

having to fly out of Truk at 2:25 am (that's right, 2:25 am)! A stopover in Honolulu makes it bearable. We flew Continental and have no complaints. This is a trip for seasoned divers and well worth the effort and money to make it at least once in your life.

Odyssey, August 2004, Bob & Doris Schaffer, (seamom@earthlink.net), Fallbrook, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 15 to 30 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 Fahrenheit, choppy, surge. This was our fourth trip to Truk and second on *Odyssey*. We encountered bad weather, arrived 2-1/2 days late (because of Typhoon Chaba) and visibility was the worst we've ever experienced. Wrecks still make interesting diving and the collection of soft corals, anemones, tropical fish and small critters is just amazing. Some wrecks are so large that it may take two or more dives to completely see one wreck. *Odyssey* is an outstanding boat; crew is knowledgeable and accommodating and they pretty much leave experienced divers alone but happily provide information and assistance when requested or they think it is necessary or would be welcome. Food is very good, plentiful and well-prepared. Everything is included (soft drinks, beer, wine, Nitrox) which makes the trip a good value and we didn't feel "nickel and dimed" for every little thing. Cabins are very comfortable and everything works. Boat could use more comfortable lounges on the deck and more attention to laundering the blankets and bedspreads between guests, but these are minor inconveniences. *Odyssey* schedules a shark feed on the outer wall of the

lagoon and while we don't particularly like shark feeds and didn't think it was needed since there seemed to be plenty of sharks without the feed, we did participate and got some pretty good video footage. Captain Lenny and First Mate Cara do a great job. Excellent trip. UW Photography Comments: Among the best of any of the live-aboards. Large 3-tier table and charging stations in video lounge with plenty of receptacles in a secure and dry area.

Odyssey, August 2004, Cliff Schaffer (cliff@slmclaw.com), Los Angeles, CA. Vis: 30-60 feet. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 1,000+. Diving on WWII wrecks left after the US attack on Truk in 1944, although they conduct one of the best shark dives I have been involved with. Typhoon resulted in hold up in Tokyo, Guam & Hawaii. Most divers arrived late, but boat efficiently picked all up at airport and motored to boat in lagoon. Excellent crew, ample camera space, loads of common area, large library of CD movies with players in each stateroom, food by buffet could have been a little better. Large staterooms. Dive own profile, dive off boat's platform, which had hot shower and war towels on return. Nitrox included. Visibility was poor with lots of scatter. Ample, but beautiful jellyfish. Wreck, external and internal penetration was good with lots to see. You don't "enjoy" Truk Lagoon — you "experience" or find it "interesting." It would be like going to the Holocaust Museum or Hiroshima and someone asking whether you "enjoyed" it.

SS Thorfinn, February 2004, Harry White (harrywhite@rcn.com) New York, NY. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. Went with a group of 5 Northeast divers and 1 California diver; there were no others on the boat. An excellent, idiosyncratic boat run by an idiosyncratic captain. Rooms were comfortable but smallish and oddly shaped (heads were large); food was decent but not memorable (but who cares — the diving was); attention to customers was excellent. Geezer gas was available albeit at extra charge. Once the dive crew got to know that we were competent (5 of us dive in the Northeast, usually decompression dives, often past 130 feet; the California diver demonstrated that he learned our style fast), limits were not imposed. (www.thorfinn.net)

Truk Aggressor, May 2004, Greg Regnier (gregnier.entract@rcn.com), Chicago, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 65 to 85 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm, no currents. Some of the most interesting diving I have experienced in the 30 plus years. The sense of history and seeing firsthand the tragic toll of war is overwhelming. The *Truk Aggressor* is a very comfortable boat. The accommodations may be a little tight, there's not a lot of clearance on the top bunk, but by boat standards, everything is roomy. This was not a full boat. The corals that encrust the wrecks are incredible. Healthy, diverse, colorful and plentiful just begins to describe the bounty of corals that you find. Add to this an abundance of fish, nudibranchs, tiny,

