

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, butterfly 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

stone age, covered with colored mud, mingle in airports with business people in suits and ties. ... Port Moresby is an unsafe city, although the big hotels are fine; but use Moresby for changing planes and daytime shopping at the superb giant crafts market. ... If you have to lay over in Port Moresby, consider Loloata Island Resort, a diver's alternative 25 minutes from the airport. ... Malaria prophylaxis is still essential. English and Pidgin English (helicopter: "Mixmaster blong Jesus") is spoken.

**Loloata Island Resort, December 2003, LeRoy Anderson (leroya@vmh.com) Salt Lake City, UT.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 70 Feet. Water: 75 to 79 F, calm, choppy. My second trip to Loloata Resort. Dik Knight has put together a much better option for over nighting in the Port Moresby area while waiting for live-aboard trips or flights, international or local. No malaria or dengue fever worries, as the island is totally dry with no mosquitoes. The accommodations are very pleasant, with air conditioning, fans, showers, and nice verandahs with ocean and mangrove views. The dining is buffet style, and is quite good, though not gourmet. Two boat dive trips per day, at 8am and 2pm, along with an optional night dive. The boat is comfortable and adequate for the job, and the dive guides are enthusiastic. Warm fresh water rinse on the boat after your dives. Though windy, it did quiet down enough for some diving at some outer, more unprotected loca-

tions. The "Pai II" is an intentionally sunk wreck in sixty feet offering soft coral encrustations, many lionfish, hard coral fans, ornate ghost pipefish, and a fabulous school of briefcase sized snappers circling about the mast. "Susie's Bommie" is a small towered pinnacle rising from about 120 ft. to a circular reeftop at forty feet. Despite calm currents, it is covered by multiple types of healthy hard and soft corals, smothered by purple and golden anthias, with the reef top populated by 100 sweetlips. Also smaller schools of Moorish idols and batfish, allowing fine photographic opportunities. A bommie of glorious color and beauty. "The Pumkin Patches are several bommies in close proximity resulting in dramatic underwater canyons and overhangs. Fans about ten by ten feet impressed me, along with waves of thousands of mid sized fluorescent reef fish — fusiliers, rainbow runners — coming up from the abyssal depths and swarming over the divers, rising from the canyons to the reef tops swarming with anthias, sweetlips and napoleon wrasse. A moment of staggering hallucinatory beauty. As a bonus, we found a yellow rhinopias scorpionfish towards the end of the dive. A few days later, the current was down, visibility was poor, the soft corals had gone into hiding, and there were few fish, showing how conditions impact the same site from one dive to the next. During the day, Lion Island revealed poor visibility, with little to see. However, a night dive was truly magical, with fabulous muck diving in about twenty feet of water. Creatures included: sphere crabs, hairy tarantula (fairy?) crabs,

anemones in the act of capturing small fish, nocturnal cowfish, bioluminescent snake and oblong jellyfish, plesthobranchs, nudibranchs, hermit crabs, mini octopi, cuttlefish, ornate ghost pipefish, bubble tailed pipefish, groups of bright red and white cleaner shrimp, mantis shrimp, siphons, pillow starfish, sleeping parrotfish, common cowries, and a small wreck festooned in brilliantly colored encrusting corals and bright soft corals. All on one dive, thanks to the expert help of my dive guide, Franco. PNG diving is as good as it gets. ([www.loloata.com](http://www.loloata.com))

**Walindi Plantation, May 2004, Edward Leibowitz, Jersey City, NJ.**

Experience: 251- 500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. The best dive I did was English Shoals. Saw two blacktip sharks on this dive. Corals are in excellent shape as good as Fiji, and possibly better. Saw mostly smaller fish. Excellent for macro. There is a type coral there that can penetrate your wetsuit if you touch it. I felt the diving in PNG was not as good as Yap or Palau, considering the distance and cost to get there. Dive operation was well run. Food was good. Get to the buffet dinner as soon as it is served, since they put out all the food at once and run out of it quickly. Lunch was served on the boat after the second dive. Lunch generally consisted of food from the previous evening's dinner. I enjoyed my week of diving at Walindi. Boat trips were usually one hour to dive sites. Boat usually returned to resort between 3PM and 4PM. My only complaint with the resort was the way they bill you for

supplemental charges incurred at the resort, i.e., drinks, night dive, etc. If you use your credit card to pay for these charges a fee is added. My supplemental bill came to \$121. However my credit card bill for these charges totaled \$136. When I protested to the credit card company they told me that I signed for this amount. My advice pay supplemental charges in cash. ([www.walindi.com](http://www.walindi.com))

## PHILIPPINES

Major dive areas are concentrated around Batangas, Mindoro, Palawan, and the Visayas. ... The reefs here are among the most diverse in the world, supporting more than 2,000 species of fish (the Great Barrier Reef, by comparison, supports around 1,500), and divers find inexpensive accommodations and diversings, splended critters, and, while plenty of divers from other countries, few Americans.

