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MARSHALL ISLANDS

Bako Divers, Robert Reimers Hotel, May 2006, Tom Sheley, Two Rivers, WI. (dsheley@lakefield.net) Air flight from Hawaii to Majuro on Continental Airlines takes about 4 hours. Because of the scheduling of the single air carrier you have three options on a stop over on Major prior to going on to Bikini (one, four or seven nights). I applied the four mainly to get my salt water equilibrium, and to make sure my gear caught up with me before flying on. Jerry Ross (Bako Divers) provided excellent service and attention. Jerry truly has his heart into what he does. I met up with three other divers that had arrived earlier and would also be going on to Bikini. Earlier in the month Jerry had given me the Internet address of one of these divers (happened to be an individual that had been to Bikini before in 2001). Direct communicating with someone else that had visited Majuro/Bikini was valuable to for me to prep me for this new adventure. My normal dive buddies did not accompany, so I latched onto these three new friends and thus made my overall trip so much better (gosh, I hate to travel alone). Majuro appears to be an environment somewhere between Chuuk (Truk) and Palau. Chuuk, because of the friendly people/kids and sometimes limited resources (examples vegetables). Palau, because Majuro has moved one step closer to a cosmopolitan environment with general air

conditioning, supermarkets, more modern hotels and a Yattie (Yacht) Crowd. The realistic visibility inside the lagoon was around 50 ft., and I understand it can get much better if you time your stay to take advantage of a large lagoon volume change that occurs with the new moon high tides. WWII interests are limited to a Grumman duck (single engine sea plain) and an end of the war dump area (called the parking lot) littered with trucks and small landing craft. There are a few other aircraft (see the web page) but their quality has greatly diminished over 60 years. All the shipwrecks are relatively modern, with the best being the 150-ft upright refrigeration freighter Cempac sitting on a 140 ft. bottom. A trip through the engine room (around 120 ft.) and crew's quarters provided the highest interest for me, although the spaces are a little challenging while wearing doubles (tight but it can be done). My new friends did some dives out on a nearby island and on the ocean side of Majuro, where visibility and fish life was fantastic (I am not into fish or coral). We stayed at the Robert Reimers Hotel, close to the center of population, about 5 miles from the airport. The hotel picked us up and got us back at the correct time for our flight. The hotel is on the lagoon. I recommend the bungalows if you are interested in a romantic setting, but the rooms in the hotel proper were well maintained and clean. There is a large supermarket (anything you want and the prices are reasonable) and a bank directly across the street. The Bako dive boat goes out right next door to the hotel. The other hotel (Marshall Island Resort — formally the Outrigger) is newer, closer to the airport and appears to be where most of the non-locals (example:

Yatties) hang out. I only use the term Yatties because that is what they call themselves. That group appears to be a mix of individuals that own or crew sailing craft from all over the world (we saw mostly Americans and Canadians). All the restaurants we visited provided good service and food, the only item in short supply being vegetables (all out until the next shipment). The locals were friendly. There were three large foreign commercial fish factory ships in the lagoon that supported an unknown number of smaller (60 ft.) working craft that appeared to be out while we were there. The island has a small support group that sailors utilize when they are in port (I will leave that up to your imagination).

Bikini Atoll Divers, April 2006,
William Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol.com), Santa Ana, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 125 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm, choppy, no currents. We booked the trip through Layne Ballard of Central Pacific Dive Expeditions. We overnighted in Oahu at the Honolulu Airport Hotel. No Aloha spirit here. The accommodations were terrible and overpriced. Next day we flew Continental to Majuro, stayed at the Hotel Robert Reimers. Nice, but defining it as basic is understatement. The staff and people however were grand. Next day we flew on an Air Marshall Islands de Havilland Dash-8 to Bikini Atoll via Kwajalein ("Kwaj" to the old hands). Actually you land on a dirt strip on the Atoll island of Enue and take a 30-minute boat ride to Bikini Island. Accommodations are spartan but on a pristine beach right out of your most romantic tropical dreams. The head divemaster is Jim Akroyd, assisted by his wife Gennifer, Chad Smith, Edward Maddison, and Ronnie Lokiar. Chad and Gennifer are

Americans, Jim is a Brit, and the other two native Bikinians. All great people. Dives are breathtaking and awe inspiring. You can learn about them through any number of books and the Internet. Baggage limit is forty pounds on Air Marshall Islands with a \$1.50 surcharge for each additional pound. This is the total cost, not \$3.00 as reported including an article in the May 2006 Undercurrent. Tanks are HP steel 85's with isolation manifolds for doubles divers and HP steel 119's for singles, either DIN or yoke. No pony bottles are available. There is no "alternate" dive itinerary. All dives are decompression to a maximum 185 feet. Expect to comply with a detailed dive plan. Decompression times run from a low of 24 minutes to as high as fifty minutes and this assumes you have multi-gas computers to switch gases on the deco trapeze. Jim's website lists some computers that are "just okay" for Bikini. He plans to change this. You need two multi-gas computers. The Cressi-Sub Archemede II is being added to the list and it works great as do most Dive Rites. The Suunto D-9 will also probably work here but so far it is untested. Jim says not to bring a safety reel and lift bag and/or SMB unless you have experience deploying these, his website notwithstanding. No Jon lines either. Bikini is no place to learn to dive doubles. Take some training or go with the single 119. Diving is off a landing craft type boat with a front ramp. It's powered by twin Honda 130 HP engines. Water conditions in the 27 by 15-mile lagoon can be anything from flat to four foot swells. Exits are an undignified flopping onto the ramp and being drug aboard after doffing your rig and swimming it in. Penetration is allowed for qualified divers with cave certifications, etc. Jim calls dive

time “run time” and there are check-points you must be at that correspond with your remaining air supply. The planned deco stops are at 80’ for two minutes with the next stop (computer willing) at 40’ for two minutes then a swim across to the deco trapeze with parallel bars at 30/20/10 feet for minimum stops of 2/5/10. ScubaPro R190 second stages hang from the boat providing 75% Nitrox. If you were to be diving an air-only computer, by the end of the week you’d be spending an eternity on the bars though you were breathing 75% oxygen. A couple people found that out when they forgot to set their computers to the second mix. I was comfortable in a 3-mm suit with hood and gloves as was my wife. Others added vests and one diver wore a 5-mil semi-dry suit. The food was outstanding, even more so when you consider that all food is brought in just twice a year. Dive season is March through November. The Bikini government owns the dive operation and Gen opined that the true cost of diving Bikini would be near 10 thousand dollars if it weren’t de facto subsidized by the Bikinians just to keep Bikini in the news. There is a full blown electrical power plant and desalination facility. The DOE has a facility and they do soil and coconut samples checking for Strontium 90 and Cesium 231. As of this writing we are not glowing. There are no chitinous bugs or mosquitoes. The Akroyds run the most professional and competent dive operations we have ever experienced. Daytime temperatures ran from high 80’s to low 100’s. The white sand beach is littered with millions of collectable shells which are okay to take. No night diving. Fabio Amaral, the previous head divemaster tried it. He lasted seven minutes before the sharks chased him out. No swim-

ming before the first or after the last dive of the day. Sharks are in the shallows. I have a wonderful wife and three great children. I fought in Viet Nam and survived. I have been to Bikini and dove on the Saratoga. I guess you can take me, Lord.

