

response from the *TAKA II* is, you did not pay a lot so this is what you have to expect. TAKA was not willing to acknowledge any of our complaints or concerns their basic response was you get what you pay for.

True North, North Star Charters, October 1999, Kim Kalisch, Fremont, CA. Vis: 50-150 ft. Water: 75-79 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced; time limit (40-50 min) Go less deep each dive. This was the second trip to the Rowley's for the new boat. Is this the best live-aboard in the world currently? You bet! We were in a luxury stateroom and it was wonderful. The food is good Aussie fare and you don't go away hungry. The membrane Nitrox system was not operational. All the Nitrox tanks had DIN fittings, so be prepared. The diving was very good. The water viz (50-150 ft.) depended on the tide. They tried to dive as much as possible on the incoming tides to get clear water. Best sights: "South Park," beautiful wall, lots of fish, long drift. "Boat Channel." How fast can you fly without eating coral? "The Aquarium" ride the incoming tide over the outer reef in four feet of water. The colors are spectacular. The crew and passengers made the trip with their Aussie hospitality. (+61 618-9192-1829; Fax +61 618-9192-1830; e-mail cruise@NorthStarCharters.com.au)

Fiji

Fiji Aggressor, November 1999, Tyler Yarbrough (tjyarbro@aol.com), San Leandro, CA. Vis: 20-75 ft. Water: 79-82 degrees. Water: calm, no

currents. Restrictions: Keep dives above your own stated limits (mine was 110 with EAN32), keep it to an hour. Took a beginning photo course with on board Nikonos V equipment. Photo pro Pele Harris was great! \$350 for camera, film, E6 processing, Padi's "merit badge," instruction. Can't beat it! Rainy a good part of the time, making for less than ideal visibility and lighting for photography. *Aggressor* crew was terrific. Level of service only slightly embarrassing. Elvis and Jack in the kitchen turned out enormous amounts of delicious food, Fijian, Thai, American, original. Divemasters Seru, Shawn and Pele found every critter you could ask for, and their enthusiasm was contagious. Boat was almost perfect. It seemed huge to me. 10 divers, and you could easily feel as if it were your own private yacht. Skiff diving makes whatever profile you dive easy. There was no current most of the time, which was a shame. Fiji's reefs, especially away from land, are the healthiest I've ever seen. No coral bleaching, hard and Soft corals were everywhere. Great passages for passing big grey reef sharks and lots of mantas. Manta cleaning station had one big guy going round and round, not 6' from the flashing cameras! Hundreds of barracuda circling! (Aggressor Fleet 800-348-2628 or 504-385-2628 Fax: 504-384-0817; e-mail: info@aggressor.com; website www.aggressor.com)

Fiji Aggressor, December 1999, Dick and Donna Stofer (dstofer@sky.net), Overland Park, KS. Vis: 40-100 ft.

Water: 82 degrees. Weather: sunny, dry. Water: calm, currents. Dive Restrictions: 60 minutes, our club limits of 100', no alcohol. *Fiji Aggressor* has changed their mooring from Suva (210 km bus ride) to Denarau Marina, 15 minutes from the airport. Our group rented two day rooms at the Raffles Gateway Hotel across from the airport to pass the time and refresh from 6: 30 am arrival till 12: 30 bus pickup for 1: 00 boarding. Dec. 25 thru Jan 1 with consistent 82 degree water and calm seas. 30' jet-powered skiff extremely well designed and user friendly — replaces original skiff used on this 2 year old boat — crew loves the new skiff. Safety sausages and dive alerts issued to all divers for the week. Safety sausages were frequently used by divers. Divers Alert did not fit our 2 yr. old Dacor inflator hoses, but no one else had a problem. Bring a reef hook for Nigali Pass (Gau Island) where we clung to the reef in strong currents and observed 30 grey reef and white tip sharks accompanied by huge potato cod. Two dives at Wakaya Pass with 5 mantas, then 3 mantas, looping to entertain us. Best dive briefings we've ever had before each dive. Captain excellent at timing tides and avoiding strong currents, however on many dives had to seek refuge from currents on other side of a bommie. Had to skip E6 on the way out due to currents, but made 5 dives there on the last full dive day and E6 was everything it's reputed to be. Think we saw every creature Fiji has to offer — sharks seen on every dive, incredible variety of nudibranchs, anemone fish, dozens of lionfish-many free-swimming

