

Guaranteed, you'll hear nothing but waves all night, and with the nearest upwind city 3,000 miles distant, the air may be the cleanest on earth. Food is so-so, supplies irregular — would you believe a hotel that runs out of coffee at mid-week? — all due to the limited communication with the outside world. But that's why you want to be there. There's a single (subsidized, nearly empty) round trip flight a week on Aloha from Honolulu, 1300 miles to the north. Tahiti is about the same distance to the south . . . but you can't get there from here. Frontiers Inc. has virtually exclusive representation (expense comparable to a Galapagos live-aboard) and is a classy agency whose real business is bonefishing and upscale hunting and fishing travel. I found them extremely helpful and easy to deal with. From the time you land on Kiribati, you become aware of the obstacles — political, social, and logistic — to a more open-market style of tourism in such a remote and undeveloped country.

([www.fun2do.com/divekiribati](http://www.fun2do.com/divekiribati))

**Dive Kiribati, June 2004, Ralph Bishop, Ithaca, NY.** Dive experience: 45 years; 1000+ dives. Kim Andersen tries hard to run a good operation, but he faces what could be a microcosm of how mankind has managed to devastate the marine environment. It would seem to be a real "find" — few tourists visit there, and its isolation would seem to guarantee pristine diving. However, the Republic of Kiribati (pronounced Kitty-boos) is poor, the government is weak, and they are prone to corruption. Kiribati has two main population cen-

ters: overcrowded Tarawa and Christmas island. — they are moving people from the former to the latter. Since Kim started his business 12 years ago, the population has grown from 1200 to 7000, and the locals have turned to collecting tropical fish and fishing out every sizable fish, including sharks, of which the island had plenty just a few years ago. There are lots of tropicals, but the ones desired by aquarists are skittish. The island has little infrastructure and can't support a fast dive boat to take divers to the less-frequented, better areas, such as Bay of Wrecks, which must be dived from shore — difficult entry and exit in rough surf on a rocky shoreline. The main hotel, the Captain Cook, looks as if had been hit by a hurricane and partially repaired, thought my bungalow on the beach was fine and cooled by a nice breeze ... without the wind, it might have been unbearable. The dining room was gruesome; food was poor to fair — no fresh vegetables, mystery meat and overcooked fish. A young Hawaiian dive instructor, who got off plane with a massive speargun, spent the the week certifying 25 locals to dive for tropical fish .... he bragged about killing a Napoleon wrasse for a beach luau. (what rare Napoleon wrasse I saw that week was very elusive. The diving in general is fairly shallow, and the coral is mostly low hard corals; viz not spectacular, mantas can be seen on some dives, no large eels, but a good variety of smaller ones at Eel Pit. There is a nice wall at Bay of Wrecks, but it may not be diveable due to windy conditions (the wind blew hard the whole week; there is

nothing to do between dives except hunker down in the shade of the rattle-trap dive truck. Not the destination for the jaded diver who is looking for a unique location.

## MICRONESIA

### Kosrae

This small, unspoiled island didn't get jet service until 1987, and it still hasn't changed much. ... Its high volcanic peaks are lush and green, and a close, fringing reef makes the diving easily accessible, but it's not high-voltage diving on a par with Palau.

**Sleeping Lady Divers, Kosrae Village Edolodge, February 2004, Jeanne & Bill Downey (downdive@comcast.net) Baden, PA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. Most people fly from Truk Lagoon to Hawaii via Guam; we experienced the island-hopping route — Pohnpei, Kosrae, Kwajalein, and Majuro, with a four-day stopover on Kosrae. Major airline service only began in the late 1980's and the islanders voted to limit construction for tourism purposes, so Kosrae is untouched by large hotels. We stayed at the Kosrae Village Ecolodge, built and operated by Bruce and Katrina for the past ten years. There are ten individual open-air thatched huts sitting along a winding path through the jungle, close to the ocean. Our room had twin and double beds, both enclosed in spacious mosquito netting, so we did not feel claustrophobic. There was always a

