

### **General:**

We made our first trip to Cozumel on October 31-November 5, 2002 and did 4 ½ days of diving. We stayed at the Allegro all-inclusive resort on the southern end of the island, located several miles south of town. While the Allegro was not a dive lodge catering primarily to divers, there was a good on-site dive operator (Dive Palancar) located on the property. We enjoyed the trip, but we did not find the diving here to be as good as we had anticipated. (Other dive destinations we have visited include the East End of Grand Cayman, Little Cayman, the Bahamas, Belize, Bonaire, the Kona coast of Hawaii, Utila and Dominica.)

The weather was quite pleasant during our stay – sunny every day with no rain. We found it be very hot during the middle of the day (from about 11-3), but otherwise very nice. My only complaint is that the dive shop did not offer a good rental camera system, so we didn't take any photos (top-side or underwater) on this trip.

### **Travel:**

We flew from Atlanta direct to Cancun on Delta. From Cancun, we took a shuttle down to Playa del Carmen, then crossed over to Cozumel on the ferry ( a somewhat rough ride that lasted about 45 minutes and cost about \$25 round-trip per person), and finally took a taxi from the dock in Cozumel to the resort. On the return trip, we retraced our steps, except for taking a taxi from Playa del Carmen to the Cancun airport, which was fairly expensive (about \$50 US). The most aggravating part of the trip was the lengthy walk between the van/taxi parking and the ferry dock in Playa del Carmen – a difficult feat with all your luggage in tow. Also, we had to check our bags on the ferry and then wait and claim them on the dock in Cozumel. If we ever return to Coz, we would definitely not repeat this procedure – we would fly directly into Cozumel instead.

### **Lodging/Dining:**

The Allegro Resort had beautifully landscaped and maintained grounds with several pools on the property. The resort has a nice beach with chairs and umbrellas available to guests. The guest rooms were air-conditioned and arranged in a series of two-story buildings with four rooms per floor. The in-room phones were good for receiving calls from the States. Our room (a standard room) was rather small and plain. As is typical given the infrastructure in Cozumel, the water was not potable and toilet paper could not be flushed. Bottled drinking water was provided daily by the maid service. While we did not take advantage of any non-diving activities, the resort seemed to offer many classes (water aerobics, learn to snorkel, etc.) as well as a children's program.

There are several dining areas and restaurants on-site, as this is an all-inclusive resort. However, during our stay, only the main dining area and a pool-side fast-food place were open during the day, and one nicer dress-up restaurant was open for dinner service. The meals in the main dining area were served buffet-style. There was always fresh fruit and a tremendous variety of meal choices at the various stations. The meals were good, but not outstanding, here. The up-scale dinner restaurant was excellent. We only ate there once because we dove both morning and afternoon or night, so it made it difficult to

schedule. Also, reservations were required, which had to be made in person at the front desk at specific times during the day (quite inconvenient for divers).

### Diving:

While the visibility in Cozumel was excellent and we liked the drift diving, we thought that the reefs lacked color and were not abundant in coral/sponges/fish/etc. Dive Palancar, the on-site resort dive shop, ran two morning dives with the boat leaving at 9:00 for the first dive plus an afternoon dive at 3:30. Evening dives were offered twice a week. The dives were conducted primarily on the Palancar Reef, so boat rides were short, generally taking between 5 to 20 minutes to reach the sites. We could easily walk from our room to the dock and the shop area, which was set up nicely for gear cleaning and storage. We found the shop personnel or divemasters to be pleasant and accommodating.

### Friday:

Our first morning dive was conducted on the *Palancar Reef* (didn't record specific site). We didn't encounter much current. We saw typical reef fish, but not an abundance of fish or coral. Our second dive took us to *The Gardens*, where we experienced more moderate current and saw much more color and life. We found arrow crabs, a hermit crab seeking a new shell, a very large surgeonfish, a turtle, a number of angelfish and two peacock flounders. During our safety stop, a reef shark swam under us as we floated above the reef. We signed up for the night dive and we were not disappointed – this was one of the best dives of the trip, conducted close to shore on the *Palancar Reef*. We saw a yellow toadfish, a fairly large nurse shark resting in the sand, 5 octopi, a huge lobster running across the sandy bottom, several eels, numerous sea urchins and a basket star.

### Saturday:

*Santa Rosa Wall* was the destination for our first morning dive. There were neat swim-throughs in the wall here. We saw several lobsters, some anemones and a number of angelfish and butterflyfish. Next, we dove at *Delilah* for the second morning dive. We saw a green moray with a shark in one recess in the reef and saw several nurse sharks during the dive. We found a number of green cushion sea stars, a trunkfish, a triggerfish and some angelfish. Our afternoon dive was conducted at *Cedral Pass*. We saw lots of fish on this dive, including schooling grunts and porkfish. There were numerous arrow crabs and anemones. We found one spotted drum.

### Sunday:

The dive shop offered an early morning dive to the far south at *Mara Cabo Reef* to start the day. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a disappointing dive – the only creatures of interest that we saw were one large turtle and a spotted moray eel. We dove down the 120' then had to come up and hover high above the reef for the majority of the dive. The second dive was conducted at *San Francisco Reef*. This was a nice dive – we saw our first seahorse ever on this dive (a small brown one). We also saw a large green free-swimming moray, a stonefish, a shark, a turtle and a group of about six queen angelfish swimming together. There was a lot of life on this dive. *Cedral Pass* was the site of our

afternoon dive. We saw two sharks, one of whom swam within about 20' of us, a spotted drum, lots of arrow crabs and anemones. Darren found a toadfish here.

Monday:

We went to *San Francisco* again for our first morning dive. It was a pretty dive with a number of reef fish. Next, we ended our trip at *French Lady* – a very nice dive with large coral heads and a wall. We saw another small seahorse, a turtle, a shark and many typical reef fish.