

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](http://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](http://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](mailto:Jagian34@aol.com)), Bermuda

**Dunes, CA.** Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm, choppy. Excellent organization; divemaster/guide Julio knew the area dive sites and pretty much left us alone to do our thing. Diving was relaxed and while not “adrenaline” diving, was comfortable. Lots of schools of tropicals; huge bumpnose parrots. Cabo Pulmo by far the best diving and viz. Trip cut short by hurricane Marty. Overall the dive shop personnel and divemasters/crew knowledgeable, accommodating. Usual sea lions not present, probably due to oncoming Marty. Have dove with Amigos Del Mar over the years and am comfortable with their operations.  
([www.amigosdelmar.com](http://www.amigosdelmar.com))

## Cancun

**Aqua World, January 2003, Didirk and Mary Kay Voss (ypmm@aol.com), Mill Creek, WA.** Dives logged: 80-100. Vis: 70+ feet. Water: 73 F. Dive restrictions enforced: depth and time. Very large, professional operation, and were flexible with reservations. Good package deals to include caverns (cenotes), wrecks. Cozumel trip, etc. On time and good treatment of divers. Dove the plan, with divemaster. Usually on the clock, but some let you dive your computer. Interesting sites with good briefings. Even with a group of 18 in Cozumel, the boat was large enough to handle all of us, and we divided into groups based on experience. A continental breakfast was provided on shore before leaving.  
([www.aquaworld.com.mx](http://www.aquaworld.com.mx))

**Manta Divers (Cancun), Scuba Staff Divers (Cozumel), November 2002, K Reis (kurt@hubcaps-wheelcovers.com), Brunswick, OH.** Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F. Experience: 51-100 dives. Choppy, currents. Westin Regina at the southern end of the hotel zone is a wonderful place, great beach and plenty for the youngster to do. Manta Divers took us out on a two-tank dive on Monday and took us to Cozumel on Wednesday. Horseshoe Reef, 62 feet, 40 minutes. Horseshoe Reef had a ripping current, the kind that keeps you vertical on the descent line. After settling on the bottom I notice that my dive computer had flooded (still can't figure out why). Fortunately it is not air integrated so I am able to do the dive. Nice healthy reef, huge schools of snappers and grunts. Many oversized angels, and a nice mix of large damsels and various other reef fish. The fish life in Cancun is amazing. Visibility: 60 to 70 feet. Water: 82 F. Grampin Reef, 58 feet, 42 minutes. Less current on Grampin Reef, nice fish life once again on the patchy reefs. Spotted two large nurse sharks. Cozumel — picked up and on the way to Playa De Carmen and the ferry. Our guide was the divemaster from Monday, Marcella. She was a terrific DM, always finding the things on the reefs that I would easily miss. We are shooting for the 10:00 ferry. We arrive at 9:55, jump out of the van, and make a run for it dive gear and children in tow. Of course the ferry leaves without us. (This day is not starting out well.) We have an appointment with a dive boat at 11:00 and cannot get another ferry until 11:00. Marcella

calls the Cozumel dive shop, and they fortunately agree to wait for us. We finally arrived at the dive shop — nice folks who really went out of their way to wait for us. My wife went off to shop, and I was rushed out to the boat. The seas were rough that day; the port authority was only allowing boats 40 feet and larger out. Several people were hanging over the side on the way out, chumming for pelagics. Due to the conditions we were unable to go out to any of the deeper walls (bummer), so we dove on two different shallow reefs. Yucab Reef, Cozumel, 65 feet, 43 minutes. I could not believe the visibility and the beauty of the reefs. Gigantic coral heads and huge reef fish. Tons of lobster large enough to feed a family of four. One of my goals was to find a spotted moray eel, and we found three!! Did several swim-throughs and just drifted along with the current enjoying paradise. Dive #4: Paradise Reef, Cozumel, 38 feet, 46 minutes. Shallow area of the reef close to where the cruise ships are parked. We could not have been more than 500 yards from them, a disaster waiting to happen for the reef. The dive itself was nice, little current with 100 feet plus visibility. Patchy coral heads to start out, but became more dense as the dive progressed. Once again many large angels and other reef fish. The dive-master found an elusive splendid toadfish. Aqua World in Cancun. Cattle boat with 20 divers, only two certified divers on the boat. Everyone else was doing a resort dive. The other certified diver was with his wife doing her first dive, so I was on my own. They split us up into four groups, each with one

divemaster, and I was in group four. The DM let me go in before group one was even geared up. He just asked that I stay near the anchor line and join up once my group descended. This worked out well, it took my group 25 minutes to get in the water so this gave me a 60-minute dive. Dive #5: Manchones Reef, Cancun, 30 feet, 60 minutes. Shallow dive, large schools of fish, and patchy coral head. This visibility was down a bit from previous dives, probably due the close proximity of the site to Isla Mujeres. ([www.mantadivers.com](http://www.mantadivers.com), [www.cozumel-diving.net/staff](http://www.cozumel-diving.net/staff))

### **Manta Divers, June 2003, T.J.**

**Labinsky.** Next to Fat Tuesday's Dock and owned by Mimi. They only have five to six divers on the boat max. It was my son's second dive (his first one was a bad experience in Aruba). Both my husband (who has been diving for over 20 years) and my son (who was little apprehensive) had the best experiences (two dives). They took 72 pictures, and my husband hardly ever takes pictures! Everything from beautiful fish, reefs, eels, manta rays, turtles, barracudas, sharks, etc. My son can only dive to 40 to 50 feet at his age, so walls are a little bit too deep, but not for long.

**Sunset Divers, March 2003, John van der Hagen** ([vdh5@chartermi.net](mailto:vdh5@chartermi.net)), **Baxter, MN.** Vis: 70 to 80 feet. Water: 75 to 80 F. Dives logged: 160. Dive restrictions enforced: 500-750 psi return. As a subscriber for the past several years, I have enjoyed the frank commentaries from readers around the

country. The no-holds-barred attitude is a refreshing change from some of the financially directed magazine articles. I was lodging at the Sunset Lagoon Resort in Cancun, and the Sunset Divers (located at the resort) were more than willing to accommodate our group of four divers. A two-tank dive at Sunset was \$55US, including weights and belts. Rental was extra, although our divemaster, John, let us use a BCD free of charge when my wife's inflator hose broke. Located on the gulf side, a mere 20- to 25-minute boat ride, we four dove Punta Negra and Banderos sites. A mild to moderate current turned our trip into a drift dive. Schools of grunts, schoolmasters, and yellowtails hugged a splendid reef with some of the finest Elkhorn coral formations I have ever seen. Eels were plentiful. Queen angelfish and french angelfish were common, in twos and threes. Several scorpionfish lounged on coral heads. Groupers, damselfish, durgons, wrasses, and butterflyfish darted in and out of crevices. A nurses shark or two could be found on most dives. Small lobsters and brittlestars could be found in some crevices. These sites were truly a jewel of a find, with more plentiful reef life than I have seen at some sites in Cozumel, Bahamas, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. We traveled to the sites in a well-used, six-pack boat, supported by our divemaster, John, a skipper and a first mate. John gave a detailed and clear briefing. The entire crew was helpful, seeing to our bags, setting up our tanks, helping us with entries and exits, and finally rinsing off all our gear at the end of our dives.

## Cozumel

**Advanced Divers, Presidente Intercontinental, June 2003, Jack Gibson, Dallas, TX.** Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, currents. It's been nearly two years since we visited Cozumel. Many things have changed, but not the great service and diving by Ricardo Madrigal and his team on the Careyitos. These guys know how to take care of experienced divers. The Careyitos is a 12-foot-wide, 38-foot-long Bertram. Generally there will be no more than 10 divers on board. She doesn't zip out to the reef and back but gives a comfortable and relaxing ride with a large sun deck above and shaded deck below. I always smile to myself when the "fast boats" zip by us, pounding and soaking their passengers. They avoid crowded sites and go out of their way to honor their guests' requests. On our last day they put us on one of my favorites, Punta Sur. Ricardo led us expertly through all the swim-throughs in one dive. I'm told that some dive shops only lead their groups through one or two of them. Of course, the guests, experienced divers, weren't climbing all over each other in the tunnels and silting them out, either. We are limited only by our air supply and computers. All of our dives were 60 minutes or more. These guys take care of you. In the water they are unobtrusive and there only when we need them to point out an interesting creature or navigate the Cozumel currents. After the first dive, they switched our gear to fresh tanks and take it all down for us at the end of the day. Between

dives we enjoyed a lunch of ham sandwiches, fresh fruit, and tostadas with the absolute best fresh guacamole followed by a leisurely siesta for our hour and a half surface interval. We've been diving with Ricardo Madrigal and his team for eight years, but they perform at the same superb level for everyone. ([www.advanceddivers.com](http://www.advanceddivers.com), [www.cozumel.intercontinental.com](http://www.cozumel.intercontinental.com))

**Akumal Dive Center, Oasis Akumal, April 2003, Richard Powers**

([powersvzb@aol.com](mailto:powersvzb@aol.com)) **Haslett, MI.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, choppy, surge. Oasis Akumal is a nice, quiet, small property with a nice beach and decent snorkeling. The food is good and the staff is friendly and helpful. The rooms are relatively large with a unique shower/tub area with portholes. We had a second floor room on the beach. About half of the hotel is an Italian travel club, but they have separate facilities for the most part and never caused any problems. Akumal is close to Tulum, the only major Mayan ruins on the Caribbean. The collective vans on the highway only cost about a dollar from Akumal to Tulum. The onsite dive shop was not helpful. They only sell dives onsite. Their boats left from elsewhere. They pushed dive trips to Cozumel. Dived with Akumal Dive Center, who we dove with in 1997. The service and prices were still good (\$25/dive). They take credit cards but you get a better deal if you pay cash. They picked us up at the resort and had lockers for equipment storage. Chepo, who was also there in 1997, is a good dive master and points out a lot of stuff.

The diving is on spur and groove reefs. The boats are small and fast. Entry is by backroll and exits are by handing all equipment up and then climbing a ladder on the side of the boat. Exits can be difficult when it is rough. The boat follows the divers and picks them up at the end of the dive. We saw a lot of turtles, including two huge loggerheads. We also saw a school of six large barracuda chasing each other. It is amazing how fast they can move. We also saw a large school of Southern Sennet. There were a few small grouper and medium numbers of the usual tropicals. The number and size of the fish is well below Cozumel but it is a nice area for a change of pace. It was rough the first few days because of a storm and there was no diving one day. It is usually fairly rough, especially in the afternoons as the easterly trade winds pick up. The dives are generally 5-15 minutes from the shop.

([www.akumaldivecenter.com](http://www.akumaldivecenter.com))

**Aldora Divers, Coral Princess, July 2002, Alisse & Dennis Ryan, Seattle, WA.**

Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F. Dives accrued: 100. Dive restrictions enforced: stay with DM. Hotel: located north of town, so is quiet and inexpensive, but dive operators will not pick up from hotels north of town. Had to meet boat at their pier. Hotel was clean and comfortable. A/C worked. They have a nice pool with swim-up bar and sandy "beach" area which is actually a rocky shore with man-made sand area. Happy hour every evening at 5 p.m. Food was inexpensive, but fair in quality. Staff is pleasant and accommodating. Dive Operator: More expen-

sive, but good service and you get more bang for your \$ with steel 102 (for women) or 120 (for men) tanks. They mixed groups of experienced and inexperienced divers. One couple complained, and they remedied it the next day. Dives were beautiful — especially Palancar Bricks, Columbia Deep, and Punta Sur with the Devils Throat. We lost count of the number of turtles we saw. We also saw the splendid toadfish endemic only to Cozumel. Currents are swift and I would not recommend Cozumel for early novice divers. ([www.aldoradivers.com](http://www.aldoradivers.com))

**Aldora Divers, Casa Del Mar, November 2002, Jean Anne Booth, Austin, TX.** Experience: More than 1,000 dives. Vis: 70 to 120 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy, currents. Aldora remains an excellent dive operation, running steel tanks (120s for men, 100s for women) and all-computer dives in small groups. They work hard to assign divers of like skills together and are reasonable about deciding where to go for a dive and what the time/depth limits will be (all drift diving, so everyone pretty much needs to stay together). They are almost always on time (usually early!) and offer long surface intervals at local beach spots between dives. Omar and Memo (Bill) are knowledgeable and easygoing divemasters, fun to be with. In late November, the eagle rays are everywhere! Good handling of a drift dive when the group is mixed, some photographers, some not.

**Aldora Divers, Meson San Miguel Hotel, February 2003, David P. Chappel ([david\\_c526@yahoo.com](mailto:david_c526@yahoo.com)),**

**Orlando, FL.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, currents. Good operation if you are a beginner. The divemasters are professional and provide excellent briefings. This is not, however, an outfit exclusively for intermediate level and above divers. The dives are determined based on the skill level of the least experienced diver(s) on the boat. We made duplicate trips to the same dive sites. Although we were using steel 100s and computers, they were unnecessary given the type of diving we were doing (shallow bland). This is an expensive outfit. They charge \$80 for a two-tank dive. The going rate on the island is about \$60 for a two-tank trip. They will tell you that they charge extra because they are using steel (100) tanks and provide a “superior” dive experience. I do believe they are capable of delivering a superior experience if you bring your own group — and your abilities are reasonably close. Unfortunately, we had mixed groups (half advanced, half beginner) each of the five days and ended up diving beginner profiles for four of the five days. They are a high cost/no frills operation. For beverages, expect warm water. They are absolutely watching their profit margins closely. In all of my years of diving Cozumel, I guess I’ve become spoiled by the \$60 operations that take out six divers and provide ice cold soft drinks, water, and snacks and take out two divemasters to accommodate varying levels of experience. Aldora does not provide this type of experience. I guess I’d rather go with aluminum 80s and some high voltage diving for 35 minutes versus

sucking on a steel 100 on a crowded shallow reef for 90 minutes.

**Aldora Divers, Bahia Hotel, March 2003, Bill Chambers (wchambers@pipeline.com), Brooklyn, NY.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, currents, no currents. Aldora remains a top quality operator — professional, safety conscious, knowledgeable, and always ready to accommodate their divers. Site selection was up to the divers on board. Enjoyed diving with the 120 cu.ft. HP steel tanks, with all dives about an hour and leisurely surface intervals back on the beach. DMs (Jorge, Omar, Bill, Mateo, Memo) were universally excellent and gave good briefings. Watched carefully over less experienced divers. Bill is the best I've encountered at finding small stuff and carries a magnifying glass to assist. The Bahia Hotel is relatively small — plainly furnished, but convenient to downtown right on the water front two blocks south of the town plaza, quiet, squeaky clean, and a great bargain at \$50/night. Rooms have A/C, TV, phones, and refrigerators, and there's free Internet access in the lobby. Aldora does not have a dedicated camera bucket on board their six-packs but will readily hand camera equipment to divers after back-roll entry.

**Aldora Divers, June 2003, Roger Zander (rwzander@netzero.net), Dearborn, MI.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, no currents. 6 days with Aldora. Their equipment and boats were in good repair, they picked us up in San Miguel at their pier and the Divemaster

Jorge was good with supervising newer divers. The owner Dave, happened to be in town, a great guy but he's not out on the boats. The dive shop would rinse BCDs only, not wetsuits — that's a nuisance. I asked for a freshwater camera rinse bucket 3 days in a row without success. There was only warm water on boat to drink, no juice, soda or ice. One day, we "ran out of reef" twice due to missing the start of the reef. We arrived at a night dive site with 2 nonworking lights and no spare batteries. Fortunately, divers had pocket lights to substitute. A typical profile was 30 minutes on a reef or wall followed by 40 minutes on a sandy bottom. The rule was to return to the boat with 500 psi, our group usually had 1,000 psi remaining due to DM ending the dive and we got bored looking at sand. We were using the larger capacity tanks with DIN connectors, yet we never really benefitted with higher quality bottom time. Aldora has a standard 2 hour surface interval which is too long for my liking, especially since we had relatively normal nitrogen loading profiles. The 7:30 am departure got us to the dive sites first, but the sites were also darker and in shadows that early in the day. For the remainder of our trip, we chartered a local DM, captain, and boat with tanks for 5 days. Using the standard Aluminum 80s, we repeated some of the Aldora trip divesites. We had equal dive profiles and returned to the boat with over 300 to 500 psi. The DM and captain went to our choice of sites, always putting us on the reef at the beginning. The conclusion we came up with is "why pay more?" The highest price does not

equal highest quality. Our charter worked out to \$50 for 2 tanks per day and only 5 divers on the boat. Aldora is nearly double that price with 7 divers on the boat.

**Aldora Divers, Presidente Inter-Cont., July 2003, JoAnn Doino-Ingersoll, NJ.** Dives logged: 75. Vis: 30-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: Descend and ascend together. No more than 6 divers were taken out at anytime. They took care of all your equipment from the first day to the last — you don't have to lug it off the boat to soak it, they do it all for you. Your equipment is set up on the boat every morning. Nice divemasters, professional, care about you having a good time. We would definitely dive with them again. And, oh, the high pressure steel tanks were a joy — how is 1.5 hrs. bottom time for you?! Most dives were over one hour. Surface intervals were taken not on the boat, but at a beach club where we had lunch every day. Truly a delightful experience.

**Aldora Divers, July 2003, Roger, Donna & Kate Soape (ras@rasoape.com), Houston, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, calm. Aldora Divers runs a nice operation. The boat picked us up at a hotel pier near our beach house between 7:30 and 8:00 am each day. This put us first to Cozumel's premier southern dive sites. (We counted 60+ boats after one morning's dive.) After a long, deep first dive, we pulled into one of several beach clubs for a snack and a long surface interval. The second dives often lasted 70 or more

minutes, then back to the pier by noon or shortly thereafter. Though they only dive 2 dives per day, divers get plenty of bottom time. Safety conscious dive-masters be sure to employ an extra long safety stop. Diving nitrox on the second dive helps, too. Our skills were respected and we were kept on a small boat all week with varying combinations of 2 to 5 other experienced divers.

**Aldora Divers, Las Brisas, August 2003, Mark McAlpin (mark@dlcoffee.com), Tyler, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 feet. Water: 72 to 85 F, calm. Our boats were fast and our crews were very good, especially Mateo, our divemaster, who was attentive but not smothering. He did his best to honor everyone's requests. There was never more than eight divers in our party and once as few as three. The larger steel tanks afford more bottom time even for the air hogs. If you don't have DIN regulators, just go by the shop in advance so they can set yours up. Their rental gear was good quality and looked new and well maintained. We went to the mainland for a couple of cenote dives and this experience was very cool. Crystal clear water and beautiful formations. We were not advised that the cenote diving was about double what Aldora charges for two tank drift dives in Cozumel — I would have liked to know in advance that it costs significantly more. I had planned to pay in cash for my diving but this left me short. We stayed at Las Brisas because the price was right and it is located within walking distance of San Miguel. Aldora would pick us up at the hotel dock. Las Brisas was clean



and nice with a huge pool and the staff at the hotel was very pleasant. The food was mediocre. We had most of our meals in town.

**Aqua Safari, December 2002,  
Stewart M. Kaslow, Maplewood, NJ.**

Experience: More than 1,000 dives.  
Vis: 70 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, currents. The Dive Safari Operation was very good, worked to provide a good time and safe dive for each of its customers. The boat was not overcrowded, and the owner was helpful when I needed some assistance with my computer, which malfunctioned. They provided a freshwater bucket for the camera which worked for me, but the layout of the boat does not have a flat, dry table to simplify changing film between dives. I actually changed film only between dive trips. Their prices are reasonable, and for \$20 dollars extra you can do a third dive in the afternoon. They had rinsing facilities for equipment in the shop, along with a place to hang wetsuit and leave gear from day to day. The Bahia Hotel is only a block away. Another good hotel option is the Mexicana Hotel on the same block. These are downtown and convenient for shopping, dining, and to take excursions.

([www.aquasafari.com](http://www.aquasafari.com))

**Aqua Safari, Vista del Mar, January  
2003, Mary K. Wicksten, Bryan, TX.**

Experience: More than 1,000 dives.  
Vis: 20 to 60 feet. Water: 76 to 81 F, choppy. A budget trip, so I didn't expect the best. Vista del Mar overlooks the harbor, has no beach. Rooms renovated and rather cute, but small.

Swimming pool is within a shopping plaza. No elevator! Continental breakfast included, many decent restaurants within walking distance, also close to shopping and Carlos and Charlies. Decent accommodations for the price. Used boat from pier across street. Boat has shade, also head (but not always functional). Water and small snack included. Dive guides Miguel and Ivan careful. Ivan found toadfish, lobsters, scorpionfish, and other critters. Got rough for first part of trip, dead flat calm on last day. Current running at some sites. Not many big fish — dim view of eagle ray in distance, few nurse sharks, and groupers. Lots of smaller fish. Dive at Devil's Throat cost extra, had to be scheduled in advance but worth it. Dive through twisting cave system in reef — enter at 80 feet, exit at 120, and return through swim-through to 80 feet. Colorful sponges, black corals, feather stars; blackcap basslets, sweepers, and cardinalfish in cave. Took ferry over to mainland and bus to Dos Ojos Caverns. Rustic buggy takes you to sinkhole. Climb down ladder, guides use winch to lower gear to you. Cool water, so wear wet suit. Beautiful rock formations, clear water, max. depth to 30 feet. Watch your buoyancy. Reef fauna of Cozumel remains in good shape despite huge mass of visitors. I counted 30 dive boats in view at once! Easy to get mixed up with another dive group while underwater. Town jammed with visitors from up to 10 cruise ships at once. Boat had camera bucket, but had to watch out for other divers using it to rinse masks. No camera table, no photo facilities at shop or aboard boat.

Film developing available in town or at photo shop in other hotel. Much diving is drift diving. Tough to compose a still photo while being swept along — might be easier to use a video camera.

**Aqua Safari & Careyitos Advanced Diving, Plaza Las Glorias, February 2003, Ron & Sherry Smith,**

**Levittown, PA.** Dives logged: 204.

Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 76-80 F. Dive

restrictions enforced: 80 ft. Aqua Safari, 75 min./500 psi, Careyitos'.

Cozumel may have grown "touristy," but the diving and visibility remains excellent and keeps bringing us back (six years now). Plaza Las Glorias ocean view balcony rooms are comfortable and roomy. Also close to town — very convenient for dinner (hotel food not that good). Aqua Safari is a good, safe, dive operation. Divemasters show you lots of critters. We took our drift dive specialty course with Pedro who is a great instructor. We enjoyed our first week diving with good friends at Aqua Safari. Second week after reading reports in the Chapbook, we decided to try Careyitos Advanced Diving. After the first day, we booked the whole week. What a great experience. (75 min. or 500 psi) Tony took time with us to make us feel very comfortable with them. Large boat, not overcrowded (10 max), but 6 divers most of the time. They took us to sites where there were not a lot of boats.

And long dives permitting seeing more than one dive sight on each dive.