for photo ops, sea snakes, huge variety of angelfish and butterflyfish, octopi, incredible corals, saw two varieties of beautifully colored foot-long nudibranchs — dive staff told us they are called pleurobranchs. This trip is definitely worth the very pricey tab!

Fiji Aggressor, December 1999, Ernest Manewal, Sitka, AK. Vis: 25-45 ft. Water: 79-81 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: computer, no alcohol while diving. You leave on a Saturday but there is no diving that day. You return Friday afternoon so there is only one morning dive that day. Diving is limited by a visit to a village that should be arranged either before or after the diving trip. On a week trip there are essentially only four days of hard-core diving.

Fiji Aggressor, March 2000, Robin and Marta Humphrey, Crystal River, FL. Wonderfully outfitted and designed Live-aboard. Spacious cabins, everything works, Nitrox. Good food and very nice diving. The service was superb, in part we think due to the presence of Alan Roberts, Operations Manager for the *Aggressor* Fleet who worked as hard as any of the crew. Alan is a jack of all diving trades including photography, Nitrox, washing dishes and a great dive guide as well. Diving with us on almost every dive. The crew was very accommodating and quietly competent at all their tasks. The diving was visually spectacular with colors and varieties not seen in the Caribbean. Sharks on most dives and an occasional glimpse of a hammerhead. Computer

diving is a must, as the passengers voted on a 5 dives/day schedule, and dives were usually in the 70-80 ft range. Tanks are rigged on the diving skiff on the first day, by the crew and stay there for the entire trip. The skiff is hydraulically lifted on the fantail of the dive boat and boarded on each dive by walking aboard. After picking up the divers after the 60 min limit dives, the skiff returns to mother where it is again lifted onto the *Aggressor* for disembarking. Tanks are filled on the skiff via long hoses from the *Aggressor*. Camera benches are huge and well equipped. Rinse tanks are big and roomy. E-6 processing. A two to three hour visit to a local islands without electricity and most modern conveniences, while participating in and watching local dances is an eye opener.

Fiji Aggressor, April 2000, Stan and Gretchen Gettis, Miami, FL. Vis: 60 to 90 ft. Water: 81 to 84 degrees, choppy, surge, no currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 60 min. The good: boat, crew and accommodations are outstanding. The dive tender is on a hydraulic lift for extreme ease of boarding. The trip is a must if you are into macro photography, coral and small things. The bad: no big fish. Not as good as Palau but still a trip to be made. Wish I had known Island visit not available this week, 4/22, due to religious holiday.

Fiji Aggressor, June 2000, Robin and Joy McDougall, Fairbanks, AK. Vis: 40-100+'. Water: 78-80 degree, at least a thin suit is a good idea. We had

reservations when that they enveloped beautiful country in a coup, civil insurrection, and subsequent martial law. Airlines canceled flights, and tourists stayed away in droves — especially the “Aussies” and “Kiwis.” Not so, the American divers. Whether we were better informed, braver, or more fool-hardy is open to debate. 14 of the 16 slots on the *Fiji Aggressor* were filled. One of the newest *Aggressors*, it admirably designed to accommodate 16. Built as a dedicated dive yacht, on a catamaran hull, she is 106 feet long, 31 feet wide, and three decks tall, she has space and features not imagined on the dive boats of 15 years ago. Eight double cabins have a queen-size bed, with a bunk above, and storage below. Other storage includes a closet and built-in drawers by the closet and the sink. Every stateroom has a window (not a porthole) and full shower and toilet. These 8 cabins share the main deck with the dive deck. There you have two large, multi-tiered camera tables, with numbered trays on the lower shelves for the diver's smaller personal items. Benches, with under-seat storage and tank racks, and overhead racks for hanging suits, etc. All the tanks and gear are placed on the dive skiff, which rides in a hydraulic cradle at deck height on the stern. The gear stays there the entire trip. All each diver has to do, is slip the regulator off the tank valve at the end of a dive. After the skiff is hoisted from the water, the divers stroll off, and the crew uses “whips” from the compressor banks to refill either air or Nitrox. Nitrox divers have to use a

mix analyzer and then reattach their own regs. Two rinse tanks and two freshwater showers on the dive deck. Diving from the skiff: Each diver has a station, which remains the same all week. All the gear is right there, and it is just a matter of slipping into it during the very short run to the dive drop-off site. The skiff is an all-aluminum jet boat, with recessed intakes. It draws little water, and it has a tall profile. It presents a truly awesome sight bearing down upon you as you bob in the waves. The crew equipped every diver with an air horn on their low pressure line, and a safety sausage clipped to their b.c. There is also a large, prominent, numbered hang-tag system that the crew uses to keep track of who is in and out of the water. None of this foolishness of sailing off and leaving a diver floating there wondering where everyone has gone! Personalized water bottles on the skiff, which the crew refilled before every dive, and towels. On the negative side, diving from the skiff does result in less freedom of choice about when and how you will dive. The ideal schedule would look something like this: 6: 00 continental breakfast, 7: 00 dive, 9: 00 full breakfast, 10: 00 dive, 12: 00 lunch, 1: 00 dive, 2: 30 snack, 5: 00 dive, 6: 00 dinner, 7: 30 night dive. Such a schedule puts a major constraint on the length of dive — all but a few of our dives were within minutes of being exactly 1: 00 long (the shorter dives were also deeper — in the 80 - 100 foot range). However, if a diver is not ready, or doesn't feel like diving when the skiff is ready to leave, you

miss that dive. Dive entry and exit are thru "gates" located amidships on each side, between the bench seats. With 16 divers trying to don gear, seating is best described as 'intimate'. A 'cattle boat' it is not, but it definitely calls for patience and common courtesy. It sometimes requires multiple passes over the entry site to get everyone into the water in the correct spot. In those same rough seas, exits can be a formidable challenge. There are ample grab rails, but climbing the dive ladder up the steep side, when it is pitching, is strenuous. My wife, who had injured her leg the previous week, was very appreciative of the help of the crew. The crew was great — arguably the best we have encountered in 20 years. They were friendly, competent, personable, and helpful, and seemed to go about their duties without any conflicts. Fijian law requires the captain to be Fijian, so the captain was Peter, who had been sailing these waters his entire life, and knew them intimately. (We were very appreciative of his knowledge and skill during a very long crossing one 'dark and stormy night'). Nominally the mate, Sean, actually functioned as captain for the purposes of *Aggressor* business, and assisting the role of photo pro. He shared this job with Pele; she was a quite knowledgeable marine biologist, especially about nudibranchs, and also performed as purser for the Fleet. The rest of the crew: Tim, the engineer; Solo, his assistant; Kimberly, a delightful young dive master on loan from the (*Matagi*) *Princess*; Deo, the steward; Sam, the deckhand; and

Elvis, the cook, who provided a continental breakfast, a full cooked breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert, and between-dive snacks, all with flair, flavor and imagination! My notes list eggs, ham, bacon, corned beef, pancakes, and French toast for the full breakfast. Lunches included sesame chicken, sweet chili prawns, fish and chips, pizza, hamburgers, Caesar salad, beef stir fry in plum sauce, and garlic ginger fish. Dinners featured roasts — chicken, pork and lamb, sesame prawns, barbecue — pork chops, chicken and fish, steak, grilled ono, spaghetti, linguine, and Sicilian tuna. There were fresh vegetables — carrots, beans, broccoli, potatoes, and soups — dahl, ratatouille, minestrone, French onion. Desserts were delightfully decadent -chocolate crepes, lemon cheese cake, papaya and ice cream, banana splits. Snacks ran to fresh cookies, sheet cakes, and fruit— granola bars, but there were micro pizzas one day. As if all that wasn't enough, there were always bowls of fruit and trail mix, and an open bar, with sodas, wine, beer, etc. Obviously, if you were drinking alcoholic beverages, you weren't diving. The diving kept everyone out of the spirits until the end of the day. We encountered off days early in the week, when bad weather and high waves prevented us from reaching some sites to which we wanted to go. Probably the least satisfactory day was our first at Nukuravula, a rather plain reef and bommie system. Although it lacked much soft coral or anything else impressive, it had lots of nudibranchs and tridachna clams, a few sharks,

