

dives allowed only for groups traveling on a dive shop sponsored trip. Sipadan divers are required to pay a US\$10 levy to the government each day they dive the reefs around the island. The boat will stop by the guard shack on the way to a site and pay for the whole boat. If you prepay the levy with the rest of your reservations and decide not to dive every day in Sipadan, the resort will not refund the unused levy. Saw barracuda, batfish, schools of jacks, turtles, and sharks. Sometimes currents would start to rip and we would tuck in and fly together through valleys and channels until we reached an area that was not affected. There were areas with healthy hard corals, but many areas void of coral. Hopefully the recent closing of the accommodations on Sipadan will allow the corals to grow back. Many whitetips on most dives. A few huge grey reef sharks and three leopard sharks. June and July is a great time to see sea turtles as it is mating season. We saw huge turtles on most dives. Muck diving at Mabul and Kapalai was excellent. Tons of nudibranchs, painted frogfish, orangutan crabs, giant mantis shrimps, soft coral crabs, blue ribbon eels, leaf fish, whip coral shrimp, ornate ghost pipefish, robust pipefish, cuttlefish, longnose hawkfish, pigmy seahorses, and a rare pink hairy octopus made it hard to decide where to dive the next day. Guides at the resort were excellent critter spotters. UW Photography Comments: Water buckets on boats upon request. Ample rinse facilities on dock. Small camera rooms near shop available for rent.

## MALDIVES

These 7000 low-lying coral islands

in a 1200-mile chain southeast of India will be among the first to disappear when global warming raises sea levels significantly. The reefs have suffered significant coral bleaching, but live-aboards still find exciting fish life. Many of the 200 inhabited islands have classy resorts catering to Europeans, with good to excellent diving.

**Pro Divers, Komandoo, March 2006, John Purcell (mtwashjohn@aol.com), Mt. Washington, MA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 6 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, strong currents. We were the only Americans on Island. People could not have been nicer. Long trip. +27 hours to get back to the States. This resort has fresh and diverse foods. Never got boring. Plenty to choose from for the adventurous or stick to chicken and salad. Spa at resort. Accommodations were clean and the Jacuzzi water villas were new and beautiful. Overall dive experience was fantastic. Strong currents. Not for the weak. Barbara and Tom ran Pro Divers. We found them to be quite efficient and helpful; they were shorthanded and took up the slack well. We had dive masters from other resorts to fill in and all were knowledgeable and friendly. Barbara was into photography and when you dove with her you were basically on your own. She was into Macro and never looked up. Tom planned every dive to the last detail. We looked forward to diving with him. Had two dive boats ; one in German and one in English. Resort is probably 60 English, 40 German. Barbara and Tom — German. UW Photography Comments: no rinse tank on boats but large enough area to set equipment and not worry. Lots of photographers, including dive operator.

**M. Y. Manthiri, March 2006/03, Peter Van Kampen (pvk@elknet.net), Elkhorn, WI.** Experience: 251-500 dives  
Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 83 F.  
Most divers were experienced and could handle the currents but a few were not that experienced and it was tough on them. Greatest number of fish I have ever seen. It was crowded down there. I joked that we could see more if there weren't so many fish in the way. Side trips from there, India, Sri Lanka, Emirates.

**Reethi Rah, August 2006, David Vickery and Suzanne Leeson (Twodivers@att.net), Hoboken, NJ.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, currents.  
Reethi Rah is part of the One and Only consortium of exclusive resorts. Access is via sea plane from Male, or an enclosed custom boat with steward service, cruising at 19 knots. Guests stay in villas, with enough distance between them that noise is not an issue. Basic villas have a king size bed with ocean view, flat screen TV with satellite, mini bar, flower arrangements, fruit basket, immense bathroom, scented soaps, shampoos, separate seating area, separate tub and shower, heavy and light robes, indoor and outdoor sandals, outdoor hammock and lounge furniture, outdoor shower, beach access and full room service. Rack rate during low season \$810 plus tax. High end villas can feature second bed room and/or infinity pool, or be over the ocean with stairs leading to lagoon. Travel is by bikes provided with each villa or a staff member will pick you up in a golf cart. World class spa, most water sports (no wave runners — too noisy), and three restaurants. The sushi restaurant was so-so. The Middle Eastern restaurant featured reserved tents or tables on the beach, a cocktail area that offered

