

## AFRICA

Any trip to Africa is best coupled with an inland safari. Timing your trip so that it coincides with animal migrations as well as the best diving season is a complicated affair; check with a specialist. . . . The diving off the coast of Kenya and Tanzania is hit-and-miss. Better diving is found around Pemba Island and off the coast of South Africa.

### Egypt / Red Sea

When the Red Sea was under Israeli control, the reefs were well-protected, but now, under Egyptian domain, Hurghada dive operators are failing to provide loving care to nearby reefs. Live-aboards are trying to move southward, but they're having difficulties with other governments. Most of the good southern sites have been closed. Check ahead to see if this has changed. Water temperatures can drop into the cool 60s during February and rise into the 80s by August. . . . Many divers combine a Red Sea trip with a visit to Israel and biblically historical sites.

**Aqua Sport, Taba Hilton, August 2000, Michael Blicher, Potomac, MD.** Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 70's degrees. Dive restrictions: Time and depth, 40 min, 60 ft. Disappointing dives. Wanted to dive the Red Sea during the trip to Israel and were told to cross into Egypt where the boat goes 1-2 hrs. south to better areas.

Little did we know that the boat travels 1 2 hours at about 1 mile per hour. So we didn't go far at all. The coral was blah and the fish were sparse. They treated experienced divers like they were beginners on a resort course (stay in formation, don't go below 60 ft, up in 40 min). **(Ph: (972) 7-6334404 (Egypt); fax (972) 7-6333771 (Egypt))**

### **Dive World Soma Bay, Sheraton Soma Bay, October 2000, Peter Louwerse, Gibelhof, Switzerland.**

We have dived the Red Sea for 10 years. The number of hotels (there are now over 130 in Hurghada alone) and divers has exploded to make diving some of the previously unmatched reefs virtually impossible, due to the number of dive boats moored there. Soma Bay opened last year. The Sheraton is a first-class hotel, with a corresponding level of service, facilities and food. The development includes an 18-hole Gary-Player-designed golf course and a number of private villas. Prices are what we pay at home in Switzerland. Soma Bay is South of Hurghada and North of Safaga. Most dive sites were also visited by operations from Safaga, with sometimes 6 boats at one reef. Dive operators are by law compelled to use Egyptian-owned boats and are not high quality. The boats have protection against the sun, but they usually carry up to 20 divers, have no facilities for photographers and lack navigational equipment (our boat had no compass or VHF). Dive World is well organized. C-cards and log books are checked, the dive instructors (one

German, one Italian) competent. We had problems with an Egyptian divemaster by the name of Ahmed. He planned his dives according to his 24-year-old endurance and air consumption, which was considerably different from my 63-year-old values. After two experiences, we went our own way. I had some equipment problems and had to rent a regulator and a BC from Dive World. While going up from 30 ft to 10 ft for my safety stop, the inflator would not let off air and I shot through to the surface — luckily without any ill effects. The weather was excellent. Air in the 90's and water about 80 F, the sea mostly flat as a mirror. Some dive sites are close to shore and truly remarkable for the variety of fish life (spotted two crowns-of-thorn starfish). Some are 1-1.5 hours by boat — always East, and with prevailing winds from the North that can make for a lot of seasickness! These far-out sites were truly excellent, with healthy corals, coral fish and several sharks (one hammerhead). We also dove the Salem Express, a ferry from Mecca to Safaga that went down in 1991 with about 700 passengers, of whom only 200 were saved. The wreck is at 100 ft, with little coral encrusting. Around the wreck lie suitcases and shoes and we believe it isn't really appropriate to dive such a recent wreck with so many casualties still in it. Next time we'll go farther South in our search for pristine reefs!

