

CANADA

If you can take cold water, the rewards include an incredible array of filter feeders and marine life that you'll never dive with in warm waters. A handful of funky boats and great crews make it possible to get in the water with orcas and other wonders of the cool-water world. . . .

Vancouver Island

Marquira Resort, July 2000, Valarie Batdorf, Gresham, OR. Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 52-54 F. Dive restrictions: Be safe. This is the best of N.W. diving. Pretty fish, some soft corals, hundreds of colorful invertebrates. Tashis does get migrating whales that stop by in the spring and fall but we were there in summer. We did encounter schools of dogfish sharks and several six gill sharks, harbor seals and an abundance of other life that rivals anything they have in the tropics.

COSTA RICA

Costa Rica is famous among experienced divers for uninhabited Cocos Island, three hundred miles offshore. If you're out for challenging, high-tension, big-animal dives among hammerheads, mantas, occasional whale sharks, and other awe-inspiring creatures of the Pacific deep, Cocos is one of the more reliable places on earth to find them, but it's not for the faint-of-heart, coral lovers, or those out-of-tune with their skills. . . . Follow the weather

pattern when planning trips as the number of sharks is negatively impacted during El Niño years. . . . Visibility and water conditions, however, are unpredictable, with both visibility and wind down in the rainy season (roughly May through November). . . . Northwestern Costa Rica's land-based diving is a smaller-scale version of Cocos Island. There are plenty of sharks (although no massing hammerheads) and a big-ocean feeling with rigorous conditions and an awesome amount of fish life (including good odds of seeing a whale shark) and often poor visibility. . . . Bat Island offshore is the place to go, so insist on it before booking. . . . Beaches vary from not-so-great to decent, but nature side trips are definitely a double "yes". . . . Though Spanish is the national language, English-only speakers can get by. . . .

Bay of Papagayo

Bill Beard's Diving Safaris, Sol Playa Hermosa Resort, February 2001, Pat Wikstrom, Warne, NC. Playa Hermosa (Pretty Beach) is similar to both Playa del Coco and Playa Ocotol to the south and Playa Panama over the mountain to the north. These resort towns are flanked by mountain ridges that enclose their individual curved bays and beaches. Our \$489/person package was based on three buddies sharing a room with a roll away bed. But they couldn't find a roll-way and upgraded us to a two story, two bedroom villa with a full kitchen, two lovely balconies, two