

. . . Why not just start the entire dive day an hour earlier to avoid this unpleasant "hurry hurry" attitude?

My only significant complaint: Nassau Scuba Centre rushed the surface intervals and the second dives way too much so they could get back to set up for their afternoon charters. Why not just start the entire dive day an hour earlier to avoid this unpleasant "hurry hurry" attitude?

### The Verdict, Please

So the Orange Hill Beach Inn/Nassau Scuba Centre package did the trick. I got a decent dose of diving, lost only a couple of days of work, and hardly made a dent in the fortune I'm putting aside for that PNG trip -- which just has to happen soon.

G. D.

# Santa Catalina Island Fantasy

*Twenty-six miles across the sea . . .*

Dear Fellow Diver,

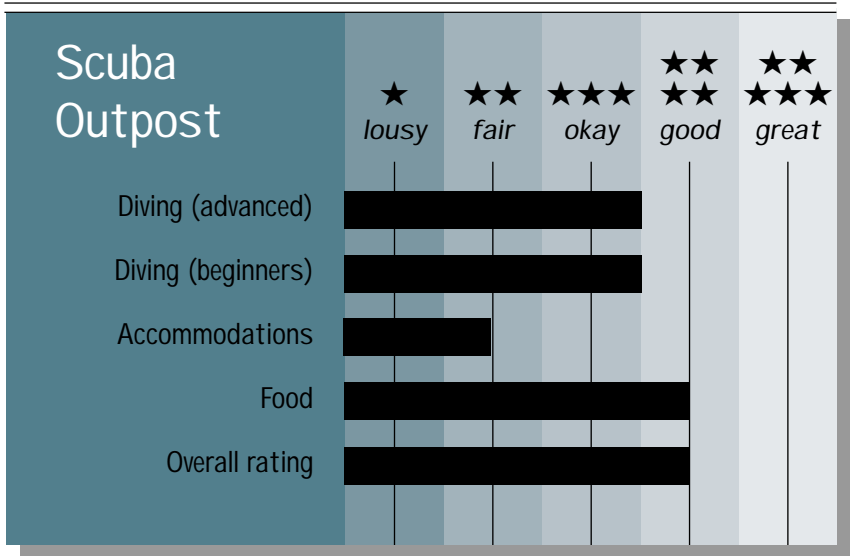
Leon Fichman, a transplant from Brazil and Israel, has an American dream: building a spectacular group of Tahitian

*fahres* covering the hillside overlooking beautiful Emerald Bay Harbor on Southern California's Catalina Island. His Scuba Outpost would become a dedicated diving clone of Club Med. The price would be moderate, accommodations modest, the food and service superb. Divers from all over would come to dive California's scenic underwater world, replete with golden Garibaldis and mystical kelp forests.

Leon, a visionary and enthusiast with a strong background in hotel and restaurant management, has made a

good start. He still has a way to go; nonetheless, Santa Catalina, largely an undeveloped island and marine sanctuary 26 miles across the sea from L.A., is a super choice.

. . . You'll need a wetsuit; the March water temperature was 59°.



### A Coldwater Scout Camp

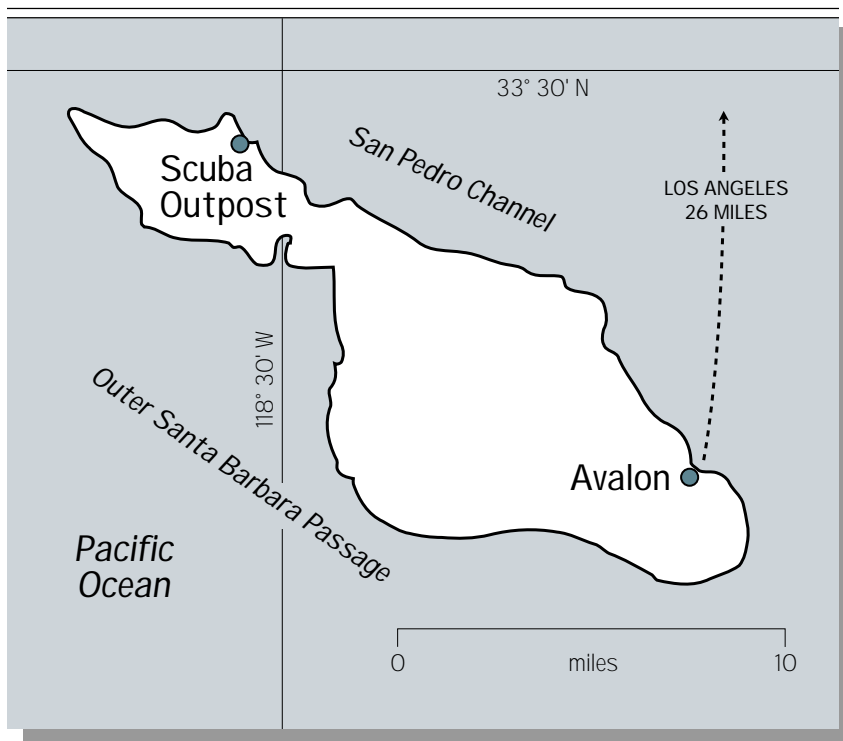
My partner and I were drawn to this excursion by the convenience and economy of his Long Weekend Package: depart Marina del Rey, near L.A. International Airport, at 7:30 a.m. Friday

on *Miss Christy*, a fast ferry with seating both outside and in, for a smooth, 90-minute trip directly to the outpost. Return late Sunday, for an all-inclusive \$245/person, including four boat dives. Visiting L.A. on business? Don't worry about gear. Masks, snorkels, fins, BCs, and regulators are free and there's a selection of wetsuits, hoods, and gloves. You'll need them; water temperature in March was 59°, though in summer the surface hits 70°.

