

Whaler Dive Center, Shark Dive Center, Kelp and Coral (soon changed to Close Encounters), August 2000, Harry Cure (cure@onramp.net), Fort Worth, Texas. Vis: 25 to 45 Feet. Water: 62 to 71 F., choppy surge currents. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: None, except request not to exceed no deco limits of computer. We dove at Allowa Shoals with the "raggletooth sharks" (we call them sand tigers) in great numbers. Close encounters with numerous sharks to 12 feet. Not much reef, but lots of large fish and rays. Whaler diver Center very professional operation. Dove with Great Whites in cage at Mossman Bay. Four Great Whites to 15 feet. Could reach out in and touch from cage? Visibility very poor to 15 feet. Boat old and musty, but Bob the Shark Dive Center operator very knowledgeable on shark behavior. Sodwana Reef is covered with rich colorful hard corals, only great barrier reef and Micronesia have better. Lots of marine life. South Africa diving is not for beginners. Current, strong surge, and colder than tropical conditions exist. Diving is from large "Avon" type boats that must go through heavy surf to get to dive sites, but for advanced divers worth the effort. (27 039-973-1562, 27 039-973-1563; Fax 27 039-973-1564)

INDIA

Bangoram Beach Resort, January 1999, June Reinisch (jmrr@idt.net) and Leonard A. Rosenblum, Brooklyn, NY. An atoll of the

Lakshadweep Islands in the Arabian Sea off the southwest coast of India. You get there by international carrier to Madras, New Delhi or Bombay then by an Indian domestic airline to the city of Cochin. The Casino Hotel of Cochin runs the resort and will make the arrangements to fly from Cochin to the main island of the Lakshadweeps and from there it is an hour boat ride to the resort. The atoll has only two islands, the larger one has only the hotel, the other is uninhabited. Food is either good Indian cuisine or fair continental food. The rooms are simple but clean with private bath. The diving is excellent. Most is done on the outer side of the atoll walls, which is one long reef. Large sharks lie every 15 feet along the sandy bottom. Morays of 6 feet or more are not unusual. A wide variety of fish are seen daily, as well as several species of ray. Water is crystal clear and warm. Visibility endless. Little or no fishing has ever been done and the only divers are from the resort. The rental equipment is good. The German dive master is excellent. Snorkeling in the lagoon is fun with a 7-foot moray living in a little wreck.

INDONESIA

Indonesia is a dive hot spot that unfortunately provides few choices. . . . While Bali's culture is fantastic (especially if you get away from the coast), the diving's not as spectacular as in other parts of Indonesia. . . . On Bali's east Coast the *Liberty* wreck at Tulamben is a favorite among fish

specialists, who claim to find a new species on every visit. On the north end there's a good chance of diving with mola molas. . . . While they're certainly harder to get to than Bali, I think the Banda Islands have some of the best coral and fish life in the world. . . . Although it offers few big fish, Wakatobi, a operation in remote southern Sulawesi, offers fantastic color, amazing biodiversity, and one of the best beach dives in the world. . . . If bizarre and rare creatures are a lure, Ambon has a dive that surpasses even PNG's famous muck dives, as does Kungkungan Bay in northern Sulawesi. . . . If you're into big turtles (and lots of them), Borneo Diver's operation on Sangalaki, which once got excellent reviews, is again open, and nearby Derawan Resort dives these waters as well The island of Flores had great diving until it was hit by a typhoon and tidal wave that destroyed its reefs. . . . The diving around Komodo, the home of the dragons, is excellent... Choices for live-aboards in Indonesia have been slim; the *Pindito* covers a lot of the same territory as the *Cehili* did, but it's mainly booked by Europeans and offers only two dives a day. . . . Northern Sulawesi has a few choices for land-based resorts, and the live-aboard *Serenade* leaves from the Murex Resort near Manado. . . . The live-aboard scene in this part of the world is forever changing, if one pops up with a good itinerary,

jump on it quick, it may not be there for long. . . . Although the volatile political scene has put a cloud over diving Indonesia, so far it's still had little effect on Bali, Manado, Wakatobi, and Sangalaki. Check with the State Department before travel, and inquire about specific destinations rather than asking about the country as a whole. Before you leave, get a copy of Kal Muller's *Underwater Indonesia*. . . .

