



## ● Travel Bug Marybeth Bond

### *Diving the Reefs of Roatan*

Do you dream of tropical vacations? I'm talking about imagining yourself on a relaxing island with powder-soft white sand beaches amid coconut palms swaying in the breezy sea air. You sip an icy tropical drink while swinging in a hammock on the porch of your cozy bungalow, stilt-mounted over a lagoon of brilliantly transparent, tinted turquoise and azure water. Sitting at my desk on a rainy day, that's exactly what I dream of!

Then I think of the price tag and reality hits home. Is it possible, in the Caribbean, to indulge in this tropical dream without dipping into a second mortgage on your car and home?

Yep! Honduras, specifically Roatan in the Bay Islands, is an affordable, must-do dive or snorkel destination. For example, all-inclusive seven nights dive packages at Anthony's Key range from \$675 to \$1,075 per person, depending upon the season and the bungalow location. This price includes all meals and up to three dives a day. Do the math. Even in peak season, renting the very best bungalow is only \$153 a day. And snorkel-only packages are much less expensive.

Roatan is rimmed by the world's second largest reef, creating an underwater environment for spectacular scuba diving and other water sports. Visiting divers can expect excellent visibility of 75 to 150 feet or better, superb and diverse dives along miles of fringing reefs, precipitous walls beginning at 40 feet of water and fish-filled coral gardens. The reefs are protected by a marine park and the marine life is so extensive and ever-changing you could see virtually anything



the water's surface.

While snorkeling I saw barracuda, eagle rays, squid, lobster, huge parrotfish and the majestic angelfish. I joined the diving groups and explored crevices in deep sea caves, floated among schools of blue tangs and yellow-tailed damselfish with neon blue spots, and saw a wealth of coral formations — from huge purple

and everything divers or snorkelers need, from gear to underwater photo processing to the opportunity to interact with dolphins. Diving has never been easier. You store all your gear on the dock next to the dive shop, and dive guides service the tanks for you and put them in the boat. Anthony's Key has a fleet of 11 custom dive boats to ensure small groups.

Anthony's was one of the first scuba diving resorts

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### Discoveries Outside the Water

Diving is only part of the island's allure. There are three white sand beaches on Roatan: West Bay, Palmetto Bay and Camp Bay. Other island activities include kayaking, canoeing, horseback riding, canopy rides, botanical gardens and a remarkable Meso-American museum with professional displays of the ecology and the many cultures that developed in the Pre-Columbian Era.

### Pirates of the Caribbean

The islands' first introduction to western civilization occurred when Christopher Columbus stopped at the Bay Islands on his final voyage to the Americas in 1502. The island's geopolitical importance began around the 16th century with the traffic of riches, from America to Europe. On the high seas, wherever there were riches, there were pirates and Roatan was no exception. As a strategically located small island close to the Central American coast, it served as a gateway for merchant vessels traveling to Spain. Eventually the island became a refuge for French, Dutch and English pirates.

"I think Roatan today, is like Costa Rica was 20 years ago. We heard about Anthony's Key from friends, then looked it up on the Internet and discovered it's beautiful and very reasonable," explained Elly and Eric, a honeymoon couple from Anchorage. Middle-aged veteran divers Doug and Jane from Denver, Colorado are repeat guests. "It's not a boozy atmosphere. We enjoy the Happy Hour with live music on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, but we also love the quiet time on our deck, lounging in our hammocks over the water, just soaking in nature."



So the next time you dream of a tropical vacation and want to get away, really away, try a dive or snorkel holiday in Roatan.

**Roatan & Honduras Info:**  
[www.anthonyskey.com](http://www.anthonyskey.com)  
 BahiaTours,  
 Hollywood Florida  
 800-227-3483  
[www.roatanbayisland.com](http://www.roatanbayisland.com)

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