

and you're yearning for guaranteed whale shark and sea lion encounters, the experience of exploring one of the most prolific marine environments in the world where there are minimal intrusions from other travelers, and you don't care about luxury accommodations and gourmet food, Bahia de los Angeles is a sure-fire pleaser.

Final note: Earthwatch, a well-known conservation/field science organization that conducts environmental research around the world with volunteer help is organizing three expeditions to Bahia de los Angeles in August, September, and October to collect data on whale sharks. Check out the Web site at www.earthwatch.org or call 800-776-0188 for more information on how to sign up for trips that are tax-deductible.

-- M.O.

Bahia de Los Angeles

Snorkeling	★★★★★
Scuba	★★
Accommodations	★★
Food	★★★
Money's Worth	★★★★★

★ = poor

★★★★★ = excellent

Caribbean Scale



Diver's Compass: Antonio and Bety Resendiz's Campo Archelon (fax: 011-52-66-503206; e-mail: resendizhidalgo@yahoo.com). . . . Daggett's (rubendaggett@hotmail.com). . . . and Raquel's (Bahiatours@yahoo.com) offer clean basic rooms for \$30 to \$35. Raquel's has air conditioning (a must for summer months), a simple restaurant and bar, and a nice balcony for viewing the stunning sunrises and sunsets. . . . Camp Gecko (gecko@starband.net) on the south end of the bay, twenty

minutes from town, is operated by Dr. Abraham Vasquez Maikin. This is near where the whale sharks congregate and is about a twenty-minute drive from town. There are no amenities and the camp is a little rough around the edges. Dr. Abraham is very friendly and knowledgeable about the about whale sharks, and often hosts visiting researchers. . . . Highway One is quite tame, save for narrow lanes and lack of shoulders; don't drive at night because of errant cows and the difficulty of seeing potholes. At Punta Prieta Parador, turn off the highway and follow the badly potholed, paved road for forty-two miles to Bahia de los Angeles For car rentals, try Baja Rent-a-Car in San Diego (www.cabaja.com; 888-470-7368). They have a full selection of vehicles, from compacts to RVs Walt Peterson's Adventure Guide or Jack Williams' The Magnificent Peninsula have a wealth of information.

New Dive Possibilities, New Ripoffs

alerts from our readers

Thanks to our attentive readers, we get important updates throughout the year and here are several we wish to share. And, keep in mind that the deadline for submissions to the Chapbook is September 23, give or take. Please use the enclosed form to file your report, or better yet, file online at www.undercurrent.org

(or e-mail: bendavison@aol.com).

Now, here are a few positive updates, and some serious warnings, so that you don't waste your hard-earned money on places that will disappoint you.

Room Rats at Bayman Bay:

We have warned our readers about the Bayman Bay Club in

Honduras, but unfortunately one of our subscribers, Karen Fiedler (La Canada, CA), missed our warning. "I wish we had read our Chapbook before going in June! There were several stories similar to the one I'm going to tell. Our first night we had rats in our room and no electricity. There we sat at 2:00 a.m. armed with only our dive lights. We finally

demanded they put the generator on so we could have the lights on to keep the rats at bay. We changed rooms the next day, but there was a trade-off: no hot water for no rats! The beds were made, but no sweeping the floors or cleaning the bathroom. But the cleaning girls were more than happy to eat your food and steal your make-up while making your bed. The trash cans in the bathrooms in the dining area had tissue with human feces, though the girls had just 'cleaned.' The staff was incredibly lazy! The pseudo-manager, Jordana, was the unfriendliest person I've ever met. The breakfast dishes would be left on the table for hours while the staff played pool. One night, the dinner dishes were left out and a storm came up; in the a.m., there was broken glass and food all over the floor. There were mangos rotting on the ground, but mangos were never served unless we picked them up and asked for a knife. Which we did, because there was no food available between meals. Only on the last two days were we given fresh fruit. We were served one plate of food at meals and that was it. Most of the time, there were no cokes or beers because the staff or locals drank them all or there was no money to buy any. We gave them \$60 to buy diesel for the generator and a bag of ice. We're still waiting to be reimbursed. We were told the owners don't wire money when there are only a few guests."

