

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](http://www.oceanhaven.tc))

## UNITED STATES - FLORIDA

### Boynton Beach

**Dive Charters International, April 2002, Sue Sepelak ([sepelak@erols.com](mailto: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](http://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

dive. The video was excellent.  
([www.americanprodiver.com](http://www.americanprodiver.com))

## Ft. Myers Beach

**Getaway Marina, Ultimate Getaways, September 2002, Fleet Pride, Tallahassee, FL.** Dives accrued: More than 2,000. Vis: 30 to 60 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F. Frankly, it was a major disappointment and rather costly for the opportunity. Little preparatory information. Few creature comforts. Crew was only mediocreately professional. Base operators were rude.  
(<http://ultimategetaway.net>)

## Key Largo

**Amoray Slates, Amy Slates Dive Resort, August 2002, Phil & Patricia Tobin (Philtobin6625@yahoo.com), Portland, OR.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 25 to 40 feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. My wife and I are new to diving, in our early "middle age" and were looking for a good place to get some experience. Amy's provided that and much more. I had been certified only weeks before, and my wife was doing her final dives at the resort. Her instructor was Steve, and he was fantastic with her. She had some issues with descending too fast, and this guy was marvelous with her. We dove a total of 15 dives in four days. The resort is basic but clean and well organized. Check in was easy, and the boat (a large pontoon boat) was 50 feet from our room. There are several restaurants within three miles so eating wasn't a problem. The best food was right next door (Hobo's), walking dis-

tance. We had a small fridge in our room for water and juice. The only weak part of the resort was the breakfast served next to the departure point. We hooked up all our own equipment, with enough room for moving around on the boat. Although some days there were as many as 20 people on board, I never felt crowded. The diving was easy, and the reefs were in were OK condition (we didn't have much to compare it to). The only way to go deeper is to bring your own shovel. Max depth during the four days was 42 feet. Did the Benwood wreck several times and loved it. Many fish, not many soft coral, but tons of hard coral. No surge or currents to deal with. Generally easy, no-brainer diving. Great for relatively new divers. Wife got certified and we had a great time. Well worth the money! UW Photography Comments: Rinse buckets for camera gear separate and clearly marked. ([www.amoray.com](http://www.amoray.com))

**Amoray, March 2003, Ben Glick (bglick@vgernet.net), Williamstown, MA.** Vis: 50 to 70 feet. Water: 73 to 75 F. Dives logged: 1,400+. Dive restrictions enforced: 100 feet on wreck. Very nice resort with boat convenient to rooms. Good service. Divers and snorkelers on same boat — not a good combination as this limits dive destinations. Very good wreck dive on Duane. Depth limit of 100 feet was restrictive. Dove Spiegel Grove with Quiescence Divers, and they were excellent with six-pack boats. Divers only. Sundowners Restaurant was excellent.

**Amy Slate's Amoray Divers, Amy Slates, August 2003, Jeff Bloomer (jlbdiver@aol.com), Hebron, KY.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, calm, currents. Typical Florida diving, shallow reefs and, if allowed, you could have some great bottom times. The wreck of the Duane is awesome, one of the best dives in this part of the world. Tons of fish and growth, it is sitting upright and is breath taking. The Spiegle Grove is a big wreck but too new for much growth, but a must do for experienced divers who can handle the current. Good fish life on most dives. The diving is self guided so if you're inexperienced you may want to ask to tag along with someone as the divemasters do not get in the water. The crew was going to take us on a night dive to a site devoid of almost all life we had dived that day. After talking with Amy Slate and telling her I had nobody interested in diving it and that if they insisted on diving there we were sitting it out they chose another site. The alternate site turned out great, a bit of a boat ride but worth it. Individuals would be hard pressed to get much cooperation but our group was large enough that I was able to pull some strings — watch out if visiting as a couple or small group. I have been successful at avoiding cattle boats, until now. The boat was always loaded with snorkelers or a class. Very congested and the crew was strict about what could be placed where. Set anything other than a body part on the padded bench and look out for the Captain to start chewing you out. The crew was more set on keeping on schedule than

having divers enjoy themselves. There is almost a palpable tension with the crew. Most are distant to rude and almost never interact with the divers. A couple of divers in our group attempted to liven things up and the most we got out of the crew was a glare and wise crack. Traveling back to the dock the boat passes under a bridge. On cue, every trip, the crew is required, I was told, to play a rendition of "That's Amoray" by The Barefoot Man. I even offered to tip the guy big if he would not play it one time, no luck! The resort is comfortable and well maintained. Parking is tight and you seldom parked near your room unless you lucked out and never moved your car. All the restaurants in the area are good. The 2.5 hour drive to Key West is worth it so go spend the day. You won't miss much in the diving. The camera area, or at least what should have been the camera area, doubled as the area to hand out lead and as the cutting board for slicing up oranges for after dive snacks. One small bucket to keep a camera in which was not well controlled from keeping other items out of it. One diver in our group chose not to use the bucket and his camera fell overboard. The crew refused to turn back for the camera and although a modest unit, \$250 dollars, it was lost. The crew could have easily circled around as there was only one other boat on the wreck. They chose not to and told the diver to "wave good-bye" to his \$250 camera. A poor commentary on the crew's customer service level but certainly in character. Needless to say tipping was nonexistent. As the group leader I spoke with

Amy Slate about how her crew responded but she was unwilling to do anything for the diver.

