

Motley had a camera and was furiously snapping photos of everything under water; a divemaster with a camera who turned into a bad diver with a camera, another first! He paid no attention to our group of divers. Due to the strong currents I frequently counted the group, and when Greg slipped down to 130 feet, below the rest of the group, I had to beat on my tank and get his attention. The boat's motor was not working correctly. So we headed back to the dock. There we had our surface interval. I chose to forgo the second dive and walk back to Manta Lodge. The second day of diving was canceled at the Manta Lodge due to "strong currents and a broken motor." All other dive shops in Speyside dove that day, so the strong current excuse was questionable, if not deceptive. The dive operation for the rest of our stay rented a small fishing boat to be used as our dive boat. Although functional, it was crowded, had no tank holders, ladder, shade, or water. If you want water, you have to purchase it at the bar prior to diving, it's not provided. You set up, tear down, rinse, and hang all of your dive gear every day. Nothing was kept on the boat. We went fishing one day in Charlotteville and managed to catch a large wahoo and tuna. After filleting them, we brought them to Manta Lodge, gave them to the owner, and asked them to be cooked and served for dinner or even lunch. Not a good idea, we never saw them again. (www.mantalodge.com)

TURKS AND CAICOS

These islands, situated south of

the Bahamas and north of the Virgins, feature awesome walls and clear water. ... Provo, the glitzy island, has spectacular beaches, but it's at least an hour's boat ride to the better diving of South or West Caicos. Grand Turk, on the other hand, is a funky, laid-back island that has a wall right offshore. Salt Cay has a guest house and pretty diving; West and North Caicos have no dive facilities. ... Bring a long-sleeved shirt during the winter; it can get cool in the evenings. ... The flight to Provo from Miami is a little over an hour.

Grand Turk

Blue Water Divers, 2002, Richard Connell, Colyton, Devon, UK. Dives accrued: 300+, stopped counting. Grand Turk is as much a state of mind as it is a dive destination. You simply have to like decent owners, fellow divers, and operators. The best are on a stretch of beach 200 yards long, and there is a civilised "island time" atmosphere. Jenny Smith has now taken over the Osprey, and it will rise to her high standards. Blue Water Divers continues its informal, friendly, and sane approach. Like the rest of the Caribbean, Grand Turk suffers from a low volume of large fish, but whales in season are common and dolphins like the place. For me, Grand Turk has been a near annual venue since 1989. (www.grandturkscuba.com)

Blue Water Divers, Osprey Beach Hotel, 2002, Faye Stiles, Somerville,

TN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 110 feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm. BWD is definitely not an operation for new divers. DMs went back to the boat, a diver with 20 dives left alone for the last 15 minutes of the dive. The DMs don't have computers, diving off the group. Each diver was allowed one bottle of water for the entire day. One day there was no water on the boat. Most mornings the boat was late for our beach pickup. Equipment is left on the boat each night, not cleaned, hung, or taken into the shop for safety. Our BCs were faded badly, my compass was broken. Both my and my husband's computer faces were scratched badly. We were not aware of this mishandling until the last night of our dive trip. The diving was good, but not great. The highlight of our trip was when we were lucky enough to run upon a pod of dolphins as we were headed to our second dive site. It could have been better if the DMs were better at their jobs. Maybe their lack of interest was that there were only four of us on the boat. The accommodations at the Osprey were nice, since the rooms have been remodeled. There are not a lot of places to eat. All places work off of a limited time schedule, making it impossible to eat late lunches or dinners. Eat when they serve or go hungry! Nothing past 9 p.m., interesting after a night dive. The service is very slow. The best place, least expensive and quick, for breakfast/lunch is at the Osprey. The restaurant is owned/operated separately from the hotel. The food and service is great. The Mooki-Pooki pizza was excellent. The most popular eatery is the Water's

Edge. They have a large menu selection, and, as in the name, on the water's edge on the beach. Folks rage about the local fried chicken joint, but we didn't work that into our meal profile. There is no shopping or entertainment for nondivers. Lots of beggars for \$\$ on an island of 4,000 peeps. The museum is a must see. Boat not really set up for cameras. No reputable camera shops on shore.

Blue Water Divers, Osprey Beach Hotel, February 2003, Martina Schlauch Jones, Chicago, IL.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 140 feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, calm, choppy, surge. Third trip to Grand Turk, and, as usual, Blue Water Divers did a fabulous job of accommodating our diving needs and wishes. Mitch has some new staff on board, and they are all as helpful, friendly, and fun as ever! We saw tons of trunkfish, cow fish, and trumpet fish. Craig (our divemaster) found some great stuff — a baby hawksbill turtle, flamingo tongue, and spotted drum. We saw several stingrays, lizard fish, porcupine fish, and Mitch found an indigo hamlet on the last dive. We stayed in one of the newly remodeled rooms at the Osprey Beach Hotel. Jenny et. al. have done a fabulous job with this place — the rooms and furniture are simple yet lovely. The bar is great — we loved Allen! The restaurant is as good as ever — the barbecue nights are the best, with fresh lobster on the grill. The only bummer was learning that a new pier is being built on Grand Turk so that big cruise ships can start coming there.

Blue Water Divers, Osprey Beach Hotel, March 2003, Scott Vickers and Mark Waddell (markwscottv@msn.com), Denver, CO. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm, no currents. Grand Turk's leeward side and underwater seascape have magnificent walls and plentiful corals, calm seas, no currents, and an abundance of sea creatures and fish. On land, low-traffic Duke Street and Cannes Alley wind their way along the beachfront, where most of the major diving hotels and restaurants are located, and into the small downtown area (Cockburn Town) and pier. Three low-key dive operations host daily trips to the wall, about a quarter-mile offshore, and arrangements can be made to go further afield to Salt Cay or Gibbs Cay, a stingray Mecca. All the dive operations use flat-bottomed Carolina skiffs, which have their limitations as to occupancy and amenities (no onboard heads, no camera platforms, etc.). Blue Water Divers is owned and operated by longtime islander Mitch Rolling, and has three dive masters. Boats pick divers up at their hotels right off the beach. Mitch also performs folk-rock and island music with friends, usually at the weekly barbecue nights at the Osprey Hotel's pool side dining area. We found Mitch to be friendly, accommodating, and deeply committed to providing a safe and memorable diving experience. He is also quite the raconteur, and full of wonderful stories. The dive staff takes care of your gear. Don't expect a lot of underwater guidance or creature hunting from these dive masters, and watch your fills (one of us got air fills as low as 2,200 lbs. Blue Water supplies

no Nitrox, but they will pick it up for you if you order through Oasis Divers. Their downtown dive shop had few diving supplies, whereas Oasis Divers had a much larger selection. Accommodations at the refurbished Osprey Beach Hotel were comfortable and spacious, though their kitchen units were severely under furnished in terms of kitchen implements. The staff quickly provided whatever items we requested. All rooms face the ocean and a balcony or patio. The newly remodeled deluxe suites have tile floors and four-poster king-size beds, but no kitchens, whereas the standard suites have two queen-size beds and kitchens. The bar and pool side restaurant areas are airy and delightful, and their biweekly barbecue night features grilled lobster, steak, and fish and a sumptuous salad bar. Annamae and Iris host these areas, and do a superb job. Grocery shopping is disappointing. There are, however, a handful of decent restaurants, including that of the Osprey. The Water's Edge (cheeseburgers, etc.), Courtyard Café (good breakfasts), Secret Garden (goat curry, ribs), and the Turk's Head Inn (ahi steak, pizza, island curry) all offer good meals, though a bit pricey. For some cheaper and delicious local fare, try the Poop Deck for fried chicken or the Regal Beagle for burgers or fish and chips, both downtown. For a special dive, visit the pier at South Dock, which is a shallow grassy breeding ground for several species. On a daytime visit, we saw juvenile burrefish and honeycomb cowfish in abundance, a juvenile French angelfish, and several juvenile cornetfish. Cruise ships seem to be in Grand Turk's near future. Although there was only one per week

when we visited, there are plans afoot to build a large pier on the South end for daily cruise ship traffic — a bummer for the diving community. Inquire before you go as to whether you, or the cruise ship passengers, will be serviced first by the local dive industry. UW Photography Comments: Small Carolina skiff boats had no rinse/storage.

