

is a converted well station that acts as a resort, another set of water bungalows and another resort on the island. The village on the island is very poor, but the people are very nice. Smart had good food, and a good staff. When I was there they were only at half capacity until the last two days when they hit full capacity. At that point the dive boats became too full, and the dives on some of the boats became shorter to accommodate less-experienced divers.

SMART Water Bungalows, September 2007, Steven Levin, Arlington, VA.

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 45 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. This is my sixth visit to the Water Bungalows over the last three years. The quality of the bungalows, food, and operation of the resort remains high. SMART has two operations on the island of Mabul. On the main island there are chalets, a restaurant, and dive center. Separate from the main island resort are the Water Bungalows, at the end of a long jetty with a beautiful setting. Each bungalow is independent, with a large deck, A/C, mini-fridge, desk, sofa, bed(s), and satellite television. A separate restaurant for the Water Bungalows serves good food. All meals are buffets. In the morning there are eggs cooked to ordered and freshly squeezed orange juice. Throughout the day there is fruit and cookies. Lunch and dinner features a range of three or four dishes such as lamb, beef, fish, prawns as well as salads, soup, and desserts. The usual diving program is two dives a day at Sipadan and a third dive at Mabul or Kapalai. Due to the restrictions at Sipadan on the number of divers, dive boats leave for Sipadan at 5:30 A.M., 9 A.M., and 12:30 P.M. for their two dives. There is gear storage and pickup/dropoff for the divers at the Water Bungalows. Diving at Sipadan offers

dramatic walls with large numbers of turtles — green and hawksbill. Sharks, mostly white tips, are seen frequently, as well as resident schools of jacks and bumphead parrotfish. Some zebra and hammerhead sharks deeper. The interval between dives at Sipadan is spent on the beach where sandwiches, hot drinks, and fruit are provided. The trip to Sipadan from Mabul takes about 25 minutes when the sea is flat but can be up to an hour if there are big swells. Diving at Mabul and Kapalai is about little creatures. There are mini-walls such as Lobster Wall and slopes at places such as Ray Point and the Eel Garden. Small creatures can include frogfish, nudibranchs, flatworms, pipefish, orangutan crabs, etc. At the SMART House tanks are available and you can enter the water from steps down to the water. The House Reef is an extensive area with many large man-made structures. There is a resident school of jacks, some large groupers, and other small creatures, including frogfish. Getting to the resort involves flying to Tawau, which can be done via Kota Kinabalu or Kuala Lumpur. After flying to Tawau, there is a 1+ hour drive to Semporna (port) and a 40-minute boat ride to the resort. An excellent operation with diversified diving. UW Photography Comments: On the boats there is a small bucket in which people put their masks and small cameras. Other than that, boats at best have a mat on which cameras can be placed. At the overwater bungalows, there are no camera facilities other than a rinse area. Charging and other camera activities are carried out in your bungalow.

MALDIVES

These 7000 low-lying coral islands

in a 1200-mile chain southeast of India will be among the first to disappear when global warming raises sea levels significantly. The reefs have suffered significant coral bleaching, but live-aboards still find exciting fish life. Many of the 200 inhabited islands have classy resorts catering to Europeans, with good to excellent diving.

Sub/Aqua/Angaga Island Resort and Spa, February 2007, Larry Polster (larrypolster@sbcglobal.net), Martinsville, IN. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, choppy, surge, currents. The Southern Atoll was the best viz with sharks and mantas. Northern Atoll is better later in the year. Most guests were from England or Germany, with a few from Japan. We were the only Americans, but most DMs could speak all three languages, so briefings were short, but good with drawings and depths. If you are an American over 40 years of age, you need to take a doctor's certificate saying you are fit to dive. I did not and had to spend time filling out several pages of forms. They assume most Americans are out of shape, dive Caribbean in calm waters. They will watch you on the first dive or two to make sure of your skills, then let you and your buddy dive on your own profile. They charge extra if you want them to guide you. Bring a reef hook and get on your treadmill for a month before you arrive. Although the currents are strong, not every dive is that way. The DM will jump in the sea when you arrive at the dive site to see which way the current is running, then get back aboard while they position the dive boat so during your decent you will not overshoot the bommie. Lots of fun, but plenty of exercise to get in the right spot to watch the shark/manta/

large fish action. I made the mistake of bringing my split fins, which are great in the calm Caribbean, but don't push you through the water as well as stiff fins. Saw frog and leaf fish on many dives, plus all the other small critters. Hard to stay steady in ripping currents unless you get on the back side of a bommie in the calmer water. The dive shop only offers two-tank dives per day — leave at 9 A.M., return for lunch, then back out again at 2 P.M. The house reef was spectacular for both diving and snorkeling. I made three night dives and several day dives to shoot macro and spend some time with my snorkeling wife. The resort is older, but well maintained. You live in a bathing suit except for meals they ask you to wear a cover-up. Never had a pair of shoes on with sandy paths to and from the bar and dining room. They have both beach and water bungalows. We booked a beach unit because of cost, but were upgraded to water when we arrived because all the beach units were full. Just walk down the steps into the water with your snorkel gear and swim away for hours on end. A night snorkel is also fun, with plenty of life to view. The sunset bar was great before dinner under the stars.

MAURITIUS

Mascareignes Plongee, Beach Villas, January 2007, Stanley Zuk (szuk@nyc.rr.com), New York, NY. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm, choppy. Mauritius is a wonderful and interesting vacation spot in the Indian Ocean, surrounded by great beaches and healthy, beautiful coral reef all around the island. I dove with Mascareignes Plongee in Grand Baie with Jean Lincoln, the owner of