

of the dive guide, which kind of contradicts my earlier comment) and look back up the wall. I was lost in a sea of undulating purple.

Advice

Consider at least a two-week visit to Fiji. Stay one week on one of the western islands, then head up north for the second week. This will ensure the widest diversity of geography, climate, and diving, with the

added bonus of getting two distinct dive vacations for the price of one plane ticket.

For those who want to sail the seas and dive until water-logged, there are live-aboards in Fiji, but that's another story.

Accommodations

Pricey/upscale: Marlin Bay Resort, Beqa; Matagi Island Resort, Matagi

Moderate: Mantana Resort,

Kadavu; Garden Island Resort, Taveuni

Diving

Taveuni - 9.5

Matagi - 9.0

Beqa - 9.0

Kadavu - 8.0

(1-10, Pacific scale)



A Faceful of Mask

Just the Ticket for Underwater Duets

Last year we asked three of our editors to take a look at two of the better-known full face masks: the Interspiro Divator MK II and Diving Systems International's EXO-26. We wondered if full face masks, with their advantages of a dry face in cold water, freedom from jaw fatigue, the ability to sing underwater (along with other forms of communication), and the safety of a continuing air supply after passing out, held any appeal for sport divers. Our editors had mixed reactions, ranging from approval ("I like this toy") to claustrophobia ("It grabs the back of your head like the Alien"). The units we tested were well built and performed flawlessly during our field analysis. Each unit has automatic lens defogging; each is communications-adaptable; each provides a Class A second-stage regulator as part of the purchase price. All list for around \$700 — so we were surprised when we saw a dive-equipment catalog offering a "full face mask" for \$64.95. We couldn't resist.

On test dives, the IST "Blue-Light Special" provided a solid seal and decent visibility in a very low volume mask. It's definitely not an Interspiro or an EXO-26, but you can buy 10 of them for the price of either of the top-of-the-line masks. With the IST, you use your own regulator. Removing the rubber mouthpiece from your reg, you insert the metal or plastic part of the second stage through the hole in the mask and secure it with a cable tie. The mask then becomes your mouthpiece. I first installed an ancient

Scubapro reg and found that I could easily inhale and exhale through either my mouth or my nose. I tried a Poseidon and a Conshelf SE2, and both worked nicely. The rubber nose pocket on the mask provides easy nostril-pinching/ear-clearing capability. To keep the lenses from steaming up, the IST has to be defogged with either saliva or a commercial product. The mask is attached to your head by a "spider" consisting of three rubber straps: one over the top of your head, two more at about cheek

level. The buckles for the spider adjustment are not the easily adjustable or quick-release types found on fancier masks, and fine-tuning the fit of the mask once under water is almost impossible.

These masks may be inexpensive, but they're not toys. Don't be lulled into thinking that you don't need to practice with them before you take a plunge into open water. They're still full face masks. A few ditch-and-don exercises with a competent, attentive buddy are absolutely required. When practicing or doing real dives, carry a backup mask with you at all times and have your octopus ready. Be aware that unless you can turn off the air at your second stage, the regulator will tend to free-flow as you break the seal when removing the mask. It will stop once you've got the mask off.

If you'd like to try using a full face mask, but can't mortgage the farm at this time, IST's Full Face Mask is an inexpensive way to try out the technology and experience the sensation of diving with a dry face and without a large object in your mouth. It can be ordered from Mr. Diver, Inc., at 1-800-532-2228; ask for item no. 35012.

