

drive to Suva (approximately 4 hours) to meet the boat, and we then cruised for 6 hours to the first dive site. After disembarking at Suva, we had another long drive back to Nadi. Although the boat returned on Tuesday evening, our flight from Nadi did not leave until 10:00 PM on Thursday. I was unprepared for the extra day on land. No explanation was given for omitting E-6 from our dive itinerary. The extent of bleached and dead hard corals (mostly at Gau Island and the Lau Group) was disheartening. Some sites were colorless with few fish, and the hard corals were covered with algae. However, this did not affect the soft corals in the Bligh Waters and Somosomo Straits. I stayed in cabin #4, next to the engine room. On most nights the boat cruised for several hours, and the engine noise was excessively loud. Underwater the boat noise was also unusually loud. 2 scheduled island visits during our trip. We spent one night at Vanuabalavu Island (Northern Lau Group) and several guests went to Greg's coconut plantation for a kava ceremony with the locals; the tribal chief welcomed divers for a tour of his village on Gau Island. We stayed at the Tanoa International Hotel in Nadi, which is conveniently located near the airport and downtown shopping area, comfortable and quiet, but I don't recommend the hotel restaurant. Mama's Pizza Inn was surprisingly good.

**Sere-Ni-Wai, June 2001, Patty Shales (aquating@aol.com) Los Angeles, CA.** Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 78-80 F, calm and flat, choppy. Diving restrictions: 130 ft. Logged dives: 1,500.

Terrific live-aboard. The crew of 4 men took care of all our needs. E-6 process. Every night. The boat caters to divers and photographers making the entry and exit safe and easy. The shack dive and Nagoli Passage was awesome. We saw barracudas schooling on 3 separate dive sites. A good variety of tropicals – flame hawkfish, 2 varieties of leaf fish, blue ribbon eels by the half dozen. Mantas on 4 different sites.

## **FRENCH POLYNESIA**

### **Tahiti**

**MS Paul Gauguin, May 2001, Arthur F. Graf Jr., San Antonio, TX.** Top of the line small cruise ship, with plenty of excellent food. The dive program offered by Radisson is expensive and offers only five dives for the trip at \$70 per dive. The equipment furnished by Radisson is first class. I dove Raiatea which has only one good dive site, with Radisson. We dove Moorea with Radisson and their program was timed so that we could fly out the following day. Moorea has two good dive sites that can be easily reached from the harbors. These consist of the usual hard corals (in very good condition) with numerous reef fish and some sharks, an occasional eagle ray. (Ph: 800-477-7500 (US); e-mail [mmantia@radisson.com](mailto:mmantia@radisson.com); website [www.rssc.com](http://www.rssc.com))

**Orava, April 2001, Alan D. Hutchison, Reno, NV.** Seven-day dive cruise. Great diving area, but we were less than happy with the attitude of the French crew. Spent some time

in Papette as well as a few days ashore at Rangiroa. On shore the attitude of both the French and the Polynesians was fine. Most of the French even spoke English to us. The staff at the Meridian Hotel in Papette and the staff at Kia Ora Hotel in Rangiroa were helpful, friendly and efficient. The food at the hotels and local restaurants was excellent and prices were not that high — maybe US\$25-30 per person for a first class dinner with wine. The hard coral reefs of the Tuamoto Archipelago just north and east of Tahiti are some of the healthiest I have seen in three years diving “world class” reefs in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. There is no sign of coral bleaching and the hard corals are extensive with a magnificent variety of reef and pelagic fish. Orava is a 58-foot catamaran from Fakarava Atoll to Rangiroa operated by Archipel Croisières Polynésienne with offices in Moorea and Paris. The purpose of the dive cruise was to dive the many channels from the ocean to the lagoon. You must have a favorable wind, plus the incoming tide. Gearing up on a sailing catamaran is not ideal, but there were only six passengers with only four divers. Using two small rubber inflatables it worked well. If the boat had a full complement there would have been overcrowding. The inflatables took us to the mouth of the channel and we rolled off and headed directly to the bottom at around 90 feet. It's a rubble dump from the strong currents, but the fish life was thrilling. We drifted at around 2-3 knots under an enormous circling school of gray reef sharks. There were

between 100 to 200 gray reefs. As we drifted into the lagoon we passed schooling chevron barracudas and jacks. The inflatables picked us up in the lagoon where the current abated. During the rest of this eight-day trip the wind was blowing hard and we could not do any more channel drift dives, but we managed two dives a day on the outside reefs. Almost every dive we were rewarded with gray reef sharks and many white tipped sharks, along with big hawksbill turtles, and manta rays on a couple of dives. Up close the reef was full of butterfly fishes and angels, many varieties of surgeonfishes and many groupers. Diving was under the strict control of our young French divemaster. He insisted on the small group of four staying behind him on the reef and ran the dive according to his computer. Considering that all four divers were in the sixties, this was running a very aggressive profile. The divers were well experienced (over 1000 dives) so when we felt it time to surface we did, but the divemaster was not happy with us. Being aboard a French yacht with a crew of six, I was expecting wonderful food. At the crack of dawn. The French crew was asleep, except for the weary captain. There was no coffee. I noticed the captain had a cup of coffee, so I asked him where I could find some coffee. He sat there in silence for a few moments then without a word rose and pulled out a thermos of coffee kept for the crew. This was routine every morning. Around 8 AM a French breakfast of coffee, bread, butter and jam was served. After many requests this was

