

had interesting discussions about what we were seeing and what we thought it meant. We know that our participation in this trip was important, and that our main purpose in coming was to bear witness to what's happening. This letter is my attempt to do so.

Nai'a Cruises, May 2005, Bob & Doris Schaffer (seamom@earthlink.net), Fallbrook, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 87 F, choppy, currents. The Phoenix Islands region (in the country of Kiribati) was hit by an episode of increased water temperature caused by global warming. Reports we received before we left indicated widespread coral bleaching. We were hoping that not all reefs were affected, but we confirmed that formerly pristine reefs were all dead. Once we stopped focusing on the dead coral and started focusing on the abundant fish life and vigorous current diving, things picked up. Plenty of Napoleon wrasse and varieties of angel-type fish, numerous reef fish cascading over the rocks, schools of jacks, barracuda, parrots and bump head parrots, and lots of sharks (although in the northern part of the island chain, which has been overfished to provide shark fins for the Asian markets) they were quite small. In the southern part, (which, presumably, hasn't been hit as hard by shark fishers/finners) white tip, black tip and grey reef sharks were much larger — five feet and more. This was a scientific expedition and two marine biologist coral experts were on board studying the affected reefs and the many patches of new coral that are beginning to regenerate. They were excellent teachers

and we learned a lot. Few anemones and small critters (because of the dead reefs). We left from Samoa and the crossing was 2-1/2 days. This is such a remote region that in three weeks on the water, we never saw another vessel. This was our 30th live-aboard trip and our fourth on Nai'a, which we deem one of the best live-aboards operating. It is a wonderfully comfortable boat with an amazing crew — friendly and attentive and safety-conscious. Owner Rob Barrel was our host and he is so knowledgeable that conversation at every meal was a learning experience. Food is outstanding, too, with several entrée choices at breakfast and dinner and all beautifully presented and served (no buffets). All in all, a great trip despite the destroyed coral reefs and with lots of good adventure including a trip to an uninhabited island to harvest coconut crabs for dinner! UW Photography Comments: A room for camera gear with adequate shelf space and charging receptacles, covered and sheltered, adjacent to but separate from the dive deck.

MICRONESIA

Palau

Ocean Hunter, March 2005, Lisa Vignerot (lvignerot@hotmail.com), Stafford, VA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 84F., calm, choppy, surge, currents, no currents. Spent a night at the Carolines resort before checking onto the Ocean Hunter. At the airport when we arrived, we were greeted by Zenia from the Carolines Resort with a lei and a smile and were

whisked off in their van to the resort. In the morning, we were brought breakfast to our bungalow and I had the best omelet I had in my life. Fish n Fins came and took us to Ocean Hunter. We got to the boat, got unloaded, and met the other folks that were on our cruise. There was one couple was from France (300+ dives), one German with a camera named Susan (500+ dives), and us two Americans with 40 dives. We started off with a 5-minute motor to our “check out” dive to the Helmet Wreck. The wreck had a lot to see, but had low visibility and sat at about 60+ feet. Total dives: 27. Number of dives off the boat: 25 (both night dives were done off the skiff). I dove in a 2.5mm full wetsuit, but by the 3rd dive in, had to put on the 2.5 shorty vest. Next trip — I am bringing the 5mm full. Crew help you on and off the boat, handed you a warm towel, and all you have to do is back up to the load platform to take off/put on your gear and jump in the water! Hot showers were provided on the rear deck to rinse off between dives. Nitrox mix ranged from 31.8 to 32.1. After every dive, we had something to eat and drink. Arlie’s cooking was fabulous— like eating in a different restaurant each day — one day Italian, next day Indian. They claim it’s low fat, but I gained five pounds on the trip! The boat was in good shape — it’s an older sailboat, it is functional, clean, plenty of hot water, air conditioning was good, and space was adequate for 8 people and their gear. There were three cabins — two up front that shared a bathroom, and a “stateroom” in the back with its own bathroom and shower. Crew had their own area. We

opted for the “stateroom” and were happy; however, they could update the mattresses or add another layer of foam. Our guide, Gabby, let us do our own thing, yet kept an eye on us when we wanted. We dove all the primo sites including Blue Corner, Peleliu Express, and Big Drop off, and managed to get New Drop Off and Blue Corner in a few times. My biggest gripe was I didn’t sign up for the 10-day cruise! The crew went above and beyond the call of duty the entire cruise, and even taking the skiff into town when we needed Sudafed. At the end of the cruise, they hosed off and cleaned all our gear. We did visit Ocean Hunter II and boy what a boat that is— good setup, brand new, but it carries 12 divers. We got into the port at 5pm on Tuesday, and had dinner and hung out on the dock. The next day, we got up, had breakfast, and got our stuff packed up and left about 9:30am. I should have spent at least 4 days on land so I could have done the waterfalls, jungle exploration, yap money quarry, and the WWII sites.