**Aquanuts Dive Center, Kelly's on the Bay, June 2003, Dave Bridenbaugh (dtbriden@fuse.net), Cincinnati,**

**OH.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, surge. Kelly's rooms are clean and comfortable. The area is humid, and they have a drying room to hang your BC and dive skins or wet suits, etc. However, they have no fan, and some days we still had wet gear even after it hung all night. Nice continental breakfast. No restaurant. The dives were nice. I am a relatively new diver, even though I've been to 110-foot depths on a couple of wrecks. Kelly's staff are competent and a little "by the book," yet they don't try to babysit new divers. We dove on reefs and a couple of wrecks that were shallow. All dives were 50 feet or less, except for the Spiegle Grove which is in about 115 feet of water, and you need to go at least 70 to 80 feet to appreciate most of it. They are reluctant to let new divers take the Spiegle Grove dive and when they do, they insist that you stay above 60 feet and that you have at least four saltwater dives logged. At 60 feet you can see the SG, but you miss the experience of seeing the entire ship in detail. Kelly's is a nice operation, especially for new divers and those with limited experience. They give you a full hour per tank and don't try to rush you. They have two boats and have two-tank dives at 8:30 a.m. and again at 1 p.m. Also, they have a one-tank night dive and a two-tank dusk and night dive

combo usually on an old wreck at about 35 to 50 feet. I made both and saw much. Turtles, nurse sharks, lobster, eels, Goliath grouper, one octopus, and numerous reef fish.  
([www.aqua-nuts.com](http://www.aqua-nuts.com))

**Kelly's Aquanuts, September 2002, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX.**

Dives logged: 74. Vis: Clear. Water Temp: 84 F. I'd left the last day open to do the big new one, The Spiegel Grove. I tried to book with the operator I'd used and liked earlier in the week on the same wreck, but they had one boat out of service and the other committed to beginners, so I called around. Some weren't even going to try to go, with hurricane Isadore churning just the other side of Cuba, but these folks felt confident the day before. The final decision was iffy the morning of the scheduled trip, but they finally committed. Hotel guests were being served continental breakfast on the patio, and I asked if I could pay and indulge since I was staying elsewhere. They comped the food. And it wasn't all that rough going out. Kelly's offers only one Nitrox blend — 32% — but when the test kit actually read 33%, the employee suggested that I "could go deeper" — which I took as a dangerous mistake, but I guess the Nitrox diver is responsible for knowing more than the employee who checks tanks out. Everything else was impressive. My reg's first state diaphragm failed on the way out, but we rigged my computer hose to their reg — once we found the tools — and made do. My first dive of the week had been here, in a strong current, but this time we had little for a 107-foot dive on

the wreck — a different dive altogether! This operator was the only one of the five I used that week that used the new DAN tags for making sure that everyone was back on board.

**Casa del Mar Resort, El Conquistador Hotel, Bluewater Divers of Key Largo/Ramada Inn, August 2002, Jim and Donna Cox (jimndonnacox@attbi.com), Federal Way, WA.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 feet. Water: 85 to 87 F, choppy, currents. Good operation. Nice size boat for six divers on board. Boat was fast and clean. Divemaster, Brent, was good. Captain Marvel helpful and considerate. Corals not as bright as Tahiti or Bahamas, but our goal of warm water diving with our newly certified kids was easily met. The currents were a little stronger than I expected. Enjoyed a brief current dive before returning to the boat. Fish were plentiful, good color and not the least bit shy. Operator is for the beginning diver or for the experienced divers wanting more of a challenge than is offered in larger boat operations. Stayed at Ramada Inn. Nice hotel, right on marina with several good dive operations within walking distance. UW Photography Comments: Small boat no camera tank. Crew was considerate of equipment. ([www.bluewaterdiver.net](http://www.bluewaterdiver.net))

**Divers City, Marina Del Mar, June 2003, Clare Petosa, Manasquan, NJ.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Highlight was a night dive on the Duane. Hot dropped onto the mooring ball, then picked up at the opposite end.

Always had the divers in site as we had equipment issues and had to do a free ascent (lucky for us there was a mild current or we'd be God knows where) — they were right there when we surfaced. ([www.diverscityusa.com](http://www.diverscityusa.com), [www.marinadelmar.com](http://www.marinadelmar.com))

**HMS Minnow, June 2003, Eva Katcher (mskitty@verizon.net), Clarksburg, MD.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 feet. Water: 80 F, choppy. Jeff Jarvis of the HMS Minnow ([hmsminnow.com](http://hmsminnow.com)) runs an excellent dive operation. He takes a maximum of six divers so that he can get out before the cattle boats. He treats you like an adult. He provides a good dive briefing and leaves it up to you to dive your own profile. You need to be back on the boat with 500 psi. We were down for more than an hour on some locations. The weather ranged from great to poor. One day there was a strong current on the surface, and the seas were cresting at 3 to 5 feet. The next day the surface was flat and calm. Plenty of barracudas, eels, and fish schooling. We managed to dive the Spiegel Grove, which is already getting good coral growth. ([www.hmsminnow.com](http://www.hmsminnow.com))

