

Northern enclave of Oman called Musandam, which goes up to the Strait of Hormuz. There are few dive operations in this part of the Emirates — three to our knowledge. Maku Diving in Dibbah is operated by two Swiss, who started up recently and who don't have many guests yet. Their equipment is excellent. They are affiliated with the Holiday Beach Motel, a rather ramshackle affair. It is 10 miles South of Dibbah and therefore one is forced to eat in their restaurant, which we cannot recommend. The rooms are large, but in poor repair. Thursday, Friday, Saturday the motel is filled with Emiratis who are attracted by the beach and the fact that the motel is licensed to sell alcohol. These nights are very noisy indeed! A new hotel is to be constructed next to the motel and the dive shop will move there. The Fujairah coast is sandy, with some rocks sticking out. Maximum depth about 50 ft. Visibility was 15 to 25 ft. Currents were feeble, water temperature mid-sixties. Dibbah Rock is an area that one can circumnavigate in about two dives. Its about one-half mile in front of the beach and one is taken out there in a small dinghy that hardly holds four divers and requires a backwards roll on the count of three, because otherwise it would tip over. Hard corals only in the very shallowest parts, a remarkable thing because we hear that in summer the water temperature goes up to the mid-eighties. All around the Rock there are large schools of bannerfish, fusiliers, mackerel, etc. A local specialty is the muscat jawfish, much larger than its

Caribbean relative. There was one seahorse and many, many large green turtles. When there are six to eight guests, the dive operation charters a speedboat on the Oman side to dive Musandam. Musandam is spectacular: bare mountains plunge from some 5000 ft into the sea, where the sandy bottom starts at about 60 ft. Several large fjords cut into the interior, with only some small fishing villages here and there. The speedboat is equipped with two 250 hp outboards and covers the 40 miles to the Northern part of Musandam in a little over an hour. The best dives were around Lima Rock, offshore from Musandam. We had currents varying from fierce to none I guess depending on the tide. Again, no hard corals, but forests of beautiful soft corals. Large schools of fish, such as spadefish and barracudas. The visibility varied, again probably with the tide, between 20 and 60 ft. one shouldn't make the trip just for diving. But combined with Musandam, with its traditional fishing villages and a trip through the Emirates - which is a fascinating country — it is more than worth the while! (Ph: 00971-9-2445747; e-mail [maku@emirates.net.ae](mailto:maku@emirates.net.ae); website [http://www.geocities.com/Maku\\_divecenter](http://www.geocities.com/Maku_divecenter))

## LIVE-ABOARDS

### INDONESIA

*Arlena, Murex, May 2001, Matt & Ellen Tate (matate@netusa1.net)*  
**Kokomo, IN.** Vis: 50-150 ft. Water:

80-83 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 950. Dive restrictions: common sense. The diving was the better than PNG, better than Maldives, Fiji. A pinnacle at 75 ft. covered with soft coral so thick you could not see the pinnacle itself. Multi-colors outstanding! Hard coral and fish life were comparable. The boat was "nostalgic". Like live-aboards were 30 years ago - no a/c, fresh water was a hose on back deck, crew and food was very good. (Ph: +(62-431) 826091; fax +(62-431) 826092; e-mail [info@manado-liveaboards.com](mailto:info@manado-liveaboards.com); website [www.manado-liveaboards.com](http://www.manado-liveaboards.com))

**Evening Star, April 2001, Mary Alice Mathews, Newton Center, MA.** Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 400. Dive restrictions: 90 ft., 500 psi. Two days of the most colorful dives at sites with fantastic all colors of the rainbow crinoids at Crinoid Canyon. Fabulous. Also a dozen gorgeous nudibranchs. A stand out like E-6 in Fiji and Richeleau Rock in Thailand. (Ph: 61 2 9527 4793 (Australia) or 62 361 728878 (Indonesia); e-mail [greg@evolving.com.au](mailto:greg@evolving.com.au); website [www.divekomodo.com](http://www.divekomodo.com))

**Grand Komodo Tours, August 2000, Terry Anderson.** A week of diving Komodo Island area with Grand Komodo Tours was only \$700, every thing included. Only 5 divers on the live-aboard, two dive masters. The live-aboard is good; make sure that you are on the large wooden boat in their small fleet of live-aboards. The crew was wonderful, food was fun and plentiful. Every night they would pull into a harbor or bay, so the sleeping was

great. Diving was excellent, with vis from 70 to 100+. White tip and gray sharks, sea snakes, schools of fish, and lots of manta rays — one day we saw 7 large ones. Scores of tiny creatures. Water temp 80-85. Local people on islands very gracious and friendly. We tipped the crew \$20 for the week and they were overwhelmed. (Ph: +(62-361) 287166; fax +(62-361) 287165; e-mail [gkomodot@dps.mega.net.id](mailto:gkomodot@dps.mega.net.id))

