

private charter and get to the sites before the crowds. Excellent local divemaster; many varieties of tropical fish. Visibility low and at similar islands dependent upon tide and current; can be great diving or hopeless.

Koh Nangyan Island Resort, July 2000, Isaac Aharon, New York, NY.

Vis: 35-50 ft. In the Gulf of Thailand comprising 3 islands joined by a 3-way stretch of pure white sand beaches. The charm is its exotic breathtaking scenery that never fails to capture the viewer's fascination. The island group also offer a colorful underwater world abundant with a wide range of coral formations and large variety of marine fauna. It's comfortable water temperature with its clear water, makes this resort an ideal place for scuba diving and snorkeling. The dive operation, run by Ference Fulmer, a great guy who will do anything for the guests even fix your scuba gear free. PADI dive center. My third year in this resort. They have TV, the bungalows are clean and very nice. The restaurant not as good as last year. You must show dive cert. They have 4-5 dives a day, night dives are great. Best dive champion pinnacles, Green Rock. Over all diving accommodations were not costly. They have packages that include dive and bungalow for three nights and 7 dives with food around \$250. They have great divemaster Sacha Stark from Toledo, OH. But Belle Dedeir from France will take you on a dive till your last drop of air, the longest dives, but with small group max. 8 divers. I saw lots of fish like peacock rockcod, spotted coral cod, harlequin sweetlips, many kinds of butterflyfish,

clown trigger fish, white eyed moray eels, cleaner shrimp. Night dive I saw big fin reef squid, reef cuttlefish, saddled puffer.

Scuba Quest, Faah Yai, May 2000, Toshi Tsunoda (T823oshi@aol.com), Tokyo, Japan.

Vis: 50 to 80 ft. Water: 80 to 83 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: time of 30 min. Fishermen killed 15 whole sharks for shark fin. No chance to encounter them for the time being. No sharks except leopard shark. Soft coral is pristine and excellent. Enjoyed topography incl. swim through rocky reef and sandy area. Specific creature in Similan and Kechilian Rock is uncountable sea anemone and lion fish. Must go before all fished out. (66 6676-27-1113)

Weekender, Scuba Tec, Pattaya, October 1999, R. Moore, Vista CA.

Vis: 50 ft. Water: 85-86 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: time limit one hour. Diving so so. Nice wreck but strong current. Not a lot of fish like Fiji, but nice warm water. Dive shop very friendly but not a lot of service. Divers took own gear and helped load and unload boat. Overall a good trip but diving not exceptional.

LIVE-ABOARDS

INDONESIA

Adelaar, Island Explorers, September 1999, Julia P. Demartini,

(hiredwolf@aol.com) Kaneohe, HI.
 Vis: 30 to 200 feet. Water: 72 to 81 degrees, calm and flat, choppy, strong currents. Dive restrictions: none. Diving involves in 25 sites around Komodo and Rinca Islands, east of Bali, Indonesia. Crew friendly and helpful. Dive guide is Indonesian from Flores Island and affiliate of Nature Conservancy; very knowledgeable of sites and marine life, very much involved in conservation. Food was mixed western and Indonesian. Most divers were seniors thus, although the sites were colorful with lots of reef fishes, the dive guide would only place divers when currents were almost slack; thus pelagics than what seems plausible. South Rinca Island is most colorful and diverse but cold less visibility. But has most unusual critters, large and small. Highlights include trekking on Rinca's National Park refuge and encounter Komodo dragons face to face and sparring between juvenile dragons. A memorable trip. **(606-255-9210; Fax 606-253-2155; e-mail Ben.Pfeifer@t-online.de; website www.adelaar-cruises.com)**

Baruna Adventurer, May 2000, Josef D. Prall (diverdan@flash.net), Carrollton, TX. Vis: 40-200 ft. Alor pass between Alor and Pantar Islands, Pura/Beta islands Wakatobi Islands [SE Sulawesi]; Tomea/Kaledupa/Binolingko islands. Contacts: Ph: 011-62-361-753820 Fax: 011-2-361-753809 E-mail: baruna@denpasar.wasantara.net.id Web site: www.baruna.com Walter Davis at Voyages: voyages@swbell.net 972-404-8797 FYI, I signed on with Walter Davis, having been to the Sea

