

INDONESIA

Indonesia is the hottest dive destination on the planet, thanks to superlative diving. Good airfares and inexpensive food and hotels make it reachable for many Americans who can afford at least two weeks' time. Bali's culture is fantastic (especially go inland) and the diving is good (but even better elsewhere) and inexpensive. Bali-based live-aboards regularly visit the excellent diving near and around Komodo Island and stage land visits with the famed Komodo dragons. They are finding new destinations. Perhaps no more diverse marine life exists anywhere than that around the Raja Ampat islands, offshore Irian Jaya, which shares the same landmass as Papua New Guinea.

Bali

Aqua Marine Diving, Alamkulkul (Legian/Kuta), Mimpi Resort (Tulamben), Watergarden Hotel (Candidasa), Honeymoon Guesthouse (Ubud), April 2006, Ted Shieh, MD, Chicago, IL. Experience: 300+ dives. Water: 78-83F. Tulamben/Seraya Secrets: calm, vis 20-40 ft. Gili Biaha, Blue Lagoon, Nusa Penida sites: slight current/surge, vis 40-90 ft. Booked a 4 day "dive safari" + land tours out of Kuta/Legian through AMD, plus 4 nights at Honeymoon Guesthouse on our own. First 3 dive days were with DM Ketut Suarta. Our first 2 days at Mimpi Resort (Tulamben) were all shore dives of Tulamben sites plus Seraya Secrets; Ketut worked hard to find the unusual. While you are photographing one critter, he is finding 2 more macro subjects for you. When he said he will find a pigmy seahorse,

on the next dive, he delivers! This is largely critter diving/muck diving, except the wreck of the Liberty, which was also rich in marine life. Since we arrived immediately after Nyepi (Bali's day of silence — which marks the end of the rainy season), it still rained hard on occasion, causing large floods that affected the vis of the east coast dive sites. Mimpi is a beautiful resort, well designed for divers, with a nice pool, rooms with outdoor showers and rinse tub for your gear, and a beautiful restaurant with lousy food. Go to Tauch Terminal for a better meal (the only descent food option) in Tulamben. Then first of 2 days at Watergarden Hotel (Candidasa) were all boat dives (leaving from Padangbai) to Gili Biaha/Blue Lagoon. Last day, was also by boat with DM Romon-to Nusa Penida's Manta Point, Bat cave, and PED. No rinse tanks on boats. Visibility was considerably better at Gili Biaha and Blue Lagoon. Coral health was impressive. Fish life was slightly low. Manta Point was choppy, vis low, but yielded a good size school of mature mantas. Romon was a solid DM; safety oriented; good for beginner divers. We released a number of green sea turtles on one of our dives, as part of AMD's turtle release program. These turtles were illegally caught by poachers; some by stabbing with knives (puncture wounds on their carapace or fin). I was not able to find out exactly how these turtles were acquired by AMD, which left me ambivalent about the experience. Watergarden hotel is a beautiful hotel. Each room with it's own lily/koi pond, with a descent restaurants on site, as well as others in Candidasa. Not well set up for divers; but staff was courteous, and allowed us to use their working areas to hang up our gear. Alamkulkul in Legian/Kuta is a great hotel with all

the important amenities. Head to Semeniuk for a meal at Made's Warung II; well worth the \$2 cab ride. Land tours arranged by AMD were private tours, and the guides were accommodating of our requests. Spend some time in Ubud, the cultural capital. Honeymoon Guesthouse, which functions also as a cooking school for tourists, does a nice job of blending modern conveniences and western service, with traditional Balinese details. Rates were reasonable. Unbelievably good croissants for breakfast (owners also run a bakery) The cooking class with a market tour was one of the more memorable things we took (or ate through), as was the Kecak fire dance, one of many traditional Balinese dance performances that first time visitors must see. Lots of great eating opportunities for the foodies, and beautiful walks through rice fields, valleys, and villages. Overall AMD runs a first rate dive op. The staff was accommodating, professional, and recommendations were good. The DM kept your gear and washed/stored them at the end of each day. Service was top notch. The boats could use rinse tanks for cameras. Lots of great photo ops under and above water. AMD's land tours were private tours. The people are gracious, friendly, and happy to see Americans visit them. A real travel bargain!

AquaMarine Diving, May 2006, Sally Schroeder. Experience: over 1000 dives. Secret Bay: Vis: 3-6m depending on the tide, basically crummy. Water conditions: quiet walk in on black sand beach from concrete area for gear setup 10m distance. Water temperatures: like ice cubes, bone chilling. Puri Jati: Vis: 6-15m. Water conditions: quiet walk in on brown sand beach 10m from van parking. Water temperatures: mid-70 degrees. Tulamben areas: Water

visibility: 20-30m+ at many sites. Water conditions: some serious waves and surge on several days at the Paradise hotel entry, still diveable but the shallows were a challenge. I had both my dive guide + a guy from the hotel to walk me in/out of the water, entry is tumbly small and big black rocks that are hell on the ankles in the surge. Water temperatures: mid- to high-70 degrees. Wet suit used: Yes, a 3mm farmer Jane with 3/2mm jacket in the morning and by 4th and 5th dive of the day switched to a 5/3mm jacket. Dive your own profile? Yes, every dive with my own dive guide. Length of dives: as long as you had air, always in the 80 or 90 + minutes range. Any diving restrictions? Within recreational limits no deco time, as long under as you could still breathe and be warm. What did you see? Secret Bay: excellent muck diving, 3 bobbit worms, frogfish, ornate ghost pipefish, pipefish, razorfish, flatheads, sea horses, fingered dragonet's, cockatoo waspfish, eels and snake eels and Banggai cardinals (not supposed to be found here). I did 3 dives. Puri Jati: Mimic octopus at least 16 times many different individuals, pair of Ambon scorpionfish, cockatoo flounder, flying gurnard, cuttlefish, octopus, unusual mantis shrimps, many veiled melibe nudi, fingered dragonets, robust and filamented and ornate ghost pipefish. A rare pipefish-pegasus-volitians that took me 8 reference books to identify, several unusual nudis, lots of various large shells, pelagic tunicates, few fish. Bottom here is 95% barren looking sand/dirt a few little sea pens and 20cm tufts of lavender soft coral in a few places. I did 6 dives. Tulamben wreck: large school of bumpheads at dawn, prolific soft corals, nice schools of many varieties of fishes throughout the structure, jacks, big sweetlips,

snappers, purple leaf fish + several others, many nudis, field of giant garden eels, scorpionfish, you could spend weeks on this dive alone and never get bored. I did 6 dives. Tulamben reef Paradise hotel entry: black sand with lovely coral reef, stellar vis, full variety of butterfly, angel, jacks (every day giant school of jacks in front of the Water Garden hotel entry), bannerfish, anemones and clownfish, crinoids and their critters, frogfish, leaf fish, nudis, sand slope critters, many blue and yellow and black ribbon eels, other eels, blue spotted stingrays, fusiliers. I did 11 dives, most solo photo trips. Saraya Secrets: black sand slope with muck type critters, 2 thorny sea horse, puffers. I did 1 dive here and did not choose to go back. Several special critters had been gone for awhile per my guide. Tulamben wall: 3 or more sites, good current, a shark or 3, turtles 2-3, big titan triggers, school of squarespot anthias, lots of eels, scorpionfish, usual reef complement but far less than at Paradise. Nice wall, rocks and crevasse. Large orange plate corals. I did 5 dives. Condition of accommodations: from less than 1* to 5* choice is yours. Secret Bay only choice 5 minutes away is Sari hotel less than 1, airco or fan, hot water or not, power 240VAC for charging camera, tiny restaurant food was ok, friendly small cheap at 11\$US. Any other choice is more than 45-60 minutes drive from the dive site. I've stayed at Sari the last 2 years. Puri Jati: nothing less than a 45 minute drive away in Lovina, many choices, I stayed at a lovely spa resort Sumari with palatial grounds, which was a real waste as I arrived there at 10pm, ate, crashed and left at 7am. Tulamben: Paradise Beach Bungalows, small on the "reef" dive site entry (literally 2 steps off the property and you are in the water),

clean small rooms with airco or fan, with hot water or not, nice restaurant and really good reasonably priced food with a wide menu, I was there for 6 days and every meal was good, nice smiling staff, internet connections. Overall comments: Aqua Marine Diving provides a spotless clean airco van stocked with wonderful reading materials and cold drinks cooler, tanks and weights (rental gear if you need it) driver and diving guide (both speak excellent English and were delightful company). You are doing a safari type driving/diving travel around the island of Bali. You set up your choice of dive sites and your schedule, how many dives, how many days at each locale etc. This is really custom diving at its best. I changed my plan twice. 3 dives at the first site was enough so we moved on a day early. My driver phoned the office to make the hotel change. Or I really like this place — so I'll stay more days — no problem. They do have planned options that you can fall into with ease if you rather. My personal dive guide was Ketut an Indonesian PADI instructor. There were several times when I ran out of air after 95 minutes and he was still watching something interesting-like the mimics in 3 m of water! Really great as we would discuss what unusual critters were to be found at each site, like the squarespot anthias or all the mimics or stargazers (looked hard but did not see). Then he would suggest where and how deep a profile we should do. We were in the water at 6:30 am nearly every day. Every dive was as long as I wished. I set the dive intervals, and how many dives each day. No grumping about anything from my guide or driver, they were all smiles and up beat. Daily I was asked what I'd like for lunch when I came out and Made would arrange lunch while Ketut and I