breeze blowing outside; unfortunately it did not make it through the mosquito netting, although there was a ceiling fan and large floor fan. In fact, our only complaint was that it was sometimes too warm and muggy to sleep well at night. Mosquitoes were not a major problem. There was a table and two chairs, as well as a small refrigerator sitting atop some shelving. The bathroom/dressing area had more shelving and a large area for hanging clothes with another shelf above. The open-air shower was spacious, surrounded by bamboo walls, with hot water and fluffy towels. Tap water should not be used even for brushing teeth; fresh water was in the refrigerator, along with some local fresh fruit, replenished daily. The porch has a table, two chairs, beach view, and entertaining hermit crabs in the front yard. The restaurant is a large thatched building; most meals were not included, but were reasonably priced and quite tasty. Lunches on dive days were included. We dove for three days with Sleeping Lady Divers, the name deriving from the "sleeping lady" land formations. After a leisurely breakfast each day, we were transported about ten minutes to one of the three marinas on the island where we boarded small pontoon boats with no more than 4-6 divers each. Boat rides were 20-40 minutes. Moorings surround the entire island, so diving is possible somewhere in just about any kind of weather. Lunch during the one-1 ? hour surface interval was quite a spread: fix-your-own tuna, meat, and cheese sandwiches, local tangerines, and desserts, including what has to be some of the world's best brownies. The diving we

did was wall/slope diving with fantastic visibility. We saw occasional barracudas, turtles, eagle rays, sharks, grouper, etc., but mostly the diving was a huge variety of small to midsize fish, along with some eels, nudibranchs, and other invertebrates. Kosrae has to be the Christmas tree worm capital of the world, and home to hundreds of clown fish. Some of the coral formations were different from any we had seen before, looking like castles. We did all drift diving, very easy and relaxing, starting around 80 feet and moving shallower up the slope. Safety stops could be done while still looking at fish. Good diving, beautiful sunrises, tasty food, killer brownies, and a great way to break up the trip going home. Large trash bin for rinsing. No camera table. ([www.kosraevillage.com/diving.shtml](http://www.kosraevillage.com/diving.shtml))

## Palau

Long day-boat rides to the best diving weave through calm water and past magnificent rock islands, but there's the potential for rough seas on the outer edges of islands. ... Most serious divers prefer live-aboards due to the length of the daily commute from Koror. ... Marine biodiversity is among the greatest in the world, but major coral bleaching and commercial fishing is taking its toll. ... Visibility can exceed 200 feet, while currents range from nil to dangerously strong. ... The capital city of Koror, well along the way to being Caymanized by massive tourism, has excellent ethnic restaurants. ... The best handi-

crafts are prisoners' carved wooden story boards for sale at the jail in town; hand-pressed coconut oil from street vendors is a good gift for your personal massage practitioner.

**Fish 'N Fins, West Plaza Desekel Hotel, November 2003, Michael N. Hofman** ([mhofman@jmoyerlandscaping.com](mailto:mhofman@jmoyerlandscaping.com)), **San Francisco, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 Fahrenheit, surge. Fourth trip with FishNFins. Even though the boat rides take about an hour to the dive sites, they are fun and interesting trips, the Rock Islands and other sites are beautiful and we took a number of side trips. We appreciate their attention to detail, especially as one of us is a snorkeler. The diving was wonderful with the coral making a strong comeback after bleaching several years ago and lots of small and large fish life. Blue Corner, Blue Hole, Ulong Passage, Turtle Cove and Turtle Corner all great dives. We also went to several other locations (downed seaplanes, harbor dives) which were interesting. FishNFins has a great restaurant serving fresh food. The hotel was clean, big rooms and a five minute walk from the dive shop (if you didn't want to get a ride). UW Photography Comments: Not great facilities on the dive boats but separate tanks, etc. on land and professional available for assistance. ([www.fishnfins.com](http://www.fishnfins.com))

**Fish 'N Fins, Palau Pacific Resort, May 2004, John Sommerer** ([john.sommerer@jhuapl.edu](mailto:john.sommerer@jhuapl.edu)) **Silver Spring, MD.** Experience: 251-

500 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm, currents, no currents. Second trip to Palau, arranged on short notice when previous destination messed up by a typhoon — kudos to Trip 'n Tour for their help. PPR an outstanding resort, with excellent staff and service. Fish 'n Fins a quality dive operation, with excellent, mostly Palauan divemasters (and they were better than the European and Japanese divemasters — they really know the sites). Did a land-based trip because this was a significant anniversary and we wanted a nice room ashore, but prefer diving Palau from a live-aboard. The boat trips through the Rock Islands are nice, but kill two hours per day, and can be rough if the wind is up or it's raining. Also, live-aboards let you do the prime sites with a minimum of other divers; we showed up for Blue Corner one morning to find over a dozen day boats. Speaking of live-aboards, Navot Bornovski gave us a tour of the brand new Ocean Hunter II, and she's a beauty! The so-called Compact Road around Babeldaob is under active construction (we did the complete loop on our last day — a very rough ride) and will be finished "soon," and a new Capital is mostly built at Melekeok up north. Things are going to change a lot in the near future. Koror a diving ghetto with huge beach resorts all around Babeldaob? I sure hope not. Try the Carp Restaurant for mangrove crabs; they're the real thing, only sold when fresh, and delicious; some of the "fancier" places try to pass off something like a Dungeness or swimming crab, which was previously frozen. UW Photography Comments:

No rinse on boats, no good storage. Good handling by staff. Excellent rinse tank at dock.