Lunch was 1.5 surface interval with meats, cheese, bread, and fruits (and the best guacamole made fresh on the boat.) Saw with both dive operations

more turtles than ever. Huge angel fish everywhere, giant lobsters with 3-5 per hole, lots of sharks and eagle rays. The marine park is really paying off!

**Aquatic Sports (Deportes Aquaticos), Brisas Cozumel (not Brisas condos), August 2003, Mark R. Chino**

**(indiandiver@zianet.com), Mescalero, NM.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis:

90 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. Sergio Sandoval, Sr., has been diving Cozumel for 30+ yrs. without an

accident. His is a family operation and he does not advertise. We have been diving with him since 1987 and have never been disappointed in the service.

On this trip, my wife and I were the only divers for 4 of 5 diving days.

Have never been diving with Sergio when he had more than 8 divers. We dove with both Sergio, Sr., and Sergio, Jr., and they let us choose our sites

each day. Lunch and soft drinks are included, as is a rest/out gassing stop

between dives. Both Sergios are outstanding divemasters, safety and environmentally conscious, without being

overbearing. Sergio showed us his newly acquired boat, which will be

roomier and faster, and should be in the water within 2-3 months, as he is in

the process of acquiring permits, etc., from the Mexican government. Sergio

will take you to the less dived areas (north, east, etc.), but you must demon-

strate that you are capable of handling those conditions. Saw lobsters, morays, barracuda, groupers, nurse sharks, and

toadfish. Great diving as usual. Brisas (formerly Costa Club) is still a good

hotel. Our only complaint was the 1/4 inch gap in the wall between the door-

ways of our room and the adjoining room. Could hear everything the occupants of the next room were doing and saying. Manuel and Rudy remembered us as soon as we got off the airport shuttle at the hotel. Had no problems with the hotel, maid service, billing, and the hotel was well-maintained.

Hotel has a new bar/restaurant across the street at its private beach. We only ate one breakfast at the hotel, as we went into town for all our meals. Costa Brava restaurant is great for cheap, early, before-dive breakfasts. Had good dinners/service at Guidos, La Mission, TGI Fridays, Ernestos' Fajitas, and Pepe's Grill. Have to agree with the Chapbook reader who was disappointed with Prima; wife and I both agreed our dinner was ok but not what the food quality used to be. Something has changed and not for the better. Usually didn't eat lunch, but bought snacks and freshly-baked pastries and rolls at Chadraui dept. store. Rented a VW beetle from Smart Rental, near the airport, for \$35/day. Turn signals/hazard lights didn't work and it had 91K kilometers on it, but it got us around.

There's a new mall near the naval base; Cozumel is looking more like the U.S. One day there were six cruise ships in port! San Miguel was a zoo that day! Only day with no cruise ships was Sunday. We still look forward to our yearly trip to Cozumel.

([www.scubacozumel.com](http://www.scubacozumel.com),  
[www.brisashotel.com](http://www.brisashotel.com))

**Betsy White, Plaza Las Glorias, May 2003, Ronnie Briery (rbriery@ruraltel.net), Norton, KS.** Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 feet. Water:

80 to 82 F, surge. This was our 13th trip to Cozumel. We dove with Betsy White, who is a private operator. We had very good service. Hotel was good. We have stayed there before.

([www.geocities.com/scubabetsy](http://www.geocities.com/scubabetsy),  
[www.cozumel-hotels.net/  
las\\_glorias](http://www.cozumel-hotels.net/las_glorias))

### **Blue Angel, Villas Las Anclas, July 2003, Sidne Tiemann, Austin, TX.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. The sponges, coral, algae, and small invertebrates were great. Lots of conchs littered the sandy bottom and it was refreshing to see their eye stalks looking out at you instead of an empty shell. There were lots of juveniles and fry, so parts of the reef are holding their own. We saw a large crab, a grouper taking a nap under a rock, a midnight parrot fish, small schools of fish and brittle stars hiding under and in sponges and crevices. Lots to see if you take your time. The dive guide lead us on swim throughs that didn't let you see as much, so I wait for the crowd until they come back out on the wall or follow them from above if you like to go slow and look. The dive guide kept an eye on everyone and chided folks for not keeping their gauges contained so they wouldn't drag on the reef. The captain was there to help get your gear when you came up. Those of us with lots of air were not rushed to get out. I dove without a buddy, and teams were split depending on air consumption if you wanted. The boat took 10 of us from a dive shop in Texas and had shade. The boat had no place to put anything that you wanted

to keep dry, no freshwater to at least wash off your face after you got out and no head. They did have cold bottled water. I went back to their dock, but they let some of our group off at the pier in town. Las Anclas was really nice at \$50. Condo style with kitchenette, air, place to rinse and hang dive gear, and lots of good info from Pedro and Elio. It is just three blocks from the square. They have purchased the hotel next to Blue Angel and are fixing it up. Stay downtown if you want to go a little more "native." If you're ok with "get me in the water quick," four or five dives a day, Blue Angel works. Everyone had small set ups, but if you wanted to change film there was no way to do it without getting the inside of the camera wet.

([www.cozumel-diving.net/](http://www.cozumel-diving.net/)  
BlueAngel, [www.lasanclas.com](http://www.lasanclas.com))

**Blue Bubble Divers, Caballito Rojo, February 2003, Dean Knudson** ([deanknudson@yahoo.com](mailto:deanknudson@yahoo.com)), **Golden Valley, MN.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 feet. Water: 77 to 82 F, calm, choppy. There are two divemasters currently working Blue Bubble. Raul is a cheerful and energetic fellow who is much more likely to leave divers to themselves and watch from a distance. He does point out marine life and gives an excellent, all-levels tour of the wreck at Cozumel. He is an easy individual to like and is as competent as any divemaster on the island. Pedro Pablo is the other divemaster and has a different approach, decidedly more regimented. He has special stainless steel tank-banger, and by the end of the week had earned the nickname "senor clang-

clang." He is rigid about the group staying together, descending together, and surfacing together, with the same 700 psi in each tank. Quite different from Raul, who will identify experienced divers and largely leave them alone. Blue Bubble has several boats, one large enough to hold 10 divers. They will occasionally pair inexperienced divers with experienced ones. Raul handles this by sticking near the inexperienced group that hovers above and shadows the experienced group, allowing for a good quality experience for both. Padre Palo handles the same mix by "dumbing down" the dive, somewhat shortchanging the experience for the intermediate to advanced group. Ask for Raul, if possible, or talk with Pedro before the dive about your wishes to dive in the 90 to 130 foot range, perhaps somewhat away from the main group, perhaps even hinting that part of the divemaster's tip could be influenced by the decision. I spent an evening talking with a freelance divemaster on the island. It can be a bad job, dealing day to day with some boorish and demanding clients, putting up with monotony, and dealing with the inconsistent flow of income. Many are young men with families and young children, and when tourism slides, it can be frightening. Many divemasters have logged in excess of 5,000 dives. A surprising percentage have chronic ear disease (frequently a career-ending injury), and some have chronic back pain. All of this takes place in a country with few social service supports and pervasive poverty. Moral of the story: be understanding of less than perfect boats and equipment, treat the divemasters with kindness and dignity, and tip the guy,

he's raising kids in a third world economy, and you don't need that extra two cases of beer as badly as he needs the money. ([www.bluebubble.com](http://www.bluebubble.com))

**Blue Bubbles, Hotel Bahia, May 2003, Lee Schnell, Austin, TX.**

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 100 to 80 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Flew Funjet direct from San Antonio to Cozumel. Excellent connections.

Arrived in CZM at 10:30 a.m. and was able to make a two-tank afternoon day. Flight departed the following Friday at 6:30 p.m., so did a two-tank Thursday morning and was still out of the water well over 24 hours before our flight. Blue Bubbles' small boat gets you to the sites quick. DM gave us our pick of sites and was very flexible with the profile. This was a very experienced group, and he gave us credit! CZM is growing everyday. This was our ninth annual trip, and we are amazed every year. But it still has plenty of treasures both in and out of the water.

([www.cozumel-hotels.net/bahia](http://www.cozumel-hotels.net/bahia))

**Cabalitos del Cribie, February 2003, Terry Erhardt ([eci@usamedia.tv](mailto:eci@usamedia.tv)), Truckee, CA.** Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. Good operation, chartered our own boat and captain and divemaster, went to the sites we wanted to go to. Good trip, friendly. I have been diving Cozumel for years, these are the best guys, their boat was a little run down but fast and they will pick you up at your hotel dock. (987-2-14-49)

**Cozumel Divers, Bahia, March 2003, Slim Johnson ([\*\*.com\), St. James, MN.\*\* I made 25 dives with Cozumel Divers while staying at the Bahia, perfectly located in front of the Aldora pier. Rooms were good-sized with a kitchenette and a balcony. The continental breakfast was good, being we had snacks and lunch onboard the \*Yellow Rose\*. I made 21 dives at three per day and two days of two-tank diving \(one being the arrival day p.m.\). I am a frequent Cozumel diver with 70 dives in the last 12 months and have been diving with the previous owners of the \*Yellow Rose\*. They were good, but Dive Cozumel has taken it to a new level. They were extremely accommodating. They are safe, but let you dive your profile. We dove up north, all the way down to Maracaibo. The boat has lots of room, working head, excellent camera table, and much more. They are tech-oriented, but cater to all levels of diving. I had lots of fun while learning a lot. Thanks to Rolli and crew.](mailto:slim@butterfieldfood</a></b></p></div><div data-bbox=)**

**Cozumel Scuba and Snorkel, April 2003, Michael and Elaine Jerome, Beloit, WI.** Dives logged: 65. Vis: 80 to 100+ feet. Water: 80 F. Our first trip to Cozumel. We made the trip with 20 other divers from Loves Park Scuba in Loves Park, IL. Dan Johnson owner organized the trip. We had our own boat and made two dives a day and one night dive. Divemasters Dave and Miguel were great. Hotel was cheap but adequate and clean. Diving was great. We ate at different places and enjoyed them all. Cozumel museum was great. Planca Reef and Santa Rosa wall were my favorite dive sites. We will go back.

