

with hard and soft corals, nudibranchs and reef fish. The dives were drift with the tender picking the divers wherever they surfaced, making it very comfortable and stressless. Water was 82 F. Visibility was never better than 30 feet, with 10 feet being the norm in the muck. On another dive there was a profusion of colorful reef fish, another mantis shrimp, a ribbon eel who angrily came out of its den and posed for all the photographers, an orange frog fish, and a pair of mating blow fish. There were currents from every direction and the system of picking the divers up is comforting. Bangka Island had vibrant reef full of soft and hard corals, all colors. Large cuttlefish, Emperor angelfish, regal angelfish, Moorish idols, many anemones with their resident clown, saddleback, Clark's and spinecheek guests. At Haga Island it rained torrents but when the sun came out when we finished the dive at one of most colorful coral reefs yet. Every type of Tropical Indo Pacific reef fish and anemone. Ripping currents and still 20 foot visibility. Next day back to Lembeh Strait and muck diving in the same area as we spent the whole first day. They should have advertised the charter as a muck dive expedition, but then the unwary would not have signed up. The \$100 fuel surcharge/person is unearned. Except for the day spent at La Haga Island, we never went beyond where the day boats venture, within an hour or so, at most, from its base at Kugkungan Bay, hardly what one expects when going on a live-aboard. Besides, no fuel was spent on the second tender used when there is a full complement of guests – with the crowding on the single tender, one had to wait until the diver next to you was finished and out of the way before you could get into your BC and fins. By the time the last one was in, it was

anybody's guess where the guides were at the bottom, taking into account the currents and limited visibility. Instead of moving the boat at night, the change in position was done every morning at 5:00 a.m., waking everyone. This perhaps makes sense from a nautical point of view since it never moved more than a few miles from its previous location.

MICRONESIA

Chuuk

Odyssey, February 2006, Chrisanda Button/Rickie Sterne), Elkins, AR. (rickandchris@alltel.net Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to F, calm, no currents. We arose at 0330 in a desperate bid to get our luggage onto the airplane (those of you who fly out of major hubs cannot imagine the problems of divers who must begin their journeys on tiny Embraer jets). We went to bed on the boat a bit after midnight. Half our group was plagued with sinus and ear problems for the next week, and we kept falling asleep at 2030 and awaking at 0430. The Odyssey is a comfortable boat. The cabins are huge. Even with a queen-sized bed we had more floor space than is usual on a live-aboard, and the shower was of normal dimensions. Each cabin has a small TV and DVD player with two sets of headphones so our neighbors could watch action movies while we read. There are also reading lights on both sides of the beds. Cabin towels were replaced daily, and hot water was abundant. The dining area was a sunny room with hardwood tables. The salon on the deck below offered soft couches and a large TV, while housing the boat's outstanding library of marine ID and history books. The half-covered sun deck was

large enough to accommodate all 16 divers during surface intervals. The food was good home cooking in liberal quantities. Breakfast was from a menu, while lunch and dinner were served buffet style. There were sweet snacks between morning dives and outstanding savory snacks (sushi, calamari) in the afternoon. Candy, nuts, and package cookies were always available. On the Odyssey, everything is included in the ticket price. There is no extra charge for Nitrox or the bar. The dive operation treated us as responsible adults capable of determining our own limitations. Dive briefings were about the history of the ship, information about penetrations, and the marine life we would see. Divemasters offered to serve as guides before every dive. With the help of the DMs we could see areas of the ships we would not have penetrated alone. There were five divemasters/instructors and Captain Lenny to assist sixteen divers. The dive deck provided each diver with a station that included under-bench storage. Warm towels appeared after each dive, and the deck shower was warm. The diving in Truk Lagoon was like no other. From massive destruction comes great beauty. The wrecks themselves, qua wrecks, are truly awe-inspiring. Heavy decking is twisted in sinuous forms. Entire portions of ships have been blown away. What I found most moving were the small objects that had been dropped as men ran to their battle stations or struggled to safety. Still, after sixty years, the wrecks have also become reefs. We saw gorgeous carpet anemones guarded by three kinds of anemone fish. Soft corals covered king posts and masts. Tropical fish were cleaned in holds and along decks. We saw quite a few nudibranchs, several turtles and morays, and one pair of eagle rays. Once a week the Odyssey

does a shark feed followed by a dive on the lagoon's outer reef. The diving in Truk Lagoon is unique, and the Odyssey with its excellent crew offers a safe and comfortable base for doing up to five dives a day there.

