

and counted 14 white tip sharks at a cleaning station. John, skiff drive, and Chomed, divemaster, always had warm towels, hot tea and homemade breads for us at surface intervals. Land tour took us all over Yap. We stopped to learn about the stone money, men's houses and to shop at the local art gallery/gift shop. The cultural tour was led by a Yap native. While telling us Yap's history, he led us down a 700-year old stone path to a village where we were treated to native foods, a demonstration of bamboo stick dancing, native crafts (lei making, basket weaving) and a chance to try beetlenut. Great addition to a trip to Palau.

Manta Ray Bay, March 2000, W. Alan Richardson (alanjane@cwo.com), Byron, CA. Vis: 10 to 100 ft. Water: 80 to 84 degrees. Dive your own profile: yes Dive restrictions: 130 ft. 1 hour. New dive shop manager very attentive and accommodating; only limited manta sightings, visibility in channels limited to 10-20 ft. 122 reef was an excellent macro sight, strong winds, choppy seas and ran every day (unusual). Excellent meals and overall attentive service at hotel. Cultural and kayak tours well worth doing. Shark feed dive needs work, sharks would not take bait.

NIUE

Niue Dive, Matavi, June 2000, Julie Spellman, Elk Grove, IL. Vis: 100+ ft. Water: 80-82 degrees. Dive restrictions: 130 ft — back to safety stop 500 psi. Small island with one flight weekly on Royal Tongan Airlines out of Auckland. "The Matavi"

is the largest (24 rooms) on the island, on a cliff overlooking the ocean where dolphins are plentiful and whale sightings are common June-Sept. Pool, restaurant and bar, laundry room, free bikes, and the staff was very helpful in setting up island tours or anything else. With a population of only 1,750 there is no crime and by the end of our week's stay we had waved to almost everyone and met a lot of great locals. Island juts up from the ocean, but who needs shore diving when Ian and Annie run a top notch dive operation. "Niue Dive" is the only dive operator. Pristine sites. They have wash and storage facilities and take care of your equipment. They are dedicated to making sure every dive is a spectacular adventure. A tractor pulls their Zodiac, with divers in it, through town to the main pier where it is winched into the water and away you go. All dive sites are easily accessible and with only 6 divers max. quick in and out. You get thorough briefings and the boat is fully equipped w/first aid and oxygen. Just an easy back-roll in and you land in some of the most consistently clear water I've ever experienced. Sea snakes everywhere, especially at "Snake Gully." One friendly snake followed my husband on a whole dive (at least an hour) and we got great photos. Another was awfully fond of my fins. We saw the usual tropicals, large schools of barracuda, reef sharks, 1 turtle, nudibranchs, at least 4 types of eel including a man-eating size Moray, lobster, sweepers, lion fish, anemone fish, rays, etc... Surface intervals were spent comfortably on board with

water, hot chocolate, cookies and amusing stories. On one interval we came upon a pod of dolphin (40+) and had the opportunity to snorkel with them. My husband and I hung onto the sides of the Zodiac as we slowly motored while the dolphins bow surfed and pooped right in front of us. A once in a lifetime occurrence but common in Nive. Underwater scenery was among the best I've experienced with cut-throughs opening up into caves with sunlight pouring through crevices on top of you, bommies, walls, great hard and soft corals and little or no current. No worries mate! A photographer's dream, I got some great macro and wide angle pics. It was a long way to go but well worth it, the scenery above and below water was spectacular. (+683 4311, Fax +683 4028; e-mail: niuedive@dive.nu, website: www.dive.nu)

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Some of the world's finest diving is in this land just north of Australia whose most consistent feature is its unpredictability. . . . It's a dream destination for live-aboards with unique critters on a big scale: big fish, big coral, big distances, and muck diving. It's also a naturalist's paradise with beautiful topography: mountains covered with snow in July shade, steaming jungles, butterflies as big as birds, walking-stick insects a foot long, and splendid Birds of Paradise. Most rain comes in heavy afternoon downpours. Volcanoes routinely disrupt things, destroying

Rabaul in 1994 for the umpteenth time, although now it has a new airport. . . . There's excellent land-based diving at Walindi Plantation. . . . The water in Kimbe Bay may be in the high 80s, with visibility up to 200'. . . . If you're into wrecks, check with the live-aboards in this area as some of them are once again making trips to Rabaul. . . . After traveling this far, you must take a week to stay in some of the fine lodges like Karawari or Tari (even though they want top dollar) to visit indigenous, primitive, wild-and-woolly cultures that are among the most interesting on the planet. The people are divided into hundreds of frequently-sparring tribes speaking hundreds of languages. Witchdoctors on the outer islands maintain the old value systems, yet go to Christian services on Sundays, and men from the stone age, covered with colored mud, mingle in airports with business people in suits and ties. . . . Women should not travel alone in PNG. Port Moresby is an unsafe city, although the big hotels are fine; but use Moresby for changing planes and daytime shopping at the superb giant crafts market. . . . If you have to lay over in Port Moresby, consider Loloata Island Resort (011-675-325-1369 or e-mail loloata@daltron.com.pg), a diver's alternative 25 minutes from the airport. . . . Malaria prophylaxis is still essential. English and Pidgin English (helicopter: