

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 overnighting. . . . 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.

### VANUATU

The world's largest air-accessible wreck, the *President Coolidge*, a 640-foot ocean liner converted into a troop ship, is a beach dive on Espiritu Santo. It's mainly for advanced divers, starting at 70 feet and going down to 250. . . . Check with DAN about your evacuation insurance before going; you may not be covered due to the number of divers getting bent on this site. . . . Some diving is available from the capital city of Port-Vila, but it's not spectacular. . . . Little reef diving is offered so far. . . . Water temperatures in February hit the

mid 80s and in September may drop as low as 70. . . . Don't miss the side trip to Tanna Island to visit the active volcano, dugongs, and Melanesian villagers living according to ancient customs. . . . Other side trips include the island of Pentecost in April to early June to see the land divers leap head-first from 70-foot towers with nothing but vines tied around their ankles. . . .

## LIVE-ABOARDS

### AUSTRALIA

#### Southern Australia

*Falie*, June 2002, John Crossley (jcrossle@csufresno.edu) Fresno, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 61 to 64 F, choppy. This was a Stan Waterman trip that teamed up with the world famous great white shark expert, Rodney Fox, on the three-masted, 80-year-old classic sailing ship, the *Falie*. The cabins were decent size, but fifteen divers shared three large toilet/shower rooms. Meals included several choices and were well prepared. The great whites were there every day. We saw thirteen different ones in a week. At most we saw five in a day, about 9-16 feet long, but most was really thick and strong looking. Four divers could get into a 6ft by 6ft. steel cage lowered from the side of the ship to 60-80 feet, where we would watch the white sharks (and eagle rays, sting

rays, and other fish) as they cruised around, looking at us, and they seemed like peaceful giants. They told us not to go out of the cage. Off the stern, four divers could stand in a steel cage that floated at the surface, while the boat crew fed the sharks tuna baited on a line that floated right next to our cage. On scuba at just 5 feet deep we could see the sharks come up to feed one at a time. They were cautious hunters, making several passes before coming back for the big bite. They would swim away and come back anywhere from one to ten minutes later, and always from a different direction in the murky water (visibility 30 ft). Sometimes it would come up right behind us and we would not see it until it was right there. What a skilled hunter! Generally, we did two cage dives a day, and each was a thrill. We forgot how cold the water was (61-64) until we got out and froze on the deck in the wind. The third way to see the sharks was on a side feeding, with us hanging over the side rail of the ship to see the great whites go for the tuna suspended a little above the water. It was really impressive to see these giants come half a body length out of the water with jaws wide. After dinner we would listen to Stan and Rodney tell stories of great adventures. We all agreed that we felt not a second of fear during our cage dives with the great whites, but instead a total sense of awe and respect for these perfect hunters. Rodney said that was why he leads these trips, so people can really appreciate the grace, beauty, and aquatic perfection of these great white

sharks. After the trip, we had a party at Rodney's Great White Shark Museum, which is a great exhibit. Great and memorable week. **(Rodney Fox Shark Expedition: Ph: +618 8376 3373; e-mail [rodneyfox@chariot.net.au](mailto:rodneyfox@chariot.net.au); website [www.rodneymuseum.com.au](http://www.rodneymuseum.com.au))**

## Western Australia

**Sea Trek, June 2002, John Crossley ([jcrossle@csufresno.edu](mailto:jcrossle@csufresno.edu)) Fresno, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 77 to 79 F, choppy. Our group of nine flew from the US to Sydney, then to Perth where we overnighted before flying up to Exmouth. The plane to Exmouth has severe restrictions on baggage, so divers need to pack light or arrange a truck to carry heavy photo equipment up to Exmouth, which is what our group had arranged. At Exmouth, we boarded the 56-foot live-aboard, the *Sea Trek*. With nine divers, four crew, and lots of cameras and videos, it was very cramped conditions. Cabins were small and it had only two toilet/shower rooms to serve the whole group. However, the dive deck was adequate, with two double deck camera tables and two large camera rinse buckets. The Captain, Ray, and his crew were excellent and tried hard to meet every need. Fantastic food served by chef/divemaster Carl. The best food I've had on any live-aboard (15 ships). Each morning we had a spotter plane fly for three hours to find the whale sharks, which are easy to spot from the air if seas are calm. It took as little as an hour and as long as three hours to find a whale shark. We found the big (25 to 45 feet) yet gentle sharks

