

**Supersport, June 2005, Rene Umberger (octopus@maui.net), Kihei, HI.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 73 to 75 F, calm, currents. Planned this trip to be there with the Minke Whales. Shortly after hooking up to a mooring the whales showed up and approached, ogled and circled the boat, divers and snorkelers for hours! They seemed to want to communicate with us and approached closer and closer as the day went on (a testament to the well controlled program). These whales are hunted by the Japanese once they head for Antarctica to feed, and are in need of protection. As for the crew, they're in need of retraining. The staff, service and food quality was well below the previous year. The briefings were much too long and repetitive — a waste of precious time. The cook was inexperienced, even serving leftovers for lunch (that weren't that great the first time). They let their "interns" (free help) enter the water before paying customers. We logged our complaints with Dorothy, Mike Ball's office manager, and she responded acknowledging and addressing our concerns and making sure that our next trip with them, two days later to the Yongala, was up to par. She provided great service, taking her own time to deliver a forgotten item to us at the dock before departure!

## FIJI

**Fiji Aggressor II (Sere-Ne-Wai), July 2005, Gabriel I. Peñagaricano (guigo34@hotmail.com), San Juan, PR.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 88 F., calm. The accommodation, the service and

the diving are the best. The crew is outstanding, as is the boat. There is something for every taste, large pelagics, lots of colorful nudibranchs, turtles, ribbon eels, etc. Just great diving! UW Photography Comments: The space allotted is rather small but, then again, there are only 10 divers maximum on board.

**Fiji Aggressor II, August 2005, Chrisanda Button/Rickie Sterne (rickandchris@altell.net), Elkins, AR.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 45 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 F, surge, currents. Wearing 5/3 fullsuits and 5mm hoods, we envied fellow divers who also had vests and core warmers, but did all 25 dives offered. The best diving we have done. The reef structures were healthy and inhabited by a wealth of marine life. We swam through an extravaganza of soft coral punctuated by numerous anemones, healthy hard corals, large gorgonians, and many crinoids. We saw dozens of common lionfish (two dozen at Manta Rock alone), about a dozen spotfin lionfish, and one twinspace lionfish. Clown triggers showed up on half our dives. We saw nudis galore, including one huge pleurobranch. Over half dozen varieties of shrimps and crabs. We saw several free-swimming feather stars. There were clouds of anthias, butterflyfish of every persuasion, filefish, dartfish, leaf scorpionfish, a couple of Papuan scorpionfish. Four hawksbill turtles showed up, and there was often a black- or whitetipped reef shark in the background. Several varieties of anemonefish and blue ribbon eels. While the diving was excellent and the visibility usually good, we did work hard for our soft corals. There were currents and surge, sometimes strong on

most dives. The beauty and richness of sites like Jim's Alley, Kansas, Keenan's, and the Ningali Wall were worth the effort. We have made ten live-aboard trips on seven different boats. The Fiji Aggressor was the best. The cabins were clean and comfortable with more storage than we've had on other boats (and we were in a basic cabin). Each cabin has an individual thermostat. The dive deck was well arranged, and Ulai kept our tanks filled to 3000 psi+. The salon and dining area were comfortable. The Fiji Aggressor carries a full complement of safety equipment and boasts a good library of marine ID books. The food was delicious and apparently endless in quantity. They always offered us seconds. The day began with a Continental breakfast before the first dive. Next came the real breakfast, cooked to order. Lunches were hot and different each day. Between the two afternoon dives, fresh baked brownies or banana bread were served. Dinner began with homemade soup and ended with fresh-baked desserts, always accompanied by ice cream. I thought homemade cheesecake a la mode was a bit over the top, but I ate every bite. Entrees included the best rack of lamb we have ever eaten, steak, fresh fish, and curry. Chef Luke even baked fresh bread. The crew was outstanding and all were divers. Captain Ned was personable and friendly. The boat moved to a different site for almost every dive. DM's Scott and Mosese gave thorough briefings. Both were excellent divemasters. Scott especially was generous in pointing critters out to us. The Aggressor carries only ten divers, so dive sites were uncrowded. Most dives were done from

the back of the boat. There was one dinghy out and dinghy back dive, and three others on which we rode the dinghy out, then swam back to the boat. The village visit on Gau Island was a high point. The Fijians were hospitable. The beauty of their singing moved me almost to tears. But few guys wanted to give up beer for kava.

