

Curacao August 24-September 13, 2003



ABC, this time it's Curacao! Prior to the trip we had spent quite a bit of time searching the Internet for information about Curacao, including shore and boat diving, places to visit and restaurants. One of the best sites we found for shore diving information was www.shorediving.com. And here is the link to their information about Curacao <http://www.shorediving.com/Earth/ABC/Curacao/index.htm>. You can use this site to find details on a number of the dives we did.

The Air Jamaica flight went smoothly, with a changeover at Montego Bay, landing at Hato, Curacao. We rented a small car from Budget at the Airport, packed it full and motored down to **Breezes**, formerly known as the **Princess Beach Resort and Casino**, near the **Seaquarium**. It is now an all-inclusive resort. However, with a timeshare trade with RCI, we got a kitchenette unit with dining area and sectioned-off bedroom. It was nice and cozy, facing east so that the afternoon sun did not overheat us.



We're not all-inclusive travelers as we enjoy exploring the country. Audience participation activities were abundant at Breezes and it seemed that everyone was having a great time (good for families). The casino was busy, although it looked to be mostly a local clientele. Here's a link to Breezes Curacao
http://www.superclubs.com/brand_breezes/resort_curacao/index.asp.

There was a **PITA grocery store** just down the street so we stocked up on goodies. Next door to the hotel was a small restaurant, the **Sea Side Terrace**, with great seafood. A whole red snapper dinner, a garlic shrimp dinner, both with rice and beans and a small salad, a bottle of wine and two Bright beers to start was \$38. Free light show- a huge thunderstorm off towards Venezuela- entertained us. Spectacular! Walking home Barbara found Nemo (plastic) lying beside the road. He had been run over and squashed. Wow, finding Nemo, seemed like a good omen.



The next morning we did a shore dive off Breezes at **Oswaldo's Reef** with **Ocean Encounters**. They also service the **Lion's Dive** hotel down the street and had recently purchased **Toucan Divers** next door. Ervin led us with 4 others off the pier into the water. There was **no** visibility (think liquid mud) on the surface down to about 30' due to construction at the close-by Seaquarium and some new condos. It's a small wall drop-off. Scattered coral was healthy with numerous fish. A large school of silversides swirled and surrounded Barbara. We saw lobster, spotted drum, and a small moray eel. Ervin came in early as he was having difficulties with a student. As they returned there were several dolphins on the surface nearby. A first for us was the dive shop insisting that they keep our c-cards. Odd, they were the only dive shop on Curacao that did that. This spot is also no longer easy to do as a shore dive as the security staff of Breezes now tightly controls access to the property.

In the afternoon we drove over to **Baya Beach**. It was well worth the \$3 entrance fee each to get in. There is a small shore dive operation there that rents tanks and gear. **Tugboat** is a nice easy snorkel, as the boat lies in about 15' of clear water, about 75 yards offshore. It's the scenic wreck shown in all the brochures and comes with midnight parrotfish and a small resident octopus. The Dutch Marine commandos were just around the corner on maneuvers. Afterwards we walked over to the bar and drank a couple Bright beers in the shade. Here's a link to lots of beaches on Curacao. Navigate on down to Baya Beach.

<http://curacao.com/ActivitiesEvents/Beaches.aspx>

Next morning, we did a boat dive with Ocean Encounters to the **Superior Producer** wreck, one of Curacao's signature dives. Their 42' boat picked us up at 8:30AM at Breezes and returned to its home dock at Lions Dive for registration and the rest of the divers. The dive presentation mainly consisted of watching a video of the Superior Producer. We finally left at 9:30AM with a load of 19 divers. We didn't take cameras but many did. The wreck lies in 83'-105' and the dive was for 25-minutes. The majority of divers with cameras were very poor divers. I was kicked in the head and bashed with camera gear. One little lonely seahorse was flashed about to death. There was moderate chop at the surface and the visibility was about 50' and a bit stirred up.