**Action Divers, Porto Fino, November 2003, Lee Thé, Palo Alto, CA.** Water temp high 70s; waves relatively calm; current varied from none to moderate. Air temp high 70s-high 80s; 90%+ humidity. Some showers, but mainly sunny. 14 dives mainly between La Laguna Point and Escarceo Point, plus two on Verde Island's East Point.walls, slopes, coral gardens. Action Divers ([www.actiondivers.com](http://www.actiondivers.com)) owner Roscoe Thompson answers email. Portofino resort 50 yards away. Second trip to Puerto Galera. 10 day trip —\$2,170 (including the \$950 airfare, 16 dives,

transfers, hotels, meals, tips, trinkets, an all-day excursion, water taxis). Did it as a group under the auspices of Chris Bradford, a Sacramento-based diver/photographer. Action Divers meets you just outside customs and puts you on a van to the boat in Batangas that takes you on hour crossing to the Portofino hotel, a few doors north of Action Divers. The boats are open and have wide dual outriggers. Puerto Galera/Sabang dive resort region is on a small peninsula on the north end of eastern Mindoro Island, with jungle occupying the middle of the island. The main source of income is divers so they don't cotton to outsiders from other parts of the Phillippines messing with their source of income. Never felt the least sense of danger. We only got a handful of mosquito bites. No no-see-ums, no gnats, no biting flies. Our suite had screens but we kept the doors to the patio. The viz 40-80 ft. Didn't see many big fish, no sharks, but the abundance and variety of smaller critters made up for that. Starry Eel, schools of juvenile striped catfish, striped anglerfish, painted flutemouth, pygmy seahorse, lionfish, scorpionfish, half-spotted gurnard, coral cod, scalefin anthias (clouds of them), Moorish idol, clown triggerfish, ornate butterflyfish, common clownfish, jacks, royal angelfish, jewel-like little gobies, threadfin hawk fish, long-finned batfish (yard-high paper-thin juvenile as well as adult), humphead bannerfish, blotcheye blue sea squirt, soft tree corals, large barrel sponges, gorgonias, alabaster sea cucumber, crinoids, numerous nudibranchs, big hermit crab (*dardanus* species), cleaner shrimp, mantis shrimp,

sea pen, huge variety of hard and soft corals, banded sea snake (five foot adult). Best diving was off Verde Island', an hour from Sabang. I saw more nudibranchs on two dives than in fifty I'd done elsewhere. Currents, so you watch the fish ahead of you and see how they're swimming. Wall started at 10 ft. and went into the abyss — even from 120 ft. down I couldn't see bottom. Had lunch on the beach. Every boat had awnings. Dove wrecks — one is right off Sabang a snap for night diving. The wrecks were unspectacular but some swimthroughs and critters in the reefs and the sandy flats. Action Divers is one of dozens of dive operators here. They go out at 9am, noon, and 3pm, returning between each dive. Night dives at 6pm if they have four divers. \$20/dive and \$25 for night dives. Verde Island is \$60 (including lunch) for the two dives. The boat for Verde Island had a head in the stern (an open-topped plywood outhouse with a straight shot into the sea from your toilet seat). You rig your own BC/ regulator/ tank. They put it on the boat. When you get back you rinse your stuff in the two rinse tanks on the premises, use their fresh water shower, and put on a new tank. You can leave all your dive gear for the duration of your stay. Divemaster's role was safety and overall guidance. They did some naturalist stuff. The boats lacked oxygen or radios, but they rarely went far. Nearest recompression chamber is in Manila! The last time a couple of Korean divers got caught in the serious channel currents and went back to Batangas the hard way — one died. On two dives in fairly strong currents and middling viz we separated from the