Divi Cleans Up Its Act: On Cayman Brac, Divi Tiara seems to have finally finished its upgrading, says Richard Parry (Westfield, NJ). "The hotel has been completely refurbished and the guest rooms, dining room, and lobby are in excellent condition. The time-share units could use refurbishing. Dinner always included excellent choices lobster tail and steak, roast pork with applesauce and mashed potatoes, prime rib with corn, and

sweet potatoes." Divi Tiara has always had a first-class dive operation, but Divi's bankruptcy a decade ago led to Mother Nature taking over the maintenance. It's good to know that the premises have at last been brought into the twenty-first century. www.divi.com, phone: (919) 419-3484, (800) 367-3484

Too Loose on St. Lucia: Dive Fair Helen is a relatively new operation, but when Helene and Al Dummer (Hartsdale, NY) tried it in April, they were not happy. "Diving restrictions were sixty feet for forty-five minutes. Perhaps the divemaster who jumped in without turning on her tank or the divemaster who ran out of air

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should have clued us in on days one and two, but we were pre-paid. The boat was in excellent condition, but the operation was total chaos. On day four, a combination of snorklers, resort divers, open water certification divers, and experienced divers were loaded on one boat (though the operator had two boats). Each group was dropped at a different location, with the experienced divers last. We began a drift dive, but Al ran low on air after thirty minutes. We told the divemaster we were going up and she okayed this. When we reached the surface, the boat was nowhere in sight (it had left to get the other

groups). Although our lives were hardly in danger (the shore was five hundred feet away), it seemed very irresponsible if there had been an emergency, we would have been skunked!

Steerage Class Down Under: Many Americans who expect the best of the Great Barrier Reef when they visit Cairns, Australia, come home disappointed, as these two *Undercurrent* subscribers report. "Cairns Reef Dive," say Sandra and Mark Lucas (Goshen, KY), "was the most disorganized dive operation we have encountered. We were dismayed at the instructors for not following proper dive procedures, especially with students. There was never a thorough pre-dive briefing. We had to haul our gear for each dive from the second deck to the dive deck down narrow, steep stairs. Not once did anyone offer to assist. The accommodations were bare minimum. The rooms were small with bunk beds covered in tattered linen. A communal shower and bathroom served at least sixteen people. We had to provide our own towels. Entry and exit from the water was a free-for-all, with as many as twenty divers gearing up to get into the water. Had we known it was the Easter Holiday, we would have booked the trip sooner with a more reputable dive operation."

Don Beukers (San Jose, CA) started booking his July trip to the GBR in February, but learned it was "much too late to book *Spoilsport* or another first class boat. By e-mail, I booked a four-day, three-night trip to Cod Hole on the *Taka II*. The crew was wonderful but the boat was sub-par; two upper deck rooms had ensuite toilets/showers, but the other people had to share combination toilet/showers on the dive deck with the crew. The average age was about thirty and a lot were travelers backpacking around the world. No charging

stations or dedicated photo table. The food was buffet, however, there were only three booths, so there was not enough seating. The GBR is an overblown destination. I went to the GBR on a *Quicksilver* boat earlier and those dives were mediocre. The Cod Hole dive was okay. Fiji blows away the GBR.”

Long Beach to Catalina, Two Dives, and Back by Lunch:

Looking for a day boat in Los Angeles? “Express Divers’ Island Time is it,” say William and Frances Ungerman (Santa Ana, CA), who joined them in Long Beach for trips to Catalina Island, twenty-six miles across the sea. “They advertise ‘resort-style diving’ and that’s what you get. Departures at 8 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Seventy-five minute run to Santa Catalina. They are extremely accommodating and helpful, with no big hand out for tips. It was never mentioned. Skipper ‘Chris’ is a former Navy SEAL. D/M Darren was watchful, but no hand-holder. Aluminum 80 tanks are furnished, but bring your own weights. Boat is a fast Pro 48 twenty-two knots. \$78 for a two-tank dive. You only spend a half day on the boat, leaving the balance free.

www.expressdivers.com or call (866) 488-3483.

