

General:

We took our first trip to Bonaire in July, 2003, and it was fantastic. We spent the week at Buddy Dive and took advantage of their unlimited boat dive package – logging 18 boat dives and 4 shore dives during our 6 dive days. We flew from Atlanta to Curacao on Delta, then took the short Divi Divi flight from Curacao to Bonaire on their 7-passenger plane. A taxi took us to Buddy Dive, where we rented one of their fleet of “Buddy Dive” Toyota trucks (straight shirt, no A/C, no power steering) as part of our package. Navigating around Bonaire was very easy, and we soon learned our way around the town of Kralendijk and down the southern coast to Lac Bay as well as up the northern coast. We found grocery stores, the Super Center, gas station, ice cream parlor and restaurants with no problem.



Accommodations at Buddy Dive were nice enough, with a separate air-conditioned bedroom and a spacious kitchen/den area with 2 sets of French doors that opened onto a private patio. The grounds were lovely, and the view of the ocean and Klein Bonaire from the shore was beautiful.

We were very impressed with the dive operation at Buddy Dive. The storage room and rinse tanks were located close to the dock, making the boat diving very easy. Boat dives were at 8:30 and 10:30 every morning, with afternoon dives at 2:15 if at least 4 divers signed up. There was also one night boat dive to Klein

Bonaire that was fabulous (runs every Monday night). The DMs were great and always on the look-out for critters like sea horses (we saw 6) and frog fish (4). While a DM went down on every dive, divers were free to explore on their own with no overbearing rules. Dives were all 60 minutes long.

On this trip we discovered that shore diving is not as easy as it sounds. On our first shore dive at Margate Bay on the South end of the island, I (Kim) fell on the rocks during entry and ended up with a gash on the heel of my left hand and a large scrape on my left knee. On subsequent dives, Darren carried my BC/tank into the water for me so that I wouldn't have to navigate over the rocks fully geared up (I know people laughed – but I don't care!) Probably the most interesting shore dive was a night dive at Angel City due to navigating our way in the dark, though there wasn't much night-time activity on the reef here.

Many of our boat dives were conducted on Klein Bonaire, where the visibility was excellent. Our favorites on Klein were Karl's Hill, Mi Duchi and Jerry's Reef. We preferred the sites on the north side of Klein to the ones we dove on the south side. Several boat dives were conducted on sites to the north of Buddy Dive on the main island. We particularly liked Reppel and Small Wall. We dove a couple of sites to the south, with 18 Palms near the Plaza Resort being our favorite in that vicinity. Also, we enjoyed the wreck of the Hilma Hooker as a boat dive.





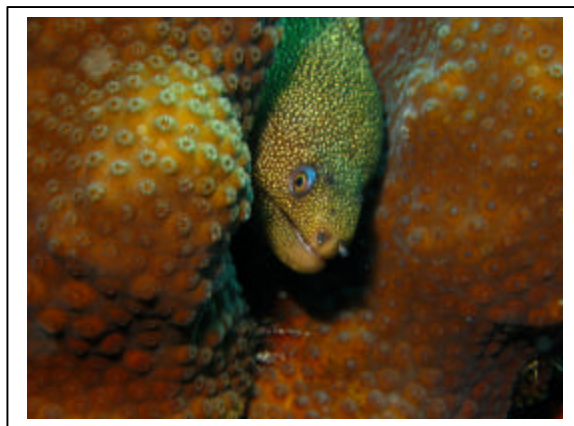
The highlight of this trip was definitely the night dive at the Town Pier in Kralendijk. We opted for a private guided dive (done with Hagen from Buddy Dive) on Thursday. We waited until around 9 pm, so we had the entire site to ourselves. There are simply no words to do justice to this experience – orange cup coral everywhere and sponges and coral of all colors and types covering every square inch of all the columns – it was truly spectacular.

Dining:

We enjoyed the breakfast buffet (open at 7 a.m.) at Buddy's restaurant every morning as part of our package there. The food was good, with a hot buffet, made-to-order omelets, fresh fruit and juice. We ate in for lunch every day –we bought groceries at the Cultimara and made peanut butter sandwiches, cold cereal, etc. We ate at Buddy's restaurant 3 nights (after night dives) because it was so convenient for a late dinner. Also, the food at Buddy's was good, and their prices were very reasonable (under \$10 for a good burger or other hot sandwich). We were told that the restaurant had a new chef, and that the quality of the food is much better than it once was. Good service, and it's hard to beat the view looking out over the water.

We also ate at the Lion's Den next door twice – once for hot sandwiches and once for a more upscale meal. We thought that the meals were over-priced for the portions (about \$20 for 6 tempura battered shrimp with fries and broccoli?) Also, the wait staff didn't seem to be very knowledgeable about the food or how it was prepared. Nice view on the water.

We ate at the Garden Café in Kralendijk one night. Very good pizza, though different from that in the States. Food preparation was slow, but the staff were friendly. Not being on the water and having no A/C, we did get pretty warm even though we arrived around 7:30.



