

swam just for fun. By the way, *Sea Hunter* also made this trip and we spent several evenings aboard with friends. She is bigger and more luxurious, but we preferred the cozy *Undersea Hunter*.

## ECUADOR

### ***Flamingo*, Eco Ventura, June 2000, Vickie Nelson, Cumming, GA.**

Water: 70-72 degrees. Land excursions were nice. Sea lions on the beach. The blue-footed booby birds doing their dance. On two dives, the sea lions dive bombed us. Diving was very rough with 5 ft. seas normal. The current was very strong. Visibility was 30 to 40 ft. Only one whitetip shark, no schools of hammerheads (the explanation of course: they were here last week!). Octopus, two spotted eagle rays, thousands of yellow-tailed surgeonfish swimming with me. Everyone wore 7 mm. I wore 5 mm, dives at Gordon rocks, Cousins rock, Enderby, and Champion. We did not go to Darwin and Wolf. The first afternoon on a buoyancy check they instructed us to start with 30 lbs. of weight and a hood. 12 divers were getting ready in a very small and people were getting cuts and scraps from the tanks and bumping into each other. On the check out I sank like a rock. When I made it to the surface, I found myself struggling then drifting away from the ship and got a strong breath of the diesel fumes coming from the back of the ship. The combination put me in a panic. I am a comfortable diver with good diving skills, but I signaled the ship that I

was in trouble. The divemaster Fabrese kept asking if I were OK? I gave the distress signal three times and realized that I had better focus on saving myself. I pumped in my BC and was still drifting far away from the ship, I turned over and just started to breathe slowly and was no longer taking in the diesel fumes. After five minutes, the dinghy came to rescue me. I hadn't up my equipment. They exhausted me. There was no ladder and I needed assistance. The crew member tried to help me. We were unable to communicate since he could not speak English. He wasn't able to help me by himself. He was starting to let go when I then landed on the side of the wood boat with my right side banging into the side of the boat and I hit real hard into one of the metal screws on top of the boat. I later found out that when I gave the distress signal, the crew members didn't know what to do. Two of the women divers on board were getting ready to jump in and save me. I would not let this get in the way of diving so I readjusted my weights and wore 20 lbs. dove the next day. Two female divers did not dive due to what they witnessed as lack of emergency skills and any type of emergency training from the crew. Later that evening, five of the passengers spoke with the Tour Operator about safety issues. He didn't care. On the second dive that day the conditions were extreme. We only had one divemaster with a group of 10 divers. The divemaster was assisting another diver and lost the group. Later that evening on June 3rd, the *Flamingo* was traveling at full speed in rough

seas. The explanation given was that we needed to get to Seymour Island to pick up supplies. Everyone thought this was strange since normally a live-aboard is fully stocked. Half the passengers on board were getting sick. I was unable to dive the following day on June 4th, I was in too much pain. No one was concerned or cared that I was hurt. I can't begin to explain how disappointed I was in not being able to dive Galapagos due to the extreme pain from the injury. On the afternoon a dinghy with three divers and one crew member capsized; no one was seriously hurt. It took 7 hours to get the dinghy out of the water and we were unable to enjoy excursions for the rest of the day. The tour operator kept saying that we will make it up the next day but we sure didn't have any fun during the 7 hours the crew spent retrieving a badly damaged dinghy. Luckily the rest of the cruise was without incident. (305-262-6264, 800-633-7972; Fax: 305-262-9609; e-mail: [info@galapagosnetwork.com](mailto:info@galapagosnetwork.com); website [www.ecoventura.com.ec](http://www.ecoventura.com.ec))

**Flamingo, June 2000, Donald K. Wilson, Caldwell, NJ.** I'd like to report on my experience with (Galapagos Adventures, 825 Periwinkle St., Boca Raton, FL 33486, [diveadv@bellsouth.net](mailto:diveadv@bellsouth.net)), Trip was terrific. Price was \$1000 less than *Aggressor* or *Sun Dancer*). Ken Weemhof, owner of Galapagos Adventures, does an outstanding job of organizing every detail, from pick-up at Guayaquil airport, an excellent hotel for the necessary overnight, airport shuttles, and on and