were diving. Ketut was an expert critter finder, he dives the areas often and knew what we might be able to see and if there was a best time to dive the site we organized it. Like looking for the bobbit worms in 1-3m night dive at Secret Bay, Ketut knew to bring bait or we would never have seen the bobbits. We did the Liberty wreck at dawn and had it all for ourselves and the school of 20+ bumpheads for an hour before the herds of divers arrived. I dove with Al 63 cu ft tanks, 50s and 80s were also available. I was able to photograph several critters that I still can't find in the reference books. An excellent guide is absolutely essential to get this kind of diving experience. And Aqua Marine has this kind of staff to treat you well! Made, my driver, even stopped to show me several choices of hotels in the Candi Dasa area for my next dive trip to Bali. Airport meet and greets to your hotel and returns can all be arranged for reasonable money. Local hotels in Kuta area can be arranged by Aqua Marine, I really liked the Kumala that they booked for me. You can choose to day dive up to Tulamben and be picked up and returned to your Kuta hotel if this suits you. All things are possible. Underwater Photography: Subject matter: 5. Shore facilities: At SB and PJ I did all my camera set up and battery changes in the van and brought my own rinse water and container for the camera. Secret Bay: plenty of fresh water showers and tap, toilet really grim, bring your own camera rinse bucket, gear setup area concrete with wooden benches some shade, towel drying rack, snack stand, fine black sand gets everywhere. Puri Jati: this is just a barren stretch of beach with a small snack stand and big shade trees. Aqua Marine arranges for the local family to haul 20 liter (5 gallon) pails of

water several 100m to a shady area where they lay a large tarp on the ground for gear setup. With a ladle you can rise off a bit after the end of diving for the day. I suggest bringing your own "bucket" of clean water for camera rinsing. That black sand finds its way everywhere. Tulamben: Paradise Beach Bungalows clean wash bins and fresh water showers right as you leave the water + your room is right there a few meters away. Nice treat is to have your set up tank carried on the head of one of the local ladies to your waiting pirogue and back.

AquaMarine Diving, Mimpi Resort August 2006, Jan and Chuck Simonds (simonds@uhcl.edu), Houston, TX.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F. Thanks to an Undercurrent Chapbook recommendation, we booked our trip to Bali through Aquamarine Diving. They arranged a custom dive/travel tour for us complete with airport pick-up, van driver and our own dive master for the 8 day trip. This was our first venture diving outside the Caribbean and we wanted to combine sight-seeing around the magical island of Bali with 5 days of diving. The service provided by Aquamarine was excellent and they booked us into small atmospheric hotels that made for great memories. Our guides stopped at two temples along the way, including one where a wedding celebration was taking place. The 3-hour drive to Menjagen took us through gorgeous scenery, over mountains, along rice fields and through small villages. We particularly liked the diving off this NW corner of Bali. This was wall diving with great vis, marvelous coral, and beautiful fishlife. We were thrilled to see a cuttlefish laying eggs on the coral, a first for us. I would have preferred staying another

day at Menjagen and repeating some of those dives. (We made 5 dives around the small island in two days.) There is a 45-minute boat ride out to the island in a small boat, back-roll off and a little ladder to re-enter the boat. The dive master took care of my gear and was terrific with this 69 yr. old lady. At the Mimpri Resort Menjagen we ate at the water, admiring three volcanoes visible in Java. Watching the long-tailed fishing boats go out in the morning was also a thrill. We went on to Tulamben where the diving is on the volcanic flow and it was necessary to walk on a rough beach to the point of shore entry. I found I'm not that fond of shore diving, muck diving or looking at small things on black sand. The wreck of the Liberty was gorgeous, covered with wonderful coral and surrounded by huge numbers of fish. Again this was a long trek down the beach on the rocks. I shouldn't complain, women from the village carried our tanks and gear on their heads; amazing. Our final dive destination was Padangbai. The water was cold, our 3 mm wetsuits were not warm enough, vis was poor, diving was again on volcanic flow. I would skip this dive. If you go to Bali, don't miss the artist village of Ubud. There are traditional dance performances each evening, a monkey forest to visit, wood carvers, craft markets, and good restaurants.

AquaMarine, Dive Timor, September 2006, Scott Johnson (scottj96@aol.com), Murrieta, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Bali: First day, dove Nusa Penida area ... my 300th dive! W 77 at the surface and 67 at 116'. First time I have worn a 5mm in 7 years ... felt like a new diver, adjusting weights etc., but this dive would put me in the face of 2 mola molas, 6-footers. Second day (warm water, 81 degrees), did Tulamben Bay that was a black sand

beach. This is shore diving, small to large rocks and pebbles made for some ugly entries and exits. First dive was the Liberty wreck ... good dive, then we did the Drop Off and Coral Gardens, lots of small and medium stuff, some unusual creatures. Women carried our tanks and gear from one end of the beach to the other on top of their heads and walking on pebbles! The tour was remarkable, these temples with all the minute detail! Get to know a little about the Hindu religion and the historical sites. The guide I had did not speak fluent English. I dove and did a tour with AquaMarine; Annabelle and Kristie were accommodating. Excellent operation. I booked my hotel, diving and tours through them for Bali. I had my own DM for both days! Everything was right on schedule. Timor: Refugee camps are set up around town (due to the violence and burning of so many homes in April/May) with plenty of Aussie and other international troops around. Never felt security was an issue. The Timorese are nice people, a nation with no debt, billions in the bank, and they do not know how to use it. They have to have the UN run it for them. Diving is spectacular. I have never seen so many sea anemones and clown fish, nudibranchs, leaf fish, scorpion fish, worms up to 3' long and at least 3" or more circumference munching away, a Spanish dancer, sea cucumbers eating and climbing their way up corals, hard and soft corals of every color, I did a drop off called K57 with more coral per sq. foot than the Big Drop off in Palau has per sq yard ... 6' barrel sponges ... strange stuff crawling around. I did dives with nothing but solid coral and I saw one sea anemone that must have been 30' by 30' with around 100 clown fish. This area is pristine. Nobody comes here! The dives are mostly shore

dives. The shore dives are mostly rocky, big and small pebbles. Makes for ugly entries and exits! Bring booties with a thick sole! Not a lot of big stuff in Timor and to get to the big stuff. Dive Timor is the only operation with a dive boat and it was down. I wanted to do a few drift dives or go to Atauro. Steve (instructor) busted his butt to find a boat to make Atauro happen at least once. We were loaded up one day and the engines would not start. He did get a boat the next day, and this diving was a wall dive ... not much in the way of fish: one shark, pretty wall. Dive Timor is excellent. Margaretha, Steve and Mark (not the owner) make you feel at home. Third world country! Not everything works or happens on schedule. Dive Timor has plenty of rental gear. Merpati air has a strict 20 kilos! Dive Timor has the Castaway restaurant. Simone imports much of his food from Australia! Getting to meet Aussies who hang out at Castaways was a plus.

Diving4Images, Temukira, August 2005, Michael Bode, Braunschweig, NS. (michael@bodeweb.de) Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 15 to 30 Meters. Water: 24 to 28 Celsius, calm, currents. We left from Maumere and followed the north coast of Flores to Alor. The tour was organized by Graham Abbot from Diving4Images for underwater photographers and filmers. We had excellent dives in Maumere Bay in the beginning of the trip with sightings of mimic octopus, gurnard lionfish and other critters. We then headed for Alor with a lot of black sand dives in the south of Pantar Island and near the entrance of Kalabahi Bay. Again lots of critters in most places and excellent night dives at several spots. Graham Abbott's ability to spot critters and discovering new dive spots is

unbelievable. The Temukira cabins are clean and big enough. Food was good and the crew always friendly and helpful. The Temukira has got a big table where UW-Equipment can be set up. The area needs some more light. helpful and knowledgeable crew. Two big freshwater tanks in the back for rinsing cameras.

Global Aquatics, Sanur Beach Hotel, August 2006, Eileen Dietrich (eileen_dietrich@hotmail.com), New York, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 76 to 82 F, calm, surge, no currents. H and Camilla run a great business. They are friendly, fun and willing to customize trips based on a diver's interest. We took 2 full days (3 dives each day) at Nusa Penida (in a small high powered speedboat) in search of mola mola/sunfish and saw three. The water temperature was mid-70s and there was a significant current. The soft corals are beautiful and the reefs are abundant with small critters; however, the currents (1 to 2 knot) hinder your ability to take photographs. H custom tailored a 2-day trip for me to Tulamben and Candidasa where we dove the USS Liberty, did muck diving at Seraya and outrigger diving at the Gili Islands in Candidasa. H took care of the details and equipment. The surface intervals are enjoyed poolside at the beautiful Seraya Resort. The reefs and muck dives are replete with sealife. There were schools of tropical fish, honeycomb eels, harlequin shrimp, seahorses, frogfish, sharks, mola mola, etc. Not only was the diving diverse and interesting but there was adventure in diving from different platforms (i.e., beach, outrigger). The water was warmer (about 81-82) and there was little current. UW Photography Comments: The dive boat was small. It could accommodate 6 dives comfort-

ably. There was a plastic cooler filled with fresh water for cameras but no room for a camera table.

