

CANADA

Vancouver Island, reachable by air or ferry from Seattle or Vancouver, BC, is a remarkable wilderness destination, both on land and in the water. A traveler may encounter anything from eagles to orcas, sea lions to bears, while viewing a remarkable range of critters in the cold, clear water. This is dry suit country. Victoria is a small, charming English town.

Abyssal Dive Charters and Lodge, February 2006, Larry Deweese, Tomball, TX. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 80 Feet. Water: 41 to 43 F, choppy. To get there from outside Canada you typically fly to Vancouver, then to Campbell River, and then take the short ferry ride to Quadra Island. The Abyssal Lodge is just up the hill from where the ferry docks. The Abyssal lodge is a comfortable place and Earl and Deb, the owners, make you feel at home. Earl handles the dive operation and Deb prepares the wonderful meals and takes care of the lodge. There are at least three bedrooms in the lodge and a "bunk house" that accommodates 5 people bunk bed style. If you don't want to stay at the lodge there is a hotel a short walking distance away and you can make arrangements to eat at the lodge. The downstairs includes a TV lounge and an area for photographers to take care of their camera equipment and charge the batteries. The second level of the lodge has a TV area, the kitchen, and the dining area. The meals are served family style. Earl and Deb live on the third floor. There is a heated wet area where you store your dry suit and prepare for each dive. I have always gone in February when the viz is the best and

water temps are typically in the low 40's. The viz can range from 20' - 80' or so. All diving is controlled by the tides that dictate when the water is moving and where. The water really moves around the island. On one morning the first dive might be at 8:00am and the next day the first dive might be at 10:00am, for example. For short boat rides Earl uses an open air 8-pack type boat and for longer rides, like the HMS Columbia wreck dive, he uses a boat that has a nice heated cabin. The top side scenery is beautiful with bald eagles, stellar sea lions, and the chance to see orca whales. All dives are done at slack tide but there can be a little current. Some of the things you'll see on every dive are kelp, tube worms, starfish in more colors than you can count, nudibranchs in every color, anemones, feather dusters, lingcod, and rockfish. What you hope to see are wolf eels, harbor seals, stellar sea lions, and giant pacific octopus. Some of the dive sites are sheer walls whereas others are shallower reefs. Divers are allowed to dive their own profiles. Not a location for beginners but if you have a dry suit and the right thermal protection it is a wonderful place. Divers can see things in the Pacific Northwest that can't be seen anywhere else in the world.

DynaMike's, May 2006, Judith M. Hartling (judy.hartling@klondiker.com), Whitehorse, Yukon. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 40 to 45 F, currents. Strong currents here. Dive only with experienced operators, of which Mike of DynaMike's is the best. He times the slack current and then has you drop in. He picks you up wherever you end on these currents dives. Tons of things to see: strawberry anemones, white plumose, urchins, starfish, nudibranchs, rockfish, sponges, corals, cucumbers,

sea lions, seals, octopus, eels, Puget crabs. Great wall diving. Walls are covered with life! This is cold water, strong current, drysuit diving.

God's Pocket, April 2006, Pat Cisar (doccisar@hotmail.com), St. Albert, Alberta. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 42 to 45 F, choppy, currents. Great place for advanced divers. Nice setup and great food. If you have food concerns let them know and accommodations will be made. You must bring your own alcohol. The operators met you in Port Hardy the evening before you start your five-day dive and deliver you back to Port Hardy the morning after your five days of diving. Dive times are tide-dependant as most dives are ebb dives. This is a cold environment and a drysuit is the only way to go. It is remote so bring your own fixes and spares. The marine life is not adequately described in the check boxes above. No tropical fish but lots of bright greenlings and rockfish species, not to mention tons of crabs, sculpins, nudibranchs and so on. Currents are strong so bring your advanced skills. The visibility is great. The resort and diving are hard to get to but the experience is truly world class.

COSTA RICA

Costa Rica is famous among experienced divers for the big animal action off uninhabited Cocos Island, 300 miles offshore. Here are challenging, high-tension dives among hammerheads, mantas, occasional whale sharks, and other awe-inspiring creatures. Land-based dive operations find a few big animals. However, they're unpredictable and the visibility is often so low you'll

miss them, yet many divers like the diving. Costa Rica has great tourist destinations, is exceptionally safe.

Aguila de Osa Inn, December 2005, Scott Johnson (scottyj96@aol.com), Palm Springs, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm or visibility, 15' to 30' max! Plenty of white tip sharks, jacks, barracuda, puffer fish, etc. There are a lot of fish in these waters ... but you just catch a glimpse of them due to the poor visibility except for the white tip sharks. You had to come right up to them before they moved. Barco was my favorite dive site. The Aguila de Osa Inn has a good dive operation. Vincent is an excellent dive master will let you dive your own profile. If you are coming to this area do not focus entirely on diving, as you will be disappointed. Plan many of the land activities with a few dives. It is one of the most beautiful areas I have been to and if the visibility were 60' to 100' probably would have been good to excellent diving.

Aguila de Osa, April 2006, Kris Carroll (kri21carr@yahoo.com), Bellingham, WA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. Osa Peninsula is a dense jungle, humid but fantastic foliage with an incredible amount of wildlife. Wild scarlet macaws to 6-foot iguanas Park. Cano Island is an undiscovered jewel. A short 45-min. boat ride from Aguila de Osa Lodge, it had incredible amounts of fish. Schools of fish in the thousands, spadefish, bigeye jacks, yellowtail, etc. Mobulas, which are miniature mantas, schooled in the hundreds. Huge parrotfish, many moray eels, zebra morays and striped morays. Many white tip sharks cruising and sleeping on the floor. Huge amber jacks attacking the various schools of fish.