

Dive Kiribati, Captain Cook Hotel, July 2001, Dave Sayles, (dpsayles@cnsurety.com)
Caledonia, MI. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 80 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 230. Dive restrictions: computer. Frontier Travel gave very good presentation on what to expect. Limited soft coral. Hard corals in excellent shape. On 2 separate occasions we spent an hour snorkeling with mantas. On several occasions the mantas were close enough to touch. Kim Anderson provided excellent assistance for his divers. Tank fills were always 3200-3300 Lb. Boat was stable. Most dives 50-80 ft. (**Ph: (800) 245-1950 or (412) 935-1577; fax (412) 935-5388; e-mail divekiribati@juno.com; website www.fun2do.com/divekiribati**)

MICRONESIA

Chuuk

This is the world's most diverse wreck diving on hundreds of Japanese ships sunk during a battle in WWII, with lionfish on the bridge, giant clams on the deck, and bottles of ink and erasers for students of the vanished Japanese Empire still visible in the hold. . . . Most wreck dives — other than on superstructure — are in the 80'+ range, but there's fine diving even without wreck penetration. . . . Expect calm water, occasional poor visibility, little or no current, and temperatures that can hit the high 80s. . . .

Truk Blue Lagoon Resort, January 2001, William R. Smythe, Scott's

Valley, CA. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82 F. Dives logged: 500+. Dive restrictions: Suggested limits. The wrecks are still some of the greatest. The corals are fantastic day or night! We were with a group of gung-ho tech divers who pushed the limits. My wife and I are senior divers so we only went down on the shallower wrecks — 80 ft. max. We were more than satisfied. The dive crew was very accommodating in helping my wife — a novice diver. She saw more stuff than I did. The high point for her was a stone fish! The resort is locally owned and managed by Mason Fritz. It has just been redone. It was comfortable and adequate. The food was just average. They ran out of papaya 1/2 way through our stay — but had Washington State apples! Perhaps a bit pricey but the main town was on a par with the worst parts of Mogadishu, Somalia or Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania where I once worked. The town is dangerous day or night. Dive shop minimal — sells mostly tee-shirts. (**Ph: 800-367-5004 or 808-955-6221; fax 800-477-2329 or 808-955-7749; e-mail info@castleresorts.com or reservations@castleresorts.com; website www.castleresorts.com**)

Truk Blue Lagoon Resort, February 2001, Michael Mason Hammond, IN. Long flights on Continental in packed planes, from Chicago through Houston, Honolulu and overnighted on Guam. The flight from Guam had us arriving on Wed in time to check in to the Blue Lagoon Resort, eat a nice lunch and make a one tank afternoon dive on the Fujikawa Maru. The Blue Lagoon folks had a van for us and

pickups for our gear/luggage (they made a few trips) and whisked us through "town" to the resort "post-card" quality. The rooms were functional and clean. The A/C worked quietly and could freeze you out. The satellite uplink was down so no "cable," a VCR was to play the tapes found in the lobby shop. A nice Lanai off each room. The restaurant, staffed with locals served up a nice menu with nightly "specials" that added verity to the otherwise unchanging menu. the food was good. A "cabana bar" was opened if anyone needed refreshment in the afternoon, and was a gathering place in the evenings. As we had seven divers, we found ourselves transported on the same boat each dive/day, and our Divemaster/ Guide Randy and boat driver Wiley, were with us the whole way. Randy took us in tow and kept a good watch. He allowed me to solo off with my camera Five diving days and I made eleven dives on seven wrecks, one at night on the Shinkoku Maru. Wonderful, hard corals feeding at night and lush soft corals made this dive "one for the books." Some of the wrecks were so "tasty" that we made second dives on them. We had rain our first two days. Randy described a wreck at dockside and we indicated if we thought it sounded good or wanted to return to one we had already done, we had choice. The Lagoon was a bit choppy and when we got out of the lee of an island it got rather rough, but the open boat took us safely to all our dives. The deepest was exactly 130 feet, to the low side of the sloping deck of the Nippo Maru (to see the

small Army tank). All our dives were mostly 40 to 90 feet, the life was the most lush in that depth zone. The viz ranged from 40 to 90 feet. Water was 83 all the way down. There was a great variety of growth on the wrecks and in some places on the bottom there were hard coral forests stretching away from the wrecks. Lots of small fish and a few mid size, but the largest we saw was a 6 ft. Gray reef shark on our last dive (Nippo Maru). Locals use explosives in their fishing, and it's pretty fished out. Some in our party rented gear and it was in good shape. There was no rinse bucket on the boat. Randy said, "Go get the waste basket from your room!" I had a rinse bucket. They had a hang tank on each dive at about 25 ft. and shot lines hung off the transom from each side of the boat at 15 ft. for safety stops. We encountered little to no current. Dream trip. We had our off-gas day on the anniversary of the US Navy's attack, but declined to attend the festivities that were being held on Dublon Island. There were a number of elderly Japanese that came to the resort to eat and walk around, the site being the location of Seaplane repair facilities during the war. This trip cost some "Pesos" but the diving lived up to the billing.

Truk Blue Lagoon Resort, May 2001, Deb and Dave Smith-Craine (smithcraine@aol.com) Kutztown, PA. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 80-85 F, calm & flat. Logged dives: 81 and 84. Dive restrictions: they were careful. Blue Lagoon Resort was very nice. We were initially put in first floor

rooms because the U.S. military was having a banquet there to which we were invited. Later we had second floor rooms which were bigger with ceiling fans and TV. The food was very good and we never left there the entire week. Our group was 12 and we had two boats. Our dive guides were very good. When my regulator broke, they brought a rental regulator out to our boat. They took us everywhere we wanted to go. The wreck diving was awesome. The dive boats dropped rebar anchor on wrecks because fishermen cut buoys. Also dove two plane wrecks.

Truk Blue Lagoon Divers, Truk Stop Hotel, June 2001, Roger Gray (diverdown60@hotmail.com)

Annandale, VA. Vis: 25-60 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 200+. Hotel for the budget minded. The rooms are big but are showing signs of age. It has a large bath and a refrigerator. The rooms also come with bottled water. The food is good and reasonably priced. Truk Stop is in town, and town is a dump. Dive boats are small 6 to 8 divers max. Crews set up tanks for you. Divemaster lets you dive your own profile with computer. Most of the dives are around 90 feet. You get a two hour surface interval for lunch (not provided — nor is drinking water). You do a second 90 foot dive so watch decompression times. Divemasters take you inside the wrecks so bring a light. The crews and the divemasters were great, helpful, and friendly. Weather was in the low 80's, the water was 82 degrees at 90 feet. It rained some everyday but did not underwater. For a more isolated stay the

Blue Lagoon Resort is on the far end of the island. Manager of the Truk Stop said the hotel is going to have its own dive boats in 2002. He said deals would be offered on its web site, www.trukstophotel.com starting June 2001. Also departure tax is \$15 and you will need to get a Truk diving permit at \$30.00. Beginning Scuba divers don't go.

Kosrae

This small, unspoiled island didn't get jet service until 1987, and it still hasn't changed much. . . . Its high volcanic peaks are lush and green, and a close, fringing reef makes the diving easily accessible, but it's not high-voltage diving on a par with Palau.