on. The *Flamingos* (there are 2, I and II) are luxury boats, holding 20 passengers, with a crew of 10. Both you and your roommate have your beds on the floor, with loads of space between. The crew was superb. The food was consistently very good. The lounge large, and a friendly group of travelers. We did the "southern itinerary" (instead of Wolf and Darwin up north), which gave us the chance to land on shore everyday to walk among the animals. Imagine sea lions, albatrosses, blue-footed boobies that do not know what a human is...you have to step over them. Faintest. Diving was superb, with large animals everywhere. Hammerheads, white-tipped reef sharks, eagle rays, unfortunately no whale sharks. Diving with sea lions is a mind-boggling experience. I was there along a wall, and WHAM, right past me shoots a large female going straight down, and what looked like 60 miles and hour, until she disappeared into the dark depths below. Then there were the other ones, simply curious, nosing around us. We made it in time for the last few days of relatively calm seas before the winter rough seas began. Even so, swells were up to 5 feet. And those Galapagos currents. Wow. Mandatory is a dive alert on every diver, furnished by the boat in case you did not bring your own. I used mine twice, with my safety stop time in current carrying me a good distance away from the pickup dinghy. Professional operation. (561-393-4752; e-mail [diveadv@bellsouth.net](mailto:diveadv@bellsouth.net); website [www.galapagosadventures.com](http://www.galapagosadventures.com))

**Flamingo I, June 2000, Paul Italiano (Motion90@aol.com), Sausalito, CA.** Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 70 to 74 F., calm currents. We cruised the southern Islands. Galapagos Adventures had by far the best price for this trip. Dive areas included Enderby, Gordon rocks, Seymore. Galapagos is quite remote so having spare parts is essential. I had an extra gauge hose to replace one that was leaking. This boat is a little cramped, there is limited storage for gear, and the suiting up area is rather small. However service and food are excellent. Cabins are a good size for a live-aboard, all fully equipped. Crew is helpful, guides were excellent. Diving is experienced only, currents and surge can be strong, at times it was necessary to grab a hold of rocks to make our way through strong current, other times there was no current at all. Best diving was early, sunrise around 6:00- 6:30 am, vis was best early and more of the big animals we came to see were around. Some dives we saw a lot of sharks (Galapagos, silkies, white tip reef sharks and hammerheads), and rays (golden, Eagle and a few mantas in the distance), others very few. Schools of many kinds of fish were abundant, sealions performed underwater for us often. Land excursions were fascinating, and are only available for those doing the southern itinerary. No camera tables, but fresh rinse tank for cameras only is available.

**Galapagos Aggressor I, February 2000, Don Beukers (beukersdon@earthlink.net) San Jose, CA.** Vis: 30 to 65 Feet. Water: 68 to 82 F., choppy surge currents. My first *Aggressor* live-aboard, I have

used Peter Hughes in the past. The boat compared with a *Dancer* boat but was not quite as good, and the *Aggressor* crew did not mingle with the guests like some of the *Dancer* fleet crews do at meals, etc. The crew did everything they could for the patrons, and the divemaster, Fernando Oritz, was great, very knowledgeable of the dive sites and topside flora and fauna. We saw many hammerheads, white tips, reef sharks, turtles, marine and land iguanas up close and personal. Darwin and Wolfe that week were not as clear as the previous week, cousins rock was clearer than the previous, luck of the draw. Overall great. Had two camera tables but because of all the photo equipment, both tables were full. (**Aggressor Fleet 800-348-2628 or 504-385-2628 Fax: 504-384-0817; e-mail: info@aggressor.com; website www.aggressor.com**)

**Galapagos Aggressor, March 2000, John J. Duggan (dugganDive@aol.com), San Antonio, TX.** Vis: 20-80 ft. Water: 73-75 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. No decom. This is my 4th Galapagos trip. Was one of the best. Availability of Nitrox really helped. Food better than last two times.

**Galapagos Aggressor II, April 2000, Barry Lipman (b\_lipman@hotmail.com), Brookfield, CT.** Vis: 25 to 85 ft. Water: 65 to 75 F, choppy surge currents. Divers were entrusted to dive safely. We were allowed to dive as we wished, buddy or solo, with sirens and sausages (or flags) mandatory and

necessary. The diving was exciting, often difficult due to strong surge and currents, combined with varying visibility and temperatures. Often all of the above would vary radically within a single dive. I was comfortable in a crushed neoprene drysuit (DUI CF200) with a polypropylene skin underneath. Lesser dry suits could easily be ripped on the extremely sharp barnacles that covered most of the boulders we dived among. I went through two pair of gloves holding onto those barnacles to withstand the fierce currents. Currents ranged from nothing to three or four knots. Sometimes your bubbles would leave you traveling up at a ten-degree angle; sometimes you'd watch as your bubbles actually traveled down into the depths. Downcurrents often added an interesting element to midwater safety stops. This is diving for the experienced diver, definitely not for beginners. Marine life was proliferate! Large schools of Galapagos and white tip sharks, huge schools of hundreds of Hammerheads. On our two-week trip, we spent five days diving Wolf Island among hundreds of hammerhead, Galapagos, white tip, and silky sharks, many eagle, marble, cow, and manta rays, tons of turtles, and schools of barracuda, Creoles, surgeonfish. The macro life was also of interest, with the Hippocampus ingens sea-horses stealing the show. They are the largest species of seahorse in the world and come in a colors from orange and brown to yellow. Due to their ten or twelve-inch size they are easy to find. Also present were a variety to triplefins, blennies, gobies,

red lipped Batfish, and many colorful crabs and shrimp. Sea lions would cavort for the divers, showing off their diving skills at close range, tug on divers fins, toss seastars about, and roll, tumble and playfight with each other, all well within range of a wide angle underwater camera. (Two large cameras only rinse tanks frequently replenished with fresh water. Two large padded camera tables with plenty of storage below and compressed air available. Cameras were allowed in the salon for film and lens changes when not at mealtimes. Plenty of room.) The *Aggressor* staff was cheerful, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and very helpful. Captain Jorge's excellent eyesight found us breaching whales and leaping mantas, and once spotted one of our divers who'd strayed way out to sea during her safety stop, only to find she'd lost her safety flag. Usually the pangueras (panga drivers) picked us up fairly promptly as we popped up all over the place depending on what currents had moved us about. The food was plentiful and very good. The tanks were always filled to capacity. We averaged four dives per day, and sometimes made five with the night dives done whenever a sheltered bay was to be found nearby.

***Galapagos Aggressor, June 2000,***  
**Ralph Baker, Las Vegas, NV.** Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Choppy surge. High energy trip for adventurous divers. Divers that haven't honed their skills should plan another trip because of swells, surge and current. Diving is from Zodiacs. Swells were 2 ft. Some current and moderate surge. The air temp was in

the 80s. The water temp around Darwin and Wolf was 80 degrees. Divers wore skins or 2/3 mm wet suites. In the southern Islands around Santa Cruz and Santiago the water was 71 Degrees. Divers wore 5 or 6 mm wetsuits and hoods. I was told it was a little warmer than normal. There are two boats that travel together. Each boat holds 14 divers. My boat only had 12 divers. The group that booked the other boat had travel problems and didn't catch up to us until our last day at Darwin. There were sharks on every dive. Always scalloped hammerheads in schools. Most dives had Galapagos sharks. I saw 3 whale sharks at Darwin Island. At least one appeared on every dive at this location. I got so close the divemaster was pointing out small parasites on the remoras that were on the Whale Sharks. They were so common I focused on other fish and didn't even chase after them anymore. I saw schools of eagle rays and mobulas. I saw many red lipped bat fish at Wolf Island. We saw them at 106 feet and the water temp was 71 degrees F. At Cousins we saw many frog fish and seahorses. The seahorses were about 5 inches long. The seals at Plazas did not play with us. The bull was very aggressive and would charge the divers. He hit a videographer's camera. We also saw a very big, 10 foot shark, in the surf zone. The divemaster said he had seen the shark in the bay where the seals and we were swimming previously. Maybe the bull was trying to protect his harem from sharks and lumped us into that category? Although I have had good

experiences with the *Aggressor* on previous trips this time their assistance in getting to the dive boat was horrible. My wife does not dive so we made separate arrangements to arrive in the Galapagos and do a surface tour. I informed the *Aggressor* personnel in Louisiana of my travel arrangements. They had sent me literature indicating that the dive boat left from San Cristobal Island. Unfortunately, the dive boat was leaving from the totally separate island of Baltra. I called twice and wrote a letter trying to get confirmation that the dive boat knew I would already be on San Cristobal. When I called I was always reassured that information was in my file. I was never told the literature they sent was wrong and I was on the wrong island. They never did respond to my letter. One week before leaving, I was informed by my other travel agent who had booked me on my trip with my wife that the dive boat was leaving out of Baltra. This other agent canceled my hotel on San Cristobal and made arrangements to drop me off and obtain a hotel in Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz. The *Aggressor* personnel never did contact me nor have they even offered an apology. One week before I left I received a Fed Ex package from the *Aggressor* people in Louisiana. It contained literature that the boat left out of Baltra and I should contact the dive boat directly if I made my own plans to get to the Galapagos. The literature was Fed Ex'd because they forgot to send it to me. They also billed my credit card twice. I presume because somebody forgot to write it down when they billed it the first time.

