

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

living/dining room with space for 22 divers plus crew, with 3 TV's, VCR, DVD, etc. Food in general was good but meat was not, due to PNG standards. This is a primitive country with few luxuries. People are very friendly and often we had canoes alongside selling us fish and vegetables in exchange for flour or rice. We visited 3 villages and got some souvenirs. Children came aboard once to sing PNG songs to us. Diving is world class and especially muck diving. I like to see big fish and pelagics and there was almost none here, but the small critters more than make up the trip for you. We saw nudibranchs of all shapes and colors, many different lionfishes, clownfishes, harlequin ghost pipefish, seahorses, cowrie shells, crystal shrimp, banded coral shrimp, morays, lobsters, starfish, scorpionfish, striped catfish, helmet gurnard, twinstar lionfish, demon stinger, blue eyed stingfish, titan triggerfish, cuttlefish. We saw at Potato Ridge a lacy scorpionfish (rhynopia) and at Ayer's Rock 2 blue ribbon eels. Also 2 mobulas, cockatoo waspfish, razorfishes, crocodilefish, ocellated & freycinet's epaulette sharks, blue spotted fantail ray, clown triggerfish and hundreds more species. It is a fantastic place to dive, even with no pelagics. Large facilities for this with fresh water, air hoses, etc. (www.mikeball.com)

Star Dancer, July 2003, Barbara and Irwin Beitch, Cheshire, CT. (divers for about 14 years, over 200 dives). Ten days of diving with Peter Hughes' *Star Dancer*, three days at Ambua Lodge in the Southern

Highlands, an overnight at Loloata Dive Resort. Our travel agent was Jen Darby (jen@papuanewguinea.com), who arranged the entire trip for us. She is personable, reliable, efficient, and quite knowledgeable — she has traveled extensively in PNG and knows what is great for middle-aged travelers like us. In Port Moresby we had a lay-over of a few hours at the Airways Hotel. We stayed at the other, the Gateway, on our way back home; both have pleasant restaurants and are clean, attractive and safe. We spent one delightful night at Walindi Plantation; their staff met us at the airport, where we met six others who would be on *Dancer* with us. A nice buffet dinner, clean and adequate accommodations, well-kept grounds. Altogether a well-run operation. After dinner entertainment — a “sing-sing” by the local village children — was delightful. Walindi divemaster Dale took us on a two-tank dive, to Vanessa's Reef and Susan's Reef — both pristine. The weather was perfect, and the reefs were in great shape. They cleaned our gear and transferred it to the *Star Dancer* for us; we did not have to lift a finger. Annie was the divemaster and is incredibly knowledgeable about fish and invertebrate behavior and enhanced our enjoyment of the 32 dives we did over a 10-day period. The crew was welcoming, and the staff members went out of their way for us. We stayed in stateroom number 3, which was quite nice. We appreciated the king-sized bed facing a huge window, as well as ample storage space and a spacious private bathroom with tub and shower. Jayne was the cook on loan from the FeBrina,

as was our captain, Alan — both are real characters! The food all week was creative, varied, and delicious. There were only 9 passengers though the capacity is 16. With 12 crew members we received a lot of individual attention. We stayed in Kimbe Bay for a few days, diving several reef then crossed to Father's Reef. It was a rather rough crossing, which began while we were having dinner. The galley chairs tip backward. One of us fell, with an impact to the back of the head. The crew promptly offered an ice pack. Dive next morning at Jackie's Knob was beautiful. Friendly schools of batfish, an exciting dolphin snorkel. The next dive was Shaggy's Reef. They do a modified shark feed, lowering a big bait box filled with fish parts, with holes all around the outside of the box to bring them in with the scents of fish juices. Silvertips, white-tipped reef sharks, and some greys came by, along with unicornfish, titan triggerfish, and trevallies, plus numerous smaller species. es, we saw lots of fishes that we would not otherwise have seen, but not in their “natural” setting. We're acutely aware of differences in fish behavior due to human impact. On the other hand, we appreciate the argument that it is important to educate people, especially divers, about sharks. The other dive sites at Fathers included The Arch (especially cool, at 110 feet), muck dive at 10 feet: white pygmy seahorses, lots of diverse shrimp, and immature crabs, but we aren't really 100% sold on muck diving, yet. Huge, healthy anemones with their varied resident anemonefish abounded on almost every dive. Night diving was available almost