five days out of six, though early June is at the tail end of the prime season, and despite bad weather and rough seas. We snorkeled side by side with the whale sharks, and when they seemed at ease with us, we would put on scuba gear to dive with them. One day I was in the water 11 different times with the giants, swimming till I was tired each time. That's called getting "Sharked Out." Each afternoon we did a one or two regular scuba dives on Ningaloo Reef and saw Olive sea snakes, three Wobbegong sharks, and a big, beautiful manta ray. A night dive included a huge Spanish dancer and some nudibranchs. Each night, after dinner, we would listen to Stan's stories; fantastic adventures told with great humor, from a humble yet master storyteller. Water as 77-79 degrees and visibility ranged from 20 to 30 feet on the reef to 50 feet in open water. Most everyone wore at least a lycra suit, to protect from the hundreds of 6-8 inch red jellyfish that filled the water column. They were more of a nuisance than anything. Overall, it was an expensive trip, but well worth it for "lifetime memories." I would go earlier in the season when the whale sharks are supposed to be more plentiful and the weather calmer. *Sea Trek* is booked through Diving Ventures: [www.dventures.com.au](http://www.dventures.com.au) (Ph: +61 (08) 9430 5130; e-mail [diving@dventures.com.au](mailto:diving@dventures.com.au); website [www.dventures.com.au](http://www.dventures.com.au))

### Queensland

**Elizabeth E II, October 2001, Bill & Nancy Allenbaugh, Reynoldsville, PA.** Vis: 80-150 ft. Water: 72-78 F. Dives logged: 280. Coral Sea —

beautiful. Yongala — most concentration of fish I've seen. Did not see another soul for days. The islands were full of birds and turtles. Calypso Star — Cage diving with great whites — 8 sharks, 8' to 15' in three days. Better than sky diving. Capt. Rolfe is Mr. Shark of South Australia. Water 60 degrees — but the "rush" kept you warm. (Ph: +617-4957 4281 or +07-49574281; e-mail [elizcecc@orion-online.com.au](mailto:elizcecc@orion-online.com.au); website [www.elizabethe.com.au](http://www.elizabethe.com.au))

**Elizabeth E II, November 2001, Steven Holland, Beaufort, SC.** Vis: 70-100 ft. Water: 78-82 F. Logged dives: +/-240. Dive restrictions enforced: time limit on deep dives. Excellent all wood 110' boat departing Mackay for GBR and Coral Sea including Yongala. Lucid briefings, safety conscious, terrific crew — mind readers all. Viz not as good as expected. Marvelous reefs full of life. Gorgeous gorgonians and soft corals. Swarms of tropicals. Numerous and interesting pelagics, especially on Yongalla.

**Spoilsport, October 2001, Luigi P. Porcu/Terri S. Short.** Experience: 180 dives. Five star treatment by a professional and efficient staff. They managed to keep the spirit going whilst spoiling us with incredible dive sites and an excellent dash of superb humor. If I were an Irish man, my personal remark would be "unbelievable good crack." This our second visit to Flinders Reef. Many sea creatures of every shape and size, from gigantic eagle rays to the tiniest goby, along with the soft corals gently

dancing. Our second day, one engine failed and the zodiac's winch decided that it had enough of working hard and without the union membership and crew's approval, they decided to pack up on us. We had to return to the mainland for some quick refitting and journeyed with only one engine through the night to local dive sites for our second dive day. Days 3-6 ranged from deep walls encrusted with incredible fans to hard and soft corals, nudibranchs and flat worms galore, along with a score of pelagic sightings. The Berlin Wall is a shallow lagoon on the edge of a pristine and immaculate drop off. Incredible visibility and abundant fish life ranging from the ever present trevally and sweet lips to large pelagics patrolling the wall at the 30m mark. We saw many lion fish dancing about on our early morning dive. Anemone city, part of a large bommie rising from 40 to 45m, with an incredible topography. Continuous water erosion has created several swimthroughs and a gigantic ledge paved with several gorgonian fans and soft corals, housing a large variety ranging from nudibranchs and soft worms to crystal clear shrimps. The site could easily have been sculpted by Moore or painted by Dali. It has the surrealism. Trigger happy and the Cod Wall bommies galore again. The Cod Wall swim through, an overhang the size of a living room, and diver size holes and caves allowing for easy penetration and exploration. Cotton-mouthed eel, few juvenile wrasse parading to the tune of a Turkish belly dancer, music not included unfortunately. Gorgonian

