

was nearly dead. I was shocked to see the shape it was in compared to Kauai. I have never been more disappointed with a dive operation.

Reef Trekkers, Marriott, June 2005, JoAn Ferguson, Herndon, VA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: to Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F., calm. Reef Trekkers picked up people at different hotels along Waikiki, and then headed for the harbor. We were surprised that many different dive groups (led by different Dive Ops) were on the same boat. Before the trip we received an email indicating their requirements related to medical conditions. Apparently not everyone in the group received this email, so there was a lot of frustration when one person checked yes to medication but didn't have a full medical release with him. The prior week he was on a live-aboard in Palau — but there were no exception to this rule! IMHO, this attitude in dive operators doesn't encourage truthful completion of a medical form. Oh... then they didn't bother checking for C-Cards! They told us to stay in one area of the boat. Getting our equipment on was challenge due to the cramped conditions. Reeftrekkers did their best to help. We dove the Sea Tiger Wreck (lots of nooks and crannies, including an opportunity to swim into the bridge). This would have been a better dive if there hadn't been so many divers on it from our boat. Our second dive was Kewalo Pipe; lots of corals and critters have turned it into an artificial reef. They broke us into smaller groups (our family of three was one group) to each dive with a divemaster.

MARSHALL ISLANDS

Bako Divers, Hotel Robert Reimers, Majuro, August 2004, Jeanne & Bill Downey (downdive@comcast.net), Baden, PA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 84 to 84 F, calm, choppy. We stopped in Majuro on the way to Bikini Island to see what the diving was like and to get rid of some jet lag. We flew to Honolulu, where we spent the night at the convenient Honolulu Airport Hotel. We caught the 7 A.M. flight to Majuro, arriving early afternoon. We were met by a hotel representative and transferred to the hotel. The rooms are basic, but OK; book a cottage. We ate most of our meals at the hotel; some were quite tasty. There's not much else to do besides dive. Jerry Ross of Bako Divers did everything he could to keep us happy. There were three to five guests on the boat. We left 9:30-10:00 a.m. returned around 3:00 every afternoon, with at least an hour between dives. One of our favorite dives was Pokelap, with a small WWII hellcat at 110', and lots of bommies in shallower water. It was also a great place to find the endemic 3-banded anemone fish, lionfish, and lots of shrimp gobies. Another favorite was Cenpac with a shipwreck at 105', 2 big bumphead wrasse, and groupers. The water inside the lagoon was like glass a couple days: getting outside the lagoon through the narrow gap was interesting, and re-entering was like surfing. There were no soft corals, and the hard corals were low. Some dives had more fish than other; Jerry has an interesting way to "call sharks" up from the depths. We

also had some great turtle encounters. Majuro is a good stop for a couple of days. Book directly with Bako Divers at jerry@bakodivers.com.

Bikini Atoll Divers, April 2005, Brad Wright (bradwr@wrightholdings.com), Bellevue, WA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 82 Fahrenheit, calm. This is all about wreck diving. You are diving the nuclear fleet sunk by the US Gov in 1946 with the Able and Baker nuclear tests. You learn a ton of history and do two planned deco dives to approx 170 ft each day on a whole series of wrecks including an aircraft carrier and two battleships. The dive operation is run expertly. They are diligent in this far corner of the world to care for the divers visiting. Follow their instructions above and below the water for a good time. Don't and it's a dangerous place to be. Getting there and getting out is chancy so plan a couple of days coming and going in Majuro as flights to Bikini run when they want. This is the epitome of island time and coconut telegraph.

Rongelap Exp., Oleanda, July/August 2005, Wuni Ryschkewitsch, Gainesville, FL. Experience: 3650+ dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 81-83 F, choppy, some currents. Interesting area, boat and crew ok, but need more training. Two divemasters from Australia very poor. Made rules that made no sense and enforced them. ad nauseam. After a 35-foot dive you can't make a 70-foot dive — claim PADI says so. Couldn't find dive spots and lost her head shouting and screaming at divers. Had no respect of crew. The 2 previous

divemasters were let go; they had lots of experience but were apparently too expensive. Boat belongs 50% to Marshall Island government and 50% to private interest who owns other enterprises (hotel, department store, etc.) in Majuro. Would have been a great trip with different divemasters. Dive boat small and cramped, had to put knees under chin to do a backflip. Boat needs some repairs — 30 degree list and it leaks.

