

501-1000 dives. Water: 81 F, choppy, currents. Malpelo was outstanding. We had over 500 silky sharks checking us out on a safety stop. Moray eels are everywhere, sometimes three or four in one hole. We saw eagle rays, a few hammerheads and many other fish. The currents are very strong. Malpelo is not for a timid, out of shape diver. Cocos Island was beautiful. We were there two years ago and didn't see nearly the same number of hammerheads this time. Black October took its toll at Cocos. We saw a manta ray, sailfish, many huge white tips, octos and 20 or 30 hammerheads on any given dive. Eagle and marble rays are everywhere. The currents are not as strong as Malpelo, but are still right up there. The crew couldn't be better. (Ph: 011-506-289-7334 or 011-506-228-6535; e-mail [booking@underseahunter.com](mailto:booking@underseahunter.com); website [www.underseahunter.com](http://www.underseahunter.com))

## COSTA RICA

### Cocos Island

**Okeanos Aggressor, October 2001, Karie Jones, Shelby Twp. MI.** Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 72-78 F. Dives logged: 140. Dive restrictions enforced: no open water drifting, four dives one day, depth depends on site. The diving is absolutely phenomenal for schooling hammerheads, uncountable numbers of white-tipped reef sharks, turtles, eagle rays, manta rays, dolphins. Every dive is a thrill! Accommodations are a little outdated, rooms need updating, but the crew makes up for it! The trip is for advanced divers, often wavy with ripping currents. (Ph: 800-

348-2628 or 985-385-2628; e-mail [info@aggressor.com](mailto:info@aggressor.com); website [www.aggressor.com](http://www.aggressor.com))

**Okeanos Aggressor, November 2001, Homer Rector, Foresthill, CA.** Vis: 30-50 ft. Water: 68-78 F. Logged dives: 700+. Dived using 32 percent Nitrox. Diving was great, service and crew excellent. The boat could use a major refurbishing and the rubber boats are tough to get into for weaker divers. I recommend it for experienced divers looking for big fish.

**Okeanos Aggressor, January 2002, Bill Schlegel ([schleggg@aol.com](mailto:schleggg@aol.com)) Jefferson City, MO.** Total dives: about 600. Nice accommodations in San Jose. Connections from there to the Okeanos, about three hours away in Punta Arenas, were expedient. We went right onto the boat. Not much in Punta Arenas and it's a potentially rough town. Some confusion as to if there would be enough Soda-Sorb on board for the re-breathers. Seven out of 18 did all their dives with Drager Dolphins, a much higher percentage than usual and requiring more than the standard supply of CO2 absorbent that the Okeanos carried. There initially wasn't enough for all, even after multiple phone calls to *Aggressor* central in Louisiana the previous weeks to make arrangements. Understood that we had to obtain more from the *Sea Hunter* at departure. So, a word of caution: The people at the *Aggressor* home office are not technical about diving and you may need to pay special attention if you or your group needs something special. The Okeanos is close to 30 years old.

Originally a private yacht. 110 feet long, beam 24 feet and 11 feet draft. All diving (except one night dive) was from two inflatable craft that carry 10 divers each, with some crowding. It was tricky to get all the gear, divers, re-breathers, cameras etc. into, and out of, each inflatable. But the crew was diligent. The only problems were when someone would decide to do it their own way. Such as jumping into the inflatable from the deck, fully suited up and with all their equipment on! The drop of four feet to the smaller boat was too much for even the most macho diver. They also have a system for getting back onto the inflatable. They do not use dive ladders. Unless you have special requirements or are out of shape, the crew will get you back into the dive boat easily. The diving was incredible. They told us that this was not the season for schooling hammerheads, but, we sure saw enough to satisfy everyone. On one dive at Dos Amigos, the divemaster (Scott) and I hung onto the rock at 80 feet in a 2-knot current for 40 minutes while dozens of 7-10 foot hammerheads came by to a cleaning station where butterfly fish cleaned them. Alcyone was where we saw the greatest numbers of hammerheads but they weren't as close. White tips were everywhere. Almost a nuisance! Night dives near Manuelita Island would draw dozens of 5-foot long white tip reef sharks. The sharks would use our lights to spot and trap soldierfish under the rocks. Saw several turtles, of at least two kinds. One green turtle became disoriented by the floodlight and swam, in slow

