

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA****Chertan, April 2000, David****McKowen, Andalusia, AL.** Vis: 30-100 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. The best diving I have seen in 25+ yrs. (675-64-11167; Fax 675-64-11291; e-mail [info@Chertan.com](mailto:info@Chertan.com); website [www.chertan.com](http://www.chertan.com))**FeBrina, October 1999, Gary****Nachtigal (divedude@swbell.net), Waxahachie, TX.** Vis: 100-200 ft. Water: 86 degrees. Weather: sunny, dry. Water: calm. Told to dive as we usually do and not to do anything crazy. We were a long distance from the recompression chamber. They gave us true diving freedom and it was appreciated by all. Excellent. Both 120 and 250 volt charging stations. Cameras and video equipment place in freshwater rinse immediately after dive. Equipment handled as requested and with great care. One of the best diving trips I have ever had, and I have had a bunch. There is a tremendous diversity. Everything from Pigmy Seahorses to Silvertip Sharks. Beautiful soft and hard coral. Giant seafans and large stands of red seaweeds. If you love wall and pinnacle diving, this is the place for you. Some current, but the Captain and crew made it very easy, just follow the line from the back of the boat to the anchor, and then swim a short 20 foot to the edge of the pinnacle and over the edge and out of the current. The Captain and crew set up shark feeds and would find whatever critters we requested. The dive briefings were excellent. We did five dives each day. The dive schedule

and the meal schedule were perfect. On the first day, we boarded the boat, were introduced to everyone, unpacked, ate lunch and started diving. The food was the best! The cabins were comfortable. Laundry was picked up each morning and delivered back to the room clean and folded after lunch. It was nice not having to deal with storing dirty laundry. You do not need to bring as many shorts and shirts. The *FeBrina* offers several dive itineraries, so you go back and see something new. The people of PNG are special. They are very friendly and interesting. Do not miss visiting the rest of this very inspiring country. (e-mail [Alan@FeBrina.com](mailto:Alan@FeBrina.com); website [www.febrina.com](http://www.febrina.com))

**FeBrina, December 1999/January****2000, no name.** Vis: 20-70 ft. Water: 80-85 degrees. Dive restrictions: None. Very little storage space in our room. Captain seems burned out. I don't think shark feeding is a good idea. A shark got entangled in the line and had to be freed. Dive assistants were very good (very helpful to one "beginner" diver). Diving briefs — some good and some poor - one dive was very deep — good variety of fish — clownfish, cuttlefish, triggerfish, etc. — swim with dolphins was fun.**FeBrina, June 2000, Bruce Yates****@hotmail.com), Bellevue, WA.** Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F., calm. My second trip aboard *FeBrina*. My first PNG live-aboard was the *Chertan*, a very well-run boat. PNG is a great place to dive (as well as do some land-based touring), but it is still very

much a third-world country. I (and my friends) had very good results with our travel arrangements made through Jen Darby (pngexpeditions.com), who has personally dove all the PNG live-aboards, most multiple times. *FeBrina* is an ideal live-aboard for experienced divers who want great things to see/ photograph, a dedicated crew, outstanding food, and a great overall experience. Accommodations are good, albeit not as spacious as other boats (some Peter Hughes boats, for example). But the boat is solid and thoroughly adequate, and what little it may lack in facilities (which isn't much) is far outweighed by the rest of the experience. Adequate table space for photo/video gear, two fresh water rinse tanks and crew always rinsed before setting on tables. 110v and 240v charging available. *FeBrina*'s biggest asset is the experience, dedication and personality of Captain Alan Raabe, but he has established a solid and responsive crew as well. Their determination to make sure everyone has a great experience is apparent in dozens of little things. To get in 5 dives/day (if you want to), the first dive is at 6: 30AM. Because of that early start, the day's final (dusk/ night) dive is at 6: 30PM (before dinner), a great practice that enables everyone to finish diving for the day, then shower and clean up for dinner. Unlike many boats, which remain at one site as long as possible so the crew doesn't have to work as hard, *FeBrina* often moves after one dive if they think another site will be better. Daily laundry service, and ready access to fresh water (without constant