tiny critters, warm water and no currents and you have the makings of the perfect place to get up close and personal while you observe the sea life. The wrecks are eerily impressive. Silent testimonials to the violence of war and the vulnerability of the men and machines attacked at sea. It is proper to have a solemn respect for the grave sites upon which we are lucky enough to be allowed to dive. The diving is surprisingly easy. The wrecks offer easy penetration and swim throughs for the most part. The *Aggressor* crew conducted comprehensive, detailed pre-dive briefings that provided a history of the boat, the things that we would see, the types of animals that had settled on the wreck and any potentially hazardous areas to avoid. Although there are deep diving opportunities at Truk, the deck of the San Francisco Maru is at 165', you don't have to go deep to enjoy the diving. In fact, there are advantages to not going deep in that you don't have to spend long times on a hang bar decompressing. Most of the dives were no deeper than 110' and you make a natural ascent up the structure of the wreck. Diving on Nitrox also limits the depth of the dives, but offers a nice safety margin for multiple dives. There were a couple of dives where I switched to air and made dives to 145', so there is a degree of flexibility in how you conduct your dives. (www.aggressor.com)

NEW CALEDONIA

Nai'a, July 2004, Rob Mougey Highlands Ranch, CO. Experience: 501-1000 dives Vis: 20 to 80 Feet.

Water: 72 to 78 Fahrenheit, choppy, currents. exploratory trip to New Caledonia. The 24-hour crossing from Vanuatu was rough, severe enough to confine many to their staterooms. some 20-30 ft seas. The *Nai'a* had arranged to have customs agents fly to Lifou, a small island off the east coast of New Caledonia to clear entry. The process was quick, and we were soon diving with a local guide. Great rock formations and abundant fish life. The local dive guide expected follow the leader type diving, our group did our own thing. We moved on to the island of Ouvea that night. We had a local dive guide who knew the area quite well, and we were rewarded with great manta encounters. The current was slack for both dives, so there weren't many sharks. For the next 8 days, the boat was on it's own. Exploratory diving at it's best. We headed north along the east coast of New Caledonia, seeking permission to dive interesting atolls and reefs from the locals. we managed to find some excellent coral bommies. Further north, a small Minke whale hung around while we were diving a pinnacle, and then followed us back to the boat. Several of us jumped in to play with her for an hour. As we continued north, we found excellent dive sites among the many walls and channel. Currents were unpredictable, but when running, provided some amazing big animal encounters. We encountered Grey Reef, Silver Tip and Black Tip sharks numbering in the dozens on each dive. We also typically saw Dogtooth Tuna, schools of barracuda and many other pelagic fish. There were plenty of Sea Fans, hard corals

and reef fish. On a couple of dives, we simply had to ride the 3+ knot current and enjoy the view. The sheer amount of marine life was always surprising. It was obvious that there was no pressure from fishing and schools of Raccoon butterflies the size of dinner plates, elusive Black butterfly fish in schools of 30-40. There were many wrasse species present, including unique species such as the Mystery wrasse, unusual Fairy wrasses and the beautiful Harlequin Tusk. The reefs were extremely healthy, sporting numerous species of Anthias, Angelfish, Puffers, and throngs of Rainbow Runners. It wasn't unusual to see many species of clownfish living in large groups of anemones. There were a few areas of soft coral where tidal currents were strongest. Around the top end of New Caledonia, we stopped at a small island to do some tide pool and reef walking. We watched as small stingrays darted in the shallow water and 18-inch Black Tip Reef shark hunted small fish in the shallows. On the western side of the Island diving was a bit more hit or miss as several rivers emptied towards the west. We arrived in Noumea 10 days after entering the country. For many of us, this was the end of a 23-day journey aboard *Nai'a*, having spent 10 days diving in Vanuatu and then 10 days diving in New Caledonia. Nearly everyone on board was a returning passenger, some with 6 trips. The Fijian crew is still among the best, the dive guides were attentive but not intrusive, and the overall experience was wonderful. Josh and Liz, the Cruise Directors, brought a fresh and enthusiastic faces to *Nai'a*. Rob Barrel was on

the boat as well, providing his trademark dive briefing tagline "Here's the Deal"! We missed Cat, but forgave her for spending time with her new little girl. To dive New Caledonia right requires a live-aboard. To date, there isn't one operating in this country. There are several local dive operators that can provide a flavor of some of the popular sites. Expect to be diving with many Japanese and European divers. Noumea itself is a pretty city, but like all of New Caledonia, it is quite expensive. Many of us flew through Sydney, while others flew through Fiji, which required multiple hops and layovers. (www.naia.com.fj)

