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not uncomfortable. There's only one water maker, which fails frequently (on every trip reported). The boat can only run two or three days using water from the tanks (even with only one quick shower a day and scant equipment rinsing). Making frequent trips to an island to get water means missing at least two dives on each trip as the water tanks are slowly filled with a small garden hose.

Food is the *Adventurer's* strong suit. Simple but tasty American and Asian dishes were prepared fresh for each meal. There was a good variety of fish, meat, vegetables and fresh fruit, served buffet style for lunch and dinner. Breakfast was ordered from a menu. In some cases, such as a severe allergy to shellfish, the chef went out of his way to accommodate. In others, such as special requests by vegetarians, appropriate meals were not forthcoming.

The top deck is combination sundeck and covered lounge with plenty of room to spread out. However, with no space dedicated to camera storage or maintenance, the forward lounge was commandeered by photographers for equipment, leaving no space for tired divers to relax. Between meals, photographers used the

comfortable, pleasant dining room to work on equipment. A single transformer in the lounge was available for electrical devices such as battery chargers, but in

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**I would be especially leery of trips involving long crossings, especially in rough weather, when directional control is essential.**

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general the boat's power supply (220V) fluctuated wildly. With a full load of photographers, some would be forced to charge batteries in the cabins, frying converters and chargers in the process.

### **Dollars and Sense**

The schedule and air transportation have been a bit of a problem. Travelers have arrived in Bali to find that they could not join the boat until a day later than planned because the boat was not in port (missing a day's diving) or have arrived in Maumere and been told that they did not have

confirmed return reservations (another delay).

With the poor navigation, trips for water, compressor problems, engine failures, and airport-related delays, divers can expect to make 25 dives on a on a ten-day trip — far fewer than the 4 to 5 dives per day promised. The price is \$2,360 standard, \$2,750 deluxe per person for a ten-night package; \$1,470 standard, \$1,800 deluxe for a seven-night package. Air to Bima or Maumere and return (not included) runs about \$200, plus fees for excess baggage, which can be expensive (or not, depending on the mood of the agent and your negotiating skills).

Several agents in the U.S. book the *Adventurer*, including Maluku Adventures (800-566-2585 or 415-321-1387), and Posideon Venture (800-854-9334 or 516-231-4475, fax 516-231-4496). However, Dive Discovery and Posideon say they won't book the boat again until they see these problems resolved.

G. D.

*The Baruna Adventurer is owned and operated by Baruna Adventure Cruises in Bali, phone 62-361-753820, fax 62-361-753809; address is P.O. Box 3419, Denpasar 80361, Bali, Indonesia.*

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# Reader Reports

## *Living aboard in the Caribbean*

Live-aboards are not for everyone. Says one dissatisfied diver, "We discovered we missed the flavor of being abroad. We ate with Americans and dived with Americans." But it's certainly a kick for others: "The live-aboard [*Wave Dancer*] is

great. I wouldn't do it any other way. I've been on two and have another planned for next year."

With advantages and disadvantages to both ways of going diving, it's not always an easy decision,

but if you're considering climbing aboard, here's a look at what's going on afloat in the Caribbean.

### **Bahamas**

A boat I would like to see make it the Bahamas is the *Ballymena*, but the luxurious 124-footer appears to be having some difficulties filling and making departure dates. Planned schedules have included exotic Baha-

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mas destinations — Exuma, Crooked Island, Cat Island, San Sal, and others. Part of the problem might be that it's a little pricey at \$1,995 to \$2,695 for six nights. (800-241-4591 or 809-394-0951, fax 809-394-0948)

At the other end of the price spectrum (seven days for \$759, including beverages), **Blackbeard's Cruises** gets good marks from readers as long as they know ahead of time what they're getting. David R. Lamb (Salt Lake City) reports on his May 1996 trip: "Lots of variety: wrecks, reefs, wall, night, current, and shark dives; vis 50-90 feet, water 76°-78°F. . . . Good food and plenty of it. Friendly, competent crew. . . . Tight quarters. Your bunk is your closet. No privacy; don't go if you're shy! Limited freshwater showers. Gear storage on deck is tight. Did get chilly some evenings. Having read comments in *In Depth*, I knew what to expect. Despite inconveniences, I loved every minute. Excellent value."

