

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

take a break. Not a relaxing trip. Sweating all night in a stuffy room with the A/C out does not make for enjoyable diving the next day. Getting shouted at to gear up, load boats, etc., does not add to the experience. Everything seemed constantly to go on in a rush — though this is perhaps due to the need to dive from the zodiacs. After the second day I figured there was no point in asking if it would be possible to arrange some snorkeling for my non-diving daughter (on the second last day we did have a chance for some snorkeling with sea lions and penguins, but even that was done with a guy in a zodiac right beside you watching the clock. At the end of the week, my tip was exactly half of what I had planned based on my experience aboard the *Kona Aggressor* where there were superb food and an attentive staff. The boat has two fair sized carpeted camera tables, but that is it. No lights over the camera tables; if you needed good light to check something, you were hanging over the side of the boat. No tools at the camera tables, so bring your own. While the boat offers E-6 processing, the chemicals had expired. They only discovered this on the third day (when the dive master finally got around to the previous two day's worth of film), and it was my film he used to make the discovery. So not only did everyone have to wait until they got home to see how shots were turning out, but the first couple of rolls of my film were black. The dive master's rather relaxed comment: "Ecuador is a third world country and sometimes we have problems getting

supplies." He didn't respond to the comment that maybe the *Aggressor* should be giving a discount from their first world prices if they're going to offer third world service. The camera tables also get used as the serving table for the post-dive snacks. We learned pretty quickly to leave the cameras covered with a towel and wait until everyone disappeared unless we wanted to be cleaning cookie crumbs and fruit juice out of the equipment. (Ph: 800-348-2628 or 985-385-2628; fax 985-384-0817; e-mail [info@aggressor.com](mailto:info@aggressor.com); website [www.aggressor.com](http://www.aggressor.com))

***Galapagos Aggressor II*, March 2002, Leon Garden ([usgardens@aol.com](mailto:usgardens@aol.com)) Monterey, CA.** Vis: 20-30 ft. Water: 79-84 F. Dives logged: thousands. Diving restrictions enforced: 130'. March trip to mostly Wolf and Darwin Islands with "the start of El Niño" unexpected warm water (low 80s) and green water. Few or no pelagic animals. Extremely strong and variable currents on most dives. Boat and crew regimented on times to eat and dive. Little flexibility for their schedule. Food selection and preparation fair to poor. Maximum dives in a week were 18. Great natural history trip. Poor dive trip! Last day crew gave guests their estimate of "proper" tip.

***Galapagos Aggressor II*, April 2002, Leon Garden ([usgardens@aol.com](mailto:usgardens@aol.com)) Monterey, CA.** Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 77-84 F. Dives logged: several thousand. Dive restrictions enforced: 110 ft., 60 min., 500 psi. A comfortable boat for 14 guests. All diving from

nine man and five man inflatables. Maximum shark diving at Wolf and Darwin Islands. Limited numbers of daily dives to allow transit times to sites. Fairly rigid schedule for diving/dining. Food mostly overcooked and unimaginative, but unlimited quantity. El Niño 2002 had heated the waters, reduced the visibility and driven the sharks deep. Expensive trip. Cost/dive \$150 if you did all of them.

**Guantanamo, July 2001, Suzanne Berger, Camarillo, CA.** Signed up for the deluxe catamaran *Millennium*, which proved not to be seaworthy on its maiden voyage, so we were shifted to the *Guantanamo*, which in no way met the expectations of our original reservation. Teensy cabins built for very small people, teenier, strangely designed heads built for contortionists, cold showers, sporadic a/c, one rinse tank (a small washtub) for everything, no camera table. We stowed our gear in bed with us and under the lower bunk. We set up our cameras on the bunks or on the decks. My dive buddy had to sleep on a hotel mattress on the top deck, because at 6'7", he did not fit in the bunk. A few nights, when the going got rough, he was subjected to loose cylinders rolling around on the deck as there was no way to secure them. (there were only secure racks for eight tanks.) The *Guantanamo* is a tour boat; placing a compressor on a tire does not a diveboat make. My group is fairly self-reliant and safety-conscious. We were experienced older divers and world travelers plus some of us were divemasters, and master

