

Sky Dancer, June 2004, Jeff & Kelly Bennewitz, Albuquerque NM. +300 dives. 12 th Live-aboard. Weather sunny, some misting rain showers, seas were calm to moderate chop, air temp high 70's, water temp 70-79. We researched *Undercurrent* and determined that most divers preferred the 10 day charter because of the distances. We cruised 600 nautical miles. Jeff was the winner of a 1 week charter. Booked by Island Dreams, Tina, an experience diver with lots of good tips on saving time and \$\$\$. The islands are serviced by modern day noisy jet airplanes, the flight from Guayaquil in Ecuador takes less than 2 hours. You are met at the airport by the *Sky Dancer* crew, bags are collected and delivered to the boat no hassle. A cool drink and quick briefing. Master suite has more than enough room if you don't pack too much. We brought long sleeve shirts and jackets for the cooler temps, daytime temps were in the high 70's. The afternoon began with an easy check out dive to adjust weight for the thicker wet suits and hoods, yes the water is cold or cooler depending on your tolerance, believe me you won't feel the cold when your adrenaline starts pumping with all the fish life. My wife and I purchased new 5 mm wetsuits with vest and hood for this trip, a good investment. Some divers used 7 mm. you will need some good gloves for holding on in the blowing currents; but you could easily hold on or just go with the flow. I worked hard on my pre-trip conditioning — Galapagos is the adventure topside and underwater, you will enjoy it more if you have experience and are in good physical

condition. We cruised during the night to our first dive site, breakfast was served at 7:00 am, the dive briefings were detailed on the white board. The divemasters Santiago and Jamie are passionate about this place; it is their home, they know the sites and will find most things in the fish book. The dives are conducted from motorized inflatables, AKA pangas, we boarded the pangas from the *Sky Dancer* with crew spotting you, cameras and fins are loaded after 8 divers are in place. We back rolled into the water at the same time, the diving is fantastic, filled with new things we have not seen in our 10 years of diving. The panga drivers are there to pick you up and retrieve your weights and gear. The crew is ready for your return the captain is standing by with a tray of snacks and hot chocolate, The crew helps you out of your wetsuits, they rinse and hang the suit for you. All you have to do is step into the hot shower and wait for a warm towel. The crew unloaded your gear from the panga and refilled the tanks; they were careful to rinse cameras, the rinse tanks were changed twice each day. A typical day was 2-3 dives and an enjoyable island tour to see the seals, blue footed boobie, iguanas, penguins. Jamie's knowledge of the island wildlife and history is impressive. We had a wonderful dive with the sea lions who played and darted about, they would bump you or nip at your fins or camera, they would even slow down and blow small bubbles as if to mimic you. We encountered a whale shark on 7 out of 8 of our dives at Darwin. There is so much fish life to see you are overwhelmed. The water was

warmer at Darwin by more than 6 degrees. The divemasters did an excellent job predicting the conditions and briefing proper safety and dive procedure. Meals were hot and delicious. The crew took care of rinsing and hanging our gear out to dry on the last day. Santiago escorted our group to the airport and took care of check in and baggage so no one had to pay any overweight fees. Bring along some DVD's from the Walmart bargain bin, leave your batteries and extra film behind, share some O-rings or spare parts with the crew, your kindness goes a long way in Galapagos. My wife and I have been onboard 12 live-aboards.

Sky Dancer, August 2004, Bob Lambertson (rdlamber@artsci.wustl.edu) St. Louis MO. Vis: 20-80 ft. (central islands); 60-100 ft. Darwin and Wolf). Water: 68F (central islands) to 75F (Darwin and Wolf). Dives logged: 400+. Guided dives, with personal attention and flexibility. Darwin Strait: we had 12 whale shark encounters in 5 dives, a few 40+ ft leviathans. There was hardly a moment when other sharks — Galapagos, scalloped hammerhead, and silky — were not in sight and often there were dozens. The density of smaller fish was amazing. Pacific creole fish numbered in the thousands. The currents are strong, and treacherous — a downcurrent just off a lookout shelf took us from 60 to 100 ft before we noticed, and since we were diving nitrox, we took that warning seriously. The upcurrents drove our computers crazy and made safety stops a challenge... get further from the

