

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

you a place; they often have good prices. . . .

Hawaii /Kona

Aloha Dive Company, August 2000, Dave Marchese, Hummelstown, PA.

Mike Nakachi is the owner and Earl is his right-hand man. Mike's boat is 28', fast and comfortable. The limit of 6 divers allows for personal service. Mike's enthusiasm and knowledge are contagious, and Buffy's (Mike's wife) fresh-baked cookies after every dive are better than anything you can buy. Before each dive, Mike would flip through his fish book and discuss which rare fish we would likely find below. He has an almost supernatural way of spotting small beauties (flame angles, tinker's angles, flame wrasses, etc.). I was impressed with the health of the coral and the abundance of tropical fish. The fish density was really great. When I told Mike I wanted to see some big stuff, he took me to a wall and two 10' hammer-heads came within 10' of us. We also saw turtles, eagle rays, dolphins, and one white tip reef shark. We also did the crepuscular (A word I learned from Mike!) Manta dive: 10' mantas flying and tumbling inches from my nose for 70 minutes — fantastic. This trip (a stop over on my return from Midway) was great. (800-708-5662, 808-325-5560; Fax 808-325-6688)

Aloha Dive Co., February 2000, Stephen Pahl (spahl@pahl-gosselin.com) San Jose, CA. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 74 to 76 degrees, choppy. Dive restrictions: none. The

quality of the dive operation is unsurpassed. Mike Nakachi allows you to dive your own profile, is completely fluent in the fishes of South Kona, knows all the fun lava tubes and truly enjoys diving. Aloha Dive keeps its boats small and quaint (a 6-pack) and the killer cookies are worth the price of admission. While Aloha is somewhat more expensive than the other larger operators, its level of service, unique dive sites and unsurpassed variety of diving make it an excellent choice.

Aquatic Perceptions, Hilo Hawaiian Hotel, HI. September 2000, Robert O'Hagan (rohaganreg@aol.com), San Jose, CA. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet.

Water: 76 to 78 F. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: Computer. I discovered Michael Brandon and his wife, Miku, next door to the hotel. They are instructors. As a new Nikonos V owner, I needed help getting started, and Michael is a professional photographer. He provided advice and was willing to critique the results after I had the film developed. Hilo is rainy, but that does not interfere with the diving. Quite a bit of surface cool water coming from springs. It gives an oily appearance to the water that can interfere with snorkeling visibility but is not a problem for diving. Hilo is crawling with big turtles. Michael would scout out photo ops for me and then help me set up. I was one-on-one with a divemaster; it couldn't get much better for me. All shore diving from his van. Parks and beaches usually have fresh water showers. You will need hard

sole booties for walking over the lava rock and warm water gloves for gripping while stepping down into the water. The hotel was old but adequate. The staff was friendly and helpful. They upgraded me to the ocean side where I enjoyed the view of Hilo Bay each morning as the sunrise illuminated the slopes of Mauna Kea.

Big Island Divers, Eco Divers, Hali Maluhia Country Inn (band), April 2000, Martin Klein, New York, NY. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 73 to 76 Fahrenheit, choppy surge. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 130ft. Great dive operation. Small boat with six divers max. No great luxuries but very friendly and flexible staff in the shop and on the boat. They accommodate whatever you are looking for and treat you like adults. Make you feel almost like family. We dived with several of their divemasters and captains and they were all great. On the manta night dive they provided the best lights and their cameraman, David Carr, also outshone the competition. More light means more plankton and, therefore, the manta that showed up spent much more time with our group than with anyone else. David's video turned out to be outstanding. We also went one day with Eco Divers. Smooth operation but way too many divers on the huge boat. Though they split you up into smaller dive groups, it still feels like a zoo. We stayed at the Hali Maluhia B&B. Did not find it very clean and the location at a well-traveled country road is not as peaceful as their web site makes it appear. Be careful when

touring the island after diving. You will easily end above 5000 ft without even realizing it. (800-329-6068, 808-329-6068, Fax 808-326-5654)

Dive Makai, Orchid Hotel, 1999, Jack Brown, Kirkland, WA. Vis: 50-60 ft. Water: 80 degrees.

Dive Makai, Moana Loa Village, February 2000, William Edwards, Placerville, CA. Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 72-76 degrees. After diving with Sea Paradise, I found Dive Makai to be much more relaxing and less rigid. The personnel at Dive Makai were cheerful, friendly and informative. Karen was one of the most enthusiastic divemasters I have ever had. No restrictions. I was allowed to stay down as long as I wanted. In fact, Dive Makai is so relaxed they don't even have a dive shop. They just pick you up at the pier in Kailua. I had my first encounter with a "bait ball" which is hundreds of thousands of fish swimming together in a compact circle. So close that you cannot see into the middle of them. We also saw turtles and lots of tropical fish. On route to our second dive of the day we spotted three humpback whales — one surfaced just 30 feet from the boat. Moana Loa Village in Keauhou just south of Kailua, Kona, was very clean and spacious condo complex.

Dive Makai, May 2000, Frank Schmidt, San Carlos, CA. Vis: 70-80 ft. Water: 75-80 degrees. Diving with Dive Makai was always a wonderful experience. Lisa and Kendra's perfect pre-dive descriptions.

