

MICRONESIA

Chuuk

Thorfinn, December 2000, Pat Aderman (pat_aderman@juno.com)

Chuo-ku, Kobe, Japan. Vis: 80-120 ft. Water: 84-88 F. Dives logged: 85. Dive restrictions enforced: safety stops 2 min @ 60', 3 min @ 30', 10 min @ 15'. Airport facilities are minimal. The luggage handling is archaic resulting in a 45 minute to 1-hour wait. The Thorfinn's van was there to pick up the 5 of us who arrived on the same flight. Driving across the island is depressing due to the squalid conditions and rampant poverty. Unemployment is 90%. Petty theft is a major problem. The Blue Lagoon Hotel is an oasis of luxury. though they have security guards and the resort is fenced in, they advise guests not to leave gear on their balconies. One of the Thorfinn's four dive launches picked us up at the hotel dock for the short ride to the ship. Since they use launches, the Thorfinn is not averse to picking up or returning passengers on any day. With the scarcity of flights this can be quite an advantage when scheduling a trip. We were greeted by Captain Lance Higgs our host. First item was assigning cabins. Even though the rates quoted are for double occupancy all of the single passengers were given private cabins since the boat was not full. While not large the cabins were clean and comfortable with tv/vcr units in each. Most have en suite baths, the few that don't have sinks and are across the passage way from a shower and toilet shared by only two cabins.

Next came a general dive briefing followed by Captain Lance checking everyone's c-cards. The dives are generally deep (several over 130') and most involve wreck penetrations. Safety stops are mandatory, 2 minutes at 60 feet, 3 at 30, and 10 at 15. Other than this everyone was free to dive their own profile within the limits dictated by their own computer. Each morning the skipper puts out lists for each dive group's itinerary for the day, which includes 4-day dives and a night dive, along with written descriptions of each site. We had two groups while I was there and we never went to the same site at the same time. The night dive was usually a combination of each group. All equipment is handled utilizing a valet system. Everyone is given a mesh duffel bag when they arrive for all essential equipment. When you get on the launch before each dive your gear is there with your BCD and regs mounted on a tank which is always filled to the max. At the end of the day the crew rinses and stores everyone's gear in lockers. There is a shower for rinsing off the salt from bodies and wet suits. Divers are cautioned not to hang wet suits over the outer rail to prevent theft though there is a security guard on deck all night. Most wrecks have mooring buoys attached, which are 15' to 20' underwater. Using only dead reckoning the boat drivers get close enough to spot these so the deck hand can free dive down and attach the mooring line. This is an amazing accomplishment considering the size of the lagoon. The guide presents a detailed briefing before each dive

describing the wreck and the route the dive will take. They do not use lines on the penetrations as most dives involve entering and exiting the wrecks at different points. There is little silting so visibility is rarely a problem. There is virtually no current. Water was in the mid 80's even at depth. Visibility varies from good too unbelievable. Removing anything from the wrecks is illegal and is strongly enforced by the dive operators as well as the local authorities. Cargoes vary and include small arms ammunition, mines, big naval gun rounds, torpedoes, sake bottles and fighter airplanes. Several wrecks have battle tanks on their decks; the San Francisco Maru has three. Most of the wrecks are cargo vessels but some have small guns mounted on the decks. Not many large fish but small fish abound. Stingrays are common on the sandy bottoms. The amount of coral varies from wreck to wreck, some have virtually none while others are covered. In 5 days I did 23 dives with no two on the same site. Between dives the launches return to the ship for surface intervals. The food is excellent and everyone eats at the same time. During meals the captain normally relates stories either about the ship or the islands. For breakfast you order from a menu that includes most common breakfast fare including eggs, bacon, ham, pancakes, etc. For lunch and dinner a set course is served. It varied widely and was always enjoyable and plentiful. Wine is served at dinner for those not making the night dive. All breads and pastries are baked fresh daily aboard

the ship. Every afternoon there is a snack of some sort, which varied from fried bananas to sushi. On Saturday night there is a bar-b-q on the aft deck and some of the girls in the crew perform native dances. There is a large sea water hot tub on the aft deck for relaxing and a spacious sun deck up top. The main salon is roomy and comfortable with a huge seawater aquarium, entertainment system, video library and bar. The crew members are friendly and do everything possible to make everyone's trip enjoyable. The SS Thorfinn still operates on its original oil fired steam engine. The ship's ride is very smooth and extremely quiet. Capt. Lance will even let guests come into the wheelhouse while underway. extremely enjoyable trip. I will return to do one of the two- week Trans-Micronesia cruises they do every summer. The Thorfinn travels from Chuuk to Yap and then back stopping at the islands and atolls in between. (Ph: +691 330-3040 (Chuuk); fax +691 330-4253 (Chuuk); e-mail Seaward@mail.fm; website www.thorfinn.net)

Thorfinn, May 2001, Joel and Bonnie Newman, Victoria, BC. Canada. Vis: 50 to 100 ft. Water temp. low to mid-eighties, no currents. Easily chilled divers were happy with a 3 mil. shorty. Warm divers wore just a skin. Gloves are a good idea in the wrecks and while holding on to mooring lives. We never encountered biting insects on land or sea or any jellyfish or others stingers while diving. We spent two nights at the Truk Stop Hotel before boarding the Thorfinn. Our ocean view room was

air conditioned and comfortable and let us get over our jet lag and get used to the tropical heat. We saw almost no other tourists, and everyone was friendly and polite. It was worth stopping at the Visitor's Centre to see local artifacts and history. Thorfinn was a great experience. The ship is large and stable. Our cabin had a queen size bed, a single bunk, air conditioning with individual adjustment, a TV-VCR (large inventory of tapes) and a sink. Our private en suite bathroom held another sink as well as a toilet and shower. We enjoyed the large lounge, hot tub on the stern, and tasty meals. The staff was friendly and helpful. Impressive wrecks covered in hard and soft corals, pretty tropical fish, a vast array of military equipment, and even a few human remains which were quite sobering. All diving was done from small dive boats which carried a boat operator, a dive guide to lead penetrations of the wreck, and a maximum of six divers. With all the silt and rust in the wrecks, we were glad that we never dove with more than two or three other divers. Another advantage of diving from small boats was that we were able to choose any or all of five different wrecks every day. The first dive was the deepest; the fifth dive was a night dive. After we unpacked our dive gear, we never handled it again for the duration of the trip. Diving involved stepping into the dive boat where our B.C.s and regulators were set up. Aluminum 80's were always filled to over 3000 psi. Rides to the wrecks were usually 5-10 minutes. At the end of each dive, the boat tender lifted

tanks and weight belts into the boat before we climbed the ladder. One night, only one diver had the energy for a night dive. The crew cheerfully took him out for a wreck dive with the dive guide as his buddy.