instructors. Our crew tried hard and was well-meaning. One divemaster yelled at me for insinuating that his assistant might have turned off a fellow diver's air before entry. He had. (No big deal in the Caribbean, but in poor vis. and 2-6 knots of current, we were under instructions to descend immediately and regroup and that if you don't keep up with the group, you return to the boat.) They were constantly cajoling us to rely on the crew, in ways that divers know not to do. So we continued to avoid problems by taking responsibility for our own equipment and checking our own air. A major problem was the transfer to the dive boat from the live-aboard, which entailed stepping onto the diveboat from the live-aboard in full gear (carrying the fins). There were no rails or supports, only the friendly hand of a crew member. One of our two dive boats was a panga. A warning in last year's *Chapbook* stated "watch out for the pangas," without giving details. Here are the details: pangas are small, low wooden boats, with nicely painted surfaces described as "slicker than snot." Divers step onto small blue rubber mats which turn into hydrofoils when the deck is wet. Sometimes the crew stabilized us, sometimes we fell. On one fall, my right leg encountered another diver and was forced backwards behind me. I wrenched my knee and tore my ACL. The tiny Ecuadorian cook's assistant was sorry that he wasn't able to catch me. I won't be diving (or skiing, or anything else) again until I have the corrective surgery and the 6-12 months of physical therapy. We

should have been more assertive about what we wanted out of our diving. A dive plan of “jump in the water, follow the dive master, and resurface in 45 minutes” won’t show you the best of underwater Galapagos. Sure, the pelagics were awesome: on nearly every dive we encountered whale sharks up close and personal! However, Galapagos has a unique ecosystem that was largely ignored in the hunt for Mr. Big. It was a kick to see all the varieties of eels lounging around on the rocks rather than in hidey-holes; I wish we had been able to explore and discover more. (e-mail [sales@galapagostours.net](mailto:sales@galapagostours.net); website [www.galapagosdiveland.com](http://www.galapagosdiveland.com))

**Lammer Law, November 2001, Norris Boone** ([norcab@charter.net](mailto:norcab@charter.net))  
**Tailors, SC.** Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 65-72 F. Dives logged: >1000. The diving was difficult as expected. The senior dive guide was only looking for large animals. There are many smaller interesting fish in the Galapagos. I would have hoped for a more complete look at the entire fish population. (Ph: 284-494-2490; e-mail [cuanlaw@surfbvi.com](mailto:cuanlaw@surfbvi.com); website [www.lammerlaw.com](http://www.lammerlaw.com))

**Reina Silvia, January 2002, Rick & Betty Agar, Cincinnati, OH.** Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 73-78 F. Dives accrued: 300. Dive restrictions enforced: no deco. Aquatic Encounters provided wonderful service, both on shore and on the boat. Arranged land tours, meals, luggage handling and provided tons of information before and during trip. Boat was clean with good food and cheerful crew. Not perfectly

designed for diving/photography, but the crew adapted well to our needs. Diving at Darwin’s Arch was spectacular. We would anchor ourselves in the rocks at different points and watch the hammerheads parade. Buzzed occasionally by bottlenose dolphin and sea lions. Strong currents — not for beginners. (Ph: +593-5-526-210; e-mail [ysilvia@reinasilvia.com](mailto:ysilvia@reinasilvia.com); website [www.reinasilvia.com](http://www.reinasilvia.com))

