
Local people told Perry the physician was out of town, so Perry didn't bother.

Why did McKittrick's travel arrangements fall through? The fault here apparently lies with the airlines. Isleña computer schedules were inaccurate; Dovenbarger learned that although a reservation number proved that the reservation had been made, TACA oversold the airline and ignored the reservation. Scores of divers every year report similar experiences with TACA. This case, Dovenbarger told us, has caused DAN to cease using TACA.

Perry believed he was out of pocket for McKittrick's second flight. His letter didn't request

reimbursement, and Worldwide said all they would do was arrange it. When we discussed this case with Dovenbarger, he noted that medical insurance didn't apply because the accident happened out of the water. Nevertheless, evacuation or air assistance does. Although they didn't get a physician's assessment in Roatan, they behaved in good faith. They have a master policy, and because of these extenuating circumstances, DAN will see that they are reimbursed for the cost of flights home, less the original cost — as long as it doesn't exceed \$1,000, the limit of the DAN policy — when Perry applies.

The Aggressor fleet has given her a free week on the *Bay Islands*

Aggressor to replace her lost week. According to Perry, she's healed, and the two are planning their next trip.

Now, a tip for all DAN members: Dovenbarger suggests that one lesson here is for every DAN member to read the policy. "We have gone to great lengths," he said, "to explain and clarify everything we can to help travelers and expedite claims."

So, Bobby, I can understand why you were frustrated and angry on Roatan, but I'm keeping my DAN membership alive and well and respectfully advise you and Sally to do the same.

Ben Davison

What's Going On . . .

Readers report on diving adventures in both hemispheres

Honduras

The biggest drawback to the Bay Islands is still the no-see-ums. These tiny flying teeth can eat you alive. True, they are cyclical, and they bother some people more than others, but the bottom line is that you have to spend the whole trip slathered in DEET. Still, the Bay Islands remain one of the best bargains in tropical dive travel — package rates are outstanding.

Roatan is growing wildly, with new resorts everywhere. Cayos Cochinos, though now a marine reserve, has kept its one resort, **Plantation Beach**. Guanaja, which will be covered in the next month's issue, also has several new small resorts.

Utila is also on the move. In a past issue I mentioned that **Laguna Beach Resort** owners had reportedly sunk two million bucks into making it Utila's first-class resort; I also asked for a report from any readers who had been there. Nels Westman (Capitola, California) responded:

"I spent seven nights at Laguna Beach in September. Arrangements were handled smoothly by their agent, Utila Tours, for a \$645 package including lodging, all meals, five dive days with two-tank dives, plus two night dives. I found the resort lovely, with sandy beaches, coconut palms, flowers, and hammocks. Rooms are spacious with AC, ceiling fans, bedside lights, good plumbing,

and hot showers. The clubhouse, bar, and dining room are all fine. Food was tasty and plentiful, served buffet style. Bar was well stocked, self-serviced, and prices were reasonable. They generate their own power 24 hours/day.

"The dive boat is new and well laid out. Plenty of room, shade, radio, and emergency gear. Entry is giant stride off swim platform; easy walk-out return via stern ladder. Boat handles 12–15 easily. One divemaster per 5–6 divers. Unless you object, dive staff takes care of all your gear (wet suits, fins, masks, etc.) throughout the stay — puts it on boat in the morning, changes tanks during day, rinses and dries gear at day's

end. Truly pampered diving. They were fine with computer divers.

“If you are a diver who likes comfortable diving and scenic settings, Laguna Beach Resort is the best thing going on Utila. The price is right.”