Bikini Atoll Divers, Tom Sheley (dsheley@lakefield.net), Two Rivers WI. Jim Akroyd (Head Dive Master) does a good job at maintaining the rules to address the risk involved. Our group was well experienced. Jim’s photo on his website makes him look like a stiff-lipped Brit, but his knowledge sharing and overall bedside manner is really good. Jim’s detailed briefings provided a clear explanation of the dive plan and the history of the specific ship itself. There is a single air flight out of Majuro to Bikini every Wednesday. There is a \$3 (round trip) surcharge for every pound that your checked baggage is over 40 pounds. After getting off the aircraft it is a 20-minute boat ride in the dive boat along the lagoon side of the reef to Bikini Island (Bikini Island is about 5 miles long and 1 mile wide). 60+ years ago. The United States set off 23 nuclear weapons in this lagoon including the first hydrogen bomb. The WWII-era ships we dive today are those US and Japanese warships that did not survive the first two tests. The radiation on the island is not gamma but, rather, short-range Alpha and Beta emitted from the decay of plutonium/strontium/cesium (which all have long half-lives and pose a body internal threat only). The only issue is that you should not eat anything that grows out of the ground or drink the well water. All the water used at Bikini is reverse osmosis processed out of the lagoon and this water is free of those landlocked contaminants. I took along a gamma detector (dosimeter) and the exposure

potential totaled out as zero for the week (unlike the 20 milli REM it picked up on a single exposure experiment I conducted on my return trip when I put it in checked baggage to see how powerful those airport X-ray machines were in Hawaii. The accommodations and food were good (soft serve ice cream also available 24/7). The support staff went out one day and brought back 6 big tuna and jack — Sushi. The rooms are simple and clean but you are not going to find anyone putting fresh flowers on your table. Dives were two a day, averaging 160 to 170 ft with at-depth bottom times of around 23 minutes. Mandatory two-minute stops were made at 80, 40 and 30 feet, along with 5 minutes at 20 and 10 minutes at 10 feet. Total in-water time averaged around 70 + minutes for every dive with all stops at 30, 20 and 10 feet using around 80% boat-supplied oxygen. I used one of their rental Dive Rite Nitek He computers with Oxygen setting for 30/20/10 feet at 74%. The rule for every dive was all the nitrogen saturation bars had to clear out of the red band into the green (appeared to have added about an additional 10 min on O₂ at 10 feet after deco meter limits had cleared). Aircraft Carrier Saratoga is sits upright on a 180-ft bottom and contains planes/bombs/torpedoes/general ship's equipment. Illegal to take anything off these ships. Japanese battleship Nagato is positioned on the bottom with the upper superstructure keeping it from going totally turtle. The gun turrets are still attached. It was impressive swimming under the forward and after turrets and into some of the larger internal compartments. The Arkansas battleship is almost totally upside down with the propeller shifts ripped out, but you can go under the forward deck area (12 turret top is on the bottom but not

out of the barbet) and see two massive anchor chains draped down off the deck. The after 6-sided gun compartment blister is interesting, along with one of the after 12 gun barrels pointing out to Port with the turret structure itself barrier in the bottom. We also dove two totally intact destroyers (one upright and one on its side), one submarine (similar to the one I served on before going to a nuclear sub) and an attack transport. Two days the lagoon went glass-calm, to the extent you could see the Saratoga and Nagato as you motored over the wreck. My opinion of the best wreck dive in the world is now split between the Saratoga (Sara) and the Prince Eugen in Kwajalein. We used heavy steel 85 ft-doubles on both Majuro and Bikini. I used my Zeagle Ranger BC on the doubles, but I was in the majority with most of the other 10 divers using some form of a solid back plate. The OMS setup impressed me the most with its bungee banding around the BC bladder (stays real nice and tight). After the last dive on the sixth day at Bikini, I noticed a little tenderness in my chest (pec muscles) and waist where the straps of the BC contacted my body. This was followed by an itching sensation at these points about 2-3 hours after the end of the dive. There was a light modeling (redness) at the itching location and the divemaster contacted the doctor on Kwajalein. The diagnosis was a possible skin hit. I was placed on oxygen. Within 30 minutes the redness and itching went away and by the next morning the tenderness of the strap contact areas had 75% gone away. Within the next 24 hours, most of the muscle tenderness had also gone away. The divemaster noted he does not think I did anything wrong (use of dive computer and almost identical dive

profile among 10 other divers and four dive masters monitoring our overall group). I feel that my application of reliance on a new computer algorithm and features (gave me the new ability to shift to different mixed gases while underwater) resulted in my previous past practice of over-conservatism being lost (kept me out of trouble in the past). All of my previous years of decompression diving (also included deep weeks in Truk) had involved 80% Oxygen under the boat or 40% sling tank bottle — but — within the use of an AIR (Nitrox single gas selection only) computer or standard air tables for the entire dive profile. Yes, more hang time under the boat — but it also appears to have compensated for my age. On first and second dive at Bikini I had taken along my air computer to see the difference and sure enough (event with the extra 10 minutes on the Dive Rite Nitek He to get the bars out of red and into green), I still would have stayed at 10 feet for another 10 minutes with the single gas Nitrox computer set at 21%. With my age — 61 — and body fat, it appears (I think — I am no expert on this) the factors applied in the Dive Rite Nitek HE for me are out of whack (age), and the added time that an air computer or tables gives me in deco under the boat is the safety factor that had kept me out of trouble in the past. Nitek He is most likely a great computer for single or repeat deep dive in one day only. If you are in your early 30s (average) and doing repeat deep dives like we were doing.

