

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

Telita and Chertan (Diana's Beach, Michelle's Beach, Deacon's Reef, etc.) are a short boat ride away. The larger, fast boat does 3-dive day trips to the sites in and around the "mouth" of Milne Bay. Basically, you could easily spend 6 - 9 diving days visiting some of the best sites in the Milne Bay as if you were on a live-aboard. The tradeoff is you would do 3 dives instead of 4 but come back to a spacious, almost luxurious resort in the evening. (Night dives can be arranged from the resort.).

**Tawali Resort, December 2005, Jeremy Cohen (jxc45@psu.edu, State College, PA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 85 to 86 F, calm. We celebrated Christmas with local villagers who sang carols in indigenous language, dove with co-owners Ronda and Bob, marveled at Cpt. Chris's pirate stories, ate family style with guests and crew, appreciated the respect for the environment and for guests shown by everyone at Tawali, enjoyed international make-up of visitors, found the forest, waterfall, fishing village, and skull cave hikes to be a photographer's joy, had no problem with bugs, found staff and dive crew the nicest I've met in 40 years of diving. Dive crew accommodating so our daughter could snorkel while we dove and able to accomplish field repairs on misbehaving pressure gauge, night sky overwhelming, the songs from local villagers paddling dug-out canoes across the lagoon at dawn inspiring. Despite 25 hours of flying and centuries of airport waiting time, Tawali is a unique and deeply rewarding, worth the effort. Reefs from just below the surface to deep. Healthy walls. Sand flats with critters for muck diving. Bring your i.d. books - you've never seen these creatures before. Rooms are huge and comfy and allow privacy. Views — oh, my. Allow some

time to explore the forest. UW Photography Comments: Camera table and rinse on boat. Crew careful with photo gear at beginning and end of dives. Pointed out tiny creatures such as pigmy seahorses. Never rushed divers while they were framing images or bracketing shots. One PC on shore. Rooms are not wired 110, so bring transformer and adapters.

**Tawali Dive Resort, April 2006, Don Lipmanson (dlipman@mcn.org), Ukiah, CA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F, calm, choppy. A lovely resort, rooms are comfortable, with great views; a pod of dolphins frolicked in the inlet below our deck just after dawn on several mornings. Chef Benson's buffet-style meals were first-rate in variety and in quality. This resort is entirely about diving; aside from a not-to-be-missed skull cave, options for land-based activity are minimal; local villages are "westernized" and not particularly revealing about local life. The ridge top above the resort probably offers good birding, but runoff and slippery slopes precluded the steep climb. All diving is from boats, except the house reef that appears decimated by coral bleaching yet harbors numerous Mandarinfish and some leaf scorpionfish. Numerous dive sites within minutes of the resort by fast small boats offered countless varieties of fish, healthy reefs and unbelievable macro (e.g., pygmy seahorses, commensal and palimnid shrimp, nudibranchs and flatworms). The muck diving at Lawadi (aka Dinah's Beach), especially at twilight, is a must: 80 minutes at 25' or less allowed us to see five species of lionfish and three species of anemonefish, several Cockatoo waspfish, Pegasus sea moths, close-ups of an octopus, etc. We made a few trips past the eastern tip of the

island to some outer reefs, where the walls and bommies were stunning. Humpback parrotfish reached 4', large angelfish of various species were abundant, a 2' map pufferfish allowed close approach, two species of pygmy seahorses were (barely) visible on fans at 75', and groups of treacly stalked schools of fusiliers. Chris Carney, captain of the turbocharged 45' Prowler catamaran (and resort manager) found leeward spots where divers encountered moderate to minimal currents instead of rip-roaring areas generated by the storm. It's hard to imagine a better way to experience the diving treasures of Milne Bay. They have books galore on marine life, plus a largely competent support staff. Besides photo supplies, the one thing conspicuously lacking was a blender for making tropical cocktails — even paradise has its drawbacks.

