

White Beach Divers, Nigi Nigi, Bora Cay, January 2001, Brant

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San Anselmo, CA. Vis: 20-80 ft.

Water: 77-79 F, choppy. Logged dives: 2,000±. Dive restrictions: stay within eyesight of group (2-3 divers plus guide). A crown-of-thorns invasion and El Niño have devastated the coral reef and, therefore, the whole chain. Poor vis, choppy surface, strong currents, unattractive sites, shoddy rental equipment made Bora Cay the worst diving in 15 years (2,000 dives) over much of the world. White Beach Divers is a comfortable place to hang out. Mike and crew are friendly and helpful. Nigi Nigi overpriced, filthy, dank room. There are tons of places to stay within any budget. Lots of drinking day and night on Bora Cay.

Sea Dive Lodge, Coron, November 2000, Dale Litney, Schaumburg, IL.

Vis: 20-100 ft. **Water:** 80-100 F. Dive restrictions; Safety stop. The two story resort is built out in the bay with views of the surrounding islands. The main attraction is the scores of Japanese ships sunk during World War II. This is uncrowded and a fraction of the cost of Truk, \$6 rooms and \$20 a day to dive. There are enough ships to not see the same one twice. You can do as much penetration as you are comfortable with. The dive guides are helpful in explaining proper wreck diving techniques. Besides great wreck dives there are hot lakes! Surrounded by cliffs rising hundreds of feet straight up, the water gets over 100 degrees as you get deeper. A wild dive! Cave dives that are out of this

world! Lots of corals and critters everywhere. The dive boats leave around 9 am and come back in the afternoon. Lots of deck space and the crew does all the work. Load/unload gear, set up gear, switch tanks and cook meals. Lunch and drinks are included in the price. Our lunches were fresh cooked tuna, crab, chicken, rice, vegetables, as much as you can eat. The best dive meal I've had anywhere in the world! The resort has new rooms that have the only hot water in town, and I mean hot. The food is great and the kitchen has all new appliances. Jim, the American owner, wants a dive resort everyone can enjoy. He'll help you find anything you need in town, from a Snickers to airplane tickets. He even found a bottle of champagne and threw a party after I asked my fiancé to marry me. Website

www.seadive.com.ph (Ph: +63 98-0937; fax +63 922-9750)

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Because of its civil uprising, this has become an unsafe destination for tourists. Before considering it, get your national government's current recommendations. . . . The Solomon Islands' tourist infrastructure is nil except for a few small, remote dive resorts in beautiful settings like Uepi and the Gizo islands, although several live-aboards dive these waters. . . . There are plenty of wrecks from WWII, lots of pristine reefs and walls, an abundance of fish (big ones too), and even more

unexplored territory. . . . Diving is year-round with plenty of places to dive in the lee, but April and May are the best months, followed by October, November, and December. . . . The Solomons are a possible add-on from Fiji (1300 miles to the southeast) or Papua New Guinea (700 miles to the west); Honiara is on the main island of Guadalcanal; use it only for overnighing. . . . Solomon Islanders produce fine wood carvings. . . . This is serious malaria country. . . .

TONGA

This island grouping, with all the beauty of the classic south Pacific, lies 600 miles to the southeast of Fiji and can be reached via Hawaii, Fiji, or New Zealand. There are few dive operations here, but diving is good and may get better if other resorts open.

Dolphin Pacific Dives, Tongan Beach Resort, September 2001, David Dornbusch Oakland, CA. In the Vava'u island group, Aroha and Joseppe operate Dolphin Pacific Divers. They are very knowledgeable, charming, and accommodating and provide excellent gear, including computers. I and my wife and two other couples chartered a Moorings sailboat for a week and then stayed five nights at the Tongan Beach Resort. Dolphin Pacific met us at a number of anchorages, as well as at the resort dock, from which they took us to some excellent dive sites. A few

of the shallow corals were damaged and bleached. However, most of the shallow sites were in excellent condition, and below 15 feet the reefs were in very good condition. Numerous tunnels, caves, chimneys, and walls. The corals and fish life are beautiful and varied, though not as abundant as the best South Pacific destinations. No pelagics The outside reefs are rarely accessible. Humpback whales come to Tonga to breed and calf. The calves are especially playful, often breaching and coming up to look us over. Whenever Aroha and Joseppe spotted whales, they altered course and spent quite a bit of time maneuvering the boat to safely bring us as close as possible and put us in position to snorkel with them — which we did twice. Aroha was very patient, working one-on-one with one of our group who had not yet completed her open water certification dives. Two tanks, without gear, cost US\$40. Fine night dive where we saw two Spanish dancers. Tongan Beach Resort — Natalie and Damien are superb managers, eager to please. The resort is comfortable, clean, well maintained, beautifully situated, and serviced by very pleasant and willing staff. It has only 15 rooms/cottages. The food is excellent and abundant. We stayed at one of the two cottages over the water which was especially enjoyable, with a couple of lion fish, a stone fish, and a variety of crabs, reef fish just down our private stairs. Whales cruised by and breached one morning. The resort is isolated and low key. Although it is located on the “main channel,” the channel is very wide, population low,