If you need to make any contact or arrangements, I suggest you contact the dive boat personally. The telephone number to Ecuador is 011-593-4-681950. You cannot depend on the people in Louisiana. I was told by an *Aggressor* official that the dive boat had been leaving out of Baltra for about 6 weeks prior to my arrival. I learned that all the boats are franchises. The Louisiana people are just a travel agency handling the bookings. None of my complaints have been addressed. Everybody evidently feels it is somebody else's problem. I feel very lucky that I made it to the dive boat. The diving was incredible.

***Galapagos Aggressor, August 2000, Sandy and John Stubbings, Northbrook, IL.*** Vis: 30-75 ft. Water: 57-70 degrees. Dive restrictions: None enforced. We dove with whale sharks several times. Schooling hammerheads usually surrounded us. Watch the floor of the Pangas. I twisted my foot badly. The crew is the most helpful staff we've been with. Capable, knowledgeable dive masters! Jaime and Nelson were the greatest. Diving with hammerheads is exciting, but the whale sharks made this one of those trips of a lifetime. An experience we'll always treasure.

***Lammer Law/Quaser Nautica, May 2000, Harry A. Kreigh, Sacramento, CA.*** Ten day trip from Baltra covering the central and northern islands (Darwin, Wolf and Roca Redonda). Fifteen passengers (capacity 16) all from the USA. Overall, it was a very enjoyable diving experience. Although the diving was good, particularly at

the northern sites, I was disappointed by the poor visibility, which hindered our encounters with sharks and other large fish. I experienced better visibility, larger schools of hammerhead sharks and whale shark encounters during a previous trip (June 1995), but not nearly as many Galapagos sharks. However, the exceptional service provided by the staff, variety of divesites and close observation of unique wildlife during the land tours made it a memorable trip. Trip Summary: Weather/Water Conditions: Mostly sunny with clouds developing in the afternoons (80-90° F) and occasional showers in late afternoon or evening; generally calm surface conditions (0-3' seas) with variable currents and swells at some locations; highly variable water temperatures with distinct thermoclines at most divesites (64 F at Roca Redonda, 69-75 F at central islands, 78-81 F at Darwin and Wolf); at a minimum, a 5-mil wetsuit and hood were required. Generally poor visibility in the central islands (20-50'); better visibility in the northern islands (75-100+'). Except at Darwin and Wolf, diving was difficult and demanding. Only experienced divers in good physical condition should attempt the Galapagos. Boat: Large, aluminum-hulled trimaran (93' long with a 42' beam), very stable boat with minimal engine noise; Except for the sundeck, all rooms and activities were on the main deck; spacious salon (bar, library and VCR); Cabins were roomy with twin beds (not bunks), plenty of storage space, en suite bathroom with shower, adjustable air-conditioning/

fan, and skylight and porthole, which when opened, provided good cross-ventilation; daily maid service. Meals were served on the dive deck (no permanent dining area); buffet breakfast (eggs, pancakes or French toast) and lunch (various salads and/or pasta). Varied dinner menus usually with chicken or fish (a few Italian meals also) and included excellent soup de jour; lots of vegetables, fresh fruit was served with each meal.

Diving Facilities/Operations: Dives were generally scheduled at 6:30, 10:00 and 2:00 daily with opportunities for about four night dives during the trip. All gear/tanks were stored on or under one of three benches on the aft dive deck. There were two racks with hangers for wetsuits. Tanks were consistently filled to 3000 psi. Divers were split into two groups and assigned to a dive guide and panga. All day dives were made via panga. Dive-Alerts and Safety Sausages were provided at no charge. There were two camera rinse buckets and a fresh water hose, but no towels after dives. Staff/Operations: Pablo and Vincente (both Ecuadorian) have considerable experience as divemasters and naturalists in the Galapagos Islands. They were both very gracious hosts, friendly and conversant with guests, and led all of the dives. Dive briefings were informative and usually accurate concerning water conditions/current direction. Boat operations ran smoothly with a large crew (8 members). Everyone was very friendly and helpful. Personalized service with a smile. Every request was handled promptly and courteously. The waiters

