

one night. The rooms have a lot of storage, wall closets and under bed drawers. The crew was always friendly, they kept everything clean and they even did our laundry. You can go on shore to visit the ranger stations and see the rock carvings. You might see a wild pig as I did. In San Jose, I stayed at the almost new Courtyard by the Marriott. Nice size, clean and quiet rooms. Just across the parking lot are several international restaurants - Costa Rica, Cuban, Peru, Brazil, Outback Steakhouse and my favorite Hooters. For a few dollars you can take a taxi to the downtown area and spend hours walking among the shops or visiting the museum and parks. Of course you can take tours to see the many wonders of Costa Rica. UW Photography Comments: Nice protected table area for working on equipment. Each diver is given a nice size cubical area under the table to store equipment and charge batteries. Both 110 and 220 provided. Large rinse tank. The crew is experienced in camera/video equipment handling. The pangas have a nice covered camera storage area. There were two film crews shooting with large housings. No problem.

**Undersea Hunter, August 2006, Chris Cozzi/Lisa Anderson, Petaluma, CA. (cdcozzi@pacbell.net)** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 70 to 84 F, calm, no currents. This trip to Malepelo Island and then to the Cocos Islands was the best. The Seahunter and her crew are the best we have encountered ever. The food and accommodations were topnotch. The diving was unbelievable. We saw more sharks on any one dive than my buddy and I have seen in total in our combined dive careers. We saw hammerheads, schools and schools of hammerheads. We saw more white tips than I

thought existed. We saw a few black tips, Galapagos and silky sharks. We saw rays, a few mantas in the distance, squadrons of spotted eagle rays, marble rays singles and groups of up to 8 together. There were morays everywhere, in holes and free swimming. We saw one red-lipped Cocos bat fish. There were king angelfish. Moorish idols, puffers and box fish, frog fish, blue and gold snappers, trumpet fish, yellowtail tuna, and half the boat saw a whale shark. Diving was done from skiffs, led by a divemaster. Typically, the profile was to drop down to know cleaning stations, wait for the hammerheads to come in and to enjoy them. After they left, or if they weren't there, we would move off, either along the wall or out into the blue. The skiff drivers were always there to pick us up as we surfaced. UW Photography Comments: Stations provided with outlets and storage for everyone. large clean freshwater rinse tanks.

## ECUADOR

### Galapagos Islands

**Aggressor, August 2006, Bill Hardee (bill.hardee@gmail.com), Austin, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 66 to 73 F, choppy, surge, currents. We had 28 people in our group - both Aggressors - and this trip as one of the best we have done. From the minute we landed in San Cristobal, until we boarded our return flight, we were in capable hands. The boats were in great shape, and the food and crew were nothing short of amazing! Diving was spectacular. Once we got used to the 68 degree water and ripping currents at 90 feet, we could sit back, hang on, and wait for the show. It took

us 16 hours to get from San Cristobal to Quito, normally a 2.5 hour trip. The crossing to Wolf and Darwin was trying (6-8 foot seas and against a strong current), but once there, the diving was well worth the trip. Sea lions, dolphins, sharks of every kind, rays, and the highlight of every dive - whale sharks. We saw no whales or orcas. I would not linger in Quito after dark, it is a dangerous place. But during the day it is a world class city, with wonderful people and a vibrant economy. This trip is not for the inexperienced Cozumel drift diver. Divers need skills and knowledge to truly enjoy what this advanced location has to offer. UW Photography Comments: The boat was amazing, charging stations-camera areas-help with equipment. The only thing a diver had to do was get in the water and hang on to their gear. Photography was not easy because of conditions, but the crew did everything they could to facilitate the photographers (virtually our entire group).

**Aggressor II, August 2006, Alan Stabile (asgp@aol.com), New York, NY.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 60 to 73 F, choppy, surge, currents. The Aggressor II was comfortable and well maintained and the crew was ever present to help with any request onboard or in the water. My dive shop, Panaqua, in NYC, organized the trip for fourteen divers and handled all arrangements without a fault. We saw 25-30 whale shales, tons of hammerheads and Galapagos sharks along with an overwhelming assortment of life above and below. The dive masters and naturalists were informative on all aspects of the Galapagos Islands. The only drawback was the slightly heavy seas and getting into the zodiacs after a dive; the crew helped us every time we needed help but a ladder

would be nice if possible. UW Photography Comments: Big, dry tables with compressed air hoses, computer services for uploading. Good large fresh water baths for cameras.