of Cortez with him three times. Walter has a store in Dallas, The Scuba Shop, and spends half the year on trips with his two-camera Nikon/Nikonos rig searching for the perfect photograph or something he hasn't found in his 73 years. We started with two days in Bali at the Peneeda View beach hotel in Sanur east of Denpasar, and spent one full and two half days there on the way back. You get a comfortable room with good A/C for \$50/night for two, with local ambiance and breakfast in the beachfront restaurant. North of the hotel offers a huge variety of restaurants; excellent meals and the prices are 1/4 to 1/2 what I'd pay in Dallas. See www.balipeneeda.com. This was Walter's eleventh trip in his sixth year and we met the ship in Kupang, West Timor. After a checkout dive in Kupang Bay, we cruised overnight to the Alor pass. Our first dive was on the SW corner of Pura Island at a site Baruna calls "Wally's Wonderland" for Walter. This area features seemingly endless anemone beds, and I couldn't count the types, colors, sizes, shapes. Overwhelming. This was also the only area where I needed my full 3/2 mm wetsuit at 75 F. Of 31 dives I did there temp ranged from 75 to 87 deg F. After a day at the islands west of Alor and at 3 Coconuts in the channel toward Kalabahi, we cruised north for dives at Karang Koka where we found great walls. The Tukangbesi Islands are heaven for wall divers. The usual dive was to drop on a reef at 15 to 30 feet, and then drop over a wall as deep as you wanted to go. We also dived Moromaho and Cowocowo (Tjowotjowo) Islands. This was a

combination trip; diving known sites and exploring new territory, so some sites were not great, but some were World-Class. Pulau Tomea is an example; the vis was not great, and the reefs were disappointing... by Wakatobi standards. Kaledupa was outstanding, despite the ship's running aground at 0610. Local fishermen had removed the marker for personal use. It made for an interesting dive, when I got video of the ship powering off the reef. At that site we were visited by several members of Operation Wallacea, based on island just off NW Kaledupa. They showed us their favorite dive sites, and we had them for dinner that night (not cannibalistically). <http://www.operationwallacea.wink.net/mainmenu.htm> Food was outstanding. The chef has been on the ship for 13 years. You get Eastern/Western with an Indonesian flavor. There's always more than you can eat and the chef never loses his touch from start to end. He can handle sashimi or veggie on demand. Walter bought three 2-3 lb. yellowfin tuna from local fishermen for \$2.50, which the chef made into two huge platters of sashimi for dinner. The soups at lunch and dinner are always delicious. The crew is outstanding and enthusiastic. I recommend considering a huge tip at the end, despite the Libertarian and Republican folks on the trip who went with the "keep the wogs in line" standards. \$55US for 11 days, more than 17 crew recommended? You cheap %@#!@#! I gave \$55 in the standard collection; \$100 extra; and \$200 extra to one crew DM who wants to open his own dive shop one day. That came out to 16.6% of the trip

cost of \$2195. Shame on me for raising the standards to the level of tips you'd give without thought in a Dallas restaurant to any undeserving doofus waitdork. The dive deck is a little crowded. With 11 divers and 2-3 crew per dive, we never had a major problem dividing between the large and small dinghies. The dinghy drivers are outstanding and can spot you from 1/2 mile. I'd recommend a safety sausage because of unpredictable currents, and a strobe for night dives. A/C in the cabins at night varies; I found 78° F+ too hot to sleep a couple of nights, while others complained of the cold. Be prepared. (BTW, my temps are accurate; as a retired chemist, I've calibrated my gauges.) On one dive, two divers went into a 6-7 knot current before recall; once, I was swept off a reef down and into the blue for a few minutes before I decided to end the dive at 95 feet after 8 minutes including 5 minutes hang time. This is not just a 1 rating for beginners; it's a ZERO killer rating. Don't dive this area unless you have at least 100 dives or more, and are experienced with drift diving and have very good buoyancy skills. A beginner could easily panic when he/she find him/herself being swept down in a current and drop weights when the appropriate response is to add air to the BC first, and then dump judiciously to control the ascent, or maybe even drop weights one-at-a-time. If you ask, the Divemasters will watch for you, but otherwise you're on your own. No one will watch you on a dive or monitor your dive profiles other than recording max depth and

time when you surface [i.e., 132 feet for 36 minutes]; obviously a multi-level computer dive, since I'm walking upright today. Briefings are detailed and generally accurate, though currents can change in seconds. In short, you should be an experienced current diver who is self-reliant. Don't think about diving Kal's Dream in the Alor channel east of Pura except at or near slack tides. Expect cold upwellings and wild currents in the Alor channel; you'll see small whirlpools everywhere on the surface. It's great for experienced divers. We had people whose expectations ranged from 3 to 5 dives per day. We got mostly 3-4, with 5 on two days, mostly owing to travel time between sites. My advice is to expect quality over quantity, and when you go on an exploration trip with Walter/Baruna, to be prepared for anything from OK to fantastic. In any event, it will be a memorable trip and you'll get your money's worth. Base cost was \$2195 plus \$1558 air, plus \$125 for 5 days hotel per person double, plus \$180 for airfare from Bali to Timor and back on Merpati Airlines. Local transfers everywhere were included. Be prepared for excess baggage charges that vary from one airline to another. Examples: AA 140 lb., two carry-ons; Cathay Pacific, 140 lb., one carry-on; Merpati, 45 lbs., one carry on. Expect \$1 per kilo extra. The land trips were great; the trip to Ubud was one I'll never forget. **((011) 62-361-751223; Fax (011) 62-361-752779; e-mail baruna@indosat.net.id; website www.baruna.com)**