MICRONESIA

Kosrae

This small, unspoiled island has lush, green volcanic peaks and a close, fringing reef. Good reef diving is easily accessible, but it's not high-voltage like Palau.

Kosrae Village-EcoLodge and Dive Resort, July 2005, Charles Feinberg (gnil50@aol.com), Flushing, NY. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents, no currents. The island is relaxing and clean! The people are truly friendly. The Kosrae Village-EcoLodge and Dive Resort is rustic, clean and beautiful. The owners know everything about diving, gases etc. The food was fun and enjoyable. The most gorgeous hard coral I have ever seen in my life and in perfect condition. No one travels here! We saw pristine coral below 150'. The dive boat is fun!

Sleeping Lady Divers, Kosrae Village Resort, March 2005, James McMeins (marinenine@hotmail.com), Carnation, WA. Experience: Over 1000 dives, Vis: 100 to 50 Feet. Water: 81 to 84F.,

choppy, no currents. Kosrae has the best and most healthy hard corals and plenty of it. Every dive site was covered in nearly every variety of hard coral and they were all thriving. They have severely over fished because we saw only two sharks in 9 days of diving and both of those were juveniles. No pelagics or big fish of any kind, plenty of small tropicals around the corals. The dive boats are pontoon types with a single 40hp outboard. It takes forever to get to the farther dive sites and the water was pretty choppy most days which made for a wet bumpy ride. My wife and I had the boat all to ourselves most days, never more than 3 on the boat. Diving freedom, the divemasters would brief you on the dive site. Just watch your computers and come up when you're done. Dive guides used a surface float that the boat followed. We did 18 dives, including 2 night dives, and we stayed until 500 psi. No dive less than an hour, most were 70-75 minutes. Kosrae Village Resort is really native built, so don't expect luxury. We had the VIP suite which meant the bedroom was enclosed and had a small A/C unit that worked overtime keeping the room at 79 degrees at night. Plenty of fans in the rooms though and there was a constant sea breeze. Each individual room is placed throughout the property in a mangrove and they blend in nicely with the surrounding vegetation. The flight there is a hassle, its Continental's puddle jumper, leaves Honolulu, stops in Marjaro, Kwajalein then finally Kosrae before continuing on to two more island and Guam. At each stop they require one side of the plane to debark while they inspect for security reasons

and you have to take your carryons off with you. So we just checked everything. UW Photography Comments: Supplied cooler for rinsing cameras on boat, no tables but the design of the boat is not conducive to a large amount of camera gear.

PALAU

Long day-boat rides to the best diving weave through calm water and past magnificent rock islands, but there's the potential for rough seas on the outer edges. Most divers prefer live-aboards. Marine biodiversity is among the greatest in the world, but coral bleaching and commercial fishing are taking their toll. Still, big fish abound, and the Blue Corner is among the world's best high voltage sites. Visibility can exceed 200 feet, while currents range from nil to dangerously strong. Use a reef hook and bring your safety sausage.

Carp Island Resort, August 2004, Mark Alexay (malexay@scinstite.com), New York, NY. Experience: 240 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 ft. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm & flat. Carp Island is a privately owned, tropical forest-covered and uninhabited island in Palau. It is Japanese-owned and caters to Japanese divers. The diving was fantastic in terms of fish, large fish, and tons of sharks, and the island located close to the best dive sites unlike other operators. We dived, relaxed on the island, ate sashimi, had great fun with our new Japanese friends, and were able to leave our 16-month-old boy on the island with a sitter during the day. It was great for him and he

learned to understand Filipino during the six weeks we dived there.

