

INDONESIA

Indonesia is the hottest dive destination on the planet and good airfares and inexpensive diving, food and hotels, make it reachable for many Americans. ... Bali's culture is fantastic (especially if you go inland) and the diving is good (but even better elsewhere). On Bali's east coast the *Liberty* wreck at Tulamben fish specialists claim to find a new species every visit. ... The Banda Islands have some of the best coral and fish life in the world. ... Although it offers few big fish, Wakatobi in remote southern Sulawesi, offers fantastic color, amazing biodiversity, and a great beach dive. ... Diving in and around the Lembah straits provides bizarre and rare creatures, surpassing even the famous muck dives of Papua New Guinea ... Frequently reached by Bali-based live-aboards, Komodo Island has great diving and land visits with the famed Komodo dragons. ... Perhaps there is no more diverse marine life anywhere in the world than around the Raja Ampat islands, part of Indonesia that was once known as Irian Jaya, and shares the same land mass as Papua New Guinea. ... The volatile political scene has put a cloud over diving Indonesia, so check with the State Department before travel, but most diving is hundreds of miles from turmoil.

Bali

Archipelago Divers, Taman Sari Bali Cottages, June 2004, Douglas Hansen (mhel0323@sbcglobal.net), San Jose, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 90 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 Fahrenheit, choppy. They limited us to 60 minutes of dive time. They cater mainly to snorkelers and newly certified divers. Ketut, the lead divemaster, even told my wife to not dawdle taking pictures while he lead his group of new divers up and down the reef, not even pausing to look for critters. The other dive guide, Koman, was more helpful and pointed out several pygmy seahorses, flatworms, and nudibranchs. Ketut wouldn't take us night diving or to Gilimanuk Bay (which we heard is no longer very good for diving.) By the end of the second day of diving we had pretty much had enough of this operator. The diving around Menjangan Island is really quite beautiful with steep walls covered with large Gorgonians, sea fans, and soft corals of many hues. The fish life is pretty good, with at least two different species of pygmy seahorses. We didn't have the opportunity to do any muck diving. The Taman Sari Bali Cottages is very popular with Europeans. The grounds are beautiful and well maintained. The cottages are older, but nice and fairly well maintained, although the need for some repairs was evident. The food was pretty good. Service was good, and the staff was very helpful. We would try the other dive operator down the beach, whom we heard is better. Bali is very beautiful, and the people are very friendly and helpful. Except

for some vendors in the tourist areas who are very persistent, we felt very safe and secure. Good wide angle area, some good macro subjects (flat worms, pygmy seahorses). No camera accommodations on boats or on shore. (www.archipelagodive.com)

Diving 4 Images, Scuba Seraya Resort, June 2004, Tracey Bennett Las Vegas, NV. Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 20 to 40 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 Fahrenheit, calm. Outstanding muck and critter diving. Took dive safaris with Graham Abbott and Diving 4 Images and were thrilled. In Candidasa there were cuttlefish, blue spotted stingrays, lionfish everywhere, nudibranchs, many leaf fish, humpback cleaner shrimp, striped catfish, ribbon eels, devilfish, and lots of anemones with clownfish and shrimps. Tulemben is more serious muck diving and it was hard to get out of the water, even after 4 long dives per day. We saw boxer crabs carrying eggs, hairy squat lobsters, lots of harlequin shrimp, white-eyed morays, warty frogfish, many nudibranchs, bumble bee shrimp, xeno crabs, orangutan crabs, cowries, fingered dragonets, Pegasus sea moths, flying gurnards, demon stingers and more in just 2 days. The last day we drove to North Bali where Graham find the mimic octopus. We found 3 in 2 dives. The Scuba Seraya Resort is adorable, with private courtyards that have a big outside tub/spa, and a mini kitchen area. The rooms are tastefully done and steps from the beach. There is a pool, massages are cheap, and the food is healthy, tasty, and plentiful. e-mail info@diving4images.com. Alila

Ubud was excellent as was the Pavilions Sanur. Both are great places for shopping and sight seeing, and Sanur is close to the airport. (www.diving4images.com)

Easy Divers, Pondok Sari, September 2004, J.C. Welch (staff@equinoxphotographic.com). 170 dives: The North coast of Bali is the best area for diving, particularly around Menjangan Island off the NW tip. The "village" of Pemuteran is a remote and uncrowded. There are three resorts in a row all having dive operations. Pondok Sari, the middle one is US\$36 a night, with accommodations similar to Hawaiian resorts costing 8 times as much. Their open air restaurant is quite decent. The grounds have elaborate Balinese water gardens and a nice pool and superb staff. Since the resident dive operation was not operational, we went with one across the road, Easy Divers, run by a German couple who speak English. Rates were lower than many places in the world, and service was outstanding. I never hoisted a tank. They always wanted to know our desires of dive location, and went out of their way to make our experience good. Their equipment is in top condition and European (e.g., no depth gauge on the console, but they have wrist computers if you need one). Reserve with them since they limit their capacity and may get full quickly. +62 362 94736 voice/fax, or andrea@easydivers-bali.com. Menjangan Island sites are nice, with almost pristine fans, sponges, and corals. As a photographer, I felt hesitant to dive there because of a moder-

ate current, as it used a lot of energy to avoid the lovely growth on the walls. Instead, I became especially enamored with the sites in front of Permuteran — 10 minutes away instead of an hour. There was little difference, except for lack of current and maybe fewer larger fish. But the soft corals and sponges were mind-blowing. Exotic nudibranchs, lionfish, pipefish, clowns with exotic anemones that I had not seen before. The night dive was astounding, with sharks [including a leopard shark], huge cuttlefish, sea feathers, strange long cucumbers — real film-burners! Even the shore dives (there are artificial habitats) were great. And they are right in back of Pondok Sari. Bali is an artistic society, not very expensive. Bali is much more comfortable than much of the rest of Indonesia, and I experienced no problems. (www.easydivers-bali.com)

Scuba Seraya, June 2004, Douglas Hansen (mhel0323@sbcglobal.net)
San Jose, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 Fahrenheit, choppy. Neither of the dive boats were working during the week we were there, so almost all of our dives were shore dives. In the Tulamben area, the dive helpers carry your gear in and out of the water, and they assist you in and out of the water; the beach is loose cobbles. The resort is brand new and very nice. The menu is limited, but the food was good. The resort is a kilometer or two outside of Tulamben, but they will provide transportation into town (such as it is) for a price. The house reef was surprisingly good muck diving. We saw numerous

nudibranchs, cuttlefish, scorpionfish, octopus, frogfish, an ornate ghost pipefish, common pipefish, a seahorse, harlequin shrimp, white eyed morays, lionfish, devilfish, and more. The diving on the house reef was reminiscent of the Lembeh strait, but on a smaller scale. It was very good for macro photography. No limits on the diving. Ninety-plus minute dives were the norm. Depth was limited mainly by the bottom and the rating of my camera housing (30 meters). The Liberty wreck was very nice. On a night dive we saw an immense grouper hunting, along with a Spanish dancer, tiger cowries, large soft corals, and a crown of thorns seastar. We also enjoyed the Paradise Reef. We saw lots of anemones and anemone fish, blue ribbon eels, giant clams, many species of angelfish and butterfly fish, cuttlefish, nudibranchs and schools of anthias. We found the reef at Amed to not be in as good of shape as others. No sharks or large pelagics. (We heard that a couple of weeks after we left, they dove with Orcas in front of the resort). (www.scubaseraya.com)