at 43 meters so big that you can see it at 30 meters. Slept through Scuba Zoo as I do not agree with fish feeding even when it's five star silver service. Night dive on Geronimo's wall — every kind of reef shark seemed to enjoy lingering around after the shark feeding at Scuba Zoo. White tips, inquisitive silver tips and some small whalers. Unfortunately with the regulators stuck in our mouths we could not scream 'Geronimo.' Their interest became a bit too close and personal. They were every where and closing in from every direction. Thank God never arching their spines and always aborting their kamikazes dive when they got too close. At the end of a long haul of diving the wet suits start to grow fungi and algae along with an unmarketable aroma far from Tuscany or Chanel #9, which I presumed helped to keep the sharks at bay. (Ph: 800-952-4319 (US) or 61-0-7-40-315484 (Australia); e-mail mbde@mikeball.com or resv@mikeball.com; website www.mikeball.com)

***Spoilsport/Supersport, November 2001, Irina Zeylikman, Lexington, MA.*** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 82 to 86 F, calm choppy. Excellent operation, the boats are comfortable, cabins are not big, but well laid out. Only premium cabins have in-suite bathrooms, all others share. All cabins have 110V and 240V outlets or recharging the camera batteries. The food was good and plentiful. The chefs on both boats accommodated all diets. Both crews were helpful, but *Supersport's* crew

was a lot of fun too. They worked as a team. Divemasters were helpful, but not overbearing. We spent four days on Spoil Sport and did 15 dives.

Diving Great Barrier Reef and seven days on Super Sport, did about 25 dives, diving Yongala wreck and Coral Sea. *Supersport* is a bigger and more luxurious. All dives on both boats were well organized. The briefings were informative. Diving profiles were not enforced, common sense had to prevail, everybody was asked to come back with 500 psi, stay within recreational diving limits and do 3-5 minutes 15 ft. safety stop. The boats are equipped with the hanging bar. The dive deck on *Spoilsport* has a couple of showers, warm towels were awaiting us after each dives. Each diver was assigned a dive station, all dive gear stayed on the dive deck. There was plenty of room for all divers to get geared up. Mike Ball is not the cheapest operation, but the trip was worth every penny. (Ph: 800-952-4319 (US) or 61-0-7-40-315484 (Australia); e-mail mbde@mikeball.com or resv@mikeball.com; website www.mikeball.com)

***Supersport, October 2001, Chrys Martin, Portland, OR.*** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78-80 F, calm. Far outer Great Barrier Reef/Coral Sea area. Staff was great, rooms, showers and facilities great and diving was first rate. Dived the outside the main reef. Hot water, warm and dry towels and lots of support if we wanted a dive instructor each dive with us. Eleven dives in three days! Diverse group of divers

who also really enjoyed the trip. Had good rental equipment also and lots of room on the boat to learn, sun, rest, etc.

***Supersport, Coral Bay (west Australia) April 2002, Gerald Bertekap (gbertekap@comcast.net) Clark, NJ.*** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy. Although it was the trip of a lifetime, once is enough as most of the coral was dead or had no color, only some sharks, and not an abundance of fish and living coral. We booked Super Sport for four days and three night and got plenty of diving, none deeper than 80' at the Great Barrier Reef. We did see different species of fish but nothing to compare to Bonaire or the Florida Keys or the Virgin Islands. Cod Hole was exciting though the cod were not as big as you would expect from what you read. The crew, food and boat were great. The cabin could have been more secure as the roll of the ship caused the drawers in the room to open and close by themselves. Difficult sleeping without getting thrown out of bed. We took a side trip to Coral Bay on the west coast and had a few great snorkels with whale sharks and manta rays and tiger sharks. It was well worth the trouble to get to Coral Bay from Perth and then Exmouth. You were not allowed to dive with the whale sharks but the encounters were awe inspiring. Make sure you go in April when the whale sharks are there and book with an operation that uses a spotter plane. Remote. Three restaurants, two motels, one gas station, and one bar. No police, no paved roads, no red

lights, no laws and they make their own water and electricity. A doctor comes once a month and the police come from 90 miles away twice a year. If there is any trouble the boys at the bar, take care of it. Could have advised passengers to store cameras in non-air-conditioned areas or rooms as taking the cameras out in the morning from the air-conditioned cabin into the hot humid air caused alarms to go off in the video camera and clouding to occur on the lens. Otherwise great service with cameras and developing onboard. (Ph: 800-952-4319 (US) or 61-0-7-40-315484 (Australia); e-mail mbde@mikeball.com or resv@mikeball.com; website www.mikeball.com)

