

choppy. Kai Viti Divers is owned by Mike & Julie Trussell who have considerable experience in Fiji and particularly the Bligh Waters. The diving in the Vat-Tui-Rah Passage is outstanding with more fish per square foot than we have seen anywhere. Great fast Jet Boat set-up for 16 divers that gets to the sites very comfortably and protects the divers in case of wind and rain with a complete enclosure of the rear deck that can be lowered when needed. We should have left about half of the clothes we took home and traveled with only shorts & shirts. Soft coral capitol of the world. Boat & crew is top notch with adequate camera table and rinse tanks. Crew very careful with camera gear and both rinsed and placed on camera table after each dive.

Kai Viti Divers, Wananavu Beach Resort, August 2004, Karen Guthrie (karen@adventure101.com), Laguna Beach, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 50 to 180 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 Fahrenheit, choppy. Watched 8 bull sharks circling in the current. Although about 8 feet or less and totally disinterested in us, it was quite a thrill. Sites he calls Mellow Yellow and Purple Haze with dramatic walls and loads of hard and soft coral. Very colorful. Hi 8 is like diving the Grand Canyon. Schools of barracuda, anthias and other small colorful additions. Like a walk through a beautiful garden. Sheltered dives on bad weather days yielded cool swim throughs and nudibranchs. I thanked God for every hour I put in on my treadmill. Even the drift dive involved a stiff swim to get away from the reef so that we could get picked up.

Currents sometimes would change in the middle of the dive or go in an unexpected direction. The resort needs to take care of the flies at the restaurant as we got quite a bit of exercise trying to keep them out of our food. All dining is open air or in a room with open double doors. Mosquitos are an annoyance. (About 2-5 bites/person/day) Food is expensive and really not that good but you don't have much choice as the town is impractical unless you have a car. Ra Divers on the premises is reportedly cheaper but has no sun shade on the boat and does not go to the spectacular outer sights like Hi8. If the weather permits Mike is totally up for going all the way out there but it is about 1.25 hours to get there and there is no place to hide if the weather gets rough. We made it more often than not to sites in that area. The divemasters needed to slow down a little more and enjoy. Get the 2 bedroom as you get a washing machine and clothes line, kitchen and fridge. Meal service is at tables sized to your party not at big group tables Evening entertainment needs to be better. The singers are not very good and I think their kava bill must be huge. Camera tables were small and also housed the snack. Fresh water rinse available. Did not see any charging or other facilities like that.

Ra Divers, Wananavu, November 2003, Steve Nelson (gone2tahoe@earthlink.net) Danville, CA. Experience: 250+ dives. Vis: 50 to 80 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 500 lbs on return. Resort upgrade (free) to beachfront villa, wonderful privacy. Easy diving. Vibrant,

robust reefs. Gorgeous hard and soft corals and huge sea fans top to bottom. Overwhelming variety, color and vibrant — visual overload. Tridacna clams and anemones throughout. Incredible small tropicals at tops. Color, color, color!! North Fiji diving superior to South Fiji. (www.radivers.com)

FRENCH POLYNESIA

Tahiti and Moorea are everyone's dream of the South Pacific, and despite their pricey resorts and food, these French-speaking islands have just begun attracting American divers since there is plenty of reef shark action. ... There are a range of accommodations, though generally it's expensive. ... The once snotty French attitude toward others has lessened considerably.

Huahine

Annie Brunet, Pension Mauarii, May 2004, David Dornbusch, Oakland, CA. Experience 251-500 dives. Vis. 50 – 75 ft. Water: 84 F, Air: 83 F, clear and dry, small chop, slight current and surge. Annie operates alone, driving her own six-passenger Zodiac and also guiding the dives. She provides gear at no charge, but her gauges indicate only tank pressure, not depth. She does not provide computers. The disadvantage of her operating alone is that the best diving is through passes, and you need to work your way back to the boat against a current, which was not especially strong during our dives, but can be stronger. She picked us up promptly