every night. Went on to the Witu islands and dived Crater (very cool location, muck diving with mandarin fish, juvenile hot lips, courting pipefish, four-eyed leaf fish, crab-eyed goby, and on and on), Swamp Tinny (with a significant current — we stayed in groups of two guest divers plus a crew member — with no moorings it was sort of a drift dive from the mother ship), Barney's Reef (cuttlefish, turtles, jack schools, and so on), and Dickie's Place, another muck dive, on which we saw some cool nudibranchs, unusual clownfishes, and for the first time some litter. Dickie came aboard for a couple of days; he is an Aussie expatriate and quite a character. We returned to Kimbe Bay and dived a site that was packed with titan triggerfish guarding their nests — quite an obstacle course — and very murky because our new replacement captain, after Alan had to leave for another obligation, had stirred up the bottom. We were relieved to find and get back on the boat with only a bite on one of my fins! Stowed our dive gear and most of our other luggage in Port Moresby with Trans Niugini Tours — for a few days, and then on to Mt. Hagen, a bustling sprawl of a town about a mile above sea level. Overnights at the Highlander Hotel, apparently the classiest place in town.; the X-ray machine in POM was broken. At best, all the “security agents” ever did was to give the outside of our carry-on luggage a cursory feel. In those airports where the X-ray machine was working, they were not interested in inspecting our 47 rolls of film, which they gladly passed around, avoiding having them irradiated. Flight to Ambua

Lodge. We had three wonderful days there, taking nature walks through the rain forest, looking for rare birds of paradise, and visiting three villages in the valley. We learned about the incredible art of wig-making, about their spirit dances, and they are living in basically the same way as their ancestors did thousands of years lived. The lodge — a truly luxurious and exotic wilderness resort — was beautiful. Our accommodations in our own attractive hut with a panoramic view of the mountains and valley were outstanding, and the food, served in the magnificent lodge, was tasty and imaginative. It took two planes to get back to the capital city of Port Moresby, where we were transferred to Loloata Resort to overnight. The staff was not among the most friendly we had met, the food was uninspired, and the accommodations were very far away from everything else, reached by a somewhat littered footpath. We vegged out there until the next afternoon, poking around looking for tree kangaroos, wallabies and other exotic island wildlife. (www.peterhughes.com)

Star Dancer, Sept/Oct 2003, Lloyd Schwengel (swendiver@aol.com) Brea, CA. Vis: 60-150 ft. Water: 84-85 F. Dives logged: 622. Dive restrictions enforced: dive computer with no deco. Dives logged: 622. Even though PNG is a little difficult to get to, long flights and at least one layover, it is more than worth the effort. The best all around diving I have experienced. Not as much soft coral as Fiji but plenty. Not as much hard coral as Australia but very nice. Not as many big animals as Palau or Yap but enough. There were more

schools of fish the anywhere I've been, and all sorts of small critters. The *Star Dancer* has nice rooms with private baths in all, and picture windows in most. The usual Peter Hughes Diving niceties, coffee delivered in the am, turned down bed and chocolates in the pm, and those warm towels after every dive. The meals were good with plenty to eat. I didn't gain or lose weight on this trip. Staff was friendly and helpful, even assisting some with fins. You were pretty much left to your own while diving with a divemaster nearby pointing out things you might miss like long tail ghost pipefish. Dive briefings were informative pointing out what you might see and any potential problem areas. They were kept brief with a map provided on most sites. The variety of fish and other animals was outstanding. There were few big things, like mantas or sharks. There were big schools of barracuda, jacks, and other fish. We did one shark dive with several white tip reefs and a large bull shark. There were lots of unusual stuff like cockatoo waspfish, pipefish, nudi's alone, blue ribbon eels, and everything between. This trip visited the Witu islands, then back to Kimbe Bay, starting and ending at Walindi Plantation. Great photo ops so bring whatever equipment you have. If you go there, don't miss visiting some of the outlying areas. We did three days at Ambua Lodge in the Southern Highlands. Great nature hikes, Birds of Paradise, and amazing people to visit. At Ambua you visit the Huli Wigman a friendly and colorful bunch. There are many other all over PNG. Allow yourself as much time as possible, the three days we spent was ot near enough. The

only negatives we encountered: usually having to return to Port Moresby, enroute to any other location with frequent layovers. The other is the mosquitoes and malaria. Take plenty of Deet and use it. Avoid Lariam at all costs. The mosquitoes are not a problem in the highlands or on the *Star Dancer*. Port Moresby is reportedly unsafe because of crime. Taking reasonable precautions helps. We had no problems but we stayed with our guide and didn't venture out alone. We used South Pacific Is. Travel for our arraignments and Donna did a great job with Niugini Tours. A great vacation place and the best all-around diving I have seen.