recent movies and hookahs (fruit flavored tobacco only, please). The Reethi Restaurant featured gourmet food with Indian or Continental motifs, a large bar, and a stunning pool area with service that was as good as, if not better than, Four Seasons resorts. The dive shop looks like a fashion store and features a separate diver's lounge area with couches and orchid displays, hot showers with shower gel, shampoo, conditioner and towels, changing area, and gear storage area. The 65' boat has center tank racks, aft lounge, and separate men's, ladies, and staff heads with designer plumbing, cleaned daily. After each dive, fresh towels, bottled water, and fresh fruit are offered. Nitrox is available as is a complete line of rental equipment. Diving is done around the Reethi Rah atoll though sites 45 minutes to an hour away are visited. A separate 65' cabin cruiser is available for personal charters to more distant sites. Supervision tends to be aimed at less experienced divers, and when divemaster Yevgeny (the Russian Bear who resembles a power lifter) says you take safety stop, you take safety stop. On our first dive we saw several white tips, turtles and a school of 10 eagle rays. The second dive featured five eagle rays, more sharks, schools of tropicals, lion fish, and eels. The next day a trip to the caves (niches in a bommie) had no sharks or rays. A second dive had washing machine current that went up, down, sideways, stopped and reversed, and ended with us flying around a corner to cling to a channel wall to avoid being carried into the open sea. Snorkeling in front of the villa in 4'-8' of water offered black tip and nurse sharks, turtles, schools of tropicals, a pipefish, and every goby in the book. If you've got the bucks, are on a honeymoon (\$175 gets you a bottle of

Veuve Cliquot Grande Dame Rose champagne, they fill your tub with scented oil, orchids and frangipani blossoms, and light a few dozen candles) or just want pretty good Indian Ocean diving with every luxury you can think of, this is the place.

## MOZAMBIQUE

**Ponta Mamoli, July 2006, Joe Puglia (jpuglia@aol.com), Orlando, FL.**

Experience: 550 dives. Water: 68 F. The weather was sunny and a little windy. The seas were choppy. A few dives had moderate current. The reefs of Mamoli were magnificent. There are miles of uninterrupted coral heads that are in fantastic shape. The fish life was fantastic. We were diving off season and the water turned greener and greener as the week moved on. Bev and Kevin, the managers of Ponta Mamoli, said that the green was rare. The reefs were fantastic. We saw turtles, a variety of eels, rays (including electric rays), scorpion fish including a Mauritius scorpion fish. The schools of anthias were huge and beautiful to watch. On one dive there were over 50 lionfish. During most dives we were serenaded by whale songs. The resort was magnificent, with great service. The resort sits on a beautiful sand beach and is the only structure for miles. My wife and I walked the beach for an hour one afternoon and did not see another person. The food was excellent. The rooms are chalets built behind the dunes. They are a little small, with nice front porches and a spacious bathroom. You spend little time in the chalets so they are just fine. The resort has a variety of activities including horseback riding and hippo watching. The staff was friendly and attentive. The ride

from the South African border is one hour on dirt roads. It can be a little nerve-racking, but it adds to the adventure. Electricity is supplied by on-site generators, and to conserve fuel they are turned off at different times of the day. It was never a problem. We visited Mamoli as part of a larger trip that included a safari camp, Phinda, in South Africa. Ponta Mamoli is a gem!

## SEYCHELLES

Billed as 3000 miles from anywhere, this group of islands has decent reef diving. From time-to-time live-aboards make the long trip to Aldabra, which has excellent diving. Island prices are high.

**Coral Strand Hotel, December 2005, Alex Stuart (aastuart@pacbell.net), San Rafael, CA.** Experience: 1400+ dives.

There's a 12-hour time difference between California and the Seychelles. The Inner Islands of the Seychelles are granitic islands that are the remnants of the supercontinent that existed when Africa and the Indian subcontinent were still connected. Mahe has a high granite backbone running the length of the island. The left side traffic, roundabouts and the architecture of the houses and stores created a big similarity between Mahe and the Island of Grenada in the Caribbean. My hotel was in the Beau Vallon on the other side of the island from the capital Victoria. To get to the Beau Vallon area from Victoria, the road turns into switchbacks that take you to a pass over the heights that run through the center of the island. The Coral Strand Hotel is an older facility that is reasonably well maintained but is on the expensive side for what it offers. Dinner was overpriced and ordinary. Breakfast and