walls and then you only drift horizontally (mostly). *Sky Dancer's* panga drivers are dedicated professionals, linked by radio to each other and to the ship, and supernaturally attentive. Santiago and Jaime, the divemasters, inspire confidence. One Chapbook contributor recently advised bringing reef hooks. Well, maybe photographers would benefit on the lookout ledges, to free their hands for short periods. At Darwin, however, currents changed every few seconds, sometimes so strong you worried about your mask, then as soon as you got oriented, suddenly pulling you in another direction. I was a more comfortable with both hands on the rock — even if the barnacles will pretty quickly destroy any set of gloves you wear — and concentrating on holding myself as flat as possible to minimize the twisting. Reef hooks are more useful in the steady currents. The dives in the central islands are tamer but colder. Jaime is great at finding little stuff and where there's such a thing as a bottom (seldom seen in the north) he'll produce specialties like the endemic Galapagos pike blenny or Galapagos garden eel in world-class shallow dives. We identified only 81 species of fish in our seven days of Galapagos diving, but more than 60 were new to us.

MEXICO

Revillagigedo Islands

Solmar V, 2004, Mark Buchfuhrer (somno@earthlink.net), Long Beach, CA. Experience: 501-1000

dives. Vis: 10 to 40 Feet. Water: 79 to 86 Fahrenheit, calm, surge, currents. The cost is similar to other first class live-aboards, but the operation has more in common with less expensive boats. They do not pick you up at the airport (I spent \$80 on a taxi to the boat) and no welcome T-shirt on my bed. The rooms are tiny and my son and I could not stand without touching each other (and there were actually smaller 2 person rooms!). The food was on a par with most live-aboards and plentiful. They did have sodas, but no juices. Visibility was usually 10-30 feet making sightings of pelagics virtually impossible. We saw only one small white tip shark on the last day in the southern most area, and no whale sharks. The highlights included 2-3 turtles, many seals, 2 jawfish, 7 sea horses (on one site) and one school of small barracuda. I did see 2 nudibranchs the entire trip (so much for my macro photography!). Many of the divers had been on the *Solmar* several times and said that more pelagics were seen 3-5 years ago. There was open diving at times from the stern of the boat, but diving from the pangas was limited to 50 minutes. There are too many divers for the 3 divemasters; with visibility of 10 feet it was easy to get separated (especially when taking pictures) and several times I ended up diving alone (despite their warning us not to dive alone) missing out on the few interesting things on the dive. I had to fight for space on the photography table and there were only 7 cameras. Imagine if all 22 divers were taking pictures! There were no secure indoor charging stations and the main area to charge

was outside under dripping stairs with only 3 double sockets. As far as how pretty the reef was, fish life and photography opportunities, this has been the worst trip that I have ever taken, live-aboard or land based! The most positive aspect is the short 2 hour plane ride from southern California to Cabo San Lucas. (www.solmar.com)

Solmar V, January 2004, Brad Bowen, Farmington, UT. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 15 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 Fahrenheit, calm, surge. *Solmar V* visits Las Islas Revillagigedos, about 250 miles off the coast of Cabo San Lucas in the Pacific Ocean. It is a 24 hour trip, both ways with 6 days of diving. We visited two islands and Roca Partida, which means "Split Rock" about 40 feet high in the middle of nowhere, but has many white tip reef sharks, and other pelagics allegedly visit from time to time. We had read about this trip being guaranteed manta interaction. Only one manta showed up at the Boiler on our first visit. It stayed for only 15 minutes, but I was able to pet its belly three times. No mantas on the second dive, but the panga drivers started driving in circles above us to attract the dolphins. It worked and we had our first ocean encounters with dolphins. No mantas at Roca Partida. Three of us were the last out of the water on one of the dives at Socorro and got a brief visit from a manta at the very end of the dive. The Boiler was disappointing, but the Canyon turned out to be a fabulous site. We had multiple, extended encounters with half a dozen manta rays, which hung around and let us pet their bellies for the entire

dive. Hammerheads were spotted a few times, a Tiger Shark once. A dozen or so yellowfin tuna just below the surface of the ocean. Three small Silky sharks, the largest only four feet long, follow the boat and are seen on most dives. You need to keep an eye on the silkys as they can be aggressive and a little unpredictable. I always keep my camera housing between me and them. After one dive we had fifty or so dolphins playing 100 yards off the starboard side of the boat. I snorkeled out to them and the silkys followed, circling closer and closer, which is just a little unnerving in open water. I was glad the captain had one of the pangas come out to keep me company, and the driver reassured me the silkys weren't a threat, and to just bang them on the head with the camera housing if they got too close. On the last dive one silky got a little too close and tried to bite my camera housing, so I had to thump it on the head. (I've seen literally thousands of sharks and this was the first that ever exhibited any aggressive behavior toward me, and it was partially my fault as I tried to get a close up picture of its eye when it got close.) We had swordfish for dinner and the leftovers were tied to a string and everyone had a chance to play with the silkys from the boat. The next morning on the first dive we fought against the current and after a bit of a swim to a canyon we found a school of at least 200 hammerheads between 90 and 140 feet. We couldn't get any closer than about 12 feet as the scuba bubbles scare the hammerheads. On the last dive we played with two manta rays the entire dive. Spotted several Humpback whales during the

