
Readers Report from the Caribbean

Where did we go, and how did we like it?

Cayman Islands

Out of the three Cayman Islands -- Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac, and Little Cayman -- it was the smallest and hardest to get to that got the most attention from *In Depth* readers. And most of those travelers tried the new Little Cayman Beach Resort and liked it. David Kupersmith, East Northport, New York, rates both the accommodations and the operation a 5 and raves about the food. And even though Molly the manta did not show up, he calls Little Cayman "the greatest wall diving ever," which is saying a lot, considering he got bent on the trip. David reported that he took a hit in the shoulder although his 15 dives in six days were superconservative.

(2/95) Dr. Gabe of Princeton, Virginia, thinks the Little Cayman Beach Resort is clean, well run, and oriented to divers. He reports the dive boats were spacious and in excellent condition. On the down side, the dive operation was inflexible. He assembled a group of eight divers for a night dive, but says that the staff would not accommodate them because it was not on the schedule, even though they would be unable to do the regularly scheduled night dive because they were flying the next morning. In general, he says the dive staff were friendly and competent, but a few were inexperienced.

(11/94) Another reader complains that the Beach Resort's operation refused to go out in what he would call only moderately rough seas (3-4 feet), but he still thinks the accommodations and dive operation were efficient and the walls unspoiled, beautiful, and full of tunnels, graced with turtles, morays, and rays every day. "A great getaway."

They may talk about the food at the Beach Resort, but they cannot be heard over the loud raves about Gladys's cooking at Pirate's Point. (3/95) Gary and Joanne Miller, Houston, Texas,

Analyzing our reports for this year reveals some interesting figures on where *In Depth* readers have been traveling to get wet in the Caribbean.

Statistics

Caymans	20%
Bonaire	13%
Honduras	10%
Bahamas	10%
Turks & Caicos	9.6%
Belize	9.0%
Saba	6.5%
Cozumel	3.4%
St. Lucia	2.6%
Curaçao	1.7%

Pack light to travel to Little Cayman. Any baggage over 55 pounds costs an additional 50 cents per pound in overweight charges.

Nine out ten divers saw sharks while diving on Little Cayman. Only 22 percent report seeing mantas.

Readers rate Little Cayman 4.7 on a scale of 5 for experienced divers.

*Little Cayman Beach:
800-327-3835*

*Paradise Divers:
809-948-0004*

*Pirate's Point:
809-948-1010*

*Southern Cross Club:
809-948-3255*

refer to Gladys Howard as "a delightful hostess and fabulous cook." They also found the reefs on Bloody Bay in excellent condition with a wide variety of tropicals in all stages of development. They must have been looking at them closely, because they report finding several seahorses, a frogfish, and rare nudibranchs.

(6/94) Carole Ott, Floyd Knobs, Indiana, says Gladys and her associate Gay at Pirate's Point are the best of Little Cayman. Her only complaint is that you get only two dives a day at the Point while the Beach Club runs three.

(2/95) Richard and Joy Visser didn't stay at Pirate's Point, but they ate some meals there. They stayed at the new Paradise Villas, where Gladys will come by and pick you up if you make reservations. The rest of the time they used the fully furnished kitchen at the Villas or wandered over to the one restaurant on the island, the Hungry Iguana, which they say has great food.

They liked the Villas -- great price, free bicycles, hammocks on the beach, swimming pool, and the rooms have air conditioning. They loved the independent diver operation, Paradise Divers. "Tom and Laurie run this operation well. They picked us up every morning. They have a 36-foot custom dive boat with a large dive platform off the back and two ladders for easy exit and entry. This is no cattleboat operation. They listened to our suggestions about where we wanted to dive. Computers were welcomed and even encouraged. We were never shepherded; we were free to follow the divemaster if we wanted, or if buddies wanted to roam on their own, that was fine too." As for the diving: "Spectacular. . . . We saw numerous rays and a few sharks. . . . This place is a diver's dream, a fish factory."

(2/95) Dr. Gabe, Princeton, Virginia, who also sent us his report on Little Cayman Beach Resort, had the opportunity to dive with Paradise Divers. He highly recommends them. Both of the divemasters he dived with were "knowledgeable, friendly, top-rate professionals who obviously enjoy their job."

