

As promised, here's a trip report. Let me preface things by stating that we are still fairly new divers, 50-70 dives apiece, and certainly amateur photographers, but we had a blast. This was our first time to Bonaire and we really only have Roatan to compare it to thus far. Our only other diving has been in the cold Pacific Northwest. Bonaire was awesome. We arrived early Sunday AM on the Continental flight from Houston. Next time, we avoid those all nighters! I don't know why they insist on showing a movie when everyone is trying to sleep; those screens are bright! Anyway, we picked up our rental (got upgraded from a truck to an SUV...nice) without any problems and headed to Capt Don's. Arrived around 7:30 and were told that our room wasn't ready yet--no surprise. We left our gear in the back of the SUV, locked up in the parking lot and checked out the premises. We attended the 9 AM orientation, bought our marine park passes, and then brought our gear down to the lockers and got ready to dive from the resort dock. Had a good first dive, worked on bouyancy and refreshed skills. Got some lunch at Rum Runners, slow service, good food. Afterwards we got keys to the room, a villa studio with kitchen, napped a little while and then dove the house reef again. So many fish! The tarpon are very big, but pretty quiet swimming nearby. Later we drove into town to find Bobbi Jans for dinner. We drove right by the place without seeing it and ended up down by the cruise ship dock. Decided to park and try a place called Bambu or something. As we started walking up the street, we chanced upon three other walkers. I asked if they knew where Bobbi Jans was and they said "Yes, we're going there now!" We ended up walking the mile or so with them and had a fun dinner of tasty BBQ and then hiked back to our car. A good first day.

Since we had purchased a package that included 6 boat dives, we signed up for two on Monday. We slept in and then went to Rock Pile and Sampler on Klein. Both dives were very nice and entry was easy from a boat. At Sampler we saw juvenile Angels, creole wrasses, and gorgeous corals and sponges. Rock Pile had a Queen Angel, a shark tail eel, and Max the DM donning and undonning his gear as he swam, ha ha. On Monday we also found the Warehouse and purchased breakfast and lunch fixings for the week (hard to figure out the Dutch names!) We had been told that they had everything, but the store was really comparable to a small town grocery, not your local Safeway or Krogers. Not much choice when you are on an island! There is a small open market in the center of town for fresh fruit and veggies from Venezuela every weekday. Later we joined a bunch of newcomers for the Rum punch (very weak) party and BBQ at Rum Runners. Delicious; don't miss this. For company, we joined a couple from St Louis we had met on one of the boat dives (Actually it was just the four of us and the dive master on that dive—nice!) After dinner we did a short night dive from the dock. Saw fire worms and tarpon. I had some buoyancy issues so it wasn't our best dive.

On Tuesday we decided to try a little more shore diving on our own. Loaded up two tanks each and headed to Hilma Hooker around 9 AM. Luckily, it wasn't too crowded, just a couple of trucks already there and no boat. We geared up; we both wore skins and 3mm wetsuits all week, mine full, his shorty; we didn't get cold except on one dive. We planned to stay on the bottom for 10 minutes or so then meander back up the reef. The entry was pretty rocky and wavy, but by holding on to each other we managed fine. We surface swam to the blue water and dove down to the wreck. It's a nice big boat, mostly bottom up, with a large mast supporting many sponges. Tarpon were swimming in the area and we also saw sea cucumbers, parrotfish, and a nice peacock flounder. No problems with the 94ft depth,