Ocean Hunter 2, May 2005, Peter Golitzen (golitzenp@hawaii.rr.com), Kailua-Kona, HI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, calm, currents. Every dive was “one-way” since currents plentiful and unpredictable. Best diving ever except walls a little barren because of ripping currents and 1998 El Nino. OC2 great boat, run well! Great trip!

Palau Aggressor, April 2004, Alex Slocum, Bow, NH. Experience: 300+ dives. Vis: 80 to 120 ft. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm & flat, strong currents. Fantastic friendly, helpful crew. Excellent boat in

top condition. Nitrox tanks were 32%. To see good coral, must be on the wall, tops of reefs (walls) have not recovered from El Nino yet. Reef-hook dives are fun fun fun!

Palau Aggressor II, November 2004, Bill Shepherd (Chorsejbs@aol.com), Satellite Beach, FL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm. A diver-oriented boat with a professional crew. Accommodations were ample, clean, and well maintained. The food was varied with ample servings and snacks after dives and in the evenings. Dive briefings were thorough with accurate diagrams that made finding the small critters easy. The Aggressor's dive skiff enabled the boat to anchor/moor in a central location and visit a variety of dive sites. Support included fast E6 processing, a computer with email capabilities, a satellite phone. They gave divers personal EPIRBs for safety. Photo table set up on dive deck along with adequate rinse tanks. Several charging station outlets that saw frequent use.

Palau Aggressor, 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 boat normally houses 18 guests, but there were only seven. We had lots of room to spread out. The rooms were kept spotless and all of the boat's facilities are top notch. The food was delicious and plentiful and the crew was extremely friendly and helpful. The divers were treated like responsible adults and we were allowed to dive our own profiles. There are two rinse tanks dedicated to cameras. The camera table

has several outlets for charging batteries and two compressed air hoses.

Palau Aggressor II, September 2005, Martha & Jeff Hubbard (hubbard182@att.net), Glenmont, NY. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm, choppy, surge. Only five divers! Less ethical operators might cancel a charter with so few guests. Five divers was glorious, twelve would be O.K., but a full ship of 18 would be crowded. Dive deck is big and has tank holders and under-seat storage, but gear stays on the skiff from which diving is done. Two showers on the dive deck, and fresh towels after every dive. The skiff is roomy and comfortable, but only one (good size) ladder for exits. The crew of five (down from usual seven) was attentive and diligent. We had no Nitrox — broken part, no spare. Four or five dives a day in Palau on air pushes no-deco limits, and some divers skipped dives because of accumulated nitrogen. (We, using Cochran Gemini computers, did all twenty-four dives in 52 days without approaching deco.) Every diver's BC gets an emergency radio beacon attached for the week, and they lend Dive-Alert, sausage, reef hook, and cutter (in case the reef hook gets stuck) for those who don't have them. Only three night dives are permitted. The dive day is pretty full, since there is a 5 to 20 minute skiff ride to and from dive sites, meaning 2-3 hr of travel added to dive time. Some travel is through the beautiful Palau lagoon, but some is on the open sea. Palau has made a substantial recovery from the damage of the 1998 El Nino bleaching. Most dives have one hour bottom time. Cabins are large

enough, but not for two people trying to pack! Lower double bunk holds two comfortably and there is enough clearance under the top bunk to prevent head bumping. Food was spicier than most of us liked. The last day after two dives and lunch, Aggressor's bus took us into town and ferried everyone where they wanted to go all afternoon. Dinner is not included, but the bus took us to a restaurant of our choice and waited to return us to the ship! UW Photography Comments: Big camera table on Aggressor and protected camera area on skiff. Crew will hand down/up camera. Digital download computer facilities and E6 available.

Truk

Odyssey, August 2004, Tim Imwold (alohatnt@verizon.net), Kaneohe, HI.

Experience: 1000+ dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 85F., no currents. This was our first live-aboard and it was fantastic! I have been diving for over 17 years and my wife just got certified. You are allowed to dive your own profile. You can have a divemaster dive with you and they will show you a lot of hidden treasures. Madison and Kent were our divemasters; they were laid-back and they always made us laugh. Sammy was there to put on our fins and help take off our gear after a dive. Mika was the night watch man and no matter what time you would get up he would be there to make coffee. Emeril is a great chef and Poorle cleaned our cabins and served us our meals, always with a smile. The wrecks are breathtaking and beautiful, some days you dive 2 wrecks and other days you dive 3. There is an outer reef shark dive but due to

weather conditions we could not do it. We were just as happy to dive another wreck. Lenny and Cara gave detailed briefs before each dive and you can also purchase slates with the wrecks printed on them to take with you on the dive. Our scuba club chartered the entire boat so as a group of 10 the single divers had cabins to themselves.

