

and sailing. The food was great. If you go in their winter it gets dark at 5: 00. Not much to do, except sleep. The diving was great. Tons of healthy coral. The colors of the coral are unbelievable. There are so many little creatures that a macro photographer needs lots of film. We saw some sharks on most dives, but everything is mainly of the small size. The dive operation is exactly how a dive operation should be run. They treat you like you're important. Have a drink with John. (Ask him why he is called elbow John?).

FRENCH POLYNESIA

Tahiti and Moorea are everyone's dream of the South Pacific, and despite their pricey resorts and food, these French-speaking islands are developing as a destination for American divers since there is plenty of reef shark action. While on the whole they're still considered a notch below many other destinations, there may well be some surprises waiting to be discovered, as some areas have not seen many divers

Tahiti

Tahiti, June 2000, Jim Virgil, Coeur d'Alene, ID. Vis: 50-150 ft. Water: 82 degrees. My wife and I took a ten-day Renaissance cruise to French Polynesia, arranging most of our dives via the Internet. We were able to dive 15 times at the five islands we docked at. We had reservations about the

French and we were worried that they would be uncommunicative and rude, but the opposite was true. They were polite, friendly and professional. The fish life and coral were very healthy on all of the islands. If you are into sharks and eels, this is the place for you, other than Tahiti that had the least of the big fish as I am sure it is fished more than the other islands. The visibility on the ocean dives (not the lagoon dives) is comparable to Cozumel and several dives it was at least 150'. Bora Bora and Moorea were the best dive spots, but all the islands were worth diving, as good as Belize, Cozumel and the Caymans. There are not many dive spots on any of the islands, so if you stayed for a week you would revisit your dive sites. The best exchange rate on the local currency was 125 French Polynesian Franks to the dollar. This was at the banks in Tahiti (or the ATM machine). Money exchangers were 115 : 1. The dive operations only gave you 100: 1. Most of the dives were \$50 US or 5000 Franks your option. Obviously it was less costly to pay in Franks or charge the dive on credit cards (no American Express). Papeete, Tahiti We dove with Dive Aquatics that is at the Beachcomber Hotel. We did two morning dives with them on two consecutive days. After gearing up (they had excellent rental gear) we took a 15 min. boat ride to the outside the barrier reef where we took a wall dive. The wall began at 50' and went down to 60'. No big fish, but lots of tropicals. The dive master guided you and kept your depth at 90'. The second dive was a lagoon dive

where we dove on a ship and an airplane that were about 50 yards apart. 60' max. The airplane was a Catalina in excellent shape. The second day was similar as we did an ocean dive and then a shallow lagoon dive in the Aquarium. The tropicals were absolutely beautiful. Great shallow dive. Dive Aquatics is a good professional dive operation. Moorea: We dove with Fun Dive for three morning dives total. This operation also had excellent equipment. The boat ride was 10 minutes to the ocean dive. Here the water had a visibility of at least 150', with schools of black tipped sharks, lots of eels, lion fish, scorpion fish and anemones with their clown fish. Divemaster fed the fish and sharks with chum, which was exciting as some sharks were eating some of the fish eating the chum. Dive master kept you at 90' max, but most of the good fish life was at 60' anyway. Not a wall dive, but more of a sloping edge. Second dive was a lagoon dive with poor visibility but lots of small critters and two big, shy, white-tipped reef sharks. Second day was an ocean dive only. Divemasters feed sharks here and once you were overboard you were surrounded by schools of black tipped and gray sharks. We were also joined by two big (12' plus) male lemon sharks. In two days we saw four kinds of sharks. Impressive. Great diving on Moorea and a very good dive operation. The other dive operation on Moorea is MUST dive and via the Internet we heard enough bad things about them that you should probably investigate them thoroughly before you book with

them. Fare, Huahini Dove one day with Pacific Blue Adventure. Small shop right on docks. Operation was professional and the gear was good. The first dive was a five minute boat ride to the pass between the ocean and the lagoon. Normally this is a drift dive but there was no current. Visibility was 70' but there was plenty of good fish life. Lots of octopi and shark. The second dive was a shark feeding ocean dive, visibility was excellent. Lots of big eels. Neither dive was deep (74') as the animal life was best at this depth. Raiatea: Dove one day with Hemisphere Sub, the only dive operation where they gave you an option of a steel 100 tank, for those air gulpers. All of the other operators had steel 80s. Very good equipment, but the language barrier was more difficult as their English was not the greatest. The first dive was a shore dive to a wreck about 200' from the dock at 100' down. The visibility was poor (30-40') and the wreck wasn't in good shape. Not worth it. Second dive was an ocean dive where the water was clear and we were joined by a 100# Napoleon fish who was friendly as the dive masters all fed him French bread. He liked to be petted. Lots of black-tipped shark. Another good dive operation. Bora Bora: Dove with two different operations. Bora Dive Center equipment was not the best, but adequate. First dive was an ocean dive at 70'. Sharks as usual, but we ran into several free-swimming remoras who were a nuisance as they kept trying to get close to your crotch. Two eagle ray, but visibility wasn't good and

