

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

welcome.

NIUE

Niue Dive, Matavai Resort, February 2006, Joseph Breivogel, Portland, OR. (breivog@teleport.com) Experience:

251-500 dives. Vis: 80 to 140 Feet.

Water: 81 to 84 F, surge. Niue is an old upraised coral atoll about 1500 miles NE of New Zealand. It is one of the smallest countries in the world, with a population of 1500. It is untouristy, relaxed, safe, and clean. It has no significant beaches (high limestone cliffs mostly), no streams and no mangroves. It reminds me a bit of Cozumel's west coast — though much more spectacular. Visibility is excellent due to lack of sand and runoff. Access is via a few small harbors — the boats trailered there and lowered into the water with a small crane. Dive boats are 12 ft inflatables with a hard bottom. The sole dive operator is Niue Dive, run by an Australian couple (ex-Mike Ball staffers), Ann and Ian Franklin. It is next door to the Matavai resort. They have good new equipment to hire, if needed. They use aluminum 80 tanks filled to 3000 psi. The 2 dives boats are rigid inflatables, holding 4 divers plus Ian or Ann. They have DAN Oxygen kits, a VHF radio, and a backup outboard motor. The boats are trailered to the put-in (they have 2 or 3 they use), where the boat is lowered into the water. Dive sites are mostly within 5-10 minutes, though northern ones can be 20- 30 min away. Two tank dives of 30-60 minutes each, with 60 minute surface interval are the norm. Surface interval spent in boat where they have water and cookies. You backward roll into the water, and on surfacing, pass up your weights, camera, and get out of

your BCD (float the tank, with the guide pulls up into the boat), then haul yourself in on grablines — there is no ladder. This might be an issue for older or heavier divers! Also, there is no diving on Sunday, due to islanders' religious laws. Most dives were through coral gullies, swim-throughs, and caves in the limestone formations. As full force ocean waves impact the cliffs, surge can be a problem. Though Niue has little fishing pressure, we did not see any large fish - a few trevally, 2 reef sharks, and a big bumphead parrotfish. Only one anemone (with clown fish). Quite a few octopus. A few lionfish, and fair number of lobsters. Also blue ribbon and spotted moray eels. Banded sea snakes are everywhere, including inside caves where they breed and nest. The snakes are poisonous, but not aggressive, and you can gently handle them. Some caves have air pockets that you can surface into. As there is no barrier reef, the island is exposed to the full force of hurricanes, and shallow corals are not abundant. Because the water is exceptionally clear, coral grows deeper than usual, with nice plate coral formations below 60 feet. The premier resort is Matavai is about 6 miles south of the airport. There are 22 rooms, a few of which are air-conditioned (having higher prices). They are clean, fan cooled, with comfortable beds, and have good hot showers and fresh towels daily. The location is spectacular — cliff-top, facing west. There is a nice pool, and the restaurant and bar are good, but a bit limited in selections (2 or 3 mains). Rooms have TVs and DVDs can be borrowed from the office. Niue has only 6 hours a day of broadcasting. During low tide, it is possible to walk out on the "reef" (a limestone bench) and explore tide pools. Other areas have natural pools to swim in.