**Emperor Divers, November 2000,  
Bill Schlegel, Jefferson City, MO.**

I'm a 53 y.o. SSI Master Diver with 30 years of experience. I'd rate this a

very good diving. Sort of like "Cuzumel for the Italians". Well organized. Closely supervised. Absolute depth limits are 100 feet. We could do a little more after our divemasters got to know us. Some currents were strong, 3 to 4 knots and variable. Most dives no current. Curious mixture of close supervision and for depth and anarchy for keeping people together in the currents. Emperor Divers. Located downtown near a nice Hotel (The Rosetta) with shuttle service. Most divers and employees are European, 85%. 10% American and 5% or so Japanese etc. Visibility variable of course and up to 200 feet with the worst being 75 feet. Water 78. No hurry to cram a bunch of dives into each day — average of 2 with fairly long boat runs but the sites were worth it. Night dives available and very good. Nitrox available, but only one compressor/concentrator on a barge in the middle of the harbor. Must be a limited supply as our group of 16 divers cleaned out all the Nitrox in town for a 5 dive overniter. Typical Indo-Pacific flora and fauna. Did not see any big animals. Zillions of little reef fish and pretty healthy coral. The Thistleworm (wreck) dive is well known. Worth doing, but there were 13 dive boats tied up on it, 150 divers crawling over the wreck. Peripheral activities are to climb Mount Sinai — start at 2 am, and watch the sunrise. And to ride camels, at nite in the Sinai desert with Bedouin guides — quite a "hoot". Total cost \$180/day with air, from Kennedy and back. **(Ph: + 20 062 601734 or + 20 065 444854 (Egypt); fax + 20 062 601735 or + 20**

**065 444854 (Egypt); e-mail reservations@emperordivers.com ; website www.emperordivers.com)**

**Mangrove Bay, August 2000, Alex Thiermann, APO AE.** Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Dive restrictions; 99 ft. The resort is ideal for serious divers. No shopping, good food and excellent diving. 2 hour drive south of Hurghada and far from civilization. It is in the middle of the desert, a self contained 40 room resort. Clean rooms with A/C; food, buffet-style, provided by the resort. The diving is from two excellent boats leaving for the day at 9:00 am, as well as unlimited diving from the pier. Some of the best Red Sea diving is right out of your room. They also have a Zodiac that will take you whenever and where ever you want. Untouched coral, great fish, including shark, turtles, even the elusive and endangered Dougot (sea cow). The dive shop is managed by Germans, it is very professional as well as providing lots of freedom to advanced divers. Rental equipment is also available. Other than diving, not much else to do. (Ph: 00 20 2 3486748 (Egypt); fax 00 20 2 3605458 (Egypt); e-mail mangrove@egypt-online.com; website <http://red-sea.com/ducks/quseire.html>)

**Reef 2000, Bedouin Moon Hotel, April 2001, Isaac Aharon (scuba99779@aol.com) New York, NY.** Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 22-23 C. Dives logged: 125. Dive restriction: 100 ft. Good operation. Friendly not busy all the time. They had a big group of divers from U.K. The best dive was the Canyon. A big Napoleon

wrasse about 6 ft. was very friendly. One day I went on a camel safari to Ras Abu Galum. The Bells and the Blue Hole were very nice. General manager Mr. Ahamed Hassan was very helpful. The divemaster and instructors were excellent. The rooms were o.k. They have diving courses for all levels (Padi). If you don't dive you can stay and relax on the beach. E-mail: Reef2000intouch.com. (Ph: (002) 069 640 087; fax (002) 062 640 087; e-mail enquiries@reef2000.org; website [www.reef2000.org](http://www.reef2000.org))

**Sinai Dive Club, Naama Bayt, November 2000, Chiara Fantoni, Brussels, Belgium.** Water: 23-25 C. Dives logged: 12. Dive restrictions: 30 mts. Multilingual instructors (Italian, German, French, English, Japanese) particular attention to the customer and their individual needs. Individual instructor for all levels of certification courses, except for Medic First Aid which is just right. (Ph: 0020 12 2815210; fax 0020 69 601040; e-mail reservations@dive-club.com; website [www.dive-club.com](http://www.dive-club.com))