**Deep Blue, June 2006, LeRoy Anderson (landersonsprint@earthlink.net), Salt Lake City, UT.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 65 to 75 F. I would rate the diving every bit as good as Cocos, and everything else at least as good or better than Cocos. The crew was competent, and they went the extra mile. One spectacular dive on Wolf Island, I was running short of air, as I always do, earlier than everyone else. We were about to enter a cavern and I did not want to do this with 750 psi. I showed my gauge to our guide, Antonio, who then guided me through the caverns in a quicker fashion, knowing I would have plenty of air, and I got to see everything. Salome, the other guide, was equally helpful Alfredo (another customer) and I both had birthdays on June 30; the crew had a big birthday party for us, the chef baked a cake for us both, James from the shark diving company who was running the trip gave me a cap. The crew was always respectful and a lot of fun. Regarding fellow divers, a rowdy and fun bunch of emotionally expressive divers from Venezuela (i.e., laughing, hugging, high fives, crying, etc. after our great whale shark encounters, etc.). Gourmet food for every meal, warm towels after every dive, large hot showers for every cabin with plenty of hot water. Nitrox, four dives a day, liberal restrictions for advanced divers, and a great camera table. Of course, the phenomenal diving with hammerheads, whitetips, Galapagos sharks, eagle rays, a manta ray, a school of golden rays, turtles, tons of morays, seals, batfish, clouds of smaller fish, jacks, and three different

whaleshark sightings. They do not take credit cards for their tips, but I was lucky to have my buddy lend me the money for this, later reimbursing him via a visit to an Ecuadorian Bank. Ken at Galapagosadventures.com set everything up professionally for me.

**Deep Blue, August 2006, Jason Pellegatto, Worcester, MA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 70 to 78 F, surge. Diving so good that it's even better than the brochure. I made 7 of the 8 dives offered at Darwin's Arch and saw 17 whale sharks that came so close I had to move out of their way. I also saw 5-10 Galapagos sharks and 200 hammerheads on every dive. Large pods of dolphins on half the dives. All this with mild currents and mild surge. I saw more in 1 dive in the Galapagos than I saw in my previous 200 dives combined. I booked this trip independently through Galapagos Adventures. They are responsive to emails and questions. All of my paperwork was handled properly and everything went smoothly from airport pick ups, transfers, etc. The Deep Blue was a comfortable live-aboard. It has large, covered decks outside, a large interior room with benches and TV/DVD player. Plenty of space and you never feel crowded. The crew was friendly and worked hard for the guests. The cabins have 2 separate beds (not bunk beds) and plenty of space for storage. Each cabin has its own full-size toilet and separate shower with plenty of hot water. The rooms were cleaned, fresh towels were provided, and the beds were made daily. The food was hot, plentiful, and varied with plenty of beef, port, chicken, shrimp, and fish. The food was much better than I had had on a previous Aggressor live-aboard. After all dives, hot towels, hot chocolate, and fresh baked cakes were

served. UW Photography Comments: There are 2 tables for setting up cameras. Compressed air is available. Leave your camera on the table, get into panga, and a member of the crew will hand it to you so that you don't have to climb into panga with it. The downside is that at the end of the dive, there isn't a secure spot on the panga, and there is risk that other divers could bang into camera gear while climbing into panga.

**Deep Blue, September 2005, Janet Hays (janet@tidemasters.net), Herndon, VA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 62 to 71 F, currents. We had 20 whale shark encounters and I not only got to see the schools of hammerheads above me, courtesy of our expert guide Luis Rodriguez, but we also got a close-up view when my buddy and I positioned ourselves near a cleaning station Luis was familiar with. Lots of playful interactions with sea lions. I also got to see the graceful spotted eagle rays again. The red-lipped batfish's appearance and mode of locomotion is nothing short of hilarious! Over 200 dolphins passed us as we motored between islands. I wish I had known to do more upper body exercises to improve my ability to get my gear and myself up into the pangas since I did get tired with the strong current and surge, especially at Wolf! I also had no idea that I would be struggling to swim hard and fast enough to keep up with the whale sharks! I wish I could have redone my weight pocket/belt configuration: on my Dive Rite I would have had the large clip pockets instead of the small velcro pockets, since I did drop my heavy weight belt when tired. On board, we had adorable food sculptures at the buffet table, and generous options for all palates including vegetarians. Meager selection of mostly English