We returned to Lion's Dive for our surface interval and then proceeded to a dive site about ten minutes away known as Saba. There was no current running and it was a sloping reef with pretty coral here and there, lots of fish, a number of cleaner shrimp, spotted or mushroom scorpionfish and many of the usual suspects. We saw an unusual delicate orange "plant" that we later identified as a "golden crinoid".



We decided not to dive with Ocean Encounters again as there were too many poor divers and more people on the boat than we prefer. The only photo facility was an overly full camera bucket.

Striking out on our own for some shore diving, we arose at a decidedly decadent hour and motored about an hour up to the western most point on the island, Westpunt, to dive **Playa Kalki**. Follow the **AllWest Divers** signs on lots of utility poles. Here's a link to their site. [All West Diving & Apartments Curacao - All West dives best!!](#)

Since most of the literature we had read at home indicated that it was a great dive but not much of a facility, we were pleasantly surprised by the new facility that had been built by AllWest. They had a changing room, bathrooms, cold drinks and snacks available. We rented tanks and weights for \$6+\$6 each from their friendly staff, walked down the pier, down the stairs and into the water. We left our dive bags in their storeroom so security was not an issue.



We swam out about 100 yards and dropped down into clear water with visibility about 70'. We went to the right at a depth of about 53'. There is a floating marker on the top of the coral slope and a large bunch of purple tube sponges in a line with their pier. It was a relaxing, beautiful dive, floating down and back, just watching the fish and coral. We spotted a scorpionfish and lots of smaller fish like butterfly, angelfish, jacks, grunts, damselfish, sergeant majors, fairy baslets, squirrelfish, goby, trumpetfish, goatfish, glassy sweepers, and spotted drum. There were quite a few fish at cleaning stations. All in all, it was a great dive. Air temperature was about 90° and water temperature was about 80°. What great color to the water as you can see!



We lunched down the road in a small restaurant perched on a promontory looking back over a small bay with colorful local fishing

boats bobbing at their moorings. We drove around in scenery that looked like Aruba, New Mexico or the Baja peninsula.



Again we arose at a comfortable time the next morning and decided to find the "**Bob the Fish**" dive operation. It is located at **Blue Bay (Blau Baai)** on the grounds of the Blue Bay Golf Resort community. It's a gated community with a guard who gave us directions to the beach once we made it clear we were going to the dive shop. A nice Dutch couple had just opened the operation and they were still getting organized. We had a nice chat with Nils and his wife. "Bull", the dog is friendly, so don't worry. Here's a link. [bob the fish dive center - biography](#)

We suited up at their picnic table and walked about 100 yards to the water over clean sand. Although slightly corally or rocky at the water's edge it was an easy entry and we decided to go right along the wall. There was no current running and we saw many healthy coral and long purple tube sponges. There were schools of small and medium sized fish, including the common varieties as well as juvenile French angle fish, bright yellow and black streaming schools of Creole wrasse, scorpion fish, honeycombed cowfish that stayed with us for much of the dive. We were beginning to be impressed with the fish life around Curacao. Christmas tree worms were in abundance. I don't think I've ever seen more than I did on Curacao. They were of many colors covering small lumps of coral often nestled with split crown feather dusters. Our dive at **Blue Bay or The Wall** lasted about 50 minutes and our maximum depth was 63'. The day was

sunny and breezy, which it usually is, and the temperature was the same as yesterday.



The dive cost us 5 Gilders per tank, which is a couple of bucks, and there was no charge for weights. Rats-no men's T-shirts, but they did have a nice shower and bathroom building and sold soft drinks. The community was a bit difficult to find. You turn off the main road at **Betesda** (big blank yellow sign) and drive until you see the windmill. Look to your left for a small sign to the Golf Club. There is also a large modern **Centrum supermarket** down the road that carried everything you might want or need.

