

to American appetites. Most people liked it; some of us didn't. There were pre-dinner snacks; some were more successful than others. Over the course of our stay, about half of the guests and a couple of the staff got sick; whether due to water, food, or a virus, we don't know. Bottled water is available for a small charge. Two afternoons, trips were made to neighboring villages to meet the natives, tour the village, and watch the children dance. **(Ph: +62 (0) 361 284 227 (Indonesia); fax +62 (0) 361 284 226 (Indonesia); e-mail office@wakatobi.com; website www.wakatobi.com)**

Wakatobi Resort, March 2001, Larry & Barbara Murphy (lemurphy@aol.com) Atlanta, GA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 150 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, calm currents. Healthy hard coral on the atolls, fringing reefs and barriers with soft corals not as prominent as Fiji. A few small schooling tropicals, nothing much big. The advertised frogfish and elegant ghost pipefish were nowhere. Definitely a wide-angle destination. A few pygmy seahorses, many leaf fish and mantis shrimp. Larger critters were stonefish, crocodile fish, scorpionfish — not the variety of critters found at Kungkungan Bay. By day 4 the diving became repetitive and boring though beautiful. Set up your own gear on every dive, though tanks are carried to the comfortable reconfigured island cargo/dive boats. Boats are very slow, but crew quick to pick up divers from water. Only rinse for regulators was the brackish, sulfurous island water which was also

in the room showers and sinks. This mineral gunk began to eat away at the regulators immediately. Bungalows had mosquito netted beds, ceiling fans, porches, hot water, and terrible reading lights considering the sun sets around 6:00 PM. Food was mainly fish caught locally but from outside the marine reserve. Without adequate refrigeration, most of the fresh vegetables spoiled over the 12 day period, so late in the stay it's a diet of potatoes and cabbage. We had the misfortune to travel to and from the island via "The Ciska," a refurbished motor sailor for 18 hrs each way. The generator broke down, so there were no lights, no a/c in the slave-hold type berths below. Slept on deck, but in high seas not an option as the gun-wales were so low to the water that one would be swept away. A/C below was nonexistent. His boat is chartered out as a live-aboard dive boat in Sulawesi. Direct flights from Bali started in July. Only fresh water available for gear was for cameras both on boat and land. No E-6. Camera room needs more light, would be cramped with more camera-toting guests.

ISRAEL / RED SEA Eilat

Red Sea Sport Club/Manta Diving Center, April 2001, Isaac Aharon (scuba99779@aol.com) New York, NY. Vis: 40-70 ft. Water: 22 to 23 C. Dives logged: 125. Dive restrictions: 100 feet. I have been diving with them for four years. Great operation, PADI diving courses for all levels. I went

with them on a few diving safaris to Sinai (Egypt) and Jordan. They are very busy during the high season, like a railway station during rush hours. But they still run a perfect operation. ASI is running this operation and doing great work. This location is great — on the coral beach in the Ambassador Hotel which is a 5 star hotel which has a few swimming pools and a great restaurant. Manta Diving Center has a separate part of the hotel (which is not 5 star) only for divers at a very low price. The rooms are very clean with TV, refrigerator and air conditioning. They will pick you up in the morning from any hotel in town. They have equipment to rent in very good condition also for sale. You can't dive unless you have diving insurance so don't forget to bring it with you or you will have to buy from them. I dove last trip only 5 times. I have my own equipment and it cost me only \$50. Good dives are: Suffa wreck, the caves, nature reserve and dolphins dive. Eilat is a very safe resort town. Very nice, busy during day and night. www.redseasports.co.il and e-mail: manta1@netvision.net.il. Great hotel, restaurants, disco, pub, shopping center, even casinos but on boats at night only. (Ph: (972) 7-6376569 or 972-7633-0866 (Israel); fax. (972) 7-6370655; website www.redseasports.co.il)