they were far away. Lots of big clams here with blue, green and red lips. Very pretty. We were going to arrange for the next day's dive, but their English was so poor we couldn't find out whether the boat was full, so we arranged our next day's dive with Top Dive Center. They had two dive boats. One held about 30-40 divers (groan) and the small one about 20. Fortunately we were on the small one with about eight divers. Our first morning dive was at a spot noted for Manta rays. We were the first divers there and we saw about six. Some swam very close to you (6'). Our dive master said that we were lucky to see that many Mantas and is was only that we were the first there as when the other boats arrived the rays vanished. This was a shallow dive (40'). We were bothered again by remoras. Second dive was the ocean dive. Several black tipped sharks and many eels. More bothersome remoras. Top dive had excellent equipment and the boats were also very good. This was more of a commercial operator catering to many divers. Most of the other diver operators on the other islands were limited to 16 divers or less. More often than not we were in groups of six or less. **(Moorea Fun Dive: +689 56-4074; Fax +689 56-4074. Huahine/Pacific Blue Adventure: +689 68-8721; Fax +689 68-8071. Raiatea Hemisphere-Sub: +689 66-1249, +689 66-1419; Fax +689 66-3308. Bora Bora/Bora Diving Center: +689 689-67-7184; Tel/Fax +689 689-67-7483. Topdive Resort Bora Bora: +689 689-60-5050, +689 689-60-5060; Fax +689 689-60-5051)**

Aquatica, Hotel Matavai, July 2000, John Barrett, Toledo, OH. Vis: 75 to 125 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 Fahrenheit, calm no currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: depth, but depended on dive. Decent corals, nice variety of fish that were different from the Caribbean, dive shop willing to pick you up at another hotel.

Bora Bora

Bora Diving Center, Moana Beach Park Royal, March 2000, Mary Temple, New York, NY. Vis: 90 to 110 ft. Water: 82 to 84 degrees, choppy, surge. Dive your own profile: no dive restrictions: depth time. The Bora Diving Center is connected to the Hotel Bora Bora but they'll pick you up at your hotel via truck or boat. Although the owners, Michel and Aime were on vacation, their staff ran the operations smoothly. Although French is their native tongue, each instructor spoke English quite well. Tanks and gear were setup for you and ready on the boat when you arrived. The only objection I had to their gear was lack of depth gauge, so I switched to my own setup. Both of my instructors, Nicolas and Stefan, were friendly and attentive. Had great manta and shark dives. The Moana Beach Park Royal is lovely, especially the over-the-water bungalows, if your budget allows so for the horizon views. The only drawback is the food, but plenty of other restaurants are within walking distance of the resort. ATM's in Tahiti only give cash advances from credit cards so bring cash or cashier's checks or your credit card PIN. **(+689 689-67-7184; Tel/Fax +689 689-67-7483)**

Bora Diving Center, April 2000, Steve Heggy, San Jose, CA. Vis: 20 to 100 ft. Water: 84 degrees, calm and flat, no currents. Dive your own profile: no Dive restrictions: dive with group, end dive at 750 psi. These guys are great. Will pick you up at hotel. 2 dives, found mantas, spotted eagles, sharks (1 black tip, grey, whites tip), barracuda, eels. Pleasant fish life. Fast boat, sights close to shop. Only dives 6 diff. Sights.

Top Dive, March 2000, G. Even Teeth, Redwood City, CA. Vis: 30 to 80 ft. Water: 81-84 degrees, calm and flat, light surge, no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: nothing specific, but recommended staying above 80 ft. on the wall. Two tank dive. One inside and one outside the reef. Visibility inside was only about 30 ft. due to plankton. Primary purpose was for mantas. Coral mostly dead inside, making good recovery outside. Operation generally uses 25 L steel tanks, but made 50 L available to me, since I am an air hog. They are now a full-blown resort with an excellent restaurant. I would definitely go with them again, give the opportunity. Hemisphere Dive in Riatea had very similar conditions, but no resort. Good clean operation for beginners or experienced divers. (+689 689-60-5050, +689 689-60-5060; Fax +689 689-60-5051)

