. Experience:
200 to 300 Caribbean dives. CCV is a

divers' place. It's easy to do four dives a day, and the hearty (I'm too old myself) do five. They do two boat dives (a recent change) in the mornings, and afternoons a boat dive and a "drop off" on one of two fine walls adjacent to the resort. The shore diving is excellent, especially when the viz is good. The facilities are diver-friendly: you get a gear locker/space right by the boat. The boats are spacious, though slow. They don't baby sit you and don't restrict you, either. Most divers here are experienced, but it is also fine for newbies. The reefs are healthy. It's fished by locals, so there are not many large fish, although you will see large black grouper, barracuda, cero, dog snapper. Very good for macro life and decent for reef fish. Lots of varied tunicates, decorator crabs, and other inverts, sea horses, schools of tangs, Creole wrasse and bogas, goat fish, southern sennet, etc. We added just a couple new fish to our life list, and a few inverts. We saw no pelagics, but one day we had a large pod of bottlenose follow the dive boat and play in the pressure waves and wake. Most sites are similar wall dives. Mary's Place is a great dive, though they try to spoil it with over-hype, especially for the many divers who have seen great formations such as Cozumel, Cuba, or Lighthouse Reef. Menagerie is my favorite site, with lots of schools (circling horse-eyes, spade-fish, mahogany snappers, bar jacks), cleaning stations, morays. The divemasters are competent and friendly but routine. The briefing is always identical ("go right/left along the wall and then return shallow-er"). The head of dive operation was

busy warming a barstool, but then a week after our trip I got an e-mail advertising for the position. Worst aspect of the dive operation: 13 divers per boat. I asked various staffers and learned that is the norm. Since most divers are experienced, they do spread out and some go their own way. The rooms over the water are nice. (Don't pay extra for the bungalow, get the nice over-water regular room.) The food is very good for an all-inclusive, with fresh seafood (and chicken or good beef) at dinners. Breakfasts made to order. Desserts are a specialty, and bread is made fresh. Beer \$1.50. The staff at this down-home resort is helpful, including Tim at the dive shop, who did some competent and reasonable gear repair for my friends. January 2003 was a cloudy, rainy month over much of the Caribbean, so viz was down (50 feet on most dives).

Undercurrent has noted problems with turistas here. During our week, a quarter of the 42 guests got sick (diarrhea, weakness, and brief fever). Some got mildly sick (my partner and I each had a bad day and skipped one or two dives), others serious (one couple didn't set foot on a boat for at least three days). As of February 2003, CCV is for sale, as owners Bill and Evelyn Evans plan to retire. The resort staffers, many of them long-term, nervously await the transition. If interested in seeing some above-water nature — birds, monkeys, crocs, and the coastal rain forest — on the Honduras North Coast, we can heartily recommend the naturalist and guide Jorge Salaverri who runs Moskitia Ecoaventuras in La Ceiba (www.honduras.com/moskitia).

The flight from Roatán to La Ceiba is \$23, and bus from there to the San Pedro Sula airport is easy and cheap. It'll be cheap: reasonable hotels in La Ceiba and Tela are \$20, good dinners \$5, beer \$0.85.

CoCo View Resort, January 2003, Van Wells, Columbia, SC. Our party of divers consisted of 36 people for a six-day adventure. The Scuba Shop, Spartanburg, S.C., set up the trip with help of travel agent in Atlanta, Georgia. Included in group were sixteen college students from Wofford College obtaining scuba certification. Due to bad weather and Taca Airlines, the first two days were spent in Houston, Texas. Taca canceled the flight the first day while we were standing in line at Houston. Major problems getting luggage back from airline for our stay in Texas. Some people waited up to six hours. Upon arrival at CoCo View, no refund was offered for days missed. CoCo View did offer half price bar drinks and T-shirts for compensation of two days lodging, food, and diving (pretty poor in my opinion). CoCo view seems more like YMCA camp vs. diving lodge. Upon checking in, dive gear lockers were assigned by boat. My dive buddy and I were unable to find "locker tags" which previous divers did not turn in. We were told we had to find locker tags, or we were just out of luck. We located tags on our own. Our first meal was poor at best and never seemed to improve. It was a buffet set-up where you were on your own. Thirty-one of thirty-six divers were sick within two days. Intestinal sickness. Speaking with bartender I

was informed this was an on going problem. My dive buddy was in bed for 18 hours only to venture to bathroom. The maid brought chicken soup and Gatoraid. I believe that CoCo View management was fully aware of the problem and no attempt made to correct. Also found out resort was up for sale or had been sold. I would advise everyone to avoid CoCo View Resort!

CoCoView Resort, March 2003, Susan Freedman (suzysu@hotmail.com), Washington, DC. Experience: More than 1,000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, choppy. I love coming to this place. There was a dive group that enjoyed being stupid, killing coral, and overall ruining the experience for everyone else that tainted my trip this year. Although immediate resolution of a rampant coral killer who was told numerous times to stop by other boat divers including me was not met, I enjoy seeing the owners and managers of Coco View and the friends I make there. I loved this place in 2002 and one customer made me not love it this year for his selfish cruelty with regard to the sea and reefs. After not getting a response from the divemasters on this, I brought this up with the management and feel that they followed up appropriately. The reefs are in pretty good/great shape. Not much in swim-throughs like Cayman, but the health of the corals is so much better than Cayman. Water was pretty choppy, but boats are made to accommodate that — unless you're an idiot. For newbies, they've got the best shore diving to accommodate those folks. The bar and social atmosphere is great. This is

a place for real divers. Bring bug spray. Food was good and bad. Got pretty sick this year toward end of week — no one else had a problem.

**CoCo View Resort, April 2003,
Wayne Makabe, Rio Vista, CA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. Accommodations were fine, we stayed in a cabana on the water without A/C; it was fine, plenty of breeze pushing through, but it was warm. The scuba storage area by the boats was where the no-see-ums were, so after a dive when you had nothing on was when we were eaten up by the bugs, other than that, it wasn't too bad. We heard about all the problems with people getting sick before we booked and decided to take our chances anyway. I didn't hear of anyone having a problem while we were there. The staff is aware and seem to try to make things as sanitary as possible. Beware if you like to eat healthy food. Food tended to be greasy and/or slathered in mayonnaise. For a tropical resort, I think they should have had more fresh fruit options on the table. Hotel staff was excellent. There are few sharks but there is one outfit that does a shark dive (about \$75). This was well worth it and professionally run. It can be arranged from any of the major resorts on the island. Skip the optional boat night dive (\$20 extra) and do your night diving from shore; there's all kinds of stuff on the local walls and shipwreck in front of the resort. Fresh water tanks on boats and plenty more on shore.

