

an hour from the small airstrip by van. The accommodations are quite nice, with bures set apart in a lush landscaped setting on Kimbe Bay. Our bure, the largest, was three large rooms including a couch, several chairs, a dining table and separate kitchen area. Meals are taken in a central communal area with an air-conditioned small dining area and library. A small pool centers this communal area with a bar to one side and a larger outdoor dining area on the other. The pictures and descriptions on their website are accurate. Breakfast is cereal and fruit or made-to-order eggs, pancakes or French toast. Fresh coffee is always available. Lunches are on the boat or on a small island if you do three dives a day, or back in the dining area if you do two. Dinner is banquet-style. The only significant complaint involved dinner where they ran out of food, or certain basic items like soup, several nights. They do not cater to night divers, and although they offer night dives, there were no arrangements for late arrivals or holding of a plate. The meals were filling and offered good variety but the food tended to be bland and uninspired. Not what I would expect from a resort of this price. The diving was quite good. All the diving is done from one of two boats that depart from their jetty. There were only four or five people doing three daily dives so the boat was not crowded. Our DM, Keiko, captain Martin, and deck hand Peter were all friendly and accommodating. Keiko let us all dive our own profiles. On about half the dives we ended up splitting up between photographers and cruisers. The reefs are in excellent shape and the deeper bommies held attractions like schooling batfish, sharks, dogtooth tuna, trevally, mantas, cuttlefish, and healthy schools of the usual reef fish. In-shore

reefs sported Mandarinfish, cuttlefish, several types of pipefish, lots of lionfish, anemonefish, numerous species of shrimps, nesting titan triggerfish, several species of shrimp gobies, razorfish and nudibranchs. On one dive, about 10 dolphins joined us on a reef for a minute or two. Reef fish life is on par with Fiji outer islands. The corals and fans are in outstanding shape, although with little current, they are not huge on the inshore reefs. Typical days were 45 minutes out to the first site, a 60- to 75-minute dive depending on depths that were 75 to 100 feet, a cruise toward shore for your interval followed by another 70-minute or so dive in shallower water. Lunches were usually taken on a small island, followed by a dive close-by in shallower water. Then motor back in for 30 minutes or so. Night dives departed about 30 minutes before sunset. Visibility was over 100 feet on the outer bommies and the worst was still 30 or so on an enjoyable WWII Zero near shore. The dive shop really is not one, so bring repair kits or backup gear. Kimbe Bay is fairly protected and we never had combined seas over about three feet. Walindi is pretty far removed from anything, so you should not plan on activities other than a visit to the local village or a birding hike. Most of the guests were divers, with a few trekkers and birders in the mix. Bugs were not a problem, although we did use DEET when we went out. Free internet was available on one slow connection in the library. UW Photography Comments: Boats only had fresh water tubs for photo gear. No area to work on gear on boat. Bring converters.

PHILIPPINES

One can get a great week of div-

ing and accommodations here for roughly \$1000 — much less if you're adventurous — so more North American divers have the Philippines on their radar screens. Major dive areas are concentrated around Batangas, Mindoro, Palawan, and the Visayas. The reefs are among the most diverse in the world, supporting more than 2,000 species of fish (the Great Barrier Reef, by comparison, supports around 1,500).

Action Divers, Deep Blue Sea Inn, October 2006, Bob Sivak (bobsivak@cox.net), Mission Viejo, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 75 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. As previously reported in Undercurrent, I am amazed why more Americans don't go to the Philippines. An exceptional value given the very reasonable airfare, accommodations, food and great diving; the only downside is the distance (still much closer than Indonesia). The Deep Blue Sea Inn where I stayed was simple at best; however, next door was the Portofino, which would satisfy any western traveler. Food was quite good everywhere, with a typical meal costing \$6! The Filipino people are very friendly and mostly Catholic. Internet access is available at internet cafes and some hotels. The town of Sabang is where most of the dive operations are. If you want nightlife at your door step, then stay there. If you like a little peace and quiet with nightlife a safe 5-minute walk away, then stay in Small Laguna Beach. The diving is a macro photographer's delight. Nudibranchs galore, pipefish (yes, ornate ghost as well), frogfish, seahorse, tropicals, amazing soft and hard corals. No big fish though. Clarity could have been a bit better, but the rich waters did provide a surprise 7 foot wide manta! I recommend a full wetsuit