group. One time we headed for the shallows, but the divemaster was quite worried because if we'd headed the other way the Batangas Express current would have whipped us away. The other was on a deep dive, again in strong current and weak viz, and we wound up keeping each other company for about twenty minutes on the surface waving our safety sausages until another diver operator's boat picked us up and delivered us to our boat, which had apparently gone the wrong way to try to find us. Bring safety sausages, air horns and whistles too. Boat traffic is none-too-careful about divers, so be sure you can get their attention. Wear a full wetsuit. One person in a shorty got jellyfish burns down one arm. I had a problem with my AirII (caused by my not having had my Stage I reg serviced before the trip, actually) and Action Divers loaned me an octopus to use. It took us 10 minutes to walk from the Portofino to Sabang. There was a small convenience store nearby where we could get bottled water and goodies. The resorts' tapwater is safe to drink — just not tasty. Much of the shore is iron-shore. When the tide's out you can go tidepooling. Shore diving is problematic because of all the boats coming in. At other locations it would probably be easy. Asia Divers, in cahoots with the El Galleon resort ([www.asiadivers.com](http://www.asiadivers.com)) is a lot bigger than Action Divers and have a quay. The Portofino was nice. No elevator, so we did have to hoof it to our third floor suite. Satellite TV, AC in the bedroom, western toilet, decent shower, tile floors and lots of places to hang stuff. The restaurant overlooks the beach. Suite had a living room, kitchen,

breakfast nook, TV room, bedroom, bathroom, patio — spacious by any standards, with a nice view north toward Batangas from the patio. We had electricity most of the time. Outlets are nonpolarized two prong outlets, some 110v, others 220v. Day trips to Tamaraw Falls and the Ponderosa Golf Course vista (at 1,800 feet elevation), for \$18 each including lunch and soft drinks. Falls are touristy (though we did spy some monkeys far off), but you drive farther to do an easy hike to the Hidden Paradise swimming hole, with natural waterslide. Locals Noel and Marc were our guides; [sherry1\\_ds@hotmail.com](mailto:sherry1_ds@hotmail.com). Americans are a small minority, but they like us because we're amiable, follow orders, speak English...and tip. The local food is quite palatable to American tastes — too much so. The restaurants tone down the spiciness to accommodate our palates unless you tell them to season things local style. That'll wake up your tastebuds! ([www.actiondivers.com](http://www.actiondivers.com))

**Atlantis Dive Resort, Dumaguete, December 2003, William Deertz ([wdeertz@centrin.net.id](mailto:wdeertz@centrin.net.id)) Jakarta.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 75 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, calm. Coastal diving along Dauin, Oriental Negros was spotty at best. Limited hard corals with that which remained showing evidence of damage from fisherman dragging their traps over the reef. The black volcanic sand made visibility also spotty if the waves kicked up. Despite this there was a wide variety of small critters such as frog fish, pipefish, crocodile fish, etc. The better diving was around Apo

Island which is about a 45 minute boat ride from the resort. White coral sand resulted in consistently better visibility around Apo Island compared to the coastal dives. Soft corals were in abundance and generally in good health, hard corals were better than the coastal sites but still not prolific. Good variety of interesting critters but limited pelagics, no sharks, mantas, etc, but a few turtles. Resort is very comfortable and the chef (Jake) at the resort can whip up some very good dishes. The resort is somewhat secluded (there are only a few resorts in the vicinity) so you can walk the beach without being hassled from hawkers. Overall a very pleasant trip but this was a family trip over X-mas with a few days of diving. If your passing through the area its definitely worth a visit, however, the diving quality doesn't justify this as a diving destination by itself (there are too many other better locations in the region). But I didn't see much in terms of a dedicated camera room. Also the boats didn't really have any sort of camera table and a rinse tank was limited. ([www.atlantishotel.com](http://www.atlantishotel.com))

**Atlantis Beach Resort, April 2004, John Crossley (jcrossle@csufresno.edu), Fresno, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 90 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 Fahrenheit, calm. Dumaguete is a nice town accessible directly from flights from Manila. The Atlantis resort is a 30 minute ride south of the airport. Very nice resort in a grove of palm trees, with 35 comfortable air conditioned rooms, a good pool, and an excellent restaurant with an American Chef (Jake from New York) who finds

out what you like and then make it the way you like it. Breakfast starts it off with a big buffet with many western and Asian choices. The Atlantis dive operation is professional and well organized, and they know how to treat photographers. The two wooden pangas can carry 10 to 12 divers, but we never had more than six with our two guides. Apo Island trips are arranged every couple of days; It's a 90 minutes ride but it has nice soft corals when the current is flowing, plus lots of tropical fish, a few turtles, sea snakes, and good visibility., I thought the best diving was at the shallow sites along the black sand beach close to the resort. Two small wrecks have a variety of macro critters including ghost pipefish, nudibranchs, lionfish, banded pipefish, decorator crabs, gobies, shrimps, frog fish, dragonettes, sand dollars. We saw several Pegasus sea moths on several dives too, plus juvenile cuttlefish, snake eels, and other macro critters. There was also a Mandarin fish dive at dusk, but we barely saw three of them.

