

where my wife and I observed other divers simply plowing through soft corals, breaking off pieces of hard coral, and breaking other reef features like sponges and anemone. As dive operator, you should protect the reef life you want to show. I don't know of any other dive location where I can blindly point my camera and click away and still get a great shot. Some of these coral heads were simply a photographer's dream. Although the boat had ample fresh water rinse tanks for the cameras, the camera table itself was a bit small, but considering there were as many as five cameras on board, I can understand this a little better. Wananavu Resort really lacks any camera facilities, so if shooting digital, pack your computer since you'll easily fill a gigabyte card after two dives.

Wananavu, February 2005, Craig C. Condrón (craigandlindaonthego@hotmail.com), Spokane, WA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 75 Feet. Water: 83 to 84F., choppy. The boat is small and crowded, but the divemasters tried hard to make each dive interesting by taking you through swim throughs, etc. The sites were a short distance away because of the choppy seas.

Wakaya Island

Wakaya Club, February 2005, Craig Condrón (craigandlindaonthego@hotmail.com), Spokane, WA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 83 to 84F., calm. I have been to a dozen resorts throughout Fiji and it doesn't get any better than this. You schedule your diving when it is convenient for you. If you wanted to

sleep in and have a late breakfast, then 10:00 was fine. You called the shots. The reef around the resort has been protected for many years and it shows. Even the Fiji live-aboards stopped by and anchored in the bay for a day to enjoy this tropical beauty. The sites are 2 minutes from the dock. Most sites are wall dives, with small stuff on the wall and big stuff in the blue. The Passage, which I dove on both sides is a fish magnet. You conclude the dive by hanging out on the edge of the reef wall as clouds of sharks, manta (1), fusiliers, snappers, barracuda, beamers, unicorn, surgeonfish, and more are viewed through a cloud of small topical fish. It reminded me of the Blue Corner in Palau. A hammerhead circled me but I was too busy watching a lionfish with his outstretched jaw. The best food and wine list in Fiji. Did I mention the 9 hole-par-3, a few par-4s, enjoyed several rounds with the local Fijians. Other activities include guided nature hikes, picnics at a private beach, boat trip to Lavuka, etc. For the nondiver the snorkeling is great 100 feet in front of our bure. Their private plane brings you in and out on your schedule. Everything is included in the price: wine, food, diving, golf, hikes, private picnics, airplane, wonderful bures.

FRENCH POLYNESIA

Tahiti and Moorea are everyone's dream of the South Pacific, and despite their pricey resorts and food, these French-speaking islands are attracting North American divers to join the plentiful reef shark action. There are a range of accommoda-

tions and restaurants, some reef diving, and plenty of great scenery. The once-snotty French attitude toward others has lessened considerably.

Bora Diving Center, Club Med, August 2004, Ed Gross (ejg2putt@earthlink.net), Plano, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. Incredible pelagic diving. Schools of large lemons and good size black tip and gray reef sharks. Lots of mantas and a large school of eagle rays. Hard coral in great shape, not much soft coral. Macro stuff is there, just not plentiful — white faced pipe fish ,etc. Three scorpion fish sitting out on a coral head at night. most diving is pretty easy, although the seasonal strong south wind can create some currents. Bora Diving accommodating to our schedule, promptly picking us up at the appointed time at Club Med every day. And they were flexible with our dive schedule (didn't have to book every dive in advance, and could change as needed). The divemasters knew the sites well, and how to find the big stuff. When four other dives did not show up for a dive night, the crew took only two of us out for a private night dive. Club Med was nice — not too big, maybe 200 guests total. Food was served buffet style, but the serving containers were not big, so they were refilled often — never empty, always fresh. Every meal included food you could order: eggs for breakfast, and some sort of meat or fish with lunch or dinner, including a sushi chef a few times at dinner. The rest of Bora Bora is nice, but its as expensive as its every been. Had to stay overnight in Papeete on the way there, the Mandarin

Hotel had an adequate room for four people, and was the only hotel that had a reasonable rate (<\$500) for 4 people. UW Photography Comments: Most dive boats are 24 foot aluminum hull, accommodating 6 to 10 divers. Not a lot of room for a fresh water rinse tank on board, but all of the sites are close to any dive shop. Bora Diving Center provided a fresh water rinse and shower at their shop, which was not more than 20 minutes away from any dive site.