**Tawali Resort, April 2006, Rick and Eleanor Sinnott, Boston, MA.** Vis: 50-100 feet. Water: 86 F, calm. From Boston, we took five flights, a cross country van ride and then a boat trip. We stayed for two weeks. The diving was beautiful and unspoiled. We saw fish here we have never seen anywhere such as gorgeous Rhinopias aphanes (Lacy Scorpionfish) and Eurpegasus draconis (Little dragonfish). The divemasters, especially Junior, were terrific at finding these beautiful creatures for us and pointed out several pigmy seahorses. The divemasters treated you like adults. You could go off on your own or stay with the divemasters. You could stay in as long as your computer and air would allow. We had many dives over 60 minutes in the warm water. The divemasters were helpful without being intrusive. We saw two Rhinopias, one that was brown and the other that was green. Crinoid Reef,

Lawardi, and Fid's Ridge were full of life and color; they were photographer dreamlands. Even my simple Canon point and shoot could capture photographs suitable for framing. We twice snorkeled with mantas and devilfish! The boat looked for mantas on our way back in from diving so we could snorkel with them. Seeing the mantas do backward rolls was astoundingly beautiful. Intimate and remote setting. Tawali has only 10 bungalows but is building a few more. Rob, the co-owner, made sure everyone had the dive experience he or she was looking for. The food was plentiful, with our favorites being the mud crabs and lamb. With a local guide, we took short hikes to skull caves (from cannibals) and walked past villages of thatched huts. We also canoed in traditional dugouts. Tawali is isolated. The local people live without shoes, phones, stores or electricity in small ocean side villages. They fish, garden and hunt wild pigs. Nearly every village has its own language. Everyone was friendly. This is the old South Pacific. Take Malorone to prevent malaria.

**Tawali, May 2006, David McKowen, Andalusia, AL.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 20 Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, choppy, no currents. Lovely upscale resort with excellent staff, great food and wonderful views. Diving is good, with 3 day dives and a night dive available. Milne Bay is a world-class macro site, but open water seamounts are also available. Trips can be combined with the Chertan. There are several boats. I only dove on the small ones, with adequate space and rinse buckets but no charging on the small boats.

**Tufi Dive Resort, April 2006, Don Lipmanson (dlipman@mcn.org),**

**Ukiah, CA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 75 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F, calm, no currents. Diving and the cultural opportunities were wonderful. Diving focused on walls and bommies; Cyclone and Veale's were exceptional, although some portions were damaged by coral bleaching and/or crowns-of-thorn. Most dives offered an exceptional variety of good-sized fish, plus countless anemonefish, gobies, blennies, anthias and small wrasses, many endemic. Nudibranchs, flatworms and crustaceans on every dive. In eight dives, saw two gray reef sharks, one white-tipped and one hammerhead, a large Napoleon wrasse and several 4' humphead parrotfish. Better visibility probably would have offered more sharks, although finning by Taiwanese vessels reportedly is a problem, with Greenpeace Australia apparently engaged in preventative direct action. Frogfish and pipefish were highlights of a wharf dive. Glen and Archie, natives of the Alotau area, were attentive, competent and friendly divemasters, finding countless macro subjects and offering divers either independence or "hand holding" according to one's wishes. The dive boat is comfortable, although slow due to a breakdown in a turbocharger part, but given the stunning beauty of the locale, slow was beautiful. Nitrox is not available, but air fills always exceeded 3000 psi and virtually every dive approached an hour. This is a 10-room resort with a beautiful lodge and outdoor dining area plus barbeque overlooking the main fjord. Rooms 9 and 10 were good-sized, nicely furnished, well air-conditioned with plenty of round-the-clock hot water. All meals are included in the price; quality is good although availability of fresh fruits and veggies can be erratic.