or skin because of the occasional jellies. Another major advantage is the 2-15 minute boat ride to dive sites. Entry from the simple outrigger "banca" is by backroll. Terrain varies from small walls to sand flats, with some very nice small wrecks. Soft corals in superb shape, while there is some visible hard coral damage from the typhoon in May 2006. Post-dive, gear is removed in water and boat crew lifts it out. Surface intervals of at least 2 hours where they should be, on the beach! Action Divers runs 9 a.m., noon and 3 p.m. dives that are professional without babysitting. Friendly and knowledgeable DMs. Boat facilities consist of a milk crate for cameras and very careful crew. Fresh water rinse tanks at the shop.

Action Divers, Deep Blue Sea Inn, April 2007, Michael Judd (michaeltjudd@copper.net), Oregon City, OR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, currents. Action Divers and the Deep Blue Sea Inn are on Small La Laguna Beach (although the area is generally referred to as Puerto Galera, few divers actually stay in the town of PG; most are at Sabang Beach, Small La Laguna or Big La Laguna). Deep Blue Sea is on the water, although the narrow beach is more of a pedestrian roadway and parking area for boats than a place to lounge. This is also true of Sabang, just to the west. Big La Laguna has a decent beach for sunbathing or swimming. The room was basic, \$30/night. The AC, small TV (with cable) and hot water shower all worked, although you had to move the toilet paper to use the latter, since the bathroom was a bit on the small side. The rooms were cleaned well each day. The restaurant on site was adequate if you're not fussy, and there were dozens of other food options within easy walking distance. The San Miguel beer was

inexpensive and cold. The three beaches comprise about a mile of hotels, restaurants, dive operations and other tourist-oriented businesses. It hasn't yet got that over-built plastic resort feel of a lot of dive destinations. Vendors on the beach are regulated, so you're not pestered too badly. I felt quite comfortable walking around at night. Enough action on the street and beach to be interesting but not overwhelming. You get to PG by a combination of bus/car and boat rides. Depending on how much money you want to spend and how much adventure you like, there are a range of options, from the transport the locals use to private car and boat. Action Divers offer 3 dives a day, at 9:00 AM, noon and 3:00 PM, returning to the shop on the beach after each as the dive sites are no more than 15 minutes away. That schedule works well if you are staying nearby on the beach. You can join any trip or not as you choose (they like to know in advance). The cost is all of \$22 per dive, about the standard rate in PG. Before each dive you mount your BC and reg on a tank at the shop, and the staff loads it on the boat for you. At the end of the dive they unload it and you wash your own gear and wet-suit and hang it at the shop for the next dive (they move everything inside at night). Diving is from a bangka, which I can best describe as a large outrigger canoe with an outboard motor. Enter the water by back roll, exit by handing your outfit up to the crewman, then climbing the wooden ladder. The bangkas were comfortable for six, cramped for ten, but even then the rides were short enough to be bearable. Most of the dives were drifts, ranging from gentle to speedy. The dive guides were professional, with the proper balance between direction and flexibility, and good at pointing out critters. Over

the six days there were only a couple of repeat locations. Overall, I would give the dive sites a B+ grade. The visibility was never more than 80 feet, more often 40 to 60 feet. I never saw a fish more than two feet long — even the site named Shark Cave had no shark (which we were told was highly unusual). There was a multitude of different kinds of anemone fish on almost every dive. Nudibranchs were so large and plentiful that even I couldn't help seeing them, in at least a dozen fantastic patterns and hues. Lots of lionfish, quite a few frog-fish, some octopus and cuttle-fish, plus numerous angels and sweetlips. The quality and variety of corals was also high. Although there are many dive operations in the area, there are enough dive sites that we didn't run into any traffic jams. While airfare from the US is going to run you more than \$1000, the fact that you can eat, sleep and dive for not much more than \$100 a day makes it a good alternative to the Caribbean.

