

anyone. Other than that it is still an amazing dive destination.

MALDIVES

These 7000 low-lying coral islands in a 1200-mile chain southeast of India will be the first to disappear if global warming raises sea levels significantly. Warming has already taken a toll on the reefs, which suffered significant coral bleaching. About 200 of the islands are inhabited (although visitors have very little interaction with the 175,000 predominantly-Muslim residents), and several are devoted entirely to small resorts that offer average to excellent tropical reef diving with big fish action — if the resort has a knowledgeable staff that knows where and when to find it. However, the Maldives are best dived from live-aboards. . . . Given its large influx of European divers, this could be one of the most dived regions of the world. . . . Dive rules are strict for this part of the world. . . . Expect year-round daily temperatures of roughly 85 degrees and abundant rainfall, which is distributed evenly from May through December. . . .

Bandos Island Resort, June 2000, Phil and Linda Stasik (Stasik@quancon.com), Merritt Island, Florida. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 83-87° F. Total freedom to dive their excellent house reef however we chose. During boat dives, we were expected to stay with the

guide, but we generally (within safe limits) maxed out our computers. We loved this place! We were well informed by a good web site. We knew in advance that June is the “southwest monsoon” season, so we expected rain showers mixed with some sun and that’s what we got (Florida weather). The monsoon also means lower vis, but the plankton attracts the mantas. The expert (English, German, and Japanese-speaking) guides took us right to “Sunlight Thila” which is a reliable manta cleaning station. At least 10 big (up to 4 meters) mantas that circled and looped with us until our film and bottom time were expired. Bleaching (from abnormally high water temps in past couple of years) has affected the hard corals from about 30-50% depending on the location. You had to push away massive schools of beautiful fish to see the coral, though. The rainbow of healthy soft corals are thriving in the warm waters. We played with several friendly Napoleon wrasses and turtles on a couple of dives. 3 to 5 foot blacktip sharks were always prowling the house reef. A 4-foot spotted eagle ray who was headed for the bottom to feed almost bumped into us on our guided welcome dive. Lion fish everywhere! We saw every variety of beautiful Indian Ocean tropical fish here. The dive shop folks told us that only 20% of resort visitors are divers, so there is a lot for non-divers to do as well. Excellent exercise/sports complex. They operate the only hyperbaric chamber in the Maldives, and it is staffed with a full time German dive physician and

nurse, high quality facility! Service and food were top quality every day. We had mixed results with airline service (Delta misplaced or dive gear in Frankfurt for two days), but the Maldives airport easily handles wide-body aircraft from many global airlines. Very multi-cultural resort, with lots of Brits, Japanese and Germans. Natives are friendly, but conservative Moslems, and their government is strict with them (but easy on tourists). We were supposedly the only Americans that have visited a while. The open "dhoni boats" that are used exclusively had fresh water dunking buckets that were fine for small cameras. There was plenty of deck space to protect a large camera from damage. We used a rental Sea and Sea camera and our own camcorder in its housing. The resort has two Noritsu print film processing machines, but no slide processing capability. The dive operator does a nice job with camera rentals and care.

Four Seasons Resort, 2000 Kris and Dana DeArmond, Khamis Mushayt, Saudi Arabia. First class vacation catered by a friendly and energetic staff. From the workers sweeping the sand, to the executive chef, Jamie, the friendly smiles, polite conversation and obvious enjoyment of their work. We arrived during the summer in the "off season" and found the only thing we didn't get was premium air fare and room rates. The weather was beautiful and probably the only area of our trip that suffered was the clarity of the water. Our typical day consisted of a delicious complimentary buffet

breakfast at 7:30 am and then walking over to the dive center for an 8:15 departure. Arriving at the spacious dive boat, (donee), our guides and captain, Moosa, were eager and ready to take us to our destination. Our equipment already assembled was stored under the bench and ready to get wet. Pre dive briefings were conducted on every dive and current checks performed. Dives were lead by PADI Instructors for those desiring the guided tour or novice divers. Since my wife Dana is an avid photographer and PADI Divemaster, we soon parted the company of the group looking for creatures to macro. When air consumption reached the house minimum of 750 psi, we performed our safety stop, inflated our sausage, and ascended to the surface where the boat motored over and retrieved us. After handing up our fins and camera, we climbed the sturdy boarding ladder where we were offered a towel and helped off with our gear. While drying off and having a piece of kiwi, the gear handlers changed our cylinders. We arrived back at the dock around noon following the second dive and proceeded to the restaurant for a light meal and cold drink. An afternoon siesta, proceeded by a walk on the beach, prepared us for cocktails and a fabulous dinning experience at one of three restaurants. Whether you book a beach or water bungalow you will not be disappointed. Tours, pool side sunbathing, a spa, windsurfing and many other activities.

**Machchafushi, February 1999,
Roger J. Hale (RH627@MSN.com),**

Topsfield, MA. Vis: 70 to 100 ft. Water: 82 to 84 degrees, calm and flat, strong currents. Dive your own profile. Island very well run and food, although buffet style, was varied and excellent. Dive shop very efficient and well-run, able to dive house reef any time day or night, but loss of corals due to El Niño 2 years before was disappointing. Kudrahtila and Broken Rock were two exceptionally good dives with thousands of blue-lined snapper at former. Got great video sequence of octopus changing color. Manta Point had very few mantas. Too many diving resorts in the area and if a few congregated at the same location, it was chaotic. On one dive it seemed there were more divers than fish.

RED SEA (EGYPT, ISRAEL, JORDAN)

The Red Sea is on every diver's top-ten list. When it was under Israeli control, the reefs were well-protected, but now, under Egyptian domain, Hurghada dive operators are failing to provide loving care to nearby reefs. Live-aboards are trying to move southward, but they're still having difficulties with other governments. Many of the good southern sites remain closed. Be sure to check ahead of time to see if this has changed. Water temperatures can drop into the cool 60s during February and rise into the 80s by August. . . . Many divers combine a Red Sea trip with a visit to Israel and biblically historical sites. . . .

Egypt

Dahab, South Sinai

Reef 2000, Bedouin Moon Hotel, April 2000, Isaac Aharon, New York, NY. Vis: 50-60 ft. Water: 22-23 C. Since I came just for one day diving I asked them to find me an instructor or DM's. They found me Arlene from Ireland. She was very nice. Two dives with my gear for only \$50. Then another two girls joined us. We drove with 4 wheel to the sites by the famous Blue Hole and got to the dive site. The Bells we had to climb up hill and jump. Big and deep wall. Very nice max depth. We dove 100 ft. and saw many fish small and large, soft and hard coral. Good condition at the Blue Hole. Second dive was to the islands and shore dive was very nice. The dive operation is excellent. A week later I did another two dives that I loved.

Hurghada

Divers International, Hilton Plaza, September 2000, Dale Litney, Schaumburg, IL. Vis: 30-100 ft. Water: 72-78 degrees. is Europe's version of Cancun/Cozumel. Hotels abound. The Hilton is first rate, with private beach and boat launch. Much better location than the southern part of town that centers around the port. Excalibur wreck is within shouting distance of the shore by the port and had low vis, and not interesting. Long dives on the reefs, 1 hour plus. Eels, turtles, stonefish, scorpion and lionfish. Dolphins on one dive. Esperanto best daily dive boat I have