

their babies! We heard the whale song on most dives. We were treated to their breaching, skyhopping, tail slapping, right by the boat all day! We saw the mantas, sharks, and dolphins on every dive. The pangas would take us near the whales for possible snorkeling encounters, but the mothers were protective of the babies so we had to just enjoy the experience on the water with them. The diving is high energy — you must be comfortable with changing strong currents, and doing your safety stop in a current in the blue in thousands of feet of water, waiting to be picked up (with the hammerheads and the whales). The trip was 9 days — the crossing to the Socorros is between 26 and 30 hours. Cabo San Lucas is a tourist town of resorts, shopping and spring breakers — a day there for us was enough to see everything and take a small boat out to the arch, sea lions and remote beach at Land's End. The Solmar V provided a large camera table. There was no specific charging station, so you could charge at any outlet. They had 2 big camera rinse tanks and the crew was good about handling your equipment after the dive. Because we dove from Pangas, the cameras were set on the floor until we got back to the big boat. We only made a few dives directly from the boat. They have a computer on board to download your photos. Bring your own CDs/DVDs.

Sea of Cortez

Solmar V, October 2006, Russ Lido (rlido@comcast.net), Sterling Hts., MI. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 75 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm, choppy, no currents. We did the Sea of Cortez leg October 22-29, 2006. You fly into Los Cabos, Mexico, and board the ship at the town marina. We arrived a day early and enjoyed some of the local cuisine. We

stayed at the new Best Western, a very nice motel for the money, and the boat will pick you up there. We were lucky to dive at all because of a late-season hurricane in the area. The Solmar V is well maintained. The cabins were very tight but they had their own head and shower. The ship's new engines are still louder than other live-aboards we've been on. Bring earplugs. The crew, food and other passengers made up for the inconvenience. Diving is done from Zodiacs, which can get crowded. Most of the dive sites had an abundance of small tropical fish and many moray and spotted eels, lobsters and crab, plus a few turtles. Diving with the sea lions was one of the highlights of the trip. They were even more friendly than ones on our Galapagos trip. We couldn't do some sites because of the bad weather. Went whale shark hunting one morning but didn't spot any. The ship didn't take credit cards, so tipping the crew and buying nitrox were difficult; new owners need to fix this problem.

UNITED STATES

California

Catalina Island

Bottom Scratcher, August 2006, Doug King (dking10982@aol.com), Santa Fe Springs, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 25 to 30 Feet. Water: 65 to 70 F, calm. The weather was good. I have seen better vis here than what we had. Boat is tight as far as room. More food than you can eat. Boat is real slow. Boat has a small boat that is in the water; seems to be more trouble than it is worth.