Odyssey, March 2006, James Rieter (james_rieter1@hotmail.com), Las Vegas, NV. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm, no currents. Rather than designating the Truk Odyssey as a live aboard, calling it a "bed and breakfast" with fantastic diving is more of a proper description. We did have some problems with Continental Airlines. Our connection in Guam was missed with a 50 min. layover. We could get another flight out the next morning arriving 14 hours late and missing two morning dives. (Capt. Lenny made up these two dives for us on Sat.). Never plan an international flight with less than a two-hour layover. A group going to Palau on the Aggressor were at least 24 hours late. Continental has an "island hopper" that departs Honolulu that makes 4 stops before Truk. Two of these stops are Kosrae and Pohnpei. Stay at one of these locations, do a few dives, relax and get better adjusted to the time then fly into Truk on the same connecting flight. We were met at Truk airport when we exited baggage claim by Capt. Lenny. We had a quick check in on the boat, shown to our large room (11' by 14") and soon after lunch we were diving our first wreck. The crew will spoil you; they even put your fins on your feet for you on the dive platform. The boat: Very well thought out and spacious design. Even the single rooms were larger than some deluxe rooms on other boats. The dining area was spacious and they even had a separate lounge area with sound and video equipment. The dive deck was

also workable and would easily handle a full boat. Food was tasty and plentiful and is served buffet style – an open gate for diving and that some of your party may be doing extra deco time and allows the rest of the group to eat when they are ready. Truk is a must dive location with warm water and low impact easy fining. The Odyssey will let you dive Truk the way you want. Our group diving experience level ranged from real newbies, techs to dive shop owners and everyone was happy. Dive guides are fantastic, just ask and they will get you there.

Odyssey, May 2006, Raymond Rowe (growe@nycap.rr.com), Niskayuna, NY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Because of high water temperature, there were a lot of multicellular creatures in the water that reduced vis. Still, vis was fine for most purposes except photography. Vis inside wrecks was limited and so photos of large objects like airplanes and trucks in holds was not possible. Still, fantastic diving and close up photos of cockpits, radiators and tires turned out fine. Photos on deck of large objects like tanks were fine also. Some reports of locals using explosives from the ships for illegal fishing around the wrecks and in holds. Not much enforcement apparent. Divemasters and all the crew were terrific. So were the passengers. Can't imagine a better trip.

Odyssey, Truk Stop, May 2006, Larry Dewese, Tomball, TX. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 150 to 200 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Before going on the trip I completed the TDI advanced nitrox and decompression procedures courses which came in handy on the dives. If you go to Truk, fly through Guam and don't take the island tour

like I did. My flight stopped in Majuro, Kwajalein, Kosrae, and Pohnpei before getting to Truk. It wasn't the stopping that was a pain, but it was the TSA rules they use in the Marshall Islands. At each stop, except Kwajalein, half the people were forced to get off the plane with their carry on luggage and then the entire plane would be searched. I got to Truk a day before I was scheduled to board the Odyssey. Truk Stop Hotel has been in business for a long time. They had a driver pick me up at the airport. They have a restaurant, a bar, a dive shop. I was there Saturday evening and most of the day on Sunday. They do not run dive trips on Sunday and the dive shop is not open either. The bar does not open until 5:00pm. The Truk Stop is adequate. The rooms are basic and the electricity goes off for a few seconds several times a day. The Blue Lagoon was a lot nicer place to stay. The Odyssey is a wonderful boat with great staff. When you board the boat you are taken care of. They treat you like an adult certified diver. I was able to dive my own profiles all week. I used twin Al 80's and usually 24% nitrox for back gas. They can pump up to 100% O2 so on many dives I slung an Al 40 with 50% and an Al 40 with 100% for deco. I had a single cabin. There is a DVD player in each room. The boat has a large lounge/TV room with a huge library of movies. The dining area is large and the meals were delicious. The boat has a well-stocked bar and all drinks are included. A thorough dive briefing is given at every new dive site. The DMs take turns giving the dive briefs and they use well-drawn diagrams of the wrecks, features, and points of interest where special marine animals like lionfish might be. You do not have to be a tech diver to enjoy the wrecks of Truk Lagoon. Several divers