Bali

MIMPI Resort, November 1999, Terry Umbach, Sechelt BC Canada.

Vis: 40-100+ ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Sunny, dry, 90+ degrees. Water calm with only mild currents. Four of us were only ones in the group, did what we asked for (with their input/advice), no restriction on length of dive, had no reason to go deeper than 100'. This was the Mimp Resort's 3 day, 2 night, 6 dive escorted trip, but set up just for our group of 4 divers and 2 nondiver. The cost was \$248 US each, including transport, 6 dives, stunning accommodations for 2 nights and breakfasts. They took us from their Mimp Resort in Jimbaran (near the airport in Bali) for 3 dives and 1 night at the Mimp Resort in Tulamben (east coast of Bali) and 3 dives and 1 night at the Mimp Resort in Menjangan (NW corner of Bali). Transport was via 2 sport utility trucks with 2 drivers, happy to stop along the way for us to take photos of the beautiful scenery. Dive guides were from the fully equipped dive shops in

each resort. The resorts were spectacular. Large rooms on a par with any 4 or 5 star hotel and enclosed outdoor shower/toilet made it very tropical. Beautiful grounds. Great food. Swimming pools overlooking the sea. Shallow drop off wall with lots of small stuff and nudibranchs at Tulamben as well as the *USS Liberty* wreck. Menjangan Island (protected) was walls with lots of small stuff, fans, corals. Didn't see any big stuff but diving was as good as it gets. Dive guides and all resort staff were incredibly friendly. Fantastic pool/accommodation and service. Found this trip to be the best option and the cheapest price was DIRECT from Mimpì (dive shops wanted to send their own dive guides along at extra cost — not needed!) Don't miss the seafood restaurants "on" the sand beach at Jimbaran! Great food, attentive service, informal seating on teak furniture placed on the sand along the waters edge, and very inexpensive. Same views as from the incredibly expensive Four Seasons Hotel. (62 7971-23-7336)

Tauch Terminal, Le Meridian Nirwana Resort, January 2000, Jose Miguel and Peggy Duran (DuranJM@worldnet.att.net) Corpus Christi, TX. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F. Dive your own profile, No deco recommended. Found in the Internet a great Millennium Special Offer by Singapore Airlines, valid only for the flight leaving LA on January 1st, 1:30 AM. Through the Internet we contacted several Bali dive operations and

decided to make reservations with Tauch Terminal (www.divebali.com). Through e-mail they helped us to arrange an itinerary covering all the best dive spots around the island, the first 4 days from the Le Meridian Nirwana Resort at Tanah Lot on the southern coast and the last 3 from Tauch Terminal's own resort at Tulamben on the north coast. Run with German efficiency and they impressed us with how professional and helpful they were even before we arrived. Their total price was very good for the service they provided. Le Meridian Nirwana is a luxurious resort located at one of the most picturesque spots in Bali. You can watch the famous Tanah Lot sunsets sipping a drink from the terrace or from their beautiful golf course. It has also the largest complex of lagoon-landscaped swimming pools and water slides we have ever seen in a 5-star resort. The service and food were as good as you would expect. We phoned Tauch Terminal on our arrival and arranged to be picked up at our hotel 3 days later to start our diving package. The first two days we dove Nusa Penida. We were picked up at the hotel and taken in a minivan to their office in Denpasar and then to Padangbai on the east coast. The trips from Tanah Lot to Padangbai took more than three hours —except one night when a torrential rain storm caused knee — deep flooding of several low roads and even a whole small village south of Denpasar— but Balinese scenery is always beautiful and we could read and nap on the way. At Padangbai we took a boat usually with 3-4 other

