

## FIJI

**Fiji Aggressor, February 2006, Jeanne and Bill Downey (downdive@comcast.net), Baden, PA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to F, choppy, currents. The Fiji Aggressor is 101 feet long with a crew of six, and since there were only six of us aboard, short of the normal 10 passengers, we felt coddled. We arrived about noon at the Trade Winds Hotel near Suva on Viti Levu, after being transferred from Wananavu Resort in the North. Our taxi was met by the Aggressor crew and our luggage transferred to the boat while we hung around the hotel lobby waiting for our 1:00 boarding time. Shortly after boarding, we began the 7.5 hour trek, which wasn't too rough, to the first dive site. The boat didn't feel cramped with six guests. There are five cabins, all with private bath and individual air conditioners, four below decks with double beds and upper bunks and one on the main deck, with a larger bathroom and one large bed. The large dining table accommodates all guests; there is a cozy lounge area with comfortable couches and chairs perfect for napping or watching a movie or the day's video on the television. The top deck consisted of the Captain's quarters, the bridge, and the docking area for the skiff. Finding a place for sunbathing was tough—there was a cushioned bench on the back, and the bow was available, but that area was splashed when moving and wasn't comfortable. Tanks and gear are kept down on the back dive platform for the week, along with fins, mask, etc., and tanks are filled there. Wet suits are hung up on the main deck. After donning our wet suits we climbed down the steps, geared up and did a giant stride into the water. The gear was constantly in

the sun and in salt water. Nitrox was \$100 for the week. There was a small camera area on the back deck, which would be crowded if everyone had a camera, and a charging area just inside the dining area. We also commandeered the top of a low storage cabinet. The schedule was pre-breakfast at 6:30am, consisting of cereal, yogurt, and toast, dive at 7:30am, hot or cold breakfast at 9:00am, dive at 10:30am, a hot lunch at noon, dive at 1:30pm, snack, dive at 4:30pm, dinner at 6:00pm, and night dive at 7:30pm. One day we tried four dives, ending with a dusk dive before dinner, but there wasn't much action so we switched back to the five dive-a-day routine with night diving. There wasn't a choice of food for dinner, but they did easily accommodate our non-meat eater with plenty of fish. A few dives were made from the Zodiac, but most were off the main boat. Since it was summer in Fiji, visibility was 50-100 feet, but a wonderfully warm 84 degrees. We did some wall dives, where we saw some sharks, manta rays, devil rays, and schooling jacks and barracuda, but mostly pinnacle diving. Some pinnacles seemed to have more critters than others, such as nudibranchs, crabs, ghost pipe fish, soft coral, shrimp, and a great variety of fish. Night diving was good with tiny soft coral crabs and shrimp, and many decorator crabs.

**Fiji Aggressor, April 2006, Peter Wood (pwood49@hotmail.com), Topsham, ME.** Experience: 350 dives. Vis: 10 to 60 feet. Water: 84 F. The crew was excellent — helpful with any questions. The food was exceptional. The tour of a real Fijian village — not commercial — was a highlight of this trip. The water visibility was fair — but the little critters were excellent: blue ribbon eels, nudibranchs, ghost pipefish, and the occasional manta, shark, chevron

barracuda, triton triggerfish. Overall an excellent trip.

**Nai'a, October 2005, Bob and Gayle Bringas (robertbringas@email.msn.com), Gaston, OR.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm. Rooms were spacious. Room No. 7 is by the chain locker, but the Captain timed the arrivals for 0630h, so guests were not awakened in the middle of the night. Healthy corals. Some huge wrasse, sweetlips, grouper; but, most of the critters were small: nudis, shrimps, blue ribbon eels, flatworms, macro stuff. All diving done from skiffs; hard-bottom inflatables with boarding ladder only on request. Most diving done in open water, with occasionally unpredictable currents. Divemasters were personable, eager to point out unusual finds. We combined the Fiji destination with the Solomon Islands, with 4 days between the trips for R and R.

