

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 Tuamotu 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-

sive and happy to help. Several folks were taking courses (from Nitrox to Advanced OW) and the training was seriously done but fun. The cook, The Other Scott, was the versatile and creative: every dinner had multiple main courses, including at least one and usually two truly interesting vegetarian dishes along with two or sometimes three or four different meat main courses. Diving was easy but interesting. The farther south of Kona we went, the better the diving, but even just off the harbor entrance was good. Of course, the must — do dive was the manta night dive, and we were entertained by nine huge mantas doing seemingly choreographed ballet in the lights used to attract their tiny food. Compared with Fiji, the coral colors are muted but that was balanced by the fascinating underwater architecture created by the lava flows, including many interesting and safe lava tubes and small caverns. Between dive sites we happened upon a huge pod of pilot whales (50+) and the captain stopped the boat and we (including the captain) jumped in to snorkel for almost an hour with the whales. Hawaii is an eel paradise and two or three different species were a part of almost every dive. Nudibranchs were a little less plentiful than Fiji, but were rewarding. Sharks, mostly reef sharks (but one large hammerhead) were around almost every day but distinctly more shy than their fellows in Fiji or in Turks and Caicos. Camera table is large and well placed with numerous power outlets. Storage below camera table is ample.

**Kona Aggressor, September 2005, Vick Thomas, Farmington, NM.** Experience: 334 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, calm and flat. Attentive crew that strove to ensure that the divers had a good dive experience. Varied,

abundant and quality cuisine – the chef excelled. Numerous and diverse butterfly fish, fun manta ray encounters, etc. Negatives: small dive deck that was crowded and difficult to maneuver on. The staterooms surround the salon. If you had a group of late-night partiers, the noise would keep awake those trying to sleep.

**Kona Aggressor II, April 2006, Eric Ault, Wheaton, IL.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 74 to 77 F, surge. 15 mantas showed up for the Manta Ray night dive at a site near the Kona Airport. The week before the mantas failed to show. Ranks right up there with swimming eye to eye with whale sharks last summer in the Galapagos. Swam with some spinner dolphins at Manuka Bay. They did come close enough for easy viewing. Other sightings included various eels including a dragon moray, flatworms and nudibranchs including Spanish Dancers. Wore a 5/3 wetsuit with hooded vest. Most days did five dives and this kept me warm right through the final dive. The boat holds 14 but we had only 9. As it was, the camera table was packed though several people weren't shooting. Never seen so much camera gear for so few photographers. Most of the rooms open off the salon that might be a problem if anyone is inclined to party. We all went to bed early. Captain Scott was new to this boat but not to Aggressor's Pacific fleet. Got the impression that previous captains had let some maintenance slide and Scott was to put things right. Everything worked while we were on the boat. Divemasters Savannah, Auvie and Brandi were great and good at finding the unusual. Aggressor Pacific veteran captain Brian was aboard for the week and is a great story teller. Chef Jonathan kept us well fed though some

of his cuisine was too highly spiced for this old stomach ("terminal" heartburn on one dive!). This is the tropics and you always expect to see a few bugs around, but this was the most I've seen in nine live-aboard trips. The crew did put a trap in our cabin that helped.

**Kona Aggressor II, April 2006, Lauren Greider, Encinitas, CA.** Experience: 600+ dives. Vis: 100+ feet. Water: 74 F, calm and flat. The manta dive was amazing. Saw some unusual things, crocodile snake eel and dragon moray a night. The fish and turtles were abundant. The crew was exceptional and the cook superb. We always love the volcanic underwater terrain. We also snorkeled with dolphins and saw one briefly on one dive.

**Kona Aggressor, May 2006, Laura Mosqueda, Pasadena, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm. We signed up for the trip and they took our deposit; we made our air reservations and then they told us that the trip may not go if enough people don't sign up. Different members of our party were given different information re: how many people were needed to assure the trip. It worked out when enough folks signed up for the trip but it was pretty frustrating to deal with them, and they don't make their policy clear on their web site. The diving was nice, but nothing spectacular except the manta dive on the final night. The dive sites were along the coast and were similar to each other with little variety of topography or undersea life. It was certainly pleasant: tropical fish in small to moderate sized densities, turtles, corals in fair condition. The manta dive is truly spectacular: we, along with many other divers, go in with dive lights ablaze, attracting plankton and thus

attracting mantas. Six mantas came swooping in and stayed for over an hour, scooping up plankton and performing an underwater ballet! The boat crew were a nice group of folks, but there was no assistance with gearing up, getting on/off the boat, etc. unless specifically requested. The dive guides were adequate.