**Reina Silvia, January 2002, Van Freidin** ([freidin@pacbell.net](mailto:freidin@pacbell.net))  
**Mountain View, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 50 Feet. Water: 74 to 79 F, currents. The *Reina Silvia* is well maintained, clean, and seaworthy. The inflatables are in good condition, and the helmsmen were helpful. Bring your fish guide for the Pacific Coast. Virtually every type of fish in the ocean lives or visits the Galapagos. You have to take time away from watching schools of hammerheads, and, dolphins, to notice the little critters. Especially the sea horse. The Galapagos sharks and brown silkies are curious when you are alone in the water away from the reef. I appreciated having a buddy nearby to chase them off when they circle closer and closer. We didn’t see any whale sharks, however the albino Galapagos shark and the sailfish made up for that. All the big stuff is at Wolf and Darwin, a 12 hr. trip. The land tours were interesting, but too long. The trip begins in Quito. We toured by bus in and around the city, which has a colorful history, and people. The hotel and restaurants were inexpensive and good. The countryside with all of its

volcanos is breathtaking. The time on the mainland could be shorter.

Regarding the need for ear plugs, the disco is on the 2nd floor, ask for a room on the 9th floor. The only thing I heard was my roommate snoring. Boat was only half full, so two tables in the galley were left open for cameras. E-6 was available, but no one offered and no one asked for it.

**Reina Silvia, January 2002, Bill Myers Pittsburgh, PA.** I departed with my dive buddy, Dan Nelson (who lost his leg when he was hit by a drunk driver 25 years ago and removes his artificial leg for diving). The trip was organized by Marc Bernardi of Aquatic Encounters and escorted by Adrienne Abbott and her husband Steve. We were greeted in Quito by Adrienne and Steve who had our gear transported to the hotel. The next two days we explored the culture in the countryside that was breathtaking. On Jan 5 we flew to the Galapagos and boarded the *Reina Silvia*, a beautiful boat with a great crew. The first dive that afternoon wasn't good but the divemaster wanted everybody to do a checkout because the water has a higher density. Everybody required more weight. We saw sea lions but the vis was only 15 ft. Then we did an awesome land trip to see endemic birds, marine iguanas etc. The divemaster was Victor Menbia who filmed many expeditions for Discovery, including sharks of the golden triangle. He spent eight years on the *Aggressor*. Victor knew where to put us at Wolf and Darwin. The currents are very strong in the north

islands. We hung on with both hands watching schools of hammerheads coming in to be cleaned for 30 minutes at our first dive at Wolf. Then a school of about 30 Galapagos sharks circled the divers calmly. Dolphins dove down in search of food. We spent three days in the northern islands doing three dives/day. Each dive had huge schools of fish and schooling hammerheads and Galapagos and white tip sharks. The other islands start with one or two dives followed by one or two land excursions. The land trips are beautiful. Because of the strong currents (one couple got stuck in a strong down current at Wolf) divers should have experience in places like Cozumel before attempting this trip. My amputee buddy has about 50 dives and used to be a competitive swimmer before his accident. He did better on air consumption than anyone. The crew went out of their way to help him in and out of the dingy. Victor filmed him to inspire other divers with disabilities that they can also dive the Galapagos after getting some experience.

**Reina Silvia, June 2002, Leona Holaday (holaprop@yahoo.com) Honolulu, HI.** Water: 68-72 F. Ship, crew and guide were first class. Saw hammerheads, sharks, sea lions, penguins, but I had expected them in greater quantity. Land visits were wonderful too — with marine iguanas, birds and lazy sea lions sunbathing. It was a great trip!

**Reina Silvia, June 2002, Larry D. Gohl, Spring Grove, IL.** Being my first live aboard, I was intimidated by

having to remember all the details. All my fears were put to rest after meeting with Marc Bernarid at Our World Underwater, in Chicago. Trip guide, Mr. David Himle, met most of the group in Miami, and lead the entire trip, through our return to Miami. David's knowledge of the Galapagos and of diving added to our comfort and pleasure. We encountered hammerheads and the elusive whale shark. The excitement of those sightings was overshadowed by the chance to swim with sea turtles, eagle rays, moray eels, sea lions, and penguins, and thousands of fish, literally in your face. Normal procedure was to drop the divers off at the dive site, when the dingy driver took my wife to a safe snorkeling spot and acted as her personal guide. Besides watching over her, he also made sure that she saw almost everything we saw, including hammerhead sharks.