week, and saw tails and spray of a mother and calf. Hardly any coral or nudibranchs. Topography is completely volcanic. Visibility is often only good for 20 feet or so, but there were times you could see over 150 feet, but it was hazy. I learned to zoom in on something white to about 18 inches, get the focus clear, and then lock it in with the "focus" button. This made it so that the camera did not go in and out of focus due to the haze underwater. Food was o.k. Accommodations a bit cramped, but not terrible. Everyone enjoyed watching the televisions in the salon. Be advised you will lose 1 or 2 dives the day they do the mandatory inspection at Socorro Island – plain stupidity in my view. Boat owner was on our trip and claims it is the government's fault as the Navy won't do the inspection at any other time. Good trip but won't do it again until they get Nitrox.

Solmar V, February 2004, Cory Gray, Long Beach, CA. Vis: 20-100 ft. Water: 72-74 F. Dive restrictions enforced: maximum depth of 130'. Dives logged 500+. *Solmar* has addressed many of the prior criticisms. The initial boat briefing covered safety items such as evacuation routes and the location of life vests. Food is plentiful and very good both at meal times and after diving. The chef will prepare eggs to order in the morning, and we had barbequed steaks done as you like, as well as chicken, fish and barbequed ribs for dinner. The reported loud and obnoxious divemaster Axel has gone on to other pursuits. The three current divemasters and two panga operators were always available to assist divers on or off the

boat or panga. The panga operators were in contact with each other and with the boat by radio and did a magnificent job of picking up divers who had drifted away in some of the strong currents. Water temperatures (72-74F) ran 3 to 4 degrees cooler this year than last year and may have had an impact on wildlife sightings. Few hammerheads were seen, although quite a number of Galapagos sharks were encountered and silkies commonly circled under the boat. Manta encounters were frequent and if nobody tried to chase them, up close. Dolphins came by once and the panga offered to take any diver out to where they were located and drop them in the pod. The dolphins didn't seem to mind scuba bubbles, but they disappeared in a flash as soon as a strobe was set off. Whales were seen at a distance, but none came close to the boat and no one encountered one in the water. The trip visited three islands, San Benedicto, Roca Partida, and Socorro. Of eighteen total dives, twelve were made at three different sites on San Benedicto, three dives were made at one site on Roca Partida, and three dives were made on three sites at Socorro. The best sites were Roca Partida and the boiler at San Benedicto. My one regret was that I did not take along a close-up camera set up. Since this is a protected area, the fish were not afraid to be around people and could be approached easily. Flame angel fish, which I have been trying for years to get photos of in Hawaii, were in your face at most locations. Beautiful endemic Clarion angels were all over the place. But even with a moderate wide-angle lens it was possible to get huge green morays and good

sized rock lobsters which walk around out in the open with no apparent concern during the daytime. It takes a while to get there, but the trip to the Revillagigedo Islands is a unique experience. I'm glad I went if for no other reason than the manta close encounters.

Solmar V, February 2004, Scott McGill (Mako@stx.rr.com) Corpus Christi, TX. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 90 Feet. Water: 74 to 69 F, choppy, surge. *Solmar V* is the most uncomfortable and most expensive live-aboard I have ever been on. Living area of boat is very uncomfortable with no place to relax, watch movies etc. between dives. Cabins are terrible with no storage. Pongas are inflatables and very crowded, diving was very hit or miss with three days of no pelagic sightings. Mantas were not present at sights which were touted as sure things for seeing them. Many rules on the boat that made no sense such as no small dive knives or lights. Dive staff spent time after dives running around recording divers depths and time rather than attending to other duties. Myself and another person got food poisoning on the boat.