**Deep Blue, Las Brisas, August 2003, Richard Zuckerman** ([rwzuckermanesq@insigthbb.com](mailto:rwzuckermanesq@insigthbb.com)), **Peoria, IL**. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm, surge. Deep Blue was one of the best operations we have been with. We had researched them in the Chapbook and found the reviews to be accurate. Debby did everything she could to accommodate divers. My wife had only been certified for 3 years and had only advanced. She felt as comfortable as I did with my 13 years of experience. All briefings were detailed and covered the necessary background. All of the dive-masters took their jobs and our safety seriously. They were also environmentally aware and concerned about the conditions of the reef. Even when there were fast currents such as at Columbia and Las Palmas dive sites they found toadfish, nurse sharks and turtles and found shelter to observe them. When a Deep Blue boats broke down; Debby arranged for another boat so that no diving was missed. The shop, located in town, was a hub of post-dive activities. Requested dive sites were honored if possible. Most trips were 10 or less. Dive groups were never larger than 6-8 divers. Pick up at the Las Braises pier was no problem for either morning or afternoon dives. Las Brisas is the quintessential dive resort. Nice rooms, nice pools, good food and bars. No problems with not diving with Paradise Divers across the street or not getting an all-inclusive package. Hanging areas on the balconies. Close to town and shopping. Highly recommended for families and couples. ([www.deepbluecozumel.com](http://www.deepbluecozumel.com))

**Dive Cozumel, Hotel-Casa Mexicana, September 2003, William Velmer** ([naga1@ix.netcom.com](mailto:naga1@ix.netcom.com)), **Newport Beach, CA**. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 feet. Water: 83 to 87 F, calm. Cozumel is great when you figure it out. You can get a great hotel (Casa Mexicana)—hard bed, clean, cold, internet connection within each room, happy staff, free buffet meal in morning, in town with no road noise and great water pressure. I dive with Dive Cozumel — the boat — *Yellowrose* — 48-foot, fast boat that holds 30 divers, but usually the groups are under 6. No dive restrictions as long as you have the proper CCs. The dive master is world class — he is certified to take you down to 300 ft+ if you are qualified. The equipment is modern, clean and new. The boat is clean, has a head, roomy and fast. I am a normoxic trimix certified diver via Dive Cozumel and we dive regularly to 200 ft on mixed gases. Roli Fontaine is the owner of the operation. His website [www.divecozumel.net](http://www.divecozumel.net) — phone 011-52-987-872-4567 — tell him Bill told you to call. This operation keeps me coming back. Of my 180 dives 2 have been with this operation and has turned me into a “real” diver! Dive your own profile: yes. Any dive restrictions: Qualified divers could dive deep with proper CCs. ([www.divecozumel.net](http://www.divecozumel.net), [www.cozumel-hotels.net/casa\\_mexicana](http://www.cozumel-hotels.net/casa_mexicana))

**Dive House, Brisas Hotel, August 2003, Scott Reynolds** ([ssreynolds@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ssreynolds@sbcglobal.net)), **Fairfield, CA**. Dives logged: 154. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 83 F. Brisas Hotel has recently been reno-

vated. Beautiful facility, with good nightly entertainment. All-inclusive meals were good. 7 of 8 in group had intestinal distress after week of food/water. Dive House: good dive staff, divemasters. Allowed to dive computers, helpful with gear and in finding interesting critters. Responded quickly and professionally to dive related emergency. ([www.divehouse.com](http://www.divehouse.com))

### **Dive Palancar, Occidental Allegro Resort, January 2003, Don**

**Henderson, Lockney, TX.** Dives

Logged: 81. Vis: Clear. Water: 80 F.

There's a number of risks involved with taking a charter airline rather than a real one — like no back up flights, no cooperation with other airlines, minimum quality controls, etc. — and I had to endure a seven-hour connection on the way back. I hated it! The airline was so sloppy that they assigned nonexistent seats to people, on a packed airplane. I think that they all made it, but damn!

The Allegro: the place was okay overall for the premium money it cost. Lovely grounds/beach, though cracker-box rooms with 25 watt light bulbs and poor sound insulation, as the Chapbook warned. I found the food delightful in the casual restaurant. The place seems to cater more to snowbirds than divers; most were content to veg by the pool with open bar all day. I was amazed that they warned against drinking the tap water; a multi-million dollar place can't have its own chlorinating system? They supplied plenty of free bottled water. We arrived at the end of a cold norther that had the channel churned up a bit, but I couldn't understand why they were not diving — anywhere?! It

wasn't that bad. It seems that — to protect the local image — no operation is allowed out unless conditions are OK for the newest paper card diver on the flimsiest craft to go. We were needlessly delayed from diving for the first 24 hours. Dive Operation: Once we got clearance to go, though, I was pretty impressed with the 42-foot cruiser, valet service, and quality of divemasters escorting us on dives. My companion was not only new but turned into an underwater clutz, yet the divemaster Ishmel helped her as much as he could, short of ignoring the others. He was on standby the next morning, so we hired him to personally assist her, while I tagged along behind them. He was well worth the extra \$35, plus tips. Ishmel was back on duty that afternoon, but with small afternoon loads, she still got a lot of his attention. The trips were pricier than most at \$65 for two tanks, I think, but Nitrox was easily available at 32% for \$6 — a Cozumel tank upgrade. I enjoyed the five-minute rides to the sites, with a quick return between tanks for fresh tanks and coffee from the nearby pool bar, close to my room and all. Dive Palancar was a joy — with one major problem. I saw no evidence of manifest security! I'm sure that the divemasters counted divers well, and they might have checked names, but only based on their memory. I like a manifest roll call before and after. We were always close to shore but with currents, winds, traffic, and other hazards. (52-987-872-3443, [divepal@cozunet.finred.com.mx](mailto:divepal@cozunet.finred.com.mx))

**Dive Palancar, Allegro, September 2003, Jim Cox ([jimndonnacox@](mailto:jimndonnacox@)**

**comcast.net), Federal Way, WA.**

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, choppy. Dive Palancar a great dive operation. Though we took our own equipment the rental equipment was less than a year old and well maintained. The boats were clean, large and well equipped. O2 on every boat, excellent dive masters and captain. Water before the dive and all you could drink after. Short run to reef locations, wall dives, tunnels and small caves. Excellent experience. Allegro resort was just OK. Food was just OK in buffet, breakfast the best meal. Rooms varied from horrible to very nice. Staff working hard to keep place up. Entertainment OK. For diving dollar good value, but the dive operation more than made up for any resort shortcomings. Pools and beach were excellent! We had a ball!

**Dive Paradise, Costa Club/Las Brisas, October 2002, Debbie Pasich, San Diego, CA.**

Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy. The diving very good! This, our sixth trip to Cozumel in the past 14 years, has seen improvements in the protection of the reef. No gloves and don't-feed-the-fish policies in the marine park have made for unafraid and occasionally inquisitive creatures. Good visibility, numerous turtles, a few nurse sharks, large lobsters, and more angelfish than ever! This coupled with great underwater formations and the typical Caribbean underwater fare makes for good Cozumel diving. (We noticed what appeared to be a green slime on a number of the gray angels — any idea what

that is?) The dive briefing on the first day was extremely thorough in explaining boat procedures and diving expectations. The briefings were always the same, and by the third boat dive the briefings were tedious. They would do well to group people and boat crews together for a few days to help eliminate going over everything, every dive. There was one dive guide for each eight divers in the water, and they typically followed their pre-planned dive profile. They allowed for a little extra bottom time at shallower depths for those of us wanting it at the end of the dive. The dive lockers were conveniently located close to the dock, and if you like stench after the first day these lockers are for you! They are horizontal boxes that are completely lined with tile. They have zero ventilation and are so short you cannot hang anything to dry. The resort: Pretty grounds, a beautiful and well-kept pool, comfortable rooms (need new pillows!), and a small beach area on the other side of the road. There is an underground tunnel connecting the hotel to the beach. There was a change in ownership while we were there so who knows what changes will occur. Coffee was not available until 7 a.m. when the dining room opened. I question the new owners' attitude toward the guests, as the day after the signs on the property changed they had a private party for travel agents. For this night's festivities they closed the pool, hot tub, and beach to the paying guests. The food was plentiful and has potential. The food had really good flavors, and if you ordered from the menu it was quite good. The all-inclusive package



relegated you to the buffet where the food was, without fail, cold. (52-987-872-5161, [info@diveparadise.com](mailto:info@diveparadise.com))

**Dive Paradise, Los Breezes, November 2002, Michael Mason, Hammond, IN.** Nice, clean room, balcony with wood hanging pegs for wetsuits and such. The a/c kept the room cold. It came with a pleasant "post card" view of the inner grounds and their giant pool. I got a cooler and kept it iced and otherwise stocked. I had to readjust the TV's color controls but there were some English language channels, the BBC and CNN. We hiked back to the lobby and down through the under-road passageway and came out right by the Dive Paradise office. They issued us locker keys, tanks and lead. The next morning a private fast boat picked my wife and I up at the hotel dock on time. Our first of two days of diving three tanks a day were with our little party of my wife, myself, George the Divemaster and Orlando our Capt. I picked the dive sites and profiles. After two great dives re-aquainted us with the 100 plus feet of viz and mild current/lazy drift diving. Our afternoon tank went just as well at Cedar Pass. As Orlando the Capt. pulled the "fast boat" up to the dock to pick us up for our wedding anniversary day of diving, I saw old friend Pepe Moi. We made 3 more splendid dives that day, at Columbia "Deep," Delilah, and after lunch, Paradise Reef. Since it was Sunday and no cruise ships were in port we pre-planned to drift up to the cruise ship piers just to see if we could spot any critters that may have taken up resi-

dence. I only saw a few yellow headed jawfish, a number of conch and some of the usual suspects. After two sterling days on the private "fast" boats we were back on the big boot ups. The Divemasters always broke the divers in two groups (usually around 6 divers per divemaster) and after one group went in the water the boat would motor off and drop group two with a nice space in-between. The dives never were crowded with people except on one dive at Tormentos Reef when Papa Hog's dropped 8 divers in on us during the middle of our dive. I enjoyed latitude roaming or lagging behind practicing my camera usage. When DP knows your skill level they allow latitude and I've dove their EDP (Experienced Diver Program) for years, and with Sr. Moi on quite a few occasions. We dove the sites I wanted (it was a democratic process among the divers onboard but discussion occurred until consensus was reached). The air fills were always at or a tad over 3 grand. A few bad tank valve O rings showed up but the divemasters always were quick to remedy any problems. The between dive snacks, sandwiches, fresh fruit and soda pops along with plenty of fresh water was welcome. The camera rinse drum was separate from the mask dunk bucket and I always had a dry place to keep and change film between dives. The Divemasters are professional, safety minded, critter finding, just good people. We dove the pre-planned profiles discussed during the well given pre-dive briefings, ascend with buddy when one of you hits 500 PSI to 15 ft. for 3 minutes (at least). I followed my

computer regarding Nitrogen loading and took longer safety stops on a few occasions, no problemo. Only once did I have to honk my Dive Alert horn for a pick up, the boat was usually always there. We “found” the usual big lobsters, nosey barracudas, a few medium sized groupers of the black and Nassau variety, good sized nurse sharks on a number of dives, number of hawksbills. Pepe located a few splendid toads and on one dive at Paradise Reef my “Buddy” found a high hat that was in a location which turned out to be home to a nice spotted moray and some red banded shrimps. Currents varied but nothing out of the usual for Cozumel. Our last dive of the trip was to the C-53. A stiff current saw us make our way down the mooring rope to the fantail deck. Things were growing nicely. Then it was inside the superstructure to find rooms filled with glassy sweepers. As we moved out of the superstructure a blur crossed the companionway in front of me from one room to another and I followed to find a rather large, about 250 lbs or thereabouts, black grouper lurking in a wardroom. Always fun seeing 13 people trying to crowd at the 15 foot point hanging on a mooring line in current doing a safety stop! Lush sponges lots of queen, French and gray angels, black spotted snake eels, big saucereye porgys, small schools of grunts and schoolmasters abounded. The water temps were 80 F at the surface and 80 F at 130 feet all day every day. My .5 and the wife’s 3 mil with hoods worked well for us both. I paid the extra two bucks per roll in fear of having fogged film from airport X-ray gizmos and had all my film

processed at the camera/photo place on Melger in town. They do the Sea-Life Color correction (one hour). Great results and instant gratification seeing my day’s shots over dinner. Dive Paradise always goes far to make my experience on Cozumel perfect. This trip was even more perfect. Apple@diveparadise.com

**Dive Paradise, Villa Miranda, December 2002, David Rand, Anchorage, AK.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 feet. Water: 80 F, choppy, currents. Villa Miranda ([www.rentcozumel.com](http://www.rentcozumel.com)) is two blocks east of Plaza Las Glorias. It has four bedrooms, four baths, and lots of space. The first floor has an open-air kitchen, living room, and dining room complete with a pool. The on-site managers Brent and Jennifer were helpful but careful to allow us our privacy. We cooked and ate about half our meals at our villa, the rest were at restaurants throughout San Miguel. Villa Miranda is two blocks from the largest supermarket on the island and within walking distance of many decent restaurants. Although it’s not needed, we rented a car for about half the time we were there. Every day I’d take a five-minute walk down to Plaza Las Glorias where Dive Paradise would pick me up. Even though my wife was pregnant and unable to dive, she also enjoyed herself with walks to the beach, lots of swimming, and plenty of relaxing. Dive Paradise was also an excellent operation. They were almost always punctual, had good, safe boats and experienced dive masters. The small/fast boats save at least 90 min-

utes of travel time each trip and keep the groups smaller and more experienced. Overall the diving was excellent, although I didn't see massive schools of fish that I've seen elsewhere. But the currents were fast and furious and lots of fun. Those darn cruise ship people inundated San Miguel. I think we had eight ships there on Christmas Day. UW

Photography Comments: Large boats had separate rinse for cameras; small boats did not unless you asked. Crew handled equipment professionally. No separate camera tables. Film was available but no camera shop and no spare parts for cameras.