Raja Ampat Islands

Kri Eco Resort, May 2004, Mel Cundiff, Boulder, CO. Took eleven of us 72 hours from Boulder to the resort Raja Ampat Islands. (24-hour layover in Manado) The last two hours were on fast boats at night without navigational lights or communication. Dr. Gerald Allen catalogued 283 species of fish on a single one-hour dive adjacent to our resort. Living quarters were thatched cabins along the

shore or the long pier. They were equipped with beds (or mattresses on the floor), mosquito netting, a wicker-type bench and table, potable water and a low-wattage fluorescent light. With an adapter, strobes could be charged in the cabins. There was no resort space for photographic equipment. When we arrived the resort was extra full because guests had their departing flights cancelled. The beach cabin assigned to my daughter and me had poor ventilation, and we had a hard time sleeping on the sweat-soaked floor mattresses. When the held-over guests left, we commandeered a duplex dock cabin with real beds and with a shared open breezeway/lounging area with ventilation and a portable fan. No central lounge or social gathering place for guests. No wide-screen monitor to project underwater images. No plumbing in the cabins; two dipper-operated toilets and two dipper-operated cleaning stations (showers?) on the shore. No laundry facilities. Three adequate and tasty meals served family style — Asian, Indian and Indonesian with rice or noodles. Some selections were spicy and tasty, but a lot of redundancy. A small selection of cold beverages and a few cold beers were available for an extra cost and, on a few occasions, ice cubes; bring your own whiskey. The dive “center” was a widened, thatched-roofed area at the end of the pier. The tide was about 2 meters and when low, this was the only safe entrance and exit from the water or dive boats. Boats for three day dives and one night dive. No Nitrox and no freshwater for washing gear. A small thatched cabin for dive gear storage was adjacent to this dive

center. Two long boats, one with twin 115 hp and one with twin 200 hp Johnson outboard engines. Back rolls to enter the water, and over-the-side ladders for the exit after the crew pulled up our BCs and tanks. There was adequate room for the two Singapore divers and the eleven of us. Our gear and tanks occupied the floor. No head on the boats, but sites were nearby. One 200 hp engine was disabled and the other was problematical. While the staff worked on them each night, they didn't get them fixed so we only dived reefs 30 minutes away on a few occasions. By the fourth day, I had repeated dives at five different sites. While they contained world-class coral reefs, I was disappointed in not being able to see others. All dives were drift dives and most of us carried sausages, but they were not needed. The boat was never far away. The current was often brisk. The House Reef was a drift/wall dive with a high diversity of critters, but the current was generally so strong that a drop-off or pick-up boat was necessary. I was not able to dive at Equator Island where one enters the water in a current and drifts “under” the equator. We did have excellent divemasters and saw some of the most beautiful and diverse coral reefs in the world. Water was 83 and the mean visibility was 48 feet. The diversity of sponges, corals, molluscs, arthropods, echinoderms, tunicates and fishes was extraordinary! We saw many species that are locally rare or absent on many reefs, and many juvenile fishes which tend to be more strikingly colored than the adults. I have never seen so many wobbegone sharks — for example,

four on a single dive. A giant clam was larger than has been described in the literature – 2 meters in length, and I saw a grouper (Malabar) an estimated 28" deep (i.e. a dorsal-ventral measurement) and greater than 4 feet long. At 45 feet in an extremely strong current, we saw eight mantas between 13-17 feet. They would swim effortlessly against the current, sometimes passing within touching distance, and or staying in one fixed position filtering the oncoming water. We were either tied in with reef hooks or hanging on tightly to keep from being swept away. We saw a few reef sharks, large humphead parrotfishes, Napoleon wrasses, large schools of barracuda, jacks and trevally, some medium sized tuna, and a number of turtles, but, except for the mantas, this area should not be promoted for large pelagics. Two resort owners, Max Ammer and Sven DeVries, were helpful making our visit pleasant. Their staff was pleasant and helpful; they even cleaned, rinsed and set out to dry all of our dive gear at the end of the week. They arranged an enjoyable land-based tour to visit a village and see the Red Birds of Paradise, endemic to the area and discovered by Alfred Russel Wallace in the 1860s. About a half mile from Kri Eco Resort, the owners are building a modern Sorido Bay Resort, to be partially operational by October 2004, with large, air-conditioned, fully equipped cabins with all the amenities of a first class dive operation. Even when it is finished, they plan to keep the present resort in operation as it is today.