Star Dancer, April 2004, Timothy Smith (timothywaynesmith@yahoo.com) Richardson, TX.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, surge. I would not recommend flying the Continental Connections that are pushed via Peter Hughes' Travel agent. It did save us money, but not time. Buy travel insurance. When you are on the layover in Port Moresby — call the Airways Hotel at 3245200. They have a representative at the airport near the domestic rental car area. You get a free shuttle to a clean/safe hotel that overlooks the airport. They have a great seafood buffet, and pool. We ate and drank on an 8 hour layover that cost us a total of \$50 for two people. The diving was incredible. From great bommie dives, to muck diving. The reef life and little critters had you begging for more. I did all 27 dives, and was totally water logged by the end of the trip. I only had one dive under an hour. One of our

muck dives near Dickie's place was 90 minutes long, and absolutely great. We did one great drift dive "Swamp Tinny," that had great overall life including turtles and spotted eagle rays. Current ropes, from the boat to the reef were great. The *Star Dancer* is showing it's age, and needs some work in the rooms. They are starting a renovation, little by little, but they should have used the off season to fix simple things. Some cabins had hot water, others didn't. Wallpaper was peeling, and mold was present. Water pressure was horrible. The regular captain and cook went off on the *Febrina* last minute to do some exploratory diving. This left us with the rather unsociable, and grumpy captain Jacques. He contracted malaria during the trip, and was hardly seen. A back up captain should have been brought in. He also allowed smoking freely in the open areas of the boat. He was not very accommodating in moving between dive sites. The first half of the trip was in the Witu Islands, then the second half on dive sites that Walindi went to in Kimbe Bay. We had a couple on the boat who were on their second week aboard, and they did the same exact itinerary except for one dive site. The lack of moving may have been more due to the designed route to save fuel. The food was prepared great — Chef Kristi did what she could with the food that was on the boat. She came in just a couple of days before this trip and had a hard time restocking. We ate either chicken, beef, or both at all meals except breakfast. There was not one seafood meal served the whole week. Dive Instructor Josie did an outstanding job. Jonah, and Patrick did

great with finding critters too. The service was great, but the condition of the boat, the lack of different dive sites, and the limited diet would prevent me from paying full price for the trip. This is the third live aboard I have been on of Peter's, and did not find this one comparable to the others. We did get to stay at Walindi the last night. Spend the money for the Oceanfront rooms. Ask for the Blue Bottle water to save you \$'s vs. bottled water. The trip to the hot springs is worth the \$25.00! They were offering \$995.00/week walk on's while we were there.

Star Dancer, Walindi, May 2004, Peter J. Maerz (peterj@wlrn.org) Hollywood, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 90 Feet. Water: 84 to 88 F, calm. Booked with Peter Hughes Diving in Miami. Michelle, Jeff first rate, professional. Brought double almost everything: computer, reg, booties, mask. Visited a travel clinic for inoculations and essential Malaria prophylaxis. Arrived Cairns, Australia 11:30 pm local time,. Spent one day touring lovely Kuranda in Queensland flew Air Niugini to Port Moresby. Immigration and customs a snap. Met just outside the door by Airways rep. Next day, flew POM to Kavieng, stayed at Malagan Beach Resort. A bit run down and mediocre food, but nice setting and very quiet. *Star Dancer* is a great live-aboard. Had cabin 3a, forward, portside. Firm, comfortable queen bed, facing large picture window. Loads of storage space, large bathroom with tub/shower. U.S. style, 110-volt outlet on wall with additional plugs on reading lights mounted over

