

or enquiries@castawayfiji.com.fj;
website www.castawayisland.com)

Waya

Octopus Resort, March 2001, John Williams, Ocate, NM. Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 83-86 F. Logged dives: 350 ±, 44 yrs, 63 yrs. old. Dive restrictions enforced: 30 M. 50 bar safe stp. Positive: 10 bures.. Most incredible in Fiji. Island very wonderful eyeful of green with black basalt and boulder and cliffs. Negative: Reefs of spur and grooves, completely devastated covered in red-brown algae, eutroficating bubbles rising, walking on reefs, netting last 4-6 fishies, beating water with 2-3 meter sticks to drive fish. (ARRGH)! Had bad experience with "Great Expeditions" We paid \$13,700 for 3 mos. of idyllic snorkeling and diving. Great Astrolabe Reef is completely dead and down (there 1 month), Dive Kandavu Reefs sad; Castaway reefs south dead and down, Castaway north 50% gone, something smashing green pocillipora hexacorals in middle We asked for 28 days of refund! Paid \$600 to leave early. \$800 trip, cancel insurance; void. No apologies! No refunds. (Ph: (679) 666 337; fax (679) 666 210; e-mail octopus_resort@yahoo.com; website www.octopusresort.com)

FRENCH POLYNESIA

Tahiti and Moorea are everyone's dream of the South Pacific, and despite their pricey resorts and food, these French-speaking islands are developing as a destination for American divers

since there is plenty of reef shark action. Some areas have not seen many divers There are a range of accommodations, though generally it's expensive....the once snotty French attitude toward others seems to have lessened considerably.

Bora Bora

Ben Heriteau, Bora Bora Parkroyal Resort, June 2001, Bob & Dorothy McDonald, Strongsville, OH.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 150 to 200 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Although the island is pricey, the resort and the over-water bungalows are lovely, the food is good, and the staff friendly. Lots of local restaurants will pick you up at the resort and drive you to the restaurant. Ben Heriteau only takes 2 divers out at a time. He has a small boat with some shade. He wore a full face mask and put receivers on our masks so we could hear him. Before the first dive we wondered if he would be talking nonstop. No he only talked to tell us something about the underwater sea life that we did not know. He asked what we wanted to see and do. Most dive sites were a 15 minute ride. He gets to sites earlier than other boats — often we were finishing a dive as another boat showed up. No shore diving or night dives. One day he did take us to the other end of the island (a 50 minute ride) to see gray sharks. There was a fairly strong current and plenty of shark action. We even saw a gray shark being cleaned by a wrasse, lemon sharks, black tip sharks, gray sharks, permits, a squadron of 6 eagle

rays, eels, turtles, bum head Maori wrasse, lion fish, clown fish, titan trigger fish, etc. On the boat rides we even saw flying fish. Ben's boat is small (we've been on boats this size that take 4 divers — which is too crowded). We waded out in knee deep water. Left gear on boat, he cleaned and dried for next day's dive. Although he charges a little more than other operations it is worth it to do own thing. No one is on the boat during the dive, but we found this was also often the case with some of the larger operators in this area. **(Ph: (689) 79 22 25 or (689) 67 69 36 or (689) 79 22 55; fax (689) 67 69 36)**

**Bora Diving Center, May 2001,
Arthur F. Graf Jr., San Antonio, TX.**

Two tank dives each day at \$70 US. Mostly of inner reef diving with reef fish, mantas, small sharks and eagle rays, the reefs were in very good condition, consisting of mainly hard corals with few anemone. One day the sea was calm and we went outside the lagoon to dive Muri Muri. We had six reef sharks accompany us down and sixteen swimming around us. The flat reef is covered with hard coral at 80'. Visibility was 100+'. There were a number of standard open water fish including barracuda and black tip, white tip, and gray sharks, large lemon sharks kept their distance but were visible. **(Ph: (689) 67 71 84 or (689) 67 74 83; fax (689) 67 74 83; e-mail boradiving@mail.pf; website www.boradive.com)**

