

# RIDING ROCK INN

## A DIVER'S RETREAT IN THE SOUTHERN BAHAMAS

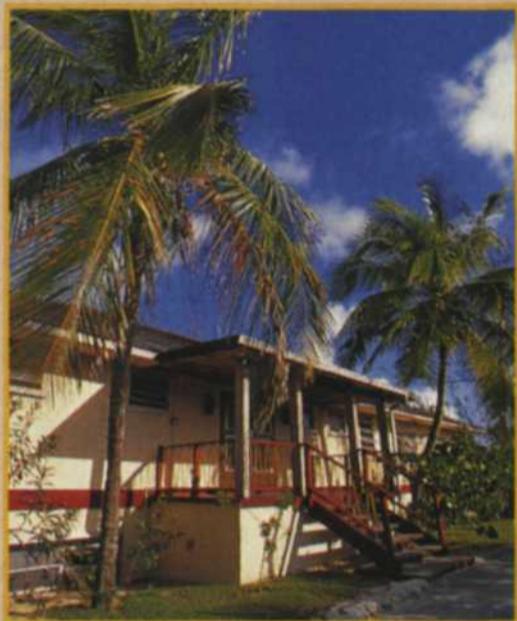
TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL

In October, 1992 the eyes of the world will be focused on a tiny island in the southern Bahamas. With less than 24 months to go, the residents of San Salvador Island are hastily preparing for the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' discovery of America. Little did Columbus know that he not only found a New World but also discovered one of the best dive spots in the world.

It takes about two and a half hours on the chartered DC-3 to make the 385 mile trip from Ft. Lauderdale. The moment you land on this 12 by 5 mile wide island, you are welcomed by the smiling airport manager, Bernie Storr.

"Hi Jack and Sue, welcome home," he beamed.

We made our first trip to San Salvador 11 years ago and felt so welcome and comfortable, we now consider San Sal our second home.



San Salvador is a beautiful island paradise in the southern Bahamas. Above: The diving off San Salvador features breathtaking walls, abundant animal life and visibility of more than 150 feet. Above left: There are 24 guest rooms at Riding Rock Inn—all with views. Left: The resort's dive operation, Guanahani Divers Ltd., has three boats—each equipped with many diving amenities.

After an easy customs inspection the hotel manager, Ednald Thompson, welcomed us with a thirst quenching rum punch. The hotel van escorted us the few hundred yards to the Riding Rock Inn, where we found check-in extremely efficient. By the time we reached one of the 24 air-conditioned rooms, so had our luggage. A quick change into the casual attire of T-shirts, shorts and thongs and we were on our way to explore this island paradise.

### RIDING ROCK INN

The hotel itself is divided into four areas: the dining room, bar, check-in and open air veranda. The front desk serves as the hotel check-in and message center and displays gifts and assorted sundries.

The dining room accommodates up to 80 guests and serves three meals a day of delicious Bahamian and American cuisine. Steaks, fresh tuna or wahoo, spaghetti, conch, grouper, ribs or chicken with salads and vegetables and a never ending supply of freshly baked bread are just a few of the items that grace your dinner table. Just outside the dining room is a spacious open air veranda. This is our favorite spot to sit and enjoy the breathtaking sunsets and hope for a glimpse of the green flash.

Adjacent to the dining room you will

find the Driftwood Bar, where you can sip your favorite drink, nibble popcorn and talk over the day's dives. There is even a list of island drinks to help put you in the festive mood. We invented a new one called the Curline Special—named for our friendly bartender. Give it a try after your night dive but be sure to tell Curline that Jack and Sue recommended it. A VCR is mounted in the corner, so that videotapes taken during the dives can be enjoyed by all.

### ROOM ACCOMMODATIONS

About 50 yards from the hotel you will find 12 rooms that look out to the ocean and another 12 rooms facing the freshwater swimming pool. Each air-conditioned room is set up with two single beds or a double and a single bed, a covered patio and a tub/shower. The rooms can be connected, via a door, to accommodate groups or families.