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provided exceptional service. Panga drivers were also helpful and attentive. Usually divers were picked-up immediately after surfacing. We dove primarily sloping and vertical walls surrounding each island. Little coral at most locations, primarily boulders covered with barnacles; although some sites (e.g., Cousins and Guy Fawkes) had plentiful clusters of black coral and colorful sponges; rows of cubbyholes filled with pencil urchins and other critters. At Wolf we dove some underwater caverns and a submerged pinnacle. Night dives were offered unless overnight travel was required, but were unremarkable except a Red-Lipped Batfish. Divers were expected to dive with their buddies to a maximum depth limit of 100'. It was seldom necessary or productive to dive below 60-80'. When the water conditions improved and after divers demonstrated necessary skills and responsibility, these rules were relaxed. Divemasters were available for guided tours, generally found interesting animals and shared their discoveries with everyone nearby. Land: We visited several islands and observed marine/land

iguanas, Sally Lightfoot crabs, sea lions, fur seals and several species of birds, including finches, hawks, oyster catchers, boobies and pelicans. The naturalist identified each species, explained the history and geology of each island, and answered our questions. We hiked to the top of Bartolome for a spectacular view of Pinnacle Rock and the surrounding bay, then we snorkeled around the coast and watched small groups of penguins on the rocks. We toured the Charles Darwin Research Station and saw several giant tortoises close-up. We took a bus tour into the highlands for a delicious lunch at a local restaurant (Narwhal) and hiked to some enormous sinkholes and lava tubes. Ecuadorian Travel/Hotels/Etc.: *Quasar Nautica* met us at the Quito airport and arranged transfers to and from the hotel. We stayed at the Swiss Hotel at the beginning and end of our trip. It is a 5-star hotel with impeccable service. A full breakfast was included, and room amenities consisted of bathrobes, a hair dryer, Jacuzzi in the bathtub, and roses and chocolates on your pillow. It was luxurious and I highly recommend it. One of the divemasters met us in Quito and together with the *Quasar Nautica* representative assisted us with check-in for flights to and from the Galapagos. The dollar is strong in Ecuador (exchange rate of 25,000 Sucres); so most prices are very reasonable. Diving Highlights/Memorable Encounters + Wolf Island provided the best water conditions and most shark encounters of any divesite; although fewer hammerheads were

observed than on a previous trip, there was nearly continuous interaction with Galapagos sharks at Wolf; when I surfaced from one dive, there were at least 20 Galapagos sharks circling below me. + Small schools of hammerheads (5-25 sharks) were seen at Cousins, Darwin and Gordon Rocks. The largest school of Galapagos sharks (75-100 individuals) was found at Guy Fawkes (Nameless Rock). Small groups of White-Tip sharks were encountered throughout the trip. At our request, Roca Redonda was added to the diving itinerary. When we arrived, the rock was shrouded in fog (we had to wait two hours for it to clear prior to diving) and there was definitely an eerie presence in the air. As expected, the dives there were very exciting and rewarding. It was the coldest water (64°), but the visibility was good (60-75'); however, the currents were very unpredictable and bizarre! Surface vortices and other localized phenomena caused pangas and floating divers to spin in circles and other unexpected actions (i.e., downdrafts and midwater suspension). There were strong currents and swells and one hazardous area known as the "Industrial Washing Machine" (which I fortunately avoided). Gas bubbles emitted from the ocean floor (fumaroles) created a champagne effect. The fish life was amazing: the largest school of barracuda I have ever seen, sea lions chasing a Galapagos shark, big schools of jacks, snappers, surgeons and Pompano, interspersed with a few hammerheads and Galapagos sharks. Definitely advanced diving and truly one of the



