

worktable, rinse bucket on dive deck, 110/220 charging station.

PHILIPPINES

Expedition Fleet, Oceanic Explorer, May 2007, Gayle and Bob Bringas (robertbringas@msn.com), Gaston,

OR. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Cabins A1 and A2 have more space than A3 and A4, because A1 and A2 do not have the storage that A3 and A4 have. A3 and A4 are next to the dining area. The dive deck is B deck. A Deck is split fore and aft. So, to get to the dining area from A1 or A2, you go down a set of stairs to B Deck, cross B Deck, and climb a set of stairs to the aft A Deck. Between Cabins A1 and A2 is the generator, so it was like having Magic Fingers in the bunk, without the quarters. Oceanic Explorer is a faster boat than the Stella Maris, another Expedition Fleet boat that made the same trip at the same time. Food was served buffet-style, typically Asian/Filipino cuisine, rarely any western dishes. Desert was usually fresh mangos. Snacks were usually store-bought cookies and crackers. Diving was done off of two skiffs. Crew always ready to give you a hand on and off. Dive guide gave briefings on the skiff, but it was generally limited to which way the current was running. Crew transferred gear on and off the skiffs, set up tanks, etc. A crew member analyzed Nitrox tanks while the diver observed, then the diver filled out the percentage and MOD in a notebook, with date and signature. Gear was left on the skiffs during the day, and taken aboard at night or during crossings. We had calm seas for the entire trip. The diving was good. Some rubble areas. Never had more than slight current on any dive site. Routinely saw

turtles, white-tip and reef sharks, lots of garden eels, big schools of big fish: Jacks, banner fish, spade fish, hump-head wrasse. Divemaster Danny led the dives, but wasn't inclined to point out much. Encountered some thermoclines, but water temperatures ranged from 84 to 87 degrees. Bob did 18 dives in the four dive days (with two night dives).

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Bilikiki, November 2006, Janet and Bob Czapski (trips@divetravelerservices.com), Farmington Hills, MI.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm, surge, currents, no currents. Those who have difficulties with stairs, high steps in doorways, step-downs from cabins into hallways, will not enjoy this boat. The cabins were clean, bathrooms were tiny but adequate. Noise travels easily on the cabin deck level. Food was mediocre at best. We did 4 live-aboards back-to-back on this trip and we rated this food the poorest. Breakfasts were never hot, food selections were extremely limited. The fruits, however, were the best and most plentiful we've ever seen. The crew did the best they could with the ingredients on hand. The crew itself was competent but, shy. They were not introduced to the group upon arrival, but they wear their names on their shirts. Once you called them by name, they were a little more outgoing. Their strength was incredible! It was nothing to pick up two sets of gear and carry it easily into the tinnies! The tinny drivers were competent in handling cameras and dive gear prior to boarding via the small ladder at the rear of the tinny. We did a few dives directly off the back of the Bilikiki. This was the least "guided" diving that we've ever done