

tions, but absolutely always has been, and still is, the best I've encountered. We've dove with 10 or more live-aboard companies. Diving the GBR, visiting famous Cod Hole, low-level flight over the GBR and watching whales up close and personal — it can't get any better than this. The service and food are superior. Get eye-to-eye with these special whales, before the Japanese eat them all!

Spoilsport, September 2007, Jay Gould (jdg_tgi@yahoo.com), Malvern, Victoria. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 10 to 20 Meters. Water: 25 C, choppy. The crew went out of their way at every moment to meet every need. The chef, if he opens a restaurant, will have us as permanent customers. The rooms were clean, fresh towels whenever required, and the bed was made everyday. You had the choice of going alone with your buddy, or one of the dive leaders led a group. More than sufficient opportunity for diving including two night dives and a fantastic shark feed dive. We did our Nitrox certification, and the instructor was professional. No warm shower or toilet facilities on the dive deck, and no toilets on the salon deck. Whenever you wanted to go to the toilet, you had to go to your cabin. Smoking was permitted on one side of the after-salon deck and if the wind was in the wrong direction, too bad for the nonsmokers. I asked for the smoking lamp to be out during a party on the after-saloon deck and was told that policy permitted the smoking. Frankly, they should be banned to the upper deck and if they have problems with the wind blowing out their smokes, tough! UW Photography Comments: Separate work area, separate fresh water tanks, professional onboard for assistance.

FIJI

Fiji Aggressor, June 2007, John and Edith Summey (summey11@aol.com), Carbondale, IL Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy, no currents. We were met by the Aggressor driver at the Nadi Airport for our transfer to Suva where the boat was docked. Divers from around the USA and Italy, too, of a variety of ages and experience. Arriving in Suva at the Tradewinds, we found the dive director, Steve, from last year and other crew there who recognized us and welcomed us back. This trip we had booked the master cabin for ease of access. It would take volumes to describe the jokes, the laughter, the smiles, the teasing, the easy spirit, and the camaraderie of the group. Fabulous food that kept coming morning, noon, and night and in between to keep us energized for the fantastic diving! The temperature was mild, the wind was slight, the sun was sparkling, the water was brilliant blue, the coral was luxuriant and radiant, and the fish were teeming. The sharks came, the huge groupers, the jacks, the tunas, the Napoleon wrasses, the usual array of tropical fish, eels, even sea snakes. The small stuff was there for those who were patient enough to look. One evening we visited the Megagi Village. Last year we had gone there and afterward had sent the teacher photos of the children who danced for us. They had written thank you notes and we had written back in return. Now we had a special surprise for them — a new Toshiba laptop computer complete with the usual office software and a special National Geographic package of back issues up to the year 2000. At the village, the children gathered around my husband as he showed them the computer and

asked if they would like to have one like it. They responded, yes, enthusiastically. So, he said, Get your teacher and tell her you talked me into giving you this one! The chief received the gift graciously on behalf of the school and village. These children will benefit greatly from the expansion of their access to information and technology. Aggressor brings guests there to help support their efforts to improve economically and to share their culture. We enjoyed a tour, kava ceremony, and dancing. We celebrated our 46th wedding anniversary on June 11. We were presented with a chocolate brownie cake topped with candles and two bottles of champagne. We drank one of the bottles with the guests and saved the other. It found a good purpose later — a celebration for Steve, the dive director. After his year-plus service on the Fiji Aggressor II, he was departing to return to his home in Ohio. So we all decided to throw him a surprise underwater going away party! A sign was made with his name and Congratulations! on it. And the bottle of champagne was hidden under a divers wet suit. On the last dive of the trip, the surprise was launched. One diver pretended to be in trouble. When Steve came to investigate, the group surrounded him, waving the sign and bottle of champagne. The party was a huge success, with a lot of silliness underwater. Steve was quite surprised! How was he to know there was a party going on? We was a splishing an a splashing! The Fiji Aggressor II is the smaller of the two boats that Aggressor has assigned to Fiji. The other one has been designated as Fiji Aggressor III and is actually formerly the Tahiti Aggressor. It is larger and can accommodate 20 guests. The Fiji Aggressor II is more compact and we like the ease of getting around on it. There is adequate

space for cameras, dining, relaxing, and other amenities. Cabins are comfortable. It takes 10 guests. The space is adequate for that number and it is nicer to have a smaller number. It is easier to get to know the smaller number of guests. Between John and me, we have booked 22 trips on Aggressor boats world-wide including some multiple trips: Caymans, Belize, Cocos Island, Tahiti, Red Sea, Utila, and Fiji. Never have we been disappointed or dissatisfied by how a trip was handled by Aggressor!