Oasis Divers, Island House, July 2002, Bob Oberle (roberle@neo.rr.com), Norwalk, OH. Vis: 100 to 120 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F. Dives logged: 150+. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 feet/60 min. The most charming of any vacations that we have been on. Getting there — no problem. Accommodations at the Island House (Grand Turk) could not be more perfect. Diving (with Oasis Divers) — the absolute best. On our return to Provo and staying at Comfort Suites — not elaborate but 100% value for the money. And finally, doing our exit dives with Caicos Adventures — one of the greatest diving days. On Grand Turk, we booked with a great operation — Oasis Divers. Their owners ensure that your diving is unparalleled — we dove with Capt. Everette (the owner) on several dives. Typical dives include a short five- to 10-minute ride to your site, drop in for 50 to 60 minutes while viewing the Caribbean's best sea life and return to the shore for your surface interval — no bouncing around for 45 minutes waiting to get back in. Second dive was more of the underwater world's best! Island House is a great place to stay as when we were there, it was pretty quiet. There was a great group of people there from North Carolina who

shared diving stories around the pool in the afternoon. Colin is the best innkeeper around and makes sure that you have what you need. Our room was kept immaculate everyday by the staff. They also give you a "vehicle" to drive; ours was a golf cart. Returning to Provo after 10 days on Grand Turk, we stayed at Comfort Suites. While it is not located on the beach, it is still a great deal compared to prices charged elsewhere. In addition, being located near several decent restaurants, the casino, and having access to the beautiful beach on Grace Bay just a short walk away. Diving with Caicos Adventures and the owner Fifi proved to be the best single day of diving. There were only eight people on board the boat, a 45- to 50-foot catamaran with every conceivable diver comfort you could imagine. Package that with the attentive service of the crew and the camaraderie was present that made for a great time. Included in the day are lunch, drink, and a chance to see some truly outstanding sea life. (www.oasisdivers.com)

Oasis Divers, The Turks Head Hotel, February 2003, Earl E. Carpenter (ecrpnr@aol.com), Barrington, IL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 140 feet. Water: 78 F, calm. Grand Turk: www.turksandcaicostourism.com. Worth the extra effort it takes to get to this location. Every one of the islanders will give you a hello and a friendly smile. It's a good place for a lazy American — they use the U.S. dollar, they speak English, and they want you to enjoy your experience so you'll come back to their island. The island

has a lot of charm. Turk's Head Hotel: www.tophotel@grand-turk.com. Island flavor, an old government building that's been converted into a residence. The courtyard is one of its greatest assets. Sitting under the trees for breakfast, lunch, or dinner is truly a relaxing and memorable experience. Service is truly island-ease. Food and drinks will be served when they're ready — not necessarily when everyone else is ready. The ladies who serve you will take their time to enjoy a laugh or carry on a conversation with you. Special BBQ dinners seem to be a big deal, and numerous restaurants have them on different nights. They were always fun and with plenty to eat. There are numerous places to eat within a block of the Turks Head. Oasis Divers: www.oasisdiv.tciway.tc. The best. Dale and Everett love what they do, and it shows in the people who work for them. Dale made all arrangements for our group on the island, including the local airline connection from Provo. She made sure there was someone at the airport looking for members of our group by name that arrived at various times. They got all luggage, equipment, and divers to our hotel. Dale brought luggage that the airline sent on a later flight. As for diving, we always had a good understanding of the site before we entered the water. We handled only our fins and mask, the rest was brought to us when we sat on the back of the boat ready to slip into it and jump in. Everett's love of the humpback can sometimes turn into an hour chase rather than tying to a dive buoy. He got us up close to a mother and calf — a sight seldom seen

by a boatload of divers. And then we went back to the dive buoy for our planned dive. Oasis also offered an afternoon of conch diving and a trip to a sandy beach on a nearby island, for conch salad and BBQ'd burgers and hot dogs. One evening Everett and members of his staff jam with a local musician at one of the BBQ dinners. Memorable wall diving. All dive sites were within 20 minutes of Oasis. The walls varied in the types and quantities of corals, and they varied from gradual descents to sheer 90-degree drops. There were several tunnels and swim-throughs, which offered magnificent photo shots. Large schools of fish and also a great variety of fish. Although we did not see many large critters. The water temp was a constant 78 and the visibility varied from 80 to well over 100 feet. Most dive profiles were to drop to 80 to 100 feet and work our way back to the top of the wall — 40 to 50 feet. Our dives were not restricted by time or air, but by our safety and our enjoyment. Thanks for your service, Undercurrent. It's how we found Oasis Divers.

Oasis Divers, Osprey Beach Hotel, July 2003, Kevin Harvill (harvill@verizon.net), Flower Mound, TX.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm. Third trip to Grand Turk in less than three years. Great diving, friendly people, comfortable accommodations, and beautiful sunsets make this one of our favorite destinations in the West Indies. The first two times we visited the island we stayed at the Turks Head Inn, a hotel we recommend. Osprey Beach

Hotel is less than 30 feet separating our door from the sand. Only one complaint about the beach. No shade. The older I get the less important it is to “work on my tan.” Some thatched palapas would make this a near-perfect place to sit near the gentle surf after a morning of diving, reading a good book or catching up on some much needed and well-earned napping. As it is we waited until near sunset to venture onto the sun-drenched sand with margarita in hand to enjoy some of the most beautiful sunsets a diver is likely to see. Only once during our nine-day visit was the sky clear enough to give us the green flash. Every other night the clouds burned yellow, then orange, then red, then purple with the setting of the sun from this west-facing beach. We chose a ground-floor room with TV, refrigerator, and coffee maker. Other rooms have more amenities such as a microwave, couch, toaster, etc. Our bed was king-size and comfortable. The refrigerator was large enough to hold several one-gallon water jugs and was efficient. The window-style air conditioner was cold! Severe lack of shelf space in the bathroom. We piled all our toiletries on the rim of the sink and the back of the toilet. During our stay the outdoor restaurant/bar/patio/pool area was retiled in an attractive terra cotta color. On Sundays and Wednesdays local dive shop operator Mitch Rolling entertains diners — he’s a good singer and guitar player. Other locals (called Belongers) join in on various instruments such as the bongo and saw. During one of Mitch’s performances much attention was given to a visiting

celebrity. Free-diver Tanya Streeter was honored by the Minister of Tourism and the Governor of the Turks and Caicos Islands for her recent free diving record of 425 feet which, I think, was set just a few days before near Providenciales. Meals at Osprey Beach are served on the patio around the pool right next to the beach. The meals we had here were delicious and plentiful and Alan whips up a pretty good cocktail. Breakfasts were taken at the Courtyard Café across the street. The setting is shaded and cool in the rising sun. The two-egg ham and cheese omelet became our standard fare. We ate most of our evening meals at a comfy little place called the Water’s Edge. From the menu you can’t go wrong with the cracked conch or a “Goo Burger.” Great place to watch for the “green flash.” Oasis Divers is simply the best. Owners Dale and Everette Freitas run a top-notch, professional operation. Paul, Phil, Ty, Baccam and Lorenzo made sure we had the best dive experience possible. The plankton was absent, so no Mantas. However, the diving here is fabulous. The reef is healthy, the fish abundant, the viz extraordinary, the walls breathtaking. Over seventeen dives we saw the biggest hawksbill, the biggest green moray, the biggest nurse shark, the biggest octopus, and the biggest Nassau grouper we’ve ever seen. At the same time we saw lots of baby critters as well. Very young turtles, tangs, drums, trunk fish, etc. On other dives we were greeted by spotted morays, puffer fish, squid, scorpion fish, lobsters, barracudas, lizard fish, southern stingrays, and cleaning stations. We

took a day trip to Salt Cay which is a 45 minute boat ride from Grand Turk. At Northwest Wall we found nurse sharks and tons of queen conch. At Callie's Folly we experienced incredible viz, dramatic valleys, two six foot reef sharks, and a healthy reef. For our post-dive lunch we headed to Island Thyme Bistro and Bar. The owner's name is Porter and he is a gregarious, entertaining fellow who makes you feel at home. Ask him to make you a drink called Dawa or one he dubs The Deep Blue. I had a pretty good jerked chicken sandwich. From Provo we flew a 19-passenger Sky King to Grand Turk. All connections went smoothly. Taxi service on Grand Turk is prompt and courteous. There are around 3,500 residents on this laid-back, friendly little island and there's really nothing for a guest to do but dive. The government has signed agreements with some cruise ship companies to allow regular stops.

Oasis Divers, Arawak Inn, July 2003, Ronald Bailey (rlbailey@rbnet.com) Roanoke, VA.

Experience: 1,100+ dives. Vis: 60-110 ft. Water: 81-83F. Rooms at Arawak were spacious, air conditioned — full kitchen, including microwave, toaster, coffee maker. Pool was clean, bar/restaurant was okay. Service on food preparation slow first few days — improved towards end of week. They ran out of hamburgers, fruits, some sandwiches on some days. Food reasonably good, but pricey. Bring some food/snacks with you. Corals on wall healthy, but only average fish life. Some turtles, limited number of sharks, limited macro. Sea horses at pier near

hotel. They are at the end of pier, in the sand. Oasis Divers picked us up on the beach and ferried us to boat anchored in front of hotel. Good job by divemaster and boat captain. Good place for newer divers. On our flight from Grand Turk to Provo, our plane (Sky King Airlines) would not start. So they shifted us to a second plane, but not the luggage, including checked carry-ons. Luggage did not arrive in time for flights back to U.S.A. Luggage came to us one day later, intact. Make sure all luggage is tagged and comes on plane with you when using Sky King. Leave time between flights from Grand Turk to Provo in case luggage not on your flight. Airport in Grand Turk being upgraded to handle jets, if airliners will fly them there.

Oasis Divers, Arawak Inn, August 2003, Skip Johnston, Oakland Park, FL.

Vis: 80-120 ft. Water: 82-84 F. and always calm. Since becoming a NAUI Instructor (1962) I have visited and worked with many excellent dive operations, in over 200 locations, but none better than Oasis Divers. Restrictions: 100 ft/60 minutes. To/from Reef 8-15 minutes. Very competent/knowledgeable divemasters, average four divers per boat. Excellent gear. Unlimited lee shore diving on close-in reefs with the 7,000 ft. wall starting at 40 feet as close as 150 yards offshore. Biomass and biodiversity outstanding. We saw sharks, turtles, pelagics, many kinds of tropical fish and other reef critters. A companion boat snorkeled with a wild dolphin pod for 45 minutes one day. Owners Dale and Everett provide the most friendly, dedi-

cated, safe and customer-supportive resort I have ever experienced. They arrange everything — air from/to Provo, hotel, daily pickup, 2-tank dives daily and more. The Arawak Inn is a clean, well-appointed 16-suite operation right on the beach. If you are seeking a laid-back place with exciting diving and outstanding value, this is it.

Sea Eye Divers, Osprey Beach Hotel, October 2002, Jill Guthrie & Mike Webber, Vancouver, BC.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 85 to 86 F, calm. Sea Eye Divers divemasters always asked us where we had been and tried to take us somewhere new each time. Most first dives were alone with DM and back to Osprey for SI and then a local retired couple often joined for second dive. All dives were over one hour and few at 80+ minutes, depths 60 to 100 feet in first dives. Most dives good vis, but due to earlier storms none were great. Aquarium — turtles, tunnels — great swim-throughs, amphitheatre — tight swim-throughs (optional of course) and sting rays, and nice wall after long shoot. Finbar — huge crab and cute porcupinefish. Osprey Beach Hotel: We got one of the newly renovated rooms with four poster king bed on second floor near bar. Room was perfect, bright, nice white tiles, beautiful dark wood furniture with white immaculate linens and nice deck over white sand beach and azure ocean. Jenny, the owner, was great, and Allan, the manager (and sometimes cook), ran a fun bar with locals and guests mingling and the best food on the island. We did not take meal plan. Nice to try other

places but Osprey had nicest food in the end. Courtyard Cafe was great for breakfast and lunch with nice home-made specials daily. The museum is great, with details on the Molasses Reef Shipwreck, etc. and talk to the manager, Brian, who knows so much (you catch at the Osprey bar too). Grand Turk was great; the one thing we recommend is the tourist board push for a bottle deposit system so everyone will pick up their numerous pop and beer cans — easy solution for minimal costs for the one blight we found when exploring by bike. UW Photography Comments: Standard water tub for camera, dive masters always helped you in and out of boat and took care to help with cameras, etc. (www.reefnet.on.ca/grandturk)

Sea Eye Diving, Arawak Inn, November 2002, Ray Haberman (Masterdiver50@hotmail.com), Naperville, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, surge. Wish I had known a wet suit wasn't needed. Sky King Airways allows 44 lbs, and you have to pay for excess. Sea Eye Divers bend over backwards to make your trip enjoyable. Unfortunately they run on "Island Time," therefore they don't leave on time. They don't carry water on the smaller boats. Interval time is taken at their shop, where they provide water, lemonade, and a snack. The Arawak Inn is off the beaten path but is one of the better hotels on the island. Rooms have a full kitchen, living room, bedroom, and bathroom. Bedroom has a king-size bed, and the living room has a queen-size hide-a-bed. The food was

excellent and not over priced, but the service was a little slow. The large dive boat had rinse tanks. Small dive boats had nothing for cameras.

Sea Eye Diving, Osprey Beach Hotel, May 2003, Irina Zeylikman, Lexington, MA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. The diving on Grand Turk is very good, but there are better places (Little Cayman, for example). We were unpleasantly surprised with Sea Eye as the dive operation. Our tanks were never full; the best we could hope for was 2,500 psi. People at the dive shop were filling them under the blazing sun, standing in 5 inches of water. When the tanks cooled down, they were only 3/4 full. The dive operation's building looked like it was going to fall down any minute; the dive shop itself was mostly closed the whole week. Some people on the boat had rental gear that has seen better days. Smitty tried his best to make our diving the most enjoyable experience, but he only could do so much. We never knew if our boat was going to start, or we would have to swim ashore (which we did once). Our BCs and regs were kept aboard all week, not rinsed even once. The dive shop does not have any facilities to store gear. The dive operation looks like the owners have absolutely no interest in it. Osprey Beach Hotel is being renovated slowly but surely. Unfortunately we stayed in the room that has not been renovated yet. We had some problems with equipment in the room, but everything was eventually fixed. The rooms are big and have a small kitchen. Food and service: The

quality of food on a island is below average, and service is extremely slow. We waited 2.5 hours for our lunch one day. There was no setup for camera, not even a rinse bucket. I had to ask the dive master to get me one.

Sea Eye Diving, Turks Head Inn, June 2003, Gloria Freund (gfandac@erols.com), McLean, VA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 90 feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm, no currents. My only disappointment was not getting desired instruction in the u/w photography for which Cecil @ Sea Eye is justly renowned. Shortly beforehand I learned Sea Eye's rental Nikonos weren't working, which prevented a real photo course. I resigned to renting Sea Eye's point/shoot MX-10 but was halfway through my trip before getting the camera, care instruction, and a few pointers. The quality of diving by our Sea Eye divemaster, Smitty, more than took up the slack. As a working stiff from N. Virginia, it's hard improving skills diving only once a year. Our small Sea Eye dive groups allowed for personalized attention. After short, pithy briefs, Smitty let folks explore walls on their own or accompany him. Choosing the latter, we had the benefit of Smitty's coaching to refine our technique and notice more critters. Smitty artfully weaves intimate knowledge of those reefs and walls with an intuitive, almost spiritual relationship with the environment; anyone, regardless of their experience, can learn something from him. So, with him, we slowed down, relaxed, shed nearly a third of our lead, and consumed less air. Never rushed, we enjoyed bottom times of an

hour, plus. Dive plans tarried at the best spots. We had arches, swim-throughs, gorgonians, elephant ear, rope, barrel, black, pipestem, and other coral formations. Smitty pointed out critters we might have missed and introduced us to resident groupers and hawksbill turtles willing to pose for photos. We saw several sea horses, yellow frogfish, batfish, scorpion fish, minute shrimp, spiny lobsters, barracuda, eel. Smitty's "ugly" site (The Pits) was a fascinating extended safety stop amongst the old tires, crates, pylons, and human debris in which sea creatures have established their castles. Most exhilarating was our dolphin encounter while commencing a safety stop at English Point. Four approached in a tightly orchestrated frolic to within a few feet of each of us for mutual appraisals, braiding around each other and eyeing us from several vantages before moving on. Grand Turk lacks glitz, upscale shopping, chain stores, fast food, commercial amusements. It is neither lush nor landscaped. It is nearly flat, dry, scrubby, and in some spots, spewn with trash. Beyond lovely, nearly un-peopled beaches and great snorkeling, Grand Turk has an individuality and warmth rarely found. Travelers will be happy who enjoy quiet, funky charm, genuinely friendly populace, and simple pleasures. Having no wheels, we availed of Smitty's island tour offer, so experienced the place through the eyes of someone to whom it is beloved home. Old Cockburn town has many dilapidating old plantation mansions that give parts of it a ghost town feel. There is no gentrification here. (Many old

structures remain in use — churches, library, Eunice lodge, a great national museum.) Smitty drove us along North Creek past feral horses and donkeys to see feeding flamingoes, to the lighthouse near the old navy base (now community college), and up along the ridge where spacious dream homes are slowly rising. The ridge overlooks both sides of the island to oceans beyond, including Cockburn town and old salt-flats-turned-wildlife-refuges. Cross-seabreezes give lift to egrets and herons. Lovely. Meals along Front Street were good but pricey at \$20, plus. Sunsets accompany good seafood at Water's Edge. Regal Beagle served reasonable fish & chips. But we found the best and most unique dining experience at Chubby's (aka Sap's) a few miles north of town. Hours vary — best call (242-1723). Open since summer '02, one won't find a friendlier, more generous or accommodating host, nor fresher/better seafood at more reasonable prices. Chubby also treated us to stories of growing up a fisherman's son (his father runs the fish market) and a rundown of island goings-ons. An outdoor expansion should be done in summer '03, so guests can enjoy ultra-fresh grouper, lobster, or just-plucked-from-the-water conch under the stars. Chubby also offers other island tour services. We stayed at Turks' Head Inn for historic charm and convenience. Its shaded courtyard hosted our included breakfasts and the hammock, post-dive relaxing. Turks' Head staff was accommodating; "deluxe" rooms on which we splurged were comfortable and spacious. Good showers had hot and cold water when-

ever needed. Re Saturday night karaoke: all guests get the audio blast anyway, so be downstairs with the crowd for the full effect. Left Grand Turk refreshed by the quiet, small community feel — awakening to roosters' crows and seeing cattle, feral donkeys, and horses wandering about. Folks greet and readily chitchat with visitors who make the time. Everyone seems to know everyone else. Within a day or so after arriving I felt more relaxed, accepted, safe, and at home above and below the water. Anxiety set in only when learning that Holland America may start developing a cruise ship pier as soon as late '03. A broadened economic base is argued, given loss of the salt industry by the 1960s. Too often poverty and inadequate opportunity do accompany quaintness so appealing to visitors, and Grand Turk has its issues. But some Islanders share deep worries for what sudden, homogenizing, cruise ship infrastructures of duty free shopping malls and mass-appeal amusements might impose on this small, open-hearted community. What will become of Grand Turk's delicate reefs, natural treasures, and gentle, welcoming temperament? One prays for Grand Turk politicians, the wisdom to absorb and pace any such development without sacrificing its most precious human and natural gifts. Many Caribbean dive destinations invite exploration but can be satisfied with a single visit. Between its great reefs and way of life, Grand Turk beckons returns.

**Sea Eye Diving, Arawak Inn,
August 2003, Ron & Sherry Smith,
Levittown, PA.** Vis: 60-80 ft. Water:

83-86 F. Experience: 204 dives. Dive restrictions enforced: dive within the limits of computer/air. Grand Turk has remained a quiet and laid back island. There is a new airport being built and talk of bringing larger planes in. Accommodations at the Arawak are great, nice, spacious rooms and pool on the beach. The restaurant is eased out. The service is slow and the food not that good. So we rented a car to drive to town to eat. The Osprey and the Waterfront have the best food. Driving to town and renting a car was a bit of a hassle, but we would not stay at the Osprey. The bartender was very rude because we were not guests of the hotel. This kind of behavior is not good relations to "guests of the island." Smitty, at Sea Eye Diving, was great! Took time to point out many interesting things including an octopus feeding on a conch during the day! Night dive was the best we ever had. Just the two of us and Smitty. Two huge friendly groupers followed us and let us pet them! We turned our lights out for 2 hr and tons of bioluminescence. When the lights were out you could feel the groupers brushing against you. When the lights went back on they started to hunt. Small fish disappeared in an instant. Short rides to sites and great wall diving made the trip overall an A+, even with a couple rainy, cloudy days.