Matahari, Puri Gopa, August 2006, Rick Tuss (rtuss@aol.com), Wilmington, DE. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 72 to 80 F, choppy, surge, currents, no currents. We dived two different areas of Bali and stayed at Matahari in Tulamben and Puri Gopa in Sanur. The Matahari is your basic, Southeast Asia dive resort while the Puri Gopa was a nice, well above average resort. The water was much cooler than expected. I only brought a .5mm wetsuit with me that I find is plenty at 80 F or better. Water temps were as low as 72 F! Talk about freezing your XXls off! Diving was great. Tulamben is shore diving, including the USS Liberty. The beach is rough as it is made up of 4 inch diameter volcanic rock, but once in the water, healthy corals, plentiful tropicals, macro action. There are critters everywhere. I've dived Lembeh Straits, and this is at least as good (without the trash). Out of Sanur, we took a speedy dive boat to Nusa Penida. Our first dive was Manta Point and we saw 3 mantas. Vis was down . . . it's fairly shallow and open to ocean rollers (lots of surge) and cold as hell at 72 F, from the upwelling bringing up the nutrient-rich water that brings in the mantas. Other dives on Nusa Penida were slightly warmer but we never saw 80F. The vis was also better, reaching 80 feet. The corals were spectacular, along with the number and variety of tropicals. We went to one site known for its Mola Mola, but none were home. Bali is affordable and a great value. The people are friendly and helpful. BIDP specialty is tech diving, so if you want to do deep and stay longer, they can accommodate you.

Raja Ampat Islands

Kri Island Resort, November 2005, Donald Gard (siki_80@hotmail.com), Bangkok, Thailand. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 3 to 15 Meters. Water: 28 to 29 Celsius, surge. Able to dive only nearby the resort for the first four days because of engine difficulties that could have been handled in the slack weeks before the arrival of 6 or 7 guests. Many delays at the dock because engine repairs were left until the last minute. No consideration for guests' preferences in choice of dive sites. During the first days of my second week, the manager would decide on the dive sites according to his personal agenda. He wanted to visit and mark (via GPS) those spots that he was not familiar with for his future employer as he was quitting mid-week. I resolved the problem with the manager, however, the owner overruled the agreement. When his manager left, the owner took over the diving and instead of asking for guest preferences, the owner would sell us on "great dive spots." We were sent on long boat rides to various damaged reefs. All were next to small settlements where we stopped between dives, which seemed to be the reason for the trips. The owner may have had his crew conduct some business at these places. The trip was not for good diving. Offered in-country arrangements at as much as 100% mark up. 50 Euros for a one-night hotel stay in Sorong; my walk-in price at the same hotel was \$21. Airfares arranged by them were marked up 20% to 30%. Failed to be met at the Sorong Airport. No manager on site for the first and last 3-4 days. My orientation to the resort was on the 4th day of my stay. Owner Max Amer, is fully occupied by another resort project about 500 meters down the beach. He doesn't have time

manage the resort and he is unable to hold on to any manager. A visit there is a real gamble at this time. I paid approximately \$2400 plus travel expenses for a 13-day 24-dive package. Only 10 of the dives were in reasonably good locations. Some of the 10 were not so good because of the conditions but that is not the fault of the resort. A live-aboard would have been a better choice. I would add that some of the best dive spots are good but not great.

Sorido Bay Resort, August 2005, John A Anderson (John@janderson.us), **Spring, TX** After a short taxi ride from the Sarong Papua New Guinea airport, we boarded a 30-foot, narrow beamed, enclosed launch for Kri Island, off the northwest tip of the Bird Head Peninsula in the Raja Ampat area. As we proceeded for more than hour in total darkness, a slight rain squall developed. Upon arriving at the Sorido Bay Resort, we were met on the pier by the owner and builder, Max Ammer and Teri Perry the Manager. There were only three bungalows that were completed so we six filled the resort. The dive sites were all great. Mike's Point is so close you can almost throw a rock to the reef from the Resort's pier. Most sites are but a short 15 minutes or less of a boat ride from the Resort pier, so most dives are a one tank dive, allowing for you to come back for a short retest before the next dive. When you are diving there, it is like you are the first one, with no broken coral or other reminders of past divers. Endless diverse schools of tropical fish. Their dive boat is a little sparse for comfort and some basic dive boat equipment but they are serviceable and they are in the development stage and are getting another boat. For the most part, the rest of their operation is efficient. Otto, our divemaster, is truly is a master of many talents: dive guide,

boat captain, translator, travel guide, and musician. Max, the owner, was a gracious host and would join, us for dinner and ask us where we would like to go the next day. We went to a Bat Cave that is in the Kaboei Bay area, a two-hour boat ride. Our first dive was one of wonder and beauty because the islands are so closely joined that it appeared that we were in a freshwater river, but we were in the "Passage," an unforgettable experience because it was like going down a Water World Park Slide underwater. Caves and walls and bottoms were literally covered with all different colors of gorgonian coral, soft coral and every hue of colored tunicate. We just drove our boat into the cave and tied it up. We climbed up a short bank and with our flashlights peered deeper into the cave and viewed thousands upon thousands of bats, flying or hanging our heads. There was a constant sound of swishing of air noise from the bats flying around you. Our last evening, the workers played their homemade wooden musical instruments of guitars, basses, and drums. Heading home by boat to Sorong to catch our planes, we stopped at "Sawandarek," a native fishing village. The whole town turned out to see us and we to see them. They are not used to seeing Caucasians and were curious about us as we were about them. One of the most remote diving areas in the world; it is for the experienced divers who like to dive, it is expensive, it has pristine marine life, openness of its people and the beauty of this area are unforgettable. Ken Knezick of Island Dreams of Houston and Tina Robinson put this great package together.

Sorido Bay Resort, May 2006, Jonathan J Cohen (jjcohen@mac.com), **Lincoln, MA.** An eye opener regarding the pleasures of Indonesian hospitality,

and an opportunity to see truly pristine reef ecology. Sorido Bay (and companion resort Kri Eco) form the only land-based resort within the Raja Ampat archipelago. Hotelier/sometime Divemaster Max Ammer was a pleasure to talk with and learn from. Excellent guides led us on dives over our 10-day stay that spanned the range of depths and ecologies, with more sea life than one ever sees elsewhere. Soft and hard corals of every description literally carpet the floor continuously. Overall diversity and density of marine life are simply astounding. One dive focusing on mantas at a cleaning station included continuous entertainment from more than a dozen of these fabulous creatures. Not many large pelagics — but everything else. Sorido Bay is extremely well equipped for photographers' needs — including guides who help find great photo opportunities. Multi-course Indonesian meals three times a day. The resort is new, with comfortable, air-conditioned individual cabins connected by boardwalks (the lack of insect screens that means you must sleep with a/c on). And note that there is no diving on Saturdays, but opportunity to view Birds of Paradise and visit local villages.

Sorido Bay Resort, May 2006, Fred Turoff (fturoff@temple.edu), Philadelphia, PA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 12 to 100 Feet. Sorido Bay Resort is being finished but it is a superior destination. Travel from the US, due to layovers between planes, takes 2-3 days. Papua is the eastern end of Indonesia, with Sorong as the main airport. A half-hour van trip and a two-hour boat ride bring you to both Sorido Bay Resort and Kri Eco resort, built and run by Dutchman Max Ammer. Small Kri Island has these two resorts on it and nothing else — no roads, no bike paths.

Perhaps back in 1992, Max decided to build Kri Eco, which is Papuan-style bungalows built over the water, with shower and toilet facilities reachable on the mainland via wooden bridges to each room on the mainland. His current project, Sorido Bay, has bungalows on the beach, each of which contains shower and toilet facilities. Each room has table areas for cameras and both 110 and 220v receptacles. Both resorts have a main building with a dining area, all constructed out of native hardwoods. Underway as we left was the balance of bungalows, a camera center and an expanded main building complex. Diving is done from the end of a long jetty, where most dive gear is kept and boats can pull in no matter what level the tide is — I noted about a 5-foot swing in tide levels. Our farthest trips took perhaps 45 minutes, where we did two dives and visited a village between dives. Local dives could be either drop in on the house reef or within a few minutes of travel. Night dives were most often done on the Kri Eco jetty, which had plenty of life. Pygmy seahorses — three and perhaps five species here, and our dive guides found them on perhaps two out of three dive sites. One coral head we visited on a twilight dive had at least 10. On four dives we had 2-3 mantas visit us and either circle us or constantly return for perhaps 15 minutes. On another voyage in a passage cutting through a larger island, two mantas, one white and one black, passed us. The water clarity was the one disappointment, as the seas contained much plankton. So backscatter was a photo problem and lowered visibility hindered us occasionally. I recorded estimates of 100 down to 12 feet of vis, with the average perhaps 60. Currents occasionally took us on unexpected

adventures, but most diving was in slow current or relative calm. Being thin, I used a 3mm full-suit with a 3 mm hooded vest for all dives for comfort in the 81-83 degree F water. In the David Doubilet book that he signed (as he was there recently doing an article for National Geographic) he stated the reefs were the healthiest on the planet. I saw: wobbegong sharks on at least five dives; a few other sharks; mantis shrimp; cuttlefish; a few ghost pipefish; plenty of nudibranchs and flatworms; schools of jacks, yellowtails and sweetlips; bumphead parrotfish, mantas, pipefish; lionfish; turtles; a variety of crabs and shrimp, lots of anemonefish; large lobster; two huge (4') tridachna clams with many smaller versions, and healthy corals galore. Although dive times are scheduled, Max and crew will adjust times upon request. Several optional dive trips are available with additional charge due to fuel use, such as to the Passage, a three dive trip with lunch. Fresh fruit and baked goods followed each dive, with delicious freshly-made juices at the dock. Usually, four dives per day are scheduled, but more can be added. Exotic birdcalls, not too much insect noise and enthralling sunrises will please your senses. The food was a bit spicy for me. Both meat and chicken were done more than I like, but Max explained that was the style to avoid food bacteria or parasites. Fish was fresh and tasty. I could find enough in the several offerings each family-style meal to keep myself well fed. The staff members did all they could to make the stay as effortless as possible, even offering to carry your camera each way between your bungalow and the boat at the jetty's end. If you play an instrument (guitar or piano, which are available) you'll be able to join in the

impromptu staff musical nights as a performer rather than just a listener.

