

nearby. Kai Viti promptly picks you up at Nananu's private pier at 8:15 am. Excellent dive staff, custom-built dive boat with plenty of room, flat step-off exit, and easy entry ladder. All dives were dictated by your own computer. DMs found interesting critters during dives. Kai Viti is the only land-based op to go out to the Bligh water, and that is a 3-tank day at an extra fee. Approximately 1 hour boat time to dive sites in the Bligh; other great sites are an easy 20 minutes from Nananu resort. Weather and divers dictate trips out to the Bligh. Mosquitoes in Fiji; breezes help, but bring repellent. We booked air directly through Air Pacific via LAX. Long travel days, arriving in Nadi after 10.5-hour flight from LAX, then 2+ hours in a van to Rakiraki, then another 20 minutes by boat to Nananu.

## FRENCH POLYNESIA

Tahiti and Moorea are everyone's dream of the South Pacific, and despite their pricey resorts and food, these French-speaking islands are now attracting North American divers to join in the plentiful reef shark action. There are a range of accommodations and restaurants, some reef diving, and plenty of great scenery. The once-snotty French attitude toward others has lessened considerably.

### Moorea

**Top Dive, Club Bali Hai, June 2007, Dennis Lewis (basileuslewis@msn.com), Fresno, CA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, choppy, no currents. I read prior reviews in Undercurrent and other publications and settled on Scuba Piti

because of small groups and, importantly, they do not feed the fish. We arrived at our hotel, Club Bali Hai, on a Sunday. Scuba Piti had called to say that their boat was out of the water and that there would be no diving that week. No offer of help in booking another company or anything. The manager of Bali Hai heard my you have got to be kidding, called TOPdive and set things up for us including having the shop pick us up the next day. Dive groups ranged from four plus a DM to a top of six plus a DM. The DMs were multilingual and energetic. Helpful since on any dive you would hear English, French, German, Portuguese or Italian. After the first dive, our DM was Nicolas Buray. He has the wonderful ability to keep track of everyone, yet stay back enough so that we all got to do the dive we wanted. If we wanted to see something specific, he would lead us to it. If not, we were free to explore. If you looked around, he would be there. Maybe just above the reef keeping an eye on us. Maybe watching that shark to make sure that none of us were on its dinner menu. After the first day, we were free to dive our computer limits as we saw fit. Feeding the fish clearly changes how the fish interact with us, especially the sharks. I did not like that each dive site teamed with fish and sharks — reef and lemon — and that they seemed comfortable with us. The turtles would come right up to us. Some divers would give them food pellets by hand. I don't know what it would have been like had there not been a big bag of fish scraps in the water. The fish life seemed plentiful and healthy even some distance from the feeding area, but how much of that is spillover from the feeding? I hear that the locals have been feeding sharks and rays for 40 years. Perhaps it is too late to stop without a major impact

to the populations. Club Bali Hai is a time share resort. It is one of the older resorts on the island and the rooms show the years. However, the staff is friendly and helpful. The rooms are clean and the air conditioning works well. Being on Cooks Bay, it is sheltered a bit from the hot sun. The larger resorts all face the open ocean and get the hot sun all day. Nice pool and a small beach. The over-water duplexes have a separate bedroom and a kitchen with a coffee maker. The on-site restaurant served breakfast and lunch only. Great dinners are a short walk away — Les Nouveaux Mondes (the owner, Roger, is a crackup) and Te Honu Iti. The many mobile lunch trucks (actually a van or hut that serves food) are popular with the locals and serve wonderful, fresh and cheap lunches and dinners. UW Photography Comments: Shop makes a video of one dive per day. No water bucket for cameras.

## Rangiroa

**Top Dive, Pensions, December 2006, Scott Johnson (travelnsj@aol.com), Murrieta, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm, choppy, currents. Rangiroa and Fakarava are Atolls which are big oblong-ring shaped islands that have passes where the currents pass through when the tides change. The currents can be up to 10 knots or more. I had dives that I went more than two miles in just a few minutes. It was a world class express train. I dove with Top Dive in both locations; very good operation. Although the correct way to dive there would be a live-aboard ... unfortunately, the Aggressor pulled out of the Tuamotu's and moved south in Tahiti to more mild diving. Rangiroa: Top Dive filled the tanks with a great