Our October 1996 issue mentioned that we hadn't heard anything about **Romeo's Resort** on Roatan since a rash of complaints in October 1995. Jack Rawlins (April 1996) thinks this must be because everyone is speechless with disgust. “I spent a horrible week there — the only dive trip in my life that was truly unpleasant. Why, you ask? (1) Several members of our party had their locked rooms rifled and lost all their valuables; (2) the staff was so depressed and hostile that when we told them of the robberies they shrugged and said it was our fault for leaving things in the rooms; (3) the boats were cranky and slow; (4) the divemaster was a child who obviously had never been to some of the sites and lied about it to cover his ignorance; (5) the head of the dive shop arranged the dives so that during the week we never got to most of the nearby well-known sites; (6) the food was rationed — you literally had to plead for enough food to fill you up, and you were refused if the cook didn't like your looks; (7) the resort sits in a

dank little lagoon, so when you're off the boat you never see ocean, get ocean breezes, shore dive, or swim. Of course the walls were great, but they're just as great when you stay at a good resort like **Coco View**.”

I sailed and dived around the Bay Islands on the *Maid'en Desert* back in 1993 and reported a

“At one point I joked that the only possible things left to break were the toilets or the engine. Before the trip ended, the joke was on me.”

mixed bag, but all in all a decent dive trip. J. Presba (Englewood, Colorado) now warns us that the boat has changed hands. “The info in the brochure for the *Maid'en Desert* sounded like exactly the kind of adventure we were looking for — not only was it live-aboard diving but an opportunity to learn to sail between dives. I chartered the boat along with a group of six for a week in September 1996.

“Shortly after arriving on Roatan, I learned that the *Maid'en Desert* had changed ownership only weeks before. The temptation is to chronicle mishap after mishap which occurred during my week aboard. At one point, jokingly, I speculated that the only possible things left to break were the newly installed marine toilets or the engine (this boat is a motor sailer). Before the trip ended, the joke was on me — on both counts!

“Captain Doug, who apparently has been with the boat since it was put into service under the prior owners and now under the current owner, was the primary reason we didn't hold a lynch party before we left Roatan. This guy tirelessly did everything he possibly could to try and salvage our week aboard — and he did one heck of a job! He spent endless hours just commuting to shore in the dinghy (after the nonfunctioning dinghy motor was replaced, that is) to get tanks filled so we could get in as much diving as possible. (The compressor broke on our first day out. The replacement was an electric compressor, which took out the electrical system on the boat — so that compressor was used only once!)

“The intent is not to dissuade anyone from booking on the *Maid'en Desert*, but the new owner is going to have to do a lot of work to get this boat in shape. This boat needs to be advertised and promoted for what it is — it's not in the luxury live-aboard category, but this type of charter can have a charm of its own. Oddly, even with all the problems and frustrations, we ended up having a whole lot of fun.”

San Salvador, Bahamas

In October, Hurricane Lili ripped across the island of San Salvador, taking out the roofs and

Attention Shoppers: Air Fare Bargain

This sounds like a bargain to me. Air New Zealand is offering a Pacifica Explorer fare that will allow a custom itinerary with up to three stopovers in the Pacific. Destination included are Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti, Hawaii, Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa, and Tonga for \$1,099. It works like this: Make a dive trip to Fiji; pay \$1,099 for air. Then add on a trip to dive Tonga, and then New Zealand, for no extra air charge. Travel must be made between April 1 and August 31, 1997, and be purchased by March 31. If you can't make it this time, keep checking; they offer bargains like this now and then. Contact your travel agent or call direct 800-262-1234.

B. D.

houses and moving the airport tower to the middle of the runway. Club Med was trashed, with roofs blown off the rooms and water sports equipment strewn in all directions; guests complained that the beach umbrellas and sun loungers left on the beach were hurled at their rooms like torpedoes.

Fortunately, the good diving on San Sal has always been on the deeper reefs. Roger Chari (New York), who was at **Riding Rock Inn** in November, reports: "The first dive of the day showed the hurricane damage. Sand was still choking the reef, coral everywhere was dead or badly damaged. Divermasters told me that entire coral formations had been toppled. The second day of diving we hit the deeper reefs and found healthy reefs that were unaffected by the hurricane — fish life remained abundant." Roger also found the Riding Rock acceptable and their dive operation safe and efficient. "Rooms were spartan, but clean. Food was basic diver's fare, nothing fancy, but well prepared."