Bora Diving Center, Intercontinental Hotel, March 2005, Art & Gerry Burke (scubadiver@houston.rr.com), Katy, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F., calm, currents. Trip N Tour Travel agency said Bora Diving Center was friendly, flexible and offered easy diving. They picked us up at the hotel promptly and had a short 10 min ride to the Center where we met the staff. It is a small operation but they are friendly and adaptable. The first day we did a lagoon dive to see mantas, and three showed up on cue. The divemasters were helpful and friendly, spoke English or French and knowledgeable about the area. They have small fast boats that carry up to six divers that made travel to and from the dive sites quick. Entry was a back roll and exit was up a ladder after you removed your weights and BCD. I had a digital camera system that they helped within and out of the water — no camera table. They did one morning dive and one afternoon dive so you could return to your hotel between dives. The dive center had room to store your gear overnight. I tipped in cash to the divemaster each day because the divemasters did rotate days. The own-

ers, Anne and Michel, were not in Bora Bora but they sent me a personal note thanking me for diving with Bora Diving Center. Everyone lived up to their slogan of “famous for our personal service and attention to the individual.” The Intercontinental Hotel was excellent. All transport from the airport is via boat so we had a great view of the island as we traveled to the hotel. We had a beachfront bungalow that had ample space with a separate bedroom from a living room. We could walk out onto the beach and snorkel over the small reefs. The pool was excellent and had an infinity edge that gave a view to the beach. There was a wide assortment of food at the main restaurant or beach cafe. The Chicken Alfredo was excellent. There were also restaurants outside the hotel — go to Bloody Mary’s Restaurant for a tropical atmosphere (sand floor) and excellent seafood. We rented a car to tour the island. It isn’t that big — where we did shop and sightsee. Great experience.

Fakarava Diving Center, Le Maitai Dream, May 2005, Tracey Bennett (Tdives@prodigy.net), Las Vegas, NV. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 Fahrenheit, choppy, currents. Fakarava is a large atoll with two passages (North and South) that create strong tidal currents to and from the ocean. The mile wide N. passage is 20 minutes by boat from the resort and here you can dive outside the passage or the passage itself. The smaller S. passage is an hour from the resort and can only be accessed during flat seas. We were unable to get there during our 7 days. The outside dives had little current and there were

healthy fields of hard coral, schooling snapper, bannerfish and butterflyfish. Several Napoleon wrasse, eagle rays, white tip, blacktip, and grey reef sharks. Pristine environment and in some areas I felt as though I was diving in one big cleaning station. For the passage dives we backrolled, descended immediately, and rode the ripping current, along with white tips and grey reef sharks, over hard corals and canyons until we reached a valley where we could drop out of the main current. Here we saw large schools of bright orange bigeyes, snapper and bannerfish. There were always 15-20 sharks circling around us, coming in from the perimeters of the valleys. Because of the strong currents, this is not a dive for beginners. Serge and Carine, owners of the Fakarava Diving Center were safety conscious and attentive. I could dive my own profile on the outside dives, but because of the current everybody ascends together on the passage dives. They will not let you dive the passage until they have witnessed your dive experience level. I was pleased with their service. The resorts’ rooms are comfortable enough, and have large bathrooms with a shower door leading outside. There is a full bar and the restaurant serves very good food. There’s not much to do on Fakarava, but go to Hinano Pearls where proprietor Gunter Hellberg will take you on a tour and give you an opportunity to buy his pearls.

