

Bora Bora the visibility was 100+, this time 20-30 feet. If the sharks and rays were there they were out of sight. The diving at Nuku Hiva, in the Marquesas, was an average step-well dive with quite a bit of sea life but the dive was in the surge zone. Next was one of my old favorites, Rangiroa. The Tiputa pass is an advanced dive. The seas were running 8 feet with a 2 ft. chop. Visibility was down to 25 feet instead of the usual 100+ thus we only saw a few of the sharks that make the pass their home. The next day the dive was on the Tiputa outer reef. Same weather conditions with low visibility so all the rays, sharks and turtles were mostly out of sight. The last dive was at Moorea at Shark Gallery. The last time I dove this it was an average dive, this time it was one of the best dives I have ever been on. Visibility over 100 feet. We dropped into the crater and six black tips greeted us, a large lemon came by. Several lionfish poked their heads out. We ran into several large schools of barracuda and reef runners. The reef fish were so thick that the divemaster would disappear. We were greeted by a large hawkbill and we spent 15 minutes being entertained. On the return to the boat black tips were there to bid us farewell. After passing through customs at Los Angeles we had to recheck our luggage at the international terminal. At the X-ray check in all bags had to be unlocked and they will not relock your bags, so I took all my baggage back to the American terminal where they would allow locked bags to be checked. While standing by while they were X-raying the luggage, the handlers were making a game out of seeing who could toss the luggage the

farthest so it would land on the conveyor belt. Luggage would bounce off the belt and hit the back stop before resting on the belt. I had my underwater video equipment in a Pelican case. The inspector opened, checked and relocked the case then instead of picking it up by the handle and placing it on the belt he cradled the case in his arms, walked over to the belt and dropped the case on the belt, knowing that it contained lights and a glass case.

Tahiti Aggressor, May 2005, David L. Bader, Burke, VA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to F, choppy, currents. Some of the crew kept to themselves but others were entertaining. "Pass Flying" is not for the faint of heart but for experienced drift divers it's a blast. Lots of sharks on every dive. Great opportunities to get close for pictures. Turtles were friendly and would pose Boat was nice but no film processing or hot tub as advertised. I have a dispute with the SeaWave Communications. My onboard account stated a charge of \$47 but I was billed \$117 on my credit card. Beware of onboard Internet use. Aggressor could have done a better job of organizing divers in Papeete that has expensive taxi service. They also did not provide a day room in Papeete as advertised. Aggressor is still my live-aboard of choice!

HAWAII

Kona

Kona Aggressor, May 2005, Toni Imwold (alohatnt@msn.com), Kaneohe, HI. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to

100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F., calm. my second live-aboard. My first was on the Truk Odyssey in Aug. 2004. I live on Oahu and most of my diving has been on this island off our own boat. I am familiar with the fish and coral, but I definitely saw more than I expected. On the manta ray night dive there were 12 mantas! The size of the turtles are smaller than on Oahu but we did see a few, a huge conger eel, several reef sharks, black coral, dragon wrasses, pyramid butterfly, garden eels, bicolor anthias, peacock grouper, Thompson's butterfly and more. During a move to another dive site we saw four pods of pilot whales, three pods of 17 and one pod of 22. The Aggressor had just been refurbished so everything was shiny and new. The cabins are small, we slept on the bottom bunk and used the top bunk as storage. The crew will store your luggage in the hull. There were only six divers. There are six crewmembers — the captain, chef, and four guides. All are dive instructors (except Robert the chef) and took turns leading the dives and giving the dive briefs. Each has a certain creature they wanted to find on each dive. Pam — nudi's. Jonatha — eels. Jeff — anthias (had to swim a mile to look at those). Food was excellent and plentiful, beverages were lacking, water, lemonade and soda on tap (and they ran out of Coke syrup) and the ice machine was broken for 24 hours. At times I felt like the crew was there to get their own dives in instead of tending to the passengers. Two people slipped on the dive deck, but no crew helped the divers in getting back up! When we returned from a dive all they were really interested in was

what was your depth and final PSI. We weren't given much assistance in taking off gear. Deck towels weren't washed. They would just throw them in the drier. I enjoyed the week. There is a lot to see in Hawaiian waters. The water is calm and 90% of the time sunny and vis is great! UW Photography Comments: The crew never talked to us about onboard facilities available to us. We brought our own laptop so we really didn't need anything from the boat. Everyone was asked to share pictures for the CD that the crew made at the end of the trip.

Kona Aggressor, July 2005, Bob & Doris Schaffer (seamom@earthlink.net), Fallbrook, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 90 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F., calm, no currents. Crew is extremely well organized, efficient, friendly and accommodating. Among the best crews we have experienced in our 31 live-aboard trips. The chef had attended a culinary institute and the meals were outstanding — we've eaten at upscale restaurants that couldn't compare! The boat holds 14 divers and all diving is from boat rather than from skiffs. The dive deck is tight, but two good fresh water showers and plenty of deck towels. We were somewhat disappointed with the diving; the visibility was excellent but the region seemed rather "fished out" and not much big stuff. Some interesting caves and lava tubes. One night dive to see mantas was good but crowded because other local dive boats and their divers are at the same spot. The cabins are pretty small but the heads and showers worked well, the bed was comfortable and fresh towels daily. And there's a hot

tub on the sun deck! Outstanding crew consisting of Captain Jonatha, Jeff, Brenden, Auvie, Pam and Chef Robert.