MICRONESIA

Most divers head to Palau, where big fish abound. The Blue Corner is among the world's best high

voltage sites. Visibility can exceed 200 feet, while currents range from nil to dangerously strong so use a reef hook and bring your safety sausage. Long day-boat rides to the best diving weave through calm water and past magnificent rock islands, but there's the potential for rough seas on the outer edges. Most divers prefer live-aboards. Marine biodiversity is among the greatest in the world, but coral bleaching and commercial fishing is taking its toll. Wreck diving mavens head to Chuuk and the world's most diverse wreck diving on a Japanese fleet sunk by Americans during WWII. Most wreck dives, other than on the superstructures, exceed 80 feet, but they're great even without penetration. The wrecks are starting to suffer and many artifacts that should have been left alone have been pilloined, but the ships are festooned with coral, and most all the unique reef fish of the Pacific have made them home. Expect calm water, occasional poor visibility, and hot weather. Both destinations are such a long haul that divers usually stop at a second island to amortize their trip costs. Yap has been the traditional stopover, but Kosrae and Pohnpei may be better choices.

Chuuk

Blue Lagoon Dive Shop, June 2006, Larry S. Klumb (lealarry@gmail.com), Lithia, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 84 F, calm. I was unable to hook up with the Thorfinn for a mid-week boarding, as they were cruising the islands. I spent my six-days following Thorfinn around the lagoon! The Blue Lagoon's rooms

were clean and comfortable. I was blessed with low occupancy, resulting in a second floor room with an ocean view, twin beds, a mini-fridge and a large bath. The Blue Lagoon operation was excellent and affordable. Our dive guide, Chiney (PH), had been diving the wrecks for 30 years. Always flexible, wanting to meet our wants and desires, we dove when and where we wanted, with personal attention, both above and below water. The boats are another leave room for improvement; converted fishing boats with little storage, no head, and minimal room with six people onboard. As noted earlier, we spent the week shadowing the live-aboards. Aside from the pampering and the ability to do five dives a day, Blue Lagoon was hard to beat and a helluva lot cheaper. We usually dove three tanks a day, with the exceptional day with four. Given the depths of some wrecks, three was more in line with the profiles our computers were liked. The food at the one and only restaurant was good, but not gourmet. Service was with a smile, if somewhat slow. In February, during the anniversary of "Hailstorm" when we were told a room is hard to come by.

Blue Lagoon, July 2006, D. Dempsey, Long Branch, NJ. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. The resort is aging but kept well. They are always working on the upkeep. You don't go to Truk for the ambience, you go to dive some of the best WWII wrecks on the planet. The food is adequate, but not as good as in the past. The dive operation was extremely accommodating and my crew was perfect. The boats are small and covered. I never went out with more than four divers. Gradvin Aisek runs a great operation.

Kosrae

Nautilus Resort, June 2006, Martha and Jeff Hubbard (hubbard182@att.net), Glenmont, NY. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm, choppy, surge, no currents. Kosrae Nautilus is a small, out-island resort where you are made to feel a member of the Beitz family, which runs it. It has all the amenities of larger properties – A/C, nice pool, good restaurant. The diving is excellent. Gigantic, pristine coral heads over 30 ft across and 20 ft tall, gin-clear water, multicolor and multiple species of reef fish. (Fish of eating size have all gone.) The Continental Micronesia Island Hopper stops three days a week eastbound, three days westbound. There are some island walks worth doing, and some good snorkeling. Usual schedule is 2 dives a day, our tour leader had arranged 3. Never on Sunday, when Kosrae closes down completely except for church. UW Photography Comments: No designated place on boat for cameras.

Nautilus Resort, June 2006, Raymond Rowe (growe@nycap.rr.com), Niskayuna, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 200 to 250 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Kosrae had a fantastic reef system and vis was essentially perfect. Could see across large canyons with other side in perfect view. Fantastic plate, dome and staghorn coral areas. Large plates 25 ft plus and domes the same size. Largest and dense staghorn coral. Not a high density of fish, but lots of fish ranging from little ace of spades to large triggerfish. The species on the reef were often the unusual variants of the ones you see elsewhere. The rare ones. Saw many giant clams but not as big as at GBR. Island has giant clam farm to repopulate them. Natives are fond of giant clam meat. Kosrae infrastructure

is good and homes and culture are nice. Kosrae Nautilus Resort was nice; good facilities for a place as remote as this. Nice Dive boat easy to dive from. New owner motivated to please. Divemasters were relatively inexperienced and concentrated on safety issues rather than showing us interesting creatures. They did not interfere with our decisions on dive profiles apart from querying us on air toward the end of the dive.

Nautilus Resort, July 2006, Charles (gnil50@aol.com), Flushing, NY.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 129 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm, choppy. My wife Julie and I put together a package of Truk (Chuuk) on the Odyssey (3rd time) and Kosrae (2nd time). We found out that the Kosrae Nautilus Resort had a pool and all rooms had air conditioning. After about a three-hour flight from Truk to Kosrae, we again found ourselves on a quiet, super clean and friendly island. We were immediately picked up by a staff member in a large, clean van. The resort looked like a simple one-level motel but after a super greeting by Doug, the owner, we entered the world of The Kosrae Nautilus Resort. The first thing we saw was beautiful natural flowers surrounding a gin clear small swimming pool surrounded by an al fresco area for dining even if it is raining. Of course you can dine in their air-conditioned dining room. We had a huge, immaculately clean room with two large double beds. The super air-conditioning blew us away. There is an excellent shower, mini-bar, fridge and a 22-channel TV. Since I bring my computer, I was happy to find internet access (purchase a \$5 card for 45 minutes with fast and easy dial-up). The restaurant's food was good with dishes ranging from an excellent fish

and chips to surprisingly good pizza! We had unreal mangrove crab one night. On off diving days you can rent a kayak right behind the resort and paddle up the mangroves. At dusk it's fun to sit on the gazebo/swing with a drink and check out the stars. The hard coral here are more prolific and diverse even compared with Sipadan or Papua New Guinea. All diving is done from Doug's two motor canopied boat which is moored just five minutes from the resort. All gear is kept in a great dive room just ten steps from our room. You put your gear in Doug's truck and off you go. The farthest site is no more than ½ hour away. The boat is fast and it has a DAN O2 unit on board. Lunches are fun and filling. There is always plenty to drink. You do two dives with Adam, Doug's older son, who is an excellent, unobtrusive dive guide. He dives with a float and as long as you keep him in sight he will not interfere with your dive unless you want him to, or if he sees something special he will let you know. On every dive you would lightly drift through at least three individual areas of coral, some that I have never seen before. The coral is mostly stacked layers upon layers upon layers. I could even see coral as deep as 150 ft. down! You start you dive right by the wall that gradually descends to the abyss. You can go down or stay with Adam and then gradually continue up to the shallows in the 20-10ft level. We saw schools of small to medium fish. We came upon spotted eagle rays on numerous dives. We saw both gray, blacktip and whitetip sharks on many dives. Twice we were surrounded by large swirling schools of chevron barracuda. One dive day as we were motoring out to the dive site, Doug got a call from another boat that they had encountered over 100 dolphins. Off we

went and we ended up snorkeling with way over 100 dolphins. Turtles were also seen. Blue hole across the road from the resort with spotted eagle rays and schools of fish. Doug, his wife Sally, Adam and their younger sons all treated us as if we were family. Check out the price. You will be pleasantly surprised! Doug did send me an e-mail last week showing his family snorkeling with a young whale shark. No diving on Sunday! Religious observance.

