

We spent the week of July 11-18, 2009 on the Peter Hughes *Sun Dancer II* in Belize. This was our first experience on a Peter Hughes boat, and the service was simply outstanding from start to finish. For example, we were met at the airport by members of the crew who took care of our bags and provided us with cold water and ice-cold moist towels to cool us down in the van; the crew always provided us with warm, fresh-out-of-the-dryer towels after every dive; and we were served hot chocolate on the dive deck after night dives.

The crew included the captain and first mate, James and Marnie; divemasters Aaron and Fermin; chef Carlos; galley assistant and attendant Barbara and Elia; and engineer Carlos. They were all delightful and always ready to lend a helping hand whenever needed.

We had a full boat of 20 divers from all parts of the US and one person from Belgium. It was a fun, laid-back group of experienced divers, and everyone got along extremely well – so well that we may plan another trip together next summer.

In terms of travel, we took a direct flight from Charlotte to Belize on US Air which was on time both ways, so air travel was ideal. No problems with luggage either way. The dive package included transfers to and from the airport, which is about 20-25 minutes from the boat dock. The dock is directly across the street from the Radisson Inn, so you stay there until it's time to get on the boat on Saturday. There is a decent restaurant with A/C at the Radisson where you can wait until boarding time the day you arrive.

The boat is spacious for a live-aboard dive boat. All rooms have a private bath with shower and either a queen bed or two singles. Cabins on the main cabin deck have nice large windows and individual A/C units. The dive deck is on the same level as the cabins. The dive deck was spacious – even with 20 divers on board, we didn't feel crowded. There are two nice large camera rinse buckets (one on either side of the dive deck) as well as large camera tables. One deck up is the dining room and a covered outdoor social area, then up one more level is a large sundeck that is partially covered.

We left Belize City on Saturday evening and arrived at Lighthouse Reef before midnight. We dove on Long Key and Half Moon Key from Sunday through Thursday. We really enjoyed the diving on Long Key the best, particularly some of the sites along one part of a sheer wall including Que Brada and Cathedral. The crew and some of the other divers preferred sights on Half Moon Key, primarily because sites here afforded more opportunities to see sharks, rays, and turtles. Lighthouse Reef appeared to be very healthy, with an abundance of corals and sponges and a good variety of fish life. We thought the diving here was probably better (more pristine) overall than Roatan, but very similar in terms of species of fish life and types of corals and sponges we saw.

The dive schedule generally started at 8:00 a.m. followed by a second morning dive at 10:30, often on the same site. The boat typically moved at lunch and moored at another site for afternoon dives at 1:30 and 4:00. Evening dives were offered on most nights, weather permitting. We had a pretty rough day on Sunday with cold, windy rain, so we didn't do a night dive that day. On Thursday we did a dusk dive in lieu of a night dive so that the boat could head to Turneffe Island that night. We dove the Blue Hole on Wednesday morning. This is a guided dive to about 140' feet to see some ancient stalactite

formations. Some members of our party thought this was the highlight of the trip, but I personally didn't find it very interesting – given the chance to do it again, I would pass (a matter of personal taste, I suppose – my preference would be to spend the time in the shallows near the boat looking for macro critters.)

One unusual aspect of diving on this boat was the way the boat moved when moored. It swung in a very large arc from the shallows over the reef into the deep blue. The boat actually moved very fast because it is so tall and the mooring lines are so long that the wind pushes it very rapidly. Some days the boat moved so fast that you could feel the pressure pushing on your mask during the safety stop on the hang-bar.

Overall, we were fortunate to have good weather. Sunday was cold, windy, and rainy and Monday was also overcast with some rain but not windy. After that, the weather was generally sunny from Tuesday through Friday.

Meals were very good. Breakfast and lunch were served buffet style, and dinner was served as a plated meal each night except for Friday. Breakfast included fresh fruit, cereal, and bagels as well as made-to-order eggs and breakfast meat. Lunch included menus such as deli sandwiches and soup, hot dogs and hamburgers, and Mexican buffet. Dinner typically included soup, salad, main course of meat and vegetables, and dessert. We enjoyed a nice variety of well-prepared fish, chicken, and beef entrees for dinner, and servings were plentiful. The food was excellent, but not exceptional (we both thought the meals we had on the Cayman Aggressor and at Southern Cross on Little Cayman were better).

The one thing we would change about the trip if we ever returned is our lodging on Friday night. The boat is tied to the dock on Friday night and we were on the side of the boat next to the dock, so we could hear very loud squeaking from the bumpers rubbing between the boat and the dock all night, and the motion was very uncomfortable. We would choose to spend the night at the Radisson on Friday instead if we made the trip again.

Overall, this was a very good trip. We thoroughly enjoyed the crew and the other guests, and we thought the diving was among the best we have experienced in the Caribbean.