(www.Papua-Diving.com)

Sulawesi

Celebes Divers, Mapia Resort, June 2003, Carl Scott (carl@carlscott.net)
Spring, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm. As a dive operation, I cannot say enough good things about the service! The large traditional wooden boats may look strange, but they are very stable and roomy. Staff is friendly and helpful. The Bunaken Marine Park is a healthy reef system, with lush stands of antler coral, along with large barrel sponges that would rival those of any Caribbean location. Large animals are nearly nonexistent, though you may see a green turtle or a small shark. Schools of dolphin at the surface are common. Reef fish, including schooling jacks, barracuda, etc., are plentiful. You will always be surrounded by a multitude of butterflyfish, anthias, wrasse, etc., when in the top 30-40 feet of the reef. This was my 2nd trip here, and I still saw something on nearly every dive that I'd never seen before. Diversity is the one word that sums up this destination. This operator is owned by a resident marine biologist, who is impressive with his knowledge of the marine life. Lembeh Strait on the other side of the island is definitely worth the trip and the fee! Regarding Mapia resort (which is essentially the same operation), it is modest, but adequate, cozy and clean. The staff is great and will go out of their way to accommodate any request (and they never want a tip). The food is good, but not gourmet. All meals are served family style; breakfast is a small buffet of fruits, cereal, and toast. However, they happi-

ly accommodated my request for an omelet each morning. Lunch is had on Siladen island, a small romantic, and beautiful island where there is a sister resort. Each day would see grilled fish, with a couple of vegetables and rice — usually my favorite meal of the day. Dinner, served at 8 PM, is a combination of Italian and Indonesian cuisine, reflecting the owners' heritage and local flavor. UW Photography
 Comments: While this operator doesn't customarily keep a rinse bucket on board, they would certainly do so, if asked. I have never had more personalized service than is offered by Celebes Divers. They cater to photographers to the point that they often provide a separate guide for photographers in the group! Their guides are highly capable, and eager to find interesting subjects that might otherwise be overlooked, especially macro subjects, such as commensal shrimp and crabs, nudibranchs, etc. There are no shore facilities, per se, but you should have no problem accommodating your equipment at your bungalow, which is always a short walk from the pier.
 (www.kudalaut.com)

Eco-Divers, Tasik Ria, 2004, William & Frances (Elitecorps@aol.com), Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives We flew on Singapore Airlines sixteen hours from LAX to Singapore non-stop. The trip was made bearable by a class of seating called "business-economy" featuring ample leg room, more reclining seat angle and an entertainment center. After a brief layover in Singapore we took a four-hour Silk Air flight into Manado, North Sulawesi.

Following an hour bus ride we arrived at the Tasik Ria Resort. It's a beautiful property with an opulent pool and nice rooms. Being just a degree or two north of the equator, daytime highs rose into the high 90s. Eco-Divers has a large, almost live-aboard-type, (80 foot) boats. Three dives a day returning at 4:00. The dives are mostly wall and top of reef dives with lots of fish. Saw a manta and several whitetip and blacktip sharks throughout the week. Turtles too. Hard and soft corals are abundant. There is a great muck dive on the house reef (accessible only by boat) with lots of critters. The dive guides are knowledgeable, professional, but never overbearing. Trip to Bangka Island (three hours there, three hours back) that is interesting with beautiful displays of soft corals for an extra \$25 US (Indonesia money is the Rupia, about 9K to the US dollar). Water temps were 81-83 degrees and viz between 70 and 90 feet, with thirty feet on the muck dive. Sunsets are gorgeous from the seaside Sunset Bar. Enjoy the fabulous garlic roasted peanuts along with a Bintang beer. Get a legitimate fifty minute massage from lithe Indonesian women for \$10 US. Lounge in the pool and swim-up to the bar for a relaxing apres-dive cocktail. No anti-American attitudes in this principally Christine area. Churches rather than mosques predominated on the journey from the airport. The people were friendly in a natural, non-commercial sense. One could only wish for attitudes like this in Nassau. This trip was arranged by Patty Shales of Aquatic Images, perfectly orchestrated with no forced group dynamics. Friendships were made and

interactions with other divers was as casual or interactive as you wanted. Well worth the reasonable investment. Large rinse tank for cameras but extremely small work table but really posed no problem. (www.eco-divers.com)

Kungkungan Bay Resort, October 2003, Walter Brenner, Wayne, PA.