Sleeping Lady Divers, Kosrae Village Resort, September 2006, Debbie Husby (deb29palms@adelphia.net), Twentynine Palms, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 F. Ladies will feel more comfortable in muumuus or longer skirts (cooler than clingy pants, shorts on women are frowned upon outside the resort). Fans worked well at keeping us comfortable. Bring bug spray; spacious, open (screened) hand built bungalows among mangrove and palms no farther than 50 ft. from high tide mark. simple boats are slow, making for a smoother ride, boats docked at whichever area we were going to dive next, thereby avoiding long rides; we were chauffeured by van to the marinas. Gear handled with care by staff. Incredible hard coral landscapes. A group of mixed skill levels, during our week no more than 3 divers at a time with 2 or 3 staff. When staff realized we had a buddy pair of photographers, extra staff was added. Custom nitrox blends, never less than 2990 psi. Something for all levels of divers. Excellent mooring system, boat follows DM's float. Service and food at the resort were outstanding. Make sure you plan on going to church on Sunday to hear the singing. O2 and cell phones on boat. Plenty of water and tea and good lunches provided between dives; good

surface intervals. Lime juice provided on return each day. I felt safer diving with this crew than almost anywhere I've been. This is diving as it used to be, pristine corals. Not a lot of larger fish, but good diversity. UW Photography Comments: lots of electrical outlets, 110 v., excellent photo advice, crew took excellent care of equipment, excellent fish herders! Rinse bucket on board, no camera table. Dry room at resort.

Palau

Dive Palau, March 2006, Scott Johnson (scottyj96@aol.com), Palm Springs, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 90 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents, no currents. Upon boarding in LA for my flight to Hawaii then on to Guam, the Captain made an announcement "I would like welcome all the Iwo Jima reunion Veterans on board." There were over 100 USMC vets from WWII, Korea, Vietnam and Iraq. Sitting in front of me was General Haynes; his regiment raised the flag on Mount Sirbachi. Across was General Snowden, behind me was Colonial Wiedhahn ... all veterans from Iwo. Next to me was Colonel John W. Ripley, former commander in the USMC and the Royal Marines now Director of the USMC historical center. I met people who were involved in changing history. I dove 10 days. The first 4 days were overcast and rainy, the next 4 were the perfect March-Palau weather. The last two days were again cloudy and rainy. The last day we were at the Big Dropoff and a squall came in. We normally have a one-hour trip back to Sam's. This boat ride was almost two hours and it was one of those trips that make you wonder is this worth it! Kevin, veteran of Sam's, got seasick and said it was one

of his worst boat rides. This year I dove 9 of the 10 days with Keith Santillano of Dive Palau/Palau Dive. He recently left Sam's to again work on development of his business. What a great time no more than 6 people on board and most of the time only 4 of us. I have never been to Siaes corner, what a great dive! Ripping current for a reef hook up. Great Wall, sharks, schools of Moorish idols, lionfish, barracuda, eagle rays and a lot more. I also did Turtle Wall, again a lot of the same thing. Both wonderful dives. Probably one of the number one dive spots in the world is the Blue Corner! This year (due to the moon phase) no ripping current for a reef hookup on the five dives I did. But did I discover the Blue Corner wall and the Plateau! Saw a school of a dozen or so of the largest bumphead parrotfish I have ever seen, some looked like they could have been between 200 to 300 lbs. The largest chevron barracudas I have seen, lionfish five at once, turtles ... and on two dives I saw sharks, giant trevallies, Napoleon wrasses all feeding at the same time. I didn't get much closer than 10 feet as it did not look safe. Looking over the corner (that you normally hook up on) hundreds of swirling barracudas and/or trevallies.

Fish N' Fins, Palau Pacific, April 2006, Dennis Lewis (basileuslewis@msn.com), Fresno, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm, currents. Palau Pacific is expensive, but is the only hotel with a beach. The food is so-so and it is expensive to get into town because you are far out. The food in town is wonderful - the Taj had the best Indian! Fish N' Fins is first class. The boats were a little full, but they were willing to move people and DM's around. The boat ride is an hour each way, so they bring lunch and drinks for you. One day there was a

boat at the site we wanted, so we voted to go to a site that our guide (Denny) found a few weeks before. Hundreds of jacks, schools of barracuda, rays and bumphead parrotfish. Every dive was out of this world - groups of sharks, turtles and thousands of fish of every sort. Bring your ID book. UW Photography Comments: Fresh water at the dock. Nothing on the boat. There is a pro that goes on a boat and he does stills and video. Video costs depend on the number of dives — figure on \$30.

Neco Marine, Palau Pacific Resort, June 2006, Bill Schlegel, St Joseph, MO. Experience: 1000 dives. Visibility: 50-150 ft. Temp: 82-83 F, currents: usually nil but on some drift dives they could be ripping at 4-5 knots. Reef hooks were issued. Neco Marine has a large operation in downtown Koror with several 35 foot open craft, with canopy, twin 200 HP outboards and oxygen, radio, first aid kits, etc. These will do about 33 knots on the flat calm waters, which allows one to get all the way to Peleliu Island in .5 hours. Their dive shop has a well-stocked store, camera/digital section and pool for instruction or soaking the salt off. They have a bar/restaurant. Palau Pacific Resort is a 4-5 star operation by American standards, with all the amenities. Neco Marine picked us up each day at the hotel's dock, on their way to the dive sites. Other hotels to consider are the Cliffside Hotel or the West Plaza, which is inexpensive and has a branch close to the Neco Marine docks. Palau has some of the best coral on the planet. We saw sharks on almost every dive and lots of sharks at Blue Corner. Pacific barracuda were common, also trevally jacks, fusiliers, pyramid butterfly fish, forceps butterfly fish, eagle rays, sting rays, Moorish idols, turtles, groupers, Napoleon wrasse, unicorn fish. Some

dives were fishy. Soft corals were notable for wondrous colors. Special attractions included Jellyfish Lake, where millions of nonstinging jellies inhabit one freshwater lake. Also, a high-speed run weaving through the Rock Islands at 30 knots is beautiful and breathtaking. There are several dive-able wrecks of significant size and history. The island has an overall friendly and exotic feel that is being lost elsewhere. Airfare will be 1/2 to 2/3 of the trip, so consider combining a week in Palau with a week at Truk, Yap or Pohnpei.

