

the cliff-side to the reception/dining area. The food was tasty and plentiful and ranged from local delicacies through Indian, Chinese and Western cuisines. Breakfast was served buffet style whereas both lunch and dinner were menu driven with different “specials” each day. When checking out from Wananavu allow at least an hour to fully review the bill since bookkeeping inaccuracies and lost signed drink vouchers tend to confuse the numbers.

FRENCH POLYNESIA

Tahiti and Moorea are everyone’s dream of the South Pacific, and despite their pricey resorts and food, these French-speaking islands have are now attracting North American divers to join in the plentiful reef shark action. There are a range of accommodations and restaurants, some reef diving, and plenty of great scenery. The once-snotty French attitude toward others has lessened considerably.

Bora Bora

Bora Dive Center, Sofitel Motu, October 2005, Ken Davis (kjdmd@aol.com), Scotch Plains, NJ. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, choppy. Bora Bora is a truly beautiful island — lush, with photogenic mountain looking like Bali Hai. Nice people, but remember for most English is a 3rd language, so when you ask a question, the answer you get may have little to do with what you asked. Sofitel Motu was gorgeous — small, private and romantic, on its own little island with frequent boat service to Novotel on mainland. Decent snorkeling at resort. Food only OK and

expensive, but good restaurants on Bora Bora. Food was better at the Novotel. Bora Bora’s famous mantas were only seen in the distance on one dive. Apparently hotel construction has driven them from some popular sites. However, I never saw so many sharks — black tips on every dive but one, lemons several times. Also saw: school of eagle rays, morays, turtles (friendly), anemone clown fish, lion fish, amazing variety of reef fish. Dive operation had its pluses and minuses. You have to wade to the boat, which is small and has no head. Boat can accommodate up to 10 divers, but the one day we had 10 it was crowded. Back roll entry, easy ladder climb to get back on boat. They help you back on boat, set up your gear on second tank. I was able to keep my gear at the shop and had my BC and regulator set up boat for first dive of the day. Coconut pieces and drinks between dives. The general approach to not touching stuff is more casual than at most Caribbean operations — at one point a divemaster picked up a large sea cucumber for us to handle. Another broke off pieces of sponge on dead coral to feed turtles. On the second dive of my 8-dive week the divemaster had me too far from the boat and too low on air, and the boat had to come get me. After I complained, I got personal service the rest of the week. On the good side, divemasters Patrick and Luiqe were excellent at finding and pointing out critters and were attentive. Luiqe saw that two of us used a little more air than the rest and shared air with us during the dives, not because we were that low, but to prolong our bottom time. He also had a plastic baby manta hidden in his wet suit — pretty good gag. The coral is not quite as good as the best in the Caribbean. Well worth the 12 hour flight from NY.

Bora Diving Center, Novotel Bora Bora Beach Resort, August 2006, Vicky Polashock (parrotfish91@hotmail.com), Roswell, GA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. We did one night dive with the Bora Diving Center. We were not impressed; it seems geared toward guests on cruise ships and 5-star hotels. We picked up 6 divers from the Paul Gauguin cruise ship and 1 from the Hotel Bora Bora. At the HBB dock we saw a manta ray at the underwater dock lights. The crew had had already set up tanks before we boarded. On board the boat they wouldn't point out which setup was each of ours, they told us to wait until we got to the dive site. Then, when we attached to the mooring buoy they quickly hustled divers to the edge of the boat, strapped on whichever BC fit, and threw them overboard — most of them didn't even take a breath from their regs first or check their tank fill. My husband and I were the only ones who insisted on even a rudimentary gear check first. The gear wasn't in great shape, either — my husband's BC inflator valve leaked and he had to dump air constantly.

Nemo World, Novotel Bora Bora Beach Resort, August 2006, Vicky Polashock (parrotfish91@hotmail.com), Roswell, GA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, surge. Nemo World is right on the Novotel property. On some dives, we were cramped, with dressed cylinders lying on the floor of the boat for lack of room on the sides. They had several boats — a catamaran with giant-stride entry and small aluminum-hulled boats with back-roll entry. The staff were good and provided adequate briefings. No fresh water or dry storage space on the boat, but hot sweet tea and fresh coconut were provided. Viz was

better outside the lagoon, and we often went to the same dive site. The operation is set up more for resort diver types, so profiles were conservative. The coral was a bit abused, but we saw tons of black tips, turtles, butterflyfish, anemonefish, stingrays, and triggerfish. Diving was expensive — \$150 for a two-tank trip. As tipping is uncommon, no one tipped the dive staff — a first in my experience! The Novotel was nice, basic, and clean. All rooms are on the opposite side of the road from the beach, so we had a view of a garden. The room had A/C, a safe, small fridge, shower, ceiling fan, phone, coffee maker, and TV. The staff were helpful and made restaurant and excursion reservations. Overall, it was a great value for the price. The location is good as well; at Matira Point, with excellent beaches. We were next door to a good market, where we stocked up on breakfast, lunch, and snack foods. We were also walking distance to several nice restaurants. We did get a ride to Bloody Mary's, which I thought was over-hyped. Placards on the table encourage tipping, we were charged for the ride that our hotel staff said would be free, and they were late to pick us up and to bring us back to the hotel. Get a reservation at Villa Mahana — it's much more expensive, and much harder to get in to, but everyone we talked to said the food was the best they ever had.

Moorea

Top Dive, December 2005, Peter Joseph, San Anselmo, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: choppy, currents. Top Dive in Moorea is destroying the coral reef with their anchor! Rather than hire a skipper to man the boat during the dive, they throw out an anchor which I saw grab a large

staghorn coral. During a swell, it snapped off a large piece. When I mentioned this the guide rudely said "What do you want me to do, eh? Lose the boat?" The guides also dove with fish heads tucked into their BCs to feed the reef sharks, a dangerous stunt to please the tourists. The coral we saw on Moorea was nothing to write home about. The operators should be censured for damaging the reef. We would never go back to Moorea. The other Top Dive operation we did enjoy was in Rangiroa, where they were professional and adequately staffed. Taputa Pass is a wild ride!

Top Dive, Club Med, April 2006, Morgan Richardson, San Luis Obispo, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 25 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 to 84 F, calm. The dive company and boats were in great shape, they had Aqualung Calypso no depth gauges and my Vytex said we were close to deco dives in just two dives a day. By the 6th dive I had pretty much seen everything and due to large swells we began to repeat dive sites. I wore a 3mm full suit which helped me not get cut by the coral. Top dive was nice. The crew was understanding of my macro photography (I was moving slowly). Lots of sharks, turtles, lion fish and a huge Napoleon wrasse.

Top Dive, Hotel Kaveka, May 2006, Edward Leibowitz (eleibow@pica.army.mil), Jersey City, NJ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 70 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, surge. Diving was good. It rained in Moorea three days. On the third day, seas were rough. Top Dive does not charge extra for Nitrox. They use EAN 36. On some dives, we went to 90 feet using this mixture. Would have felt more comfortable if we stayed at 70 feet using EAN 36. You entered the water by doing a backroll and go down

the anchor line and blacktip sharks greet you. Divemaster feeds smaller fish. However, the sharks do not approach divemaster to be fed. Saw at least one or more lemon sharks on most dives. Saw beautiful corals, large moray eels, few triggerfish, clown fish, and yellow stripers. Usually visibility on second dive was better than first. When you reenter the boat after completing a dive, you place one foot on one rung and the other foot on a higher rung. Ladder rungs were slippery and Top Dive told divers wearing slipper fins to keep the fins on when going up the ladder. Top Dive returns to the dive shop between dives and shows a video of the first dive dubbed with music which can be purchased. Nico, the photographer, does an excellent job. On some dives we were diving to a deeper depth on the second dive. Example: we would go to 70 feet on the first dive and ninety feet on the second dive. French Polynesia is expensive. The restaurants only serve bottled water. Have a thin crust pizza at Allo's, ten minute walk from the hotel. For you Brooklynites, it tastes as good as DiFarra's World Class Pizza in Midwood.

Top Dive, Club Bali Hai, July 2006, Gill Cruz, Pleasanton, CA. Experience: 2500+ dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm and flat, choppy. High safety concerns by dive guides, huge lemon sharks each dive, black tip reef sharks, many species of reef fish, sting rays and eagle rays. Our bungalow was over the water. Island not too crowded, truly a kickback destination. The food at local restaurants was excellent. Diving is too restrictive for experienced divers. Dive guides led you on a route and you followed. You need to set up your own dives with shop if you can. Very expensive location. In the barrier reefs snorkeling is good.

Rangiroa

Six Passengers, January 2006, Richard Bruch (rich.bruch@verizon.net), Durham, NC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to F, choppy. Rangiroa is an atoll an hour by air north of Papeete, Tahiti. Air Tahiti Nui has been canceling a lot of international flights. The inter-island carrier, Air Tahiti, is excellent and reliable, but will charge for extra baggage weight; \$130 as we carry our own dive and camera equipment, dive repair supplies, batteries and books. Showing a C card when checking in with Air Tahiti will save money, as will requesting the "circle route" baggage fee if traveling to more than one island. Six Passengers dive operation in Rangiroa is within walking distance from the Kia Ora that has deluxe overwater air-conditioned bungalows. Kia Ora has excellent snorkeling, the best we have had anywhere. Six Passengers, near Tiputa Pass, dives from a Zodiac with six divers per boat and backroll entry. All dives are led by a competent divemaster. They observe safety precautions but do let the diver breathe down his/her tank. The best Rangiroa dives are "pass" dives beginning in the ocean and going with what can be a quite brisk current through the pass, ending in the lagoon. Beware: attempting to ride the current the other direction can be fatal. All the creatures and the fishes large and small love the movement and nutrients of the current and are seen in the pass when the current is running in. We saw many sharks, napoleon fish, manta rays, eagle rays, and titan trigger fish. On one dive dolphin came close. And we saw hammerheads from a distance. Also see many eels, unicorn fish, butterfly fish, many more varieties than in the Caribbean. At Avatura Pass, both last