Indonesia

I contend that some of the best diving in the world is in Indonesia, but from my experience Bali is not where you find the really good stuff. However, I wouldn't try telling that to Steven Altfillisch and his wife, who spent five days in Bali this August. I'm sure I would feel differently about it, too, if I were in the water with a giant pelagic ocean sunfish:

"We stayed near Kuta Beach and decided to dive **Nusa Penida Island with Dive & Dive's**, based in Sanur Beach. They promised a small, fast boat with twin outboards and sun shade.

"A van picked us up in the morning at our house for the short drive. The boat was as promised, and after a 30-minute

crossing to Nusa Penida we backrolled into a ripping four-knot current. The corals and fish were beautiful as we flew over them. Twenty minutes into the dive we spotted a five-foot-tall mola mola that swam slowly off into the blue and then returned for one more look — the highlight of the trip!

"As we ate a nice box lunch on the beach, we watched the slower boats arrive for their first dive. All of our diving at Nusa Penida was in strong currents, and we had lots of fish on every dive. Corals were beautiful and undamaged. Dive and Dive's runs an efficient, no-frills operation."

And where is that really good stuff in Indonesia? In the August issue one of our correspondents reviewed the **Baruna Adventurer**. The diving was great, but the boat and crew had problems. According to Sidney M. Rosen, owner of

Great Western Travel, those problems are being addressed. "I have just returned from the best month of diving of my life in the islands of Nusa Tenggara, Timor, Komodo, Rinja, Banda Islands, and Alor. I had the privilege of being invited to join the **Baruna Adventurer** with the David Doubilet Exploration Expedition.

"Mr. John Sujayana, owner of the boat, has gone to tremendous efforts and expense to correct the water-maker and crew problems and some of the other minor aspects of the boat that could use correction — but these matters pale in comparison with the quality of diving and the opportunity to dive this region of Indonesia.

"In short, the boat is now a solid three stars, if not three and a half; the food is at a solid four-star level, with exotic Indonesian spices, seasonings; the air-conditioning system throughout is

Generally recognized as the best supplemental underwater light meter by far is Sekonic's Marine Meter II (also known as model L164). Not only is it the best, it's basically the only. Many photographers I know will not dive without one. These are the people who are panicking; Sekonic discontinued their production.

The meter, which originally sold for around \$250, now can't be found anywhere. That is, unless you've found Cathy and Herb. It seems that underwater photographer Cathy Church and her partner, Herb Rafael, managed to buy all of the remaining supply of Sekonic meters from Helix and have been offering them over the internet for \$450. Last week they raised the price to best offer over \$650 (meters@cathychurch.com).

I talked to a Mr. Henry Frolich at Mamiya, Inc., which now owns Sekonic. He told me he was getting a lot of pressure from underwater photographers to start producing the meters again. He'll be making a trip to Japan in February for a corporate meeting and will try to persuade them to do just that.

Those wishing to be put on a list for notification if production resumes can e-mail their name and address to sekonic@mamiya.com or write to Sekonic/Mamiya, 8 Westchester Place, New York, NY 10523. Frolich also indicated that the number of responses received might also determine whether there's enough demand to justify new production.

WD-40

Who's Selling Sekonic Meters for How Much?

acceptable, although admittedly on the weak side for those who want their cabins at freezing temperatures.”

K. L. Rubinstein shares the opinion that the *Baruna Adventurer* is getting it together. “The diving was spectacular, particularly around Alor. We were diving along the island chain, including Komodo, where we went ashore to see the dragons.

“The boat crew was helpful and anxious to please. Dive guides were on each dive, but were not intrusive. The entire area is still being explored in terms of dive sites.

“There were 12 divers on the boat, and the crew used two Avon-type boats to drop us off and pick us up. The dives were mostly drift dives, sometimes in strong current. There was never more than a 2- or 3-minute wait for a pickup.