Odyssey, March 2005, Ann McGrath (amcgrath@att.net), Alexandria, VA.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 F., calm, no currents. We have dived dozens of live-aboards, and the Odyssey has the largest cabins we've seen yet. Their dining room/bar area is monstrous, and there is an additional salon on the main deck with hundreds of DVDs, which you can watch in the salon, or in your cabin, which is equipped with headphones at each bed so you don't disturb other passengers. I gave the kitchen staff a fairly strict diet to follow, and they did an excellent job. At most meals, they had prepared a plate separately for me. There was plenty of hot water, and the toilets are not marine toilets! The Odyssey, at one time, was a small cruise ship, so its accommodations more closely resemble those of a cruise ship than a live-aboard. Because of recent surgery, I could not lift my equipment. No problem! The crew graciously brought me my tank and BC to the dive deck, where I put my gear on while sitting on the back deck. They always tied their own line to each wreck, so we always had a guide line back to the Odyssey after a dive, without having to follow the mooring line. The divemasters gave excellent tours of the wrecks, and found great stuff for us to see and photograph.

I would prefer more local cuisine. The food was excellent, but it was normal American fare. Our last dinner was steak and lobster! For snacks, we had fresh baked breads, brownies, coconut macaroons, sashimi, and always fresh fruit. Their bar is well stocked and is included in the price of the charter. The Odyssey has a large area for cameras — there were 13 photographers on our trip, and we had plenty of room. There is a separate area in the salon for charging batteries. They processed E6 film quickly, and have a large light table for viewing slides.

Odyssey, February 2005, Pat Wikstrom, Warne NC. The MV Odyssey is well thought out, well constructed and luxurious. Owners Lenny and Cara have created a fantastic floating dive palace. The wood is polished, the carpets are clean, no threadbare upholstery, no rust is showing. The crew takes a lot of pride in their boat. Compressors, A/C, water systems, Nitrox membrane, generators, etc. worked flawlessly. This 132-ft long vessel with its nine well-appointed cabins can easily accommodate 18 divers. Staterooms are fully carpeted, paneled in rich hardwoods, have ensuite facilities with regular toilets and showers, individual air-conditioning controls, and a wall mounted DVD player with flat screen monitor. Passengers congregate on the uppermost deck with its dining/salon and the adjacent sun deck. Entertainment lounge is large, comfortable, with a bar, a round table with four armchairs, an illuminated slide viewing table, wrap around couches and entertainment center. The dive deck is a well thought out, functional. Almost

everyone was diving manifolded doubles and carried a 30 cu.ft. deco pony loaded with a 50/50 O2 mix. There was sufficient space for all these tanks and gearing up. On surfacing from the rigid deco bar at 15ft. we climbed one of two dive ladders, took a freshwater shower and dried off with a warm fresh towel. Meals were buffet and some of the best I've had on my 15 liveboard trips. Fresh fish was often delivered to the boat by locals and the seafood dinners were with grilled, blackened, and broiled delicacies. My trip was organized by Fathoms Magazine as a dedicated deep wreck trip where decompression diving was the mode and everybody either was an extended range diver or taking the class on board. Did just three dives a day due to the much longer surface intervals we needed.

Water 82 degrees, visibility 60 ft. to over 100 ft., but could drop to less than 5 feet inside the wrecks. Extensive dive briefings with detailed drawings of the site, possible dive plans, route of entry, historical information, and hazards to avoid. They left buddies to plan their dive and have a good time. Many of the 300' to 500 ft. long wrecks have settled upright or with just a slight list, with many of the more than 50 vessels sunk throughout the lagoon within the recreational diving limits of 130ft. Open holds provide easy access to fascinating contents: deck guns, masts, and kingposts have been transformed into colorful displays of soft coral, sponges, and fans surrounded by schools of anthias, opal sweepers, trevelly, and chevron barracuda. Occasionally wahoo or tuna fly by, graceful eagle rays sweep over the decks, and blacktip reef sharks cruise

the edges of visibility. Odyssey Adventures (800) 757-5396 — www.TrukOdyssey.com. I used Reef & Rainforest for airfare, transit hotels. Good service with no document hassles. www.reefrainforest.com (800) 794-9767. Continental trip was 37 hours from Atlanta involving multiple stops and a night in Guam.

