

## AUSTRALIA

Cairns, the jumping-off spot for the Great Barrier Reef, is a youth-oriented, tropical city with plenty of hotels and restaurants as well as an assortment of day boats going to the Reef and overnight trips to Cod Hole. Cairns' "beach" is a mud flat dotted with roseate spoonbills and other tropical birds, and you can visit the reptile farm to gawk at saltwater crocodiles eating chickens or take the Kuranda Railway for a look at a magnificent waterfall. . . . The best diving, with pristine reefs and oodles of fish, is to the north, reachable only by live-aboards during their summer, roughly November to March. The Ribbon Reefs are known for big sharks — lots of them, including bronze whalers. . . . Pack safety sausages, whistles, strobes, mirrors, and any other safety devices that would make you noticeable if a current carries you too far from the boat. . . . Pricey Lizard Island is the northernmost land-based operation; they have day trips to Cod Hole to pet friendly, refrigerator-sized potato cod. To the south, the wreck of the Yongala out from Townsville may be the best fish-covered wreck in the world. . . . Summer weather is sultry and oppressive, with tropical showers. . . . Water temperature is below 80 and colder in their winter, so bring rubber. . . . Moving from Queensland south, you'll pass from full-on tropics, through temperate water, to chilly water in

Sydney, and finally into the really cold stuff when you reach Tasmania. . . . Don't worry about the Great White in the GBR; they hang around south of Sydney. . . .

## Great Barrier Reef

**Adrenalin Dive, November 2001, Martin Raffauf (mr Raffauf@us.ibm.com) San Carlos, CA.** How many dives logged: 135. Sunny, warm. Vis: 35-50 ft. Water: 79-80 F. Dive own profile if you are an advanced diver and have a computer. Yongala is a 330 ft. steamship sunk in a storm in 1910 with the loss of all hands. No wreck penetration allowed. This is a world class five star dive site. The fish life is excessive, large turtles, 5 ft. grouper and Maori wrasse, large barracuda schools, massive schools of most tropical reef type fish, tuna and other pelagics. This wreck sits on a sandy bottom in about 95 ft. and is on its starboard side. You can see the anchor, some bones and bath tubs in portholes, and toilets, engineering spaces, plates, the name of the ship. The hull is impressive. It is encrusted with colorful coral growth. This is not a dive for beginners. Currents and chop can be and are usually strong. Boat ride took almost four hours one way. About 1/3 the passengers were sick most of the time. Fixed lines are required for decent ascent to and from the wreck due to high currents. Once on the bottom, currents are diminished. Paul Crocumb and staff at Adrenalin Dive do an excellent job. 43 ft V hull that can do 17 knots. Well laid out with tanks in the middle and is fully covered for sun protection on the

main deck. They provide morning tea and snacks, good lunch with fresh salad, vegetables, sandwiches, etc. Afternoon tea is also provided with cookies and other snacks and lemonade. The dive master/instructors (Dean and Murph) are very capable. A thorough briefing is given. Good briefing on the history of the ship during lunchtime. The instructors do a thorough analysis of divers skills and try and match up people accordingly. They are very safety conscious, they even have a zodiac deployed at the site as a safety measure to pick up anyone who lets go of the safety line and drifts away. Adrenalin Dive will pick up guests at hotels, and return you after the diving. The boat leaves at 6:30-7 a.m. and returns about 6pm. (Ph: 61 7 47240600; e-mail [info@adrenalindive.com.au](mailto:info@adrenalindive.com.au); website <http://www.adrenalindive.com.au>)

**Lady Elliot Island, November 2001, Martin Raffauf** ([mr Raffauf@us.ibm.com](mailto:mr Raffauf@us.ibm.com)) **San Carlos, CA.** Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 72-73 F. Air 82. Logged dives: 140. Dive restrictions enforced: time and depth controlled. Lady Elliot is a national park. A small island (you can walk around in 45 minutes), the landing strip is grass. It is remote -- 80 KM offshore. The southern most island in the Great Barrier Reef. It is a coral cay. Can only be reached via small plane flight from Bundaberg or Hervey Bay. Accommodations range from tent cabins to two bedroom beach front units with ensuite bath. The beach front units have great views, and lanai areas for gear storage,