Managers, Simon and Sharon Tewson, are environmentally conscious folks; Simon has spent the last 45 years in PNG and can negotiate local politics in a way that allows visitors access to remote villages. Birders should not miss an overnight stay in Orotoaba, where two guides took me on a four-hour crack-of-dawn hike into the rainforest to see Raggiana birds of paradise, hornbills and a couple dozen other species, including numerous endemic raptors. Discrete inquiry may yield detailed information about inter-clan killings over land and women that continue to this day and are settled, at least temporarily, by pig feasts. A singing in a local village would justify missing a couple dives, as their customs have not yet been undermined by tourism. Tufi offers no "entertainment" or even TV, and is closed off from the surrounding village by a chain-link fence and a couple security guards (although wandering about in daylight seems entirely safe). Still, between diving, cultural activities, conversation with the managers and the sheer beauty of the locale, our seven-night stay was barely enough.

**Tufi, July 2006, Lori Brown, Chris Green (DoctorSLB2001@yahoo.com), Bellevue, WA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. The view of the area from the air is awesome. The fifty-minute flight is on a sixteen-seat plane from Port Moresby. The plane lands within walking distance of the resort, on a grassy area next to the sea. We were in Tufi during the PNG winter, and, the water was pretty cold, about 75-78°F. I only had my 3 mm wetsuit — I would have been more comfortable in a 5 mm. Our first dives were at Cyclone Bomie and Cyclone Wall. This site is about an hour boat ride. The water was choppy and getting in and out of the

boat was a bit tricky. We saw a gray shark and an immense Maori wrasse. On Cyclone Wall, we saw numerous nudibranchs. We ended both dives early since we were cold, but the dive guides left the water after a few minutes because they were so cold. We went for a twilight dive on the Tufi Jetty. There was a considerable amount of trash. We did see several banded pipe fish, an anemone with two tiny black percula-like clown fish, and a juvenile sweetlips. The best dives were at Bev's Bommie. There was high current and I used a reef hook to stabilize myself. The top of the bommie, at the mooring line, is scrubbed clean by the current. We saw two gray sharks together with two trailing remora. There were also 2 small white tip sharks. The wall was swarming with fish. A beautiful scorpion fish rested on a sponge. We also saw many nudibranchs including several large funeral joruna. I spotted a tiny (maybe quarter to half inch) rockmover wrasse. The dive guides, JT (short for John Thomas) and Evelyn, were enthusiastic and helpful. JT prided himself on calling sharks for us (I have to admit to being skeptical about how effective this is) and finding unusual nudibranchs. He was the one dive guide that stuck with us even when the others had left because of the cold. The boat itself was a bit shabby, with torn upholstery, and there was difficulty starting the motor a few times. The cars for getting a lift to and from diving were in pretty shabby shape as well. The ride to and from the dive shop was so uncomfortable that we took to walking up and down the steep road. The resort itself is a bit of a fortress. Every effort is made to keep local people off the property. Gates open and shut rapidly to let the resort's cars in. There are guards posted at the gate and patrolling the grounds. We

visited a nearby village and were warmly welcomed but heard there were other nearby villages that were not as friendly. The rooms were adequate and air conditioned — important not because it was hot but because the mosquitoes were out in droves. Our room had a deck overlooking the fjords and the view was spectacular. The dining/reception area is comfortable and beautifully maintained. The dinner was consistently delicious and beautifully presented. On Sunday night, they prepared a barbeque out on the large deck overlooking the fjord. This feast included lobster, spicy crab, fish, spicy noodles, fried rice, and local vegetables.

## PHILIPPINES

One can get a great week of diving and accommodations here for roughly \$1000 — much less if you're adventurous — so more North American divers have the Philippines on their radar screen. Major dive areas are concentrated around Batangas, Mindoro, Palawan, and the Visayas. The reefs are among the most diverse in the world, supporting more than 2,000 species of fish (the Great Barrier Reef, by comparison, supports around 1,500).

**Atlantis Dive Resorts, Puerto Galera November 2005, Lucius "Bud" Foster (elijahsdad@prodigy.net), Duluth, MN.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, choppy. I have traveled all over surfing and diving. I have realized that I am safer out of the USA than in it. Truth is, Americans are more likely to be murdered and kidnapped in the USA than in most places we travel to for diving. I believe most people are