

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.

The resort has mountain bikes to lend (free) and it is possible to explore most of the Island on them. There are limited other choices of hotels — a motel and a few guesthouses. Also only a few other eating options. Niue is reached from Auckland on a Friday Air New Zealand 737 flight or Tuesday from Samoa on Polynesian Air. Returns are also Fri/Tues. February is hot (80-85 air, 83 water) and scattered showers. Hurricanes are a possibility. June-Sept would be better weather-wise for Niue, but if you are also visiting New Zealand it would be cold and rainy there. got in 4 days of diving, only one of which was really rainy — but the caves were still OK. UW Photography Comments: no special provision for cameras (just a big plastic box). Cameras handed passed over by guide after divers rolled back into water. Guide returns to boat first, and assists divers back in. On shore, there is a big fresh water rinse tank. Niue dive will keep your gear and rinse and dry it for you. At hotel the TVs have video (RCA jacks) inputs, so you can review your videos. Voltage is 220, 50 cycles, Australian plug.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Some of the world's finest diving is in this land just north of Australia. While there are several dive lodges with excellent diving, it's a dream destination for live-aboards. Unique critters abound. Muck diving is great for macro photographers and there are plenty of sites with big fish, big coral and brilliant coral. It's also a naturalist's paradise with beautiful topography: volcanoes, steaming jungles, butterflies as big as birds and walking-stick insects a foot long, and splendid Birds of

Paradise. Most rain comes in heavy afternoon downpours. Take a week to stay in fine lodges like Karawari or Tari to visit indigenous, still primitive cultures, among the most interesting on the planet. Port Moresby is an unsafe city, although the big hotels are fine, as is a cab trip to the superb giant crafts market. Loloata Island Resort, a diver's alternative, is 25 minutes from the airport and they'll arrange round-trip transportation. Malaria prophylaxis is still essential. English gets you by everywhere.

Tawali Resort, October 2005, Ray Haberman (RHaberman@msn.com), Naperville, IL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 120 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. On the first 3 dives I observed a rare hairy ghost pipefish, two varieties of pigmy seahorses, leaf scorpionfish, a crocodile fish, all the normal reef fish and a promise that it would get better. Small dive boats. With 4 divers and a 3-man crew, they are crowded. Tawali is a new resort that is on the side of a hill overlooking a reef. There are many things to keep nondivers occupied. Setup on the big dive boat "Prowler" had ample room. Setup on the smaller boats was cramped.

Tawali Resort, November 2005, James Jenkins, San Francisco, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 83 F, calm. The site was beautiful and the way the main resort area and cabins are integrated into the hillside is spectacular. The construction and quality of materials and finish are first-rate. Tawali is on the northern side of the northern peninsula of PNG in Milne Bay Province, not far from East Cape. One of many, excellent dive sites, Sponge Heaven at the resort; other legendary sites opened by the