Vis: 40-60 feet. Water: 78-80 F. The “muck diving capital of the world” and the best. So much to see it is impossible to capture everything on each dive. As an U/W videographer, I usually am shooting 25-30% of the time. At KBR, it was more like 80-100% of the time. Night dives were awesome. Hard to believe so many unusual creatures can live in a relatively small area. Unfortunately, the water in Lembeh Strait is filthy with trash – bottles, cans, plastic bags, etc. I was forewarned, but, nevertheless, it is a disgrace! (www.kungkungan.com)

Lembeh, March 2004, Diane & Ned Elton (elton@stern.nyu.edu), Ridgewood, NJ.

Vis: 60-80- feet. Water: 80-92 F. Saw a dozen creatures on first dive I've never seen before. Mostly muck diving. Overload of small creatures. Not a lot of coral. Resort 5-star. Large individual cabins – lovely furnished. Food off a menu with wide choice. International food. Dive guides expert at finding creatures. Incredible service. (www.lembehresort.com)

Lembeh Resort, March 2004, Michael Culby (mlculby@prodigy.net), Eau Claire, MI.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 Feet. Water: 78 to

84 Fahrenheit, calm, surge. The resort is absolutely gorgeous. Resort/diver staff are friendly and more than willing to do anything to make your stay more comfortable. The diving was easy and more rewarding than we ever dreamed possible. The walk-in house reef was great, and could be done as an unguided dusk or night dive with lots of Mandarin fish. Dedicated camera room next to dock area - guarded 24/7.

Lembeh Resort, May 2004, Mel Cundiff, Boulder, CO.

Resort grounds were exquisitely groomed. The cabins, all with a view of the Lembeh Straits, were spacious and fully equipped with all the amenities and full bathroom facilities including both an inside and outside shower. A large two-story, vaulted-ceiling building housed offices, a gift shop, kitchen and a spacious inside/outside dining area and bar. Indonesian, Indian, Asian and American foods could be ordered off the menu. Meals were plentiful and tasty. Could keep in contact with the outside world via phone and/or email. A separate library had fish and critter ID books and an entertainment center. Jeremy Barnes, who managed Kungkungan Bay Resort and owns Safari Tours and Travel in Manado, is the manager. Bruce Moore is the manager of Murex Divers, which commands several buildings and offers both new dive equipment and rental equipment. There is ample individual bench space with electrical outlets for camera/strobe maintenance and dive gear storage. No E-6 film processing. Three twin-outboard-equipped boats were modified with tank slots. No

heads on the boats, but few sites were more than 40 minutes away and many were 20 minutes. No navigation lights on the boats for the night-dives. Over-the-side ladders were used for exits after BCs and tanks were lifted up by the crew. Water was 82, visibility 35 ft. Nitrox an extra \$8-\$10 per tank. “Muck diving” at its finest. There were a few intact and beautiful hard-coral reefs in the northern part of the Strait, but if that were preferred, the diver should be on the other side of the peninsula at Bunaken. We saw a few sharks, turtles, Napoleon wrasses and humphead parrotfishes. Hair Ball and Police Pier in the Lembeh Straits house many subjects which have starred in picture books..These sites tend to be shallow with a black-sand substrate. They are often littered with discarded human artifacts and fish parts, they generally have poor visibility, and they tend to have a disproportionately large number of really weird fishes and critters. Hairy frogfish, ornate pipefishes, pygmy seahorses, cockatoo flounder, leaf scorpionfishes, cockatoo waspfishes; spiny devilfishes (Inimicus); Japanese flatheads; reticulate stargazers; longhorn cowfishes; Pegasus sea moths; porcupine puffers and gurnards; barramundi, spotted sweetlips and pin-nate batfishes (spadefishes); Banggai cardinalfishes; octopuses including the mimic octopus, wunderpus, flamboyant cuttlefishes; bobbit worms; and the active burrowing sea cucumber (Neothyonidium). We saw a 22 inch (56 cm) long cuttlefish and hatching ping-pong-sized cuttlefish eggs. We found a Sargasso frogfish in the floating algae between the boats at the dock, the

