

MADAGASCAR

Aventura Diving, L'Heure Bleu, August/September 2007, Michael Jöst (mijoe@arcor.de), Kehl. Experience: 1600 dives. Vis: 50 to 120 feet. Water: 28 C, calm and flat. Overfishing and spearfishing leave some reefs nearly empty of fish. Some small areas have good, healthy coral and a good mixture and variety of fish life. Most dive sites are deeper than 15 m; no chance of multilevel or safety stop in the shallows, watching fish. Nitrox would be a good idea — so far nothing there. 14-day stay too long for the diving. Some nice deep dive sites down to 70 m with huge gorgonia on boulders with canyons and tunnels, some smaller caves but nearly no fish life. Visibility great. Aventura Diving gave me 14 days of different sites and even went out for diving with me being the only customer. As a single, I often had some bad experience in other places, multiple times same dive sites and buddied up with beginners. Coming back from a dive, we got close to four humpback whales cruising the waters between Nosy Be and Madagascar. Awesome to see them coming up for air or their fluke above surface on their way down. A full meal, starter, main course, dessert plus wine was around 5 to 9 EUR. Most times they had delicious fish dishes on their menu and some not too spicy local food — for example, zebu sirloin steak in vanilla sauce, really a new experience for your taste buds.

MALAYSIA

Sipadan, a tiny island off Borneo where 20 divers and others were kidnapped by Filipino Muslim terrorists nearly a decade ago, no

longer has land accommodations, but one can still reach the good diving there through other resorts. Malaysia has areas that compete well with Indonesia, but its diving infrastructure is not comparably developed.

Borneo Divers Mabul Resort, March 2007, Yvonne Lanelli (EVLanelli@zianet.com), Alto, NM. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 15 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Terrific place to see Mandarinfish, turtles, blue-ringed octopus, flamboyant cuttlefish, frogfish, ornate ghost pipefish. Our package included 3 dives and three buffet meals with lodging in roomy beachfront duplex cabaña with king-sized bed, AC, hot showers. Twilight dives extra. Free wireless, swimming pool, bar, ice cream stand, gift shop, critter reference books. Dive op provided large showers, cabinet storage, equipment repair. Dives well-organized with sites, times and divers clearly indicated. Dive staff helpful with equipment transfers, dive orientation. Divemasters knowledgeable about critters; accommodating to divers' requests and concerns. 5- to 30-minute boat rides with snacks, water. Buffet meals mostly Asian and local specialties. Bottled water provided. Airport transfers on time and efficient. Resort staff helpful but not obsequious. Our cabin and public areas clean, nicely furnished and well-kept. Clientele includes Aussies, Europeans, Hong Kongese, locals; families as well as singles. My dive buddy and I were the only Americans. Socializing easy and fun, particularly on Poolside Buffet night with live music by divemaster band. English universally used. Bring adapter/converter for 220 V. and Asian three-prong outlet. Local airlines charge extra for baggage over 30 pounds. Resort isolated, self-contained. Schedule free time in city of Kota