

advertised, 5* diving, sharks, etc. We dove 10x 5x at same time. Vis. was 10-20 ft. Sometimes 50 ft.; sharks were reef white tips, mantas small mobulas, no whales. Lots of schools of jacks, etc. but nothing really exciting. Lots of current and thermo dives (not very comfortable). My friend and I put our camera great away after first day diving. We also dumped 2 dives (took the loss) and did land-based things. Land things were great—horseback riding, tubing in rapids, hiking in Cocavado were super. But not a dive destination. Very disappointed but made the best out of it by doing land things and had fun. Worst part was Tropical Adventures recommended this place wholeheartedly. Was not cheap either as much as a live-aboard. Recommend the area for land based things, but not Jinetes. There were other more comfy resorts there at same price.

MEXICO

Before Cocos Island, Costa Rica, the seamounts of the Sea of Cortez were the place for schooling hammerheads and sea lions. The sea lions are still there, although the hammerheads are harder to predict. . . . Some live-aboards now run to Isla Socorro to find hammerheads, although it's a long ride and there's no guarantee of sharks or good weather. . . . Manta rays are a little more reliable, and they have a reputation for letting divers approach them. . . . Water visibility and temperatures vary dramatically. In

winter and spring there's a thermocline, with 70 to 80 degree water on the surface and 50 to 60 degree water below 30-40 feet. . . . Visibility is determined by the plankton blooms; while it's low (25–40 feet) in midsummer, it generally improves to 80 to 100 feet by late summer. . . . From December through May winds kick up the water, which makes diving difficult. . . . Wear a wetsuit for protection from jellyfish even if the water's warm. . . . Whale-watching season is from December through March. . . . The nice hotels and restaurants in Cabo have helped make it a long-weekend retreat for some California divers. . . .

Cabo Pulmo

Cabo Pulmo Divers, November 1999, Bill Mashek, rubicon@metro.net, Rubicon Adventures, Forestville, CA. My 5th trip since '75.0 Cabo Pulmo is only coral reef in the Western Pacific. Though the reefs are not spectacular, they are very interesting and sea life is prolific. Visibility approx. 60+ in late summer. I have heard 100+ water temp. 84 with no thermocline to 60 ft. Several large rays and the biggest green moray. Easy 5-10 minute boat ride to dive sites (via ponga) and snorkeling is excellent (about 50 yards from shore). Great place for a family with small kids or a couple on a honeymoon. Not a lot to do other than read, dive, fish and enjoy your environment. Cabo Pulmo Divers the only operation taking folks out. Though there are two others in the

area. Cabo Pulmo is not for the pretentious diver as it offers “humble” accommodations. aka palapa or beach bungalow instead of a fancy hotel. Food is varied and good. Three restaurants, two very moderate one on the expensive side but nothing compared to Cabo San Lucas. We bought food and beer in San Jose del Cabo and brought it to Cabo Pulmo. Cabo Pulmo is a good place to get away from it all. Most Cabo San Lucas Dive shops offer one day trips to Cabo Pulmo for approx. \$110. If you are interested in Cabo Pulmo (best option) contact Jenny Farr at cppmex@compuserve.com or Edna cppusa@compuserve.com

Ixtapa

Ixtapa Divers, Hotel Presidente Intercontinental, February 2000, Joe Minton, Hixson, TN. Vis: 25 to 40 ft. Water: 70 to 75 degrees, surge. Dive your own profile: no. Dive restrictions: 80 ft., 500 lb. air. Not a diving destination. I attended a conference there and went diving. The water was cool 70-75 degrees, murky 25-40 ft. vis. and with moderate surge. I did enjoy the departure from the Caribbean marine life I am used to, though. Ixtapa Divers is a small shoestring operation with a strip mall shop; a 20-minute taxi ride from their small wooden outboard motorboat. The divemasters are friendly and personable but didn't know much about the marine life.

Ixtapa Divers, Radisson Plaza, June 2000, Stephen Carmichael, Roches-

ter, MN. Sunny. Water conditions — surge. Water 83° F. Could dive our own profile on computers. Not a major dive destination, but we were pleasantly surprised. We got a good deal (4 nights, hotel, meals, drinks, and airfare for \$430/person from Dallas). Ixtapa Divers, across the street from the Radisson, was a completely professional outfit. Top notch Divemasters. We didn't see any large critters, we saw lots of pufferfish, octopi, a turtle, many colorful fish and two sea horses on one dive! The visibility was 20 feet, and the surge could be challenging to a beginner. A two-tank dive cost US\$45. Not the best dive vacation we've ever had, but not the worst either, and it was the most reasonably priced!