mixture of 36% Nitrox ... diving is done from Zodiacs as you are 5-10 minutes from the dive sites. Deep current diving you can do 3 times a day! I did the famous Tiputa pass where you ride with the great hammerheads, squadrons of eagle rays, etc. Well, unfortunately they were not always swimming thru when I did! Before you enter the pass, you are swimming in the blue, you look down upon a generally white sandy bottom ... you see schools of sharks, eagle rays, barracudas of every size, etc. You are 100 feet, they are about 150 feet or more! I did about 10 dives in the pass. The Tiputa pass can become a bit redundant if nothing is flying through. On a few of the dives, Pascal (instructor) would take a few of the more advanced divers and we would enter the pass at about 95 feet. There would be little valleys we would duck into to get away from the current and see grey sharks, trigger fish, etc., fly by. On one dive, at the beginning I am about 60 feet, going down looking for my buddies ... I found 4 of them ... they were dolphins in my face ... I mean within an arm's reach! They swam all around us for about 5 minutes ... wow. The other dive location was the Avatoru Pass. This was not as deep of a dive, about 70 feet. Here is where a school of silver tips hangs out ... one of them had to be about a 9-foot-fat shark. I had to duck to avoid hitting his belly. I did catch a glimpse of a great hammerhead about 30 feet away. Fakarava: No Nitrox here and went into deco a couple of times. You generally only do 2 dives a day. I dove only the northern pass. The southern pass is reported to be better but I was the only person on the dive boat and the south pass is about 2 hours away and you need at least 4 divers. This has to be the hard coral capitol of the

world. Grey reef sharks, wrasses, small and large tropical fish everywhere. On one dive the current had to be about at least 5 knots; we clawed our way up and down a ridge ... when I looked out and up there must have been something like 75 baby grey reef sharks swimming in the current. One dive that had to be my favorite dive I have ever done called the Passe Nord Garuae: We started out swimming against a strong current up to a ridge, looked out and there must have been 50 sharks in the current. We then swam down to a valley that was about 60 feet deep by at least 100 to 150 yards long. The bottom was a mixture of white sand with what I call popcorn coral ... small beige, light purple and blue colors were at the bottom. There were schools after schools of trevallies, soldierfish, gobies, Moorish idols, seapearch, etc., all motionless ... parting the way as we swam through them. You would look above ... patrolling grey sharks and at 5 big Napoleon wrasses floating amongst the schools of fish. Overall, this was some of the best diving I have ever done!

## Tahiti

**6 Passengers, Kia Ora, July 2007, Chuck and Julie Feinberg (gnil50@aol.com), Flushing, NY.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 150 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm, currents, no currents. With the most personal and professional help from our Travel Agent (dive@divetahitiblue.com), we had an amazing dive trip. It does help when your Travel Agent happens to live on Moorea right near Tahiti. We flew Tahiti Airlines (Air Tahiti Nui) direct (12 hours) from JFK in New York. We had no problems with overweight luggage as long as we showed our C-Cards. Our awesome duplex chalet at the Kia

Ora was only a five-minute walk to Six Passenger Dive Shop. Dive with Serge if hes there! Everyone speaks English. The entire staff works hard. Their fills are always 3100+ with clean tanks. You have secure lockers. We only did 2 dives a day, with a long surface interval. More dives can be arranged. We actually went back to our chalet to shower, do our logs and relax. They have three Zodiacs and most dive sites are no more than ten minutes away. The larger Zodiac has a ladder. Never worry about getting back into the Zodiacs; all the boat drivers are "former sumo wrestlers"! They just drag you in! Our first dive was what Rangiroa is famous for: seven-minute boat ride through the pass to open ocean. Back roll in just before the current picks up. Drop down to 140+ feet (we were assigned a boat with all experienced divers) and glide slowly into the current back into the lagoon. You first see carpets of gray and silver-tip sharks queuing up for their meal. Then the current picks up to at least 5-6 knots! At least 1000+ sharks on this dive. The other dives over our six days were either current or just dropping us off the wall at 45 feet, swim out off the wall, drop down to 130+ feet and look for the school of sharks that come close by! Also mantas and almost daily encounters with a family of dolphins who loved hanging around us. On the fairly flat coral plain, we saw many morays, school of chevron barracudas and, during dusk dives, spawning schools of small fish with attack mode to eat the sperm/eggs. This is shark diving like Cocos but without live-aboard diving and the ability to wear just a skin. The visibility was amazing.

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