

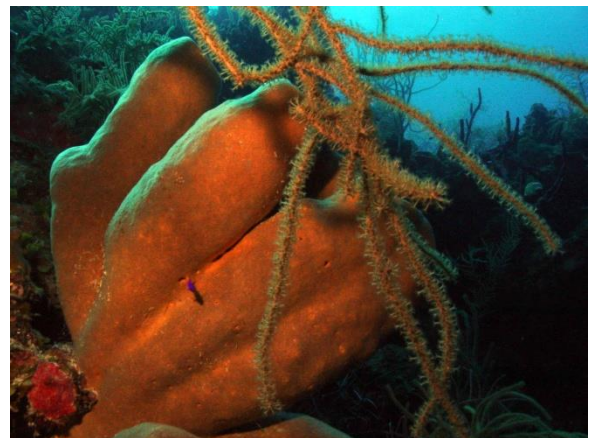
Belize Live aboard Sun Dancer II (The Corbins)

Barney and I spent a week in Belize aboard the Sun Dancer II. It was somewhat a last minute decision to take the trip, but definitely well worth it. The Sun Dancer II is a 138 foot vessel with 10 cabins,



accommodating a maximum of 20 people. Each cabin has an ensuite head, a large picture window and plenty of storage. Most of the cabins are on the same level as the dive deck, a large galley with both inside and outside dining on the next deck and a large sundeck at the top with lounges and hammocks, as well as some shade to get out of the blazing sun. The food was outstanding and more than any one person could eat. Breakfast starts with coffee and juice delivered to your cabin, a continental breakfast, buffet style from 6-7am, followed by cooked to order hot breakfast from 7-8am. Then it's time to dive! The

crew schedules 5 dives a day (weather permitting), with plenty of food in between. The boat hits two sites a day, but at least two dives at each site are needed to see it all. The 3rd dive at the second location is always a night dive. The Sun Dancer II spent the entire week out on Lighthouse Reef, with every dive starting out on a sheer wall covered with life and teeming with sharks and rays. The Sun Dancer II is docked at the Radisson Fort George. We arrived on Saturday, and the boat our luggage was delivered to our cabins. The boat left the dock around 4:30pm for the five hour trip out to lighthouse reef. Thus began our week of eating, sleeping and diving. The diving was fantastic! The soft sponges

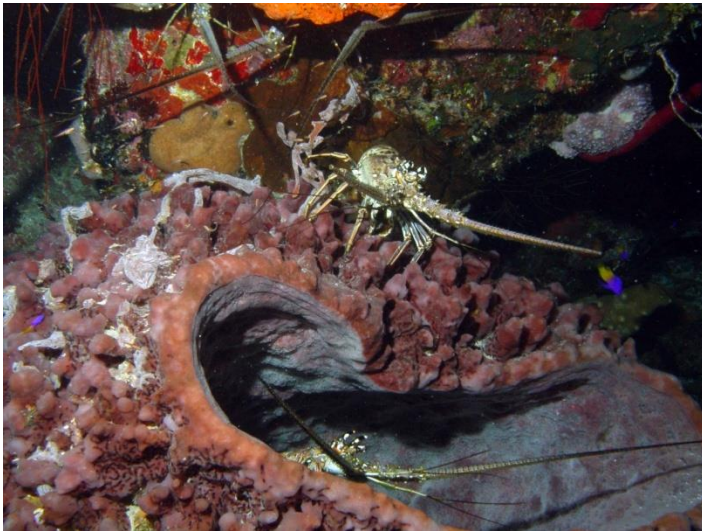


were all over and some of the most interesting formations I'd ever seen. Each dive started in one direction along the wall around 70-80ft for around 30 minutes, then coming up to the top of the wall for the remainder of the dive. All dives (except the Blue Hole) were at least an hour, with plenty to see. After an hour surface interval and a delicious home-baked snack, the second dive at the same location took us in the opposite direction along the wall. There was no current to deal with at any of the dive sites along Lighthouse Reef. We picked up a little current on our last dive at Turneffe Atoll on our way back towards the dock, but that was it. The walls were covered with sponges, with sharks, barracuda,

and eagle rays flying along the wall (often too far and fast to catch with the camera!). There were definitely lionfish on the walls, but there are now 32 fewer than when we started! Jess Starks was busy doing his best to thin out the lionfish crowd! We'd spot them and Jess would shoot them, clip them and let the other fish eat them. The crew kept the running lionfish count throughout the week.



Lionfish were the only thing Jess was allowed to shoot. Everything else during the trip was protected. Especially the lobster – and there were plenty – big and small. This spot had 5 lobsters all clustered



around this sponge and they seemed to know we couldn't touch them! Visibility was always 70-150 ft, so even if the camera couldn't catch it, you were able to see quite a ways to catch a glimpse of the gray reef sharks and eagle rays.

There were several sand chutes from the top of the reef down the wall. These were usually a good place to head up to the top of the reef for the second half of our dives. As you went up through the crevices in the walls, we spotted grouper, turtles and an occasional nurse shark. As we moved back

up on top of the reef, you spotted all of the normal reef fish, eels, sea cucumbers, Christmas trees, cleaner shrimp, sea horses and lots of small critters for great macro shots. On Wednesday, we made a trip to the Blue Hole. This is a 140 ft dive into the middle of this 400 ft deep sink hole. Not much to see inside the hole, except some stalactites at 130-150 ft. Since this was such a deep dive, we took the rest of the morning for an extended surface interval on Half Moon Caye. Half Moon is a marine sanctuary and research center and home of the red-footed Boobies. The Sun Dancer anchors a short distance off shore and a small boat comes out to take the group ashore for a few hours. There isn't much on shore except a path to a viewing platform among the boobie nesting areas. There is a small gift shop, but not much there.



Approaching the Blue Hole.



Stalactite at 135 ft.



After a few hours ashore, it's back to the boat for lunch and another afternoon/evening of diving.





The boat makes its way back to the dock Friday by noon. Friday afternoon is a free afternoon for a shore excursion. Several folks went cave tubing, we went into town for a little shopping (and I do mean a little) and others could hang around the pool at the Radisson Fort George. Friday evening the Captain hosts a cocktail party and then dinner is on your own. Everyone is off the boat by 8am, so the crew can prepare for the next group. Our flight was at 4pm, so we spent the afternoon hanging around the pool at the Radisson before the Dancer crew loaded our luggage into the vans and transported us back to the airport. All in all, it was a wonderful trip. We didn't hit every dive, but still spent over 23 hours under water that week.