**Sinai Divers, Ghazala Hotel, July 2001, Pat Bridges, Nashville, TN.** Vis 100+. Water: 84 F. Logged dives: 200+. Egypt Air left my dive bag at JFK for 6 days. Their policy is to give priority to Egyptian nationals' personal cargo over that of tourists. And a lot of returning families had taped cartons the size of washing machines, so, I used rental gear for half my trip, courtesy of Sinai Divers, adequate equipment that included a computer. The Ghazala Hotel features

comfortable, remodeled bungalows and a restaurant, all staffed by good-natured personnel who spoke just enough English to help us along. Dinner one night was "America's Out West", complete with a butter sculpture of a cowboy. Most clientele are Germans, Italians and locals. Our group of twelve was the only Americans, except for one couple from Cajun country. The diving around Na'ama Bay is truly in a protected park-no gloves; no-take rules are enforced. Sinai Divers' dive boats are individually owned, so facilities are uneven. I dove on four different boats, each with different amenities in terms of deck showers, deck heads, rinse barrels, and space. The multilingual divemasters ranged from those who raced us along with a see-the-whole-reef-on-this-dive approach to those who cruised at a let's-get-a-good-look-at-this pace. The Straits of Tiran had the best hard corals I've experienced worldwide. The currents were so strong that attempts at photography were limited to aim-and-shoot. Two-tank boat trips were all-day affairs, at a slow pace that seemed like a lot of wasted time. Days were designed for relaxing between 9a.m. or so and 4 p.m., with a couple of dives thrown in. Lunches were prepared aboard by the captain and crew, excellent food, and all the warm sodas and water you wanted for \$7.50 U.S. Huge humpheads and Napoleons; unicorns and picassofish. Nudibranchs, the egg mass of a Spanish dancer, crocodilefish, pipefish, flashlight fish, two varieties of lionfish. Since my field guide was having a vacation at JFK, I

used the one on the dive boat. It was in German so I saw Rotmeer wimplefish, forsskals barbe und lyraschwanz korallen fisch. On drift dives, if you separated from the divemaster, an arms-above "o.k" sign at the surface brought the dive boat to get you. There's excellent cooperation among the 300-odd independent dive boats in sharing tie-up moorings and interboat communications to get divers back to where they need to be. From the hotel and its next-door dive shop there's limited diving right off the beach. The 40' max depth area has three nice size coral mounds that are home to a pride of lionfish, crocs, goby and shrimp combo holes, parson's hat urchins, and a swell variety of other fish. (Ph: +002069-600697 (Egypt); fax +002069-600158 (Egypt); e-mail [info@sinaidivers.com](mailto:info@sinaidivers.com); website [www.sinaidivers.com](http://www.sinaidivers.com))

### Madagascar

**Tsarabanjina Island Resort, 2001, Mel Butler ([mbutler621@aol.com](mailto:mbutler621@aol.com)) Claremont, CA.** Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm and flat. Dives logged: 800+. Restrictions: suggested depth and time but very lenient. 15 minute seaplane flight north of Nosy Be; beautiful resort with individual cottages, delightful bar, and great dining area, this resort was the perfect end to three weeks of walking through rainforests looking for lemurs, chameleons, and visiting villagers. Clive, the diving director, offers one boat dive morning and afternoon, primarily out to the Four Brother Islands. Nice dives comparable to Hawaii. The many recreational

activities. Reef fish are fairly numerous, but all pelagics and other large fish are fished out by the net fishermen. I don't think this would be a destination just to dive.