I have dove with them 15-20 dives. They are expensive, but money well spent. We had some less than experienced divers and the divemasters, Kate "the young Aussie" was more than patient. Many little critters, some sharks, one large manta during the day that came within a few feet. I asked Kate to see a Spanish Dancer and she led me to one. Dive Makai may be equipped for everything you may have broken or left in your room also. Wonderful people. (808-329-2025; Fax 808-329-2025)

Dive Makai, July 2000, William Deane, New York, NY. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 77-78 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 100. I've had 130 dives from the Red Sea to Mexico and Dive Makai is tops in pre-dive briefings with pictures, interest and knowledge. Kendra, in dive boats since she was 2, loves the territory and knows where the little critters are and what they are about. Absolutely outstanding! Disappointed in not seeing any dolphins, mantas or whales, understand January and February are the months for the big guys (and the rain). Good for both experienced and inexperienced divers. On the surface and underwater they know when to let you do your own thing, but are always there and ready to help if you need it.

Dive Makai, July 2000, Edward Clapp, Corte Madera, CA. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 75 degrees. Water between calm and flat and choppy; strong current on one dive. I wore a wetsuit, the top to my form fitted one

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for California, plus a hooded vest. We were asked to return with at least 300 psi (steel 72's were used). We were allowed to dive our own profile but it was suggested we dive with the guides. No sharks; a couple of mantas; no dolphins; no whale sharks; more than two turtles; no whales. Dive Makai has a base of return customers, which is quite understandable: what they do, they do excellently. Email, snail-mail, and phone calls involved in making reservations were extremely helpful. They provide enough information that you should know pretty much what's going to happen and there should be no unpleasant surprises. Well, if you don't like dogs, you may have a problem, as a small one does occasionally come along, but the dog was a hit. There's a wide range of hotels and restaurants in town, and their info packet does a good job of describing them (except they don't tell you quite enough about where to eat an early breakfast). Their specialty is showing small and beautiful fish, which they do very well. They're the best dive operation for guided reef tours I've seen. The staff is enthusiastic, knows the area

extremely well, knows what to look for, and is very good at pointing things out. Pre-dive briefings are extensive — maybe a little too much so about what to expect to see to the exclusion of adequate descriptions of the terrain in case you want to strike out on your own (I didn't ask, but expect I would have gotten the needed answers) — and include very useful hand signals to show what's been found. Getting in and out of the boat was easy, though this might be the norm these days. Munchies were provided between dives. The boat leaves at 7:30 and returns about 1:30 after only two dives, though you should get close to two hours of bottom time. The area is fished (so, for example, there are very few lobster), which is why the emphasis is on the small critters. It's the southernmost of the Hawaiian islands but there's not much by way of coral. They're fun to dive with, but some people prefer diving on their own. It's permitted and they're happy to let you. A dozen divers plus three employees makes the boat just a little crowded, but it's not bad. They split up into two groups, one divemaster per group, which is about right, but having 14 people in the water at a time can make it busy down there and more thought might be given to ensuring the groups don't intermingle until the very end of the dive. Plan to spend a couple of days in Volcanoes National Park.

Dive Makai, Aston Royal Sea Cliff Condos, July 2000, Debbie Finch, Kissimmee, FL. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 77-78 degrees. Requested a max depth of 130 ft -- long surface intervals.

Dive Makai is simply the best! The most extensive, critter-knowledgeable briefings I have experienced! Extremely personable staff, especially Lisa, Amy and Kendra. Well organized and their system works very efficiently. Definitely not a cattle boat op - small groups (max 6 divers plus divemaster). They were calling us by name within a few minutes on our first dive day, despite 9 other "first day" divers. Lots of turtles, several nudibranchs, huge (12"-13") frogfish!

Eco-Adventure, May 2000, Dayna Gernansky, Los Angeles, CA. Vis: 90-100 ft. Water: 70-72 degrees. Dove in groups of 4-6 with guide. Had to follow. Max 60 ft for our group. Night dives not only Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday. Would have planned it so could try 2 (no mantas on ours). Stayed at Royal Kona — ok. Great price, so we can't complain.

Eco-Adventures/Outrigger Waikoloa Beach Resort, July 2000, Russ, Sterling Hts., MI. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, calm choppy no currents. Dive your own profile. Rec diving limits. This operation one of best land based we've had. Hawaii not only has good diving but also there's lots to do and see on the island. (800-949-3483, 808-329-7116; Fax 808-329-7091)

Fair Wind, June 2000, Kathleen Fenton, Stony Brook, NY. Vis: 80 ft. Water: 75 degrees. Stay with divemaster. Fair Wind is a huge catamaran packed with tourists, but I include it for two reasons: it was the only dive

operator on the island that would take me out in the afternoon (not morning or evening). I was in Hawaii on business and timing was crucial. Good option for those traveling with nondivers since snorkeling (good quality — not the usual dive-boat snorkeling) and “SNUBA” are also available.

Jack's Diving Locker, Royal Kahana, November 1999, Ray and Fran Behnke, Salt Lake City, UT.

Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 77 to 79 degrees, choppy, surge, no currents. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: none. Gear didn't show at check-in and they were very accommodating to get us fitted up. Boat top-heavy so a lot of rocking in moderate surf and many nauseous. Served sandwiches between dives. Had a lot of beginner divers and students, to whom they catered. Therefore, dives shallow, basically and no one to show where the critters were hanging out; not around our areas anyway; overall, very disappointing. (800-345-4807, 808-329-7585; Fax 808-329-7588)

Jack's Diving Locker, November 1999. Reza Gorji (Reza@Gorji.com), Jamesville, NY.

Vis: 40-200 ft. Water: 70-80 degrees. Weather: cloudy. Water: calm. Dive Restrictions: none. Comments: Jack's Diving Locker is a top notch operation in Kona. We've known them for 6 years now and they just get better.

Jack's Diving Locker, May 2000, Paul Jacobsen, Torrance, CA.

Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 75-76 degrees. Dive restrictions: time, depth. A 2-tank

Manta Ray dive, with dive light rental was \$92. Manta dives for the last year have been hit or miss. Several operators no longer are doing them because of customer satisfaction of doing a Manta dive and getting “skunked.” I had resigned myself. Check-in time is 3: 30 PM; the process was not organized, because of the amount of people. Snorkelers and divers coming back, returning equipment, paying, sales. After I finally got served, it went fast since I had been given information over the phone the previous day. Then we waited for others to get equipment and loaded in the van. We were driven to the Kona pier, and the boat. While they loaded the boat we got the standard, but good, Coast Guard boat briefing. The crew set up equipment while heading to the dive. The boat was 27 feet; we had 11 divers and 2 snorkelers. Beverages were water or a weird mix of ice tea and fruit juice. The boat is equipped with a marine head (a plus since I don't like “making shishi” over the side during the surface interval). The engine housing takes up the last third of the stern, and the crew didn't want you on it while in motion or gearing up so divers cannot gear up at the same time. As crowded as the boat was, the crew asks some people to go forward to the bow, which gives more room on the mid ship area for those who wanted to be out of the wind. Gearing up is easy; two divers sit on the stern, above the swim deck and the brings your gear. You're divided into two groups. The more experienced divers geared up then headed off. The second group

then does the same. The pre-dive briefing was pretty basic, limited and missing some points; the basic layout of the reef and typical depths, no drawing, no description of life to look for, no review of signals. (I had to ask what the boat recall signal was.) Divers were limited to 60 feet and 60 minutes, but if you had a computer you were allowed to go deeper. (I didn't have a buddy so I don't know if they'd let you go off on your own.) The first dive was a typical Hawaii dive (Water 76, vis 80+). Tako City (Japanese for Octopus.) Only found one hiding deep in the coral. Had all of the rest of the Hawaiian reef fish, in good quantities. All of the divers were out of air before 60 minutes, except another and me. The guide buddied with me while I used up my time. She called the dive at 60 minutes. There is a ladder climb to reach the swim deck. The crew will grab your fins. You sit on the stern and the crew will help you get your gear off and stow it. There's a hot water hose you can rinse with on the other side of the stern on the swim deck. The surface interval was used to reposition the boat, watch the sunset, and have a sandwich. The sandwiches were basic foot long deli, sliced into sixths and you got one slice. Or two if you were lucky. They then had a bag of cookies. The crew switched the tanks for you during the SI. The pre-dive briefing was the same as before regarding the dive site, but this time Jeff (leader, guide and videographer) went into more detail on the "do's and don'ts" of a Manta encounter. Since there were no Mantas around we just started a night dive tour. 45 minutes

into the dive a Manta appeared. At that point all diving planning went out the window, we hadn't been briefed what to do if the Manta appeared. The guide Alison was trying to get divers to get to the bottom and form a circle, but gave up after a few minutes and was just trying to reduce the impact on the reef. The inexperienced diver's buoyancy was all over the place. Floating up mid water column, others were crashing into the finger coral, it was not a pretty sight. Despite the pandemonium the Manta didn't seem to be bothered by divers shining the dive lights at her, floating up in the way of her feeding. I went back to the boat when I had pushed my air to the max. But I wasn't aware of the dive guides monitoring the inexperienced divers to make sure they didn't forget to check their air in the excitement. The captain did a good job of leaving the site. There were snorkelers that came near the rear of the boat because of the Manta, as the engines were starting and we were trying to get off the mooring — really dumb. But we all pitched in a yelling match to get their attention and to have them back off. Which they finally figured out what was going and moved away. We were supposed to have had hot chocolate on the way back, but the hot water pot didn't work. The crew broke down the gear and rinsed it on the 40 minute ride back to Kona. I let them break down my gear — that was mistake, they took my regulator and console with my computer in it and just tossed it onto the hard deck. I rescued my regulator before more equipment was about to be tossed on it. I would

recommend Jack's Diving Locker and would probably go with them again. They do a good job of getting you diving and to good locations. I would have liked more information on the marine life, but if you asked questions they could answer most of them.

Jack's Diving Locker, Mauna Lani Bay Hotel, July 2000, Steven Dingeldein (sdingeldein@triad.rr.com),

Burlington, NC. Vis: 100 to 120 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm. Depth Limits of 50-60 feet, or computer limits. Up with 500 PSI. Mauna Lani Bay Hotel is wonderful but expensive. Jack's is a very good operation. They keep a little tighter reign on divers, presumably due to US legal environment. Divemaster leads groups of no more than 6 on dives that are 45 minutes to over an hour. They set up your gear, help you slip it on in the back and off you go. They rinse it off after each trip and you can store it at their store. Good dive briefings and most of the divemasters are good at finding stuff you might miss underwater. Serve sandwiches between dives with great cookies to boot. Plenty of fluid on board to drink. Dive boat is very nice although a little crowded. No walls and the corals are mostly low stony corals. No soft corals and no big sponges. The floor looks like diving in a lake with clear water. The Caribbean topography is much more interesting. However the fish life is great with 30% of the fish endemic to Hawaii. Morays to beat the band, Turkeyfish, turtles, and even frogfish. Lots of nudibranchs. We did the Manta night dive with Keller and

Wendy who were very knowledgeable and have an obvious love for the critters. We dived the site in the late afternoon and had 7 Mantas cruise in to be cleaned by Hawaiian cleaner wrasse. The night dive brought in at least 16 Mantas and they put on a great show. There were, however, 4 other dive boats there. Keller was concerned because one boat set up lights to attract the Mantas in an area of coral that I'm sure took a beating. We were on the 6 pack Blue Dolphin the last day we dived with Jack's and it was great. Crowded when suiting up, but very nice to have. Only 6 divers and Elaine as the DM and Captain Bob. Elaine took it easy and pointed out fish in caves and under ledges I would have missed.

