

afternoon. The dive deck was well organized and roomy. Each diver had an individual station with equipment bin below. There was a camera only table with storage table below that, separate rinse barrels for cameras and equipment, 2 fresh water showers, towels, and white board for briefings. A top deck allowed for lounging and sunning. Racks on both sides of the boat allowed for hanging of wetsuits to dry. Louis and Alex were experienced divemasters while Pedro is new and still learning the sites. All were cheerful and helpful, doing their best to enable us to have great dives and see the things we came to see. There were always 2 divemasters in the water if you chose to go with them. On a couple of sites, we signed up into groups and were taken at different times or to different sites in the same area. The sea lions, mantas, hammerheads, turtles and sting rays generated the most excitement. There were thousands of starfish and king angel fish, lots of morays, Moorish idols, parrotfish, puffers, and many of the usual tropicals. Lots of small stuff to see when current died down. Many dives were drift dives because of the current, which was quite strong at times. Two pangas were utilized for pick up and the terrific drivers were always there to pick you up wherever you surfaced so you didn't have to ration your air to make sure you got back to the boat. We went north of La Paz and then worked our way back south toward Cabo San Lucas. We had dive sites at La Reina, Las Animas, El Bajo, the sea lion colony at Los Islotes, and Cabo Pulmo. 4-5 dives

could be done each day and the divemasters were always willing. There is only a small area where corals thrive so most of the seascape is boulders and rocky areas. Night dives were available each night. The female sea lions were friendly and playful while the bulls kept a watchful eye. A squadron of mantas was seen at Cabo Pulmo. On the last night, the boat stopped at Pelican Rock/Sand Falls in Cabo San Lucas Bay for a last night dive for those that wished. We then docked. Got a departure briefing for the next morning, and the rest of the evening could be spent in the town.

PANAMA

Coiba Explorer II, July 1999,
Lauren Henderson, San Antonio, TX. Vis: 20 - 60 ft. Water: 78-82 degrees. Adventure diving off the beaten path. Second summer of diver operation. Personal service from the time you arrive in Panama City. Transfers handled by Coiba operation. 115 ft. spacious boat; comfortable cabins, bar area, lovely open air diving area salon, for video viewing and lots of fresh hot water for rinsing and showers. 12 divers max. Good food and snacks. Crew is wonderful. Diving is done from two 28 ft. Pursuits with 6 divers each. Two am dives then return to mother ship for lunch and rest. Two pm dives. Night dives offered 3 nights. We fished for tuna and snapper during surface intervals on Pursuits. Dive instructor/master Kevin and captain Kid did a wonderful job locating good dive spots. Attention to safety due to depth,

surge and current. Stayed with Kevin but did not feel babysat. Profiles based on computers. Pinnacles covered with low soft corals and lots of fish. Huge schools of barracuda, game fish, and tropicals. Highlights: sharks on almost every dive, plenty of large turtles and moray eels. Saw 7 eagle rays on one dive and a 12 ft. manta slowly circled overhead. Virgin diving so you never know what you'll see. Very exciting. Captain Charlie is very personable and caters to individuals need. (800-733-4742 or 504-871-7181, Fax 504-871-7150; e-mail: info@coibaexplorer.com; www.coibaexplorer.com)

Coiba Explorer II, June 2000, Milton Provel (mprovel@hotmail.com), Edison, NJ. Vis: 35 to 80 Feet. Water: 76 to 79 F, calm currents. Dive your own. Dive restrictions: Drift diving in 6 packs. This is a great operation. They pick you up at the airport find and take your luggage. Take care of you better than any live-aboard I ever dealt with. Put you in a 1st Class hotel 1 night coming and 1 night going. Fly to No. Panama next morning than 1 hour boat ride on 28" pursuits. Carry sun tan lotion in carryon because the sun is hot! *Coiba Explorer* is a first-class live-aboard. Well kept fresh water toilets no smell 12 divers crew of 11. They bend over backward to take care of you the diving is wonderful large schools of fish this is definitely the Pacific. The diving is on pinnacles that are huge. White tip sharks on almost all dives. King angel fish in schools. The perfect trip for experienced diver that is sick of the lack of fish in the Caribbean.

All diving on two 28 ft. Boats two 6 packs. Plus they fish between dives. Nothing small taken.