**Kararu, August 2001, Karen and Herb Kavet, Wayland, MA.**

Experience: 101- 250 dives. Vis: 20 to 200 Feet. Water: 76 to 82 F, calm choppy surge, no currents. From the moment we were greeted by the dress-white uniformed crew to the moment we were deposited at Ubud, 25 miles from the harbor, our trip was exceptional. Our group of 10 was pampered to by an attentive crew of 18 plus two divemasters who accompanied us on every dive. Owner Tony oversees every detail of the smooth operation. Our tanks, dive stations, dive towels and rooms had been tagged with our names. When I admired a steel pointer that Tony was using during the dives, I was presented with my own the next dive. When my fin strap broke on the way out to a dive, Tony fished one out of his pocket. Divemaster Graham, who had only done 3 trips in the area before ours, was a master at finding little critters and made certain everyone saw it. His favorite find trip was a orangutan crab. His briefings were detailed and accurate. The boat is a 115 ft. wooden sailing schooner with 6 double rooms below and two staterooms above, all en-suite and air-conditioned.

The boat is roomy with an air-conditioned lounge which serves as the dining area, a shaded outside lounge and a sun deck. The dive staging area is roomy with separate bins and clothes lines. The lounge houses a library of identification books. The progress updated regularly on a map. There are two hot showers on deck, and each person is given their own towel. There is a separate area for photographers to work and store equipment. Numerous outlets for recharging batteries in both 110 and 220 volts. The crew was wonderful. Our weight belts were at our stations, our fins were in the correct boat, next to our BC and tank. They helped us dress when cooler water necessitated hoods and layers of wet suits. They opened doors, addressed us by name, entertained us with song, and were always there before, during, and after each dive. There were two breakfasts: coffee, fruit and croissants before the 7 am dive and a full breakfast after. Lunch was a wonderful array of Indonesian specialties. Dinner: Thai, French, American, etc. The cook was happy to cater to your desires. We went to many different areas, each having its own character. We dove in relatively cool water for a couple of days and then moved on to more comfortable temperatures. The reefs were pristine, the quantity and variety of fish beyond one's imagination. We saw everything from pygmy sea horses to sharks. The waters were sometimes calm and sometimes choppy, sometimes with reduced visibility and sometimes with unlimited visibility. The reefs varied from

muck dives in volcanic ash to lush soft coral. The scenery above the water was equally magnificent, from stark volcanoes to tree covered slopes. The diving boats were easily exited and entered. Both boats were sent out on every dive and were always there wherever we surfaced. The crew was careful with our equipment and cameras. The current was checked before every dive. Because of the long distances covered (200 miles in each direction), there were some days when only 2 or 3 dives were offered, but most of the time 5 dives per day were available. We had three land visits: one to see the Komodo dragons, one to visit a local village, and a specially arranged Balinese dance performance. Other than that, we rarely saw any signs of life other than an occasional local fisherman. **(Ph: (62) 361 282 931 (Bali); fax (62) 361 289 120 (Bali); e-mail [info@kararu.com](mailto:info@kararu.com); website [www.kararu.com](http://www.kararu.com))**

***Pelagian, September 2000, Sharna Kahn (ToDive4@compuserve.com) Oakland, CA.*** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 90 Feet. Water: 77 to 82 F, calm currents. Well appointed comfortable ship with inside and outside dining. The standard cabins are small with twin beds but adequate with a private head and shower. She rides the swells well and is stable. Your dive gear is loaded on the tenders where it remains in the hands of the staff as they help you gear up and gear down. The only challenge is climbing the metal side ladders into the tenders. Larry Smith knew exactly where to dive with the changing