warnings not to use too much, another common live-aboard annoyance). One of the few boats I've ever been on where the trip doesn't end with a "guilt speech" about tipping the crew, and how if you don't leave at least 10% of the trip cost, you're punishing the poor crew, who don't get paid decently otherwise. Alan — if you push him — will simply say, "I don't suggest particular amounts — do what you want — anything is appreciated." What a classy way to handle it. (Are you listening, *Aggressor* and Peter Hughes fleets?) By the way, I (and I know others) left higher tips on *FeBrina* than I ever have on any other live-aboard — not because we were pressured into it, but because the service and diving were great enough that we just wanted to. The diving really is great. There's plenty to see — huge schools of jacks and barracuda, soft and hard corals, and profuse fish life and reef creatures everywhere. We saw several sharks (silver-tip and gray and white-tip), dolphins, 4-foot bumphead parrots, numerous turtles and cuttlefish. On the smaller side, macro photographers have ample material, from pygmy seahorses to harlequin ghost pipefish, blue ribbon eels, colorful mantis shrimp, a dozen kinds of nudibranchs, and anemone clownfish galore. El Niño seems to have totally spared PNG (at least the Bismarck Sea, where *FeBrina* dives). The reef is still wonderfully healthy and vibrant — several times, I was conscious of not being able to find even a tiny spot of dead reef to rest a stabilizing finger while taking photos. Diving is done from the mother boat

(not Zodiacs), but is made easier by well-placed mooring lines. This is not a boat for novice divers — some dives have current, no one is going to baby-sit you on depth/time, and buddying is informal and loose. Anyone who is particularly sensitive about language, off-color humor and/or political correctness would be well advised to stay away. Much of Alan's charm (and indeed Febrina's) is the fact that he is completely genuine and totally uncensored. No one who has been on *FeBrina* — no matter how vivid their imagination — could ever picture Alan working in an office in corporate America. He epitomizes the classic "old salt" boat captain — unconcerned with being "proper," but totally devoted to his boat, crew, and passengers. Combine that with some of the best diving locations in the world, and you've got the makings of a great live-aboard experience (which it was!).

**Golden Dawn, April 2000, Bob Puschinsky, (puschinsky@aol.com), Seabrook, TX.** Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 83-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: None. Terrific boat and operation. Owner/operator on board. (675 325 6500; Fax 675 325 0302; e-mail [inquiry@mvgoldendawn.com](mailto:inquiry@mvgoldendawn.com); website [www.mvgoldendawn.com](http://www.mvgoldendawn.com))

**Golden Dawn, April 2000, Bernie Bergen, San Diego, CA.** Unseasonably windy, cloudy and thus choppy. Strong currents made some diving impossible, so the weather altered the plan. The previous week was blue skies and clear. If doing 3 dives a day, a skin is adequate. If you use 0.5mm,

the 4th and 5th dives are a lot more enjoyable. Diving long the mainland — the water was too warm for more than a lycra skin. On one dive the bottom was 85 degrees, blue water, and 80 foot vis, but above the 35' thermocline with an outflow, it was a sultry 94, ugly green/brown, and 25 foot vis! No restrictions of depth, time, or frequency of diving. Nitrox available. Some reefs are hopping. Most are alive with baitfish, limited larger fish. Large schools of sharks on a feeding, once I counted 25 — white tips, some black tips 3-8'. One hammerhead in the blue distance, silvertips in schools from time to time. Sharks on most every dive. Three or four turtles, several in touching distance. Along the coast frequent eagle rays, one or two mantas. A school of stingrays mating, all 4-7'. 7' Wobegong shark up close, nurse sharks, several others. Rhinopious, pipe fish, colorful slugs. A sight I captured on DV, no one can explain. On a muck dive in 15' of calm, clear, warm coastal water, I found what looks like an anemone mounted to the ceiling of a hole in the reef. It extended down like a 6" diameter trunk, hanging some two feet, where it spreads out pinning a bright blue starfish on the floor, apparently eating it. Eastern fields is a totally submerged atoll lying between PNG and the northern coast of Australia, some 100 miles from the nearest land. It is subject to rapid weather changes, strong currents, and rough seas. We fed sharks on two or three occasions. Once, a 4' whitetip bumped the back of my head, then mouthed my tank