used single Al 80's. If you want to use doubles you have to reserve them in advance and they allow you to dive to your level of certification. The decks of most of the wrecks were about 65 to 85 fsw. The masts and king posts sometimes rise to within 20 feet of the surface and are completely covered with beautiful soft and hard coral. There are at least four DM's plus the captain that will lead dives for anyone that requests it. I penetrated every wreck and enjoyed seeing the engine rooms, artifacts, cargo, and even the skeletons. The San Francisco Maru is one of the signature wrecks at Truk and we did it on the last day. A Hoki Maru lower cargo holds is full of 1940 Nissan trucks in excellent condition. I dived 12 different wrecks plus the Betty Bomber and the shark feed and made a total of 22 dives. On some wrecks we only made one dive and others we did three dives. Schedule a land tour to see some additional history of the war. I stopped at Hawaii on the way home and dived on Maui for a few days, however a better plan would have been to schedule an additional week in Palau, Yap, or even Bikini. Read the *World War II Wrecks of the Truk Lagoon* by Dan E. Bailey.

Odyssey, June 2006, Martha and Jeff Hubbard (hubbard182@att.net), Glenmont, NY. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm, choppy, no currents. This was our 4th week aboard Odyssey in 3 years. The big question, now that the owners are taking some time off, was, "Can the new Captain do the job that Lenny and Cara did?" British Captain Nick is absolutely up to the Kolczynsky standard, and our 4th week aboard was as pleasant as the others. The crew, mostly of some years' service, is excellent. We did miss ship's cat Shasta, who now lives in Colorado. The wrecks are little changed – still the

best wreck diving to be had. Comparison to our photographs of 2003 shows that one-half to two-thirds of the soft coral, which cloaked most of all the wrecks then, has gone. The cause is uncertain (to us) but the dynamite fishing which is reported and which the Chuukese government does not control is a likely contributing factor. E-6 processing is gone and almost nobody misses it. Standard nitrox mix is 30%, fills always exceed 3000 psi. Big (112 cu ft) tanks available, and yoked doubles. Even the heavy breather in the couple got dives > 1 hr. Max operating depth [1.6 atm] for 30% O₂ is 143 ft, which is fine for every dive except San Francisco Maru, for which you breathe air or 24% O₂.

Odyssey, June 2006, Bill Schlegel, Jefferson City, MO. Vis: 50 to 150 feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, no currents. J.J. led two buddy teams of divers into the engine room of this sunken Japanese fleet oiler to see the bones of a great sea turtle. The penetration started on the deck of the ship at a depth of 93 feet. We slipped into an aft hatch and down three flights of stairs, along railings, over the huge steam engines, spiraling downward. Past the racks of tools that the Japanese sailors had left as their ship was bombed and sank in 1944. Past the huge hole in the side of the ship that a bomb from a US Navy carrier plane had left. At the bottom of the hold and J.J. pointed out the huge turtle skeleton (leatherback ?). The overhead was close and the silt on the bottom was thick. Then, 5 beeps from my Cochran computer, which notified me that I was at 133 feet and now had a decompression obligation in an overhead environment. Not all Truk Lagoon diving is decompression diving. There are beautiful dives on and outside wrecks that have decks and