***Thorfinn, May 2001, Jack Pierce
(JLP3332@CS.COM) Miami, FL.***

Experience: 501- 1000 dives. Vis: 45 to 70 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. Accommodations for a live-aboard were 1st class. only 7 divers on the ship we all had individual cabins, each with two beds and a full bath. Diving is from small tenders (20-22 ft) which take you to the wrecks which are generally 5-15 minutes away. You could stay for a couple of weeks and never dive the same wreck twice unless you wanted to. Generally you would do 4 dives during the day, returning the ship between dives, followed by a night dive if you had the energy. Meals were served in the dining room, breakfast was off the menu while lunch and dinner were chosen for you. In between dives, snacks were served in the lounge near the stern and at night complimentary drinks/beer were served. During breakfast Captain Lance would give you the international news that he would obtain off the Internet. Because the Thorfinn doesn't anchor directly on the wrecks there is no damage done, unlike other live-aboards in the area.

***Truk Aggressor, January 2001,
James Lyle (jlyle@beachnet.com)
Hermosa Beach, CA.***

Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, choppy no currents. Slightly over 24 hours of airplanes, Los Angeles to Honolulu to

Guam to Truk, made us all cranky and tired. This mood did not last long.

Group of sixteen reserved all spots for a week and all the spots on the Palau Aggressor the following week. With 14 paid, you get two spots free, which we amortized over the sixteen divers to reduce the cost. With an additional \$100 off for back-to-back charters, we saved almost \$1,000 per person. live-aboards are more fun when you know everyone The Aggressor folks met us at the airport in the rain and transferred us, our luggage and dive gear to the boat, moored at the fuel dock in Moen. It rained almost every day with only one day of sun. Strong winds made for choppy surface, but we were able to do all of the dives and get to all the wrecks that we wanted to. The TA had returned from a major refit in Majuro and everything was new and shiny. They've added a quad cabin on the top deck and now hold a maximum of 18 divers. Well appointed yacht with lots of wood trim and a nautical feeling. The cabins have en suite heads that are small, but adequate. Each cabin has a lower queen and an upper single that allow for any desired combination of bunks for two passengers. The dive deck is spacious, with lockers for each diver, ample rinse tanks, and a large camera table.

Diving is from the mother ship, which is moored near each wreck. Do a giant stride off the back of the boat and then follow the anchor chain down.

Coming back to the boat you can hang on the deco bar for a safety stop which has a low pressure hose and second stage for out-of-air emergencies. The only limitations on divers were they

asked us to go no deeper than 130 feet, but no one ever checked computers. All but one of our group dove 32% enriched air nitrox.(unlimited nitrox fills are \$100 for the week) The nearest chamber is in Guam! The crew consisted of Captain Niall, a Brit, Tom, a German, and a Chuukese cook, dive masters and deck hands. Tom is a chef who was doubling as instructor/photopro. The crew made us comfortable. The Aggressor's motto is "eat, sleep, dive." After each dive there were delicious snacks. The food was buffet, ample and delicious. The usual fish, chicken, and beef was augmented with breadfruit and regional dishes. They will do their best to accommodate any dietary requests. We had a full blown turkey dinner with all of the trimmings. Most of the wrecks are cargo ships that were caught in the Lagoon by the US Navy in February of 1944. On board, are sake and beer bottles, airplane parts, bombs, torpedoes, china, uniforms, and miscellaneous items used by the crews. Either on their side or upright on the sand, the ships are in good shape despite the more than fifty years underwater. While the bottom is usually over 100 feet down, the deck and upper structures are shallower and made for ideal multilevel dives. The cargo holds are wide open and are easy to penetrate. The more adventuresome or wreck certified divers can safely venture into the engine rooms with a dive guide. The upper part of each wreck is covered with soft corals, anemones, tropical fish, invertebrates, and myriad schools of small bait fish. The occasional shark or eagle ray,

schools of jacks, tuna, and other predators visit. You can treat each dive either as a wreck dive or as a creature dive, or both. Photographers can do both wide angle and macro to their hearts' content. With forty wrecks and a maximum of only about 75 divers when the Aggressor, Nautilus, Thorfinn and Blue Lagoon are all full, you won't encounter crowds. Most of the wrecks are near to Moen so there is little time lost in traveling from one site to another. On some of the sites we did more than one dive which gave us time to explore all parts of the larger wrecks. During our week, we dove the Kiyozumi (twice), Rio de Janiero, Sankisan, Unkai, Fujikawa (three dives), Nippo (twice), Betty Bomber, Fumizuki destroyer, Shinkoku (three times), Kensho, Heian (twice), and Yamagiri (twice). My favorites were the Fujikawa and the Shinkoku because they are big, upright, have lot of things to see in the holds, and have the most marine growth and fish life. We only got to do five days of diving instead of the normal five and half due to the fact that Continental Air Micronesia doesn't fly out of Truk everyday so we had to leave a day early for Palau. Our plane wasn't until 5:00 pm so the Aggressor van took us to the airport to check in early and then returned us to the boat to wait for the plane, returning to the airport just in time to walk on board. To get to Palau from Truk, you have to go back to Guam to make your connection. (Ph: 800-348-2628 or 985-385-2628; fax 985-384-0817; e-mail info@aggressor.com; website www.aggressor.com)

Truk Aggressor, February 2001, David L. Orr, (Fe2ORR@aol.com) Warrington, PA. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 82-85 F. Dives logged: 550+. Dive restrictions: Back on 500 psi. Good — history of the wrecks, bad — lack of bottom time due to depth of wrecks. Good — soft corals and growth that covered the wrecks, bad — amount of stuff in water cut vis for good wide angle pictures. Crew was great and made the trip great. Continental Air: all connecting flights had long layovers that made you get a room to hang out for 3/4 of a day or longer. We did Yap, Palau, and Truk.