“The dive operation was well run, with the crew taking care of our gear. The gearing-up area, however, is small and confined. With 12 divers, it seemed as if we were all elbows and knees, and it would be worse with more divers. With the maximum load of 18 or 20, they would need to work in two shifts.

“Space for camera gear was limited, but adequate. The food

was excellent. The accommodations were fine, on a par with the Holiday Inn or Best Western sort of hotels; certainly not the Ritz. The air conditioning had been redone just prior to our trip. There were some glitches. Notably, the new large unit in the main salon went on the fritz as soon as we cast off.

“After the trip, we spent several days in Bali and dove two days with Baruna. These (in

“Blue Bubble deserves its fine reputation. We were in the water and on the bottom while divers on other boats were still lined up at the dock waiting to board.”

contrast to the *Adventurer*) were poorly organized trips. I would recommend the *Adventurer* to anyone, but would not recommend the Baruna land-based trips out of Bali.”

Danger: Wild Eels

All those slick pictures of fearless divemasters feeding eels and sharks and morays leads a lot of divers to treat these animals as so many pussycats. Tigers might be a better analogy.

Australia's Cod Hole, on the Great Barrier Reef, is a major animal feeding zoo, but a few months ago a woman diver became the fodder. New Zealander Gillian White, 21, was bit on both arms by a six-foot moray. The damage to her right arm was so severe that it had to be amputated by surgeons after she was airlifted to a Queensland hospital. England's *Diver* magazine says she was lucky: an artery was severed, but a medically qualified companion on the dive boat was able to treat it, most likely saving her life.

B. D.

Cozumel, Mexico

In the October issue we recommended **Aldora Divers**, with its fast boats, steel 120s, and willingness to do the best dives, as a way to avoid the mass-market diving on Cozumel. I didn't mention **Ricardo Madrigal** because I had not had a report on his operation for more than a year. Mark Berger must have noticed the oversight and sent in this report:

“These guys are the best! Everyone dove with computers, and we tried to get the most bottom time possible. Depths were usually limited to one hundred feet on the first dive, but bottom times ranged from 60 to 75 minutes. On the second dive, bottom times would go longer, and for the experienced divers, ranged from 80 to 90 minutes. Lots of good coaching from divemasters on subtle ways to work with breath, equipment, and profile.”

Fin Beven (Pasadena, California) writes that he read about **Blue Bubble** in *In Depth/Undercurrent* and checked them out: “I had heard of their reputation for running less formal dives for relatively experienced divers — Blue Bubble deserves its fine reputation. Their boats are small, but among the fastest on the island. We were in the water and on the bottom while divers on other boats were still lined up at the dock waiting to board. And after two extraordinary drift dives, we were back at the hotel rinsing our gear while others were slowly putting their way home. The divemasters acted as tour guides (not instructors or baby sitters) for reefs selected by the divers.”

George Arnold did five days with Blue Bubble and found them “an outstanding dive operation with knowledgeable, friendly, safety-conscious divemasters. Divemasters would have taken us

to 150–160 feet had we wanted to do that. All boats were fast, six-pack type with oxygen and radio on each boat. They rinsed, dried, and stored our gear each day and loaded it for us onto dive boats. The total cost was \$24.50/dive plus tips.”

Fiji

“Any diver who doesn’t get *In Depth* is a fool [*Ed. note: shameless promotion, but just couldn’t force myself to cut it*]. If I didn’t, I would not know about this place. Five stars plus for finding this one — the find of a lifetime,” write Bill Myers and Bob Dabkiewicz, of Pittsburgh. “We just got back from **Loma Loma**. This place is magical. Not only is it possible to see anything that inhabits the ocean on these pristine reefs (locals say they have even seen great whites outside the reef), but the locals who work here are happy in a magical sense. The only bad thing was having to leave this heavenly resort to return to the real jungle.” The full review of Loma Loma is in *In Depth*’s April 1996 issue.