## South Africa

**Andy Cobb, Durban Area, May 2001, Edwin L. Granite, Wilmington, DE.** Vis: 20-50 ft.

Water: 68 F, choppy. Restrictions: Stay close to Andy. Andy Cobb is a great guy and very friendly and efficient diver and owner of the operation. He and his wife are great people. Andy is a legend in this area! But: Divers fight and push inflatables from shore through surf and then jump into boat. Must keep your feet in special straps and hold onto ropes to prevent falling out of boat, to and from dive sties. Water was rough, surge, swells, lousy visibility. Got seasick for first time in 30 years. Not easy to get back into boat! I'm told these are better dives when weather is better, but these dives were for die-hard divers! One redeeming issue: saw a school of 40-50 dolphins swim by during drift dive at protea banks. (Ph/ fax: +27 (0)31 9164239 (South Africa); e-mail [andycobb@iafrica.com](mailto:andycobb@iafrica.com); website [www.adventurescuba.co.za](http://www.adventurescuba.co.za) )

**Marine Dynamics, May 2001, Edwin L. Granite, Wilmington, DE.** Vis: 20 ft. Water: 53 F, calm and flat. Logged Dives: too many to county since 1968. Marine Dynamics run by JP Botha and Andre Hartmann in Gaansbai, South Africa — 2 hours out of Cape Town — These are the guys depicted in National Geographic

Magazine April 2000 issue on great white cage dives. Unusually warm and sunny, flat seas — saw 6 great whites, largest 16 ft. — great video opportunity. This is the dive operation for great whites in South Africa! This day was probably the high point of my 33 years of diving around the world! (e-mail [jpb@iafrica.com](mailto:jpb@iafrica.com); website [www.dive.co.za](http://www.dive.co.za))

**Two Oceans Aquarium, Cape Town, May 2001, Edwin L. Granite, Wilmington, DE.** Logged Dives: too many to county since 1968. Do not miss these 2 dives if you go to Cape Town! Tank #1: predators - 5-6 enormous, fat sand tiger sharks (they call them "snaggies") and rays, turtles, jacks, etc. Tank #2: Kelp tank — beautiful kelp forest with indigenous flora and fauna — colder than tank #1 6mm wetsuits for protection. The aquarium will provide all needed equipment. About 53 F. (Ph: +27-21-418-3823 (South Africa); fax +27-21-418-3952 (South Africa); e-mail [aquarium@aquarium.co.za](mailto:aquarium@aquarium.co.za); website [www.aquarium.co.za](http://www.aquarium.co.za))

## Umkomaas

**Whaler Dive Center, April 2001, Nancy Aberg, Vacaville, CA.** Vis: 25-34 ft. Water: 60-65 F. Wetsuit: 5mm. Dive restrictions: none, but should state No Beginners! (My lifetime dives totaled only 4 at this time. ) Adventure diving, not recreational diving! Rough, choppy sea took the 7 meter Rubber Duck with twin engines 30 minutes to just make it through the surf. Rough sea with huge swells required holding on to the

raft ropes to prevent being pitched into the sea. After the 45 minute shear terror ride, we arrived at the Aliwal Shoal dive site. Despite my right arm being numb from holding tight and my stomach about to lose its contents, I somehow managed to make my very first backward roll boat entry perfectly. My appointed buddy, a German student, left me behind immediately. (I learned later why he left. South African divers have been taught to dive down immediately to prevent being carried away by the strong currents.) Then I discovered that I had not been supplied enough weights to submerge. Not having any extra equipment in the boat, I was forced to abort the dive and return to the boat to chum the Fish. Lesson learned: no matter how nice the office folks are, it is the divemaster's wisdom that makes for a good dive. If it is a foul sea, no other companies are diving, and there are no life jackets aboard and no extra weights, don't go. Also, although I made reservations far in advance, the students that were passing their certification exam that day took precedence over a recreational customer. There should have been two dive master's on board. One to examine the students and a buddy for my dive. I canceled the rest of my week of diving with The Whaler. Aliwal Shoals is for advanced divers who want adventure diving. (Ph: **039 9731562/3 (South Africa)**; fax **+27 39 973 1564 (South Africa)**; e-mail **info@whaler.co.za**; website **www.whaler.co.za**)