at our Pension's beach and we traveled about 20 minutes to what she felt were the best dive sites at the Avapahi Pass one day and Fa'a Miti the other. We moored to her underwater buoy. Back roll in. At the end of the dive, Annie would board first to help with gear. Many sharks at the pass (mainly white tips), an eagle ray, large morays, many nesting triggers, and large numbers of angels, wrasses, and many other reef fish. Hard corals in fair condition and not plentiful. Safety stop every dive. Reasonably good diving, but not worth a special trip unless you've already come for the diving in the Tuamotus. Pension Mauraii is very charming, comfortable, with excellent and congenial staff, serving very good food, and reasonably priced. Free bananas were available anytime, hanging in the dining room all day. Large breakfast, with fresh fruit and eggs. Huge dinner menu. The best mahi-mahi I've ever had. Lunch sandwiches are big enough for two. Live local music Friday and Saturday night. Other restaurants nearby, but never felt a desire to go elsewhere. Owner-operator is Vetea Breyse, very charming, very attentive, who developed the property on his family's home site. Email communication and direct booking was easy and fast. Hobie cat, windsurfers, kite boarding, and free kayaks. Reasonably good snorkeling from their beach, where we saw lion fish and stingrays. No air-conditioning, but not necessary. Provide mosquito netting, but it too was not necessary. Rent a car for at least one day to see this beautiful undeveloped island. Airport pickup/dropoff is only \$15 per person, round trip. Highly rec-

ommend going to a church service on Sunday morning for the singing! Multiple part harmonies. Wonderful voices. (Almost as good as in Tonga.) Long pants for men (though a T-shirt or short-sleeve collar shirt is fine), and a skirt and hat for women are appropriate. (Long sleeves are not necessary.) They're delighted to have you come.

Moorea

Bathy's Club, Intercontinental Beachcomber, May 2004, David Dornbusch, Oakland, CA.

Experience 251-500 dives. Vis. 60-80 ft. Water: 81 F, Air 80 F, clear every day. Slight current. No surge or chop. Bathy's () operates at the Beachcomber. Competent and congenial divemaster who fed sharks during the 8:30AM dive. Attracted eight 3-5 ft. black tips and three 5-7 ft. lemon sharks, the larger lemon shark giving the feeder a hard bump on his ribs during its first pass. School of rainbow jacks. Very large triggers. Although didn't feed on the second dive, black tips circled throughout the dive. Hard corals in reasonable condition. Lots of reef fish, nesting triggers, lion fish. Trip to the dive sites about 10 minutes. Fresh water shower and rinse tank. No storage. Back roll in. Very helpful with gear into the boat, but not after the dive. Carried our own gear to/from the boat – only about 50 feet. They rent gear, but not computers. Reasonably good diving, but not worth a special trip, unless you've come for diving in the Tuamotus. The Beachcomber is very nice but a pretty standard upscale (expensive) resort. However, we negotiated our "garden-

view" room for about half price. Air-conditioned, spacious, very clean, very good bed, and balcony (good for drying dive gear). Our son negotiated a more spacious and very attractive over-water bungalow for only \$100/night more than our rate. His bungalow also had a deck and ladder into the water for easy access to swimming/snorkeling. Meals not included in the price. However, for breakfast, we drove only three-minutes north to an excellent patisserie with outdoor tables and where they made wonderful croissants and a number of other pastries as well as great omelets. We also had dinner at some excellent restaurants (some very near the hotel), some of which provide free pick-up drop-off service. However, recommend renting a car. One-way van to/from the airport is \$40, and rental cars are \$60-\$70/day. Moreover, meals are less expensive and even better in restaurants. And, there are things to see on the island as well as great hikes, with no biting insects when we were there. Recommend taking the boat (\$5/person) to the motu for decent snorkeling and a great lunch. Also, recommend going to a church service on Sunday morning for the singing! Multiple part harmonies. Wonderful voices. Long pants for men (though a T-shirt or short-sleeve collar shirt are fine) and a skirt for women are appropriate (no hat or long sleeves necessary.) They're delighted to have you come. (www.bathys.net)

Rangiroa

The Six Passengers, Les Relais de Josephine, May 2004, David

Dornbusch, Oakland, CA.

