

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 hand 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

superb giant craft market. Loloata Island Resort, a diver's alternative, is 25 minutes from the airport and they'll arrange round-trip transportation. Malaria prophylaxis is essential. English gets you by everywhere.

**Loloata Island, July 2005, Jill Rain (jrain@rockisland.com), Lopez, WA.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 15 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F. Quite underrated as a dive destination. I went after a live-aboard knowing it would be crazy to go to PNG just for a week. Loloata is good enough to be a dive destination in itself. The muck diving is excellent and convenient to the resort: pipefish, nudibranchs, flatworms, shrimp/gobies, crabs, cuttlefish, blennies, etc. The wonderful surprise was the diving farther out, 15-40 minute boat ride; sites ranging from good to excellent; bommies, walls and wrecks. Great diversity and abundance (butterfly fish, anemones/fish, angels, parrots, surgeonfish, triggers, filefish, snapper, eels, jacks, sweetlips, some sharks) and pygmy seahorse, lacy scorpionfish (both varieties), frogfish, leafy scorpionfish. The wrecks, mostly fishing trawlers, are shallow enough (less than 100') to have plentiful coral growth (hard, soft, seafans) and lionfish, sweepers, anthias, crabs, seahorses, scorpionfish, shrimp, large groupers, triggerfish and barracuda. The dive operation is topnotch: handling equipment, divemasters and crew above and below surface (briefings, finding and pointing out things) helpful and competent. They will run a boat for even one diver. Rates are good. Three dives a day and a night dive if requested. The resort has a relaxing and

homey atmosphere, and has everything you need: 24-hour power, good plumbing, A/C, good food, a friendly and helpful staff. Each duplex bungalow has a large deck overlooking the water and the mainland beyond, which you can enjoy (no bugs). Interesting assortment of wildlife on the grounds. Altogether, a great land-based dive destination, convenient to Port Moresby and modestly priced.

**Tawali, August 2005, Karen and Tom Prideaux (karen@spatialworks.info), Larkspur, CO.**

Experience: Karen 350+ dives; Tom 500+ dives. Vis: 30ft (muck dives) to 150ft (outer reefs). Water 78 F. Mostly sunny with some wind. Little to no current. Dive your own profile with normal safety restrictions. Milne Bay is a diverse and vibrant place for any marine life enthusiast. Wide range and quantity of sea life from the rare hairy ghost pipefish to hammerhead sharks to schools of dolphins and whales everywhere. An abundance of nudibranchs, lionfish, many species of anemonefish, eels and other muck diving creatures make for fantastic photo opportunities. Even the elusive mandarin fish and the unusual crocodilefish can be commonly seen. Reef and wall dives with beautiful soft and hard corals and giant clams and sea fans. Fly from Port Moresby (POM) to Alotau (GUR) and take a van ride for 1.5 hours. A 20-minute boat ride then takes you to this new, isolated, beautiful, well-run resort as the hub for surreal rainforest and marine life observation.

**Tufi Dive Resort, April 2005, Roy and Carol Roberts (caroljroberts@cox.net), San Diego, CA.**

Experience:

400+ dives. Vis: 80-100 feet. Water: 82 F, calm. Top rate service in a unique remote location. You can fly from Japan or Australia (Cairns or Brisbane work best) to Port Moresby. We overnighted Airways Hotel, caught a cab to PNG ARTS to find New Guinea carvings and crafts at reasonable prices. We arrived at Tufi at 9 a.m. after a spectacular flight over lush green 12,000 foot mountains and fjords. They met us at the grass airstrip and driven two minutes to the resort. We used Diversions out of Cairns to make the scheduling easy ([www.diversionOZ.com](http://www.diversionOZ.com)). They were helpful and reliable and saved us money. Tufi's deluxe accommodations were outstanding, spacious, meticulously clean with tiled floors, traditional woven wall coverings, louvered glass windows perfectly screened, and a large covered deck looking out through the trees to the sea. Air-conditioning, ceiling fan, hair dryer, refrigerator, beautiful rattan furniture, plenty of storage and counter space. The central building had a huge veranda furnished with an elegant rattan bar where you could buy beer, wine and mixed drinks. Large dining room, library, game area. Food was first class with homemade breads, cookies and wonderful deserts. Lots of skillfully prepared fresh fish, lobster, chicken etc. The grounds were nicely landscaped with stone pathways, flowering hibiscus, ferns, palms. A large brick barbeque had built-in barbeque, lots of seating, and was wired for sound. This area overlooked the dive dock and had spectacular fjord views. Staff was friendly and helpful, sometimes shy. Trips to the village were not to be missed Adrian and Shiho, manag-