Huahine

**Pacific Blue Adventure, July 2001,
Richard Heath (rehcpa@att.net)**

Surfside Beach, SC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 400 to 500 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. A great dive experience. The dive operator, Didier, took 7 of us out along with his assistant — total of 9 in the boat. Dive master and assistant spoke good English. Saw a couple of schools of the small dolphins on the trip out. Coral formations and water were excellent. Sea life and various rock and coral formations are fantastic. If you can dive only one island in the French Polynesia society islands — this would be the dive group to go with. You take a free bus from the dock to the town of Fare — the dive shop is located right in town and at the dock for the dive boat. Folks friendly and considerate. Didier asked if I could take a BCD that a diver on the ship had left on his boat. He said if I could it would save him from mailing to the next island to get it back to them. The people that left the BCD had not realized they had till I returned it to them! **(Ph: (689) 68 87 21; fax (689) 68 80 71 ; e-mail info@divehuahine.com or pba@divehuahine.com; website www.divehuahine.com)**

**Pacific Blue Adventure, July 2001,
Cottrell Fox (cfox@jwterrell.com) St
Louis, MO.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 125 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm. The Pacific Blue operation is outstanding. The friendly divemasters are French and Polynesian but all speak good English — language is not a barrier any where in FP. The boat was a comfortable 30+ ft steel center console with swim

platform and deco bar. Pre dive briefings were excellent. We dove the Huahine harbor pass — the top of the wall was at 100 feet. The wall drops of straight down into the deep, deep blue. Saw turtles, a school of eagle rays and sharks galore — lemons, grays, white tips and black tips. Of all of the islands we liked Huahine the best because it was authentically Polynesian and less touristy. However even the big tourist attractions like Bora Bora and Moorea were invariably hospitable and very friendly and arguably the most beautiful islands on Earth!

Manihi

Manihi Blue Nui, Pearl Beach Resort, October 2000, Lisa Lawler (mrplow@execpc.com), Kenosha, WI. Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 84 F.

Logged dives: 80. Dive restrictions: don't go lower than divemaster — let them know when low on air. Fabulous accommodations. Beautifully furnished individual over-water bungalows with private deck and steps leading right into water. Restaurants were open air and had very large menus. Food was ordered off menu. Desserts were buffet. Kia Ora Village on Rangiroa had evening entertainment each night. Dive shops were located right on the hotel grounds. Employees were very informative and helpful and divemasters were great. Equipment could be rented and it looked very well kept. Videos were available for cost. Zodiacs so you needed a lot of upper body strength to haul yourself in the boat with all of your equipment still on. Diving in the pass was definitely a wild ride and on

a lot of dives the surge at the end during the 15 foot safety stop was pretty strong. Both dive shops did shark feedings and while I really don't approve of this, it was really something to be surrounded by dozens of sharks. Sea life was plentiful — couldn't believe how much there was to see! Lionfish, octopus, triggerfish, parrotfish, eels trumpetfish, stonefish, peacock flounder, huge Napoleon, eagle rays, manta rays, sharks and turtles. Huge schools of barracudas and snappers. Had 2 mantas play with us, circling and swooping in at us in about 20 feet of water. **(Mahini Blue Nui Ph/fax: (689) 96 42 17; e-mail manihi.blue.nui@mail.pf; Manihi Pearl Beach Resort: Ph: +689 96-4273 or +689 43-1610)**

Mahini Blue Nui, Manihi Pearl Beach Resort, June 2001, Bob & Dorothy McDonald Strongsville, OH. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, currents. The over-water bungalows are fabulous — complete with glass tables that have lift off tops for feeding fish in water below bungalows. We wore microprone suits and were comfortable. No shore diving offered. Typically a morning dive, back to resort, and then an afternoon dive. The resort staff was very friendly. Bikes available for touring, salt water pool, even a miniature golf course. Tahitian entertainment nightly. Food very good — no other place to eat. Some shade on boat. Short rides to dive sites. Usually 5 to 6 divers. Except for drift dive, usually no one remained on boat. A variety of fish

including the usually present black tip sharks, manta rays, peacock grouper, Titan triggerfish, turkey fish, lion fish, a huge stone fish (at least a foot high), butterfly fish, banner fish, giant morays, bump head Maori wrasse, spotted eagle rays, etc. One roller coaster drift dive in a 5 or 6 knot current did not have a good profile but sure was fun and exciting. Grabbed hold of a rock and peered into an undercut to see a group of 6 or 7 white tip sharks taking a rest; a huge manta going against the current paused in its flight to check us out; even an octopus watched us as we zoomed along.