Neptune's, Palau Pacific Resort, May 2006, James Masella, New York, NY.

(jvm21@columbia.edu) Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Keith Santillano is safety-conscious, but not overbearing. He also knows the waters extremely well, and can spot some incredible things. He knows all the sites. He gives great pre-dive briefings, complete with pictures that he and his girlfriend took underwater. I loved the Palau Pacific Resort. They have a good dive shop and incredible rooms and beach. For two dives he charges \$115 and a third dive adds \$40.

Peleliu Divers, Storyboard Resort, February 2006, Daniel Imbody (dwebsterdwi2@wmconnect.com), Shorewood, IL. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Ft. Peleliu Divers is great if you prefer a nice quiet spot all to yourself, you don't want long boat rides to the dive spots, you would like to get away from other boisterous Americans, you would like to get a small sampling of the local customs and culture, you want to go all that way and spend two weeks but yet you still have to stay within your budget, and you don't mind an informal dive operation.

Godwin Sadoa is the owner/manager of Peleliu Divers — a native Peleliuan who was born and raised on the property upon which the resort now stands.

Along with his Japanese wife, Mayumi, he runs a nice resort. The huts/bungalows are nice of mostly natural construction materials. There is a nice size balcony to sit on while palm trees and other vegetation surround you. There is no nice beach to go for a swim. Food is adequate. My wife would have preferred a larger variety of foods. Food is seasoned with a lot of MSG, so if that's a problem request no MSG.

Expect roosters crowing, frogs croaking and cats fighting all night long. Bring your earplugs. Mosquitoes will bite you. The islands are flat and the vegetation is lush so it rains quite a bit. But the diving is not affected. As stated in the 2006 Chapbook, the coral has been bleached by the 1998 El Nino; but the coral colors are coming back little by little. Just about every dive has strong currents; reef hooks are used here to keep you stationary while the multiple schools prof fish flash by as sharks chase them. This must be what others call "high voltage." A multitude of fish feed on the plankton floating by in the strong current. In my opinion, you need at least a 3mm wet suit. Although the water temperature is 80 to 82, the strong current forces a lot of water down your wet suit, so your body is constantly warming up a water layer. Also, the water temperature changes considerably with depth. Additionally, cold water pockets can arrive at your location while you are attached with a reef hook. I dove Blue Corner six times. I did six dives at the southern tip of Peleliu. Peleliu Cut was as good as the Blue Corner. I did not dive Peleliu Express. Godwin's Point was also a good dive; it was not the high voltage

type of dive, though, it was a coral garden. Blue Hole is usually crowded with boats and divers and this provides a safety net. Because if you get in trouble or drift far away from your boat, another boat can help you out. At the southern tip of Peleliu, your boat is most likely the only boat there. So take every signaling device available. Ngedbus Coral Garden was a nice relaxing dive with almost no current, plenty of nice pristine coral, anemones, clams etc. and just about no one dives it. German channel had strong current and nice coral gardens but it is dove to see mantas. Blue Hole was just a geological feature.

Sam's Tours, Caroline's Resort, August 2005, Shawn and Jackie Nelson (snelson@blackhole.com), Monticello, MN. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm. Caroline's offers a shuttle service (\$4) to Palau Pacific Resort where you can enjoy all the amenities they have to offer with no additional charges. We dove 3 days with Sam's tours. Diving with Sam's was quite good. The sea conditions were great so the long 45-60 min rides were beautiful instead of potentially miserable. The dive guides were nice, helpful, knowledgeable, and good at pointing stuff out. We made an effort to get to know them but there was no real connection. They would assign a different dive guide each day (Jim, BJ and Dexter). Of the 7 dives, 3 of them were essentially unguided because the guide and the rest of the group (no more than 4 other divers) left us trailing by ourselves with no safety sausage. Each day I would tell them I wanted my own to carry and they said they had one and they would stay close to us. At the end of one dive when we were left in the "dust," the guide said he held up the group to wait

for us for a few minutes, but when they didn't see us they kept going — not real responsible. On the wall dives we were told to go slow and easy, which we did, but it was too slow for the guides. They said it was because they had to stay by the divers that were eager and going fast. I would think as a guide you should be able to slow everyone down to wait for the group to be together. We certainly could have stayed with the group but seeking out creatures to photograph was more important to us. We rented a jeep and headed to a wonderful waterfall (Nardmau) where we spent many hours playing around in the "pools" on our hike to the falls. We were the only visitors at the falls. We dined out and found the food to be fantastic. Kramer's an owner/cook is an interesting guy from the states. We ate at Suriyo Thai restaurant — excellent and cheap (they don't take credit cards, which I found out after our meal). They had no problem with me coming back the next day to pay our bill. We also ate at Rock Island Café — an incredible menu but we were in the mood for pizza, which was excellent. Also our breakfasts at Caroline's were all great. Sam's Tours provided us lunch on the 3 days we dove with them and the food (especially the sushi) was great. With Sam's diving, you kept your camera with you or under the bench where you're stationed. An exclusive rinse tub was available back at the shop.

Sam's Tours, Palau Pacific Resort, February 2006, Chrisanda Button and Rickie Sterne (rickandchris@alltel.net), Elkins, AR. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: choppy, currents. There are a lot of fish and critters in Palau, and Sam's Tours made sure we saw many of them. DM's Daniel and Jim treated us as competent divers, focusing on pointing out

interesting critters and formations rather than herding us. Our dives were unrushed, usually ending when we were close to deco limits. Both DM's were sharp-eyed and knowledgeable about marine life and marine life behavior. When they turned their eyes and minds to finding the small stuff, we were shown dragonets, juvenile palette surgeonfish, tiny juvenile fire dartfish, several types of scorpionfish, and neat nudis. On our first dive at German Channel, three of the mantas we had not seen in Yap swam in close. We also saw shrimp-goby pairs, groupers, triggerfish, and parrotfish getting cleaned, three kinds of lionfish, and several nice clams. On to Blue Corner! The current was not ripping, but there was plenty of action: over a dozen black- and white-tipped sharks, dogtooth tuna, schools of fusiliers, jacks, barracudas, and red-tooth triggerfish. DM pointed out smaller stuff like anemonefish eggs. The current was stronger at New Drop Off, and when we surfaced Rickie said, "We saw it all." I didn't know there were so many pyramid butterflyfish in the world. Besides the sharks and schools of larger fish, we admired balled carpet anemones, nudis, a porcelain crab, sea stars, and clown triggerfish. A Napoleon wrasse accompanied us throughout the dive, often coming within a foot of divers. At Ulong Channel the soft corals were large and multi hued, the hard corals healthy, and a patch of lettuce coral amazing. We saw sharks, many fish, and nudis along the way. We ended the dive watching a large turtle chomping on a sponge. The wall beyond Saie's Tunnel, itself pretty neat, was a hard coral and anemone lover's delight. Probably the most impressive wall we have dove on. The wall also offered multiple nudis (3 types in one

