

HAWAII

Hawaiian guides have developed great skill in finding the unique: On the big island of Hawaii, Spanish dancers, rare juveniles, and lionfish are regulars. Diving is mostly lava flow dives with little coral cover, but the tropical fish are colorful, unique, and generally plentiful. There's access to good shore diving. Kauai reef diving is passable, but the attraction is unique trips available only in the summer. Maui's diving is often to the backside of Molokini or Lanai and boats leave at 7 a.m. or earlier. Turtles are common, and occasional white tip shark adds to the fun, and the reef fish are colorful. Most reefs around Honolulu and Oahu have declined considerably, but there is some decent diving toward the north side. Hawaii has virtually no controls over divers who collect reef fish for aquariums. Nine months a year expect clear water, visibility that's usually better than the Caribbean — around 100 feet — and air temperatures in the low 80s. Water temperatures hit the low 70s in January and February when storms can last several days and cut visibility. There are plenty of condos for rent everywhere and you'll need a car since dive boats are not berthed at hotels.

Hawaii

Aloha Dive Company, October 2005, Bob Greaves, Las Cruces, NM.

Experience: 350+ dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 82 F, calm. My 12th dive trip with Aloha Dive Co. Mike and Earl have been the crew all these years. We did four days at sites south of Kona and

one day 50 minutes north. On day two, three groups of 5 to 7 hammerheads passed overhead. On day five, we dove at a site where Mike could see mantas. In the water we saw two — each about 10 ft across. One stayed doing loops and rolls for the entire dive. A digital camera, good for 100+ exposures, is just the thing for this kind of action. Another dive had a resting white tip shark and plenty of local tropicals — just an unhurried, enjoyable time.

Aloha Divers, Fairmont Orchid, May 2006, Dave Eckenberger, Midlothian, VA. (decken@comast.net)

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 120 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm, currents. Mike and Earl run a great operation and cater to your skill level and can arrange amazing large animal encounters. They can find most things on the reef upon request. I saw nearly all endemic butterfly fish over 6 dives and they could find octopi on nearly every dive. There were lots of turtles and eels as well as eagle rays. Both men have a deep love and appreciation for the ocean and everything in it and their enthusiasm was contagious.

Big Island Divers, Hapuna Prince Beach Hotel, March 2006, Bob and Laura Mosqueda, Pasadena, CA.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm. We stayed in a nice resort area, Hapuna Beach, but it was a long drive south to Kona (about an hour, with a lot of traffic at times) to get to the boat. Big Island Divers was a first rate operation: safety-conscious, excellent service, and reasonable (for Hawaii) prices. They set up equipment, helped with getting in/out, and have friendly and knowledgeable guides. One DM (Frank) has a tendency to go fast which is a shame because there are a lot more things to

see if you take your time. We went on two of the famous night “manta dives.” We saw no mantas on one dive but had wonderful encounters with 2 mantas on the other dive. On the night we were skunked the dm (Frank) took us on a series of “tours” that added up to a reasonable night dive. We would leave the manta sight for 10 minutes and tour around, then come back to see if the mantas had arrived; we did this for about an hour, but no luck. The other dive operations had left after only 20 minutes!

Dive Makai, March 2006, The Bengtsons, Grand Rapids, MI. Completed a week diving with Michael and his crew the new owners of Dive Makai. The transition from Lisa and Tom to Mike and his wife Kimberly has been seamless. It is nice to still have Tom booking the trip and to continue interacting with him. The diving was great though the back end of the incredible rain that pummeled Hawaii was just finishing. We saw dolphins and a humpback on our first dive. The underwater life although less over the past few years was still great! Their crew Mark, David and Jan were really topnotch! Both of my daughters and my wife dove and we have varied experience, but the crew was really great with them. They were good at finding the unusual underwater life: leaf scorpions, frogfish, viper moray, harlequin shrimp, turtles, green lionfish, a variety of nudibranchs, and finished up with some mantas on a night dive.

Dive Makai, May 2006, Michael J Sare (sare01@comcast.net), Placitas, NM. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 76 F, calm. Within minutes of sending DMC an email requesting updated information,

Tom Shockley called me, introduced himself, provided immediate answers to my several questions, and within 2 hours had backed all that up with a more comprehensive email, and then a “snail mail” package. Tom filled in all the blanks so that there were no surprises. Dive Makai Charters (DMC) changed ownership late 2005, but the same standard of excellence has been maintained. Very competently run, thorough site and naturalist pre-dive briefs. All divers experienced, competent. Many repeat customers (like me). Morning two-tank routine: meet at 0730 at Honokohau Harbor (2 miles N of Kailua-Kona); in water by 0900, back at harbor by 1300-1330. Boat is 31' custom built Radon, Lio Kai III (translates to “Seahorse” in Hawaiian); 12 divers max. I brought minimal personal gear and rented equipment — in good condition. DMC uses LP steel 80's; boat crew accurately did math to recompute weights. I had requested a rental 3mm full wetsuit, but on first day of diving, boat crew readily admitted they pulled the wrong size. Crew divers Todd and Mark literally gave me “the shirt (wetsuit) off their backs” by lending me their personal wetsuits for two dives. Can't beat that for service! As the wetsuits were 7mm and 5mm, and then the correct 3mm for the following day, boat crew rigged the correct weights for me without adjustment, every time. All four dives averaged an hour or slightly more with max depth on deepest dive 93'. Snacks, water, juice between and after dives. Thorough knowledge of dive sites by Jan, Todd, Mark, and Dave. Competent at detecting creatures. Many different types of eels, juvenile and mature rock movers, frog fish, banded shrimp, octopus (including one free-swimming who gave us a color-change demo,

lobster, nudibranchs galore, barracuda, "lion's paw" sea cucumber and 25 spinner dolphins while we were at a safety stop.

Dive Makai, May 2006, Ron Kloberdanz (infinite-entropy@engineer.com), Fairfield, CA. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 70 to 80 F, calm, choppy, no currents. 3 days of 2-tank dives with Dive Makai. Excellent service all around. Fun, personable crew who love what they do and are happy to share it with their divers. Decent rental gear. All gear completely set up for us, tested and brought to aft of boat for us and helped on. All gear explained in case something might be new for someone. Divemasters provided excellent pre-dive briefs including site layout, expected conditions, fish and critters, etc. Also provided great post-dive briefs as well. Divemasters guided groups through each site and pointed out interesting items and hidden critters. helpful with any equipment problems. Provided yummy snacks and drinks. Solar-heated freshwater shower. No dive shop, but a van with merchandise that meets at the dock after return. UW Photography Comments: Separate dunk tank for cameras, strict dry area if needed. Boat personnel were always helpful and careful with camera gear.

Dive Makai, Outrigger Royal Sea Cliff, May 2006, Sherri Howard, Encinitas, CA. (sherrihoward@cox.net) Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 75 to 77 F, calm. The new owners of Dive Makai are carrying on the great tradition of thorough dive briefings and eco friendly diving. New owner Mike dove with us one day. We had not been diving for a couple years and Tom, previous owner and still involved, provided info for a great

check up dive. Tim at South Kona Scuba (808-322-5012, Hwy 11, mile marker 113) provided gear and great directions to Pu'uhonua o Honaunau (dive site "two steps"). Kayaks can be rented at same location from Kona Boys. It was an easy shore dive to refamiliarize ourselves with our gear and a good place for nondivers. The boat leaves from Small Boat Harbor just north of Kona. DM's speak with each individual and try to accommodate the critter specific requests. Dive briefings are detailed and specific to each site. One site off Royal Sea Cliff had some of the healthiest corals we had seen on this trip. The boat lost one engine on Adventure Day and operator only charged for a regular day of diving. Your bottom time limit is your computer and your air.

