

with no explanation. This led to diving the same dive sites repetitively. Overall, I believe it is a safe dive operation but not a accommodating or organized one. The front desk made quite a few mistakes and had quite a few upset customers. The Club is a remote dive hotel — not quite what I would call a resort. It is 45 minutes from town or anything worth exploring, but they do take you into town 6:30 PM to 9:30 PM daily. The Club's backside borders cargo liners and trucks loading/unloading 24/7. Can be pretty noisy. First night my AC did not work even after they tried to fix it and they would not move me to another room. I had to leave the doors open for ventilation but the noise kept me up most of the night. The next day they fixed it. There were quite a few diving staff members and divers I met that will help nurture some fond memories. I would be hard-pressed to recommend this operation to anyone. UW Photography Comments: Crew helpful with equipment needs. Simple rinse — plastic drum. Limited visibility and strong currents with debris made for difficult photography at times. Several spots had high degree of unattractive algal growth.

Puerto Vallarta

Chico's Dive Center, July 2007, Thomas R. Chase (trchase@msn.com), Prospect, KY. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 72 to 80 F, choppy, surge. We went to Marietas Island, which is known for large pelagics. Unfortunately, the visibility was poor due to heavy rainfall. The water was also fairly cold (72 F below the thermocline). The next day we did a combined snorkel/dive trip to Majahuita. That was a nice trip. The only drawback is the boat is slow. Our

last dive was a night dive at Los Arcos. It was excellent. The visibility was not great, but the abundant life was stunning. I have never seen so many eels. They also had schools of puffer fish. My daughter saw a couple of seahorses at the end of the dive. The staff were outstanding and did everything they could to accommodate us. Especially helpful were the staff from the shop at Barcelo Resort (where the night dive departs). The conditions weren't the best, but the staff and service were great. Not geared toward photographers.

Zihuatanejo

Zihuatanejo Dive Center, May 2007, Ron Clark (rbclarkconcrete@shawus.com), Willis, TX. Experience: 50+ dives. Vis: 15 to 60 feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm and flat, surge, no currents. Zihuatanejo had varied vis. Lots of fish schools. Shoreline dives had a strong surf surge. Very shallow 40 feet max. Offshore w/great vis. down to 80 feet. Hotel Iruna is great as usual. No all-inclusive. Bu Playa las Latas or the Town of Zihuatanejo has great food.

UNITED STATES

California

Catalina Island

Catalina Divers Supply, August 2006, Laura Mosqueda, Pasadena, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 40 Feet. Water: 60 to 66 F, calm. The diving off Catalina Island is beautiful: kelp forests, the giant black sea bass are making a wonderful comeback, garibaldi, rockfish, scorpionfish, nudibranchs, and an occasional sea lion zips by. The boat is great for diving: easy off (giant stride off the back) and on (sturdy ladders).

There's a head on the boat and part of the boat is covered if you want to get out of the elements. Lunch is included. The crew are consistently excellent: safety conscious, friendly, helpful. They make a real effort to find the best dive spots depending on the conditions that day.

Monterey

Monterey Bay Dive Company, October 2006, Jon Scott (jascott2@adelphia.net), Plainfield, NH. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 Feet. Water: 56 F, surge. 2-tank boat trip with Monterey Bay Dive Center on their 40-foot Silver Prince on a Saturday morning. Both dives at 3rd Pinnacle in Carmel Bay, a 40-min. trip from Monterey (swells and wind making for sickness difficulties for some). Boat was not full with 12 divers (capacity 14) but full enough. Needed to rent equipment as airlines temporarily misplaced gear. Dive shop easy to work with; good quality equipment. Good dive and safety briefings. Nice breakfast (bagels, coffee, etc.) and snacks on board. Good roll-call procedures. Entry off side by giant stride; return by stern ladder; staff assists with fin removal. All gear setups responsibility of diver. Dove with guide/divemaster Jeff Conway, as this was a first kelp forest dive experience and dive partner had not been diving in several years. Site consisted of granite formations/walls with interesting channels to swim through. Every hard surface covered with colorful anemones, urchins and cup corals. Visibility and color both much better and even more spectacular than expected. Abundant fish life. Interesting small critters. 2nd dive stayed in/around kelp forest exploring fish and other life at different levels. Like being on another planet. Much more dynamic than re-creation in Monterey Aquari-

um. Thick clouds of fish everywhere; after a few minutes clinging to stalks of kelp, you become invisible to the fish and they swarm around. Dive op and staff made potentially very challenging (cold water, unfamiliar conditions, surge, etc.) dives a blast. Dive Center also arranges/supports shore diving.