Kosrae Village Resort, May 2001, Roger Gray (diverdown60@hotmail.com)

Annandale, VA. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 200+. Authentic thatched bungalows. No phone, TV, radio, or newspaper. Each bungalow has two beds with mosquito netting over it. Do not drink the water. Each hut is provided with fresh filtered water. The rooms also have a refrigerator. The food is very good and reasonably priced. The resort has its own boats. The boats can hold up to 10 divers, but there was only 2. Lunch and drinking water at the surface interval. Could use a sturdier ladder to get back on the boat. The diving speaks for itself, over 100 types of hard coral and over 50 types of soft coral. Tropical fish and critters of all size, are all over the reef. Great diving for both beginner and experienced

diver. In water of 25 ft or less there is surge. It rained most of the time. The divemasters and crews were very good. Tips are placed in a tip jar at the resort for all workers to share. (Ph: +691-370-3483; fax +691-370-5839; e-mail Info@KosraeVillage.com; website www.kosraevillage.com)

Kosrae Village Resort, May 2001, Kenneth & Domin Lathom (nagatikus@aol.com) **Del Valle, TX.**

Vis: 50-125 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Logged dives: 31. Dive restrictions enforced: 85' 45 min., stop at 15' 5 min. No diving on Sunday, go to church. Local singing was nice. Bring am radio for the one station's island music. No TV. Rooms have fans — no a/c. Queen beds. Have mosquito nets. Stable ride. No place to change film. 1200psi at end (both dives!) Anemones, tridacna clams, Christmas tree worms.

Sleeping Lady Divers/Kosrae Village Resort, February 2001, Greg & Caye Norwick, Parshall, CO. Vis: 80-150 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Rainy season. Only dove 3 days of 2 tank dives. Repeated 2 of the sites by choice of dive guide — so don't have a good handle on different sites but loved the corals and small tropical fish and visibility. (Ph: +691-370-3483; fax +691-370-5839; e-mail Info@KosraeVillage.com; website www.kosraevillage.com)

Mariana Islands

Rota

Dive Rota, Coral Garden, June 2001, Kenneth & Domin Lathom (nagatikus@aol.com) **Del Valle, TX.**

Vis: 100-150 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Logged dives: 31. Dives 40 to 70 minutes, go to 100'. Tanks are special 3500 psi — usually just 300 psi end of dive after 5 min. 15' stop. Use less lead here. WWII Japanese wreck — Shoun Maru at 95 ft. Lots of war stuff on island. Rent a car at \$40 a day. Return to shop after each dive. Eat across street before going on second dive. Senhanom Cave has a curtain of sunlight rays — like in movie "She"! Red lion fish. Black crinoids. Cave was massive. Nice boat. (Ph: +670-532-3377; fax +670-532-3022; e-mail mark@diverota.com; website www.diverota.com)

Marshall Islands

After years of radiation monitoring, the historic shipwrecks of Bikini Atoll have been opened to recreational divers. Monitoring is still being done by the U.S. Department of Energy to ensure that radiation levels in the lagoon are low enough to permit safe diving. This is a wreck diver's paradise, but be prepared: most of them are deep. . . .

Bikini Atoll

Marshalls Dive Adventures, September 2000, James Callahan, Cincinnati, OH. Vis: 40-90 ft. Water: 85 F. Dives logged: 400+. Dive restrictions: Full cave cert. for wreck penetration, UWATEC or DiveRite Bridge Nitec /Recommended Computers/2 dives per day. Well run dive operation overseen by Fabio. Due to depths (135-191') bottom times ranged 25-35 min. w/25-50 min. decompression using 30'-20'-10' buoyed hang bar

w/surface supplied Nitrox (80%). Double 85s and single 108s w/H valve used Din preferred. No rental gear available. Weight limit for the Marshall Air flight is 275# diver included. We are large men and we had to leave a lot of stuff behind and had it flown to us 2 1/2 days later (video cams/ND lites/clothing/shoes) @\$3/pound. Food was just OK. Pretty basic stuff (hot dogs for lunch, pasta and rice meals, frozen mixed veggies). Soda and beer at extra fee. Free laundry service. Big Tease: there was a frozen soft serve ice cream machine but no mix for it! No big schools of fish or pretty corals but this is the Mt. Everest of wreck diving. Good pre dive briefings. All deep air diving/note 1 mix available. Be prepared to get hammered by nitrogen. Log onto www.bikiniatoll.com — Good info. Also try www.nps.gov/scru/bikini (Submerged Cultural Resources Unit) for historical facts. Dive these wrecks now. In several years people will be saying, I remember when you could penetrate these wrecks. And believe me. I don't glow in the dark after being there. The only glowing I did was after the dives remembering what I had just experienced! USS Saratoga was the main focus of the week, but 2 battleships, a destroyer, a troop transport and a submarine was also visited. Now that I've gone down on Sara and penetrated her, I can die a happy man! **(Marshall's Dive Adventures: Ph: 692-625-3250; fax 692-625-3505; e-mail mdabikini@hotmail.com or peter.fuchs@excite.com; website <http://www.rreinc.com/mda.html>)**

Marshall's Dive Adventures, October 2000, Harry L. Cure, Jr. (cure@onramp.net) Fort Worth, TX. Vis: 60 to 75 Feet. Water: 84 to 84 F, calm no currents. Dive Restrictions: Full cave certification required to penetrate wrecks, maximum dive time, including decompression was two hours. Two dives a day. My second trip to Bikini Atoll (the first in 1997). The wreck diving is still the best in the world (Truk on steroids). The wrecks are quickly showing wear. I strongly recommend that anyone diving these marvelous wrecks do so within five years or penetration may become dangerous. The food quality has gone down greatly, but the living quarters are the same, basic but clean and adequate. The service by Fabio and the staff is still great. This is for advanced divers only. Most dives in the 140-170 foot range. Double tanks and 70-80% oxygen for decompression are provided. The only place in the world you dive war ships of this nature.

Marshall's Dive Adventures, June 2001, Ed Heimiller (heimiller@att.net) Streamwood, IL. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 83 F. Dives logged: 4,000 +. Dive restrictions enforced: run time less than 2 hours. For my 60th year of living, I decided to return to Bikini Atoll three years since my initial visit. Long travel time Chicago to Houston to Honolulu where we overnighted. The next afternoon it was off on Continental's island hopper heading to Guam but only as far as Majuro. We overnighted and caught Air Marshall's weekly flight to Bikini Atoll. Air Marshall has

strict luggage limits, one carry-on, thirty (30#) lbs. of checked baggage free and anything more a \$1.50 per pound. It cost me an extra \$94.00. Fabio, Head Divemaster and Resort Director, is leaving after six years, but his replacement is there and in training. Short ride to "Bikini" island where we would be staying. The work boat was to be our dive boat as the regular one, "Bravo" was no longer sea worthy and the new boat was still in Majuro. All dives would be guided. On all deep dives we were to make an 80' stop for 2 minutes and our total run time on any dive could not exceed 120 minutes. 7:00 am Breakfast 8:30 am dive briefing, travel to dock, assemble dive gear and ride out wreck. 9:15 am Dive. Noon lunch. 2:30 pm dive briefing, travel to dock, assemble dive gear and ride out wreck. 3:15 pm dive. 6:00 pm dinner, relax and sleep. The lunch and following day's meals were not the best, but the meals improved. They were buffet. Breakfast — cold cereal, toast, bagels, juice, coffee, tea, milk, eggs some days pancakes, french toast, sausage, ham, spam, bacon. Lunch — juice, water, salad, can fruit, white rice. Dinner — a combination of salad, canned fruit, white rice, fried rice, potatoes and gravy, steak. Short ribs chicken, ground beef, shrimp, fresh Fish. Pop and beer an additional charge. Wednesday afternoon: Checkout dive on the flight deck of the Saratoga, as we descended down the mid-ship line to the bridge the sight of the Saratoga takes your breath away. From the bridge we descended to the flight deck and then swam