Dive Makai, Kona Coast Resort, August 2006, James A. Heimer (jmsjnk@earthlink.net), Houston, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 77 to 81 F, calm. When we were last on the Big Island in 2005 we dove with Kona Coast Divers, which has been acquired by Jack's Diving Locker. Since they were booked, we turned to a small operation, Dive Makai, and couldn't have been more pleased. You meet the Dive Makai boat at the marina north of Kailua Kona. The boat is on a trailer, and they load your gear and set up your tanks before putting the boat in the water. It is a 30 footer and accommodates 12 divers plus 3 crew. There is a covered cabin over half the deck and a dry area in the bow. Dive Makai had optimized the equipment storage, seating, and process of getting in and out of the water so that everything went smoothly. We got a good safety brief, boat brief, and thorough dive site briefings (with photos from the fish ID book) for each

site. The first dive set was an afternoon dive with a total of eight divers followed by a manta ray dive at Garden Eel Cove. The dives are guided and it is worthwhile to follow the guide, who knows where to find everything discussed in the briefing. The pace is slow enough for photographers, but the whole dive is packed with things to see. On the first dive the highlights were a small free-swimming manta ray, harlequin shrimp, several leaf scorpion fish (look like frogfish, for those used to the Caribbean), and several species of moray eels, plus the garden eels and tropicals. The second dive was the night manta ray dive. Our boat was joined by four others for a total of 40 or so divers, but the dive shops involved had coordinated this popular dive and it went off well. The divers formed a large circle in 35 feet of water around a light array and aimed their lights toward the surface; the snorkelers aimed their lights down — then the mantas appeared to swoop and scoop though the krill attracted by the lights, passing in and out of the circle of divers — sometimes only a foot (felt like less) over our heads. We had a fourteen footer and a ten footer doing somersaults in front of us for an hour. They were still at it when we reached the limit on our air. We did two dives the following morning (with only one other couple on the boat. Jack's was booked solid again) at the Big Arch and Manta Bay. No mantas, but we were buzzed by two eagle rays and encountered six species of morays, plus the myriad species of butterfly fish, trigger and surgeon fish and the rarer angel fish unique to Hawaii. Dave, Mike, and Jan proved to be excellent divemasters with encyclopedic knowledge of the waters and the ability to find really unique marine life. We got some

valuable photo tips (which we always try to do) and learned a lot about Hawaiian waters. The dive operation was well run, and you felt like you were part of the Dive Makai family on the boat. I usually dive with a shorty 2 mm in the Caribbean, but was glad I had a full 2 mm/3 mm wet suit — a hood is advisable if you get cold easily. Because the boat is compact, bring your gear to the boat in a mesh bag and have a dry bag for your clothes while diving, so that you can keep everything together. The boat provides snacks, juice, water and soft drinks between dives. UW Photography Comments: Boat had small rinse tank for cameras and dry storage during transit to and from dive sites; dive operation did not have onshore base.

Dive Makai, Outrigger Keauhou Beach, August 2006, Jim Schoeneck, San Diego, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. Dive Makai seems to have smoothly transitioned from the prior ownership to Mike and Kimberly (the new owners). Crew was outstanding, both on top and in the water. Probably the best dive briefings I've ever had, complete with fish book or custom pics and discussion of what fish behaviors to look for. Underwater, Mike, Todd, Mark and Lydia had great eyes to find the interesting stuff and took time out a squad of spotted eagle rays, some manta rays and a pod of dolphins came to see us. During a dive with Lydia, we found both a blue striped butterfly fish (rare and found only in Hawaii) and a white margin eel. Mike did a great job of getting people back to the boat that had modest air consumption skills and then took us on a second tour of the dive for another 30 minutes plus. Overall, we were able to stay underwater for an average of over 70 minutes a

dive, though we often had hit 80-110 feet. For those without great air consumption skills, the crew was quite willing to help teach some techniques. The crew would ask what we wanted to see and generally delivered, including a Harlequin Shrimp, leaf scorpion fish, dragon wrasse and a frogfish. Overall in 3 days of diving, we counted 16 species of butterfly fish and 10 types of eels. We saw 20+ spinner dolphin while diving, a school of over 100 Heller's barracuda, 7 manta rays, 6 eagle rays, and more nudibranchs than I could count, including the largest Spanish dancer I've ever seen (10-12 inches). The boat does not have a head on board, so you get to jump in the ocean or step down the ladder when nature calls. Tom, who does the reservations, was quick to respond and, helpful both before we got to Hawaii and on island. Mike has added regular manta dives to the schedule.

Jack's Dive Locker, November 2005, Jack Gullo, Jr. (jgullo@carr.org), New Windsor, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm. Tank rentals by the day, with free refills. They will give you maps of the shore dives and suggestions. Mile Marker 4 is great; as is the old airport. Night dives from shore are possible — use a shore light for a marker. Boat dives with Jack's are professional and informative — the night dive with the manta — saw 19 mantas! A great operation; great boat; great shop. Shore diving makes it tough to drag a camera across the lava rocks into the surf.

Jack's Dive Locker, August 2006, Robin E. Green (rgreen@acquiretitleinc.com), Knoxville, TN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 65 to 120 Feet. Water: 77 to 81 F, choppy, no currents. Although Jack's is a large operation, they never

crowded their boats. Diving is valet style, which I have never been fond of, but Jack's makes it work well. They never rushed us. On shallow sites I had well over an hour bottom time. We also did several deep dives (over 100 feet) and were allowed to dive our computer profiles. We had south swells during our stay, making it necessary to travel to more remote locations for the best diving conditions. Those who felt comfortable were allowed to penetrate lava tubes for some really sweet marine life encounters and photo opportunities. The manta ray night dive was unforgettable. Water temp really cooled by the end of the week. Wish I had brought my 5mm semi-dry. The crew was great. I felt like they were having as much fun as I was. We greatly appreciated the post-dive fellowship at the kava bar. UW Photography Comments: Boats had dedicated fresh water rinse tanks. The staff found really interesting marine life to photograph.

Kona Honu Divers, Hilton Waikaloa, February 2006, Lori Brown, Chris Green (DoctorSLB2001@yahoo.com), Bellevue, WA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 75 to 75 F, surge. Due to respiratory illness, I only went diving with them once during our 10-day stay. On the way out to the dive site, we spotted 3 humpback whales, one a calf. The calf repeatedly breached. This was the signature manta ray dive. The first dive at twilight was on the coral growing on volcanic rocks. I found the colors to be pretty ho-hum. Mostly yellow and tan. We saw a few colorful flatworms, a few butterfly fish, and a few colorful wrasses, but not exactly swarms of fish. As the time for the manta ray dive approached, a half dozen boats showed up. Boxes of lights were placed in a sandy area about 30-35 ft deep. The idea is to get the plankton

hopping. We went down with plans to wait about 10 minutes and if the mantas hadn't shown up, then tour the coral area and return to the sandy area to look for manta rays later. As we were leaving, we spotted a manta ray and headed back to the sandy area. There were about 50 divers and one solitary manta ray, about 8 ft wing-span. The lights had pumped up the plankton to a blurry frenzy and the manta twirled and flipped through the dense plankton. The divers were practically dancing about and it was a joyous site. We also saw 2-3 free-swimming spotted viper morays hunting with the help of the light. Our dive master/guide, Scott, was attentive but not intrusive. There were 20 divers on the boat that was a bit crowded. However, they worked to separate more experienced divers from newer divers which enhances everyone's experience. Between dives, they served soft drinks and sandwiches. The briefings for each dive were appropriate and there was a safety briefing before getting on the boat. There was a rinse tank specifically for cameras and the crew was helpful getting cameras on and off the boat.