**Reina Silvia, June 2002, Jorge More (more@mcs.anl.gov) Downers Grove, IL.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Water: 70 to 79 F, choppy currents. Fantastic trip. Our group leader/divemaster from Aquatic Encounters, David Himle, met us in Miami. David was a wonderful and indispensable, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and helpful. The trip included the option of a tour to Otavalo and neighboring villages, an excellent addition. The Ecuadorians were interesting and gentle. The diving was outstanding. Darwin was out of this world. Diving was done off the pangas, and the seas were generally calm, there were no problems. Currents varied from

"hang-onto the coral or you get washed away" to relatively mild. We saw hammerheads, white-tipped and Galapagos sharks, dolphins, sea lions, mantas, turtles, eels, and all kinds of creatures. The fish generally would come close. There were many hammerheads, but not in schools of 100s. Visibility good but not as good as the Caribbean. The *Reina Silvia* is well-maintained. The rooms are air-conditioned with a shower and toilet. The captain and the crew were great, and got along with the guests well. Some days we would wake up, go diving, have breakfast, dive, have lunch, dive, have snack, go on a land excursion, and have dinner. Then sleep like a log, and get ready for another day. The food was good, and there was tons of it. The land excursions were excellent, blue-footed boobies with their ritual dancing must be among the cutest animals on this earth. Snorkeling with sea lions and Galapagos penguins off Bartolome was a unique experience. Our Ecuadorian divemaster/guide, Victor Mendia, was friendly and knowledgeable.

**Sky Dancer, October 2001, Tom and Donna Kelly, Irmo, SC.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Water: 65 to 70 F, choppy. First night, overnight in Guayaquil. Stay on the executive floor of the Hilton Colon, three minutes from the Airport. Take a lot of dollar bills for tips. Upon landing in Galapagos I found out that *Sky Dancer* was undergoing repairs and was not scheduled to be in the Galapagos for two more days. They transferred me to a smaller boat called the "Eric" —

disappointing. The diving at Baltra and Cousins was disappointing. The water was cold you had to wear gloves and a hood if you didn't want to freeze. Visibility was horrible. I saw sea lions, turtles, and seahorses at Baltra and Cousins. A 5mm suit is necessary, dry suits worked well also. At Albany the water there was even colder and a lot more wind. Stingrays, sea lions, and morays. Land tour at St. James Bay was great. At Wolf and Darwin I witnessed thousands of schooling hammerhead sharks. We also saw a "Bait Ball" where dolphins, sea lions, sharks, and diving boobies attack the "Bait Ball." At Darwin dove with 50 ft whale sharks. Skip every other island except Wolf and Darwin. The best rooms in the *Sky Dancer* are on the Lido deck. The food was terrific and the staff was good. I was expected to give a tip of 15% of the cost of the trip on the last day. It was hard coming up with \$350 cash, but they except all major credit cards. It's cold, so bring a jacket. The hotels on Santa Cruz are too far from Darwin and Wolf Islands to be considered. It would be a 20-hour boat ride one way to Wolf. Tame airline charged me \$80 overweight fee on the return flight but not the incoming flight? Don't forget your motion sickness pills. Some people got sick on the 20-hour boat ride from Albany out to Wolf and Darwin. No processing on boat, take lots of film and batteries. (Ph: 800-932-6237 or 305-669-9391; fax 305-669-9475; e-mail [dancer@peterhughes.com](mailto:dancer@peterhughes.com); website [www.peterhughes.com](http://www.peterhughes.com))

