

pop for a couple of days until ice was trucked in. Corcovado National park is beautiful and hikes into the rainforest by foot or horseback were rewarded with beautiful waterfalls and cool pools to renew the spirit. I went fishing twice and had good catches and the chance to see and feel a very big sailfish tail walk the Pacific ocean. The lodge had just opened a canopy trek on cables from platforms high in trees and this is a must. Unless you get my standard room, I suggest you bring a few nails that you can hammer into the cracks of the boards to hang some of your clothes and, some 100 watt light bulbs if you want to read at night. This is a bare-bones lodge that is trying real hard to improve. The people are very nice, they work very hard and try their best to make you comfortable. There is a lot more to do here than just dive. But it will cost you extra! (Ph: 800-317-0333 or (506) 371-1598; e-mail crventur@costaricadiving.com; website www.costaricadiving.com)

Jinetes de Osa, El Ocotol, July 2001, Karen Wakefield (klwake@mindspring.com), **Carnation, WA.** Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to 84 F, choppy. Great place for under and above water. We saw sharks (too many), stingrays, schools of barracuda, lots of decent size Fish. From the boat we saw many dolphins, whales, one 6' manta and one turtle. Dive master Paul was great — took care of everything and keeps people from touching things underwater. The low visibility makes you wonder what you are missing! Corcovado Reserve

was beautiful — four types of monkeys, snakes, anteaters, wild pigs — lots of birds. Great price — basic accommodations — and really good all homemade food (great bread). We also went to Playas de Coco and stayed at El Ocotol. We dove 5 times, wildlife not as varied — although we did see a frogfish and some big sharks. Divemasters are all over the place, fins hitting everything and one guy used a knife to drag himself along. Watch your belongings! We were robbed twice the first time we were there.

Rich Coast Diving, Playa Del Coco, November 2000, Larry & Janet Gordon (ljgordon@flash.net) **Tijeras, NM.** Vis: 30-50 Feet. Water: 78-82 F, calm. Carol, at Rich Coast Diving, was absolutely great! We corresponded with her about our diving, our accommodations and even transportation! Her dive operation was prompt and very efficient. We went to Catalina Island and saw white tip sharks, turtles, manta rays, large spotted eagle rays, large sting rays and a large school of small rays. Villa Del Sol, a bed & breakfast was fine but a little off the main road, about 15 minute walk to town. There were a couple of other places closer. Wasn't the best diving we have done but it was a fun trip. (Ph: 800-4-DIVING or +506-670-0176; e-mail dive@richcoastdiving.com; website www.richcoastdiving.com)

MEXICO (WESTERN)

Before Cocos Island, the seamounts of the Sea of Cortez were the place for schooling hammerheads and

sea lions. The sea lions are still there, although the hammerheads are harder to predict. . . . Some live-aboards now run to Isla Socorro to find hammerheads, although it's a long ride and there's no guarantee of sharks or good weather. . . . Manta rays are more reliable, and they have a reputation for letting divers approach them. . . . In winter and spring there's a thermocline, with 70 to 80 degree water on the surface and 50 to 60 degree water below 30-40 feet. . . . Visibility is determined by the plankton blooms; while it's low (25-40 feet) in midsummer, it generally improves to 80 to 100 feet by late summer. . . . From December through May winds kick up the water, which makes diving difficult. . . . Wear a wetsuit for protection from jellyfish even if the water's warm. . . . Whale-watching season is from December through March. . . . The nice hotels and restaurants from Cabo to the North have helped make it a long-weekend retreat for some California divers. . . .

Baja

Cabo Pulmo

Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort, August 2000, Peter Hemming. As you said in your guidebook it is primitive. The Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort is owned by an American named Cole Barrymore. I arranged passage on the Internet. There are about 15 bungalows from about \$60 to \$165 per night. I stayed cheap but the accom-