John Moeller (Davenport, Iowa) did a Blackbeard's cruise in February 1996. His enthusiasm was somewhat dampened by the cold water (71°-74° F), but he still says, "Boat was clean and everything worked. Crew was friendly, competent, and worked hard. Ample food was okay to good. Beer, wine, and liquor with the package. A good value but not luxury."

Bill and Jayne Goocher (Hermosa Beach, California) also thought Blackbeard was "a great trip for the money. We got in some great dives, laughed a lot, met great people, gained weight, and would go back in a heartbeat. However, the next time it will be for their nine-day cruise. If you'd rather go to 120 feet every dive, this isn't for you, but dives were varied for all ranges of divers." (Blackbeard's: 800-327-9600 or 305-888-1226, fax 305-884-4214)

The bizarre-looking *Nekton Pilot*, a twin-hulled boat billed as so stable it's seasick-free, gets mixed reviews from readers but seems to be building a following.

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### The *Belize Aggressor* crew "kept the hot tub hot, pouring hot water down our wet suits after each dive."

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Irby Hartley (Hixson, Tennessee) says the diving on his February 1996 trip aboard the *Nekton* varied from super wall sites to the ho-hum, but thinks the *Nekton* is "the ultimate boat for a dive base, but would do it again only if a new, more experienced diver itinerary were offered."

Kamer Vartanyan's (Davie, Florida) trip on the *Nekton Pilot* last summer was spiced up by "numerous reef sharks, but the highlight was a close encounter with an eight-foot tiger shark at 100 feet. It circled within fifteen feet, an exciting moment." He found the food decent, the crew friendly, but the coral and visibility poor on some sites. (Nekton Diving Cruises, 800-899-6753 or 305-463-9324, fax 305-463-8938)

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### *Nekton Pilot*



## Belize

Weather was chilly and lousy on Roger Chan's (New York City) trip in January, but the *Belize Aggressor* crew "kept the hot tub hot, pouring hot water down our wet suits after each dive, and laid out plentiful snacks." As for the diving, Roger reports "a fair amount of coral bleaching. Lots of small, colorful reef creatures and fish not found in other parts of the Caribbean: toadfish, juvenile misty grouper, schools of permits." He liked the food and comments that the shared bathrooms were not a problem because the boat was only half full. (800-348-2628 or 504-385-2416, fax 504-384-0817)

Peter Hughes's *Wave Dancer* is plush. "No-hassle eat (excellent food); no-hassle drink (open bar); no-hassle sleep (privet head and shower in every cabin); and best of all, no-hassle diving (five times a day, two in the morning, two in the afternoon, plus a night dive)." Dirk Wood (Springfield, Ohio) writes of his January trip, "*Wave Dancer* operation is superlative," and makes the crew sound like the embodiment of the Boy Scout's creed — trustworthy, loyal, friendly, and courteous. . . . R. Thayer (Commerce, Michigan), who was on the *Dancer* in March, concurs: "Staff was very professional." Are you paying these guys enough, Peter? Both the quality of food and the boat have been receiving a solid five stars from readers. The only questionable thing has been the weather. "Chop and surge gave beginners a bit of a problem [in March]," says Marilyn Sorrell (Old Bridge, New Jersey) of her May *Wave Dancer* trip. "Windy conditions limited the number of sites and the visibility." But she had no reservations about recommending the boat or the location. (1-800-DANCER or 305-669-9391, fax 305-669-9475, <http://www.winnet.net/dancer/>)