On our last night, we went into town and ate at Coco's Tex-Mex place in the strip of restaurants by the pier. The atmosphere was great, the view was lovely (from our street-side table), and the waiter was super. The food was good (not great) and reasonable.

Photography:

I tried out my Canon A40 digital camera underwater for the first time on this dive. I have used Sea & Sea's MX-10 (lost at sea on a previous trip) and Nikonos (rental) in the past, and enjoyed results from both. For this trip, I purchased the underwater housing (Canon WP-200) and Sea&Sea YS-90 DX strobe to use with the A40. I was pleased with the results, especially in the macro range (10" is minimum distance at max zoom). I also brought the 20mm Sea&Sea wide angle lens with me, but

wasn't as pleased with the photos – I need to get a better (longer) strobe arm and replace the one that came with the strobe. Also, I took all photos on the program setting (with ISO speed set to 50 and flash set to “on” with the strobe in the slave mode). I also kept the macro mode engaged for most photos, up to a few feet away. Next time I will experiment more with the manual settings.

Diving:



Sunday was our first dive day. After the morning briefing at Buddy Dive, we completed the mandatory check-out dive on **Buddy's Reef** (1). We stayed shallow and kept the dive short so that we could make the 10:30 boat dive. We saw a good number of reef fish, Christmas tree worms everywhere, and a peacock flounder.

Bonaventure (2) on southern Klein was the 10:30 boat dive. The shallow area here was especially nice with lots of reef fish as well as pretty coral and sponges. Lots of small stuff – cleaner shrimp, arrow crabs, Christmas tree worms and feather

dusters. The most unusual sighting was a leopard flatworm.

Hand-Off (3) on Southern Klein was the afternoon boat dive. Here we saw lots of orange elephant ear sponges, large brain corals and other corals. Again, more macro critters including cleaner shrimp, arrow crabs and lots of Christmas tree worms.

We tried our first shore dive in the late afternoon at **Margate Bay** (4). This was a beautiful dive with large tube sponge formations and fish everywhere. Here we saw our only octopus of the trip up in the sandy shallows as well as a number of anemones.

On Monday morning, we enjoyed a spectacular boat dive on north Klein at **Karl's Hill** (5). We were the only two divers on the boat and DM Murphy gave us a great tour. We saw our first sea horse of the trip (brown), a goldentail eel, a juvenile drum, flamingo tongues, lettuce slugs, and fireworms. In the shallows at the end of the dive, we saw a formation of 3 squid moving in perfect unison – awesome!

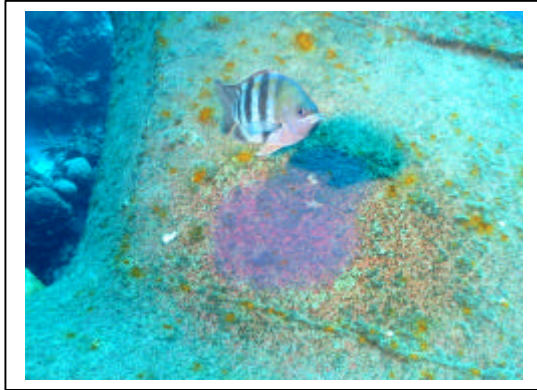
Kerry's Reef (6) on the north side of the main island was the second morning boat dive. This was a lush reef with a pretty wall. We saw one small goldentail eel, lots of cleaner shrimp, and a small-medium turtle in the shallows at the end of the dive.

The afternoon dive to **Mi Duchi** (7) with DM Sandra was very nice. Sandra found a reddish-brown sea horse for us, and we saw lots of reef fish and an abundance of corals and sponges here. Good visibility and a very nice dive.



For the Monday night boat dive, there were only 4 divers on the boat and Sandra was our DM again. We went back to **Karl's Hill** (8) on northern Klein and enjoyed a fantastic dive. We saw a pair of spotted lobsters, several crabs, and a good-size conger eel swimming about on the wall searching for

food – we saw him catch one part of his dinner. Beautiful orange cup coral was also abundant here. A great dive.



We visited the wreck of the *Hilma Hooker* (9) as our first morning boat dive on Tuesday. A neat experience with only 4 divers on board. The wreck had lots of nice large tube sponge formations. Some large tarpon joined us here as well a good-size barracuda. The sergeant majors guarding their patches of purple eggs on the surface-side of the wreck were especially interesting.

The 10:30 boat dive took us to *Something Special* (10) near the small marina just north of Kralendijk. Visibility here wasn't great because of the proximity to the marina, but we saw a large green eel, a spotted eel, a number of

fireworms and a large school of grunts.

We tried our second short dive in the afternoon at *Alice in Wonderland* (11) on the southern end of the island. This was a very nice site with lots of fish on a very healthy reef. We saw the largest trumpetfish we have ever seen (a good 4', if not longer). I also spotted a nimble spray crab hiding in a coral head in the shallows.

