

HAWAII

Kona Aggressor, May 2000, Mary Kay and Didrik Voss, Mill Creek, WA. Vis: 70 to 100 ft. Water: 73 to 75 degrees, calm and flat, surge. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 110'. Our first live-aboard experience and we were spoiled. Superb crew, very professional, very experienced and attuned to taking great care of us in, and out of the water. The food was plentiful and varied; the cook came up with an endless array. 3 of the crew had decades of experience; we learned a lot and feel bad about needing help after getting caught in a strong current and missing the boat. They were readying the Zodiac before we even signaled. Took Nitrox course on board—would have been nice not to have paid so much for the Nitrox, though. Snorkeling with pod of 50 dolphins was a highlight. The manta dive was a disappointment; mantas didn't show. (**Aggressor Fleet 800-348-2628 or 504-385-2628 Fax: 504-384-0817; e-mail: info@aggressor.com; website www.aggressor.com**)

Kona Aggressor, June/July 1999, Dale Franklin, Houston, TX.

Duration: two weeks, back-to-back. Generally clear and somewhat cloudy in the afternoons, low humidity, cool mornings and evenings with great sunsets. 100+ visibility always; temperature 77-78 which is slightly cooler than most Caribbean and west Pacific destinations. Current light to almost nonexistent most of the time. Twice was strong. Surface was

relatively quiet. One-to-five rating: corals-3, tropical fish-4, large fish-1, large pelagics-3, small critters-4, beginner diving-4, experienced diving-3, accommodations-4, service-5+, food-4, operation-5. Crew was A over A plus. Very competent, positive, upbeat, safety conscious and committed. All of the guests at the end of the trip treated the crew to a fine dinner at a local Kona restaurant. Everything on the boat was functional. Captain Monk demonstrated superb crew leadership with crew motivation and professionalism with special attentiveness to individual guest's requests. Not an archaic authority-driven culture. Everybody did everything, including the captain. Food was very good, fresh, and varied all week. Fresh fish were caught while trolling. What I wish I'd known before the trip: get off the boat after the Friday afternoon cocktail cruise and check into a hotel so you can wake up leisurely and have a hot breakfast Saturday morning before your afternoon flight back. Kona pier law requires the *Aggressor* to leave the pier at 10pm. This requires the boat to be tied to a single moor a mile off the coast where you'll rock and roll all night (in bed) then be required to vacate the boat promptly at 8am for cleaning. Diving: Two morning, two afternoon, and 1 night dive (all Nitrox). The boat traversed many, many miles of the coast to pristine dive sites to the extreme South Point tip (no skinflint saving fuel). For most sites, the boat was secured with 2-3 moorings for comfort of the guests and sleeping. The underwater terrain had frequent lava arches to swim

through, including several caves, caverns, and lava tubes. Hawaii diving is not Palau, but it is a significant world dive spot. I'm glad I went. Like the Red Sea, it has many fish and critters indigenous only to Hawaii. I snorkeled with the mantas and dolphins. The highlight was a close encounter with a 40-ft whale shark. I took superb video of everything including octopus, turtles, and many small night critters. I enjoyed the trip immensely. Dale Franklin former instructor on Guam, now in Houston, very competent, positive, upbeat, safety conscious and committed.

MICRONESIA

Palau

Big Blue Explorer, February 2000, Nancy Simon. Water: 85-90 degrees. Boat was kept clean; hot water installed after 3 days. Crew was accommodating, dive masters excellent. Food plentiful, not gourmet but well prepared. Diving was fantastic. Sensory overload of sea life. German channel, Ulong Channel and Blue holes and Blue corner were unbelievable. (877-348-3475, 562-865-7198; Fax 562-809-7300; e-mail explorer@palauscuba.com; website www.palauscuba.com)

Big Blue Explorer, June 2000, Ronald Bailey (rlbailey@rbnet.com), Roanoke, VA. Vis: 60 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: No deco requested, and suggested dive times, but we dove our computers.

The *Big Blue Explorer* has 9 cabins, which are very large. The B deck cabins are a little larger than the A deck cabins. Bathrooms in the cabins are about 5 ft. by 5.5 ft. with hot water showers. Bunks are comfortable, clean and made up daily. Air conditioned throughout. Only five of us on the 165 ft. boat. Plenty of room to get lost on the ship. Food was good to very good. Crew was excellent. Dive guides did a good to excellent job. Breakfast room and TV lounge were plenty large enough. Upper dining room also large and covered. Plenty of storage for gear and after dive showers. No complaints from anyone about the boat/facilities. The best dives were Blue Corner, New Drop Off and Turtle Cove with wall to our right side. Saw more sharks and schools of fish at these sites. Other sites were good to average. Currents there were light to none most dives. Five dives/day offered. Crew accommodated our suggestion for 3 dives during the day with a twilight fourth dive near the end of the week. A little less hectic that way. Got in 25 dives. Saw dolphins on way back from dive and managed some snorkel time with them. Also got close to pilot whales off Angaur. Did not get to dive Peleliu due to surface conditions. For the reduced price compared to the well-known live-aboards and the amount of space on board, the *Big Blue Explorer* is a bargain. Separate enclosed camera room with shelves. Room enough to work on cameras. Plenty of camera only rinse buckets on the live-aboard and rinse bucket on dive skiff. Crew would also carry camera to/from dive skiff if you wished. Also handed and