Kona Coast Divers, March 2000, Gary @ Marie Scheidt, Sheila Price, (diverdown@netusa1.net), Hartford City, IN. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water:

72 to 74 F, choppy surge. Dive restrictions: none, stayed with guide. Worst boat trip ever. Conditions bad in afternoon and night, operation can't control weather, but did dumb things. Put a large group of snorkelers into very surgey water, too deep to see anything. Little if any help from crew into and out of water on a bouncy boat. Divemaster swam past boat on return leg, we knew where we were, he didn't. Night dive for mantas in bad conditions, o lights where you stowed gear, real pain trying to repack. Sat in rain at anchor, bouncing around after dive while crew messed around trying to get boat ready to leave, were not very organized. Most onboard

complained. (800-562-3483, 808-329-8802; Fax 808-329-5741)

Mauna Kea Divers, HI, March 2000, Peter, Los Angeles, CA. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 79 F. Dive your own profile: yes Dive restrictions: According to certification — I am TDI mixed gas certified. Jim Anonsen is one of the most friendly boat owners I know. He will accommodate snorkelers (and actually give them a good time; rarely more than four divers on a trip. The boat is ideal for tech divers with a large rear deck and swim step, but he is super friendly to novice divers too. Manta night dives are a specialty. I have known Jim for almost 10 years. Jim's fiancé Kathy Rich is the chef at The Blue Dolphin Restaurant, next to the Mauna Kea Divers shop (808 882-544 e-mail: mkdivers@interpac.net) in Kawaihae Harbor, S. Kohala Coast, Hawaii, HI 96743-9721. Kathy is CIA trained (Culinary Institute of America) and if that were not enough, a 13-piece big band plays jazz every Friday night under the stars! The combination of excellent diving, great food and top-class jazz makes this the best kept vacation secret on the Big Island! Oh and yes, there are great resort hotels and good B and B's nearby. South Kohala Coast of the Big Island of Hawaii has excellent hard corals and is not as frequently dived (and so beaten up) as near Kona/Kailua. All photo facilities are available nearby including repair. The ability to combine snorkeling and filming dolphins with a wealth of smaller critters (dragon wrasse, turkey fish,

turtles) with very scenic corals makes me rate this area excellent for UWP's. While Hawaii has fewer species per m2 of reef than the Red Sea, it makes up in endemics and close proximity to dolphins, turtles. (808-883-9298)

Pacific Rim Divers, June 2000, Kathleen Fenton, Stony Brook, NY. Water: 75 degrees. Follow the divemaster (3 divers, all experienced and divemaster). Pacific Rim Divers offers friendly and personalized service on a small (6 diver) boat. The manta ray night dive is only given if the mantas are showing up." They came the night I was there and were unforgettable. The rest of the dive was great too. We played with an octopus, followed a large sponge crab. Would have been a great night dive even without the Mantas. (808-334-1750, 808-988-4830)

Sea Paradise, September 2000, Bob Puschinsky, (puschinsky@aol.com), Seabrook, TX. Vis: 100-125 ft. Water: 80-81 degrees. Follow guide. Not many fish. Very good hard coral. Outstanding dive guide. Found unbelievable amount of hidden sea life -- octopus, scorpion fish, nudibranchs including Spanish Dancer). Crown of thorn being eaten by trident trumpet, lion fish, banded shrimp, moray. Went in April, Water: 75-76 degrees. (800-322-5662, 808-322-2500; Fax 808-329-8721)

Kauai

Bubbles Below/Hanalei Bay Resort/ Kiahuna Plantation, February 2000, Pamela and Powell Arms

(divepam@home.com), Narberth, PA. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 72 to 74 F, choppy. Based on all the *Undercurrent* comments I expected a top notch organization and neither my husband nor I was disappointed in the least. Bubbles Below is a first class organization! I dove with Linda one day and she truly is one of the best guides, critter finders, and dive buddies. The rest of the divers finished their dives and we poked around and found some great little gems. I had the same experience the next day with Peter, who often serves as the boat captain. There was no rush to get back on the boat, back to harbor or anywhere! My husband dove with Ken and seriously enjoyed the diving, they are both very laid back, and it was a perfect mix. I thought they did an excellent job feeling out everyone's comfort level and experience level before departing the harbor, and on one of my days diving they hung around long enough for somebody who hadn't seen water since they got certified 5 years ago to decide (on his own) to head back to the car. The Hanalei Bay is very pleasant on the North Shore (if you've got the extra cash go for the Princeville). We enjoyed Kiahuna Plantation, though our unit was very far from the beach, very close to the road, and thus loud! It was a beautiful unit, but the resort's pool (not much to look at) is across the busy main road — pretty far with a 21-month old. A must visit is Gillen's Beach — find it, explore it — Nirvana! (808-822-3483)