modations were very good a spacious room, stove and refrigerator and hot and cold shower. Very clean. You can dive on their small panga for \$65 per 2 tank dive. I've been all over the world diving but Cabo Pulmo beat them all when it came to marine life. It's a marine park and is the most northern and westerly coral reefs in this hemisphere. Because the reefs are spread out the marine life is very concentrated in each area. My favorite spot was El Baho, a conglomerate of several reefs about ten minutes from shore by boat. I saw Moorish idols, triggerfish, grunts, turtles, big morays, huge schools of big eyed jacks, garden eels. For some reason the water louses up in the afternoon so its best to dive in the morning. There's a small market nearby to buy food and there are 3 restaurants. My favorite is Nancy's, owned by a lady from Chicago. There are other dive tour companies like Pepe's Dive Center or Cabo Pulmo Divers and they all charge about the same price and take you out on the same boats. Summer I had practically the whole resort to myself. They have dive masters and instructors and you can rent gear as well. It's all up to date and well maintained. (Ph: +52-114-10244; e-mail pulmo@caboworld.com; website www.caboworld.com)

Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort, June 2001, Jill Rain
(jrain@lopez.wednet.edu) **Lopez, WA.** Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 20 to 60 Feet. Water: 65 to 75 F, choppy. Compared to reports I'd read, the water was much colder (65 F under the 20' thermocline) and the

visibility much poorer — an extremely anomalous year. In a skin and 3 mm suit, I was only able to keep diving because of post-dive hot showers. Fortunately, the dive sites are very close (5-15 minutes in a skiff) and I came back to shore after every dive. The dive operation was very casual: times were approximate and there's no dock, so loading and unloading involved a swim or wade from/to the beach. The boat crew found the dive sites by triangulating topographic features inland. But there is safety equipment. Most importantly, the sea life and the staff were fantastic. Unlike most eastern Pacific diving, there was a divemaster on every dive. During my 3 days, the number of divers ranged from 6 to just me. The boat driver and divemasters were cheerful and accommodating, from equipment handling/cleaning to assistance in/out of boat to identifying sea life both above and below. Dive sites were 40-60' with a slight current: drift dives or finning lightly. No need for a dive light. I often had an hour bottom time. The coral is nothing to write home about, but otherwise there is a greater variety of life and things are generally bigger than in the Caribbean. Several kinds of rays, eels (incl. zebra moray), hundreds of pufferfish, many boxfish and porcupinefish, huge jacks (5'), mantas, a few elusive hammerheads, many juvenile as well as adult angelfish + various surgeon, butterfly, pork, damsel, trigger, hog, parrot, filefishes. One jewfish. Turtles up close. Many inverts also: nudibranchs, urchins, stars, cucumbers. Sometimes clouds of krill

cut vis. Easy and good snorkeling from shore, though be ready for jellyfish. Cabo Pulmo is very out of the way (uncrowded) and has terrific diving overall.

Vista Sea Sport, Buena Vista, July 2001, Bob Kopeck, Houston, TX.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 78 to 62 F, calm choppy. The Buena Vista Hotel is a nice basic hotel not too far from the Cabo Pulmo Marine Park and several other good divesites. Nothing fancy but adequate with OK food. Vista Sea Sport picks you up on the beach in 20 ft well equipped fast pangas with plenty of sunshade, and takes you to the divesites where the conditions are best that day. All dives were in Cabo Pulmo marine park. In the past 20 years I have dove all the "hot" locations in the Caribbean and the marine life here was the best I have seen. We dove and snorkeled with a school of 20 hammerhead sharks (we did our surface interval snorkeling with the sharks — VSS recommended this as a better way to get close to them as they tend to be timid around divers), a squadron of 5 manta rays, a school of 40 yes 40 bat rays, several very large (100 lb) groupers, schools of medium sized groupers, countless and varied puffers, numerous morays, very large jacks, turtles, Moorish idols, large parrotfish including a very large bumphead parrotfish, king angels, and numerous large schools of schooling fish like grunts, chubs, chromis, snappers, etc. We experienced widely varied water conditions in our three days of diving. On the first two days, vis was 40-60 with the

water temp 78 on the surface and around 72 on the bottom (at 60 ft). Conditions changed dramatically on day 3, I suspect due to a full moon bringing in a high tide of colder Pacific water. Unbelievably, on day 3 the surface water temp dropped to 70 with temps at the bottom around 62—in early July ! The water turned green and the vis was 20-30. Not much fun in these conditions. VSS tried to find warmer water on the second dive but it was only warmer on the surface, the bottom conditions were still a frigid 62. VSS advised that they had never seen a sudden change like this. **(Ph: +52 114 10031; e-mail Vseasport@aol.com; website www.vistaseasport.com)**