**HMS Minnow, Westin Resort, June 2003, John (ahomesllc@aol.com), Cranbury, NJ.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 35 to 80 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. We took a family scuba trip to the Keys. My wife and two youngest sons had just been certified (in N.J.) the prior fall. We wanted an easy and interesting first trip so that they could get comfortable. The

Minnow's Capt. Jeff Jarvis is a first rate operator. The boat is a six-pack, so it was perfect for the five of us. During six days' diving we only had a sixth diver with us once. The boat is big enough to be comfortable and small enough to get to and from the dive sites quickly. Capt. Jeff leaves the docks early (7:30 a.m. on morning dives and 12:30 p.m. on afternoon dives), so you are always the first ones on the site. We saw all the big stuff before the other dive boats could scare them off. Jeff was always making sure our gear was set up right and helped us in and out of the water. By the time you got your fins off and got back to the gear bench, your tank was switched over for the second dive. Because we had new divers on board we didn't dive any of the more challenging sites (Speigel Grove, Duane, Bibb, etc.), but Jeff would take divers there if they were up to it. We were allowed to dive within our own limits, just return to boat with 500 psi. Jeff's hand drawn maps of the dive sites and briefings were helpful for navigating the reefs. Tons of fish (mostly small) and some turtles, big grouper, sharks, and eagle rays. The Westin is a nice hotel but needs refurbishing and better management. For the price it wasn't really a good value. Housekeeping never came before 4 p.m. and did a poor job. The food was outrageously priced.

**Horizon Divers, Holiday Inn, May 2003, Michael K. Hill, McLean, VA.**

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 feet. Water: 76 to 83 F, calm. Horizon are friendly, knowledgeable, and helpful. Excellent info. on local conditions

and dive sites. Very responsive to divers' interests. Holiday Inn reasonably priced, good facilities, and handy for dive center. Horizon's boat is a catamaran offering lots of space, comfortable seating, freshwater shower, and dry lockers. Good understanding of UWP requirements. Separate soak tank for gear, careful handling of cameras/equipment.

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

**Horizon Divers, May 2003, Francine Alexander, Cathedral City, CA.**

Rodale's Scuba Diving Magazine rated Horizon Divers as the #1 best dive shop/day boat/etc. for the area, and we made our reservations through them. I am a PADI Instructor but like to be pampered on my dive vacations. I asked about diving Pennekamp Park and was told that they did, but we never went to Pennekamp Park. I wanted to dive the "Jesus" statue, and was told that they take you to better sites. Perhaps that should have been the first clue that this operation was about what Horizon Divers does and not really all that customer friendly. Since our experience was not even close to our expectations I wonder what criteria Scuba Diving magazine uses for their judging. The following are examples of our trip; some positive but too many negative to disregard. Upon arrival at the dive shop on our first day in town we were made to pay the total fare for our week of planned dives. I thought that was strange, but I'm from California, maybe they do it differently Back East. The shop does allow it's divers to mail their equipment so we picked up our boxes and prepared for our next day's

diving. That afternoon, we hauled our own gear on board and set it up. Ok, I understand that the crew likes to check out your comprehension of equipment. We went to Molasses Reef, an interesting shallow dive site. The Captain as we understood him, said in his briefing, "An hour from when you jump in the water" and that's what we did. As my husband approached the ladder to get back on board, Captain Jim started yelling at him about being late, and it got pretty ugly. Then, Divemaster Michael added his 2 cents by telling my husband that he messed up. Wow! In your face customer service? We then changed our weight integrated BCDs onto our next tank (I've never in 10 years had to do that myself) and after a stunning 10 minute surface interval (enough time to get to the next site) we dove in again. This time, we made sure we followed the rules. With such a tense atmosphere, we really wanted to change dive operators, but we had already paid for the whole week. Hmmm? The next few days were better due to a change of captains and divemasters. Still, no one helped change our equipment and the surface intervals were much too short for my comfort level. Another example of Horizon Divers lack of customer concern was on a treacherous dive to the "Duane", a large wreck down about 100 ft. There was a ripping current, and my husband and I decided to dive Nitrox for safety and longer bottom time. There were several people on board diving with an Instructor (they were OW certs., not advanced) and a divemaster but there was one too many divers for the crew to legally supervise.

The gentleman was from Germany and could not speak English. He was diving on air and we were coerced into having him buddy with us. As it turned out, the current was awful and my husband and the German man ran low on air about the same time but that added more stress and responsibility to an already stressful dive. The boat is able to accommodate over 20 divers, but there were fewer on the days we dived. The side of the boat for our giant stride entry was about 4 or 5 feet above the ocean and that was a hardship for me, due to recent knee surgery. Also, I had to climb up the ladder wearing my tank and weights, which was painful. Additionally, there is only water and sugary juice to drink. Our masks fogged on every dive, and we finally figured out that the boat's de-fog just wasn't cutting it. We did have a dive canceled due to poor conditions and we were given just a touch of attitude about refunding our money. The cashier said we could have credit with the shop for our next dive trip with them. Uh, I don't think so.