***Sky Dancer*, December 2001, Ayse Boykin (ba659@verizon.net)**  
**Manhattan Beach, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 120 Feet. Water: 60 to 74 F, choppy surge currents. Baltra Airport major chaos on a hot day. *Sky Dancer* dive masters Santiago (Ecuadorian with little English) and Martin (Swiss, living in Ecuador, heavy accent) met us at the airport. Much needed cold towels, and they did not offer water as happens with Hughes/*Aggressor* airport welcomes. This boat is an Eco Venture (an Ecuadorian touring company) partnership so it is not under Hughes control. After a long wait for luggage, we got on a big bus with many Europeans who do not care to wait in line. It is a lot of pushing and shoving to get on the transfer bus. At the docks we had to wait to be transferred to the *Sky Dancer*. There is a small convenience shop with food and water the docks. They accept US dollars everywhere. Label your luggage with Peter Hughes tags as this makes it easy for them to identify. Dress for hot weather and wear old shoes that you do not mind getting wet. Bring hats, wind breakers, old tennis shoes, couple of T-shirts, heavy sweat shirts and light long pants and easy drying bathing suites. We got shuttled to *Sky Dancer* by skiffs there was a simple spaghetti lunch. A warm welcome by the crew, and the captain but no welcome drinks. We had booked master cabins on the upper deck but were sent down to the dark and constricting lower deck cabins. A huge disappointment especially since we booked this ten months before departure and it was several times

reconfirmed. We immediately complained to the captain and he could not care less, his English was also way below of what it should be. I immediately sent faxes to my tour operator from the boat (there is no e-mail on this boat and sending a fax is no easy job either) to Ecoventura headquarters in Quito. It was Saturday and after that Christmas so we did not have much luck and Peter Hughes did not do much either even to this day. This made the dive portion of our trip uncomfortable. If you cannot afford the master cabins do not go on this boat. The deluxe cabins in the lower deck are not on a par with any standard. Though this is a new boat, it is not kept up well. Several closet doors were broken. The crew's indifference was unacceptable. Their inability to speak English did not help 13 of 14 passengers were English speaking. The captain did not have the courtesy to make us feel more comfortable. We were on high seas and the anchor was broken and we found this out half way into the trip. The boat could not stay at one location. While we were diving, the captain had to keep moving and then come back to get us. Until we got to the Tagus Cove, the other side of Isabela Island the dives were all almost no visibility, cold and rough conditions, a waste of four days. Tagus cove was the first dive with excellent visibility although the water was only 60 degrees. Abundant sealife: The red lipped batfish, lots of tropical fish, sharks frolicking sea lion pups, colorful groups of puffers were everywhere. Wolf and Darwin Islands

were just spectacular world class diving. Hammerheads, Galapagos sharks, silkies, eagle rays, few mantas and turtles and tropical fish. Although the underwater currents are heavy and the surge is way up there, the water was definitely warmer (74 degrees) and visibility is at least 150 - 200 ft. Once you descend get your grip to watch the parade. Take at least two pairs of good gloves. A drysuit is definitely worth it. December and January is the warmest time and 80% of the divers were using dry suits. In February and March pelagics are just not there as much. June should be the peak time to see the whale sharks. We did not see any whale sharks or whales end December. Socorro Islands and Cocos Island are definitely at least as good as the Galapagos, if not better. All the boats leave Baltra at the same time. Several go to the same locations. Our boat never seemed to get there before the others. So we were ending up seeing lots of other divers. *Sky Dancer* does not sell any over the counter medicine, bring plenty of Sudafed, aspirin, vitamins, and whatever you choose to use for sea sickness: Couple of shore excursions we made to Isla Bartolome and Isla Isabela were interesting and informative. The divemaster Martin was a much better naturalist than a dive master. Hats are a must to keep your head and ears warm between the dives. Bring heavy sweatshirts. Washcloths were absent so you do want to bring your own. Bring binoculars to see lots of birds and occasional big schools of dolphins. Not the advertised gourmet food. Hit



and miss. They are trying to fit somewhere between Ecuadorian and American so it is neither. Ecuador is not only about diving. The volcanos, markets, beaches and the Amazon region are definitely worth a visit. We spend two additional weeks visiting the rest of the country and we still felt we could have stayed longer. Well priced, peaceful destination. Great for people who seek a balanced mix of culture and nature. *Sky Dancer* does not let you put the tip on your credit card, do bring enough cash, about 10 percent of the fare is the norm. Diving is done Zodiacs, build upper body strength before you come, so you can pull yourself in and deal with the heavy surge and currents. The day you fly back to mainland go to the airport early — do not let the crew you talk into an hour before departure. The line got longer and longer because people cut in, we had to get the divemasters to talk to couple of officials to make the flight back to Quito.