Evening Star II (Dive Komodo), August 2000, William Deertz, (WDeertz@attglobal.net) Jakarta. Vis: 20 to 30 Meters. Water: 78 to 84 F calm. Dive your own profile. No restrictions. Fantastic live aboard on 100 ft. Sailing/Motor yacht. Group of nine chartered the entire boat, plenty of room. Seven A/C cabins (no en suite showers/toilets but not a problem since the boat generally charts to private groups so everyone knows each other), can fit up to 14 divers but captain prefers 12 or less. Dive from two aluminum tenders. No E-6 processing. Could use more rinse tanks for camera equipment. We dove the north side of the Komodo National Park since due to rough weather the southern sites weren't accessible. Southern sites you tend to see more pelagics because of the cold upwellings from the Indian Ocean. The northern sites were generally warm water, clear visibility and moderate currents. Several sites had ripping currents that made for exhilarating diving. Variety of diving, from walls, bommies, flat reefs. Very little evidence of coral damage, reefs are mostly pristine. Normal variety of tropical fish, several mantas, turtles, white and black tip sharks, schooling barracudas, tuna, trevallies on several wall drift dives! Additional benefit is going onto Komodo island to see the Komodo dragon. Captain and 1st mate are Australian and know the area well. Make everyone feel welcome. They are probably two of the most laid back people I've met but they still maintain some resemblance of professionalism. Indonesian crew friendly and helpful.

Food was a mixture of western/Indonesia and was absolutely fantastic. Fresh breads for most meals, portions were plentiful and family style. Most charters are around Komodo but the captain is willing to go anywhere in the area. Check out their web page at www.divekomodo.com. (Phone/Fax 2 9527 4793; e-mail greg@evolving.com.au; website www.divekomodo.com)

Serenade, June 2000, Dan Shore, Breckenridge, CO. Vis: 40 to 70 ft. Water: 82 to 84 degrees, strong currents or no currents. After traveling for 42 hours to get to Manado we should have viewed it as a bad sign when we were greeted at the airport by Angelique (the Serenade's owner) and told that our itinerary would have to be rearranged because the boat had been involved in a collision. It only went downhill from there. The *Serenade* was the most unprofessional, least safe, dive operation I've experienced in 10 years of diving. The boat was a decrepit, floating roach motel with a dive deck configured so that only a contortionist could safely navigate it. We were promised by Angelique that at least one member of the crew would speak English, but no one spoke enough English for communication to be possible. As a result, there were no safety or dive briefings. When you are going open ocean, pinnacle diving in current, the protocol on getting on and off the boat are very important. I would venture to guess that they did not even have basic first aid or oxygen on board. If they did, we were not made aware of

it. The final straw for my group was surfacing from a dive and seeing the *Serenade* and chase boat disappearing around the other side of the island. Fortunately members of my party were prepared with safety sausages, mirrors and whistles because the dive guide had none of the above. The *Serenade* is an accident waiting to happen.

Symphony, July 2000, Robert A. Gramzinski (gram@namru2.com), FPO, AP. Vis: 35 to 120 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F., choppy. Dive your own profile. Murex operates three live-aboard boats. The *Symphony* carries 6 passengers comfortably and a crew of 5. Three passenger cabins each double occupancy with bunk bed style sleeping arrangements. Rooms are adequate but not roomy. When boat is underway or compressor running, it can be loud below and above deck. Most nights boat will find safe harbor in quiet cove. If boat has to move at night then it can be loud in cabins due to engine noise. The farther forward your cabin the quieter it will be. Boat crew works very hard, Captain was always right over dive site and

If you're about to spend a few grand on a dive trip overseas, you ought to spend a few bucks to make sure you've picked the right place. Become an Undercurrent Online member: www.undercurrent.org

divemaster was very experienced and professional. Crew runs Zodiac style boats for pick-up after dive and I never had to wait more than one minute on surface before pick-up. Divemaster and crew performed 5 dives a day with the first dive at 7:00 am before breakfast and last dive at 7:00 pm with dinner following. Boat showers were common hose showers at the diving platform in the rear of the boat. Private toilets were in each cabin. Dive sites range from wall drift dives, muck diving, deep hammerhead shark dives, to soaring pinnacle dives in quick currents. The more advanced your diving experience the more you'll be able to take away from these dives.