Fish N Fins, West Plaza Desekele Hotel, February 2005, Lucius Foster (elijahsdad@prodigy.net), Duluth, MN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 82F., calm, no currents. Palau was a wonderful place and the locals were always polite. I put together my two week trip by calling Fish N Fins www.fishnfins.com and asked for a package deal to include two tank dive per day and lodging. They put me up at the West Plaza Desekele Hotel that is a five min. walk to the dive shop and dock. I was given a room in the middle of the second floor without windows (weird but I got used to it), a small living room with television (four channels only), couch and a closet, hallway kitchen, full bathroom, and bedroom with television. The hotel was above a grocery store that supplied most things I needed (Twinkies and Yoohoos) and was walking distance to all kinds of restaurants from Sushi to American BLT. The room was clean and the staff always smiled and made sure I had everything I needed. You will be just fine bringing a few t-shirts, trunks and shorts because they will clean your clothes for a couple bucks. As far as Fish N Fins, Tova Bornovski (owner) was a fantastic host. Her husband and partner Navot was away on business. This dive operation was top notch. The dive sites on the walls and reefs had great visibility while most of the wrecks had enough visibility to make them great wreck dives. We dove the famous Peleliu Express. We were cruising on a wall dive with a slight current, as when the divemaster signaled to set your reef

hook, it was too late. The current was ripping so hard that all anyone could do was hold on for dear life to the floor bottom and look straight so that your mask did not get ripped off. Everyone on the dive was a rescue diver or better and we all managed to hold on and wait for the divemaster to let go so that all of us would release at the same time and stay together. Now that was exciting and I guess it was OK to piss all over myself since I was in a wetsuit. We all followed the 20 to 30 mile an hour current and made our safety stop before our final ascent. When we came up you could barely see land and our boat captain was nowhere to be seen. But within 2 minutes he came and picked all of us up. We were all a little shaken and with the story of a lifetime to tell others of the Peleliu Express!. The other drift dives were mild and easy. I saw sharks on every dive except one wreck, lots of huge manta rays and sea turtles, schools of dolphins, and many pelagics. The coral seemed to be rebounding after the bleaching from El Nino and the small fish were everywhere. Not a lot of was nudibranchs and small stuff for the macro lens, however, I believe it was because I was so busy looking at all the huge stuff and I am over forty and the reading glasses were not on the dive with me. Fish N Fins has a wonderful photo and video shop with professional staff; rental, repairs, film and processing, computer use for digital corrections and then download to disk with Adobe Photoshop (I believe), PADI photo courses, cameras only huge fresh water cleaning tank, and plenty of table space. The dive boats have no rinse bucket or place for camera or video

equipment. You must store on floor or under seat. However, divemasters and boat captains are great with handing off equipment before and after the dives.

Fish N Fins, May 2005, John Kendall (j.kendall@earthlink.net), Denver, CO.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. The boats are nicer than the cattle boats used by other operations in Palau. This is important because the trips to the sites take awhile. The dive staff was friendly and knowledgeable. Jelly Fish Lake trip is overpriced — it's just a snorkel through tens of thousands of stingless jellyfish — but not to be missed. Blue Corner is better for experienced divers with a reef hook (buy one before you get here, I can't believe they're that expensive back home). The hook will keep you suspended in the fast current as you watch the sharks school by, along with an eagle ray or two. New Drop-Off is a nice wall, many schools of fish. Don't do wreck dives at low tide, high tide brings in the clear water. West Plaza Desekel is convenient to the dive operation, nothing fancy, but it's ok. The cheapest rate gets you a windowless room. There's a grocery store on the 1st floor.

Fish N Fins, July 2005, Mark Berger (bergger@cox.net), San Diego, CA.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F., calm. Cattle boat operation. On our first dive we had a full boat of experienced divers, three of whom were master instructors, and all had done 15 dives the previous week. The divemaster was informed, and yet we still did a check dive at a site with little growth, current, or much to

see, other than a vertical wall that went into the blue abyss (a waste of half a dive day) The 60 min dive limit was limiting as some dives were shallow and the divemaster would start organizing the end of the dive at 45 min. I would come up with over 850 psi and wanted to say down for another 10-15 min. That is why I went! On our third day FNF put new divers (their first day) on our boat and we had to do the check dive nonsense again with them and could not go to Shark City, an advanced site close to the other sites we were going to. One drift dive through the Ulong Channel was the best. The undersea life is abundant, exciting. I have never seen so many sharks, schools of barracuda, turtles, clams, jacks. Just want more time to stay with the beauty and environment. FNF tries to be helpful but if someone shows up to dive they will put them on any available boat. That is the problem with this kind of business, costs of fuel, skills of clients, and economics of providing dive services profitable. We had a small group that had excellent air consumption and had to make almost every dive short. FNF's facility is good. Their boats are in good condition and their divemasters are knowledgeable. The briefings were good and the lunches were at beautiful beaches. The food was OK, simple and filling but nothing special. And everything costs a "little extra." Palau is beautiful, the sharks are elegant.