**Palau Pacific Resort, March 2004, Anne Warburton, Yorba Linda, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 150 Feet. Water: 73 to 85 Fahrenheit, choppy, surge, currents. Lots of large fish, schools of many different types of fish, turtles, great coral, clear water and a requested dive to see the nautilus. It was all fantastic. At Blue Corner an eagle ray hung for about 5 minutes 6 inches from my son while we were hooked on the reef. An eagle ray swam around me within inches on another dive. ([palau.panpacific.com](http://palau.panpacific.com))

**Sam's Tours, Palau Pacific Resort, December 2003, David Shem-Tov, London, NA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 10 to 30 Meters. Water: 30 Celsius, calm, choppy. At Sam's they went out of their way to please us. Minor complaints were immediately and satisfactorily addressed. A couple of Sam's guides were either a little patronizing or jaded. Fortunately, discreet requests to switch were immediately accommodated, as were requests to be placed in less crowded boats (we were there at the Xmas break) or to join trips to different areas. Particularly commendable of the admin staff was the Swiss Ops Manager. We enjoyed diving with Jonas on the days he was available for us. If he does start a Northern Palau operation, we would certainly consider staying with him on a future trip. Unfortunately, the day we went to the North with him to look for mantas had very poor visibility. I saw

one. I commend him for trying to vary our experience and balancing so well so many requests. If you travel with relatively inexperienced kids, Jonas will ensure they will have as good a time as advanced divers on the same boat. That is quite a skill. On one day we dove with Jonathon Iyekar, a four foot Palauan bundle of infectious enthusiasm and energy who led us on the most exciting dive we ever had at Blue Corner. I would unhesitatingly say that if Jonas leaves, Jonathon will be the best guide at Sam's. PPR is pleasant, though overpriced. The restaurant is still as poor as ever. You are best to eat off-site.

([www.samstours.com](http://www.samstours.com))

**Sam's Tours, West Plaza Hotel Coral Reef, January 2004, Carl Scott**  
([carl@carlscott.net](mailto:carl@carlscott.net)) Spring, TX.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm. One huge difference is always the dive guide and other crew. I reserved a week with Jonas Bernburg, but he was busy with another group my first 3 days. The guides provided for those days were inexperienced and, thus, were like shepherds. They did little after the dive briefing, except to give you someone to follow underwater. However, Jonas is a superb guide, who knows the sea as well as anyone I've met. He fixed us up with a day of diving with mantas, at my request, and we saw about 30 individual mantas during 2 dives at the same site. We saw mantas in German Channel and other sites, as well, but only 1-2 per dive. In fact, we saw mantas nearly every day. Jonas says that he thinks mantas are more

plentiful in Palau than in Yap, if one knows where to look — most guides don't. Anyone will tell you that he is the only guide at Sam's who can put you on the mantas (the inside scoop is that he may be starting his own dive service next year, to dive the relatively uncharted North areas of Palau). Blue Corner, as always, offered up some great shark action, as well as dogtooth and yellowfin tuna, napoleon wrasse, bluefin trevally, and schools of barracuda. The coral in Palau is generally nothing to write home about, but Ulong Channel does serve up some very impressive stands of lettuce coral, along with many other species. Peleliu is worth the extra fee, as it is home to big numbers of fish and many animals that are hard to find elsewhere in the area. The currents at some sites make this destination a poor choice for a novice or rusty diver, but they should be no problem for divers with moderate skills. Jonas's experience also makes him a diver-friendly guide, who has no problem with letting you be responsible for your own safety and dive profile, once he is comfortable with your skills. He knows the marine life well and can spot creatures that many guides would miss. The service at Sam's is generally good, with reliable pickup service, a staff that does want to provide you with a good diving experience, as well as a popular bar at the water's edge. West Plaza hotels come in 2 types: new and decent, and old and smelly. I'd avoid West Plaza by the Sea, and West Plaza downtown. The other 3 are like a Best Western, but with highly courteous and friendly Filipina staff. Rates are much less than

