

posed and played with anyone that would play with them or had a camera. Also saw lots of torpedo rays. We found a super alternative to this shop, Surface Time, which met all of our needs including safety and comfort. For the same price, they took no more than 6 divers on their larger boat. We booked a smaller boat and they took just the 2 of us (husband and me) to do some local dive spots. On our way out to the dive sites, we were able to troll and catch fish. Our boat captain made lunch with our fresh catch while we were doing our first dive. After completing our 1 hour surface interval, we trolled to a new site and completed our 2nd dive of the day as happy divers. The boats only had a salt-water rinse bucket — no table for setup since they used the only table for food.

UNITED STATES

California

Catalina Scuba Luv, August 2004, Fiona Rattray, Elora, Ont. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 59 F., calm, choppy, no currents. I dived with Catalina Scuba Luv on the King Neptune. I arrived with my own drysuit and equipment but no dive buddy. The good people at Scuba Luv set me up with a father-son team who had dived Catalina plenty of times and acted as good tour guides. The rest of the diving group were EMTs getting their Open Water Certification for work. Between the well-maintained boat, clear dive briefings, helpful crew, the herd of EMTs and my dive buddies I've never felt safer on a dive boat! We did a three-

tank day, diving Red Rock Quarry, Bird Rock and Toqua Springs. Since my previous dive trip was to Vancouver Island, with water a good 10 degrees colder, Catalina seemed toasty! The kelp forest and all her denizens were enchanting. At the end of the day, I surfaced to a full moon over the water just behind the dive boat. The next few days I shore dived Casino Point with Catalina Divers Supply. This was an easy and relaxing series of dives; you just walk down the steps and you're in. If the tide is out when you come back, be prepared for an ungainly slither over the rocks at the foot of the steps. Lots of Garibaldi, sheepshead and other lovelies among the kelp towers. I met up with the same dive buddies for these dives; it would not have been difficult to find others to dive with as a single diver.

EASTERN PACIFIC LIVE-ABOARDS

CANADA

British Columbia

Nautilus Explorer, August 2005, Douglas Banik, Redding, CT. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 45 to 50 F, calm, currents. The Nautilus Explorer is a brilliantly designed dive boat. It consists of two boats really: a 116' motor yacht with cabins for up to 24 divers; large salon with HDTV for viewing digital photos, videos; large, uncrowded dining room that seats 24 comfortably. Not ultra luxury, but "ship shape and Bristol." The second boat is

a 38' skiff that is hauled up longitudinally into the stern of the NE itself. You actually dive from the skiff, which has 24 dive stations that are more roomy than on most day boats. Upon arrival, you set up your dive gear on a tank at your station, throw the odds and ends in a large bin below. Tanks are filled on the skiff. The skiff is well designed. It has minimal freeboard — about a foot. It has hand rails running the length of the skiff for divers to grab while waiting to climb out of the water. Boarding from the NE is a snap. Even if the skip has been launched, the decks of the two boats are precisely level. When exiting the water, there are three ladders, two usable while wearing fins. But mostly divers let the crew remove their fins while in the water and climbed the third, more conventional ladder. Everything is built around the divers' convenience, not the crew's. So you can use aluminum or steel tanks, DIN or yoke, air, Nitrox or Trimix (with prior notice), singles, doubles, or rebreathers. The crew will buddy up single divers if they want, but most of the serious photographers dived solo. The only limitations relate to currents: all diving is at "slack" as the tides change and are generally limited to 60 minutes. Any longer and the current become hazardous. The water is cold, so dry suits are de rigueur. Since for me the combination of DUI FLX and WeeZle Wear—with a mysterious 15 lbs. that appeared around my waistline—made lifting foot to knee an effort, The crew was quick to help me don my fins. I was the "baby" on this trip with just 65 dives to my credit. The next fewest were 180, but most divers counted their dives

by the thousands. About half were back for their second, fourth or eleventh time. Captain Mike Lever knows what divers need, where the best sites are, when to dive them, and how to build an itinerary that provides lots of diving (3-4 dives per day, even a night dive) while not seeming rushed or hurried — not an easy trick when 24 divers don and remove dry suits for each dive. The crew is fantastic: knowledgeable (all have degrees in marine biology!), helpful, and skilled. British Columbia diving is challenging and there's little else to do on board (though they did try to break the routine with a crab cookout on the beach, a trek up a salmon run, and a visit to a quaint fishing village). The Alaska dive trips have more on-shore excursions and attract about 30% nondivers; the NE moves to Mexico for the winter where wetsuits are the rule and currents are infrequent. The trip was awesome. Photography Comments: two large rinse tanks for cameras only and ample dry shelf space for the largest rigs. Also, many AC outlets available for battery charging. (Twelve chairs, no waiting.) Two computers set up for downloading pics and editing.

COSTA RICA

Cocos Island

Sea Hunter, August 2005, LeRoy Anderson (landersonsprint@earthlink.net), Salt Lake City, UT.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 90 Feet. Water: 70 to 80 F, choppy. Special rebreather expedition sponsored by Fathoms magazine and managed by Brett Gilliam. Very well set up and