across it to the port side and continued on towards the bow stopping to look at the gun emplacements along the side. There were several openings behind the guns for penetration. My dive buddy, entered the Communication Bridge and swam through it. max depth of 109 feet an actual bottom time (ABT) of 43 minutes and a total run time (TBT) of 66 minutes. I used my Uwatec as an air computer even though we used EAN 75 for our 20 foot and 10 stop. USS Lamson, Destroyer. We descended on this upright destroyer at mid-ships by the machine shop on the starboard side and proceeded to the bow passing gun, depth charges, torpedo launcher with two torpedoes stuck part way out and several more on the bottom. Max depth of 152 feet, ABT of 28 minutes and a TBT of 77 minutes. Saratog. Examined the two planes, exited at the aft hanger elevator and swam back the bridge and line. Max depth 133 feet, ABT = 32, and TBT = 52. USS Arkansas Battleship. The ship is upside down on its port side and the line is just aft of the 12- inch guns. We entered a room with only one entrance and saw two small engines and telegraphs. After we exited we swam forward past anti-aircraft guns and the forward turret with the barrels pointing out. Max depth of 177 feet, ABT of 26 minutes and TBT of 73 minutes. HUMS Nagato Battleship (Capital). We dropped down mid-ships on the overturned battleship and swam up through a hole in the deck and head towards the stern inside the ship going through several rooms. 16-inch guns, four props that were used to power the ship and the two

rudders that steered it. In this area there were damsels, hard coral, a baby shark and a larger shark and a large puffer.

Max depth of 167 feet, ABT of 28 minutes and a TBT of 72 minutes.

Doing deco on one dive we saw several sharks and jellyfish. Saratoga Bow: we saw the rooms, bed and wash area for the officers. USS Carlisle: small arms armory, galley area, recreation area and individual rooms. Emergency lights were still in place as well as horns, fire hoses and first aid kit. USS Anderson Destroyer: depth charge racks, anti-aircraft guns, the fallen bridge, a large gun, torpedo tubes and finally the bow. We returned on the starboard side and you still see the intact portholes. USS Apogon Submarine. Bunks, gauges and torpedoes stored in their racks. At the stern we examined the rudder, prop and rear torpedo tubes which have the doors open and you can see a torpedo in one. Trip to Shark Pass was cancelled because they only had the work boat.

Palau

Long day-boat rides to the best diving weave through calm water and past magnificent rock islands, but there's the potential for rough seas on the outer edges of islands. . . . Most serious divers prefer live-aboards due to the length of the daily commute from Koror. . . . Marine biodiversity here is among the greatest in the world, but major coral bleaching and commercial fishing is taking its toll. . . . Visibility can exceed 200', while currents range from nil to dangerously strong. . . . The capital city of Koror, well along the

way to being Caymanized by massive tourism, has excellent ethnic restaurants. . . . The best handicrafts are prisoners' carved wooden story boards for sale at the jail in town; hand-pressed coconut oil from street vendors is a good gift for your personal massage practitioner. . . .

Carp Island Resort, January 2001, Laura Todd, Arcata, CA. Vis: 50-100 + ft. Water: 80-84 F. Water temp was consistently 84, generally calm, with strong currents at some sites and none at others. The guides had a strong preference for keeping their groups together, but divers with computers and a sausage could form sub groups. Guides knew the sites well and were good at finding small stuff (saw hawkfish, leaf fish, spiked goby and file clam). Unfortunately, they tended to go to the same sites repetitively. There are some 80 dive sites in Palau, yet we visited only 10 in a week. They actually repeated the Blue Corner + German Channel combo 3 days in a row. When we (the English speakers) begged for other sites, we were told conditions weren't right for Sieas Tunnel and Ulong Channel. However, on the 3rd trip to German channel we saw 5 Mantas at once and a leopard shark. They had no medium size rental BCs so I floundered all week in a large. Carp Island is about 1 hour south of Koror, very near some of the best sites, so you'd think the management would take advantage and beat the day trippers, yet they keep to a boat schedule (pick up new folks in town in the morning,

get to island, unload and get them geared up, then all boats back to Koror around 3 pm) that gets you on site at 9:30 with everybody else. Third dive and night dives when request by 5 or more. Coral is in better shape (at least in the limited sites I saw) than expected. Promised sharks showed up on almost every dive = grays, white and black tips plus the leopard shark. The mantas were there, but contact tended to be brief. Plenty of big fish: trevally, tuna, and a Napoleon wrasse convention on one dive. Huge schools of barracuda on most dives plus swirling bait balls composed of several species of reef fish. Also hawksbill turtles on several dives. Only one eel all week. The Rock Islands are gorgeous, and staff went out of the way to take us to scenic lunch spots. Think of Carp as a summer camp for adults. In the dive house, which does have private rooms, there are wood platforms and you sleep on the equivalent of lawn chair pads on them. Electricity after 6 pm. Showers are shared and cold. Rainwater is reserved for cooking and rinsing regs and cameras — the shower water comes from a well and is a little salty. Consequently you feel in need of a shower all the time. If you need any comforts at all, spring for the new cottages, which are luxurious in comparison. The beach cottages are only a slight improvement (en suite bathroom — cold water) at \$25 more. Only 3 hammocks for the whole place. Latecomers are relegated the strange “beach lounges” basically a wooden luge track. Beware of the no seems if the trades stop blowing. Food: Is all

buffet style in a dining space that will definitely remind you of summer camp. Simple, but good quality and decent variety, with Japanese (sashimi, miso soup) and American (bbq chicken, salad) at every meal. Dinner is overpriced at \$20. Breakfast is wonderful, with fresh eggs from the resident chickens. Rainwater is used for cooking and is served at meals, but bottles of drinking water can be purchased. Free coffee (instant) and tea all day. Diver’s lunches are Japanese food prepared at the company’s Koror restaurant and were simple but good = rice + bbq or grilled fish, hard boiled egg, fruit and pickled veggies. Occasionally some hapless delicacy would make an appearance; simple sandwiches available on request. Although the snorkeling right in front of Carp is not great, there are much better opportunities a short paddle away in one of the inexpensively rented kayaks. There is a great hike (easy level, almost all shady) to see some stone money. Exquisite beaches and views. Lie on the long dock at night and watching for falling stars. (Ph: (680) 488-2978; fax +680 488-3155; e-mail carpcorp@palaunet.com)

Dive Palau, Palau Pacific Resort, December 2000, Bill Smythe, Scott’s Valley, CA. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82 F. Dives logged: 500+. Alan Dean Foster, has a saying — A lot of people lie a lot. Don’t go to Palau for the coral — wait 5-10 years. El Niño did a number on the shallow coral — it’s 90% dead. Deeper stuff, depending on area is 50-75% alive. Hence fewer tropical fish. I did Blue Corner on a low current day — it was just good.