Cabo San Lucas

Amigos Del Mar, Solmar Suites, November 2000, Andrew Molnar (lwisincctazm@aol.com) West Haven, CT. Vis: 40-70 ft. Water: 73-78 F, calm, flat and choppy. Logged dives: 350+. Dive restrictions: Once divemasters comfortable with your abilities, within reason, one could dive their own profiles. Small operation. Small uncomfortable boats. Lots of beginner divers and people who dive for a day or two. Sites around Cabos Lands End bare of corals, and few fish. Mainly rubble bottom, poor visibility. Saw a few scorpionfish, 4 mobula rays, a couple of eels. Shop offers diving “across the bay” (surcharge added), which offered a bit better visibility, but no more critters, large or small. OK for warm-up dives, but would have been disappointed if this was the object of the vacation. Hotel is very clean, on a beautiful

stretch of beach, but otherwise too noisy, crowded and sterile. Cabo was fun the first 4 days, but then became tiresome with all the street vendors and time-share pitches. **(Ph: (800) 344-3349 or +52 (114) 30505; fax (310) 454-1686; e-mail CaboResort@aol.com; website www.amigosdelmar.com)**

Land's End Divers, Hacienda del Mar, November 2000, Larry Lovecchio. Vis: 25 ft. Water: 82 F. Luxurious timeshare is styled after a Spanish colonial village. Everything was first class and their restaurants served the best food in Cabo. The service was excellent and everyone was extremely hospitable. We preferred shore diving off Chileno Beach where Acuadeportes has a dive shop and is very helpful. Found a few large green morays and gold and black snake eels, saw an octopus foraging while changing colors. Cornetfish eyed us warily and on our return swim back to shore we encountered a cloud of jackfish that blocked out the sun. We did dive a couple of boat dives with Land's End Divers but did not like their hurry-up attitude. One good dive though was at the Point (A.K.A. Land's End) where we saw lobsters falling all over themselves crammed into a crack in the rock. Cabrilla, grouper, chub, different species of damselfish, triggerfish and hogfish were ever-present. **(Ph: (800) 576-3483 or +52-114-32200; fax + 52-114-32200; website www.mexonline.com/landsend.htm)**

Land's End and Aqua de Puertes, Hacienda Del Mar, November 2000,

Larry and Fawn Lovecchio, Ignacio, CO. Vis: 25 ft. Water: 82 F. Dive restrictions: Time (40 min.). Cabo San Lucas is not equal to the Caribbean for diving but is a fun place to visit. Great food and great Mexican hospitality. Land's End Divers was substandard, no briefing and they seemed in a hurry. An hour dive was unheard of. The best boat dive was The Point (AKA Land's End) where we saw lobsters falling all over themselves crammed into a crack in the rock. Cabrilla, grouper, chub, different species of damselfish, triggerfish and hogfish were ever present. Water 82 degree and the visibility averaged 25 feet. We saw more by shore diving off Chileno Beach with up to 1-2 hour dives at your own pace. Dive shop (Acua de Puertes) right on the beach, stows your personal belongings and real helpful. Found a few large green morays and gold and black snake eels. We also saw an octopus foraging around while changing colors to blend in to its surroundings. Cornetfish and a cloud of jacks that blocked out the sun. Good snorkeling in Santa Maria Bay 8 miles east of Cabo. Reserve your rental car before arriving in Mexico, A/C worth the extra cost to block out the exhaust fumes of the traffic in town. Luxurious timeshare Hacienda Del Mar is styled after a Spanish colonial village. Everything was first class and their restaurants served up the best food in Cabo especially at Pitahaya's, which serves pacific rim specialties in a beautiful open air palapa style building. The service was excellent. Baja, with its

rugged and healthy desert is a fascinating place and is only a few short hours away by plane.

