

AUSTRALIA

Cairns, the jumping-off spot for the Great Barrier Reef, is a tropical city with day boats visiting the lower quality sites on the GBR or making overnight trips to Cod Hole. Cairns' fronts on mud flats and there's no shore diving anywhere in Queensland. The best diving, with pristine reefs and oodles of fish, is to the north, reachable by liveboards during the Aussie summer, November to March. Pack safety sausages, whistles, strobes, mirrors, and other safety devices in case a current carries you far from the boat. However, Aussie dive rules are now tight (far tighter than the Florida Keys, for example), with redundant headcounts after every dive. Pricey Lizard Island is the northernmost land-based operation, near Cod Hole with refrigerator-sized potato cod. To the south, reached from Townsville, the wreck of the Yongala may be the best fish-covered wreck in the world. Water temperature is in the 70s so bring rubber. North American divers are beginning to discover diving south and west of Sydney. On the west coast of Australia, sea planes from Exmouth lead dive boats to schools of whale sharks on Ningaloo Reef.

Heron Island Resort, August 2005, Richard Nelson (chard@alum.cal-berkeley.org), Oakland, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 68 to 70 Fahrenheit, choppy, currents. Heron Island is a lovely resort, and the reef is lovely and accessible. The

rides to dive sites are short, and because it is a marine preserve, there are LOTS of fish and lots of bigger (i.e., full-grown) fish than you find elsewhere on the Great Barrier Reef. However, this is not a Dive Resort. It is a resort that does some diving. Lots of beginners or mildly experienced divers. Few experienced divers. The diving is nice, but not challenging. Some sites are quite pretty. The water was cold, and many divers were wearing full 7mm wetsuits, mostly rented on the island. Winter is low season, but the resort was sold out and the diving overloaded. The resort was understaffed, both in general and in the diver operation, so they had limited ability to add extra boats (though they did manage one day). The dive shop was overwhelmed. The first day I had trouble finding a tank that was full — had to try four different ones before finding one with more than 2000 PSI. The dive staff was nice, too, just way over their heads. Room service came at random times each day (probably because of the under staffing). Food and service in the restaurant was hit-and-miss. First night, incredibly slow, and backed up out the door. Other nights, it was fine. Just about everyone on the boat crossing out to the island was feeling sick, even those of us who normally don't. Seasickness medication is recommended (and sit downstairs). Many people chose to take the helicopter back, rather than face the boat again (although it was a flat, smooth ride going back!).

Seasports, June 2005, Ian Kennedy (kenn123@mac.com) Davis, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 61 to 62 F., choppy, surge.

Jervis Bay lies 2 2 hours by car south of Sydney along the Princes Highway, Australia's coastal route to Melbourne. The bay is large and provides several beautiful, sheltered, white-sand beaches. It is enclosed by two headlands: diving sites are just within the heads and outside on the open-ocean. The towns of Huskisson and Vincentia. are small with a limited number of shops and restaurants but with a variety of accommodations. We stayed at Claudi's beach Retreat in Vincentia. www.jervisbaybeachhouse.com.au and the email address for Kerrie Curac who manages the property is leighc@shoal.net.au The house is 20 yards from the beach with a view of the bay from the main bedroom. The second bedroom has a bunk bed with a double bed on the bottom and single on top. The house can accommodate five people. The kitchen is fully equipped. The house is nicely appointed and cost us about \$110 US per night. The house is a five minute drive from the dive shop and wharf in Huskisson. I arranged for two days of two-tank diving by email and web before leaving. I carried most of my own gear but needed to rent a two-piece wet suit off them. During winter they run dives only on weekends. Their boat carries up to 20 people although there were no more than 12 with room for everyone. The boat is rather slow (known affectionately as the sea slug). Nitrox is available. No table or rinse bucket for cameras. The crew provides a lunch of hot dogs between dives and cakes on the way home. A divemaster is in the water on all the dives. Saturday was wet and windy thanks to a southerly wind. Normal winds in winter are