divers for the 45 minute crossing to Nusa Penida. After the first dive, the divemaster Herb would set up lunch on the boat, rice, curry, fish or chicken and fruit. Throughout the trip we had Jack, a great divemaster with lots of experience in Kalimantan and Bali, as a personal guide for the three of us. He had an incredible eye for leaf fishes, nudibranchs and all kinds of rare marine life. The diving in Nusa Penida was as good as described by Kal Muller and a lot better than we had expected. They chose times and places well and the currents were quite manageable. No real walls but steep slopes with excellent undamaged coral covering, clouds of tropicals, quite a few rare critters, turtles, schools of sleek unicorn fishes and batfishes, Napoleon wrasses, leaf, lion and scorpion fishes, tunas, many morays and even one or two white tips in the distance. After the first two days, we went in the van with Jack and a driver along the entire southern and western coasts to Nusa Menjangan where we had another great 2 boat dives. Jack showed us two large frog fishes, soccer ball size and four leaf fishes together in different colors. Saw only minor dynamite damage. We continued to Tulamben, where the *USS Liberty* has to be one of the best wreck dives in the Pacific. The beach is formed of smooth black pebbles and stones, hard on the feet with only diving booties, although the little old ladies that have exclusive rights to carry on their heads—the tanks and diving gear from the resorts to the dive site, didn't seem to have any trouble walking on them barefooted

and sometimes carrying two tanks! Tulamben has 3 dive sites, all teeming with marine life, extremely tame. Great footage of a blue ribbon eel next to a huge anemone trying to catch some juvenile anemone fishes while their parents kept trying to repel it friendly giant cuttle fishes, shy octopi and cunning mantis shrimps. Unlimited shore diving Saw only saw a few other divers. Tauch Terminal's resort is located on the beach about 300 yards from the wreck and it is comfortable and beautifully landscaped. We stayed on quaint, traditionally decorated adjacent bungalows with large baths with showers. Quite comfortable although without much privacy due to thin walls. The food at the restaurant was good although after three days it would be repetitive. The dive shop is well equipped and they have good, reliable, rental gear. After two days we continued around the island to Candi Dasa on the east coast where we had another two great dives — in a current swept wall where we visited a sleeping shark cave and another at a pinnacle where we swam with 7-8 white tips and reef sharks before heading back to Sanur where we spent the night at the Grand Bali Beach Hotel before flying back to LA. (62 361-73-0200; Fax 62 361-73-0201)

Paradise Beach Bungalows, Aquamarine Diving, August 2000, M.S. Ginsburg, Tampa, FL. Allow at least 3 hrs for the ride from Kuta Beach to Tulamben. You'll pass by verdant rice terraces and dramatic volcanic peaks so keep your camera handy. PBB is a very basic accommodation with twin

beds, runny plumbing, poor lighting, no maid service or TV, but \$18 a night for 2 w/breakfast. Close to the water and restaurant. They had a shower and dip tank steps from the drying rack on our porch. If you want cold AC or a clean room try the fancier Mimpri Resort next door. The open air seaside hotel restaurant had good service and food; large beer was less than \$1.50 and most entrees \$1-2. The food was safe to eat, even the raw salads. Diving Paradise, the hotel dive operation: beware of their website and booking agent Sarah, who made me wire our deposit and dumped us after we paid in advance. We were actually better off with Aquamarine, who provided our own dive guide, Jack. They have a website and the owner Annabel is a gem. We did 2 dives a day plus a night dive and Jack always asked us when and where we wanted to go. He found critters and treated us like adults. All dives are from the rocky shore and female porters carry your tanks on their heads, 2 at a time! *Liberty* wreck made an exceptional night dive, with decorator and hydroid crabs, sporting unique and zany ornamentation. The crinoids had, a lot of clingfish and ghost pipefish, too. Coral festooning the wreck is colorful. Coral garden and sloping wall dive that boasts the large purple gorgonian 10' across. (62 361-73-0107, 62 81239-4-4162; Fax 62 361-73-5368)

Kalimantan (Borneo)

Derawan Resort, April 2000, William Deertz (WDeertz@attglobal.net), Jakarta. Vis: 5 to 20 Meters. Water:

78 to 82 F, choppy. Dive your own profile. No restrictions other than normal safe diving standards Difficult location to get to. Jet service Jakarta to Balikpapan no problem but then 1.5 hour prop plane ride to Berau, 2.5 hour boat ride to resort. First hour in river strewn with submerged logs. Paper and pulp mill up river so a lot of logs in river creates safety hazard. Transport boat had no radio, minimal safety equipment. Once in open water we collided with collapsed fishing platform, luckily no damage. Return trip was back breaking. I guess some would consider it an adventure. The resort screwed up our reservation and our first night was spent in a small bare room. Problem fixed next day and we ended in VIP cottage that was what we reserved. Very nice with two bedrooms/two baths, living room, small kitchen, TV, stereo, video player, nice patio for watching sun set, etc. Food was buffet, mainly Indonesian/Asian food. Not bad but nothing out of the ordinary. Turtles are plentiful. You are almost guaranteed to see a turtle on every dive. They are very large turtles and usually you can get very close. You can watch them lay their eggs on the beach at night. Downside was the visibility, since it's so close (approx. 5 km.) to shore the rain runoff causes poor visibility. The resorts jetty reef is known for its macro photography due to the variety of unusual small critters. Kakaban island much better visibility. Barracuda point was an exhilarating drift dive, hung on corner and watched large school of barracuda. Surface interval dive jelly fish lake in center of

Kakaban island. Stingless jelly fish same as in Palau. Hike to lake can be treacherous over lava type rocks, wear hard sole booties. Sea Coral Garden site in afternoon, very large gorgonian fans and barrel sponges stick out in my mind. Sangalaki island is known for schooling Manta Rays, unfortunately we only saw one and not very well due to poor visibility (maybe 5 meters) due to abundance of plankton in the water. This is to be expected since the plankton is what attracts the Manta's for feeding. Saw one large leopard shark. Not bad diving but the difficulty in getting to this location is definitely a big drawback. There was some evidence of coral damage from dynamite fishing. Divemasters were helpful, resort accommodations nice (unless you get stuck in one of the plain, basic rooms), food okay but nothing special. (62 542-2-0258, 62 542-3-5997, 62 542-3-1896; Fax 62 5422-0293)

Derawan Resort, May 2000, Mr. and Mrs. R.B. Stewart, Guildford, Surrey, UK. Vis: 10 to 100 ft. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: time and depth. Long travel time — 2 days from Singapore. Vis. on main island, Derawan, pathetic, but macro critters good. Food and service poor. Good: Snorkel with mantas at Sangalaki is world class; eagle rays, sharks, cuds at Marstua are world class; jellyfish lake at Kaksban really interesting.

Sangalaki

Borneo Divers, Sangalaki, May 2000, Ronald A. Enlow, Oakton, VA. Water: calm and flat. Dive your own

profile: yes. Dive restrictions: None, bottom at 50 to 60 ft. Kakaban is excursion only deep diving. Borneo divers runs a very fine resort, quite similar in all respects to Sipadan. Mantas, cuttlefish, a few sharks, Japanese shark fishermen have decimated population, many turtles, especially on island laying eggs. Possible to buy a nest for \$20 to save eggs from licensed egg collectors. Airline connections change without notice; plane only on Thursday twin otter flight from Tawau to Tarakan and return. The boat ride from Tarakan harbor to Sangaluki is 97 nautical miles, head on boat. Kader and Bahrin (divemasters) were great.

Sulawesi — Northern

Kungkungan Bay Resort, November 1999, M.S. Ginsburg, Tampa, FL.

Great macro muck diving with whimsical critters, such as hairy frogfish and ghost pipefish. 3 boat dives and beach dives daily, w/ approval of dive mgr., due to currents. Expect plankton filled waters, that's why so many invertebrates call the Lombok Straits home. Every nook filled with life. At one anemone, friendly cleaner shrimp swarmed my camera and strobe to groom them. Friendly staff, good food, nice cabins. Dedicated camera room and charging stations for photographers. Definitely snorkel in front of the resort. It's a treat! No AC, a bit pricey by Indonesian standards, but repeat visitors get discount. (62 438-3-0300 or 62 438-3-1400)

Kungkungan Bay Resort, November 1999, Leon Garden, Monterey, CA.

Vis: 20 to 50 feet. Water: 82 to 85 degrees, calm and flat, no currents. Dive restrictions: none. KBR is still probably one of the best places in the world to get to see hard-to-find cryptic critters. Frog fish, weird octopus, uncountable nudibranchs, dozens of scorpion fish. But the resort is trying to get bigger, now, a maximum load (32 people) stresses the dining room and the dive operation. 4 dive operations managers in one year says something. Not all dive sites in Lombok Strait are equally great; the dive operation tries to limit the visits to the best sites. Returning photographers will be concerned about limits on dive site visits. The dining room cannot keep up with service for the growing number of visitors. Even if dining room is open 24 hours a day, most people eat at the same time. KBR was better when it was smaller.