valve. He was checking out the yellow slap strap, so divers be aware of bright colors in feeding situations. The food was inadvertently still left hanging in the water during the ensuing night dive. A bad idea as the sharks stayed in the area in large numbers, but in the dark were much more aggressive.

They chased two experienced divers from the water. Two other divers were bothered, but could continue their dive once they left the area under the boat.

On a night dive two of us encountered a 6' poisonous sea snake. They can't bite easily because their fangs are in the back, and their mouths are small, and they are normally not aggressive.

We followed this snake for several minutes, videoing it swimming across the sandy bottom at 30' depth. I killed my lights, shooting video from the other diver's lights. The snake was heading for deep water, so we turned to leave, when in my peripheral vision I noticed the snake doubling back. I swam forward to let it by. As it traveled the 30' in ever more rapid movement, it continued to head straight for me. When it was 10' away, I placed my camera between us, and switched on my lights to scare it off.

With a final flurry it lunged at me, and as I thrust the camera forward defensively I heard it strike a hard surface, after which it beat a hasty retreat for the depths. The tape was running, and on review I saw that it squarely struck the lens, before turning for the depths.

The outer reefs are clearer. The coastal diving is subject to dirty runoff, but has all the interesting critters. Muck diving is either boring or mind bending, depending on your willing-

ness to search diligently for the strange and unusual. We were mostly unguided. The captain and cook are Aussies, others are PNG natives.

Exceptionally friendly and hard workers, and they treat everyone with courtesy, which made it a pleasure to part with my hard earned money for a crew tip. There is no better way to transition time zones and sharpen your underwater skills than to arrive a few days early and hang out at Loloata Island resort. Because they are waiting curbside, holding a sign when you exit customs, you minimize the dangers of city crime, which is real. They are a safe 20 minute drive, plus a 20 minute boat ride to the island resort. They are full service, nice rooms, nice views, and reasonable food. Their help is very friendly and make you quickly feel at home. Bring a water bottle for taking water to your room. Loloata diving is from a nice day boat, and is occasionally world class, but is more often hampered with poor outflow vis and/or spotty fish life. Look for the small stuff: leaf fish, Rhinopious, etc. Buy at least 25 Kina before you arrive in country, since you must pay in Kina, at immigration on arrival. Do not bother with a visa ahead of time for PNG. If stopping over in Australia, you need a visa, but you can get an electronic one through your airline. To run your 115 vac chargers is no problem on the boat. Have a separate charger you can run in your room. On land, an adapter with two round pins to an extension cord with multiple outlets, will run most chargers well, since most are rated 110 - 240 vac. Malaria is the scare, but there are no

bugs when at sea. In coastal waters, and even on the island, you seldom have a mosquito problem. Use DEET 30% to be sure. I took anti-malarials the first week, but stopped when I decided the unpredictable side effects of the drugs outweighed the dangers of getting malaria. The crew does not take anything. Malaria is a much more serious problem if you spend time inland, and somewhat of a problem if you go north. When on land, staying under a fan is the best deterrent at night. I e-mailed the captain via [dive@MVGoldenDawn.com](mailto:dive@MVGoldenDawn.com), who patiently and quickly answered my every question via his satellite link. You can e-mail from the boat at a buck an e-mail. My roommate for 10 days happened to be photographer Carl Roessler, a pleasant surprise. Carl has a site at [www.divexpert.com](http://www.divexpert.com), a great spot for information. You can e-mail him for advice, and book most trips using his help. He is easy to work with, and a veteran diver with a lot of practical knowledge.