**Nai'a Dive Cruises, November 2004, Art Schumer, Ocala, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. A terrific dive operation. The boat is set up nicely for photographers. The crew was among the best I've ever dove with and the room large and kept clean. Food was fantastic with great variety and portions (you could always ask for more). Several choices at meals. The dining room/main salon was not air conditioned. The weather wasn't too hot and it was not a problem but if you are going there in the heat of summer, be prepared. One of the best dive boats I've been on and Fiji itself is incredibly rich in underwater soft coral and wildlife. Nice, dry, camera room for setup and work. Rinse tanks close by and all you do is rinse the camera, set it down and it shows up on the skiff you're taking to the dive site. After the dive, they bring it off the skiff, rinse it and set it down by the camera room for you. All the boat operators and dive masters are well versed in taking care of your camera on the boat and did a great job for us (14 photographers on this last trip!).

**Nai'a, February 2005, Audrey & Bob Ray (sunray@dakotacom.net), Tucson, AZ.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60

to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, choppy, currents. Variety of dive sites created diversity of conditions. Top dive Nigali Passage, amphitheater from which we watched pelagics cruising the passage. All crew members attentive. All divers experienced. Dived from skiffs. Travel agency connected with Nai'a did excellent job of arranging air and keeping us informed of changes. Nice touches: stored dive gear during trip to New Zealand, posted divers' pictures on website. [explore@naia.com.fj](mailto:explore@naia.com.fj) [www.naia.com.fj](http://www.naia.com.fj)

## FRENCH POLYNESIA

**Paul Gauguin, December 2004, Russell Schroeder (scubatanks@yahoo.com), Grand Prairie, TX.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 Fahrenheit, calm, no currents. The reason Radisson Seven Seas "Paul Gauguin" received Conde Naste's rating as the number one cruise ship in the world is the fantastic six star facilities and service. They have their own dive program, dive instructors, and a dropdown water sports platform. Zodiacs with four divers each leave the platform for the outside reef at different times for students and certified. They attempt to sort by skill level. They also will arrange for you to use shore based operations if you are interested in more challenging dives or shark feedings. The ship cruises at night and anchors in the lagoons at five different islands for the day. Standard cruise is eight days seven nights. Of all the islands, I would rate Moorea the highest with 10-20 blacktips on each dive as well as turtles and lionfish. The corals were pristine.

The dive from the ship also does a dive/fin/by the local shark feeding and most large lemon sharks will check you out. There is nothing cheap in French Polynesia you can check out hotel rates, inter-island airfare and meal prices on the net. I found this to make the small ship a relative bargain for seeing multiple islands and at least allowing some diving. I found brownandkeen-etravel.com to have the best rates and agent Susan Walsh has been diving with the ship five times and has a lot of great info and video to send. Dive Moorea first and then do the Paul Gauguin. The exceptional food and service on the ship will spoil you for anything after it. No tips, liquor in your room and 24 hr. room service (included).

**Paul Gauguin, July 2005, Arthur F. Graf, San Antonio, TX.** We were slated for a two-day stay at the Radisson Plaza Resort Tahiti. A quality resort with a fine beach but remote, but they have shuttle service to Papeete. I scheduled a dive with a local operator to check out my equipment and also so when the divemasters ask me when my last dive was I could say "yesterday". We were slated for a 10-day cruise on the Paul Gauguin, which holds 350 passengers and has a complete water sports program. The stern of the ship drops down, making an ideal water sports platform. They have a good scuba program for both advanced divers and beginner divers. All equipment, including scuba gear is top of the line and in first class condition. You can setup all your dives with them or split between them and shore-based dive shops. I dove Bora Bora Divers; the dives were disappointing — the last time I dove