Kungkungan Bay Resort, November 1999, Mark Fleming (drfleming@cs.com) Houston, TX.

Vis: 40 to 80 feet. Water: 82 to 84 degrees, strong currents, no currents. Dive restrictions: None. This is a macro-intermediate range photography paradise. The resort is very well-managed with excellent food and accommodations. Combining this with 5-7 days at Santika Hotel, on same island 2 hours by car, makes a very well-rounded dive/photography trip.

Kungkungan Bay Resort, February 2000, Ira Ringler, Easlan, MD.

Resort terrific macro diving, sea

horses, pipefish, frog fish, leaf fish, Pegasus, etc. Tried diving in the Seychelles but unfortunately there was a lot of dead coral due to high water temperatures. Desroches Island was not hit as hard so there was still some good diving there.

Kungkungan Bay Resort, July 2000, Lewis and Melissa Kohl, (lewkoehl@compuserve.com) North Salem, NY.

Vis: 30-40 ft. Water: 86-88 degrees. Dive restrictions: None. Muck diving at its finest! Macro photographer's heaven. More nudibranchs on one dive that 14 days in Fiji. 3 different colors of Ghost pipefish on one dive. Pygmy sea-horses, flamboyant cuttle fish, star gazers, mandarin fish. Resort was delightful. Treated like distinguished quests. Staff can only be described as sweet and incredibly accommodating. Dive guides can find anything. Day trip to rain forest (Tancoco) to see Tarsiers. Never touch your dive gear. Great photo room. Longest boat trip 20 minutes. Magnificent setting and service.

Dive Center Thalassa, Hotel Santika, Kungkungan Bay Resort, November 1999, Tom Wilson, Princeton, NJ.

Vis: 60-120 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Recommended 30 meters and <one hour. We visited two diving resorts in northeast Sulawesi. There were seven couples, 13 people were divers. This excursion was arranged by Kristen Theais of Reef and Rainforest, who did a great job for us, and she managed to have a baby at the same time. The price was exceptionally

good. We had two delightful days in Singapore on the way out. Manado is the main city in northeast Sulawesi and the Bunaken Marine Park is near. It has some healthy reefs and walls. But we also saw areas that had been dynamited, and there is little enforcement to prevent local people from fishing in this marine sanctuary. Saw more scorpionfish than anywhere. The diving was good but not great. I'd rank it behind the Maldives, Thailand, Papua New Guinea, Palau, and Fiji. We hired a guide and had a good day of sightseeing from Manado across the northeast peninsula of Sulawesi to Bitung and the Lombok Straits. We are enthusiastic about the diving at the Kungkungan Bay Resort. I had met Larry Tackett before, and we scheduled this trip to coincide with the time he and Dinise were at Kungkungan Bay. Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. We always had guides with us to help find the unusual critters. Bob Halstead had introduced us to "muck diving" in PNG ten years ago. What we experienced at the Lombok Straits was the best yet. We marveled at the weird and wonderful critters: seahorses, ghost pipefish, frogfish, amazing shrimps, crabs, nudibranchs and much more. Many of these critters are so ugly that they are beautiful — and photogenic. After years of diving on beautiful tropical coral reefs, it's great to know that there is another wonderful underwater world down there to be explored and enjoyed. (62 431-85-0230; Fax 62 431-85-0231)

Dive Center Thalassa, Santika Hotel, December 1999, M.S. Ginsburg, Tampa, FL. Uncrowded 4

star hotel, many amenities, IDD phones, AC, TV, pool and jogging track. Beautiful grounds, stunning volcano island views and a long pier through the mangroves to the water great for sunset strolls. \$925 a wk. off-season, we got a fine room, 3 boat dives daily, meals and transfers. Food was tasty, Asian and continental, and hotel personnel helpful and cheerful. 5 star PADI dive center has newer rental gear, equipment service, special trips and night dives. Dive gear was toted, rinsed and stored daily by staff. Boats were roomy and camera-friendly-rinse buckets onboard. Water temps in the 80s. Weather was wonderful. Dive guide Anwar was friendly and found us great critters. Each group of 2 or 3 got their own dive guide who determined service required, unobtrusive with experienced divers, there to hold the hands or cameras of those who wanted it. Sites were dramatic wall and drift dives in Bunaken area, pinnacle dives at the Bangkas and large wreck. Don't miss the 3 tank, trip to the Bangka islands for only \$12 extra, flowing colorful soft corals and abundant nudies made us wish we'd gone twice. Macro and wide angle lenses got a workout, vis some mornings was over 100'. Variety of goodies including robust ghost pipefish, pygmy seahorses, huge trevally, nudibranchs, tiny squat lobsters, dugongs and pilot whales. Some less experienced divers found occasional currents a bit daunting. If you don't want a wild ride, avoid the full moon.