six-inch circle), anemones, and flatworms. Sam's Tours' boats look just like all the other dive boats on the island. They are covered and carry two tanks for each diver. Nitrox is free. Our gear was set up on the boat each morning when we were picked up at the PPR dock. The DM's would have switched our gear between dives had we not done so ourselves. The box lunches were really good: choice of a half dozen sorts of sandwiches, a sushi tray, or the popular bento box. While the rides to the reef were long, we enjoyed cruising past the Rock Islands. We were taken to Jellyfish Lake to snorkel. The DM's heard us saying that we had never seen mandarinfish, and asserted that these little critters were on parade every evening right in front of the shop. They invited us to ride back to the shop with them. Five of us accepted the invitation. They gave us full tanks, and we backrolled into thirteen feet of rather murky water. We swam past trash to a pile of concrete rubble and within two minutes were observing over a dozen mandarinfish. We also saw pajama cardinalfish, nudis, a barramundi, a banded sea serpent, ringed pipefish, brown-banded pipefish, strapweed filefish, and broken plastic forks. Palau Pacific Resort is nice but pricey. Our second-floor garden view room in the 700 cluster was in a perfect location. Little foot traffic passed, and our balcony overlooked a large fishpond with turtles. The rooms are large with good linens. The swimming pool is big enough to swim in, the beach beautiful, the snorkeling off the beach good, and the two in ground jacuzzis hot. Food in the Coconut Terrace is also good but expensive. Attentive service.

Sam's Tours, Neco Marine, Cliffhouse, July 2006, Neal Langerman, San Diego, CA. (neallangerman@sbcglobal.net)

My wife and I have more than 65 years of diving experience between us around the world. In general, both operations were good, though our Sam's guide, Daniel, provided an exceptional experience on the three days we dove with him. Both operators picked us up at our hotel and provided lunch. The rides out to the outer reef — "Blue Corner," "New Drop-off" and "Blue Holes" — was long and often bumpy. The large pelagics and the soft corals were spectacular. Visibility was good, but milky, which contributed to difficult photography. Once we met Daniel, we stayed with him and had excellent dives. Neco provided a guide named Marcel, who did a great job of showing us the reef walls. The next day, Neco provided a guide named "Greg" who was on his last day as a guide. Conditions were rough and we could not go to the outer reefs. He insisted we do a live-prop entry along a wall called "Short Drop-off." I refused to allow my wife and me to do a back-roll off a skiff with the prop engaged and turning. After an ugly confrontation, Greg agreed to have the engine killed just before we entered the water. While Greg was leading the dives, he lost the group immediately, and never looked back. We stayed at "Cliffhouse," a rustic inn outside Koror. The accommodations were comfortable and the staff was helpful. The location looks out over a lovely lagoon, and the poolside bar — if open — is a beautiful place to relax.

Pohnpei

The Village Hotel, November 2005,
Henry Ziller (caziller@hotmail.com),
Conifer, CO. Experience: 101-250 dives.
 Vis: 40 to 110 Feet. Water: 83 to 88 F,
 calm, currents, no currents. We
 arranged the trip through Lisa Wallner

of Trip-N-Tour (Continental Cool Vacations) and she does a great job. Afternoon and night on Hawaii to connect to Majuro and Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands and Kosrae in the Caroline Islands finally arriving at Pohnpei. That is 6 hours 22 minutes waiting in airports, and 13 hours seven minutes flying time. The Village Resort was the first recipient of Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) Ecotourism Award. Bob, Patti, and son Jamie Arthur are really great and will do anything in their power to help you. There are twenty thatched-roofed bungalows. None are air-conditioned, but all have a variable speed ceiling fan and we were comfortable most of the time. (If air-conditioning is desired try the Joy Hotel in Kolonia. There are other dive operations in Kolonia). Ours had a view of the lagoon and nearby islands. It was 20 feet by 26 feet with two queen waterbeds, a love seat and chair, and a coffee table. All have a bathroom with shower only, sink, toilet, and lizards (they like to chew on blue and green colored plastic items, and move along the rafters so watch out for droppings). Do not bring food or sweet beverages to your room, as they attract critters like rats. Hot water was always available and the water is safe to drink. Tours are arranged. We toured Nan Madol, Kepirohi waterfalls and hiked Pohndolap Mountain (A pretty vigorous hike all uphill for 1.7 miles). We were there during the rainy season October through December (They get 400 inches a year in the mountains), but we had lots of sun every day. We were never caught out in the rain except while diving. We have plastic ponchos that work great and fit in a pocket. Everything seems to start at 9:30 AM whether touring, diving, or bumming a

ride to Kolonia. The van goes in many days and will let you ride free. Meals are great and there is a good variety. You can get food and drinks between 7 AM and 9 PM. The dive shop has no repair parts and little equipment that I would use. One regulator without the bite piece forced the renter to use the secondary reg as primary, and the gauges had water inside. It is a short downhill walk to the boat. They take your gear down on a truck, and use a van to transport divers back up at the end of diving. They have three boats, a 25 and 27 feet covered skiff with two 60 hp outboards and a 23-foot skiff with a single outboard. There was only five divers maximum during our dives. The seats consist of flotation seat cushions, one for the bottom and one for your back. No water for rinse tanks for camera or other equipment, but drinking water is available although sometimes cups are not. I suggest you bring a bottle of water. There was no oxygen, medicine kit, compass, gps, or radio on the boat. There was a cell phone and we were always in sight of land. The boat rides are 10 minutes to 60 minutes of mostly smooth water to get to dive sites. Manta Road dive site is 10 minutes away and we dived it once but no mantas. We looked from the boat on two other occasions, but no mantas. We did see white tip and gray reef sharks, large jacks, tuna, bump head parrotfish and napoleon wrasse on every dive. There were loads of anemone fish, butterfly fish, several eagle rays, and lots of other small fish. Most coral showed signs of bleaching. A skin worked fine. Divemaster and boat captain were good with informative pre-dive. Lunch with a drink is ordered from the hotel the night before and eaten on the boat during the 1 ½ hour surface interval. The return boat trip

sometimes includes a trip through the mangroves. The boat is usually back by 3:30 PM. Night diving is available but we did not take advantage of it. There was no rinse tank for camera or other gear on the small boat, and no camera facilities other than to purchase film at the resort, and the same for in the town of Kolonia, although we did not search for camera facilities in town. Power 110 volts 60 Hz are available 24/7.

The Village, July 2006, Neal Langerman (neal@chemical-safety.com), San Diego, CA. My wife and I have more than 65 years of diving experience between us around the world. The Village Resort provided all diving, meals and lodging ala carte. The Village is over 25 years old and is reported to be the best accommodations on Pohnpei. It is set on the side of a steep volcanic escarpment. Diving starts by meeting in the Long Building and walking down a steep coral-surfaced road to the waterfront. Gear is transported in a truck. If you are carrying equipment or cameras, this walk is onerous and unpleasant. At the waterfront, several bare bones skiffs are tied to the stone walls. The skiffs have no seats, no tank racks and minimal shade. Cushions are provided for divers to sit on the skiff deck and lean against the sides. Four or five divers, a guide and an operator appear to be the maximum safe load for the skiffs, which are powered by two outboard motors. The skiff is unprepared for most reasonably anticipated emergencies. Communications is provided by mobile phone, which may or may not have reception. Oxygen and a first-aid kit were unavailable. Indeed, when a guest fell in the skiff and dislocated a finger joint, no materials were available to provide a splint to stabilize the injury, though all that was needed was tape.

Diving can be inside the reef or on the outer reef and surrounding atolls. Visibility on the outer reef and atolls is markedly better than inside. Manta Ray Road is a channel inside the reef with two cleaning stations at which Manta's frequent. Visibility is relatively low in the channel, but is tide dependent. A reef hook is essential but not provided or even offered by The Village staff. Diving from the minimalist skiffs is simple. The guide helps you put on your BC and you back roll into the water. You need to remove your gear to get back into the skiff. The fish are typical Indo-Pacific, with beautiful hard corals. We saw many more anemones with the anemonefish on the reefs of Pohnpei than at Yap or Palau. Sharks and spotted eagle rays cruised just off the outer reefs. At one point a school (20 – 30) of young white tip sharks cruised by within 30–50 meters, well within the clear visibility. Ant Atoll is a must-do dive. The water clarity is exceptional. The hard corals were the most beautiful we saw in FSM. On our first dive, a spotted eagle ray swam by about 20 meters out from us. White tips and black tips were hunting on the shallow reef, in about 20 feet of water. Large clown fish and their anemone were abundant. The drift dive through the Ant Atoll channel, about 2 hours into the incoming tide was exceptionally exciting. While the guides were helpful, we found the overall operation to be less professional than we expected based on the reputation of The Village. The senior management was responsive to reasonable requests only with great effort on our part – well beyond what any guest at a resort should be forced to expend. Their attitude resulted in our overall frustration with what otherwise would be an exceptional resort.

SAIPAN

Speedy Turtle Dive Op, Aqua Resort, Yvonne Lanelli, NM. Experience: 350 dives. Saipan, a U.S. territory 120 miles north of Guam, boasts highways, high-rise resort hotels, mega-malls, strip clubs, and 24-hour poker clubs. Aqua Resort Saipan is a classy place. Rented a car to explore World War II bunkers, rusted planes, overgrown guns and tanks; and museums reflecting both American and Japanese perspectives. Saipan's tourist industry caters to Japanese. American-Russian-owned Speedy Turtle Dive Op is downtown, five minutes from the dock. It's a full service shop, with instruction, rentals, and gear sales. Divemaster Eric Javier picked up me and my dive buddy at the hotel and drove us to the dock where we met Captain Mark and his 21-foot Sea Blue (115 hp Yamaha, cell phone, first aid kit, DAN O2, water and snacks, no head) for a two-tank dive to two jaw-dropping coral mounts, less than 10 minutes from shore. At Dimple, I descended over plate and antler coral and swarmed for 45 minutes with schools of pyramid fish, squirrelfish, butterflyfish and surgeonfish in 80-foot visibility and a light current. At Ice Cream, a flotilla of two dozen eagle rays soared above a white-tipped, pickup-truck-sized coral mount. And, there were plenty of Pacific tropicals. Next day it was the Grotto, a world class dive. 110 slippery steps descend into a giant throat formed by immense stone boulders. Eric hefted my tank and BCD and scampered down and I carried my personal gear with the other. Waves from two directions slapped Volkswagen-sized boulders, creating a washing machine effect. I followed Eric under a rock bridge into the Closet, one of the Grotto's three passageways. Thirty feet

down, the water calmed. Hundreds of butterflyfish – pyramid, raccoon, long-nose, saddleback, long-fin and penant—surrounded me. From above, the bright morning sun filled the grotto with blue light. I swam through the Closet, emerging at in open ocean along a wall. At 100 feet with 125 ft. vis, a school of barracuda hung 50 feet away. A light current carried me above giant boulders covered with algae and cauliflower coral. A pair of two-striped clownfish scurried inside a carpet anemone. Orange-band and eye-striped surgeonfish, pale nose parrotfish, yellow and Achilles tangs and yellow-stripe goatfish schooled around me. I followed Eric through many passages before returning to the Grotto, where my dive discovered a white-tip reef shark with three pups, each three feet long. To exit, I followed a buoy line and Eric timed the surge so I could hand up my gear. Next day it was the other side of the island for a shore dive at Obyan Beach, where a wrist-thick line guides entries and exits through the current. At 50 feet, I explored coral channels in 100-plus viz, photographing star-eye parrotfish, two octopi, leaf fish camouflaged in antler coral, lionfish, emperor angels, stonefish, and thread-fin butterflyfish. Great diving.

Yap

Beyond the Reef, O'Keefe's Waterfront Inn, July 2006, Neal Langerman (neal@chemical-safety.com), San Diego, CA. We did two dives a day for seven days with Beyond the Reef using a small skiff with a guide and operator. We were the only divers for the entire time and got comfortable with our guide and operator. One day, two snorkelers joined us, but the skiff was not overly crowded. Beyond the Reef

caters to the particular interests of the divers. July is rainy season and not the time the large schools of mantas gather in the cleaning stations. However, we were able to dive with up to seven of these large fish and the mantas remained near us for the better part of the hour dive. On other occasions we were visited by one to four mantas. January through April is the best time of the year to visit Yap to see mantas. Yap diving is much more than mantas. The south and west walls provide vistas of hard corals at least as beautiful as the soft corals of Palau. Spotted eagle rays, reef sharks, and an assortment of reef fish are abundant. Diving is easy. A backroll entry puts you in a gentle current and you drift at comfortable depths in extremely clear water. The skiff had an acceptable boarding ladder that simply required removing your fins and climbing onboard. The skiff followed our bubbles and I never felt at risk of being left behind. The owner of Beyond the Reef, Dave Vecella, picked us up at our hotel every morning. He made certain that everything was planned and executed to our satisfaction. He was a perfect host. We made all of our arrangements through Beyond the Reef and booked into O'Keefe's Waterfront Inn on Dave's recommendation. This was a superb five room Inn with the rooms extending over the water. The rooms were designed to make you feel like you were on a 19th century sailing schooner. The well appointed accommodations were comfortable and provided a drying closet off the porch overlooking the bay. Waste heat from the air-conditioning condenser was directed into this closet and wet clothing and dive gear was quickly dried.

