

CANADA

If you can take cold water, the rewards include an incredible array of filter feeders and marine life that you'll never dive with in warm waters. A handful of funky boats and great crews make it possible to get in the water with orcas and other wonders of the cool-water world. . . .

Rendezvous Dive Ventures, July 2001, Art Hulse (ntcc@grove.iup.edu) Kittanning, PA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 50 to 48 F, calm. No currents. Incredible diversity of marine life, mostly invertebrates, but also lots of cold water reef fish, wolf eels and giant Pacific octopus, sun stars up to 2.5 feet in diameter and white anemones up to 2 feet tall. Every hard surface is totally covered with life. A macrophotographers dream. Brightly colored nudibranchs are everywhere. Land facilities are rustic but good. An island about a 1.5 hour ride from Port Alberni. Food was fantastic. Renate Christy is a great cook and a good Scrabble player. Her husband Dave runs the oldest dive operation on Vancouver Island and it is one of the best. He knows Barkley Sound and has dozens of sites. (Ph: 877-777-9994 or 250-720-9306; e-mail rendvous@island.net; website www.rendvousdiveventures.com)

Rendezvous Dive Ventures, Rendezvous Retreat, July 2002, Jill Rain (jrain@lopez.wednet.edu), Lopez Island, WA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 48 to 50 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents, no

currents. Rendezvous Lodge, in Barkley Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island, is remote — they book groups of 10 for minimum 3-day 8-dive stays. Assemble your own group or sign up for the package with a northwest dive shop (Anacortes Diving and Supply goes there thrice yearly). Bring your own gear including spares (I had to borrow when one of my gloves was taken by an octopus — really). RL accessible only by boat 2 hrs from Pt. Alberni, nearest town. Tall A-frame “vertical lodge” tucked into rocky wilderness cliff side. Five double-occupancy rooms, powered by generator/battery, hot water, two bathrooms (one with shower), drying room. Dramatic setting and views but also homey, comfortable atmosphere (couches, book, dogs). Run by the gracious, friendly and competent Christies: Renate (who among other things, such as beating off bears) does the cooking (old-fashioned, delicious in every way, plentiful, eaten at a big table family style) and Dave (who also among other things such as collecting mussels for red-tide testing) drives the boat, chooses dive sites and gives briefings — he has dived every wall and pinnacle in B. Sound from 30 years experience. Leisurely 2-tank day trip includes hot homemade soup for lunch with long surface interval at quiet bay, beach or hamlet of Bamfield. Switch your own tanks on board for second dive — morning and night-3rd dive tanks filled with compressor at RL dock. Boat anchors, buddy teams (required — if you don't come with one, you will be assigned) descend anchor line, dive own profile

and come back up. Poor navigators may have to do green-water ascent — try to avoid this! Currents can be strong in top 20', generally minimal to moderate at depth. Bob and Kelley (owners + instructors of Anacortes D & S) monitor and rearrange teams for best experience and safety, stepping into buddy a less-experienced diver, and provide help generally (including optional argon pony bottle and fills if previously arranged) — plus enthusiasm and extensive knowledge of the ecosystem. No Nitrox. No film processing, however at least half the photographers were digital. Camera rinse tank on board. Octopus and wolf-eels on most dives, often out in the open — these guys were big but receptive to respectful fondling. Abundant nudibranchs, anemones, seastars, abs, sponges, brittle stars, giant rock scallops, rockfish, greenling, huge lingcod, ratfish, baitballs. Saw a humpback whale, seals, sea lions from the boat + lots of eagles. The viz, diversity, abundance and size of marine life are superior to Puget Sound diving and the ambiance of Rendezvous Lodge makes this a memorable expedition.

COSTA RICA

Costa Rica is famous among experienced divers for uninhabited Cocos Island, three hundred miles offshore. If you're out for challenging, high-tension, big-animal dives among hammerheads, mantas, occasional whale sharks, and other awe-inspiring creatures of the

Pacific deep, Cocos is one of the more reliable places on earth to find them, but it's not for the faint-of-heart, coral lovers, or those out-of-tune with their skills. . . . Follow the weather pattern when planning trips as the number of sharks is negatively affected during El Niño years. . . . Visibility and water conditions, however, are unpredictable, with both visibility and wind down in the rainy season (roughly May through November). . . . Northwestern Costa Rica's land-based diving is a smaller-scale version of Cocos Island. There are plenty of sharks (although no massing hammerheads) and a big-ocean feeling with rigorous conditions and an awesome amount of fish life (including good odds of seeing a whale shark) and often poor visibility. . . . Bat Island offshore is the place to go, so insist on it before booking. . . . Beaches vary from not-so-great to decent, but nature side trips are definitely a double "yes". . . . Though Spanish is the national language, English-only speakers can get by. . . .

El Ocotal, Hotel Ocotal, September 2001, Carl Scott, Spring, TX.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 68 to 82 F, surge. Large schools of many species, along with unusual critters not found in the Caribbean. Sharks every day (white tips, and bull sharks at Bat Islands), saw several schools of bat-nosed rays and countless schools of other species. The stingrays were plentiful and huge. Schools of playful spotted dolphins, mating turtles (for the voyeurs aboard)