La Paz

Baja Diving & Service, Club Cantamar, February 2000, Adam Mandel, (adlyd@mindspring.com) S. Easton, MA. Vis: 30-40 ft. Water: 65-70 F. Dives logged: 100+. Dive restrictions: Depth varied. La Paz is a beautiful Mexican city with real authenticity, i.e., fewer Americans and less American influence than many of the larger resort towns. The dive operation was outstanding. The hotel is about 10 miles out of town, (not mentioned in their promotions) in the middle of nowhere, so you need to rent your own transportation. Tons of sea lions and pelagics and pods of dolphins. (Ph: +52 (112) 21826 or +52 (112) 27010; fax +52 (112) 28644 ; e-mail ajadiving@lapaz.cromwell.com.mx ; website www.bajadivingservice.com)

Cortez Club Scuba, La Concha Hotel, November 2000, Larry Lovecchio. Hotel is comparable to a nice Motel 6, and shows its age. Small beach and snorkeling in shallows just offshore. Food is basic and unimaginative, but its just outside of town away from the noise and next door to a well organized and equipped dive shop — the Cortez Club. Their rental gear (Mares) seemed in tip-top shape as were their dive boats. Their dedicated dive boat, the New Rage is a speedy 35 (+/-) foot with a 200 hp Evinrude outboard and quite comfortable with eight people on board; a nice canopy to shade the strong sun in the

hour plus rides to the sites. The shop runs two and three tank packages for (\$100-\$125). On one dive day, through slightly choppy seas, we made it to Los Islotes a sea lion colony. Accustomed to divers, these frisky critters were all over us, but no causalities were reported as divers petted them when they zoomed on by. While performing underwater acrobatics, they even performed their version of underwater soccer with a blown up balloonfish. As I swam through and arch and circled the islet, I spotted green moray, and zebra eels, and a small spotted snake eel, a thick school of 100+ barracuda of varying sizes and myriad tropicals. Moorish idols, guinea fowl and bullseye puffers, king angelfish, Cortez angelfish, make it an unusual dive for people accustomed to the Caribbean. Myriad critters hover among the nooks and crannies.

Divemaster Javier gave us an informative briefing, allowing our 90 minute dive to be ruled by our computers. Next dive, along a wall with some nice coral formations, a giant Pacific manta stayed with us the entire dive, allowing me pet its soft underbelly and rough top. Wingspan was a full 10'. Hundreds of mobula rays came out of the gloom and flew on by. The only downside: visibility approx. 25'. The water 78 degrees. Rough weather prevented us from getting to El Bajo and its hammerheads, so we opted for a couple of "macro" sites and saw beautiful red and black nudibranchs, coral hawkfish, and the divemaster even located and uncovered an angel shark hiding in the sand. **(Cortez Club: Ph: (+52) (112) 1-6120 or**

(+52) (112) 1-6121; fax 0052 112 16123; e-mail info@cortezclub.com; website www.cortezclub.com; La Concha: Ph: (800) 999-2252; fax (619) 294-7366; e-mail laconcha@juno.com; website www.laconcha.com)

Fun Baja, June-July 2001, George and Eva Moody (gwmoody@aol.com)
Tulsa OK. Vis: 20-80 ft. Water: 65-80 F. Dives logged: 120 each. Dive restrictions enforced: depth. The water was cold in June, we wore 7 mm suits in 65 F water. Warm in July, 80 F at surface, 75 F at bottom. Comfortable in dive skins. La Reina to see mantas is close to Cerrovolvo Island, as is La Reuita a fantastic reef which sometimes has very strong currents. Los Islotes, the "mother of all sea lion colonies" is at the northern tip of Espiritu Santo Island, which also has several resident jawfish, with eggs in their mouths — July. Tropical fish abound, angel fish, butterfly fish, damsel fish, parrot fish, long nose and giant hawk fish, surgeon fish, tangs, Moorish idols, file and trigger fish as well as Cortez garden eels; green, zebra and spotted morays; large schools of tuna, grouper, bonito, jacks, barracuda, leaping marlins, dorado, occasional nurse and angel sharks and of course hammerheads, which totally ignore us divers. We've seen all kind of rays: spotted eagle rays, large stingrays, bullseye stingrays and some of the largest manta rays with approx. 20' wingspans. We've swum with whale sharks and have seen one huge blue whale right in La Paz bay. We've noticed a lot of coral growth recently