subtitled DVD shows. We had the cabin at the absolute bottom of the boat and we had some problem with sewage backing up in our shower that was not completely eliminated even after two attempts by the crew to alleviate. I would pay my money early to have the premium choice of the cabins!

**Galapagos Islands, Lammer Law, September 2006, Ted and Natalie Lee (whitesirocco@yahoo.com), Mill Valley, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 72 degrees in Southern Islands and 81 degrees at Wolf/Darwin. We stayed at the charming Café Cultura in Quito and did day tours of the city, the equator, and the Otavalo market. We were met at the airport by the Quasar Nautica staff and avoided overweight charges both ways to the Galapagos by checking luggage as a group. We went on the ten-day itinerary. Lammer Law is a 93-foot trimaran. Eight spacious cabins surround the sizable indoor lounge/dining area with bar and TV. The huge top deck has several lounge chairs. Bedding and towels were straightened several times a day. There are two 220-volt and 110-volt plugs in each cabin. There was plenty of storage space, and the AC worked pretty well. The small bathroom had a combined head and shower (water temp was difficult to control) with shampoo, conditioner, and small bars of soap. In rough seas, the drain on the floor, which empties directly through the hull, was a bit of a geyser. The marine head was a timid flusher. The weather was calm, but crossings to Wolf/Darwin and back were rough, and the Lammer rattled and slammed up and down rather violently, making for a queasy and sleepless night despite using Bonine. Food was excellent, with lots of fresh vegetables and delicious sauces. The crew was friendly and professional. The captain

was rather aloof. Divemasters Santiago and Jonathan were both excellent and knowledgeable. Dive briefings were detailed, with hand-drawn maps. No EPIRBs provided, but the panga driver was always right on top of us; only once did we use our safety sausage (when we had to surface early after swimming after a whale shark). 15 divers, half from France and Belgium and the rest Brits and Americans. Made for interesting bilingual briefings, and one guest got nicknamed "Pepe Le Pew" for his persistent attempts at wooing one British diver. We had strong currents on only a few dives. We timed our visit for what we thought was peak whale shark season, but the unusually warm water temps of 81 degrees (due to a possible El Nino year) limited our sightings to only two. We dove with one-piece 7 mm fullsuits the whole time, adding a hood for the southern islands. The salinity is high, so most divers used about 10% more lead than when diving elsewhere. Tanks were aluminum 80s, and no nitrox was available despite our being told beforehand by Lammer that we were "confirmed" for nitrox. Apparently they have not had nitrox for a long time, so this is misleading. We would gear up, including weights and tank, and go down the stepladders mounted aft to board one of the two inflatable pangas. Negative back-roll entries (while holding our cameras) were standard procedure. Upon dive completion, we would pass off our weights, cameras, and fins, the panga driver would haul our tank and BC aboard, and we climbed back up on a ladder. The rides back were comfortable as the scuba kit was on the floor of the panga instead of on our backs. Upon return to the ship the crew passed the heavies back up to the deck to begin filling the tanks. Dive deck: Manage-

able but a little tight. Tanks stored on each side of the aft deck with shared cubbies under the bench, which were a little hard to reach. Limited camera table space was available on the deck, but it is right next to the water cooler so we kept our cameras in our room. We had a video camera, but everyone with cameras used point-and-shoot digitals. We saw large schools of hammerheads, turtles, a juvenile and a large pregnant whale shark, pilot whales, dolphins, cow nose rays, eagle rays (31 in one formation), schools of salemas, Galapagos sharks, and playful sea lions. The only animals we missed seeing were mantas and penguins. There were 22 offered dives, including one night dive where we saw red-lipped batfish. We spent four days at Wolf & Darwin. Highlights of the land tours include seeing sneezing marine iguanas and frigate birds with their bright red pouches, watching baby tortoises at the Darwin Research center and adult tortoises mating in the wild, and wandering among the lazy sea lions basking on the beach. Our last morning, we took a peaceful early morning panga ride around the tuff cone of Leon Dormido (the sleeping lion) and saw blue-footed boobies on the rocks.