Neco Marine, Palau Pacific Resort, April 2005, Dale Thompson. (dthompson1@san.rr.com), Del Mar, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Water: 83F., calm. Stayed at Palau Pacific

Resort for 7 days, probably nicest place on the island, where guest population during our stay was split between Japanese tourists and American divers. Rooms small but well furnished, service excellent, restaurant good with reasonably priced a la carte or lavish breakfast and dinner buffets. Neco Marine had clean, well maintained, fast (35 kt) boats with sun canopies, side bench seats fitted with tank racks. Crew of two, one being the divemaster. We had two divemasters, one excellent, the other competent but not as good at pointing out items to divers. Most sites 30-45 ride on boat. Provided adequate lunches (sandwich or bennto box), lots of water and soda. After first day picked us up at Pan Pac dock. On last day returned to Neco to wash gear and settle up and found a nice open air bar run by Neco adjacent (semi-lethal Mai Tais). Diving was excellent. Good visibility, typically 60-80 feet. Most sights (walls and caverns) were along perimeter reefs with current from nothing to 1-2 knots. Reef anchors were used to "hover" at edge of reef where current comes up from depths onto reef tops. These edges were collection points for tremendous variety and numbers of larger fish, schooling fish and sharks. Reefs healthy — coral, soft coral, sponges, etc. Many fish and macro subjects along walls and reef tops including lionfish, turtle, eels sighted nearly every day. Went to Jellyfish lake — well worth it, but once is enough. Climb up and over ridge to lake from boat dock is steep, 10 minute, clamber over rocky trail and requires sturdy sandals or tennis shoes not the average wetsuit bootie.

Peleliu Divers, February 2005, Jim Haynes (jimhaynes@gorge.net), Hood River, OR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, currents. Good alternative to diving from the main island (Koror) because boat rides of 5-20 min instead of 60-90. We were the only Americans, wife and I, had the boat and guide to ourselves. Godwin a native Peleliuan and his Japanese wife Mayumi run a nice little resort, all loose and informal, attentive. The dive sites of Peleliu Wall, P. Express, Yellow Wall are highly exciting, with serious current, (reef hooks required) and great wild life in the wild ocean. The land conditions were also excellent, peaceful and quiet. No night life.

Sam's Tours, Palau Pacific Resort, February 2005, Embry Rucker (nsrucker@aol.com), Prospect, KY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85F., choppy. Sam's is big and well organized well run. Good personal service. We were on a 452' boat with 13 divers and 2 dive-masters. The boat size was good since it is a 50-70 minute ride to the far sites. We had an especially good Divemaster, Keith Santillo. He has been on Palau 15 years and does a great job on briefings as well as looking after newbies and letting more experienced divers do their thing. He is good at spotting interesting things. PPR resort was nice but expensive. Snorkeling at their beach was super — lots of giant clams as well as fish. Palau was a very interesting and lively place. Coral has recovered a lot from the El Nino. Jamaican Restaurant at museum is great.

Sam's Tours, West Plaza Malakai, March 2005, Scott Johnson (Scottyj96@aol.com), Palm Springs, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. In the three years diving with Keith, he has taken half the weight off my weight belt and doubled my bottom time. My first day, water like glass and temp 82 degrees. The first dive was the Blue Holes. Simply a Beautiful dive. Looking up at divers descending through the Blue Holes is incredible. We descend down to the Disco Clam and then drift down the wall. You will see hard and soft corals, schools of black snapper, yellowbacks, trevally, butterflyfish and so on. Then the surface interval. Probably the 20th time I have dove the Blue Corner. The current was ripping at about 3 knots with 5-knot surges. You hook up to the Reef and watch the underwater zoo! Barracuda, eagle rays, jacks, white tips, dog tooth tuna, 50 grey reef sharks large and small. The females were cut and scratched, mating season, looks a little rough. Then off the Corner and into the flats. Triggerfish are hanging around their nests, and they do not want you around. One bumped the lens of my camera, and then I felt a tug on my fin. Just a Triggerfish biting and it would not budge, so I decided to leave them alone. Actually I was running out of air. Whether it was the German Channel, Peleliu, Big Drop Off, or Turtle Cove. The diving was simply the best! I met Flip and Mike on a dive boat, they said they were getting one day off in thirty days and this was their day off. I asked them what they did. They work for Bent Prop www.bentprop.org their job was to search for