In August, John and Lee Scruggs (Loveland, Colorado) did the live-aboard thing in Fiji aboard the *Sere Ni Wai*, owned by Greg Lawlor. Greg knows Fiji well; he also owned and operated the *Mollie Dean* in Fiji before it was hit by a rogue wave and sunk a few years back.

“We overnighted at Toka Toka Resort, a pleasant hotel near the airport, then took Fiji Air to Savusavu and a boat out to **Moody’s Namena**. Tom and Joan Moody, the owners of the island resort, had survived the cyclone that had virtually destroyed their home and the bures (cottages). Tom has worked hard to rebuild, and it showed. The diving was still as good, but visibility was down a little. Food was good and plentiful — the famous banana-and-coconut pancakes were great!

“After an enjoyable five days at Namena, we moved on to the *Sere Ni Wai*. The luxurious 101-foot boat is only two years old and was designed exclusively for divers (it does have two seats for avid deep-sea fishermen). Accommodations are luxurious: double beds and private heads with showers. The use of native woods enhances the overall appearance of the boat.

“Our destination was the northern Lau Islands. These islands

“Sometimes I felt like yelling, ‘Get out of my way, I can’t see the other fish!’”

reminded me of the Rock Islands of Palau: all limestone, not volcanic like the other islands of Fiji. Diving is different here from the rest of Fiji. We saw less soft coral and more hard coral. Octopus, sharks, cods, and various other tropical fishes abounded. Sometimes I felt like yelling, ‘Get out of my way, I can’t see the other fish!’

“We enjoyed the island and the boat. Both should be rated five stars.”

PNG Exploratory

Nothing gets my spirit up like exploration diving. I’m envious of Peter Jennings’s fall trip aboard the Kavieng-based *Tiata*. “On a 14-day exploratory to the remote (very!) Nuguria and Lyra Atolls in northern Papua New Guinea, the *Tiata* and her crew had an impressive hit rate of good to excellent site discoveries — a remarkable feat for an exploratory. The kudos go to Capt. David Miller, his enthusiasm for diving and explo-

ration, his experience and ability to use *Tiata*’s mind-boggling electronics to maximum advantage. Meals were awesome in terms of imagination, quality, quantity, and frequency (burp!).

“Despite the fact that the trip was a privately arranged exploratory for experienced divers, with no guarantee of good dive sites or diving conditions, less experienced divers would have enjoyed the trip immensely. While Dave Miller focuses on finding the best action or best critter spot, he is quick to evaluate the currents and make sure the dives can be done safely. The disadvantage of an exploratory is that you sacrifice dives while cruising in search of sites or, if fortunate, because you’re invited to come ashore by local village leaders (who rarely see outsiders, let alone foreign divers). Nevertheless, in 12 days of diving, I was able to get in 40 dives — with no regrets.

“We covered over 800 miles on the trip from Kavieng, on the northern tip of New Ireland, west to the island groups of Tabar, Lihir, Tanga, and Nuguria (an atoll with a Polynesian population), then north to the huge, remote, submerged Lyra Reefs before returning to Kavieng. *Tiata*’s stabilizers made the long, choppy crossings to windward quite tolerable.”

J. Q.

Contact your dive travel agent or call direct:
Plantation Beach 713-680-2090
Laguna Beach 800-668-8452
Romeo’s Resort 305-559-0511
Coco View 904-588-4132
Maid’en Desert 011-504-45-1620
Riding Rock Inn 800-272-1492, 954-359-8353
Dive & Dive’s 011-62-361-288-052
Baruna Adventurer 011-62-361-753820
Aldora Divers 713-334-3003
Ricardo Madrigal 011-52-987-21578
Blue Bubble 011-52-987-21865
Loma Loma 800-554-2SEA, 011-679-880446
Sere-Ni-Wai 011-679-361382
Tiata 011-675-3257755