**Nai'a, November 2005, Gerald Meral (bmeral@horizoncable.com), Inverness, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm. Nai'a was our first live-aboard. It was incredible. We averaged 3 dives a day, which was fine. The Bligh Water and Namena Reserve are amazing places to dive: big and small fish and critters everywhere. Soft corals are especially outstanding. Crew does everything for you: diving was off small skiffs so you could get right to the bommie (rock/coral pillar) or other dive spot. Never more than 3 minutes from the Nai'a. Helped you into your b/c, and then took it from you while you were in the water at the end of the dive. No limits on diving; you can do what you want, although if you stayed with the divemaster they found tons of little things you might otherwise miss. I identified (using the Allen Indo-Pacific

book) 166 species, Probably not a good trip for beginners: there were some currents. But we did have one new diver, and he had a great time. The Nigali Passage (drift through an opening in the reef, with a stop at the "bleachers" to watch schools of sharks, mackerel, barracuda, jacks, and giant groupers) was definitely a highlight of the trip. Cabins on board are amazingly spacious, with huge (for boats) showers. The crew was Fijian, and always smiling and ready to help. The divemasters were all good, and the cruise leaders (married couple Josh and Liz) are expert underwater videographers and fish experts. Viewing their videos (which were usually playing) was a highlight of the trip, and the trip video was great. Village visit was excellent, as was the onboard Kava party. Food was absolutely remarkable: they had a chef and two assistants. They can accommodate almost any diet. The Nai'a often carries such luminaries as Stan Waterman, Gerald Allen, and Paul Humann. UW Photography Comments: more room on this boat for photo set up than many others. Sensitive to needs of photographers.

**Nai'a, April 2006, Juli Tracy and Dick Gamble, San Diego, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Cabins were roomy, diving was beautiful and easy. Dove from dinghies, but there was no time constraint — they would pick you up wherever and whenever you surfaced. Divemasters were safety conscious and knowledgeable. Beautiful hard and soft corals; although there was some bleaching, it made the corals prettier — pastel colors. Tons of fish. Crew, native Fijians and Liz and Josh, were excellent. Went out of their way to help and entertained us each night with their singing. Visit to Fijian village was also fun — not too

long and we felt welcomed by the villagers. Itinerary on 14 day trip (another good point — if we have to travel for that long, we want to have a long live-aboard trip). We started diving the first day, then motored overnight (very calm, in the lee of the big island Viti Levu) to our next destination. Dove mostly between the two big islands, where diving is probably the best in Fiji. Dove the regular dive schedule even on the last day, then motored back to port during the night, in time to disembark Saturday morning. So got good diving, easy traveling, and a full 13 ½ days diving. Bad: cockroaches upstairs, food. Separate Camera Room with lots of space for storage, but not much room for working on a camera (lots of shelves, but too high to work on). With only half the full complement of divers, we were fine, but with the boat full, it would be crowded. Lots of cockroaches in the camera room! Crew careful with cameras, and crew knowledgeable about camera techniques and settings. Liz and Josh showed excellent videos.

## FRENCH POLYNESIA

### Tahiti

**Aggressor, January 2006, Michael H. Foust (drfoust@comcast.net), Santa Ana, CA.** I've around 300 dives and often drift dive in Cozumel. The reef hooks and pass diving are challenging so a diver who isn't in good condition or experienced might be overmatched with these dives. However, there are other dives that were easy and slow paced yet enjoyable especially for photographers. Visibility (100+) and water temperature (83) were great. Cabins were roomy and well laid out

with storage. The boat did have a rough time in crossings in choppy seas that made the ice machine and air conditioning go out which impaired sleep. Lots of manta and shark action in the pass dives. Some playful encounters with bottlenose dolphins (although I wasn't the lucky one to play with them). Schools of snapper, jacks and tropicals over hard coral fields were common. Several turtles. They are moving the boat from the Tuamoto Islands (where this report is from) to the Society Islands to make the flight schedule easier and increase options because there are less currents there. Though there were dives I could have used more than the 45 min. (the dive time averaged 50), having 4 dives per day didn't bother me, though there were some on board that did. The passengers were multi national. The crew upbeat and well trained. Helpful and efficient. I would highly recommend this trip to advanced / experienced divers. But be ready for the pass dives. The current is powerful . . . the boat safety and practice, however, alleviate any real concern. UW Photography Comments: plenty of camera table space, and rinse buckets; recharging station good.

### HAWAII

#### Kona

**Kona Aggressor, August 2005, Joshua Boger, Concord, MA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, calm, no currents. The crew was well-oiled machine and overall a pleasant and happy bunch. The Captain (Scott) runs a tight ship but creates a friendly and open atmosphere. He is an expert photo pro, both still and video. The rest of the crew was great, respon-