Others in our party did it on a high current day — they raved. All diving is a one hour run to the same area — so I can't speak for any other areas of Palau — but I understand it's not much better. Operators reluctant to depart from the old groove. Dive Palau has one covered/cabin boat. But it is a bit worn. In fact, due to the pounding due to bad chop it developed a split in the hull. Other operators use boats with a cover — but no wind protection for other than the operator — we had a lot of rain/chop — so at 25 mph the rain was damn painful and the pounding hurt! Cold too. Palau Pacific Resort — 5 star but very expensive. As was the food. We ate in town. The resort dive operation Splash caters to the Japanese. Full service shop though — well stocked. We paid full high season rates \$270/day only 1/4 full. Found out Palau has 60+ wrecks, most stripped of anything interesting. But a nite dive on one was good. **(Palau Pacific Resort Ph: (680) 488-2600; fax (680) 488-1606; e-mail PPR@palaunet.com; website www.panpac.com)**

Fish 'n Fins, Palau Pacific, September 2000, Paul Lee, (paulleesd@earthlink.net) Carlsbad, CA. Vis: 100-150+ ft. Water: 81-84 F. Dives logged: 400+. Dive restrictions: Common sense, depth and time. Dive inst/master Oliver at Fish n Fins was excellent. They went way out of their way to make everything perfect, such as, extra stops at Chandelier Cave, a plane wreck, Mandarin Fish Lake, a cave we drove the boat into. Some coral was dead, I suppose from high temperatures, but the life was

abundant and varied. Large wrasse sharks on every dive. The sharks at Blue Corner posed for pictures six to eight feet away. The highlight was German Channel. Two mantas got very close, one hung around for twenty minutes. **(Ph: (680) 488-2637; fax (680) 488-5418; e-mail fishnfin@palaunet.com; website www.fishnfins.com)**

Neco Marine, Palau Pacific Resort, May 2001, Deb and Dave Smith-Craine (smithcraine@aol.com) Kutztown, PA. Vis: 75-200 ft. Water: 80-85 F, calm & flat. Logged dives: 81 and 84. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. depth limit, 500 psi start to ascend. The resort was excellent. Catered to all your needs and wants. Bedroom slippers, fresh robes and chocolate on you pillows when they turned down the beds. Nice pool, bar, beach and restaurant. Neco Marine was the best. Our group was 12 and we had two boats. Our dive guides, Jan and Bert, were enthusiastic and took us to Peliue Corner when the water was flat as a mirror and later that day dove Blue Corner when the current was ripping. Saw sharks every dive. Jellyfish Lake is worth the climb. Neco Marine put a mini-bus at our disposal every evening and the last day for shopping. We felt safe and comfortable. **(Neco Marine Ph: 680-488-1755/2009; fax 680-488-3014; e-mail NecoMarine@palaunet.com; website www.seapalau.com)**

Neco Marine, West Plaza Desekel Hotel, August 2001, Michael & Donna Hellums (empath@aracnet.com) Portland, OR. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 15 to 150 Feet. Water: 84

F. Top notch dive operation expertly managed by Bert and Jan Yates. They worked hard to keep us diving despite terrible weather. High winds and pouring rain for days. All dive operations were confined to inside the barrier reef due to rough seas on the outer reefs. Neco took us to accessible sites, then had to start repeating dives. Neco still made it interesting by showing us a different aspect of the same site. All employees were courteous and helpful. We were greeted at the airport and daily hotel pick-ups were on time. I had doctor's orders to not lift my gear and to remove it prior to exiting the water. Neco staff cheerfully hauled my heavy gear (with integrated weight system) and I never had to carry anything. Neco's boats were spacious and comfortable, with tanks set up along the sides, padded bench seats, ample gear storage, shaded canopy, camera tables, and even a small dry storage area. Neco staff set up BC's & regulators for us before the boat left the dock and in between dives. Gear was stored overnight in a locked room. Michelle, our dive guide, matched her style to our preferences. My husband was able to get some excellent videography due to Michelle's patience, keen eyes, and knowledge of critters. Danny, the boat captain, was quietly competent and considerate. West Plaza Desekel is nothing fancy, but rooms were clean, modern and comfortable. Staff was very friendly. On a side street, but within walking distance of restaurants and shopping. Being directly above the grocery store was convenient and not noisy.

Sam's Tours, West Plaza Hotel, November 2000, Glenn Davis, Pittsburg, CA. Water: 84-86 F, calm choppy surge currents. Package trip from <http://Worldofdiving.com>. <http://www.worldofdiving.com/westplaza.htm>—they arrange for diving with Sam's Tours, the best dive shop in Palau for Westerners. The others mostly cater to Japanese "cattle boats". Lots of eye popping soft corals and dense schools of tropical fish. Quite a few sharks, mostly gray reef, white tipped and silver tipped and a few manta rays. There are blue holes, tunnels, drop offs, walls and channels. Best places to watch large and small fish occur where there are significant currents and they rent you a large blunt hook on 6' of line with a clip to go on your BC. You hook to some exposed limestone rock and hang out. All dives are led by an experienced guide. You can dive alone, but should at least tag along at a distance if you want to get picked up by the boat as they follow bubbles. Everyone must have a safety sausage — the boat was very good about spotting us quickly. The rock islands constrict the flow of water and generate the currents that feed the life you come to see. Air was from 80-92 degrees. We did get occasional rain showers and it was nice to have the 4/3 wet suit to zip into — a dive jacket would have been nice. Many wore skins or a shorty or just a swimsuit. Visibility was 125' plus for the first week and then 60-80 for the last couple of days as a storm came a pushing somewhat strong surf into the reefs. Extra days at \$89/day diving

and \$63/day hotel. Sam's charges \$35 for a third dive, but the only two that are worth the third dive were crystal cave — just across the cove from where Sam's boats dock — and a wreck with visibility about 20' with the deck at 92'. Lots of silt on the decks, but some interesting life and good opportunities for macro shots. Nice lion fish and beautiful tropical carpets of anemones on the mast structure. They will do a night dive for \$50 — but there were never four divers. The best DM is Jonas who works with Jonathan as his boat captain. Jonas used one of the erasable dive slates to talk to the divers, usually four to six. West Plaza Desekel convenient and new. All the West Plaza Hotels are \$70 a night, 10% discount for a week. Each room has a small refrigerator and pot to boil water for tea or coffee. They put me in the West Plaza Malakal, which is a five minute walk to Sam's — but isn't close to anything else except for the Clam Aquaculture farm (interesting) and several low class bars. But you get a free van ride to the boat daily from any hotel so it's better to be close to restaurants and shops. The West Plaza Desekel is round the corner from banks, restaurants and shops and has a convenience market. Rock Island Café (9 oz Marlin steak dinner for \$6). Taxi rides are a local rip off. The fare is \$1 in town of Koror and \$2 to a neighboring town, like Malakal— where Sam's is located. They want you to pay \$5-\$10 for the \$1-\$2 rides. Don't ask how much, instead tell them \$1 (or \$2) to go to (name your destination). That is the rate charged to the locals and the

taxi drivers will do the same for tourists if they know about it. My favorite restaurants: Furusato for the Tuna Sashimi (cheap and great, \$6 for 12 big pieces); The Seahorse Restaurant in the hotel West Plaza by the Sea is an excellent North Indian restaurant (hot to mild on request) with indoor/outdoor dining; Thai Garden was a great Thai restaurant that doesn't know the meaning of "make it mild"— great food; the only place for a good American breakfast (and general American food) is the Rock Island Café. On my last day of diving, I got a substitute dive guide. Went to Siaes Tunnel. Great dive going through a big tunnel (entrance is at 80' top and bottom 130' with the opening being about 50' high) exiting at about 70' and then along a nice wall. The sea was rough with 4'-8' swells and 2' wind waves. The guide never found the tunnel and switched dive directions from what he had told the boat captain. He also had told us to be sure to swim away from the wall at the end of the dive or be swept over the reef. When I surfaced the boat was no where in sight as it thought we had gone in the opposite direction from our actual path. As the DM surfaced with our group two divers were in the surf over the reef and directed the DM to their plight. He immediately swam off to rescue them. All three disappeared into the crashing surf. One lady in the remaining group noticed we were now being drawn into the reef and so we swam hard away from it for a few minutes and got to a stable location over deep blue water. Still no boat, we all had our safety sausages