La Paz

Buceo Carey, La Concha, September 2000, Peter Belden, Palo Alto, CA. Vis: 15 to 60 Feet. Water: 83-87 F. Calm choppy no currents. Dive your own profile. Divemaster led dives, but was flexible as to destination. He was easy going and served more as a local guide who helped find shy hammerheads, etc. You can negotiate the price of the trip. You should get on a boat where you cannot stay any snorkelers, that way at El Bajo longer. Try to bring 4-7 friends so that you can have your own private boat and avoid being paired with inexperienced divers. Saw octopi, many eels, two great wrecks including the Salvatierra. Whale Sharks don't arrive until November. Mantas are relatively rare. Easy sea lion viewing.

Cortez Club, La Concha, December 1999, Paul Semmer, Breckenridge, CO. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 78 to 80 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile? Yes. Dive restrictions: 60 Ft. (bottom terrain depth). Choppy waves forced the dive boat to 60 to a mediocre site. The dive boat, Rampage, was comfortable and fast to get to the dive site. However not big enough to handle 4' waves. Dive operation at Cortez Club was very friendly. We only made 4 dives and the diving was so-so. La Paz is more noted for pelagics but they weren't around. (52-112-1-6120; 52 112-1-6121; 52-44-127373-1144)

Cortez Club, La Concha, January 2000, Lance Cordoni (cordoni@aol.com) Washington, IL. Vis: 10 to 40 ft. Water: 64 to 67 degrees, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: none. Water very cold and vis. Poor. Not the best time of the year for this destination. Sea Mounts were good dives with many hammerheads, however they are skittish and with poor vis. We saw them only briefly. Sea Lion dive at Los Islotes was incredible with many sea lions playfully frolicking with us. Many nudibranchs everywhere. Cortez Club a terrific operation, good boats, great rental gear, superb divesuits and terrific owners. Trips to some dive sites 1-1/2 - 2 hrs-be prepared.

Cortez Club, La Concha Resort, July 2000, Mike Saffas and Lori Falls, N. Las Vegas, NV. Vis: 30 to 60 ft. Water: 75 to 80 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes.

Dive restrictions: use common sense, return to boat with 500 psi. Hotel was nice, Cortez Club was top-notch. Dive crew was very knowledgeable. The dive boats were small (4-8) divers and very fast 1-1/2 hrs. to El Bajo. Stopped to snorkel with pilot whales. Spotted hammerheads, tons of green morays at the seamount. Also zebra morays, angel sharks and huge schools of all kinds of fish. The Aalvatierra is a must-do wreck dive; all in all the resort and dive operation is recommended.

Rio Rita, Los Arcos, November 1999, Uwe Haensch (uh@totacc.com), Alamogordo, NM. Vis: 25-50 ft. Water: 74-78 degrees. Weather: sunny, windy, dry. Water: choppy. Dive Restrictions start ascent with 500 (shallow)/700 (deep) psi, stay with divemaster on deep dives. Flew in from LAX with Aero California, 2 hrs delay both ways. Hotel Los Arcos nice and comfortable, convenient location. Baja Expeditions picks you up in front of hotel, 5 min drive to marina. Rio Rita very comfortable boat, lots of space, dive gear can stay on board over night — 1.5 to 3.5 hrs to dive sites, 2-3 dives per day, back at the marina between 4.00 PM and 5.30 PM. Crew fantastic, very helpful, excellent food (breakfast, lunch, snacks) -2 days very windy, dive sites therefore limited (better: August or October) remaining days ok, could go to El Bajo (best site in the area, schooling hammerheads, lots of other fish and morays all over the place). Some wrecks in the area, two just recently (Oct '99) sunk -water: 74 - 78° F, 1/4 inch wetsuit is a must, air: 72 - 80° F. Peter

Eastern Pacific

(divemaster) very knowledgeable and relaxed. Excellent setup/trip.

Los Cabos

Acuadeportes, Hotel Cabo San Lucas, June 2000, Norman K. Motter, Dallas, TX. Vis: 40-50 ft. Water: 70-72 degrees. I called Acuadeportes in Cabo San Lucas a month in advance. Only when I arrived and started to get ready for my first boat dive, was I told the “La Niña” had the water temp 10 degrees colder than normal. Not only did I have on a medium thickness wet suit (my own) but they also put on full thickness wet suit jacket (long sleeves). With all this on I was pouring sweat in the 90-degree F air temp. I am not a cold water diver! Being trussed up like a sausage made me very uncomfortable in the cold water. We got down to 67 ft. and I could only take 21 min. of this and came up. I canceled all my dives as I was feeling very sick and exhausted. A wasted dive vacation! (800-854-0436; Fax- 702-356-3869)

Puerto Vallarta

Pacific Scuba, March 2000, Van Freidin, Mountain View, CA. Vis: 3 to 15 feet. Water: 68 to 64 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile? Yes. Third time diving at Marietas Islands. Pacific Scuba is the best dive operator in P.V. March has great weather hi 88° F. lo 70° F. water 68° F. But chances are the algae bloom will reduce visibility to 3 ft. down to 30 ft. deep and 15-70 ft. below, due to

darkness. Caves, tunnels, tropical fish, dolphins, mantas and humpbacks seen from boat. Downtown PV has real character not seen at other Mexico tourist towns.