**Club Ocelaris, April 2004, George A. Bogard (awesomei@sbcglobal.net), Rockwall, TX.** This is my third visit to Club O and as always it was excellent. The boat captain and his sons were great. The reefs are in good shape and teeming with marine life, some exotic.

**Kunie Scuba Center, Isle of Pines, February 2004, David Benson (dave.ben@adelphia.net), Colorado Springs, CO.** Vis: 50 feet. Water 78-80 F. Dives logged: 892. I asked for a manta. Lionel Bonnet, owner, put me four feet under mantas at a cleaner sta-

tion. I asked for leopard shark and he put me three feet from one. Wonderful people above and below water. For those who want the height of luxury go to the Meridisa Hotel. Others will be comfortable and eat well at Kodjeue. Ask for AC if you want to stay cool. ([www.kunie-scuba.com](http://www.kunie-scuba.com))

**Malapascua Exotic Beach Resort, July 2004, John Crossley (jcrossle@csufresno.edu), Fresno, CA.**

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Water: 82 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm, choppy, currents, no currents. On the northern tip of the island of Cebu, it's a three hour ride from Cebu (the resort can arrange the transfer), then a 40 minute boat ride out to Malapascua island. My package for lodging, food, and three dives a day was \$100 per day. The air conditioned rooms were Spartan but clean, and have complete bathrooms. Food was surprisingly good and you order off a menu with plenty of choices. If you want variety, the Maldito Bar and Grill is a 10 minute walk down the beach. They have pool tables, friendly staff, and excellent pizzas and good steaks. Diving is from a couple of wooden bancas and there were usually just three or four divers on a boat that would hold many more. The crew was excellent at critter spotting. Our longest boat ride was about an hour to Gato Island where we had nice soft corals and sea horses, nudibranchs, a Spanish dancer, and a couple pygmy seahorses. Another distant trip to Monad Shoals to see Thresher sharks, which we saw on both trip. The highlight of Malapascua was the macro critters, offshore from the resort or a short boat

ride away. One dusk dive, we had numerous mating Mandarin fish who were pretty cooperative for photos. The "house reef" should have been named "Frogfish City" as there must have been at least ten and crabs and shrimps, squid, seahorses, more pygmy seahorses, lion fish, sea snakes, a couple large mantas, and a flamboyant cuttlefish. Visibility ranged from 25 feet on the muck-critter dives to 90 feet I purchased a 5 gallon jug of fresh water for under \$2 and created my own rinse tank in an extra trash can. I was lucky with the weather except for two days lost to a big storm. Better to go in June or earlier. ([www.malapascua.net](http://www.malapascua.net))

**Planet Dive, August 2004, Paul Osmond (marriard@deepseaimages.com), Weston, FL.**

Experience: Over 1000 dives Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 Fahrenheit, calm, no currents. My second visit to Planet Dive. Anilao is popular with local divers as it is 3 hours from Manila and the diving is excellent. As Planet Dive is not near anywhere else (apart from other dive resorts), you will buy a package which includes accommodation, unlimited shore diving and all meals. Airport transfer is cheap and you will pay for boat diving with deals available for buying a # of dives up front. Pre-book 2-3 dives on the boat per day and doing 2-3 dives a day on the house reef. Planet Dive picked me up in a van at the airport even though I got in after midnight and drove me out to the resort — we didn't arrive til after 4am but I was in the water at 7:30am. At the end of my stay they also took me

back to the airport. Huts range from basic with fan cooled open air rooms to staying in air conditioned apartments. Basic rooms have a bed, a mattress, a pillow, a small table, a shower/bathroom area, great views and nothing else. Hardcore divers wont mind the basic accommodations as you will be tired from diving anyway. More casual divers may want to upgrade. All rooms have enough electrical outlets for charging batteries/running laptops. The resort is built into a hill and has a lot of steep, uneven (and sometimes loose) stairs. Food is all inclusive. plentiful and a choice of meat and vegetable meals. If you are there more than a few days it starts to get real old. Kitchen staff is friendly and go out of there way to make you happy. The shore dive in front of the resort is fantastic. Entry is over a rocky beach so have a sturdy pair of dive boots. A reef runs from 10' to about 80' deep off shore and includes a barge covered in giant clams and anemone fish at one end and twin rock mounds at the other end with Batfish and larger fish at the other. Crinoids are everywhere and the night dives fantastic. You could dive it all day without getting bored and I would except there is other fabulous diving to be had here. Unlimited shore diving is included. Boat diving is done off bangkas - which are basically large outrigger canoes powered by old truck diesel engines. Alfie has been my DM for both trips here and is phenomenal. Sites are varied and offer great coral formations and a depth of fish and other marine life. Sombero Island sites are the best if the seas allow you to cross to them. Current are stronger here on a