Experience 251-500 dives. Vis. 100-150 ft. Water: 84 F, Air 87 F, mostly clear with some brief rain one day. The Tiputa Pass offers the best diving, but has strong currents (up to 5-6 knots) often with swells to 6-7 ft. just outside the pass for the entry. Recommend full body wet suit. A skin might not have been sufficient protection when strong currents rolled me into coral on two dives. The Six Passengers knew exactly where and when to dive. The current changes direction at the pass. So, they scheduled and located the dives to maximize chances of seeing the best and most fish. (This was not done by other dive companies, whose divers reported seeing much less than we did during the same times.) On the incoming current, saw white tip, black tip, large lemon, and large gray reef sharks (sometimes more than I could count), schooling barracuda, many turtles, schools of various types of jacks, large napoleons and morays – all within a few feet to inches away. Many dolphins (5-6 ft.) on the outgoing current, very large areas of hard coral in reasonably good condition, and very large numbers of reef fish. Close views of black tip sharks in small caves. The swift incoming dives usually put us in the channel (away from the coral), where we saw the larger fish. Because of the large swells outside the reef, needed to descend to 15 ft. immediately, where we grouped, then descended to 90-110 feet, where we'd spend most of the dive. We then gradually ascended to a safety stop at the end of each dive. Critical to stay with the divemaster in the strong currents. Zodiac usual-

ly picked us up within a few minutes. But in the chop and current, we were swept out of sight on one dive and waited about 20 minutes for pickup. The divemaster's sausage got snagged on the bottom, and the current was too strong for him to descend to free it. (He smiled to see that I brought my own on the next dive.) Never more than six divers with a divemaster. We sometimes had as few as three. Trip to the dive sites about 10 minutes. Very helpful with gear, carrying it to and from zodiac for us and lifting it from the water at the end of the dive. Fresh water showers and rinse tank, hangers/racks and lockers for storing gear between dives and overnight. Pickup/dropoff by van from/to our lodge every dive. Very competent and congenial divemasters. They don't feed the sharks, although they do wave a small sack to put fish scent into the water to attract the sharks. By far, this was the best of our diving in French Polynesia, which also included Huahine, and Moorea. Les Relais de Josephine is charming and comfortable, but not luxurious. () Josephine is a charming manager and host, who picked us up and dropped us at the airport herself. Located right on the Tiputa pass with clear view (from the deck) of the jumping/spinning dolphins (only during the outgoing current). They put on a 40-minute show for us one afternoon. Recommend the bungalows near the water for fewer bugs. \$277, including breakfast and dinner, airport transfers and all taxes. A single bungalow in the garden, also including breakfast and dinner, was \$180, including all taxes. Rooms are open with

ceiling fans and floor fans and mosquito netting over the bed. The netting was not necessary near the water due to the wind, but critical for the garden bungalows. Excellent set menu dinners, although small continental breakfast with juices, baguettes, coffee/tea, and cakes. Fresh juices, tea/coffee and snacks in the afternoon for no charge. No lunch at Josephine's, so had lunch at a café on the dock a five-minute walk away. Café had basic food at very reasonable prices, including very large sandwiches – enough for two. Very good hamburgers, chicken, and fish. Nothing else to do or see on the island. So, we stayed fewer days than our reservation. Josephine volunteered not to charge us for the unused days. (www.the6passengers.com)

Tahiti

Bora Diving/Cruise, Tahiti Iti, October 2003, Bruce Thompson (thompsv@sherbtd.net) Cambridge, MN.

Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, no currents. We went to Tahiti on the Princess Cruise ship in late October. Ship was great. Smaller size but very elegant. Great meals and ports of call. Eleuthera plonger. The first dive site was a single dive in 40-60 feet of water. Started in sand then to a reef with lots of fish. Sharks all over. Black tipped sharks were around the whole dive. We had 12 divers in 2 separate groups. Only hard part is the English was spoken only minimal amount. All other divers were French. Tahiti Iti — small dive shop on the other end of the island. Shop is not much to look at but the service was top