lounging etc. There is no air conditioning, just ceiling fans, however in November that was fine, although during Jan-Feb apparently it is much hotter. Meals are buffet affairs, with plentiful and good food, and a bar. Food is in a central dining area where all guests eat together. A maximum of 140 people are allowed on the island at once. A bird sanctuary with thousands of nesting boobies, noddies, herons, and other sea birds -- some, as the red-tailed tropic birds are quite rare. Not many bugs -- the birds seem to eat them all but the birds are noisy all the time and there is bird poop every where. You will get hit at least once. Dive operation does an excellent job given what they have to work with. Dive boats used are low draft landing craft, which on high tide come right to the beach to pick you up. On low tide, you have to walk some distance with full gear to the boat thru sand and coral. No equipment storage. You cart your gear back and forth to the room in little push carts. Boat rides are short -- 5-10 mins max. Dive sites are numerous, but dependent on conditions of current, chop, etc. Every dive we did have some current. One dive was a real four knot drift dive --excellent. One dive in the AM and one dive in the PM, with occasional night dives. Dives are guided only. You do a full gear up on shore before boarding the boat. Saw sharks, both silver tip and gray whaler, saw lots of turtles, in fact Lady Elliot is a turtle breeding ground between Nov-Feb. They come ashore and lay eggs. We saw mantas either from the boat or in the water every day. Saw some dolphins,

plenty of sea snakes and large numbers of tropical reef fish. Snorkeling very good (my wife saw a silver tip shark while snorkeling). Snorkelers are kept separate from divers. Good nature programs. Reasonable cost compared with other barrier reef operations.

**Lizard Island Resort, September 2002, Barton Smith (basmith@yahoo.com) Campbell, CA.** Experience: 51-100 dives Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 73 to 75 F, calm. First class tropical island resort with snorkeling and diving on the Great Barrier Reef. Accommodations and service are excellent and the food is fantastic. Typically two dives each day. The 55-foot dive boat MV Serranidae makes the run to the outer reef (on alternate days) in one hour. "Cod Hole" is a favorite location. The reef here is in great condition, with more to see than time allows. Feeding by the dive operators attracts tame potato cod, so you can get a close look at these large fish. They usually have certified divers, resort course divers, and snorkelers on the boat. The crew is experienced and trained in first aid, and the boat carries oxygen. They take extensive precautions to insure that no one is left behind after a dive. Service is the best I have seen. This is the place for relaxation and luxury, with a little high quality diving. The tour of the nearby marine research station is well worth the time. There is plenty to see, including lots of giant clams, snorkeling from the beach. Our 3mm/2mm full wet suits were adequate. The resort was renting 5mm shorties. Beware of luggage weight restrictions on the Mac Air flight to the island.

Your clothes may have to go standby so you can take your gear. (Full equipment rental available on the island.). No special provisions for camera gear on boat, but there was sufficient space on table in cabin for setup. (Ph: 800 225 9849 or 1800 737 678 (Australia); e-mail [reservations@poresorts.com](mailto:reservations@poresorts.com); website <http://www.lizardisland.com.au/lizard>)

**Quicksilver Outer Reef Cruise, September 2002, Barton Smith (basmith@yahoo.com) Campbell, CA.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 70 to 74 F, choppy. Quicksilver operates several Great Barrier Reef day cruises out of Port Douglas, Queensland. On the Outer Reef Cruise, the MV Quicksilver VIII takes tourists to their floating platform on Agincourt Reef, where there are opportunities for snorkeling, glass-bottom boat rides, and diving. For certified divers, two dives cost AUS \$120 besides the price of the cruise, and includes all equipment rentals. They also offer introductory SCUBA. They take certified divers on a small dive boat to two nearby reef. Conditions and support make this a good opportunity for beginning divers. The scenery could not be better. Experienced divers may feel limited by the prescribed depth and time. Water and reef conditions excellent for photography. Requirement to stay with the leader means that you can't spend too long setting up a shot, or go deeper if you see something down there that looks interesting. (Ph: 61 7 3876 4644; e-mail [visitors@greatbarrierreef.aus.net](mailto:visitors@greatbarrierreef.aus.net); website [www.quicksilvercruises.com](http://www.quicksilvercruises.com))

## Southern Australia

**Eaglehawk Dive Center, St. Helen's Dive Center, Tasmania, March 2002, Tom Millington, MD (pvhhvo@aol.com) Somis, CA.**

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 45 to 50 Feet. Water: 58 to 60 F, choppy. Fly from Sydney to Hobart, and drive to Eaglehawk Neck (about 45 minutes). Many bed and breakfasts with costs \$70-US, including a great hot breakfast and wine and cheese at 6 P.M.. The dive center also has a dorm and showers and kitchen for \$10 for the budget minded. Gary and the crew at Eaglehawk Dive Center treated us as "family," including having a "barbie" for us Sunday night. The diving was remarkable. Cold water with about 50 ft viz, but wonderful kelp beds, huge schools of anchovies and other baitfish being herded by barracuda, large boar fish, jacks, sea lions. We found the weedy sea dragon on our third dive -- wonderful photo subject. There are also sea horses in the kelp, but we couldn't find them (another reason to go back). Lots of macro also: sea spiders, nudibranchs, cup corals, colorful crabs. At 120 feet in 58 degree water were beautiful sponge gardens! St. Helen's dive center, run by Colin, takes you to beautiful walls again covered with sponges, corals, kelp, and schools of bait fish. Besides wonderful diving, visiting the Tasmanian Devil Farms to be able to hold Wombats, feed Wallabies and Kangaroos, watch the Devils feed is unforgettable. Take the many trails through the National Park south of Eaglehawk Neck or