CoCo View Resort, May 2003, Bill Edwards (bill@edwardsaz.com), Phoenix, AZ. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 feet. Water: 85 to 88 F, choppy, surge. Coco View has had some bad press regarding the food and divers getting sick. We went May 3 for a week, they had a new chef, and the food service was great. There were four in our party, and the rough seas were the only cause of one person getting sick. The dive operation was great. We brought too much clothing, should have left a lot at home. The operation was relaxed, with great response to any problems we encountered. This resort is for divers by divers.

CoCo View Resort, June 2003, Mike Szathmary (SzathmaryM@aol.com), Cary, NC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm, surge. A no frills dive resort which is more than adequate in all respects. The rooms are not fancy but comfortable, the food not gourmet but plentiful, the atmosphere laid back. It is clear that this is a resort for divers; the operation is well-oiled and consistent. There is plenty of opportunity for both boat and shore diving and one can spend the whole week without leaving the property. The dive operation was top notch and Jesse, our divemaster, was enthusiastic in his briefings even though he's done them a thousand times before. There have been many reports of stomach ailments among the visitors to this resort and before my trip I started a prescription of Cipro as a precaution. My buddy and I had no problems but there were several at the resort that did during my time there,

including some taking Cipro. The notorious no-see-ums were a non factor. I don't know if that's because we had a room over the water or if the Cactus Juice was effective or if they just weren't around when I was there.

CoCoView Resort, July 2003, Jeffrey Houdret, Lansdale, PA. Experience: Over 1,000 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 feet. Water: 80 F, surge. This, my eighth trip to the resort over 15 years, illustrated what has changed and what is the same. No longer was I the only diver to be ferried from the airport to the resort. This time, a bus carried 20 or more of us. As usual, the CoCoView staff person who met the plane whisked us through customs without hassle. The Resort sports a new dock, updated dive shop, an exercise room, Internet access, and a few new rooms. Bottled water is now free. The overall atmosphere of the place, I call it camp for divers, has not changed. CoCoView works for me. I love the people it attracts, everyone from neurosurgeons to Texans. Class barriers disappear. Diving is all that anyone talks about. Still there are issues, the first being an intestinal malady we named the CoCoRuns that has plagued the resort for awhile. It certainly hit our group hard. I was sick by my third day. By the middle of the week, 20 out of 25 guests were also stricken. Many lost complete dive days. One lady had to relieve herself off the back of the dive boat if you can imagine anything more humiliating. The diving, to my eye was the same as always; well organized, efficient and adequate. Forget seeing large fish except on the extra cost shark-bating

dive. The sites are the same ones they have been diving for years. Mary's Place is in pretty good shape. Forty Foot Point still has schooling fish. Visibility was on the poor side, 40-feet at most. It was unusually rough with 10-foot rollers on the boat dives. There had been a storm just the week before. Finding and entering the boat in the murk was occasionally challenging. CoCoView's boats, with their unique centrally located entry chambers, work wonders in rough seas. While the dive operation in general runs efficiently, Nitrox users complained of strange tasting air. The staff responded by scrubbing the affected tanks but the problem persisted. I believe the biggest issue with CoCoView diving is that the reef is dying. The dive staff lectures about reef protection — no gloves, no touching. However, all this becomes irrelevant when you realize that there is no sewage treatment on the island of Roatan. So, every shower, every dish washing chemical and every poop sooner or later ends up on the reef. There are septic tanks but effluent eventually reaches the reef. Algae covers many parts of the reef, particularly those areas in front of CoCoView and the small towns downstream. Dive sites to the east, upstream from prevailing currents, where there is little building, exhibited much less algae. Diving is still enjoyable. The walls are full of sponges and crevices hiding eels, crabs and occasional sea horse. But forget the diversity of hard corals, pelagics and nudibranchs that once were common in these waters. Serving up to 40 meals, three times a day is a challenge in any environment. At CoCoView,

they do an excellent job. The food, while not gourmet by any stretch is adequate and often quite good. The staff punctuates the normal buffet style dinners with a cookout, which is lots of fun. Again, the intestinal plague that swept through the resort during my week, made everyone wary of each food category. One night, they organized a dinner at a different restaurant on the island, almost everyone signed up, even though it cost extra. We were all pretty tired of CoCoView food by then. While some guests complained about the food and conditions, one must take into account that CoCoView is a great Caribbean bargain. The week I was there, the fee was \$699 for the week with accommodations, diving and food. That's tough to beat in this hemisphere. It follows that in order to provide services for that price; costs have to be cut in lots of places. You get what you pay for. Overall, CoCoView offers excellent value. The friendly atmosphere exuded by both staff and the type of diver the resort attracts is contagious and welcome. The diving, while not world-class, is very good. Reefs are dying all over the world from global warming, sewage and physical damage. CoCoView works much harder than most resorts to preserve what they have. Intestinal maladies can strike anywhere. I have had worse problems in Switzerland than Roatan. Expect it and prepare for it by packing antibiotics and being wary of what you eat and drink.

CoCoView Resort, July 2003,
Michael Holden (mikebeckyholden@msn.com), Clinton Township, MI.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. This was our third trip in 5 years to CoCoView and we never had so much problem with the no-see-ums before. Our luggage arrived with us — TACA never managed that before! Dove Nitrox, took own analyzer, but resort had one for use that compared closely to my own. Resort is the closest thing to a live-aboard on land that I have ever heard of. Had a spotted eagle ray that came around our cabana each afternoon to feed — got some great video footage from our deck! Lots of octopus, seahorses, eels, and turtles. Mary's Place is open again, but it's disappointing. Wet tank on board reserved for cameras only and enforced photo pro good, currently working on a project with Stan Waterman.