some large grouper, an interesting red hard coral, lots of small tropicals, including beaked leather jackets. Catamaran hulls are not necessarily the best choice for negotiating rough waves, especially if you are in one of the forward-most cabins. I believe this was the night that the acoustic ceiling tiles, weakened by water from a leaking pipe, collapsed in one cabin. At any rate, morning saw us at Makogai Island. Diving there presented us with schools of fusilier and barracuda, the requisite shark, several turkey fish, and long-nosed hawkfish. Cloudy, rainy weather followed us to Wakaya Island, where we dove with blue-ribbon eels, turkey fish, huge titan trigger fish, clown trigger fish, leaf scorpion fish, white tip sharks, schools of barracuda. The hoped-for mantas failed to appear, but there were lots of nudibranchs, some of which appeared to be mating. The weather finally started to ease somewhat the next day, at Namena island. Our dives here were sort of a combination of the manta passages at Yap, with the Blue Corner in Palau. We dropped down to a sand bottom, replete with garden eels, and drifted across, holding on occasionally, to watch the shark action and the barracuda, and then going on across to the bommies, covered with hard and soft corals, pipefish, lion fish, anemones and the usual tropicals. The emphasis however, was truly on the sharks, mostly grays and white tips. E-6 is a truly marvelous pinnacle, rising from a depth of some 2000 feet. Along its sheer sides are hard and soft corals, huge red sea fans, magnificent anemones, and virtually every tropical

fish of the Pacific. In the mid-water, white tips cruised by, barracuda hung in schools, and fusiliers spilled over the rim and a banded sea snake swam up onto one of the rear swim platforms. Diving for beginners — not a good idea! Air Pacific has superb service, and offers a flight from Hawaii, if you would like to avoid the long crossing. “Bring a Friend” week by the *Aggressor* Fleet offers half-fare for your companion. (You have to belong to *Aggressor’s* ‘Dive the World Club’ — which is free for previous *Aggressor* patrons). Te *Aggressors* have a loaner policy, if your gear malfunctions. They also have a complete stock of rental gear. Nitrox fills cost extra, \$8 to \$10. The Fiji government has imposed an excise tax of \$145/US per passenger, which has to be collected on the boat. Credit cards ok, but not checks. There is also a \$10.00 US airport departure tax, collected in cash at the airport. June air temperatures ran about 80. *Aggressor* Fleet says they believe gratuities should be voluntary, but strongly encourage a tip. These people really deserved theirs!

***Nai’a*, December 1999, Bill Garner, Pittsburgh, PA.** Vis: 30 to 90 ft. Water: 80 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: request 120’. My wife and I had been on the *Nai’a* 2 years before and loved it. We were not disappointed. We were on the dateline midnight 1/1/00-special trip. I had my own private guide, Bugsy, who was excellent. We saw more sea shells than in years. Only took 2 empty ones. Visited two

different native villages this trip. The dance shows they put on were great. Got to visit a farmer’s market; always fun and one full floor of Kava in many varieties and forms. (e-mail naia@is.com.fj; website www.naia.com.fj)