Moorea

Bathy's Club Moorea, December 1999, Marla Berry, Somerville, MA. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 80 degrees,

calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Overall the diving was very good, lots of black tip sharks, the lemon shark feed was great. Some divemasters, however, were very unprofessional, arrogant, paying no attention to the inexperienced divers, leading tours at much too high a speed for the new divers and never looking back. They also put their faces in every moray or stingray photo op. Dive operations at other islands in French Polynesia were more professional. (+689 56-3144, +689 55-1919; Fax +689 56-3810)

Bathy's Club Moorea, Moorea Beachcomber Park Royal, March 2000, Mary Temple, New York, NY. Vis: 60 to 100 ft. Water: 80 to 84 degrees, choppy, surge. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: depth time. The Moorea Beachcomber Park Royal is beautifully situated on the north side of Moorea with glorious views of the ocean and mountains. The resort is built around a lagoon with Dolphin Quest on the grounds. A plus for families, although the dolphins seem to be more a moneymaking gimmick rather than for research. Bathy's is the dive shop associated with the resort. Although a 5* facility, it's strictly a do-it-yourself, carry your tanks, gear and setup. The staff was not too friendly. The dive instructor, Franck, practices urinating over the side of the boat in full view of the patrons at each dive site was a bit disconcerting and highly unprofessional.

Bathy's Club Moorea, April 2000, Steve Helly, San Jose, CA. Vis: 75 to 100 ft. Water: 84 degrees, calm and

flat, choppy, no currents, strong currents. Stay with group, head back @ 500 psi. Friendly group of DMs. Filled boats to max, up to 16 divers. Always left late. Great shark feedings, lemons, greys, black tip, silver tips. One dive counted 6 lemons, 20+ greys and 50+ black tips, just looking one direction. Fast boats, great facilities, sights close to shop; relaxing, easy diving.

Club Med, Robert Wund, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA. I had excellent experiences with Club Med's dedicated dive resorts at Columbus Isle and Turks and Caicos. I was expecting the same at Club Med Moorea also advertised as a dedicated dive resort. NOT! leave your computers at home. Your choices are follow the dive guide and stay real close like a bunch of chicks following a hen. "Cluck, Cluck, Cluck" many French guides get real anal if you aren't right next to them in 70 to 100 ft vis! If you are lucky you might draw a guide who will give you a better experience. Actually got down to 85 ft on the second dive one trip because he wanted us to see a neat canyon and coral garden. You have a choice of two dives, one at 8: 00 am and one at 10: 30 am. The boat makes a fast run to the dive sites, usually about 15 minutes and returns for tank refills and pick up for the 10: 30 dive. You can go on one or both. I did ten. The boat is a cattle boat packed with 35 divers. Forget about any help with gear such as cameras when getting back on the boat. The driver is busy reading a book and there is no place to put a camera. Must not be part of his job! No rinses bucket or camera table

and only storage space under your seat. Not a good space for cameras etc. Don't worry about being neutral for a safety stop. You must hold on to the safety bar and only go to the ladder when the guide says so. It's the rule. Maybe they will pair you up with a buddy but forget about using your computer. Buddy divers are limited to 60 ft. As anal as they got about all their rules, the Friday trip went to one of the further sites about 25 minutes away by a fast boat carrying 35 divers plus, only to run out of gas on the way back. Dropped anchor on the edge of the reef to wait for help. Driver found some reserve gas and limped into a nearby hotel landing on one engine to get more fuel. Back at Club Med over one hour late. Despite the rules diving was good to great. Tons of black tip and gray reef sharks, and the guides did a shark feeding several times during the week. It was awesome to see so many sharks but after a few times it became routine. Coral was diverse and healthy with lots of reef fish and large tame ells. Club Med Moorea is geared for the novice/resort diver. Experienced divers will get frustrated with their rules as I was.

M.U.S.T., March 2000, G. Evan Weeth, (GEWeeth@aol.com)
Redwood City, CA. Dive your own profile: no dive restrictions: 50 ft. follow Napoleon. I had to abort the dive early, due to a free-flowing octopus. I signaled to the divemaster that I was going up and he gave me an OK sign. I began a normal ascent when the DM grabbed the back of my B.C. and literally dragged me to the

surface at approx. 80 ft./minute. He immediately went back down with the rest of the group and proceeded to get bitten by a moray eel. That was my only consolation of the entire dive. The dive shop owner only said "sorry you had a bad dive but it was your equipment." They really have an attitude problem. I should definitely have gone with Bathy's that is now a 5* PADI operation. (+689 65-1951; Fax +689 56-1951)