**Taka II, September 2001, Mike Moore, Manhattan KS.** Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 76 F. Dive restrictions: safety stops. The cabins are indeed small, but since time spent in the cabin was mainly spent sleeping, this was not uncomfortable. The remainder of the time was spent eating, updating logbooks, socializing or sunbathing. A slight smell of dampness seemed to pervade. Dive crew professional, knowledgeable and safety-minded. They explained the diving areas in detail and offered suggestions. You were signed off the boat upon entering the water and were signed back in upon returning. You were then required to come back and sign that log again after drying off. Even if not diving, they require you to sign the log. All signatures must be present before moving to the next dive site. Though the equipment is not new, it is

well-maintained and in good working order. A safety stop line and tank were always available. The galley crew did an exceptional job with food preparation: it not only tasted good, it was appealing to the eye as well. The skipper was sociable and always seemed to have a pleasant smile and demeanor. He frequently socialized with the divers. (Ph: +61-07-4051-8722; e-mail takadive@taka.com.au; website www.taka.com.au)

**Taka II, July 2002, Don Beukers (don@donbeukers.com) San Jose, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Water: 75 to 80 F, choppy no currents. Started the booking in February 2002. This is much too late to book a Spoilsport or other 1st class boat so found Taka II Dive Adventures, in Cairns. I contacted them by E mail and booked a four-day three-night trip to Cod Hole on the GBR. Crew was wonderful but the boat and the other facilities were sub par two rooms with ensuite toilet/shower on the upper deck; the other people had to share the combination toilet/showers located on the dive deck, with the crew. The average age that this operation catered to is about 30 years old and a lot were travelers backpacking around the world. No charging stations or dedicated photo table. The food was prepared and served buffet style however there were only three booths, so there was not enough seating places. Most of the crew had to take their plates to the dive deck and eat off their laps. The great barrier reef I think is an overblown destination. I had gone

out to the GBR on a Quicksilver boat a few days before and got in two dives. Both were mediocre and the Cod Hole dive was okay. Fiji just blows away the GBR. The cost is from \$690 to \$560/person; you have to pay for sodas, beer wine, even bottled water.

***Undersea Explorer*, February 2001,  
Theresa Bivens, Sellersburg, IN.**

Vis: 40-90 ft. Water: 75-80 F. Dives logged: 180. Fantastic live-a-board though it didn't have all the amenities of an *Aggressor*, but it was just as comfortable. No head in each room, but there were four heads on the dive deck. The food was excellent, as the chef was a young man that had just graduated culinary school. We had a wonderful variety. The *Undersea Explorer* is also a research vessel and we were privy to nautilus and white tip shark research that the resident marine biologist and the dive master were conducting. Each afternoon they gave us a two-hour class using audio/visual equipment and hands on training. We learned all about corals, the Great Barrier Reef, sharks, cephalopod mollusks. The entire crew was fantastic, polite and helpful. We spent one afternoon and evening on Lizard Island hiking, swimming and snorkeling the lagoons and a having wonderful BBQ. Osprey Reef in the Coral Sea was fantastic and we saw five species of sharks there in one day. The coral is much healthier than what I had seen in Fiji three weeks earlier.

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## Fiji

***Fiji Aggressor*, October 2001,  
Theresa Bivens, Sellersburg, IN.**

Vis: 30-85 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Dives logged: 180. Dive restrictions enforced: 60 min. Very nice live-a-board. The food was excellent, especially the soups. I celebrated my birthday while onboard and they surprised me with a wonderful homemade cake and champagne for everyone. The crew that was Fijian was super including the captain. They all were attentive, polite, enjoyable and entertained us with music and singing several times. Three dive masters who acted as hosts, videographer, photographer, and ran the dive operations were not Fijian and were more formal with their attitudes. All gave excellent dive briefings. Diving was off a dive boat hydraulically lowered in and out of the water at the rear of the *Aggressor*. All of the dive gear stayed on the dive boat. Getting into the wet suits and the dive briefings were on the deck of the *Aggressor*. The dive boat was crowded when everyone was trying to get their gear on. Safety was taken seriously by all crew members. Two of the night dives sights were disappointing. The day diving was good and the dive boat picked you up wherever you surfaced. The crew was super. The tour of a Fijian village one evening we all thoroughly enjoyed. I spent two weeks in Fiji in 1/O1 at two different resorts, two different islands doing day boat diving. I found the dive sights from the *Aggressor* and from the day boat resorts were about the same. I enjoyed the amenities of the *Aggressor* as