Moorea

Bathy's Club Moorea, Moorea Beachcomber Parkroyal, March 2001, Pamela and Powell Arms (divepam@home.com) Narberth, PA. Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, calm. Perfect operation for a novice diver. A lot of hand holding, good briefings, follow the leader. My husband and I both have 200+ dives so we were not truly appreciative of these services. There were never more than 12 people, and they made an effort to split you up by experience and steer you away from a boat full of new divers. I often had to end my dive at 45 minutes because that is when we were directed to head up — often with 1,000 lbs of air or more. Reg was always hanging off the boat for the heavy breathers. There was a hang bar at 15 feet which sometimes you needed when the current picked up. They run an exciting shark dive to Tiki Point — 40 sharks, mostly black

reef sharks (saw them on every dive), several gray sharks, and a few lemon sharks. After 20 minutes, you actually go on a dive. They did a stingray feeding at 30 feet which was a very different experience from stingray city and the rays (4 or 5) were quite interactive. The boats are not set up for photographers at all though the dive shop is photographer friendly and very video friendly. Juan Pedro who owns the dive shop is safety conscience and keeps all equipment in top condition. Baby-sitting is available at \$20 per dive via Juan Pedro's wife who is a pediatric nurse. Our 3 year old had a good experience with her and their 2 year old daughter. French, English, and Spanish spoken. Pickups are available from other resorts and cruise ships at no cost, taxis are outrageous on Moorea. With no rental equipment our 10 dive total (for a couple) package was about \$400 US. Single dives are more expensive. No boat ever leaves on time — there are usually 4 dives a day, none left close to on time — though the rest of the island works like clockwork. There is a lot of standing around. No water on the boat and poor facilities for photographers. Divemasters ranged from friendly to not so friendly. We enjoyed diving with Florent but the rest of the crew was hit or miss. My bottom time was severely impaired by the legions of beginners, cruise ship divers, and those who had not touched their snorkel since they were certified 5 years ago. They need to learn that part of diving is sitting on the boat waiting for others. The hotel is being converted to an Intercontinental. There

was a lot of renovations going on while we were there, it was loud. Get a straight answer about the ongoing construction. Breathtakingly beautiful setting, the traditional hotel rooms are not that nice and the upgrade cost is minimal. The food at the hotel is outrageously expensive and the closest store is 1.5 miles away. Hoof it to the town, invest in a taxi; but do not give in to the \$20 continental breakfast buffet or \$7 glass of juice or you will feel ripped off. We had some issues with service and wrote a letter upon our return — it was answered in three days and we refunded money, which was very fair. Air Tahiti Nui had excellent service and food, and the flight times were much more favorable than the Air France flight. We arrived in time for a good night's sleep. If you are traveling without kids I would recommend 4 days here, then hop over to Bora Bora and Rangiroa. Also, if you have a late night flight out of Tahiti (ours was at midnight) book a room for the day at the Hotel Tiare. Tahiti is cheap, clean, and air-conditioned. Papeete is a culture shock after Moorea. (Ph: (689) 56 31 44 or (689) 55 19 39; fax (689) 56-3810; e-mail bathys@mail.pf)

Bathy's Club Moorea, Moorea Beachcomber Parkroyal, June 2001, Bob & Dorothy McDonald, Strongsville, OH. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. The resort is gorgeous although expensive. Lots of good restaurants on the island that will make free pickups at the resorts. The weather was sunny and gorgeous

our last day when we weren't diving! Despite weather the visibility was excellent. The diving was very controlled and is suitable for beginners and those who don't mind sticking with the guide. The guide always carries a food/scent canister to attract fish. One dive was a shark feed — besides the ever present black tips two 8' -10' lemon sharks attended. There were a large variety of fish including titan triggerfish, banner fish, snapper, clown fish, lion fish, butterfly fish, remoras looking for a free ride on divers or air tanks, black tip sharks, giant morays, turtles. Corals just so-so. One dive in morning, back to shore, one dive in afternoon. Rides to sites 10 to 15 minutes usually.