superstructure in the 60-to 100-foot range. There are enough to keep the average open water diver busy for a week. However, many wrecks sit at 120-130 feet with decks at 80-90 feet. They are encrusted with multicolored soft corals, branching hard corals, sea fans, scallops, and frequent brittle stars. The growth is most dense along the railings, the superstructure, masts and booms. Fish life is prolific, with everything from an occasional grey reef shark or eagle ray to schools of jack trevally and small tuna swirling overhead. Inquisitive schools of longfin batfish that liked to be fed out of your hand were on several dives. The routine inhabitants of the wrecks were sweetlips, groups of Moorish idols, banner fish, many types of butterfly fish including forceps and four-spot butterflies, chromis and damselfish of several varieties were abundant. Small hard coral heads seemed to be everywhere on the railings and plates. And blennies, octopi were seen on several wrecks, pipefish and lionfish seemed to pose for the camera. Divers embark on the Odyssey from the grounds of the beautiful Blue Lagoon Dive Resort, which was run by Kimeo Aisek, who relocated most of the wrecks in Truk Lagoon in the 1970s and 1980s. He then ran the shore-based dive operation until his death a few years ago. Many of the best wrecks are deeper so the Odyssey runs its dive operation differently than other live-aboards. They pump 30% Nitrox for everyone. The instructors can certify you within the first day or two as you are diving. They also hand out Nitrox computers to those who don't have one. Everyone is encouraged to dive with at least steel 112s that are overfilled to 125 cu. ft., or to use twin 80s if you have a B.C. that will hold them. Part of our group still used single aluminum 80s if

they were real air sippers. I averaged about 1 hour per dive, with fairly square profiles and average depths of 90 to 120 feet. Most dives had a short deco stop. The hang bar on the Odyssey is best described as an inverted football goalpost lowered to 15 feet when divers are in the water. Diving is allowed 24 hours a day. The Odyssey is a 132-foot live-aboard, recently refurbished. The ship is stable and Truk Lagoon was calm (as usual). The rooms are larger than those of most of the competition. All rooms have private showers and ample storage space for gear. There is a huge carpeted library/movie room on the main deck with an even larger dining room on the upper deck. There is a perfect sundeck near the bar. The dive gear area is just about perfect, with ample wet storage, all cylinders filled in place at your station with gas of choice and plenty of drying rack room for suits. A spacious camera table with compressed air and dry storage space is at the end of the gear benches. Most dives are done off the Odyssey's spacious dive platform. The ladders are perfect and for those who would prefer not to climb up the ladder with all their gear on, the crew were more than willing to assist clients with gear removal in the water and then lift it for them. Kent and Sammy, who were the two local Chuukese divemasters, know every nook and cranny on the wrecks. Their cheerful assistance all week resulted in a substantial tip from me near the end of the week. The food, prepared by Gina, the cook and Kermi, her assistant/stewardess, was wonderful and varied. There were fresh snacks after each day dive. There is an open bar but, the rule is no diving for 8 hours after imbibing. Nick, the 1st captain (Australian) J.J., the 2nd captain (U.S.A.), and Charlie, another dive-master from Wimbledon, England,

rounded out the crew. They organize a shark feed every week. Some amateur reef ecologists in our group commented how this isn't natural and changes the reef ecology, etc. But they managed to convince themselves to go anyway. After the dive, all the divers in our group were convinced that this shark feed was one dive they will never forget! Fifty or more 5-foot grey reef sharks and one 10-foot silvertip tore apart several tuna purchased from the local fisherman in a feeding frenzy as good as anything you'll see on the Discovery Channel. All of this viewed safely and from 50 feet away in 150 ft. visibility. All the wrecks are covered with 62 year's growth of hard and soft corals and swarms of tropical fish. The Heinan Maru is a 510 ft. long submarine tender that sits on its side with the upper side at 80 ft. She still has a cargo of Japanese Long Lance torpedoes, spare periscopes and artillery ammunition. The Yamagiri Maru is a 437 ft. ammunition ship with a hold of 14 diameter inch shells for a Japanese battleship. The Fumiziki is a 320 ft. long destroyer that sits at 125 feet on the sand with its stern blown off by a bomb and a lionfish on the bow that likes to pose for divers. Its torpedo launchers, depth charge launchers and artillery pieces are fascinating. The Shinkoko Maru is a 510-foot long fleet oiler (tanker) which apparently doubled as a hospital ship and has an operating room and some human bones positioned on the operating table by the dive-masters for tourists to view. It sits on sand at 133 feet, with its deck at 90 feet and superstructure at 75 feet. Above decks there are friendly longfin batfish that like to eat bananas out of your hand. The Nippo Maru is a 400-ft ship that sits in 165 feet of water with the deck at 120 feet and a Japanese medium tank posing on the foredeck. It