WWII, MIAs. Bent Props job is to interview people in. Palau that lived during WWII. Search out wrecks and try to identify MIA to bring them home. They found remains of two planes and now trying find if the person(s) is an MIA. Bent Prop is voluntary organization. They are Airline pilots, Students, Doctors etc. They held a presentation at Sam's one night in which Bent Prop discussed their findings this year. I met a veteran who came in the first wave of the invasion in Peleliu. Also met a Medal of Honor winner who was on one of the first boats landing for the invasion of Iwo Jima — he told me he remembered it was 9:30 AM! What stories. I am in awe of all these brave men!

Sam's Tours, West Plaza, March 2005, Charles Menbeck (blusky79@aol.com), Chicago, IL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 83F., calm. Nice to be back after 5 years. Sam's had expanded operations from about 4 boats to 8 boats now. Seasonality may have something to do with that. Very well run and professionally organized dive operation. Divemasters Keith, Jim K, Dexter, and Steffan, all top notch. Dive itinerary was quite varied. Did Blue Holes, Blue Corner (lots of sharks, turtles and schools of fish), Siaes Tunnel (cavern at about 100'), Siaes Corner, Turtle Cove, Peleliu Wall, Peleliu Yellow Wall/Express (4+ knots drift dive), German Channel (Manta Rays), Ulong Channel (more sharks and monstrous barracudas), and Jim's/Dexter's Wall (near Blue Corner with the same action). The Blue Corner this time around had a stronger current on the wall when we reef hooked down

to the reef. I was told it was because we were there on a full moon resulting in stronger tides. Went to the famed Jellyfish Lake. Truly an anomaly seeing so many jellyfish isolated in a lake and losing their ability to sting over the evolutionary time period since they were separated from the sea. You have to do a short hike to get there. Would spend time at the end of the dive day having a cheeseburger with a cold Budweiser while watching the other dive boats come in. Nice and relaxing. Would also eat in town near the hotel at the Rock Island Café, where the menu was quite varied and included American style dishes. They have an Internet café. The West Plaza Hotel Desekel is in town and right above a small grocery store. They're nice people running the hotel. The airport transfers between the hotel and airport were smooth.

Sam's Tours, Palau Pacific, June 2005, Pamela Turner, Oakland, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, currents. We spent eight days in Palau, five diving and two kayaking with Sam's. Blue Corner and New Drop Off were some best dives my husband and I have had in 21 years. So many sharks (reef, blacktip, whitetip) that we lost count, big Napoleon wrasses, schools of a barracuda. We did not see any mantas underwater, but two cruised by our boat for five minutes. Palau Pacific is nice, especially the beach access, though some rooms look like they need new wallpaper. Best restaurant on the island is The Taj (great naan and butter chicken) followed by Arirang (Korean). Sam's Tours are committed to conservation—the general manager, Dermott, helped push

through a shark finning ban and is actively involved in getting a new zoning plan to protect the reefs further. Our guides, Dexter and Daniel, were excellent. Our youngest (12) was certified by the affable Ronnie. Our kayaking guide, Jake, was entertaining and an incredible athlete. If you want to see mandarin-fish, go kayaking to Risong Bay — you can snorkel with them in two feet of water as long as you like.

Sam's Tours, Palau Pacific Resort, July 2005, Bill Dobrin (bdobrin@earthlink.net), Libertyville, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F., calm, currents. The Palau Pacific Resort was outstanding. The best service. Great rooms and terrific restaurant. There is also excellent snorkeling at their beautiful beach. Sam's Tours is an excellent, well-organized company. The dive masters, Ronnie and Jim, were eager to find critters that the rest of us may have missed on every dive. They were also willing to follow our wishes about which dive sites to visit.