Atlantis Hotel and Resort, February 2007, Sue Cropper, Wyckoff, NJ.

Experience: 1856 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm and flat, no currents. Hotel food, staff, rooms were great! For beginning divers with no experience and some trepidation, a supervised, simple, decent learning experience. For divers with any experience and spirit of adventure who do not wish to be herded, yuck! Unless there is a driving need to photograph the plentiful nudibranchs, dont go. Our group had one exciting small creature dive out of the entire week.

Atlantis Dumaguete, February 2007, Robert Ayers (astroayers@gmail.com), San Jose, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. I chose to dive Atlantis Dum-

aguete only (not also Puerto Galera). The Dumaguete location is quiet. Rooms are reasonable and not small. Nice restaurant/bar overlooks the beach with an outside area: four 'specials' each lunch and dinner, one veggie. The "muck diving" at Dumaguete is spectacular. Many frogfish, ornate ghost pipefish everywhere — and the DMs find them for you (I certainly wouldn't have found them on my own). Nudis, leaf scorpionfish, crocodilefish, Mandarinfish, sea moths, lots of huge, beautiful anemones with their fish (I could extend this listing; divers weren't even paying attention to the many beautiful Lionfish). Atlantis also runs optional day-trips to nearby islands where the diving is more traditional reef-coral flats, slopes and walls. Set up your gear once, then it is moved from tank to tank and boat to boat. Backroll off, shed BC, then ladder back. The DMs are local and really know the area — the secret to finding critters. I was astounded at how well a frogfish can color-match the background. Max of four divers per DM; a couple times it was just me and the DM.

Atlantis Beach Resort, March 2007, Michael N. Hofman (mhofman@jmoyerlandscaping.com), San Francisco, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm, choppy. After reading the glowing review in Undercurrent about the two dive locations of Atlantis Beach Resort, we decided to give it a try. For the most part, it was an enjoyable trip; certain components of the dive operation were surprising and made the diving a little awkward and cumbersome. The resort is great — rooms wonderful, food and service way above average. The dive operation is set up well, with labels for all the gear so that staff can move it to the boat or shore location easily

and keep track of it. The dive operation is managed by the German fellow who is a little too controlling for our taste. The local dive guides/masters were excellent but not able to deliver the type of service that makes sense. After several dives that the dive master gave the "thumbs - up" (dive over) at around 50 minutes. Turns out that the dive boat may carry anywhere from 5 to 20 divers and the gentleman in charge doesn't want his schedule disrupted. Things loosened up a little after several of us complained — there were actually several 65 minute dives. Nonetheless, much of the diving was interesting, with many small things to see — my first black frog fish (4 of them), many cuttle fish (including my first flamboyant cuttle fish), sea horses, tons of nudibranchs, dwarf frog fish, octopus and so on. Actually saw schools of small jacks and other small schools in the preserves which start and stop with a great deal of frequency along the beach. So the diving was better than I thought it would be, the resort (especially the food) was topnotch and once we negotiated on dive times, diving was good. We did two day trips which were interesting but slightly overrated. If you can get them to go to the coconut factory wharf, do it, as there is incredible assortment of life there. And the house reef has a Mandarin fish population too!