Kona Honu Divers, Outrigger Keauhou, April 2006, Jeff Baratta (jbaratta@sbcglobal.net), Mill Valley, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, surge. From the first contact, Maggie and Glen were pleasant and easy to deal with. They have a large comfortable boat, but limit the number of divers on any given trip. They are professional and attentive. You hand you gear to the crew and they prepare your tank. They have Nitrox. All gear is handled with care and safety by the crew. Divers can choose to set-up their own gear. The crew will also store and handle your gear for the entire trip. They make the

entire adventure pleasant and easy. Although the boat had some fresh fruit and cookie snacks for the surface something more substantial might be helpful. This is an outfit for the beginning diver as well as the experienced. They appropriately put groups together for the dive. Then they are able to maximize the dive for the folks that use air more slowly. Bottom times are maximized within all safety ranges. Divemasters and instructors (John, Rich, Frank, Cynthia, JJ, and Jason) are knowledgeable. They have great knowledge with not only diving related issues, but each dive site as well. Frank and Rich worked hard to find the best sites and point out the best aspects of each dive. We found a beautiful Spanish dancer, an incredibly tiny lizard fish and a beautiful fire angel. Not to mention the countless eels and nudibranchs. A week's worth of diving with nothing repeated. It was great fun. Finally, the Manta Ray night dive is spectacular. Our particular night we had at least a dozen mantas present. We all spent 40 minutes glued to the bottom watching these beautiful creatures circle inches above us gathering food. Initially I was concerned that the boat would be too crowded because of too many divers and that non-divers would be on board as well. That was just not the case. They truly do limit the number of folks on the boat and the non-divers stay clear of the tank area. My partner became ill and though we had already booked and paid for all our dives, we were allowed to move dives around to accommodate her short illness without any penalty. Helpful hints and suggestions for new photographers. Helpful in getting camera equipment to you once in the water. Always cognizant of where the cameras were and making sure no one

put masks etc. in the camera tank.

Kona Honu Divers, July 2006, Tom Nemetz (tnemetz@aol.com), Athens, GA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 F, calm. I had researched beforehand in the Chap-book to see which was the best. Kona Honu particularly appealed to me because reviewers said this was not a cattle boat. Wrong! The boat was a nice 48 footer, and the crew was capable and helpful, but 6 crew, 19 divers and 9 snorkelers did not make for a fun experience. On the other hand, the night dive with the mantas was religious — 5 or more mantas at once, many coming within arm's reach (but don't touch!). I'd suggest making reservations with them but checking the number of bookings before going out so you can cancel without penalty.

Kona Honu Divers, August 2006, John Liston, Downers Grove, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 82 F, calm. I had booked with Kona Honu divers after reading other reports in Undercurrent. I like dive operations that take your gear, set up your gear, and rinse your gear after the dive. They do separate levels of divers (certified, classes, resort course divers) and their entry times into the water to maximize your bottom time and to separate the groups. There was still plenty of room on the boat for your gear at your "station" on the boat. I did like the use of the negative tanks to cut down on your weight. My son (approximately 25 dives) and I were put in the "certified" group with divemaster John. John was great at pointing out critters both large and small. John let the divers using air return to the boat on their own while my son and I managed 67 foot dives with about a 55 minute bottom times on both dives. On

Day 2 with Kona Honu divers our gear was set up at our diving station (Kona Honu took our gear back to the shop to dry overnight and then returned it to the boat). Again my son and I were in the certified group with 4 others and Cynthia was our divemaster/guide for our two tank dive day. Again, after a briefing when we were ready we could go to the stern and get in the water and wait on the surface or underwater for the divemaster and the rest of the group. Cynthia was good at pointing out "critters" and other features at our dive sites. Again, we had two dives with a max depth of about 65 feet and dive times around 55 minutes. Fresh fruit snacks, animal crackers, water, and soda were available for surface intervals. A freshwater shower is also available after the second dive. On our Day 2 dive we had a longer surface interval as we came upon a pod of pilot whales. Kona Honu Divers, big boat, good service, and safe diving.

Pacific Rim Divers, Bay Club at Waikiloa, August 2006, John Liston (john.liston@sbcglobal.net), Downers Grove, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 75 to 82 F, calm. I booked Pacific Rim divers after reading other reports from Undercurrent readers ... and they were right. Patrice Heller and Pacific Rim Divers are great for personal service, showing you sights and critters while diving. There are only 6 divers on the boat (no head) and the twin Yamaha outboards can get you quickly to the dive sites. Room at you dive station for your basic gear and forward for the dry gear. There are cup/bottle holders for your (provided) bottled water and pen to mark it. Water entry is a back roll off either the port or starboard side. Upon returning to the boat, a ladder is on the side and either Patrice or Capt. Dave

took our tanks and belts. They did have a small solar heated camp shower set up after the second dive. Patrice is excellent as a dive guide. She is animated with her hands and with her dive slate in telling you different corals, fish, and small critters. On our two tank dives at two different sites we averaged over an hour dive time and about 65 feet was the average depth. Patrice allowed some of our group to return to the boat when they were low on air and stayed with the rest of us to show us the sights on the reef. My son (25 dives plus) and I had a great time. Patrice e-mailed before I left the mainland, and called me on the island to confirm our reservation and to see how much weight and what size tank my son needed or used. Her web site gave good directions and told where to meet for the dive. Yes, her brownies are great! But she also had fruit, trail mix, bottled water, and ginger ale soda for the surface interval. There wasn't a photo table but there was a rinse bucket.

Wanna Dive, Sheraton, February/May 2006, William Fisher (wfisher@nv.blm.gov), Brigham City, UT. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 74 to 79 F, choppy, surge, currents. My wife and I have dove twice with Wanna Dive in Kona and had a great time. Small boat (6 pac), able to dive our computers. No rush, the pace of each day's diving day was set by us not by an operator in hurry to get done. All nice dives 45 minutes to an hour fifteen. Between dives we did some whale watching and mixed with pods of dolphins. We dove geezer gas and all mixes were on the money, tanks were always over 3000 lbs. Steve, Bob and Rich were great to dive with and a lot of fun. Boat had all the required safety equipment and the fellows did a good safety brief. You can dive your profile

after they check out your skills. The guide will provide as much or little help as you desire. Steve has great sandwiches for the surface interval and has water and Gatorade. Kona can get chilly so I recommend a least a 3mm and hood, if you get cold easily, go to 5mm. Photographers, weight yourself a little heavy so you can rest easily on the bottom. I spent 25 minutes at one turtle cleaning station and had as many as 5 turtles there at once. Steve has a theory about when the turtles will be there and it seems to work. Beginners should be wary of the surge in the lava tubes, let the guide know your skill level as you can get tossed around rather significantly. Follow their advice and lead and you should be okay.

Kauai

Bubbles Below, June 2006, Martha and Jeff Hubbard (hubbard182@att.net), Glenmont, NY. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Water: 78 F, choppy, surge. Day boat diving out of Port Allen. Leaves early to beat the wind and waves. Two dives in a.m. and 1 in p.m. Night dives Thursday! Fairly comfortable boats. Owner Linda is on top of everything, and led the dives one day. Dive guides experienced and pretty good with guests. We had a string of unprepared divers ("I didn't have time to check my computer battery . . . I need 38 pounds of weight" . . . and nobody got stranded. Captain a little less user-friendly. Anchor tore loose and the boat floated off. Capt. brought it back, sort of, but left us to swim the last 100 yds. or so. No real reason, beyond he could. Divemaster Joe was super in keeping everyone together and laughing on the upcurrent surface swim. Topography is mostly rock, not coral. More big turtles (Hawaiian green) than we have ever seen. Several times I could see 7 or 8

from one place. One pushed me aside gently when I was in the way! After our departure, Linda sent a personal, detailed and helpful weather/temperature email to use in planning next year.