Twin Dolphin Dives Ctr, Chicos March 2000, Bill Colderbank, Livermore, CO. Vis: 0 for first 30 feet, 30 feet after. Water: 68 to 70 degrees, choppy, surge. Dive your own profile? No. Dive restrictions: very loose restrictions; dive until you run out of air. Good divemasters, tried hard to make a good dive out of bad conditions. Water had an unhealthy look. Dive operator sold trip as much, much more than it really was. Very over priced. Will not dive again with the operator. Chicos dove divers together with experience level of 3 dives to 100+ dives. Water was brown/green with 6-12 feet of foam on top; very unhealthy look. I felt dive operator should have advised on water conditions before booking dive trip. Will not dive again with Chico's.

Vallarta Adventures, June 2000, Mary K. Wicksten, Bryan, TX. Vis: 20-30 ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: Don't go deeper than guide, stay with guide. Don't go to Puerto Vallarta to dive, but if you have a spare day, contact one of three or more operations to go. Vallarta Adventures won't let you go to more remote locations unless you've dived with them before. They push their “refresher” course — not a bad idea, if you saw the sort of divers I saw. I went on a combined diving snorkeling boat to the Marietas Islands, small rocky islets that are a bird sanctuary. There are three rivers nearby and it had rained, so

visibility was soupy; 30 ft. at best. \$80 covers two tanks, coffee, juice, fruit and Danish, lunch and a bar (yes, alcoholic), fins, BC's and suits can be borrowed, weight belts are provided. The boat was roomy, despite a mob of sunburned snorkelers. Divers boarded small live boats to dive among huge rocks, cliffs and coves. No big fish, but saw green morays, Moorish idols, barberfish, guineafowl puffers, arrow crabs, starfish. Guide Raymundo was very competent. We made a decompression stop at 15 ft. Watch out for jellyfish! Luckily, I wore a lycra suit.

PANAMA

Rocas Divers, January 2000, Michael Keane, Fort Lee, NJ. Vis: 25 to 40 ft. Keep with divemaster at all times; dives 40-45 min. nothing to see. Worst dive operation I have encountered. Staff uninterested, management more interested in selling real estate. Tanks often filled to 2,000 psi, rental gear unreliable. One day spent from 9 am to 2 pm in boat while boat crew took care of real estate investors and snorkelers first. Coral (hard) broken; soft coral appears to be overwhelmed by some type of starfish; reefs completely overfished; nothing to see big or small. Divers stay away.

UNITED STATES

Alaska

Wind and Water Charter and SCUBA, Ketchikan, July 2000, Mark Wahl, Rock Falls, IL. From their web site, they looked like a good,

professional outfit to go diving with while on family cruise to Alaska. Sent several emails back and forth, as well as at least 2 phone calls to confirm plans for them to pick us up at cruise ship terminal and take 3 of us on single tank boat dive. They sounded really nice over the phone. We waited about 2 hours in the rain at the terminal, while calling their shop every 20 minutes. (Kept getting recording saying they weren't open till 9:00.) Eventually took taxi to shop — no one there. At 9:20 an employee showed up. He asked what we were doing there — was told by owners to open store because they were going to be picking us up at 6:30 AM. Shortly thereafter, owners (husband and wife) drove up. They appeared angry, walked right through the four of us, soaking wet and huddled under their tiny porch, without even acknowledging our existence, and sarcastically said "Is there something I can do for you?" I said "I'm Mark Wahl. We're the people that were going to go diving with you today." He angrily replied, "I don't think so." We were shocked. The owner said he didn't know anything about us or our dry-suit experience, and that we'd "be nothing but part of the food chain out there." He told us doesn't "deal with 'cruise ship asses.'" My nephew asked "Is this the way you treat all your customers? We wait 3-1/2 hours in the rain for you, and you call us asses?" If you decided you didn't want to take us out, don't you think you could have at least dropped by the dock and told us?" To which the owner responded, "You're not my customer! Do you got a