Bubbles Below, March 2000, Betsy Robinson, Oakland, CA. Vis: 50-70

ft. Water: 72-73 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Come back to boat with 500 psi. "I'm a comparatively new diver in my 60's, with 125 dives since I was certified two years ago. I was diving for the first time without my husband (who had been diving for 35 years) who was laid up with a bad back. Somewhat nervously, I emailed Linda Bail at Bubbles Below, asking when she was scheduled to be on the boat and got dates nailed down. It turned out that between reservations and diving, schedules got changed and she wasn't supposed to be out that day. That morning, Linda looked at the booking, did a double-take, and showed up anyway to be my personal guide! The excitement of seeing unfamiliar creatures (Hawaiian Turkey fish, Zebra moray, ugly frog fish, endemic whiskered boarfish, Hawaiian morwong, Titan scorpion fish, arch-eye hawkfish, etc.). The superb, ecologically-oriented guiding provided by Bubbles Below marine biologists. The singing and breaching of the whales. The schools of dolphins following the dive boat as we moved from one site to another. And the beloved turtles — on occasion, masses of turtles — communing with them is akin to a religious experience, especially when one came slowly into my face mask on its way to the surface. As I hung motionless, holding all hoses, etc. close in, he looked into my mask then seemed to say "all is well with her" and went on his way. It was awesome! Linda and I were on a 15' safety stop, bouncing in what seemed like 10' waves. Suddenly I

was super buoyant and thinking what an interesting fish below—that long, pink thing with black stripes — egad, that’s my weight belt going down! With hand signals indicating “Don’t worry,” Linda dove down to the 40’ bottom, retrieved my belt, and, at the end of the stop, shepherded me back on board. Bubbles Below carry 8 divers in a fast boat. After comprehensive briefings, sites are selected to fit individual divers’ interests and what’s good today based on weather conditions. Computers are provided free. You are free to do your own thing (as long as you remain in visual contact) or go with dive guides. Bottom time is dependent on your breathing capabilities — on one 60’ dive I was down over an hour.

Bubbles Below/Fathom Five, March 2000, John Barrett (jbarret@pop3.utoledo.edu), Toledo, OH. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 70 to 74 Fahrenheit, surge. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: Area itself tended to limit depth, otherwise computer limit to avoid decompression. Lots of spinner dolphins and humpbacks in the area at the time. Tons of large green sea turtles (seen every dive, often ten or more). Nice mixture of crustaceans (decent number of full size crabs and slipper and spiny lobsters) and micro stuff (cool worms and nudibranchs, lots of small crabs and shrimp). Decent size octopus. Good variety of fish (including several frogfish and lots of scorpionfish and lionfish) but numbers were only ok at most sites. Plenty of white tip reef sharks (several on most dives). Weak

on coral but lava formations are interesting. Bubbles Below is best dive operator I have ever been with. Incredible knowledge and they really enjoy what they are doing. Very safety and environmentally conscious, but they aren’t their to micro manage you. Definitely worth the slight extra they charge. Great at finding stuff. The only downside is the lack of a dive shop to store gear means you have to carry your stuff with you every day. Fathom Five has nice people with good facilities away from the water (they drive you down to the pier). Divemaster friendly but could be more knowledgeable and helpful in spotting things.

Bubbles Below/Poipu Sands Condos, April 2000, Cheri, Olympia, WA. Vis: 0 to 60 Feet. Water: 70 to 73 F, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: None really, just time and depth that were not monitored unless you asked for help. Dive computers were provided at no charge. I wish I had a better idea of boat comfort. There was no really good place to sit. You had to hold on to a handle or brace your self carefully not to get bounced around. The staff (Linda in particular) was very nice, we had both of our boys with us (11 and 14). She was wonderful, patient, and very tolerant of my behaved (and thoroughly talked to about “no goofing off” by Mom and Dad) kids, even when my share of a teenager was on his second/third? Candy bar). There was no kid prejudice that you have a tendency to run into these days. Linda was very supportive of my snorkeling sons and gave them help,

extra gear, information, and encouragement. No coral, big fish etc. Linda was an expert at finding lots of critters though. "House of Turtles" was the best spot of all four dives. We dove there twice, once because of weather. Lots of turtles, a reef shark, lobsters, frog fish and lion fish. My only real objection: the cost, \$100 per diver and \$50 per snorkeler. (\$300 for 4 of us per day)! Same price of our airline tickets. Also they prefer to go early in the morning. It makes for a long day and pulling grouchy kids (and sometimes me) outta bed at 6 am to gulp food down (yuch). Just doesn't make it very fun when you're supposed to R and R on vacation! We have dove the Big Island, Maui and Kauai. The money we save on diving else we will spend on tickets to get to a better (and cheaper) spot.

Bubbles Below, June 2000, Debbie Finch, Kissimmee, FL. Vis: 35-40 ft. Water: 78 degrees. Requested 5 minute safety stop. Bubbles Below worked hard to find a good dive site on a day with less than ideal conditions -- kudos to Linda and Gary. Linda's briefings very detailed. Because of south swells, vis less than usual too. Lots of turtles on both sites. Also liked the small group; not a cattle boat operation!

Bubbles Below, Kihunu Plantation Condos, June 2000, George Glasscock, Wausau, WI. Vis: 60 to 80 ft. Water: 77 to 79 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: no decompression allowed otherwise very accommodat-

ing to divers' preferences. 5-star operation. Bubbles Below is an excellent dive operation. Divemasters Linda and Debbie are experts on all facets of local marine biology and ecology. Thorough pre-dive briefing and guided dives allow visiting divers to see much more marine life than most operations. Special attention is given to endemic Hawaiian species. Small group size 6-8 divers and very accommodating crew allows divers to individualize their dives as much as wanted. Kiahuna Plantation condos are beautiful and on the best beach on the south shore; 20 minute drive to dive boat; excellent accommodations for the money.

Bubbles Below, Waikomo Stream Villas, July 2000, Steve Luethje (tradersl@hotmail.com) Santa Clara, CA. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet.

Water: 78 to 79 F, choppy. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 130 ft max. Recommend 5 minute safety stop — you're a long way from the chamber. We took Bubbles Below on a 3-tank trip to Niihau. Ken was our divemaster and the operation lived up to its Kudos for professionalism. The boat facilities are at best adequate. No good places to sit for the extremely rough crossings. They could use some pads since everyone was bruised after the return trip through 10-12 foot seas. There were no beginner divers on the boat and I don't recommend that they go, but definitely worth it for the experienced. Incredible underwater topography and good large marine life. We had 3 Hawaiian Monk seals come play with us underwater, saw a

school of baby Galapagos sharks and a school of spinner dolphins. Eat at Roy's in Poipu—you won't regret it!

Bubbles Below, Marriott, July 2000, Pete Hammer (Pandgham@aol.com), River Edge, NJ. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 74 to 78 F, calm choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 500 PSI back to boat for deco stop. Booked dives with Bubbles Below after reading the ratings in the *Chapbook*. I could not have been more pleased. Linda, Debbie, Tara, Gary, and Peter are the best. Upbeat, accommodating, friendly, and concerned with every diver's well being. Small boat but maximum eight divers. They make you feel like you are diving with family. Huge turtles, lots of white-tipped reef sharks, dragon fish, lion fish, and they will bring you right to harlequin shrimp and tons of macro opportunities endemic to Hawaii.

Seasport Divers, Niki Villas, August 2000, C. Hoffman, Vienna, VA. Vis: 10-20 ft. Water: 79-81 degrees. Stay with guide! 500 psi back at boat. Sea Sport Divers permits giant stride entry off their big boat. However, there is no ladder to climb back up. Though there were only 3-5 divers on each of four dives, the staff rushed us. They made a big production of us wanting to analyze our Nitrox tanks. In general the staff was competent but had an attitude. Sheraton dive was neat with lava tubes and many fish nearby including Chocolate-Dip Damsel fish, stocky hawk fish, and Hawaiian Green turtles. Murky conditions at most locations, so we canceled our last day

of diving. (800-685-5889, 808-742-9303)

Seasport Divers, Poi Pu Plantation, September 2000, Ron Weddington, Austin, TX. Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 79 degrees. Dive restrictions: depth on some dives. Captain Andrew and Divemaster Hans the best we have dealt with in 17 years. Trip to Niihau is something every diver should experience. Hans does a great video. Caves and arches, monk seals, sharks, lion fish, etc.

Maui

Dive and Sea (Kihei), September 1999, Jean Parker, Jupiter, FL. Vis: 200+. Water: 77-80 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: computer. Maui is not typically touted for good diving, so we almost did not take the gear. That would have been a big mistake. Kihei is on south Maui and sports some good am shore diving and some excellent, 200 ft. vis. Wall diving at Molokini Crater was used for target practice during WWII. Dive op was good. DM energetic and experienced as was the captain. Boats go in via trailer at Kihei boat ramp for a 10 minute ride to the crater. Fun comes at a price though. \$109 each for two tanks that is why we did the shore dives. If you go from Lahaina you are in for a boat trip plus Kihei shore diving is better than that of Lahaina area. We chose Dive and Sea to stay away from the cattle boats of Maui Dive Center and succeeded in that. However, Maui Dive appears to be first class operation. With many

convenient locations for tank rental (\$7). Get yourself to Maui Dive Center for a nicely illustrated guide to the area shore dives or they will be glad to mail you one in advance. Nice healthy tropicals and corals, turtles aren't scarce and if you're lucky, an occasional meandering white tip. Take your gear to Maui. It provides enough good sites to keep even the most seasoned diver entertained for two days. Oh, and keep your eyes open at Molokini for souvenirs from WWII. The 50 cal shells are still there for those with an eye for them! Aloha. (808-874-1952; Fax 808-874-8690)

Dive and Sea, Wailea Ekahi, July 2000, Jeff and Sharon Jens, Redding, CA. Vis: 60-120 ft. Water: 78 degrees. I have 350 warm water dives all over the world. Weather was sunny and windy in the afternoon. Water calm in the morning and choppy in the afternoon. Wetsuit was 1/4 shortie. We were allowed to dive our computers but generally maximum 100+ all no decompression dives with mandatory safety stop, 500 PSI return to boat. 2-10 sharks most morning dives, many large turtles every dive. Schooling dolphins on boat trips. Decent hard corals sporadic pelagics, rare frog and leaf fish and green and snowflake eels. Good boat diving for beginners accommodating experienced divers too. Small operation operating out of the Kihei boat ramp. Laid back about departure time, maximum six divers per trip and only one two-tank trip per day. The group Ron, Bill, Brad, and John are a lot of fun and know how to find sites and

critters. They helped us with everything from photography to restaurants and other local entertainment. Macro was good. Dove sites on our backside Molokini I had been unaware of. Sw 5 grey reef (small) schooling and white tips regularly. You even get a fresh turkey sandwich on board and they provide all equipment for 3 day at \$285 per person. They are in the phone book in Maui.