Coiba Explorer II, June 2000, John V., Southampton, NY. Vis: 30-90 ft. Water: 75-81 degrees. I used a 3-5-3 wet suit, 5 mm boots, Polartec hood and I was fine! I started in Panama City and on to the city of David, an hour and a half flight away aboard a twin engine prop plane, 250 miles northwest near the Costa Rican border, look left and see the Pacific, look right and see the Caribbean, you will fly over rainforests, mountains, waterfalls and white water rivers in flight. From David you will take a two-hour boat ride out a mangrove lined river to the mother ship, 115 ft. by 27 ft. that travels another 6 hours west into the Pacific to a group of islands that are very Jurassic looking with many birds and rock pinnacles. You will be diving from two 28 ft. boats — 8 people per boat (6 divers/1 dive master/1 captain) cramped, little room for cameras but ok. Two am dives then lunch on main ship then two PM dives, night dives when you can, I did 23 dives. Two rinse tubs for cameras on the main ship, camera storage has to be enlarged. Rooms are clean with good storage, TV and VCR, air conditioning, sink four people share a shower and toilet. A good video library, food good, nice dining area. The diving is great but not Caribbean diving it is eastern Pacific diving, rocks covered with a carpet of white Gorgonian. Large schools of every kind of fish large and small. Spadefish, barracuda, king angels, Moorish idols, jacks

trevally, tuna, groupers, turtles, eagle rays, manta rays, moray eels, sea snakes and many more fish all on just about every dive! Sharks white tip, Galapagos sharks, nurse sharks, and some tiger sharks, sharks on every dive. 300 miles from Cocos island and 600 miles from the Galapagos islands, 200 miles from Malpelo island so you never know what you will see above and below water. On one dive we saw 150+ golden cow rays running on the top at 10 ft. Truly an underwater wonderland. For a full day we he hundreds of spotted Dolphins all around our dive boat 360 degrees, another day 41+ Pilot whales, the next day 30+ more. A lot of rain. Wet season May to October so bring a rain jacket. The dive masters are very good, the small boat captains are right there, the main ship captain Charly is a great guy. Like National Geographic adventure. You will be diving deep in currents with some strong down currents; be fit and have good equipment with advanced training. A trip on the *Coiba Explorer II* can be some of the best diving of one's life. The last day in Panama City we took a good tour of the Panama Canal and the old city founded in 1510 AD.

Coiba Explorer II, July 2000, Tanya Green, Rancho Murieta, CA. Vis: 30-60 ft. Water: 75-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: stay w/divemaster because of current. Best dive trip ever! Tiger shark on one dive and whitetips every dive. Huge manta, school of golden rays, huge schools of curious barracuda and spadefish. Lots of turtles. Big schools of big fish! Many different types of blennies and colorful gobies.

Beautiful gorgonians and free-swimming eels. Only 12 divers on two 28' Pursuit chase boats. Pilot whales and hundreds of dolphins. Not for beginners — strong current and surge, but that's what attracts the pelagics.

Coiba Explorer II, Executive Expeditions, July 2000, Tracy Johnson (TracyJ@malibuonline.com), Manhattan Beach, CA. Vis: 20 to 70 Feet. Water: 76 to 82 F., currents. Restrictions: Led by divemaster due to currents My third trip on the *Coiba Explorer II*. Was so impressed with the diving that my son and I shot a promo video for them. This year we represented the boat at 4 dive shows. (Editor, I understand if you don't want to print this since I know you don't like shills pushing their own operation, but I do have a real day job. This is just a hobby.) Your visit to Panama begins with a VIP greeting at the airport, followed by transfer to the Westin Caesar Park Hotel. The next morning you are flown to David and transferred down river to the mother ship. That same day you're in the water for an afternoon dive. This is one trip where you get 6 days of diving. The 115-foot boat has 8 staterooms, which share 4 baths between them (TV/VCR and sink in each room) and a VIP stateroom/bath. Maximum of 12 divers on board. All dives are from 28 foot Pursuits. Food is excellent but not gourmet. Plenty of snacks after diving. Dine outside on upper deck, no problem with bugs. Bring a light wet suit, water is 76-82 F. Also nice to have a light jacket as the salon gets cool at night. Camera

storage is not great for slrs with long strobe arms. Compact video units work well. Camera rinse tanks on mother ship. Fresh water hose on Pursuits. Most diving is on pinnacles and led by divemaster. Four dives per day plus night dive. Not recommended for beginners due to strong currents. You can fish during your intervals. Lots of white tip reef sharks, dolphins, some mantas, turtles, Jew fish, octopus, eels, and schools of barracuda. Great crew, most return each year. Dive season is June-September with fishing December-April. (PH: 800-733-4742, www.coibaexplorer.com) (Tracy, since you disclosed your relationship, I'll print it. I've tossed reviews of other operations out, when I know there's a relationship and it's not disclosed.)