Providenciales

**Beaches, August 2002, Larry
Wagner (lpwagner@swvbell.net),
McKinney, TX.** Experience: 26-50
dives. Vis: 60 to 70 feet. Water: 83 F,
calm, no currents. Great diving experi-

ence for beginners and families with junior divers. Many newly certified divers on the boat. Divemasters were capable and attentive and tended to focus on those showing less skill — one new diver ran out of air and then got tangled in the spare air hose at the safety bar. For an experienced/hard core diver Beaches' protocols are intrusive — specified short bottom times at no more than 80 feet (but conversely safe profiles) and had to pass a brief skills test before being allowed to sign up for diving. Once the divemaster was comfortable with your skills (one dive), you could go off with a buddy if you had a computer — but still were required to be up within the time limit. We cheated by exploring the shallows below the boat while others exited — gaining about 10 to 15 minutes per dive. DMs were OK with this, but even so we were coming up with 800 to 900 psi. Boats had standard safety gear and could hold 30 divers easily — which could make for crowded conditions below. Dives to The Crack and Black Coral Garden were best, but not as good as French Cay sites.
(www.beaches.com)

**Beaches, Parrot Caye, June 2003,
Dr. Tom and Donna Kelly, Irmo, SC.**

Both of us have over 1,200+ dives and are PADI Divemasters. At Beaches, everyone has to do an “orientation dive” in the pool your first day. You can’t sign up for any dives until you do this. This causes you to lose one day of diving. When you finish the “orientation dive” and try to sign up for the next day, all the boats are booked full. You lose a second day of

diving. You have to sign up for the next day’s dive at 8 a.m. on the previous day. Rules, rules, and rules seemed to be made to keep you from diving. If you answer “yes” to anything on the Medical History/Release Form, you won’t be diving. Every dive boat is packed with 27 to 30 divers; strictly a cattle boat operation. The dives are in Grace Bay, East Cay, and Northwest shore. The coral appears unhealthy and bleached. If you want to go to West Caicos or South Caicos, where the diving is better, you’ll need to call an independent operator. The diving was very restrictive. They require you to follow one of their instructors in one of their groups. After a couple of these dives, they let you “buddy dive” outside the group. Though they try to advertise the diving there, this not a dive resort. Stay in the Parrot Cay Villas. Rooms 618, 619, 620, 614, and 615 are the closest to the dive shop. There is no storage at the dive shop for your gear and no safe place to put your camera. The diving aside the resort is beautiful, and the food was great. The Parrot Villas suites are composed of two large rooms. A bed/bath and a separate sitting area, which has a pull out sofa bed. The large sitting area also had a wet bar that was stocked with eight different liquors, snacks (pretzel, chips, and popcorn), juices, cokes, and beer. Both rooms had TVs, independent A/C, and a door separating both rooms for privacy. A family of four could be quite comfortable in the Parrot Cay Villas. Also keep in mind American Airlines departs for Miami at 7:40 a.m., while U.S. Air departs at 3:30 p.m. for Charlotte.

Beaches, June 2003, John Brinkerhoff, Glasgow, KY. Vis: 50 to 100 feet.

Water: 78 to 80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 80 feet. Considering how busy the dive operators, they were helpful and courteous, but they were too crowded. They went out three or four times daily with 30 to 40 divers each trip. The dives were guided with 10 to a group. That's too many! It's no wonder we didn't see much fish life on the reef. We have about 60 dives recorded and would have preferred to go it alone.

Big Blue Unlimited, Grace Bay Club, 2003, Erwin P. Staller, Huntington, NY. Being an older diver (82 years of age), I require more assistance than the average diver. All of the people associated with Big Blue were happy to provide me with whatever attention I needed. Big Blue is dedicated to the safety and health of their divers, as well as being ecologically sensitive to the coral. I had a great week diving with them. We stayed at the Grace Bay Club, which has excellent facilities. The Club is on a beautiful beach and has an excellent restaurant. Big Blue was able to arrange for John Garvin to give me a course on nitrox diving. John was a member of the support team on the world-record free dive of Tanya Streeter. He was informative and thorough in his instruction and got me certified to dive nitrox. (www.bigblue.tc/welcome.htm)

Big Blue Unlimited, Sands At Grace Bay, April 2003, Gregory Oppenhuizen (doctoro@macatawa.com), Holland, MI. Experience: 501-

1,000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 76 to 77 F, calm. Big Blue Unlimited is a good operation for divers who prefer to dive their own profile. You may stay down until you are ready to come up (60+ min). Nitrox increases your no deco limit, since most diving is in 50 to 80 feet with no shallow 15- to 30-foot reef. Novices can be guided. The boat is a 39-foot twin hull design well suited for diving and in good repair. They provide soft drinks, sandwiches, fruit, and snacks. The food is good since many sights are nearly an hour away. You leave at 8:20 a.m. and may return as late as 2:30 p.m. for two tanks. Big Blue takes no more than eight divers but does charge about 10% more than the other dive operations, which may carry 20+ "guided" divers. BB dives all the sights including the nice sights around Provo which I found as good or better than West Caicos and French Cay. I enjoyed Football Field and Northwest Point best, both of which are off Provo. I dove for seven days. The dive personnel were friendly, capable, and equipped to assist with modest technical problems. The Sands At Grace Bay is a nice resort with its own restaurant less than 10 years old. It is expensive, but prices in Provo are nearly comparable to Grand Cayman. A typical fish entree will be \$22 to \$29. With soup, salad, and wine expect nothing less than \$50/person for dinner. You can do sandwiches and beer for quite a bit less or go to IGA and get light food, beer, and wine, or bring your own wine with you. The Sands provides a shuttle for a fee (they claim less than the taxi) to restaurants and stores, although there is complimentary pickup and return to

the airport. I did not observe a dip tank on the boat, but there was space on the boat to securely place cameras as well as a functional fresh water shower. The biggest advantage for photographers is an unlimited dive profile.

Big Blue Unlimited, Alexandra Resort and Spa, June 2003, Albert Tims, Woodbury, MN. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 90 feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm, choppy. The operation demonstrates a real commitment to ecologically sensitive diving, provides detailed dive briefings, and encourages individual exploration and discovery. Groups are kept small (typically eight or fewer) with mandatory dive computers (supplied free of charge, if needed) to encourage divers to plan their own dives without time limits or profile limits. The dive shop is ideally located, spotless, and well equipped with onsite Nitrox blending. The dive boats are fast, dry, and expertly configured for the local waters. The staff is friendly, professional, and committed to offering superior dive experiences. French Cay, West Caicos, and Provo's Northwest Point feature spectacular walls, abundant reef fish life, pelagics, and good to great viz. A world class beach (Grace Bay), great restaurants, premium accommodations, and great diving makes Provo an exceptional dive destination.

Big Blue and Dive Provo, Allegro, August 2003, Kris Cummings (pmgkrc1@aol.com) Noblesville, IN. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 200 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, choppy, no currents. Our group was put

together from my local dive shop, Indy MPH Watersports. We had a chartered flight using ATA and flew direct from Indianapolis to Provo Island. The 130 stayed on Provo and 34 divers that went on to Grand Turk. Out of the 130 that stayed on Provo about 120 were divers. We used 3 boats that Dive Provo had and used 2 boats from Turtle Divers. So everyone had five days of diving. We were broken into 6 groups of 20 divers and every group rotated. The boats were plenty big enough to accommodate 20 divers but not 20 camera systems. I also went to complete my semi-closed Rebreather certification. The Dive operation that O2 technical uses is Big Blue. I purchased my own Drager Dolphin Rebreather and took it with me to get certified with John Garvin. I then started using the Rebreather to enhance my photographs and video. I started getting greatly improved videos immediately. An example was being face to face, within inches of each other a 6 foot Caribbean reef shark. Big Blue and O2 Technical are some of the best people in the dive business I have dealt with during my 18 years of diving. The Allegro Resort was fine. Get reservations at either of the 2 onsite restaurants as the restaurants are superior to the buffet. The pool is first class, with water volley ball being the sport after a long morning of diving. Diver's have time for breakfast prior to diving and will return in time to still have a leisurely lunch before the buffet is taken down to begin preparing for dinner. My dives with Dive Provo were geared for photographers. I still take photos using film and heavy high out-

put Ikelite strobes. My equipment takes up a lot more room than these new compact digital beauties. My video equipment takes up less room so I switched to shooting video for the remainder of the trip to allow more room for the other photographers. Diving with Big Blue I had all the room I wanted for my equipment.

Caicos Adventures, August 2002, Larry Wagner (lpwagner@swbell.net), McKinney, TX. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 84 F, choppy, no currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions enforced: stay with DM if you take the guided dive, or dive your own profile with your buddy. Safety stop recommended. Fifi's new power cat makes an excellent dive boat, and he runs a good operation. Boat was equipped with oxygen, first aid, safety stop hang bar, and spare air reg. The head on our trip became temperamental early on and became useless. Fifi gave a one hour and 40 minute surface interval with pretty good sandwiches offered. We dove G Spot and Double D. Both were awesome dives! Very dense coral in great shape, lots and lots of the usual reef fish, plus barracuda, eagle rays, and sharks. The sharks at G Spot seem to wait for divers to play a game of chicken — coming straight at you and then veering off when maybe 15 feet away. One playful shark liked to do this under the boat 15 feet — making the safety stop a real thrill. If sharks aren't your thing, maybe this isn't the place for you, but the diving is superb, so maybe you could stay in the middle of a pack of divers when surfacing.