CoCo View Resort, August 2003,
Sandy, Balboa, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 25 to 150 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy. Visited more than 5 — less than 10 times. Always middle to end of August. Until this visit, nothing out of ordinary. Within 2 days of arrival, between 2 to 2/3 of total guest population was stricken with severe intestinal diarrhea, cramping, fever and chills, vomiting. I only was able to dive Sunday and Monday before contracting the 'bug' Tuesday afternoon. Tuesday evening had severe chills. Wednesday in bed all day too weak to move about. Thursday and Friday spent recovering after taking CIPRO and Lomotil to counteract the situation. One charter group reportedly contacted CoCoView before coming to inquire about whether this problem had been

eliminated and told no problem existed. They came and were out of commission within 2 days. Owner Bill has spent considerable effort and money doing such things as totally redoing the kitchen refrigeration equipment, etc. — testing water, food, employees. Never found anything wrong that could be the cause. Most disturbing was/is the attitude on the part of some of the senior staff. Most notable the resort operations manager who sort of walked around with a chip on his shoulder and a “what’s the matter now?” attitude when various guests approached him on the subject. One employee went so far as to say that it seemed that “it was just CoCo View’s time in the barrel” for negative comments. Another passed it off to a virus from TACA airlines that “incubated” for the 2 days after arrival. After much ‘testing’ of many affected guests, on Friday evening it was widely reported that there was some sort of ‘mold’ on the native Honduras cheese that was different from U.S. cheese. Owner Bill immediately pulled cheese from the menu. I have never written anything like this before — thought it was just me — until I discovered the magnitude of the problem. Employees who interact with the guests on a daily basis told me that this problem is not an isolated situation — it has been on going. Paying for a week of diving and only getting in 2 days is not what I consider a value. I intend to request a refund from Roatan Charter — run by owner’s son. What do you think my chances are? Dive operation: As a PADI Divemaster, I checked out the emergency oxygen on our dive boat. Not operational. Had

other divemaster check other emergency kits — not operation and/or obsolete. Only on Friday did resort operations manager finally admit that they were aware of the situation and working to correct it. Do yourself and your fellow divers a favor — check out the Oxy kits in the future and see if they have been fixed.

CoCo View Resort, September 2003, Michael & Elaine Jerome, Beloit, WI. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 84 F.

Experience: 85 dives. CoCo View is still a very good dive operation as it was the last time we were there 3 years ago. Tulilo, our DM, was one of the best. We had a cabana and it was very comfortable. Food was good and plenty. Staff very friendly. Just a good dive operation overall.

Note from *Undercurrent*: The source of the intestinal problems that have plagued divers visiting CoCo View apparently has been discovered and eliminated. In late August 2003, the problem was attributed to Honduran cheese, and since the product has been eliminated the owners claim that divers have had no further difficulties. None have been reported to *Undercurrent*.

Fantasy Island, March 2003, Bill Bailey (wmb1410@msn.com), Sugar Land, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm, no currents. Our group went to Fantasy Island knowing several things to be aware of: sand fleas/no-see-ums, good food, unlimited shore diving, friendly/helpful staff, and laid-back atmosphere. And we were

not disappointed on any of these, though the sand fleas seemed to be less antagonistic than usual — probably due to liberal doses of DEET. We had a rare opportunity to observe orcas — a pod of eight killer whales — on the south side of the island. We rushed out to observe and got several great above water shots as they swam toward and under our boat. Some videographers captured some great underwater footage. Truly a rare occurrence so far south. Was told that they appear about the same time the last five to seven years. The boat captain (Kelly) and divemaster (Robert — also dive shop manager) were helpful, friendly, kind, cheerful, and went out of their way to make sure we all had the best experience — from the least experienced (<30 dives) to most experienced (>300 dives). The videographer (Luis) also assisted, pointing out critters while we cruised underwater. Robert made sure we saw plenty of stuff — sea horses, morays, squid, octopuses, crabs, lobsters, and pointed more fish than I can name or find in our ID books. We conducted several reef fish counts as a group. Even the most experienced divers were satisfied with the opportunity to see critters. Actually saw a spotted moray eat several fish on a night dive. Not too many big fish other than groupers. We tried to dive one day on the north side around the west end, but the water was so rough that several boats from the north side came around to the south to dive. We aborted and did one dive in that area and the second morning dive back at Mary's Place. We were able to dive any site that we wanted and did dive several

twice as there was an abundance of critters to see. Most dives were 10 to 20 minutes out, making best use of our time. Had we wanted to go farther from the resort, all we had to do was ask. To shore dive, the staff would ferry you and your equipment around to the Gazebo, along with tanks, give a slight briefing, and you were off. They would leave tanks there for divers to dive after hours (8 p.m.). The same area was great for snorkeling, and on our off day we saw almost as many fish as we saw diving, including a free swimming green moray that stayed around under the Gazebo. The food was plentiful, hot, and the variety was remarkable — fish, beef, chicken, and pork every night, an amazing salad bar, several vegetables, breads, and of course many desserts including several types of ice cream. The only hitch in the whole trip was checking in for the return flight on TACA — we were listed as open seated due to down computers, which meant that our group boarded last and had to find seats wherever. Lesson: have the resort verify your flight/seats midweek. The ownership has changed in the last several years. There is evidence of renovation of the dive shop area, the dining rooms, and general maintenance. Was told they had spent 3 million in updating water system, kitchen, and additional buildings. Some rooms could use a face lift, but all in all a good place to dive. Looking forward to a return trip. Each boat had separate rinse tanks for masks and for cameras. In addition, on shore there were also separate rinse tanks (two each) for cameras and equipment. They were kept full and

always had fresh clean water. I used digital so did not use processing.
(www.fantasyislandresort.com)

Fantasy Island, August 2003, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX. Group diving trip sponsored by Lubbock's "Best Little Dive Shop In Texas." We were flying "Sol" the new Honduran airline operated by "Falcon," a Miami Florida charter company originating out of DFW. Nice meal and free drinks — including "Salva Vida," the Honduran beer I grew to appreciate last time. A rep met our flight, requested our passports and \$2 each. All I had to do was spray for insects, contribute to the bag handling tip pool and get on the bus; the bag truck followed close behind. No problems yet! Checking in was easy enough for most as the hotel had our manifest: grab a free cocktail, present a credit card for incidentals, retrieve keys and passports, and wait for bags to appear in the correct rooms. Three of us single guys paid for private rooms, but the hotel had booked us three all in the same one barely big enough for two! Bad deal, wouldn't work at all. With promises of separate rooms on the morrow and free extra excursions for each, the other two made do in the one room, and when I balked at being the third in the room, they suggested shipping me to a nearby hotel for the night. "Not going to happen," was my response. Management found me a bungalow on the property for the night and I had my own room before dive time the next morning. Some didn't like the buffet meals, and while I agree they weren't up to my memories, they were good. I