those at the popular resorts, too. Ask many different people about restaurants, if you want a treat. There are some good ones that are off the beaten path and look like houses. If you want to experience the local cuisine, emphasize it, and you may be rewarded with some great food in a homey atmosphere. There is also plenty of Japanese food, Thai, Chinese, Italian, etc. Most restaurants are in the downtown area, within walking distance of many hotels. Prices are generally similar to the USA. Sam's has a photo shop and capable staff. However, provisions for guest photographers were limited to a table at the dock. The only rinse tank is for all dive gear. The crew does not bring a rinse bucket on the boat, but there is safe (dry) storage for time between dives.

**Sam's Tours, Palau Pacific, February 2004, Harry E. White, New York, NY.**

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm. Probably the best hotel catering to divers I have ever stayed in but it had quirks. While dining room (which served buffet style) offered to serve ala carte, service was bad and the bill was usually wrong; separate ala cart had dress code so it was unused. The beach bar was good, fast, and billed correctly. Sam's did a decent but not a great great job. Dive leader always wanted to go to same sites (around German Channel), which entailed a long boat ride. There were good sites much closer. Dive hand broke my prescription mask; there was no offer to repair (the shop at Palau Pacific repaired without charge). Over the last 20 years, marine life

declined in both quality and quantity; but then this time we did not see the variety of sites we saw before.

**Sam's Tours, Palau Pacific, April 2004, Wyatt R. Skaggs** ([wyray@aol.com](mailto:wyray@aol.com)), Laramie, WY. Vis: 50-100 feet. Water:

70-80 F. Dives logged: 400+. The Palau Pacific Resort is isolated and very expensive I recommend Sam's without qualification. Be ready for 45 min boat rides and the world's best diving. A cyclone brushed us, but Sam's kept diving. No restrictions diving in great coral and clouds of fish.

**Sams Tours, Palau Pacific Resort, June 2004, Joan Traylor, Houston, TX.**

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm. This was our second trip to Palau in 12 months and for a diver, this is a wonderful place. The staff at Sams one in a million. They anticipate your every need. We stopped in Yap (wonderful diving with lots of mantas). Take a rain slicker, usually each afternoon is a shower on the boat ride. The visibility was outstanding and the sharks, turtles, and big fish were everywhere. There were several ornate eagle rays, spotted eagle rays and thousands of huge groupers on this trip. Turtles by the dozens on almost every dive. Highly recommended trip for divers, but there is little if anything else to do while in Palau. Palau Pacific Resort is like a little bit of heaven.

## Truk

This is the world's most diverse wreck diving on hundreds of

Japanese ships sunk during a battle in WWII, with lionfish on the bridge, giant clams on the deck, and bottles of ink and erasers for students of the vanished Japanese Empire still visible in the hold. ... Most wreck dives — other than on superstructures — are 80 ft. or deeper and there's fine diving even without wreck penetration. ... Expect calm water, occasional poor visibility, little or no current, and temperatures that can hit the high 80s.

**Blue Lagoon Divers, Blue Lagoon Resort, May 2004, Larry and Terry Roth (seawolf20@compuserve.com) Green Cove Springs, FL.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, calm, choppy, no currents. Truk Lagoon has some of the best wreck diving in the world. This was our fourth trip to Truk. The guides were, as always, accommodating and assisted us so we were able to dive many of the wrecks we had not previously visited. Blue Lagoon Divers has oxygen available and can mix Nitrox, trimix and fill stage bottles with advance notice. The shop and staff were always willing to go the extra mile, including providing additional guides for trips to ships which were significant distances from Weno Island. We set up our doubles the first day and the boat crew set them up each day thereafter. Gear can be rinsed at the dock and stored in small concrete lockers nearby. The dive shop is on the hotel grounds and most surface intervals are spent back at the hotel if desired. (I loved the ocean side hammocks). We brought our own iso-

lation manifolds and bands to set up double tank rigs. Next trip we will also bring stage bottle harness rigs and an equalizer whip. We normally made two dives on one set of tanks, but topping off from a single tank on the boat would have allowed us to make longer deep dives. Diving the shipwrecks of Truk Lagoon is a must for anyone interested in history. The artifacts are protected, (although some divers do not respect that rule) and swimming through the ships is a wreck lover's dream. The shallower wrecks have amazing soft coral growth; in some cases, such as the Shinkoku Maru, it's hard to remember you are on a ship. The coconut palm-studded hotel grounds include the island's best beaches and sunset views. Photos of our trip are located in the Truk Section of the "Shipwreck Museum" at <http://www.seawolfproductions.com>. Shore based facilities provided ample power for recharging lights and batteries. A power strip is handy to set up a camera table in your room. ([www.castleresorts.com](http://www.castleresorts.com))