### **Ocean Divers, Marina Del Mar, June 2003, Clare Petosa, Manasquan, NJ.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, choppy, surge. Though the coral isn't top notch, the amount of fish and critters really amazed me. Ocean Divers was accommodating for a large group, though if not part of a group — it may have been a bit overcrowded. The Marina del Mar takes pets, so that's really all that matters as our dog was traveling with us.  
([www.oceandivers.com](http://www.oceandivers.com))

**Ocean Divers, Bayside, July 2003,  
Vince Guinee, Reston, VA.** Vis: 60 to  
100 feet. Water: 82 to 86 F.

Experience: 600+ dives. The wrecks  
were great (Spiegel Grove and Duane).  
All the reef dives were shallow (40 feet  
or less). The operator advertises certain  
dives for certain trips, but these can be  
changed at a whim! We were supposed  
to dive the USCGC Bibb one afternoon  
and I signed up specifically for it.  
There were two other divers who had  
been on the Spiegel Grove in the morn-  
ing. The captain changed the dive to  
the Duane to accommodate these two  
divers with no regard for the wishes of  
others who wanted to do the Bibb. He  
said it was a safety issue. Maybe those  
two divers shouldn't have been on this  
trip! Another dive (City of Washington)  
was also changed later in the week to a  
nondescript reef dive with out explana-  
tion. When pressed, the crew would  
not say it was due to conditions but  
that Aviz was better on the reef. I think  
they didn't want to take us out there!  
Needless to say, we were not happy  
since we had no desire to dive that  
shallow reef again. Had we known the  
dive site was changed before the boat  
left, we would have left.

**Ocean Dwellers, September 2002,  
Don Henderson, Lockney, TX.**

Dives Logged: 61. Vis: Good. Water  
Temp: 84 F. Two big, comfortable  
boats, generally putting newer divers  
on one, more experienced on the other  
— for more adventurous dives. And  
when they say that they'll take you out,  
they will — in a nice, big boat, even  
with only two divers. Would have pre-  
ferred 28 to 30 percent oxygen for the

depth I'd been shooting for, but their  
Nitrox is all 32 — membrane only.  
Everything else was super. My first  
time in a strong current, with legs fly-  
ing away from down line on way  
down, but just part of the adventure.  
Down 103 feet on the huge Spiegel  
Grove wreck; super dive! My assigned  
buddy was from Europe and not accus-  
tomed to the rented gear or computer.  
Everything went well until we com-  
pared air pressure — me at 1,500 lbs,  
him at 500 lbs, still 80 feet down. I  
motioned to the down line, and once  
there gave him my spare regulator for  
the slow ascent and safety. He fumbled  
the last reg change after the stop, but  
we made it. I continued on 32 Nitrox  
for the shallow reef dive to help reduce  
my nitrogen load — and because  
upgrades were so cheap — then went  
back out on the same boat for a 106-  
foot dive on the Duane — in light cur-  
rent, which is a rare treat for this  
wreck. Great dive, but new assigned  
buddy ran short on air, yet wouldn't  
take my spare reg. We survived.

**Quiescence, Ocean Pointe Suites, June  
2003, Martin Klein, Hoboken, NJ.**

Experience: 142 dives. Vis: 100 ft.  
Water: 83 F. Dive restrictions: 500 psi.  
2 bedroom, 2 bath at Ocean Pointe  
Suites was top notch (\$150 per night).  
Quiescence was a great operation.  
Boats do not take more than 6 divers.  
Require AOW for Spiegel Grove or  
stamped log book with recent and simi-  
lar dives. I ended up pleasantly sur-  
prised and very impressed by the health  
of the reef and abundance of fish life  
that is comparable to the best  
Caribbean destinations. I was there dur-



ing minnow season and it was mesmerizing to watch the huge clouds of little fish moving as one when the bar jacks and groupers mounted their attacks.

**(305-451-2440, info@keylargodiving.com)**

**Quiescence Diving Services, Port Largo Villas, July 2003, Al Ammons (aammons2@comcast.net),**

**Indianapolis, IN.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 45 to 65 feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm. (www.quiescence.com) three six passenger boats docked behind the dive shop on US 1 in Key Largo. 3,000 psi in all their tanks. With three boats they can mix and match dive sites from Spiegel Grove for advanced to a "private" patch reef for beginners or a second dive. The owners, Rob and Paul, work in the store and captain the boats. I went out with Rob as a boat captain for two days running and had a great time. Very good briefings and a real concern for safety. You sit on the transom, your BC and tank are placed on your back, you buckle up and do a giant stride and are in the water. Getting out you sit on the transom, the BC is removed and you board the boat. Tanks were changed for us both days. This is not a large operation with cattle boats. I enjoyed talking with Rob about the history behind the Spiegel Grove. Good people with good attitudes.