**Dive Paradise, Coral Sands,  
December 2002, John Keith (jkeith@econ.usu.edu), Logan, UT.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 10 to 30 Meters. Water: 24 to 27 Celsius, calm, choppy. Apple's operation is first class. My wife and I (advanced) and son (PADI open water) really enjoyed the dives and the crew. We left on time and the DM and captain tried to find locations that were both good diving and free of other boats. Corals were good — as expected. A couple of reef sharks, a turtle, a few eels and a group of squid were sighted along with lots of other critters and fish. Apple and her staff were accommodating — even forgave me for losing my locker key. Facilities were a little small and the wash tank got full at times, but the restaurant next to the shop was good and had Noche Buena. The Coral Sands (RCI exchange) was adequate. Great sunsets and a not bad snorkling area (saw a couple of small eels fight-

ing over a crevice). The drive (need a car for sure at CS) around the island was quite interesting — visit to the lighthouse and bird sanctuary followed by lunch on the eastern shore and a visit to the ruins. Only real downer was when the cruise ships arrived. Downtown was a zoo and the dive boats went out like ants.

**Dive Paradise, Plaza Las Glorias, May  
2003, Michael Mason, Hammond, IN.**

Mini suites complete with mini fridge and a great ocean view. The balconies had drying bars for wet suits and the multi level rooms were nice and clean, as usual. TV and in closet safes makes Plaza one of my close to town picks. Checked in at Dive Paradise's main office for the four of us. The next morning as divers were clogging the dock at Plaza Los I spotted our "fast boat" as Divemaster Marcos, an old friend waved to us. Some grumbling was heard as just the 4 of us got in and off we went for Columbia Deep, waving to the divers standing on the dock waiting for their "fast boat" pick ups. We made a 100 ft dive in 150 ft. viz on Columbia and as always, we all were in awe of the coral towers and plummeting 2,000 ft. drop off on the sea side of the reef, one of the finest dives in this hemisphere to my counting. After an hour interval we back rolled on Columbia shallows, for 60 minutes at no deeper than 30 feet of 82 F gin clear water, another splendid site in my book. We were dropped off at the Plaza Los dock for a hotel lunch and then back on our fast boat for another tank in the afternoon. We had the private boats for our first 2 days then it was on

the large boats for our remaining diving days. We magically had Marcos as our Divemaster on each big boat trip and were able to put in more than our 2 cents worth regarding dive sites. We all have computers and with Marcos knowing our skills, we had latitude. I could go on and on about the reef health and all the fish we spotted and I photographed, but I'll leave it at, "we" saw the usual suspects, in abundance, great sponges and soft stuff and healthy hard corals. I had a touch of the Aztec Dagger one night and felt rather drained the next morning. Dive on the C-53 was so filled with sweepers and sardines with huge prowling grouper. We were engulfed in clouds of sardines coming out of hatches and windows on the wreck, and then would bump into another large Nassau grouper, the sardines parting like a curtain as the groupers prowled around, it was beyond splendid. Dive Paradise and all their folks work hard to make things right. On time pick ups, personal care and attention even on the big boats is what I have always known as "normal" with them. We did our last full day on the Island "pub crawl" hitting the bars and beaches on the East side and as usual ended our tour at Coconuts with that great view and Elvis pictures (have them make the Cooba Libre with coconut rum, extra lime). Hook up with Dive Paradise online at [apple@diveparadise.com](mailto:apple@diveparadise.com).

**Dive Paradise, Plaza Las Glorias, June 2003, Charles Seder ([edandbunny@hotmail.com](mailto:edandbunny@hotmail.com)), Mesa, AZ.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 45 to 100 feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, choppy, currents.

Dive guides were friendly and knowledgeable. The fast boat option was worth the extra money. These boats were good condition and got you to the dive sites fast enough that the lack of sunshade on the boats was not a problem. I was not happy that they kept the boat in idle while picking us up. We ended all of our dives sucking in engine fumes. This company needs to pay better attention to o-rings on the tanks. I can't begin to count the number of first stage leaks we saw on the trip. Plaza Las Glorias is beginning to show its age. They keep up the lobby and exterior but the rooms are starting to show lots of neglect, i.e., broken tiles, rotting doors, masking tape over peep hole, A/C that couldn't keep up. Restaurant had a good breakfast but the lack of fans to move the air made it a heaven for mosquitoes. In the evening we had a \$60 steak dinner and the mosquitoes ate better than we did. No other restaurant we ate at had this problem. Even when current slight divemaster set a fast pace.

**Dive Paradise, Brisas Cozumel, August 2003, Al Krenz ([akrenz993@aol.com](mailto:akrenz993@aol.com)), Countryside, IL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, calm. Brisas is the former Costa Club which was the former Fiesta Inn. Accommodations are clean and the hotel is well run. Breakfast is a buffet while lunch and dinner (for the most part) could be ordered off a menu. Food was generally good. Dive Paradise can be a bit of a "cattle boat" operation. Some divers continue to bring their gear on board the boats in large travel bags which can take up a lot of space.

Evidently, they haven't heard of mesh bags! Dive Paradise runs a nice operation with thorough briefings and safe procedures. In between dives, the dive-masters offer divers small sandwiches, fruit and drinks. Fish in Cozumel tend to be the same as other venues in the Caribbean but more plentiful and somewhat larger, especially the angel fish. You really can't beat Cozumel, Brisas and Dive Paradise for really good "Caribbean" diving at a reasonable price. My sixth time there.

**Dive Paradise, Presidente Inter-Con, August 2003, Michael Mason, Hammond, IN.** After a visit to Oaxaca for Olmec/Zapotex ruins then to Villahermosa and a trek with 2 vehicles across the border into Chiapas and on to Pelanque for some Mayan ruins, we arrived in Cozumel. Van'ed to the Presidente Inter-Con, we checked in smoothly with our 8 people and I headed to town by taxi to Dive Paradise Headquarters for a little chat with Ms. Applegate, finding her not in, her staff were expecting me and I found all arraignments were in order. I had corresponded with Apple via e-mail just a few days before leaving the States. The next morning our "fast boat" was waiting for us to finish breakfast and we loaded up, sorting the rental gear I had ordered up the day before. Since we had been tripping around the mainland none of us brought our whole gear complement hence rentals of BCs, fins, masks and regulators. The Mares BC was in good shape as was all the gear my people rented. We hit Santa Rosa wall first (viz 140 ft. temp 82F) then after an

hour interval, over to Los Palmas for some sea horse action. Divemaster Marcos even found a spotted pipefish sneaking around where we had found a rather large brown sea horse. As we had a friend from South Africa with us I was interested in his reaction to Cozumel's reefs. He was blown away by the visibility, coral structures and abundant small reef fish swarms. We even swam with a 7 foot nurse shark for a while. (Nothing like the white pointers he's seen but he was impressed with Cozumel's underwater beauty). We made 2 private "fast boat" dives that morning and found ourselves pooped out, we'd been on the road for a week and had run the tank low. We opted for a night dive that evening and Marcos and our "fast boat" showed up on time and took us just a few hundred yards over to Paradise Reef where we were underwater as the light faded to black as shift change was going on. Among the 2 splendid toads found, we had some black groupers lurking just out of our light's beams skittering around hoping we'd stir out some tid-bits. Some rather large crabs in the king family along with a number of large lobsters made a showing. At one point I spotted a 4 foot spotted moray snaking along between coral heads. A snake eel, hiding parrot fish, a large French angel was lodged in a crevice and the usual suspects were spotted. We had a grand time watching a frightened octopus cycling through his color pallet, and after his show we were treated to 2 more smaller octopi going through the same show for us before squeezing through cracks I didn't think it was possible for them to escape

through. We only had the one diving day and finished our trip with the "Pub Crawl" of the East side, eating frijitas and guac/chips with plenty of suds and Cooba Libres at Coconuts. The Presidente is top flight and you pay for it. Dive Paradise has always gone that extra mile for me over the years. apple@diveparadise.com.

**Dive With Martin, Hotel Bahia, February 2003, Rickie Sterne & Chrisanda Butt (rickandchris@alltel.net), Elkins, AR.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, choppy, currents. This trip was our third with Dive with Martin. Martin's service has, in our experience, improved with each year. Pablo and Orlando were good divemasters. Pablo has an amazing eye for finding the tiny critters. Orlando bailed me out when I ran low on air during the rest stop at Barracuda, and he lured a splendid toadfish out into the open. We were taken to the beautiful deep sites on Columbia and Palancar and to the north end of the island to dive Barracuda Reef and San Juan Wall. There was no extra charge for trips to the north end. We saw turtles every day. We encountered spotted eagle rays four days out of six. We saw octopuses by night and day, a total of six splendid toadfish, longsnout sea horses and pipefish, nurse sharks, one blacktip reef shark, numerous morays, and the full roster of angelfish, parrotfish, and butterflyfish. There were small schools of grunts, snappers, and chub, and we saw quite a few juvenile fish. Some world-traveling divers on the boat proclaimed Cozumel's reefs to be "in better shape than many places." The

night dive on Paradise Reef (included in our package) was again a real treat. Hotel Bahia remains a scrupulously clean, spacious, and inexpensive option for those of us who prefer to spend our afternoon in the coffee house rather than on the beach. We crossed the line from tourist to traveler and started eating from street vendors. Cheap, delicious, and safe. La Loncheria Mi Chabelita offers large, varied, and tasty blue plate specials. We booked our trip through Tony at Diving Adventures, and his arrangements were, as usual, flawless. Getting through customs in Houston took over an hour, but we had already missed our connecting flight anyway since our plane was late arriving in Cozumel for unexplained reasons. We took a Nitrox course from DWM, and Fernando (aka Monstro) was a good teacher who went beyond the PADI manual. We have both been teachers and thought the quality and content of his instruction were excellent. (800-518-0932, [dwm@cozumel.com.mx](mailto:dwm@cozumel.com.mx))

**Dive With Martin, Summer Place Inn, April 2003, Jennifer, Green Bay, WI.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, currents. Summer Place Inn was wonderful. It is a bed and breakfast. There was an open-air kitchen out by the pool, and the fridge was kept stocked with food for breakfast (or any time you wished). This included bacon, eggs, bread, pancake mix, cereal, muffins, juice, milk, fresh fruit, etc. Small fridge in your room a few blocks behind Plaza Las Glorias, so is an easy walk to their pier for dive boat pick up. It is also close to Chedraui (like a Wal-

Mart Supercenter). Originally we had booked to dive with Living Underwater. I was really excited to dive with them, especially after reading the reviews published here. The first day we were to be picked up at the dock, they never showed up. We called after waiting an hour and were told it was our fault because we had not called them. When I explained we had an e-mail saying it was not necessary to call unless our plans changed, the gentleman said he had stopped by the night before and we must have been out. We never got an apology. I asked for our deposit back and that was returned that day. We decided on Dive with Martin — also another dive operation highly recommended by the Chapbook. I was not impressed. They would not let any dive go beyond 40 minutes before starting the ascent no matter how much air you had left. The third day the boat never picked us up because of a miscommunication on their part with their divemaster. We did not have the same divemaster for any of the day dives. On our night dive, the boat driver never showed up, so instead of having two divemasters for our group of nine divers we had one. Divemasters made no effort to point out any creatures besides the obvious lobsters or grouper. We were told they would keep our gear and rinse it each night, but after the first day when it was obvious our gear had not been cleaned we took it with us. On talking to that day's divemaster, he let us know he was not paid to clean our gear and it would be better if we took it with us.