## Yap

Yap got hammered by a typhoon in April 2004, and it's recovered slowly. It is a very traditional island, so behave accordingly. Mantas are the attraction and islanders and dive operations have argued about access, so before planning that trip of a lifetime to see mantas, verify ahead with the dive operations that they're still visit manta feeding areas. ... There are steep coral-covered walls and

drop offs and plenty of fish. ... Expect clear water except in the entrance of the lagoon where mantas pass. ... Yap is a good extension for a Palau trip.

**Beyond the Reef, Traders Ridge, February 2004, Steve Kohl (stkohl@msn.com) Brush Prairie, WA.** Experience: 375+ Steve, 160 Sybil dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 79 to 82 F. Do not dive the outer reefs. Dive boats all small, only backroll entrance possible, fast motors. Spent four days on Yap before Palau. Went to see the mantas and they were there in squads! A larger group of 16 took most of Beyond the Reefs boats, so we (wife and I) had a small boat with captain and dive guide to ourselves. Rolled off sides, shaky ladder up, but safe and catered to all our whims! Great Mandarin fish dive — mating in full moon. Trader's Ridge is very luxurious — pricey, but worth it! Great food, great service, and set up. Sure looked better than Manta Resort. Kayaking through mangroves was great birding trip. ([www.diveyap.com](http://www.diveyap.com), [www.tradersridge.com](http://www.tradersridge.com))

**Beyond The Reef, June 2004, Beth & Matt Dodd (dodd@vzpacifica.net) Agana Heights, GU.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F. Despite a recent typhoon, we found Yap to be as wonderful as it was when we visited 4 years ago. As an island, they have really pulled together and are recovering well. It is back to it's lush, green beauty again. All utilities are restored and all major hotels (Trader's Ridge, Manta Ray

Bay, Pathways, ESA, etc.) are up and running well. As for the diving (what you really want to know about!), it is still fabulous. We did 13 dives over 2 1/2 weeks and were not disappointed! The southern tip reefs (Lionfish Wall, Yap Caverns, & Gilman Wall) were all still pristine with beautiful hard & soft coral, tons of reef fish and small critters, and nice pelagic action (sharks, trevally, a large school of tuna, schools of huge humphead parrotfish, many schools of snapper, etc.) Even got to see a pair of sting rays at a cleaning station! Currents that meet at the tip of the reef make for nice drifting! Speaking of drifting, we did 2 awesome, adrenaline pumping dives in Mi'il Channel on quick incoming tides. Obviously the fish liked the fast current too as we saw lots of sharks, big humphead parrot fish, Napoleon wrasse, bat fish, & big golden trevally. Even spotted a nice sized painted rock lobster. Did one dive in Mi'il Channel at outgoing tide (which equals maybe 20' vis) to see the mantas. Had one 12 footer swooping over our heads at the deep cleaning station for as long as our computers allowed us to stay. Saw others as we came in and went out, but couldn't be sure if they were actually different mantas, or the same one due to the vis. Went back once more, but no mantas that time. Instead, there were 2 sharks getting cleaned. It was really cool to watch one go into his head up, tail down, mouth open, "clean me" posture! If you enjoy small critters/macro photography, they you'll love some of their sites inside the lagoon. 1:2 (said "one to two") was chock full of little critter surprises both

day and night. They have a couple of sites where they find mandarin fish consistently. It was really neat to be able to see them mate at dusk! We dove with Beyond the Reef 4 years ago when we visited and found them just as great this time. They cater to small groups — no cattle boats here! They offer very personalized service with competent & friendly staff! We definitely plan to go back! Great place to take pictures! No dedicated rinse tank or table at shop. No facilities on boat either, but crew were careful to put cameras in a safe place onboard. They were also good with handling.