motion, right into the lens of my camera. Large marble rays were everywhere. Most were several feet across. A type of sting ray, they were gentle and benign unless assaulted by a diver. The divemaster informed us that some fool on a previous trip tried to ride one and ended up with a sting ray spike in his leg. Several spotted eagle rays passed repeatedly. No whale sharks. Schools of horse eyed jacks and blue spotted jacks that could blot out the sun. Legions of king angels, Moorish idols, soldier fish, butterfly fish, surgeon fish, striped grunts, goatfish, Pacific barracuda, wahoo, yellowfin tuna and I believe I saw a bluefin tuna (huge thing) swim by. Morays and other eels including tiger morays and spotted snake eels were common. Huge (by Caribbean standards) red or yellow frogfish, a red lipped batfish at 120 feet. Several octopi and one fighting with a moray and leaving a tentacle on the moray after the rest of him left. Herds of lobsters were seen in some cracks and caves. There has never been a shark attack on anyone diving off the Okeanos they told me. However, silkys have aggressively bumped divers. This is the prelude to "tasting" and they told us to calmly leave the area and the water if this happened to us; it never did. So, what did we do? We went looking for silkys by doing blue water drift dives a half mile offshore. Saw lots of silkys that way. They would come in and make a pass or two and leave. We were the first group to do blue water drift dives off the Okeanos and the Captain thought he might put that in his regular

repertoire of dives for some groups. The food was excellent. Emphasis on seafood. Open bar every night (no diving for 8+ hours after any alcohol). Accommodations were acceptable in the staterooms, but cramped and a little worn. Each room has its own shower. There was never any shortage of fresh water or hot water. Air conditioning was up to USA standards. Gas mixing was satisfactory and my blends for the re-breather were all within acceptable range for 40%. Captain encouraged those who were not Nitrox certified to take the PADI Nitrox course. E-6 Processing was prompt and technically good. The Captain could provide some technical support for digital video buffs including one Frenchman Jean Louis who needed a European connector for his digital video. Jean Louis claimed to have been started in diving 50 years ago by Cousteau in southern France. Take the ten-day trip and not the seven-day version as it takes about 36 hours to get there and the same to get back. The crew cast a wary eye on anyone they perceived as a novice as the diving is certainly advanced and most dives are easily 100 feet. Currents are always there and occasionally ripping along at several knots. There are thermoclines of almost 20 degrees. Surface temps were near 80, thermoclines could occur at almost any depth but were guaranteed by 80 feet and would drop suddenly to the low 60s! Then the big sharks would come.

***Okeanos Aggressor, February 2002,***  
**Maureen E. Smitt, Ft. Myers, FL.**

Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 78-84 F. Dives accrued: 650+. Dive restrictions enforced: 130-55 minutes.

***Sea Hunter, September 2001, Gregg Gaylord (gregg1954@aol.com)***  
**Sheboygan, WI.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy surge currents. Captain and divemaster Hugo, divemaster Mario and the panga drivers, chef and staff were our guides for an all rebreather (Dolphin Drager) trip to Cocos Island. Bret Gilliam and Fred Garth organized the trip. Mike Ange represented Drager. There were 20 divers, with 10 per "panga" or chase boat. Everyone had a Dolphin Drager rebreather. Those not certified were trained during the 36-hour trip from Puntarenas to Cocos Island. The trip was choppy with several people wearing "the patch" and a few more on Meclizine. Food was very good. Special dietary needs are accommodated by chef Louis. Fresh Costa Rican coffee is available day or night. With all divers on rebreathers, the schools of hammerhead sharks, and hunting white tips and manta rays, were not spooked by the divers. At one point our group arrived at Alcyon — a 100-foot deep seamount famous for schools of hammerheads — as a group of "open circuit" divers from another live aboard was emerging. The surfacing groups reported a large school of hammerheads that dispersed upon their arrival with a few brief return visits. We descended (11 divers on Rebreathers) and were entertained the entire dive by surgeonfish cleaning dozens and dozens of hammerheads.

We surrounded the cleaning stations with nary a complaint from the majestic sharks. A great deal of other “anecdotal” evidence suggests rebreathers clearly enhance the dive experience at Cocos. The Hunter crew is well equipped to deal with problems with the Dolphin Drager Divers saw manta rays, a massive orange frog fish, hunting white tips that ignored the divers as they swarmed and massed for their nightly hunt, massive school of jacks, an occasional sail fish, schools of dolphins for snorkeling on the way back from dive sites, and enough marble rays to excite even the most jaded Caribbean divers. The *Sea Hunter* has 8-9 suites that are well maintained. The lounge has AV equipment for movies and to review dive videos. The only negative to the trip was a poor “hand off” of dive equipment for a couple of divers in transit to Costa Rica. My clothes and dive equipment didn’t show up in Puntarenas (a 2-hour drive from the airport under the best of circumstances) until we were ready to load the tug boat that took us to the *Sea Hunter* moored off dock due to low tide. But all was well that ended well. Great 7 days of diving with 10 days of boat time. (Ph: 011-506-289-7334 or 011-506-228-6535; e-mail [booking@underseahunter.com](mailto:booking@underseahunter.com); website [www.underseahunter.com](http://www.underseahunter.com))