south of Coles Bay on the east for breathtaking photo ops. The food at the local small restaurants is wonderful (try the sticky date pudding for desert). (Ph: +61-3-6250 3566; e-mail [info@eaglehawkdive.com.au](mailto:info@eaglehawkdive.com.au); website [www.eaglehawkdive.com.au](http://www.eaglehawkdive.com.au))

**Kangaroo Island Diving Safaris, Ozone Seafront Hotel, June 2002, John Crossley (jcrossle@csufresno.edu) Fresno, CA.**

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 15 to 30 Feet. Water: 51 to 54 F, choppy. Kangaroo Island was great! The big attraction are the beautiful and unique leafy sea dragons, but there is much more to do. It is a large island off the south coast of Australia, with a few small towns, but mostly it is a natural area, with lots of opportunities to see kangaroos, koalas, and sea lions up close. Take a small plane flight from Adelaide, or save money by taking a bus from Adelaide to Cape Jervis to catch a high speed ferry. We stayed in Kingscote, at the Ozone Seafront Hotel, which was moderate in price, but nice and with a good restaurant. Local tour companies with vans know the best spots to see wildlife, but you could probably see much of the wildlife in a rental car if you get good directions. Parndana Wildlife Park, a preserve, had all the animals. We could hand feed the kangaroos, and some would hang around just to be petted. Kangaroo Island Diving Safaris is operated by Jim and Josie Thiselton, who know the waters of Kangaroo Island well. We had booked two days of diving on their catamaran, but the weather blew us out of action

one day. On the second day the water outside the bay was still too rough so we dove the large Kingscote Wharf. It was a great muck dive site where we found many crabs, two cuttlefish, sponges, yellow cup corals, and several types of unique nudibranchs and juvenile fish. On our second dive, Jim found two leafy sea dragons. With its multiple green leafy appendages, this was the most beautiful critter I've ever seen in the sea. Although the water was really cold (51 degrees) and the air temp was only about 55, we found the leafys and had a great time. (Ph: 61 8 8559 3225; e-mail kids@kin.on.net; website [www.kidivingsafaris.com](http://www.kidivingsafaris.com))

### COOK ISLANDS

Tucked between French Polynesia and Tonga, the Cook Islands have from time to time tried to promote themselves as a dive destination. They've never really succeeded - even though the main island of Rarotonga has good food and a wide variety of places to stay. There's a decent dive through a cut into the lagoon that has good sharks and strong current, but overall the diving doesn't measure up to other South Pacific locations. . . .

**Cook Island Divers, Local Lodge, September 2001, Tim McKenzie, Canberra, ACT.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 10 to 40 Meters. Water: 23 to 24 Celsius, choppy. We had high hopes for this trip with our Australian Dive club. The viz was supposed to be spectacular and the diving great. Well

— viz was good. Water touted at 26-27 C but was significantly colder and several of us borrowed/hired additional protection as our 3mm suits were simply not enough. Bring a 5mm. The Dive shop was pretty good, picked us up in the morning (7:45am) and took us down to the shop. They have three RIBs that seem more than adequate for your needs. We had ten in the group and the RIBs weren't too crowded. Good tank racks. Initial equipment set up at the shop (new compressors) then into our suits and down to the dock in their van. There seemed to be a wind blowing most days but as the island is small it was always possible to find the lee side. Our dive guide Mel was great and helpful but one "guide" to ten divers meant we all had to load up the boats and help ourselves. Not an issue as we were all experienced. Initial dive was obviously a check out for Mel to see what we were like. Only dive we were asked to stay at or above a certain depth (25 meters) to see what we were like. After that essentially free for all, with Mel leading the group if they wanted to go with him. The disappointing thing was the "bio-diversity" — or lack of it. The corals (most hard — few soft) were dull and lifeless looking. They appeared healthy not bleached, but far from spectacular. The fish life was also pretty sparse. Yes the viz was great — but it emphasized the lack of critters! Occasionally we saw small reef sharks — Mel very excited. Also found a few *Helgardia* nudibranchs and one Spanish dancer. There are a few small wrecks which we dived for variety but