

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. (Ph: +61-740995911; e-mail info@undersea.com.au; website www.undersea.com.au)

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

compared with other live-aboards I have been on but I'm not so sure they were worth the extra thousand dollars. (Ph: 800-348-2628 or 985-385-2628; e-mail info@aggressor.com; website www.aggressor.com)

Fiji Aggressor, November 2001,
Ronda Rice-Passon, Ferrysburg,
MI. Vis: 20-40 ft. Water: 79-80 F.
 Dive restrictions enforced: one hour.
 Live-aboards from a nondiver's perspective: I had only been snorkeling twice before this trip. It was a wonderful trip and the crew was terrific. One engineer, Ulai, would go snorkeling with me if no one else was available. When the others were out diving, they had me stand on the platform for the skiff and lowered me right into the water. It was great! A couple of times we would snorkel right from the skiff while everyone else dove. All but one dive site were compatible for snorkeling, with 1-15 foot depths. While I wasn't snorkeling, I would relax in the hammock, read, take pictures of the divers (some dive sites were close to the mother ship), or watch a movie. They have an extensive library of movies and books. Not everyone dives four dives a day, so there were usually others around to chat with.

Fiji Aggressor, November 2001,
Richard Visser (rviss@aol.com)
Caledonia, MI. Vis: 10-100 ft. Water 78-80 F. Dives logged: 125. Flew Pacific Air to Fiji. Their flights leave LA at 10:30 P.M. and fly 11 hr. non stop to Nadi. They give you a snack shortly after takeoff, then turn out the lights for the next 6-7 hrs and every-

one sleeps. I slept like a log and awoke 2 hrs. before landing when they turned up the lights. A nice breakfast and then you land about 5:30 A.M. Fiji time. Ask for a day room at the Toka Toka resort because the *Aggressor* bus doesn't pick you up till 12:30 P.M.. It's about a 20 minute air-conditioned drive to the boat. When you board, they ask you to remove your shoes and you are barefoot until you leave in seven days. They absolutely pampered us. Each crew member is exceedingly kind and polite. Even Alan Roberts, the *Aggressor* operations manager (who happened to be on board) poured my evening glass of wine with dinner. I would dive with him during the day, and he would wait on me at dinner — jeez. Dinners were all buffet style. Delicious food and lots of it for us big eaters. Food was high quality (one “snack” was actually sushi and sashimi. You're even pampered on the dives, which are all done from a dive tender that is hydraulically lifted into and out of the water from the back of the *Aggressor* for each dive. Other than the first dive, you never set up your gear for the entire week. When you climb out of the water back into the tender, they hand you a towel and a personalized lemon water bottle. When you arrive back at the *Aggressor*, they hand you a second, warm towel after you have taken a hot fresh water shower on the dive deck — jeez. The diving was phenomenal. The lionfish were so commonplace, we were pretty nonchalant about them toward the end of the week. The favorite two dives were E6 where we

anchored and spent the afternoon diving from the *Aggressor* itself for as long as our computers allowed. The other was Nigali Pass where there is a fair current and you are swimming right among dozens of grey reef sharks. On other dives, we saw massive schools of barracuda, sea snakes, a potato cod that looked like it could have easily swallowed my head, leaffish, blue ribbon eels, banded pipefish, and tons of anemones with their anemone fish. The fish life is so prolific that I can't even begin to list them all. The afternoon visit to a Fijian village is not to be missed. You must wear the native "sulu", a wrap around skirt-like garment to set foot on the island (*Aggressor* provides these). We brought several little gifts for the children and these were a big hit. Everyone receives a lei, and the natives sing and dance after they give a tour of the village. They cooked our food for us in a hole in the ground, much like a luau. When at anchor in island bays, the boat is OK. However, some open water crossings at night can be a little rough. My wife lost one day in the cabin recovering from a rough nighttime crossing. She hadn't been wearing a patch. I did and had no problem. Since our plane for LA didn't leave till 10:30 P.M., we again rented a day room at the Toka Toka. They have a pool with a water slide, a spa, and a nice restaurant. We visited the orchid gardens — nice. The Fijian government collects a \$145 per person "excise" tax on board at the beginning of the trip.

Fiji Aggressor, December 2001,
Bradley Bowen, Farmington, UT.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy currents. We chartered a boat to take us on a two-tank dive immediately upon arrival of our plane at 5:30a.m. as the *Aggressor* does not board until 2:00 p.m. We booked directly through the dive shop at the Sheraton Denaru and had a fabulous dive at Malolo Pinnacle and a mediocre dive at Mystery Reef, half way between Malolo Island and the Sheraton. Shortly after boarding we were forced to endure a rather lengthy orientation. Eventually, I got up and started reading a book on a couch. They got the hint and wrapped it up. Crew friendly, helpful and relaxed. When my wife didn't want to make a dive, they made it clear that solo diving is not their policy. After making it clear in a friendly way that I was diving at my own risk, they did allow me to dive solo. Only does four dives a day, and one is the night dive. Tuesday the *Aggressor* makes an excursion to a village on an islands, which eliminates the night dive. *Aggressor* claims the long night crossings prevent them from doing more than three day dives and a night dive. Most divers only did the night dive the first day. I was surprised we were only able to do one dive Friday. A second dive easily could have been scheduled without delaying arrival in port by much. This is an expensive destination for only four dives a day, no diving Saturday and only one dive Friday. We saw sharks and other big fish on many dives, but only sporadic soft corals on most dives. On the dives where we saw blankets of soft corals, there were

few big animals, although there were some sharks and turtles. A couple of hammerhead sharks frequent one site. On one dive there were 12 manta rays in formation, although they told us that we shouldn't expect to see manta's after the middle of November. One of the best overall dive sites was "Window of Dreams" near Namena Island, where we had very good visibility, lionfish, a white-tipped reef shark and blankets of soft coral with anemone fish. Initially I was disappointed with "E-6." This dive site consists of a reef that rises to within a few feet of the surface, portions of which may be above water at low tide. Corals for most of the length of the reef are dead and broken, but, when I drifted to the West end the wall is heavily encrusted with tunicates, hard corals, soft corals and is breathtaking. Some divers on our vessel missed this most beautiful portion of the dive because they didn't know where it was. The food is plentiful but mediocre. Meals are buffet. Breakfast consisted of fresh fruit, cold cereal, eggs, bacon or sausage and toast. They served pancakes once. There was always plenty of coffee, hot chocolate, beer, wine, pop and lots of juices. Soup was usually the first course at lunch, with some being good and others not to my liking. They served salads at all lunches and dinners. Main courses consisted of hamburgers, sandwiches, fish, lamb or pork. The dessert Sunday was great. After that mediocre. The between dive snacks were botched and could not be served several times. *Aggressors* have a tradition of serving "Thanksgiving

Dinner" Thursday, which was done well. The Fijian people are extremely friendly. We were sung the same native Farewell Song a couple of times, at the conclusion of the village visit and after dinner at a fancy restaurant Friday night. The song was preceded by a speech that explained the lyrics to the song. It was very sweet and made me wonder if the speech had been distributed by the national tourism board. I felt safe in Fiji and would not hesitate to visit again. Most of the people are poor. Native Fijians have been taught for thousands of years not to be competitive but rather to follow a communal lifestyle. The village visit is a worthwhile experience and a great way to experience some native Fijian culture.

Fiji Aggressor, May 2002, Ralph Baker, Las Vegas, NV. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 F, currents. It had been raining for a month. We had rain the first day of diving (Sunday) and it cleared up after that. We had three days of sunny weather. The rest were overcast. Lots of particulates. The more current the better the visibility. They are transferring the boat to Tahiti after August 2002. The accommodations and service were excellent. Alan Roberts was the captain and guests were given maximum of attention. Only nine divers so we all had private rooms. We saw scorpion fish, leaf scorpion fish, blue ribbon eels, some nudibranchs, gobies and their "bulldozer shrimp," gray reef sharks (5 to 6 ft long), white-tipped reef

sharks, two greater hammerheads (one 5 ft the other 8 ft long), a giant manta ray, lots of damsel fish, clown fish, anthias, fire darters, soft coral, and hard coral. The soft coral was beautiful when the current was running. We did four dives per day, but missed one night dive because the captain called the current wrong. The fish identification books were difficult to find on board. Should keep in a central area. The dive guides would point out the critters they had promised, but didn't try to find other things. Joseph, the dive master, did direct me to two beautiful coral bommies. Although everybody did their own thing, one diver did tell me she wanted a buddy. She tried to stay with the dive guide, but I often found her diving alone. The dive guides were not good dive buddies.

Nai'a, October 2001, D. Demming (Demmingfsc@aol.com) Hudson, OH. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 76 to 79 F, calm choppy. Local crew friendly and cooperative. Helen was knowledgeable on macro-life and companion. Stuart added good humor and good knowledge of photography. Village visit was noteworthy. The best rooms were comfortable but suffered from a petrol smell. The boat is fueled every 3-weeks and we were the first week. I was given bad info on water temp and consequently was under-dressed. They lent my son a farmer john that helped but I had only brought polartecs and in 77 degree water with no sun, I was cold. Need a place to put

cameras in the skiffs. I damaged my reef-master lenses when someone stepped on it. **(Ph: 800-903-0272 (US) or (+679)-450-382 (Fiji); e-mail explore@naia.com.fj; website www.naia.com.fj)**

HAWAII

Kona Aggressor, August 2001, Craig & Ruth Campbell, Long Grove, IL. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80 F. Dives logged: Craig: 272, Ruth: 229. Dive restrictions enforced: Buddy and 130'. Dives were mostly over hard coral or lava rock that was in great shape, but not as colorful as in the Caribbean. Reef fish life was spectacular, lots of colorful fish, many varieties of butterflyfish, eels and turtles. Spectacular night dive with 10-15 mantas and had an unexpected opportunity to snorkel with a large pod (probably close to 50) spinner dolphins. Typical excellent *Aggressor* live-aboard experience with a Captain (Gia) and crew that knew the dive sites, where to find the critters and made the trip above and underwater a trouble free memorable occasion. **(Ph: 800-348-2628 or 985-385-2628; e-mail info@aggressor.com; website www.aggressor.com)**

Kona Aggressor, November 2001, Dave White, Elk River, MN. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100+ Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm no currents. Pampered and catered to by a great crew. Captain Guy, Marcie, Dave, Travis. Guy is a serious captain with just the right amount of humor. The crew worked from 5AM till 10PM to make our trip more comfortable. They