

CURACAO -

A DIFFERENT DIVE VACATION

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I discovered a whole new concept of dive vacations on a trip to Curacao. I had always believed that if it was a dive vacation, I should dive all the time. This trip, however, showed me the world of great diving plus having a great time on land as well.

I had never had the opportunity to visit the islands of the southern Caribbean. So, when the Curacao Department of Tourism invited me to visit their island, I jumped at the chance.

The trip was divided into two segments. I came to discover that those segments summarize the Curacao experience quite well. They are: the quite, laid back resort and diving experience of the west part of the island and the faster paced, more upscale experience of the city of Willemstad.

The first two days of the trip were dedicated to resorts and diving on the west. I stayed at Sunset Beach Resort and dived with Sunset Divers one day and with Easy Divers @Habitat Curacao the next.

Throughout my diving on Curacao, one of the things that impressed me the most was the condition of the coral. The coral is the healthiest that I have seen in the Caribbean in a long time. The water was cool and I saw no bleaching or patching. Also, I did not see any of the red algae growth that many times occurs in the Caribbean. The reefs were lovely.



I saw lots of helmet coral and large brain coral structure interspersed with extensive soft corals as well. Nice schools of Grunts and Schoolmasters were around the coral heads, and I saw multiple Spotted Drums, both juveniles and adults. There were turtles both days and I also saw an Eagle Ray, a couple of Southern Sting Rays and several Green Morays.

For the second part of the trip, we moved east to Willemstad, staying at Lions Dive Beach Resort and diving with Ocean Encounters.

The diving near Willemstad was quite different than the diving that I had found further west at Sunset Waters and Habitat Curacao. There were not the numbers of soft corals that I had seen previously, but the marine life was just as good. This is the area where the best known wrecks, the Superior Producer and the Tugboat are located, and one of the dives that we did was on the Superior Producer.

Located just outside the entrance to Willemstad harbor, the Superior Producer is a freighter that sank accidentally in 1977. She is about 200 feet long, and is nicely encrusted. She lays in 110' of water. On the day that we did the dive there was good visibility and no significant current.

The remaining day and a half was spent doing non-diving exploration, and it really opened my eyes to opportunities for having vacation fun other than diving.

Our afternoon was spent on ATV adventure. We each rode a 4 wheel ATV into the wild north coast area, which is mostly undeveloped, with dirt trails. Rough sea conditions created great views of waves crashing up on the shoreline of the North Shore, as well. The tour was about 4 hours long, and I would not have wanted to miss it.

The following morning we did a jeep eco-tour that took us to the far west end and included a drive along the Mount Christoffel National Park. Once again we saw parts of the island that we would have never seen any other way. The tour was well worth doing.

Our final afternoon included a trip into downtown Willemstad to do some shopping and to see the harbor. The downtown area is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the restorations are marvelous.

Our final dinner was also one of the highlights. The entire group went to Angelica's Kitchen, an eating establishment often mentioned in food and dining magazines. The proprietor has taken traditional dishes from her time growing up in Curacao, updated them, and has created a kitchen where the guests participate in preparing the dishes. So, we split into groups and, under skilled and talented guidance, cooked and then are out own Caribbean gourmet dinner. It was a fitting end to an altogether remarkable trip.

Curacao showed me great things above the surface that I would have missed without having taken the time to acknowledge that there is more to a dive trip than diving. Dive vacations don't have to be just about diving. There's a lot of cool stuff ... take Curacao for example.

Web sites related to this article:

Curacao Tourist Board: www.curacao.com

Sunset Waters / Sunset Divers: www.SunsetWaters.com

Easy Divers @ Habitat Curacao: www.HabitatCuracaoResort.com

Lions Dive Beach Resort: www.lionsdive.com

Ocean Encounters: www.oceanencounters.com

Eric's ATV Adventures: www.curacao-atv.com

Angelica's Kitchen: www.angelicas-kitchen.com