was not happy with the Honduran coffee, a complete lack of decaf, and powdered milk stirred into warm water on request, but we worked that out. I treated water and made coffee and decaf in my room, filled my thermos to carry everywhere (after diving — 25% duty free Kaluha), and we compromised on the milk: Keep some made and cold for me! Done! Nice resort with spacious and well appointed rooms. Air conditioning, three boat dives and additional shore dives every day. Some of us did come down with a stomach bug. I was happy to see Willy, my divemaster from my last trip, who now runs the dive show as assistant manager — in part because I'd long felt I hadn't tipped him and "Robert," my previous trip's captain, well enough. I introduced myself, explained my problem, and laid an extra \$20 on him. He was impressed, and we shared old times from then on. Robert was now the shop manager, but ill, so he'd have to wait a few days. When I did the same for him, his reaction was more humble, but we all felt good that I was able to make amends. Our group was assigned two boats, with another Texas group from Houston taking a third, a fourth and fifth for the Italian group and other non-Texans at the resort, and no one suffered any crowding. Nitrox was tested; tanks, gear and divers were loaded; and we all got away almost on time from the first. Each group had a dive master in the water on every dive and a captain always on the boat by the radio — great outside of U.S. safety protocols. I did voice disappointment that they didn't do a verbal roll call after the

first dive, and from then on — the manifest was checked out loud every time, before we left the dock or any site. I am yet dismayed at how close other boats would pass while we had divers in the water. We'd generally start on a delightful wall following one direction until any diver hit 1,500 lbs, then head back over the top of the reef for an extended multilevel and safety stop — a super wall dive one way, a great reef dive on the return, with mind boggling invertebrates, a multitude of tiny to small fishes, many medium to large. A 9 am-10 minute trip and dive, back to the dock to resupply for the 11 am-10 minute trip, lunch and two hour plus surface interval, 2:30 pm dive trip for those sturdy enough for three — and one day five of us opted for a fourth! We boarded the little skiff for a special sundown trip to drop in on "The Prince Albert" wreck just off FI's private key, I was amazed that a few got seasick on those gentle rides; some had ear problems that slowed them down. On the fourth day, my boat took its turn going down to West End for a couple of drift dives and lunch at Half Moon Bay. Most rode the boat back, but I joined a family of four on a shared ride — dropping off locals in the more interesting parts of old Coxen Hole, not an excursion I'd recommend or repeat! I'm a self employed business man, and I did pass out my personal promo ball-points and even a few calculators with my name on them throughout the week, so the staff all called me by name quickly enough. Some opted for extra cost trips offered by outside vendors, details handled by the lovely lobby

concierge — a shark feeding dive, snorkeling or diving with dolphins, island and shopping tours, and I chose the channel crossing to Utila to hopefully dive with whale sharks. I started to board the Coco View "fast boat," but I looked around — asking, "Excuse me, but do you have life preservers?" "Oh no, we don't got none of those." I was floored, but I quickly ran back to my dive boat and borrowed a couple for the day. After that, I noticed the hombres seemed to be having some boat problems as we moved across the water, frowning when they tried to get more speed, and after a while — we turned back, but we didn't make it. A little boat brought us fluid for the leaking transmission, and I thought about pouring five gallons into a hot transmission on a fiberglass boat. I've seen a trans fluid fire, and I saw a boat burn once; really bad. I asked, but they didn't carry a fire extinguisher, either! That's when I donned my flotation device and offered one to the one minor on board without a parent. Fortunately, the feared explosion didn't happen, and we finally got back to our dock — how does that Gilligan song go? After "a three hour tour." They offered to get another boat and come back, but I doubt that any of us would ever get on another Coco View boat. I went to AKR for the dolphin dive and one of their dive masters who explained that since it was my first time there, I had to pass a simple checkout dive. The experience was neat, but one of the two dolphins, the one pictured on two of my Padi C-cards, had girlfriend problems and wasn't in the mood for

tourists, so we played with the other one alone. We three single guys had rented a van for the day, so they could do the dolphin snorkel, and so we could all shop West End the last night, but the General Manager reserved the banquet room to give us a special dinner, complete with lots of free wine. Most of us turned out for the beach party after dinner. Personally, for a single Texas cowboy and former Marine over a thousand miles from home, I think I behaved okay for the week — not mooning anyone until that seventh night! Everyone was on time with packed bags at 6:30 the next morning and we each waited patiently in the hot terminal as bags were inspected and checked in. The nonfunctioning AC was finally started, but the word was passed back along the line that the plane would be a few hours late. The AC never did really catch up.

Inn of Last Resort, June 2003, Leslie & Michael Bardelli (lbardelli@snet.net), New Milford, CT.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. Fourth trip in 4 years. ILR is a small resort that provides everything a diver could want. Great diving (of course), 3 meals a day, large clean room, privacy and space to relax, beautiful sunsets nightly, blue skies (weather permitting) and blue water. The diving is 3 single tank dives daily, with the boat leaving at 8:30, 10:30 am and 2:00 pm. Boat rides are generally 10 and 2; 15 minutes with a 2-tank boat dive weekly. Dives are generally lead by a DM, but if it is a moored dive you can go off on your

own. This trip there were more divers than we had experienced in the past, but the boat was split up with 2 DM's so the groups were small and staggered getting in and out of the water. Boats are large and spacious. Plenty of room for storage. Fresh water and fruit on the dives. DM's and Cpt's helpful and fun. The reefs are healthy and teaming with life. We prefer to go slow, the macro life should not be missed. There were plenty of turtles (almost daily), eagle ray, sting rays and green morays. If you have the opportunity dive with the videographer Pablo, he does wonderful video and finds lots of creatures. The resort is lush with vegetation. Trees and plant life surround the four buildings. The guest rooms are large with queen and 2 twin beds. They also have AC and 2 ceiling fans for comfort. The lagoon is a short walk and provides great snorkeling as well as a quiet place to read or just relax. The food is great! Homemade rolls daily by Casper. They are able to accommodate dietary restrictions as well. Internet access that you purchase minutes for. Several dogs roam the resort which kind of gives it an at home feel. They also have monkeys and parrots. All the staff is friendly and helpful. Have a problem, just let them know and every effort will be made to correct it. The boat rides are short, so change of film and batteries on shore. Each boat has a special rinse tank for cameras. (www.innoflastresort.com)

Inn of Last Resort, September 2003, Paul Costa (costainc@hotmail.com), Aurora, CO. Experience: 501-1,000

dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 83 to 88 F, calm. The rooms are spacious and comfortable. A/C always worked fine. Plenty of room for storage. All rooms I saw had queen and 2 twins. Beautiful setting in cove — no sandy beach so no-see-ums only problem when wind was not blowing. All resort staff from mgrs. Melissa + Vern to kitchen to dive shop were extremely helpful, friendly. Food was good and when we mentioned we preferred less fried they started serving grilled.