Ed Robinson, March 2000, Gary Scheidt (diverdown@netusa1.net), Hartford City, IN. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 72 to 74 F, calm. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: Dove with dive masters all dives, they set profile, however all divers had computers, and could vary depth as needed, back side of Molokini was only site this was a factor. Boats were nice, the 3 tank dive has only 8 divers, 2 tank dives with 12 divers. The crew was great. Dan, Fish, Bird, Carrie, were a lot of fun. Gave excellent briefings, used Ed Robinson's book to explain what we'd see. Back side of Molokini is great dive. Divemaster in water-led tour gave us plenty of time to shoot video and stills. Pointed out frog fish, never rushed us. Good water and boat handling skills. Photography comments: Ok, could use more space for cameras on boat. (800-635-1273 or 808-879-3584, e-mail robinson@maui.net)

Hawaiian Rafting Adventure, June 1999, John and Karen Elaine Bakunin, Venice, CA. Vis: 90-120 ft. Water: 75-79 degrees. My husband (who has a NAUI Divemaster cert. card) and I (PADI Rescue Diver cert.

card) were threatened to be left behind on the far-side of Lanai if we were not to follow the boat divemaster's 'guided tour'. Not only did the 300 lb.+ arrogant SOB smoke an entire half-pack of cigarettes before the long Zodiac ride, but he entered the warm water with Kevlar gloves and a crowbar (besides his full camera rig)! After bashing apart coral (when we asked why he was doing that, his defense was that "the reef sharks do the same thing at night when feeding at night"), he then had his captive audience take turns holding either octopi or floating near eels for his practice photo sessions. The boat divemaster even swam into a white-tip reef shark den to 'wake em up' so that we could see the sharks swim around. (Doesn't it occur to idiots like that, that Californians — who happened to make up most of that particular boat trip — see LOTS of sharks already?) The crew berated one diver for getting cold and holding everyone up because of slow gear doffing (we spent a total 89 minutes in the water, with only 19 minutes for our lunch break/ move to new dive site!). The offensive joke-of-a-lunch was mayonnaise and bologna sandwiches.

Lahaina Divers, June 2000, Norm Davis, Chandler, AZ. Vis: 100 to 120 ft. Water: calm and flat. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: time. Small but friendly and knowledgeable operation. There were only 8 divers on both days I dove with them. For \$40 you can hire a professional photographer to dive with you and take all your underwater photos for you. A great

way to be in your dive photos, too. They gave very thorough pre-dive briefings of the dive spot and told you where to look for critters. **(800-998-3483, 808-667-7496, 808-667-6280; Fax 808-661-5195)**

Lahaina Divers, Aston Maui Islander, July 2000, Jan Motsinger, Canton, IL. Vis: 60-100 ft. Dive restrictions: Just dive safe and don't push the limits. The dive shop was slow in starting each morning but they were friendly and went out of their way to help you with your needs.

Maui Dive Shop, Mike Severns Diving, Maui Lu, February 2000, Jack Millard, Orangevale, CA. Vis: 80 to 100 ft. Water: 76 to 78 degrees, calm and flat, no currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: depth. Feb. and March best months for whale song; close eyes and listen. Maui Lu and old original resort; fair rooms, no hassles. Drove to town for all meals. Maui Dive Shop; I stressed my desire for advanced diving. Dove 3 days with 6-8 divers. Mostly dove backside Molikini on computer, 120' max. 1 hour TBT. Mike Severns: dove 1 day at Apartments + Molikini, 130' max. 1 hr. TBT inc. 20 min. safety stops, 6 divers. Both shops let me stay down 15-20 minutes longer than rest of group. **(808-879-3388; Fax 808-879-1644)**

Mike Severn's Diving, Maui Vista Condos, January 2000, Susan Fuhs, Hermosa Beach, CA. Vis: 50 to 80 ft. Water: 74 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions:

don't go in front of divemasters to not spook any animals early. Mike Severns Diving is a fantastic dive operation. Pauline (Fiene-Severns) and Jennifer (Anderson) are the best divemasters; they know where to find all sorts of great critters and tell you all the interesting stuff about their behavior, life cycle, etc. not just what they are. Maui also has good shore diving.

Mike Severn's Diving/Papakea Condos, February 2000, Rick and Lesley Kruzel, Holland, OH. Vis: 60 to 90 Feet. Water: 73 to 75 F, calm. Very smooth operation. Excellent dive briefings focused on marine biology and the species of fish we could expect to see. Capt. Vicky, Jennifer, Andy, Beau and Kavinnie all top notch. Quality of diving and weather better than expected. Soft corals almost nonexistent, not much hard stuff either, but lots and lots of fish. Mostly tropicals, no big stuff, but still very cool. I wouldn't make a point of going to Maui just to dive, but if you're going to go there on vacation, don't skip the diving. No camera table or rinse bucket on boat. Laid cameras on carpeted section of deck. Set up fresh water rinse on shore when we returned to the dock. Dive staff careful when handing down cameras, rinsed them with a freshwater hose after dive. A more secure storage area on the boat would be nice. Always worried that someone would step on cameras on the deck.

Mike Severns, May 2000, David and Gayle Clinehens, Scottsdale, AZ. Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 76-79 degrees.

These people are professional, safe, fun, give an excellent briefing and an excellent underwater tour. Never seen so many frog fish! (808-879-6596)

Oahu

Aaron's Dive Shop (Kailua), July 1999, April Cohen, Brandon, FL. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 77-80 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: stay on rope! Stay with divemaster! Come here fast, go up fast! This outfit was taking us to the scheduled location despite conditions. Seems like they were putting on a dive show for a tourist submarine. The divemaster left us on a line and went to feed fish in view of the sub.

Aaron's Dive Shop, April/May 2000, Robin L. Basher, Loveland, CO. Vis: 20-50 ft. Water: 76-78 degrees. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. Divemasters were poorly prepared. Some had not been on the dive site before. Boat captains most helpful.