For the diver anxious to get in the crystal clear water, myriad fish and other marine life can be found by just snorkeling in front of the rooms. The **Riding**

**Rock Wall**, which drops off to more than 100 feet, is just a short distance from the sandy white beaches.

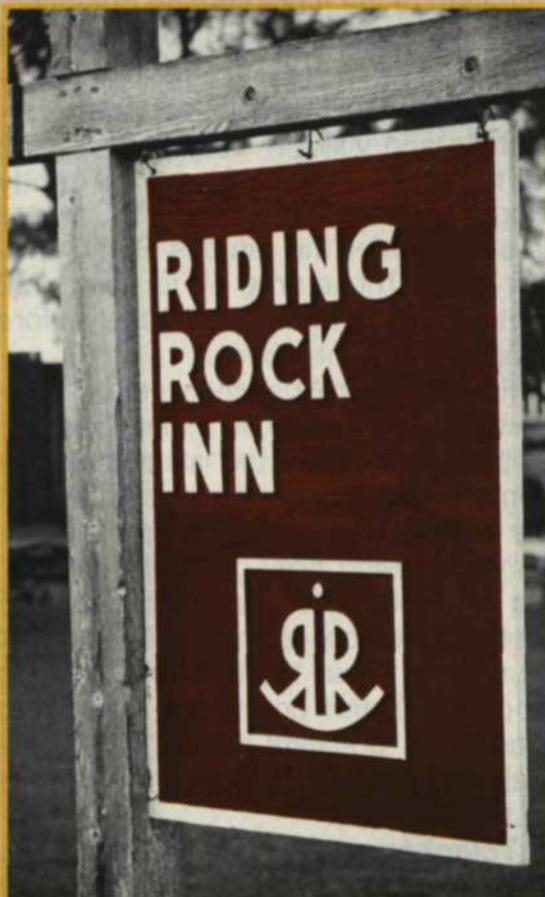
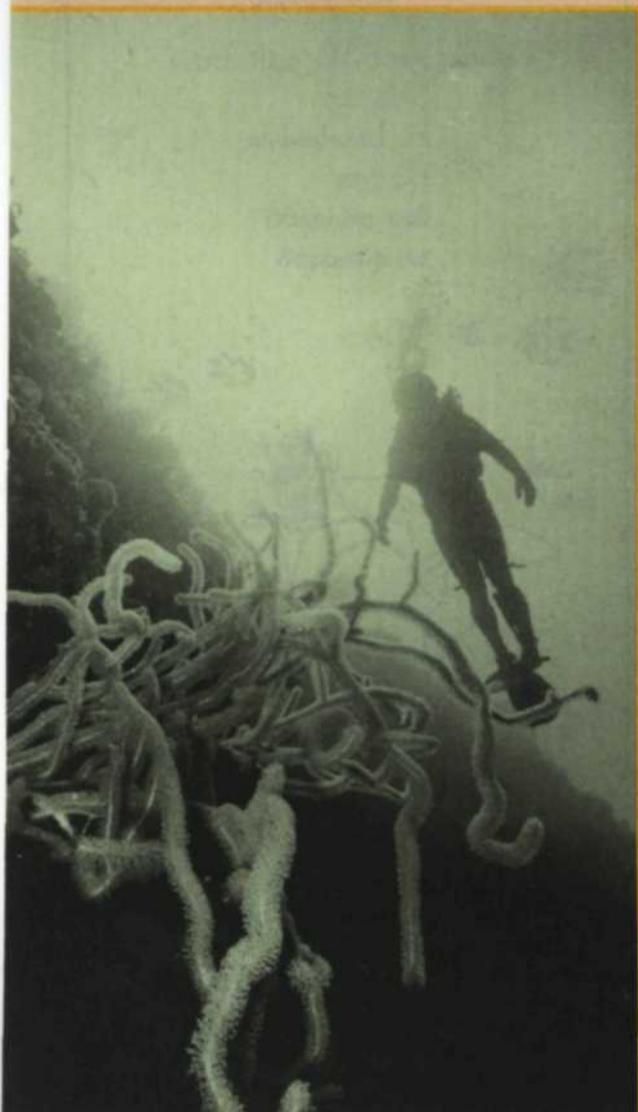
### DIVING OPERATIONS

If you follow the sidewalk past the rooms, you come to the heart of the resort, the Guanahani Divers Ltd. dive operation. The dive fleet consists of three V-hulled dive boats, the 47 foot *San Sally*, 41 foot *Sea Fan* and a 30 foot twin engine *Island Time*. Each boat is equipped with tank racks, freshwater camera rinse buckets, storage areas and a dive platform with a ladder for easy re-entry.

The diving and marina operations are overseen by San Sal veteran Tom Stansell. The divemaster on our boat for the week was Colby Johnson—another divemaster named Jeff Utt will be joining the crew. These three musketeers do everything to make your week of diving the best ever.