Manihi Blue Nui, Pearl Beach Resort, August 2005, Michael Kamens (kingston2@hotmail.com), Wintersville, OH. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F., calm, surge, currents. Manihi is a tiny

atoll in the same vicinity as Rangiroa, which has gotten big due to high energy drift dives with schools of sharks. Manihi has stayed under the radar. The diving is quite good. Crystal clear water with such abundance of fish life at certain sites that I was speechless. Huge schools of fish. "The Drop Off" is just that. A wall that dives to 4500 feet just outside the pass that is the only navigable pass into the lagoon formed by Manihi. Blue Nui is at the Pearl Beach resort, the only one on the island. They are both top notch. Small groups, fast boats and sites 10 minutes from the hotel. Gear is taken care of and no more than five divers with each divemaster. Saw mantas on several dives with a school of four on one dive. Very close encounters with these huge creatures. Nice coral formations with great fish. Fair number of grey and black reef sharks as well. Humpback whales come through in August, but had not arrived yet. I did see and snorkel with them in Moorea earlier in my trip. The Pearl Beach Resort is paradise. Beautiful beach and over water bungalows with wonderful cooling breeze left no need for A/C. They treat you like royalty. Nightly fumigation keeps mosquitoes under control for most part. Restaurant at hotel is the only one on the island. It is quite good, but expensive. Took free water taxi to only store on island to buy bottled water, beer, snacks. Brought granola bars etc...in luggage and did simple breakfast and lunch so big bill at dinner a bit more acceptable. No shops outside resort so do your gift getting earlier at one of your other stops. Motu (small uninhabited islet) picnic a real treat. Stop off in lagoon over reef to hand line fish for lunch. Great day at

the islet with fresh fruit, fish, chicken, etc.

Moorea Blue Diving, Moorea Pearl Resort, September 2005, Rick Hart (rickhart@comcast.net), Richardson, TX.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 50 Feet. Water: 72 to 75 F, calm. Moorea is beautiful. We flew Air Tahiti Nui from LAX to Tahiti. It is about an 8-hour direct flight. The planes are nice and their service is also good. But, it is still a long flight in coach (for a mere \$700/ trip/ person, they will upgrade you to business class). The Moorea Pearl Resort was great, the service wonderful and the food was good. We stayed in a premium over water bungalows. The resort has an on site dive center (Moorea Blue Diving). It is a new operation, convenient to resort. The boat was not crowded. They expected you to get your own gear to the boat, do your own gear setup and change tanks between dives. The boat ride was only a few minutes. Lots of black tip sharks and would usually see three or four big lemon sharks. Dive guides to feed the sharks. When the boat tied to the mooring ball, fish (including sharks) would swarm the area. After a couple of dives, you begin to wish you could see the fish in their normal mode. The dives felt gimmicky and staged. Everything is expensive. Typically, the Polynesians do not encourage tipping. One road circles the island, 35 miles long. We ate at various cafes/restaurants and they would send a car to pick you up and take you back at no cost. So, overall a nice dinner was about the typical cost of a nice restaurant back home. I wore a 1.5 mm wetsuit, and most folks wore a shorty. A skin would be too little, and any more

than 1.5 mm probably too much.

Moorea Fun Dive, Sheraton Hotel, March 2005, Art & Gerry Burke (scubadiver@houston.rr.com), Katy, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F., calm, currents. Moorea Fun Dive is operated by Edmee and Roland who were attentive to our needs and diving preferences. Roland picked us up at the hotel in morning and we did a two-tank dive. They have small fast boats that hold up to six divers. They were safety conscience with good briefings and planned safety stops. All entries were back roll and easy exit via ladder after removal of BCD and weights. We did dives down the anchor line and drift dives. The corals were excellent. They did not bait for sharks but we saw many types ranging from lemon, black tip and silver tip. I had a digital camera system that they helped with — no camera table because the boat was small. You could leave your gear at the dive center overnight as they had lockers, showers. Moorea Fun Dive gave excellent personal service. The Sheraton Hotel was excellent. Moorea is a large island with many shops and sights. We had a beachfront bungalow that had a large porch. The pool was large and shallow. There was a wide assortment of food at the main restaurant or beach café. The restaurant and bar were on the second floor with a cool breeze and beautiful view of sunsets. There were restaurants outside the hotel. The spa on the hotel premise was nice. There was also a room with an internet connection. We rented a car to tour the island and to purchase snacks and bottled water that were expensive at the hotel. The view

from The Belvedere outlook was excellent of the two inlets on Moorea Island. Great experience.