Sorido Bay Resort, August 2006, Wafa Abdelati (wabdelati@hotmail.com), Washington, DC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 10 to 30 Feet. Water: calm. A truly unique and exquisite place that is well worth the time to get there, a totally different experience than its sister resort, Kri Resort, which was featured in the May 2006 issue of Undercurrent. I was surprised to hear that a subscriber found "damaged reefs that were not up to par." All my diving was with the divers from Kri Resort, who were happy with the service and diving, and the only complaint I heard was the lack of warm water in the shower. If comforts matter to you, then go for Sorido Bay, with large air-conditioned rooms that are tastefully decorated and have a lot of privacy. Food was generally good, with some fantastic Indonesian dishes (great soups at dinner and a salad with raw fruits and hot pepper sauce). But limited fresh salad and fruits, probably reflecting the transport distance. Max Ammer was gracious and his company and conversation unmatched by others on my travels. All the dives were good to excellent, with schools of fish swimming harmoniously back and forth. We had no trouble with old boat engines, although one or two new boats were on order. The service was excellent, with everyone accommodating your wishes, and arranging for you to dive at the sites you chose. I managed to get some 6am morning dives though these are not normally on the schedule. The exploratory trip to mangroves was a special treat as I'd never imagined so much coral and sea life to live right under the mangroves roots.

Sulawesi

Bangka Island Resort, April 2006, Wayne Warren-Angelucci (web1.WayneWA@choicemail1.com), Rancho Santa Fe, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 28 to 30 Celsius, calm. 7 bungalows on a white sand beach) on a remote island about 40 minutes (by boat) north of Sulawesi. Staff was friendly, helpful and food was great Indonesian. All diving is 5-15 minutes away by boat — some of the best diving in Sulawesi. Soft and hard corals extremely healthy, many small critters, lots of exotic reef fish, octopus (including a blue ring). Bungalows were Indonesian style with open air shower, and ocean breezes.

Diver's Lodge, January 2006, Judith and Michael Ruhm (juderuhm@gmail.com), Holderness, NH. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 6 to 15 Meters. Water: 25 to 29 Celsius, calm. Muck diving at its finest. The dive guide asks what you are looking to see and will take you to the sites where you will see what you want, such as pygmy seahorses, ghost pipefish, ornate ghost pipefish, flamboyant cuttlefish, mimic octopus, fireclam, seahorses, nudibranchs and more. The local staff prepares wonderful local cuisine with pommes frites each night at dinner as the owner is Dutch. Breakfast is local with fruit, crepes, eggs and nasi goreng. Good and all fresh! Meals are family style. There is a free laundry service and internet use. There are only 5 guesthouses. A clean place to crash and extraordinary diving for a reasonable price with helpful, friendly staff. Dive boats are well maintained and comfortable with a toilet on some boats. Nitrox is available for an extra charge. Rinse tank on board the boat. Staff will carry camera equipment back to your room, where

you can re-rinse in tank in your room, download photos etc. Availability to charge strobes, batteries, etc. in your room and at the community house.

Divers Lodge, June 2006, Jeffner Allen, Newfield, NY. Experience: 251-500 dives. The accommodations are simple but sufficient, eco-friendly, and with lovely views of the straits and surroundings. Much thought has been given to siting the lodge and the separate cabins. The result is tranquil, expertly maintained, and noncommercialized. Divers often gathered after dinner to view photos and videos taken during the day. The cooking is nutritious and dietary requests are accommodated. The lodge and dive staff are friendly and accomplished. The straits are well known for their small critters, and with good reason. A question for Lembeh diving may be how, as more divers and photographers come to the area, to preserve the underwater environment.

Eco Divers, Tasik Ria Resort, June 2006, Richard and Toni Haines (haines2430@msn.com), Colorado Springs, CO. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm. The Tasik Ria Resort is nice and the staff is a class act. Bugs were minimal, as they fog the grounds and spray inside rooms routinely, but wear insect repellent for breakfast or dinner. Rooms are clean with refrigerator and air conditioning. They have a large fresh water pool with pool bar, a good place for lunch. The main restaurant is open air, serving breakfast and dinner. Lunch is usually on the boat. The other restaurant (the jetty bar and grill opens at 5:00pm) is where they park the boats and is also nice. Danny, an outgoing "Brit," and trained chef, assured us that if we had special diet requirements, he

would meet them. You can order off the menu or eat off the buffet or both, and there is a different menu and buffet every night. Plenty of fresh fruit and pastries too. Every Thursday they put on a BBQ on the beach. Kids from the local area provide live entertainment. Food is top notch and tasty. All water and ice used to drink or prepare food is filtered/purified. The resort has a full spa. When you arrive, they give you a free 15 minute "jet lag" massage to hook you. One hour reflexology massage for \$15. The resort offers white water rafting, Volcano trekking, and a rainforest tour. Cary runs the dive operation, a finely tuned machine. They took all our gear and tagged the BCDs and wetsuits with name tags. We showed our C-Cards. The boats are huge! Two dedicated fresh water tanks for camera gear, and two shower hoses on the back of the boat. Two restrooms, a water cooler for hot and cold drinking water, and a refrig with coke. Also, there is a power station for plugging in anything that needed charging. They wash and dry your gear for your departure. The DMs are great, and they know every critter's common and scientific name. Before each dive, the briefing included the reef and features, the expected currents, profile, (depth and time) and what critters to expect to see. We were divided into groups, usually 4 divers to a DM. You could dive your computer and stay out of deco, and no diving alone. After each dive there is a roll call, and everyone was required to fill in their dive info. The boat would leave around 8:00 and all three dives would be in Bunaken National Park. (pronounced: boo naw ken) A few days a week they would dive twice in the park and then hit the house reef, a good dive. All dives averaged 60 minutes, with a 1:30 SI. Lunch was after

the second dive. The boat would return to the resort around 5:00. The planned night dives are Monday and Wednesday on the house reef, but I got the feeling you could shore dive anytime you wanted. Diving in the Bunaken park was amazing. I noticed DMs picking up any trash on the reef and putting it in their BCD, and they were adamant about not touching anything. (not even a "steadying finger" to get that shot) Gloves were verboten. If enough divers are interested, (min of 6 I think) they put together a muck diving day trip to Lembah Strait. (pronounced: Lem bay) It was about an hour and a half to 2 hour drive each way. After the first dive, we were taken to KBR for lunch and then made the second dive.

Gangga Island Resort, July 2006,
Steven Levin, Arlington, VA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. The resort has a good physical plant with spacious common areas. The main area contains the bar, various sitting areas, a large dining area and a pool table. The resort has a nice pool and a credible white sand beach. There are many lounge chairs, covered areas, and other places in which to rest by the beach — lots of shade. The rooms are double bungalows that provide good privacy and are spacious. Amenities include a television, mini-bar, coffee-tea making, and air conditioning. There is good lighting and a good number of outlets. The room contains a built-in desk. In a corner of the room there was another table with two chairs, the coffee-tea making equipment, and a coffee-table. There was fresh fruit upon arrival. The bungalow has a nice patio/terrace with chairs and a table that faces the ocean. Dinner was served buffet-style in an outside covered area. You could sit at long tables holding six to ten people

with your feet in the sand. The first dinner offered a small salad bar (i.e., lettuce, red cabbage, tomatoes, cucumbers, and carrot). There was an appetizer of fish fingers with tartar sauce or mayonnaise. The main dishes consisted of grilled marlin and some whole snapper-type fish in a sweet-sour sauce. There were prawns and squid that were being grilled. Non-fish items consisted of nasi goreng (rice), roasted potatoes, and some mixed steamed vegetables. A corn crab soup was also available. Dessert was fresh fruits and three different types of cake. Diving is conducted from the traditional wooden boats. Depending on the boat that is being used, entry is either a back roll or a giant stride entry. Entry is easy. All boats have a large ladder. You have the option of handing up your weight belt and tank or just handing up your fins and climbing aboard. I had no problem getting up the ladder with my gear. Depending on the boat, there would be one or two small plastic tubs in which cameras could be placed. The dive staff was good in handling equipment. All dives were preceded by a good briefing. A set of flip charts diagramming the dive site illustrated the site's topology. All dives were guided and with one or two exceptions they were drift dives. For most of the diving I had my own guide. Rarely did I see more than four people with a single guide. The guides were enthusiastic and professional. While briefed as a one hour maximum, I usually was able to dive from 70 to 75 minutes even 80+ minutes and 95+ minutes. The diving area includes several islands (i.e., Talisei, Bangka, Gangga) and several sites off the Northern Sulawesi mainland. Travel times were from 30 to 45 minutes. Many guests would sit on the bow of the boat or on top of the cabin. After

the first dive there was a refreshment consisting of a "coconut with a straw" and bananas. Water and fresh towels were provided on every dive. The departure at 8:00 AM for two dives in the local area with a return to the resort for lunch. The afternoon dive was at 3:30 PM. The dive sites are quite varied and include great pinnacle dives such as Batu Gosoh and Sahung. There are some wonderful wall dives such as Pulisan and muck areas such as Paradise Reef. Both the Bangka Island dive sites and those on the Northern Sulawesi coast offer great soft corals. Sightings typically include frogfish, nudibranchs, flatworms, and good schooling fish. I spent 45 minutes with a mimic octopus at the Paradise Reef site on this trip. UW Photography Comments: The dive boats have plastic tanks for cameras. A new dive shop with additional facilities for underwater photographers was being built and near completion.