Bathy's Club Moorea, Beachcomber Hotel, July 2001, Jim & Donna Cox (jimndonnacox@home.com) Federal Way, WA. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm choppy surge. Our first dive experience after certification in Puget Sound. We had our checkout lagoon dive with Hughes (who spoke excellent English as well as French). He worked with us on how to improve our time and dive enjoyment. We then progressed to open ocean dives (in choppy seas) with Eric as the instructor (again good English and French). Very patient with us newbies. Facilities were clean and well organized (although they had run out of souvenir shirts). We advanced rapidly increasing our time to reasonable levels and depths to 100'. We had experienced divers with us (they were with another diver master) and they dove a different profile. Sting ray

dive. Very shallow (18') but rays all over us as we fed them. The shark feeding dive was great as well. Black tip reef sharks, gray sharks and a lemon shark. Big moray's, lion fish, stone fish, trigger fish, garden eels, etc. etc.

Moorea Fun Dive, July 2001,
Richard Heath (rehcpa@att.net)
Surfside Beach, SC. Experience:
251-500 dives. Vis: 300 to 500 Feet.
Water: 78 to 81 F, calm. A great dive
experience. Swam with a school of
black tip sharks and a few brown
sharks. Snapper; grouper also many
tropicals – including Napoleon fish.
This operator had his act together; his
boat meets you at the dock — go
straight out for first dive, go back to
his dive shop for second tank. His dive
shop located on a topless beach —
which was extra benefit for guys!
Corals were excellent. Our dive master
played with a moray, scratching it under
the chin; eel followed him to another
part of the reef . When he went to
scratch it this time another moray eel
darted out toward his arm. Could have
been really interesting. They focus on
overall safety — well planned dives.
(Ph: (689) 56 40 38; fax (689) 56 40
74; e-mail fundive@mail.pf;
website <http://www.fundive.pf>)

Moorea Fun Dive, Bora Dive
Center, September 2001, Dack
Patrick, Norcross, GA. Being newly
certified divers, we went on four dives
during our ten day cruise. Three were
a fabulous and exhilarating experience
— sharks, exotic fish, whales, giant
mantas, sting rays, beautiful coral.
Moorea Fun Dive Center and Pierre,

respects your experience level. Bora
Dive Center — a true professional
Eric, made safety first, made sure we
were comfortable and coached us as
we dove our plan. He made my wife
and me cross a threshold in diving —
we finally relaxed and found out it
was ok to have fun! Top Dive on Bora
Bora; the facility was beautiful. Hotel
on the beach, a pool, a store for
equipment and souvenirs, and lots of
new equipment. Bad weather had
canceled the early morning dives, so
we were rushed and felt like they were
trying to make up for lost revenues.
We were not asked to fill out paper-
work, they did not ask to see our dive
cards or logs. Our dive master showed
no interest in our experience. The
divemaster told me to use 5lbs less
than I did earlier that week. As my
wife and I were preparing for the dive,
other divers were already going down
the anchor line. We were left on the
boat with a member of the dive shop
that did not speak English nor did he
offer any assistance. My wife went in
the water first and looked back at the
boat to give the “ok” signal to find he
was not paying attention nor did he
even acknowledge her signal. I
received the same “no response.” As I
started to descend, I did not have
enough weight nor would the dive
master give me any more and told me
would have to get back in the boat. “I
don’t have time to fool around with
you, I must get down with the other
divers.” I was very upset and did not
belong in the water. I received no
assistance from the dive shop member
on the boat as I exited the water. The 45
minutes I sat on the boat while my wife

and other divers finished the dive, this man did not act like I was even there. My wife and I canceled the second part of the scheduled two tank dive.

Rangiroa

Blue Dolphin Dive Center, Kia Ora Hotel, November 2000, Michael Fox, Shinkawa, Tokyo. Vis 40-100+,

Temperature 80-83 F. Hotel overpriced. Rooms are getting old but the restaurant was fine with a wide enough selection. Three dives a day (8:30, 10:30 and 2) with the 10:30 dive usually in the lagoon for training dives, snorkelers or new divers. Sometimes, they will take a group out to the pass at 10:30. In the lagoon I saw a juvenile eagle ray, banded pipe fish, some whitetips, a large stone fish and lots of reef fish. At the shop everyone puts on their wetsuits and walks to the inflatables (20 yards). Dives sites were 5-10 minutes. Tanks with BCs are already on the boats. Dives in the pass started from outside the lagoon and through the pass. Some dives the current was ripping while other dives there was no current. Some currents swept you across the entrance of the pass so that you finished the dive outside of the lagoon. One group drifted 45 minutes before the driver realized what had happened. The dives through the pass were great. I usually saw 10~30 sharks per dive, mantas and eagle rays on most dives, dolphins on half the dives, lots of dogtooth tuna, turtles, large schools of barracuda and a huge school of snapper at the entrance of the pass. Some of the staff (Megumi, Philip, Sebastian) were hardworking