notch. First dive was only myself with the divemaster. Went to the lagoon about 100'. Coral, fish, eels lots of time spent teaching me to observe the little things. Ran out of film way to quick. Second dive — we returned to the shop and picked up 7 more divers. Once again the other divers were Tahitian or French but the divemaster spoke adequate English. We went outside the lagoon to a reef. The wall dive went down to 1500 feet but we stayed about 90 feet. Within minutes I got pictures of a moray eel in the coral. It came out about a foot or so and retreated back in the coral. We saw more eels that were swimming in and out of the coral. Lots of reef fish. Coral was great. Also saw a giant wrasse a couple times during the dive. Once again lots of sharks. About 2 dozen black tipped sharks. Great dive again. I was told that in September it is easy to dive with the whales. Bora Dive Center. Two tank dive. First one outside the lagoon. A wall dive at about 100'. Once again sharks. Black tipped ones. Good coral and reef fish. Giant wrasse also. Second dive was in the lagoon about 40-60'. Good coral, reef fish, clams and a manta ray — about 12' across. This dive was a little crowded. About 60 snorkelers in the shallow areas. Had to get them out of the way to jump in the water. Overall the diving was first class. Snorkeling was great too. Did a drift snorkel at Tahaa. It was like a mouse maze — lots of color in fish and coral. Boats did not have fresh water to rinse equipment but did on shore. Boats had plenty of room to keep equipment. (www.boradive.com)

Raie Manta, Ariana Pension, September 2003, Laura Todd (LTodd@co.humboldt.ca.us) Arcata, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 74 to 78 F, choppy, no currents. This trip was for whale watching, not diving, but is easily combined with good diving elsewhere in Tahiti. This operation is only open July through October when the whales are around Rurutu. They are the only shop in town and it shows — a little competition would do Raie Manta a world of good. For US \$100 per outing, customers are apparently entitled to a pick up at their accommodation and 3 hours at sea and that's it. The staff barely spoke to customers preferring to chat amongst themselves and with the local boat drivers. These guys deserve a mention for the "Utterly Lacking in Service" award for stopping unannounced at the local grocery store with an open truck full of shivering customers post afternoon outing for about 20 minutes so the owner could do his personal food shopping. The only thing that could vaguely be construed as safety gear that I saw was a cell phone; no life jackets, no throw ring, no radio, no first aid kit. If you want anything to eat or drink, bring it with you. They advertise that raincoats are provided; in reality this means there are 6 coats for 24 customers. These do nothing to keep you dry but do prevent freezing in the high winds and constant saltwater spray. At these prices, you'd think they could invest in some simple ladders, but everybody has to scramble back into the fiberglass fishing boats using the swim step. Swells in the 2-3 meter range (6-9 feet plus) with gnarly chop

sloshing around on top of that due to the high winds. Bring more seasick medication than you think you'll ever go through. I found the climate otherwise delightful with daytime temps in the low 80's and into the low 70's at night, but others were cold. It is much cooler here compared to the rest of Tahiti. The island is not overrun with whales. The humpbacks do come here consistently, but only 12-20 and they are mostly different whales each year. Some years they are very tolerant and even seek human interaction, sometimes they are quite shy. They are wild animals and there is no guarantee as to the nature of your contact with them. We had quite a bit of good surface sightings including breaches but only 4 chances to be in the water with whales in a week. Pension Ariana has a lovely setting with bungalows scattered down a flowering hill above a nice beach with sunset views. Unfortunately the accommodations could have been a lot cleaner; one customer complained that they arrived to find the sheets from the previous guests still in place. The rooms were dark and very buggy. Mosquito nets would go a long way; bring your own as "Mama" is not real receptive to feedback. The food was simple but adequate. One guest who used the kitchen to prepare food for her baby stated that it was dirty. A better choice would be the new Manotel, which has four pretty bungalows and reportedly great food. There is no landscaping to speak of and the beach is across the road. It's very helpful to have some French here. Do take the island tour; there are interesting caves and very nice views. The local women

do very high quality pandanus weaving; the intricate hat bands are especially nice. Credit cards are not used on the island. It's best to pre-book everything with a Papeete travel agent, who will meet your international flight with vouchers. I have found Tahiti Tours to be very professional. The weekly Hawaiian Air flight to Tahiti stranded us on the return for four days due to an electrical problem. Hawaiian's idea of compensation for this delightful side trip was a discount on future travel for those who stuck out the whole four days and squat for those of us who got home a little earlier without any help from Hawaiian. There are no accommodations for photographers even though world famous UWP's come here. Bring a waterproof hard case for your stuff and expect to do all care at your accommodation. (raiemantaclub.free.fr)

GUAM

Micronesian Divers, Outrigger Guam Resort, March 2004, Anne Warburton, Yorba Linda, CA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to Fahrenheit, choppy, currents. MDA is a quality operator. Diving is not the best and I would not return to dive there. (www.mdaguam.com)

