

Petra and the desert of Wadi Rum are extremely beautiful and make great 'surface intervals'. Jordan is Egypt like it used to be 25 years ago, but facilities for modern tourist. (962 331-4131; Fax 962 331-4133)

SEYCHELLES

Billed as 3000 miles from anywhere, this group of islands has been trying to promote itself to divers as THE place to see whale sharks, but this is unproved. From time to time live-aboards run to the out-island of Aldabra, which is reported to have excellent diving. . . . Island prices are high. . . .

Seychelles Underwater Centre, Coral Strand Hotel, Beau Vallon, Mahe, September, 2000, Nick Valentine (nickvalentine@beeb.net), Leighton Buzzard, Beds, U.K. Vis: 5 to 15 Meters. Water: 26 to 28 degrees Celsius, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes; Any dive restrictions: Max 30M / 50 mins. bottom time. Magic sunny islands, with great beaches. The weather was mostly excellent and the odd day with cloud / rain did not affect the diving. I took my own equipment (I always like to!) but the kit at the centre looked OK and reasonably maintained. The dive boat was fast and had shelter from the sun so getting to the dive sites was not a problem. I am reasonably experienced and it was a pity that the dive sites visited tended to be selected for trainees and could become repetitive. However, even some of the novice sites - Conception & L'Illot in

particular - got more interesting when the current was running! The sharks that we saw were mostly white tips and the odd nurse shark, but we did get a clear site of a 6-7 M whale shark from the surface following the return to the dive centre and even got a brief swim with a snorkel with it before it headed off. The stars of this trip for me were the huge bump head parrotfish, as big as a Napoleon wrasse, bump head as well and a large, powerful "beak." The biggest disappointment of all was the state of the coral - what a tragedy! Global warming has destroyed enormous areas and what is left is uninspiring. However, there were signs that a recovery is in progress, but it will be 5 years before there is much to write, or to get excited about. Overall a good holiday and enjoyable diving even if not particularly challenging.

THAILAND

Thailand is a bargain. . . . Whale shark season is usually from March through May, with Richelieu Rock providing an excellent chance of encounters. . . . Trips to the Burma Banks have been put off limits from time to time for political reasons; check before booking. . . .

H₂O, Phuket, February 2000, W.J. Carroll, London, England. Vis: 30 to 70 ft. Water: 76 to 78 degrees, calm and flat, choppy. Dive your own profile: yes. Dive restrictions: 100 ft. and computer. Surprisingly good diving at Shath Point, Anemone Reef, etc. off Phuket. Provided you take a