**Diving Adventures, Villablanca, March 2003, Ron Benjamin,**

**Trempealeau, WI.** Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 feet. Water: 78 to 83 F, choppy. This was our seventh trip to Cozumel. Many eating establishments have begun to cater more to the cruise ship crowd. It's harder to have a laid back vacation. The diving was excellent. The guys at Diving Adventures — especially Rosendo, our divemaster, and Gato, our captain — took good care of us. We found a group of excellent, experienced divers, and the five of us pretty much dove where weather and conditions would let us. One of the highlights of our dives was San Juan/Barracuda. Rosendo, our divemaster, told us he could take us to hopefully see a school of eagle rays. We dove this site twice and saw eight to 10 on the first dive, and we sat on the sand in a notch in the reef on the second dive and had the school of eagle rays swim around us for about 18 minutes. We also saw several hawksbill turtles over the week. Villablanca was a nice place. Very laid back. Service was good and the price was right. ([www.divingadventures.net](http://www.divingadventures.net), [www.villablanca.net](http://www.villablanca.net))

**Liquid Blue Divers, Plaza Las Glorias, January 2003, Paul Seidenkranz ([paul@accesstravelmn.com](mailto:paul@accesstravelmn.com)), Golden Valley, MN.** Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm, no currents. Liquid Blue Divers owned by Roberto and Michaela, formerly with Aldora. Six diver max with nice, small, fast boat. I thought it rode better than any small boat I've been diving with in Cozumel. Restrictions: air supply and computer

limits. This is a personalized, service-based operation, and they accommodate your needs. We dove with AL 80s; however, the steel 120s and 100s are on the way. Nitrox 32 and 36 are available and highly recommended. Roberto's great with people and speaks fluent English. Early 8:00 a.m. pickups. Beach visits between first and second dives. They will alter schedules for a group. Service is the key to a great dive trip, and they went to great lengths to make everyone have a great trip. ([www.liquidbluedivers.com](http://www.liquidbluedivers.com))

**Liquid Blue Divers, Brisas Hotel, June 2003, Bruce Mah ([mahgwa@pacbell.net](mailto:mahgwa@pacbell.net)), Danville, CA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, currents. "The Man" at Aldora, owns his own shop with his wife, Michaela. They are incredible! She is the consummate hostess, he is an incredible DM! They have a new six-pack that picked us up at the dock, and we were on the dive sites when most people were getting there. The surface interval is a five-minute boat ride to Playa Palancar, for fish tacos on the beach! The level of diving is intermediate-advanced; he lets most do their own thing, with the option of following him. No whiners or babies should dive with them. A fast six-pack, rollovers to the site, fast diving. If you want your level of diving to get better, dive with them. We had a 3-knot drift dive that was incredible! He made a point of making my son's 50th dive special, and he did, finding a huge green moray sleeping under a rock! Seahorses, octopuses on the night dive, a cool thing he did with

his signal mirror, and a pike blenny. The hotel has changed hands a few times but is within walking distance to the center of town, or a \$3 cab ride. The rooms are clean, the A/C works, the housekeeping was always done, on time with no surprises. We did not buy a meal package, but upon check-out (five nights), our bill was only 980 pesos! That's \$98 for all you gringos out there. That was for breakfast buffets for two, bar and pool bills, and miscellaneous stuff. I would do nothing different, except have the letter to leave the country with my son for the airlines. (e-mail me if you want to know about that). The dive group, sites, weather, hotel were all great. Try to avoid the town when the cruise ships arrive, there were five unloading when there, including a Disney Ship! By the way — I just received an e-mail from them, telling me to pack my 3mm, and come down in January — rays are schooling and mating in the north end of the island!

**Living Underwater, Plaza Las Glorias, February 2003, Duane Hill ([polecreek@aol.com](mailto:polecreek@aol.com)), Beaumont, TX.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 feet. Water: 78 to 79 F. Living Underwater exceeded my demanding expectations. I made a trip in autumn 2002 with Aldora and, while that was good, LU was even better. Jeremy, the divemaster, could not have been more professional. There were only two divers on the boat for the three days. Each day brought the same questions: where would you like to go; what would you like to see and do. He was there to accommodate us. As a dive-



master, he was concerned that we dive safely. However, he was willing to do dive profiles that other operations would never let you do. The 120 cubic foot tanks were great. Our bottom time never was less than an hour, even at depths of greater than 120 feet. We went to dive sites north and as far south as Punta Sur. Jeremy took care of all the equipment daily. He took the equipment back with the boat after dropping us off, and it returned the next day washed and dried. Post-diving a towel was handed to us. If someone was extra cold, parkas were provided. Snacks were given, as well as sodas or water. LU was prompt about arriving on time. None of the usual "Mexican time problems." If I have to drag my lazy self out of bed to meet the dive boat at 8:00 a.m., I expect the boat to be there at 8:00 a.m. as well. They do not have the ability to take credit cards. They ask you to send a check for the deposit. I am not used to a business that does not take cards. PLG was pretty good. We had two different rooms, and one was cleaner and had been taken care of much better.

([www.living-underwater.com](http://www.living-underwater.com))

### **Living Underwater, Reef Club, April 2003, Bob Curtis, Kenmore, WA.**

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, choppy, currents. Decided to dive with Living Underwater based on *Undercurrent* reader reports. We weren't disappointed. Weather delayed our dive schedule, but when it improved the owner was accommodating, so we were able to get in all the dives we had planned. Divemasters Jeremy and Samantha

were superb. They served mostly as guides and critter finders. First dives of the day were the big reefs of Palancar, Columbia, and Santa Rosa Wall, rated 1-3 in Rodales reader ratings. Second daily dives were generally selected by the DMs and contrasted nicely with the first dive. Example would be the Palancar, a buttress reef with swim-throughs and some critters, for the first dive, followed by Yucab Reef, a critter- and fish-rich reef without swim-throughs. Boats were on time always, divemasters efficient, professional, and safety conscious. Four of us stayed in a Junior Suite at the Reef Club. It was a little tight for two couples but doable. Recommend you know your room-mates well if you try this. The main bedroom was separable from the rest of the unit and the roll-away/sitting room. Both areas had their own air conditioners. Only one bath, but it was large. Food was not five-star, but their efforts to supply lots of good food and plenty of variety were five-star. The recent fire has not seemed to hamper their service level. The staff was respectful and helpful and worked hard to meet our special needs. One of our party has serious allergies, and the air conditioners seemed lethal to his condition. We notified the staff and a service technician was at work on the units within two hours. The premium restaurant had a set menu. Presentation was above average, but food lacked distinctive flavors, as though they were cutting back on spices. After having eaten there two or three times, you basically had it all. The buffet enjoyed a new food theme daily. Reef Club staff worked hard to provide daily entertain-

ment and activities for children and adults alike. One drawback is the isolation. Unless you're willing to pay \$30 for a round trip taxi, you're left out of the local San Miguel nightlife. On the plus side, you're really close to the diving. No long boat rides! Had a wonderful time, spectacular diving.

**Living Underwater, April 2003, Lori Brown (DoctorSLB2001@yahoo.com), Germantown, MD.** Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 80 F, calm. Lori Brown, Chris Green, and Justin Brown Green. Our Dive Guide, Jeremy, made diving a real pleasure. While on the boat, he didn't let any of the guests lift a finger. He worked hard to get divers ready and to make each dive entertaining and relaxing. Living Underwater is famous for the small number of divers per boat, big tanks, and long dives. On a few days, we were the only divers on the boat. We were never down for less than an hour and a half. We dived with Nitrox-36 on all second dives. It's just a few dollars more. On one dive at Columbia Normal, we saw at least five turtles, some so bold that they came within a few feet of divers. We also saw splendid toad fish, a spotted scorpion fish, French and gray angel fish by the dozens, schools of grunts, and even a large spotted eagle ray at El Cedral, a juvenile trunkfish the size of a pea, fluttering around under an overhang. After diving with us and others all morning, Jeremy worked on open water certification with our son in the afternoon, without complaint and certified our son in the week. During his last certification dive, Jeremy spotted a

seahorse in front of the Hotel Lorena. Not a bad way to learn to dive. Restaurants worth visiting are Cocina de Caribe, an excellent seafood restaurant but with rather odd hours — it closes early; La Cocay which was pricey but good; El Moro is always good and sometimes serves a free anisette liqueur after dinner; and Guido's (previously called Pizza Rolandi) which went through some rough times but seems to be making a fabulous comeback. Huge margarita prize is a toss up between Capi Navigante and La Prima.

**Living Underwater, Plaza Las Glorias, August/September 2003, Alvin & Renee Taylor, Bella Vista, AR.** My husband I have traveled to Cozumel for the past four years, ten trips. We stay at Plaza Las Glorias. We love the location, the grocery store across the street, the excellent service (ask for Marko, tell him Renee sent you), and most of all, we love the view of the ocean! We dive with "Living Underwater" and believe there is no comparison. Our dive experience with L.U. is always pleasant, relaxing and very safe. Our divemaster, Jeremy, is by far the best! He takes care of your dive gear from the first day of diving to your last day of diving. He washes and rinses it each day and your gear is set up and ready for the next morning dive! The minute you board the small fast boat, (no more than 6 divers) until you return to the boat dock at the end of the day he provides the best personal service we have experienced. The dive sites are decided upon by the divers, and on our way to each dive

site, Jeremy will brief the divers about safety, what our bottom time will be, and what to expect at each dive site. We always dive our computer within safe limits, with an average of 75 to 100+ minutes per dive. L.U. uses pressed steel 95 and 120 cubic foot tanks, which on several occasions we have exceeded 2 hours of bottom time. Using the large tanks always allows for longer bottom time, and after all, that is what we were looking for. We even did a few deco dives, which were cool! We dove Punta Sur for 1 hour and 20 minutes and Maracaibo for 1 hour and 30 minutes. You definitely get what you pay for.

**Living Underwater, La Ceida, September 2003, Ross Ruddick (rossruddick@repswest.net), Surrey, BC.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100-150 ft. Prior to this, my first trip to Cozumel, I read through the various years of Chapbook reports and narrowed my list of dive operators. I followed this up with emails a list of questions about their diving operations. I chose Living Underwater. It was the right choice. They were punctual in their daily pick-up from the La Ceiba dock, professional in the pre-dive briefings, allowed the guests to pick the dive spots and allowed more than ample surface intervals in which to off gas. As promised there were snacks, towels and jackets on board and the steel 120s allowed all of the divers to shed some or all of our weight. Jeremy, as dive master, was a thoroughly enjoyable and extremely competent leader and allowed us enough in-water freedom without compromising safety.