The drop off at G Spot is straight down to the abyss, and just took my breath away when I first peered over the edge. (www.caicosadventures.tc)

Caicos Adventures, Comfort Suites, September 2002, Glen Spence (glenspence@yahoo.com), Cooper City, FL. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 84 to 85 F. Dives logged: 700+. Dive restrictions enforced: 500 psi on boat. Comfort Suites has pool, continental breakfast, nice room, and is quite adequate for the money. Caicos Adventures is a good dive operator. Excellent dive boat. Fresh sub sandwiches after first dive. Nitrox is not available. Depths and times of dives are limited accordingly. We saw five dolphins, spotted eagle rays, many reef sharks, nurse sharks, turtles, stingrays, schools of jacks, etc.

Caicos Adventures, September 2002, Glen Spence (glenspence@yahoo.com), Cooper City, FL. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 84 to 85 F. Dives logged: 700+. Dive restrictions enforced: limit to 110 feet, 500 psi when surfacing, nitrox max. to 110 feet. Food was good and plenty. Visibility was only about 60 to 80 feet, but the amount of marine life on the walls was outstanding. Schools of horse-eye jacks, many Caribbean reef sharks, spotted eagle rays, turtles, stingrays, etc. Schools of colorful tropicals were in abundance. 23 dives in the week, 20 deeper than 100 feet. Thank God for nitrox.

Caicos Adventures, January 2003, Paul Brown (pbrown@fedex.com), Cordova, TN. Experience: 51-100

dives. Vis: 80 to 130 feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, choppy. Fifi runs an excellent operation, and the catamaran he uses to get you to the great dive sites at West Caicos and French Cay cuts travel time down and is comfortable. The crew, Asa and Kenard, do all the work. Never touched my gear for five days. All three guys made this a great trip. Boat will carry 25 divers and the max we had was seven. All the sites were good and no other boats around. One wish is that the sandwiches he provided would change each day. But they were big. Bring your own fresh fruit.

Caicos Adventures, Carribben Paradise Inn, February 2003, Barry Zigas (barryzigas@earthlink.net), Washington, DC. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 65 to 70 F, calm, choppy. Well-run dive operation, with spirited crew that is knowledgeable, professional, and courteous. Captain "Fifi" Kuntz ran a tight ship but made it easy. Divemasters like K. Cruikshank also qualified and friendly. Went on successive days, first to French Key and second day to West Caicos. Very calm for the crossing to French Key. The large twin-hulled boat made it quickly and comfortably. Fresh water, O2, marine head. Divers set up gear for first dive, second by divemasters. Divers for multiple days leave gear on board and crew rinses and puts out for second and subsequent days. First day had about 12 divers, in three groups. Wide mix of experience and training. Second day more cozy and relaxed with only six of us. Generally dives to sandy bottoms then over the wall to 60 to 85 feet. No dive under 45

minutes, with ample shallow degassing time and mandatory three minute safety stops on bar with hanging regulator. Lunch of grocery store sandwiches (ask for tuna in advance if ham and cheese ain't your thing!) served between dives during long surface interval of at least an hour. Second day more choppy but quick trip to West Caicos. Both days great dives with lots of sharks and eagle rays, black grouper, tons of tropicals, lobsters, etc. Hard coral, gorgonians, and sponges galore. I did my Advanced Open Water certification dives on this trip and after some initial confusion — I'd signed up but they seemed to have forgotten — got thorough and professional check out. Caribbean Paradise Inn is small — about 20 rooms — bed and breakfast place a short walk from the beach at Grace Bay, nearly adjacent to Royal West Indies Resort. Comfortable rooms, firm beds, fans, and AC, plenty of hot water in clean full bathroom, cable TV with plenty of movie channels, plain but filling continental breakfast every a.m., rooms arranged in two stories around a nice pool. Lockers and dunk tank for divers, but most guests were nondivers. Host Cliff is always around and hospitable. Rates are comparable to other places (including taxes, assume \$200/night or more), but a quiet, comfortable place. Good website. Nearby West Indies resort has a nice, relatively affordable bar/restaurant and the main restaurants, discos, and the casino are a short, 10-minute walk down the road (bring a small flashlight for walks after dark). No beach frontage, but a short walk to gorgeous beach for at least a mile in either

direction. For local “color” try Smokey’s on the beach in Blue Hills. It’s about a \$50 round trip cab ride, but great local fish, conch, and lobster served in a low key island setting.

Caicos Adventures, Sands Resort, February 2003, Robin Masson (ram@wigginsandmasson.com), Ithaca, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, calm, no currents. Excellent boat, fast smooth ride to West Caicos and French Cay. Dive sites in great condition, lots of fish and huge sponges. Small groups on guided dives. Decent dive briefings. Good rental gear. Lunches not good, but they filled the belly. Fifi, his staff are fun, enthusiastic, and dedicated to excellent customer service. His reputation is well-deserved. You need to bring your own towels, but otherwise all needs met on board. Boat is on south side of island — Fifi will pick you up at your hotel at 8:15 a.m., or you can rent a car and go on your own. The Sands Resort is a beautiful all-suite resort on a gorgeous beach and gardens, with spacious accommodations. Good value for the price. Well-equipped kitchens mean you can eat meals in to save \$\$.

Island is safe, people are friendly. Good grocery store if you want to cook at “home.” Hyperbaric chamber on island. Good medical clinic (unfortunately, I learned firsthand) with appointments available on the day I called. Dry area in front of boat, small fresh water bucket for cameras — O.K. if not too many cameras. One-hour print processing five minutes from dive op.

Caicos Adventures, Coral Gardens, April 2003, Bill Stacy, Chesterton, IN. Experience: More than 1,000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Coral Gardens is a small condominium type resort right on Grace Bay with excellent snorkeling at your front door. Matthew Williams, owner of Cactus Voyager, is a friendly, knowledgeable Brit, books diving, sailing, snorkeling, beach picnics, water-sports rental, and just about anything to do in the islands. The staff at Coral Gardens was friendly and helpful, making our stay enjoyable. The restaurant on the premises was excellent but pricey. They need a beach restaurant. To get to other restaurants requires a cab or rental car. Most cab rides are \$10 and rental cars about \$55/day. A small local hang out called Go Fish, try their cracked conch and cole slaw. The Tiki Hut has everything from burgers and fries to gourmet. The diving arranged by Cactus Voyager a short Land Rover ride to Caicos Adventures. Diving was aboard a custom 43-foot catamaran that even with 24 divers on board was never crowded. Phillipe, the owner/captain, and his crew are excellent. They give you as much help as you require and let you dive your own profile. Tanks filled to 3,000 and changed for you between dives. Ample food and drink on board, as well as a fresh water shower and head. Boat rides were normally 45 min to an hour and very comfortable. Great place to stay if one spouse or partner is not a diver.

Caicos Adventures, Sands at Grace Bay, May 2003, James Masella, New York, NY. Experience: 101-250

dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm. Caicos Adventures was a terrific operation and "Fifi" did a super job of planning, explaining, and leading dives. Long boat rides (45 minutes to an hour), but necessary to get to the good diving. A "five star" operation. Strongly recommend the Sands at Grace Bay as a place to stay.

**Caicos Adventures, May 2003,
Sharon Rapacz, Rochester, IL.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, choppy. Stayed in a one-bedroom condo at the Alexandra and dove with Caicos Adventures. When I called to check on rates, etc., Fifi claimed he had the best boat and dove the best sites around the islands, and he wasn't lying. We dove four days with him, and they took care of our equipment and stored it each day. Caicos Adventures is a full service dive operation. Because they dive West Caicos reef and French Cay, we had a 45 min. boat ride to the dive site. This was pleasant because the boat was comfortable and the weather great. Fifi captained the boat each day and everyone enjoyed the ride, because he wasn't on a time schedule and took time so we could enjoy the dolphins, etc. We left the dock around 9 a.m. and returned around 2:30 after completing two dives. Submarine sandwiches were available after each dive, so we weren't starved when we pulled into the dock. There isn't much else to do on the island.

Caicos Adventures, Beaches, June 2003, Kim Devoe (devoeks@att.net), Loveland, CO. Experience: 206 dives. Vis: 80-120 ft. Water: 82-84F. Nice

rooms and facilities and grounds. The food was good, varied, and plentiful. But the resort was crowded and there were lines for the restaurants and bars. Pools and beach were well maintained. The dive operation is run by the resort. I was informed I would have to perform a skills evaluation in their pool; no exceptions. (I am an active teaching status PADI assistant instructor, and I presented that card.) I could understand this for all the inexperienced and inactive divers they get, but an A.I.? The dive boats are extremely crowded (25+ divers and one or two O.W. classes jammed on a Newton 42.) The diving restrictions were zealously enforced. I was told to surface after 45 minutes no matter how long I was hanging for my safety stop (I like a 5 min. s.s. when multi-day repetitive diving.) Depth and time restrictions were increased for buddy diving with both buddies having computers, but buddies could not dive their own profile. Grace Bay dive sites were good, northwest point excellent. So, I dove with Fifi of Caicos Adventures for two days after getting disgusted with Beaches dive operation restrictions and "cattle boat" conditions. Fifi's cat-hulled boat rode beautifully through the choppy seas to West Caicos the first day and Salt Cay the second. West Caicos corals and walls were ok, but not up to diving on Provo's northwest point or directly off shore on Grand Turk. The currents were heavy and the resulting poor visibility was disappointing. The end of the trip was really an adventure when Fifi's bus broke down (the bus had sat at the garage for 10 days, being ignored, before Fifi came and got it back) and it

took an hour to get another bus back to the resort. I felt that the diving and service were highly overrated.