When you arrive on the island, your dive gear is transported to the dive shop adjacent to the boats. Here, you can rent any additional gear you may have forgotten. Each diver then stores his/her gear on the assigned boat and it remains on board for the entire week. A dive storage cage is also provided for any gear that you may not want to take

*(Continued on next page)*



Left and above: Most of the dive sites visited by the Riding Rock Inn can be reached in a five to ten minute boat ride. In a week's visit guests can dive about one-third of the more than 50 documented dive locations. Guests are allowed to design their own dive plan—the divemasters do not lead visiting divers around by the hand. Above right: Ednald Thompson is the friendly, efficient manager of the hotel. Right: Divemaster Colby Johnson demonstrates the next rage in sports—scuba skiing!



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## THE RIDING ROCK INN

on board the boat.

The dive sites are all relatively close to the hotel and most can be reached in a five to ten minute boat ride. The boats leave the marina at 9:00 for a morning wall dive, which is followed by a shallow reef dive. Guests are allowed to design their own dive plans without "hand holding" by the divemasters. Each diver is responsible for keeping track of his/her maximum depth, while the boat captain logs divers in and out of the water. The dives are planned with no decompression profiles and computers are a common sight.

After a satisfying lunch the boats set out again, allowing divers an afternoon wall dive. On Tuesday and Thursday there is a night dive instead of an afternoon dive. On these two afternoons, you can tour the island, rent cars or motorbikes or just lie back, relax and take it all in.

## DIVE LOCATIONS

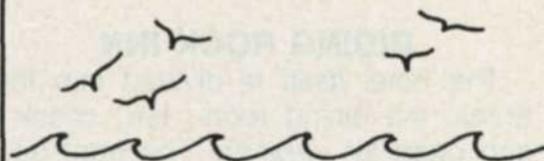
In a week's visit you can dive about one-third of the more than 50 documented dive locations. The west side of the island has most of these locations—featuring beautiful walls, abundant animal life and visibility of more than 150 feet. From shore, the bottom gently slopes down to about 40 feet, where you encounter the famous San Salvador walls. These drop off to about 100 feet and slope again to 170 feet before dropping into the abyss.

**French Bay:** When the weather is extremely nice, a 20 to 30 minute boat trip to the south end of the island presents some of the most impressive diving in the world. Here, at French Bay, the bottom has rolling hills, gradually increasing in depth until you reach about 45 feet on the top of the wall. The wall plunges to about 155 feet, angles out to about 220 and continues down into blackness. Constant current bathes the wall with nutrients, creating a thick mat of animal life.

**Telephone Pole:** This is the classic San Salvador dive and a favorite for both first time and returning guests. Several large friendly groupers greet you when you enter the water. A sandy bottom starts at 40 feet and slopes down into a brightly lit cave, which eventually comes out on the side of the wall at 70 feet. We found this cave to be extremely good for silhouette photography using available light and macro photography using flash. A large sponge on the wall outside the opening is usually loaded with brittlestars.

**Snapshot Reef:** For many years this shallow reef was a favorite photo hunting ground for students in the Paul Tzi-

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moulis School of Underwater Photography. Today, the reef abounds with animal life such as sea anemones, flamingo tongues, fire coral, squirrelfish, groupers so friendly you can tickle their chins and several types of crabs. Snapshot is also excellent for snorkelers. The bottom of this gorgeous reef is only 20 feet deep with coral heads reaching close to the surface.

**Cable Crossing:** This reef gets its name from the cables left behind when the island was a tracking station for Gemini spacecraft. At the edge of the wall you will find a sandy bottom with coral heads shooting up six to eight feet. Each coral head is populated with a variety of small animals awaiting the macro photographer. As you start down, yellow sponges populate the upper wall, while huge plate corals can be found at about 70 to 80 feet.

**Movie Caves:** Here you can make a very shallow dive and visit the monument where it is estimated Columbus dropped anchor. Several small caves are found throughout the dive location and make excellent wide angle photos with or without the use of flash. A wide variety of fish and other animals populates these cave openings, which makes this an excellent location for snorkelers as well as divers.

**Devil's Claw:** This is a relatively new dive location that resembles a three fingered claw when viewed from above the top of the wall. Each claw forms a crevice starting at 45 feet and sloping down through the wall until it comes out at 85 feet. We found each of the claws to be excellent for wide angle and macro photography. Many large fish, rays and turtles can be found swimming along the walls at various depths.

**The Hump:** In the middle of a sandy bottom, in front of the hotel, is a sea-mount affectionately called The Hump. As a daytime dive it rates with the best of the reef dives; at night it is spectacular. We found pufferfish, trunkfish, scorpionfish, octopus, goatfish, a lobster so big you couldn't fit your hands around it, miniature rays that could fit in a 1:3 framer, eels, crabs, shrimp, barracuda, basket starfish and dozens of other small creatures—all on one night dive.