HAWAII

Hawaiian guides have developed great skill in finding the unique: On the big island of Hawaii, Spanish dancers, rare juveniles, and lionfish are regulars. Kailua-

Kona is filled with trendy shops to extract dollars from tourists in tacky hula shirts. The diving is mostly lava flow dives with relatively low coral cover. There's excellent access to good shore diving. ... Kauai has special trips available only in the summer. ... Maui's diving is often to the backside of Molokini or Lanai and boats leave at 7 a.m., or earlier. ... Development in Honolulu has burned out most Oahu diving, but go to the northside. ... Some reefs are barren due to commercial collection for aquariums. There are few soft corals and dull hard corals, but colorful, plentiful, and unusual fish make the diving interesting. ... Expect clear water, visibility that's usually better than the Caribbean — around 100 feet — and air temperatures in the low 80s. Water temperatures hit the very low 70s in January and February ... From mid-December to mid-February, squalls can last several days; otherwise the climate's pleasant and unoppressive year-round. ... There are plenty of condos available everywhere (many with cars, which you'll need since the dive boats are not berthed at hotels); ask your dive shop to find you a place; they often have good prices.

Hawaii

Aloha Dive Company, October 2003. Nick Ferris, Arvada, CO. 850 dives. Vis 60 - 100 ft. Water: 78 -79 F. Aloha is an excellent operation, with a 25 ft. inboard drive boat; no head, 60%

canopy cover for divers. Maximum number of divers is six. On two days owner/operator Mike Nakachi took just the two of us out. We left early to beat the crowd, dive before the wind comes up, and get back in time to enjoy other attractions. Only people with compatible abilities and interests go on any given trip. This allows Mike and dive-master Earl to locate fascinating sea critters and photo subjects. They are very helpful with respect to photography. In our 4 outings we got great shots of octopus, Tinker's butterfly, and a bright red frogfish. Last year my wife and I were on the Kona Aggressor for twice as many dives, we had more interesting and productive dives with Aloha. Normal 2-tank morning dives within several miles of Honokohau Harbor cost \$95; Farther ranging trips are \$140. These prices are not out of line with what other Kona operators charge. Aloha washes off all their clients' dive gear upon return to shore, and will store it if requested until the next dive day. There was no hassle about bottom time, depth, or air pressure. Releases had to be signed, of course. A medical questionnaire was probably to determine the diver's ability to handle Buffy's (Mike's wife) cardiac cookies, which are legendary and addictive. Aloha Dive Company, Ph.: 1/800/708-5662 or Ph./fax 808/325-5560. (www.alohadive.com)

Aloha Dive Company, Ah Paradise, January 2004. Bob Lambertson (rdlamber@artsci.wustl.edu) St. Louis MO. Vis: 80 ft. Water: 77-79 F. Dives logged: 400+. Guidelines enforced: guided dives, guided by one

of the best. Mike Nakachi runs a world-class operation from his driveway. His 28', well-equipped boat is on a trailer when it's not in the water, giving him the flexibility to make the most of the opportunities in winter — when big swells attract the surfers but often shut up the diveboats in their harbors. If there is a place to dive, he'll get you there, either from Honokohau Bay, just north of Kailua-Kona, or from Keauhou Bay at the south end of the Kona Coast, just north of Cook's Bay and funky, less developed South Kona. Outstanding, personalized service by a real professional, considerate of his divers and their needs and interests. Let him know you are serious about fish watching and he will find endemics for you right and left, including the rarest ones. Add to that two mantas and a hammerhead in four dives (and Buffy's cookies!) — this diving is hard to beat. The South Kona sites are best — a little more expensive, because remote. Reserve well in advance. Mike has many repeat divers. You need a car, but the Kona Coast is that sort of place, and there's so much to see. Mike and Buffy can help with suggestions. Keauhou Bay has the architectural charm of coastal New Jersey so we tried Ah Paradise (www.ahparadise.com). Just a few rooms, all different, on a hobby farm (organic Kona coffee, best we tasted, and macadamia nuts) full of birds and other wildlife. South Kona is steep (great sunsets) and retro, resisting the homogenizing development farther north. The drive to the boat was 30-40 min., but worth it for us.