

CANADA

If you can take cold water, the rewards include an incredible array of filter feeders and marine life that you'll never dive with in warm waters. A handful of funky boats and great crews make it possible to get in the water with orcas and other wonders of the cool-water world. . . .

Abyssal Dive Charters, Quadra Island, Beaver Aquatics, Summer 2000, Howard Block, Wellington, FL. My wife and I just returned from a combination scuba diving, kayaking and salmon fishing trip at Quadra Island in British Columbia. Quadra is a beautiful island with warm friendly people just 7 hours from West Palm Beach, Florida. We dove with Abyssal Dive Charters, a family operation, owned by Ian and Joanne Lamont. They accommodate up to 12 divers with room, board and diving. Joanne ran the show and did a wonderful job. She took us to great sites in protected waters just 10-15 minutes from the boat dock. She also helped me get dressed in a 7 mil wet suit, mittens and hood. All the dives except for the shipwreck, "*Columbia*," are drift dives during slack tides. Wherever I surfaced, Joanne was there. After the dive, Joanne poured warm water down the front and back of the suit. It felt great! Sea life includes nudibranch, anemones, rockfish and lingcod. You may get to see wolf eels and octopi. Brian Erickson owner of Beaver Aquatics equipped us with wet suits to make our 46 degree dives comfort-

able. Heat packs were also available. In case you do not want to take your gear with you, Beaver Aquatic can set you up with everything you need. We camped and kayaked with Spirit of the West. Our guides, Cory and Brenda, were excellent. They were experienced and great cooks. We observed a pod of Orcas just 15 feet away. We went salmon fishing with Top Guides. The owners and staff are extremely friendly and helpful. Our guide, Chris Seipio, was personable and knowledgeable. My wife and I caught and released more than 5 salmon in a little over an hour. I kept one. Chris also took us to feed eagles by hand with live herring. It was amazing. All of the arrangements including hotel accommodations and flights were aided by Morgan Ostler from Uniglobe Travel, telephone number 1-800-567-6511. This adventure was truly a unique experience. (Abyssal: 250-285-2420, 800-499-2297. Beaver Aquatics: 250-287-7652; Fax: 250-287-8652)

God's Pocket Resort, Hurst Island, B.C., September 2000, Sandra Cohen and Richard Struve, Seattle, WA. Vis: poor this trip, is usually 30-70 ft. Water: 46-50 degrees. Be back on boat with 500 psi. We spend 5 days here every fall because of the great diving. For serious cold-water divers, this is as good as it gets. Brilliantly colored walls for relaxing drifts, nudibranchs and other smallish critters. Boat diving in cold water is never easier than this with jets rather than props, fin-compatible ladders, and helpful staff. Spectacular surroundings. Photographers' paradise.

Many wolf eels who seem to enjoy exploring divers' gear; octopus grow to huge size. Bill and Annie are enthusiastic hosts who love to share their passion for this area. Simple motel style rooms with private baths, very clean, max. 14 guests. Profane heat, generator power from pre-breakfast to 10 pm. VCR and charger power available all night from battery bank. Food hearty, ample, tasty, varied, served at one big table for staff and guests and snacks on boat. Two boat dives daily (scheduled around the tides) and interesting critter diving at night off the dock. Aluminum 80s and weights/belts provided. Bring a hair dryer for avoiding cold wet heads after night dives and for making neoprene repairs. Hurst Island is 1.5 hours from Port Hardy, once you're there you are isolated on the island. Bring warm clothes and rain gear but hope for sun. Food is plentiful and delicious. Free kayaks. Night diving is great for small critters. Overall diving rivals all but the best sites in PNG, Palau, if you like cold water. **(250-949-1755, 888-534-8322; e-mail scuba@istar.ca)**

COSTA RICA

Costa Rica is famous among experienced divers for voyages to uninhabited Cocos Island, three hundred miles offshore. If you're out for challenging, high-tension, big-animal dives among hammerheads, mantas, occasional whale sharks, and other awe-inspiring creatures of the Pacific deep, Cocos is one of the more reliable places on earth to find them, but

it's not for the faint-of-heart, coral lovers, or those out-of-tune with their skills. . . . Follow the weather pattern when planning trips as the number of sharks is negatively impacted during El Niño years. . . . Water temperatures run 75 to 85 degrees year-round, and air temperatures are about the same. Visibility and water conditions, however, are unpredictable, with both visibility and wind down in the rainy season (roughly May through November). . . . Northwestern Costa Rica's land-based diving is a smaller-scale version of Cocos Island. There are plenty of sharks (although no massing hammerheads) and a big-ocean feeling with rigorous conditions and an awesome amount of fish life (including good odds of seeing a whale shark). . . . Bat Island offshore is the place to go, so insist on it before booking. . . . Beaches vary from not-so-great to decent, though nature side trips are definitely a double "yes". . . . Shopping is mainly in San Jose, which is also a pleasant city for overnighting. Though Spanish is the national language, English-only speakers can get by. . . .

Aguila de Osa Inn, March 2000, Steve Polito, Anchorage, AK. Dive boat out of Drakes Bay took us to Cano Island. 40 min ride from the mainland. They use 3 different boats, they are 31 ft. diesels and the operators are as good as you will find. Water 84 degrees, with thermoclines around 50 ft. that lowered the temp to