westerly that help to keep the seas flat. The south wind brought up a 2-meter swell that prevented us from reaching the best sites. We were limited to one site inside the heads, the Nursery. The first dive was at 50 feet on a sand bottom with rock ledges. The surge closer in was strong. Visibility was limited by the churning of material off the bottom. We did see a good selection of wild life. Upon descent on the mooring line, we almost ran into a wobbegong, a toothless shark. Later I came across a pair of the sharks that were mating. The divemaster, Brett, disappeared in pursuit of a shark and was not seen for the rest of the first dive so I teamed up with a brother and sister from Sydney. I spotted an eagle ray in the distance. An octopus was lurking under a bottle. The second dive was in deeper water with less surge but no better visibility. Sunday, we were forced to return to the Nursery due to the weather and swell. However, the visibility was better, 60 feet. The locals report visibility up to 100 feet. A group of Japanese divers needed most of Brett's attention so I teamed up with Ian from the dive shop. We spotted several nudibranchs on the rocks. A large cuttlefish swam by. Many colorful semi tropical fish were evident, such as Moorish idols. The second dive was closer to the inlet to the bay, near the southern headland. Conditions on the surface were rough but the surge below was not a problem. Visibility was good. There was a rock wall covered in colorful sponges. More nudibranchs, seals, and fish were in evidence. The quality of the wild life was good. Jervis Bay is a marine sanctuary, an excellent dive when conditions are perfect. The

operation run by SeaSport is good and the accommodations were first rate.

CHILE

Easter Island

Orca Diving, Bed and Breakfast, January 2005, Harvey Monroe (CheMono@aol.com), Santa Fe, NM.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 73 F, calm, no currents. The Undercurrent report was accurate and still up to date. Definitely off the beaten track. Mostly, South Americans, European and Japanese come to see the archeological features. We spent more time underwater than above. Pensions are a much better deal than the 2-3 hotels, expect to spend between \$40-\$80 per night for high season, the Xmas holidays. The climate is subtropical and can be cool at night or when it rains. The Rapa Nui-Polynesian Culture has been preserved to a great extent though the island is Chilean. They have several dance performances. The Orongo Village is a memorable spot on the side of a volcanic crater overlooking the ocean and the two small islands or Motus.

Orca Diving, the more professional of two island dive operations, is owned by ex-Cousteau diver. Has three capable dive leaders who tend to be overly protective of the recent arrivals. They loosened up after the 2nd day. Cladio, Christian and Jose-Luis are personable. The Motu Nui and Motu Iti are not to be missed. Shear pinnacles that rise out of the south ocean coast. We did several dives there to over 150 ft. Other spots not to be missed are the Dos Cuevas, the Giant Coral Head and Hang Roa

Reef. Fish life is not profuse but unique, colorful and interesting. This is the far South Pacific that is all hard corals and volcanic formations cool crystal clear water. Fish life was not plentiful but unique to the area with 30%-50% endemic to the region. The visibility was the best I've ever seen. With some spectacular coral encrusted rock walls and formations. The boats where small panga type boats usually taking out no more than eight divers. Isla de Pascua or Rapa Nui is off the beaten track, five hours from Santiago, but for those that want something different I would recommend it for the adventurous.

FIJI

For West Coasters, it takes as many hours to get to Fiji as it does to most islands in the Caribbean: 10 hours nonstop from L.A. Prices are comparable and you can tailor air packages to include New Zealand/Australia extensions at little extra cost. Fijians are polite, friendly, modest, and religious. Wetsuits are staples year-round; currents add coolness and in some places they are vigorous, so carry surface signaling devices (tubes, strobes). In September 2004, American Dan Grenier, the operator of Crystal Divers at Bamboo Reef Resort, took several divers to a distant reef and disappeared with another diver in heavy currents. The weather can be stormy June through September. Short, heavy showers are possible any afternoon year-round, especially around Beqa Lagoon. The year-round average temperature