Kona Aggressor II, July 2005, Jay Newby (yebo@comcast.net), Huntsville, AL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, surge. This was my third time on a live-aboard and second time diving in Kona. The crew is knowledgeable and friendly. Our first day concluded with the manta ray night dive where four of these big animals devoured the plankton from the lights. Another boat nearby set a milk crate full of flashlights on the bottom and all the divers had lights too. I used the modeling light from my Ikelite DS125 twin strobes, which emits a powerful light. I had a cloud of plankton above my head, which means the mantas swooped down inches above my head and occasionally bumping me. A true religious experience. Throughout the week the diving just seemed to get better and better. The food was awesome. Every meal was a special occasion with Robert the chef cooking his ass off for the divers. Always fresh veggies and meat from the islands and the crew catches fresh fish too! I enjoyed the macro subjects and the crew's knowledge. During week, we saw other mantas, eagle rays, dolphins, a white tip on a night dive and a large hammerhead. A pod of dolphins played with us for a half hour. Most of us jumped in with snorkel gear and could get close. Some dolphins were real playful, and some were making baby dolphins! Rob Clayton the boat captain is a professional shutterbug shooting a Canon Rebel in an Aquatica housing. His website: www.divesights.net. He was a big help to me

as I just went to the dark side (Nikon D70 in Aquatica housing) from shooting Nikonos V. LiveDive operates four Aggressor franchises; Kona, Palau, Fiji and Truk. They are moving the Truk boat to Indonesia in Dec. 2005 due to low volume of business. They run a topnotch operation and have the advantage of moving their crew from boat to boat to reduce burnout. All the crew were hardcore passionate divers, with many being into photography as well.

Kona Aggressor, September 2005, Sarah Shoaf, Alan Miller (sshoad@wfubmc.edu), Winston-Salem, NC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 65 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 Fahrenheit, surge, no currents. Excellent quarters including queen-sized lower bunks in cabins, private showers and heads en suite. Dive deck spacious and easy to dive from, even with full capacity divers and crew. Hot tub on upper sun deck — good for rewarming after night dives. Food spectacular for a dive boat. At least two meat plus vegetarian entree for each lunch and supper. CIA-trained Robert was a wonderful chef. Meals served on time, but around dive schedule. Snacks after each dive. Selected sites were easy to dive, with minimal shallow water surge and no current. Good variety including mantas, turtles, morays, dolphins. Most dives 35-70'. Nice lava formations. Corals not spectacular. Great fish life, with many endemic fish. Morays: zebra, white mouth, undulated, dwarf, tiger, and the spectacular dragon moray. Day octopus. Night dives with many crustaceans and hunting morays and octopus. Manta dive the highlight. Spinner dolphins, mantas, and frog fish

all on one day site. Many nudibranchs. Lion fish, clown wrasse, rockmovers, scorpionfish seen frequently. Captain and second mate did not respond with appropriate concern for diver who got "skin bends." Lots of miscommunication, reluctance to contact DAN, delay in oxygen treatment, delay in seeking medical attention. Seemed more concerned about keeping a dive schedule than the health of the divers. Cockroaches landed on you in bed and were on food, and the tables with food. All parts of the boat inundated. Need to bug bomb the boat on a regular basis to avoid grossing out passengers. Set up to get 5 dives, incl night dive (8am, 10:30am, 2pm, 4:30pm, 8pm). As dives were shallow, long bottom time (over an hour) was the norm, which left shorter intervals than desired. Could be cause of "skin bends." Would prefer pre-breakfast dive at 7am, then 10:30am, 1:30pm, 4:30pm, and 8pm. Gives longer interval after deepest dive and should help avoid problems. Second mate was unhelpful Did not work well with others. Did not help the divers, even when it was her job. Divemasters insisted on "follow the leader" dives, showing "Ainteresting sights" along the way. Inexperienced divers rushed to a site, crowding out others and scaring fauna from sight. Photographers found it difficult to compose pictures while others were jostling for position. When asked if we could dive away from the group, some divemasters OK, others upset. With the good viz, the limited area of dive sites, and shallow depths, felt the "herding" was unnecessary and limited photographic opportunities, especially for

experienced (almost 500, over 500 dives for myself and husband) divers. Notified 10 days before start of trip of \$100 fuel surcharge/person. Thought this was unfair, as the trip had otherwise been paid for 3 months in advance. Great camera-only table with pressurized air. Several camera-only rinse buckets. Good method of passing cameras to divers once in water. Crew knowledgeable of cameras and helped divers with minor difficulties. Shot 29 rolls of film on 27 dives, so good diverse subject matter and photo ops. Nice sites w/ only minor surge, so easy to maneuver. Lava rocks gave easy purchase to steady cameras. Independent charging station.

KIRIBATI (CHRISTMAS ISLAND)

Nai'a, May 2005, Wendy McIlroy (doctorwen@yahoo.com), Valencia, PA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F. I spent two weeks as part of an expedition to study the Phoenix Islands ecosystem's recovery from a severe coral bleaching episode in 2002. David Obura and Sangeeta Mangubhai, our coral scientists, had been on two previous Phoenix Islands expeditions, when the object was to study pristine reefs isolated from most human development. A National Geographic article from February 2003, documented the second of these trips, in early 2002. Our current trip was to be a pleasure trip to see these untouched reefs. Unfortunately, a severe hotspot of ocean warming occurred here in late 2002, and a