most memorable dives of my life! I have never seen so many turtles (green and Hawksbill) on a dive trip; it was common to see groups of 4-5 at once and probably 10-20 total on many dives, some were quite large. Other frequent sightings included eagle rays, marble stingrays and mantas. The fish density at Darwin was amazing; prolific concentrations of Creole wrasse, jacks, triggerfish, Moorish Idols and Yellow-Tail Surgeons; also Rainbow Runners, Mexican Hogfish and Green Morays. So much fish activity that it was difficult to focus on any individual animal or see through the frenzy. Frequent, extended encounters with playful sea lions at several divesites. Memorable opportunities to observe aerial acrobatics and snorkel with dolphins at Darwin and Wolf. Other notable species included Bullseye Puffers, Banded Blennies, Golden Groupers, Long-Nose Hawkfish and Hieroglyphic Hawkfish. No sightings of seahorses or frogfish were reported. I was disappointed with the limited number of dives possible on this trip. Of ten days onboard, we dove only on seven days and averaged three dives per day (I had 21 total dives with three night dives). I had expected more dives, especially at Darwin and Wolf, but the decision to go to Roca Redoda probably cost us at least two dives. To be fair, most people were content with the dive frequency given the difficult conditions and appreciated the chance for rest and relaxation between dives. I really enjoyed the early morning dives (6:30 AM) before breakfast; what a great way to start the day and often

they were the best dives. If I go to the Galapagos again, I will consider the "Darwin and Wolf Express" itinerary offered by the *Galapagos Aggressor*. The best water conditions and diving are usually at the northern sites so I might bypass the central islands entirely and get more dives. One of our divemasters considers November the best time to dive the Galapagos Islands. Photographers should be aware that there is no E-6 processing onboard. I have two minor complaints about the dive operation on the *Lammer Law*. One, the tanks are spaced too close together on each bench causing congestion and delays before each dive. Two, sometimes divers were picked-up by the other panga; in which case, their tanks could be placed anywhere in the three storage racks, not necessarily in the original position above their gear tray. This was a minor inconvenience causing divers to walk across the deck with their tanks on. Be aware of increased costs traveling to the Galapagos Islands. The park fee has been raised to \$100 and the Ecuadorian departure tax is \$25 (both in US dollars). TAME airlines charged our group in Quito (about 10 people) about \$170 for excess baggage (\$1.70/pound), which was paid largely by the photographers. The remaining divers, who stayed in Guayaquil, were not hassled at all about excess baggage. On the return trip, most of the luggage was checked as cargo at a reduced cost (it was actually loaded onto the plane as normal baggage); however, one bag was not offloaded in Guayaquil and ended up in Quito. **(284-494-2490; Fax: 284-494-5774; e-mail: [cuanlaw@surfbvi.com](mailto:cuanlaw@surfbvi.com); website [www.galapagosdiving.com/](http://www.galapagosdiving.com/))**

**Lammer Law/Quasar Nautica,**  
**May 2000, Alan Nestlinger**  
**(ajnpblc@pacbell.net), Santa Ana,**  
**CA.** Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 71 to 76 F., surge currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: My wife and I always followed the dive master. This is unknown territory and the currents were challenging. A superb boat, 8 large cabins with private shower/toilet. Great food. The crew was very hard working and attentive. Nobody drank alcohol so the bar was left open for self service soft drinks. Our panga driver was amazing. A tiny Ecuadorian but as strong as a bull. He often took my integrated weight BC and tank in one pull if we were close to the rocks or in rough water (which was about half the dives). The divemasters are also credentialed naturalists (by the National Park Authority) who led our shore excursions. Both spoke good to excellent English and took the time to give us university level explanations of the fantastic animals. A sea lion ambled over to sniff my hand and smell my breath. Amazing! Rinse tanks always ready. A large floor area covered with towels was set aside for laying out cameras. I got some GREAT video with my Sony PC-1 miniDV in a Sea and Sea housing. A very nice combination being VERY small and easy to use.

**Reina Silvia, June 2000, Lauren Henderson, San Antonio, TX.** Vis. 50-80 ft. Temp. Varies from southern to northern islands 75-80 degrees. The adventure begins with 2 days of touring around Quito, the equator, and the Market villages north of the city.

The scenery outside the city is gorgeous and the shopping is fun. Take cash in small bills, you can almost name your price. The people are very friendly and seem to enjoy the bartering. Good deals on leather, and woven goods, and t-shirts. Purchases and extra items can be left at the hotel so you don't need to carry them on the boat. On Sat. you fly to Baltra where you board the boat. Rooms are adequate in size with lots of storage, private heads and showers. For an extra \$600 the owners suite is huge for those who enjoy the extra luxury. Food is good and very plentiful. Breakfasts are buffet style with cooked to order eggs. Lunch and dinner are served restaurant style with soup, entree, and dessert. Between dive snacks are set up in the lounge with a variety of goodies including late afternoon pizza. Alcohol is not included and, except local beer, can be expensive; \$15-\$20 a bottle for Chilean wine. Bring your own from Quito. Extraordinary diving. Lots of turtles, variety of eels, beautiful pacific tropicals, lobster, and huge schools of game fish. The stars were the hammerheads at Wolf and Darwin where they created a non-stop parade for every dive. Too numerous to count. I was greeted by a pod of 30 dolphins during a safety stop in the blue. They performed for me with their babies for 15 min till low air forced me to surface. Also encountered a group of 10 mantas trailing after some hammerheads but of course I was out of film. At Cousins, we saw numerous passive turtles and schools of 20+ eagle rays. Sea lions were very