**Quiescence Diving Service, August 2003, Bill Harward (pnw\_diver@yahoo.com), Portland, OR.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 feet. Water: 86 F, choppy. They have 3-6 pack boats and plug themselves as not being cattle boats. Boats are in

good condition and well run, professional outfit. Boat I was on was late leaving the dock and the captain apologized. Went over basic boat layout, safety and dive restrictions (60 minutes or 500 psi). Got to the site and he gave us a good briefing. Was last one in the water and started return at 50 minutes, about 5 minutes out captain started moving the boat toward us (that's cool). Once everyone was back onboard he explained that we were at the best site given current conditions and that there was no reason to move (?). He did move us a short distance to another buoy, but we stayed on the same site (Dixie Shoal). Second dive was actually better, stayed closer to boat, last one in again. At 50 minutes was under the boat and the captain was leaning over the side looking at us. What he meant by 60 minutes was out of the water and back on the boat! Returned to dock and we were off quickly, boat was reloaded and the captain was gone out again. They don't run cattle boats, but they turn the boats around 3 times a day and they stay on a tight schedule. Though we were late leaving the dock the captain still stayed on schedule. Felt the dives were rushed, no rinse bucket or any place for cameras. Came up and found my camera stuck in a bucket with boat cleaning gear!

**Quiescence Ocean Pointe, August 2003, Paul Lima, Christiana, TN.**

Vis: 45-80 ft. Water: 84-86 F. Dives logged: 51-100. Partly cloudy, choppy early, 3-4' last day. Nice condo setup with full kitchen, 2br/2bath, ocean view, complimentary continental breakfast, complimentary kayak rental

15 minutes from Quiescence diving in Key Largo. Dive operation excellent with clean and roomy boats (6-pack) and obliging captain. Cap't John Peacock was with us on 2 of our days and was a knowledgeable, laid back Conch who took us where we wanted to go, gave thorough site briefings and never put limits on our diving time. Most dives were shallow wreck/reef combinations which were scouted for viz/current first using Cap't John's unique oatmeal method. If conditions weren't to his liking we went elsewhere. Unfortunately our dive on the Spiegel Grove (computers required) was less than ideal with stiff current and poor (45') viz. Cap't John told us conditions were marginal but we wanted to try and were allowed to do so. There were only the 3 of us on the boat for that trip. None of their boats went out that afternoon due to high seas and approaching tropical storm.

**Scuba Do, Travelodge, August 2003, Bill Harward (pnw\_diver@yahoo.com), Portland, OR.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 feet. Water: 86 F, calm. Dive restrictions: 500 psi or 60 minutes. Was referred to Scuba Do by Jeff at HMS Minnow (he was totally booked), thanks Jeff. Booked morning and afternoon two tank dives. Very nice boat, lots of room, will hold 12 divers they max at 10. Laurie was great to work with on making the reservation and on getting on the boat. Good safety briefing before leaving the pier. Rinse bucket for masks and a separate bucket for cameras, and a small table for camera gear, nice! First dive was on the

Spiegel Grove, Tony the captain put us back by the stern. Once we were on the buoy Tony started the dive site briefing and took lots of time to talk about the site, conditions, best way to dive the site. No hurry to get into the water or to end the dive. All my reef dives went over 60 minutes. Overall a great operation, topography.  
(<http://scuba-do.com>)

**Silent World Dive Center, Port Largo Villas, July 2003, Al Ammons (aammons2@comcast.net), Indianapolis, IN.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 45 to 65 feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm. Silent World is a smaller operation (two boats) with a retail store front and a separate dock for launching the boats. Silent World has been around for quite a few years (at least 8 that I have been visiting them) and the quality of the service and staff has been consistently good. The two boats are not cattle cars and I have yet to be on either with a full boat of divers. Dive briefings are concise, with additional details available for the asking. Once you are geared up you move to the rear of the boat and do a giant stride off of the dive deck and have fun. Their dive packages result in a good savings.  
([www.pennekamp.com/sw](http://www.pennekamp.com/sw))

**Tavernier Dive Center, October 2002, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX.** Dives Logged: 65. Vis: Great. Water Temp: 84 F. Mike Wendy run a really nice, small operation, with personal service all the way. I was even warmly greeted at the door by the divemaster's mini Yorkies. Went down on the Eagle

the first morning, broken and on its side, briefly dipping down to 113 feet on 32 Nitrox. Oops! Super wreck dive. Entered through the breach, then up through the hold, both ways. Their prices are so cheap, I used Nitrox on the shallow dive, too; why not? Mike custom blended 29 Nitrox the next morning for a dip to 126 feet on The Bibb. Nice wreck dive, followed by a nice reef dive. Good folks, good diving, great prices.

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

### Looe Key

**Looe Key Dive Center, September 2002, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX.**

Dives Logged: 69. Vis: Clear. Water Temp: 84 F. If you want to dive the Adolphus Bush wreck, this is the one to go with. Others I called weren't interested, but this one will on Wednesdays. Three dive trips, with one dollar hot dogs between reef dives. Unlike other Key operators I'd been out with, this one prices the trip at only \$50, tanks and weights extra, but not much. Quite flexible and reasonable. I liked their friendly approach, and diving the wreck was a neat addition to my week of wrecks. Does not offer Nitrox, but they did refer me to nearby Underseas Dive Center that provided me with a 100 cubic foot aluminum tank, custom filled with 30% EAN for my 108-foot dive on the wreck.