### Sodwana

**Sodwana Bay Dive Center, April 2001, Nancy Aberg, Vacaville, CA.**

Vis: 65-70 ft. Water: 70-75 F. Wetsuit: 5mm. Rebecca gave a very informative pre-dive briefing. Safety and enjoyment were the two main focuses. Surf much calmer; dive operators require life jackets be worn for the 3 min ride through the waves. Easy trip to the Two Mile Reef dive site. Dolphins on both trips and divers were given the option of snorkeling with them. A very pleasant recreational dive to 50 ft. Saw my first rays and lots of gorgeous coral. Tropical fish everywhere. Second day went to Nine Mile Reef and dove to 65 feet. Saw my first eels and went through my first cave. Third dive was to Seven Mile Reef and dove to 70ft. Accommodations at Sodwana Bay Lodge were great. (Ph: **+27 (0) 35 571 0117 (South Africa)**; fax **+27 (0) 35 571 0055 (South Africa)**; e-mail **sblsc@icon.co.za**; website **www.sodwanadiving.co.za**)

### Tanzania

**Sea Breeze Dive Center, Bahari Beach Hotel, Penni Davis-Tantum, October 2000.** Vis: 60 ft. Water: Upper 70's. I was in Dar es Salaam, diving, on October 4 2000. I was the only diver so the divemaster and I went out in a Zodiac. There were two guys who came along as crew, I guess. The first site was called T-bone wall. It was nice — vis was in the neighborhood of 60 feet. Saw octopus, Moorish idols, remora, lionfish, on a fairly decent wall. Second dive called Coral City. The vis was not very good — maybe 20 feet or so. Saw more lionfish, lots of coral, something that looked like bunches of green grapes,

and a huge coral head split in half. When we came up, he (divemaster) said that they had obviously been fishing (with dynamite) a few days earlier. He also said that the vis was usually better from November through March. If I had known they had din valve tanks available, I wouldn't have converted to yolk before I went. The Bahari Beach and the dive operation were about an hour outside of town. The Bahari Beach is a functional hotel, right on the beach. There were very few people staying there when we were there. We only had one meal there — dinner — which consisted of a chicken leg and thigh and French fries. We couldn't eat the lettuce and tomato (fresh veggies in a foreign country washed in their water is a "no, no" for us). The hotel was about \$100 per night and the meal was cheap. Diving was \$60 for a two-tank dive.

## INDONESIA

Indonesia is a dive hot spot that unfortunately provides few choices. . . . While Bali's culture is fantastic (especially if you get away from the coast), the diving's not as spectacular as in other parts of Indonesia. . . . On Bali's east coast the *Liberty* wreck at Tulamben is a favorite among fish specialists, who claim to find a new species on every visit. On the north end there's a good chance of diving with mola molas. . . . While they're certainly harder to get to than Bali, I think the Banda Islands have some of the best coral and fish life

in the world. . . . Although it offers few big fish, Wakatobi, a operation in remote southern Sulawesi, offers fantastic color, amazing biodiversity, and one of the best beach dives in the world. . . . If bizarre and rare creatures are a lure, Ambon has a dive that surpasses even PNG's famous muck dives, as does Kungkungan Bay in northern Sulawesi. . . . If you're into big turtles (and lots of them), Borneo Diver's operation on Sangalaki, which once got excellent reviews, is again open, and nearby Derawan Resort dives these waters as well. . . . The island of Flores had great diving until it was hit by a typhoon and tidal wave that destroyed its reefs. . . . Although it's seldom been reached by live-aboards, the diving around Komodo, the home of the dragons, is excellent.

. . . . The volatile political scene has put a cloud over diving Indonesia, so check with the State Department before travel, and inquire about specific destinations rather than asking about the country as a whole. Before you leave, get a copy of Kal Muller's *Underwater Indonesia*. . . .

## Bali

**Bali Club Diver, April 2001, Les Sowitch, Morrison, CO. Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 83-87 F. Logged dives: 50+. B.C.D. allowed us a short ride by auto to get to the boat. The entire operation was bad: 45 minutes late to pick us up — no apologies; 20 min**