Truk Aggressor, February 2001, John Slattery (jamslats@aol.com) Palm Coast, FL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 74 to 77 F, calm no currents. As one diver put it, "the wrecks are the canvas on which the beautiful, colorful corals are painted." While the wrecks are awesome and the encrusting corals magnificent, it is criminal to that so many artifacts have been removed. While the boat is comfortable, it is not as good as the original Truk Aggressor. The dive deck is spacious but the upper deck is not as comfortable as other live-aboards. The service and food was outstanding. Several divers were rank beginners (40 dives) and did serious damage to coral, constantly banged into other divers and frankly were a danger to themselves and the other divers. Large, multi-level camera table. Central charging station in main salon. Separate rinse tank for cameras.

Truk Aggressor, April 2001, Don Lambrecht, Rocklin, CA. Experience:

501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 159 Feet. Water: 83 to 85 F, calm choppy. Truk Lagoon is a fabulous spot for the wreck diver. While the wrecks are being picked over by uncaring divers, most of the large relics are intact. It will only be a short time span before many of the wrecks are reclaimed by the sea and are too dangerous to dive. Live-aboards are the only way to see this area. I would not recommend novice divers visit this area. Nitrox certification is essential. The Aggressor offered Nitrox fills for a per bottle or weekly price. Blend is pretty much only 32-33% except for deep weeks. Captain Stu and crew were absolutely great. Great variety in food. The Aggressor was overhauled and refitted, but the result was new paint and cramped cabins. A four person cabin was added on the top deck that is the best. The main cabins in the hold are small and dark, without port holes. This add on cabin has large windows and plenty of fresh air. The smell from the toilets in the main cabin area is overwhelming. If the cabin door is closed during the day the cabin is almost unlivable in the evening. The Aggressor needs a bigger boat or fewer divers (18 on the Truk Aggressor). Aside from the smell, the boat diving was great. Easy entry from the dive platform on the rear of the boat. Great set up for deco stops. The history of war is really painted out on the decks of the Japanese fleet sitting on the bottom of the Lagoon. The awesome power of bombs and torpedoes to cause damage to ships really caught me by surprise. Great photo pro showing slides of trip every day. Slide processing and video.

Truk Odyssey, June 2000, Thomas E. Orred, San Diego, CA. Vis: 35-100+ ft. Water: 82 F. Dive restrictions: Computer/Nitrox profile/to bottom. A great boat with full accommodations. Great skippers (husband/wife team) and a good crew. They allow everyone to dive unrestricted. 90% Nitrox diving at 30% with no extra charge. 4 fresh water rinse tanks, two for cameras, two for gear. Easiest access to water than I experienced on any boat. A solid no swaying decompressing bar when moored, boat would swing over wreck which allowed you to drop straight down on wrecks, vice versa for surfacing. A fun nonobtrusive reef shark feeding enjoyed by all. Professionally built camera table. Dining area — spectacularly walled in Fiji teak (beautiful) with full picture windows. Great sun deck and comfortable state rooms. Guest lounge, better than most homes with DVD-surround TV-stereo-movies, CDS, etc. Really comfortable. Even has a light table. Overall AAA+ but not for beginners/intermediate divers. (Ph: 800-757-5396 or (904) 346-3766 (US); fax (904) 346-0664 (US); e-mail info@TrukOdyssey.com; website www.trukodyssey.com)

Truk Odyssey, October 2000, Jim Urquhart, Prescott, AZ. Vis: 40-100 ft. Water: 82-85 F. Dives logged: 120+. Lenny and Cara are the hosts. The crew is hospitable. From the aft dive platform with a warm shower and deco bar at 15' with a nitrox tank to the galley and bar forward, this is an excellent dive boat! The staterooms were roomy, although the aft most

staterooms could be a little noisy when underway. The dive briefings were thorough and graphically rendered on an erasable board. No hand holding on your dives. But they accommodate for divers that have not dived wrecks before. The guides lead you to interesting artifacts and areas with excellent photo ops. The vis was usually 40-60' inside the lagoon. This coupled with the clouds and occasional rain shower made bright dive lites a necessity on every dive. The notable exception was the shark dive outside the lagoon where the vis was 100+. Cara did an excellent job video taping our group of 13 divers. We got our land legs back on an afternoon on Eten Island for a stroll through the past seeing Japanese bombings and scattered aircraft parts on the overgrown air field. Spent evenings watching DVD's or videos of the day. A nice slide table is found in the air-conditioned parlor. E-6 processing. Between dives we feasted on tuna sashimi by the plate load and always had fresh fruit. The meals were excellent, always enough for seconds. Great dive week.

Truk Odyssey, November 2000, Steve Ryals, Middleton, ID. Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 80-84 F. Dives logged: 500+. One of the best live-aboards I have been on. Very spacious rooms — twice the size of most boats. Excellent diving. We dove mostly doubles doing the deeper wreck. Crew was very accommodating. Let us dive our own profiles — no babysitting. Deco bottles with O2 were available for the asking. Excellent food and plenty of it.

Truk Odyssey, December 2000, Jean Taillac (scuba@aqua-world.net) Garland, TX. Vis: 30-40 ft. Water: 84 F. Dive restrictions: None. Lenny and Cara are the best. They have the best boat. When you leave them you leave as friends.

Truk Odyssey, December 2000, Myra Tishkoff (Myra@Tishkoff.com) FPO, AP. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm. Amazing live-aboard experience. Up to 5 dives per day. Chuuk is famous for it's shipwrecks which are historically interesting and cool dives. The coral buildup was gorgeous. Dive instructors were knowledgeable and great fun. They created a shark feeding frenzy which was impressive. I got Nitrox certified on board. The food was excellent and all dietary needs were met (out of 6 passengers there was quite an array of different needs). Great trip, extremely relaxing. The boat did have Processing capabilities.

Truk Odyssey, January 2001, Greg Whittenburg (DecomStop@aol.com) Bend, OR. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 85 to 85 F, calm no currents. Flight was brutal. Bringing a sleeping aid would have been smart, as well as earplugs and blindfolds. Claiming luggage at the airport in Chuuk was akin to being in a street fight let the locals do their bit first! Everything went silky smooth once we were met by "Capt. Lenny". All luggage was put into a waiting van, all passengers were put in an air-conditioned bus, and taken to the boat. Very nice operation. I dove solo, I dove deep (185+), I decompressed (lots)! I

switched from air to Nitrox whenever I wanted. We dove at night, and before dawn you can do whatever floats your boat. Just don't mess with the artifacts! You will get grounded if you violate it. There is more to photograph in one ten minute dive in this lagoon, than in most week long trips other places.