***Paradise Sport, July 1999, Dave Vickery/Suzanne Leeson***  
**([twodivers@att.net](mailto:twodivers@att.net), Hoboken, NJ.**  
 Vis: 80-100 ft, Water: 77-80 degrees.  
 Weather: sunny. Water: calm, choppy, surge, currents. Dive Restrictions: No diving below Nitrox limits, required safety stop. Reported depth and time when checking in after dive. One planned air dive to 140' comments: dedicated table on dive deck, very attentive photo pro, lessons and some rentals available. The best live aboard we've done to date. Excellent comfortable cabins, good food,

brilliant crew of 15 members for 20 divers. We did the New Ireland route out of Kavieng. Mostly channel diving, which involves hanging or hooking onto a rock at the mouth of the channel and watching the action when the tide is coming in from the Pacific. The entire food chain shows up. Saw school of more than 1,000 chevron barracuda, schools of jacks too large to count, schools of Pacific grey sharks, silvertips. Once you unhook from the edge of the channel current is not too bad. Nice wrecks but low vis. Unlimited diving. Only require 20 minutes on boat between dives. On repeat dives at same site, possible to go off on your own and experience it with just your buddy. Catch boats very attentive; no problems getting picked up. Some drift diving. Night dives so-so. The crew arranged a surprise birthday party for me with champagne, gifts, favors, etc. Simply the best for big fish. **(800-952-4319; e-mail [usa@mikeball.com](mailto:usa@mikeball.com); website [www.mikeball.com](http://www.mikeball.com))**

***Paradise Sport, August 1999, Jacquie, Auburn, CA.*** Vis: 60 to 100+ feet. Water: 80 to 82 F., calm currents. Dive restrictions: In the water check in. Same getting out. Diligent about keeping track of divers and down times and depth. Overall excellent services and diving for the money. Best dive briefings I have ever experienced. New boat. 2 Cummings Diesels. 2 Generators for air, desalinization, great food, fresh fish, fruits and veggies traded with the villagers in outriggers daily. Head and showers on deck and staterooms. Warm towels

after dive. Comfortable bunks. Good layout in catamaran style boat. No queasy tummy problems. Craig, Scots divemaster best in the profession. Dives included Japanese zero, sunken freighter and secret location shark dive. Sometimes the viz was clouded with particulates, sometimes the current was wild and fast. I had such a good time can't be too critical. They still dump sewage in the channels which is weird when they have such cutting edge technology. If I go again I would go to dive resort like Walindi instead of trek to Mt. Hagan. Then do another live-aboard with Mike Ball. Long flight but worth it. Also had Nitrox and fish ID and photography. Our instructor was sub ok. The group did better instructing each other (12 Aussies 12 Americans). Developing, slide table, classes available, not the best instruction, video previewing very classy.

***Paradise Sport, December 1999, David and Nancy Smith, Cambridge, MA, davidalexandersmith@compuserve.com).***

Air Niugini to Moresby and Alotau was hideously expensive. We made all connections but some luggage did not (ANG frequently leaves bags behind because of load); it arrived next morning. Delay prevented overnight steaming (hence cost one dive). ANG printed timetables are advisory (Web site info usually wrong); planes go when ready or full or both. On return, made a connection via Moresby to Tari despite tight times (originally 20 minutes, cut to 5 on printed tickets). If you fear problems, seek out Nori Mariana in Moresby Airport; she is a jewel. Great boat: 110-foot twin hull,