Atlantis, April 2007, Pec Indman (pec@beyondtheblues.com), San Jose, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm. My husband, 12-year-old diving daughter and I stayed for almost 2 fantastic weeks at Atlantis, Dumaguete. The staff, from the front office to the guys hauling the dive gear to the boat, were kind and helpful. Restaurant staff knew us by name, and remembered what we liked to eat and drink. The chef worked hard

to please my daughter, and made her special things. The dive crew was fantastic — most of the time we were able to have DM Lemi (just for our family), a patient, sweet, fun guy. All the DMs were helpful and friendly. We saw many wonderful fish and critters. I am a total novice u/w photographer, and Lemi was patient with me as I tried over and over to capture some of the amazing sea life. We did wish they would institute a No Smoking policy on the boat. My husband got a wonderful massage every day in the spa at the resort — inexpensive by US standards. Our room had air conditioning and a fan, and was comfortable and clean. We booked our trip through Ken at Ultimate Dive travel. My pictures are at www.pecsfish.com shutterfly.com UW Photography Comments: wonderful padded rinse tank at the dive center at the resort.

Atlantis, June 2007, Allan Jones (divers@sbcglobal.net), Anaheim, CA.

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 35 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, choppy, no currents. It was a good trip with average diving. It was good from the standpoint that this was our first time in the water with our new digital rigs — Subal/D200/Inon and the diving allowed us to concentrate on the ‘learning’ aspect as opposed to hunting for critters. The resort is well maintained, with about 38 rooms. Each had a TV, A/C and mini-bar. There was a nice fresh water pool and beach front bar and dining. The dive shack had some of the best custom-made rinse sinks for gear — separate units for suits, B/C, booties, etc. A separate camera tank was foam rubber lined — a nice touch! Storage cubicles are assigned to each diver and there are ample hangers for suits. You take your camera to your room each night. The dive shack is locked each night and the grounds are

patrolled by security. There are four dives offered each day— extra charge for night dives. Everyone does a check-out dive, without camera. Diving is done from several wooden boats holding a maximum of 14 divers. We lucked out and were there between groups and had only 6-8 divers in the resort. You enter with a back roll and are handed your camera. The exiting procedure was to slip off your rig and the boat crew pulled it up. You then climbed a good ladder. Most of the diving is a mild muck variety from the boats along the shore. Depths averaged from 10 to 85 feet; water was a consistent 84 degrees, with vis about 30-50 ft. With the low number in the lodge, my wife and I had a guide assigned just to us. On 2 days we were able to dive a commercial pier with good critter life. All of this was 60 mm macro. A 45-minute boat ride away was Apo Island, where there were walls and hard corals. Most colors here were crinoids with few soft corals or sponges. Here, we tried out our new Nikon 16 mm fish eye and 10.5 mm lens. A nice lunch was provided and we did 3 dives here for the day. While we thought the diving was mild, we did see 3 new critters: white ornate pipe fish, Chlamydatus moray eel and a saw blade shrimp. The dining and food were the best we have had in 29 years of diving. Since the attendance was low, everything was cooked to your order. At our request, chili mud crab was secured in the market and prepared for us. We flew Philippine Air from Los Angeles to Manila and then Air Philippine from the domestic area. Air Philippine does not charge for excess baggage! On our return we had to fly Air Cebu back to Manila and they do charge for baggage over 40 lbs/person and it landed at a different airport, requiring a short taxi ride. Departing Manila required 5 sepa-

rate security inspections and they were thorough! We booked through Dive Discovery, San Carlos, CA, who in turn used Teresa Montilla, jun_monty2004@yahoo.com in Manila for local tickets and transfer assistance. She is extremely efficient. UW Photography Comments: Rubber lined camera rinse tank. Provided replacement HP hose.