inflated and held high. Just then, another lady mentioned we were being stalked by three sharks. Sure enough, I looked down into the water to see three sharks circling us about 60' down and coming up gradually. They were two white or silver tipped at 6' and one 9' gray reef shark. This was unsettling. I had seen many sharks over the prior week but was always on the bottom or against a wall — never in a prime bait position. We stayed close and I advised all to kick at the gills and eyes of any shark that got close enough to touch — something I recently read in the “Worst Case Scenario Handbook.” Just as the sharks were getting into the 20'-30' depth range they suddenly disappeared — and the boat showed up. We found the two who went through the surf. The young newbie lady — who surfaced where she was told not to — nearly drowned as she lost her regulator as she was tumbled through the surf line. She also lost mask/fins and her BC was ripped up. At the dive shop, we were assured that sharks have never bit divers in this area and that they were probably just curious. Famous last words. (Ph: (680) 488-1062; fax (680) 488-5003; e-mail samstour@palaunet.com; website www.samstours.com)

Sam's Tours, West Plaza Desekele, December 2000, Fran Macintyre (jennienik@netzero.net) Albuquerque, NM. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, choppy. West Plaza Desekele is an expensive Motel 6 setup in town. Bussed to the dive shop daily. It was a

hassle not staying right at the dive area, but transportation back and forth was dependable and only took 8 minutes. There was a well stocked grocery store downstairs and a very good restaurant (Furusato Restaurant) around the corner for breakfast and dinner. Breakfasts were standard menu items and inexpensive. Dinners were Oriental/Japanese for \$5-\$7 for as much as most of us could eat. We were also within walking distance of shops and restaurants further in town. The long rides to the dive sites (60-90 minutes) across some very rough seas were hard on our backs and stomachs. Although we had a very good boat driver (Jimmy), he occasionally hit a wave wrong, causing people in the front of the boat to wish we'd brought a chiropractor along. Thankfully we had plenty of Dramamine and ginger tabs to help with the seasick problem, and it was always a short reach to the side of the boat in case our stomachs refused to cooperate. On most days we had our lunches on land at Two Dog Beach. One of the dogs had died just recently, but the second one hobbled around on it's crippled up legs to greet each boat as it landed. It was one very well fed doggy! The diving was awesome, the wrecks were great, and snorkeling Jellyfish Lake is not to be missed. We all took the Blue Corner Padi Specialty course from divemaster Matthew Young and headed out the next morning for an incredible dive. Hanging on the edge of the reef by our reef hooks, watching more sharks than we could count cruising by was a tremendous experience. Every time we were given a choice of where to dive, we chose Blue Corner. Just outside

Ulong Channel was our second favorite dive — lots of shark feeding activity. Story boards: Stop by the jail to see the inmates' carvings; they're quite good. You'll be able to negotiate directly with the artist. Day boats had rinse tank but no dedicated area to work on cameras.

Sam's Tours, Caroline's Resort, June 2001, John Chernesky, Valencia, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 89 F, calm currents. Everything for the advanced diver. Wall, drift, reef-hook, macro, large pelagics, wreck, caverns, etc. Sam's Tours are very efficient, and do what they can to accommodate special requests. But, you're at the mercy of the group assigned to your boat (i.e., if everyone except you wants to go to Blue Corner, you're going to Blue Corner!). We learned to go with the flow, since there is no such thing as a bad dive on Palau. Encountered very bad experience with Rich (dive master). No attention to safety, told us one thing but did another, told us not to bring reef hooks but then went to a site that required them. He was quickly replaced by Matt — enthusiastic, attentive, knew all the highlights to look for, and focused on our safety without making us feel restricted. Not able to arrange a night dive. They require minimum of 4 divers, and surprisingly no one else was interested. At the shop there is a large board that indicates who's diving on what boat, with what guide, and where you're going. Always ask them in the morning,

before you go out, where you want to go the next day. If you wait until the afternoon, it might be too late. The Lonely Planet dive guide to Palau is excellent. Bring a large floppy hat — sun is brutal. Boats didn't have rinse tank, too small to accommodate. Shop had separate tank.

Sam's Tours, Palau Pacific Resort, August 2001, Harry Cure, Jr. (harry@curelawfirm.com) Fort Worth, TX. Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 83-84 F, choppy. Logged dives: 1,500+. One of the best dive destinations in the world, but due to rainy, windy conditions, mainly did second tier sites. One blue corner dive showed dozens of sharks, a half dozen eels, several large Napoleon wrasse, lionfish and several turtles. Sam's Dive Tours provide outstanding service. Matthew and Omar are excellent divemasters.

Storyboard Beach Resort, January 2001, David & Susan Scott (kypg3@msn.com) Cape Coral, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 200 Feet. Water: 82 to F, choppy surge currents. Peleliu is the heart of the better diving in Palau, the boat is a 28' Yamaha with twin 200hp engines, well maintained, in 15 days of diving, we had the boat to just us for 10 days, one day was a full boat which seemed crowded. Tanks are al80's, no nitrox. The owner Godwin Sadao, waits for the tide to be just right before you leave the dock. Dive times are dictated by the tides not by a set operator schedule. This makes the difference between a so-so dive and

a high voltage dive. Most times the hoards from Koror have long since left or have not yet arrived and you beat the other hoards from the live-aboards. The “resort” is a “bure” type setup, no ac, clean, private bath. Eight units total. Don’t drink the water. Bugs are not too bad, but we are from the swamps of SWFL, the bug capitol of the world. We where there in ‘97 before the El Niño bleaching. Some corals areas decimated, others untouched. It was always hard to concentrate on the coral with all the pelagic activity anyway. The first time visitor may not even notice the coral damage. Peleliu was the location of a major WW2 battle, the first of entrenched Japanese battle plan. Plenty to see top side. Hundreds of caves, manmade and natural. Food is good. Local fare, mainly fish and pork from time to time. Had rain, sun and everything in between, dives never canceled due to rain and the boat rides are short. Transportation from Koror was by plane but it crashed in 2000, now provided by water taxi, a nice ride, but not one I would like to do everyday. Sausages provided, we also dive with a flashlight/strobe as well. Peleliu express location can be a hairy dive in terms of egress. As to the story boards, don’t miss the opportunity to order one from Isaac on the north side of the island, a true artist. Most of the boards in Koror are carved by drunks in the local jail, they look like it too. Land tours by Tangie Jesus, worth the fee. Over 13,000 people were killed here in WW2, the jungle is most of the time a somewhat eerie place. We found the

diving to be even better in 2001 than 97. pdivers@palaunet.com. “bure” is about \$80/nite, dives are about \$95/ two tank 3rd is \$40 or so. (Ph: **680-345-1058 or 680-345-1019; fax 680-345-1058; e-mail pdivers@palaunet.com; website <http://plaza16.mbn.or.jp/%7Epalau/pdivers.htm>)**