Monterey Express, March 2007, Mort Rolleston (mortmandu@rcn.com), Washington, DC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 49 to 50 F, calm, surge. A skin, 7 mm Henderson gold core wetsuit, and a vest on top (along with hood and gloves) kept me comfortable (though many donned dry suits). We dove Locals Ledge and Fire Rocks off Pescadero Point — both pinnacles. My dive buddy, a local amateur underwater photographer, and I were content to spend most of the first dive right under the boat in and around a crevice filled with a huge school of blue rockfish, starfish, and some short kelp. We also saw the occasional kelp fish, tree fish, and half-moon common to the area. The pinnacle was covered in red and pink hydrocoral and anemones, with a few sunflower stars and decorator crabs roaming around. According to those on the boat, a migrating gray whale came close by, but we didn't see or hear it (we did see several on the boat ride back to Monterey, however). Most of the dive was around 60 feet in depth. Unfortunately, my tank only showed about 2400 psi at the start, which limited my bottom line. Fire Rocks had similar aquatic life to the first dive. The site is more of a ridge, with tall kelp strands, and felt more like a coral reef in setup. We explored small areas of mostly sheltered large holes in the rock/ledge. The boat operator was solid and experienced. They are not affiliated with a dive shop, so any rentals, etc., would have had to be

through a separate business on shore. They allowed divers on my trip who were clearly advanced to dive their own profiles. They did not put a guide in the water. My only complaint was the relative lack of weights (and all in five-pound increments!). I suppose with most of the divers local and probably showing up with their own weights, that is usually not an issue. They also, oddly, really pressed me to put a ton of weight on, saying I'd need much more here than other places. I can dive with all the neoprene I listed above with only 12 pounds of weight in the local fresh water quarry and they insisted I put 25 pounds on — big mistake. I dropped to about 20 pounds on second dive, but it was still too much. I would have been fine with 15-16 pounds or so. Overall, the diving was interesting and worth it, but I was disappointed in the lack of larger fish and seals (which I really wanted to see!). I think Catalina Island off Los Angeles is better for diving on the Pacific Coast as the water is clearer, warmer, and contains more critters (including larger fish like bat rays, huge jewfish-size black sea bass, large sheep crabs, and small sharks). Monterey is truly one of the most beautiful areas I've seen in the U.S.

San Diego

OEX Scuba and Kayak, Marriott Courtyard Hotel, March 2007, John Crellin (john15237@yahoo.com), Wexford, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 10 to 30 Feet. Water: 52 to 60 F, calm, surge, no currents. This was 2 shore dives to the La Jolla Canyon. Jim Metzger, my instructor for the PADI underwater naturalist specialty, took the time to go through the course properly. I had decided not to bring my gear and rented gear from his shop. The gear was in excellent condition. I had not

dove in full 7 mm wetsuit in a long time so I asked for advice on how to weight myself. I was severely overweight and had a hard time maintaining buoyancy during both dives. I take part responsibility for this since I feel I should find a way to find the proper weight before the dives. Serious cold water and long surface swims. Jim and the folks at the shop were friendly and never rushed me. We took most of the day to do 2 shore dives. He is an excellent instructor. He made sure I understood each step of the class and helped me with gear. OEX is a short walk to the beach. Parking is easy if you get there early (before 9 am). And the folks who work at the shop are extra friendly and helpful. here was nowhere to work on your camera since both dives were shore dives. However, we walked back to the dive shop after each dive and Jim (instructor) took the time to set up a fresh water barrel for the camera and showed me to a clean, dry table to change film and make adjustments.

EASTERN PACIFIC LIVE-ABOARDS

CANADA

British Columbia

Nautilus Explorer, August 2007, Jerry Jensen (jensen_jerry@hotmail.com), Eagle Point, OR. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 2 to 100 Feet. Water: 50 F, calm. This boat is so popular that you must book at least a year in advance to get a spot. I went by myself and had the dorm room in the bow where we three passengers shared the area with the crew. quiet and well-ventilated. The