

We made our first trip to Reef House Resort on Roatan in May 2010. Overall impressions: outstanding diving (especially in the Port Royal area), excellent food, good accommodations, average grounds, less-than-great boats, fair dive operation – overall excellent value.

Now for the specifics . . .

We flew direct from Atlanta to Roatan on Delta and all went smoothly so we were at the Reef House by lunchtime. Mike (resort owner) and his guys met us at the airport and got us and our luggage loaded onto the vans pretty quickly. The trip from the airport to RHR took about 45 minutes. The van takes you to a landing in the town of Oak Ridge and then you take the RHR boat to the resort, which is on a small key along with some other homes just a short distance across the water. We were able to unpack our luggage and scuba gear after lunch and go out on the boat for the afternoon dive. It is very nice to wake up in Clemson SC in the morning and be diving in Roatan in the afternoon!

We stayed in one of the two newer guest rooms and were pleased with the accommodations. These two rooms comprise the upstairs floor of a free-standing building that is separate from the other guest rooms. Our room had 2 double beds, plentiful dresser/closet space, and a separate bathroom with toilet and shower (sink in the main room). The A/C worked well and the power outlets were standard US outlets. The room had a TV with satellite feed, but we never turned it on. No mini-fridge or coffee maker. We shared a balcony with the other guest room in the building so there wasn't much privacy in that regard. Also, the room was about 30 yards from shore so the balcony was pretty hot – we preferred sitting on the deck by the dining hall.

The meals at RHR were fantastic – this is one area where the resort really exceeds expectations. All meals were served as plated meals at set times. For breakfast we had entrees such as omelets, pancakes, or eggs with breakfast meats; for lunch we had wraps, quesadillas, fried shrimp, etc.; at dinner we enjoyed nicely prepared chicken, beef, or seafood accompanied by salad and veggies and some outstanding homemade desserts (coconut pie was my favorite). The portions were more than adequate and the food was always made from excellent fresh, high quality ingredients. On some days the ladies in the kitchen prepared homemade afternoon snacks (cookies or donuts), and on other days they made popcorn. Coffee pots are set up and ready to brew in the dining room at all times so good, fresh coffee is always available. Also, there is a cooler in the bar area of the dining room with beer, wine and sodas available and very reasonably priced. Guests keep a tab on the honor system.

The main area for socializing with other guests is a covered bar area outside of the dining room and an adjacent large over-the-water deck. We spent many hours here in the morning before breakfast and in the evenings before and after dinner enjoying the ocean view and getting to know the other guests. There is a small enclosed pool of water in front of the resort where Mike keeps young sea turtles that local fishermen bring when they find them – then he takes them to the marine park scientists to be tagged and released. The bar/deck area is a nice, comfortable space with plenty of seating. The resort has Wi-fi which worked well on our mobile devices in our room and all around the grounds.

The dive operation at RHR is probably the least impressive aspect of the resort (though the actual diving is outstanding). The resort has 2 boats – one that can take a max of 14-16 divers (we had 12 the week we were there) and another that could take about 8 people (6 the week we were there). The larger boat is okay but not plush or spacious. You enter the water via back-roll and you have to take off your gear in the water and hand it up to get back on the boat via a small floating platform that is dropped behind the boat. Not our favorite system. Also, guests are responsible for setting up and breaking down their gear and changing it over between dives -- the DM (Davit) and captain (Choco) definitely do not assist with this. Davit and Choco have been the main dive crew for RHR for a long time and they are both very congenial, but their roles do not include the typical services that many experienced divers expect from a dive crew. If you are used to valet diving and expect a high level of service, you will not find that here. The smaller boat is definitely a no-frills boat. Entry is via back-roll, though you do get back on the boat via a ladder. This boat typically goes to sites fairly close to the resort.

The week we were there RHR had 18 divers so both boats went out every day – we alternated taking turns in groups on the big boat and small boat – 12 would go on the large boat and 6 would go on the small boat. The small boat generally went to sites closer to the resort and to the west, while the large boat went usually went eastward toward Port Royal. The dive schedule included 2 morning boat dives (one two-tank trip) and an afternoon boat dive each day, generally with boat rides of 10-25 minutes from the resort. We did one night dive - we broke into two groups for two different nights. The night dive was outstanding – lots of critters, beautiful orange cup coral, lots of color. The day of the night dive you skip the afternoon dive. Shore diving was available but we were happy with the boat dives and did not try a shore dive. We did go to the house reef a couple of times on boat dives and the diving here is very good, and the shore entry looks very manageable.

The house reef at RHR was quite nice, as were the dives to the west of RHR (going toward CocoView & Fantasy Island), but we thought the best diving was to the east of the resort in the Port Royal area. This is a very pristine part of the island – it is substantially further east than we have ever gone on the dive boats from CocoView. To put it in perspective, Calvin's Crack is typically about as far east as boats from CCV and Fantasy Island go, while it is the farthest west that the boats from RHR go. The walls on some of the eastern sites were heavily covered with large sponges and corals and looked very natural and undisturbed – somewhat reminiscent of Belize. Sites that we visited near the resort included Reef House Wall, Lighthouse, Crab Wall, and Church Wall. I'm not sure of the names of the sites we visited to the east of Oak Ridge and in Port Royal as on-line maps don't show many official named sites (and I think DM Davit made many of them up – like "Donkey Wall" – so he could tell humorous home-spun tales about the site names.) As in our previous trips to Roatan, we did not see an abundance of fish or macro critters, but the topography, colorful reef, and beautiful sponge and coral formations here are spectacular.

A few miscellaneous observations – the Reef House is a VERY reasonably priced dive destination and because of that, some of the "amenities" are missing. For example, the staff is very lean so there is only one housekeeper who can only do so much in a day. Sheets are not laundered if you stay for one week or less, and towels are exchanged infrequently. There are no rinse buckets for your feet outside the rooms to avoid tracking sand in after every dive (you pick up a lot of sand between the dock and the

room). The grounds could be spruced up a bit to be more attractive. It would be nice to have packaged snacks available for purchase since there is no easy way to get to a store and no way to store any leftovers from meals in your room. But, all of this takes more manpower and resources and would drive the price up. Finally, the Reef House is in the town of Oak Ridge so you are surrounded by houses in various states of repair – you are not on an isolated key as at CocoView. This is not to say that we felt unsafe at any time, but the surroundings are not attractive if that is important to you – the boat dock is on the side of the key facing the town and you go through the channel between the houses in town coming and going to the dive sites (which are, once again, exceptional).

Overall, we give RHR high marks and would certainly return. Given the price you pay for what you get, the Reef House Resort is the best value that we have found in the Caribbean; moreover, the diving on this part of the island is outstanding.