Pohnpei

The Village, January 2001, Pat Aderman, (pat_aderman@juno.com) Chuok-ku, Kobe, Japan. Pohnpei is not highly developed though it is more developed than Chuuk. Petty theft and poverty are not nearly as severe here as on Chuuk either. The Village is a collection of tree house style thatch roofed bungalows built on stilts on the edge of a high ridge. All rooms are open air, screened with no A/C, (it isn’t needed), only a ceiling fan. They each have a private bath and sitting area. They are built in such a way that you can’t look into other cabins from yours nor can anyone look in on you for the most part. The main building, which houses the office, restaurant and bar is open air with a thatched roof. An afternoon/evening spent at the bar looking out over the ocean enjoying cocktails with the other guests, both divers and non-divers, followed by a delicious dinner of the local seafood, (the Mangrove Crab is terrific), is about as good as it gets. While the hotel offers packages that include meals. It is a 200 to 300 yard walk down the hill to the boat dock via an old 4WD truck that it uses to haul everyone’s gear back and forth. You give them your gear on the first

day and the staff takes total care of it until you are ready to depart. They rinse and hang it in their gear locker every day. The tanks were not topped off. They usually had only about 2850 psi. You order lunch the evening before each dive day. There is a variety of sandwiches to choose from but they tend to be very dry and bland. The real treat for lunch is the "bento" which is usually served still warm in a banana leaf. It is rice topped with a variety of grilled fish and meat, vegetables and a hard boiled egg. When doused with the supplied soy sauce and eaten with chop sticks on the beach of one of many uninhabited islands it is wonderful. You can also order bottled water and/or soft drinks or beer for after diving on the ride back. The boats are open 20 footers with twin outboards and bimini tops. The boat rides vary from 10 minutes to an hour or more depending upon the day's dive sites. The diving is mostly on walls with some currents. Most are in the 50' to 90' depth range. Water was in the mid 80s, visibility ranged from 40'-50' at Manta Roads to 80'-100' on the outer walls. The staff will try to group divers together on boats with similar skill levels and diving preferences. They also make every effort to accommodate everyone's wishes each day. Mantas are fairly common as are sharks. Mantas can normally be found at Manta Roads or Na Island. Sharks can be seen on any of the walls. Poahloang Pass has almost as much marine life as Palau's Blue Corner. Hooking up on the outer corner is like being inside a giant aquarium. And Atoll requires the

longest boat ride but it is well worth it. It is a small atoll a few miles outside of Pohnpei's lagoon. The wall drifts are spectacular but the lunch break on the beach makes you expect Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday to walk out of the jungle. Combine a visit to Nan Madoll an ancient city built with basalt logs, (the origin of which is unknown), with a dive at Na Island. This ancient city bares a resemblance to Mayan ruins and was studied intensely by Eric von Donegan for his "Ancient Astronaut/Chariots of the Gods" works. Another good side trip on the boat is to return through the Mangrove Channel after diving Dahwahk or Poahloang Pass. The Archer family, who own and manage the hotel, are extremely pleasant and do everything to make both your stay in the hotel and diving as memorable as possible. This place definitely merits a return visit, or two. Before leaving stop in town and pick up some native wood carvings. There is no public transportation on the island but taxis are relatively abundant and cheap. (Ph: +691-320-2797; fax +691-320-3797; e-mail thevillage@mail.fm)

The Village Resort, January 2001, Laura Todd, Arcata, CA. Vis: 40-100+. Water: 78-82 F. Not allowed to dive individual profile, but each dive plan highly customizable due to small number of divers (maximum of 3 when I was there). Only 2 dives per day offered. Never mind the Dramamine, bring your chiropractor! The island itself is quite large and the lagoon is huge, resulting in some long

boat rides in choppy seas. The boats are long panga types with a small shade cover, but nothing for protection from the rain — gets between 2 and 4 meters of rain per year. They do have a creative, very comfortable boat ladder made of PVC pipe. Willing to take folks to distant sites and try alternate sites in case of non-optimal currents/visibility. Rinsed equipment for customers. Hauled equipment up and down the 4 wheel drive road/creek bed leading to tiny private harbor. The downside is that divers had to hike it. Good knowledge of sites and critters. Guided impromptu snorkel trips on surface intervals. However, seemed unconcerned when my inflator button stuck open at 90 feet in the pass at Ahnd atoll — I chose to crawl up the wall rather than risk and out of control ascent/out of air scenario. The unadvertised manta capital of Micronesia. At Manta Road, 3 out of 4 visits we had at least 15 to 30 minutes contact with several mantas in great visibility. Both snorkelers and divers had close quality encounters. The coral is in fabulous shape, prolific and healthy. Dives are usually in the reef passes, depending on current direction, 100 ft vis. Generally too many sharks to count (gray reef, white and black tip), occasional turtle, some tuna, trevally and barracuda plus the big beautiful marbled rays in unexpected places. Also several large and interesting shells. When conditions dictate a site inside the lagoon, visibility drops to around 50' but no currents. Marine life not nearly as prolific, but good soft coral plus some black coral at depth and large sea fans.

The trip to Ahnd atoll takes a good 2 hours (late spring and summer is the calmest time for this) and is so worth it. An exquisite half circle of islets with white sand beaches and mirror flat water in a zillion colors of aquamarine. The big stuff (oceanic white tips and tiger sharks) wasn't there on the one day we were, but it's a matter of odds. Smaller sharks, trevally, turtle. The Village is spread out along a ridge about 20 minutes (but only a \$2 cab ride) from town. Each bungalow has wood walls on the bottom and screens on the top and is set in the hilltop forest in such a way that you feel you're in a magical tree house. They are very simple, with wicker furniture, 2 big waterbeds with mosquito nets and a basic bathroom. Food: The restaurant serves high quality food, have a diverse menu (fabulous fresh fish, Japanese, American staples, huge local crabs) with the most expensive item less than \$20. The delicious Pohnpei pancakes (topping of local fruit) fill you up for about \$6 at breakfast. Make sure to order the "bento" lunch for your dive/tour. You get rice, grilled fish, hard boiled egg and a veggie all wrapped in an ice cream cone of banana leaf. The Village offers tours to other sites such as Nan Madol and waterfalls, etc. Expensive but lengthy and high quality. hire a guide for hikes as the existing maps (both visitor center and Lonely Planet) are only marginally useful. The trails are reasonably strenuous, steep, with mud and rocks and tree roots. Pohnpeians are friendly and proud of their islands. You'll see sakau bars everywhere — it's like

slimy kava. They also are very into growing — and driving around showing off — huge yams, the likes of which (one) fill the back of a small pickup truck. Also worth seeking out are the uniquely beautiful appliquéed skirts and palm ivory carvings of local animals. While there's not many beaches and you can expect some rain.

**The Village Resort, May 2001,
Kenneth & Domin Lathom
(nagatikus@aol.com) Del Valle, TX.**

Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 80-83 F.
Logged dives: 31. Dive restrictions: 80'. 15' stop 5 min. All dives one hour or longer! Octopus, lions, crynoid, I snorkeled with 5 sharks! Mantas, porcupine fish, barracuda, bengal cardinals at Nan Midol ruins mangroves. These had only been seen at East Malaysia but they are here in Pohnpei Micronesia. Rooms are very nice. No a/c but don't need it. Restaurant over looks ocean from 500 feet up in jungle. Nice sunsets. Bring camera and radio -- no TV. See waterfalls after Nan Midol ruins and a morning dive. Ant Island -- 45 minute ride. Eat lunch on deserted/ remote island. Reapply after snorkel SPF 48. I did not and got burn. Fast 27 ft. narrow boats with twin 50 Honda.