also features three field guns (cannons) on the aft deck with their barrels pointing up into the air, aimed at attacking planes that are long gone. The Fujikawa Maru is a beautiful dive and has commemorative plaques to Kimio Aisek and the Japanese Navy. The Hoki Maru has its construction equipment and a bulldozer balanced on a single steel beam over the gaping hold. The Sankisan Maru, a 370 ft long ammunition ship, had its entire stern third destroyed by a bomb and subsequent immense secondary explosion of its cargo. There are interesting artifacts in the midsection, including airplane parts, a Japanese Zero fighter with spare engines along with some trucks. According to the dive briefing there are millions of rounds of small arms ammunition in the forward hold of the Sankisan. There is a pile of bullets! Other outstanding dives are the Kiyusumi, a light auxiliary cruiser, the huge Rio De Janeiro Maru and the Kensho Maru. The San Francisco Maru is a deep dive with the deck at 174 feet and the bottom at 210. It has two Japanese Type 95 light tanks on deck along with aircraft bombs, artillery pieces and ammunition, with motor vehicles and equipment everywhere. This is, of course, a technical dive, which the Truk Odyssey is well equipped to provide the support for if you have the training. The dive to the San Francisco Maru was done by a subset of the group's technical divers off the Odyssey's 20 ft aluminum tender, which is also well designed for diving. Helium is available and was used for that dive, although one could do it on air or 23% Nitrox with much shorter bottom and longer deco times. Part of our group (Triton Dive Club out of Chicago) who had been to Truk about 10 years ago felt that there has been a continuing

pilfering of small artifacts from the wrecks.

Thorfinn, April 2006, Ioana Fiore (joanfuhr@yahoo.com), Santa Cruz, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, no currents. Accommodations: cabins are not luxurious but perfectly adequate with comfy beds. Some can be cramped, some roomy, some sharing community showers/toilets and some with in-cabin facilities. Most, if not all, have natural light from windows or skylights and in-cabin sinks. Comfy salon with big-screen TV, good video/DVD/library with historical data on WWII activities in Truk Lagoon. The wreck diving is unique and deep (hence the mandatory safety stops). Numerous and diverse artifacts to view (both above decks and below), plus great coral reef environment formed on the ships, teeming with lots of fish and critters. They hyperfill tanks (in-water fills) for max bottom time on deeper dives. Dive guides are expert, knowledgeable, and conscientious – do not make it difficult for them to keep track of you by your going off alone, without telling them what you're doing, or by being inattentive to your dive profile. Even if you've never penetrated a wreck before, you can do it with these guys. I'd tip them individually as well as contribute to the common pot liberally – they get little, if any salary, and they dive 4-5x/day, 7 days/week for months. We didn't see (or hear about) them getting any off-time for de-gassing, and suspect they may be chronically bent – which, if true, is exploitative at best and downright cruel at worst. The dive tenders are super-fast transparently enclosed inflatables, with individual sit-atop gear bins with padded seats, grip bars, clip straps for headgear, easy-up ladder at the stern, and a sit-down

freshwater shower. Bar arrangements for alcohol are strange: Pre-notification of what you'll want, and/or you have to purchase by the bottle, or six-pack at the least—then you drink from your own supply that they keep under lock and key. Soft drinks are free. No juices. Food was good and in reasonable quantities. Good snacks served during the day, and the saltwater spa on the salon deck is great for dive post-mortems. The Thorfinn is extremely stable, no seasickness woes. The crew lives on the ship and the Captain (age 65+) and his post-pubescent local wife have a couple of babies running around (can you say “lead-paint poisoning hazard?”), so it's like a little fiefdom on the seas. And odd arrangement, but the diving was great.

Thorfinn, April 2006, Lee Bennion, Pine Grove, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 84 to 84 F, calm, choppy. As a divemaster with 150 dives, I was one of the least experienced divers of the 22 divers on the boat this week. The only diver with less experience was my son, with 60 dives. Divemasters did not have octopus regulators and would often lead 8-10 divers deep inside the ships. Made me uncomfortable that many people and not a visible way out.