Truk Odyssey, January 2001, Naomi Shields (nshields@pol.net) Wichita, KS. Vis: 70-85 ft. Water: 78-81 F, choppy. Logged dives: 205. Dive restrictions: 140 ft., Nitrox 29%. Awesome. A great live-aboard. Spacious compared to Aggressors (Belize, Cayman). Our group was not into technical diving and had a great time with 130 ft. depths. There is great soft coral and lots to see.

Truk Odyssey, February/March 2001, Al Krenz (akrenz993@aol.com) Countryside, IL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. Not only are the wrecks awesome but the coral growth and the fish life are something to behold. Dive briefings were comprehensive and accurate. Boat moored over each wreck so there was no problem finding them. Stayed at the "better" wrecks rather than one or two dives and moving on. Did five dives on the Fujikawa Maru after a morning dive at another wreck. Free nitrox. Cabin was larger than some I've had on cruise ships. Plenty of room on dive deck for divers and their equipment plus rinse tanks for gear and cameras. Large dive platform with a deco bar and ladders you could climb with your fins on. Warm, fresh water shower and an accommodating

divemaster that was always there with a fresh water hose giving me an "extra" rinsing when I got back on the boat after a dive. Great food with a varied menu. Captain Lenny and co-Captain Cara were outstanding hosts and ran a great ship. One of the largest camera tables I've seen on a live-aboard.

Truk Odyssey, June 2001, Debbie Finch (divefin7@kua.net) Kissimmee, FL. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 85 F, calm no currents. One of the rare instances where the reality exceeded the brochure. It's a beautiful, spacious, comfortable live-aboard — 132 feet long, with only 16 divers max — almost more like a cruise ship than a live-aboard. Very large wood paneled cabins (nice single cabins are available too), each with private bathroom and windows. Delicious food (cooked to order breakfasts) and plenty of it. Sodas, kool-aid, and ice are available 24 hours. Onboard owners Lenny and Cara cared about making sure each diver has a wonderful experience. Their friendly attitudes make the Odyssey unique. Most of the dives are in the 80-100 foot range, and deeper depths are easy to achieve. Soft corals are extensive and beautiful. The wrecks are most impressive, and appear to be in good shape. Dive guides are very accommodating. Nitrox 30 is always available (and included in the cost of the trip). Diving is done from the Odyssey, not from a skiff; Lenny moves the Odyssey to each new dive site. In one week, we dove 12 different ships, plus a submarine and a bomber. Well worth

the 25 hour journey! Big camera table; two rinse tanks dedicated to cameras; E-6 processing onboard.

Truk Odyssey, July 2001, Bob Scranton, Los Gatos, CA. Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 85-87 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 250. Dive restrictions: 140 ft., buddy. I have been on 2 Hughes boat, 2 Aggressor and others, but this is the best! Huge cabins, moderate freedom to dive, food great for location, and the crew always a plus! Shark dive fun. Great wreck/briefings. Main island at Chuuk is a dump.

Truk Odyssey, July 2001, John Duggan (DugganDive@aol.com) San Antonio, TX. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Have been to Truk Lagoon several times. First opportunity to dive double tanks with additional carry bottles with high percentage of oxygen (50 to 100%) for decompression. Tables were left up to us as was depth limitation. Since there was no helium we used Nitrox for dives to 130 feet (used 32% for a 1.6 PO₂) and air for the deeper dives. We used NAUT's RGBM Nitrox tables for the Nitrox dives and Abyss software for the air dives. Thoroughly enjoyed the extended time and additional penetration. Food was fair with poor snacks. Had a substitute cook. Air Micronesia had a delayed flight from Guam so we missed connection from Hawaii, but hotel reservations and substitute travel arrangements were set up by Continental by the time we arrived. Excellent camera table and dedicated wash tubs for cameras. Excellent viewing capability in lounge. E-6 processing.

Truk Odyssey, August 2001, Doris and Bob Schaffer (seamom@earthlink.net) Fallbrook, CA. Vis: 30-50 ft. Water: 82-86 F, choppy. Logged dives: 2,500+. Third trip to Truk and we saw a lot of deterioration in the wrecks since our first trip in 1984. Visibility not as good, still it is some of the best diving we've experienced. Odyssey is our 25th live-aboard and it ranks up there among the top three! Cabins are the largest and most comfortable we've seen on a live-aboard and the boat is very spacious and comfortable too. Cabin towels changed daily and clean deck towels after every dive! Dive crew is knowledgeable and attentive and diving is easy and not regimented. Food is plentiful and tasty and includes freshly baked breads and crisp salads and the staff accommodated food allergies. Captain Lenny did a good job of getting us to a variety of excellent sites, which included 15 ships, the outer reef and the Betty Bomber. Captain would have arranged for us to dive the deeper wrecks if we had asked. First Mate Cara did a video of the week's diving (starring all 15 divers and without stock footage — the best video of its kind we've taken home from a live-aboard. Boat does two dives on the outer reef including a shark feed which is one of the least "staged" shark feeds we've observed but, nevertheless, somewhat "touristy" and unnecessary for experienced divers since there are plenty of sharks to observe and they don't need to be enticed with food. (We fail to see the benefit of altering the behavior of wild animals). Great trip.

Truk Odyssey, August 2001, Harry L. Cure, Jr. (harry@curelawfirm.com)
Fort Worth, TX. Vis: 40-50 ft. Water: 83-84 F. Dives logged: 1500+.
 Service, food, accommodations are outstanding. Large rooms, state of the art dive deck, super service. August has flat seas, but visibility, poor.
 Better to go May to June.

Palau

Aggressor II, January 2001, Greg & Caye Norwick, Parshall, CO. Vis: 80-120 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 160. Trip was good. Did 21 dives in 5 days. Only 2 repeat dives.
(Ph: 800-348-2628 or 985-385-2628; fax 985-384-0817; e-mail info@aggressor.com; website www.aggressor.com)

Big Blue Explorer, February 2001, Robert Hills (rehills@tampabay.rr.com)
Anna Maria Island, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, choppy currents. Converted Japanese, communications ship. It's big. Plenty of room for anything, and everything you would bring. The food was wonderful, in content and presentation. The staff was friendly, helpful, and did a great job. I dive DBL's as a rule, and never once heard a complaint about the weight. The crew helps you do everything. All I had to do was get in my gear, and fall over the side! I'm in my 60's, believe me, that's nice. The ship itself, has a room for camera gear, however I keep mine in my cabin as a rule. **(Ph: 877- 417- 6160 (US & Canada) or 562- 865- 7198; fax 562- 809- 7300 (US); e-mail**

info@palauscuba.com (US & Canada) or explorer@palauscuba.com; website www.palauscuba.com)