Atlantis Resort, August 2007, Lisa Carangelo, Swampscott, MA. Experience: 1000+ dives. Vis: 40 to 80 feet. Water: 85 to 90 F. In 25 years of dive travel, I have never seen such fabulous corals as on APO Island (a 1-hour, 3-dive day trip from Atlantis Dumaguete). It was as if someone landscaped underwater. The dive guides were good at pointing out seahorses, pygmy seahorses, Mandarin fish mating at dusk, frog fish, sea snakes, snake eels, etc. The resorts were clean and well maintained. Water in restaurants was purified and the meal choices were delicious and plentiful. Puerto Galera has more night life, Dumaguete is quieter and more restful. Both resorts offered diving at 9, 11, 2 and 4 PM daily. Except for APO Similan Islands, all sites were less than 20 minutes from the resorts. Long flight (15 hours from San Francisco plus 5 from Boston to San Francisco), but worth it. Be sure the pay ahead for a room in Manila. Everyone spoke lovely English and was genuinely interested in doing anything that would make your stay more enjoyable. Highly recommend Ultimate Dive Travels Laura to do any Pacific trips. We've relied on her twice and not been disappointed

Exotic Island Dive and Beach Resort, April 2007, Gayle and Bob Bringas (robertbringas@msn.com), Gaston, OR. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm. Philippine Airlines (PAL) has the only

direct flights from LAX to Manila. The flights were completely full both ways. The SportsPlus program allows 20 kilos of extra weight from sports equipment for USD30 per year, good on both PAL and Air Philippines. Exotic's rooms range from basic to deluxe air-conditioned rooms with minibar, satellite TV, hot/cold running water. There is a hotel safe at the front desk for valuables. Our package included breakfast and 2 dives a day. The menu was a combination of western and Asian cuisine. Divers set up and rinse their own gear. Dive shop employees carry the gear to and from the dive boat. Diving is done from bangkas. To board, a plank is angled from the beach to the bow of the boat. Exotic has three bangkas of varying sizes. Entry is a three-to five-foot giant stride (depending on which boat), with crew members standing by to steady you. Exit ladder was easy to use. Dives are always guided in a group. Proposed dive sites are posted on the board at the dive shop and you sign up for the ones you want. Thresher shark dives leave for Monad Shoal at 5 AM. Divers wait on the bottom at 75 feet to the sharks to appear out of the 30-foot visibility. We tried two different locations on the Shoal during the six days we were there, but only saw one thresher at the limit of visibility. Monad Shoal in the afternoon is for mantas. Again, divers wait on the bottom at 75 feet for the mantas to appear. Visibility remained at 30 feet. We saw three of the largest mantas we have ever seen in 500-plus dives. Most dives, current was slight to moderate. Tapolon wreck was the only dive with strong current. The wreck is at 90 feet Exotic's house reef was a pleasant dive; no current, bottom at forty feet, lots to see; the only dive where we were able to go off on our own. Exotic no longer goes to Calangaman Island; the owner of the is-

land won't let anyone use the beach for a dive interval without payment. Nitrox was available, but they suggested only using it on certain dives (i.e., Monad Shoal, Tapilon Wreck). Mixes ranged from 33% to 36% because the Nitrox tanks are hand-blended, not filled from a membrane system.

Scuba Ventures, Atlantis Dumaguete, September 2007, Martha Mandel

(peonyfarm@sbcglobal.net), Glendale, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm.

We spent one week here at Atlantis Dumaguete, which is in a more beautiful location than Puerte Galera and the resort itself is more elegant. Diving is fantastic! We saw so many exotic fish and nudibranchs; a fish I.D. book come to life. Marcos, one of the DMs, is also a marine biologist! All DMs are outstanding, respectful of marine life and professional. Food good; service was slow since staff would wait for all of our group to be seated before serving — so it was not their fault, yet the latecomers in our group held everyone else up. A daytrip into town was provided with Noel, an excellent guide. Biggs, the attractive young woman from Australia, is the energetic and efficient manager; ask her to introduce you to the Dog Dream Team — 2 Jack Russells and a golden lab.

Scuba Ventures, Atlantis Puerta Galera, September 2007, Martha Mandel

(peonyfarm@sbcglobal.net), Glendale, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 82 F, calm, currents. Friendly people and great diving.