Solmar V, March 2004, James R. Grim (yorkdivers@aol.com) York, PA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 72 to 74 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents, no currents. This is my fourth trip on the *Solmar V* and one of the best. We had good interaction with mantas at "the boiler," saw whales everyday, had dolphins by the boat during the day and at night. Did several dives at "el canyon" where we

saw schooling hammerheads. The crew was very cooperative. Good dive briefings. The food was plentiful and very good. We had steak 3 times. The dive sites varied from no current to lots of current and sometimes with surge. This is open ocean diving and one has to be ready for anything and for things to change from dive to dive. Airfills were quick and always at 3000 psi or more. This trip can be all or nothing or little bit of everything. Mother Nature is in charge and in four trips has never disappointed us.

Solmar V, March 2004, Ken Mostello (kmostello@expertek.com) Carlisle, MA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 70 Feet. Water: 71 to 74 F, calm, currents. The Revillagigedos Islands (informally know as Socorro Islands) are located 230 miles south of Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. There are 3 small islands (Socorro, San Benedicto, and Clarion) and Roca Partida, a small rocky pinnacle. The *Solmar V* is the only live-aboard to dive these islands. A permit is required from the Mexican government to go there, and the boat is required to check in at the naval base on Socorro Island once during each trip. The boat does not typically travel to Clarion Island due to the distance, and diving at Roca Partida is subject to favorable sea conditions. The crossing takes between 22 and 26 hours. Our eight day trip provided time for 19 dives. The quality of service and professionalism of the crew on the *Solmar V* is second to none. Beds were made by the steward on all diving days and linens were changed once during the trip. The dive briefings

were sufficiently detailed, and the dive-masters eager to help. All were fluent in English. The diving restrictions imposed were not unduly onerous considering the remoteness of the islands. Evacuation to the nearest recompression chamber takes about 24 hours. Night dives were not allowed due to the strong currents and the aggressiveness of the sharks at night. The food quality was superb, consisting of traditional Mexican cuisine as well as American dishes. The cabin accommodations include private heads and showers and TV/VCR units, but the cabins themselves were tiny and there was very little headroom between the bunks. These accommodations were definitely not for those with claustrophobic tendencies. The quality of diving in Socorro is variable, and depends greatly on the season, sea conditions and plain dumb luck. The main attractions are large pelagics, including mantas, seven varieties of sharks, including whale sharks, and dolphins and whales. The reefs are all rocky and volcanic with few macro photo subjects, so finding the large marine life is the principal objective of each dive. We were consistently able to find mantas at well known sites like "The Boiler" at San Benedicto. The mantas were large, plentiful, and eager to interact with divers. White tip sharks could be found in small caves and crevices. There were occasional encounters with Galapagos sharks, yellow-fin tuna, and wahoo, especially at Roca Partida. Schools of scalloped hammerheads were seen at The Canyon at San Benedicto. Silkies were found on a few occasions near the surface. Humpback whales were sighted many

times from the boat but kept their distance from the divers and the pursuing pangas. No whale sharks were seen on this trip. Socorro diving is not for newly certified divers. Currents are strong at times, and most of the diving is deeper than 90 feet. Manta encounters are usually made in blue water conditions where buoyancy skills are important. Also, the frequent shark encounters, including the occasional tiger shark (not seen on this trip) may not be for everyone. Cameras only table in dive area with separate storage underneath for camera cases. Divemasters happy to hand cameras to divers after entering water. Ample electrical outlets and compressed air available. No E-6 processing.

Solmar V, May 2004, Bruce Busfield, Middletown, NJ. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Water: 72 to 78 F. It was a little over 24 hours sailing from Cabo San Lucas. Manta rays and sharks, seen on almost every dive, and large schools of fish such as tuna and jacks. The bottom topography was always stark rock which made many of the local fish, in particular the orange, outlined in brilliant blue, Clarion angle fish really stand out. The crevalle jacks were also spectacular with their iridescent blue color. The *Solmar V* is a nicely designed dive boat that is well maintained. The crew of ten were always very enthusiastic and helpful. The food was excellent with good variety. The cabins were not big. The tinniest of them all were cabins 201 and 203, one of which I stayed in. With only a floor space of about 2' x 2' to stand on, these cabins are fine for singles but would be