conditions and is intimately familiar with the homes of the exotic critters. Our itinerary was the Komodos and islands southeast. Each dive brought marine diversity that boggled the mind. At Palua Satonda, not far out of Bali, was a sandy slope with beautiful hard and soft corals. *Tridacna* clams were everywhere. Heading to several spots, I chronicled leafy scorpion fish, harlequin ghost pipe fish, devil stone fish and hundreds of garden eels. Nudibranchs of every shape and color and I photographed an orange orangutan crab. Magnificent giant green eels, trunk fish and clownfish and frog fish in a variety of colors. On one night dive we enjoyed bioluminescence in the water, in the jellies, in the shrimp, on the coral. orangutan Small purple lobsters and big sleepy puffers hung in the still waters. The Yellow Wall of Texas offered hundreds of nudibranchs and cuttlefish. The crinoids and coral were all in yellow. Another dive site was mainly lots of orange feeding soft corals. Banded sea snakes and black blotched porcupine fish reigned. Pygmy seahorses are very hard to find — take a magnifying glass! Skeleton shrimp, red octopus and flounder, mantis shrimp and a squat lobster (aka a fairy lobster, a recent discovery One salon on the boat is just for storing camera gear. A large rinse tank on the aft deck is only for camera gear. On deck fresh water showers allow for rinsing yourself and your camera gear. (Ph: 800-962-0395 (US) or +66 (76) 263-732 (Thailand); fax 954-351-9740 (US); e-mail [sales@diver-asiapacific.com](mailto:sales@diver-asiapacific.com); website [www.dive-asiapacific.com](http://www.dive-asiapacific.com))

***Pelagian, October 2000, Harry A. Kreigh, Sacramento, CA.*** Twelve-day trip from Bali to Komodo National Marine Park (a World Heritage site) diving primarily at Sumbawa, Komodo, and Rinca Islands. Eleven passengers [boat capacity is 12]. Fifteen hour crossing from Bali to Sumbawa, where we made our first and last dives. Mostly sunny, hot and dry (90-95 F); (78-84 F with 40-75' visibility in the north, 74-78F with 10-40' visibility in the south). A few drift dives with steady currents (1-2 knots). Most dives were relatively easy and relaxed. Large, steel-hulled stable boat with minimal engine noise and comfortable ride. Spacious salon. Large indoor camera room with work area and multiple outlets for recharging batteries. Cabins were roomy with twin beds, plenty of drawers and a small closet for storage, reading lights, en suite bathroom with shower, adjustable air-conditioning, and portholes for natural light. Impeccable service from a large friendly staff (11 crew members). Daily maid service; Large water cooler. Complimentary soft drinks. Pre-dive breakfast (coffee, juice, cereal and toast) was followed by a cooked breakfast: eggs( including Eggs Benedict), pancakes, French toast, bacon, and ham or an Indonesian fried noodle and vegetable dish (mie goreng). Varied, abundant and tasty lunch and dinner usually with salads, vegetables and multiple chicken/beef or fish entrees (usually Thai or Indonesian stir-fry or curry recipes) served buffet and included excellent soup du jour; fresh fruit. Excellent baked snacks and desserts.

Dives were at 7:30, 11:00, 2:30 and 6:00 (twilight/night) daily with additional night dives (8-9:00) offered several times. Personal gear was stored in individual mesh bags hanging from the side railings near the dive deck. Tanks filled to 3000 psi. All dives were made from the tenders with tanks, weight belts and fins stored (and tanks filled) there between dives. Safety sausages were provided. Two camera rinse buckets and two fresh water showers on the dive deck, and fresh towels were available after each dive. Larry Smith is ably assisted by the second divemaster, Anton. Larry has a legendary reputation for his ability to find rare and camouflaged critters. Anton was also very friendly and skilled at finding animals. Dive briefings were very basic as were sketches of the sites, but usually accurate concerning water conditions/current direction. Usually divers were picked-up immediately after surfacing. We generally dove fringing reefs near sand chutes, large rock formations and bommies, walls and a few submerged pinnacles. Night dives were usually in and around sand chutes (muck dives). Most dives began with a guided tour of resident critters, then we dispersed to seek our individual interests, listening intently for Larry or Anton to signal (distinct yell of "Wahoo") a significant find. Most dives started at 50-80' and the optimum depth range was 25-40'. Healthy populations of diverse tropical fish species, dense hard/soft corals, invertebrates and nudibranchs, but the absence of schools of larger fish (jacks, barracuda, tuna) and sharks was unex-

pected. Solo diving permitted. No depth limit was imposed, but to maintain the diving schedule, a maximum bottom time of 70 minutes was requested and honored. Cannibal Rock (Horseshoe Bay at Rinca Island) is an exceptional dive site (large submerged rock extending from 20' down to about 90'). It is densely covered with soft corals, fans, sponges, crinoids and a variety of invertebrates. Nudibranchs (20+ species identified), and giant frogfish (black or yellow) here. Gili Lawalaut (pygmy seahorses and a submerged pinnacle with lots of tropical fish and mollusks), The Slot (several huge horseeye jacks, potato cod, Napoleon wrasse and a couple of mobulas, and Manta Aley (Batu Tiga), where 4-5 mantas repeatedly paraded through the channel. I had never seen a Spanish dancer so Larry escorted me on a night dive, where he found 3. He took us to see flashlight fish. In complete darkness we were amazed to see light twinkling from small groups of fish gathered under ledges and within coral heads (like viewing fireflies through a window). Although there were several outstanding sites, many were mediocre and boring. The sand dives were described as muck dives intended to find unusual critters. While we did find a couple of interesting subjects at a few sites, others were a complete waste of time. Often dive site selection seemed to be based on convenient location for our itinerary. Dynamite fishing continues unchecked throughout the marine park. However, at most of the dive sites, the corals were in pristine condition with abundant