and great to dive with. Others were at times indifferent. Junko (the manager) made an extra effort to meet any request. Although the lagoon is calm, the channel leading to the outside was choppy. Everyone sat on the edge of the 20 foot inflatable and held onto a rope that ran alongside. Once at the site, the divemasters helped you put on your BC and then it was an easy backroll. With 3-4 foot swells, at times it was uncomfortable. Cameras were either laid on the floor of the inflatable or held onto with one hand while the other hand held the panga's rope. **(Ph: (689) 96 03 01; fax (689) 96 03 01; e-mail bluedolphins@mail.pf)**

Blue Dolphin Dive Center, Kia Ora Resort, March 2001, Barbara Price, Oakland, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 82-84 F, calm choppy surge, no currents. French Polynesia is extremely beautiful topside. Rangiroa has world-class diving with schools of hundreds of very big barracuda, and other large fish, countless sharks: black tip, gray, lagoon, and silvertip. Napoleon wrasse, turtles and giant mantas too. Huge numbers of many species of tropicals. Coral outside atoll is healthy, interesting and varied — unlike the prolific colorful coral of the Caribbean, however. Coral inside the atoll was 90% dead from El Niño, unlike 25 years ago when lagoon snorkeling was great. Beginner diving inside the lagoon would be good if the coral were alive but without it, diving for snorkeling is limited. Diving requires experience and skill because you're diving from Zodiacs in rough water entry and exit; considerable

currents and surge sometimes, must have buoyancy control and good air consumption to do silvertip shark feeding dive which is a great experience (unlike tourist shark-feeding dives in Bora! Bora which are fun but casual). Accommodations were great and food is good.

Tahiti

Aquatica Dive Center, La Meridien Hotel, May 2001, Arthur F. Graf Jr., San Antonio, TX. Vis: 30 ft.

Aquatica Dive Center. Aquatica is located at the Tahiti Beachcomber Parkroyal, but they offer free transportation from hotels. Aquatica is a first class shore diving service with excellent guides and good short range dive boats. They furnish aluminum 80's filled to 3000+ lbs. Visibility inside the reefs was about 30'. The dives consisted of slanting reefs and walls. Numerous reef fish and some sharks. The reefs consisted of hard corals in good condition. **(Ph: (689) 53 34 96 or (689) 77 60 01; fax (689) 43 10 65; e-mail dive@aquatica-dive.com or aquatica@mail.pf ; website www.aquatica-dive.com)**

Aquatica Dive Center, June 2001, Richard Heath (rehcpa@att.net) Surfside Beach, SC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 25 to 100 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm. We cruised Tahiti aboard a Renaissance Cruise Ship: Aquatica Diving Center: Dive operation was very lax in pick up. Schedule called for 8:30AM — was picked up at a few minutes before 9. Dive boat small for the number of divers. Due to size of boat, had to return to shore to exchange tanks for

2nd dived. Water clarity, dive location and overall operation of dive was less than desirable. I dove 3 other islands in the French Polynesia, and if I would have know about the poor quality of this dive location, I would have skipped this first island. The others Moorea, Huahine and Bora Bora were all superior to this island and excellent dives well worth the whole trip! **(Per their website at www.renaissancecruises.com, Renaissance Cruises ((800) 525-5350) ceased cruise operations and filed for bankruptcy on 9/25/01.-ed.)**

Aquatica Dive Center, Beachcomber Hotel, July 2001, Jim & Donna Cox (jimndonnacox@home.com) Federal Way, WA. Experience: 0-25 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Wonderful dive center. Didier (dive shop owner) and Lionell (instructor) were great! They were very helpful, patient and considerate to us. Gave us good directions and help on areas to improve. Facilities are clean and well organized. Rental equipment appeared to be in great shaper. Deco bar used on boat as well as extra tank with octos at deco. We dove both lagoon and open ocean. Deepest dive was 105'. Lots to see, corals, moray's Napoleon fish, etc., etc. Highly recommend for the beginner or experienced diver. Didier and Lionell both speak excellent English (as well as French of course). Clean dip tanks, can process film locally.

HAWAII

Hawaiian guides have generally developed great skill in finding the