On a bright August morning, we continued our leisurely shore diving and headed east to **Jan Thiel Beach**. It was on the way to Baya Beach but we turned right earlier. There was a 10Nfl entrance fee for the beach, restaurant, and dive shop. There was a kid's playground that was about a story high with water spraying all over and kids frolicking and splashing in the spray. The Dutch fellow running the **Scuba Do dive shop** was very friendly and helpful. The fee for diving was \$16 for both of us for tanks and weights. There is the easiest entrance to any shore dive I have ever seen with steps and a handrail and a nice sandy bottom. Here's a link. [Dive Center - Scuba Do - Jan Thiel Baai, Curaçao](#)

We swam on the surface for 10 minutes to the left, swam underwater for about 9 minutes to the drop-off and turned further left onto a sloping reef. Things were healthy and again we saw the usual suspects. There was a slight current to the west. The shop had great Scuba-Do T-shirts. It was the best-stocked shop we found. The restaurant, **Zanzibar** had very good pizza- fungi. It was a pleasant place to dive and then have lunch.

Our week was over and we left Breezes, but not before Barbara had a great massage. On our way to the **Hilton** to meet our Annapolis Scuba friends we checked out another dive operation called **Silent Immersions Dive shop**. Being inland they mostly lead shore dives, including a North Shore dive which the owner agreed were like going 10 meters out and getting knocked back 8 meters by the waves (way too rough to dive). We drove to **Playa Kanoa** on the North Shore next to a row of high tech windmills.



Although the area looked like the surface of Mars there was a small complex of restaurants/bars for the locals. There was small breaking surf in the harbor and three young surfers were eyeing the conditions.



We wound our way to the **Hilton**, which is to the west of Willemstad, in an area with several other hotels. We were the "advance guard" for the **Annapolis Scuba** group. **Seascope** has a nice shop with good gear storage and a 42' boat (others if needed). During the week we occasionally had another diver with us, but generally it was the 10 of us (minus one or two who occasionally succumbed to ear problems). Here's a link to the **Seascope** website. [Seascope Curacao, Five star PADI Dive operation, Netherlands Antilles](#)

Sunday morning, on August 31st, we arose to a very different routine than the previous week. We were up by 7:30AM for the breakfast buffet. Sure beats our peanut butter sandwiches. Although the room was smaller with no kitchenette, the facilities at the Hilton were quite nice. The entire **Annapolis Scuba** group, consisting of Sam, Johnny, Francis, Jack, Chip, Kevin, Tricia, Janelle, Brian, Barbara and myself would rally around a big table for breakfast. We headed down to the boat to meet **Captain Robbie**, our Captain for the week, and **Clark**, our divemaster.



We received the requisite introduction to the island, the shop, and the boat. The boat was not equipped with a camera table, but there was a large rinse tank for cameras only. There was plenty of room on board, especially for the number of divers we had. Once all our gear was loaded we motored out to the west to **Bullen Baai (Bay)**. The dive was on a semi-wall. It was sunny, breezy with a decided chop from the wind. Visibility was about 70'. We saw schools of blue and brown chromis and Creole wrasse sweeping all around us that were beautiful against the blue sea. For a shallower dive we slipped the mooring and motored over to the **Garden side of Blue Bay**. Visibility was about 60' and the usual range of critters, corals and sponges were seen. They were two very relaxing dives.

Day 2. We motored to **Bachelor's Beach** in sunny and slightly breezy conditions. **Andy**, the other divemaster from **Seascape** joined us to certify a diver.

Shortly after leaving, the Curacao Coast Guard hailed us. Several armed officers boarded us and spent about a half hour asking questions of Captain Robbie. It turned out that they were requesting information about activities that they had recently undertaken to apprehend some drug traffickers and the local Captains are a good source of information about what they have seen. Interestingly, we were moored off of the **Police Beach**, where they have facilities for their officers. The dive was a semi-sloping wall with about 70' visibility at 65' for about an hour. Both of us took our cameras.

Mine was the Olympus C-5050z/PT-015 housing/Sea & Sea YS90DX strobe, and Barbara's was her Nikonos V shooting Velvia 100 ASA slide film. We both shot at f5.6. Most of my shots were at a speed of 1/125 with about $\frac{3}{4}$ strobe. We saw many of the regulars but also a fire worm on some coral, bar jacks, yellow jacks, and a large school of mackerel scad.