Tarata, June 2000, Jose Miguel and Peggy Duran, Corpus Christi, TX (DuranJM@worldnet.att.net). Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 72 to 82 F., calm currents. None except as dictated by experience and common sense. My wife, daughter and I booked a 12-day dive trip Grand Komodo Tours. Their new flagship, K. M. "Tarata" was one of the most comfortable of the 18 live-aboards. A traditionally built 85 foot sail assisted wooden motor boat with 2 decks, it sleeps 12 divers in 6 decent sized cabins with en suite bathrooms, four astern with bunks and two aft with double beds, all with portholes, a small desk and a clothing cabinet. Each cabin had a separate A/C unit with remote control. Plenty of water pressure in the showers for H/C rinses and the bathrooms were large and comfortable. The upper deck has a spacious lounge with two long tables and windows and benches all around.

The open area in front offers plenty of room for suiting up and bins for storing gear. The compressors were almost out of hearing range at the stern. There is also a head with shower in the upper deck, as well as a water cooler. The top deck offers a large area to relax and court skin cancer. There are oxygen and a small fish identification library. The boat could compete with the out-of-operation Sea Contacts and at almost half the price. Went via Corpus Christi, Dallas, LA, Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Bali. Got a great airfare with Malaysian Airlines (combined with American Airlines). Storms led to a missed connection, to paid the difference to get us first class seats (the only available) from LA to Bali. Overnighted at Puri Kelapa Hotel in Sanur: delightful traditional Balinese bungalows in a gorgeous garden setting with good A/C and sparkling clean BR for \$ 48 a night. On to Bima, where we stayed at the Lila Graha Hotel. Clean, large A/C rooms with traditional "mandi" bathrooms equipped with western showers. Had a tour in carts pulled by ponies that are the main transportation in the city. The *Tarata* raised anchor when we boarded and 4 hours later we were suiting up for our first dive of Gili Banta, a small island next to Komodo. We dove nine or ten islands in the area between Komodo and Rinca. Their landscape is quite different from most other areas of Indonesia, being in the driest part of the archipelago. They reminded us of the Sea of Cortez with tall volcanic islands covered with arid terrain with low brush and an occasional Lontar

palm. Underwater it was the Magic Kingdom. Dive both the north and south ends of Komodo and Rinca and the dive masters Anton, Ian and Imam were excellent at finding pygmy sea horses, exotic nudibranchs and many unusual critters for which Komodo is well known. The currents varied from mild to wicked, but the boat was always moving between islands to get to the best dive sites at the best times for currents and tides. The diving was mostly from a large conformable fiberglass dinghy. The boat operator was excellent at spotting and we never had to wait more than a few minutes to be picked up after surfacing, although in such a remote place with strong currents you must carry a safety sausage and other signaling devices. The area is pristine and increasingly better protected though on a couple of occasions we heard underwater bangs of dynamite fishing. Never saw any areas of reef with significant damage. Dive masters were helpful at finding what you wanted to see but stayed out of the way when we were involved in video or photographing. The night dives were simply great. Never had a mediocre dive and some of the best in our 1100+ dive history. There were always snacks and fruit smoothies during surface intervals and the food was excellent, plentiful and varied. The crew was uniformly helpful, friendly and cheerful and we had congenial diving companions, everything adding to an unforgettable trip. Shore trips to Komodo and Rinca to see dragons, monkeys, deer and even buffaloes. Overnight anchorage at the port of Labuan Bajo on Flores

Island for a good dinner at a local restaurant. Indonesians gladly pose for photos. Tip: always visit a department store where the locals shop before buying from the souvenir shops or local market vendors; they usually have the same items at fixed prices. Going back to LA on coach class included also quite a bit of pampering compared with what you get crossing the Pacific with, say, Continental. Malaysian Airlines planes are almost as comfortable as Singapore Airlines.

MALDIVES

Manthiri, December 1998, Sigal Greenberg, San Diego, CA. Vis: 50-100+. Water: 78-82 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: depth limit 130 ft. The second time I had been on the *Manthiri*. Manique the D.M. had just had an operation so the dives were taken over by Moosa. The outfit was still top notch. Reefs seemed to be dying from El Niño, but the abundance of fish was still amazing. The currents were very strong this trip. We all dove with reef hooks, but it was a lot of fun. The food was amazing also. Lots of fresh fish daily. The Maldives is a beautiful place. *Manthiri* is a fabulous operation! ((960) 32 5634, 32 0323, 32 0324; Fax. (960) 32 5633; e-mail seanssee@dhivehinet.net.mv; website www.manthiri.com)

Manthiri, November 1999, Stephen Mann (0788@gateway.nol) Sacramento, CA. Vis: 50 to 75 ft. Water: 84 to 86 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: <110 ft. This was my second