Big Blue Explorer, February 2001, Brant Shenkarow (brantkarow@aol.com)
San Anselmo, CA. Vis: 50-150 ft. Water: 81 F, calm and flat. Logged dives: 2,000. Dive restrictions: no deco limits. Excellent crew, dive operations, and accommodations. Uninspired breakfasts, very good lunches and dinners. No help yourself snack table. Big, comfy cabins with private heads. Lots of lights. Deck hands and dive crew all extremely friendly and helpful, fast, agile chase boats took us to sites. BBE is too big to cruise, so a surprisingly seasick filled 3 hour jaunt from dock (Koror) to German Channel was the big ship's only move. The ship is about 150 ft. but much of the former Japanese communications vessel is off limits. Still, you can go for strolls; you can spread out on deck and in your cabin. Clean, warm, bath sheet towels are everywhere and available all the time. Plenty of space for photo/video work, but no onboard developing. We visited all the popular Palau dive sites. Groups often went to 2 or 3 different sites to accommodate a variety of requests.

Big Blue Explorer, Scuba World, February 2001, Dr. Steven Banks, Des Plaines, IL. Vis: 30-100 ft. Water: 79-81 F. Logged dives: 690. Dive restrictions: 500 psi. Large boat set up to accommodate 18. There were only six which was great — 12 should be the limit. Camera room can accommodate 3 photographers realistically. Diving was superb. Soft

and hard corals in abundance, sharks both black tip and white tip as well as occasional reef sharks seen on almost every dive. Fish life varied and active. The current went from moderate to extreme. I saw one diver have his mask torn off his face by the current at Blue Corner. The boat is not fancy but is adequate and reasonably priced.

Big Blue Explorer, March 2001, Jim Chubb, Ketchum, ID. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 150 Feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm currents. Huge roomy boat. The divemasters and staff were great. But they were new to Palau, so we just sort of did the “greatest hits.” There are too many tourists on shore now to do anything but a live-aboard. There were about 1/5 the number of sharks compared to 1985, when I was there last. Instead of huge tuna and dogtooth tuna every dive I saw one tuna all week. The coral is really trashed at many sites by El Niño and maybe divers too. The flats at Blue Corner are now a wasteland. A drift dive down Pelileu’s east side was pure disintegrating rubble: no live coral at all. Pelilue Wall where once we lost count at over 100 sharks in 1985, we saw ONE. Maybe just a bad day. Still, I’m glad we went. The diving was good but no longer spectacular.

Ocean Hunter, January 2001, John Sommerer (john.sommerer@jhuapl.edu) Silver Spring, MD. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 35 to 150 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm choppy surge currents. No currents. 2-week cruise. Boat fantastic: well designed and ap-

pointed for comfort and diver convenience. Crew service-oriented and excellent: Captain Kenneth, Divemaster Troy (both from Palau), Chef Arlee (from Philippines). Food excellent. Diving excellent, but coral still very damaged from El Niño. We dived only a few sites that had good coral. Many previously well-known dive sites now considered “dead.” Fish life and critters overwhelming. Mantas under the boat in shallow water several nights. Sharks plentiful. Extremely demanding (and wealthy) guest wanted to dive Blue Corner over and over. We did other sites, but only made it to Peleliu for two dives, and never made it to Angaur. Kenneth mediated, but was not able to ignore the potential impact on a gratuity that I probably couldn’t compensate him for the loss of. When I requested that we repeat a dive site that had really good hard coral in good light (we had done it in late afternoon), it produced a look of despair from Kenneth — and we didn’t do it again. I didn’t appreciate the later statement about how lucky I was to get to dive the site once, because the other guest was opposed. At the end of the cruise, Tova Har-El (one of the OH owners) matter-of-factly told us that this guest had caused trouble on a previous trip. I wish that we had known from the beginning. If you are going on your own, better to go on a bigger boat, where no one personality can so skew the dynamics. Bad weather for the first week, restricting diving substantially (typhoon off the Philippines). The advertised advantage of the OH is that you can dive directly from the

boat, rather than from dinghies, but that only works if the boat can get to the dive site. We had a daily conflict with Fish 'N Fins (associated shore operator) over whether they would send an appropriately sized chase boat during the bad weather. (The OH dinky was a small inflatable, that would not hold all the divers and our gear; it also had an extremely unreliable outboard. Kenneth requested a chase boat daily, but Navot Bornovski usually instructed him to "try it" before committing. We lost a number of dives this way, and some of them we did do were probably unsafe in very heavy swell. Fish 'N Fins capsized one of their shore-based boats near Blue Corner in the same conditions they wanted us to try, then instructed Kenneth to help them with the recovery (more lost dives). Took Fish 'N Fins 6 days to send out a replacement safety sausage, despite their boats visiting us daily. Tova and Navot only visited the boat once, after the weather had turned good and things were going better. They did manage to get me a replacement sync cord very quickly after the one I brought failed. Overall, our experience was very much at odds with the tremendous positive publicity the Bornovskis have gotten for their dive operations. Enough camera workspace for about 3 photographers. Relatively small, but adequate dunk tank. Experienced crew took very good care of equipment. (Ph: 011-680-488-2637 (Palau); fax 011-680-488-5418 (Palau) or 680-488-1725 (US); e-mail Ocean.Hunter@palaunet.com; website www.oceanhunter.com)

Ocean Hunter, March 2001, Stephen D. Pahl, (spahl@pahl-gosselin.com)
Los Altos Hills, CA. Vis: 100+ ft. Water: 84 F. Dives logged: 500+. The Ocean Hunter bills itself as a small, personalized 6-pack versus its larger competition such as the Aggressor and Peter Hughes. While the accommodations may be less palatial and more Spartan, the absolute freedom in diving, the flexibility by the captain and dive master and the ability of the chef to alter the menus to accommodate 6 divers (rather than 20!) are refreshing and wonderful. The crew let us jointly plan our dive locations based on our desires and not a predetermined script. The chef modified his standard menu to accommodate the particular likes and dislike of the guests. Their desire to accommodate and make the experience enjoyable was overwhelming and enlightening. This is not, however, a trip for those wished to be fluffed, pampered and desire easy wall diving.

Ocean Hunter, June 2001, Jason DeSalvo (desalvo@concentric.net)
Montclair, NJ. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 150 Feet. Water: 86 to 87 F, calm currents. Great boat with a great crew that provides outstanding service and is probably the serious diver's best option for diving Palau. Unfortunately, Palau no longer offers truly world class diving. I flew from Newark, via Continental Airlines, which takes over 24 hours in each direction. I arrived in the evening (Palau time) one day early. For the days before and after the cruise I was offered a choice of hotels ranging in

price from \$60 to \$350 per night. I chose The Carolines Resort a lovely small resort offering 7 villas with views of the beautiful rock islands. At \$145/day, it is a downright steal for the quality/beauty of the room. The Carolines also had a wonderful boutique offering handicrafts from all over the islands of the Pacific including story boards from Palau that are in a completely different class than any others I saw on this visit. My trip (excluding air) was arranged for me via Tova, one of the owners of Ocean Hunter. She and her husband Navot are committed to providing a world-class experience. Everything is taken care of for you. On the last day, when I had developed an ear infection, not only did Tova call to make an appointment for me at the clinic in town, but she even made sure that someone drove me there and back! The boat is a lovely motor-sailor (although the sail was never used during our trip) that carries just 6 passengers and 3 crew. Cabin numbers 1 and 2, near the bow of the boat, share a bathroom, each sleep two and are quite small. Cabin number 3 (for which there is an extra charge) is in the stern, has its own bath and is significantly larger. Pay the extra freight and get this room, you won't be disappointed. Ocean Hunter is air conditioned throughout and is in great condition. It is slow, it cruises at just 6 knots and there was no good place outside to sit and relax. The options for outside lounging involved either getting pelted by hanging wetsuits or suffering the noise from the boat's small and nearly constantly running compressor. The

crew fished every night, even at dive sites! Not that any of the groupers, snappers, parrotfish, etc. that they caught was ever served at mealtime. We were all appalled by this, but were unsure how to address it because it seemed so ingrained in their routine that we thought it must be an accepted local custom. At the end of our trip, we found out when mentioning this to the owner, Navot, that not only was this not a local custom, but that he actually forbids fishing from his boat! He had some strong words with the crew and they apologized to us, not that it did any good to the 30-40 large fish that are no longer swimming the reefs. The crew varied from good to great. Captain, Kenny, knew the waters and dive sites like the back of his hand as did the other divemaster, Wilson. Kenny varied from slightly cranky to really fun. Both he and Wilson were good to dive with and would help you find any critters you asked them about. Chef Arlee, prepared food on par with many a fine restaurant. Thai on one day, Japanese the next, TexMex the day after, and so on. There was plenty of food, plenty of choices and it was all served with a smile. Despite the coral making an obvious comeback (there was new growth virtually everywhere), the vast majority of the sites had less than 50 percent live coral cover and most of this was below 40 feet. We were hard pressed to find a single healthy shallow coral garden of which Palau used to have too many to count. As for the fish life the species variety that exists here remains among the most diverse in the world. Only the most

jaded, well-traveled diver could return from a dive not having seen something new and wonderful. The quantity of schooling fish (especially pelagics), was disappointing, however, with the exception of one dive in Ulong Channel (Ngerumekaol Pass) where we happened upon a spawning aggregation of brown-marbled groupers that numbered into the thousands, the big schools of fish that Palau is famous for were virtually absent. Sharks were still common, however, and we saw them on every dive (sometimes 10 or more at the same time) except on the two wreck dives we did inside the lagoon. All were gray reef sharks, blacktip reef sharks and whitetip reef sharks. The Mastigias jellyfish are back with a vengeance at Jellyfish Lake. Estimates are now over 10 million of the sting-less Mastigias in the lake, compared to 50 million before the El Niño related die off. Four day dives and one night dive are offered every day. During our week, 29 scheduled dives were offered. There is one guide in the water for every dive, but you are more than welcome to go on your own with or without a buddy. No maximum times and/or depths were enforced. My buddy and I routinely made 90-minute dives, spending a great deal of time in the shallows looking for critters. There's no need to dive deep in Palau, as most of the good stuff seems to be above 70 feet. The deepest we got on the entire trip was 90 feet on one of Palau's outstanding wrecks the Chuyo Maru. Peleliu Wall/Express and Blue Corner were seriously overrated, despite diving

each twice at different times on different days. (Ph: 800-348-2628 or 985-385-2628; fax 985-384-0817; e-mail info@aggressor.com; website www.aggressor.com)

Palau Aggressor, December 2000, Trish Zuccotti, Kirkland, WA. Vis: 40-100 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Dives logged: 75. Dive restrictions: 130 ft. An unbelievable experience. Crew was top-notch as were accommodations, food, etc. Despite not great weather (some sun but mostly cloudy with some rain) diving was awesome. Large pelagics everywhere. Blue Corner (went 3 times at guests' request) as good as advertised. Crew worked hard even under water to be sure we saw even tiny critters. Almost 100% drift diving off skiff (fast!) which made for an easy life — little navigation worry and no need to swim once we surfaced. Stay still and they brought the ladder right to you. Coral was in good condition though some bleaching we understand.

Palau Aggressor, January 2001, Mario Mizrahi

(mmizrahi@internet.com.mx)

Mexico City, Mex. Experience: 501-1000 dives Vis: 30 to 100 Feet.

Water: 81 to 83 F, calm currents.

Group of 16 friends from Mexico City do one trip like this every year. Live/Dive Pacific in Hawaii took care of bookings. It was a wonderful trip, with lots of soft corals, small critters, countless species of butterfly fishes, gray reef, whitetip and leopard sharks, turtles, black unicornfish, clownfishes with anemones, yellowmargin triggerfish, clown triggerfish, lionfish,

Napoleon wrasse, giant clams, crocodile fish, garden eels, batfish, barracudas, manta rays, eagle rays. At Jellyfish Lake we swam with hundreds of non stinging jellyfish. At Orange Beach we saw WWII cannons, shells and a landing craft. We did 4 dives/day out of a possible 5. At Blue Corner, Ulong Channel and German Channel we used reef hooks to attach ourselves to holes in dead coral and watch the action of gray reef sharks, whitetips and Napoleon wrasses approaching schools of jacks under very strong currents. We'd see the sharks surfing the current and at times some jacks would rub themselves against the shark's skin. At German Channel we saw 7 Pacific mantas feeding near the surface and letting us get close to photograph them. The ship is the most spacious live-aboard that I've ever been to. It was kept clean, service was good with 4 women, including Tanja the captain, on the crew. Food was good while not very abundant. Nitrox an extra cost. Spacious, clean, cameras only rinse tanks available, room for charging batteries.