Nai'a, November 2006, Janet and Bob Czapski (trips@divetravelservices.com), Farmington Hills, MI. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 82 F, calm, currents, no currents. The crews smiling faces and topnotch service were unparalleled. The boat is beautiful; rooms are spacious and comfortable; storage is great. The food is wonderful and varied; Thanksgiving dinner was spectacular! The diving is world-class and the dive briefs were comprehensive. Reef preservation is stressed and wonderful between-dive videos were shown throughout the week, educating divers to the things they were seeing and great marine behavior emphasis to make everyone's dives more enjoyable. The crew handled divers and gear fantastically. The new cruise directors, Grant and Sonia, were enthusiastic and related well with their Fijian crew. Grant's trip DVD was fantastic. We enjoyed the crew's singing throughout the week and the Meke they did on-board near the end of the week.

Naia, March 2007, Tim Nugent. Vis: 40 to 80 feet. Water: low 80s F, strong currents. The crew is knowledgeable, hard-working and friendly. The dive operation is well orchestrated and destination decisions are based on the

current weather conditions. No limits were imposed on dive times, with most dives lasting well in excess of one hour. No requirements to buddy up or follow the leader either. All diving is done from small rigid-hull inflatables, while the Naia is anchored just off the reef. These Fijian reefs are in the best condition I have seen of any sea since the seventies! Lots of healthy hard corals, colorful soft corals, a wide array of invertebrates and schooling reef fish that were so dense I sometimes wished them out of the way to avoid spoiling a photograph. The skiff drivers were attentive and always ready for a quick pickup. Currents are fierce and can move you a long way in the course of a dive. One day was lost due to a fuel line problem, which required us to anchor near the channel of a commercial port so parts could be transported easily. That location resulted in substandard visibility, although the reefs were still spectacular. A/C in cabins was responsive. A volcano erupted in Tonga during August 2006., launching rafts of pumice into the sea that floated through Fiji on their way to Australia. What should have been consistent 100+ visibility ended up around 60, but with lots of particulate and backscatter right in front of you. The village visit cost us an afternoon dive, but was certainly worth it to wander around and talk to the Fijian islanders and see how they live. School games / toys are appreciated. We also lost a night dive to the crews Kava party. This too was well worth while, watching the crew let loose and enjoy themselves. The flights from LAX aboard Air Pacific arrive in the early morning to Nadi. The Naia operation will set you up with a day room to wait for the early afternoon bus pickup; however, with a little advance planning you can rent a car at the airport

and drive around parts of the island to see several villages and have a local beer or two before the cruise begins or join a half-day tour. Same thing on the departure day. Rosies Tours seemed to be reliable and accommodating.

Nai'a, April 2007, Ron Dion (ron-dion1@juno.com), San Francisco, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. We have done 9 dive boats in last 12 months. Nai'a is still the best, even with the grounding last August. I must comment on the government. Some have said not to go there because of the unstable situation. Not true! Tourists are welcome in this wonderful place. There is no indication of political problems. Because tourism is way down, there are many bargains to be had in all hotels. Some of the world's best diving. UW Photography Comments: Large camera room with multi-voltage valet service for cameras.

Nai'a, June 2007, Douglas C. Spencer (spencer@gilmorebank.com), Santa Monica, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, surge, currents. This was my first live-aboard. I have been diving since 1982 from land-based resorts and have felt anxious about going on a live-aboard. The only negative is that the rooms are equal to nice motor home accommodations. However, you are only in them for sleeping. Naia crew was 5 star outstanding. They were knowledgeable, courteous, and helpful. No dive restrictions were maintained, and the guests dived with experience and maturity. The dive guides (Sonia, Grant, and Rich) were the best. They were patient, funny, informative and knowledgeable. The food was superlative and abundant (and healthy). Sulie served us 4 times a day. I saw her up at

4:30 AM and she worked until I crashed at night at 9 PM. We also had the pleasure of diving with Robb, the owner and founder, a remarkable individual who is patient, kind, and wrote the book on resourcefulness. I was amazed at how fast the days went by with 4 dives per day. Also, the other passengers were interesting and I made several new friends. If you wanted your private space, there was more than enough time and spots for that. Diving in Fiji rocks! Everything you have heard about soft corral and fish life is true!

Nai'a, June 2007, John and Edith Summey (summey11@aol.com), Carbon-dale, IL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100+ feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy, no currents. We were transported from the Tokatoka Resort Hotel in Nadi by a bus containing the group of divers led by Steve Webster, formerly from the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Steve makes the Nai'a trip regularly. Dive director Sonia gave thorough briefings and provided helpful assistance whenever needed or requested. One of the best features about the Naia is its respectful attitude toward its divers. Rather than setting a lot of limits and rules, the divers are allowed to dive their own profiles and times and encouraged to let the dive masters know their individual needs. Thus, the new divers get plenty of help while experienced divers are not monitored excessively. Divers are allowed to be responsible for their own dive. The two dive tenders are assigned to different dive sites to minimize the impact of divers. Two morning and two afternoon dives and an evening dive are standard. The signature feature of Fiji, soft corals are abundant in many of the sites visited by the Naia. Colors and formations vary between sites. Some sites have pinks and reds, others are golden and yellow.