**Mistral, September 2006, Carl Bodenstein, Spokane, WA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 15 to 50 Feet. Water: 72 to 74 F, calm, surge, currents. Bad experience. There is no way this boat should accommodate 12 divers despite its 6 small double cabin accommodations. The toilet and sewage system was horrid, and all the cabins stunk like a cesspool. The air conditioning was inadequate and could not be run while the air compressor was being run to fill tanks. And on a Galapagos trip, the hope is they will have to fill a lot of tanks. Only one tank per diver

available and some 6 extras and after adequate surface intervals tanks were usually still not refilled, interfering with our dive schedule and costing several dive opportunities to be passed on. Our itinerary was for several days at Darwin and Wolf, but due to a DCS-affected diver, we returned to Baltra early, and the boat is overly slow and it took 29 hours to get back south despite relatively calm seas. Our diver's fault entirely, but also note no dive master in the water the dive with the injury. No real pride in the cleanliness of the cabin and there is no way that 12 divers can sit at the single dinner table for meals. AV equipment is of poor quality. Expensive and long to travel to Galapagos to have this poor a dive operation. The crew tried their best. This is not worth the savings over other operators. The boat could barely accommodate our gear. Useless fresh water rinse "tank" could barely accommodate the smallest of our housings. One expensive dome port was scratched badly. Small dinghies could not hold gear and divers well.

**Lammer Law, July 2006, Michael Marmesh, Miami, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 5 to 60 Feet. Water: 64 to 76 F, currents. Our three days at Wolf and Darwin were excellent; however, only guide and one member of the group saw a whale shark. Lots of scalloped hammerheads. Pod of over a hundred dolphins. Surfaced to orca and calf swimming off in the blue. Weather conditions allowed us to make 8 dives on Darwin. Turtles everywhere. Playful, curious sea lions found us at several other islands and even harassed a white-tipped shark on east side of Floreana. Saw one penguin in the rocks at Punta Roca. Large schools of fish at multiple sites including: chub, barracuda and snapper. A thirty-foot bait

ball blocked out the sunlight at Cousin's Rock. Saw a mola mola with a four foot vertical diameter. Our group included 4 Israelis, 4 Kiwis, and several Americans. This made for interesting conversations and discussions of worldwide dive sites. Accommodations were excellent. The 8 guest cabins were spacious for a live-aboard. Meals were served buffet style on covered aft deck. Tables were set with tablecloths for every meal. We had fresh fruit and vegetables throughout the 10-day trip. We tasted a wide variety of local foods. Our naturalist/dive guide was knowledgeable about subjects above and below the water. Land tours were worthwhile. My wife and I, as well as other divers, were promised Nitrox when we made our reservations. However, Nitrox was not available. No explanations were given although we saw Nitrox labeled tanks. Another inconvenience is that the dive deck doubles as the dining area. Storage for dive gear was limited and it was difficult to access equipment between dives. Bathrooms contained marine heads. The trimaran crosses large expanses of open Pacific and guests should be prepared for possible seasickness. Divers need to be able to handle strong currents and cold water diving from inflatable pangas. Re entry is more difficult than on a regular dive ladder. Crew was excellent and helpful. They compensated well for panga that ruptured bladder on next to last day.

**Reina Silvia, October 2005, Valerie Miller (valerie@personsmiller.com), Paradise, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 66 to 79 F, choppy, surge. Comfortable cabins with en suite facilities. Immaculately clean and maintained 15 passenger yacht with attentive staff and great food. The diving was amazing, particularly at Darwin I. Hundreds of ham-

merheads, feeding black tip reef sharks in a pack, Huge schools of tuna, angel fish, butterfly fish, Creole fish, and more, 8 encounters with at least 5 different whale sharks! Scores of moray eels swimming and lounging about, many dolphins sighted in the water and from the surface, cleaning station activity. Eagle ray squadrons, a manta caught on tape, friendly and not so friendly sea lions, giant sea horses, black coral gardens and massive garden eel colonies. Above the water and below, the animals are unafraid and easily viewed.