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## Caymans

Wash your hair before you go — the U.S. State Department notes that “people wearing their hair in dreadlocks have occasionally been refused entry to the Cayman Islands.” The *Cayman Aggressor* rates high with *In Depth* readers even if it normally gets over to Little Cayman only during spring and summer, when the water is calmest. Janet Fohs (Los Gatos, California) rates her November trip as “easy dive, dive, dive vacation. Great photo operation. Warm snacks always available, great macro, night dives. Fish were adequate, corals and sponges magnificent. Critters: blennies, stonefish, coral-banded shrimp, crabs galore, lobsters, octopi (Caribbean blue).” Sherwin Isenberg, M.D. (Los Angeles) reports that his November trip had rough weather and asks what happened to all the Cayman sharks, but concurs with the excellent photographic help and well-organized diving. (Aggressor Fleet, 800-348-2628 or 504-385-2416, fax 504-384-0817)

Reader Lisa N. Neilsen (Omaha) appreciated her *In Depth* subscription when she boarded the *Little Cayman Diver II* last January. “If I hadn’t received your review prior to departure, I wouldn’t have known that deck towels are not provided and no alcohol is available: bring your own, only.” Lisa also had high praise for the boat and the diving: “Best crew and food of any live-aboard I’ve been on. Best diving in the Caribbean in terms of beauty, number of fish, size of fish, and fun fish encounters. When the crew found out eight of us were Nebraska Cornhusker fans, they arranged for us to be transported by dinghy to the beach and driven to the Hungry Iguana on Little Cayman, the only bar on the island with a satellite

dish to get the Fiesta Bowl championship game.” Amy Elliot (Yountville, California) was pleased with her fall trip: “Food was awesome. Staff was helpful,

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## The Turks and Caicos are an excellent place for live-aboards because most of the great diving is hard to access from the land-based operations.

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never had to lift a tank. They postponed meals so we could dive exactly when we wanted —

tremendously flexible, relaxed atmosphere, great diving.”

## Saba, St. Kitts, and Nevis

The *Caribbean Explorer* leaves out of St. Maarten, which has virtually no diving, and heads for Saba via St. Kitts and Nevis (close enough together to count as one dive site). Saba is where the diving turns good. Rodale’s *Scuba Diving* rated the *Explorer* as the number one live-aboard. It’s a good boat, but I sure wouldn’t say it’s the best. Scott Kramer (Los Angeles) gives us a hint for cabin selection: “Rooms 6, 7, 8 on top deck right off ‘sun’ area have windows and are convenient.” He liked the food: “Not a hamburger to be seen (steak, ribs, fish, chicken),” but commented that

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I’ve never heard of diver superstitions, but the British claim there are several. Says “Beachcomber,” writing in *Diver* magazine:

“Though most divers know that it is not wise to whistle aboard a boat as it is bound to bring strong winds, there are superstitions that have grown up specifically around diving.

“Red bobble hats, Cousteau-style, were believed by hard-hat divers to be lucky (they also protected the top of the head from the weight of the helmet).

“Many old sailors say that the presence of a woman on a boat is unlucky. In Spain, this has spread to some dive boats, which will not take a woman out on a dive, no matter how good a diver, as her presence will ‘bring on the bends.’

“Divers in Cornwall believe that a barefooted woman crossing their path on the way to the dive boat is a sure sign of a bad dive. If the barefooted woman is a redhead, it is even worse.

“On some dive boats, particularly in Yorkshire, a dive may be cancelled if anyone aboard uses the word ‘pig’ (ed. note: which many a woman would do when faced with these sexist superstitions).

“In other parts, drinking in any pub with porcine names like The Pig and Whistle is said to be a near guarantee of bad vis the next day.

“And dive suits with a touch of red on them are thought to be lucky suits.”

You might find these British superstitions strange, but so, it is rumoured, are British divers. One of our correspondents reviewing diving in Malta years ago said that they peed in their wetsuits: a somewhat common occurrence, perhaps — but while still aboard the dive boat?