Top Dive, Hibiscus, August 2005, Michael Kamens (kingston2@hotmail.com), Wintersville, OH. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F., calm, surge, currents. Dove with Top Dive in both Moorea and Bora Bora. Took 10 dive inter-island package. Six dives in Moorea and four in Bora Bora. Top Dive Moorea was top notch. Handled all gear and kept safe overnight. Divemasters Thomas and Nicholas great and friendly. Diving is easy and close to shore. Coral is fair but fish life and large animal encounters phenomenal. First two days, spotted Humpback whales and snorkeled with mother and calf both days. The divemasters went out of their way to find the animals for us. Lots of black tip and lemon sharks at 10 feet plus. Top Dive takes a tuna head on most dives and puts it in the coral to keep the sharks interested and the diving with the sharks is quite exciting. Dive would usually end with the tuna being exposed to the sharks and watching them do their thing. Saw clown fish and many other endemic species, turtles, eels etc. Bora Bora a more herd-like atmosphere. Still dive in small groups, but several on same boat and while not crowded, a less personal touch. The water is gorgeous and the diving highly charged with plenty of sharks and two mantas. I was put with a group of beginners but complained and was put into a more appropriate group. Both areas are better for these animal encounters than coral growth. Not a lot of color and diversity, however the reef

seemed quite healthy with little bleaching or dying coral to be seen. Lots of fish life. Maitai in Bora Bora quite nice. clean A/C room with ocean view. Great staff, nice beach with decent snorkeling and great lagoon views. Hibiscus on Moorea a bit more economical and rustic. A bit of a bug problem and although owners were friendly and the grounds nicely kept, I would stay elsewhere. Food extremely expensive so we walked to local groceries and stocked up on French cheeses and baguettes and did our own breakfast and lunches. Tahitian and French cuisine very good with The Mayflower in Moorea and The Bounty in Bora Bora being stand-outs. Both islands' topside sites are as impressive as the underwater sites. My nondiving wife took a ferry to Tahiti to see Papeete and do some shopping and had a great time all around exploring the islands.

GUAM

Guam is largely a stopover for flights to Micronesia and the reefs aren't up to a dedicated dive vacation.

MDA, Holiday Inn, February 2005, Jeanne & Bill Downey (downdive@comcast.net), Baden, PA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 F., calm. We've been through Guam so many times, we decided to see what Guam's all about. We contacted MDA via email and they arranged everything, including our room at the Holiday Inn at a good price, including buffet breakfasts. We spent 5 days driving around, seeing ev-

erything and did 6 dives. The two MDA dive boats we were on were well run, with adequate space. The crew seemed friendly and professional. Four of the dives were done with most of the passengers being Japanese; they brought their own gear and divemasters, and did their own thing. Two of the dives were mainly locals and a few soldiers off an aircraft carrier. We did not have a guide, but no problem, as we kept the repeat customers in sight. The underwater terrain is volcanic with not much coral. We dove their blue hole twice, saw the Atlantis submarine underwater, and did 3 easy drift dives. A beginning diver would have fun, as the diving is easy and there's enough to see. An experienced diver would probably get bored after a few dives. Guam doesn't have that "exotic island" feel, but it makes a decent alternative to Hawaii for stopping off and getting rid of jet lag. The water is warmer than Hawaii, but the diving is not as good. It's a big shopping area for the Japanese, and not as pricey as Hawaii. It's a lovely island with a lot of history.

HAWAII

Hawaiian guides have developed great skill in finding the unique. On the big island of Hawaii, Spanish dancers, rare juveniles, and lionfish are regulars. Diving is mostly on lava flow with little coral cover, but the tropical fish are colorful, unique, and generally plentiful. There's also good shore diving. Kauai reef diving is passable, but unique trips are available in the summer. Maui's diving is often to