beginning of the house reef. It contained muck and rubble in the shallower parts and coral and rubble in the deeper parts and interesting species, not the least of which was a large Mandarinfish population, 30-50 of them, and a bit later they performed their mating ritual of swimming upward, belly-to-belly, shooting eggs and sperm. The Lembeh Straits is the “weirdo” capital of the diving world!

Lembeh Resort, July 2004, Jim Chubb (jimchubb@cox-internet.com) Ketchum, ID.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Very friendly, lovely, sweet and simple and affords three Nitrox dives a day. Their Nitrox doesn't seem state of the art with tank O2 concentrations ranging from 27 to 40 in one particular batch of tanks. And the oxygen meter looked tired. The divemaster suggested setting our computers to air and having a huge safety margin, depth not being an issue. Guides were good. Food service was a trifle tardy at times. The cook had a tiny kitchen to work in, with a few woks and pans and a three burner stove. On a bad night 14 people arrived at once to eat. On the other hand, every now and then there is a barbecue that leaves you babbling about the local grilled pork and all you can eat fresh seared ahi tuna. Rooms are comfortable with nice outdoor bathrooms and outdoor shower. At night we discovered we needed to stuff towels into gaps in the door to keep mosquitoes totally out. The area is supposedly malaria free.

Lembeh Resort, September, 2004, William & Frances Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol.com), Santa Ana,

CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives Vis: 20 to 40 Feet. We left Manado's Tasik Ria Resort and made our way across North Sulawesi to the Lembah Straits. Half our divers opted to for the jungle trek in search of monkeys and apes, but we took the two hour, real-live Indian Jones ride to "Police Pier," and embarked on a runabout for the 15 minute ride to the magnificent Lembah Resort, halfway between rustic and subdued modernism. Carved out of the jungle cliffs, the resort is a Frank Lloyd Wright masterpiece. The rooms are spacious and tastefully appointed but don't look for satellite TV or telephones. The bathroom and shower are outdoors, fringed with high walls for privacy. Food is varied and well prepared and runs from traditional Indonesian to contemporary Western. The CDC lists this area as a "moderate" malarial risk but no one took Larium or Chlorquinine and were fine. Didn't see many mosquitos anyway. The underwater terrain is nothing but black or yellow sand strewn with broken coral rubble interrupted only occasionally by outcroppings of living coral. The viz is terrible (20-40 feet) and the water is chilly (76-80 degrees F). Don't expect to see sharks and mantas, but what you will encounter will boggle your mind and titillate your imagination: At any one time three other divers will be screaming into their regulators and gesticulating, inviting you to inspect some bizarre creature, or ten of them all in a row. On one sunken coconut log I counted 17 lionfish, five various scorpion fish, a couple mantis shrimp and fifty small flounders surrounding the log. I saw a

piece of broken coral housing a giant stone fish, a wonderpuss, a devil fish, a crocodile fish and oh hell . . . then there was and old barrel with a flamboyant cuttlefish, pygmy sea horse, harlequin shrimp, porcelaine crab and a hairy frog fish and the fake stone fish, juvenile bat fish, thorny sea horse, wasp fish, snake eel. On the house reef you can enjoy- a half dozen mandarin fish. Some saw a mimic octopus. Some of this stuff is not even in the books. No wonder every major UWP personality makes this a number one destination. I ran out of film on every dive here half or 3/4 way through every dive, even after eschewing bracketing! An ex-pat Canadian named Bruce runs Murex Divers. He's good, professional and accommodating. We dove Nitrox from 34-40 percent at \$8(US) per tank. The air temperature is surprisingly mild, due largely in part to the trade winds that blow and sometimes blow hard. The water is a chilly 77-79 degrees F. You need a five mm suit. Many people layered everything they had with them to stay warm. Patty and Gene Shales of Aquatic Image, Inc. put this sojourn together and did a great job. We stopped overnight in Singapore and what a place. Contemporary modern, there is no graffiti, no trash in the streets, no loitering street toughs. Prices for watches, cameras and electronics at Lucky Plaza were typically 30% under the US rates.