**Reina Silvia, October 2005, Gino Dubay (ADub@aol.com), Pigeon Forge, TN.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 75 Feet. Water: 68 to 74 F, choppy, currents. Everything you have ever read in Undercurrent or any other dive publication regarding the Galapagos Islands is understated. Trips are becoming pricey, to say the least. I have learned to trust Aquatic Encounters (Marc Bernardi) for my bookings when I can. They book the best boat, Reina Silvia, which has the best DM, Victor Medina, for starters. This is my 4th major adventure w/Mark and he has the uncanny ability (luck?) to find strangers and friends to put together a boatload of fun loving, serious, responsible, interesting divers who can't wait for their next trip together. This was Bernardi's 54th tour group to the Galapagos. Victor Medina is a certified DM and naturalist, expert photo pro, who can smell whale sharks! Our group encountered 9 Ws during the 2 ½ days allowed for us to anchor at Darwin. Not to count the hundreds of hammerheads per dive (so many, so often, they became a nuisance)! Then 10s of seals, morays, turtles . . . all really big, too. All this is besides land trips to observe sea lions within reach, boobies, giant

tortoise. If you book 1 of the 2 trips Aquatic Encounters plans each year, your experience with “The Ogre” (who shall remain nameless) encountered there, will be much more enjoyable.

**Reina Silvia, November 2005, Sabra Basler (sbasler@unm.edu), Albuquerque, NM.** Experience: 101-250 dives.

Water: currents. A volcano was erupting on a different island. We tried to get permission to visit it and do a horse-back ride but that fell through. The VOG (cloudiness due to volcano smoke) was a bit of a bummer. The diving was great ... especially the whale sharks and the hammerheads. Also had great land visits that didn't interfere too much with diving. Crew was great. Trip was well orchestrated. Enjoyed time in the cloud forest and Otavalo Market.

**Reina Silvia, November 2005, Dean Ulven, Lanaken, Limburg.** Experience:

101-250 dives. Vis: 10 to 25 Meters. Water: 17 to 27 Celsius, choppy, surge. Marc B did an excellent job at making sure we were informed and ensuring each stage of the trip was organized and fun. The MV Reina Silvia was a great boat and excellent platform from which to dive and explore the islands, the crew was friendly and efficient and the food was good. The boat was comfortable and clean with plenty of room. The beds were good with plenty of room to stretch my 6-ft body out. The weather was a mixed bag of clouds and sun with just a spot of mist. The diving was varied and excellent: some current but nothing raging. We saw sierra mackerel, sea lions, tropical fish, pacific mullet and endemic nudibranchs in the inner islands. At Darwin Island we saw hammerheads in the hundreds (the guide said thousands but I can't count that high, I had a public education what can I say), Galapagos sharks, black tip

reef sharks, rainbow runners, jack, huge schools of bonito, wahoo, yellow fin tuna, turtles and dolphin. I had 7 whale shark encounters in 2 ½ days. The photographers had a ball getting their shots. We had such good diving at Darwin we didn't even bother with Wolf island.

**Reina Silvia, June 2006, Richard Smith (iowalawboy@yahoo.com), Dallas, TX.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 15 to 70 Feet. Water: 73 to 81 F, currents. The Reina Silvia is a bit more expensive than some other live-aboard options, but is well worth the money. The ship holds a maximum of 16 passengers, but we only had 10. This makes for a blessedly uncrowded ship. Standard cabins are somewhat larger than other live-aboards I have been on, with nice storage space and comfortable beds. Each cabin has its own small bathroom, with a handheld shower nozzle connected to the sink for bathing, with a drain in the floor — functional. The crew, service, and guide were all excellent. The ship is maintained immaculately. If you rested in your bed between dives, you would return from the next dive to find your bed was again wrinkle-free. Meals were good. Snacks were always available, with everything from fresh fruit to homemade pizza. Our guide, Victor Medina, was a freelancer who bounces between the various live-aboards, although Marc Bernardi of Aquatic Encounters appears to use Victor regularly. Victor was top-notch, with solid pre-dive briefings and a great eye for all the stuff. He also shot video on land and underwater the entire week, which he edited professionally and made available for purchase. Our first day of diving was only a checkout dive at North Plaza. It was water only 20 feet or so deep, but was livened up by a number of playful

