

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

too colorful. The shipwreck of the Reggae Queen is interesting for wreck divers but not penetrable. There is no shore diving allowed, and they really don't want you snorkeling outside the swimming area, which unfortunately happens to be where the reef is. This is a nice resort vacation with a dive or two thrown in at no cost, but it is not a dive destination. The divemasters were not overly enthusiastic about their jobs and seemed rather pleased not to have to go out when it was windy. There is nothing to do outside the resort. If you want to shop, Ocho Rios is fun. Work out a cab price in advance and have them pick you back up. (www.BreezesRunawayBay.com)

Negril Scuba Center, December 2002, Brian Tomsic, Ann Arbor, MI.

Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F. Dives logged: 265. Dive restrictions enforced: Divemasters set time limits on dives. No freedom to wander from group. Negril and Jamaica in general have seen a serious decline in condition of reefs due to sewage runoff from nearby rivers. Everyplace we went was dead or dying, covered with green algae. Over fishing has done the rest. The most interesting fish were in traps. Did see one eagle ray. N.S.C. seems to cater solely to its students for dive sites. Depths and bottom times are set to their needs. Divemasters shooting to the surface with no safety stop set a rotten example for students. I go to Jamaica for Jamaica and dive because the water's there. It does get depressing, though. (www.divenegril.com)

MEXICO

Once Cozumel was visited mainly by divers, but now cruise ships daily disgorge packs of shoppers who descend on the night clubs, restaurants, and bars galore, and sidewalk hustlers hawking condos, and little plaster statues of guys wearing big hats leaning on saguaro cactuses. ...

Spectacular dives do exist, but many operators are reluctant to visit these sites, especially if the divers aboard have mixed experience levels. Much of Cozumel's diving is deep or fast-current drift dives. Beginning divers should select other destinations.

... Carry surface-signaling devices for both day and night (strobe, safety sausage, etc.) and stay with your dive guide or group.

... Dive operators vary in quality and safety. ... The best diving is in spring and summer; it can be rainy during the fall (hurricane season) and winter. ... Cozumel is one of the biggest travel bargains, with accommodations ranging from the inexpensive downtown hotels to diver hangouts to high dollar hotels. ... While there are dive operations up and down the Yucatan Coast, only Maya Ha in the south regularly visits the Chinchorro Banks.

Cabo San Lucas

Amigos Del Mar, Solmar Suites, September 2003, Betty Ekmanian
(Jagian34@aol.com), Bermuda