In contrast were his comments on the Southern Cross Club (2/95): "The dive operation was third rate, the divemaster unprofessional. He canceled one of our dives because he was hung over, and another so he could have room on the boat for his friends. On the dives we did, he would often not dive with us because he 'didn't want to get wet.' The dive boat was in disrepair. The engine would stall ten to twenty times on each excursion (really!), each time requiring the divemaster to work on the engine to get it started."

Dr. Gabe's description of his room at the Southern Cross doesn't sound much better. "Our cabin was infested with cockroaches. Live wires stuck out of uncovered outlets, beds and bedding were dirty, and the food was some of the worst I've eaten." If anyone else has been to Southern Cross Club in the last six months, drop us a line and give us your opinion.

Cayman Aggressor

After Little Cayman, the *Cayman Aggressor* was the next most visited by *In Depth* subscribers in the past year. (11/94) Lesley Hand, Lafayette, California, says she would do it again. She cited a 1½-hour night dive with Molly the manta, a large grouper, Stingray City, turtles, lots of tropicals, and a great crew.

(3/95) Nancy and Jack Betts, Yutan, Nebraska, agree with Lesley's assessment of the crew, calling the *Aggressor* "an excellent, well-run operation with an outstanding captain and crew." They also liked it because divers were fully responsible for their own profiles.

(3/95) Darryl Allen, Toledo, Ohio, not only calls the ship and crew the most efficient anywhere, but claims the food is the best, bar none. It was his second time to Grand Cayman in February. Neither time did the weather allow more than a single day's diving on the North Wall. The crew said they had not been able to make it over to Little Cayman since December. Also there in March, Bill Baylis, Denver, Colorado, writes, "Weather kept us on the west side of Grand Cayman all week -- we were always surrounded by other dive boats."

Another *In Depth* reader on the *Aggressor* this spring wrote, "We had really wanted to dive Little Cayman, but here is the lesson: The *Aggressor* regularly goes to Little Cayman only in the summer -- Easter through November. The rest of the time they claim that Bloody Bay Wall is too rough to be enjoyable. They were able to take us to some great sites on Grand Cayman. The *Aggressor* is a well-run operation and worth the trip."

What's Yours?

If you've been dive traveling lately to one of the above locations or anywhere else, or if you disagree with any of the above opinions, please fill out or copy the form on pages 9 and 10 and mail or fax it to us. You'll see your report in our annual *Dive Resorts and Live-Aboards Rated* compilation. We'd like to hear from you.

Six out of every 10 divers on the *Cayman Aggressor* saw sharks. They rated the diving (for experienced) 4 on a scale of 5 and the boat's dive operation 4.8.

Cayman Aggressor:
800-348-2628

When the *Cehili* pulled into one of its premier dive spots in Indonesian waters, the local chiefs wanted to talk. It didn't matter that they had a previous agreement to let the boat dive their reefs — they wanted money.

Evidently the argument became quite heated. The Indonesians were the ones with machetes; the ones without were from the *Cehili*. As the story was told to me by someone aboard the boat at the time, there were some threats to spear the divers as they came up from their dives, and a few aggressive swipes with the machetes during the argument. Some money was finally tendered to defuse the dangerous situation.

However, neither side was satisfied. The local chiefs thought it was not enough money, and *Cehili* owner Thor Thorsen, who was on board this cruise, announced that he was putting the *Cehili* up for sale because it was not safe to dive this region.

After diving the Banda Sea, the *Cehili* was working its way up to Singapore for a dive show. I can't help speculating that this incident is not the sole reason the *Cehili* is now up for sale — that the *Cehili* was already en route to Singapore to be put up for sale.

It will be interesting to find out soon what the other boats in the area — like the *Pendito*, which also dives the troubled spot — will be doing. It will also be interesting to see what the fate of the *Cehili* will be and where she ends up.

Bad timing. The *Cehili* had just discovered the mother of all muck dives in Ambon Bay. The word was out that on just one dive you could see all the strange and rare creatures that took Bob Halstead years to find on the *Telita*.

John Q.

Gone for the Second Time