Fiji Downtime: The bizarre airline schedule to Fiji has you arriving from the U.S. at sunrise and departing around midnight. It means downtime somewhere. Bradley Bowen (Farmington, UT) has discovered a way to handle it. “We chartered a boat to take us on a two-tank dive immediately upon our arrival at 5:30 a.m, since the *Fiji Aggressor* does not board until 1:30 p.m. We were in a cab on our way to the Sheraton Denaru by 6:45 to dive with their operation. Our first dive was at Malolo Pinnacle, twelve miles out. Great dive at two pinnacles rising from a sandy bottom in

eighty feet of water. Dozens of anemone fish were on top of the pinnacle, including tomato clown fish and Clark’s anemone fish. Lots of jacks, trevalley, giant trevalley, and clouds of anthias. A great tunnel ran under the second pinnacle; plenty of soft corals. The second dive was at Mystery Reef, halfway back. Fabulous swim-throughs (but not many fish) and sea cucumbers that spewed long sticky threads when stressed. Call the Sheraton, but book directly through the dive shop manager, and ask for special arrangements.

Unique Maui Shorediving: If you don’t want to rise at the crack of dawn for Maui dive boats, there’s an excellent shore diving option with Octopus Reef, say David and Susan Wisdom (Portland, OR). “In April we dived three days with Octopus Reef. Rene took us off both the northwest and southwest coast of Maui. Her enthusiasm is infectious. She is very knowledgeable about the fish life. The briefings made it seem as though we were diving with a marine biologist. She was generous with her time long, shallow dives. Though there were no large critters, I’ve never seen so many different types of wrasses. We saw numerous turtles (my wife was elated!), several free swimming octopi, and many different eels. The highlight was seeing up close and personal a juvenile manta in twelve feet of water.” info@octopusreef.com or call (808) 875-0183.

Magnificent Majuro? J. D. Webster, M.D. (St. Clair, MI) says, “Diving in the Marshalls is excep-

tional and Bako Divers made each of my three trips to Majuro a success! Jerry Ross, owner/operator, and his staff go out of their way to help you not only diving but getting around town. The *Paula Jean* is fast a twenty-five-foot Glass-Pro with twin ninety-horsepower Honda outboards — and it handles rough seas well. Jerry is a large man 6’2” and 280 pounds but he swims gracefully and always watches out for your safety. He’s one of the best, and I’ve seen them all while logging over 5,500 dives since 1953. The boat ties up at the Outrigger Hotel dock each morning, fifty feet from the dive shop, and only twenty feet from the restaurant. They kept my gear overnight and had my first rig set up when I arrived each day. The sites range from ‘steep and deep’ walls to lovely coral gardens that are dense and healthy. Over 350 varieties of hard and soft corals can be found in the Marshalls, along with 1,200+ species of fish and invertebrates. I saw all the ‘tropicals’ including multicolored angel fish, decorated dartfish, butterflies, huge populations of pelagics including enormous dogtooth tuna, barracuda, sharks (white-tip, gray reef, nurse, silver-tip, black-tip), dolphins, eagle rays, green-sea and hawksbill turtles, and more. At the deep-water pass in Majuro Lagoon during an incoming tide, we watched what appeared to be 10,000 big eye jacks feeding on the rich incoming tidal flow. Scores of gray sharks cruised within the school. Most dives were drift dives in mild currents at both Majuro and Arno Atoll, a ten-mile boat ride to the east. The water was eighty-four degrees and clear, and visibility lingered at eighty feet or more even