We tried *Buddy's Reef* (12) as our night dive and it was very nice. The reef had lots of color and macro critters were abundant – cleaner shrimp, feather dusters, Christmas tree worms, arrow crabs, brittle stars. There were also a good many long-spine urchins in the shallows near the drop-off. We saw a huge tarpon and a large unidentified yellow fish followed us throughout the dive.

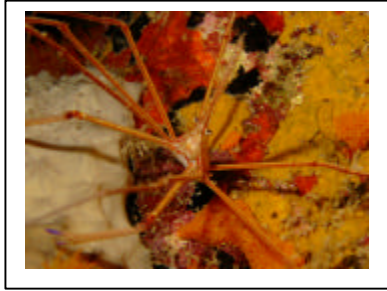
Sharon's Serenity (13) on the north side of Klein was the first morning boat dive on Wednesday morning. This was a nice dive with lots of fish and pretty corals and sponges. We saw a flounder and a spotted eel.

We loved the second morning boat dive at *Small Wall* (14) north of Buddy's at the Black Durgeon Inn. This was a beautiful reef with a small wall covered with life and color. We saw a small goldentail eel, a scorpionfish, a juvenile angelfish, and a hairy clinging crab inside a bright orange sponge – beautiful dive.



We dove *Reppel* (15) on the north shore on the afternoon boat dive. A little rough on the surface but not bad. This was an awesome dive due to topography (coral cliffs). There was also a good bit of life here. We encountered a medium-size turtle at the beginning of the dive, a brown seahorse, 2 drums, and a squid in the shallows at the end of the dive. One of our favorite sites.

The *Town Pier* (16) night dive was nothing short of spectacular. We entered the water around 8:30 with DM Hagen just as all the dive shop groups were leaving. Orange cup coral is everywhere, and sponges and coral of all colors and types literally encrust the pier columns. We saw a baby scorpionsifh (1.5" long), several adult scorpoinfish, huge arrow crabs, teardrop crabs, 3 seahorses, 2 frogfish, and squid. An unforgettable dive.

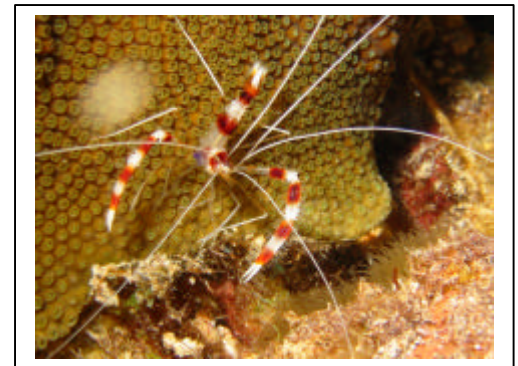


On Thursday morning, the first boat dive went to 1000 Steps (17) on the northern end of the main island. This was a pretty dive, with lots of fish. We saw some barred hamlets and a feather star waving its tentacles from a coral head.

Jerry's Reef (18) on Klein was our second morning dive, and it was fantastic. There was a nice current here – not enough to be burdensome, but just enough to make a nice easy trek back. Here DM Alex found a yellow seahorse that was beautifully nested in a green rope sponge. We also saw a gray frogfish, 2 squid, a spotted eel, and lots of other life.

We returned to Karl's Hill (19) on northern Klein for the afternoon boat dive. It was nice and the wall was very colorful. We saw 2 goldentail eels, flamingo tongues, and a turtle in the shallows at the end of the dive.

We tried a night shore dive at Angel City (20) on the southern end of the island on Thursday night. We waited past dusk until very near dark to enter the water. We explored the neat double reef system, but didn't see a lot of life – two hermit crabs, a few brittle stars and banded shrimps and a couple of sleeping parrot fish, but nothing really spectacular. Finding our way back and exiting the water in the dark was challenging but fun. Fortunately, Darren accidentally left the truck door ajar so we were able to spot the truck on the swim back in.



Friday was our last dive day, so we had only the two morning boat dives. First was Eighteen Palms (21) by the Plaza Resort, with DM Murphy. This was a pretty reef with lots of fish. We found a juvenile drum and a sharptail eel swimming about between the coral heads. Murphy found an orange frogfish at the end of the dive just after I went up for my safety stop, but I had left my camera with Darren and he got a great shot of him!



Sampler (22) on Klein marked our last dive of the trip, and it was indeed a nice one to end on. This was a beautiful site with lots of hard coral formations. In addition to the standard reef fish, we found 2 drums.

After cleaning our gear for the final time and having lunch in the room, we spent Friday afternoon touring the island in the truck. We went around the southern end of the island to Lac Bay and watched the wind surfers there. Then we went inland back to

Kralendijk and headed up to Rincon. After passing through Rincon, we stopped and checked out some of the northern shore diving sites for our next trip, including Karpata and Andrea I and II.

We will definitely be returning to Bonaire. We will probably try a smaller resort or inn on our next trip, though we will most likely continue to dive with Buddy Dive. We will also try to incorporate more top-side activities.