***Sky Dancer*, January 2002, Dianne C. Bloch, Henrietta, NY.** Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 58-79 F. Dives accrued: over 1000. Dive restrictions enforced: Dive your plan, use computers. First class boat, crew and diving. The Galapagos is a must do for experienced divers. The waters are cold and currents strong, but the fish life is worth every minute of in water time. The *Sky Dancer* is a fantastic new vessel and lives up to Peter Hughes outstanding reputation. No whale sharks in January but schools of Galapagos sharks. Hammerheads abound. Sea lions are great fun. Land tours exceptional.

***Sky Dancer*, January 2002, Robert (rcwhite@qwest.net) Denver, CO.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 120 Feet. Water: 64 to 79 F, choppy. The Ecuadorian airline TAME routinely change its schedules and even the city from which they land and take/off. It is imperative that your live-aboard captain stay in constant contact with TAME's office in Guayaquil. One confirmation is not enough! Peter Hughes did an excellent job of handling this. The airline did lose one person's luggage, and they denied any responsibility. Eventually all was found and we had a great trip. Peter Hughes does not supply fresh water to wash gear on the *Sky Dancer* until the last day of the trip. Even the camera water was salty. Not good. BCs and tanks are numbered, but sometimes the crew did not put them back in their correctly numbered spots. I moved my stuff back to my own station a couple of times. A comfortable and well-kept boat. The food was good, nothing special, but satisfying. Some complained of odors in cabins from the toilet system. Bring cash and not credit cards to tip the ship's staff (typically 10% of your fare). If you tip a crew member with a credit card, it takes up to three months for him to receive the money. Wolf and Darwin Islands have the largest pelagics and extended visibilities of 100 feet or more. Diving elsewhere was pretty murky and not good. We spotted a whale shark at Wolf Islands, and many schools of hammerheads. Pronounced thermoclines in some locations, of 5-10 degrees. Take a 5mm or 7mm suit. The temperatures

and diving conditions vary because of the complex interactions among ocean currents. Large table devoted to UWPs and their equipment. They instructed divers not to place anything on this table except cameras. The rule was well respected.

**Sky Dancer, March 2002, David Davies, Farnham Royal, United Kingdom.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 Feet. Water: 73 to 83 F, choppy currents. Not told that forward cabins on lower deck smaller and had steps. Peter Hughes reply, when I complained, was that I should have asked for aft cabin and in their view no difference between cabins. No representative to meet at as Quito Airport at 7:30 a.m. as agreed. Three announcements over airport system got no reply. Only Spanish speaking group member got airport person to find rep. Peter Hughes reply was that known and time to get pass so go in and out of security. Yet all passengers were going in and out without any problem. Complained that only after third time did dive guide slow down and stay with us when going through strong currents and went off to take pictures. Peter Hughes reply was that I should have asked dive guide — not sure what more could do. No one told us that change of plan on return flight to Quito. We were all put on second flight so no time in Quito. Peter Hughes said should have been told. Told have to be off boat by 9 a.m. and told this at 8:30 a.m. so rushed round to be ready. Then told at 9 a.m. that not leaving boat until after 10 a.m. Everyone makes mistakes but for

Peter Hughes not to admit them and to ignore them is unacceptable. Diving at Darwin was so bad all agreed to go back to Wolf. We saw no schools of hammerheads at Darwin or Wolf and some dive sites saw little compared with what we should have seen. Told reason was El Niño. One member of group went four years early and felt it was disappointing diving. We accept that it can happen. Our friend went in April and the diving was excellent — seeing many schools of hammerheads and all what we expected to see at each dive site.