**Bubbles Below, Kauai Marriott,
August 2006, James A. Heimer
(jmsjnk@earthlink.net), Houston, TX.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 110 Feet. Water: 77 to 81 F, choppy, surge. Bubbles Below operates out of Port Allen on the South side, about 45 minutes from our hotel in Lihue. You meet one of their two boats (one 30-foot cat hull and one 32-foot conventional hull) there at 6:15 am, gear up and hit the water for the trip across. Mid way they stop for a swim call in several thousand feet of water (weather permitting — and we had nearly dead flat calm seas), then you proceed to the eroded crater that forms the small island of Lehua just off the NE point of Niihau. The dives are either deep, in current, drift dives in current, or a combination. Our first dive was at Vertical Awareness with the boat moored. This site features angular pillars of volcanic rock rising from 300 feet to 60 feet from the surface with intermittent currents swirling around. Visibility was 100' plus, and we were joined by a lone male monk seal who examined almost every diver. On a previous dive, we were surrounded by nearly a dozen. The second dive was the Keyhole drift, named for a hole eroded through the island. You start in a notch formed by the vertical walls of the island with cathedral-like lighting, then drift around a corner past a more sloping section, which features small black tip reef sharks at 120 feet and eagle rays at 70, then around another corner into surging shallows at the end of the dive. The last dive, at the Arches, was on terrain reminiscent of a sunken

Atlantis. On all the dives hundreds of brightly colored butterfly fish, Moorish idols, and other Hawaiian tropicals accompany you. The boat trip back is always brutal due to having to fight the wind all the way home. We had 2- foot swells, but they felt like potholes in a cement road. Even so, one divemaster Joe, spent about an hour giving a seminar on the volcanic formation of the Hawaiian islands, which kept us mesmerized. Our two dives on the next day were just offshore near Port Allen in a site called House of Turtles. At least a dozen turtles were present for the duration of both dives - and some were the size of VWs. Also on this dive - white tipped reef sharks, octopus, and the Hawaiian lionfish as well as several species of moray eels. Dive masters, Joe, Mike, and Linda, exhibited a thorough knowledge of the areas and found everything they identified in the dive briefings. The dives were guided (due to the challenges on Niihau and to see everything on Kauai), but as other divers reached their limit on air, the remaining divers were free to stay down and continue exploring. Although their boats are smaller than the ones we used on the Big Island of Hawaii (due to the engine housing protruding into the well deck), everything was organized to accommodate the eight divers on the Niihau trip and three of us on the turtle dive. The boat carried water, sodas, and snacks. On the Niihau tip we had bagels and fruit for breakfast, hot pizza (heated on the engines) for a between dive snack, salad and sandwiches for lunch, and cookies in the afternoon. Dockside facilities to rinse gear exist, but most of the cleanup had to be done back at the hotel. Great diving and a great operation! UW Photography Comments: Our boat had only the ability to rinse cameras in a fresh water

shower after the dive and keep them dry and protected to and from the sites.

Fathom Five, Cliff Club, August 2006, Mike and Elaine Jerome, Beloit, WI.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy, no currents. On one dive going to the dive site we saw a triple rainbow, a pod of over 100 spinner dolphins; once we got into the dive; Anthony, our divemaster, found 3 large reef sharks and a little one hiding under an overhang, eels, turtles and more turtles, what a sight to see, a raccoon butterfly fish, sea cucumbers, scorpionfishes, and octopus, and lots of reef fishes, one of the best dives we have been on, the site was called "Turtle Bluff."

Seasports Divers, Poipu Shores Condos, September 2006, Dr. Lee and Gordon Vliet (mantalee@aol.com), Tucson, AZ.

Experience: 500+ dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy, surge. We have dived with Seasports Divers many, many times over last 10 years of trips. Seasports is attentive and helpful staff for beginners we've referred and watched them with, accommodating to us as experienced divers. Well-run boat operation with excellent attention to safety and comfort. Staff has been pretty stable over last 8+ years, which helps their consistency. Crew eager to point out sea life. Have done their Nihau trips many times and compared with others, their boat is more comfortable for the long trip and their attention to safety is really outstanding.

Seasport Divers, September 2006, Kelley Price (scubagirlkelley@gmail.com), Kirkland, WA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy, surge. Meeting time was 7:30. Pretty early for vacation.

Schlepped our gear from the car to the shop, and then from the shop to the van, then from the van to the boat. No assistance was offered. Divemaster had apparently injured his leg boogy boarding and was limping badly. He also appeared hung-over. My dive bucket was propped in the back of the van, on top of the tanks and was told it would be "fine." Of course, when someone opened the back door at the dock, all my dive gear went flying. And none of the staff helped pick it up. Staff did not assist with gear setup, or changing tanks between dives (they did the latter when I asked, but most had already done their own — I was the last one out of the water). The boat was large (48 feet?) and easily accommodated the six divers and three staff (Captain and 2 DMs) w/o crowding at all. Dives were nice enough, saw quite a few large sea turtles, but overall I could have skipped it. Service from the dive staff was nonexistent. We canceled dives with them for following days that we had scheduled previously.

Maui

B and B, Four Seasons, September 2005, Kevin McCarter, Elgin, IL.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 F, calm. Just worked in one day of diving. B and B is a good operator. Straightforward, accommodating people. Lots of nice small touches ... nice people. Homemade cookies, etc. Dove in Molokini crater. Sometimes has lots of large critters. Frankly, I think the snorkeling right at the crater rim is probably better than the scuba. Coral isn't too colorful; looks like pine cones. Saw about 4' white tip shark and two smaller ones. Lots of large turtles. Second dive was on a nearby wreck (St. Anthony) — huge

turtle ... that's about it.

Ed Robinson's, Ritz Carlton Kapalua, December 2005, Jack Kelly, Orion, MI. (jkelly@vectorbenefits.com) Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 83 F, choppy. I chose Ed Robinson's almost entirely due to reading reviews in the Chapbook and I owe a lot to the Chapbook because Robinson's was arguably the best dive operation I have been with! The boats were more than adequate but what really sets them apart is the quality and personalities of the dive crews. Most have been with the operator for many years; indeed most of the divers I was with knew all of the crew members. You meet the boats, which are trailered to the Kihei boat ramp near Wailea, early (between 6 and 6:30 AM). They have Kona coffee and muffins for you at the dock where you check in and the crew loads and sets up your equipment on the boat. The boat is then put into the water where you board it from a dock by the boat ramp. On the four dives, they had between 7 and 11 or 12 divers; two DMs in the water with you. DMs asked what you wanted to see and usually found it. They let you dive pretty much your own profile, but would occasionally check your air level. We dove extended bottom times, basically to our computer or air limits. Did not dive nitrox, though you could arrange for it through another dive shop. During surface intervals, they had coffee, fruit, drinks and big cookies and muffins. During the three-tank dive trips, they provided make-your-own deli sandwiches and all the trimmings in addition to the fruit, muffins, etc. Lanai trip was long and rough. Saw schools of spinner dolphins jumping and spinning in the wake. Cathedrals was a great dive. Corals in Maui are not what you're there for! Nothing like

Caribbean varieties or plentitude. But the fish life is awesome. Many varieties (something in excess of 25 or 30%) such as vampire morays, bandit fish, etc. that occur only in Hawaii. Turtles were not plentiful, but this is unusual. White tip reefs lounging on the bottom were numerous. Dolphins playing on the bottom with us were incredible. The Robinson staff really made it fun, comfortable.