**Hole in the Wall:** Two large crevices cut through the wall at 50 feet and come out at 110 to 120 feet. Numerous king crabs and lobsters can be found in the cracks. Don't be surprised if you see a hammerhead shark or manta ray cruising along the wall as you come out. We found this spot to be excellent for both macro and wide angle photography both in the cracks and on the wall itself.

**Double Caves:** Two caves start on the top of the reef at French Bay and drop down through the wall until they come out at about 110 feet. The most

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impressive part of the dive is when you reach the large, deep blue opening on the wall. If luck is in your favor, you may see schools of hammerheads, eagle rays or manta rays.

**Frascate:** On New Year's Day in 1902, the 261 foot *Frascate* ran aground on a shallow reef and created one of the most famous wrecks in the Bahamas. In about 15 feet of water, you will be able to see large boilers, anchor chain, the ship's bow and a variety of gears, plates and drive shafts. Fish can be found everywhere and this is a popular place for fish feeding. The *Frascate* is another excellent spot for snorkeling.

## UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY CENTER

The folks on San Sal cater to underwater photographers. They have provided a photo center next to the dive where you can get your film processed, store and work on your camera gear and even get a glimpse on the big screen of those prize winners you capture during the week. The staff at the photo lab can process E-6 Kodak and Fuji color slide film and have it ready before your next day's diving.

The auditorium is the perfect place to conduct classes. This air-conditioned room has ample space for 50 people to comfortably sit and listen to lectures or view slide shows. Along each wall of the auditorium are work benches designed for camera maintenance, photo equipment storage and slide show preparation for 16 to 20 photographers.

## ISLAND TOURS

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, free island tours are available. Forbes, your tall tour guide, will show you the Columbus monument, documenting where Chris stepped ashore, a kerosene operated lighthouse, an impressive shipwreck, a quick spin through Cockburn Town and a variety of other scenic attractions. If you want to do it your own way, you can rent motorbikes or a car and make your own island tour. Better yet, have the hotel staff pack you a lunch so you can spend the day frolicking on a secluded beach.

Sometime during the week you may run into a handsome Bahamian businessman by the name of Carter Williams. He is the owner of the Riding Rock Inn, with a well deserved reputation for providing a friendly, helpful staff, great food and drink and comfortable yet exhilarating diving in an extremely relaxing atmosphere.

Attention to detail begins when you book your trip to San Salvador.

(Continued on Page 154)

# Clearly Inviting

True 200 foot visibility and friendly fish are the classic signatures of San Salvador, the diver's paradise of the Southern Bahamas. Spectacular vertical walls beginning in just 35 feet of water, groupers friendly enough to eat from your hand, and a multitude of photogenic reef tropicals define this magnificent, pristine resource.

Unlike many of the other diving HOT, HOT, HOT spots, San Salvador is still uncrowded, unspoiled, and very friendly.

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## HOWARD JOHNSON

slightly higher price. As a special bonus, the resort is offering five nights for the price of four if you book Sunday to Thursday. This offer will be extended to weekends during the fall. Howard Johnson offers its dive package with Atlantis Dive Center all year long. Package arrangements are also available with a variety of local dive operations.

## THE RIDING ROCK INN

(Continued from Page 110)

Maureen Morgenthein heads up the stateside booking office, where she and her staff answer questions for the first timers. Their office is adjacent to the Ft. Lauderdale Airport, which is convenient for supervising the weekly San Sal DC-3 or nine passenger charter planes.

The Riding Rock Inn is a resort that caters to divers. Everyone you meet on your week long stay is concerned about making your trip the best ever. You may start the week boarding the plane with strangers, but by the end of your week's adventure, you have made friends for life. Before you even leave the island you will be planning your next trip. Maybe that is why they call this a family island—the more people that visit San Sal, the bigger the family gets because returning guests now call San Salvador their second home.

For further information or reservations contact Maureen at (800) 272-1492 or, in Florida, (305) 359-8353. Mail inquiries to 750 SW 34th Street, Suite 206, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33315.

## ROMEO'S RESORT

(Continued from Page 75)

known former Roatan photo pros. Barbara and Charlie also function as U.S. sales representatives for Romeo's Resort. Toucan Photo offers daily E-6 slide film processing, rentals, custom video and photo shoots, and several programs of instruction.

The director of photo and dive operations is Marc Frisco, a 21 year old NAUI instructor with an incredible 14 years of active Caribbean diving under his weightbelt. Marc, the son of Midwest scuba educator Ken Frisco, completed his first scuba dive in Roatan when he was only four years old. He is accomplished in both photography and videography and offers a certified photo course (NAUI) and on site Nikonos repair services. Marc also presents a weekly slide show and a preventive