***Nai’a*, December 1999, Roger Dennis and Ruth Rouse. San Jose, CA.** Start of rainy season, 79-80 F. Visibility 50-100 ft.+. Nitrox. Excellent operation. Crew was most friendly and made every effort to minimize “friction.” Half the divers were “repeat business,” which is always a good sign. Nine staterooms, 18 divers max. We had 16 divers. Arrive a couple days early to “decompress” from jet lag and adjust to warm/humid conditions. They *Nai’a* people will pick you up at your hotel or the airport and take you to the boat. They have special trips to whale watch at Tonga. Tel: 1-800-903-0272 or (679) 450 382, Fax: (679) 450 566, e-mail: naia@is.com.fj, web site: <http://www.naia.com.fj>

***Nai’a*, February 2000, Jason DeSalvo (desalvo@concentric.net), Montclair, NJ.** Water: 82 to 85 F. Dive your own profile. Come back with 500 psi. I’ve been diving since 1983, but this was my first trip to the South Pacific. WOW. The *Nai’a*, her crew, and the diving are as great as *Undercurrent* and the *Chapbook* have said. Normally, four day dives and one night dive per day. Diving is at scheduled times, and because some dives are tide dependent (especially toward the latter part of the trip), the

schedule is strictly adhered to. I did 22 dives; there was an opportunity for 27. The boat holds up to 18, but there were only 13. Diving not for beginners. The currents can be strong and there is no hand holding. Ocean crossings were at night and though we had a couple of nights of moderate seas, *Nai'a* is stable and engine noise is relatively minor. Visibility averaged 60-70 feet (best - 100+, worst - 30). All diving is done two 20' zodiacs that provide diving freedom like I've never experienced. Divers are shuttled to the dive site and the Zodiacs split so that everyone doesn't dive the same spot. You have the option of diving with a guide — there were at least two in the water -- or going it on your own (with or without a buddy is quite accepted). Only your air, your computer and common sense limit profiles. Virtually every dive I did lasted over an hour and several were over 1: 20! Swim toward whatever looks interesting and when you surface a zodiac will pick you up. This allowed us to see far more of each dive site than we could have if we had to make our way back. The diving was good enough that all of the long bottom times and reef roaming are well worth it! Getting to Fiji requires a 10-hour nonstop flight from Los Angeles aboard a comfortable Air Pacific 747. You leave Los Angeles on Thursday night at around 11: 00 PM and (after crossing the International Date Line) arrive in Fiji at roughly 7: 00 am Saturday. Let the *Nai'a* staff book your air - they saved me \$600 off the best rate I could get on my own! They also arranged for a \$55 day room at the Fiji Mocambo

Hotel (a \$2.50 cab ride away from the airport) so that we could shower and rest before being picked up and taken to the boat at 1: 00 PM. A little more than two hours after boarding and the boat is moored at the first dive site - Samu's Reef, *Nai'a*'s "checkout dive." With a max depth of 50', no current and sand surrounding a small coral bommie, it provided the perfect way to get acclimated to the *Nai'a* way of doing things. This was the worst dive of the trip (in terms of quality) and it was better than 90% of the diving I've done in the Caribbean. Blue spotted stingrays, all three anemone fish found in Fiji (tomato, pink and orange), several giant clams, a Moorish idol and a cavern packed with Schwenk's sweepers - all against a background of colorful hard and soft corals. Other stops included: E6 (5 dives) -- a huge coral pinnacle ("bommie") in the middle of nowhere that rises from 3,000 feet right up to the surface. Scalloped hammerhead, whitetip sharks, several large schools of barracuda, lionfish, school of bigeye trevally, schooling anthias everywhere and healthy and abundant hard and soft corals. Don't miss the night dive at the part of E6 called The Cathedral. Cat's Meow / Rob's Nob's (4 dives offered) - Two similar shallow water sites in the Bligh Water area. Cat's Meow has the best hard corals many on the boat had ever seen. Diving between 50 feet and the surface over acres and acres of the most pristine hard corals you can possibly imagine. Massive schools of scalefin anthias, rudy fusiliers and many varieties of butterflyfish, colonies of neon blue