Ulithi Atoll, Yap State

**Dive Ulithi Scuba Center / Ulithi Adventure Resort, March 2001,
Kendall Botellio, Phoenix, AZ.** Vis: 40-100 ft. Water: 77-80 F. Dive restrictions: computer. Awesome shore diving. Great undiscovered "never been dove" destination. I was

18th diver there! Dive the newly discovered wreck of the WWII USS Mississinewa, or hang out on walls that will soon rival Palau. Bring a pioneering spirit and have a blast! **(Ph: 808-821-9321; e-mail info@diveulithi.com or reservation@diveulithi.com; website www.diveulithi.com)**

Yap

Yap is a very traditional island: bare-breasted women, men in loincloths (thu), and huge wheels of stone money quarried in Palau and hauled to Yap in open boats. The people are extraordinary sailors, having navigated the Pacific for thousands of years. . . . Reputedly the best betel nut in the South Pacific, useful for trading or gifts for locals on other islands. . . . Inexpensive restaurants and hotels. . . . Guaranteed mantas with Yap Divers. . . . There are steep coral-covered walls and dropoffs and plenty of fish. . . . Expect clear water except in the entrance of the lagoon where mantas pass. . . . Yap is a good two- to three-day add-on to a Palau trip.

Beyond the Reef, Trader's Ridge, October 2000, Kirk Faryniasz, Yigo, GU. Vis: 20-90 ft. Water: 82-84 F. Dives logged: 118. Trader's Ridge is a new resort on Yap. It is marvelous and the food fantastic. Wonderful chef. Beyond the Reef is a small operation but gets you to some of the best dive sites. The mantas were not around during our stay so instead of wasting

time we dove other wonderful locations beyond the reef. (Ph: 691-350-3483; fax 691-350-3733; e-mail beyondthereef@mail.fm; website www.diveyap.com)

Beyond the Reef, Pathways, December 2000, John Sommerer (john.sommerer@jhuapl.edu) **Silver Spring, MD.** Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm choppy. Mantas in Miil channel are wonderful, but you share them with many divers. Wish I had spent more time on Yap reefs, less time in channel. The coral was in perfect shape, unlike Palau. Terrific water clarity on reefs. Very interesting dive sites. Beyond the Reef is a very service oriented operator. Out of three days of diving, we had private boat on two, two other divers on one. Pickups at our hotel by boat or car. Pathways is picturesque/interesting, but if you have a bungalow with a great view, you have a murderous climb, and the rooms are small and dark. Yap very worthwhile from cultural standpoint. Yap airport scene very bad. Must push and shove to get luggage, then fight back through crowd to get out. Divemasters were very careful with equipment. No rinse tank on (small) boats. No dedicated rinse tank on shore.

Beyond the Reef, Trader's Ridge, February 2001, Jill Glassco (jdglassco@earthlink.net) **Austin, TX.** Vis: 25-50 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Logged dives: 153. Dive restrictions enforced: n/a — manta cleaning station provided depth limits — no time limits. Diving: Wish I'd known we could see only one manta out of 5

dives in Yap. We saw more in Palau (although not as close). It wasn't worth the travel hassle. Beyond the Reef very accommodating and personal, but no nitrox. Trader's Ridge: very beautiful property, unfortunately with view of Mobil plant. Staff did everything we asked but not particularly friendly. I wish they had some kind of in-room guide rather than us having to call or find someone for every question. I'm not sure what they mean by "personal room steward" — no one ever identified themselves as such — it's not like we had one person all the time.

Beyond the Reef, Traders Ridge, April 2001, Jim Chubb (jimchubb@cox-internet.com) **Ketchum, ID.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F. One hundred percent alive, dense and flourishing coral reef. Fish and critters tiny and big are fabulous. A number of sharks — 15 gray reefs at a shark cleaning station. At another cleaning site: four 2 foot baby grays. Herds of enormous bumphead parrotfish. Mantas; 14 at once in Miil channel. Yap has not been wrecked by tourism above or below water. The people are nice. Tired betel nut (no noticeable effect for me. Traders Ridge is great including the talents of Chef James. Beyond the Reef has comfortable functional uncrowded day boats. Easy going and excellent operation. They know the good spots. Tricky current flows affect visibility markedly so those need to be called right. The Manta sites, which are small, are sometimes crowded with

other divers. Depending on the moon and the tides, the viz in Miil where the Mantas are ranges from murky to excellent. Both Manta Ray Bay and Traders Ridge have very good food for lunch and dinner. Leaving Yap you will have the pleasure, since there are no X-Ray machines, of having every single item in your carry-on bag inspected and exhaustively looked into.

Beyond the Reef, Traders Ridge, April 2001, Jim Chubb(jimchubb@cox-internet.com) Ketchum, ID. Experience: 501-1000 dives Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm choppy currents. Yap is fantastic. I wish I had more time there and less in Palau.

Coral is vibrant and all alive. Loved the mantas (one day 14 at once) which we always dove on clear incoming tides. Beyond the Reef is low key and a very good dive operator. Boats are uncrowded. Traders Ridge Resort: rooms, food, service all the best. What Yap lacks in huge dramatic walls is more than made up for by the healthy conditions of the reefs. There are walls but not the vast ones of Palau. Yap Caverns at the southern tip is an incredibly beautiful dive site.

Manta Ray Bay Hotel, February 2001, Sally Herbert, Belmont, CA. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 81-83 F. Dives logged: 1,000's. Food was better than last time and the chef accommodated all tastes. Only 1/2 day mantas but lots of small stuff. H2O temp a little warmer — flat and calm. Viz 50'. (Ph: +691-350-2300; fax +691-350-4567 or 3841; e-mail yapdivers@mantaray.com; website www.mantaray.com)

Manta Ray Bay Hotel, July 2001, Tom Wardle (twardle@attglobal.net) Canal Fulton, OH. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, choppy. Manta Ray Bay Hotel is well maintained, very comfortable and has an excellent restaurant. The chef prepared a Shrimp Etouffee after I commented on how good his Jambalaya was. The soups are excellent. Stored gear in their small lockers overnight. There is not a lot of air flow to help dry out and keep gear smelling fresh. Cultural tour of the Yap village can be arranged by the hotel. The fee of \$50 goes to support the center.

Trader's Ridge Resort, Manta Ray Bay, October 2000, Teryl and Keith McLane (no city, state). Almost 200 dives logged since 1998. A million times nicer than Palau Pacific Resort. We were absolutely spoiled and it cost less than the PPR. Everyone was incredibly nice to us. We didn't dive with Trader's Ridge — we dove with Manta Ray Bay. They were a great dive outfit, but when we saw the hotel we were thrilled that we weren't staying there. Our friends staying at Manta Ray Bay visited us and were really upset that Trader's Ridge hadn't even been suggested to them by their tour operators. When you get back to your room at night not only has your brand new, king-sized bed been turned down, but there are fresh flowers scattered over the bedspread. (Ph: 691-350-6005; fax 691-330-4297; e-mail traders@ite.net; website http://tradersridgeresort.com)

Yap Divers, Manta Ray Bay Hotel, January 2001, Tom Rain, Irving, TX. Vis: 30-100+ ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 265. Dive restrictions: Follow computers. Only saw mantas once in 3 days of diving. Still special! Dive sites to see mantas weren't much if there were no mantas. Other dive sites were pretty nice. One site we dove had the clearest water I think I've ever been diving in. (Ph: +691-350-2300; fax +691-350-4567 or 3841; e-mail yapdivers@mantaray.com; website www.mantaray.com)