Ed Robinson; Prodiver Maui Condo, December 2005, Len Sander, Ann Arbor, MI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 71 to 75 F, surge. I dived with Ed Robinson twice before. This trip it seemed that the operation has slipped in quality. I dived during a crowded Christmas week, and I may have been seeing the second team. The boats are efficient and competently run. I didn't like the dive guides; their attitude and level of experience leave much to be desired. An example: our guide explained that if you need to work your way up a current by hanging onto the bottom (this had just happened to our group), it is perfectly acceptable to break coral since 'mother nature breaks coral all the time!' (This was in the Molokini natural reserve — and there was plenty of dead coral and lava rocks to hang onto). I dived once with Prodiver Maui and liked them much better. This is a classy six-pack operation with experienced and careful staff.

Ed Robinson's, Westin, April 2006, Hilary, Vancouver, WA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 74 to 76 F, calm, surge. We booked two 3-tank Adventure charters with Ed Robinson's. They advertise that the first of the 3 dives takes you to Molokini and Shark Condos, which is a 130' dive. On our first charter, we didn't go to Shark

Condos so it was nice to have a few warm up dives. We arrived at the Kihei boat ramp before the 6:30am meet time, and the crew, took our gear, and set it up for us on the boat. There was coffee, juice, and bagels. Once the boat was launched, we had a short briefing about the boat as we took off for our first site. Our first dive was at a site called "The Apartments" off the south coast. This dive was a rather square profile, 110' for 25 minutes. We saw a couple of amazing frog fish, including a white one that we got fabulous pictures of. We had an SI of 1:14 where we were served muffins and coffee. Second site was Ene Nue at Molokini, and there was little current or waves, which was great. Profile was 87 feet for 40 minutes where we saw many grey and white tip sharks, octopus, and lots of eels. SI for 1:08 where we had sandwiches, juice, and soda served. Our final dive profile was 60 feet for 45 minutes on the Backwall of Molokini where we also saw quite a few sharks. On all 3 dives, the whale songs were loud. Our second 3-tank Adventure charter had the same procedures as the first. Our sites were different though, which was great. The first site was Shark Condo at Molokini with a profile of 130 feet for 40 minutes. Obviously we pushed the no-deco limit on that dive, and quite a bit of time was spent much shallower than 130 feet, but it was really neat to see cruising sharks and ones hanging out under the ledge that gives the site its name. After a 1:17 SI and muffins we then moved to "Reefs End" where we did an 84' dive for 55 minutes. After sandwiches and a 1:14 SI, we went to St. Anthony's wreck (at my request), and did a 70' dive for 40 minutes. On that dive we saw a rare red-striped pipefish inside the wreck, and a beautiful frogfish hanging out on the deck. There

were 3 turtles on the wreck hordes of butterfly fish and trumpet fish in the tires surrounding the wreck. Dives would have been challenging for beginner divers. The boat had a large dry table for cameras.

Ed Robinson's Diving Adventures, September 2006, Lanny Oden (lannyariz@aol.com), Tempe, AZ.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. This was our first boat dive of the trip. We booked the dive with Maui Diving Scuba Center in Lahaina. They made arrangements for us to dive with Ed Robinson's Scuba Adventures. Since Maui Scuba had no boats and worked more like a travel agency, we had no choice on such short notice, so we went ahead and booked the trip the day before the dive. We were to meet the boat and crew at 0630 at the boat ramp in Kihei. About 25 miles from where we were staying in Puamana. We arrived shortly after 0600 and 0620 here come two big aluminum 32' dive boats, each pulled by a big ol' 3/4 ton Ford pickup truck. Each boat had Ed Robinson's Diving Adventures printed along the hull. One was named Sea Diver the other, Sea Spirit. Once the crew was settled in and making checks on the trailered boat, I met the skipper of Sea Spirit, our assigned dive boat. His name was Ken. He asked me to bring over the two other divers in my party. After checking C-cards, he had us fill out the usual paperwork, checked us in and we were introduced to our dive master, Bill Finch. They then took our dive gear aboard and set it up for us. Bagels, cream cheese, coffee and juice were available while the check-ins were completed. Each dive boat would take no more than 12 divers, with two dive masters taking no more than six divers. The Skipper and crew went out of their

way to get to know each diver by name and were each friendly and made us feel as though we were old friends. Once underway, Bill came to each diver in his charge and got to know each of us a little better. He asked me what it was I wanted to see while diving and what sort of dive I wanted to do. On board drinking water and juice. Between dives, large muffins and the sweetest, juiciest and softest pineapple I had ever tasted! Once at our dive site, Bill went over hand signals and gave us final instructions. Bill kept constant watch on all of the divers in his charge and was always aware of where each diver was and of their comfort during the dive. This turned out to be a really nice dive and truly a first class dive boat operation. I booked a three-tank dive with them. David Reader was our divemaster and he was no less concerned about my diving safety and enjoyment than Bill was two days before. He was an excellent guide and dive master! Sandwich ingredients were available after the second dive – turkey, ham, roast beef, sliced cheeses, lettuce, tomatoes, Water and different types of sodas were also available.

Extended Horizons, Mana Kai Maui, February 2006, Paul and Donna Lima (plintn@hotmail.com), Christiana, TN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 71 to 75 F, choppy. Went out with Captain Erik, Maren and Chris for two trips. The boat is well designed and comfortable and there is always plenty of good food for the surface intervals. The crew was friendly and informative, using large magnetic slates to identify creatures. The first trip was to Lanai where we dove First Cathedral and Fish Rock, both great dives. We were able to be the first into the lava tube/dome at First Cathedral and experience the beauty in pristine

conditions. We were shown a different exit where you can be propelled out by the surge if you time it correctly. Dived the wreck of the Carthaginian sunk off Lahaina in December 2005. This used to be a whaling museum docked in the harbor for many years and still has the name prominently displayed on the bow and stern. It was sunk by Atlantis submarine company who gives sub tours of the wreck and we had the good fortune to be on the ship when the sub came by. Interesting to experience how quietly such a large craft appeared next to us. Since they have right of way we had been instructed to remain on the wreck itself while it was in the vicinity. The ship sits at 90 feet and could be clearly seen from the surface. No current made it a pleasure to dive. The second new dive is usually done as a shore dive with scooters but Erik agreed to take us to a manta ray cleaning area. We spent a lot of time swimming around and suddenly one, then two, then three, then four mantas swam into the area and were tended to by a variety of fish removing parasites. Mala boat ramp in Lahaina is a 45 minute drive from Kihei where we were staying which means an early start to get there by 6am for the usual Maui launch time (due to trade winds picking up by noon which whip up the ocean in a hurry).

Extended Horizons, April 2006, Linda and Steve Tolf (lindatolf@comcast.net), Hopkinton, MA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 120 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, calm, no currents. We were not disappointed. Maren, our divemaster, exuded enthusiasm and confidence. After a first dive at Knob Hill where we viewed peacock flounder and bandit angelfish, it was off to Cathedrals II. This cavern dive lived up to its name as an ethereal feeling permeated the cavern when the sunlight streamed in.

Site featured many pyramid butterflyfish, Achilles tang, orange spine surgeonfish, brown and yellow phase trumpetfish and a male bird wrasse. Several white frogfish were there for the viewing. Extended Horizons offers photography services for those who don't take their own shots. Picture quality was good and CD was reasonably priced. The boat trip back to Maui featured a pod of spinner dolphins.

Extended Horizons, July 2006, Susan and Bill Arbios (Susan@ArbiosCellars.com), Healdsburg, CA. Experience:

101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet.