Pohnpei

The Village, February 2005, Embry Rucker (nsrucker@aol.com), Prospect, KY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85F., choppy. Pohnpei was great — a beautiful island — and The Village is a super place to stay. Each room is like a treehouse looking over the jungle and the sea. The dive operation is not super comfortable (you ride on cushions on the boat bottom) but the diving is great, the divemasters are good and interesting. Saw lots of mantas, nudibranchs, fish. Bring your own equipment.

The Village, July 2005, Charles Feinberg (gnil50@aol.com), Flushing, NY. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents, no currents. The Village: 2nd time (1st time the diving was not exciting. The Village Resort is amazing; super accommodations, food/trip to Nam Badol and now new boats with larger engines. Yet the Manta Dive, only ten minutes from the resort, puts Yap to shame. Mantas at 50 feet and at the surface; close up and personal. The most amazing Manta diving ever. The entire staff: totally professional and friendly.

Truk

This is the world's most diverse wreck diving on a Japanese fleet sunk by American planes during WWII. Most wreck dives, other than to the superstructures, exceed 80 feet, but they're great even without penetration. The wrecks are aging, but they are festooned with coral, and most all the unique reef fish of the Pacific have made them home. Expect calm water, occasional poor visibility, and hot weather.

Blue Lagoon Dive Resort, March 2005, Charles Menbeck (blusky79@aol.com), Chicago, IL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 79 to 83F., choppy. I enjoyed the diving here so much that I returned 5 years later. The Blue Lagoon Resort is simple with all of its palm trees spread out profusely over the grounds. The room view from the deck was the best I have ever seen. Try to stay on the second floor in room 407 (best). If not avail-

able, request 406 or 405. For what I was paying there (Blue Lagoon Resort is not cheap), I thought they could do better on the quality of the dive boats to give you more room and protection from the elements. They're 6-pack-like boats. You sit in a square configuration with the other divers. Large oversized rowboats with engines on steroids. Nice to get out there fast as the resort is conveniently located where all the major wrecks are. But the boat drivers don't like to slow down when it gets quite choppy, thereby producing a rough ride with plenty of water spray in your face and on your dry back. For a couple rides there, I thought I was on a mechanical bull being thrown around. Not good when you need to be strong for a deep dive. Nobody likes to show up at a dive site queasy. So I was puzzled why the boat drivers were so aggressive. Due to all that over spray before and after the dives, I wound up having a nasty sinus infection for the last few days. Yes, it cut my diving short. I wasn't thrilled knowing how it happened. The dive sites were, as usual, great. We did the Nipo Maru. I think I'll have some great wreck photos from that one. After that dive, we went to "JEEP" Island (Japanese Expedition Exploratory Party in the 1940s) to eat our lunch. It was about 400' in diameter loaded with exotic Trees, 5 different shades of water colors and loaded with Palm Trees. When we arrived, two barking dogs, wagging their tails, greeted us. Bring your cameras! Other top dives are the Fujikawa Maru, and the Shinokoku Maru. Cobalt blue waters that are warm (82 degrees) with little or no current. Don't look for much to do in town or at

night. You come here for the diving and world class tropical scenery.

YAP

Mantas are the main attraction and while they're frequent visitors to M'il channel, they sometimes stay home. There are steep coral-covered walls and enough tropical fish to keep divers occupied for a few days. Expect clear water, except where the mantas feed. Most divers see Yap as an extension of a major trip to Truk or Palau.

Beyond the Reef, ESA Hotel, February 2005, Embry Rucker (nsrucker@aol.com), Prospect, KY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85F., choppy. Excellent, small personal operation, good local Divemasters with lots of local info, each boat had captain and DM, one to 6 divers per boat. Yap is great, we should have stayed more than the 5 days. It is great for people also interested in history and plants. ESA hotel is like an American roadside motel clean good size rooms good service and inexpensive.