The Scuba Outpost is part of an historic Boy Scout Camp (which my partner visited half a century earlier). Fichman coordinates his schedule with the Scouts' activities during the week, serving as their scuba instructor. For now, divers stay in the decidedly rustic cabins and dormitories -- eight bunks to a room, unless you're lucky enough to get the privacy of the Chaplain's cabin -- and depend on the group bathroom and shower. I was reasonably comfortable and appreciated the facilities for soaking and drying gear.

## Kelp and Garibaldi

Soon after arriving, eight of us were transported by inflatable to Indian Rock, about 300 yards offshore. I descended into a flourishing kelp forest on the bay side of the islet, where the water is only 20 to 30 feet deep, then continued over 100 yards of rocky ledges and sand patches. Going through a pass in the rocks to the sea side brought me down to 40-70 feet and to a rock wall with all the marine flora and fauna of Catalina: sheepshead, Garibaldi, calico bass, señoritas, schools of a brilliant blue fish called a blacksmith, and an extended galaxy of life. Easy, interesting, scenic diving, a remarkable contrast to tropical diving. And we were free to dive any way we wanted,



## *Santa Catalina Island*

Subscriber Donald Parker of Las Vegas reports a harrowing experience aboard Peter Hughes's *Sun Dancer* last January in Palau:

### *Is Your Sausage Too Short?*

"The divemaster gave each diver a safety sausage (scuba tube). I had purchased my own from our local dive shop and, sure enough, got caught in a current and was carried several hundred yards from the pickup boat.

"I inflated my safety signal, but it was only 3 feet 6 inches long (vs. 7 feet plus for the scuba tubes supplied). The pickup crew could not see me. They radioed the *Sun Dancer* and, with their three-story advantage and binoculars, its crew located me right away — after some anxious moments.

"Lesson learned by both me and the crew: Compare the devices you have with the ones used at the briefing."

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for as long as we wanted, using our computers -- and the waiting divers -- as our limitations.

We were cosseted by one of the two excellent divemasters working with Leon, assisted by a diver-in-training who turned a hand to tank-carrying and equipment-running. Leon made sure that tanks and equipment were transported to whatever spot we required. All was set up for us on the first inflatable dive. Later in the afternoon we were each consulted about where and when we would prefer to shore dive -- our gear was carried there and, if necessary, adjusted to our liking.

**. . . At Ship Rock, one looks up through layer upon layer of translucent green kelp set off by the intense blue of the water and the shimmering sun.**

Shore diving is simple and lovely from the Scuba Outpost. Just over the brow of a low hill is the sheltered beach of Doctor's Cove. Shore entries are a cinch, especially with a solicitous divemaster helping. I kicked out to Table Rock at 70 feet or more, admiring the flora and fauna, frequently face to face with lobsters enjoying the protection of the marine sanctuary. As it was, we made boat dives to Ship Rock (a breathtakingly beautiful dive where one looks up through layers of translucent green kelp set off by the intense blue of the water and the shimmering sun) and to Blue Caverns (a grotto lined with immense blue sea fans). As for bigger fish, my partner was more successful in his scouting, spotting a three-foot white sea bass and a remarkable angel shark.

### **Comestibles Aplenty**

The extravagance that is missing in the accommodations is made up for at mealtime. Served in the vaulted-ceiling lodge

with a big stone fireplace and a covered porch, it was as good as traveling divers can expect -- and I've been on virtually every live-aboard around. Breakfast: omelets to order with every conceivable filling, pancakes, cereal, bagels, fruit, and six kinds of juices. Lunch: four salad choices, sandwiches with a multitude of cold meats and cheeses, including choice rare roast beef, and fresh cookies.

Dinner: one night, roast lamb

or orange roughy; another, mesquite-broiled thick top sirloin steak and a delicious fish. Have one, have both, order twice. Fresh vegetables, varied desserts -- and a nightcap of fresh brownies and milk to top off the evening.

Still, the "under construction" status of Scuba Outpost is evident in such things as the periodic failure of the inflatable's motor, which caused one dive to be canceled, and a lack of punctuality -- the *Miss Christy* was two hours late picking us up Sunday evening for the return to the mainland. Nonetheless, it was indeed a fine escape for a diving weekend.

X. A.

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### ***Ditty Bag***

Transportation, three days/two nights accommodations, all meals, four boat dives, one night dive, unlimited beach diving, tanks and weights included; all for \$245/person double occupancy, \$195 if you come out Friday

night. . . Leon arranged for us to spend Thursday night on a sailboat in the yacht harbor from which the boat departed. Cost: \$10/person. Early Friday morning we found doughnuts and coffee at the local store before departure. . . In the summer, the *Miss Christy* serves as the dive boat. . . Use free time to snorkel, hike, or kayak; on the western end of Catalina, Scuba Outpost is a long way from Avalon, the resort town. For reservations, call 1-800-896-2239 or 310-574-8111 or fax 310-574-8114. Web site: <http://www.travelsource.com/scubapost.html>.

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