Water: 78 F, calm. They dive Lanai almost every day and are not as rigid in their dive calendar as some Maui operations. It is a small operation with one boat. We were usually 10-12 divers in two groups with a divemaster each. Everyone from EH was experienced and pleasant - and great at finding endemic fish and critters. The ride to and from Lanai was pretty choppy the first two days; I was glad for my Meclizine. The last day we stayed on Maui because of the surf and dove the new wreck and near Kapalua. The crew were safe and professional — and the equipment available was in good condition.

Lahaina Divers, Westin Maui, March 2006, Rick Swan (rick@rickswan.com), San Carlos, CA. Experience: 0-25 dives.

Vis: 45 to 65 Feet. Water: 73 to 75 F, calm. Not much to see, but just felt lucky to be alive after making 3 beginner mistakes on my 2 dives. Lahaina is a large, quick in and out operation. Two large, full boats went out at 6:30 am. Groups of five went out with each divemaster. No one was paired. On each dive the divemaster surfaced early with the first diver low on air, and paired us up just before he left. On the first dive four of us waited

on the bottom as the divemaster went back up with someone having trouble equalizing. At the end of the first dive my instant partner and I swam ahead not knowing where we were and surfaced as we ran low on air. For beginners I would recommend a company that could give you more individual support. Advanced divers would want a company that would let them dive their own profiles. Lahaina is a good choice for those traveling with snorkelers, as they have a dedicated snorkel leader that instructs and leads the group. Lahaina Divers leaves from west Maui.

Lahaina Divers, Westin, April 2006, Hilary, Vancouver, WA. Experience: 51-

100 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 74 to 76 F, calm, surge. We did 2 Lanai charters with Lahaina Divers on our short trip to Maui. Because of their recent rains in Hawaii, nobody had taken a charter to Lanai in more than 3 weeks. Lahaina Divers has big 46' Newton dive boats that are extremely roomy, wide, and provide a comfortable crossing to Lanai (which can be rough). They do take upwards of 22 divers, but we've never been on a morning charter with them where they've had more than 18. Dive groups were limited to 6-7 divers, and since we're repeat customers and most of the DM's know us well, we're pretty much left alone to do our own thing as long as we don't go into deco. One complaint I've heard/read a lot about Lahaina Divers is that they have short SIs and AL72s. SIs are typically 45 minutes, with profiles being limited to around 60 feet for 30-35 minutes. Although I've seen other divers burn through tanks in less than 25 minutes, I've never even come close, so the smaller tanks don't bother me. They also give some latitude to divers with computers, with our dives being

no less than 45 minutes each. The dive sites we visited were 2nd Cathedral (twice), Monolith, and No Name. Our first charter out to Lanai had visibility down to 20' in some areas with a lot of silt in the water at 2nd Cathedral. Monolith was a clearer dive and we enjoyed snooping in the cracks and crevices looking for critters, which we found in abundance. There was quite a bit of silt on the corals, which provided us with a "grey/brown" color for most of the dives. Our second charter out to Lanai 2 days later showed us much better conditions. 2nd Cathedral was clear with over 60' viz, and we were treated to excellent viewing of the hanging black coral inside the cave. No Name also had good viz, though we could really see quite a bit of silt still on the corals. It was already clearing off, so we had good color, though we've seen it far better in the past. During the SIs, we had yummy sandwiches, chips and salsa, and lemonade. After the second dive, they brought out warm cookies that we enjoyed on the way back to Lahaina. It's definitely an excellent charter operation for beginner divers and vacation divers as they are conscientious of the divers in their dive groups and do an excellent job supervising them.

Lahaina Divers, April 2006, Jim Burns (jimmydives@hotmail.com), Gloucester, MA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 70 to 75 F, calm. What a disappointment! It started upon arrival at the shop for our first 2 tank boat dive (we scheduled 3 days of diving with them). When making the reservation I was told I could get 100 cf tanks for an additional charge. At the shop, they said they didn't think they could accommodate me. After making a fuss, I finally got the bigger tanks for an additional \$10 per tank. While we were

checking in, I noticed it getting crowded in and outside the shop. About 30 people. Surely they would employ both of their dive boats ... not! They put 28 paid divers (max capacity is 28) on the boat, plus 5 divemasters and crew. There was no room to move at all. Gear was everywhere. We were told we all had assigned seats (there are numbers, 1-28, on the benches), and they were sorry if we were not placed next to our buddy! It felt like I was in second grade. We were placed in groups of 5-8, and told our divemaster's name and what group # we were in, but never introduced to the DM or any of the staff. I had to ask the staff their names and no one bothered to learn ours or greet us with a handshake. On returning from one dive, one of the staff said, "you must be number 22." I responded, "No, actually my name is Jim." We dove Cathedral I. We had to quickly swim through the underwater cave to allow for the other 4 groups to do the same. We didn't have time to explore or take more than a quick picture. There quickly formed a waiting line at the entrance of the cave. I felt like I was in line at motor vehicles. After the second dive we were asked to fill out an opinion card (on the boat), but no staff member could find any and we were told to fill them out at the shop. At the shop, no one could find any, so we were told to write our comments on a scrap piece of paper and they would make sure they got to the right place. I cancelled our additional 2 days of diving. When asked why, I told them it was just way too crowded and impersonal. Two weeks after our dive, I received a form "thank you" e-mail from them. I responded by writing about my negative experience. To their credit, I promptly received an e-mail from the owner apologizing and he

gave me a nonexpiring gift certificate for the cost of my girlfriend's and my dives (almost \$300). He said he would address my issues at the next staff meeting and urged me to give them another try. We really enjoyed diving with Ed Robinson. They are extremely professional and personable.

Mike Severns Diving, Maui Sunseeker, August 2006, Stanley Zuk (szuk@nyc.rr.com), New York, NY. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 74 to 76 F, choppy, currents. Before going to Maui, I was checked Undercurrent's reviews about Maui dive operators and picked Mike Severns. It is a good dive operation — professional staff, well prepared boat. There is not much to see on Maui, even after extensive diving around overcrowded Molokini Atoll, and after diving St. Anthony's wreck with green Hawaiian turtles, and beaches around the Little Beach. Marine life is not abundant and if it wasn't for the turtles and a few interesting critters, there would be not much to see. Maui tends to be expensive, and for the money you spend there, you may choose many other much more exciting dive destinations. Most of the reviews of Maui were written by the people who haven't seen better diving.

Mike Severns, Kihei Kai Nani Condos, September 2006, Jerry Jensen (jensen_jerry@hotmail.com), Eagle Point, OR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 250 Feet. Water: 77 to 81 F. Last year's Chapbook had many good reports re Mike Severns diving and they were all true, if not understated. Pauline and her crew are an outstanding group who love what they do and want to share the underwater beauty. Besides the standard safety briefing, they have an instructional briefing on critters that

we will see if we stay close to the dive leaders. If we want to wander off on our own, just keep the group in sight. We dove with them for 4 days in a row and just kept our gear on the boat, where they rinsed everything off and it was ready for us the next morning. They do want us at the boat ramp at 6:15am for paperwork. The boats are trailered to the boat ramp and brought out after we get back about 11:30. The trade winds really picked up, making for rough seas. They provide rain jackets which are greatly appreciated in the wind and spray. We stayed walking distance at the Kihei Kai Nani condos. Good snorkeling within walking distance.

Octopus Reef, December 2005, Kurt F and Linda L Wilkens, Green Lake, WI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: choppy. We had new regulators and wanted to learn how to use them as well as learn how to be more efficient shore divers. Victoria from Octopus Reef did a wonderful job. She looked at our regulators and gave us some tips on how to use them as well as how to enter and exit the water. The weather conditions were not the greatest and the visibility was not good, but Victoria did her best to educate and show us what she could.