NEW ZEALAND

Mazurka, Ocean Blue, November 2003, Glen Gustafson (glen_gustafson@hotmail.com), Sylmar, CA.

Experience: 26-50 dives Vis: 35 to 80 Feet. Water: 51 to 53 Fahrenheit, calm, surge, no Currents. There are other excellent dive operators that go to Poor Knight's but they take 30 or so divers. Ocean Blue is owned by Glenn and Tiana Edney, who live aboard their stout 45' motor sailor, *Mazurka* (which means Dance on the Water). They take 6 divers, so it amounts to is a dive trip aboard a friend's classic yacht, with the owners insisting on doing all the work (including terrific cooking). Both Glenn and Tiana are avid divers, but with their little girl, Samantha on board Tiana spent most of her time minding the boat (she's a licensed skipper), though she did take us on a great dive through a deep arch filled with snoozing pink and blue Maomao and rays

and littered with paper nautilus casings. Samantha spent her time playing in her state room and she was delightful - "I want to do a proper dive" she says. The head can get a little warm from the engine room, but we never stayed in there long enough to care. It's a great boat. Having a sail gives it more stability during the motor trip out and back, something my wife appreciated. Poor Knight's is fantastic diving. An extinct volcano at the edge of the continental shelf, honeycombed with caves and arches and surrounded by marine life from both tropical and temperate waters it almost defies description. We saw a giant salp as well as a bizarre fish I could not identify, which Glenn said had been carried up from a depth of over 800 meters. The area is protected and the marine life is thriving. We were encompassed in a great school of Kawahi did get to see a couple of Bronze Whaler sharks. Plankton was in full bloom, so visibility could be as low as 35' or so. As soon as you made the turn into one of the long, vaulted arches visibility increased dramatically. It's like cave diving but open to the surface, and the gentle surge in the arches seemed pleasant (perhaps because a large school of Blue Maomao were often napping so comfortably above us). The diversity and richness of invertebrate life boggles the mind. Nobody may land on the island as it is a sanctuary where the largest population of Tuatara live (last surviving member of the dinosaur family still having the same skull characteristics). There can be strong currents and deep dropoffs, so we were a little concerned about our level of experience, but they

were skillful at reading (and predicting) conditions so we were always at the right part of the island at the right time to dive. Glenn has 15 year's experience diving the islands and we were in good hands. He is a professional photographer and has set up a large swing-away table just for camera gear. Large plastic rinse tank next to the ladder with clean fresh water for camera gear. (www.oceanblue.co.nz)

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Chertan, May 2004, Bill and Ruth Maki, (Bill.Maki@ttu.edu), Lubbock, TX. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to Fahrenheit, calm, choppy. first-class dive operation run by Rob van Der Loos. He's a wizard at finding them. The winds were a bit blusterous so most of our dives were on the north shore where we did quite a bit of muck diving (many dives at Lauadi). We photographed nudibranchs, ghost pipefish, popcorn shrimp, cuttle fish, lion fish, a coral head teeming with Mandarin fish, and nautilus. We did get to one of the outer reefs where Rob found a pygmy seahorse for us. We were intercepted by a pod of orcas. They rode the bow wave and cruised along under the dinghy, apparently playing in the prop cavitation, for half an hour. For one of our land excursions, one of the crew escorted us to a skull cave. We also visited the Tawali resort, an amazing venture put together by Rob. It was being finished while we were there and some fast boats were on order for day trips to outer reefs as well as muck dives. Popular dive sites are

minutes away. (See www.tawali.com) The *Chertan* is comfortable. However, there were only 3 divers on board. We suspect it could get crowded with a full complement of 12 divers (the boat is on the small side with only 2 on-deck heads). The food prepared by Rob's family members, Peo and Malle, was good. (If you have to overnight in Port Moresby, we recommend the Airways hotel and a visit to PNG Arts.). (www.chertan.com)