Palau

Big Blue Explorer, May 2006, Mark Wilensby (mwilen161@aol.com). Water: 83 F. I booked the Big Blue Explorer through Ultimate Dive Travel in Woodridge, IL, and they did a first rate job. Since I was in Hong Kong on business, I was able to avoid going to Guam and overnighted in Manila and then on to Palau. The Big Blue takes a minimum of six divers (capacity of 20), and the Filipino crew is excellent. There

were 3 divemasters (Gat is Filipino and was in charge, Junior is English, and Jamie is American), all superb in knowledge and service. Steve Fish (yes, that's his real name) is a videographer with 13 years' living in Asia, and an encyclopedia of tales and information. From ample and varied meals, to cabin maintenance, to personal advice and assistance, this is an operation that's second to none. With only 9 divers, I had a cabin to myself without paying extra. They have two chase boats to take you to the dive sights (we needed just one), whereas the nearby Palau Aggressor loaded 20 divers onto one chase boat. The diving is exceptional – from coral to animal life, everything overshadowed my Caribbean diving experience. We did 4 dives daily plus a night dive, including Blue Corner 3 times.

Ocean Hunter II, December 2005, Cres Van Keulen (cres@vkam.com), Tiburon, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. I used United frequent flier miles to Guam via Osaka, Japan, then purchased Guam-Yap-Palau-Yap-Guam ticket from Cindy Harris of Micronesian Divers Assn. Because MDA is Guam-based, they can sell the expensive Continental Micronesia tickets at a discount when packaged with live-aboard, hotel, etc. In Palau, spent 1 night at the clean but basic West Plaza Desekel Hotel. If staying more than 1-2 days, you'll probably be much happier at the Palau Pacific Resort (only one with beach) or the Carolines Resort. New road being built around Babeldaob will really open the area up - maybe too much. The Rock islands of Palau are stunning. Couples should consider upgrading to the upstairs suite with its own balcony but it was double-booked when I was there and the boat owner's

cousin from the Philippines got it over my friends, Navy doctors from Okinawa. Only 5 of us onboard for our 10-day tour so we got lots of attention including fresh sashimi every night. The docs and I split the cost to hire a videographer who went diving with us for a day, then mailed the DVD to us. Capt. Mike from MN, divemasters Clayton, Gabby and Eddy, Arley the singing cook, and crew Richard were all great. We saw so many sharks, after a few days it was ho-hum, another shark. Most dives were fishy, with great coral, walls, caverns, and tons of healthy micro life. December weather was sublime — low 80s, occasional rain showers, comfortable. A pricey trip, but worth it.

Ocean Hunter, Fish'n Fins, February 2006, Tom Hawkins (hawkfly2@aol.com), Oakland, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm, currents. Four of us book the boat for a week. One of the best trips we have been on. From the incredible high octane diving to our superb hosts. Our crew and the owners of the boat could not have been more hospitable. No attention to detail was spared. From our warm showers and warm towels after every dive, to the great meals and snacks that came from the galley. They were even able to prepare a great birthday cake for my wife. The ability to have this boat with just my close friends and get into dive sites where the larger boats needed to shuttle their people into was fantastic. The diving itself was superb. Each dive was exciting with the discovery of new species of fish to the adrenaline filled shark action to the many dancing mantas in "German Channel." The boat is a small boat, but they are totally geared to the underwater photographer. There base staff is professional and

helpful with some of their staff having worked with numerous trips with National Geographic on the boat. I called ahead and told the owner Tova that my camera was jammed. She was able to have someone meet me within a half hour. This gentleman took my camera and had it back to me the next day with my film intact.

Ocean Hunter I, August 2006, Mike Plante, Gold Canyon, AZ. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, surge, currents. We wish the weather had been better — there were typhoons brewing. The staff did their best to get us to the prime dive spots but it was pretty risky at times in a small zodiac type boat. They knew we were “hard-core” so they took us when they probably should have passed on these spots.