Coiba Explorer II, July 2000,
Kendall Botellio, Phoenix, AZ. Vis: 20-50 ft. Water: 76-80 degrees. Dive restrictions: computer. Boat and crew are terrific! Diving is outstanding. Schools of barracuda, jacks, tuna, spadefish all in the 100s. Mantas are very friendly, seem to love divers. Whales surfaced right by boat and we snorkeled with them! Tons of sharks, whitetips, Galapagos, nurse –1 fantastic! Great fishing too! Excellent photo ops, sea horses, frogfish, turtles! Tons of playful octopus!

Coiba Explorer II, August 2000,
David Gouge (dhgouge@aol.com),
Kissimmee, FL. Vis: 15-50 ft. Water: 76-81 degrees. First class no problems trip. Included in the price is being met at the airport and waiting in a lounge

while they collect baggage and take care of immigration, transfer to a 5-star Westin hotel, next day transfer to the airport one hour flight to David where you are met and transferred to the 115' mother ship via 28' pursuit dive boats. They handle all baggage, check-in, transfers, etc. You relax and enjoy. Procedure is same for return at the end of the week. Boat has 8 cabins each with 2 bunks, ample storage, sink, TV/VCR. Share shower and head with next cabin. Dining is family style and food is excellent, abundant and served by two stewards in white chef shirts who also make up rooms daily. Snacks after each dive-fruit, cookies, hot chocolate, punch. Laundry done on Wed and DM takes care of gear unless you want to. Boat sleeps 16 but 12 divers max split between the two dive boats, each with experienced DM. Due to current, surge and viz, diving was group, but very relaxed. I never felt rushed. Mostly pinnacles, some never dived before. AM dives 80-100' PM dives 40-70' Night 30-60'. Lots of soft corals. Look up for circling schools of 'cuda and jack. Sites explode with variety. Scads of white-tip sharks, occasional tiger and Galapagos sharks. Mantas, turtles, pilot whales. Dolphin and eels everywhere. Surface interval spent trolling for wahoo, yellowfin tuna, jack, dorado, and snapper (my wahoo fed the boat one night). Briefings thorough and no site dived twice. Boats went to different sites so definitely not crowded. Every person involved with this operation is committed to making this a memorable dive vacation.

Eastern Pacific

Coral Star, February 2000, Bruce Cohen, (bcohen2562@aol.com), Chatham, PA. Vis: 25 to 60 feet. Water: 80 to 82 degrees, calm and flat. A good change of pace from Caribbean dive destinations without much additional travel time. Very well maintained boat; attention captain and crew, excellent food. 5 dives offered most days. Diving similar to Sea of Cortez. Visibility 25 to 60 ft. not much coral but a lot of fish and critters. Saw schools of large jacks, barracuda, king angle fish, saw white tips on about half of my dives, many green morays (6 or more free-swimming), at least 10 octopus, 3 sea horses, a variety of rays, tropicals, invertebrates, etc. Because I elected to dive Nitrox (an additional \$75/wk) and the fact that most dives were to 80 ft. of shallower I was able to rack up a lot of quality bottom time. **(800-215-5169 or 307-733-3127; Fax: 1-307-739-9139; e-mail: info@coralstar.com; website: www.coralstar.com)**

UNITED STATES

California

Monterey

Cypress Charters, Clinton Bauder, (gecko1@apple.com), Cupertino, CA. Vis: 5 to 80 Feet. Water: 48 to 58 F., calm choppy surge currents no Currents. I dive nearly every weekend with Cypress Charters. The diving in Monterey south to Big Sur is spectacular, if not exactly comfortable. Cypress Charters caters to

experienced cold water divers and is the best way to see the really wild and woolly dive sites. These are offshore pinnacles featuring shear dropoffs, amazing invertebrate life, big schools of rockfish, sea lions, harbor seals and the occasional wolf eel. The walls and pinnacles are absolutely covered in brightly colored anemones, nudibranchs, hydrocorals and sponges. Coral reefs have nothing on the more advanced Carmel and Big Sur dives. Fish life is not as diverse as Southern CA but the rich and colorful invert life more than makes up for it. The ride in and out and surface intervals often feature whales and porpoise. Expect difficult conditions. Surge, limited vis (usually about 25 feet) and cold water are the rule. Deep dives (100 feet or more) are often the order of the day to get under the surge. Drysuits are highly recommended. Topsides conditions can be tough if you are susceptible to seasickness. People not familiar with these kinds of conditions should arrange for a guide. The boats provide a safety diver who stays on the surface and watches for trouble but dives are normally unguided. The Cypress Charters boats are a bit Spartan but very functional. They feature really nice swim steps, onboard Nitrox fills, hot showers and nice benches on the dive deck. There is lots of room for gear and all areas of the boat are accessible by people wearing exposure suits. The *Cypress Point* is about 60 feet and has 2 heads. The *Cypress Sea* is