

I could have swam faster (one hour and 15 minutes each way). The head was “closed to men.” Divemaster Edward is a diamond in the rough. Fantastic attitude. Catalina Island was a bit disappointing as well. Typical Eastern Pacific diving with few hard corals and so-so visibility. The other group on our boat had the expert divemaster, Julian, who found a school of 13 whitetips and 3 mantas. We saw none. We did see a couple of eagle rays, free-swimming morays and a fair selection of tropicals. Tortuga Point and Punta Argentina were only fifteen minutes away on Rich Coast’s own trimaran boat (it had a laughable engine configuration of one small outboard and one medium size outboard). Both sites had more hard corals than Catalina and more tropicals. I saw one whitetip that was a very cooperative photo subject, and one turtle. No babysitting with both DMs. Villas del Sol was adequate and with the all-inclusive rate, a good deal.

ECUADOR

The Galapagos is the naturalist’s dream destination, above and below the surface, with all sorts of big fish action, and the remarkable life on each island. Several excellent live-aboards cover the area; however, the government is now limiting itineraries to reduce the impact of tourists.

Isla La Plata

Exploramarc Diving, September 2007, Bill Mashek (bill@rubiconadventures.com), Forrestville, CA. Experience: 1000+ dives. Puerto Lopez is a quaint fishing village centered in a crescent-shaped bay with a picturesque set-

ting. It is the launching area for whale watching trips and dive trips to the bird-rich Isla La Plata, also known as the “poor mans Galapagos. I got on a combined whale watching trip and dive trip with Exploramarc Diving. It was about an hour-and-a-half jaunt to the island. The first 30 minutes we observed two humpback whales playing in the cool waters. During June to September, hundreds of humpbacks pass this area on their annual migration. The boat operator dropped off the whale watchers at the Islands park headquarters for a three-hour walking tour; two other divers, the divemaster and I found a moderately calm cove for our first dive: Dive one, 110 feet, visibility 50-60 feet. I didn’t have my gear and our included equipment didn’t have a computer so we followed the divemaster profile. Everyone was a good diver and there were no problems. The underwater structure was standard pacific coast rocks and boulders. Currents were moderate to strong and the fish life was prolific. We saw coronet fish, stone fish, puffers, 3 green turtles, many large moray eels. The show topper was two large (15-foot) mantas. Dive two, another cove not far from the first but more open and much stronger currents. 40- to 50-foot visibility. In addition to the copious fish population, saw two eagle rays, four (large and up-close) mantas, more large morays, and two turtles. I was impressed with the diving at Isla la Plata. The 8-hour trip cost \$95, included all equipment and diving (\$35 whale-watching and hiking only).

MEXICO

The sea mounts of the Sea of Cortez have sea lions and occasional schooling hammerheads, though