Atlantis resort was excellent for staff, service, quality of food, clean, attractive rooms; always had hot water and had clean sheets every other day. professional divemasters and guides. There were lots of crinoids, lionfish, frogfish,

leaf fish, large batfish in schools, nudibranchs, all kinds of angelfish, triggerfish, and more! Diving is like jumping into an aquarium. The few sites with strong currents were manageable with help from the divemasters. Only thing that disturbed me was that the Filipinos hit and abuse dogs and cats and treat them as if they were pests; sad to see that.

SeaQuest Dive Center, Hannah's Place, April 2007, Gayle and Bob Bringas

(robertbringas@msn.com), Gaston, OR. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50

to 60 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. Due

to travel agent error, we were booked at Hannah's Place instead of Sumisid Lodge. Sumisid is attached to the dive center. Hannah's Place is a five-minute walk to the dive shop. The dive package was two dives a day and three meals, so we walked back and forth five times a day. The full-board plan is buffets at the Sumisid Lodge. Food was plentiful, Asian/Filipino dishes a majority of the time. Hannah's Place is on the beach and has five rooms arranged around a private courtyard with air conditioning, minibar, plenty of storage. We stayed seven days in Moalboal prior to the dive safari, 2 or 3 days too many. Diving was done either from bangka or skiff, depending on how many dive groups there were. The skiffs are easier to dive from: Faster to the dive sites, back roll entry, dive ladder exit after handing up all your gear. The bangka is slower, the deck was too high for a back roll entry and too rocky for a giant stride, so we did side-roll entries. The exit ladder was fine, but the crew member had to climb down the ladder if you were going to hand up more than your fins. To board the bangka, a plank was angled from the beach to the bow. The boat crew was always willing to give you a steady-

ing hand. The dives were all wall dives. Slight current, 50- to 60-foot visibility, 83- to 84-degree water, no Nitrox, 60- to 70-minute dives, always dive as a group with dive guide. Encountered lots of jellyfish on one dive at Tongo Point. Dive sites were put on the white board and divers signed up for the site they wanted. If a diver wanted a particular site, others had to sign up as well in order for the dive to go. Usually, four to six divers were needed.

SeaQuest Dive Center, Oasis Resort, May 2007, Gayle and Bob Bringas (robertbringas@msn.com), Gaston, OR. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. The Visayas Dive Safari ends at Panglao Island and the Oasis Resort. No Nitrox at the Oasis. Divers set up and rinse their own gear. Dive shop employees carry the gear to and from the dive boat. Diving is done from bangkas. To board, a plank is angled from the beach to the bow of the boat. Entry is a side-roll off the bow. Exit is via a dive ladder, after handing up your fins. All dives are guided. Minimal current. Dove Balicasag Island again from Panglao Island. We did three dives there, took a box lunch and stayed on the bangka for the dive intervals. Diving there was awesome. Large schools of jacks and barracuda at Black Forest and Divers Heaven, as well as turtles, scorpion fish, frog fish, nudibranchs. We stayed four days on Panglao. We could have used another 2 or 3 days there, as we didn't get the chance to dive Cabilao Island.

SeaQuest Dive Center, Visayas Dive Safari, April 2007, Gayle and Bob Bringas (robertbringas@msn.com), Gaston, OR. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: calm. This is a 5-day, 4-night dive safari from Moalboal, Cebu, to Panglao Island,