very stable. Rooms spacious (enough closet, drawer space), bed large (but cramped if you are 6' 3"), shower viable with enough hot water. Lounge very spacious, good couches, TV/VCR. Food filling and plentiful if fat-heavy (watch the weight gain): huge banquet first night, settled down to ordinary, another huge spread final night (bit obvious attempt to influence memories). Boat holds 22 guests with 12 crew normally; we were 14, which felt very comfortable. Crew generally helpful (especially Tour Director Ruth and divemaster Fidelis) but one staffer grumpy and difficult. Dive deck big, each person has a setup station, two stairways down to giant-stride entry. On most dives, you do safety stop at 15 feet, then climb on; in chop or drift situations, inflatables pick you up. Tanks promptly refilled. We did 22 dives in 6 days, almost all at different sites; fanatics could have done more. Dropped anchors onto coral or sand (write to Mike Ball and ask him to put in moorings). Morning often sunny, clouding (or rain squalls) as the day wore on; though long viz, colors sometimes muted. Good dive briefings, profiles, procedures (since the Lonergan vanishing case, all operators are worried about liability). First dive 100-110 feet, rising through the day, last dive typically 35-50. Water 80+° (3mm jacket plenty, never cold), currents minimal except in rare spots. Muck diving is a misnomer - think featureless flat bottom. Some muck dives fizzled, others teeming with small life. Coral magnificent. Unbelievable variety of small fish (butterfly, parrot, anemone, trigger, wrasse)

and brilliantly colored nudibranchs (world's weirdest creatures). Larger critters rarer: epaulette shark, white-tip reef sharks, one very large loggerhead turtle. Saw a few hammerheads on one dive. Best dive, 160 feet to crashed B-17 Blackjack, pristine condition, then (topside) visited the village.

***Paradise Sport, (Milne Bay), March 2000, Mary and George Jonilonis, Del Mar, CA.*** Vis: 50-80 ft. Dive restrictions: 130' except for 2 dives, Recorded after dives. The boat is fabulous. Large rooms with big windows, in suite facilities, dive deck, with a full boat, crowded. Main salon nice, one end was dining. Crew ate outside on tables so to eat outside would have to take plate up flight of stairs to upper deck. Too much hassle. Chef Michael (Aussie) was really accommodating and a good cook (one lady on wheat-free diet - what a hassle for him) also the nicest of the crew. Chef best of crew! The captain we only saw at meals where he put away huge quantities of food. Never on dive deck, never helped. When some people complained about sites (many were crappy) he refused to alter itinerary. He didn't seem to be interested in his divers. Mike Ball rotates his crews every 6 mos. This crew was 2 weeks away from rotation. The head was trying but only half-heartedly. She would give good dive briefings including all sorts of critters seen there or supposed to be there. Very few special critters were seen — no ghost pipe fish, pygmy sea horses, crocodile fish, etc. Some "cowboys" were unhappy with the mellow diving

and wanted deep and action (Excuse me, in Milne Bay?) Carlos, divemaster from Spain took his camera on every dive and we divers never saw him after he hit the water. The native crew was supposed to have been w/boat a long time but didn't seem to want to help those of us needing extra help w/ tanks and never could remember which housing was mine (even though I was only 1 of 2 or 3 still photographers on board). The gear shelves on dive deck built so high I had to stand on a plastic bucket to work on my cameras on top shelf (I'm 5'6"). There was a pail for exposed film. I drop in my 1<sup>st</sup> roll and it takes two days to get it back and the film is rolled up in a baggie. Seems he had not gotten film sleeves on board before departure. I hurriedly retrieved my other film from pail. He could have told us.

***Paradise Sport, March 2000, George and Eva Moody, Tulsa, OK.*** Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 80 to 85 feet, calm and flat. Would have been nice to know before our trip that it is always cloudy and rainy in March in PNG. For those into muck diving, it's out of this world. Some photographers dove up to 7 dives per day. Diving was unlimited. *Paradise Sport* is a wonderful vessel, but we were glad the sea was flat, as the ship is prone to rock 'n roll at the slightest excuse; the boat is top heavy. The crew is first class; Michael's cooking really great. Ruth's (tour director) enthusiasm and knowledge are awesome. The shore visits were interesting, in our case only to meet the local people; the easy climbs to skull caves, volcano, etc.

were too slippery, too steep, too hot, but the local kids were a delight, dressed up in war paint and grass skirts for a school trip aboard *Paradise Sport*, while we visited their village. We took gifts from the USA, crayons, felt pens, hair clips, bits and pieces for the children, but gave away most our t-shirts and ball caps, too. There is no electricity, running water in the villages on any of the islands we visited. But the local people seem happy enough, poor, but friendly and they all appear to speak English, I should say British. It's a long, expensive trip, but for us it was probably a once in a lifetime thing and worth it; a very relaxing, seven-day cruise. Went from PNG to Australia.