and have seen many nudibranchs. Dolphins, pilot whales, even schools of 35 orcas swim along side the boat on many trips. Fun Baja, owner Enrique Castillo, is a well run operation with several perfectly equipped dive boats and a crew that is second to none. 2-3 tank day trips, with lunch served on the boat or one of the beaches. A divemaster comes on every dive. Better still are the camping trips to Eusanada Grande Beach on Espiritu Santo Island. Not only does it cut out the travel time to and from La Paz, it also allows for 3-4 tank dive days, with night dives available. There are also a couple of wreck dives, the more popular being Salvatierra Wreck in the channel between La Paz and the island. The camping is unlike anything we've ever done, with a chef who whips up 3 hot meals and a constant stream of snacks in his field kitchen. The tents are clean, the linen also, there are field toilets and 2 showers. There are kayaks available, climbing on the desert rocks surrounding the campsite and the chance to meet divers from everywhere in the world, La Paz is getting famous in Asia and more Americans are finding it too. Best time to go is July-October. Air and water temperature highest, visibility best. Several good hotels in La Paz. Aero California flies from L.A. and Tucson to La Paz. **(Ph: +52-112-1-5884; fax (+52) (112) 1-5592; e-mail funbaja@prodigy.net.mx; website www.funbaja.com/)**

Tio Sports, Melia San Lucas, November 2000, Juan M. Fernandez, Reseda, CA. Vis: 40-60

ft. Water: 72-75 F, calm and flat. Logged Dives: 100 plus. Restrictions: up with 500 psi, depth limit not enforced. Chileno Bay — good shore diving, beautiful beach and good snorkeling. Pelican Rock ; Saw 10 moray eels, lobster, groupers, sea bass, schools of jacks, etc. Lots of big fish even with all the boat traffic and people snorkeling and diving. Food in Cabo is superb (especially fresh fish and lobster) but very expensive. Dive operation — divemaster very good, not pushy. Let us do whatever. Safety stop enforced. Great dive (2nd time). Dove with same outfit in October 1998 (same divemaster). Better visibility then. Awesome dive. **(Ph: (800) 246-6226 or + 52-114-32986; fax + 52-114-31521)**

Loreto

Baja Outpost, July 2000, Walt Bolton (wbolton@teleport.com) Prineville, OR. Vis: 30-45 ft. Water: 82 F. Logged dives: 75. Those with more experience dived their own profiles; we accepted the guidance of the excellent dive master. Owner Leon Fichman is a legendary gem! We made arrangements with Leon to drive down the Baja with our two dogs, and Leon made arrangements to accommodate us and our critters! After arriving, Leon took me aside and quietly asked me the level of experience we had and how much supervision we wished while diving. He then introduced his instructor level dive master, John Black. John patiently guided us and over the week progressively moved us to more advanced dives with more depth, current, and down welling! It

was such a natural progression we barely noticed our improvement until we had to leave 18 dives later. Leon's Baja Outpost is a bed and breakfast dive operation and it certainly exceeded our expectations! Every morning presented us with fresh tropical fruits, elms, breads, pastries, coffee, milk. The distances are great on the Sea of Cortez, for Leon focuses his operation on the best dives on several off shore islands and sea mounts. After a 45 minute high speed panga ride across glass smooth seas with Kiki, our delightful captain, we rolled in for our first dive since my wife had been certified. John took his time with Pat as she developed her comfort. We had a wonderful first dive and then surfaced to find Kilo right above us waiting even though we had traveled a good quarter mile. Kiki is big and he jerked our weight integrated scuba units into the boat as if they were feathers. John briefed us for the next dive: Wonderful swim along a rocky wall filled with green moray eels. We anchored in a totally isolated bay with beautiful white sand and turquoise water and they served a gourmet clam pasta accompanied with tropical fruits, soft drinks; and cerveza on the beach . 2 dives a day. Myriad of tropical reef type fish; moray eels; grass eels; lobster; parrot fish; jacks; etc, manta rays on the surface in the mornings along with schools of dolphins and right whales: Loreto is quiet and sleepy until dark and the heat of the summer day has passed. Wonderful restaurants with a broad range of menus and prices. We tend to enjoy authentic Mexican cooking so

we were at home with the more modest less touristy eateries: One street vendor not to be missed is a couple or three blocks west of the malecon on the north side of Av Miguel Hidalgo which served pork cooked in the style of Michoacan. The ice cream shop puts Baskin Robbins to shame for tropical fruit flavors! (Ph: 888-649-5951 or +52-113-51134; e-mail outpost@bajaoutpost.com; website www.bajaoutpost.com)