Lagoon area has nice setup for bbques and relaxing on hammocks and good shore dive area too. Internet access 24/7 but phone service iffy at best. Diving good for small to medium fish and decent coral but I preferred walls on North side where we went two days. We had 2 first timers and the diving was great for them. No photo pro or facility. Boat has no camera area, but most trips are short with a return to resort for interval and film change. Boat and shore have special camera only rinse tanks.

Paya Bay Resort, June 2003, Roger and Ruth Rouse (rcdennis@att.net), San Jose, CA. Water 80-83 F. Dives logged: over 300 each. After we read Russ Langley's glowing and positive report in the 2002 Chapbook about Paya Bay Resort we changed our minds and booked a week's reservation there following a week at Laguna Beach Resort on Utila. Everything Randy said we endorse in spades. We were the only two divers the whole trip except one afternoon when Staci (Miami) "discovered" this hideaway while driving around the island. A cou-

ple days earlier, we actually met Russ Langley as he and his wife had dropped by for a visit with Mervin and Lurlene. We thanked him for his good write-up about Paya Bay Resort and that is what had brought us here. We had a great week and the food was good — you get to chose from the restaurant's menu at each meal. Mervin and Lurlene are truly charming and warm people. The setting is excellent, the rooms are great, and the evening sunsets from the terraces outside the restaurant are just fantastic. Room, 3 meals per day, and 3 dives per day for one week was \$795 each. We agree with Russ' conclusion, "In Paya Bay and Roatan I found paradise."
(www.payabay.com)

Utila

Laguna Beach Resort, February 2003, Jim Boone (masterdvr@hotmail.com), Alexandria, VA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 75 to 76 F, choppy, surge. Really enjoyed the trip. Accommodations were right on lagoon with deck and dock out back. Enjoyed feeding the banded puffers and crabs. All personnel were helpful and friendly. Boats were excellent. Only complaint we had was the food. Had the pleasure of diving with Ben Davison who was there at same time. Deduced this later after I read his report. Laguna Beach is a truly beautiful place, very tropical. Diving was good. Lot's of lobster, big crabs, and lots of macro. On nondiving day took 2 person kayak through the mangrove swamp to other side of island. (Use sun block and DEET.) Great experience.

Bugs were really not a great problem shore side. Only was bitten a few times. Nondiving spouse can accompany on boat and snorkel. All gear washed and mounted by dive operation. Captain Wagner looked hard for whale sharks but they were not there at the time of our trip. (800-66-UTILA, res@utila.com)

Laguna Beach Resort, March 2003, Cheryl Morgavi Mire, Metairie, LA. Although Utila Dive Lodge certainly has an established reputation for providing good diving, Laguna Beach is a far more appealing resort with an equally satisfying dive operation. Of particular appeal to us were the 36-foot Newton dive boats made in Morgan City, Louisiana. From previous experience, we knew that these boats are exceptionally well-suited to diving. At Laguna Beach, the boats have secure, centrally located camera tanks, adequate space for dry gear, and — best of all — an onboard flushable toilet. Unlike conditions which we noticed at UDL, the boats were never overloaded and had plenty of shade space for us non-sunbather types. The staff made our visit truly special. Managers and dive crew are from Argentina. Luciano and his wife were particularly charming hosts. In the morning, the dining area was open with coffee, toast, and cereal with Andrea Bocelli playing in the background. At 7 a.m. the hot food was served — sunnyside-up or scrambled eggs pre-prepared to perfection, hot breads, meat, and fresh fruit. Lunchtime fare always included hot soup and a meal, never sandwiches as we had received at other resorts. Fresh

baked cookies and fruit rounded out the menu. Dinners included coconut shrimp, pasta, various fish and chicken dishes, and a special barbecue of Caribbean lobster. With key lime pie and conch chowder, we may actually have gained weight for the first time on a dive trip. The grounds are meticulously landscaped with tropical vegetation. Single and double cabanas built out over the water have been constructed by an on-site carpenter with a penchant for special ceiling work. We stayed in Cabin J (for Jackfish). The cabanas run from A to Q with the letters at the end of the alphabet located farther from the main dining area but closer to the fishing pier where a few residents dropped a fishing line nightly. The dive crew was beyond reproach. Marcela and Arturo were our divemasters. On each dive they each took half of our group down the reef. They assured us that we could dive our own profile. Nearly all of our dives were in excess of one hour. We dove Nitrox, using our usual conservative air computers. The dive masters changed tanks for us after every dive and cleaned the BCs in the evening. Dockside rinse tanks for wetsuits and cameras were the cleanest I have ever seen. The hanging area was perfectly arranged for safe evening storage so we could head back to the cabanas unencumbered. We did three boat dives a day on Sunday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. On Monday and Thursday, we were able to do a fourth night dive at around 6 p.m. Dinner was served after the dive around 8 p.m. After the night dive, Wagner greeted us with hot chocolate and hot towels. Wagner drives the

fastest boat on the island. Wagner has a nose for whale sharks. Every day, between the two morning dives, Wagner went on the prowl for the huge graceful fish. At first, the process seemed scary to me. We geared up with fins, masks and snorkels, then hung perched on the sides and back of the boat with our feet in the air racing through the open sea in pursuit of whale sharks. When the surface tuna and bubbles which are the telltale signs appeared, we heard Waggy's command — in the water now. Off we went, a jumble of fins and elbows. When the underwater bubbles cleared, we witnessed a 20- to 36-foot whale shark. During our week at Laguna, we swam with the lovely creatures four times. Each experience was more overwhelming than the next. Once the whale shark delayed his normally quick descent and swam with us across the surface for what seemed like a lifetime. Diving is similar Roatan. It is primarily wall diving, but Utila appears to have more sloping reefs and more labyrinthine swim-throughs. The seamounts are also impressive. We found the fish life more plentiful than Roatan. On one dive we saw whole schools of scrawled filefish, a species we have rarely noticed in groups larger than two. Angelfish as well were everywhere. On one dive we came upon a jewfish more than 4 feet in length, which we estimated to be over 300 pounds. We also had an extended photo op with an octopus in the daytime. Like Roatan and Belize, it is host to no-see-ums but when the tradewinds are active, they are not a problem. We found that an ordinary repellent was

sufficient but mandatory, especially before the night dives. Furthermore, travel to this part of the Caribbean is not easy, but for once we arrived with all of our luggage and returned home with it as well.