Siam Divers, Dan Eilat, November 2000, Mel McCombie, New Haven, CT. Vis: 40-100+ ft. Water: 70-72 F. Logged dives: 1200+. Dive restrictions enforced: boat dives, depths enforced; time. We went to Eilat as

part of a trip to Israel. I would not recommend it as a diving-only destination, but an enjoyable break in a larger cultural experience. The patchy reefs offshore have been loved nearly to death. On a day trip to the Egyptian Coral Island, we saw much healthier stony corals and more fish. The fish life featured those Red Sea favorites anthias, blue spotted rays, varieties of eels, great anemones, large and bold varieties of lionfish out hunting in broad daylight. Siam Divers is well-located on the water, and is an unprepossessing ramshackle grouping of small buildings. The staff of young, athletic Israelis exude confidence and casualness. We found the female staff members to be exceptionally cheerful and helpful, and the guys considerably less so. Israeli regulations require that divers present their c-cards, logs, and proof of insurance (like DAN); one must purchase Israeli insurance if you don't have your own, even if you do but one dive. Once our bona fides were proven, Yarra in the booking office ensured that we got the dives we wanted. She arranged guided dives for our son and his friend and shore diving without interference for us. Since we didn't bring our gear, we rented their equipment, and it was pretty shabby. Leaky second stages, cracked and mis-matched fins, 5mm suits that had compressed to 2mm, lights with nearly dead batteries — not stuff you'd want to dive every day. I had brought my own 7mm suit and hooded vest and was fine in the 70-72 degree water, but my husband and son were freezing in the rental gear. We

stayed on the other side of town at the glitzy DAN Eilat Hotel. Designer Adam Tihany has created an eclectic postmodern fantasy featuring boomerang-shaped tables, flashy suspended sculptures, vegetation and live birds, and a lobby ceiling lit like the night sky. The decor is especially incongruous with the many ultra-Orthodox families on vacation. The rooms were very comfortable and the food okay; by law, Israeli hotels must serve Kosher food, so don't expect to mix meats and Dairy. We found better (and cheaper) food in outside restaurants. The hotel pool and beach were gorgeous. If you are in Eilat just to dive, you're better off staying on the side of town where the dive operations are located (near the Egyptian border). If you want more variety or have non-diving folks with you, the side near the Jordanian border is best. The weather was gorgeous, with crystal clear days and a mild breeze. (Ph: 972 8 637 0581; fax 972 8 637 1033; e-mail Siam2000@siam.co.il; website www.siam.co.il)

MALAYSIA

Sipadan, the tiny island off Malaysian Borneo, was the scary site for a political kidnapping in 1999, so before considering this destination, get information from your government. Sipadan is crowded with new resorts... Why? Imagine 20 to 30 giant turtles on every dive, sharks, jacks, schooling barracuda, and the best shore diving anywhere. While there's an abundance of turtles year-round, counts are highest in July and

August, although the reef in front of the resorts is showing signs of distress from the crowds. . .

.Layang Layang Resort is a relatively young resort in the Spratly Islands; because of their oil reserves, the islands are claimed by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, and Taiwan as well as Malaysia. Schooling hammerheads and pristine reefs lure divers, but nothing lives on the flat coral atoll except birds. . . . Hammerhead season is March and April, but the resort operates from March to October. . . .

Borneo (Malaysian)

Mabul

Kapalai Dive Resort, May 2000, Marion Fitzgerald, Seaside, CA. Vis: 35-70 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 500+. Dive restrictions: None if experienced. Resort is 15 minutes from Sipadan. Great for diving couples. Kapalai is romantic. Built on stilts over water. Sandspit is visible only at low tide. Otherwise it looks like you've in the middle of the ocean. Fantastic sunsets and sunrises. Can watch squid and lion fish from the wooden walkways. Cuttle fish, mandarin fish, crocodile fish and mantis shrimp right off the restaurant plus frog fish (huge!). Kapalai is more for macro. More sites with nudibranch than in Sipadan. Boats will take you to Mabul and beneath the oil rig housing turned scuba resort. Lots of fish under the rig including a huge moray bigger around than my waist! Boats will go