Kasawari Lembeh Resort, September 2006, Jane Huessener (diverjane@cox.net), Laguna Hills, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm, choppy. Opened August 2006. Built by the owners of the AquaOne live-aboard boat, the resort is intimate (only 10 bungalows housing 20 people), but the rooms are large, fresh and clean with the best beds, pillows, comforters I've encountered at a dive resort. The bathrooms are large with 2 showers — one in the bathroom and another just outside in a sheltered little patio. The staff is still training, but try hard to make your stay perfect. The resort is evolving — the room safes, wall pictures had not yet arrived from Thailand. The bungalows are arranged in a horseshoe around a garden area that will soon be landscaped with

ponds and tropical plants. The fresh water infinity pool is completed, but lounge chairs were still en route. We completely enjoyed our stays. Underwater photographers go to Indonesia for the little, odd stuff, and we had plenty. The divemasters were all from the area and found frog fish, rhinopias, ghost pipefish, flamboyant cuttlefish, lots of nudibranchs, mantis shrimp, a baby mimic octopus, etc. Many lion fish posed openly over the dark sand. But we also dove spectacular tropical reefs (i.e., California Dreamin) that compared with the best of Fiji and Thailand. No dive was shorter than one hour – never went past 80 ft. — and one of the divemasters stayed in the water nearby until you decided that your air was low. Because the dive sites were all near shore and the boat we were trusted to know when our air was low, to allow for a safety stop, and return to the boat safely. Each UWP had a basket into which we put our cameras each morning and the crew carried the basket to and from the boat each dive. There are 3 large camera-only rinse tanks and a large room on shore strictly for UWPs, complete with electrical outlets above each of the 20 camera stations. The room is locked each night and a security guard patrols the premises at all times.

Kungkungan Bay Resort, April 2006, Ernie Hounshell (ernie_keys@yahoo.com), Ramrod Key, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Vans pick you up at the airport for the one and a half hour scenic ride to the resort. After a briefing, the dive gear is transferred to the dive operation. They will take care of it for your stay and have it thoroughly rinsed when you are ready to leave. You only need to care for your wet suit and camera. Nitrox is available. The

dive guides use air, so they will be on a more conservative profile. The dive gear is always on the boat that you are assigned so that you never have to handle it. The dive operations were smooth, leaving on time, with fast boat rides to the dive sites. The boats can be cramped if they have a full boat load (8 divers and 2 dive guides), but most rides are short. The dive sites are mainly muck (black sand, trashy, rubble) with some sites coral and rubble. The dive guides (4 divers per guide) are expert at finding all the weird things and they make sure that everyone has an opportunity to take photos before moving on. Hand placement is critical when taking photos, since poisonous fish are buried in the black sand. Two divers in our group got nasty stings from devilfish and had some bad swelling for a few days. The rooms are kept clean and fresh towels are always on hand. The restaurant had a good selection on the buffet breakfast and lunch; and many choices on the menu. Dinner from the menu had a wide range of choices, including Mexican, Italian, and Indonesian. Generally service was good, but if a large group arrives all at the same time, service can become slow. The resort is beautifully maintained and secure with security guards. Management kept everything running smoothly. UW Photography Comments: Cameras are kept in laundry baskets on the dive boat, no rinse tank on boat. Dedicated camera rinse tank on shore with dedicated camera room with charging facilities.

Kungkungan Bay Resort, May 2006, Gayle and Robert Bringas, Gaston, OR. (robertringas@msn.com) Experience: 500 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm and flat. Stayed here for three days. Gayle missed all dives due to an ear infection. KBR

called their house doctor (who makes house calls!) who provided medications to get Gayle back in the water in time for the Aggressor trip. Eco Divers refused to credit us for Gayle's missed dives, but did allow Bob to dive three of them (that's all we had time). You can arrange for a massage in your room. Swimming pool is nice. Food was good; the menu is varied. Cottage in the new addition was spacious, with a large bathroom, large bedroom and a sitting room. Had lots of storage, lots of windows, nice view of the Strait. The diving is mostly muck, with lots of critters: frog fish, devil scorpion fish, leaf fish, winged and ringed pipe fish, flamboyant cuttlefish, octopus, ribbon eels. Competent dive guides. Everything ran like clockwork. Maximum 8 divers per boat; maximum 4 divers per dive guide. Nitrox. They had fresh-baked snacks between the 0800H and 1000H dives, and usually snacks after the 1400H dive. You can dive the house reef any time. You can "trade" the 1400H dive for a 1700H "Mandarin Fish Dive." Night dives are always extra; they needed a minimum number of divers and advance notice. Muck night dives are great, especially Nudi Falls and Nudi Retreat. There was an eight-hour layover in Singapore. Using the Transit Hotel was a good idea on the trip over. Departure tax at Manado airport must be paid in rupiah.

Kungkungan Bay Resort, July 2006, Gary Krippendorf, Redwood City, CA. (gskrippendorf@hotmail.com), Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm. I planned a trip for 12 via telephone and e-mail with Linda at KBR. Linda was good at answering our questions, and we booked a 6-night inclusive package. She also arranged for our transfer from the Santika Hotel to KBR rather than their

normal airport pickup. The KBR was in excellent shape and it was kept up. The restaurant had a mix of western and Asian dishes. The cottage suite rooms were clean with lots of room to move around. The view of the Lembeh Strait from the veranda porch was fantastic. Don't overlook the house reef. I dove it three times and each dive was great muck diving. The water was smooth and most boat rides were 10-15 minutes to the dive sites. Our maximum depth was 90 feet, though we spent most of our time between 30 and 60 feet. Most sites were sand bottoms with scattered coral heads. Some sites had more bommie type coral formations. There were 6 of us in each of two boats along with the boat captain and 2 dive guides. Our dive guides were able to find all sorts of well-camouflaged and truly unbelievable critters. Often we'd have to look several times to see the critters. Before each dive we'd get a briefing for the site, which listed the critters in the area. The guides made sure we saw them along with many others. We were seeing things that we could describe, but couldn't name. I was taking digital photographs, which provided a record of what we saw with a date and timestamp so we could match the photos to the dive sites. Small boats did not have any facilities for cameras. Cameras safely handled and stored on towels in plastic basket.

Lembeh Resort, September 2005, Paul and Sandra McCrossan. Experience: 400+ and 500+ dives respectively. An hour and a half drive from Manado on North Sulawesi followed by a five minute boat ride to the island. Air access is from Bali or Jakarta or Singapore. The resort is 1 1/2 degrees north of the equator and specializes in "muck diving. There are 7 large air conditioned cabins (5 accommodate 2

people and 2 accommodate 4 people) plus a spacious dining area over an office, a library/TV centre, a pool and the dive operation. Three additional hillside cabins were nearly completed. Our cabin (#1) was the farthest from the dive operation (less than a 2 minute walk) and had a fabulous view. There was a nice breeze blowing off the Strait keeping the air in the low 80s F. But, once away from the breeze and water, the temperature rose into the mid 90s. The water started at 82F and fell steadily to 78F since the southerly breeze moved cooler water into the Strait. We brought 2 piece wet suits; but never needed more than a one piece 3 mil full length suit plus a hood. In 9 diving days, we did 25 boat dives and 2 shore dives. Once, we had 4 divers to a divemaster. Otherwise, each dive master led 1, 2, or 3 divers. When the number of divers passed 7, the resort put another boat into service Sulawesi is a volcanic island and diving along the shoreline of Sulawesi is mainly diving in black volcanic sand looking for creatures. However, there are patches of pretty coral to dive and a wreck. Lembeh Island appears to be a coral upthrust and the sand is white on the island side of the Lembeh Strait. The dives on the Lembeh Island side are less muck dives and more traditional. The resort offered to take each set of divers back to their favorite site on their last day of diving. Dive guides are good at finding interesting critters in the muck. They found: regular octopus, coconut octopus, mimic octopus, and wonderpus; regular cuttlefish and flamboyant cuttlefish (from 1 inch to 8 inches); cockatoo and long-spined waspfish; juvenile black and adult blue ribbon eels; two species of pygmy sea horses (the usual pink and tan one and a new (as yet unclassified) gold pygmy sea

horse; pipe fish of all shapes and sizes (1" to 14"); sea horses of many different colors; snake eels (free swimming and buried with heads out to grab prey; a star gazer, Pegasus sea moths, many different species of lion fish. Dives generally last an hour in which the divers descend the sand to maximum depth of 70–100 feet and slowly work their way up the sandy slope. It can be easy to get into deco if you spend too long photographing neat creatures at depth and lose track of time; but the slow ascent up the slope works off the deco easily. [We did not see the mimic octopus or wonderpus although others on our boat did – some several times.] There is a daily sex show for those with such interests. The house shore dive features a coral rubble. Each night between 5:15 and 6 pm, the male mandarin fish, immature females and mature females come out to “strut their stuff” on top of the coral. The mature females round up 3-4 males in an area less than 2 feet in diameter. Then, one by one, she walks to each male and, after suitably exciting him, mates. The pair rises belly to belly about 5 inches over the coral rubble with fins fluttering for 3 – 5 seconds. All this takes place about a foot or two in front of your nose. (The immature females do a passable imitation of fore-play but never quite manage the real thing.) The resort has a fixed menu with island specialties, regional Asian specialties and western specialties like burgers and fries or club sandwiches. Asian food is prepared under spiced unless you ask for a more spicy version. The UN is considering designating both sides of North Sulawesi as a world heritage site due to the remarkable diversity of marine life. The resort offers the alternative of a massage as part of its spa. When you get into your mid 60s

(as we are), three interesting dives a day topped off by a double massage each night after dinner is close to heaven. I chose a Thai massage (strong to the point of pain – but oh so relaxing). Sandra found the Thai massage too strong and had the traditional Indonesian massage.