Staghorn coral. Mt. Mutiny (5 dives): a hammerhead, several whitetip sharks, two hawksbill turtles, schooling barracuda... On one part of the site, there is a massive colony of yellow sea-fan type creatures that colors the entire wall. Wakaya (5 dives) macro diving heaven. Blue ribbon eels, clown triggerfish, fire dartfish, spotted golden eels, titan triggerfish, Randall's gobies, sand perch, leaf scorpionfish, pipefish, scorpionfish, lionfish and too many nudibranchs to count. Coral spectacular. Nigali Pass is Big Animal City! After drifting through the channel, we settled on an area called "The Bleachers" in 60 feet of water to watch from 3 to 10 Grey Reef Sharks circling in the blue just in front of us. The sharks are (4-8 feet) and they come within a foot or two of your mask. On our last dive here we were treated to a 12-foot Manta that rolls in front of us for ten minutes! One dive here was along the outer wall — great visibility (120 feet), gorgeous coral, two turtles, several sharks and a small manta. Anthias Avenue/Jim's Alley (4 dives) were the least exciting dives of the cruise. The visibility was in the 30 - 40 foot range on the two dives I did here. The night dive here was also a calamity (I skipped it, but it was the talk of the boat) - raging current with near zero visibility. The food was good (not great) and the rooms were nicely sized for a live-aboard. The crew was as good as I've seen, and was accommodating in every way. If you do not own an underwater video camera, bring an extra \$500 to rent one of the available Light and Motion

digital video rigs for your cruise. It's a lot of money, but you'll never be able to explain to anyone back home the splendors that you experienced without a video.

***Nai'a*, June 2000, Steve and Sona Dennis (sjdennis@earthlink.net), Carmel, CA.** Vis: 40 to 80 Feet.

Water: 79 to 81 F., choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. The seven days we spent were — perfect! The diving was outstanding, especially if you love soft corals. We had sharks on nearly every dive, saw turtles, sea snakes, lots of lion fish, blue ribbon eels, every imaginable type of clown fish. The currents weren't nearly as bad as we had anticipated and diving off the skiffs meant - dive — come up when you are ready and get picked up and whisked back to the boat. I never thought we would find the equal to Dive Makai's team in Kona but the *Nai'a* crew is. The Fijians are simply the friendliest, funniest most helpful people we have ever encountered. Visited a remote Fijian village one afternoon and were treated like royalty — the children performed and were fantastic. The food on the *Nai'a* is first rate — great meals and great choices each meal. After leaving the *Nai'a* we spent 4 days at the Jean Michel Cousteau Resort, the place to get pampered. The food there was good, but the *Nai'a* was much better. The staterooms on the *Nai'a* are great, each with a private shower. The boat is extremely steady in rough seas, no one got even a little sick. They could use a better technique for getting into the skiffs after the dive. The strong

Fijians can pull you in easily if you are struggling but a ladder system would be better. UW Photography comments: A full photo room but best of all the availability of first class rental equipment. I rented a top of the line Sony digital video camera and Light and Motion housing.

Nai'a, September 2000, Bob and Doris Schaffer, Fallbrook, CA. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 72-78 degrees. Second trip to *NAI'A* - first-rate operation. Comfortable cabins, very good food nicely served and hands-on attention and remarkable knowledge of owner Rob Barrel enhanced experienced. Started in Tonga where we had daily Humpback sightings and numerous up-close whale encounters (snorkel, not SCUBA). Attentive, friendly, accommodating, safety-conscious crew. Excellent diving for Fiji part of trip as well as cultural visit to village. Some coral bleaching and hard coral rubble but abundant tropicals, sharks, sea fans and interesting small critters. Overall experience far outweighed a few minor inconveniences.