***Paradise Sport, Milne Bay, March 2000, Bob Puschinsky, (puschinsky@aol.com), Seabrook, TX.*** Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: Nitrox limits. Muck diving not my favorite. Boat parked at combination sites most times where one could go to reef or muck. Crew not very enthusiastic. Outstanding accommodations. Lots of good fish action.

***Paradise Sport, Kavieng, August 2000, Michael Harrison, Vancouver, WA.*** Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 85 degrees. Service and diving was first rate. You were treated as adults. If you wanted to dive solo you had to have a redundant air source (the boat would provide a very small pony) and demonstrate you could follow a compass heading under water. If you are trained for decompression diving

you can dive any profile you desire. Fortunately my buddy and I brought our double set-ups and the staff was more than accommodating. The fish were abundant in number and variety. Numerous sharks and rays daily. Boat was fantastic, the crew was knowledgeable and exceeding helpful, and the food was excellent (steak, lobster, salads, curry, etc.). My only complaint was our accommodations at the hotel our last night in PNG. It drove home the message that we were truly in the third world. By the way, malaria prophylaxis is recommended by the CDC.

***Paradise Sport, Kavieng, August 2000, Bob Puschinsky, (puschinsky@aol.com), Seabrook, TX.*** Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 83-84 degrees. Dive restrictions: Nitrox depth limits. Outstanding accommodations. Good not great diving quality. Crew good but not bubbly as with Hughes boats.

***Star Dancer, September/October 1999, Bridget K. Thomas, Wilmington, NC.*** Rarely in life does one have their expectations exceeded! This is exactly the way I feel about my trip. I am a dive wholesaler and have been an active dive traveler for more than 20 years. I can be a bit jaded with destinations at times; however, PNG was an incredible fantasy brought to life. The crew could not have been more attentive. This is an exotic destination! The land portion of the trip is as fascinating as the diving. The land is truly a trip back in time visiting tribes that have only been known to the modern world for 60



years. I would urge every diver with a true sense of adventure to visit PNG before encroaching civilization leaves its mark on the world's last frontier. (800-932-6237; 305-669-9391; Fax 305-669-9475; e-mail [dancer@peterhughes.com](mailto:dancer@peterhughes.com); website [www.peterhughes.com](http://www.peterhughes.com))

**Star Dancer, November 1999, Andrew Molnar, West Haven, CT.** Vis: 75 to 100+ ft. Water: 83 to 85 degrees, calm and flat, surge, some current. Another excellent Hughes trip. I've been on this boat before in Palau and still think it is one of the best laid out dive boats. Service and personnel excellent. Added bonus of having Silvie as cook. The diving was very good, especially at Fathers Reef. Bommies teaming with life, hard and soft corals. Lots of macro critters with a fair amount of pelagics, turtles and eagle rays. Besides diving to your ability and using common sense, no restrictions were imposed after detailed dive briefings. Divemasters Fona and Trina available if you wanted tour. Fono found and videoed mandarin fish; seen them before but this reminded me what spectacularly pretty fish it is. We could do five dives a day. All dives were 1-1/2 hours apart and all before dinner. Good planning. Usually most people pass on the night dive when it's offered after dinner but here these were infrequent absences. The road to the old airport is like a Dalinian landscape.

**Star Dancer, 1999, Tom Webb (twebbind@ucla.edu), Playa del Rey, CA.** Vis: 80 to 180 ft. Water: warm, calm and flat. Dive your own profile:

yes. Dive restrictions: none. Great boat. Very comfortable and crew was helpful. No large pelagics but a macro dream. A highly recommended trip. Don't neglect a land excursion to PNG, it's a weird and wonderful place.