playful and came right up to your mask, phenomenal! Several guided island tours that made for a well rounded vacation. The final tour at the Darwin Research center puts you close up to the giant tortoises. The week is rounded out with a going away dinner in Quito on Sat. at an outstanding restaurant and 3 weeks after the trip I received a complementary video of the week's highlights. Aquatics Encounters owner, Marc Bernardi served as the trip leader. He is easy going and does his best to make sure everyone is having a good trip. (303-494-8384; Fax: 303-494-1202; e-mail: Info@AquaticEncounters.com; website www.aquaticencounters.com)

**Reina Silvia, June 2000, Ming Peng** (peng@hsc.usc.edu.), South Pasadena, CA. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 72 to 78 F., surge currents. Marc Bernardi has made traveling to the Galapagos a science for the visiting scuba diver. Greeting at airport by Karen Bernardi (Marc's wife) and Patricio, our tour guide in Quito. Spending three days in Quito (Wednesday arrival) proved to be beneficial for some guests since their plane was delayed. One guest left Friday, but could not go on the trip, since his plane got delayed. (Fortunately, he had travel insurance) Another guest arrived Friday evening/ Saturday morning but her dive gear did not make it. Marc Bernardi constantly on cell phone trying to acquire dive gear and clothes for this guest. Patricio insured all went smoothly arriving, leaving, and while in Quito. Alameda Hotel five star (US

standards). Room service cheaper than hotel restaurant. Food safe. Bottled water provided. As recommended by previous *Chapbook* contributors, bring earplugs for the adjacent disco. Bring lots of one dollars for shopping and tips (We bought about \$50 worth) Ecuador recently converted to the US dollar so don't expect exact change. As recommended by previous *Chapbook* contributors, bring a crisp \$100 bill for the park entrance fee. (Thank you *Undercurrent*!) *Reina Silvia* Boat excellent. No Nitrox. Two buckets for camera rinse. No E-6. No dedicated camera table, but two tables in the dining area are designated as such. No problem with setup on boat. However, only 7 of 16 guests were photographers/videographers. Water safe to drink. All rooms with A/C, outlets, and own toilet and sink. Bathroom doubles as shower. While owner's suite is three times size of regular cabin, it is on the top of the boat and will sway the most. The guests in that room got seasick to and from the crossing to Darwin and Wolf Island with much of their belongings tossed about. Food good. Too much food in between dives. Reserve depending on sensitivity to seasickness. Diving challenging and is not for beginners. Currents strong and could be felt ripping regulator/mask out. One diver swept on the other side of Darwin's arch. Wore 6 mm full wetsuit without hood. This is not only for thermal protection but physical protection as the surge could bash you against the barnacle-covered rocks. Tons of marine life. Schools of hammerheads, jacks, dolphins, seahorse, sea turtles,

sea lions, red lipped batfish. No Mr. Big. Divemaster/Naturalist Mauricio knowledgeable with an infectious laugh. Land excursions a good balance: Galapagos tortoises, blue-footed boobies, sea lions, frigate birds, marine iguanas all out of the Discovery channel. If a guest does not arrive, you could stay another week for \$500.

***Reina Silvia*, Aquatic Encounters, June 2000, Dr. Sam Pearlstein (sbpdpm@aol.com), Manlius, NY.**

Vis: 25 to 60 Feet. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: None that I observed. The currents and surge dictated good sense and use of dive skills. Because of weather problems we could not land in Quito and were rerouted to Guayaquil. Continental Airlines told us they would keep our luggage on the plane and send us to a hotel. We got transferred to a second hotel when the 1st one was filled. The very helpful hotel staff contacted Continental to let them know where we were to send transportation to take us to the airport after a 3-hour nap. At the airport, the next morning, we were shuffled from line to line to line and got on another airline, TAME, who, of course, did not have our luggage. When it arrived in Quito's airport at 5 pm that same day someone had broken into my bags (but only took nonessential stuff like T-shirts that was easily replaced). Aquatic Encounters! They sent packets of information to us months in advance. Our agent in Quito, Patricio, showed us the city and countryside, outdoor marketplaces, and a couple of equator monuments. Our hotel in Quito, the Alameda Real,