and visibility was great. We off gassed for a while and then headed to Angel City right next door. Couldn't find the sunscreen I thought I had packed in the car (it was in a console cubby, slap forehead!) so tried to stay in the shade some. Once the morning clouds burn off, it can be very bright. At Angel City we had much the same entry. The ironshore is very hard and uneven and once you are in the water there are urchins everywhere. Holding on to my dive partner was the only way to go for me, since I'm still recovering from foot surgery last November. Anyway, here we saw a big spotted moray, some juvenile trunkfish, another peacock flounder, and a nice sized trumpetfish. Another good dive. We returned to our villa for lunch and changed out tanks for the afternoon diving. Note, we took others' advice and brought a solar shower with for rinsing after diving. This worked great—highly recommended, especially if you have cameras. Be sure to bring water to drink, too. It's quite hot in a wetsuit on the surface ;) We didn't bring anything valuable along except for our keys and a credit card and a \$20. My hubby carried these during the dives in a small dry box, this worked fine, and we had no issues with leaving the vehicle unlocked and no problems with theft either. That afternoon we dived Invisibles, loved it, and the Lake, good one, too. We saw trunkfish, garden eels, more parrotfish, beautiful coral and sponges, French Angelfish, Black Durgon, Blue Tangs, a Spotted Drum, and an eagle ray feeding during the swim in. Way cool! At the Lake, we got photos of some nice anemones, Christmas tree worms, some shrimp and a cowfish. Also found the tail of a large spotted Moray, but couldn't find his head! For dinner that night we went next door to the Lion's Den at Buddy's and had a delicious meal with some good calamari to start and a seafood platter for me, and surf and turf for him. Prices seem comparable to home for the type of restaurant, around \$30 each for a complete meal. We didn't drink in case we felt up to a night dive later, but could have, since we didn't. We found that the staff was slow to bring the check at most places we ate, so learned to ask for it when we were ready. Note, we spent about \$625 for both of us to eat all week, including the groceries for breakfast and lunch in the room and dinner out every night. This was about \$45 each per day, but we ate very well. It could be done for much less, but we were on vacation. Headed back to our nicely air conditioned room for a good night's sleep, after signing up for two more boat dives the next day.

On Wednesday we joined about 12 other divers for a trip to Alice in Wonderland, next down from Angel City. Again, boat entry is easy and here we saw some bar jacks, a pair of orange file fish, a shark tail eel, a big rainbow parrotfish, and an obvious scorpionfish, rare! Also saw a pair of manta rays near the surface. Upon returning to Capt Don's we dove the house reef, La Machaca again, and this time we saw a big tarpon, a big spotted Moray, and a well camouflaged scorpionfish. Always something different on this dive! We ate lunch in the room and in the afternoon joined a boat headed to Klein. We were supposed to dive Keepsake, but there was another boat there so it became divemaster's choice. We ended up at Rock Pile again, but guess what: another good dive with different things to see. We found a cowfish, a barracuda, more trumpetfish, and got some video of a pretty black durgon rolling back and forth as he swam. After we got back, we got some advice from Leo, one of the DMs, and found our way to Something Special, down by the marina in town. The parking is near an apartment complex with a small city beach to go around, but this was one of my favorite dive sites. You have to walk over a beach of broken coral that can be unstable (yes, I fell once and had to be helped up by the spouse—gear is heavy especially after a good dive!), but it well worth it. There is a lot of junk on the bottom here from the boats, I guess, but we found our first turtle, trunkfish, black bar soldierfish, cowfish, many shrimp,

French angels, a queen angel, a big purple trumpetfish, a golden eel, a porcupine puffer, and a shark tail eel that was being friendly with a trumpetfish. Very nice! For dinner we stopped to order at Pasa Bon Pizza. The wait was 45 minutes, so we returned to the room to clean up and hubby went back for the pizza later. He had sausage and olives and I had tuna and mushroom. Good pizza!