Palau Aggressor, January 2001,
James Lyle (jlyle@beachnet.com)
Hermosa Beach, CA. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm currents. We reserved rooms at the Palau Pacific Resort for the group of 16 and they provided our pickup and transfer to the hotel. The next morning we all went snorkeling on the reef in front of the hotel; very healthy and populated by various butterflyfish, triggerfish, parrotfish, giant clams, pipefish,

blennies, etc. The PPR is a five star hotel with beautiful grounds and nice rooms; a nice place to relax before going on to the next week of diving. Late that afternoon the van from the Palau Aggressor picked us up. The crew welcomed showed us to our cabins, gave us a briefing on the boat and fed us dinner. This Aggressor is a huge, three story catamaran. The eight staterooms are on the first level with the dive deck. The cabins are large by boat standards and contain a large, en suite head and shower. Each has a window, queen and single bunks, individual AC control, and ample storage. The dive deck is spacious and there are lockers for everyone with a large camera table and rinse tanks. The dive deck is terminated by a hydraulic lift that cradles a large skiff with room for all 16 divers. Your tanks, weights, stay on the skiff. When it is time to dive, you walk onto the skiff at deck level and slip into your BC. The skiff is then hydraulically lowered into the water and driven to the sites, no more than 10 minutes. Entries are back rolls and a ladder is lowered for divers at the end of the dive. Upon returning to the main ship, the skiff is driven onto the lift and brought back to deck level where you simply step off. Warm towels were ready on the dive deck. Air fills are done with a whip, but for our nitrox fills the crew had to transfer the tanks to the deck and then back on the skiff. The second deck is the lounge, dining area and kitchen with a bar that can be opened onto a shaded deck area. There is a hot tub. Food was fantastic! Eric, the chef, prepared delicious fish,

chicken, lamb, pork and beef dishes. Curries and soups were especially good. The desserts were tasty and the snacks between dives were good; I gained five pounds! Eat, sleep, dive. The third deck is a partially shaded sun deck with chair, tables, and hammocks. A great place to idle, read a book or catch rays. The crew consisted of Captain Brian, Instructors/Photopros: Sam, Janice, Sarah, and DM's Ike and Hector, all hard working people. Skies were partly cloudy and we only got a couple of brief showers. Drift dives along vertical or sloping walls, high energy reef hook dives on the corners, and a couple of wreck dives, a couple of cavern/cave dives. The drift dives were leisurely, "wall on your left" or "wall on your right," depending on the currents. We saw an indescribable number of butterflyfish, unicornfish, fusiliers, white tip reef sharks, gray reef sharks, bump head parrotfish, lionfish Napoleon wrasse, wrasses, swirling schools of snappers and barracuda, eels, angelfish, a zillion soldier and squirrelfish, anemonefish, a couple of manta rays, eagle rays, one ornate eagle ray, an octopus, several kinds of nudibranchs, and a seasnake! The reef hook dives at Blue Corner, Peleliu Corner, New Drop Off and Saies Corner are world famous. You drop in the water and after a brief drift along the wall, you are swept up to the top of the reef in 40/50 fsw and deploy your reef hook to hold you steady in the current. Some currents were of the "turn your head and lose your mask" variety. While you are holding on for dear life in the currents, the sharks are

sailing effortlessly by giving you the eye. Schools of pyramid butterflyfish are like fall leaves in the wind. Huge schools of bait fish that come to feed on the incoming currents and attract the top end predators. We made the following dive sites: Lionfish Rock, Big Drop Off, Turtle Cove, Ngebus Coral Garden, Ulong Channel (twice), Blue Corner (twice)! Matthew's Wall, Peleliu Corner, Barracks Point, West Wall, Orange Beach, Blue Holes, German Channel, Saies Tunnel, Saies Corner, the wrecks of the Gozan Maru and the Chuyo Maru, and Chandelier Cave. Dives were limited to: no more than 110 feet, be on the surface by the end of 60 minutes, and no deco diving. No one checked our computers. Tanks were aluminum-80's filled to 3,000+ psi. Fifteen of us dove nitrox (\$100 per week for unlimited 32% EAN). Nearly every dive was an hour. I did 21 dives in the five and half days and totaled 21 hours and 19 minutes of bottom time. The last night we all went into Koror for dinner at Kramer's for mangrove crab. The next morning the van dropped us off at the PPR where we snorkeled, ate and rested up for the arduous 24+ hour trip back to LA. Fantastic trip.

Palau Aggressor, March 2001, Don Lambrecht, Rocklin, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 50 to 159 Feet. Water: 82 to 83 F, calm. Heavily advertised as the best reef in the world, it pales in comparison with such places as Little Cayman. Tremendous damage by El Niño to Wonder Channel presents a dive on coral rubble instead of vibrant coral. Blue

Corner, Blue Hole and Virgin Blue Hole are great dive sites. Visits to Peleliu and Jelly Fish Lake are a must on the tour. Palau Aggressor is a 110' Cat and is a dream to stay on. Large cabins, dining/lounge and dive deck spoil the diver. The skiff, while needing an overhaul, is brought aboard the boat hydraulically. All gear is left in the skiff. Tough flight into and out of Palau. Continental Micronesia leaves at 2:00 am for Guam. Currents along the wall can be quite challenging and not a spot for the new diver. Aggressor provides Nitrox at a per bottle price or a flat weekly rate. Don't even think of diving this area on a live-aboard without being Nitrox certified. Food aboard is excellent. One of the neatest additions is e-mail on the boat to "talk" to your loved ones while gone. Captain Tanja and crew are great. Slide processing good. Camera table on deck.