at 9500 feet above sea level, was as nice as most of the hotels I have been to for conventions in the States. Marc Bernardi, met us in the Galapagos at the airport for the dive week aboard the *Reina Silvia*. Besides the great diving, Marc and our dive master/ Ecuador naturalist, Juan Carlos (JC), showed us several islands (land trips) that are as pristine as Charles Darwin found them in 1835. Spent 3 full days at Darwin and Wolf. Hundreds of scalloped hammerheads, Galapagos sharks, a lot of turtles, the biggest eels I ever saw, hundreds of dolphins to snorkel with one day, snorkeled with penguins, eagle, mobula and sting rays and dove with very playful sea lions, but no whale sharks. Lots of small tropicals. No coral but barnacle encrusted volcanic rock. Bring your gloves and wear them! Water a cool 70 degrees (6 mm suit) in the southern Galapagos islands and about 78 (3 mm suit) at Darwin and Wolf. The big fish and current and surge are at Darwin and Wolf. You'll never forget Darwin's Arch once you have seen and dived it. Most of the dives were with 50-60 feet of viz. *Reina Silvia* is a converted yacht with an Ecuadorian crew of pleasant and hard-working men of the sea. Always helpful and courteous. All photo tables were inside. Dip tanks on main boat. No E-6 developing. No slide projector but TV available for our 3 videographers to show us their stuff. Our rooms had effective temperature controls, comfortable beds and sinks, shower and head that worked well. Food was tasty, plentiful and varied.

**Reina Silvia, June 2000, Peter T. Hartlove, Longmont, CO.** Vis: 40-60 ft. Dive restrictions: One hour. Aquatic Encounters is owned by Marc Bernardi and had him with us on this trip. All administrative and informational paperwork was timely and excellent. Printouts were available onboard, going over the salient points on the shore excursion or dive sites. Despite being detoured from Quito to Guayaquil, once we were in Quito, a local tour guide was waiting for us, whisked us thru the terminal and to our hotel. A guided tour of the old city, then a trip back to the airport to retrieve our baggage. The next day was a highlands trip to shop at various towns. I stayed behind and read and walked. The guide again whisked us through the airport for our flight to the islands, taking care of baggage and check in. Marc Bernardi is a fun, enthusiastic cheerleader and he and the naturalist took care of anything needed. I'm looking forward to a copy of our trip video done by Marc, if what I saw between dives is any indication, it will be excellent. *Reina Silvia* is a wonderful, clean, well-run boat. The crew is happy and very helpful in all aspects. I lost all but one of my Oceanic Probe's backpack bolts and had to abort a dive, the crew was determined to fix it. They did, finding just the right size nuts, with stainless steel, no less! The food was plentiful and good, lots of variety. It's not a dedicated dive boat but does a good job handling the divers. Special touches: a cake for me on the day of my 500" dive (another received one for his 300th ) and musicians serenad-

ing us at a local restaurant on our last night in port. The naturalist guide was Juan Carlos, an excellent guide and popular with the locals as well as the other guides. As a dive guide, he was very thorough and had most everyone do a check-out dive with him including kneeling in a circle and practicing taking our masks off, regs out, buddy breathing. I didn't mind, hadn't done it in a while. The diving was very good. The *Reina Silvia* spends 3 days at the north islands, a 14 hour cruise. 3 dives per day and optional night dives. In the main islands we interspersed shore trips with diving. Total of 13 dives available, not including optional dives at night. Diving in the main islands was OK, some sea lions, a few sharks, turtles and some nice bait balls. The north islands is where the action is. At both Wolf and Darwin, the dives involve going to 30-40 ft., find a hole to crawl in and hide. If the hammers come, hold your breath and they fly right overhead. The best dive was always the 1st and the others progressively had less hammers. On one dive, I saw dolphins, hammers, Galapagos sharks, turtles and sea lions. A jewel of the world. Water temp was warmer than expected, 77 at the main islands, 80 in the north then the last day in the main islands was a brisk 71! Very good trip. It would be nice to go to the north islands for 5 days but the whole trip is a little more expensive but it is definitely worth it with all of the help from the local guides Marc employs, nice dinners out, and the boat.