**Manta Ray Bay, March 2004, Anne Warburton, Yorba Linda, CA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 150 Feet. Water: 73 to 85 Fahrenheit, choppy, surge, currents. Saw many mantas in three days s. Water was murky in the channel so photography not great. Life in the channel included crocodile fish, sharks, morays, turtles and more. Outside the channel, the coral and critter life on the one wall dive we did was an A+, water was clear and little current. We went overboard into 3-4 foot waves and immediately saw 8-9 circling reef sharks. Sharks come to feed after the boat circles 2-3 times. Also, saw many mandarin fish at Rainbow Reef. Good diving while we were there but one week later the cyclone hit. ([www.mantaray.com](http://www.mantaray.com))

**Manta Ray Bay Resort, March 2004, Sherwin Isenberg, MD, Los Angeles, CA.** Experience: 490 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 feet. Water: 79-82 F. On first manta dive, saw three awesome mantas

up close. On three subsequent manta dives, saw three total from afar. It is all luck. But, there were two incredibly memorable other dives. One was a shark feed at Vertigo with 20 sharks passing close — fabulous on a sunny day. The other was a near-dusk dive studying mandarin fish in all their colorful splendor — mating and courting in and above a shallow reef in less than 20 feet depth. We saw more than 20 mandarin fish. The dive operation is very professional. The resort has spacious, new rooms, which are very nice.

**Manta Ray Bay Hotel. September 2004, John Kendall (j.kendall@earthlink.net), Denver, CO.**

Experience: 101-250 dives, Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 Fahrenheit, calm. The typhoon in April had an impact on the trip; home-grown fruits are nonexistent, everything has to be shipped in; blue tarps still dot the city where roofs once were. The accommodations are good; the restaurant good, but relatively pricey (I can't recommend the meal package, rather that you explore the island for lunch & dinner). The staff is pleasant and helpful. Many coral reefs and lobster habitat are gone (Magic Kingdom might have been an appropriate name prior to the typhoon; it isn't anymore). Yap caverns are worth exploring; at M'il channel saw several Manta Rays & some shark; good fishlife, though not plentiful. Tim, the DM, & Henry, the skipper prepped tanks for each dive. The boat requires a roll back off the sides & entry via ladder on port side. The camera facilities are nonexistent; the dive break got us cake, but not much else. Take advan-

tage of the kayak trip through the mangroves; it's a pleasant way to spend the last day. No station for cameras on board; no rinse bucket for cameras.

**Yap Divers, Traders Ridge, June 2004, Joan Traylor, Houston, TX.**

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm. We were afraid that with the typhoon in April that the diving would not be up to the standards we were anticipating. The diving was outstanding! We saw so many mantas and large fish on every dive. The small creatures were everywhere! The visibility was wonderful and staff at the dive shop and hotel were outstanding. The people of Yap are some of the friendliest and hardest working people we have ever met. Seeing as many as 18 huge mantas come out of the beautiful blue waters straight towards you on one dive is something every diver needs to experience. We saw as many as 20 sharks on many of the dives as well as lobster, small fish, corals, and turtles. ([www.mantaray.com](http://www.mantaray.com))

**NEW ZEALAND**

**Dive! Tutukaka, February 2004, Barry Zigas (barryzigas@earthlink.net)**

**Washington, DC.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 25 to 30 Feet. Water: 19 to 21 Celsius, calm, surge. Did 2 dives on Poor Knights Islands. Dive! Tutukaka organized and efficient. Check in very well done, gear rental handled quickly and seamlessly. Boat thoroughly equipped, oxygen, rinse tanks for photo bugs. Very good briefings, very thorough interviews of divers to determine experience and buddy-up singles like

me. Divers left to selves. Great swim throughs in volcanic formations. Rich animal life, clouds of blue MouMou, large eagle and stingrays lolling in sand channels, nudibranches, sponges galore. Kelp meadows for variety, large cod and rockfish. Hot instant soup, coffee, tea, chocolate served on board after dives, hot shower on aft. Long surface interval for lunch, which can be ordered for \$NZ 10 and stowed aboard — sandwich, cookie, fruit. Whales breaching on return, skipper tried to get us in for closer view despite delay in return it caused. Great trip. ([www.diving.co.nz](http://www.diving.co.nz))

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

Some of the world's finest diving is in this land just north of Australia. ... It's a dream destination for live-aboards with unique critters on a big scale: big fish, big coral, big distances, and muck diving. It's also a naturalist's paradise with beautiful topography: mountains covered with snow in July shade, steaming jungles, butterflies as big as birds, walking-stick insects a foot long, and splendid Birds of Paradise. Most rain comes in heavy afternoon downpours. ... Take a week to stay in some of the fine lodges like Karawari or Tari (even though they want top dollar) to visit indigenous, primitive, wild-and-woolly cultures that are among the most interesting on the planet. The people are divided into hundreds of frequently sparring tribes speaking hundreds of languages. Men from the