Caicos Adventures, Sands, July 2003, Gabriel I. Peñagaricano (guigo34@hotmail.com), San Juan, PR.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy.

The Caicos Adventures dive boat is the best I have ever been on. It was designed by owner Phillippe "Fifi" Kunz and built in Martinique. It is roughly 40 feet long and 20 wide, with plenty of open space and shade for the divers. Every detail has been thought out, and the results are evident in the comfort with which one can move about, exit, and board the vessel. There is a safety stop bar, descent line, and hanging regulator for those who might not have watched their consumption. All dives are at West Caicos of French Cay, both areas significantly better than those close to Provo. The ride out is about 40 minutes, but one hardly notices it due to the boat's accommodation. There is a rinse tank on board and a padded area on which to place the equipment.

Club Med, February 2003, J White, Sherrill, NY.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 feet. Water: 70 to 74 F, choppy. My wife and I had been to this resort in 1994 where we got hooked on diving. The club itself was unchanged and had been updated.

Rooms clean, service good, as was the food. The group of gos running the dive shop and boats were the best we have encountered at any Club Med as well as other resorts. The boats were not crowded; they kept more experi-

enced divers together. My wife did her advanced and photography course over the week, and they had no difficulties arranging buddies for me. The visibility improved daily, and the seas calmed. There were no cancellations during our stay, but the weather was bad the week before our arrival causing some dive cancellations.

Dive Provo, Big Blue, Caicos Adventure/Sands, July 2003, Jim Reilly and Fran Klass (james.reilly4@worldnet.att.net), Wyndmoor, PA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, choppy. We loved Turks and Caicos and especially the Sands Hotel, which was just super. We hope the wonderful, warm, friendly atmosphere we enjoyed survives the growth. We arrived and were through customs and had our luggage within 10 minutes. Arrived at the hotel to waiting porters and welcoming drinks. We registered and were in our room in minutes. We stayed in a studio room, which was a real nonsmokers room, not a room where the ash trays were removed as we entered. Nice kitchenette, modern well equipped bathroom, king bed, furnished living room, and a screened balcony with chairs and a table (great for drying dive gear). The Sands is well run, friendly, super clean, and works hard to please. Plus, they have great swimming pools and a wonderful beach with real sand and no coral. The Sands had a fine restaurant where good burgers with lots of fries cost \$8.95. They offer bar and restaurant service on the beach. The only feature lacking from the hotel was a pool bar. Food prices at restaurants were

about what you might expect in the U.S.A., although the taxi ride, 10 percent government tax, and tip added up to make dining a bit expensive. So a trip to dinner for two adults with drinks, which might have cost \$50 or \$60, ended up costing closer to \$100. Food choice was limited, and sometimes what we ordered was not available. There are daily specials. We went to one and enjoyed a good ribs and chicken dinner for \$10 per person. We also bought breakfast and lunch food at the Graceway IGA, a modern, well-stocked super market. A case of 24 cans of Diet Pepsi cost \$7.99. Dived with three operators: All had well equipped, clean, and modern boats with clean, working marine toilets. Two-tank dives ranged in price for the high \$80s to over \$130. Two diving experiences are offered: short, OK dives in Grace Bay or long trips to French Cay or West Caicos, where the diving is great, but sea conditions can be challenging. We bought a three-day package of two-tank dives from Dive Provo. They were kind enough to split one of the days into two afternoon dives without extra charge. We did one afternoon dive and a two-tank morning dive in Grace Bay and the rest off of West Caicos. All of the Dive Provo dives were relaxing and fun. The briefings excellent, and staff supervision superior for those who needed it. Snacks were provided, as was ice water, soda, and Gatorade. We also did a two-tank morning dive with Caicos Adventure off West Caicos and an evening dive in Grace Bay. Again superior service, a wonderful boat, and professionals on the boat and in the

water. Plus Fifi, the owner, offers free lunch (good sandwiches), lots of chilled drinks, and on our trips brought his kids, who are fun to watch. Fifi took such good care of us (due to seasickness two days earlier) that we agreed to do a night dive that evening. Half past 7 and up roars Fifi in a smaller twin hulled outboard boat. We board through the surf and suit up. Then out into Grace Bay where the wind has whipped up 1- to 2-foot waves. But it's quickly over the back. We also did a morning two-tank dive with Big Blue Unlimited. This operation is a rip off. They advertise that they limit the number of divers to eight. Guess what, we doubt you could get more than eight divers on the small boat they use — in fact we found their boat to be far more crowded than on the Dive Provo or Caicos Adventure boats. The two-tank morning dive was \$125 per person, and they charged \$6 each way per person to pick us up and take us back to our hotel, and they had the nerve to change us a six percent service charge for using a credit card. On board they ignored all requests we made, went to a site with 3- to 4-foot seas, and announced we were there, it was a drift dive — take it or leave it. They also announced this is Big Blue where you dive your own profile, but no one go below 60 feet. But first they asked us to stay aboard while they took a Discover Scuba couple for their first scuba experience. Naturally this dangerous act did not work, and the only thing discovered was how terrifying it can be to be in scuba for the first time and in rough seas. Great site. Lots of spotted eagle rays, clouds of colorful fish, nurse

sharks, good coral. After the dive we were on our own to surface. No boat in sight. Even with emergency sausage and a lift bag deployed, it was 15 minutes until we spotted the boat and several more until we got picked up. Then after all the divers were collected, they chose to stay out in the rough seas, rather than motor a mile or so to a calm area behind French Cay. Half the divers got seasick, being pounded in a small boat for over an hour. And the other dive operators dive this same site but take shelter between dives.

(www.diveprovo.com)

Dive Provo, The Sands, September 2003, Robert Johnson, Brownstown, MI.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy, no currents. Our condo was beautiful, clean, well decorated, spacious, kitchen was well appointed, IGA supermarket was large and well stocked, eating in was a pleasure, eating out was expensive, food and service were average. Taxi fare was outrageous, made sightseeing and eating out cost prohibitive. You would need to rent a car if going out, if you could find somewhere to go out to. Very little to see and do on the island, and the roads are horrible. The beach and water were beautiful. Dive Provo was a quality operation, boats well maintained and safe, dive masters pleasant and flexible, better dive sites were at least an hour away, West Caicos and French Cay. Two tank morning dive to these places made for a long day and no possibility of afternoon dives. Night dives are far and few between. G-Spot, Thunderdome, and Sunset Strip were

the best dive spots for the week. The rest were only average. There are better places to spend your diving dollar.

Flamingo Divers, Turtle Cove Inn and Simbonne, February 2003, David Shem-Tov, London, UK.

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 feet. Water: 26 C, choppy. Dived exclusively the West Caicos on three days we were there. Were told that conditions were not sufficiently good for other sites. Professional operation, excellent boat, superb crew, particularly Micky and Jayne. They take up to eight divers, but we were at most six. One day there were only just us two. Jayne was helpful stopping at the supermarket on the ride back to the hotel on two occasions. Expats seem to prefer Flamingo Divers. Dives were pleasant, with lots of healthy coral. Worth the long bumpy ride back. Promised big pelegics and whales never materialised. Turtle Cove Inn, recommended by *Undercurrent's* correspondent, must have since been patronised by many scoundrels and thieves. So distrustful are the owners of their guests that they apply a \$25 security deposit for the television remote control on check-in and admonish guests who forget to turn it back in on checkout. Nasty. We moved to the sister hotel, the Sibonne, the next day. Sibonne claims to be a "boutique" hotel but is really an aspirational motel with a hideously expensive bar/restaurant. Rooms are definitely worth the extra dollars over the Turtle Cove Inn. (www.provo.net/flamingo)

Provo Turtle Divers, Turtle Cove Inn, October 2002, J. Culp, Iva, SC.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 65 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Comfortable, spacious, fast dive boat with excellent crew. Dive briefings were informative, accurate, and thorough. Crew worked to provide the best dive opportunities for us. Bad — Turtle Cove Inn is a long way from town. No sidewalks or streetlights make for “interesting” evening walks to restaurants and bars.
(www.provoturtledivers.com)

Provo Turtle Divers, Ocean Club, October 2002, Kathleen O'Connor, Virginia Beach, VA. Vis: 80 to 150 feet. Water: 84 to 85 F. Dives logged: 238. Provo Turtle Divers has new owners who took us to the best sites, e.g., French Caye, W. Caicos, NW Point. They are upgrading their equipment and shore operations. Staff was knowledgeable and helpful, especially for photographers. Ocean Club has every amenity on a gorgeous beach, with a dive shop on site. Provo has many great new restaurants. The diving was outstanding. Saw sharks on every dive, gorgeous, unspoiled walls. Calm/clear water.

Provo Turtle Divers, Ocean Club, March 2003, Kevin Hopper, Cincinnati, OH. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 80 feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, choppy. Nice dive operation recently recommended in *Undercurrent*. The owner, Art Pickering, has sold to a younger group headed by a spirited, enthusiastic Virginian named Dave. Great guy. Nice 42-foot Newton dive boat. Max 16 divers, which we had. \$90 for two-tank dive. Drops to \$80 if diving more than three days. They put on

extra divemasters, so usually no more than four to five in a group. Well-organized. You can also dive on your own. Long days. Leave hotel at 8 a.m., boat leaves about 9 a.m., returns to dock at 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. They move the boat from south coast to north during week so you can see West Caicos, Fish Cay (if flat sea), Northwest point, and sometimes Grace Bay. Very environmentally conscience. Don't touch, kick, etc., the coral. Drinks on board, water and juices via fountain and snacks, cookies and chips. They change gear between dives. You can store gear at the dive shop next to the boat.