Octopus Reef, August 2006, Anne Dignam (cweasel@optonline.net), Central Islip, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 79 F, calm, choppy, no currents. Rene Umberger of Octopus Reef took care of booking us on the best dive boats with a small group(4-5) and became our private dive guide. She picked the places, found and identified the fish, and gave us the benefit of her 9000 dives in Maui. Without her eyes we would have missed much that Maui diving has to offer. We saw sharks,

manta rays, dolphins, small critters, turtles galore, and every variety of Pacific fish. If you want to shore dive she will make entry, exit and clean up a breeze. Rene also will provide nitrox tanks and personal service if you want to get your nitrox c-card. We found Octopus Reef in the 2005 Chapbook and were glad we chose to dive with her. She also recommended a nice condominium complex (Maui Kamaole) which was directly across the street from the Kihei boat ramp. If you want to dive in Maui it is definitely better to be in the Kihei, Wailea area, rather than Lahaina. Less hassle dealing with the traffic at peak time.

Scuba Shack, Mana Kai Maui, February 2006, Paul and Donna Lima (plintn@hotmail.com), Christiana, TN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 150 Feet. Water: 71 to 77 F, choppy, surge. Michelle at the store was helpful and pleasant and arrangements were easy. Typical Maui start in the dark at 6am from Kihei boat ramp. They have a truck with equipment for those that need to rent; coffee, tea, hot chocolate, granola bars and cookies for consumption while forms are filled out and equipment distributed. Equipment is brand new and replaced each month. Great deals on purchasing last month's gear. Nice, spotless boat with 350hp twin diesels and jet drive which reduced worries about getting back on after drift dives. There are handy rails on both sides of the dive platform to hold while removing your fins. It was a little cramped when gearing up. Captain Valerie was competent and enthusiastic. Many humpback whales breed and calve offshore in the winter. We stopped several times and she killed the engines so we could watch and listen to the whales. Whale song was our constant companion under the water as well.

Went out two days with one day being sunny and pleasant and one being cold and cloudy. Brought lots of expedition weight polypropylene and wore all of it on the second day! Hawaii can be cold (highs 70s, lows 60s) this time of year. Dove with Toby as our divemaster and Waldo as extra eyes on the boat enabling us to do drift dives (Coast Guard regulations). Nice dives with lots of fish, turtles and a few sharks. Toby was aware of air consumption but was great at letting us use our air while others returned to the surface to be picked up as their air ran low. On the back wall of Molokini we watched a white tip reef shark and large ulua (jack) hunting together. The shallower dives were consistently well over an hour! Never experienced any time pressure either below or above the water. Nice surface interval food (bagels, cookies, croissants, pineapple, juices and water). The Mana Kai is close to the boat ramp (snorkeled over there one day) and right on the ocean. It has a long beach to the left but also has a nice reef to the right. Large lawn, perfect for watching whales during the day and for watching sunsets with Mai Tai's in hand. Saw the "green flash" one evening. Enjoyed sitting on the lanai (balcony) in the morning with coffee and binoculars watching whales breach.

Scuba Shack, Kamole Sands Condos, February 2006, William Boswell (wfboswell@marklang.com), Millersville, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 71 to 73 F, choppy. One of the best dive operations we've ever dived with. My five-year-old grandson did the sassy program and he loved it; now he talks about when he was diving. Molokini Crater inside is great but the back wall that everyone raves about is ho hum (Captain Charley warned me).

Oahu

AAA Diving, Doubletree Alana Waikiki, February 2006, Craig Wood (craig_a_wood@merck.com), Radnor, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 75 to 76 F, calm. Chose AAA Diving based on a good review in the 2006 Chapbook, an informative website, and responsive email. I was not disappointed. AAA picks up and delivers from Waikiki hotels. I came to the lobby for my 7 AM pick up on the 1st day and Alex, the operation's owner, was waiting for me in the van. The on time pick up continued for the remaining 3 days of my diving, a rare treat. The boat, Elysium, is a newer, custom 38 foot dive boat. We dove with no more than 8 divers, the boat could easily support more. It has a nice cabin area for protection from sun and wind and easy exit and reentry. AAA does not sell commercial boat seats to other operators, a practice common on the island (details on website). I never felt the trips were rushed to make schedule. Departure and return times were flexible depending on the passengers and surface intervals were leisurely. AAA supplies dive computers at no charge to customers without them. Divemasters accompany the group on every dive but are not overly controlling and they give experienced divers appropriate leeway after skills are demonstrated while they take care of less experienced divers. I dove with Alex, Chris (Captain for most of the time), and Kirsten. All knew the dive sites and sea life well. No decompression limits and back on board with 500 PSI. Cylinders were 80 cu ft aluminum and were always appropriately filled. I dove the AM 2 tank dive Thursday, Friday, and Saturday and dove the 3

tank dive Sunday. We dove wrecks of the Sea Tiger, YO-257 and San Pedro and The Ledge, 100 Foot Hole, Kewalo Pipe, Turtle Canyons, Runway Reef and Nautilus Reef. The visibility was good and sea life much more prolific and varied than I expected. There were turtles on literally every dive and many moray eels, several unfamiliar to me from my Caribbean diving. Hawaiian reef fish were innumerable including butterflyfish, wrasse, grouper, parrotfish, triggerfish, and puffer. Individual sites almost always held surprises such as eagle rays, octopi, white tip sharks, leaf scorpionfish, amberjacks, scribbled filefish or incredible turtle cleaning stations. Several passes by the Atlantis submarine while we were on the YO-357 made for an interesting diversion; the passengers appeared quite entertained by the scuba divers.

AAA Diving, Hilton Hawaiian Village, March 2006, Steve Iwanowicz (siwanowicz@wavecable.com), Bremerton, WA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 70 Feet. Water: 72 to 74 F. This is a service-oriented outfit that could use a bit of polish. Alex Mason proprietor and instructor comes from South Africa (great accent!). He doesn't like cattle boats and tailors the day's trip to provide a good dive experience. Cash or checks only. Prices reasonable. Picked up at the hotel on time in his aged van. Alex asked about prior diving experience and discussed the options for dive sites. Divers are treated as adults, being allowed to dive their own profiles within general rules for return pressures / times. All divers were experienced, though it was clear that appropriate allowances, provisions, support, and flexibility would be made for neophytes. Offers a 3-tank deep dive package on Sundays. Boat was "Elysium," 38' long, 15' beam, listed as being