Manta Ray Bay Hotel, March 2005, Dale Thompson (dthompson1@san.rr.com), Del Mar, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 70 Feet. Water: 81 to 82F., calm, choppy. During three days of diving (about the right length of time for Yap) had 3 dives in the channel frequented by mantas for cleaning stations — and, at this time for year, for mating. In 30 - 40 foot visibility (tidal surge through channel) at one time we saw up to 16 mantas either slowly drifting past cleaning stations or females

working up and down the channel with 2-3 males trailing each. Other dive of note was twilight dive in shallows of lagoon for mandarin fish. This is mating season and they come out of the coral heads and spiral free swimming in the water in pairs. Rest of dives along reef so-so. Boats old and no tank racks, benches, or adequate seating. Don BC and tank while standing or perched on narrow boat rail, both hazardous when the chop is up as it was for two of three days, then back roll entry. Scramble up narrow ladder back on board. Manta Ray Bay Hotel has seen better years (indeed it looks like it's seen better decades — but it's not that old). Rooms in poor condition, a/c marginal, lights not working, doors to balcony hard to operate/inoperable, screen doors propped to side as an interesting statement in fashion I suppose. Hotel and restaurant service friendly, slow, willing, and sometimes (not often) competent. May have been poor due to absence of owner during our stay on business trip off island. Disappointed upon arrival on the island to find a much newer, first class hotel and dive operation — Trader's Ridge Resort — which we had not been told about by our tour agency — Trip-N-Tour. Had dinner there and spoke to the owner who has contracted rates for only a little more than the Manta Ray Bay.

Werner Lau, Trader's Ridge, June 2005, Pamela Turner, Oakland, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, currents. Visibility at the manta cleaning stations was limited, but we saw two big mantas. Our second dive was better — through an underwater canyon with barracuda,

baby whitetip sharks, big lobsters, and a huge barracuda. Best time for mantas, according to our dive guide, Nikko, is February. We chose the upscale Trader's Ridge and its Werner Lau dive center over Manta Ray Bay Hotel, which attracts the package tour crowd. Trader's Ridge is nicer, has a lot more atmosphere, and Werner Lau has a new facility a short walk from the hotel. We had a boat to ourselves (family of five) while the Manta Ray Bay divers were crowded shoulder-to-shoulder. Service is generally slow but friendly.

NEW ZEALAND

Dive Tutukaka, March 200, Szilora Gogh (szgogh@hotmail.com), Burbank, CA. Experience: 5,000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 65 to 70 F, calm and flat, no currents. Diving is similar to California, just warmer and a little more fish (not overfished). I booked my trip with Dive Tutukaka a few days before the dive date. They were really helpful, cool, professional. Their rental facility and the way they organize everything around the shop was impressive. The sign-in process, the dive gear fitting and lunch order were done in 15 minutes. They offer vegetarian or meat options. Right outside the store is a cool café where divers hang out. They were on time always. The dive boats are clean and roomy. The crew is friendly, knowledgeable and professional. The diving can be done with a group and a guide or individual buddy teams, which is great.

Dive Tutukaka, August 2005, John Sommerer (sommerer@comcast.net),

Silver Spring, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 57 to F, choppy, surge. Great dive operation in a fascinating location. We're not normally cold-water divers, but we really enjoyed the Poor Knights. Large diversity and abundance of fish, critters, in a beautiful setting. One of the best (day) boats I've ever been on. Suzette and I were the only divers, but they took us out (24km!), no grouching. Dive guides Michelle and Jury were both great. Nice boat tour of the islands during surface interval. Wish we had time to dive more of the sites. Arches, caves, points, etc. Coldest diving I've ever enjoyed! Drive to Tutukaka pretty. Recommend Pacific Rendezvous for a place to stay; the hot tub is essential at the end of the day.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Some of the world's finest diving is in this land just north of Australia. While several dive lodges have excellent diving, it's a dream destination for live-aboards. Unique critters abound. Muck diving is great for macro photographers and many sites have big fish, big and brilliant coral. It's also a naturalist's paradise with volcanoes, steaming jungles, butterflies as big as birds, walking-stick insects a foot long, and splendid Birds of Paradise. Most rain comes in heavy afternoon downpours. Take a week to stay in fine lodges like Karawari or Ambua to visit indigenous, still primitive cultures, among the most interesting on the planet. Port Moresby is an unsafe city, although the big hotels are fine, as is a cab trip to the