Murex, March 2004, Diane & Ned Elton (eelton@stern.nyu.edu), Ridgewood, NJ. Vis: 60-80 feet. Water: 81-83 F. Good coral, lots of fish. Currents most dives. Most dives

are drift diving and reasonable. Resort would fit comfortably in the Adirondacks (rustic, but nice). Food is varied and excellent – local Indonesian. Resort personnel are helpful and pleasant – mostly Europeans. (www.murexdive.com)

Thalassa Dive Center, Hotel Santika, February 2004, Michael Culby (mculby@prodigy.net) Eau Claire, MI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm, surge, currents. The Santika is a great location to dive 3 areas of North Sulawesi. Poopo (a great muck site) is one hour to the south, Bangka Island (great soft corals) is two hours north, and the Buneken-Manado Tua Marine Park (lots of walls) is only 10 minutes away. The dive staff were flexible about departure times and site selection. Large rinse tubs set up on boats, crew were gentle with cameras, and would transport your gear from the shop out the long pier to the boat. (www.thalassa.net)

Wakatobi Dive Resort, July 2003, Jay & Karen Reiner (jaycpa@yahoo.com), Cold Spring, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. Best diving we've ever done. We have absolutely no complaints about the dive operation in general. The house reef has incredible things to see, all the way from 90 feet down, all the way up to the surface. For our last dive there, we didn't even go below 20 feet! During a two week stay, I did 40 dives, and my wife did 20. If you want to do a night dive on the house reef, just ask around and

chances are you'll have a buddy for the dive. Our only recommendation would be that the dive staff be stricter for those who have no regard for the reefs when it comes to taking photographs. We saw a couple of people stepping all over the corals so they could get that "perfect shot." We felt that these people should have had their butts hauled right out of the water, and kept out of the water for a day, so they could have some time to reflect on the damage they did. There is no air conditioning in the room (just a ceiling fan), and the temperature in the room got up to 85 degrees F (and this was the winter!). The only source of air circulation was a ceiling fan, and it was installed in a spot where it wasn't even over the bed, so we were very hot the first couple of nights. After that, we had them move the bed so it was under the fan, which was better, but still not very cool. The lighting in the room is with compact fluorescent bulbs, which made for very glaring light with a lot of dead, dark spots in the room. It made reading at night very straining on the eyes. The shower is in the same room as the toilet (with no curtain or divider), so if you needed to use the toilet or the sink after showering, it was like having to walk through the bathtub to get there (not very pleasant). We were extremely disappointed with the food, and rate that the lowest of any aspect of the resort. The website purports to have a European chef, and excellent cuisine, blah blah blah. We don't know where this European chef was (maybe he quit), but the food was very plain, and there was way too much repetition of food at every meal. If it wasn't for the

fact that you need food to live, we would've starved to avoid eating the same things over and over. This is something that they really have to seriously address. Considering that areas in Indonesia are known world wide for their coffee (Sumatra, Sulawesi), we were shocked that the coffee available in the morning was instant! If you wanted anything fresh, you had to special order an espresso or a cappuccino, and there was an extra charge for that! We asked Lorenz, the manager, why there was no fresh brewed coffee in the mornings, and his reply was that there's a choice of five coffees, so what's the problem? Yeah, there are five, but three are instant, and the other two cost more. (www.wakatobi.com)

Wakatobi, September 2003, Walter Brenner, Wayne, PA. Vis: 75-100 feet. Water: 80-82 F. Wakatobi is reached by charter plane and is the only occupant of an otherwise uninhabited island. Accommodations, food, and diving are the best. Small critter paradise – pygmy seahorses and other varieties, like leaf fish, nudis from tiny specimens to Spanish dancers, frog fish. Great drift dives, beautiful house reef. The finest pier dive anywhere.