year and this year witnessed a ball of several hundred jack fish. Also have seen African Pompano, this trip seven of them together. Our third trip to Rangiroa, the diving is world class, not much in the way of soft corals, but great fish life. For dining, we tend to only have breakfast at Kia Ora. For dinners, most restaurants will provide pick-up service. Call them and usually pick up is at 7 pm. We enjoy dining at Vaimario, Chez Josephine and Kai Kai. UW Photography Comments: Diving from a Zodiac so no rinse bucket or protective area for camera. Camera is handed to the diver after backward roll entry. No criticism if diver wanders to get a shot.

Six Passengers, Miki Miki Village, August, 2006, Ron Madaras, San Leandro, CA. (RJMadaras@lbl.gov)

My wife and I had a confirmed reservation to stay at the Miki Miki Village "pension" on Rangiroa for the above dates. The written confirmation was from the owner. When we arrived the manager of the Miki Miki Village had no record of our reservation! I showed her the email from the owner that had our confirmed reservation, but she said he never told them about it! I also had five reservations on Rangiroa with The Six Passengers dive shop for that week. Since we had no place to stay because the Miki Miki Village didn't honor our confirmed reservation, I called The Six Passengers. The secretary of the dive shop, Stephanie, then drove us around from pension to pension until we found one that had a place for us that night. We dove in the nearby Tiputa Pass. The drift dives are awesome! The staff is helpful.

Six Passengers, Hotel Kia Ora, September 2006, Vicky Polashock (parrotfish91@hotmail.com), Roswell, GA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100

to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents. The Six Passengers was a short walk down the beach from our hotel. Most of the staff spoke little English, but enough to provide briefings. You drift dive, so you stay together and dive a similar profile. The staff don't believe in wasting air, and kept us down until the heaviest breather was down to only 10 bar! Their goal is to maximize bottom time, and see the biggest fish. We played with a school of dolphins on two of the five dives we went on in Rangiroa, and saw tons of sharks. Most of our diving was in and around Tiputa Pass; diving through the pass we were swept along with large schools of barracuda, butterflyfish, and mating pufferfish. We saw mantas at the surface on one dive. The coral was in much better shape than on Bora Bora. The boats are all zodiacs, and the ship tries to limit them to a captain and six passengers, though we had eight on one trip. You have to wade out to the boats with your gear, though the staff will carry dressed tanks out for the ladies. There is a dive operation affiliated with our hotel, but it was more expensive and geared toward resort divers. The Kia Ora was beautiful. We had a "deluxe beach bungalow with pool," which had its own infinity-edged pool, and a garden tub outside surrounded by a coral wall for privacy. The garden bungalows were smaller and a bit cramped, but nice. The overwater bungalows were a little small, but most of them were spread out and appeared to have more privacy than some resorts on Bora Bora where the overwater units were packed tightly together. The hotel made reservations for us at other restaurants, but charged us \$1 to do so, which was not explained in advance! For the lack of crowds, we liked Rangiroa more than Bora Bora.

GUAM

MDA Divers, Hilton, May 2006, Yvonne Lanelli, NM. Water: 82F. Large American military presence, tourist development (mostly Japanese), high rise resort hotels – Guam Hilton – designer shopping in mega-malls, bars, strip clubs, and movie houses. MDA Divers (rentals, sales, instruction, Nitrox, 3000 PSI, compact 80s, divemaster extra) is a professional operation. Viz less than 30 feet on our much anticipated dives to the wrecks of the WWII Tokai Maru, a Japanese freighter that sank in Guam's harbor on top of the SMS Cormorant, a German WWI ship, as well as to the wrecks of an American tanker sunk as a breakwater, Hap's Reef and Pete's Reef. As we showered on MDA-Guam's dive boat the Sea Chaser, we could only listen as the other 12 divers, American stationed on or working in Guam, talk about what could be seen on "good days."

Micronesia Divers Association, June 2006, Larry S. Klumb, Lithia, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Took advantage of the MDA Divers Club (MDA) membership. For \$75 I received five boat dives and other ancillary goodies. Overall excellent, well run operation. Well stocked and professional ScubaPro dealer with a top-notch repair station. Boats were first rate, with competent, engaging staff. Diving was enjoyable, not much in the way of pelagic sea life, but lots of small marine life, turtles, and other interesting critters. You were on your own to dive your own profile, without being encumbered by a dive guide. Diving was easy and enjoyable. No time to do any shore diving, but everyone I spoke with raved about it.