Thursday we decided to finish out our 6 boat dives and signed up to go to La Dania's Leap and Carl's Hill in the morning. Turned out to be good choices. As we were finishing up the dive at La D's, the boat captian, Max, jumped into the water to signal our DM, Lutty, that there were dolphin in the area. We waited a while, looking all around and listening, but didn't see them, so finished up the dive. We had seen a turtle, a big barracuda, a nice scrawled filefish, and more, but nothing beat catching up with the dolphins on the ride in. There must have been around 100 of them around our boat, surfacing and swimming right in front of the bow. Lutty asked if I wanted a photo, and he jumped in with my camera and a mask and snorkel and got me three nice shots! Thank you Lutty! The dophins frolicked in our wake on the ride in. Since the return took longer than usual, we only had a short wait to the next dive. At Carl's Hill we again found another boat ahead of us, so the DM, Karin, decided on Mi Dushi instead. Not a bad dive (there are none on Bonaire, I'm convinced.) Karin pointed out a very tiny Peterson's shrimp in an anemone, and we saw the usual array of spotted morays, schooling wrasses, many shaped sponges, and a cute juvenile spotted drum. After lunch in the room, soup and sandwiches, we decided to try another north dive, Oil Slick Leap. There were some snorkelers there, but otherwise we were on our own. The ironshore is pretty rough on top, but the ladder entry is easy and we proceeded down the reef. We found the north dives not as nice as the south ones or the house reef ones. We did see more scorpion fish, spotted drums, and another big rainbow parrot, but we didn't think the climb up the ladder was worth foregoing one of the pretty south end dives. Upon our return, we again dove La Machaca at Capt Don's, this time looking for the elusive frog fish that was all the talk in the locker area. Success, we found him exactly where folks said he was, "at 34 ft, straight down the reef from the L-shaped concrete block, in a purple sponge." It was a little white one; such a strange looking fish! On this dive we also saw the "big old puffer" under the small fishing boat near the rope marker from the dock to 100 ft. His mouth was decayed looking and he had a huge head. We lucked into finding an octopus right after that, and I got some neat video of it changing colors over and over as it swam and landed, swam and landed. Cool! Got some close-ups of a hawksbill turtle munching on the coral and a tarpon on the way in. Another of my favorites! That night for dinner we tried Casablanca. Very good service and a tasty meal of wahoo. Every catch of the day we came across was wahoo; good thing it tastes good!

On Friday, due to continued strange weather that was supposedly due to a low pressure somewhere, we had no wind and higher humidity; equals more mosquitos, yuck! They ate me alive in the evenings, and let me warn you, you don't even see or hear them! We did use bug spray some, but should have used more ;) My spouse was one of those lucky people the little buggers don't like, so he only came away with a couple of bites, but I had at least 30. No sign of dengue fever, thank goodness! Anyway, Leo the DM suggested trying out a wild side dive at an unmarked site, Baby Beach. He told us to head south (there's only one road), go past the Lighthouse and stop at a "fishing shack". He had been there the previous afternoon with his wife and videotaped at least 20 mantas on the bottom. We decided to give

it a try. I was a bit wary of the wave action, but with encouragement from my partner, took the plunge. We could feel the multitude of sea urchins crunching under our 7mm boots as we walked in; glad I didn't fall. I did make it a practice to hold my fins, one in each hand, to cushion them in case I did fall. We braved the surf and started swimming toward the blue water. It was a long swim out and my spouse endured my complaints for a short while. We have a difference of opinion on the need to "save our air" for the deep water and we'll see the shallow stuff on the way in." I think you can see good stuff on the way out, too! And I am getting better on my air consumption. By the end of the week we were getting out with pretty equal air in our tanks, and staying down for close to or more than an hour every time. Anyway, when we headed down to the coral at Baby Beach, we immediately came upon a very large manta ray laying in the sand. The reef slopes slowly down here, and really has no cliff edge to swim along. We swam with the current down the shoreline, watching for rays, saw 2, taking video of the pretty fan corals waving in the surge, and enjoying the schools of jacks swimming by. We found this weird fish that looked like it had a Mohawk strip on his nose, kind of like a black strawberry birthmark. I'll have to find out what that was sometime. We did notice a real change in temperature at places on this dive, very like a thermocline in freshwater. We surfaced and got out about a half mile south of our entry and my partner walked back for the car while I waited with the gear. There is plentiful junk on the beach here, including so many shoes I couldn't count them. Not sure why, but shoes were the main type of trash there. From there we headed to Red Slave as we off gassed. We thought we'd stop at The Lighthouse, but there were other divers there, and who likes a crowd? Red Slave is an interesting site with the huts all lined up since 1850. They are quite small and uncomfortable looking, but at least they would be protection from the sun. We walked in over the bumpy beach and planned to swim against the current up the reef and float back again. As we descended to depth we realized that the current was very strong. We were swimming very hard and hardly getting anywhere. About the time I was thinking, we better abort this dive, things calmed some and we were able to proceed. It did make it difficult to get pictures on the early part of that dive, but we saw trunkfish, a scorpionfish, a peacock flounder, a school of yellow snapper chomping on the sand in a row (strange sight!), and big lobster under a rock on the way in. We overshot the entry point a bit due to the current, but would have missed the lobster if we got out too early ;) This was our hardest dive for the swimming, but still very doable. Headed back for lunch and tank swapping. We found the parking lot at Capt Don's often full, so sometimes had to carry our tanks a bit further than we wanted, but it was still very easy to get good fills to continue the shore diving at our own pace. They did have hand trucks if you wanted to carry many tanks at once and the rental vehicles all have tank racks in the back. In the afternoon we decided to try Tori's Reef as I had read many good reports on this site. I concur with the previous reviews. This is a very easy entry and a nice dive. We didn't see anything new here, but we saw many of the same photo subjects and the current was very small and comfortable. At most dives in Bonaire, you need go no deeper than 60 ft to see most everything, and 30 ft is full of life, as well as over the sand to the entries. We had good visibility all week, although when the winds died there were some plankton swarms that brought it down to 50 ft or so at times. Still way better than the Puget Sound in Washington. For what turned out to be our last dive on Bonaire we chose Windsock, opposite the Flamingo Airport. This was a very good choice; we saw many of the previous characters from our underwater shows and enjoyed no current to swim against. The only drawback was the very loud noise from the cruise ship departing the port. Good thing we communicate with sign language underwater! We talked about maybe doing a