Laguna Beach Resort, March 2003, Chris Hylemon & Ish Phillips (ish2876@hotmail.com), Lakewood, CO. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm, surge. LBR far exceeded our expectations for a Caribbean dive resort. The cottage was always spotless when we returned from our morning dives. The a/c worked, and the screens were intact. Built-in work bench/table. Perfect for working on gear, cameras, storage space. The food was good and plentiful. We particularly enjoyed the dishes prepared with fresh fish and the lobster bar-b-que on the beach. The diving was also good! Walls, a wreck, shallow reefs, the drop-off dive in front of the resort, swimming with dolphins, and of course the whale sharks! There are so many dive sites around the island that we were able to dive "sheltered" sites every day regardless of the weather. From the time we arrived until we left we never had to touch any of our gear except to hang up our wet-suits. The crew and captain worked hard changing tanks, organizing the gear, end-of-day rinsing, and stowing the gear. The dive guides also did a good job pointing things out on the dives, although several of them got carried away with the tank bangers. One thing I wished for was dockside compressed air to dry camera housings after rinsing. We also enjoyed the sea

kayaks when we had the energy. An unexpected surprise was the fishing from the pier. We had an absolute blast hooking, but never catching, tarpon at night. Romy and Luciano (the managers) made it known that if you wanted anything, all you had to do was ask. We have never been to or don't know of any other place where you get so much value for so little money. Rinse tank on boat tended to be smaller and was right out in sun. No one briefed nonphotographers about dry table so they became a collection point for sunscreen, used drinking glasses, snacks.

Laguna Beach Resort, March 2003, Steve, Cindy, & Geoffrey (14 yrs.) Blair (blairokc@theshop.net), Edmond, OK. Dives logged: 246. Vis: 75 to 125 feet. Water: 79 F. Dive restrictions enforced: none although we agreed to time/depth before dive. Thoroughly enjoyed trip. It was Geoffrey's second dive trip. Snorkeled with whale sharks twice and dolphins once. Weather was calm and temperatures were 90 to 95 F. On one dive a hawksbill turtle swam with us for about 25 minutes. Saw spotted eagle rays and large stingrays. Large school of squid under boat. Black Hills seamount was great dive. Dive resort was well run. We had an a/c problem, and it was taken care of immediately. Facilities were comfortable. Both boats were comfortable and never crowded. Saw just about every fish imaginable, including a toadfish, yellow ray, hairy clinging crab, neck crab, and scorpion fish. Three divers saw seahorses. Food was not fancy, but we thought it was well prepared and tasty. All meals were buffet style. Bar was self service using

an honor system. They had decent wine at reasonable prices (\$15/bottle). No-see-ums were around but bearable — bring DEET.

Laguna Beach Resort, May 2003, Bill & Jeanne Downey (down-dive@attbi.com), Baden, PA.

Experience: More than 1,000 dives. Vis: 3 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. Laguna Beach Resort is the place to go on Utila to get away from the loud music in town. It's a lovely, well-kept complex of individual and duplex cottages, all overlooking the lagoon. Each room is nice-sized, with hardwood floors, small closet, open cupboards for clothes, and wonderful desks/shelves for cameras, suitcases, and the other stuff that usually ends up on your bed. Socializing takes place in the large bar/dining hall. Drinks are reasonably priced (local beers \$1.25, Pepsis \$1, mixed drinks \$1.50) and on the honor system. Meals were buffet style, with cereal always available for breakfast, as well as eggs, pancakes, etc., and fish or meat for supper, along with salad, vegetables, and dessert. Vegetarians are happily accommodated. The food ranged from good to excellent. The diving is normally a variety of walls, pinnacles, and sandy/rubble areas. It was windy most of the week we were there, making it uncomfortable mooring at some sites, so we did mostly wall dives. Some of the wall dives were nice, reminding us a little bit of Cuba. Diving the tops of the walls was surgy; we stayed just over the edge on the way back to the boat. Getting back on the boat sometimes got a bit interesting — watch out

for the boat platform. We did two morning boat dives and one afternoon boat dive; a fourth drop-off dive near the resort is also an option. We saw a couple of nurse sharks, a few turtles, and a nice variety of smaller fish and invertebrates. We saw whale sharks on two days, even giving up one dive to snorkel with them. They were about 30 feet long and began diving as soon as they realized we were in the water. Two night dives are included in the package; our first night dive was also our first ever "sand storm" dive due to the combination of shallow depths and wind. The second night dive was canceled, also due to the weather. The dive boats are comfortable and never crowded. Our guides, Marcela and Arturo, were accommodating and slow enough that we photographers could actually keep them in sight! The sand fleas were the only bad thing about the resort, even though we had windy conditions most of the week. They laugh at anything except DEET. They weren't a problem in the rooms, but they were everywhere else including the dining hall. You must be persistent and regular in the use of repellent!

Laguna Beach Resort, May 2003, Harold & Jan Bedoukian, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Dives logged: 300. The management and staff try to make your stay as pleasant and carefree as possible. The resort is good "basic." There are 18 cottages along the lagoon, which were always clean and comfortable. The food, served buffet style, was plentiful and good. The water at the resort is not potable, but there was an ample supply

of drinking water in our room. There are no telephones. There is one television in the game room with a limited channel selection. During one of the dives a diver lost her weight belt 10 minutes into the dive and ballooned to the surface from a depth of 85 feet. This was followed by a series of errors on the part of the divemaster. The dive was not aborted. The divemaster did not go up to see about the diver but continued the dive. When one of the other divers went up to see about the diver and asked about oxygen, there was no oxygen on board. The diver was transported to the decompression chamber. Fortunately she did not have to go into recompression. The diver did not panic and exhaled all the way to the surface. That divemaster was not seen again and when we asked, we were told that he had been fired. The dive boats were great, clean, easy to board, and not over crowded. Wagner and Lee were excellent captains and Norman was an excellent divemaster. He tried to make sure every dive was "the best." His enthusiasm was infectious, and the entire dive boat benefited from having him. Utila has some of the best dive sights that we have seen in the Caribbean. We did see a whale shark several different times one day. Searching for the whale sharks is done at the surface interval, which is a great way to pass the time.