Although pricier than many of the operations in Cozumel, the extended bottom times and surface intervals probably give greater dollar value than many other operators. There were several other dive ops that picked up divers from the La Ceiba dock that week and the only other one that seemed to always be on time and return quite late was Aldora. Fellow divers at the hotel complained about late pick-ups, short or almost non-existent surface intervals often spent entirely on the boat, crowded cattle boats and large and unwieldy group sizes. Living Underwater had a nice fast and small boat and, although promising not to exceed six or seven divers, we never had more than five. Probably the greatest limitation right now is their small size as a company. Certainly this will allow them to provide more personalized service and maintain quality control but it does also mean that they are forced to mix divers of varying experience. I missed out on a couple of sites that I had been looking forward to because of this not a big deal just a reason for a return visit. In spite of that, Jeremy (and Pepe who was our dive master for one day of the five) took me to many of the spots I had requested and the overall diving experience was outstanding. Devil's Throat was a highlight as was the military wreck. La Ceiba was as advertised, a diver friendly hotel with well maintained facilities, a friendly staff and dive shop operation from which to rent tanks for the night shore dive and a good beach and pool. My only complaint is the on-site time share operation which uses the Tuesday evening

diver's get together as a come on to a time share pitch. Restaurants we recommend include Prima's, Guido's, La Chosa, Casa Dennis, and La Mission. The European bar is a great spot for cheap drinks and has free access to the Internet to check your email.

**Papa Hog, Villa Blanca, July 2002, Barry Klickstein, Swampscott, MA.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, currents. We had the same DM all week, and he was accommodating. Strong currents and down currents on several dive sites. Small groups made the diving fun — no crowds. Also, Papa Hogs has its own restaurant across the street, which has the best breakfasts and burgers on Cozumel. Villa Blanca is simple, but the upstairs rooms are large, airy, and clean, and they give you a five-gallon jug of water. The garden and pool were a great place to relax, and there was never a problem with anything we asked for. (52-987-872-1651, [diving@papahogs.com](mailto:diving@papahogs.com))

**Paradise Dive, October 2002, David Walters, Auburn, CA.**

Santos and Jaime were the guides on the Atlantis. It could not have been better. Lots of variety and professional care. ([www.diveparadise.com](http://www.diveparadise.com))

**Paradise Dive, Las Brisas Hotel, June 2003, Donald "Digger" (donaldrowe@earthlink.net), Glendora, CA.**

Experience: More than 1,000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, surge. Very good diving in warm, clear water with some current dives but not overwhelming. Wide variety of

beautiful fish (though not huge schools). Interesting fish and critters, e.g., pipefish, red-lipped batfish, toadfish, dragon pipe fish, sea-horses. Nice wreck on CX53. Current keeps boat clean, and lots of holes in every space for the squeamish. Balls of baitfish with Jewfish and groupers hiding within. No surprises. Excellent value for the cost, both the diving and the "everything included" at the hotel.

**Sand Dollar Sports, Reef Club, July 2002, Billy E. Haggerty Jr. CRNA (billy.haggerty@cox.net), Midland, TX.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm, choppy, currents. The Reef Club is an all-inclusive (including meals and alcohol) resort way south of the main town in Cozumel. This is great for repeat divers to the island and non-divers who want to lay back on the beach and not be hassled by the hawkers in town pedaling their wares. The room was clean and all of the options in the room worked (A/C, toilet, shower, etc.). The huge pools are clean and have plenty of staff-directed activities to get you involved if you wish. Great place for the kids. They have activities for all age groups. There is also an adult only pool with a swim up bar. The food is served buffet style. Food was OK and specialty theme each day and night. A huge Mexican Fiesta night mid-week with tons of food and a special entertainment show. Each night there is a staff show in the air conditioned theater. A taxi to town is roughly \$170 pesos each way for up to four people (\$15). Sand Dollar Sports (SDS) scuba shop is full of English-speaking,

helpful, and talented folks. They make the diving easy. There are dive packages available. Check the Internet or your vacation travel agent. Mine was BayAdventures.com. They only book Cozumel trips. The SDS shop is on the Reef Club's north end, and a pier for the dive boats is there also. The best part about these "south of the Island" dive operators is that there is only a five- to 10-minute boat ride to the reefs that you dive. Usually these are 40 minutes to an hour, at least from the operations near downtown Cozumel. No food or drinks on the boat between dives — so bring your own from breakfast. I was issued a free dive locker for the week that I was there. Fresh water rinse sink handy. I dove with an UW video camera all week and had a blast. Certification classes available, look at the website. Nice big boats. They dive two tanks in the a.m. and p.m. and night dive if enough interest to fill a boat. Punta Sur is so close. Go see the church with the white coral/sponge cross and Devil's Throat. Separate wash buckets for UW video and cameras. Staff knowledgeable.

([www.sanddollarsports.com](http://www.sanddollarsports.com))

**Sand Dollar Sports, Reef Club, February 2003, James Reilly and Fran Klass ([james.reilly4@worldnet.att.net](mailto:james.reilly4@worldnet.att.net)), Wyndmoor, PA.** Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. Traveled by U.S. Airlines without incident. The TSA staff is much quicker and nicer than the rent-a-cops who used to do the security work. Our Junior Suites at Reef Club Resort were large, well appointed, and comfortable. Each suite

had a private bedroom, a living room/dining area, a nice kitchenette, and a large bathroom. Our fridges were stocked with cold canned beer, soda, and bottled water. We also had large balconies with hot tubs. All the rooms were new. One couple was unable to get into their room, due to a reservation error. The resort provided them with a standard room and a discount and then got them into their room the next day. Housekeeping was well done, although getting extra towels proved challenging. It is evident that a lot of money has been invested in the Reef Club since our trip there in February 2002. Wooden walkways and stairwells have been replaced by concrete structures. Several new buildings, including a private dining facility and a private new swimming pool exclusively for time-share owners and folks who rent suites. We remain impressed with how hard the Reef Club staff works to keep the resort spotless. However, the food is not the best, although it is plentiful. Breakfast is fine with fresh eggs made to order, pancakes, French toast, cold cereal, and various fruit, pastry, and meat items. They serve early enough so that you can eat breakfast and catch the early dive boat at 8:30 a.m. Lunch is buffet sit-down fare in one of the restaurants or burgers, hot dogs, fries, salsa, guacamole, and chips by the pool. We usually chose the poolside fare. Dinner is steam table food, and we found it bland, even in the "special" restaurants. While several members of our group chose to eat in the hotel, we ate most evening meals in San Miguel, where wonderful seafood dinners can be bought for under \$20 in the lovely

local places away from the cruise ship tourist area. Oddly, it is hard to find Mexican food at the town's restaurants. Much of the food is grilled. Order the grilled chicken, which is just wonderful, as are the grilled garlic shrimp. The diving was fine. There were lots of fish and interesting reefs. Drift diving is a Cozumel specialty. Sand Dollar has decent boats, most with heads, and was accommodating. We easily arranged several special trips and secured our own boats with little advance notice (usually the afternoon before we wanted the dive). Almost all the dives are led by a Sand Dollar divemaster. The typical profile is an 80-foot first dive along a wall and a 60-foot second dive drifting along a reef. All tanks are 80s with yoke connections. Some of our divers were able to rent HP twins and stage bottles with 50% Nitrox at shops in town. This gear was then delivered to the Reef Club pier. On our last day, we insisted on a deeper, freer dive than is normally allowed. The chief divemaster allowed us to do this, after a thorough discussion of our dive plans. Sand Dollar had their divemasters come with us, rather than lead these dives, an arrangement which worked well for everyone.

**Sand Dollar Sports, Reef Club, August 2003, Jim Mularkey (mularkey@hotmail.com), McKinney, TX.** Dives logged: 2,000+. Vis: 80-110 ft. Water: 81-83 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 140. At age 72 I still love to dive but do not enjoy the long flights to the so-called "exotic" dive spots. I have been diving for 48 years but no longer enjoy wrestling with wet or dry suits and

cold water. My solution is Cozumel. We watch the Sunday travel section for the package deals and fly down three or four times a year. A four-day trip is Thursday through Monday. The flight leaves Dallas at 8:00 a.m. and we are in Cozumel by 10:15 a.m. We enjoy the Reef Club and Sand Dollar Divers. We can get in four two tank dives starting with a Thursday 2:00 dive and then a morning two tank dive on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Total cost, everything, \$625-\$650 per person. The Reef Club is all-inclusive. All you can eat, all your can drink and access to non-motorized water craft. The meals are buffet with a large selection. The staff is friendly and will bust their butts when treated with respect and an attempt to speak a little Spanish. The party crowd enjoys an adult pool with a swim-up bar. The Reef Club is a family resort and the staff will look after your kids 4-12 years old while you are off diving. Sand Dollar Sports is next to the Reef Club. You can carry your gear over and they will store it for you between dives. The morning dives leave the dock at 8:30 and they tend to be pretty much on time. The weekly dive program is posted on the wall, and it is the same every week. The first dive is to 85 feet along a wall, the second is a reef dive at 45-60 feet. I get tired of the wall dives but it is part of the package. Since the divemasters are diving the same reefs weekly they have spotted sea horses, toadfish, and octopus. Most Cozumel diving is drift diving and you don't often get a chance to see these elusive critters. A trip down town is no longer enjoyable. Five to six cruise ships are in port at any given

time and down town has been turned into a zoo. A visit to the decompression chamber is worth the trip and the staff is pleased to give you a tour. It is a state of the art facility, computer controlled. The last time I visited a German was being treated and we were allowed to watch the treatment and follow the progress on their computer.

**Scuba Club Cozumel, May 2003, Lisa Jabusch (stevenieters@charter.net), Alton, IL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: 82 to 84 F. Only “gentle” currents present. This was our first trip doing only drift diving — it was so easy! The night dive was absolutely awesome! We dove the Yucab Reef and saw more in one dive than all of our previous night dives together! We quit counting the octopi and toadfish; there were several basket stars feeding, numerous eels hunting, and our guide even found seahorses. Alberto was good at finding toadfish, seahorses, eels, and adjusting the dive given the conditions and divers. The shore diving is good for checkout, but mostly rubble and macro stuff. Good night dive. Diving was as a loosely structured group that was follow the leader, but we could stay down until our air got low. The lodgings were nice, and the staff was always friendly and helpful. The food was good, basic Mexican, but you could choose burger and fries or sandwiches at lunch for a change. \$800 each for a week, all-inclusive of meals and two-tank boat dive per day. Shore diving was “unlimited,” but after two or three dives, you’ve pretty well seen most of what was there. The beds are a thin mattress

(no boxspring) on a concrete base (take an air mattress). The diving in Cayman is so much more varied and overall better (because of the wall), but the combination of price and quality in Cozumel at this operation can’t be beat. ([www.scubaclubcozumel.com](http://www.scubaclubcozumel.com))

**Scuba Du, Presidente Intercontinental, March 2003, Curt Marshall, Auburn, GA.** Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, currents. Our first family dive vacation. We were initiated to diving on a Royal Caribbean Cruise last year and were “certified” (PADI scuba diver) in Barbados. We have been told that Cozumel is a less than ideal place for our first dive trip because of the current and the complexity of the drift diving. In fact, we had a terrific time. We found the Presidente top notch in every way, and the onsite dive operator, Scuba Du, was super. We opted for the five-day, two-tank, and a night dive package. Scuba Du’s service was convenient. Carlos took our gear after each dive, rinsed it, and delivered it to the dock the next day. Beto, our divemaster, was personable and made sure we saw a great deal of sea life. I unfortunately sucked a little too much air and had to surface ahead of the crowd with my buddy. After I requested a 100 cu. ft. tank, things got a lot better. The dive boat was well equipped, clean, and the crew friendly and safety oriented. Ricardo helped with the gear and made sure the gas was on before we entered the water. We enjoyed renting a jeep and taking the afternoon to see the east side of the island. We stopped at Coconuts for lunch. Great stereo sys-

tem powered by car batteries (no electricity on that side of Cozumel). ([www.scubadu.com](http://www.scubadu.com))

**Scuba Du, Presidente, July 2003, Jeff and Colin Daniels ([jeffd@attglobal.net](mailto:jeffd@attglobal.net)), Whittaker, MI.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, currents. Scuba Du ran pleasant, efficient dive service. Don't do special dives (Punta Sur, Maracaibo Wall, wreck) regularly, even if you ask in advance. If you want to do those, try to find other divers who also want to do them. Do Punta Sur if at all possible. Reefs in OK shape. Currents not as strong as expected. Lots of small tropicals. Few larger ones. Occasional turtle, shark, ray. Divemasters were all good, friendly, knowledgeable, and safe but not overly protective. Night dive on Paradise Reef was excellent. Short boat ride, long dive. Lots of lobster, large crabs, eels, octopus. Took one day off from reef to dive with German Mendoza of Yucatech Expeditions in two cenotes on the mainland. Expensive (\$135 per person), but worth the experience. Cost includes equipment, ferry, transport to caverns, guide, and lunch. German handles everything and does an excellent job. The caverns we dove (Taj Mahal, Chuk Mool) have permanent guidelines that you follow. Even though you are supposed to be able to see daylight at all times, there are times when you feel like you are deep in a cave. Great introduction to that kind of diving. German took us to small restaurant in Playa del Carmen for lunch. Not a place I would ever figure to go, but had a great meal of authentic

Mexican tacos. Stayed at Presidente. Nice hotel, large rooms, great beach, good service, expensive. Punta Sur lighthouse is worth a look. Eating at Prima, Guido's, and Pepe's Grill recommended.