marine life. The Pelagian anchored quite a distance from a few sites resulting in long trips in the Zodiacs. While crossing over to Rinca Island in choppy seas, a shackle securing one of the tenders broke and dive gear was lost (instead of loading the tenders onboard, they were merely hoisted for the 3-4 hour trip), including fins and one tank with a regulator and BC; Fortunately, The Pindito was anchored in southern Komodo and had enough spare gear so we could continue diving. Dive Asia-Pacific (owner of the Pelagian) agreed to replace all lost dive gear. Both tenders broke down several times due to engine problems and there was no spare engine available. This resulted in delays in picking up surfacing divers. It could have been a serious problem. The automated E-6 Processing onboard wasn't used. At Komodo National Park a park ranger led our group on a 1-1/2 hour tour through the island. We encountered 5 solitary dragons (only 2 were active, the others were resting) and none aggressive. Back at the park complex, there were as many dragons as we saw on the tour. Stayed at The Grand Bali Beach hotel on the beach (Sanur Beach) is a large hotel with good facilities and included a lavish buffet breakfast. Nearby, there is a continuous stretch of shops, restaurants and vendors providing various services (haircuts, massage, tattoo) on the beachfront. It becomes tiresome dealing with the pesky peddlers. We spent 2 nights in Ubud at the Kokokan Hotel, 2 miles south of the town. It is next to

terraced rice paddies and the landscaping is gorgeous with many carved stone statues. Lots of motor scooters, the main streets are trip malls with lots of shops (woodcarvings, batik, rattan) and restaurants. Casa Luna and Kokokan Thai restaurant: good food at reasonable prices. The Monkey Forest is a community of Macaque monkeys that take bananas from visitors (also any loose items they can grab like cameras, water bottles, hats, etc.).

***Pelagian, October 2000, Dennis Marguet, Pleasanton, CA.*** Vis: 25-50 ft. Water: 74-84 F. Dives logged: 1,000+. Dive restrictions: Don't do anything stupid. Good variety of diving and creatures. Saw mantas, few sharks, schools of anthias, soft corals, hard corals, crinoids galore, and many rare creatures including plenty of ornate ghost pipefish and pigmy seahorses (12 on 1 fan). Seeing Komodo dragons a great half day outing. Flying foxes up close were awesome. Boat is in good condition with fine appointments. Food is plentiful, but you need to like Indonesian food. Good camera room and work area. Crew is tops. Great critter finders. Larry is infectious. We had 10 passengers (12 max) 9 were serious photographers, most award winners, one filmed a documentary on sharks. It was a major problem shooting the 1 or 2 creatures per dive site. Sometimes you lost out due to no more bottom time. They would not split the two tenders 15 minutes apart to allow everyone a chance to shoot. They did do it once at the pigmy seahorse fan with

12 pigmies. Everyone on board asked for it and got it. You have to be the first one to the critter to get your shots.

***Pelagian, October 2000, David C. Kinney (dkinney@ezraco.com)***

**Vienna, VA.** Vis: 15-75 ft. Water: 75-78 F. Dive restrictions: Minimal.

Great operation — Larry Smith and crew know what serious divers want. Excellent small stuff. Macro diving at its best. Not a big animal place but we saw sharks, turtles, mantas and 1 dugong type of manatee. I was impressed with the operation.

***Pelagian, February 2001, Anne and Fred Straus, Cincinnati, OH.*** Vis:

50-125 ft. Water: 80-84 F. Dives logged: 400+. Dive restrictions: Very few — no deep dives! First class dive boat! Crew of 11 for 12 passengers! Food very good. Quarters kept clean and neat. Guide Larry Smith, brought two excellent dingy drivers with him. Pick up boat had two-way radios so pick up time was minimal. Captain/Owner Matt worked hard at pleasing guests. He ate all his meals with us. On last three days of trip we were joined by Captain's wife and eight year old daughter. Trip arranged by Aquatic Encounters of Boulder, Colorado.