ers, were always available. The dive boat was fully shaded with comfortable cushioned seats and backrests, windows that could be opened or closed to avoid spray, and a spacious sundeck overhead. Dive tanks and gear stowed in the rear. The boat had a VHF radio, GPS to find dive sites, 1st aid kit and (I think) oxygen. Departures were punctual. The staff was helpful, providing good briefings and never rushed. They took charge of the gear on day one. It was always rinsed and hung to dry, set up and returned to us on our last day, ready to pack. Although there had been 43 guests Easter week, there were 2-4 divers while we were there. Wide variety and abundant schools of fish — batfish and silver batfish, sweetlips, Tuna, mackerel, sharks, barracuda, lionfish plus unknown hundreds of others. The corals were healthy with no bleaching, soft corals spectacular, variety of nudibranchs, large clams, friendly turtles, crocodile fish. Shiho was wonderful about pointing out critters. Came up from that first dive to find a big bath towel folded on the seat, and to be served hot tea or coffee and cookies! Soft drinks were available for purchase. Lunch followed the second dive on the ride back, and the mountain views were beautiful. Dives frequently exceeded one hour. Boat was easy to board and the staff provided lots of assistance with weight belts, vests, etc. Since we're both approaching 70, this was especially appreciated. The "muck" dive from the resort revealed another view of the diversity. On departure we noted a tip jar at the office counter. The manager said it was optional and not necessary. Based on prior demands at other resorts for

tips, this was a refreshing change. We were delighted to tip generously for all that had been done.

## THE PHILIPPINES

Major dive areas are concentrated around Batangas, Mindoro, Palawan, and the Visayas. The reefs here are among the most diverse in the world, supporting more than 2,000 species of fish (the Great Barrier Reef, by comparison, supports around 1,500). Divers find inexpensive accommodations and diving, splendid critters, and plenty of divers from other countries.

**Atlantis Dive Resort, September 2004, Bill Knoblauch** ([scubaguy@starstream.net](mailto:scubaguy@starstream.net)), **Lincoln, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 90 Feet. Water: 72 to 74 F., calm. The people are friendly, food was very good, and I loved the diving. We flew out of LAX and were lucky the plane was only half full so didn't need a fuel stop in Hawaii. But, the flight is 6 hours. Upon arriving in Manila, we caught a bus to Batangas (about a two hour trip), where we then boarded an outrigger boat for a one hour ride. We were pooped when we arrived at the resort. The resorts staff greeted us warmly upon arriving, taking our luggage off the boat. Check-in was relatively painless. Not too much large critters to shot. Macro photography was excellent. Dive boats are not set up well for photographers, but, it only takes 5-10 minutes to get to all dive sites. The resort has computers and TVs so one can easily view digital work. Print film and slides

can be processed in town at reasonable cost, with about one-hour turnaround. There is a separate rinse tank for cameras and computers.

**Atlantis Dive Resort, November 2004, Bill Knoblauch** ([scubaguy@starstream.net](mailto:scubaguy@starstream.net)), **Lincoln, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 70 Feet. Water: 68 to 72 F., choppy, surge, currents. I was there two months earlier. Was this trip as good? No. I went with a group of about 60 divers. I prefer smaller groups where everyone gets to know each other. We had to eat our meals buffet style. The quality of the food was not as good as my September visit (but still good), but in September, we were able to order directly off the menu. The dive operation worked well with our large group. Air and water temperatures to be somewhat lower than normal, plus it did bring rain and plenty of wind. Not too much large critters to shot. Macro photography was excellent. Dive boats are not set up well for photographers, but it only takes 5-10 minutes to get to all dive sites. The resort has computers and TV's so one can easily view digital work. Print film and slides can be processed in town at reasonable cost, with about one-hour turnaround. There is a separate rinse tank for cameras and computers.

**Atlantis Dive Resort, January 2005, Mike de La Chapelle, Bellevue, WA.** Six members of my family (including 2 non-diving parents) spent one week at each of Atlantis' two resorts in Puerto Galera and Dumaguete. We booked an all-inclusive dive package from World of Diving ([www.worldofdiving.com](http://www.worldofdiving.com)) which included 6 days x 4 dives/day,