bed. Dive Deck: Sturdy aluminum benches with built-in tank holders. Typical for live-aboards: once gear set up, it stays on tank, filled immediately by whips after each dive. Webbed plastic bucket for booties, masks, lights, etc. under each bench. Two large, solid rinse tanks for wetsuits and gear. One large tank for cameras only. Plenty of space for hanging wetsuits. Well-sheltered, large, two-tiered, carpeted camera table with pressurized air hose. Sheltered charging station: one tier for 220 volt, one for 110. Two, heavy-flowing, hot water showers on deck, towels fresh from the dryer after every dive. Gear thoroughly rinsed by crew at end of each day. Lido deck (above dive/stateroom deck): Large indoor salon/dining room, lined with windows. Large TV monitor, VCR, stereo with surround speakers, plenty of reference ID books. Top, lounge deck: half canopied with two large net hammocks and chaise lounges. 6:30-1st dive. 8:00-Hot breakfast. 9:30-2nd dive. 11:30- 3rd dive. 1:00pm-Lunch. 3:30-4th dive. 6:30-5th (night) dive. 8:00- Dinner. C-cards and DAN card carefully scrutinized. No one looked at a log book. Once you've signed your life away in the release, you're expected to be able to make your own decisions and be responsible for your own profile. Two excellent guide/instructors always in the water (and always finding the good stuff). You must record your tank pressure, O2 percentage if on Nitrox, and depth on a clipboard. Excellent briefings, though pretty much carbon copy sites: seamounts or walls, with some great muck diving. Off the back dive deck (just inches

above the water). Swim to front of boat, follow mooring line to reef. Incredible abundance, diversity and health of flora and fauna. Got good photos of Mandarin fish, leaf scorpions, stonefish, banded pipefish, shrimp gobies, cuttlefish, crocodile fish and more nudi's than a Diamond Dolls strip club: from pure white to electric, neon green with scarlet racing stripes and everything in between. Pygmy seahorses. Porcelain crabs. Free-swimming and attached feather star crinoids in every conceivable color scheme. And a blinding blizzard of reef fish with Moorish idols and butterflies galore, brilliantly colored regal, blue-saddled, and other angels and clouds of anthias. Huge expanses of completely undamaged hard and soft corals,. 15-foot wide, unblemished sea fans a common occurrence. Sea whips with razor fish. Sponges. Tunicates. Dense, tropical rainforest island scenery, often relatively close to boat. Often, entire families of local folks silently sitting in outrigger dugout canoes as you surface from your dive. Breathtaking sunrises/sets. Seas pretty flat except for our steam from Kavieng to Fathers. Then, very heavy seas for 14 hours! Crew: Super. Friendly, fun, and very knowledgeable, homegrown and internationally trained dive staff. Very sweet, demure, and thoughtful kitchen and housekeeping staff. Capt. Raabe is a hilarious, energetic and very gregarious guy. Great raconteur. He "swears like a sailor," but with such a keen wit and twinkle in his eye, it's accepted by even the stodgiest passenger. Food: Not great. Dry meat/chicken, limp fish, heavy sauces.

Good deserts. Complimentary soda/juice. Wine served with dinner. Beer available in a cooler. Walindi Resort: Beautiful, lush grounds in the midst of teeming rainforest in lovely Kimbe Bay. Large, very well-ventilated, meticulously screened bungalows. Pretty good food. Great staff knows you by name from day one and, though unobtrusive, is ready at all times to attend to your needs. Outlets: 220 volt South Pacific plug configuration. Downside: sopping humidity with no AC can get to you. Also, the daily Mozzie (mosquito) threat is a bit disconcerting, even though there are not many flying about. I tired of being oiled with sweat and "Ultracon" repellent. Small dive boats are swift, but rides to the reefs (same ones visited on last leg of *Dancer* trip) are 30-45 minutes long. Gear mounted on tanks and laid on side. Back roll or giant stride. Lunch after two dives on beautiful Resort island. Very capable crew. visit the Hot River (a 40-minute, very bumpy but scenic van ride through the oil palm plantation and rainforest), preferably on last day there. The volcanically heated, rushing water feels great and the setting is lost-world paradise!

Star Dancer, June 2004, Darren Denyer (darren.denyer@gmail.com) Rancho Santa Fe, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives.. Water: 82 to 86 F, surge. If your willing to pay premium the flights can be fairly direct. But getting there constituted six flights for myself and my father from San Diego. If you take any artifacts from PNG back with you be prepared to deal with Australian

customs agents. Anything packaged up will get torn apart and you'll be left to put it all back together best you can. We met *Star Dancer* at Walindi Resort in West New Britain and were aboard for eight days. It was warm, but primarily cloudy and occasionally raining. The accommodations aboard *Star Dancer* were nice. It was a comfortable atmosphere and the crew was extraordinary. They took every opportunity to make our stay an enjoyable one. They were all fun and professional above and below the water. Captain Bradley Davies was a funny chap and a good ship handler. Also on board was owner Alan Raabe who took funny to a whole new level. He is also owner/captain of the Febrina as well. Jayne the chef provided tasty and filling meals, and left everyone with a smile. Diving was spectacular. We unfortunately hit a rough patch of weather. Visibility ranged from great to a lot of surge and >50 foot visibility. The sea life, from large to minuscule, was fantastic. From pygmy sea horses, small nudi's, and squat lobsters to large schools of jacks and barracudas made it all worth the trip. Shark dives to dives where the skill of the guides unlocked a world normally not seen by our drifting eyes. See the country, meet the people, and take in this still developing country. We went to Goroka in the Eastern Highlands and could have not been more pleased. Photography Comments: Having an air compressor aboard for cleaning video and photo equipment on the dive deck was helpful and efficient. Plenty of space and a helpful staff made using photo and video units easy and effortless.