Laguna Beach Resort, June 2003, Laura Todd (bucknsnoop@aol.com), Arcata, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, surge, no currents. Top notch operation from the location to

the dive services and great staff. The setting is on a peninsula well away from town; peaceful. Your bungalow, with its own dock, backs up to a mangrove lagoon and fronts on the ocean. Accommodations are quite simple, but large and well maintained; most have a/c. The food was divine, home-cooked and served buffet style. Always two main dish choices and a full breakfast. Kitchen staff will also make you a snack anytime; no English spoken though. Honor bar with lots of supplies but no bartender. The managers are organized, customer oriented, genuinely interested in making sure you have a good time. They have two big, powerful boats that were uncrowded with six to eight — could feel full at capacity of 16. Each had shade, heads, oxygen, and radio. They also have the kind of tank racks that are cut down in front, a small but nice detail that means you don't need help to stand up with all your gear on. Drinking water and homemade cookies supplied. The staff waits on you hand and foot — all you need to do is remember your personal stuff and rinse your wetsuit. The dive-masters are great at seeking out the little stuff. They don't skimp on the gas like a lot of places do; it was routine to go all the way around the island for the morning's diving. Divemaster Jen tended to be a little conservative profile-wise, usually asking folks to stay above 80 feet, but all the critters tended to be at that depth or above. Experienced divers with computers were allowed to start deeper. The north side of the island could be quite swelly, with the south fairly calm and the shallow west side with the tiny cays covered with

fishing villages always gorgeous. Topside the weather ranged between hot and damn hot. I was skeptical coming from a week on Roatan where we saw almost no animals, but Utila is packed with wonderful critters, admittedly mostly small. They have a lot of the pretty reef fish: queen angels, rock beauties, the jewel-like juvenile yellow tail damsel fish, and spotted drums both juvenile and adult, including one whopper about one foot long. There was a variety of eels, balloon, porcupine, and burrfish, toadfish and scorpionfish, several hawksbill turtles. Invertebrates included plenty of lettuce leaf sea slugs, a few nudibranchs, decorator crabs, and of course the squid squad of 32 who contemplated us for quite a while. Bring your big book of blennies — there are tons here from the teensy secretary blennies to quill fins. A couple yellow and regular sting rays. Then there were the eagle rays that let us get within eight feet and actually slowed down and stayed at one depth, so we could really see them. No whale sharks, and the promised seahorses did not materialize. There is great snorkeling right in front of the resort, and some decent shells wash up on the rocky beach west of the main building. Two adorable chocolate lab puppies who insisted on "helping" with everything tended to poop pretty much everywhere, and it was not cleaned up timely. Also, the ocean and beaches had a dishearteningly large amount of trash. Even so, it was a great trip. Local flights always go back to the mainland before going to the next island, and their flight schedules are pretty random, often leaving early.

They do not synchronize well with a couple of the international flights into Roatan, notably Sol Air. Any trip to Utila alone may necessitate an overnight in La Cieba. The main booking agent, Utila Tours, knows the drill and will get you set up. Simple bucket for cameras on boat. Dry table tended to get taken over with other stuff. No processing at resort.

**Laguna Beach Resort, June 2003,
Roger Dennis and Ruth Rouse
(rcdennis@att.net), San Jose, CA.**

Water: 80-83 F. Dives logged: over 300 each. Dive restrictions enforced within 130 ft, 60 min. max. Recommend taking local air service from Roatan vs. riding the ferry. Ferry trip is a long ride. Food is okay but nothing really exciting. Rooms were fine but the small bugs are a problem — bring your DEET. Construction in progress to bury new electrical cables ran right through the resort. Both boats full most of the week — try to get on the larger boat if you can as the smaller one is slower and short of space. No whale sharks during the week. Dive sites are good and well documented — check out their web site for details and site descriptions. Water was comfortable in just our swimming suits the whole week — we are warm water divers. No real complaints. We will return again some day.

Utila Divers, Mango Inn, August 2003, Pete Wennermark (pwennerm@aol.com), Longmont, CO.

Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 82-86 F. Experience: 450 dives. The Mango Inn, affiliated with Utila Divers, is inexpen-

sive and has excellent food, including a wood-fired pizza oven. Utila Divers specializes in training from basic to instructor. The DMs were control freaks and overly conservative with regard to safety stops. It was difficult for an experienced diver to do their thing. Macro photos are impossible since DMs would not allow you close enough to reef or subjects for the shots. They said the photos would kill the coral. Without whale sharks or mantas, Utila is only average Carib diving. Subsistence fishing has wiped out all sizeable fish, including conch. We did, however, snorkel with 2 pods of porpoise and saw several 3ft barracuda and one loggerhead turtle. The coral is average, but not as colorful as most locations. There were an abundance of purple sea fans and purple soft corals. According to boatmen, there have been no whale sharks seen since April '03. This was disappointing, as I was under the impression that late Aug was w.s. season. The price of diving, food, and accommodations is excellent and the island culture is fascinating.
(www.utiladivecentre.com)

Utila Dive Center, Mango Inn, October 2002, Allen Harris, APO, AA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. Utila Dive Center is a pleasant, competently run operation. The boats could use a fresh coat of paint, since it was chipping and flaking off on the dive benches. Accommodations at the Mango Inn were basic, in the shared rooms. The biggest problem was the mosquitoes in the shared bath. Spend the extra money and get a room with a private bath. Utila

is an interesting island; however, there are limited beaches.

Utila Lodge, September 2002, Steve Neal (steveaneal@aol.com),

Fairfield, TX. Vis: 60 to 100 feet.

Water: 84 to 88 F. Dives logged: 239.

Dive restrictions enforced: 130 limit, 1 hr. limit. One week with Shark

Research Institute at Utila Lodge. Saw 15-foot, snorkeled with, and took pictures. Later a 30-foot surfaced beside the boat, but no one was ready and no pictures were taken. Only two we saw all week. One day we were sitting on a bait ball watching birds and tuna and watching for whale sharks; Laguna Beach boat bee-lined for us from five miles away. Twenty minutes later they arrived and parked 50 yards from our boat. As luck would have it a whale shark surfaced by them, and they snorkeled; we missed it. Very bad deal. Willie, the boat diver, lived up to his reputation, as did Albert the divemaster. Food at lodge was good. Rooms clean. Boat towels \$4 for the week.