Wakatobi, July 2004, Suzette and Mark Baker (M2SBaker@aol.com), Atherton, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 79 Fahrenheit, calm, choppy, surge. Wakatobi has enforced strong ecological requirements, the coral is among some of the healthiest in the world. Wakatobi gives a contribution to the local village for every diver at their

resort. The fishing and diving is limited, thus helping keep the area pristine. A marine biologist confirmed that this is one of the healthiest reefs he has seen. Wakatobi's philosophy is that divers are certified and capable of diving their own profile. However, they provide experienced instructor-level guides to show you camouflaged fish and critters. Some dive guides even carried magnifying glasses to help point out the pigmy sea horses that we had difficulty seeing with our aging eyes. Accommodations were clean and comfortable, with king-size bed, desk, and internet access. Private bathrooms were basic with toilet and shower. They are continually making improvements and currently plan to build some additional luxury rooms. The 5 star chef prepared scrumptious meals with several main courses, and a separate 5 star pastry chef made several desserts each night! Due to a family emergency right before our trip, we thought we would have to cancel. However, they worked with us and helped make it possible for us to come. Wakatobi has built their own airstrip and charters a private plane to fly their guests from Bali to an island a short distance from their resort. From there, they pick you up by boat for a short ride to the resort.

MALAYSIA

Sipadan, a tiny island off Borneo, was the site where 20 divers and others were kidnaped by Muslim terrorists from the Philippines in 1999. By all counts, it is now well protected by the Malaysian

military. Once home of arguably the best diving in the world, it became overwhelmed with tiny dive resorts; they were ordered to abandon the island at the close of 2004, hoping to protect the giant turtles, sharks, jacks, and schooling barracuda from too many divers. Day boats, in controlled numbers, may now visit from nearby resorts.

Pulau Sipadan Resort, June 2004, John Orange, Irvine, CA.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: to 79 Fahrenheit, choppy, surge. Beautiful over water resort on Kapalai, a sand spit that is submerged underwater most of the day. No mosquitoes. No air conditioning, but the constant breeze and overhead fan made the stay comfortable although very hot under the sun (90+ degrees). Accommodations much better on Kapalai, but wish we had stayed on Sipadan at least one night for the night dive (heard others raved about it). Sipadan will be closed after Dec. 2004. Saw lots of giant turtles, some white tips, crocodile fish, frog fish, cuttle fish, too many to name. (www.sipadan.com.my)

RED SEA

Hurghada dive operators are failing to provide loving care to nearby reefs, so divers head further south. European divers still heavily visit the area, but Americans are reluctant. Water temperatures can drop into the cool 60s during February and rise into the 80s by August. ... Many

divers combine a Red Sea trip with a visit to Israel and biblically historical sites.

Egypt - Sharm el Sheikh

Camel Dive Center, July 2004, Margaret Zometsky, Conway, SC. Vis: to 100 feet. Water: 80-83 F. July very hot 100 F+, could be good or bad, great water. Camel Dive is just the best. Nice people. Very safety conscious. Nice boats. Excellent staff. Sharm el Sheikh a little more pricey than the rest of Egypt, but still cheap in comparison to other places I've been. (www.cameldive.com)

Red Sea Diving College, Radisson SAS Sharm El Sheikh, November 2003, Alan Mayfield (alanmayfield@yahoo.com) APO, AE. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 200 Feet. Water: 73 to 78 F, calm. I have made over 1000 dives and been an instructor for over thirty years. I made the arrangements for this trip for myself and five other divers. I work at the American Embassy in Athens, Greece and completed all reservations via the Internet. Red Sea Diving College had been mentioned in previous "Chapbook" articles as "the facility that I would use the next time I dove the Red Sea." That statement pointed me toward them, and I was not disappointed. We were picked up at our hotel every morning and driven to the shop to begin the day. Our gear was checked out the first day and placed into plastic cartons. These were moved from boat to boat each day from then on. Although I changed plans one day