Scubapiti, Club Bali Hai, July 2000, John Barrett, Toledo, OH. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm choppy no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: depth depending upon site. Hotel was decent but in phenomenal view spot. However, it was far from the dive operation we chose, which I is the best on the island and is one of the few that doesn't conduct fish, ray, shark feedings. Great people and food, but boat was hard to get on and off at the dock due to large step. Tons of sharks, nice variety of corals and a decent mix of fish (quite different from the Caribbean). A few whales and schools of dolphins from the boat plus tons of flying fish. One of the supposedly great dive sites, a pass on the western side of the island is difficult to dive this time of year. (+689 689-56-1267, +689 024-453-1407; Fax +689 689-56-2925)

Rangiroa

Six Passengers, April 2000, Steve Helly, San Jose, CA. Vis: 75 to 100 ft. Water: 84 to 85 degrees, calm and

flat, strong currents. Dive your own profile: no Dive restrictions: stay with group, notify DM when 750 psi. Six divers per boat maximum. Dive outside Tiputa and Avatoro passes. Schools of sharks (black tip, grey, white tip, silver tip), barracuda, snapper, grunts, triggers, porkys, butterflies, many I didn't know. Mantas in most dives, some at drawing stations. Spotted eagle rays. Something new in every dive. While the atoll is remote and the pensions are mediocre accommodations this is the best diving in FP. Great dive operation. Professional and friendly. (+689 689-96-0260)

Six Passengers, Kia Ora Village, Rangiroa, May 2000, Edith M. Davis, Brooklyn, NY. Vis: 40-120 ft. Water: 83-84 degrees. Dived from rubber boats in strong currents. Groups of 6 stayed together -- sensible approach. Rangiroa is the shark capital! We saw literally hundreds of gray reefs, blacktip reefs, and whitetip reefs, and silvertips! Also frequent manta encounters up close and personal, sea turtles, incredible schools of jacks and barracuda, free-swimming octopi, tons of lionfish, scorpionfish, stonefish, eagle rays, zillions of large and small reef fish. Six Passengers is a basic but very competent operation (work on upper body strength for hauling yourself back into the rubber boats). Ugo, the owner, is incredibly knowledgeable about marine life and a superb videographer. Kia Ora Village charges luxury rates for all cabins and the run-of-the-mill ones are not really luxurious.

The restaurant was being renovated during our stay and we dined a “5 star” prices under an outdoor tent on the sand. Breakfasts, at least, were great.

GUAM

The island of Guam is the main layover point for divers headed for the Micronesian destinations of Palau, Truk, the Marshall Islands, and others. The diving is several notches below those final destinations, but it is the Pacific, and if you end up there with time on your hands, there is diving available.

Professional Sport Divers, August 2000, Jim N. Parkhill, McAllen, TX.

Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 84-86 degrees. Dive restrictions: none. professional in every respect. Comfortable, diver friendly boats. Knowledgeable DM's. Most dive sites are close in. Shark Pit a unique site with acres of jettisoned World War II material and towering 75 foot boulders. Hap's Reef teems with reef fish and small critters. (+671 565-3488; Fax 671 565-3633)

HAWAII

Hawaiian guides on the big island have developed great skill in finding the unique: Spanish dancers, rare juveniles, and lionfish. Kailua-Kona is filled with trendy shops to extract dollars from tourists in tacky hula shirts. . . . The major bill is the fishing industry, with dead marlin and sailfish as scenery du jour in the harbor. The diving is

mostly lava flow dives with relatively low coral cover. Sea turtles belly-up to boats of snorkelers to be fed lettuce, dogfood, or “turtle chow”. . . . There's excellent access to good shore diving at City of Refuge and at Puako at the northern end of the bicycle route for the Iron Man competition; still, the right guides provide fish fanciers a great experience. . . . Kauai has special trips available only in the summer, but Maui's diving isn't much; take day boats to the backside of Molokini or Lanai. Development in Honolulu has burned out most Oahu diving. . . . There's limited fish diversity here compared to further west in the Indo-Pacific. Some reefs are barren due to commercial collection for aquariums. There are few soft corals and dull hard corals, but colorful, plentiful, and unusual fish make the diving interesting. . . . Expect clear water, visibility that's usually better than the Caribbean—around 100 feet, and air temperatures in the low 80s. Water temperatures range from 73 in January and February to 80 in August and September From December through February, squalls can last several days; otherwise the climate's pleasant and unoppressive year-round. . . . There are plenty of condos available everywhere (many with cars, which you'll need since the dive boats are not berthed at hotels); ask your dive shop to find