Ben Davison

## *Superstitions, Anyone?*

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the boat “had a tendency to rock side to side so getting back to boat in low vis was sometimes a tough proposition.” Visibility on his January trip was 10–60 feet and water temps ran 76°–79°F. Sam Pearlstein (Manlius, New York), who was also there in January, noted that seas were lumpy, making island crossings rocky. Sam went for the warm towels and hot chocolate after night dives and appreciated the helpful crew and cook Gini’s delicious meals. Another January traveler, Peter Hartloue (Longmont, Colorado), also thought Gini was a great cook, but thought the divemasters, Kurt and Keith, lacked enthusiasm. Weather was a little rough on his trip, too, and he recommends bringing an extra layer of garments in the winter. (*Caribbean Explorer*, 800-322-3577 or 307-235-0683, fax 307-235-0686, or [expven@coffey.com](mailto:expven@coffey.com))

## Turks and Caicos

Another place where the *Dancers* and the *Aggressors* butt heads is the Turks and Caicos Islands. These islands are an excellent place for live-aboards because most of the great diving is hard to access from the land-based operations. However, this island set lies well to the north and winter weather can be a bit of a crap shoot. Jeff Griest (Cinnaminson, New Jersey) did a trip on the *Sea Dancer* in January and was surprised by the tiny personal storage: “Two-thirds of my clothing should have been left at home.” He liked the food, thought the crew was great, but included a warning for new divers: “Operation ran smoothly and safely, but the ocean was rough most of the time. Not the best place for an inexperienced diver because the tops of the walls are fairly deep. The staff did a

great job of working with my inexperienced buddy and making him feel comfortable, but he made only half the dives.” Kayla Koeber (Redondo Beach, California) found the accommodations comfortable on the *Dancer* and also thought the crew members were outstanding: “Helpful, fun, lighthearted, and yet I had complete confidence in their ability to handle any difficult situations. Stan’s cooking is legendary.” The February weather turned rough midweek (rain, choppy seas) but they still managed to find sheltered spots with

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**On the *Cuan Law*, “dive times were generally 40 minutes so high air users would not have to wait in the dinghies.”**

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good vis. “Saw eagle rays, silky sharks, one reef shark, typical fish and critters, and an explosion of soft corals and gorgonians. Walls, which often started at 70 feet or more, are spectacular, and due to winds I was glad to have a warm jacket at night. Wore my dive skin, a spring suit, and often my 5-mm California water jacket! Hood made a huge difference.” (1-800-DANCER or 305-669-9391, fax 305-669-9475, <http://www.winnet.net/dancer/>)

Bethany Kolb (Albuquerque, New Mexico) made a March trip on the *Dancer*. She grumbled a little about tight quarters on the boat: “Cabins aren’t as roomy as newer boats; requires a coordinated effort for two people to be in the cabin at the same time unless they are both asleep.” But

the panoramic underwater canyons, curves, and dramatic undercuts, abundant marine life, and the school of 17 eagle rays on one dive seem to placate her.

David & Elaine Hollabaugh (Fulton, Missouri) found the crew to be excellent during their October trip aboard the *Turks & Caicos Aggressor* and thought the food the best of eight live-aboards; would definitely return, but were disappointed the only beer aboard was Millers and the depth limit was 110 feet. David Lund (Minneapolis, Minnesota) made a December departure and sent us a lukewarm report: “Good, but aging, boat. Good captain (Julie). Fair crew, fair food. Less spicy alternative dishes would have been most welcome. Overall, a fair trip, but lots of other places to go before I go back.” (Aggressor Fleet, 800-348-2628 or 504-385-2416, fax 504-384-0817)

## Virgin Islands

Although the *Cuan Law* is probably not a live-aboard for a gorilla diver (only three dives a day), it’s “Huge, spacious, and beautifully appointed. The state-rooms are more than anyone could hope for. Good food. The ultimate comfort-party boat with a little diving thrown in.” David Fanfarillo (Locust Grove, Virginia), who made the trip in February, was a little surprised when he had to kneel in the sand at 15 feet and perform mask clearing, regulator recovery, and octopus sharing on the first dive, but was disappointed that “dive times were generally 40 minutes so high air users would not have to wait in the dinghies.” Randall Gilmer (Acworth, Georgia) reports his July 1995 trip on the *Cuan Law* as having “excellent food, accommodations, crew, and diving; just slip on your BC and jump in.” (809-494-2490, fax 809-494-5774) ■