Utila Lodge, October 2002, Bill and Karen Cousins, Falls Church, VA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 10 to 50 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. The best parts of this trip were getting away from our intense jobs, water warm enough to dive with only a microprene vest, two frogfish and one seahorse, and finding a beautiful and empty cowrie shell. The distressing parts will take a little longer to recount. The two American Airlines flights to Miami and San Pedro Sula were roomy and pleasant. No food though — eat in the airports. We were

missing a bag by the time we arrived San Pedro Sula. It took two more flights to get from mainland Honduras to Utila — no air conditioning aboard. Utila is unattractive, rundown, and poverty-stricken. Utila Lodge was clean and rustic. The staff was pleasant and courteous, and we appreciated their efforts. Showering was a daily challenge due to low water pressure and unreliable water temperatures. The food was hearty and tasty. No-see-ums and mosquitoes were bad, even in the dining room. Our group of 14 experienced divers had one DM, who was adequate. Nitrox was \$6/tank; our fills were rarely more than 2,900. The 17 dives, sadly, were mediocre and uninteresting. Reef destruction was shocking. Coral rubble everywhere. Soft corals were healthier but not pretty. We saw skimpy numbers of fish. Tangs, parrotfish, and an occasional queen trigger, a couple groups of nice yellowtail snapper, one or two big Nassau grouper, two morays, two scrawled filefish. There were no big boys — sharks, mantas, whale sharks — but we did have dolphins twice surfing the bow of the boat as we returned to shore. One dive blended into the other with nothing outstanding. Utila Lodge is in a cluttered, congested area of the town along a bay with several bars nearby, playing raucous music until the wee hours. We could hear the beat and words to the songs even over the drone of the AC. One night, at the bar Coco Loco, a fellow diver suggested we check out the restroom. Lifting the commode lid, one finds the ocean below. This is not a lovely tropical island.

Utila Lodge, February 2003, Susan Freedman (suzysu@hotmail.com), Washington, DC. Experience: More than 1,000 dives. Vis: 50 to 85 feet. Water: 80 F, choppy. Small, homey facility with eight rooms off the water (two floors of four rooms). It's next door to the Utila Dive College, so you'll run into many more folks from all over the world into diving. Very friendly, easygoing. Not a lot for non-divers, not a lot of amenities. Boat captain Willy and our divemaster Albert were excellent! One morning we ventured into the deep blue for whale sharks and found them on four separate occasions. Laguna Beach's boat and others (rival companies) would follow us because Willy had a knack of finding these gentle giants, so once a crowd formed we'd head off to find more on our own again — which Willy was a pro at. So one day we jumped in on snorkel with whale sharks four times — from 18 to 35 feet long. Another day Willy found them again once for others not on boat earlier in the week, but I relaxed and watched the shadows on board enjoying the new excitement. The diving: good to excellent. So many pristine corals and small nudibranchs and tunicates and sea horses and juvenile spotted drums and more. Lots of schooling horse eye jacks, blue tangs, an old, large turtle, and more. Schools of dolphins chased and led our boat on more than one occasion. The boat was good, easy on and off if you had any common sense. Food was OK, most of time good or tolerable, sometimes less, which is par for the course with remote all-inclusives. There is no real airport — more

a giant black top on a field, and Utila is not in airline computer systems. I had mechanical problems with my first flight out of D.C. to hub in Houston, so I missed it, and it took 72 hours to finally reach Utila via Belize, El Salvador, and the mainland. Being so remote, airlines were not helpful, and Roatan Charter was absolutely horrendous. But seeing the whale sharks — sometimes just a few inches from me — made it all worth the pain. The lodge owners, staff, and bar were great, too. If you don't mind no TV, no e-mail, no phones, and needing a lot of bug spray, this place is excellent.

Utila Lodge, May 2003, Doug Kersten, Angola, IN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm, no currents. Utila Dive Lodge was excellent and the service was the same. Rooms were nice with the dive boats docked right outside the dining area. We had a 6 am flight out of Utila with a 5+ hour layover in San Pedro Sula, but the manager of the Dive Lodge was able to arrange for the flight out of Utila to be later (10 am). That was great! Diving was beautiful and the captain of the boat went out of his way to locate a whale shark for us. On Friday (our last dive) he succeeded. It was awesome. The weather was beautiful and the oceans calm.

Utila Lodge Resort, May 2003, Sheri Guzick (sheri.ray@sbcglobal.net), Dallas, TX. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, choppy. Utila Lodge Resort is an all-inclusive that is close and conven-

ient to both diving and town. Resort is built over the ocean. No bug problems, probably due to constant breeze. Staff is friendly and food is generally good. Only attire required is a bathing suit, shorts, T-shirt. The hammocks were great for surface intervals. Variety in diving, some strong currents. Many locations had lovely coral; large schools of fish; crab; lobster; lots of sand channels between the reefs; eels; manta and eagle rays, a couple of sites were too silty. A whale shark passed right beneath us! Three dives/day for 5 days, 2 on last day. Dove Nitrox. The dive masters should be more familiar with the sites and conditions. Saturday to Saturday with 17 dives, food, accommodations cost \$850/pp. Of course the bar tab at the end of the week jacked that up a bit. Separate tank for cameras and other gear.

Utila Lodge, August 2003, Michael Holden (mikebeckyholden@msn.com), Clinton Township, MI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy, no currents. The accommodations are simple, but there is no view, no beach, no shore diving to speak of (no coral). However, the diving is superb. Lots of pelagics, great reef fish, lots of juveniles, varying coral structure, sea mounts, etc. The lodge is attached to a diving college and there is a free fish ID class given to lodge guests — highly recommended. And then there are the whale sharks!! We only saw one as the beginning of August is only the beginning of the season which peaks in September. Prior to our one shark it had been five weeks since there was a

sighting (don't go in June or July for whale sharks — aren't any). Seeing the gray blotch in the ocean resolve itself into a whale shark is an awesome sight! Snorkeling with one is even more amazing! No photo operation as such, a wet box was on board, and the captain handed down the camera, but there was no place to get film developed, no repair facilities. You are on your own. But subject matter abounds.

JAMAICA

A lovely island with plenty of hotel amenities (and lots of swinging-singles and couples-only all-inclusives), but the impoverished population (22 percent of whom are unemployed) eats anything a fisherman can scoop up, and you can hardly blame them. ... Experienced divers will become bored on the first dive, but the diving's okay for beginners (although the local divemaster may be poorly trained. ... Jamaica lies in the hurricane belt.

Breezes Runaway Bay, January 2003, Bill and Kathy Carstens (bkcarst@new.rr.com), Kaukauna, WI. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy, surge. The rental scuba gear (all included in the price of the resort) was in good shape, but some of the full foot fins had seen better days. Runaway Bay is over-fished. We saw almost no fish on the dives but there were quite a few sergeant majors and some octopuses when we snorkeled off shore. The coral is alive but not