***Sea Hunter, January and August 2002, Cynthia Starkovsky*** ([cstarkovsky@san.rr.com](mailto:cstarkovsky@san.rr.com)) **San Diego, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 52 to

81 F, choppy, surge, currents. Two wonderful trips aboard the *Sea Hunter*, one in January, one in August. There were less sharks, but sunny weather during the January trip. Both rides in and out were glassy smooth, a matter of sheer luck. The diving is magnificent and the crew is experienced and superior. During the January trip, there were unusually strong currents and icy thermoclines. In August, it poured rain nonstop and there were dozens of shark finning boats pumping their bilge, dumping their trash, and brazenly fishing within park limits. A handful of ill-equipped park rangers attempt to curtail these activities using transportation that resembles an old rowboat with single outboard attached. Personally, I find it difficult to completely enjoy an environment in which such a tragedy is occurring. The dive boats, however, are playing an important role in chasing away the bad guys.

***Sea Hunter, August 2002, Frank and Renie Arroyo, McMinnville, OR.***

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 65 to 78 F, choppy, surge, currents. *Sea Hunter* is already sold out for summer 2003! Why? Where else on the planet can you see hammerheads, white tips, marble rays, eagle rays, mobula rays, manta rays, turtles, jacks, wahoo, tuna and dolphins all on a single dive! We’ve been on many live-aboards but had never found a dive operation with the total package until we spent ten awesome days on the *Sea Hunter*. Fantastic big fish action. The *Sea Hunter* and its dive skiffs are great

and were specifically designed to dive these wild and crazy waters. The boat has plenty of room, is comfortable and has excellent food [including bottomless cookie jars]. The crew is outstanding.

***Undersea Hunter, January 2002, Sandy Hermer, Huntington Beach, CA.*** Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 80s F. Diving restrictions enforced: 100 ft. Wasn't prepared for the strong currents and surges. Got great sea conditions going to Cocos. Weather was warm and sunny. (Ph: 011-506-289-7334 or 011-506-228-6535; e-mail [booking@underseahunter.com](mailto:booking@underseahunter.com); website [www.underseahunter.com](http://www.underseahunter.com))

## ECUADOR

### Galapagos

***Galapagos Aggressor II, February 2002, Bruce (bruce.brander@shaw.ca) Calgary, AB.*** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, choppy currents. Galapagos is for experienced divers. Diving is off zodiacs because the large boats have no anchorage close to the dive sites. There is frequently lots of chop, so the zodiac rides and getting into the zodiacs are tiring. Wore 5 mm suit. There are few sites that do not have significant current and/or surge. The dives can be tiring — especially for photographers trying to hold on with one hand while fighting the current. The currents give rise to safety concerns: every diver or buddy team had an air horn for the BC, and a collapsible flag for signaling in the waves. Every diver was issued a

watertight canister containing an emergency satellite transmitter. After a couple of guys on one of the first dives found out just how far a strong current can carry you, everyone got more cautious about keeping someone else's bubbles in sight. The undersea life makes the effort worthwhile. Dense schools of fish. Turtles, rays. Huge moray eels swimming beside you or going between your legs as you held onto a rock looking for sharks. Many individual sharks, and large schools of scalloped hammerheads and Galapagos sharks. Dolphins paid a visit on some dives, and at some locations the sea lions would play with the divers. The boat stops for several land excursions to see the birds, marine and land iguanas, and sea lions. Good tour of the Darwin Research Station. The *Aggressor II* is, unfortunately, a 2-3 on a scale of 5. The steward was a joy — serving meals and keeping the rooms clean, and the guys who drove the zodiacs were always helpful. However, that didn't compensate for things like intermittent air conditioning in the rooms, and indifferent food (if the cook is going to put on a white uniform and a chef's hat, he should learn to fry, poach or boil eggs to some consistency other than "hockey puck," and should that filet mignon does not need to go in the oven at 4 p.m. for a 7 p.m. dinner, and not to put waffles on the breakfast menu if they're going to be made in a toaster). The staff showed symptoms of doing it for too long, i.e., if you are in a service industry and start regarding the customers as cattle, it's time to