Dive Center Thalassa, Hotel Santika, March 2000, Ben Glick, Williamstown, MA. Vis: 50 to 75 ft.

Water: 82 to 84 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. Beautiful hotel, reasonable, excellent dive operation, great dive guides. Very fine hard corals; lunch was served on filthy beach.

Dive Center Thalassa, Hotel Santika, June 2000, Jeff Lenchner (lenchy19@sirius.com) Sausalito, CA. Vis: 80 to 120 ft. Water: 82 to 86 degrees, surge. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: responsible diving. Excellent land-based diving. Dive Center Thalassa has a very professional staff, with almost everyone eager to help; very accommodating to add extra dives/night dives. Drove mostly sites at Bunaken Island, beautiful wall, impressive biodiversity. Few sharks, some turtles; current at times can be challenging. Also Thalassa will run trips to Bangka islands (about 2 hrs. by boat). Current makes the diving there more difficult, but well worth it. Thalassa is on the property of Santika Hotel; nice bungalows and hotel rooms. Food was fair at best. They need a new chef.

Sulawesi — Southern

Tukangbesi Islands

Operation Wallacea, Tukangbesi Islands, August 2000, Rance Wadley, St. Maries, ID. Weather: sunny and windy; season for east wind starts around August and can limit access to dive sites. At the atoll ripping surface currents changed direction during most every dive (very

strange); negative entry required. Water: 27 C Water Visibility: 20-70 feet. Enforced dive profiles of 60 feet and 50 minutes including required 5 minute safety stop at 15 feet; anyone deviating from this received a scolding. Operation Wallacea caters exclusively to new divers and treats all divers like those just out of their Open Water course. Accommodations: thatch huts on stilts with no electricity — tropical paradise. Sit by the vegetarians so you will get enough to eat. Shore Diving not allowed, though the wall was a five minute swim off the beach. Operation Wallacea runs scientific surveys and community projects in Southeast Sulawesi. Since it has been unable to interest dive clubs into helping, it exclusively recruits English university students as paying volunteers. The vast majority of participants learn to dive there. Experienced divers are told they must abide by rules set for the new divers. These rules are strictly enforced. To participate in projects, volunteers are required to take a week long reef ecology course that turned out to be poorly presented, learn-on-your-own-from-books; a real disappointment. Lindsey (in charge of the nudibranch project) and Adam (dive mapping on the live-aboard) are both quite impressive. Because my visit coincided with a field trip by an exclusive English private school, access to the ocean for other volunteers was cut back to take the school kids around. I managed to cram four (4) dives into the first week, then was required to take the mandatory off-gas day. In all, 12 dives during the two weeks. Boat

crews on Hoga are poorly trained, from irritating to hazardous; the crew on the live aboard was good. We enjoyed the too-short-time on the live aboard at a huge atoll, consisting of seven dives at one site to do mapping. Only one blow-your-socks-off site, the others OK for SEAsia. Expect various triggers, clouds of anthias and fusiliers, lionfish, an overwhelming variety of wrasses, secretive dottybacks, banded sea krait, dart gobies, amazing tunicates including pelagics. We were also shocked at the pursuit of drunkenness on Hoga Island at the end of the day. Skip Operation Wallacea and go to Wakatobi Divers. Interesting web page: www.operationwallacea.win-uk.net (<http://www.opwall.com>)