Our second dive was the first of a series of drift dives that we did for the rest of the week. We motored back towards the Hilton dock and when we were within a half-mile we popped into the water and drifted down towards the dock. When we crossed the Bay adjacent to the dock, we encountered a cloud of silt that was coming from inshore. It gave a very "eerie" effect to the dive, especially when 5-6 large

snook drifted out of the cloud. We saw a large green moray, a big anchor, some small drum and many anemones. I saw my first frogfish, a yellow one. Reaching the Hilton dock we swam over to the ladder and carefully exited. Everyone enjoyed the drift dive and I guess Captain Robbie and Clark decided that we would do more of them during the week based on this dive.

Tuesday morning was scheduled to be a moored dive at the **Superior Producer**. The dive was much more pleasant for us this time as there were fewer and more experienced divers. Barbara and I went straight down, cameras in tow, searched for the lonely seahorse, but didn't find him. There was a bit of a current running, but we circled the whole ship and explored more than last time.

Our second dive was a drift dive back at **Blue Bay**. It was truly a great dive. There were tons of fish, schools of brown chromis, blue silversides, and sergeant majors. Beautiful pillar coral, stag horn and elk horn coral were plentiful. Barbara spotted a big crab that may have been a channel clinging crab inside a sponge as well as a 2 ½' grouper just resting on the bottom under some coral. We also saw several morays and a number of shrimp. There was a strong current running east to west that drifted us to the edge of the **Blue Bay Golf Course** where we found several errant balls. This wonderful and easy dive was for an hour at a maximum of 60' with visibility of 65'. Captain Robbie did a superb job of plucking us out of the sea.

Wednesday we were scheduled for three dives, two in the morning and a night dive. For the first we motored all the way down to **Near East Point**, as far to the east as you can go. Most of the dive operators don't go this far but Captain Robbie and Clark went out of their way to take us to spots that were not dived too often. This was greatly appreciated by all the divers. We did a drift dive at 60' for an hour. Accompanying us was an army of sergeant majors and lots of other schooling fish. We saw several lobsters, a turtle and an abundance of soft corals in pristine condition and a forest of purple vase sponges also in wonderful condition. Topside conditions were sunny (what else) about 90° with a water temperature of 80°.

For our surface interval Captain Robbie took us on a tour of the **Spanish Water Bay** area with its multitude of upscale homes and

boats and then we motored over to **Barbara Beach** for a look. Our second dive was at **Lost Anchor** nearby to the **Tugboat** but across the bay. Again it was a drift dive at 50' for about an hour. The lost anchor chain was beautifully encrusted with colorful coral growth and it was another great dive with schools of fish.

Finally we had our night dive at **Blue Bay Wall**. We left at 7PM and drifted for about an hour. Most notable on the dive was an overhanging cave-like area that was full of orange cup coral that were blooming.



We saw a large lobster crawling around, some of the largest drum we'd ever seen, a big green moray eel and an octopus at the end of the dive. Several in our group had big "bluish" dive lights that we found disorienting and blindingly bright. The only camera mishap of the entire trip occurred here when the female connector of my strobe ripped out of the Velcro and was lost. But that's a night dive for you.

Thursday was a special day for us. **Seascope** had arranged for an all-day three-tank outing including lunch, starting with a dive at the signature **Mushroom Forest** and including **Port Marie** with a stop in between. The Hilton staff had kindly opened the breakfast buffet 15 minutes early so that we could board the boat earlier than usual. This is a fairly long boat ride (about 1½ hours) from the Hilton and most of

the boat operators who are east of the Hilton don't usually go that far. **Habitat Curacao** and **Sunset Waters Resort** are the only dive resorts further west, except for **AllWest**. This is the Habitat operation.