**Scuba Shack, Reef Club, December 2002, Brian ([bamitch@execpc.com](mailto:bamitch@execpc.com)), Madison, WI.** Experience: More than 1,000 dives. Vis: 150 to 200 feet. Water: 84 F, calm, currents. This is my sixth time diving with the Scuba Shack/Eco Cozumel group. Six pack, own profile. Good folks. I will dive with them again. Reef Club was OK. Traveling with nondiving teens, and they found plenty to do. ([52-987-872-4240](tel:52-987-872-4240), [scubas@cozunet.finred.com.mx](mailto:scubas@cozunet.finred.com.mx))

**Scuba Staff Divers, December 2002, Steven Mathews, Seattle, WA.** Vis: 80+ feet. Temp: 81 to 86 F. Palancar/Horseshoe. Before signing on with Scuba Staff Divers, we told the manager at 11 a.m. that my son and I had to be back by 4 p.m. to catch the ferry to the mainland to connect with our bus to Cancun (the ferry actually left at 5, so we had a one-hour cushion). He had a dive party leaving at 11:30 for a two-tank dive; being back by 4 p.m. was no problem. I figured almost two hours total underwater time, an hour between dives, and an hour total travel time on the ocean. Returning by 4 p.m. seemed reasonable, and we still had some time margin. The equipment truck did not leave until 11:40; we did not leave until 12 noon for a five-minute ride to the boat. The boat left at 12:15 for a 20- to 30-minute run to Palancar. About 5 min-



utes before we arrived back at the dock after the first dive, I noticed the helmsman radio ahead to the dive shop. We arrived back at the dock by 2:30, but the new air was not at the dock. The new air finally arrived at 3 p.m. I estimated at that point that, even though the second dive was supposed to be just five to 10 minutes from the dock, making it back to the ferry by its 5 p.m. departure was risky: the staff had demonstrated no ability to stay on any schedule. My son and I went back to the dive shop with the truck. We pointed out to the new duty manager that their time inefficiency caused us to not be able to do the second dive: they had wasted well over an hour. Therefore, we wanted half our money back (\$30 each). The manager said that since we only did one dive we were only entitled to \$15 back each since their posted rate for one dive was \$45. After 30 minutes of arguing, we took the \$30 total and a Cozumel ballcap. One of the dive party members got on the ferry five minutes before it left. He had to run back to the ferry; the dive shop offered no ride. My wife had my and my son's return ferry ticket, and she and my son's wife would have been frantic if we had arrived 5 minutes before the ferry departure. The first lesson I learned here: do not pay cash. The second lesson: use the *Undercurrent* Chapbook to pick a dive shop versus letting my hotel do it for me.

([www.cozumel-diving.net/staff](http://www.cozumel-diving.net/staff))

### Puerto Morelos

**Diveair, Ojo de Agua, March/April 2003, John Thurston ([jthurston@](mailto:jthurston@)**

**indra.com)**, **Golden, CO.** Dives logged: 210. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 feet. Surge, some strong current. Pat Beach, a Canadian woman and PADI Instructor, runs the dive operation from her house near the hotel Ojo de Agua. Her boat leaves from the beach in front of the hotel for a short trip to the dive sites. She takes up to six divers but will go with only one diver. The boat is an open, small boat with an awning. Water entry is by a backward roll. Boat reentry is by ladder, after handing your equipment to the boat captain. Pat led the dives that I went on. Two dives are usually done with an interval on the boat. The length of the interval depends on no decompression limits determined by Pat's and other diver's computers. Pat is a conservative dive leader and will not go out when the winds are strong. I lost several days of diving due to strong winds. The dives are to a sunken warship that has been opened up for diving and to various coral areas. I saw a lot of small fish. The coral and sponges are not as good as the best of Cozumel, but the diving is a lot less crowded. Snorkeling is available for coral and fish viewing at a reef that is a short distance from the hotel. The town is quiet and has several good restaurants. The hotel is air conditioned and is comfortable. A shuttle bus runs from the Cancun airport to the hotel.

**Mystic Diving, Royal Sands, November 2002, Patrick T. Gilley, Sr., Belvidere, IL.** Vis: 85 feet. Dives logged: 66. Have been going to Cancun for 10 years. Diving fair.

Found Mystic Diving in Puerto Morelos, 25 minutes south of Cancun. 33-foot, canvas-covered boat. Twin 115hp outboards. Excellent condition. \$45 tank dive. DAN First Aid kit and oxygen on board. Ship to shore radio. Victor Reyes' wife, Mary Lu, friendly and personable. Tank to wash gear and shower. Corals and sponges outstanding. Saw the biggest green moray ever in a cave! 10 footer. Large lobsters, eagle ray, 5-foot nurse. Little to no diving in area so everything is pristine. Not broken up like Cancun. Victor runs a great operation.  
(<http://mysticdiving.com>,  
[www.royalresorts.com/sands.stm](http://www.royalresorts.com/sands.stm))

**Wet Set, Casita del Mar, August 2003, Gustavo Valero, McAllen, TX.**  
Dives logged: 37. Vis 60-90 feet. Temp 82-84 F. Sunny, windy, rainy. Calm & flat, surge. Paul Hensley runs a small but good dive operation. He knows the area well, and he is excellent locating animal life. He offers shark and turtle petting and he delivers. Boat is small, no fancy camera facilities are available. Entry is back roll, reboarding with a ladder after handing your gear up. Shallow dives have plenty of animal life and coral is healthy although not spectacular. Deep dives (some drifting) are spectacular as far as visibility and variety of animal life (nurse shark, turtle, all kinds of large angel fish, queen trigger fish, scrawled file fish, groupers of different size and types and a spotted black and white eel, all in a single dive). There is a nice wreck (C-59) which is penetrable and has plenty of life including schooling barracuda. Most sites are within 15-20 min. The longest boat ride

was 45 min (maromas) which was rewarded by a spectacular wall dive with at least 8 large green turtles with real opportunities to get at a "petting distance." Casita del Mar is a modest hotel and the food service is average at best. I'd try something else, perhaps Ojo de Agua. Puerto Morelos is a laid back village. You can safely go for a walk at night and enjoy authentic Mexican style seafood. Nightlife is minimal but Cancun and Playa del Carmen are a 25-30 min taxi ride (air-conditioned buses are also available). [www.wetset.com](http://www.wetset.com), e-mail: [diver@wetset.com](mailto:diver@wetset.com).  
([www.wetset.com](http://www.wetset.com))

## Xcaret

**Aquatic Activities Center, Occidental Grand Flamenco, January 2003, Flore & David Locker, New York, NY.**  
Dives logged: 200+. Vis: 75-100 feet. Water: 82 F. Dive restrictions enforced: time and depth, stay with dive guide. All-inclusive resort a 10-minute taxi ride from Playa del Carmen. We did two dives in Xcaret Eco-Archaeological Park. The Aquatic Activities Center offers diving and snorkeling tours to the barrier reef and is next to the dolphin area. An instructor picked us up at our resort. Everyone at the shop was pleasant, friendly, knowledgeable, and spoke good English. We were asked about our dive experience and what kind of dives we wanted to do. We had the boat to ourselves on the first dive, called Turtle Reef (75 feet), with a driver and the instructor. The boat was fairly new, with a small shaded area, and had cold bottled water, first aid, and oxygen on

board. Once the boat left the dock, we needed to gear up as the dive site was two minutes away. We did a giant stride into the water, one after the other, and went straight down. The current was swift, but we had no problem staying together. The boat followed from above. The instructor had given us an appropriate depth and time in the pre-dive briefing (we were all using computers), and he stuck to it. The topography and fish life were very much like Cozumel. We saw 15 huge turtles on this dive! When time was up, we did a slow ascent up and a safety stop at 15 feet. Then to get back on the boat, you hand up your weight belt, then BC, to the driver and hoist yourself up to the dive platform (no ladder). We went back to the park for the surface interval and ate lunch while watching people in the water with the dolphins. We had brought sandwiches, but it would have been equally easy to purchase lunch there. Our gear was already set up for us on new tanks for the second dive to Barracuda Reef (45 feet). This dive did not have much current but lots of fish life. A new diver was on the boat with his own instructor. They did their own dive. At the end of the dive, our gear was rinsed for us. The park also offers many varied activities, so is great for non-divers.

([www.xcaret.net](http://www.xcaret.net),  
[www.grandflamencoxcaret.com](http://www.grandflamencoxcaret.com))

## PUERTO RICO

Puerto Rico is beginning to come into its own as a dive destination, with good reefs and walls and good fish life. Winters can be cool.

### **Parguera Divers, Posada Porlamar, Villa Parguera, April 2003, John Yasaki, Oakland, CA.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 feet. Water: 82 F, choppy, currents. Porlamar Posada is a wannabe luxury hotel, needs to figure out that service is important. Bar on patio was open, but unstaffed; when staffed, anything ordered was picked up from restaurant upstairs. Everything involved a wait. The restaurant, however, has great food, but you (again) have to wait for it. Villa Parguera is a little more pricey, but a much nicer place to stay. Beautiful grounds, a somewhat stodgy front desk, but all around relaxed and friendly once checked in. Restaurant is average, though the service was pretty good. Parguera Divers is a great operation; boat is a little small for the offshore conditions but not a problem if you don't get seasick. Angel Rovira and Jose (the DM) do a great job making sure you are happy. Lots of fun on the boat. We arrived after two weeks of heavy rains, so vis was poor, and fish life was sparse. Corals in pretty good shape, inverts plentiful. Supplied camera rinse bucket on request. Pace was a little fast on dives, but that may have been because we didn't make noise about it. (<http://netdial.caribe.net/~divepr/>)

**Parguera Divers, Parador Posada Porlamar, July 2003, Karren & Tom Darone (KDleChat@aol.com), Fairfax, VA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 83 F, choppy, no currents. I wish we'd known it was the start of a four-day holiday weekend. Seems like most of San Juan joined us on the road to La