Chertan, August 2004 Allan & Barbara Jones (divers@sbcglobal.net), Anaheim, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: 74 to 77 Fahrenheit, calm, choppy, currents, no Currents. This was our 59th foreign dive trip, 7th trip to PNG and our 6th on the *Chertan*. The ship carries up to 12; there were 6 on our trip. *Chertan* is about 70' long and is extra wide for it's length giving it more stability and less rolling. Food was excellent with fresh baked cookies/banana bread in mid-morning and hors d'oeuvres in the afternoon. We had chili mud crab and many nights of fried bananas with ice cream and golden sauce! We were forewarned by telephone that the water was abnormally cold for this time of year, so 3 mil wet suits were required. Our trip was 14 days long and started at the east of Milne Bay. Wahoo, Michelle's, Jason's, Bunama, etc. was not up to usual standards, so we moved to the west side of Milne Bay near the old port of Samuri. Here the diving was excellent with lots of subjects. Best sightings were a rare green and also a red 2 winged pipe fish. Dive whenever you want to. Normally, the

Captain and also cook (Bionic Eyes Molly) dove with you and the members of the crew also went in to spot. We only did 40 dives, due to cool waters. There has been a change in the native control of a site known as Luardi. Normally a 2 Kina charge/diver is given to the local native chief for diving in his back yard. This has been raised to 50/dingy/day by the new land lord, and with the exception of the ship Telita, most other dive boats have quit this site due to the exorbitant charge and the significant fall off of the dive quality over the past 3-4 years. The site adjacent, Decons reef with the huge sea fan, has suffered unknown damage when the full sea cliff collapsed recently into the sea. Several of our trip members stayed at the new land based lodge Tawali. Set into the jungle, overlooking a smooth bay, it will be formally opened in Sept., 04. This lodge has 10 rooms, full dining, diving and land based tours. It has two day boats and will also set up trips in conjunction with *Chertan*. Contact the *Chertan* or Oceanic web sites for more details. Crew is experienced camera handlers; never had any problems. You can service your camera in the dining area or up stairs on a large camera table. If asked, the crew will move your camera up stairs for you. Two fresh water rinse tanks are available for cameras.

MV Golden Dawn, December 2003, LeRoy Anderson (leroya@vmh.com) Salt Lake City, UT. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm, currents. My second trip to Papua New Guinea, and my first to the Eastern Fields/Portlock Reefs on

the *MV Golden Dawn*. The boat is run very well, the dive operation, food, and physical structure of the boat was excellent. The captain, Craig DeWitt, is interested in providing "adventure diving," some of which is exploratory, as opposed to running "milk run" itineraries. Opportunity was provided for Nitrox or rebreather diving on the Draeger Atlantis rebreather. This destination offered the finest in coral reef/pelagic combinations. Swarms of all types of reef fish, fabulous coral, including table coral and fans as big as barn doors, schools of jacks, rainbow runners, bluefin trevalley, tuna, barracuda, and more big sharks, especially silvertips than I could deal with. Carl's Ultimate Reef, along with Susie's Bommie were the highlights of the trip. See the somewhat dated Undercurrent article on the *Golden Dawn*. It is still an accurate reflection of the experience and provides more detail than this report can. Rebreathers added adventure, education, and closer/more intimate encounters with the various fish. If you love open ocean virgin reefs/walls/pinnacles in the most remote location imaginable, this is the place. (www.mvgoldendawn.com)

Paradise Sport, January 2004, Mario Mizrahi (mmizrahi@avantel.net) Mexico, MX. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 10 to 100 Feet. Water: 87 to 89 F, calm, no currents. Australian boat belonging to Mike Ball Diving Expeditions. The rooms are huge with plenty of space for baggage, clothing and extras that one might bring (I took a standard room out of 4 categories that go from suites to budget). So is the