sea lions. A land excursion to South Plaza was more enjoyable, with more sea lions, plenty of land iguanas, and birds that could not care less if you walked right up to them. The next morning, we anchored at Darwin Bay on the island of Genovesa. We only did one dive at Genovesa, as the main attraction was the thousands of frigates, boobies, and other birds. The one dive was nice, however, with marbled stingrays, half a dozen turtles, a squadron of golden cowries, and our first hammerhead of the trip. The land excursions were even better, particularly since it was mating season for the frigates so the males were all showing off their bizarre, bright red throat pouches. We headed north for three straight days of diving at Darwin Island. Immediately after you drop in, you see dozens to hundreds of hammerheads, which is overwhelming the first time you see it. Dropping down to the reef at 60 feet, you grab onto a convenient rock and watch the scenery swim by. At times, you practically want to push the hammerheads out of the way to see what else is down there, especially the whale sharks. June is the beginning of whale shark season, and we were lucky enough to encounter eight of them in our time at Darwin. Fortunately, the currents were mostly mild enough to allow us to chase after the whale sharks, which allowed for several extended encounters of up to seven minutes, with really great photo opportunities if you had the gas to keep up with them. And if the whale sharks and hammerheads weren't enough, we also had several Galapagos sharks, plenty of silky sharks (including a circling school of about 20 on one blue-water safety stop), a couple of dolphins, giant schools of jacks, even a yellowfin tuna swimming past at top speed. The

reef at Darwin is pretty darned nice. After three days at Darwin — we skipped Wolf because of better odds for whale sharks at Darwin — we headed back to the central islands for one last day of diving. Our morning dive was at Albany Islet, which showed itself off with mixed squadrons of eagle rays and cowries, one or two mantas, more marbled stingrays, a couple lone hammerheads, and a whitetip. After that dive, we moved over to Cousins Rock, where a tremendous school of black-striped salemas that would envelop you and block out the sunlight when you swam inside. The salemas were unreal, and Cousins had turtles and a fair amount of nice macro critters too, including a couple seahorses. The final full day of the trip was spent on land at the Charles Darwin Research Station, the town of Puerto Ayora, and the highlands of Santa Cruz Island. Most of the day was dedicated to the famous Galapagos tortoises, but Victor, as always, did a great job of pointing out and explaining everything. Camera rinse tank right next to the dive platform, and plenty of space inside and out to work on cameras.

**Reina Silvia, July 2006, Greg Storey (gregstorey@bellsouth.net), Chattanooga, TN.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 71 to 77 F, choppy. Victor Medina was hands down the best divemaster I have ever been with. Besides the great land tours and all the top side wildlife, the diving was incredible. We were lucky enough to have light current and relatively warm water at Darwin Island, where we did three days of diving after the southern dives at Plazas and Genovesa. Despite the slack current, we had dozens of schooling hammerheads on every dive at Darwin. And seven whale sharks. Three were on one dive, which also

included the countless hammerheads, plus several large Galapagos sharks as well as silky sharks. The diving at the end of the trip (Cousins Island and Albany) was also good, although colder water. Lots of white tip reef sharks, eagle rays, one manta, seahorses, and young sea lions that were a blast to dive with. Diving is all done off three tender boats. Each group has color coded tanks so the mate can spot his people when they surface. Time spent getting to the sites was always short, less than five minutes. The mates running the boats were professional and extremely helpful. The gear area is on the level above where you board the tenders. However, you don't have to carry anything heavy up and down the stairs, you just put the wetsuit on upstairs then walk down with mask and fins. The BC and reg stay on the tank at all times, either in the tender boat or in a rack at the area where you board the tenders. The boat has a large platform that makes it easy for getting off and on the tenders. The food was quite good. The cabins were reasonably sized. I booked one of the two small ones for myself and had more room than I knew what to do with. My impression is that two people in the larger cabins fared just as well space-wise.