Yap Divers, The Pathways, May 2001, Pat Aderman (pat_aderman@juno.com) Chuo-ku, Kobe, Japan. Vis: 20-80 ft. Water: 84-86 F. Dives logged: 100. dive your own computer limits. The Pathways consists of 8 bungalows constructed in traditional fashion with thatched roofs set on stilts on the side of a hill overlooking the inner lagoon in Colonia. There are no telephones or TV sets but they are air-conditioned and have private baths with hot water showers. They are clean and comfortable with each having a small lanai on the front. The main building contains the restaurant, bar and a lounge area. It is also traditional construction and open air. The entire staff are Yaps and extremely friendly and helpful. Guests are treated as members of their family. The B&B rate plan includes a continental breakfast and an American breakfast is available at an extra charge. The food is very good and reasonably priced. Grilled fish is a specialty on the island. The restaurant stops serving at 9:00 PM but will whip

up something if you come in a little later hungry. The bar closes around 10:30. The Manta Ray restaurant has daily specials based on availability of fresh ingredients. Trader's Ridge: one night we had dinner there the food was fine but the service was terrible. Not only would nobody come to check on us, they wouldn't even look our way while bringing food to an adjacent table. It took nearly an hour to get our food. I left no tip and a note on the check explaining why. Yap Divers is the oldest dive operator on the island. The boats are 20'-24' open skiffs with twin engines, radios, DAN oxygen kits and sun canopies. While not luxurious, they are adequate for the short trips to dive sites and are the norm for dive boats in the area. Towels, hot tea and snacks are provided after each dive. The guides, mostly Yaps with a couple of Brits and one Japanese, are very knowledgeable of the sites and do their best to accommodate everyone's wishes. Surface intervals are normally one hour minimum. The walls and reefs lack the number and variety of fishes found in places like Palau and Pohnpei. Corals are healthy and abundant. We were normally back at the dock in time for lunch after two morning dives. I would have done at least one more dive every afternoon had they been available. There are rinse tanks on the docks. The equipment room contains assigned cubicles where you can stack your gear and hangars for wet suits. which don't dry over night. Trader's Ridge runs it's own dive operation but many of the guests there were diving with Yap

Divers. The Marina Restaurant is an open-air place right on the water at the marina in the main lagoon serving great Chinese food. It is run by a delightful Taiwanese woman whose menu consists of a blackboard listing each day's available items and will discuss variations and options and then prepare a culinary masterpiece. Her husband, a Swiss doctor at the hospital, is an avid fisherman who on our last day took one of the divers from another group fishing. The cultural tour to Kadai Village is held every Tuesday and Saturday. The young people from the village perform native dances and demonstrate such crafts as basket weaving, etc. While I was there they were experiencing a beer shortage. The Manta Ray bar was down to a critical level when the supply ship arrived to save the day. Taxis are readily available but are really not needed. Everything is within walking distance and the hotels and dive operators all have courtesy vans that will gladly take you wherever you need to go. There are also a limited number of rental cars available at reasonable rates from 7-D across the street from the Manta Ray Bay Hotel. You can pick the car up there and return it at the airport. This especially useful if you are on one of the midnight flights.

Yap Divers, Trader's Ridge Resort, May 2001, Kenneth & Domin Lathom (nagatikus@aol.com) Del Valle, TX. Vis: 80-150 ft. Water: 82-83 F. Logged dives: 31. Dive restrictions: 70' (usually 50') 50 minute dives. 8 to a boat. You lay on bottom and wait for the mantas at "cleaning stations". I could retire here. Like Micronesia's

calm living, no rushing! Blouses optional — but don't show any thigh (cover up leg a must!) Go see stone money, or have a "stone money" pizza at Yap Divers restaurant. Kayaking the mangroves (guided). TV's don't work very well but it is nice to read for a change.

Yap Divers, Manta Ray Resort, June 2001, Ed Heimiller (heimiller@att.net) Streamwood, IL. Vis: 25-75 ft. Water: 84-85 F. Dives logged 4,000+. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. After traveling all day from Majuro, we arrived in Yap about 10:00 pm. a representative of the hotel, Manta Ray Beach Resort, introduced himself and tagged our luggage and took us on a short ride to the resort. We were told to go directly to our rooms and in the morning we could register at the resort and dive shop. The resort is laid out with offices, shops, bar, dive shop and rooms on the first floor. The second floor is strictly rooms, while the third is shared between rooms and the restaurant. Wide variety of items, American and native, on the menu, portions were large and reasonably priced. I got hooked on Wa-Who Fish sandwich, fries and special lemonade for lunch. We also ate the Marine Restaurant and at Trader Ridge Resort. I like manta Ray's restaurant the best. Half-day island tour for \$50.00 each, our guide was a divemaster, had gone to college in Texas and returned to the island. We returned just in time for our complimentary rum drinks, welcome, at the bar. Valley of the Rays; The guide positioned us, Bob, another diver and myself, and in a few minutes a ray came. Visibility was not the best

but we stayed for 63 minutes at 56 feet. The ray stayed for awhile then left and a couple more came and then left. After an hour surface interval in which we were given a towel to dry off, tea or water to drink with apple slices and banana bread we returned to the same spot but no rays appeared. We did see two large hump head wrasse, a small shark and many small tropical Fish (butterfly, blemmies, tangs, small parrot, surgeon and a bay pipefish). Bob and The reefs have a variety of coral from lettuce, brain, staghorn, cabbage, plate and pillar to mention a few. They also have a wide variety of marine life, clown fish, anemones, feather dusters, lionfish, leaf fish, wrasse, sharks, eels and turtles, pink skunk clown fish, a baby white tip shark and trigger fish which attached my fins when I stumbled in their nesting area. Night dive: a burrowing crab, several lionfish, nudibranch, starfish, black long spined urchin, slugs, sea cucumbers, hermit crabs, banded coral shrimp and other types of shrimp.

Yap Divers, Manta Ray Hotel, August 2001, Harry Cure, Jr. (harry@curelawfirm.com) Fort Worth, TX. Vis: 60-100 ft. Water: 83-84 F, choppy, surge. Logged dives: 1,500+. Some of the best hard corals I have seen. Mantas in large numbers on almost every cleaning station dive. Lots of sea life. The Manta Ray Hotel and Yap Divers provides great service and a wonderful experience.

NEW ZEALAND

Poor Knights

Dive Tutukaka, Pacific Rendezvous, May 2001, Wayne Batzer

(wbatzer@prodigy.net) Kailua, HI. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 Feet. Water: 64 to 65 F, calm choppy. If anything, better than described in last year's Undercurrent article. The dive boats are quite comfortable, with hot showers. They had steel tanks as an option. The briefings were quite complete, and sea life from small to large was exceptional. The volcanic arches, tubes and caverns of the Poor Knights are beautiful, above and below the surface. I brought my own gear, but the rental equipment appears first rate and well maintained. Pacific Rendezvous was excellent for lodging, the Schnappa Rock restaurant (next to Dive! Tutukaka) has super seafood and a nice selection of New Zealand wines. Several of New Zealand's best photographers use this operation regularly and seem quite pleased. **(Ph: +64 9 4343 867; fax +64 9 4343 884; e-mail info@diving.co.nz; website www.diving.co.nz)**

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Some of the world's finest diving is in this land just north of Australia whose most consistent feature is its unpredictability. . . . It's a dream destination for live-aboards with unique critters on a big scale: big fish, big coral, big distances, and muck diving. It's also a naturalist's paradise with beautiful topography: mountains covered with snow in July shade, steaming jungles, butterflies as big as birds, walking-stick insects a foot long, and splendid Birds of Paradise. Most