

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 grousing. 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