Lembeh Resort, March 2006, Ben Glick (dglick@vgnert.net), Williamstown, MA. Experience: 1500+ dives. Vis: 30 to 50 feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm and flat, choppy. Very clean, fantastic service, reasonable prices. The dive operation was outstanding, with excellent dive guides. They could find anything you wanted to see. I asked for mimic octopus, rhinopus, scorpionfish, and lots of nudis. Saw them all. Singapore Air and Silk Air – still the best.

Lembeh Resort, April 2006, Ernie Hounshell (ernie_keys@yahoo.com), Ramrod Key, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Good briefing on arrival, the rooms are built on the side of the hill with a fantastic view of the straits. Dive operations are smooth, boats left on time and had one dive guide for every four divers. Boats are roomy and a comfortable ride. Most dive sites are not more than a twenty minute boat ride. Sixty minute bottom time. Nitrox is available. Dive guides are proficient at finding all the little critters. This place is macro heaven, with all the weird critters that you see in the reference books. Dive guides make sure that everyone has a photo opportunity before moving on. Most dive sites are muck dives, with black sand bottoms and lots of trash. Some sites are coral and rubble. The critters are well camouflaged, so stick with the dive guide to see the most things. The shore dive is great for the mandarin fish at

dusk, but use a dive guide if you want to be sure of seeing them. The meals are varied and tasty, service was good. The rooms are kept spotless and cleaned while you are diving. The outdoor bathroom is unique; enjoyable and private. The management went out of their way to make sure everyone was taken care.

Lembeh Resort, April 2006, William Deertz (wdeertz@wdeertz.net), Jakarta, Jakarta. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 1 to 5 Meters. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, no currents. With the addition of two expatriate onsite managers the service level is being enhanced. Several new bungalows have been added up on a cliff overlooking the resort and it's a long hike up from the dive shop and restaurant. So unless you are physically fit (why wouldn't you be if you are diving?) you may want to go with the older bungalows that are a closer walk. I stayed in Bungalow 4B, one of the older bungalows, and was quite pleased. A large bungalow with front sitting room, large bedroom, outdoor bathroom and exceptionally large veranda/patio. The food was good considering the price. Breakfast consisted of your normal made-to-order fare, lunch and dinner were generally a 3-course ala carte menu with several choices (mixture of Asian and Western dishes). Afternoon tea/coffee generally included a light snack but these weren't imaginative or good. Morning tea/coffee did not include a snack. The dive shop was good with each bungalow having their own storage space. The boat crew were excellent about handling all your equipment and rinsing each day. The resort wasn't crowded so generally there was 1 dive guide for every 3 divers; maximum is 4 divers per dive guide. The boats handle up to 8 divers with 2 dive guides and go to different dive

sites. Generally you'll be diving in limited visibility and looking for strange creatures in the muck. The dive guides were exceptionally good at pointing out the strange critters. Saw included several kinds of pygmy seahorses, spiny seahorses, snake eel, stargazer, pipe seahorse, flying gurnard, and several kinds of frogfish. The only thing on our list that we failed to find was the mimic octopus and the hairy frogfish. An ideal trip would be 3 days in the Lembah Straits and 3 days in Bunaken on the other side of the peninsula. UW Photography Comments: Excellent camera room with about 15 stations. Boat attendants were careful and conscientious when handling camera gear. No rinse tanks on the boats but this really wasn't an issue as most dive sites were no more than 15 minutes from the resort and you generally return between dives.

Lembah Resort, August 2006, Lois Kong-Zell, San Jose, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 15 to 75 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. The dive guides ability and enthusiasm for finding critters made the dives truly outstanding. We saw rhinopias, pipe fish (ghost, ornate ghost, robust, stick, etc.), mandarin fish, seahorses (pygmy, giant pygmy, thorny, etc.), eels (black and yellow ribbon, snake, moray), pygmy cuttlefish (including a juvenile), frogfish of various colors, and a hairy frogfish, octopus (long-legged, coconut and a blue-ringed!). Our spacious suite overlooked the Strait and I loved sitting on the verandah at night, watching the fisherman and enjoying the breeze. The food was great! Each meal had several menu choices and my husband and I enjoyed everything. My favorite was the coconut-cream mahi-mahi. Diving and resort staffs are sweet and hard-working people. UW Photography

Comments: Separate rinse tank at the dock for cameras, which are placed on the boat by the staff. The camera room next to the dive shop was spacious and well lighted.

Lembah Resort, September 2006, Paul and Sandra McCrossan. Experience: 460 and 560 dives, respectively. For the 50th anniversary of first meeting in our freshman year of high school, we chose to return to Lembah one year after our first visit. Lembah has good internet access, a more western menu (generally a choice of an Asian, a western and a vegetarian main course for dinner). The food was good — although we like to eat Asian food in Asia. We did not have a single “tummy rumble.” All water was bottled. The masseuses were more gentle than the iron-fingered girls who were at Lembah last year. I love strong Thai massages — and, so, would not count this as an improvement. We settled into a daily routine of three dives a day (8 am, 11 am and 2:30 pm) followed by twin massages after dinner — except the day we added the dusk dive on the new house reef to see the mandarin fish mating. A storm had badly damaged the old house reef but the new house reef (about another 20 yards away), in which the mandarin fish have taken residence, is a jewel. And there were an octopus, a seahorse and a lobster on the dusk dive. As for the muck dives in the Lembah Strait, the water was warmer 80 F to 81 F. There were three new rhinopias (red, yellow and cream colored). We watched a flamboyant cuttlefish hatch (it is a little bigger than a grain of rice at birth). All the dive guides from last year were still on staff and they really know their stuff. All dives after the first were over an hour except one deep wreck dive of 45 minutes. A magnifying glass is a help (especially for the pygmy seahorses).

Minahasa Prima, September 2006, Kriss Kirchoff (KrissK@aol.com), Boise, ID. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 77 to 81 F, calm. The resort was laid-back, a bit rustic but the staff was always ready to please. Keep in mind that this is a lesser developed country. Several nights the government cut the power off as a part of a conservation initiative. The resort did their best to compensate with a large generator and ample battery powered lanterns. It was only a minor inconvenience and perhaps added to the adventure. The Minahasa Divers team was fantastic Noldy is an expert dive guide. I was able to influence where we went, what we saw and the pace we dove so that I could go slow and take pictures or just drift along the wall with the current and enjoy the show. Minahasa Prima is south of Manado about 45 minutes by car in a quiet coastal area and sits on a beautiful Mangrove lined bay. It is an hour boat ride over to Manado Tua and Bunaken which always went quickly and was a relaxing part of each day. I dove several times in the Manado Bay in sandy areas and on a nice wreck but greatly preferred diving Bunaken. I also spent a day over in Lembeh. The Minahasa Divers team drove me over on a beautiful drive through the jungle and villages of central North Sulawesi. Lembeh is everything that you hear — an amazing experience. Incredible and unique biodiversity. On my one off day the gang took me on a tour of the region where I climbed a volcano, toured an ancient cemetery and learned about the Minahasa native culture.

Siladen Resort and Spa, September 2006, Paul and Sandra McCrossan. Experience: 460 and 560 dives, respectively. Siladen Resort and Spa and Lembeh Resorts are “worlds apart,”

even if they are less than a two-hour drive apart. The resort on the 100-acre Siladen Island is in the middle of the Bunaken national marine park and occupies the western tip of the island. We had a spacious beachfront cabin (including a four-poster king-sized bed complete with mosquito net — though we never saw any bug, of any type, in the cabin) with a view dormant Manado volcano to the west. Our first evening, we spent 45 minutes on the beach photographing the setting sun fall behind the volcano as it turned the waters to gold and the sky to crimson. The resort consists of both beach side and interior cabins, a dining room built around an immense salt water pool (with a bar in its middle), a spa and a dive centre. We treated ourselves to twin massages each evening after we dove three dives. The diving is drift diving on walls. Currents run from almost none to 2 knots, similar to Cozumel, but with more small colorful fish. The water is generally warm (82F to 85 F) except on days when there are strong upwellings of nutrient-rich cooler water from the deep. Two out of seven days, we could see the shimmering thermoclines of cooler water approaching as the water plunged from 84° F to a “frigid” 76-78° F. It was as if someone had put an ice cube inside our wet suits! Well, nutrient-rich water brings in the big fish — a whale shark, a group of tuna on the hunt. Visibility fell from 80 feet to 40 feet. We were often in immense schools of red-toothed trigger fish and pyramid butterfly fish. There were many sites with pygmy seahorses of two species — the “regular” gray and pink and the “new” species of yellow. A magnifying glass is a help to see the pygmies and the many tiny crabs, cowries and gobies on the whips. Food is excellent — Sandra classed some

meals as “gourmet.” Prices for alcoholic drinks and pots of tea (or — yuk — instant coffee) at dinner were high for Asia. All water is bottled. Side trips off the island are extremely expensive. There is no evening activity other than having massages (or doing a night dive). While TV is available, the choice of channels is poor. The west end of the island has a fringing reef and most visitors took walks on the 200-300 yard-wide tidal flats during low tide (in their dive boots to protect against anemones). Many villagers walked the flats in search of cowrie shells. It took us about an hour and a half to walk around the island at new moon low tide. For dives done during low tide, the departure point was the village jetty rather than the resort, where the water became too shallow. The “boat dive” near the village jetty is among the prettiest dives in the region. The crew carried all gear to the boats except for our cameras, which we chose to carry ourselves. This time of the year the deciduous trees lose their leaves. This brings an “army” of villagers out every morning to pick up every leaf and sweep the sandy beach. The resort is clean. Wireless internet access is available but slow and expensive. I swore off getting e-mails for the week out of frustration — had a much more relaxing vacation. Generally, there were 3-4 divers per dive master. The dive masters were good at finding the creatures on the wall. We were the only North Americans at the resort. The rest of the guests were European or Asian. The staff is multilingual and almost all speak English.