**Sky Dancer, August 2005. Name withheld.** Special trip with Amos Nachoum, a two-week itinerary seeking out big animals and sold out in just three days. Spent an unheard-of 9-days diving the waters of Wolf and Darwin Islands and the passengers were not disappointed as there were numerous whale shark encounters – my wife and my first encounter (after years of trying) with those magnificent yellow school bus sized creatures. The almost daily interaction with various species of shark – Galapagos, silky, scalloped hammer-

head and white tip – sometimes in schools in excess of 100 was incredible. Then there were the ongoing squadrons of eagle ray “flying” in precise formation like the Air Force Blue Angels. At times an eagle ray would remain stationary for the diver to fully explore and photograph the beauty of this creature. The following were spotted on just one dive at Punta Vicente Roca at the northwest part of Isabela Island: the rare and quite unusual looking mola-mola or sunfish (the largest bony fish of the oceans); whale shark; horned shark, the usual contingent of the common sharks of the islands; dozens of playful sea lion; sea horse; many large turtles; jellyfish; octopus; penguin (yes, I said penguin); red-lipped batfish; flightless cormorant; marine iguana; marbled ray and untold numbers of other fish. Again, this was on but one 50-minute dive! Punta Vicente Roca was, to say the least, an incredible dive site. There is a spectacular vertical wall loaded with colorful corals, sponges and untold numbers of small critters in the many nooks and crannies to include a small brilliant blue nudibranch. The visibility is not great and the water is quite cold – a bone-chilling (for this Florida diver) 60 degrees at depth. Water temperature at Wolf and Darwin was upward of 77 degrees – much more palatable. Amos, a professional photographer, is more than eager to share his photographic expertise with the passengers to help them bring home the best possible photos. Further, evening slide shows of some of his other big animal photo/adventure trips around the world were a delight.

**Sky Dancer, November 2005, Mike McIntire, DVM (mmcintire@adelphia.net), N. Palm Beach, FL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 35 to 50 Feet. Water: 57 to 77 F, choppy. Fantastic diving.

Definitely adventure diving, not pleasure diving. In some areas, the current was so strong you had to pull yourself hand over hand over the rocks. Glad I had a dry suit. I also dived with a 9mm and was extremely cold. There are sharks everywhere, mostly hammerheads by the hundreds and Galapagos sharks. Also saw a fair number of white-tipped reef sharks and mantas. One member of our group did see one whale shark and got the photo to prove it. The weather in October is cool so bring a light jacket. The boat was a real pleasure as was the crew. UW Photography Comments: Big camera table, rinse tank on boat. Don't know how often the water in the tank is changed.

**Sky Dancer, December 2005, Brent U. (robhopbuf@yahoo.ca), Waterloo, Ont.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 63 to 77 F, choppy, currents. The diving in the central islands was good with encounters with sea lions, manta and mobula rays, eagle rays and some white tip reef sharks. The water however can be quite cold with temperatures between 63 and 68 degrees. This is not a problem as long as you are prepared for it. We spent the first two days in the central islands and headed to Wolf and Darwin Islands about 17 hours to the north. We did a total of 12 dives over three days in the northern Islands. At Wolf we saw groups of hammerhead sharks, Galapagos sharks, eagle rays, dolphins and lots of free-swimming moray eels. The currents were strong and the dives consisted of heading down to the rocks and holding on while watching the sea life swim by. The water at the northern islands ranged between 75 and 77 degrees. After Wolf we moved to Darwin Island and the diving was even better there. All the diving takes place at one site and we did of 6 dives here. The

dive routine was to head down to rocks and watch the wildlife go by and then head out into the blue if the action slowed down on the wall. We saw schools of hammerheads, a few Galapagos sharks, silky sharks, dolphins, turtles, 4 whale sharks and tiger shark. The currents here were not as strong as at Wolf but were still moderately strong. I had no problems with the boat, everything was clean and seemed to work fine. The crew was great and always ready to help with such things as helping you into the pangas and helping take off your wetsuit. There was always a snack after the dives as well as a warm shower and towels. The food was good, however I ate lightly most of the time due to mild sea sickness during transit to and from the different islands. The land tours were also good and a nice change of pace from all the diving. Learn a little Spanish before you come here as a lot of the crew only spoke Spanish. The dive masters and the boat captain all spoke good English. As well in Quito almost nobody spoke English and again knowing some Spanish would have been helpful.

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