night dive later, or even a dawn dive before our no fly time, but as still relatively new divers and me out of shape after the surgery last fall, exhaustion won and we called it good. 21 dives in 6 days = not too shabby! For dinner that night we went to Plazita Limena for the recommended ceviche and calamari. Very good and nice service. Had a couple of Amstel Brights with my meal. Did you know they come in 8 oz bottles? Pricy for what amounts to a Bud kind of beer.

On Saturday we slept in and pondered what to do on our no dive day. We grabbed a couple apples and headed south, intending to hit the Donkey Sanctuary(they are very friendly and cute) and see some flamingos and the wind surfers. We were successful at all of that and hungry for lunch by the time we were through. We walked around downtown Kralendijk for a bit and ate at Whataburger. Hubby got a dutch sampler and I had a burger. Both very good. We got some pictures by the old fort and then stopped at Lovers for an ice cream on the way back to the room. I didn't find it all it was cracked up to be and my partner found his yogurt quite grainy. Kind of overpriced. We picked up souvenirs for the folks back home while were out. Note, stay away from the main street shops for better prices on t-shirts and stuff. Go where the cruisers won't get to. When we got back to the resort we wrapped things up with our gear, emptying our lockers (by the way, these were pretty small and two tiered. You wouldn't want a lower tier as your stuff would be dripped on all day. We had to bring our own locks, and the latches were small), and checked out with the dive shop. We had no extra charges so that was easy. Also went to the main desk to clear our bill, \$6 for the room safe for the week, and found we'd have to go to the restaurant to clear our bill there as well. Too bad they can't consolidate all these bills. We waited 15 minutes for someone to bring out our bill at Rum Runners, but were finally on our way back downtown to try Unbelievable for dinner. It was "unbelievable", just kidding. The food was good and eating out on the upper terrace was nice, but service was a bit slow and getting the bill took too long. I will note that there are many more restaurants, just in the downtown area, so it pays to ask around for recommendations and try more than one. We headed back to the room to finish packing and get a good night's sleep before flying out in the morning. As recommended, we headed to the airport with a few hours lead time, allowing for the rental car return, quick and easy, and to buy our exit passes, go through customs, and through security. We had more than enough time! As it turns out, we ended up boarding the plane early and taking off early. Had a long day of layovers in Houston (3 hours) and San Francisco (5 hours), but made it home to Spokane as planned around 1 AM Monday morning. One week later, I'm finally over the jet lag, but missing Bonaire very much still, and the diving, more. We will return!