coral wall, and white-tip and black-tip sharks are regularly seen here along with the occasional eagle ray and turtle. Top of the reef for a soft coral safety stop with thousands of anthias. West sites are calmer with spectacular walls, lots of barracuda and chance to see all three colors phases of ribbon eels. Must do site for macro photographers is 'Basura' which translates into 'Trash'. Snake eels, sea horses, strange nudibranchs, rare octopus, flatheads, scorpionfish, shrimpfish schools and clown frogfish Perhaps not enough big life for some but , fish and macro photo subjects are plentiful and the coral reefs are healthy and thick. Plentiful sinks for washing your gear at the resort and they'll let you keep your equipment and charge batteries in the bar area (which avoids carting gear up and down the stairs).  
([www.planetdive.net](http://www.planetdive.net))

## VANUATU

East of Australia and north of New Zealand, Vanuatu offers the world's largest air-accessible wreck, the *President Coolidge*, a 640-foot ocean liner converted into a troop ship, is a beach dive on Espiritu Santo. It's mainly for advanced divers, starting at 70 feet and going down to 250. . . . Water temperatures in February hit the mid 80s and in September may drop as low as 70. . . . Don't miss the side trip to Tanna Island to visit the active volcano, dugongs, and Melanesian villagers living according to ancient customs. . . . Other side trips

include the island of Pentecost in April to early June to see the land divers leap head-first from 70-foot towers with nothing but vines tied around their ankles.

**Hideaway Island, February 2004, David Benson (dave.ben@adelphia.net), Colorado Springs, CO.** Vis: to 50 feet. Water: 86 F. Dives logged: 892. They advertise the "underwater post office", but that can be overlooked. Some very good diving. All on air, short boat rides to sites in good condition. Dive shop will go above and beyond to show you what you want. Accommodations for every level from dorms to bungalows.  
([www.hideaway.com.vu](http://www.hideaway.com.vu))

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## Central & Western Pacific Live-Aboards

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## AUSTRALIA

**Down Under Dive, March 2004, Jeffrey Anderson (anderson145@earthlink.net) Laporte, IN.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 82 F, calm, choppy, surge. I am very new to the sport having been certified only months before this trip. Down Under Dive was recommended by a friend who dove with them weeks before I went. The boat leaves from Cairns Marina. They offer a 3 day/2 night all inclusive package (minus alcohol/soft drinks) for \$400 Aussie. I had a flexible schedule and decided to stay an extra night which they gave me for \$100 Aussie (\$50

savings). Pretty cheap for 14 dives, meals, rental gear, and a bed. The accommodations were small and I shared a room w/ 2 other divers. Didn't spend much time in the room though. Dive times were 6:30, 10:00, 3:00, 6:30. The only real restrictions were 30 min. at 30 ft for the night dives. Seemed reasonable to me though. Hot buffet breakfast, hot buffet lunch, and sit down served dinner. The food was actually pretty darn good. After I dive I'll eat just about anything. Very spacious galley w/ small bar. With very little to compare it to, I thought the diving was great. Nothing very deep though. I pretty much stayed between 30-50 ft all the time. The viz was cloudy at times but for the most part it was at least 60 ft. Very warm water and only used a wetsuit the 1st dive. Very knowledgeable and helpful staff of 8 or so. ([www.downunderdive.com.au](http://www.downunderdive.com.au))

**M/V Diversity, December 2003, Pat Aderman (pat\_aderman@juno.com) Naperville, IL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents, no currents. Great boat with clean and comfortable accommodations, gourmet food and helpful and friendly crew. This is a fast boat that makes the run to Osprey Reef on every trip. This offers much better sites than the GBR. While you cannot totally dive your own profile the crew makes every effort to accommodate everyone's interests. This boat is more expensive than others in the area but worth the difference. The atmosphere is more like being on a private yacht than a dive boat. Spend at least one night in Port Douglas. Don't miss