

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

and dove a different site than the rest of my group, my gear was there, on the boat waiting for me. After the dives, we were transported back to our hotels. The sites were wonderful. I had read that they weren't as good as they were when the area was under Israeli control, but I found the coral to be plentiful, beautiful, and the fish everywhere. Lunch was included each day for a small additional fee. Pasta was a main selection, but other food was always included. Most dives were drift dives which allowed us to complete the dives and relax on the surface as the boat returned to pick us up. The dive I made on the day I dove without my group was to the "Thistlegorm." It is a WWII British supply ship that was sunk early in WWII. It was 100 feet to the bottom and about 80 feet to the deck. The holds were open and contained jeeps, motorcycles, trucks and other war supplies. The fish life around the wreck was abundant. The divemasters (ours was Hooch) were very knowledgeable and allowed us to enjoy the dives at our own pace. They were there to lead the dive, but not there to restrict safe exploration. The group I dove with were all experienced and Hooch allowed us to enjoy the dives. My last day of diving was with the other people that accompanied me. They arrived a couple of days after me and were placed on another boat. They had told their divemaster that they didn't want to go deep and their divemaster accompanied them at shallower depths. Other members on their boat were allowed to dive deeper. The divemaster could watch both groups because the visibility was excellent.

She was perfectly suited to divers of that level of training and experience. The dive facility was outstanding. On the second day, our van that was taking us to the harbor, broke down, but we were stranded for only about five minutes before another van picked us up. One area for improvement would be to increase the number of vans available to transport divers to/from the shop. Often, the wait at the end of day would be several hours after arrival at the shop before a van would be available to return us to our hotel. Radisson SAS Resort is a new resort five miles from the airport in the direction opposite the town. They offered a full BandB service or full Board. The meals were well prepared and served buffet style. They had special theme meals several nights. (We were there for six nights.) Being so far out of town, we were dependent on their shuttle service. When you took the shuttle from the hotel to town at 7:00 PM you couldn't get back to the hotel until 11:00. Taxis were available and reasonable, but we could have walked to most resorts because they were much closer to town. (www.redseacollege.com)

Red Sea Dive College, March 2004, Barbara Anderson (shrinski@aol.com), Winter Park, FL. Vis: 60-80 feet. Water: 70-75 F. Unique and wonderful diving. The Red Sea Dive College is professional and well organized. The boat was comfortable, had indoor space to hide from the sun, as well as great sunning locations. We asked for a trip to dive the Blue Hole and the canyon and it was honored, as

well as a night dive. I was surprised how friendly everyone was toward Americans (dive staff, shop keepers, hotel staff).

SEYCHELLES

Billed as 3000 miles from anywhere, this group of islands has decent reef diving. From time to time live-a-boards run to the out-island of Aldabra, which is reported to have excellent diving. ... Island prices are high.

North Island Resort, November 2003, Erwin P. Staller, Huntington, NY. Dives logged: 250+. Vis: 20-30 ft. Dive restrictions enforced: depth and time. My wife and I ventured off to North Island in the Seychelles. After approximately 17 hours of flying via Paris to Mahi, and then by helicopter for 15 minutes to the North Island, we were amazed as to what we had booked. It was paradise. The accommodations, food and beach were just perfect. Regarding the diving, I had some awesome and spectacular dives with mostly tropical and small fish varieties. We did see several large turtles, lobsters and devil fish. The dive operation was very well run, very professional and they did everything possible to assist the diver in and out of the water. Happily, the coral, to a small degree, is reviving. I did see several patches of anemone with its clown fishes darting in and out, as well as new forms of hard coral. Unfortunately, there were no fans or sponges to speak of. I would suggest anyone who is interested in a fantastic

vacation, including diving, should pawn the family jewels and make this trip. (www.north-island.com)

THAILAND

Thailand is a bargain and scores of day boats and liveaboard make trips into the Andaman Sea to Richelieu Rock where fish life can be exciting. ... Many liveaboards extend their trips to the Burma Banks in Myanmar, where most divers — not all — find superior diving. ... Thailand has unending opportunities for broader travel experiences and any dive trip out to have a few extra days to appreciate the culture.

Big Blue Dive Resort, July 2004, John Crossley (jcrossle@csufresno.edu), Fresno, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Although the seas were flat, and the water was a toasty 84 to 86 degrees, visibility was 40 to 50 feet, and sometimes less. A few dive sites had hundreds of anemones, and White Rock had a super friendly red wrasse named Lucy that would swim right into your hands to be stroked. Other sites typically had some nice reef fish and nudibranchs, but not much in the way of big fish or any special critters. Big Blue Dive Resort was the most disorganized and poorly managed dive resort I have ever visited. Problems included botched transfers, loss of my reservation (although I had several email confirmations), mediocre food at best, poor lighting in the rooms, weak air conditioning, huge cracks in door and window frames that let mosquito's in, no