Baja Outpost, October 2000, Jim Jackart, (jjackart@wavegate.com)
Rome, GA. Vis: 30-50 ft. Water: 72-86 F. Bed and breakfast, 4 hotel like rooms, 4 thatched rooms. All with own bathroom and AC. Very clean. Good breakfast, fruit, cereals and eggs. Outside temp 95 and humid. No hot water, but not needed this time of year. Owner and dive operator Leon Fishman is terrific. Great DM and host. Diving around island, drop offs and sea mounts. Can dive shallow with tropicals or deep wall with current and larger critters. Depends on your experience. Restaurants in town are very good and cheap.

Puerto Vallarta

Pacific Scuba , May 2001, Michael Hofman (mhofman@jmoyerlandscaping.com)
San Francisco, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 35 Feet. Water: 60 to 64 F, surge. Pacific Scuba is a well run operation to dive. Get ready for cold water until about June or July. Had the water been warmer, the diving would have been very interesting. We saw a number of

small fish, many Spanish dancers and a large collection of puffer fish. Pacific Scuba has a small boat, a complete DAN oxygen system on the boat and competent staff. The dive-master was very interested in fish life (we discussed fish in the area compared to the rest of the Pacific for the hour trip to the dive site). (Ph: + 52-322-24741; fax + 52-322-24741; e-mail scuba@pvnet.com.mx; website www.pacificscuba.com.mx)

UNITED STATES

California

Catalina Island

Catalina Divers Supply, August 2000, Emmet Jones, Valley Center, CA. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 64-70 F. Dove at rock quarry just north of Yellowtail Point. Great dive, 60-80 visibility. Divemaster Ron Moore put us on butterfly fish, very uncommon. Catalina Divers Supply ran a new boat, fast, huge deck area, excellent crew, lots to see. (Ph: 800-353-0330 or 310-510-0330; fax (310) 510-1629; e-mail cds@catalinas.net; website www.catalinadiverssupply.com)

Catalina Divers Supply, Casino Point, Pavilion Lodge, July 2001, William and Frances Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol.com) Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 70 Feet. Water: 68 to 70 F, choppy surge no currents. My ten year old daughter completed her PADI O/W certification dives and it was ideal. Casino Point is a marine reserve, a perfect place to explore for both beginners and the more advanced. Weekends in the summer tend to be

crowded with student divers, but there is plenty of room in the park once you clear the steps and adjacent area. Kelp was abundant and the water was clear and relatively warm, but then again, we were diving dry. Had a close encounter with a giant sea bass, which are protected. Cruised the wreck of the Sue Jac and other small wrecks within the park boundaries. Lots of Garibaldis and other typical California marine life. The Pavilion Lodge is diver friendly (although pricey) and is centrally located in Avalon. Take a cab or one of the shuttles to the point and rent your tanks and weights from Catalina Divers Supply. In the summer, they are there seven days a week. In the winter, only on weekends. Avalon is a great little getaway with the feeling of being in a lot more exotic locale than 26 miles from Los Angeles. The diving was good and the nightlife excellent. No rinse tanks available at Casino Point.

Monterey

Monterey Bay Dive Center, March 2001, Howard Chalmers (hchalmers@mindspring.com) Suwanee, GA. Vis: 15-25 ft. Water: 52-58 F, calm and flat. Dives logged: 61. Dive restrictions: depth. First dive on West Coast. MBDC set me up with a guided dive. Great dives! Made me very comfortable with the cold. Good explanation of what we would see in the kelp forest and on the flats. 5 or 6 small sea lions buzzed us on our second dive. (Ph: 800-607-2822 or 831-656-0454; fax 831-656-9535; e-mail service@mbdc.to; website www.mbdc.to)