On the way up we spotted either a large shark or a white marlin leaping out of the water and then a huge school of flying fish that flew out in front of it. The animal had a big blunt face but no one saw it clearly enough to really decide what it was. Captain Robbie thought it was a marlin. Barbara and I thought it was a shark.

Mushroom Forest was an hour-long drift dive at depths between 30' and 65'. Barbara saw a ray immediately upon

descending. Yes, the coral was "mushroom-shaped" and was a greenish-brown hue. Way cool.



Many anemones and tons of small fish were around. This scene was to be with us all day. A large puffer fish accompanied Barbara for a while. Janelle was able to dive but Francis had succumbed to ear problems.





Our second dive was at **Harry's Hole**. This was not a regularly buoyed spot so Captain Robbie nosed us up very near the vertical limestone cliff and Clark set the anchor. The wind was really howling by this time and there was quite a chop with a bit of current running as well. The locals were out fishing on a very small boat that looked like a ping-pong ball bouncing around in the waves. The water here looked like aquamarine Jell-O and even though the conditions on the surface were rough, underwater was calm with good visibility. Again we were surrounded by schools of small fish, including another army of sergeant majors and chromis. Anemones of an astonishing variety dotted the seascape.

The next stop was **Port Marie** for lunch. This is a well-known spot that can be a great shore dive. There are plenty of amenities at the beach, including a large parking lot, dive shop, bathrooms and a snack bar. The dive is on a double reef system with an abundance of small fish. We saw a large eel, a small turtle and again lots of anemones. After the dive we motored about an hour back to the Hilton dock. Three very different dives, in very different conditions with one thing in common – lots of fish. It was, as Barbara described it in our dive log, a super day!

Our final day of diving took us back to the **Tugboat** and the nearby **Small Wall**. The Small Wall was a typical dive with lots of small fish. The bottom was slightly disturbed and visibility was less

than we had seen for much of the week. Even though we had done the Tugboat as a snorkel, it was a fun photo opportunity diving in about 15' of water for 75 minutes. The several large midnight parrotfish were very friendly but one unfortunately had been hooked and the line was still streaming from his mouth. We gathered ourselves back aboard the boat and headed back to the Hilton dock, unloaded our gear for the final time and began to thoroughly wash and clean everything.



Saturday morning found us a bit later at the breakfast buffet. After two weeks, the drive to the Airport was a breeze and we just took our time getting there. We had no problems with returning the car and lucked out with first class upgrades on Air Jamaica. The flights went smoothly and we were home 11PM. We had a wonderful time! Thank you Nemo!

Restaurants that we liked:

Sea Side Terrace next to Breezes
Kon-Tiki at Toucan Divers
Blues at the Avila Beach Hotel
Hook's Hut on the Beach next to the Hilton
Zanzibar at Jan Thiel Beach

Larousse downtown overlooking the harbor (\$\$\$, pick the five course meal for savings and fantastic gourmet food)
Jaanchie's in Westpunt
We tried to find Fort Nassau but never succeeded
Both of the restaurants at the Hilton were surprisingly good.

Tips we'd like to pass along:

Before you go contact the Curacao Tourism agency and get their booklet "Take The Plunge". It's the free island dive guide and one of the best we've ever seen. Ask for their map as well.

Check out all the websites we listed and use their links to find others.

Rent your car online from home to be picked up at the airport and you can save about \$100. (Budget)

Pick up all the tourist information you can find at the airport and car rental office. Contains good tips and coupon deals.

Shore dives are fun and inexpensive. Do not leave anything in your car when you are doing a shore dive.

Buy the \$3 detailed road map at the car rental office. Roads are not well marked. Ask directions. You'll get lost a couple times until you get the hang of it.

Not much shopping to be had, although there are shops downtown.

Restaurants are generally good and reasonable.

People are friendly and mostly all speak English.

Dollar is widely accepted.

Bring all of the scuba and camera gear you need as the shops are not nearly as well equipped as what we're used to. Have a good time, we did! If you want to see more photos, especially more underwater ones, please go to our website at:

[Photos from Ted and Barbara Janssen](#)