Salt Cay

Reef Runners, February/March 2003, L. Leighton Decore, Edmonton, Alberta, CA. My wife and I have been diving for 28 years. The more we dive, the more we seek places where you are not herded onto “cattle boats”; the places where there is some adventure in a dive holiday, coupled with great diving and superior dive operations. Salt Cay is such a place. Reef Runners is a relatively small but efficient and friendly operation. Its owner, Dierin Longmire, has a friendly, fun, and relaxed approach to diving. We dove on a relatively small boat, maximum eight people including the dive guide and boat captain, onto the beautiful vertical walls of Salt Cay. The walls start about 25 to 35 feet and descend absolutely vertically for more than 1,000 feet. These are the same kind of walls as on Grand Turk, clear (usually) waters abundant with turtles, larger than normal reef fish, and beautiful

corals. Large stands of black coral are found at 40 feet. Rays, lobsters, angel fish, and friendly groupers are common. We went there for the whale season hoping to swim with the whales as they passed. Although we heard them while diving on the wall, we could not get close enough to snorkel with them. One diver who remained there after we left informed us that five days later they did swim with the whales. There were few accommodations on Salt Cay. The few restaurants are run by local people out of their homes, but the food is great. Dierin arranged accommodations for us and another couple at “Whale View” a delightful cottage at the edge of town. Dierin arranged for food to be stocked in our cottage. Thereafter, we took the seven-mile boat ride to Grand Turk (where we have dived before), dove there, and restocked our grocery needs. The trip to Grand Turk was another neat adventure. Reef Runners did not hesitate to take us where we wanted to go, and did it with great hospitality. (www.reefrunnerssc.com)

Salt Cay Divers, Tradewinds, November 2002, John Sweeney (jtsweene@bechtel.com), Crosby, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy, no currents. Small laid back island with pretty good diving, excellent food and cozy accommodations. Debbie at Salt Cay Divers stocked refrigerator in room with drinks, met us at airport and made sure things ran smoothly. Porter at Island Thyme Restaurant/bar made us feel at home and served surprisingly great food. At the end of the week, we

felt like locals. Divemaster Mike was great to dive with, making for some relaxing diving — never rushed. Dove at Grand Turk one day — great dives. Tradewinds, while not fancy, was clean and had refrigerator — some with kitchenettes — but Porter’s food was so good, we ate all 3 meals at Island Thyme. Locals were friendly, a few donkeys roam the streets. Overall, a good, relaxing place to dive. (www.saltcaydivers.tc)

Salt Cay Divers, Tradewinds, November 2002, Thierry Olivry (thierry_olivry@yahoo.com) Raleigh, NC. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. I was the principal organizer of a once-in-a-lifetime family reunion of 12 people, including one child, four teens, and three seniors. At the beginning of the trip, I was the sole diver, and the others were snorkelers. We wanted an isolated place, with great beaches, good snorkeling, and great diving. I dreaded the task of having to please everyone. Salt Cay, Tradewinds, Debbie Manos at Salt Cay Divers, and Porter Williams at Island Thyme Bistro proved to be the ideal combination to make this trip memorable for all of us. We booked the entire set of Tradewinds suites. All suites have a large dining/living room and a good-size bedroom. The rooms were clean, and the kitchenettes were more than adequate. The water is drinkable, safe, and of good taste — a treat in isolated islands. We sent a long list of groceries prior to our arrival, and Debbie had everything ready when we arrived. A groceries refill was possible

midweek. We took our dinners mostly at Island Thyme Bistro, where Porter acted as our “private chef.” We ordered entrees at midday and could have everything ready to feed our group of 12 family style at 6:30. The food was splendid and was appreciated by teens, yuppies, seniors, and vegetarians alike. The highlight of the trip was having Debbie as our “tour operator.” She kept one of her boats for our family, and we had afternoon trips to Gibbs Cay to snorkel with the stingrays and to the Endymion wreck and Great Sand Cay. She organized PADI certification courses for the teens and one adult, so that by the end of the trip we were five divers. I had the opportunity to dive with the “regular” divers and appreciated the relaxed atmosphere, the friendly staff, and a healthy reef. Diving the Endymion wreck was a treat — it is located far out to sea on top of a plateau with amazing coral grooves. There are two wrecks on the same site. The cannons, balls, and anchors are visible even to snorkelers. Salt Cay is a small and safe island that provides a wonderful haven to those wanting to avoid crowds. Our family appreciated the personal service from Debbie and divemaster Mike, as well as the great cuisine from Porter Williams at Island Thyme. The only minor point was the weather. We had rain a couple of times and some wave action for a few days — yet it was Thanksgiving week and we were not that far south. We ended the week without bug bites — a major plus in the islands. We will be back.

**Salt Cay Diver, Tradewinds,
December 2002, Susan Conaty,**

West Columbia, TX. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 140 feet. Water: 78 to 84 F, calm, choppy, surge, no currents. Decided to go to Salt Cay based on Chapbook after four years of no open ocean diving. I was using a computer for the first time and was nervous about my skill level and new environment. Mike and Debbie made me feel secure, and they are the best instructors and examples of good diving I have had. I never felt in danger, and they were interested in my comfort level. The experience level of others ran the gambit from pro divers who dive the Maldives every year to true beginner divers, and every one was accommodated with safety and fun. Salt Cay is a place where you are made to feel at home and are treated like part of the community. My husband is a nondiver. He spent the days biking around the island and reading. If you want peace and quiet this is the place, other than at night — the donkeys and chickens and wind can get pretty loud. Tradewinds is a great place. We had the deluxe suite with kitchen. Good thing, food is hard to come by; Netty’s only has limited nonperishables. We only ate at the Island Thyme restaurant twice. Our bill for two meals for two was 95 dollars. We decided we would make do with Netty’s and what ever Debbie could get us from Grand Turk. Do take Debbie up on her offer to get food from Grand Turk. Best to do that before you land to give her time to gather. Food is limited on Grand Turk also. Next time we go we will get Debbie to get some things for us that are too heavy or fragile to bring and bring a box of other food. All food needs to be paid for with cash.

The only thing you can put on credit card is the diving related stuff. Debbie gets food for you out of her own pocket, so you need to pay her back in cash. It is nice of her to do this service. If you don't do the meal plan, you need to give whatever restaurant you decide to eat at advanced notice of what meal you want and discuss what is available. The standard is to run a tab and settle at the end of stay. You can eat every meal out, or do what we did and make do on mac cheese, canned tuna, and soup. I did find Snickers bars at Netty's. I lost 10 pounds in 10 days and still ate candy. I don't know of any diet claim or fat farm that can promise that! The boat is a Carolina Skiff. You do a back roll in off the side. You are helped on with your gear. I had never done back rolls and was nervous at first but learned to love it, just hold on to your mask. Getting back on boat can be difficult. If you come up with a tank best to wait for Mike to take your weight belt and tank, take off fins and up ladder. My favorite dive sites were Black Coral Canyon, Kelly's Annex, and Rock's Paradise. One day we went to Grand Turk and the wall there is steeper. I liked those dives. We never missed any diving due to weather. Saw turtles on almost every dive. Three octopuses, two during the day, one at night. The beach in front of Tradewinds is rocky. Great place to look for critters at low tide and beach glass and pottery. Many other places to snorkel. North beach steep sand beach, other smaller areas all over to discover. Again Debbie and Mike are great and can help you with any thing. We will be back!

Salt Cay Divers, Sunset House, February 2003, Michael Mason, Hammond, IN. Vis: 65 ft. Water: 80 F. Overnighted on Providenciales then took an inter-island flight to Salt Cay (around 50 minutes). On landing at the strip we realized the "airport" was deserted. The pilot assured us that if we were expected, someone would show up. After 5 minutes of looking at each other and the donkeys roaming around we noticed a van approaching, and up pulled Debbie of Salt Cay Divers, a pickup truck followed and loaded our gear and off we went to Sunset House. A 200 year old house built by shipwrights that had a number of "lives" as a part of the island's great history. We moved in, filling it nicely and made friends with Michelle our host and the proprietor of the Blue Mermaid café which took up the sea side of the patio behind the house. We had to make reservations and our menu choices a day ahead of time. Debbie vanned us over to the dive shop/boat dock and after filling out of releases we were off for a 1 tank afternoon dive. After about 5 minutes motoring we hooked to a mooring ball, listened to Debbie's pre-dive and profile expectations and back rolled into 80 F, 65 ft. viz water. A nice easy "get acquainted" dive no deeper than 70 ft. I dove for 48 minutes then up to 15 ft. for a 3 minute safety stop. They pull up on the sand with the skiffs and they took the gear and had set up for us in the morning. We never had to mess with gear again till it was time to go. The Patch/Spur and Groove reefs I saw off Salt Cay were nothing to write home about but we did make 1 dive there where we

saw a nice black coral tree at around 80 ft. The usual suspects were rather sparse. Hog fish, gray angels, French angels, some porgies and grunts, a few barracuda, the usual small stuff, I did spot some reef squid but they kept out of range. It was February and we had high hopes for humpbacks. One afternoon we boarded Salt Cay Divers “big boat” and headed out with hydrophones at the ready and after hours of motoring “we” (me) spotted a breach at 11 o’clock but also at about 700 yards, all heads on board turned as a second breached, then a third. We headed in that direction squinting for more action. After another hour we stopped and lowered the phones, nadda, not a peep or chirp. That was the total, 3 viewed at 700 yards. Of course we heard the stories, “you should have been here last week, folks swam with a group of 12, with yearlings!” Debbie helped me with everything from the inter-island booking, the rooms at Turtle Cove on Provo, got us over to Grand Turk for a day of much nicer reef diving (we bounced over in one of their skiffs), golf cart rental et al. Hook up with Debbie on line at scdivers@caribsurf.com.