very tight for two. Each cabin had its own combined shower/head, so everything gets wet when the shower is used. I preferred to rinse off at one of the two showers at the back of the boat in the dive area. Plenty of room for dive equipment to be stowed and lots of room for cameras on the camera table with several tiers underneath. The dive platform was great. Two wide stairs go down to the transom platform and then the same into the water. With nice flat steps and hand rails on either side it was possible to walk into the water up to your waist with all your gear on, including fins, and then cast off into the ocean! When the dive site required, dives were made from two Zodiac-type pangas. These were crowded and a confusion of fins, weight belts and cameras but all somehow went smoothly. We all rolled in backwards at the count of three. The panga drivers were excellent at following bubbles and retrieving divers scattered all across the ocean. Safety sausages were provided but they ran out by the time they got to me — fortunately I brought my own. Weight belts, BCD's and fins were handed up from the water making the ladder climb back up into the panga easy. All week I saw only 5 hammerheads. There were a fair number of silky and whitetips, but no Galapagos sharks. When the boat arrived at Roca Partida, a rock just sticking out of the ocean 68 miles west of Socorro Island, there was a long line fishing boat illegally within the limit of the marine preserve. Our captain radioed the Mexican Navy to complain. The next morning we awoke to see 6 buoys floating near by to mark the location of the long lines the fishing boat

put out during the night. After a morning dive our panga approached within several hundred feet of the fishing boat and we watched as they pulled live sharks out of the ocean to be finned. They were stripping the place clean! Shortly thereafter a Mexican Navy patrol boat appeared on the horizon and seized the boat. Two days later when we returned to Socorro Island, which had the Navy base, the illegal fishing boat was still there in custody. One of the return divers on the trip, however, thought there were many more sharks four years ago. A highlight was snorkeling with about 20 false killer whales. They swam all around us in groups of 6 or 7 in very tight formation, often swimming on their backs or side to eyeball our pathetic human group staring from above. Our snorkeling activity also attracted silkys that immediately appeared when the whales moved off. When the whales returned over and over the sharks just dove down a little deeper to get out of their way.

Solmar V, July 2004, Daryl Briten (dtbritten@crocker.com) Ashfield, MA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 72 to 84 F, calm, currents. I wasn't aware of how cold the thermoclines can get. I only brought a 3 mm and ended up having to rent a 3 mm hooded shorty. If you tend to get cold, I'd recommend a 7.5 mm. If you are a hardy diver, a 5 should be enough. The boat is nice and well outfitted, but small. We lucked out and only had 8 dives. Boat accommodates 22 I think. Rooms are tiny so pack light! The staff is wonderful! Ask them to take you to the northernmost seamount. It was the

best diving of the trip.

Sea of Cortez

Don Jose, October 2003, Scot Kramer (scotkca@earthlink.net) Los Angeles, CA. Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 75-79 F. Dives logged: 470. Two weeks after a major hurricane, with hundreds of half submerged still in the harbor, we were lucky to be aboard a boat, that while on the older side, was in good shape and well kept. With a Spanish speaking, agreeable crew, and a experienced postcard typical captain, we were able to miss two additional hurricanes during the week. The Captain knew enough to avoid potentially dangerous diving sites/conditions and found the best/safest alternative dive sites. The food offered was solid, although not special. There was no Nitrox on board. When suitable overnight anchorage were available, night dives were offered. Diving was done off the back if the boat or zodiacs if necessary. Wet suits were kept on the upper deck where the dive lockers were located. Divers dressed on the top deck, carefully stepped down the ladder, were handed their BC/Regs, and exited the ship. The water was chilly, but visibility was good at 30-70 feet. No sharks were seen this trip, but there was plenty of healthy sea life. Notable were scads of scad and an abundance of moray eels. (www.bajaex.com)

PANAMA

MV Coral Star, April 2004, Tracy Johnson (tracy@coastvideo.com), Manhattan Beach, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 80 Feet.

Water: 66 to 84 Fahrenheit, surge, currents. My 5th Panama live-aboard on two separate boats, including the *Coiba Explorer*. If you like big animals and exploration. Schools of barracuda, dolphins, and game fish. There are huge tidal changes in Panama so the diving can get rough due to the current. Beginners keep this in mind. Diving is from 28 foot Pursuits with a max of 6 per boat. They get you on site in record time with a comfy ride, you can even spend your intervals fishing. The *Coral Star* is both a dive and fishing live-aboard so if this bothers you, ask about the trip make up ahead of time. Coral Star pays for 1 night at Caesar Palace Hotel at the beginning and end of trip. The next day you fly 1 hour to David to meet the mother ship. They charge 25 cents/lb for overweight baggage. Food is good and the soups are outstanding. Air conditioning needed a little work (condensation leak in my cabin). This trip had colder thermoclines than I have ever seen in this area (usually about 74F.) but it did seem to bring the game fish closer to the surface. There is plenty to occupy the macro diver. We spent about 20 minutes watching a small octopus doing its work. This is the only live-aboard because this area is difficult to supply and operate in. Support good operations that are run under difficult supply situations because if we don't, we'll lose the opportunity to dive in those waters. Camera table on second deck, but used the salon for camera setup. No fresh water bucket on some boats but did have a salt water bucket to keep the housing wet. (www.coralstar.com)

UNITED STATES California

Psalty V, Psalty Adventures, October 2003, Bruce Baker, Falls Church, VA.