**Kona Aggressor, June 2006, Mel Butler (nora.mel@verizon.net), Claremont, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 25 to 50 Feet. Water: 74 to 79 F, calm, choppy, no currents. I had day-dived Kona area several times in the past. The Kona Aggressor is only dive boat going south of Kona, but I was disappointed with the quantity of reef fish. They are there but not in the numbers I expected: we were told reef fish are being caught for aquariums. We dove from the southern tip progressively north up past Kona, ending with the last night as the manta dive, and turtles on the last morning. We saw two mantas on the afternoon dive that circled us several times and then, the night manta dive had about six mantas coming at you from all directions to eat the plankton collected by our lights. This happened to be my 1000th dive so I was ecstatic! The ship was clean and neat. State-rooms, with bathrooms, are all on the main deck with picture windows. The crew and the alternate captain, Brian, were outstanding and fun. The new chef served delicious meals and snacks. Excellent camera rinse tanks. Excellent camera tables. Could have been more 120 outlets with many photographers. Good camera support from crew.

**Kona Aggressor, July 2006, Bertram Kraft, Northfield, IL.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. Probably the best crew on a live-aboard and we have been doing

live-boards since 1990! They wanted to dive and show you around. The food was outstanding and varied. We had 14 divers total and everyone got along well and this made for a pleasant trip. The suites on this vessel are small compared with others but things were clean and tidy. We did the usual 5 dives a day. The manta rays were spectacular and plentiful and we saw 2 hammerheads as well. There were many nudibranchs as well as lion fish and stone fish. We saw mating octopi and numerous varieties of eels. I was disappointed in the coral as not being colorful. This is easy diving — good for beginners.

## INDONESIA

**Northern Sulawesi Aggressor, Gabriel I. Peñagaricano, April 2006, (guigo34@hotmail.com), Guaynabo, PR.** It took 26 1/2 hours of actual flight time to Manado, North Sulawesi. From there to the Kungkungan Bay Resort it was another hour and a half by a barely one-lane road through squalor. At 5:00 p.m. the following day we were taken by tender to the Aggressor, anchored just off the shop pier, and given an adequate briefing. The rooms have no closet nor portholes, space under the lower bunk is limited and there are no provisions for storing your large dive bag elsewhere on the boat; or, at least, they told us there wasn't. Room 4 has no space beneath the lower bunk. Food was plentiful and well prepared. Diving is from a tender on which you don your equipment that has already been placed on board. We were only 11 divers and the space was uncomfortably cramped. This was the 12th charter since having the vessel reincarnated from the Truk Aggressor. On the first morning at 4:00 a.m. we were awakened to the sound

of a vacuum cleaner that I first took to be a quaint British custom, mad dogs and Englishmen being what they are. I found the carpet soaked. Some rooms and the hallways had flooded with (thankfully) clean water and they were vacuuming it. Every time the toilet in the cabin was flushed, there was a back flow of putrid gases that was never repaired. When divers were aboard the tender, a diver noticed that he had a short fill. Instead of changing his tank, the high pressure lines were brought down and the tank serviced in the midst of the crowded divers. I hate to think what might have happened if one hose failed and started whipping among the passengers. The native crew, though with a limited command of the English language, is friendly, as are the other crewmen: one Welsh, two British and one American. The Master would never win a Captain Congeniality contest, but his brother the chef more than makes up for his sibling's personality. The Captain summons divers by blowing on a conch shell from the doorway and it is almost inaudible in the cabins. Add to that the anomaly of no two of the ships clocks having the same time and you have the ingredients for disgruntled divers who, literally, missed the boat (pun intended). Dive profiles are suggested but not enforced, making for pleasant days. The first day of diving was all muck in the Lembah Straits. An overdose for those who prefer colorful reefs with their endemic fish life.. There were critters galore: stargazers, frogfish, lionfish, scorpionfish, leaf fish, napoleon snake eel, devil scorpion fish, flying gurnard, mantis shrimp, hairy trigger fish, porcelain crab a miniature cuttlefish and crocodile fish were some of those viewed. On the second day we started on (California Dreamin', TK1, TK2) a beautiful and large reef, vibrant