

Shortcomings: *Palau Aggressor's* library is weak. No books on coral or crustacean identification were available and fish books were limited. In an area with 10 to 20 times the numbers of everything found in the Caribbean, a couple hundred dollars worth of books on the *Palau Aggressor* would greatly help the average diver interpret the kaleidoscope of colors, shapes, species in Palau (inside tip: Until that happens invest \$35 in Robert F. Myers's *Micronesian Reef Fish*). . . .

About those currents: Huge tide fluctuations and complex currents in Palau render fixed dive itineraries useless. Professional, experienced dive captains are required to provide optimum results with minimum safety risks. Currents were not a problem on any of the dives we did — annoying for macro on a couple, but not a problem. Briefings were complete with current anticipation and procedure covered. Safety sausages and safety whistles (attached to LP hose) were issued by the *Palau Aggressor* to each diver for the

week. I believe we got our money's worth of professional judgment, putting us on the best sites at the best times for the best results except 1 Tree Beach.

Recommendations: If at all possible, avoid diving Palau only on day boats, limiting the day to two dives and a possible lagoon night dive. There is too much in Palau to see. I have no hesitation in recommending the *Palau Aggressor*, based on our experiences. . . .

— Michael & Mitzi Fields,
Birmingham, AL

Using Credit Cards for Dive Travel

What You Get and What It Costs

Paying for dive travel with a credit card has several advantages. If the booking agent's company goes belly up before you make your trip, you have a measure of protection if you've paid by credit card. Credit card payment also makes it possible to go on trips that you can't really afford. This could be considered either a plus or a minus, but we all know that we'll have more money just down the line. It's the American way.

However, the advantage that appeals to me most is frequent-flyer miles. I use American Express's Membership Miles. For every dollar I charge on my American Express card, I get one frequent-flyer mile. I even charge my groceries. *Consumer Reports* places a value of about two cents per frequent flyer mile, so it's a 2% bonus added to purchases.

When I book a dive trip, I'm ready to reach for my card and

add on those frequent-flyer miles I need to get to Palau. The problem is that not all dive travel specialists accept credit cards, and some that do have started adding a surcharge of 2–3%.

In several states it is illegal to charge extra for using a credit card. The way around it is simple: it's not an additional charge for using a credit card, it's a discount for paying cash or check.

From the travel agents' point of view, they have to pay around 3% for processing a credit card — a charge that comes out of their profit. If the retail price of a trip was determined on a profit margin based solely on cash sales, then a credit card buyer is cutting into an already slim profit margin.

However, determining what a dive travel specialist's profit margin is, or how it was arrived at, is outside the realm of the consumer. I shop around for

the best price with the best terms. Below is a list of dive travel specialists with their policies on credit cards.

Adventure Express **800-443-0799**

Checks only. Uses credit cards to confirm booking, but not to pay for dive trips (unless it's for just one or two nights' hotel accommodations).

Aggressor Fleet **800-348-2628**

Yes, accepts credit cards; no penalty.

Aqua Trek **800-541-4334**

No. Checks only for dive trips, but can charge certain airfare tickets.

Caradonna Caribbean Tours **800-328-2288**

Penalty: add 3% for credit-card use except for trips to Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao.

Go Diving
800-328-5285
No, checks only.

Island Dreams
800-346-6116
Yes, accepts credit cards. No penalty.

Landfall Productions
800-525-3833
No credit cards. Checks only for dive trips, but can charge certain airfare tickets. Plans to add credit card payment in the future.

Poseidon Venture Tours
800-854-9334
Penalty: 3% for credit card use.

Scuba Tours
800-526-1394
No, checks only.

Scuba Voyages
800-544-7631
Penalty: add 3% for credit card use, except certain airfare tickets. No American Express.

Sea Safaris
800-821-6670
Accepts credit cards; no penalty.

See & Sea
800-348-9778
Yes, accepts credit cards with a written authorization that is mailed to you. No penalty.

Tropical Adventures
800-247-3483
Penalty adds 2% for credit-card use, but will remove charge if you insist.



Swept Away

Readers Respond to Palau Tragedy

After writing in the April issue about the six divers who lost their lives diving at Peleliu in Palau ("Lost at Sea — Learning from the Palau Tragedy"), I was surprised to see a letter by William (Bill) Douglas of Brisbane, Australia, published the same month in the Journal of the South Pacific Underwater Medicine Society citing three other incidents in which groups of divers had been lost at Peleliu.

"Six companions, including the dive guide, were swept away. The man in charge of the dive boat was unable to see them due to the sun in the west and, not having a radio and being nearly out of fuel, he returned to Peleliu for assistance.

"Boats and a sea plane searched the area. The pilot flew up and down to Angur on several occasions without sighting the seven in the water,

who had tied themselves together with their weight belts, blew their whistles, held up their colored fins and put up a safety sausage which fell to pieces after half an hour. [*This raises another issue: how reliable are inflatable tubes? Looks like we need to test the various brands. In the meantime, carry two.*] By an absolute fluke, the pilot was returning to Peleliu from Angur after giving up the search when, tilting the aircraft towards the west, he spotted a strobe from the camera of one of the seven divers who were being swept southwest towards the Philippines. They were picked up at 7:30 that evening. [*For more on this incident, see the July '93 issue of In Depth.*]

"The Filipino pilot later told me that he had no idea which way the currents were taking the divers but that he had found five other divers some

months previously who had been swept as far south as the reefs immediately north of Angur Island in an area where the currents are so bad that the fisherman can fish there only two weeks each year. He also related an incident in which five American divers were carried away from Peleliu and by chance brought ashore near Blue Corner by the current."

Our article prompted In Depth reader John Siedel of Carbondale, Colorado, to send us his Palau story:

Dear *In Depth*,

We recently returned from a semi-yearly dive vacation, this time from Palau. My wife and I consider ourselves experienced divers, with more than 200 dives over the past eight years