**Sky Dancer, April 2002, Carol & John Stoveken (cj\_stoveken@hotmail.com) Monroe, CT.** Vis: 30-70 ft. Water: 62-85 F. Dives accrued: 200. Dive restrictions enforced: depth limits, drift diving. I would recommend layers so you can adjust to the wide water temperature differences. Surge, thermoclines, currents. The Ecuadorian people were wonderful, helpful and accommodating. Inadequate dark room, fogged film, you have to be robust enough for dinghy diving. We were the “junior divers” with 200 dives. We expected more land excursions, there were three on a 10-day trip, but it is a dive trip.

**Sky Dancer, May 2002, Dennis Brower, Silver Spring, MD.** Vis: 20-60 ft. Water: 62-75 F. Dives logged: 402. Dive restrictions enforced: depended on conditions and prior dives. Trip was great. Dive operations/service was outstanding. They took care of everything and dive deck layout was excellent. Because of 10 day trip we spent extra time at Wolf/

Darwin and could stay extra at best spots. We stayed extra day at Darwin. Schools of hammerheads all over, with dolphins everywhere. Saw several whale sharks. Morays and turtles too numerous to count. School of fish so thick it blocked the sun. Land excursions were great also. Crew support was outstanding. Food was very good, considering small kitchen and 10 day trip. Boat only a year old and in good shape.

***Sky Dancer*, July 2002, Mary Anne Pedoto, Cincinnati, OH.** Vis: 30-50 ft. Water: 66-69 F. Dives accrued: 900+. July is evidently not a good time for Galapagos. Poor vis: Sharks timid, no whale sharks. Boat (for being 1.5 years old) is not aging well! Mold and mildew in heads. Crew was great. Food very disappointing.

## MEXICO

***Solmar V*, Amigos Del Mar, 2001, Mel Butler (mbutler621@aol.com) Claremont, CA.** Vis: 20-30 ft. Water: 72-75 F. Dives logged: 860+. Dive restrictions enforced: 130', no decompression dives. A clean, efficient, friendly live-aboard that travels 230 miles south of Baja California (25 hrs. down, 28 back). Sea was very rough during our week (6-8' seas @ Roca Partida and "Boiler") but divemasters and crew were excellent getting us in and out of zodiacs. Water was quite murky. Did not see many hammerheads, but mantas usually found us near the end of each dive. Rooms very small, especially the shower/toilets. Good 110 power outlets above beds. Water is cool: 72-75 F on surface, but

67-70 F at depths. Fellow passengers were fun and crew outstanding. A good trip. (Ph: 800-344-3349 or 310-459-9861; e-mail CaboResort@aol.com; website www.solmar.com)

***Solmar V*, November 2001, Mr. & Mrs. H. Kimberger, Austria, Europe.** Vis: very good. Water: 23C. Dives logged: Hellmuth 1520, Ginette 656. Dive restrictions enforced: 40 m. A nice boat, well kept and clean, but cabins are small with little storage space. The dive operation is well organized and is being run efficiently by a competent and friendly staff. The information provided before leaving home was detailed and precise. The trip was the best in our 25 years of diving. Encountered four different schools of sharks; dove with up to eleven huge mantas on one dive; encountered several schools of dolphins and on once 15 interacted with us for the length of the dive. We dove for two continuous days with two whale sharks at Isla Partida — a dream come true for any diver!

***Solmar V*, November 2001, Harry A. Kreigh, Sacramento, CA.** Eight-day trip (5-1/2 days of diving) starting and ending in Cabo San Lucas (24-hour crossing each way) with diving in the Revillagigedo Islands. 16 passengers with a capacity of 22. Mostly sunny (80-85 F) with variable light winds, some large ocean waves (6-8') at San Benedicto created considerable surge; surface water temperature 78-80 F and visibility was 20-75' except at Roca Partida where it was 125-150'. Currents were highly variable and changed rapidly. Stable boat with