A contingent of Patowmack Divers went west to test the waters of California. Psalty Adventures is less than 20 miles from LAX, so one can be on the boat an hour after landing in Los Angeles. *Psalty V* is a Hatteras 46 sport-fisher, converted to diving. It cruises at about 25 knots, so it can be out to Catalina in an hour flat. It has beds for five and couches in the main cabin that could sleep two more in a pinch. We stayed on the boat for four nights and found it quite comfortable, not to mention much cheaper than staying in a hotel on Catalina. With a compressor on board, we were able to dive pretty much at will. Between dives, we could catch the Sunday football games on the 27 inch TV. Diving in kelp is a truly mystical experience. In shallow water, the bright kelp overhead adds a kind of halo effect. At deeper depths, it gives the feel of being in a cathedral. It's magic in another sense too. You enter a kelp forest with a group of divers, and you come out a solo diver! Garibaldi fish are about the size of a dinner platter and bright orange in color. They're the official state fish and are protected by law. They would fit right into a Caribbean color scheme, although California waters were 66 degrees. I was nice and warm in my 7mm farmer john. Visibility on our trip was 20-40 feet. Despite the poor vis, we did see some giant sea bass — maybe five feet long, weighing several hundred pounds. We

also saw some seals, although we didn't see them while diving. Oil platforms were closed to diving because of repairs. Captain, Gary, took us anywhere we wanted to go, including a two-hour visit to Avalon, the largest town on Catalina. Tarri, our mate, made us feel right at home. She's a fine cook, not to mention a hot babe. She made herself handy in many ways, offering up a dry towel, a hot meal, or a cold beverage. "KO," the dog provided comic relief and a keen eye for seals. Overall, it felt like we were diving with old friends. (www.psaltyadventures.com)

Conception, Truth Aquatics, July 2004, Jeff Hawkins, Tucson, AZ.

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 52 to 64 F, calm, choppy, surge, no currents. This is a great dive operation. We went out on the *Conception*. There is room to accommodate 40 people. There were only 26 so there was plenty of room. The food was wonderful. This is BYOB though. The crew went out of their way to help you and also to leave you to yourself. There were a lot of experienced divers. Everyone was comfortable doing what they were doing. Most had a drysuit on though I wore a 7mm and was just fine. The setup on the boat for dive gear allows ample space for storage. You might have to wait a couple minutes for the benches to clear to get your BC on but there were no time limits on what we were doing other than the captain telling us when the food was ready so we were in no rush. As soon as you put your tank on the rack the divemasters were there filling it. Good compressor, quick fills. The life in the north channel

islands was nice. A lot of kelp. Plenty of life to see, even small stuff like nudibranchs and gobys. Saw many bat rays and sea lions and some harbor seals. Smaller species of shark as well. The only disappointing thing about this trip was not finding a giant black sea bass. The bunks had plenty of room to sleep in. Make sure to bring your own sleeping bag. Hot water showers on the boat which is nice after diving in cold water all day. Plenty of room for setting up cameras, cleaning, downloading images. Also ample rinse tanks. Great dive operation. (www.truthaquatics.com)

Truth Aquatics, September 2004, Jerry Jensen (jensen_jerry@hotmail.com), Eagle Point, OR.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 5 to 50 Feet. Water: 54 to 65 F, calm. Though there were 30 divers and 6 crew nobody felt crowded though this was the smallest of three boats. Food was great. even rivaled the *Bay Islands Aggressor*. The crew were friendly and professional and helpful. The diving wasn't too good. We stayed around San Miguel island only for the 3 days. The kelp and marine life looked bad and visibility was poor. We moved to various sea mounts were vis increased to 50 ft plus but at 70 feet deep where it was 55 degrees. Here the marine life was plentiful. It bothered a few divers to watch the anchor chain destroy much coral, starfish etc. Too bad moorings couldn't be used. At only \$435 for 3 days diving, it's a good deal for us northwest divers without drysuits. Small fresh water tank for cameras. Outlets available for recharging, crew helped with cameras carefully.