

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

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receipt? Do I got any of your money?"
We walked away. (907-247-3783)

California

Catalina

Scuba Luv, Atwater Hotel, November 1999, Kendall Botellio, Phoenix, AZ. Vis: 30-60 ft. Water: 57-60 degrees. Dive restrictions enforced: Computer. The crew of King Neptune are awesome! Very helpful and friendly! Hotel is nice. Diving was good. Shark dive was great! We always have a great time with Catalina Scuba Luv. Harbor seals, giant kelp forests, keyhole limpets, Garibaldi, bass, hag fish, bat rays, horn sharks, swell sharks, blue sharks. Tons of fun. Three dives a day. Great food on boat! (818-346-4799)

Scuba Luv, December 1999, Bill Mashek, rubicon@metro.net, Rubicon Adventures, Forestville, CA. Dove the area over a dozen times, mostly with boats out of San Pedro. Last December we stayed on the Island. Scuba Luv offering only a two tank "guided" dive and charged me more than \$100, the most I have ever paid anywhere in the world. Both dives were within kayaking distance of Avalon. Our second dive the dive master "guide?" got lost and we spent 20 minutes over sand looking for our rock reef. The dive captain was a nice guy and knowledgeable. I had a problem with the arrogant attitudes of both island dive shops. Catalina is a great place for families and a fun spot to visit. Diving conditions are always

good, averaging 35-60+ ft. and in the summer you only need a 3 mil suit. Best dive operators are out of San Pedro. In the summer and some weekends during the winter you can rent tanks from a trailer, parked at casino point.

Scuba Luv, Hermosa Hotel and Catalina Cottages, January 2000, Barry Lipman (b_lipman@hotmail.com), Brookfield, CT. Vis: 25 to 60 Feet. Water: 54 F, calm surge. No restrictions on shore diving at the marine park. Boat restrictions if diving solo: the captain wanted to see your OK signal forty five minutes after you left the boat, except on one dive that was too deep for a quick surfacing. Captain Steve of Scuba Love runs a friendly, laid back, but serious dive operation. Boats are small but comfortable, the fills are full, they have Nitrox and offer support for rebreathers. I went out there to get used to my somewhat modified Draeger Atlantis Rebreather. I started out hating the thing but after a half dozen dives or so I began to get used to it. By the end of the trip I'd fallen hopelessly in love with it and was able to forget about it and focus on my main mission: getting photographic images. Not camera friendly on shore or in boats. Bring your own rinse tank or bag. No problem getting it filled on the dock before boat dives, but there is no publicly available water at Casino Point where the Marine Park entrance is. The diving is real good kelp forest diving, with Garibaldis, seals, kelp bass, sheepsheads, and a host of the other usual as well as some unusual

suspects. The kelp was lush and healthy. There is nothing like diving on a clear day with the sun streaming through the emerald kelp fronds while loads of colorful fishes mill about. The night diving's pretty good also, with octopuses and a wide variety of crabs, snails, shrimp, and nudibranchs. One night I was joined for ten or fifteen minutes by a seal who enjoyed eating any fish my lights illuminated for him. Truly unlimited diving is available 24/7 at the Marine Park. Concrete stairs lead from Casino Point down to the water's edge, allowing a reasonable entry except in extreme low tide, when the rocks are exposed. With a free tide chart, available from the dive operation, you can avoid this most of the time. I rented a large aluminum push-cart to carry my gear the half mile or so from the Catalina Cottage to either the dock or to Casino Point. While a bit more physically demanding than some shore-based diving I've done, it was easy to get three dives or more in each day. I was glad it was January, as it would have been difficult had it been a warmer time of year. Hermosa Hotel and Catalina Cottages are basic but clean and comfortable. Food was available from a variety of restaurants and most were at least very good. The town of Catalina caters to cruise ship patrons and there is plenty of shopping and lots of restaurants. There were many non-divers enjoying the laid back and almost tropical atmosphere of the town. The town is picturesque, with its palm tree and bird-of-paradise lined streets, its boat filled bay, and

the lovely homes built into the surrounding hills. I met many people there on a few day's getaway from LA and its surroundings. I was told there are herds of buffalo to be found inland, all descended from a bunch left over from a western movie filmed there, but I never got to see them. During the summer the marine park gets crowded with divers, but in late January there were very few except on the weekends. I had a great time there — lots of

 diving bang-for-the-buck!