Some sites are rich with a combination of hard and soft corals, others are dominated by hard corals. Not many pelagic fish are seen, nor are sharks common. One of the most delightful aspects of diving in Fiji is the bright color of the reefs. The fans, corals, and fish give a vibrant view of a shimmering garden moving and changing constantly with the current. The dance of small anthias as they cascade around the corals provides ribbons of brilliance. These swirls of bright fluttering fish sweep across the pinnacles and shower the sides of walls, especially at the shallower depths. Swim-throughs provide a mysterious multidimensional experience noted by shafts of light flickering through coral windows contrasting with shadows. On the Naia, the photographer finds an entire equipment room with counters, charging stations, dedicated towels, rinse tanks, a system for the cameras to be taken to and from the tenders, and availability of AV equipment for previewing results. The video materials provided by the Naia for promotion and on its web site are excellent. Life on the Naia itself is a pleasure. Cabins and facilities are tops — comfortable and complete. The menus are varied and interesting. Choices of entries are offered. Snacks and beverages are plentiful and tasty. Presentations about fish ID and other relevant information were given. Entertainment was offered constantly. Kava parties conducted by the crew, serenades of songs, and a village visit are examples. We even had an opportunity to go back to the village of Megagi which we had visited while on the Fiji Aggressor II. We brought the children a CD of photos we had taken of them during our previous visit and learned how they were using the laptop computer. The atmosphere on the Nai'a was one of fun, eat, dive, rest, relax,

enjoy, dive, snack, drink, watch, review photos, and prepare cameras more fun! Above all else, the crew was always smiling and cheerful, ready to help in every way possible. Check out my web page: <http://e-diver.spaces.live.com>

Nai'a, July 2007, Harvey Schecter, Lilburn, GA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 80 to 81 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents. A great boat — clean and well maintained with cheerful, helpful crew. Good food and world-class diving. Sonia, the hostess and divemaster, was one of the best I have ever encountered — knowledge of the reefs and fish and critter identification; enthusiastic, helpful and friendly. Superb briefings followed by knowledge of the hangouts of critters. Definitely plan to return. UW Photography Comments: Camera room with lint-free towels, compressed air, 110v and 240v outlets.

HAWAII

Kona

Kona Aggressor, January 2007, George Entwisle, Cashiers, NC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 73 to 76 F, calm, surge, no currents. The diving and the operation were both above board. Each day the diving got better and better. Not a lot of coral, but lots of fish. Have never seen so many different types of fish species as there are in Hawaii. It was totally amazing.

Kona Aggressor, April 2007, Ed Heimiller (heimiller@att.net), Streamwood, IL. Experience: 200+ dives. Vis: 50 to 70 feet. Water: 74 to 78 F, calm and flat. This was the best-run, cleanest boat I have been on. The food was plentiful and great. The crew was helpful

and friendly. The only down side is a small and crowded area to suit up.

Kona Aggressor II, September 2007, Russ Battisto (Russ_Battisto@comcast.net), Roseville, MN. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, choppy, surge. Flew in the night before and stayed at the King Kam's Kona Beach Hotel near the pier. It is in need of a remodel job. Clean, though. Aggressor van will pick you up from any of the nearby hotels in Kailua, Kona. The boat was wonderful, although they were experiencing engine problems (running with only one). And no nitrox on this trip but the profiles were easy enough that it wasn't a huge issue. Little current, if any, and some moderate surge near shore that made picture-taking a challenge at times. Great crew and excellent food. The diving was easy and fun. At first I was surprised at the lack of big coral until I realized that the lava flows we were diving on were only about 50 years old, which in coral time is nothing. There is a lack of big fish, but the little stuff was plentiful and colorful against the lava or black sand. Dolphins were around as well as eagle rays and the mantas. Manta Ray Night Dive: sensory overload! The engine problems limited us, so we stayed at the same site for the 2 morning dives and went to another site for the 2 afternoon dives and the night dive. This tended to make me less interested in doing both the 2nd afternoon and/or the night dive as it would be 3 times on the same site. Rooms were clean and nice. Mary and I had the quad to ourselves upstairs behind the bridge. nice! Weather cooperated and water temp was tolerable but I did switch from my shorty to my 5 mm in the afternoon/night dives. The camera table is well suited, equipped and big enough to handle all the activity. Clean