***Pelagian, July 2001, John (jcrossle@csufresno.edu) Fresno, CA.*** Experience: 501-1000 dives.

Water: 75 to 81 F, calm surge currents. The Pelagian best among 11 live-aboards I have been on. The cabins are nice, with adequate storage; the lounge is comfortable with a great library of books and videos; the dive deck is pretty good though not real

large, the chase boats are fast and stable; your BC, tank, fins & mask stays on them; the boat has all the state of the art navigation and safety equipment. Separate camera room with light table, charging station, and good quality E-6 developing. The food was excellent with several choices.

Between dive snacks were basic. Cruise director Larry Smith is a master at finding unusual critters. I have used 80 different dive companies and Larry is the only one as good as Lisa and Kendra Choquette of Dive Makai on Kona — in some ways maybe better, because he covers so many different dive sites. You name it and Larry finds it: coral pipefish, ghost pipefish, leaf fish, squat lobster, orangutan crab, stargazer, sea snakes, crocodile fish, frog fish, cuttlefish, atomic nudibranch, mantis shrimp, sea horses, pygmy sea horses, octopus, ribbon eels, red coral cowrie, razorfish, two dozen types of nudibranchs. His other guides are very good and have great personalities. Some dives are calm and flat and others have ripping currents with quick changing up and down currents. Visibility can be 100 plus along a wall or 30 ft. at a great muck dive site. Few turtles, and rays, with dolphin sightings several times but not underwater. Surrounded by flashlight fish one night as they came out at dusk. Larry knew where to wait for them. Got portraits of dragons on Komodo Island, and was in the flight path of thousands of bats that swarmed out of a cave at sundown. Five star trip. They have a camera room inside and it has room for a few

people to work on cameras at the same time. Charging station, light table, and a good E-6 system. There is storage room underneath on shelves. The dive deck has two rinse tubs.

**Sea Safari III, Sea Contacts 2000, John Randall.** Sea Contacts operates the 35-m wooden schooner "Sea Safari III," built in 1997 and operated by three former divemasters. Lisa Crosby (Canadian), Sascha Dambach (German), and Tony Rhodes (English). The vessel generally cruises at 8-10 knots. It has 12 spacious air-conditioned cabins, each with private bath and hot water, and takes a maximum of 16 divers. There is an on-deck shower, sun deck, marine life identification library, camera battery charging stations. Three dive tenders take up to 10 divers each. There is a crew of 14 and at least two divemasters. The usual Bali dive cruise takes 8 days and 7 nights. Prices vary from \$250 to \$300 per night for divers (depending on the stateroom). "Sea Safari III" alternates cruises to Komodo with those to Bali. the "Pindito," similar to "Sea-Safari III" owned and operated by Eddie Frommenwiler (e-mail: pindito@indo.net.id). (Ph: (62) 361 282 931 (Bali); fax (62) 361 289 120 (Bali); e-mail info@kararu.com; website www.kararu.com)

**Sea Safari III, Bob Flatt, March 2001, Captain Cook, HI.** Vis: 50-160 ft. Water: 78 F. Mostly sunny, some rain. Water: calm. Timor to Bali, via Alor, Flores, Komodo, and Sumbawa in March. Based on a traditional Indonesian design and built in 98 this wooden boat takes 16 passengers. Our

trip was spacious with 8, 6 of which where repeats (a good sign) with the boat or with the managers (Kararu — Lisa, Sasha, and Tony). The food was very good and occasionally excellent, as vegetarians we were well looked after. Kararu did an excellent job of showing us coral slopes, walls, sea mounts, mangrove, and muck. They were also good at listening to passenger requests to repeat dives. Saw most of what we might hope to: pygmy seahorse, ornate ghost pipefish, blue ribbon eels, mandarinfish, cuttlefish, crocodile fish, orangutan crabs, flying gurnard, juvenile batfish, juvenile angelfish, juvenile sweetlips, white tips, a nurse shark, and innumerable nudibranchs; but not a lot of big fish. Particularly good marine and local reference library. The boat had occasional glitches such as an intermittent failure of the A/C on the port side cabins below deck, but the crew always fixed any problems. We had several village visits and a dragon hunting trip on Komodo. Dynamite fishing is a problem along these islands subjectively more so in the west, Komodo as a national park is somewhat protected. Past bombing hasn't ruined all the reefs but we did see the results, and in one case moved on because of it. Such is exploratory diving. The usual route for the Sea Safaris III is to Komodo from Bali which we covered in the latter part of our trip. Note that in the same waters there is a similar boat the Sea Safaris VI but this is not managed by Kararu (www.kararu.com). (Ph: (62) 361 282 931 (Bali); fax (62) 361 289 120 (Bali); e-mail info@kararu.com; website www.kararu.com)