Bohol. There are 13 dives from a large bangka. No Nitrox; tanks are filled from a compressor on the bangka. You either stand up or sit on the deck. The tanks are laid on their side on the bow (no tank racks) so you have to step over them (if you're tall) or step on them (if you're short) to get from one side of the boat to the other. The "comfort room" is a roofless enclosure on the stern that sits out over the water. Embarking/disembarking was via a plank angled from the beach to the bow, if the bangka was able to get close to shore. If it had to anchor out (as at Siquijor Island), divers/gear were ferried in small skiffs and then you had to pull yourself up onto the bow. Dive entry was a side-roll off the bow. To exit, you hand up your fins and climb up the dive ladder with your gear. We saw dolphins on every crossing, but not on any of the dives. It was five-and-a-half hours in calm seas from Moalboal to the first stop, Apo Island. We stayed at Apo Resort for two nights. You take only a pack with needed items to the resorts, and leave the majority of your luggage on board the bangka. At Apo Resort, we had a stunning view of the beach and cove from our room. There is no running water on the island. Fresh water is brought in from Negros Island in five-gallon plastic cans. The generator only runs from 6 PM to midnight. We used our dive lights in the bathroom, as it had no other form of illumination if the generator was not running. Space in the shower area was taken up with the barrel of fresh water used for rinsing off. Part of the doorway to the bathroom was blocked by the barrel of seawater used to flush the toilet. The barrel of fresh water was not replenished during our two-night stay — conserve. The granite tile floors are extremely slippery when wet. Meals were served family-style for

the safari group and the dive guide. Meals were well-prepared and plentiful, mostly Asian/Filipino cuisine. Apo Island is a marine reserve. Sanctuary fee is not included in the cost of the trip. No dive gloves allowed. This was some of the best diving on the trip. Slight current, 50- to 60-foot visibility, water temperatures 82-84 degrees. Lots of big schools of big fish (surgeon fish, banner fish, etc.). A turtle or two on every dive, ribbon eels. The only dive with strong current was at Coconut. One-and-a-half hours in calm seas from Apo Island to Siquijor Island (also a marine reserve and sanctuary fee is not included in the dive package). We spent two nights at the Coco Grove Resort. It's a beautiful resort spread over a large area. Two swimming pools. Grounds are lush, tropical vegetation, well-maintained. The cottages are set back from the beach, so you have garden views, not ocean views. Has electricity and hot/cold running water. All meals were served family-style for the safari group. Food was predominantly Asian/Filipino dishes. Meals were well-prepared and plentiful. Only three dives around Siquijor, as we made dives around Apo on the day we left for Siquijor Island and made a dive at Balicasag Island when we left Siquijor Island en route to Panglao Island. Visibility was 50 feet, slight current, water temperature was 81 to 83 degrees. We saw blue ribbon eel, snake eel, banded pipefish, ornate ghost pipefish, porcelain crabs, plus all the "usual stuff."

SOLOMON ISLANDS

While difficult to get to, the Solomons are classic jungle islands with beautiful reefs and excellent fish life.

Gizo Hotel, Uepi Island Resort, March 2006, Mark and Gini May (mvmay@comcast.net), Sandy, UT. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, choppy. The Solomons are rarely visited by Americans but a lot of Aussies and Kiwis visit. This was by far the best diving we have done in 22 years since certification. We stayed a week at the Gizo Hotel on the island of Gizo and a week at Uepi Island Resort on Morovo lagoon. The Gizo Hotel is very basic and makes a Motel 6 look lux. Uepi Island Resort was nice, but not as fancy as one would expect on Fiji or in Hawaii. The Solomon Islanders are great, though; they don't see many Americans so are very friendly and interested in us. The diving is fantastic; with over 900 islands, dive sites are everywhere. At Gizo we took off in the morning and had a dive, went to an uninhabited island for lunch and swimming, then went for our afternoon dive. One lunch was on Kennedy Island where JFK and crew swam after their PT boat was cut in two. WWII history is everywhere and we did our first wreck dives there on ships and a P-38 and a Hellcat.

TONGA

Dive Vava'u, The Moorings charter, August 2007, Mike Binnard, Belmont, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 76 F, no currents. Vava'u is a pretty ideal sailing environment. The weather was good, the navigation is easy, and the islands are great. Anchoring is easy, because the water is so clear and you can see exactly what you're doing. The only trouble we had was that VHF radio contact is a little less reliable than advertised. "Sailingbird's Guide to the Kingdom of Tonga" is the best refer-