Salt Cay Divers, March 2003, Brian Bolton, Winter Springs, FL. Debbie, owner of Salt Cay Divers and manager of some of the residences on the island, met us at the Salt Cay “airport,” a house-sized station with no staff. The waters are the playground for humpback whales between January and March. Salt Cay was once the epicenter of salt production in the world. All that is now left of that industry and

time are the abandoned salt ponds or “salinas” and some deteriorating windmills that once powered the transfer of salt water for production. Our diving, accommodations, and whale watching were booked with Salt Cay Divers three months before we arrived and required a few e-mails and a phone call. Divemaster Mike Dinegras accommodated every level of diver experience from the newly certified to the experienced visitor. Mike allowed us to dive our own profiles or to be guided, which ever we preferred. Before the first dive, he briefly questioned each diver about his/her experience, and before each dive he provided excellent briefings, reviewed signals, and covered safety procedures. The dives were made from 24-foot, center-console skiffs, which are used for both diving and whale watching. They are comfortable and rode the water surprisingly well. They require back roll entries into the water, and ladders are used for reentering the boat after first passing BCD and tank up to the divemaster in the boat. The boats were well maintained, and proper safety gear was carried on each dive. All diving equipment was in proper working order. Debbie has put together a fantastic yet simple operation. She was not pushy, let us ask questions, and gave advice about the island’s beautiful beaches, food, and places to see when we asked. The diving was terrific. Our first dive was on the wreck of the *Endymion*, a British warship that sank in about 1790. There are actually two wrecks at the site, which is about 10 or 12 miles off Salt Cay. The second wreck is thought to be that of a late nineteenth

century ship. There is much to see at this site, including anchors, canons, anchor chains, along with huge stands of healthy coral and the local fish population. At other sites we encountered small parades of reef fish, beautiful walls, and saw some turtles. The local dive sites were only a five- or 10-minute boat ride away, meaning that surface intervals could be done back on land, where there is a small open-air diner called the "Green Flash," where drinks and food can be obtained. The Green Flash remained open until 8 p.m., and fresh fried seafood and snacks of all sorts were usually available. Tom Jubb is a whale guide employed by Salt Cay Divers. In a laid back British fashion, he educated us about humpback whales, located same with seemingly little effort, and provided us with unforgettable post-diving whale watching that included seeing these beautiful creatures frolic and play in the waters off Sand Cay, a few miles south of Salt Cay. A calf, from a group of three whales, was so curious about our group that it swam up to within about 20 feet of our boat to check us out. Tom carried sound equipment that helped locate the whales and provided an exciting and awe inspiring time listening to the singing of the whales that must be experienced first hand to fully understand. On one occasion, we could hear the whales while diving. Once, we were so close to the whales while they were singing that we could actually hear them through the hull of the boat. Tom was also thoughtful of the whales, not staying with a group too long or leaving a group of whales if it appeared they were becoming fearful

or agitated. We also snorkeled with large stingrays and observed pods of dolphins. Salt Cay is virgin to crime and asphalt. Riderless donkeys outnumber cars on the dirt roads. The natural trade winds make air conditioning unnecessary. Besides, we wanted to have our windows open to hear the predominant sound from the great outdoors: The gentle wind rustling through the pines. At night we wanted to see the spectacular light show: bright stars undimmed by city lights. The bicycle is the predominant mode of transportation. I have only one warning for visitors: Watch out for the legendary Sally, the salt worm of the salinas! She comes out only at night and will knock you off your bike while you are riding home, especially after spending time at Island Tyme, a popular local bar and restaurant. Being a service friendly island, the 70+ residents and numerous "ex-patriots" who have left the rat race were genuinely happy to greet and get to know us. One native-born resident bakes homemade bread that surpasses any in the finest restaurants in the States. Bring cash or travelers checks, as credit cards are not readily accepted on the island. Also, consult ahead of time with your host about pre-ordering food and drinks, as food at the restaurants tends to be expensive. Salt Cay is a rustic retreat, and we had no easy access to newspaper, radio, television, or Internet. We were grateful to stay on simple British-provincial island in the azure waters of the Atlantic.

Salt Cay Divers, The Vistas, March 2003, George Kane, Raleigh, NC.

Dives logged: 200+. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 74 to 77 F. Dive operation is terrific, small boats, small groups, dive your own profile. Numerous dive sites within a few minutes, and the world-class Edymion wreck site which has spectacular and unusual coral (though it is an hour plus boat ride). Service on the dive is terrific, and all the staff are excellent. Saw many whales, even on scuba, many dolphin, turtles, reef in excellent shape. It is excellent diving for experienced because you can dive your own profile, excellent for beginners because sites are close by, little or no current or surge, good vis and can dive in a small group with divemaster. The Vistas, a house on ocean, is great, watch whales and sunsets off the deck, and the sunrise from the bedroom. Excellent.

South Caicos

Ocean Haven Lodge, May 2003, Elizabeth Hilla, Arlington, VA. We had several friendly e-mail exchanges with the proprietors, Bob and Diane, as we planned our trip. About a week before we departed I emailed them to see if they needed us to “import” any favorite items and they mentioned that they’d left South Caicos but that dear trusted friends were running the place just as they had. Well, I know the place wasn’t the Ritz to start with, but the change of management did impact our visit. The wife of the man who runs the lodge’s fishing operation was managing the place on a temporary basis. She and her husband were nice but it appeared that the job had landed in their laps with little notice or preparation. Meals were included, but they

weren’t impressive. Breakfast was okay, but lunch was cold cuts, bread just removed from the freezer, maybe some fruit or salad, and no dessert. Dinners were less than creative — a meat, a starch, and a vegetable or salad. Dessert one night was Jell-O. No drinks were served with either lunch or dinner, not even lemonade or iced tea. The Ocean Haven Lodge, the island’s only hotel is nicely situated overlooking the area where the bay/channel meets. But it’s sorely in need of major renovations. Our room was air conditioned and there was hot water, but that’s about all you could say for it. The buildings look bad, the salt water pool was empty and the dining area is plain. Beer and sodas were available, self-serve, for an additional charge on an honor system. There was no actual bar at the lodge; instead we walked a few blocks to the “chicken bar” which sold a limited selection of rum and other alcohol in addition to chicken. My husband and I were the only divers at Ocean Haven that week. One other couple showed up and learned that their special request for wheat-free meals hadn’t been communicated to the local management. They bolted for Grand Turk despite our assurances that the diving was worth the inconvenience. And it was. We had the small dive boat and excellent divemaster, Terry, all to ourselves and made about 15 dives, all a short boat ride away. (It was windy the week we were there and the boat rides were rocky and the re-entries to the boat challenging.) The coral is quite pristine, especially at the deeper depths. We choose South Caicos

based on reports of lots of bigger creatures, and we weren't disappointed. We saw reef sharks on almost every dive, nurse sharks, several turtles (one passed by me almost nose to nose), and many roughtail rays, which burrow down in the sandy areas and are soft to the touch. The spotted eagle rays for which South Caicos is known were elusive but we did see one on our last outing. Fish life is abundant and varied, and we saw squid, lobsters, crabs, shrimp, and many other interesting animals. We could choose our sites and our dive profiles, and he pointed out many interesting creatures. He handled most of our gear as well, and made the entries and exits from the water as easy as possible. The island itself is small, flat, and dry. There isn't much in the way of beaches, nightlife, or entertainment. We spent our evenings comparing experiences with the bone fisherman who were sharing the lodge with us. Our cell phone didn't work from South Caicos so we used the hotel's one phone and following their instructions for outgoing calls through a designated long distance company. The calls home to check on our children were expensive. Airline service is through Provo and then a local island-hopper flight over to South Caicos. It wasn't any more difficult than getting to any other more remote destination, and the airport in Provo is pretty comfortable. South Caicos will be a much more attractive choice if the Ocean Haven gets new ownership or management that can afford to invest in some much needed upgrades. (www.oceanhaven.tc)

UNITED STATES - FLORIDA

Boynton Beach

Dive Charters International, April 2002, Sue Sepelak (sepelak@erols.com), Columbia, MD. Vis: 60 to 90 feet. Water: 75 to 78 F. Dives logged: 550. Dive restrictions enforced: drift diving, stay with group. Was in Fort Lauderdale on business and hooked up with dive Charters International out of Boynton Beach with Capt. Leo Sand (888-340-DIVE). Well worth the 40 minute drive from Ft. Lauderdale. Excellent dive operation. Operated two dive boats with morning and/or afternoon charters. Excellent crew — safety oriented. Mostly drift diving. Crew was excellent at getting divers into the water quickly to maximize dive time. Reefs were in good condition with abundance of basket coral, gorgonians, sun whips, etc. Large variety of fish including nurse sharks, dolphins, and cobia. (www.deeper-dci.com)

Crystal River

American Pro Diving, January 2003, Richard Hill, Central Point, OR. Vis: 12 to 15 feet. Water: 72 F. Dives logged: 250+. We snorkeled with the manatees in Crystal River. It was a great experience to interact with the young manatees. We then made a dive at Kings Bay Spring. There were lots of fish to see in the bowl of the spring. The cavern was tighter than we expected and visibility was 12 feet or less. Chris was our divemaster. He was personable and professional. He made a video of us with the manatees and doing the cavern