Princess II, January 2000, Ernest Manewal, Sitka, AK. Vis: 25-35 ft. Water 79-83 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: computer. The owner, Selwyn Douglas, was aboard and made every effort to see that the guests were comfortable and well-taken care of. At the end of the trip he asked what the guests felt could be changed or improved. (800-576-7327 US, (679) 725 116 (Fiji); Fax 303-417-0557; e-mail info@PrincessII.com; website www.princessii.com)

Princess II, April 2000, Dale Franklin, Houston, TX. Formerly the *Matagi Princess*. The boat is now operated by Selly Douglas, 4th generation Fiji-born of Scottish descent. He and his fine Fijian crew provided a superb week of diving from Nadi to Taveuni. I did an adjacent charter on another dive yacht the following week. The differences between a franchise and owner-owned and operated were obvious. In my 41 years of diving, Selly has been one of the few live-board dive operators that is extremely attentive and adaptable to the needs of his guests. I got the strange feeling that I (alone) charted this operation. The other guests felt similarly. Most operators cater to the 'average' diver who does 3 (maybe 4) dives a day and at night, parties, watches movies, reads paperbacks, and gets loaded. For the rest of us hard-core divers and videographers (who anticipate the night dive), it's "too bad" if there aren't enough night divers for a dingy operation in a respectable location. Instead, "you can dive off the anchor rope of the main vessel." With Selly operating the *Princess*, it's a different story; he's quick to relocate the boat and dive pristine sites (some known only to him) and makes an earnest attempt to mark a good place for the night dive (and I really mean NIGHT, not twilight). *Princess* night dives: 6, the other: 2. On departure Saturday we did 3 dives; the other boat, zero. On last dive day Friday, for those of us flying out Sunday night, we did five (5) dives, including a night dive; on

the other boat, one. In my view, priority #1 is underwater and the underwater operation: this is what memories, pictures, and video are made of and why we fly half way around the world for. Priority#2 are boat amenities. The rooms and food are good. The *Princess* is a fine vessel. Selly is constantly adding improvements. I'm not sure about "Fiji being the SOFT coral capital of the world." I've seen better in Truk and Palau, but "it's the HARD coral capital of the world." Around the 20 foot level at E6 and especially Hi-8 (east side) are corals that will knock you dead. White tips almost every dive. One place I counted 8 sharks. I had 4 manta ray encounters and saw large hawksbill turtles. Whoever said "Fiji isn't known for big animals" must have been snorkeling in the hot tub. I don't have any financial gain tied to the diving or travel industry so my opinions are not biased. I just love to give a good pat on the back when it's well deserved.

***Princess II*, May 2000, Bob and Betty Barada (bbarada@pacbell.net), Walnut Creek, CA.** Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 83 F. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 500 lbs. of air remaining. Outstanding dive equipment set-up; excellent knowledge of dive spots in outer reefs; accommodations small, but adequate; boat crew excellent.

***Sere-Ni-Wai*, August 1999, Mike Nieman (mike @chesapeakecuba.com), Annapolis, MD.** Vis: 80 to 150 ft. Water: 77 to 81 degrees, calm and

flat, choppy, strong currents, no currents, some drift diving in lee of reef. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: common sense. Greg Lawler, owner of the *Sere Ni Wai* is a first class fellow of excellent character. He runs a wonderful boat and takes great care of his guests. When my video camera was stolen by baggage handlers, Greg lent me his system for the trip. The Indian chef, Ram, prepared fabulous dishes and special requests were always taken care of. We were never in want and often pleasantly surprised. (679-361 171; Fax 679-361 137; e-mail sere@is.com.fj; website www.sere.com.fj)

***Solomon Sea*, August 1999, Sheila Harmer, Burbank, CA.** Vis: 50 to 150 feet. Dive your own profile: yes. Matagi Island and live-aboard are owned by different family members that appear to get along. The booking agent is (maybe presently not) also related to family and the arrangements made were not all honored by the family members on the island. Weather stormy, wet. Sunshine visible 3 times in 14 days. (677-25300/24936; Fax 677-25300; website www.solomonsea.com)

***Solomon Sea*, April 2000, Bruce Lazar Smith, Berkeley, CA.** Vis: 35-75 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Wonderful boat and crew. Dove some excellent sites. E-6 and hi-8 somewhat disappointing, but explored and found outstanding new sites.