Star Dancer, Walindi Plantation, July 2004, Alisa Kling (alisakling@billissa.com) Malibu, CA.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents. If I had known what I know now I never would have gone on this trip. The *Star Dancer* is rundown and in need of a refit. More than one stateroom had water leaking from the ceiling. The food was adequate but lacked variety and was too fatty. Almost all dives took place from the *Star Dancer's* dive deck since there is no adequate tender or ponga. The boat has a small fiberglass skiff that is a pain to ride in and get back into. When diving in strong currents you had to make sure that you could get back to the main boat or they would have to tow you back with the skiff. The crew was generally nice but not well trained, and at times a lazy. The divemaster was not experienced. Even though we were told not to touch anything, one of the guides handled whatever they were interested in. At times, after completing a dive, there would be no one around the dive deck nor would they have put the dive ladders down. The divemaster did not like constructive comments about her diving or the dive schedule, and, at times, adopted a poor attitude. The first dive was at 6:30 am followed by dives at 9:00 am and 11:30 am. There was a break for lunch with an afternoon dive around 3:30 PM and then a night dive at 6:30 PM. Why the morning was so crowded with only one dive in the afternoon was never explained. The crew was rough on the gear when allowed to handle it. I had to replace the O-ring on my tank numer-

ous times because of damage caused during the tank filling process. The second stage on my backup air source (Air Mic) was broken, and my backup dive computer's face was scratched when my BCD was loaded onto the skiff and then on to the boat. Air Niugini is a real piece of work. restriction of 32 kilos per person (70 pounds) for internal flights but that if you were carrying dive equipment they would waive it. My husband and I were subject to \$50-\$75 per flight in excess baggage charges. They take only cash (Kina). The diving was not good enough to warrant the aggravation. There are other destinations in the Pacific that are easier to get to, have better diving, and better boats: The boat was adequate for underwater video photography. There were only five divers on our trip so the camera table was not crowded and the rinse tank was all right was were the charging stations for the batteries. If the boat were full it would be pretty tight. The underwater sea life was interesting but not spectacular.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Bilikiki, September 2003, Charles Shippam (chashippam@heydon71.fsnet.co.uk) Norwich, Norfolk, England. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 90 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm. Weather good — breezy but not uncomfortably rough, cloudy but with plenty of sun. Boat excellent — one of the most spacious and comfortable live-aboards, photographs do not do it justice. Excellent crew and the Management (Monty and Michelle) could not have been more helpful and

professional but with a relaxed approach to experienced divers. Many magnificent corals in pristine condition and a great variety of reef fish of all shapes and sizes with many good macro opportunities. Barracuda Point must be one of the best dives in the world for those who like to be with large schools of barracuda, rainbow runner, trevally and dog tooth tuna. Only large pelagics were absent. The political situation in the Solomon Islands is much more settled now that there is a multi national Peace Keeping Force there but Honiara has little to offer so take the advice of Bilikiki Cruises and minimize your time there. I felt the diving, boat and crew well rewarded the cost and effort of getting to the Solomon Islands. Photography: All the necessary facilities were available and every possible form of help was given by Monty the Manager of the vessel. (www.bilikiki.com)

Bilikiki, March 2004, Larry Schnabel, Rolling Hills, CA. Boat comfortable, well organized, rooms clean and spacious. Food quite good, lots of fresh veggies, fruit, fish. You pay for your wine (\$19/bottle) and beer (\$2.50/bottle), wine all Australian, good but retailing in states for probably \$8/bottle. Dove Guadalcanal, Russell Island, Florida Islands, both divemasters (Michelle and Monty) knowledgeable and helpful, but let you dive your own dives without trying to mollycoddle you. Saw no big pelagics (a few mobulas and whitetip, blacktip and reef sharks largest maybe 4 feet) but coral and smaller fish life very abundant (saw about 4 varieties of trigger fish