Star Dancer, February 2001, David L. Orr, (Fe2ORR@aol.com)

Warrington, PA. Vis: 40-75 ft. Water: 83-85 F. Dives logged: 550. We had looked forward to this trip for many years. The vis was a disappointment and the fish life was not the best in the world as I had been told. The Star Dancer was out of its element as it is usually in PNG. It should stay there as the crew does not seem to know enough about Palau and where to dive. We dove the same sites, close to one another and when we did the channels we missed or were there at the wrong tide change. We really expected more. When the cab came to

take us to the airport none of the crew were around and we had to bring all of our gear up from our cabins across the Sun Dancer and to the cab. Two of the crew from the Sun Dancer finally helped. (Ph: 800-932-6237 or 305-669-9391; fax 305-669-9475; e-mail dancer@peterhughes.com; website www.peterhughes.com)

Star Dancer & Sun Dancer II, January/February 2001, Vlad Pilar (pilarvl@netcom.ca) Toronto, ON.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, calm choppy surge currents. Did a week on each of the Star Dancer and Sun Dancer. Both boats are the usual high quality Peter Hughes operations. The Star Dancer normally operates in PNG and was in Palau for 4 months only, whereas the Sun Dancer is in Palau all year. The crews on both boats were very professional, friendly and most helpful in all respects and were genuinely interested in making the trip fun in all respects. The diving was phenomenal. Real "high voltage" diving — Blue Corner, Peleliu Express, Peleliu Cut — with up to 3-4 knot currents. You hook into the reef, and watch the underwater parade. Sharks galore, schools of all types of Fish, small medium and large, many turtles. In the German Channel on 3 dives saw a total of 4 mantas. At times the ocean can get choppy (5-7 ft. swells) while one is under the surface, making retrieval of divers exciting. Virtually all diving is done from tenders which drop you off at the site and retrieve you at the end of the dive. On most dives the Mother Ship is no

more than 10-15 minutes away. Many dives have less dramatic currents but are still full of critters. 70-75 % of the hard coral died and has not recovered. There is plenty of soft coral though which was not affected. Great diving experience for more experienced divers. Jellyfish Lake again swarming with two types of harmless jellies. Palau is 10 time zones and some 21 hours flying time from Eastern North America. Do overnight stops in Honolulu and Guam. Palau Pacific Resort as close as you can get to Paradise on an inhabited island.

Star Dancer, April 2001, Sean Bruner (sean@bruner.net) Tucson, AZ. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 25 to 150 Feet. Water: 84 F, calm currents. The hard coral was disappointing and has a long way to go to recover from 1997 El Niño. Soft coral has recovered nicely. Disappointed that two dives at Blue Corner neither time ripping current so the "show" wasn't on. Current ripping at Peleliu Tip but no critter show. What happened? Great dive at New Drop Off with lots of critters. Same Blue Holes. Jellyfish Lake awe inspiring. Night dives so-so. We paid for 7 nights and five and 1/2 days diving but couldn't do our last night on the boat or last 1/2 day's diving because the plane left at 1:45 a.m. technically the "next day" but really the last night. I was eligible for a first class upgrade on Continental, but "not on this type of ticket on these flights." Huh? Continental packs you in like sardines. LA to Honolulu 5 hrs. Honolulu to Guam 7 + hours. Peter Hughes was great. Personnel tops. Toilets didn't work in room,

but room otherwise okay. Food plentiful and good. Nitrox available in EAN 32 only. Were not told when we reserved and asked about Nitrox that it costs \$100 for week per person if prepaid, but \$150 if bought on the boat. Seems like a lot of resentment to create over \$50. E-6 overnight Processing for \$10. Single table, but big enough to accommodate. Air gun was nice. Separate rinse tank. Good about handing camera down from boat. Good advice from dive guide photographer. Separate area for charging batteries. Facilities to show slides and videos. Overall good time. Approx. \$4K to get there, dive, and pay tip (10%).

Sun Dancer II, December 2000-January 2001, Tom Rain, Irving, TX. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 265. Dive restrictions: No decompression diving. Excellent live-aboard. Excellent diving. A few days of bad weather but we dove anyway. Palau was beautiful. Only complaint is that it takes so damn long to get there and then get back home. (Ph: 800-932-6237 or 305-669-9391; fax 305-669-9475; e-mail dancer@peterhughes.com; website www.peterhughes.com)

Sun Dancer II, January 2001, John (jamslats@aol.com) Palm Coast, FL. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, calm currents. My first visit to Palau was a land-based trip seven years ago and I couldn't understand what the attraction was for so many divers. Not only did we get more diving but we got to see more of this beautiful country above and below the water. Large and comfortable boat with two large and

fast tenders that are very easy to get back on. Plenty of space to relax during surface time. Two multilevel camera tables with central charging station. Large camera platform on each dive tender.

***Sun Dancer II*, January-February 2001, Vicki Singley, Houston, TX.**

Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 80-84 F. Dives logged: 100. Dive restrictions:

Resurface at approx. one hour.

Outstanding trip. My only complaint would be going to Blue Corner 3 times — 2 was plenty. Had only mild currents at Blue Corner but strong current at dives at Peleilu — very exciting stuff! Saw sharks on every dive, couple of mantas, and loads of turtles. Had 4-5 dives a day. Crew was outstanding and helpful. The captain, Raymond, was amazingly skilled and very friendly and helpful with divers. Food was excellent, accommodations very nice. *Sun Dancer* is a beautiful boat. Service was top-notch, with crew always there to provide whatever you needed. Thumbs up all the way around. Bring a long 3 mm wetsuit (I had a shortie) — much better for multiple dives over multiple days, especially in current.

***Sun Dancer II*, March 2001, Jack and Debbie Gibson, Dallas, TX.**

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 125 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm currents. Having read about the coral bleaching we did not see nearly as much as we feared. We were told this was partly because the *Dancer* crew chose the best reefs and partly because the reefs are recovering faster than expected. Jellyfish lake is back —

they were just as thick as when we visited four years ago (before el Niño). We dove Blue Corner four times and it was great each time, producing gray reef sharks, white tips, black tips, a turtle, eagle rays, and even schooling Moorish idols. Though most of the regular crew had the week off, the replacement crew provided the same quality service that we have come to expect after many Peter Hughes cruises. Provided a separate camera rinse tank and camera table, E6 processing each night.

***Sun Dancer II*, July 2001, Tom Wardle (twardle@attglobal.net)**

Canal Fulton, OH. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm. First live aboard experience. This crew worked well together. They went out of their way to be helpful and made an old grumpy diver a happy camper. The food was excellent and there was always plenty. Only six divers on board and we all got our own stateroom. Two to a cabin would be crowded, but manageable. How is it possible to go through 40 rolls of film in two weeks? E-6 Processing onboard.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

***Chertan*, September 2000, Allan and Barbara Jones (abjones@pacbell.net)**

Anaheim, CA. Vis: 60-140 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Dive restrictions: Common sense. This was our 6th trip to PNG and 5 of these were on the *Chertan*. This is a family run operation and caters to the experienced and mid level diver. Their area of specialty is macro-mid range photography. The