San Diego

Blue Escape, One Eyed Jack, Lois Ann, 1999, Bill Mashek, (rubicon@metro.net), Rubicon Adventures, Forestville, CA. San Diego and area is a great spot to dive. Dive boats are reasonable, I have used and recommend: Blue Escape, One Eyed Jack and Lois Ann. Check out the Coronados, usually great vis. (60'+) and diving conditions with lots of Sea lions. Three tank dive on the Lois Ann or Blue Escape is about \$85. Kelp bed dives are \$60-65 for a two or three-tank dive. Blue Escape and Lois Anne do the three tank dive trips and they are worth it (food is good too). I wouldn't spend more than a one tank dive at the wrecks. It is usually poor vis and with sandy bottom silt gets everywhere. The wrecks are worth seeing once. The kelp beds are interesting and full of life. Good visibility in San Diego area is 30'. Average 15-25. You can beach dive at La Jolla, a protected marine sanctuary. Lobster diving in San Diego is good

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but many small lobsters. Some operators offer night lobster trips. Check out: www.caldiveboats.com, www.divebums.com or www.heff.net/scuba. California Dive News has all kinds of info and dive boat schedules. (619-223-3483; 888-500-3483; Fax 619-223-3477)

Blue Escape Dive and Charter, 888-500-3483, September 2000, Gary R. Nachtigal (divedude@swbell.net)

Waxahachie, TX. Vis: 40 Feet. Water: 70 to 62 F. Solo diving allowed. Be prepared and qualified for penetration of the Yukon. Sunny and calm, one foot seas, 70 air temp and 62 at 100-foot. Though there were several dive boats at the Yukon, it is a large wreck at 366 feet; I only saw three other divers. Good briefings, divers were allowed to dive their own profile and treated as responsible divers. Included were bottled water, soda, snacks, fruit, cookies and pizza. Fresh water showers and two heads. Good operation. Rinse bucket for cameras. Tables inside for camera maintenance. Crew helped during entry and exit.

San Pedro

Psalty Adventures, 6/00, Ming Peng, (peng@hsc.usc.edu.), South Pasadena, CA. Vis: 40 to 80+ Feet. Calm. Fourth time with Psalty Adventures. Only six pack boat departing from San Pedro Harbor. No cattle boat. Dove the oil rigs off Long Beach. Played with sea lions

(about 10), saw Garibaldi, and other schools of fish. Pylons covered with white, orange, red, and purple coral polyps as well as scallops and mussels, which you can pry off and take home. Huge purple striped jellyfish. It is like an aquarium at these artificial reefs! Will need 6 mm suit with hood if not dry suit. Visibility 40 to 80+ feet. No restrictions; dive your own profile. Should be comfortable in open ocean and a confident diver. Unfortunately, one diver was lost doing this dive with a different operation. Breakfast, lunch, weights, and tanks provided. Did not go hungry. Did three dives. Arrive a dock around 7:30 am and back to harbor around 3:00 pm. Dining area is cleaned to serve as camera table. No dedicated rinse bucket, sink doubled as such. One photographer brought his own. All cameras treated with respect and care. Outstanding operation and highly recommended. They also do multi-day live-aboard trips (which I found fantastic) and California shark diving. (www.psaltyadventures.com)

Washington State

Orcas Island

Island Dive and Island Sports, July 2000, Rick Hughes, Seattle, WA. Vis: 10 to 50 ft. Water: 52 to 56 degrees. Dive your own profile. Dive restrictions: 80 ft. Island Dive and Water Sports is a wonderful operation with a courteous and knowledgeable staff. (360-376-7615; 800-303-8386; Fax 360-376-3743)