Traders Ridge Resort, March 2006, Tim, Apopka, FL. Experience: Over

1000 dives. Vis: 25 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, currents. Traders Ridge met us at the Yap airport and took care of us the entire stay. The Resort is comfortable with AC and plenty of hot water. King size beds, mini bar, drinking water, pool, laundry service and restaurant all top notch. The Resort was recently remodeled but retains the architecture of the early 1900's. The food was good and fresh. The service was 5 star. Traders Ridge had just recently taken over the dive operation and retained most employees. The Dive shop, equipment room, air fill station and marina are in one spot. Easy walk from your room. They offer Nitrox for those certified. Equipment room was secured and had a nice breeze through at night so the gear was dry each morning. The check out dive was to Manta Ridge and that is one of the prime dive sites on the island. Mike and Xavier were our divemasters the 6 days we stayed and they are great. After the first few dives we could pick our spots and dive to the limits of our computers. Our three divers had several dives over 90 minutes waiting for the mantas. Grey sharks, whitetip sharks, Napoleon wrasse, horse eye jacks, large schools of barracuda on most any dive. Lionfish, nudibranchs, turtles, moray eels and starfish are common. We enjoyed the night dive for mandarinfish. Large number hidden in the staghorn coral. The weather was 84 degrees most days and cloudy. Occasional rains helped cool things off and did not affect diving. The island tour arranged by Traders Ridge was a nice way to see the island as we waited our last day for a 10pm flight out. UW Photography Comments: No dunk tanks for cameras on boats. There are protected compartments for your cameras. Little macro opportunity.

Traders Ridge Resort, April 2006,

Dennis Lewis (basileuslewisd@msn.com), Fresno, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 20 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm. Werner Lau closed shop the week before we got to Yap. Traders' Ridge hired a DM to run the shop and a local boat captain and diving guides. Very nice people and they tried to make the dives interesting. That said, four days of the Manta Cleaning Station was three days too much for my wife and me. The four other divers started each day with the chant, "Manta, manta, manta!" We saw five rays the first day. None after that. Four days of hanging out on the sand, 20' viz and nothing to look at. Great fun! Only on the last day did we manage a different local. Here we saw hundreds of tropical fish including two lion fish, sole, pair of filefish and a lot of healthy hard corals. A wonderful dive. Traders' Ridge. Great staff, great rooms and wonderful food.

Yap Divers, Manta Ray Bay Hotel, February 2006, Chrisanda Button and Rickie Sterne (rickandchris@alltel.net), Elkins, AR. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to F, choppy. We were in transit to Palau. We liked the hotel. Our standard ocean view room was large and comfortable. Our carved wooden door sported a hawksbill turtle, repeated on our bed covers and shower curtain. The room had two double beds, a writing desk, a comfortable chair and table, and plenty of storage space. Our small balcony, with its own small table and chairs, overlooked the lagoon. The shower was huge. The ceiling fan was backed up by air conditioning. A carafe of coffee was delivered to our room each morning just minutes after our wake-up call. There was a sort of Joseph Conrad ambience to the place. The staff were most obliging. The restaurant is an old wooden boat docked in front of the

hotel. Ocean view rooms are really boat view. The breakfast buffet was \$10. Lunch sandwiches were \$8.50 with soups and veggie specials (quite tasty) for less. The hotel bakes its own bread, delectably. We enjoyed our meals. Yap Divers is onsite. Nitrox is free. We were assigned a locker in the shop. There are outside hanging racks. Water in the three rinse tanks outside was changed daily. For the first two days of our stay, our group was assigned to their large boat and taken to the walls. The dives were all slow drifts led loosely by a divemaster. While maximum depths were stated in the dive briefings, they were not strictly enforced. If the divemaster were at 60 feet and a couple of divers dropped down to 75 for a while, nothing was said. We were asked to signal the DM when we got to 1000 psi so we could go shallower for the remainder of the dive. We were with a group of experienced divers (with 400 dives, we were the least experienced), and all our dives lasted over an hour. Yap Caverns was the prettiest. The hard coral cover on the sloping wall was in good condition, and a variety of fishes and invertebrates was present. We saw a pair of emperor shrimp, several nudibranchs, and colorful clams. The DM pointed out a leaf scorpionfish. A couple of common lionfish and a clown triggerfish showed up, too. On other sites, damage inflicted on the coral by the typhoon two years ago was evident. Magic Kingdom was an interesting study in the regrowth of hard corals (the coral is coming back). We saw small schools of jacks, barracudas, and sweetlips. A number of sharks swam by, as well as three turtles. At Cabbage Patch a large black ray on the sand was cleaned, indifferent photographers. On our third day we boarded two small boats and headed to the M'il Channel

to see the mantas. Who failed to show up after we made a sprint against the current at 80 feet in water so murky I was afraid to lose sight of the DM. The DM labored mightily to entertain us, pointing out a sleeping shark, a crocodile fish (pretty cool), several nudibranchs, and whatever tropicals the small coral head offered. Same story on our second dive: no manta. The Aussies, who headed out to M'il Channel earlier in the morning, did see mantas. The rides to the sites were long, but the boats were covered and reasonably comfortable. They gave us towels between dives and served hot tea, water, and fresh-baked sweet breads. While we found the wall diving in Yap pleasant, I would rate it as pretty good Caribbean diving.

NEW ZEALAND

Dive! Tutukaka, Pacific Rendezvous, July 2006, Dr. Lee Vliet (mantalee@aol.com), Tucson, AZ. Experience: 500+ dives. Vis: 40 to 50 feet. Water: 59 to 60 F, choppy, surge, strong currents. We thoroughly enjoyed Dive. Tutukaka. We are not normally enthusiastic about coldwater diving, but the staff of Dive! Tutukaka made it easier than usual and a memorable time! The Poor Knights Islands offer a wealth of sites and experiences and marine life – we only had a brief time to scratch the surface, and obviously, their winter is not the ideal time to go. However, all our schedule could do. Crew helpful with adjustments we needed for cold water, rental gear well maintained and efficient arrangements to set us up. Glad we brought our own gloves! Needed them and they had none to buy or rent. Boat large comfortable. 5 hour trip to site; hot drinks and soups