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

**Looe Key Reef Resort & Dive Center, Barnacle Bed & Breakfast, October 2002, Julian Watkins & Debbie DiMascio ([julianw@flash.net](mailto:julianw@flash.net)), Santa**

**Monica, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 feet. Water: 82 F, choppy, surge. Looe Key is easy to dive. Most dives will be no deeper than 30 feet. This outfit takes you a few miles offshore to the reef, which is in a national marine sanctuary. Fish life and corals are moderately abundant. We noticed a decline in marine life since diving there last in 1997. Boat is a 45-foot catamaran called the *Kokomo Cat*. Three-tank dive trip with three different sites. Many passengers were snorkelers. The boat was a little crowded with approx. 30 + crew on board, but it wasn't a big problem. They offered hot dogs and sodas for sale and allowed personal coolers to be taken aboard. Dives were rushed, as the boat captain wanted to quickly move to each new dive site. We were only allowed 45 minutes of bottom time at each site due to the rushed schedule. Sites are so shallow you can easily stay down one hour or more. Food is very good at Monte's Restaurant on nearby Summerland Key. Key lime tart with raspberry sauce is delicious. Also enjoyed Rob's Island Cafe on Big Pine Key. Both restaurants are casual and inexpensive. Barnacle Bed & Breakfast on Big Pine Key — nicely decorated rooms with a fishy tropical ambiance, located on the beach (Atlantic side) with full breakfasts daily. A nice, quiet location off the beaten path, no crowds. Kayaks, bikes, BBQ, and hammocks readily available to guests.

### Marathon Key

**Abyss Dive Center, March 2003, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX.**

Dives: #96, 97. Surface: 79 F, at 100 feet 67 F, significant current, good vis. I had been diving Key Largo deep wrecks for a few days with my favorite local operator, Tavenir Dive Center, but wanted to do the Thunderbolt in the middle Keys. When I called a few weeks in advance, no other Marathon operator could put the trip together for me, but Abyss said they'd try. Two days before my last day in the area, they had only one other diver interested, but the next day they found four more, so we were good to go — weather permitting. A north wind blew thunderstorms in the night before the planned dives, and the Sombrero Buoy was reporting winds in excess of 20 knots when I left Largo that morning, but with the keys breaking the winds and surge a bit. The waves at the site weren't too bad, and the trip was indeed a go! Abyss runs a roomy six-pack twice a day out of their impressive shop behind the Holiday Inn, and for the T-Bolt they charge extra to include a divemaster, but the prices were still reasonable. The only other single diver talked like he was experienced enough, although he was the first assigned buddy I'd had that week who had neither a nitrox card or a computer. I told him to plan the dive within his own limits and let me know when he wanted to ascend. (I'll watch out for a dive buddy, but since he was the more vulnerable, I didn't want the legal responsibility of planning his dive.) The dive was even more enjoyable than the time I'd done it before, a little spooky in the dim lighting of depth (one of the aspects I enjoy about deep wreck diving), well populated in

invertebrates and fishes, and I keep myself above my 32% EAN Soft Bottom of 11 feet, even though my buddy did dip down to maybe 120 at one point. We did simple penetrations on the bridge and another room, then peeked in the aft cabin before ascending — finding a really nice inch-tall brown drum or high hat swirling around and then — another specimen a good three inches tall! I noticed that my computer was reading high in the yellow area! I had plenty of gas and was planning on a five minute safety stop anyway, but I worried: If I'm in the high yellow range on nitrox, what could my buddy be at on air, after going deeper? Wished he had a computer! I insisted on ascent, and he followed. He showed no problems after the dive, and we followed with a shallow reef dive, so I suppose he worked off any bad possibilities. Still, on the way in, I suggested he watch for symptoms the rest of the day and get a nitrox card and a computer as soon as possible. A few weeks later, got a thank-you postcard from Abyss. Now I'm really impressed!  
([www.abysdiver.com](http://www.abysdiver.com))

**Hall's Dive Center, September 2002, Don Henderson, Lockney, TX.** Dives Logged: 72. Vis: Clear. Water Temp: 84 F. When I called about reserving the trip, they took the reservation and quoted a trip price. When I called later to confirm, they added that they charged extra for tank fills, plus the upgrade for Nitrox. When I got there, the Nitrox upgrade was higher! Their prices were reasonable enough, and some operators price trips without fills, but I would

prefer that they be more open. Finding the place was a challenge for me, but when I called from my cell phone for help, I couldn't find anyone who could give me usable directions. I found the boat too crowded, then discovered I was the only tourist on board, with two locals, a rebreather class, and several VIPs. I was paired with the locals for The Thunderbolt wreck dive, but they discouraged me from following them on the subsequent reef dive. I used 30% EAN on the 113 foot wreck dive and enjoyed it, but I was glad I didn't have any problems. When I called back the next morning to see if anyone had noticed a computer I'd left behind, they were quite helpful, but I must be grateful for that — and did tip nicely then. I guess that they were okay, but I'll try to find someone more into hosting out of state divers.