supplemented by a few soft/hard boiled eggs. The diet was mostly fish, both raw and overcooked. While we did have some tuna, most of the fish served was reef fish, including a unicorn fish! Several of us developed stomach problems! The crew went spearfishing for our evening meal. With all of the grouper down there, they always came back with reef fish. Perpetually hungry, we searched the ship for snacks to hold us over until dinner at 8 pm. We did not get a safety briefing from the captain. We did not know the location of life vests or fire extinguishers. The crew was all from France. The attitude was that the passengers were interfering with their ability to enjoy themselves. I asked the captain if this attitude resulted from the policy of "no tipping" in French Polynesia. "Oh no", the captain replied, "we do expect a tip." At the end of the voyage the six passengers agreed the crew did not deserve a tip, but nevertheless, we did not want "to stiff" them, so we agreed on US\$ 100 per passenger. Three of the passengers spoke fluent French and later they overheard the crew complain about the inadequate tip! (Ph: 33 (1) 48-28-38-31 (France) or 689-56-36-39 (Moorea); fax 33 (1) 48-28-33-72 (France) or (689) 56 35 87 (Moorea); website [www.archipels.com](http://www.archipels.com))

**Renaissance Cruises, September 2001, Laura Todd, Arcata, CA.** Vis: 25-125 ft. Water: 79 F. Dives logged: 115. I went on the Renaissance cruise

ship and did a combination of their shore excursions, pre-arranged dives and on the dock operators. All worked easily, though more expensive (\$100 US) to go with ship-arranged trips (diving is only offered by the ship on Moorea and Bora Bora). Prices ranged from \$75-\$90 for 2 tanks, which included all equipment rental and round trip transfer from the dock/hotel. All the dive shops take credit cards. ATM machines require a 6 digit PIN; I ended up getting a credit card advance for walking around money. The rental gear ranged from good to excellent. Sea conditions varied widely, from tiny chop inside the lagoons to 12 foot swell after a storm on Huahine. Most of the dives are moderate to shallow, the best critters usually being above 80 feet. All the operators tend to get a lot of beginners (people seemed impressed with my 100+ dives. They return to the shop between dives rather than to a beach or snorkel spot. The dives varied significantly by island, but over 4 days I saw: 4 species of sharks (including the large lemons), manta rays, eagle rays, sting rays, turtles, moray eels, lion fish and on the surface dolphins and breaching humpbacks. The islands themselves are possibly more beautiful than the brochures Bora Bora. Top Dive (maeva@topexcursions.com 689-60-50-50) is a big, efficient Swiss owned operation with its own hotel and 3 big dive boats. With 10 customers and 2 dive masters (both adorable, blond Eurohunks) it was fine. They gave a short briefing and split us into 2 groups, suggested a depth and time, insisted on safety stops. The first dive is a manta search inside the lagoon. The visibility was only 25 feet; 3 big

mantas cruised by at a distance, then made successively closer appearances and brought four friends. The second dive was inside the lagoon by consensus, to look for eagle rays. Drift dive in a moderate current. 2 rays close with a whole squadron behind them, single turtle and a free swimming moray that went at least 6 feet. Huahine: I arranged by e-mail to go with OIRI Plongee (oiri.plongee@mail.pf 689 - 68-76-84), 2 dives and a day long excursion that includes lunch on a beach or motu, snorkeling and a visit to a pearl farm plus equipment rental and transfers. Service was excellent but laid back. The rental reg breathed so hard that unless I kept my head in one exact position the workload of just breathing raised my heart rate and gave me a headache. Serge, the owner, accompanied us on both dives, giving a thorough briefing. Service was personal and friendly, and his love of diving comes through. Visibility was 75' inside the lagoon. We saw a crowd of eagle rays, a large unicorn fish, another big puffer, a brilliant purple nudibranch, several beautiful trunk fish. On the second dive we also negotiated some interesting vertical chimneys. Single ladies beware: Serge is quite the flirt. Although I was amused hearing his theories of life and love while lounging on an exquisite beach, not everyone would be. It's helpful to speak some French here. Moorea: Moorea Fun Dive (689-56-40-74), the ship's provider. They were professional and courteous. Gave a decent briefing, suggested we stay above 80 feet, where the best stuff was and enforced a safety stop. Both dives were outside the reef, with 100 + foot

visibility. Saw heaps of black tip reef sharks, some within 10 feet of divers, 2 big (10') lemons sharks slightly farther away, 2 green turtles and a huge puffer fish. Several remoras here, including some very friendly ones. Saw the whales breaching from about 100 feet or so distance. Raiatea: Hemisphere Sub, (hemis-subdivingmail.pf). Owner Hubert met the and it is easy to set up dives on the spot provided there is room. 2 dive masters for 5 divers; Both dives were outside the reef and conditions varied with the west side very calm and the windward east side kinda lumpy with a 4 foot swell. Between the two sites we saw many gray reef sharks, some very close, a big Napoleon wrasse, a school of barracuda, and more amorous remoras. **(Per their website at [www.renaissancecruises.com](http://www.renaissancecruises.com), Renaissance Cruises ((800) 525-5350) ceased cruise operations and filed for bankruptcy on 9/25/01.-ed.)**

## HAWAII

### Kona

**Kona Aggressor, August 2000, Lissa Woodbury Jensen, ([xenadancer@dancerart.net](mailto:xenadancer@dancerart.net)) Kodiak, AK.** Vis: 100 ft. Water: 74-80 F. Got stuck with a roommate that didn't know I would be there — uncomfortable at times as she was a bit of a snob. **(Ph: 800-348-2628 or 985-385-2628; fax 985-384-0817; e-mail [info@aggressor.com](mailto:info@aggressor.com); website [www.aggressor.com](http://www.aggressor.com))**

**Kona Aggressor, September 2000, Thomas & Sue Downey, Frisco, TX.** Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 79-81 F. Capt. Alan and crew were outstanding. Boat