Thalassa Dive Center, Santika Manado, May 2006, Gayle and Robert Bringas (robertbringas@msn.com), Gaston, OR. Experience: 500 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 feet. Water: 84 to 86, calm and

flat. Very nice resort, close to the Bunaken Marine Park. No elevators, so request a room on the first or second floor if you want to minimize stairs. Although, even that won't get rid of all the stairs! Best views are from the third floor. Beautiful grounds, large swimming pool, excellent spa for massages, facials. But they can't do manicures/pedicures. Expect at least a 40-minute cab ride to Santika from Manado. It's 15 km of narrow, winding roads with lots of traffic. We did two dives a day at their dive operation, Thalassa Dive Center. It's mostly reef and wall dives, with a wreck and a muck dive also available. Beautiful corals, lots of schools of lots of fish, colorful nudibranchs and flatworms, turtles, ribbon eels, jaw fish, scorpion fish. The muck dive at Mega Mall was worth the boat ride — big seahorses, stone fish, cuttlefish.

Thalassa Dive Center, Hotel Santika, July 2006, Gary Krippendorf (gskrippendorf@hotmail.com), Redwood City, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84° F, calm. I planned a trip for 12 of us via e-mail with Simone, the general manager of the Thalassa Dive Center. Simone was good at answering our questions via e-mail, and we booked a 6-night all-inclusive package. She took care of everything, including arranging for our rooms at the Santika Hotel, bus pickup at the Manado airport, etc. We all met in the Singapore airport and were on the same Silk Air flight to Manado. We cleared immigration and customs, and were picked up by the Thalassa / Santika Hotel bus for the 45 minute ride to the resort. The Santika Hotel and the two restaurants were good. The restaurants had a mix of western and Asian dishes. Food service was rather slow for dinner. The

massages available through the hotel were great. The 12 of us were assigned to our own boat, with the same boat captain and dive guides for our 6 days of diving. The water was smooth most boat rides were 15-20 minutes to the dive sites. Our maximum depth at Bunaken was 90 feet, though we spent most of our time between 45 and 60 feet. There was a mix of walls and fields of coral. On all of our dives, there were large schools of small and mid-sized fish everywhere. Lionfish, blue ribbon eels, and the many varieties of anemone fish were among my favorites. Our dive masters give good pre-dive briefings, which told us about the site and what kinds of things we'd see. One day we did a 3-tank all-day trip to Bangka, which was worth the fuel surcharge.

Wakatobi Dive Resort, September 2005, Ray Haberman, Naperville, IL. (RHaberman@msn.com) Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 120 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. Pigmy seahorses, ghost pipefish, scorpion leaf fish, and many more. Guides delight in pointing out the macro stuff. Reefs are alive and teeming with soft corals, sponges, and reef fish. It costs a little more than most, but it is well worth it.

Wakatobi Dive Resort, October 2005, John and Gwen Kontnik Lakewood, CO. Experience: 1000+dives. Resort is beautiful and well run, the locals work hard. The transfer from Bali went flawlessly and was comfortable. The day boats are not new but are user friendly and spacious and even had heads. The reef system is as pretty as any we have seen. The diving was all wall diving and the drift from none to moderate, great bottom times up to 75 minutes. The house reef was also great, as good as the dive sites. easy diving. Some great cuttlefish, frog fish, banded kraits,

scorpion leaf fish, blue ribbon eels, etc. No large fish. The food was varied, not bad but not great. The expat dive staff was only fair. We found Iman, Erwin, Dani, and Wendy to be friendly and easy to interact with but John, Marcus and Doris were not friendly and somewhat hostile (they were servicing a group of 19 and did not interact with anyone else). The resort had coffee and hot tea available all the time but charged for ice tea, you had to ask for ice (a pain) and water only stayed cool for minutes, They tried to charge for pre dinner snacks on the jetty which was cheap in my opinion. The last day we had to be out of our rooms by 9:00 am and did not leave the ah strip until 3:30 pm that afternoon (three options stay on the jetty were it was sort of cool, do a little snorkeling or stay in the one public air-conditioned room which with 20 people was not cool). One would think that with three dive boats they could have cobbled together some sort of island sightseeing tour. It left people feeling like, well we were done with them so lets move on. Mixed drinks are expensive so bring it with you from Bali. Resort partner and manager Lawrence was non interactive and disinterested. This came close to being a world-class destination but fell a little short.

Wakatobi, April 2006, Teresa Nelson (willie@theofficenet.com), Valley, WA. Experience: 475 dives. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm and flat, choppy, no currents. Good: location, great staff – all the staff including the dive guides. The rooms are more than adequate, each “hut” has its own “yard” with lounges and an umbrella – there’s even an opportunity to have a massage right at the same spot or indoors if you prefer, for a mere \$15. They have internet – including wireless if you bring your own laptop; better yet,

they have a computer to view and store your digital pictures, then burn a CD to take home.

Wakatobi, May 2006, Chris Davies, Redwood City, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Wakatobi deserves special acknowledgment. Do your homework so you know what to expect in the way of sea-life and then be prepared to be stoked daily by the exotic and abundant marine world of Wakatobi. Only rave reviews for facilities, staff, boats, meals, locale and breathtaking beauty of my first juvenile batfish.

Wakatobi Resorts, May 2006, Kirk, Millbrae, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, currents. Very competent staff all around, excellent macro critters. Some dives with strong current, some not. Resort has supplies of power converters and charging stations for cameras and lights. No absolute restriction on diving deep or solo — based on qualifications and experience and at the Divemasters' discretion. UW Photography Comments: Designated area with a/c and 110v and 220v power for camera gear and lights.

Wakatobi Resort, June 2006, Vann Johnson, Raleigh, NC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm, currents. World class remote location with all the amenities you'll want for a first class diving vacation. The corals are in excellent condition and there are scads of small critters which the dive guides will readily point out to you, some so small that they require a magnifying glass to see. Cuttlefish and beautiful anemones are abundant. However, if you want to see pelagics, you'll need to book an accompanying trip on the Pelagian dive yacht that will take you out to deeper water away from

the island reefs which have only small fish and critters. The ocean side accommodations are worth the price difference. I was impressed with the helpfulness, warmth, and concern for a positive diving and vacationing experience from the staff.

Wakatobi Dive Resort, June 2006, Bonnie Bonome (bonnie.bonome@mindspring.com), Austin, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. The entire operation is set up extremely well. Accommodations were basic, but neat and clean, well maintained. Staff was friendly and helpful, making the guests feel welcome and comfortable. Dive boats, dive guides and diving itself was superb. We were 2 groups of 5 on our boat and had plenty of space. Towels, snacks, hot and cold drinks were provided between dives. There was a roomy head/changing room, too! Captain and dive guides accommodated our wishes. Dive guides were protective of the reefs and critters. The currents could change without warning. On one dive the current was so bad, we drifted vertically to fight the speed. On other dives the currents were manageable to not present. Don't bring gloves and be prepared to use the metric measuring system (my 2 dive computers came in handy here: I set one to metric and left the other one set to the more familiar imperial units).

Wakatobi, June 2006, James Jenkins, San Francisco, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 39 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. Beautiful resort catering to up to 50 divers on 4 large, purpose-built boats where everything runs like a Swiss watch. They meet you upon arrival in Bali's Denpasar Airport, coordinate your entry, transfers, and give you the schedule for their private

plane departure to their own landing strip. Breakfast 7:00a, briefing 8:00a and onto your boat for two morning dives; back to the resort in time to shower and change for a 1:00p lunch, then a single afternoon dive at 2:30p (back by 4:30p or so); dinner 7p. There are two “night” dives via your boat in the 11-day charter; done early enough to return and change for dinner. The house reef is good and is “open” from 6a to 10p; there is a small boat service available from 6:30a to 6:00p to take you out or pick you up. The food is good including both Indonesian and Western style dishes. The bungalows are spacious and have adequate AC. There is a library with a computer and internet access and free wired and wireless internet. There is a large camera room with 110V and 220V, fresh towels, mild AC and lots of space. Dining is in a separate restaurant; the Long House includes relaxed seating and tables, a shop and a media room. There is a bar at the end of the pier. The largely local staff is helpful; most speak some English. The dive guides were good guides and spotters. They are respectful of the reefs. They’ll help you with buoyancy. There were no more than 6 divers/guide. The groups dove the same sites with staggered entries. Guests were allocated to boats based on who was traveling together, skills, etc. They change your tanks, schlep your gear back to shore, help you up the ladder, and help you on with your tank, and you verify and log your Nitrox mixes. The walls and slopes rise to within a meter of the surface and are healthy. The corals (hard and soft) and sponges are beautiful. Usually the last 20–30 minutes of each dive was a long safety stop – most interesting things were in the shallower water. The diving is generally easy. Dives are limited to 70

minutes (60 for “night” dives) but we sometimes pushed that by 5 or 10 minutes, returning to the boat with adequate air since the dives were fairly shallow and required little exertion. We saw crocodile fish and lion fish on virtually every dive; there were plenty of scorpion fish, leaf scorpion fish, cuttlefish, turtles, bumphead parrot fish and abundant reef fish. The guides could usually find pigmy sea horses on most dives. Other critters included: frog fish, winged pipefish, false stone fish, stone fish, a good assortment of nudibranchs and flatworms (but not abundant, by any means), 5 types of cardinal fish including the pajama, banded sea snakes, eels, mantis shrimp, many small (macro) shrimps, blue (and black juvenile) ribbon eels, octopus, jaw fish, decorator crabs, and more. There were few big things (other than turtles and medium-sized bumphead parrots). In 32 dives we saw one pair of eagle rays and a couple white tips. There were a few small and medium-sized tuna and a small school of chevron barracuda. We had low tides every evening which meant that to do a real night dive we had to walk down the beach to a specific entry point. The outgoing tide meant that we’d have poor visibility and the possibility of strong currents if we didn’t hit the slack just right.

Wakatobi, July 2006, John DeRoo
(jderoo.undercurrent@eitronix.com),
Hopkinton, MA. Experience: 251–500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. Lots of little critters; nudis on most dives and pygmy seahorses on about a quarter of them. Several cuttlefish, octopuses, a few rays, banded sea snakes, garden eels you could almost touch, schools of medium-sized reef fish, but virtually no pelagics. The guides were in the water for all boat dives; you could follow them or not as

you wanted, but it was worth it to stay relatively close since they know where many critters hide. Vis was somewhat limited by the particulates in the water. The dives are nominally 70 minutes, but some people surfaced sooner and were picked up by the boat while some of us stayed a little longer when the guides found things to show us at the end. The house reef can be dived from shore, but watch out for the currents! Or the house reef can be dived from a tender - they will take you "upcurrent" and you can drift back to the resort. The currents were sometimes rather strong and for a couple of dives we couldn't make it to the planned endpoint. There are three boat dives a day: two in the morning and one in the afternoon. However, you can do more dives by diving the house reef, too. Nitrox is nominally 32%, but I often got 33%. The boat crews would set up your gear and put it up on the bench when it was time to gear up. Some divers had back problems and the crew helped them gear up sitting on the side of the boat. When you indicated you wanted to do a night dive, they'd take your gear off the boat for you, and return it the next day. Most everything ran on-time and smoothly. The bungalows were clean and had A/C, but we just opened the windows the whole time. The food was excellent — a good variety and more than we could eat. UW Photography Comments: Air-conditioned camera room on shore with plenty of space for setting up camera gear. 110V and 220V available for recharging. Several staff members who are willing and able to help. Freshwater rinse tank on the boats for cameras, and a large work surface area. Screening room with a digital projector for viewing stills or videos.

Wakatobi Dive Resort, August 2006,

Curt Harpold, Rockville, MD. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 74 to 78 F, calm, currents. The service and food were top-rate. Meals are in a new restaurant, with chefs from Bali. The restaurant has a dedicated pastry room. Meals are buffet style, and the food is plentiful and varied. Accommodations are in roomy and well-appointed bungalows. The beach bungalows can get a bit hot in the afternoons. The garden bungalows are in some shade, but still have a view of the water. Bungalows on the south end get an almost constant breeze. Shore dives any time day or night. Daily scheduled boat dives: two-tank after breakfast and one-tank in the afternoon (unless your boat is scheduled for a night dive). If you want to go somewhere else on the 5-mile stretch of house reef, just ask one of the staff to take you there in a "taxi" boat and drop you. The staff watches while you're in the water, and assists with cameras and other gear. Don't even think about carrying your own camera to the water or boat. Choice of cylinders: 80cu ft or 100 cu ft (11 or 13 liters), with either DIN or yoke valve. Nitrox is available, but only EAN32. They have an O2 booster, and will cater to Rebreather divers, but only if those divers bring their own cylinders. Dive briefings are good and thorough, and the dive guides exhibit excellent knowledge of the marine life and its conservation. During my 10 days there, we saw all three species of pygmy seahorse, Mandarin fish, many hawksbill turtles.

Wakatobi Resort, August 2006, J. Tindell (jtindell@skadden.com)

Experience: 200 dives. Water: 79 F. Disappointing from visibility/clarity, but reefs diverse and in great shape. Nitrox broken. Two-hour charter on propeller flight from Bali. Larger tanks

allow for max. 70-minute diving. 3mm suit was sufficient with a vest. One diver did not use a wet suit! Divers were generally cold on boat with winds, but manageable. Max. six divers with dive master leader, but divers are free to be on their own. Dive masters generally there to spot unusual creatures. Unlimited house reef diving, with small boats taking people along large reef. Max. 48 guests on three well organized and roomy boats. Reef conditions excellent and varied topography. Abundant macro life but also crocodile fish, lion fish, cuttlefish, sting rays and a few shark but more emphasis on the macro, including pygmy seahorses. All-inclusive resort. Management tries hard but their organization leaves little flexibility. Breakfast at 6:45 and dive briefing at 7:40; lateness not tolerated well. Dive boats are preordained and appear to largely be culled by nationality of divers, which assists communication but hurts diversity. The groups of six are assigned to a dive guide for the week with no changing permitted — groups with the more experienced dive guides obviously see more. Dive groups can be a significant portion of the resort, often keeping to themselves (similar to sheep herding together). No thought to matching groups based on experience, age or photography preferences. Food is advertised as gourmet — in reality, basic and plentiful, with fish, meat and chicken offered in various preparations with potato and rice side dishes; sashimi available a few times and salad. All meals buffet style, no table cloth or napkins (Kleenex used). Variety of desserts. Soda and drinks kept are priced reasonably. Bar at end of pier is nice sunset location for happy hour. Rooms are basic but clean, somewhat reminiscent of camp. A/C available but

not needed in many cabins, with good wind; need to choose between windy side and sunset views (far less wind). Overall: succinctly stated by one woman with significant experience in southeast Asia — three star resort with five star pricing. 48 guests is a bit “corporate” in largeness and management style. Diving positives outweigh negatives.

Wakatobi, August 2006, Peter Sonbert, Jupiter, FL. Experience: 250 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 feet. Water: 78 to 79, calm and flat, mild currents. First class operation. Great dive boat. On first dive, asked to see you clear your mask and buddy breathe, then you could dive your own profile, 60 minute limit not strictly enforced. You have to go through Bali to get there. Did not like Bali. Reefs shallow enough for snorkelers. I was OK with 3 mil shorty but most people need 5 mil full suit. Slight problem with most of the boat crew not speaking English. Crew helpful and safe.

Wakatobi Resort, September 2006, Eric Turnquist, Quincy, IL. Experience: 2000+ dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm and flat. Both Island Dreams and Wakatobi made this an easy and fun adventure. The logistics and email updates removed doubts of water temp and what’s going to happen and when. The vis. wasn’t the best. Two days before coming home, the vis. shot up to 100+ feet. The food, boats, cabins, boat staff, dive guides were excellent. Spent 11 days and didn’t repeat a dive site. 70-minute dive times. Great coral and fish life.

Sumatra

Lumbalumba Diving Centre, August 2005, Michael Bode, Braunschweig, Nds. (michael@bodeweb.de Experi-

ence: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 15 to 25 Meters. Water: 27 to 28 Celsius, choppy, currents. Pulau Weh is easy to reach via Medan and Banda Aceh. Two fast ferries from Banda Aceh connect every day to Weh (1 h). It is another hour by taxi to Gapang beach and Lumbalumba Diving Resort. There are decent bungalows close by, some even with a/c. We were the first guests to visit P. Weh after the tsunami. There is little damage under water. The main dive sites did not show signs of destruction. Biodiversity is high with nice coral (hard and soft) and big schools of fish, many species of moray eels, scorpion fish and nice nudibranchs. Underwater volcano - much better and more active than the underwater volcano north of Manado in the Sangihe Archipelago - and the WW2-wreck of Sophie Rickmers, which lies in more than 40m on the sandy bottom. Lumbalumba is a professionally organized dive base with two dive boats (no sun protection) and well-maintained dive gear. Special freshwater tank for photographers. No special area for photographers. There is a lot of sand around. So be careful!

MALAYSIA

Sipadan, a tiny island off Borneo where 20 divers and others were kidnapped by Filipino Muslim terrorists, no longer has land accommodations, but one can still reach the good diving there through other resorts. Malaysia has areas that compete well with Indonesia, but its diving infrastructure is not comparably developed.

Borneo Divers, August 2005, Dale Finch (flya737@aol.com), Chapel Hill, NC. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm,

choppy. Divers suit up at the Dive Shop. At low tide there can be a substantial walk out to the end of the dock because there is no channel into the Resort. However, it does preserve some muck life worth snorkeling. Borneo Divers arranged all of our land excursions and accommodations as well as the diving. They always met us promptly at the airports, took us to our hotels, and coordinated tours by touring companies. When unexpected weather altered our access to some sites, they seamlessly rearranged our itinerary. Be sure to visit the Orang Utan Sanctuary and stay at the beautifully landscaped Sepilok Nature Resort, they have an extensive orchid garden. UW Photography Comments: The boat captain will house your cameras on life jackets for the extended boat ride to Sipadan, but there is no dunk tank on board. Consistent help was available entering and exiting the water. The dive shop does have a dedicated dunk tank for cameras. Although they have computers available for email, there is no free image download.

Borneo Divers, Kapalai Resort, July 2006, Tracey Bennett (Tdives@cox.net), Las Vegas, NV. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 45 to 85 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy, currents. The resort is casual and comfortable, a creation of boardwalks and bungalows stemming out from a tiny sandbar in the middle of nowhere. All the rooms are the same with 2 twin beds, double ceiling fans, large bathroom and balcony. Each private balcony has a floodlight that is switched on at night. I spent hours gazing at blue spotted stingrays, trumpetfish, lionfish and anemones from the window near my bed. Meals are buffet style with a nice variety of choices. Beer and wine available. They ran out of diet coke and