"2 years old," but appeared older. Elysium capable of taking 16 passengers and 4 crew, but Alex says they run with 5 - 9 divers plus crew. We had 5 divers. It ain't glorious, but it'll do: Fresh water hose at stern for shower and washing equip. No camera tank. Overall stowage, cleanliness, and orderliness below average. No snacks. Water provided in water bottles, but cooler it had debris floating in the ice water. Trash had accumulated in the trash cans and was not emptied before getting underway; by the end of the day, the trash was near full. Between dives, the crew did not change out dive gear from tank-to-tank, divers took care of their own equip. All tanks were aluminum 80s and had full air charges; no Nitrox. Plentiful uncoated hard weights; no soft weights. An oxygen tank was on board. They did not have a method (like a diver tag board) to show when everyone was on board, but with the small group of divers on board, it is obvious when someone is missing. Pre-dive briefs were well done and sufficiently detailed. The crew was adequately attentive to surfaced divers and assisting them out of the water. Great discussions during surface intervals. Dove San Pedro wreck, near the YO-257, was a hospital ship that was sunk in 1996 to create an artificial reef. It rests upright in 85 ft, with the deck at 60 ft and the top of the wheel house at 50 ft. The current at the surface abated with depth, but was always there to some extent, but small and posed no problems at all. The wreck had many coral formations and a great variety of reef fish. Also saw green sea turtles. Oahu had received a lot of rain and vis was reduced to 60 ft or so as a result due to both run off from the land as well as algae: YO-257 was a Navy yard oiler built in the 1940's and serviced

ships during World War II. It was bought by Atlantis Submarines HI and sunk as an artificial reef off Waikiki in 1989. The ship rests upright in 100 feet of water with the main deck about 85 feet. It has many large access holes cut through the structure and is a well-developed artificial reef. Easy swim-throughs – bring a good dive light. The ship was teeming with reef fish, turtles, and other life. Also saw a white tip reef shark. Atlantis tourist submarines also drove by all in the dive group took time to wave to the tourists – mostly Japanese. Alex gave us a clear warning about the subs: when you hear them, stay close to the wreck. The subs came close – within 15 – 20 feet of the wreck and us. The electric motors/thrusters of the sub was loud enough to drown out the alerts of my dive computer, so you have to monitor your gauges. After the dive, we pulled into a pier to get away from the rough water, let out stomachs settle, have a bite, and offgas. Sea Tiger coral formations and other marine growth is in early stages. Not much wildlife. Two octopi inside the main deck. Also saw spotted eagle rays. Atlantis tourist subs came by a number of times here too. I came across four sport fishing rigs fouled on the wreck; we took care of the heavy monofilament and hooks so other divers wouldn't run into problems.

Aaron's, Royal Hawaiian, February 2006, William Boswell, Millersville, MD. (wfboswell@marklang.com)

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 71 to 73 F, choppy. Diving on Oahu was uneventful. Which magazine rated Oahu one of the top ten (what a joke)? Aaron's had six resort (discover) divers. The medical releases were handed out on the way to the dock, no pool or shallow water time only a 45 min briefing at the dock.

Then, the divemasters wanted to do the Corsair site 110 feet! Two of my children hadn't been diving in a year. I told them we wanted to do a shallower dive, which we did (Angler 55 feet). Two of the six discover divers never made it off the boat, two went in the water and immediately got back on the boat. The other two, one of which had done a resort dive before, did go down to 35 feet for 20 minutes. None of the six resort divers did the second dive. On day two we had two newly certified divers as well as experienced divers and this day we did the Corsair (110 feet). One of the newbies never made it off the boat (equipment) and the other panicked at 105 feet (I could hear her scream at 105 feet). When I turned around one of the divemasters was in hot pursuit because this woman was going to the surface. Everyone was ok except for some seasickness. I've seen better rental equipment in third world countries. I'm not sure how this establishment received a PADI 5 Star rating. Aarons doesn't own any boats, they charter the boats so that it's easier to dive different sides of the island. Captain John's Diving was the boat we were on these two days; John and his girlfriend should get out of the dive boat business. There was no interest in safety only the fact that the platform had been recently painted and not scratching it.

Captain Bruce's, Hilton Hawaiian Village, January 2006, Bob and Janie Williams, Mesquite, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 73 to 74 F, choppy, no currents. Rented gear. Since Captain Bruce's picks you up at your hotel (in Waikiki) and drives hour to West Coast bay at Waianae, your gear is on board with no chance to try it on. No computers. BCs way too big, allowing tank to move all over,

constantly jerking at regulator. Dive briefing practically nonexistent; didn't even name the dive site. Told who the divemasters were but no instructions to stay with the group. Hawaii coral is either dead, destroyed, or struggling for existence — though we only did two dives. First dive 80 feet to remnants of plane mostly torn apart. Moderate tropicals. Dive master dug a poor octopus out from under the plane wing and handed it around to be petted, terrifying the poor thing. On the second dive, 40 - 20 feet, did see two turtles up close. Fish life limited. Because BC was so big, wife had trouble getting air out for proper buoyancy. I stopped to help and dive master and group disappeared. We searched but couldn't find them. After ten minutes, he returned but only my wife saw him. She turned to signal me and he was gone again. We eventually surfaced and swam to the ship where we heard the divemaster was angry and making rude comments about us. He never came to see if he could help when we had trouble, never asked about remaining air, and disappeared without being sure we were following. We were never instructed to surface if we lost the divemaster and we weren't in trouble. Rude and unprofessional.

Dive Oahu, Doubletree Hotel, October 2005, Henry Ziller (caziller@hotmail.com), Conifer, CO. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, choppy, surge, no currents. Most dive operators will pick you up at any of the hotels. There is parking near the dive boat in fact within 30 feet if you want to pay for parking, (Under \$10) or within a quarter mile to park free. The dive operation is at Kewalo Basin Harbor near Ala Moana Park in Waikiki. They picked me up at 7:30 and I was dropped off around 12:30. The

shop has new equipment to purchase, or you can rent, and is well equipped. The boat can hold 28 passengers and two crew. It is a 38' Custom Cat with a 14' beam, which makes it extremely, stable. She is equipped with twin 400 hp water jets for power, hot showers, twin dive ladders, and underwater sound system. All of the safety equipment you would hope for is on this boat including oxygen, first aid kit, GPS, radio, life preservers, etc. The boat does take on other dive operation divers and their dive masters, but there were less than 10 people on the boat. Fresh fruit and water or sodas are available for surface interval. The first dive is normally either the YO 257 wreck or the San Pedro wreck and Turtle Cove for the second dive. We were lucky enough to visit both wrecks on one dive since there was little current. There are usually turtles on every dive as well as eagle rays and lots of fish. We saw octopus on every dive. For some reason the dive masters like to catch the octopus and play with them. I don't approve of this practice, but that is not going to stop them. In 2003 we were fortunate to see a whale shark off the west coast of Oahu and unfortunately the dive master thought it would be cool to ride it and it left so some of the divers did not get to see it. The boat rides are usually less than 15 minutes. Diving is rather expensive. Two tank morning dive is \$99. Repairs and purchase of equipment is readily available in Honolulu.

Ocean Concepts, JW Marriot Ilihani, November 2005, Gerrit Milks (gpmilks@hotmail.com), Seabrook, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm, choppy, surge. The diving and visibility varied from day to day based on weather conditions. There was not a lot

of colorful creatures and coral, but the lava formations and wrecks more than made up for it. Ocean Concepts was an excellent dive operation.

KIRIBATI

Christmas island is roughly a three-hour flight due south from Honolulu. It's the world's largest coral atoll, 45 miles long and seven to 25 miles wide, although lagoons make up nearly two-thirds of the area. It was uninhabited until the 1950s, when the British chose it for nuclear weapon development and induced a small Micronesian work force to relocate there. When the British left, poverty and debris remained. The 4,400 residents are citizens of the Republic of Kiribati. There is a dive operation on Kiriitimat, but the reefs are in trouble.

Christmas Island Divers, Shark Fin Hotel, May 2006, Rick Sekely (ricksekely@sekely.com), Salem, OH.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm. Christmas Island Divers Association is a new PADI certified diving operation. Robert Lower, owner, is service oriented, enthusiastic and eager to please. Although there is no dive shop, they do have a garage with a compressor, dive tanks and basic equipment. Robert has a smaller faster boat to go to the furthest sites and a slower, longer more stable boat for closer dive sites or for rougher conditions. He did take us to the furthest and best dive sites (The Korean Wreck and Bay of Wrecks). We saw a total of 9 manta rays during our stay. Four of those were at the surface feeding and we watched them from the boat. We saw a squadron of 5 eagle rays on one dive and a couple others