Aaron's Dive Shop, August 2000, Jim Kreamsreiter (jimk@baraboo.com), Baraboo, WI. Vis: 15 to 50 Feet. Water: 79 F, choppy surge. Dive restrictions: Divers had to be on board with 500 psi. Could not do second night dive if first dive ended with less than 500 psi. Aaron's Dive Shop (<http://www.hawaii-scuba.com>) has a small studio apartment for 2 people that we used and the shop has dive boats around the island so despite the wind, good diving can be found. I dove the first day off Waianae on the leeward side for a 2-tank dive and an

intro to Scuba for my daughter and son-in-law. The vis was lower than Kona — about 50 ft on the deep dives and only 15-20 ft on the intro dive in 25 ft of water. They did see lots of fish and a green sea turtle and I saw a Humuhumunukunukuapua'a (Hawaii's State fish, a Trigger fish) for the 1st time so we were all impressed and had a good time. I did 2 night dives on the south shore off Honolulu and saw many critters for the first time. Pete was the divemaster/guide and was excellent. Aaron's studio apartment is an addition to Jack Aaron's house and is not on the beach as the web site seems to claim but it is very nice, new and comfortable and costs only \$65/night. It was stifling hot during the day but should be air-conditioned by now. The apartment is about a city block walk from the beach but access is through a locked, secure gate. The beach is beautiful, uncrowded, white sand. (888-847-2822, 808-262-2333; Fax 808-262-4158)

Captain Bruce's Scuba Charters, January 2000, Fred Brantingham (owlfin@mosquitonet.com), Fairbanks, AK. Water: choppy, surge. Dive your own profile: yes. Very customer oriented, quick to solve any problems that arose. Only time dive was cut short was one night dive. Rest of dives it was up to diver's own judgment, unless a student; then instructor and student dove lesson profile. Diving on Corsair great. Shallow caverns and swim throughs very nice. All needs and support of staff great. (800-535-2487, 808-373-3590; Fax 808-394-9421)

North Shore Diving, Turtle Bay Hilton, March 2000, Julie and Dan McFadyen, Falls Church, VA. Vis: 25-50 ft. Water: 77 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: time — to stay on boat schedule. Dove the Mahi wreck and Makaha Caverns with North Shore Diving Headquarters (NSDH). Both sites were overcrowded with three other dive boats there at the same time. Apparently many dive operations have a habit of feeding the fish, so there are swarms of them. Lot of current on the Mahi. Little coral growth, but we saw puffer fish and three eagle rays. At Makaha Caverns, we swam through lava tubes, saw two turtles, spotted morays, trunk fish, and an octopus a guide had found. While at Makaha Caverns, we saw another dive boat's anchor on the reef (despite moorings) and saw the anchor chain breaking coral heads in the strong surge. NSDH wasn't running their own boat, so our group of five divers (plus divemaster) was on a larger charter boat with a lot of other people. It was very crowded and felt like a cattle boat. They enforced the short time limits so they could stick to the boat's schedule, but they were good about taking role before departing. NSDH staff is very active in conservation efforts—from rescuing sea turtles to retrieving ghost nets.

South Seas Aquatics, Breakers, June 2000, Marilyn Koukol, APO, AE. Did a couple of dives with South Seas Aquatics in Waikiki. It was \$75 for a two-tank dive on a couple of wrecks. Everyone spoke Japanese and some English, but since I had lived in Japan

for sometime, this wasn't a problem. There was a nice school of puffer fish and an eagle ray hanging out on the deck. It was ok diving. We were limited to 30-40 minute dives due to depth and the air consumption of others in the group. We also had free snacks (fruit/cookies) and drinks. It was fine for single day, Hawaii diving. Breakers a nice little hotel just a couple of blocks from the beach in Waikiki. They have a nice pool and a friendly atmosphere. (808-735-0437; Fax 808-737-8780)

JAPAN

Sawes Divers (Yonagunz), February 2000, Richard Ruth, Okinawa, Japan. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 71-73 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Typical 30 minute Japanese guided dives. Took a trip to the underwater structure/lost city? in Yonagunz Japan. January thru March is hammerhead shark season. Did four dives looking for hammerhead and two dives on the underwater structure of Yonagunz. This structure has sharp 90 degree cuts and clearly looks like it could be man made! If not it is the strangest u/w shapes and formations I have ever seen. Yonagunz is a long way off the beaten path and is very Japanese from fish and rice for breakfast to extremely controlled dives. Lots of fishes, some great fan corals and lots of turtles. Great diving on the reefs and comfortable accommodations. No English spoken here so a trip to Yonagunz is best booked with one dive shops on the Okinawa mainland. Fathom specializes in the monuments! www.fathoms.net

Mambow House, Osezaki, Izu Peninsula August 2000, Michael Fox, Shinkawa, Tokyo Japan.

Water: 72-77 degrees. Dive own profile: yes. If you are on business or vacation, it would be worth checking out. Osezaki is on the western side of the Izu Peninsula (facing Suruga Bay) about three hours from Tokyo. Easy shore diving and some wonderful fish life. Although it looks crowded at first glance, once in the water I barely saw any other divers. There are three places to dive: in the sheltered harbor, the point or the Suruga bay side. Avoid the harbor as it is crowded and used for training/certification (and has litter on the waters' edge). The point and the bay side are wonderfully clean and have some nice soft corals and surprising fish life. The point (with a clear view of Mt. Fuji) has a rocky entry point. It's about a fifteen-yard swim in about 6-9 ft. of water until you reach the 45-degree sloping wall. There are lots of tropical fish, some large sea bass, large lionfish and lots of small tropicals and schools of squid. On my last dive, I counted about 6 different schools with about 10-20 squid in each school that kept a distance of about 5 meters from any diver. On the bay side, similar fish life but with the addition of free-swimming eels. The wall on the bay side is a little farther away from the shore. During May, sunfish are often sighted and once spotted a 2-m wobbegong shark. The Mambow House is a well run operation but Japanese is required. Lunch is available, as well as shower rooms.