Palau Pacific Explorer, 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. We originally were to spend the week aboard the Big Blue Explorer but a couple weeks before our departure we were notified that there were too few guests to operate the Big Blue so we were moved to the Pacific Explorer. We were the only two guests for the first 4 days, when a neat young couple joined us for the remainder of our live-aboard trip. The crew were all awesome. The food was endless and was surprisingly good. The 2 dive guides spent all of their time with us — eating, socializing and, of course, diving. Richard, from the UK, took some incredible pictures for us. Jamie, from Pennsylvania, was an interesting young lady who was great at guiding our dives and pointing lots of creatures. We dove 5 dives most days with at least 60 minutes per dive. We

used Nitrox (\$150/week extra) so our max depth was no more than 100 fsw. We saw sharks on almost every dive. The fish variety (big and small) was amazing. The coral seemed to be in great shape. Blue Corner is everything that we expected — hook on and watch the action! German Channel was great as we saw lots of manta rays on each visit there. We dove a couple WWII wrecks and snorkeled in Jellyfish Lake. One beautiful night was spent on Ulong (Survivor) beach for a barbecue.

Palau Aggressor II, March 2006, James A. Danse (JamesDanse@earthlink.net), Bolinas, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: to F, choppy, currents. The captain and entire dive crew were safety conscious. We stayed in port the first day due to severe storm rather than put to sea. They were concerned about head count and bottom times with each dive. The dive set up on the skiff and hydraulic lift platform was excellent. The gear rinse buckets could have had the water changed more frequently; they got really foul after 2 dives. Most of the dives involved strong currents. This was particularly so at Peleliu Corner where currents from multiple directions, including sudden down drafts, created a washing machine like effect that gave a few anxious moments. Great trip for intermediate to advanced divers.

Palau Aggressor, Palau Pacific Resort, April 2006, Mark Meredith, Galt, CA. (j4mark@yahoo.com) Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy, currents. The Palau Pacific resort was over priced and under serviced. They lost our reservations and then moved us to smoking twin rooms until we complained and they miraculously found our reservations. The Aggressor dive operation was

first class, they were knowledgeable, competent and fun. The visibility was slightly less than expected, but the grey reef, black tip, silver tip and white tip sharks were plentiful. A giant hammerhead was spotted deep by some. The diversity was incredible. Whale sharks are rare in Palau, the second captain diving in the waters for 25+ years had never seen one. We saw a baby. About 15' long, it came up from deep, swam with us for 20 minutes and then moved off. This whale shark had been captured, and had a rope around the tail encrusted with barnacles. This was a heartbreaker, and will probably kill it. The diving was structured but the staff was not obtrusive. A great destination and experience. UW Photography Comments: Cameras accommodated well, rinse barrels on the deck when returning from the dive, cameras on nonskid rubber mat on the dive skiff. Large camera table on the dive deck.

Palau Aggressor II, 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. Captain Mike Farmer and his crew provide a memorable diving and living experience of the best of Palau outer reef diving. The catamaran Aggressor II is a well-appointed, stable and extremely comfortable home for a week of world-class diving. The large salon and huge galley allow for living comfort that exceeds most land resorts. All diving is from a large, fast skiff. The skiff is secured in a lift cradle across the stern of the Aggressor. Boarding it is as easy as entering the ship's galley. Once all divers are on-board, the skiff is lowered into the water and pulls free of the mother-boat. Each diver's equipment – tank, regulator, fins, mask, etc. – remain on the skiff. Thus, the between

dive chore of managing loose equipment is eliminated. A short run to the dive site and an easy backroll entry drops you into spectacular water. Reef sharks, Napoleon wrasses, eagle rays, and turtles are intermixed with a huge variety of reef fish. The soft corals are beautiful. The walls seem to drop off forever. Most diving is drifting in the current, with three crew members in the water acting as guides. Blue Corner, Blue Holes and New Wall are always close. Ulong Channel, two days before the full moon on the incoming tide was the most exciting drift dive we have ever done. The fast current, the coral and the fish created a kaleidoscope of images diverse images. The same channel two days later was good, but nowhere near the first trip. We did not go to Peleliu because of the weather. According to the crew, the spring and fall are the best times to go south to this island of World War II infamy. Captain Mike was totally involved with his guests and joined the diving activity two or three times a day. He understood what each guest was interested in seeing and worked hard to make each dive an exceptional experience for every diver. His enthusiasm and professionalism were reflected by every member of the crew.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Chertan, November 2005, David McKowen, Andalusia, AL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 80 to 86 F, calm, no currents. I have spent over six months on the Chertan in nine years. I photographed over one hundred different nudibranchs this trip. The crew is well trained, friendly, and knowledgeable. Rob VanDerLoos, the owner/captain,