Odyssey, July 2005, Charles Feinberg (gnil50@aol.com), Flushing, NY. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 70 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F., calm, currents. When you have a husband and wife team owning and running a boat and living on it, you get personal attention to every detail. My brother and sister-in-law, who were not wreck divers, but are now, could not believe how after just one day of diving on the outside of the wrecks they ended up diving on the inside. Our first time to Truk was for three days diving the small skiffs from the Blue Lagoon (I would not suggest this unless you have no other choice and then it's super). Both the Odyssey and the Thorfinn will be going into dry dock for repairs and the Aggressor is leaving for Indonesia for good! We dove on the Odyssey with a professional and fun group from Michigan. Deep pro divers. We could do the San Francisco Maru deep into the holds (185' plus for 15+ minutes) and everyone gave high fives after the dive because we dove our profiles perfectly with Lenny (the Captain) diving with us because he loves this deep wreck. I had e-mailed Lenny asking him if he had a guitar? Reply: Yes so Jon, my brother-in-law brought his flute and we jammed just about every night. We are on a low carb diet and they Tried! I didn't spend time on the dives because they are what they are;

some of the greatest dives ever. Constant and consistent! The dive crew will take you to R2D2 or any deep penetration you desire. The Nipo was almost as great as any of the deeper wrecks. Three tiered camera area for the largest to smallest unit plus air guns.

Odyssey, July 2005, Mark Berger (bergger@cox.net), San Diego, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 70 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F., calm. Excellent dive briefings that included where to go, what you could see, and what to stay away from. You could run your own schedule and dive your own profiles. Deep penetration into the wrecks was best done with a guide but there was so much to see that we did that few times. We went to twelve wrecks and most dives lasted around 60 min. I had one deep dive on the San Francisco Maru that was a planned deco dive that went to 175' for 14 min with my computer indicating 11 min of deco time. Lots to see and so little time. The food was good, fresh, and plentiful. Not gourmet but adequate. The staff was attentive and helpful in donning and doffing gear. The Nitrox fills were always over 3000 psi and I loved the freedom to go at my pace and see as much as possible. The sea life on the wrecks is incredible and this boat is the best.

Truk Aggressor II, July 2005, Richard Nelson (chard@alum.calberkeley.org), Oakland, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 87 Fahrenheit, calm. Our third trip on this boat, and sadly the last, as it is heading to Sulawesi. The crew (which is going with the boat) is great. Very personable, easy-going, but professional

(and unyielding on such issues as the occasional dive beyond the recreational limit). The food has improved over the years; they are getting better quality stuff. Nothing fancy, but tasty and filling. The boat itself was showing its age, such as a broken handle in the shower in our stateroom. But that's all scheduled to be fixed when the boat moves to Indonesia. The diving was great. The crew would guide people through the wrecks and would break the group up so as not to overcrowd the penetrations. All smooth. Other than the abundance of jellyfish (always a possibility in July), conditions were terrific. Once we'd all found our Lycra hoods, gloves, etc., we were OK with diving through the jellies.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

MV Golden Dawn, August 2005, Clinton Bauder (gecko1@metridium.com), Cupertino, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm, choppy, currents. Excellent trip, worth the expense and travel hassle. Besides the three of us, there were only two other divers. Diving was flat out fantastic on this Wewak to Madang trip. Amazing hard corals, the best and healthiest I've seen. Lots of sharks (grey reef, whitetip reef, blacktip, java, silvertip, bull and scalloped hammerheads) though usually just far enough away that we had trouble getting good pictures. Several turtles. Maybe not so many of the weird muck diving kind of critters but we did see a leaf scorpionfish, a demon stinger and many crocodile flatheads. Cuttlefish and lionfish on most dives. We dove quite a few wrecks,

mostly from WWII including several Japanese Marus and a B25. The Golden Dawn in a nice boat and Captain Crag de Wit is an excellent and enthusiastic host. Food was good enough that I gained about 5 pounds even doing five long dives a day, often in strong currents. Nitrox is filled via a membrane system and helium is available via prior request. Weather was bit rough by tropical standards though this didn't affect the diving much. Dives tended to be relatively advanced so this might not be an itinerary for a beginner. Travel to PNG is not for the faint of heart or light of wallet. Leave time at the beginning of your itinerary in case your baggage doesn't make the same flights as you do. UW Photography Comments: Camera table is a bit small but otherwise fine. Plenty of room for chargers both in the salon and the cabins. TVs that worked with both NTSC and PAL and even a digital projector.

Paradise Sport, September 2004, Edith Summey (summey11@aol.com), Carbondale, IL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to Feet. Water: 82 to F, calm, no currents. Unfortunately, someone on the boat brought along a cold and shared it with the rest of us so that most divers spent much of the 10 day trip nursing runny noses, coughs, and general malaise. As a result, I missed about half the dives. I am sure I would have had a better impression of PNG had I not felt so under the weather. I did manage to take a few photos and quite a lot of video. But, I felt that the areas we visited did not live up to the rave reviews. The coral was not particularly spectacular or colorful. I