“On a shore dive we saw turtles, several free swimming octopi, and the highlight was a juvenile manta in twelve feet of water.”

on bad days. There is a WWII Grumman F6F Hellcat fighter plane at 115 feet, just 500 meters from the dock at Bako Divers, and a rare Grumman 'Duck' float plane three miles down the lagoon; inside the lagoon is an 'Avenger' fighter at 110 feet. There we found a dozen lionfish, four species of anemone, three species of anemone fish, nudibranchs, octopus, and thousands of tropicals dancing over hard coral pillars. You are allowed to dive with your computer. Majuro is basically undiscovered and not crowded. The Outrigger Marshall Islands Resort has very complete rooms (cable TV, refrigerator, A/C, etc.) The 'Enra' restaurant offers great food and drink. The local people are extremely friendly, helpful and always smiling." Phone from the U.S. Jerry Ross, 011-(692)-625-2525 Ext. 140; fax from the U.S. 011-(692)-625-2500; e-mail jerryr@ntamar.com.

Micronesia, Maybe: These islands are getting more play, per-

haps because American territories are presumably safe these days. Ulithi is a side trip from Palau, which long-time *Undercurrent* correspondent Bill Knobloch visited last winter. "Ulithi was interesting. The diving was okay, but the dive manager, Gregg from Water Sports Adventures in Kauai, treated us like beginning divers and herded us together. The first dive was sixty feet for forty-five minutes. That didn't go over well with this group that included master scuba divers, PADI course directors, and several master dive instructors. We dove off two boats, and instead of having each boat away from the other, they made us all dive together. When photographers separated, Gregg aborted the dive and chewed us out on the surface, yelling at us about staying together. He even threatened to take away our diving for the rest of the trip. Several of us finally calmed him down somewhat, and we continued diving. The USS *Missisnewa* is the only

known U.S. ship that was sunk by a Japanese Suicide Sub. It was found only last year, so it was a thrill diving it (120 feet). The dive boats are open, approximately twenty-five feet long, powered by two forty-hp outboards. There was no place to sit and no cover from the sun. The local dive guides were great. The resort is fine, with ten rooms, all with air conditioning. They shut off the water at night. Food was adequate. One person on our trip had booked a future week, but canceled it because he knew his divers would hate the dive operation." Another reader, Nikki Mahan (Bellevue, WA) found the diving pristine, and noted that the "operation is very new but everyone is eager to learn. We pointed many critters out to the divemasters, and they were very excited to see them. We saw many cuttlefish interacting with each other. Several fish we couldn't even find in the books. The USS *Missisnewa* had us all feeling like we had the ghosts of those thirty-five men trailing us. Outstanding diving. Worth the heliocious trip to get there."

Three Magazines for Experienced Divers

inside information on the serious side of the sport

North American scuba divers have three general dive magazines at their disposal: *Skin Diver* and *Scuba Diving*, which are put out by two publishing giants, and *Sport Diver*, which is PADI's attempt to get a slice of the advertising market. Each of the three is driven by advertising that is apparently aimed at newer divers who want to travel — for example, the May issue of *Skin Diver* has eight pages of advertisements from Grand Cayman alone.

Three much smaller magazines — *Advanced Diver*, *Immersed*, and *Fathoms* — publish on the fringes of the market. Each is aimed at a distinct niche within the diving field and each has its own merits. *Advanced Diver* and *Immersed* are rather crudely edited, littered with perverse punctuation and grammatical glitches. But reading them is like chatting with the most knowledgeable diver in your dive club — or the biggest loudmouth on a live-

aboard. Not exactly poetic, but plenty informative. *Fathoms*, on the other hand, is the closest thing to an underwater coffee table magazine since *Ocean Realm* (see sidebar).

Advanced Diver is, in the publication's own words, "designed for the Advanced Openwater Diver to the most extreme Technical Explorer." It publishes four times a year on what seems to be an irregular schedule. The most recent issue (#10, with no date and eighty-five pages) fea-