Wakatobi Dive Resort, November 1999, No name, personal info. Vis: 75-125 ft. Water: 85 degrees. One of the best dive locations that I have ever been at. After reading Undercurrent and talking to people who had been there I decided that this was the place and I was not disappointed when I finally got there. I found some of the most beautiful coral that I have ever seen. The coral was in great shape and with outstanding color. The fish life was fantastic, not the big critters that you might find some places, but large amounts of the smaller variety. Saw a lot of lionfish, nudibranchs, and clown fish. House reef was great and you could dive it any time. Most currents were mild, but occasionally they would pick up. The boats did not drop an anchor but would always pick you up where you ended your dive. Sometimes you would start your dive

in one direction, then the current would change more that once. Visibility was great. I used a 3 mm farmer john and was not bothered at all. We did have rinse buckets on the boats for our cameras. Dive boats are very satisfactory but not modern with a lot of space. The resort accommodations are comfortable but not plush. Food was good but not exciting. Always was enough to eat. The people were always ready to do something for you to make your visit enjoyable. (873 762 148 034, Fax: 873 762 148 036; e-mail office@wakatobi.com; website: www.wakatobi.com)

Wakatobi Dive Resort, May 2000, Bruce Martin, (MNTC@idt.net), Malibu, CA. Vis: 75-200 ft. Water: 83 degrees.

Wakatobi Dive Resort, May 2000, Robert Shaklovitz, Houston, TX. Vis: 25-100 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Buddy system enforced to an obnoxious extent. The good stuff: excellent shore diving on the house reef around the clock. English divemasters Graham and Paul were friendly, enthusiastic and accommodating, never turned down a request to act as critter spotters and buddy up for a night dive on the house reef. Several impromptu afternoon boat dives were arranged. Food was pretty good, though I grew tired of fish. Transfers from Ujung Pandang to Kendari and then to Wakatobi were handled expertly by staff and agents. Much time (2 1/2 days) going to and returning from Wakatobi, including a 19-hour ride on the "transfer boat" on

both legs of trip. Owner was unduly hung up on enforcing the buddy system — to the point that it ruined a couple of dives for my buddy (who does wide-angle photography) and me (a mostly macro guy). We changed boats after a couple of days, and divemaster Graham was much more accommodating. Handling of camera gear by the Indonesian crew was unsatisfactory: my Nikonos V was flooded in the rinse tank after a dive on the second day: crew twisted the 20 mm lens about 90 degrees, exposing the o-ring, putting the camera out of commission for the trip. Buddy lost a 20 mm optical finder, which rough handling apparently loosened. Boat dives varied from poor to excellent but too many sites were mediocre. Two-tank morning boat trips left the resort between 8:30 and 9:00, but often did not return until 1:30 or 2:00. Toward the end a few divers (including me) opted to sit out the boat dives and enjoy the superb house reef.

MALAYSIA

Sipadan, the tiny island off Malaysian Borneo, was the scary site for a political kidnapping last year, so before considering this destination, get information from your government. Sipadan is crowded with new resorts... Why? Imagine 20 to 30 giant turtles on every dive, sharks, jacks, schooling barracuda, and the best shore diving anywhere. While there's an abundance of turtles year-round, counts are highest in July and August, although the reef in front

of the resorts is showing signs of distress from the crowds. . . . Layang Layang Resort is a relatively young resort in the Spratly Islands; because of their oil reserves, the islands are claimed by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, and Taiwan as well as Malaysia. Schooling hammerheads and pristine reefs lure divers, but nothing lives on the flat coral atoll except birds. . . . Hammerhead season is March and April, but the resort operates from March to October. . . .

Layang Layang

Layang Layang, April 2000, Michael Fox, Shinkawa, Tokyo, Japan. Vis: 70-90 ft. Water: 80 degrees. No deco diving. I went during "peak" hammerhead season but didn't see one. On many dives we were encouraged to drift in the blue water looking for hammerheads. Saw one large manta (5-6 m wide) and a few dogtooth tuna. Many turtles, schools of jacks, barracuda and titan triggerfish. Only a few sharks, (reef, whitetip and leopard). Dives nearly all wall dives starting about 30 feet (from there a sloping reef to the surface). Currents moderate to none. Three dives a day (9,11 and 12) and all within 10-20 minutes from dock. Cameras placed on a mat in the front of the boat. Rinse tank available on the dock. Rooms clean but walls are paper-thin. Cable TV but hot water only 5-7/7:30 pm and water pressure poor. Food was buffet but not much variety. Requested special meal