**Star Dancer, May 2000, Mel Cundiff, Boulder, CO.** Vis: 30 to 100 ft. Water: 84 to 86 degrees, calm and flat. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: none, but was suggested we limit our dives to one hour. One of the most comfortable live-aboards I have been on with very large staterooms on the same level as the dive deck. Nitrox free. Five dives a day were easy to get in, but the night dive was always early so it could be before dinner. There were many beautifully complex, diverse reefs, but occasionally ones with significant rubble. Some crew members lacked maturity. Overall, a highly recommended dive operation and location.

**Star Dancer, July 2000, Jim N. Parkhill, McAllen, TX.** Vis: 50-90 ft. Water: 86-88 degrees. Dive restrictions: None. Nitrox restricted to 32% and must dive with computer on air or 25%. Good Stuff: The Boat — Outstanding crew. Diver friendly dive deck. Good food. Nice amenities such as in room coffee service, terry cloth robes, laundry service, mask defogger dispenser, water fountain on dive deck, warm towels after dives. Free Nitrox, dive own profile. Diving excellent for small critters and reef fish. Warm water. — Avoid owner's cabin noise can make sleep virtually impossible. All moored dives require swimming from stern in blue water to the mooring line. In strong

currents, a good deal of psi can be sucked up fighting the current to the mooring line or back to the stern. Several requests to deploy a granny line went ignored. Since all sites are pinnacles, there is a certain "sameness" as the week progresses in the diversity in dive sites. Not a venue for "big stuff." My routing from U.S. required 23 hours flying, 10 hours connections, 2 overnight layovers.

## PHILIPPINES

***Oceanic Explorer, May 2000, John Crossley, Fresno, CA.*** Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82-83 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. The Philippines can be reached easily on flights from Los Angeles (and can include a free stopover for diving in Hawaii), but probably will require overnighing in Manila before flying on to the live-aboard's port, Puerto Princesa. Manila was dirty, with terrible traffic congestion, and extremely polluted air. The Pan Pacific Hotel in downtown Manila was a great hotel for exploring the city for a couple days; stay near the airport and get in/out of Manila as quick as possible. The *Oceanic Explorer* has 12 cabins of adequate space, a small salon that isn't used much, and a big shaded rear deck where meals were served and most of the non-diving activity took place. Fairly good buffet, with several choices each meal, but desserts and between dive snacks were marginal. Both port and starboard sides have narrow areas for gear storage and suiting up, plus very small camera tables and rinse buckets. Our 18 divers

were divided into three groups, each served by small motorboats to take us to the dive sites. The crew handled all our gear, and dive briefings were comprehensive. We reached the Tubbataha Atolls in the middle of the Sulu Sea after an overnight sailing. The reefs were generally very healthy, with no damage from bleaching or dynamite fishing. Seas were absolutely flat calm, not typical for May. Fish life was pretty good; lots of colorful tropicals, but not many big fish. One dive we had three mantas circle several times, and another dive included a small school of sharks. About every other dive we saw a solitary turtle, shark, or manta. Macro critters were pretty good, especially nudibranchs. Lionfish or two on every dive and Titan triggerfish. Several divers were attacked by the triggers, but only had fins bit. Night dives were good, but we had problems with some type of mini jellyfish that resulted in rashes around exposed areas for half the divers. 17 dives in four dive days on this five night, six day cruise. It was a pretty good value (\$1000)/info@scubaworld.com.phor diveislesaaol.com 877-348-3475 (877-348-3475, 562-865-7198; Fax 562-809-7300)

## SOLOMON ISLANDS

***Aggressor, December 1999, Bob Puschinsky, (puschinsky@aol.com), Seabrook, TX.*** Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 82-84 degrees. Crew not adequately knowledgeable of Solomons - dove with local dive operator at some of same spots with much better results