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

### Palm Beach

**Jim Abernathy's Aquasports, August 2003, Joseph Gallagher ([joegallagher@aol.com](mailto:joegallagher@aol.com)), Fort Wayne, IN.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Ft. Water: 70 F, calm. Diving off of West Palm Beach is adventurous due to proximity of Gulf current. Jim Abernathy's boats accommodate experienced divers by going to sites north of the West Palm Beach/Riveria FL Inlet where sites are deep and currents strong. Barracuda, sharks, and turtles are plentiful as well as spiny lobsters and rays. Large morays live off the reef shelves which line the sea bottom at depths of 60-80 feet. Breaks in the reefs provide respite from the currents and allow for

exploration and photography. The skill of the boat captain is critical in setting up divers. If set up incorrectly the currents may carry divers off the reefs before they reach bottom providing a dive tour of sandy bottoms. North dive sites, which include wrecks and a site referred to as Shark Alley, are best left to experienced divers. South dive sites off West Palm beach are shallower and currents are not so strong, thus more accommodating for the less experienced. Jim Abernathy's is the best run operation and the best at accommodating experienced divers. The presence of local divers very experienced in diving the reefs who are more than willing to provide advice and insights on the best method of diving the many sites. Ride to dive site is from 30 min. to 1 hour. During that time the boat is large enough to set up camera equipment although bench space is not plentiful. There is normally a bucket in which to place cameras prior to entering water. Dives are drift dives with strong current, best to enter water with cameras or fight to stay with boat to be handed cameras. ([www.scuba-adventures.com](http://www.scuba-adventures.com))

**Coral Island Divers, February 2003, Richard Hill, Central Point, OR.**

Vis: 50 feet. Water: 69 F. Dives logged: 250+. Dive restrictions enforced: drift dive with divemaster. My wife and I were the only certified divers going out mid-week while we were there. Ocean conditions were good. The reef at Fish Bowl and Fourth Window was quite alive with lots of small fish. We also saw lobster, octopus, and plenty of barracuda. Coral Island Divers was top-notch. ([www.coralislandcharters.com](http://www.coralislandcharters.com))

**Scuba Club, March 2003, Ben Glick (bglick@vgernet.net), Williamstown, MA.** Vis: 50 to 70 feet. Water: 68 to 74 F. Dives logged: 1,400. Excellent reliable dive operation. Very good dive boat. Divemaster in water with group. Drift dives. Large #s of fish, good variety, great corals and sponges, reef was in excellent condition. Wreck dive was great, giant grouper, large nurse shark, turtles. All types of food and accommodations near by.

## Tavernier

**Conch Republic, October 2002, Julian Watkins & Debbie DiMascio (julianw@flash.net), Santa Monica, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 feet. Water: 82 F, calm, currents. Conch Republic in Tavernier runs two boats each day as needed. One six-pack, and the other is much larger. We went out on the six-pack with two other divers. The staff specializes in accommodating the more serious and/or tech diver. Nitrox is available. We dove the wreck of the Duane, a 327-foot Coast Guard Cutter sitting upright in 120 feet of water. Strong current and depth make this an advanced dive. Lots of fish life on ship's deck at 105 feet and in the wheel house. Crows nest and mast still intact at about 70 feet. Second dive at the Canyons. A patch reef done as a drift dive. We towed a dive flag with us attached to a long line as we cruised the reef. Boat picked us up where we surfaced. Lots of usual reef fish and marine life. Saw a small nurse shark here, but what happened to all the nurse sharks that used to inhabit the Keys? Water and Capri-Sun juices provided. Space in

their cooler with ice available for your own beverages. Nice dive shop and repair facility. Rinse tanks, drying racks, and overnight storage available if desired. Night dives and dawn dives offered. Shop owner also conducts marine research with various professionals. Very good dolphin sandwiches available at Hobo's restaurant in Key Largo. Order with sauteed mushrooms, excellent! Prices reasonable, service good. Staff repaired a malfunctioning schraeder valve in my BC inflator and only charged \$5.00 for the repair. ([www.conchrepublicdivers.com](http://www.conchrepublicdivers.com))

**Conch Republic Divers, Island Bay Resort, Frank Hall & Carole Ott, Floyds Knobs, TN.** Vis: 50 to 60 feet. Water: 83 F. Experience: 300+ dives. The Island Bay Resort is a great place to stay. Our room included a stove, microwave, and mini-refrigerator. The grounds are immaculate, and there is a dock. This is the second time we have dived with Conch Republic Divers. We were disappointed on this trip. One day, instead of splitting up the divers, they crammed 23 of us on one boat. All 23 did a drift dive. What a mess! Another day we encountered a storm (including two water spouts) on the way to the morning dives. The crew elected to go ahead with the dives. We had a lot of close lightning strikes. We could actually see the lightning from under the water. By the time we got back and unloaded, the storm had cleared out. The owner informed us that the boat wouldn't go out for the scheduled afternoon dives. He said it was because of the weather. He also said the crew got wet and were cold!

The afternoon dives were going to be our last of the trip. We checked with some other shops in the area, and they all made the afternoon dives. We believe they didn't want to take the boat out with the five afternoon divers. If they were really concerned about the weather, the boat should have returned instead of staying out during the storm. We think Conch has forgotten about customer service.

**Conch Republic Divers, August 2003, Patrick Resen (presen@juno.com), Cromwell, CT.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. Conch Republic Divers was bought by Brenda and Gary Mace in July 2003. They like diving and they like divers. When an afternoon trip got down to two other divers and me (and the couple was thinking of canceling) Brenda said: "I don't cancel a trip if someone's here who wants to dive." She would have sent the boat out with just me. Boat staff helpful and friendly, assists to the dive platform and take your tanks upon exit. Not a lot of explanation about the marine life per se, but that's something you rarely get anywhere these days. A tip box is onboard but no pushing, directly or indirectly, for tips. Boat is comfortable, head, cabin for changing, easy entry and an exit ladder, fresh water shower, no snacks but juice for post dive time. The boat is the former *Lady Cyana* and Paul (who ran Lady Cyana Dive Shop) was onboard doing his own diving on most of my trips (10 dives, three days).

**Tavernier Divers, Coconut Palm Inn, October 2002, Julian Watkins &**

**Debbie DiMascio (julianw@flash.net), Santa Monica, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 82 F, choppy. Nice outfit. Their 42-foot diesel boat took just four of us out to the Eagle Wreck and Crocker Reef. Staff was knowledgeable and let us dive our own profiles, just return with 500 psi. Nitrox is available. Oranges and pineapple slices were provided and water to drink. The Eagle, a 285-foot freighter intentionally sunk in 1985, is a nice wreck. It rests on its side in 110 feet of water but is easily viewed from 80 to 90 feet. Wreck is broken in two mid-ship but is in good condition. Possible to swim into the cargo hold, but no other penetration. Look for the 250 lb. Jew fish hanging around the bottom. Current was moderate-strong the day we dove it, and visibility was fair. Crocker Reef is a patch reef with a sloping drop-off on one side. This allows for a little deeper dive than most of the shallow reef dives in the area. Good corals and lots of big barrel sponges. Fish life OK, not prolific. Coconut Palm Inn in Tavernier (formerly known as Frank's Key Haven) — nice resort right on the beach on the Gulf of Mexico. The resort was mostly deserted (mid-week), and the manager gave us their best suite with a full kitchen (the Coconut Palm suite) at no extra charge. Nice pool, hammocks, BBQs, boat docks (bring your own boat), and kayaks at no additional charge. Some remodeling and construction in progress. Minimal, continental breakfast served in their office. Excellent location, nearby good dive outfits like Tavernier Divers and Conch Republic. ([www.coconutpalminn.com](http://www.coconutpalminn.com))

## Venice

**Florida West Scuba, September 2003, Thomas Daly (oilertom@aol.com), Oviedo, FL.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 6 to 20 Feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, calm, no currents. Great place to dive for the teeth of Carcharocles Megalodon. The teeth are laying right on top of the sand for you to pick up if you are lucky. There are numerous fossilized smaller sharks teeth. I found 8 meg teeth and about 20 other teeth. I also found a fossilized manatee bone with shark tooth scarring on it, whale ribs, and a whale tooth. I found numerous fossilized scallop and gastropod casts. The dive day begins at the dive shop at about 8 am. You check in and do your waivers, set up any special requests you may have regarding gear, weights, Nitrox etc — then head to the boat. The sites are as close as a quarter mile offshore. Steve Thacker who is a retired geologist gives a history lesson of the area. He also has a large assortment of the “treasures” you can find on the dives, from megalodon teeth, to ancient horse teeth, to manatee and whale bones. He briefs you to take a dive flag, dive with a buddy if you wish, or by yourself. When you surface Steve or his divemaster helps you aboard and hoses you down with warm fresh water. They handle your gear, then he helps you identify your treasures. If you are lucky, you may have brought up a “Chatah tooth” as he calls them. That is a tooth that he will trade for the price you paid for your charter that day. Between dives, water, coke, diet coke and homemade chewy chocolate chip cookies are offered. After

everyone is on board, the group heads to a second site. Once again, expect to get between an hour for heavy breathers to two hours for those who are good on air. Again, you are asked to bring some air up with the tank. The most exciting part of the dives is obviously finding the historic Megalodon teeth and other fossils, but equally as pleasing is comparing finds with everyone else on board. The visibility here ranges from diving by Braille to 20 feet. There is not much else to see on the mostly sandy bottom. On this day, from the time we got in the water, we could hear dolphins. On surfacing, there were at least 30 dolphins all around us providing a most enjoyable show and finish to our dives. The dive boat is set up for 6 and that is all the divers he will take. So book early. Also offered are deeper dives for spear fishing and wreck diving. The dive shop is well equipped with Dive Rite, Faber Aqualung and other equipment Steve considers the best out there. The prices are pretty fair in my opinion as well. You are pretty much back at the shop and dried off by 2 pm and headed to Captain Eddies nearby for some fantastic seafood for a late lunch. ([www.floridawestscuba.com](http://www.floridawestscuba.com))

## UNITED STATES - VIRGIN ISLANDS

### St. Croix

**Anchor Dive, Bluewater (SCUBA) Divers, The Waves at Cane Bay, February 2003, Donald Hoft, Holliston, MA.** Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: