

HAWAII

Hawaiian guides have generally developed great skill in finding the unique: On the big island of Hawaii, Spanish dancers, rare juveniles, and lionfish are regulars. Kailua-Kona is filled with trendy shops to extract dollars from tourists in tacky hula shirts. The diving is mostly lava flow dives with relatively low coral cover. Sea turtles belly-up to boats of snorkelers to be fed lettuce, dogfood, or "turtle chow". . . .

There's excellent access to good shore diving at City of Refuge and at Puako at the northern end of the bicycle route for the Iron Man competition; still, the right guides provide fish fanciers a great experience. . . . Kauai has special trips available only in the summer. . . . Maui's diving is often to the backside of Molokini or Lanai and boats leave at 7 a.m., or earlier. . . . Development in Honolulu has burned out most Oahu diving. . . . There's limited fish diversity here compared to further west in the Indo-Pacific. Some reefs are barren due to commercial collection for aquariums. There are few soft corals and dull hard corals, but colorful, plentiful, and unusual fish make the diving interesting. . . . Expect clear water, visibility that's usually better than the Caribbean - around 100 feet - and air temperatures in the low 80s. Water temperatures hit the very low 70s in January and February . . . From roughly mid-

December to mid-February, squalls can last several days; otherwise the climate's pleasant and unoppressive year-round. . . . There are plenty of condos available everywhere (many with cars, which you'll need since the dive boats are not berthed at hotels); ask your dive shop to find you a place; they often have good prices. . . .

Hawaii

Aloha Dive Company, Royal Kona Resort, January 2002, Richard J. Troberman (tmanlaw@aol.com) Seattle, WA. Vis: 75-100+ ft. Water: 77 F. Dives logged: 125. Dive restrictions enforced: computer. Wonderful dive operation. Mike and Earl take great care of their customers. They have a small, but well equipped and comfortable boat (28' Force) which is capable of 40 knots, which enables them to depart from different locations. This permits them to dive the more remote spots. They take six divers, and give personal attention. They took us more than 40 miles south of Kona to look for some rarely seen fish. Mike and Earl handle all of the gear for you. Their rental gear is top-of-the-line and in great shape. During the trip to the dive site, all of the gear is kept stowed. This was a nice touch, not having wetsuits, tanks, fins, etc. all over everywhere. They are knowledgeable of the local fish and critters, and give a thorough briefing before each dive. Mike makes it a point to try to show you something you haven't seen before on each dive. Between dives, you are treated to Buffy's (Mike's wife) cookies, which

are incredible, and perhaps as big a draw as the diving. The Royal Kona Resort is a classic older hotel (built in the 60's), but has been undergoing refurbishing. It is in a great location, and is a great value. **(Ph: 800-708-5662 or Ph/fax 808-325-5560; e-mail diveadc@ilhawaii.net; website www.alohadive.com)**

Aloha Dive Company, Outrigger, January 2002, Gary Vos, Arnolds Park, IA. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 75-76 F. Dives logged: 300. Dive restrictions enforced: computer. Found out about Aloha Divers in the *Chapbook*. Tried booking months ahead, knowing that Mike and Earl only took maximum of six on his small but fast boat. They have lots of repeats customers and I think Mike and Earl prefer experienced divers. Both seem passionate about diving and are enthusiastic and the best I've seen at pointing out critters and endemic fish. On our first dive we were greeted by a 9' hammerhead. Mike said "Ye! Ha!" underwater. Lots of octopus, a manta, white tips and reef sharks. Fish life unbelievable. Saw whales above and could hear them on every dive. Heard spinner dolphins on another dive and waited for them in 60' water. Suddenly were swarmed by 300 dolphins. Fish collectors are taking lots of fish with no restrictions and selling some for up to \$1000. No laws to stop them. I left an eight-year-old bootie on the boat and Mike mailed it to me! Buffy's world famous cookies too.

Aloha Dive Company, June 2002, Vicki Huffman & Al Knight (vjhawk@maqs.net) Montello, WI.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, no currents. Mike Nakachi, operator of Aloha Dive Company, along with first mate Earl, are native Hawaiians and we have logged 150 dives. Mike's enthusiasm for the rare and endemic fish never stops, nor his excitement at anything big. No burn out here. Want a manta ray dive? In 1998 he advised us to cancel unless we just wanted a straight night dive, mantas hadn't been sighted in a month. This June, he asked if we wanted to add it to our already booked five days of diving as the mantas were back (Earl knows how to make the mantas leave the 45 other divers and swoop incessantly right overhead ADC's six divers). Earl and Mike set up two fishing rods during surface intervals on remote southern dives and four (35-40 pound) ono were caught over two days. Earl's folks have a restaurant in Kona and Earl makes a great black bean sauce to accompany the ono! There are Buffy's famous cookies for snacks, but it is the frog fish, flame wrasse, juvenile dragon wrasse, titan and black leaf scorpion fish, octopus, red striped pipefish, hammerhead sharks, turtles, etc. that Mike and Earl find that make us want to dive with these guys again!

Dive Makai, November 2001, Jim Johndrow, Alexandria, VA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 + Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, choppy. Great operation. 12 max. on the boat, split into two groups of six, each with a knowledgeable guide. Extensive pre-dive briefing on what to expect at each site along with unique hand

signals to describe each critter. Can stay with the group or not, experienced divers are expected to watch their bottom time and air. Most personnel have been with this operation for several years. They know the Kona waters like their backyard. (Ph/fax 808-329-2025; e-mail tom@divemakai.com; website www.divemakai.com)

Dive Makai, December 2001, Tom & Bette Reese (treese@ev1.net)

Gustine, CA. Vis: 30-80 ft. Water: 75-76 F. Dives accrued: 750. Dive restrictions enforced: 200 psi, computer. We did see a few mantas, a couple hammerheads, a turtle and several large morays over four days. The coral was scarce and plain with much more of a rubble or sand bottom in the areas we dove. The main interesting features were the small fish and creatures that could be found. There were several interesting and rare species, though they certainly weren't as abundant as in the South Pacific. While we were there, a north swell was prevalent which resulted in all the dive boats using the same areas between the town pier and the airport so sometimes there were 4-6 boats moored every few hundred yards around a cove. That is not too conducive to great diving if you want to see big stuff, although the mantas, turtle and morays we did encounter were used to divers and not spooky at all. It is possible that there are more interesting areas, weather permitting and the dive boats can spread out. Dive Makai lives up to what I have seen others write about them in

Undercurrent. The boat is small when they are full, but they manage it well and there was never a problem getting in or out of the water. Dive briefings are first class and they all do a great job pointing out critters underwater. They are involved in studying the marine life of the area and contributing to the available research. Everyone is happy and enthusiastic about their jobs. The crew is always ready to help or offer advice, but never tried to 'herd' a dive or demand compliance with silly rules. You were free to follow your dive guide, or explore on your own. While I would have to rate the overall diving in Kona only a three, Dive Makai itself, rates a high four, if not a five based on their attitude and level of service.

Dive Makai, January 2002, Alan Huether & Lee Hayes, Rapid City, SD. Dives logged: 357 and 44. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 75-79 F. The folks at Dive Makai are easy to work with and present detailed briefings before and after each dive. They were courteous, helped divers who needed it while allowing independence for others. For personalized, enthusiastic, knowledgeable service Dive Makai gets five stars. Dive guides ability to find the unusual makes diving with them a memorable experience. Saw plenty of humpback whales during surface intervals and saw a manta ray on the final dive of our Hawaiian adventure.

Dive Makai, March 2002, Clem (cclapp@aol.com) Maplesville, AL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 73 to 75 F, calm no currents. Good-large six pack boat.

Friendly personnel, marine biology included pictures from books and a binder of their own photos of probable out of the ordinary critters on each dive. Dove computers. If you didn't have one, they gave you one. Patient folks. Wanted you to see what was on each site. Gave a buoyancy test to everyone on initial dive. Slow follow the leader cruise to point out critters, formations, lava tubes, pinnacles, etc. Boat set up well. It was a sit down on the back and they would bring your BC to you and put it on, then all you had to do was step off back. They did not do Nitrox, but got another shop to provide and were glad to do it for me! I went by and checked the percentage and someone carried the tanks to the boat. Had a variety of munchies, fruit juice and water. Hot showers. It's almost impossible to find an ad for them. This may be the most conscientious dive op with whom I have ever dived. www.divemakai.com (808)329-2025. Boat did not have head. Op does not take credit cards.

Dive Makai, March 2002, David Rand, Anchorage, AK. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 72-75 F. Dives accrued: 120. Spent an hour, up close and personal with about 20 pilot whales, snorkeling between dives. Whitetip sharks also made it interesting. Dive Makai does the best dive briefing of any operation I've found.

Dive Makai, Kona Reef Condos, March 2002, Kerry Thompson, Scottsburg, IN. Vis: 40-70 ft. Water: 75 F. Dives logged: 310. Dive restrictions enforced: 110 ft. Dive Makai people were very helpful.

Picked up my pony bottle at resort so it could be filled before boarding. No dive shop. You meet the boat at the wharf by the King Kam Hotel in town. Free parking two blocks away. Boat can be crowded if full but people get in water and out ok. Deck hand helps divers in and out. Group dive or buddy up on your own. Personnel, friendly service.

Dive Makai, Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel, August 2002, Robert Johnson (rjwata@mac.com) Albuquerque, NM. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, surge, no currents. Hotel was fantastic! The staff was and friendly; very service oriented. From the first day the staff greeted me by name. Upon check in I was greeted with a cool wet towel and a refreshing drink. There were no extra charges for valet parking, local phone calls, in-room safe, porter service. (Several friends staying at the Waikoloa Hilton were constantly being charged for this and that.) The hotel is beautiful; it is quiet and secluded. The beach was voted the best in the USA by Conde Nast Traveler; it was great for swimming, but the snorkeling was not great. I found the best snorkeling at Honaunau (Place of Refuge) Bay near the National Park and Kahalu'u Beach Park. Guide book "Hawaii The Big Island Revealed" was extremely helpful (<http://www.wizardpub.com/bigisland/bigisland.html>). For fish identification, I recommend "Hawaii's Fishes, A Guide for Snorkelers, Divers and Aquarists" by John P. Hoover. Dive Makai is the best day charter I

have encountered. I dove with Kona Coast Divers on a previous trip; the staff was not friendly and had a bad attitude; they enforced limits on dive time and depth; they harassed the marine life. Dive Makai was just the opposite. They were enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the island and its marine life. The dive guides were adept at finding interesting critters and were mindful of not disturbing the animals. Dive Makai allowed me to dive at my own pace. They allowed more experienced divers to enter the water first and dive on their own, while they helped less experienced divers. I saw angler fish, mating octopi, spotted eagle rays, helmet shells feeding on sea urchins, to name a few. Sea turtles were numerous and were unafraid of divers; easy to approach. Dive Makai's leisurely pace made it easy for photographers to take their time. (Ph/fax 808-329-2025; e-mail tom@divemakai.com; website www.divemakai.com)

Eco-Adventures, October 2001, Joe Spears, Conover, NC. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 73 to 82 F, choppy. Recommend the long range all day boat dive (three tanks). Start times of dives vary from day to day so check when the boat is leaving. Eco-Adventures was accommodating and professional. Limited macro opportunities but great wide angle opportunities. (Ph: 800-949-3483; fax 808-329-7091; e-mail info@ecodive.com; website www.ecodive.com)

Eco-Adventures, Royal Kona, February 2002, Jeanne & Bill

Downey (downdive@attbi.com) Baden, PA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 75 to 77 F. Most of our group had ocean view rooms overlooking the luau area. The resort is showing some wear but the price is good and the hotel is less than a mile from town; we walked to Kona once or twice a day along the ocean, for dinner and shopping. There are refrigerators in every room. The breakfast buffet saves time when diving in the morning. Although we didn't see whales underwater, two of us did a whale watch tour and enjoyed it, even seeing breaching whales. The only pain is the \$35/week parking fee and finding a parking spot on luau nights. Eco-Adventures has a large roomy boat, with a large sun deck on top and lots of room for divers below. They will keep your gear for you, and set it up on the boat. Our first day with them we requested the turtle cleaning station. We got some great shots of the turtles being cleaned by butterfly fish, along with the large manta ray that happened to cruise by, while we were hearing whales underwater. The second day we went to two mediocre dive spots, one of which had several other boats already there. The third day we tried their blue-water dive, which is hit or miss, and we missed big time; although we did see a couple of humpback whales from the surface and the weather was absolutely gorgeous. We didn't like having to rise at 5:30 A.M. to be at the boat by 6:45 A.M. the first morning and 7:00 after that; evidently departure times are now being staggered and Eco-Adventures opted for an earlier

departure so they can get back for their afternoon departures.

Jack's Diving Locker, Mauna Loa Village, September 2001, Craig & Ruth Campbell, Long Grove, IL.

Dives logged: Craig: 272, Ruth: 229. Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: Safety stops. Outstanding dive operation, extremely accommodating in trying to meet the needs of the divers. Dive staff knowledgeable about the dive sites on the Big Island and went out of their way to find the various fish and critters, watched over divers, but let us do our own thing. Good dive briefings. Dive crews all not only know what they are doing but truly enjoy doing it. Rinsed all equipment and stored in dive shop until the next days diving and had it all set up for you when you reached the dive site. If you wanted, changed tanks between dives. Most trips started with the question "What do you want to see today? Rather than "where do you want to go?" Managed to make surface intervals interesting by finding large pods of dolphins or schools of large game fish almost every day. (Ph: 800-345-4807 or 808-329-7585; e-mail dive@jacksdivinglocker.com; website www.jacksdivinglocker.com)

Jack's Diving Locker, November 2001, Larry R. Ward, Phoenix, AZ.

Vis: 90-150 ft. Water: 80-85 F. Dives accrued: 278. Dive restrictions enforced: 130'. Have been diving often with Jack's. Great dive boats, great service and allow those with computers to dive your won profile with no bottom time limit for Nitrox divers.

Clean all of your gear after each dive trip. Great site briefings. Friendly people. Very good dive shop.

Jack's Diving Locker, The Orchid at Muana Lani, March 2002, Eric A. Frick, Elmhurst, IL.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 73 to 75 F, calm. Kona Coast diving was nice. The staff at Jack's was friendly and helpful. The 2-tank trips begin at 8:30 but you don't get back until 3:30. It takes a while to assemble their guests, transport them (a 5 to 15 minute van trip) to the dock and get under way. Their 38' boat was filled with 14 divers. Like just about everything else in Hawaii, this was no bargain: Their 2-tank trip is priced at \$98. A full 3mm wetsuit is the minimum a diver would want. Divers more sensitive to the cold may want to bring more protection. The evening manta dive was an experience. The Orchid is swank and expensive, a 30 min. drive to the dive shop in Kona. (The Orchid at Mauna Lani: Ph 808-885-2000; e-mail michael.troy@sheraton.com; website www.orchid-maunalani.com)

Jack's Diving Locker, The Orchid at Mauna Lani, July 2002, Steven & Beth Schwartz, Great Neck, NY.

Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 75-80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. limit. Dives logged: 300 to 400 respectively. The diving was mediocre, at best, compared to the South Pacific and even Dominica, and St. Vincent and the Grenadine Islands. We booked our diving about three months in advance with Jack's Diving Locker in Kailau-Kona, though we were staying at the

Orchid at Mauna Lani (a good 40 minute drive away). We chose to dive with the “Advanced” group which cost more than the “Regular” diving (\$115 per 2-tank dive vs. \$95) ostensibly because they took you to more challenging dive sites. (We weren’t sure if this were true or if it were a marketing gimmick to be able to charge more.) Jack’s is a big operation and all business — you pay before you dive. The dive sites were about a 30 minute boat ride after which they do a briefing and drop you into the water where we would see lots of lava, little hard coral, hardly any sponges and not much fish life. Yes, we did run into the occasional tinkerbells, tear-drops, butterflies, octopi and eels. But, this was the first time we did four dives before changing a roll of film. We saw more turtles resting on the beach at our hotel than we did in the water. Pretty ho-hum — except our first dive where the current made the Soma-Soma Straights off Taveuni in Fiji look like a day at the beach! The night manta dive was unbelievable! Five showed up and we watched in awe as they whirled, twirled and barrel-rolled for us for over an hour. It was like watching an underwater ballet — truly magnificent! Between dives, there was plenty to eat — sandwiches, chips, cookies, soft drinks, etc. After the second (or third — depending on your package) dive, the crew washed everyone’s gear and took it back to the shop where they’d store and set it up for you the next day, if you wished — greatly appreciated! Our final comment — we were amazed at how many people we met in

the “Advanced” group who had only dove off the Big Island and no where else. There’s a big world out there— DIVE IT!

Mauna Lani Bay Hotel & Bungalows, April 2002, Craig Young & Sharon Busey, Menomonee Falls, WI. Vis: 50-80 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Northwest part of the Big Island. The hotel itself is fantastic as well as expensive. Very comfortable, large room, nice bathroom, which includes tub. They deliver fresh towels twice a day). Room has ceiling fan, air-conditioning, mini-refrigerator, iron, robes, slippers and large room safe. Extensive grounds include well-equipped fitness center which contains complete Nautilus type workout machine circuit, 25 m lap pool and regular pool, tennis courts and free weight room. Two main beaches have free towel service and ice-cold water. The beach at the hotel fronts a coral rimmed lagoon. Marginal visibility (10 feet), but daily visits from turtles. Also octopus, lagoon triggerfish, Picasso triggerfish, peacock grouper, stripe belly puffers, Moorish idols, stareye parrotfish, bullethead parrotfish and different butterflyfish. The beach at the beach club is a short walk. More visibility (30+ feet) although patches of fresh water (from springs) sometimes disrupt visibility in the top inch or two. While snorkeling we saw eagle rays, teardrop butterflyfish, Hawaiian white spotted toby, turtles, forceps butterflyfish, gold rim tang, Achilles tang, white mouth moray, bird wrasse, convict tang, Moorish idols, Hawaiian filefish,

white bar surgeonfish, threadfin butterflyfish, ornate butterflyfish, raccoon butterflyfish, four spot butterfly fish, barred file fish, ambon toby, trumpetfish, cornetfish. Most dive operations are in the Kailua-Kona at least 30 minutes south of the resort. The resort dive operation Sea Adventures runs a small boat from a dock near the beach club. They take six divers. Sign up early, the trips can fill fast. They have two morning dives and one afternoon dive (plus a night dive if they get enough people). The sites are 5-10 minutes (since one of the few coral reef areas in Hawaii lies just off the resort). They supply dry towels, juice, water and soda on the way back, cookies at the picnic tables between morning dives. Rental equipment is in good shape, locked storage area which has no after hour access. They do not rent tanks for shore diving. They have large clean rinse tank (none on the boat). They have a nice warm shower at the base. Their prices are slightly less expensive than many Kona operators. Airfills 2800-3200 psi. They'll carry your equipment to the boat and have it assembled and ready to go. They request that you stay within sight of dive master, but can basically dive your own profile. They have a crew member on board the boat always. Captain Larry is a great guy — he'll find all sorts of stuff (like frogfish) and has a great knowledge of the sea life. Saw flying gurnard, albino yellow tang, blackside freckled hawkfish, orange spine surgeonfish, Whitley's trunkfish, pinktail triggerfish, octopus, helmet triton, crown of thorns starfish, Potter's angelfish,

Hawaiian Dascyllus, blackphase longnose butterfly, turtles, frogfish, bluegill triggerfish, barred filefish, white mouth morays, giant morays, goldrim tang, eagle rays, viper moray, spotted puffers, stripe belly puffers, arc-eyed hawk fish and the ubiquitous butterflies. Good restaurants include the Canoe House at the resort, Roy's at the Hilton. In Kailua-Kona, Michaelango's has good Italian food for a moderate (at least in relative terms since everything's pricey on this island) price and Sibu has good Thai food for a moderate price. North of the resort in Kawaihae, Café Pesto has good nouveau Italian for a moderate price. The Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park makes an interesting day trip; it's a couple hour drive to the south. Call (808-985-6000) or check the Internet (www.nps.gov) to see if the lava is visible and where and when the best place to see it is. If you eat any significant amount for breakfast, get a hotel package which includes the breakfast buffet — better than most places' Sunday buffets. If you have a non-diving spouse, the Mauna Lani is an excellent resort. (Ph: 808-885-8848; e-mail winona@gte.net)

Pacific Rim Divers, October 2001, Betty Woo (Betty_Woo@Lucid8.com)
New Castle, WA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm no currents. We have dived with Frank and Patrice Heller for three years and they are great! They run a small boat with up to six passengers. They setup all your gear, rinse everything at the end of each day and will keep your gear for you. They

provide towels, beverages, and snacks, including yummy home made brownies. \$80 for a two tank dive. They also go out for afternoon and night dives, including the famous night Manta Ray Dive. They are honest about whether mantas have been scarce and won't take you out if mantas haven't been seen in a while, but they have been seen fairly regularly the past several months. (Ph: 800-988-4830; e-mail primdvrs@gte.net; website www.pacificrimdivers.com)

Pacific Rim Divers, October 2001, Suzanne Chudnoff, Chandler, AZ. Vis: 80-120 ft. Water: 80 F. Dives logged: 400. Patrice is a superb dive guide with an amazing knowledge of marine life and rare species. She seeks out and finds anything rare underwater and communicates via her underwater slate. Her service and enthusiasm are constant and you can see she enjoys what she's doing. Daily fresh brownies on the dive boat are her trademark. She also lets me stay down as long as my computer profile allows, so 80 minute dives have become my norm. Their six pack boat is impeccably maintained and their quality of service has kept us coming back year after year. We always encounter sharks, turtles, mantas, eagle rays, octopus and schools of dolphins!

Pacific Rim Divers, October 2001, Martin C. de Wet (martin.deWet@specastro.com) Chandler, AZ. Vis: 80-120 ft. Water: 79-80 F. Dives logged: 172. Frank and Patrice run one of the nicest and most customer focused dive operations I have experienced. The atmosphere on

the boat is relaxed and there is no rush to get you in and out of the water. This is a family run business and you are guaranteed the same wonderful service every time. Also Patrice makes the best brownies on the island. Not much in the way of large marine life, but the abundance and variety of tropical fish are truly fantastic and has kept us coming back.

Pacific Rim Divers, November 2001, Phillip Reed (preed@cencoast.com) Newport, OR. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 73 to 77 F, calm surge. Safe, laid back, enjoyable-friendly dive operation. They are knowledgeable about diving, the area, what critters we will see. No more than six divers, great boat, brownies, bottled water and juice. They try to match divers' site requests to present water/weather conditions. Their e dive cost are the lowest. They do not have a dive shop, operate out of their home, they do rent equipment or you can bring your own. After each dive they wash and store your gear for the next dive. Down side -- they do not have any to video or take pictures of your dive. Also, they need a min of two paid divers.

Pacific Rim Divers, November 2001, John House (jghouse@uswest.net) Medford, OR. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 75-78 F. Dives logged: 14. Dive restrictions enforced: computer. Great knowledge of the staff, location and experience. Wish I had brought my own wet suit. I rented one.

Pacific Rim Divers, Mauna Lani Resorts, March 2002, Gregg

Gaylord (gregg1954@aol.com)
Sheboygan, WI. Experience: 251-500
dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 78
to 79 F, calm. Pacific Rim Divers
(www.pacificrimdivers.com) is a "6
pack" boat that is clean, has ample
space for a maximum of six divers or
snorkelers, has an excellent Captain
(Frank) and one of the best dive
guides for macro life. Patrice is
enthusiastic, outgoing, kind and has
some of the funniest jokes you will
ever hear (not dirty though), and
excellent with all levels of divers. I
went with my 12-year-old son for four
days of two tank morning dives and a
spectacular night dive with the famous
manta rays of the Kona Coast. We saw
pipe fish, two baby frog fish about the
size of my little finger nail, and
innumerable reef fish. Turtles were
plentiful. Other spottings were a
variety of eels, a pregnant, resting
white tip shark, a beautiful "cavern"
dive, and pacific garden eels. Dives
were in the 50-60 foot depth range
with about an hour between dives.
During the rest interval, we saw
breaching humpback whales and
schools of spinner dolphins. The night
dive commenced at Eel Garden where
we were led to the bottom in black/
gray sand and joined by 20 other
divers. We all had dive lights pointed
up to the surface to attract plankton.
The first half hour produced one brief
manta visit, but the water was filled
with whale song. Humpbacks were
present for their annual spring visit to
Kona. The multiple whale "voices"
were loud and varied. The songs alone
would have made the dive worth the
trip. However, after about 30 minutes

of bottom sitting, our patience was
rewarded with a squadron of manta,
varying wing span from 10-20 feet
and their were probably 8-10 of the
creatures. Patrice and Frank meet you
at Honu harbor north of Kona and put
the boat in the water. They provide
tanks and weights/belts and will rent
any gear you may need. The gear they
rent is in excellent condition and I am
tempted to return to Kona without
bringing my own BC. Dive briefings
are excellent with Patrice showing you
pictures of the fish we will probably
see, or those we hope to find (we
didn't find the black tang we were
keyed in to). Snacks were provided
including excellent brownies. Soda
and water were provided as well. Here
was a solar heated shower bag
available for brief rinses included
mask rinses and a mask defogger
(diluted "no tears" shampoo) also
available. No head. The harbor has a
large rest room facility. The Mauna
Lani resort is a five star hotel with a
"private" beach that has fair snorkel-
ing. Accommodations are first-rate.
We had the ocean view room and
awoke the first morning, and several
other mornings, able to watch whales
breaching and passing in the harbor. A
spectacular resort though expensive.
Check out their deals (seven nights for
the price of six). This is a
service-oriented hotel with free valet
parking, fresh water pool, sailing,
diving and other water sports available
and golf and health club.

Sea Paradise, Bay Club at
Waikoloa, May 2002, Carol
Thompson (baricat@yahoo.com)

Shrewsbury, MA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy surge. The Bay Club is supposed to be a Gold Crown resort (were on a timeshare exchange). We had spider bites while sleeping, ants in kitchen, flies everywhere in dining room and kitchen, and best of all, MICE. Waikoloa is about 40 minutes from Keauhou Bay where Sea Paradise is located. Sea Paradise good operator, considering their limited facilities boat (no head, no room). They are safety conscious and concerned. All dives are guided and the divemaster stays with you the entire time. Fortunately, Mitch allowed us to stay down a little longer than the others. He sent them up and remained with us. You sit on the back of the boat and they bring the equipment and suit you up, even putting defog on your mask. Easy in and out. Free tanks for shore diving. Charged us \$2 one day because the compressor was broken, and they had to pay that to have them filled elsewhere. Tim and Mitch were great at finding things. Mitch found us our first lion fish. Tim good at octopi and nudibranchs. Night dive with lobsters. Surge at most sites. The one and only manta we saw the whole trip was while we were on our own snorkeling at the Mauna Kea (Kauna'oa).

Kauai

Bubbles Below, January 2002, Nikki Mahan, Bellevue, WA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 ft. Water: 78 F, choppy. Considering the thousands of dives Lina has done, she's still as enthusiastic as a newbie. Who else

will talk to you underwater? The divemasters know the sites inside and out. We saw many octopus, eels, white tips and several huge frogfish plus the usual critters. I especially like the turtle cleaning stations. One huge turtle buzzed me, coming right up to look into my mask! I dive all over the world but love diving Kauai with Bubbles Below, especially Linda. (Ph: 808-332-7333 or 808-822-DIVE; e-mail kaimanu@aloha.net; website www.BubblesBelowKauai.com)

Bubbles Below, June 2002, Jill Rain (jrain@lopez.wednet.edu), Lopez, WA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents, no currents. Class operation — rates are pricey but you get a discount after several days and they have no trouble filling their boat. Book ahead, esp. Niihau. Usually eight divers max on the 35' high speed boat. Dive as a group, but not in tight formation; no buddies assigned which I appreciated as a single diver. Divers go up as individual air supply lasts. DM stays until last diver ascends. Most days dive south shore: 10 min - 1 hr. away, depends on variable currents. 2-tank dives, plenty of snacks on board. Mornings are better than afternoons for viz though the night dives are worth doing. Some local sites are good enough to dive more than once. Divemasters, including Linda (owner), informative and enthusiastic about creatures and their natural history. Algal Reef with some hard coral. Abundant reef fish (esp. surgeonfish, butterfly fish, triggerfish), eels,

lobster, lots of turtles and sharks (mostly white-tip, one hammerhead). Twice weekly trips to Niihau — these get canceled 30% of the time due to rough seas but if so, they usually go around to Na Pali coast, with excellent diving and terrific views from the boat. Niihau (\$250, three tanks) is an all day trip with dramatic underwater topography, big pelagics, monk seals, and lush reef communities, lionfish, tiger cowries, black coral. Some strong currents. Snorkel with dolphins during surface interval. No dive shop — bring all your own gear or arrange for rental ahead. You need to rent a car to get to Port Allen Marina and around Kauai. I stayed at a B&B recommended by Linda in nearby Kalaheo; if you stay on the north shore it's a 1-1.5 hr drive to the dock. 2-tank dive days get you back in time to go snorkeling or hang out at one of the many excellent beaches.

Bubbles Below, June 2002, No name, San Jose, CA. An experienced outfit that completely comprehends that a diver's quality is not measured in years, rather it is measured in behavior and actions both above and below the water. New divers diving with Bubbles Below the first time are required to display a C card. The staff (Linda, Peter, Gary, Byron, and Anthony) are highly professional and unobtrusively observant of all that goes on, as they take the safety, comfort, and enjoyment of everyone with extreme seriousness. They do an excellent job of accessing the skill level of the group, picking sites based on least common denominator. The

dives are group lead, with the dive master keeping a watchful eye on first time divers. For the highly experienced diver, once you display competent diver skills, attention to safety, and conscientious adult behavior you may expect to be given latitude befitting an experienced diver. Bubbles Below's dive vessel Kaimamu is Coast Guard certified for 18 passengers, however they take no more than 8. Kaimamu is a utilitarian diving vessel with an excellent return swim step and the requisite radio, medical kit, oxygen, life vests, emergency raft with EPIRP, etc. Water entry is via backward roll. Fresh warm water showers equally effective for cameras, masks, and other items. Nitrox is available in any percentage desired up to 36%. Peter and Gary are experienced captains, especially when it comes to Kauai's waters, and I trust them to safely navigate and provide the smoothest journey possible regardless of conditions. Linda has been professionally leading dive trips for many years, yet her enthusiasm and approach to any dive is with the passion of someone diving a wondrous site for the first time. Her knowledge and experience regarding diving Kauai and Niihau waters are vast; thus no wonder marine scientists seek her out when visiting the Garden Island. While Byron displays a very easygoing nature, he is aware of all that is going on, and has everything under a watchful eye. He will take appropriate and assertive action necessary for the situation. If one's actions and/or behavior jeopardizes anyone or any thing, expect Linda,

Byron, and all Bubbles Below staff, to act accordingly to protect both you and anything you have placed in harm's way, even if it places them in greater danger. For the night dive trip we ended up moving locations between the dives; changing conditions and the average competency of the dive group warranted the location change. Anthony was not primary dive master as he was conducting an advanced training course. Regardless, I found him quiet and highly confident. Has an amazing ability to find difficult critters such as leaf scorpion fish, frog fish, rays, etc. Kauai is an algae reef and ancient ecosystem befitting the wettest place on earth. Though there are limited brightly colored corals, the life around Kauai and Niihau is significant and critter filled, from the smallest worm to the monk seals, turtles, rays, and sharks. www.bubblesbelowkauai.com for a summary of the sites. All dive trips allow long dives 50 to 75+ minutes depending on depth that ranged from 30 to 110+ feet. Surface intervals were one hour. Expect to be out 4 to 5 hours with no rushing. The Niihau trip is an all day affair (6:30 A.m. to about 5:00 PM). There is plenty of drinking water, juices, sodas, and snacks, with lunch on the Niihau and Nai Pali trips. Diving your computer is no issue, and free use of Bubbles Below's dive computers are provided for those without their own. I spent three minutes observing an adult frog fish swimming freely in the open, eagle rays while diving with Linda on a Niihau trip, a flea cone that Byron found laying eggs, leaf scorpion fish

thanks to Anthony, and a significant number of critters, both common and rare, that are endemic to Kauai and Hawaii.

Bubbles Below, Kiahuna Plantation, July 2002, Bob and Betty Barada (bbarada@pacbell.net) Walnut Creek, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 35 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, choppy. Niihau ("The Forbidden Island") is the least visited and northern most of the Hawaiian chain. It is diveable only during the calmer summer months via a 2 to 2 1/2 boat ride, which is usually calm in the morning but rough on the return. We saw monk seals, though only one on each of 2 of the dives and they did not linger. We saw some juvenile gray reef sharks and larger white tip and gray sharks at depth just at the edge of visibility. We also saw a couple of spotted eagle rays, but not close up. The rest of the sea life was fairly disappointing little coral and the bottom looks more like a rock desert. We did get to dive through some large caves, swimthroughs and arches, but quite barren. A few flatworms and nudibranchs, lots of urchins, and a few other small critters. The Bubbles Below crew was knowledgeable and helpful, but the boat is not well suited for an all day dive trip with 8 divers. Nowhere comfortable to sit or rest. Food and snacks were terrific. The boat ride back to Kauai in the afternoon was rough and there was nowhere to get comfortable and hang on. Pretty good diving for Hawaii, but no competition for anywhere in the Caribbean or South Pacific. Hawaii is

a lovely, romantic place to visit, but not really a diver's paradise.

Fathom Five Divers, March 2002, Tom and Mar Wolf, Huron, OH.

Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 75-76 F. Dives logged: 350+. Dive restrictions enforced: Group dive, depth 1st 100', 2nd 50' (everyone has computer). "We try harder" seems the mantra of owners George & Jeanette Thompson. From the morning coffee and pastries before the dive to the focus on divers preferences and experiences in creating the dive groups, the owners gave us two days of good diving. Although Kim, our accommodating and competent divemaster controlled the depth of the dives and led the group, she was aware of our individual needs and interests, excellent briefings. A superb critter locator, Kim found eels galore — dwarf viper, snake, yellow marlin, lush black coral trees with a long-nosed hawkfish, bicolored anthias, potter and bandit angels, turtles, huge array of endemic reef fish. (Dive sites — the operation runs 2-25' six-packs with no head, but the boat will return to dock at surface interval if needed. Discounts are offered for multiple day diving. (Ph: 800-972-3078 or 808-742-6991; e-mail fathom5@fathom-five.com; website www.fathom-five.com)

SeaSport Divers, Sheraton Hotel, January 2002, Charles Farwell (sfarwell@msn.com) Auburn, WA.

Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 75-80 F. Dives logged: 250. Dive restrictions enforced: 120 ft. The diving was outstanding whether am or pm. All along Kauai's West coast and Niihau

and Lehua Rock all the dive sites are outstanding. Sheraton Caverns, Fast Lanes, Koloa Landing, General Store, Ice Box, Brennekes Beach, Spouting Horn. The sea life was abundant and the staff was like your best friends. It was a month in heaven. (Ph: 800-685-5889; 808-742-9303; e-mail seasport@pixi.com; website www.seasportdivers.com)

SeaSport, Poipu Kai condos, March 2002, Ray Varzhabedian, Des Plaines, IL.

Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 79-82 F. Dives logged: 116. Dive restrictions enforced: computer only. This dive operation was great. A new site every dive. Discounts for returning customers within the week. Extremely helpful with gear. Always a head count. A maximum of 10 divers per boat. A divemaster goes with to point out sea life and rock formations.

SeaSport Divers, March 2002, Bui Patterson, St. Peters, MO.

Vis: 30-150 ft. Water: 74-78 F. Dives logged: 50. Dive restrictions enforced: stay with your group on boat dives. Marvin and his employees are all friendly and attentive. They are always trying to make sure you, the customer, are number one, which in turn makes them number one.

SeaSport Divers, Coconut Beach Resort, April 2002, Marshall Bruns (mandt@in-tch.com) Hamilton, MT.

Experience: 25 dives. Vis: 15 to 45 Feet. Water: 74 to 78 F, choppy currents. The dive was really great. Even when I momentarily got stuck in a small cave due to my mustache -- my mask kept filling up with water so

I was continually purging it. I didn't want to miss anything so I followed along into a small sea cave. Upon doing so the entrance angle must've caused my mask to fill even faster, and since the cramped quarters disallowed me from tilting my head back and repurging I couldn't see that the group had gone left. I went right — got stuck! I was in a dark and cramped place and couldn't move! But I could breathe and just wait till the guys saw what was going on. Before I knew it, Chris got me unstuck and out of the little cave. I think my tank was caught on something that also caused me not to do any forceful move and risk losing my "life source of air!" I did shave off my mustache next day -- 2nd time in nine years. Overall I really enjoyed the day and the dive.

Maui

Ed Robinson's Diving Adventures, Maui Schooner Resort, September 2001, Craig & Ruth Campbell, Long Grove, IL. Vis: 40-80 ft. Water: 80 F. Dives logged: Craig: 272, Ruth: 229. Dive restrictions enforced: Safety stops. Quality of diving was not as good as we experienced the previous two weeks diving on the Big Island. Not as many fish or turtles and the boat rides, particularly returning from the dive sites were a lot rougher. Dive operation was above average. Dive guides know the sites, where to find little critters and were attentive to their dive group without being overwhelming. Good dive briefings before each dive. Because of weather conditions, most of our dives were done on Molokini Crater. (Ph: 800-

635-1273 or 808-879-3584; e-mail info@mauiscuba.com; website www.mauiscuba.com/erd1.htm)

Ed Robinson's Diving Adventures, Palms at Wailea, November 2001, Joel Feldman (mdfeldm@earthlink.net) Troy, MI.

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. Well-organized operation out of the Kihei Boat Ramp. Attentive to each diver's wishes, needs, and skills. Their pre-dive briefing is not the normal "go to this depth, come back at that." They focused on what marine life to see, how to recognize them and what signs the DM's will use to highlight them. Which means, you follow the dive masters (two per boat, one for each group of six, so 12 divers max per boat) but since they're going to point out all the marine life, even the rare, it's not a bad thing to do. You're guaranteed to learn something. Fresh water shower on board.

Ed Robinson's Diving Adventures, Kahana Reef Condos, November 2001, Ron & Henni Ray (scuba@ctaz.com) Needles, CA.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, calm. Dive operation first rate. Set up your equipment upon arrival while you enjoyed coffee and bagels, and that was the last time you had to handle it, except to dive. Crew rinsed all your equipment before giving it back to you. 3-tank adventure dive is geared toward experienced divers. Divemaster and boat captain asked each diver (total of 10) what they wanted to see, then accommodated each request as

much as possible. Reef's End at Molokini Crater was a drift dive (very little current) to 130 feet. You had the option to follow the dive master (one per five divers) or dive you own profile. DM only requested you let them know your dive plan and signal them if you were going back to the boat. Vis was 200 feet, lots of small fish, with bigger fish and lots of white tips at 100 feet and below. Hawaiian Reef: We descended anchor line to a fantastic pinnacle at 85 feet teaming with life: eels, white tips, butterfly fish, Moorish idols. After lunch The Wreck -- 9 dolphins interacted with the divers and eventually just lay on the bottom and let us pet them. Even the divemasters where speechless with this amazing encounter. The rest of the dive on the wreck was also terrific with two turtles hanging out. One turtle has only a left front flipper and is affectionately called Lefty. The wreck is in 70 feet of water and can be explored inside and out. The divemasters and crew treated us all like responsible adults that we don't always find. We were scheduled to dive another day, but the first Kona storm in 15 years canceled our second day. Kahana Reef Condos an hour drive from boat.

Ed Robinson's Diving Adventures, February 2002, Joe McHugh, Dallas, TX. Their people are knowledgeable, helpful, friendly, courteous and pleasant to dive with. Large comfortable boats, good briefings and safe operators. Had the best dive of my 55 dive career. Close in to the South shore of East Maui in 20-40 feet

with huge turtles, two huge manta rays, white tip sharks, octopus, scorpion fish (adult and juvenile), frogfish, and many other interesting critters.

Ed Robinson's Diving Adventures, March 2002, Dan & Tammy Guill, Graham, WA. Exp. 400 Dives. Vis 40-100 ft. Water: 71 F. These people are genuinely excited about diving. They treat their customers like royalty. Always happy, friendly and helpful in every way. A 7mm wetsuit is a good idea this time of year, hoods and gloves will help also. We did 22 dives and the only repeated site was one we requested, which was Red Hill. They always asked everyone on board what they wanted to do and though we loved Molokini's "Back Wall," "Shark Condos" and "Reef's End," they showed us many more dive sights around Maui that were fascinating. On a night dive a foot long squid came straight at me. I photographed a frogfish as big a basketball and on our last day we saw a mother humpback whale and her calf swimming underwater with us on Molokini's "Reef's End!" My wife had trouble clearing

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her ears for three days and they were completely fair with the billing, though she was on the boat, gearing up and attempting to descend on these days.

Ed Robinson's Diving Adventures, May 2002, S. Inman, Orange, CA.

Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm. Depending on the number of divers, they divide you onto two boats. They read roll and they ask you to present a dive card and credit card. When we explained to 'Captain John' that we would be paying in cash he insisted we needed a credit card to open an account. We told him we didn't want an 'open account' and after a lot of frowning he finally allowed us to board the boat. Without a mention where the boat was going they headed out to Molokini Reef's End. The pre-dive briefing was OK, but frankly these guys are so impressed with themselves they barely notice their customers. We had an uneventful dive following dive master Bill. I imagine it as the diving equivalent to being on a pony ride with the tails tied together. After about 30 minutes, Bill asked me to signal my air time. I signaled 700 though I had a little more. He motioned me to swim toward him, which I did. He motioned me to keep coming closer which I did and when I was finally near him, he grabbed my bc and dragged me straight to the surface! Now, being a fairly new diver I have ingrained in my brain always to perform a safety stop. My maximum depth had been 81 feet and I was at 35 feet when Bill yanked me to the

surface. He offered no explanation and quickly descended back to the others. Alone, I swam to the boat. My dive partner thought I had some kind of emergency so he surfaced a few minutes later. I wasn't sure if I had done something wrong but I was furious! I surfaced with 744 psi. I asked Captain John why this would happen and he dryly replied that he couldn't answer for Bill. When Bill climbed on board his explanation was, "700 psi is low enough and time to come up." When I protested about not making a safety stop he said, "You swam at 20 feet for 15 minutes, you don't need a safety stop." This was not true. I complained to Captain John and he just shrugged his shoulders.

(Maybe I should have provided that credit card after all.) I only went on the second dive because I think it would have given them too much satisfaction to have me sit it out. On this dive I witnessed Bill chase after an octopus and elicit help from another diver to turn over a rock with coral on it. Then he pulled an octopus out of its hiding place. Something stung the other diver and Bill sent him up to the surface. On this dive kept my distance from Bill. On future trips, I will keep my distance from Ed Robinson's Dive Adventures.

Ed Robinson's Diving Adventures, Grand Wailea, September 2002, Tracy Napp, Clear Lake, MN.

Vis: 30-90 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives accrued: 10. Dive restrictions: keep near divemaster. Rooms ok but overpriced. Service poor. Food terrible. Did not dive through the

resort. Made own dive arrangements. Ed Robinson's is fabulous, professional operation; informed pre-dive briefings and good divemasters. Best dive was shark condo at 130 ft. 60+ juvenile sharks on Molokini Crater.

5-Star Scuba, Outrigger, Sheraton, November 2001, Joel Feldman, Troy, MI. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, choppy surge currents. They focus on resort courses and taking the occasional experienced diver on a shore dive. Abe, the DM at the Outrigger was good and conscientious on the two shore dives we did. We wanted to do a night dive at the Outrigger but he said it's better at the Sheraton. We got there, couldn't find their 'dive shack' and when we did we had to rush to get ready (already a bad start) while the dive leader handed out flash lights. No detailed pre-dive briefing, just the normal follow me. Entry from the beach was rough, given the wind, the surf, and the surge. Had to abort the dive half way through due to strong currents but dive leader was way ahead and didn't notice. We were about 1/4 mile from shore and did the back swim with fully inflated bc's. We were about half way back when the dive leader showed up angry with us for aborting the dive. He came out with another diver on scooters to bring us back. He said they already called the coast guard to find us. He lectured us several times on how we should have stayed on the bottom and he would have eventually come back for us. Since that was not mentioned in a pre-dive briefing, how did he expect

us to know that? Pay extra money and dive with Ed Robinson's Dive Adventures (I dove with them two days later and they were a superior, fun, and educational group to dive with.) (Ph: 808-667-5551)

Lahaina Divers, December 2001, J. W. Wenger, Glenview, IL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 75 to 77 F, choppy. Maui is not really a super dive destination, however if you were there it would be a shame to miss it. Molokini is ok, but I experienced heavy pressure due to its uniqueness. The night diving was likewise somewhat mediocre. Lanai's Cathedrals were great and highly suggested for their beauty. Naturally Hawaii's fish life variety was interesting on every dive due to its endemic species and color varieties. Lahaina Divers went everywhere I wanted to take my family diving and their boats have heads. Lahaina Divers does what it does well, but it's a bit restrictive due to their schedule. (Ph: www.lahainadivers.com)

Lahaina Divers, December 2001, Jackie Dixon (Realjackie@msn.com) Albany, GA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 95 to 120 Feet. Water: 75 to 77 F, calm. Great Dms. Timed dives so not so much bottom time -- usually 45 min with an extra 5 min. given to proven experienced divers. Out of nine dives in 2.5 days I did have two at 60 minutes. Many excellent shore dives possible -- maps available at most dive shops. Nitrox \$8 extra per fill and most dives under 40 feet. Very friendly helpful staff. Christmas week -- most busy week of the year =

crowded. Great island with lots to do both in and out of water. Island time here "No Worries, No Hurries" Must see the "Cathedrals" at Molokini.

Lahaina Divers, Napili Point Resort, April 2002, Mike Dawson (mtd@redshift.com) Monterey, CA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 100 Feet. Water: 75 to 78 F, choppy. One divemaster was extremely arrogant. We had to take equipment away from him to set it up. We observed him damaging another diver's rig while trying to fix it. Make sure you specify 'advanced' when you book. We were thrown in with beginners, and went on two lame dives, during which we waited for 12, then 10 minutes on the bottom for the divemaster to drag a beginner down. Ride to Molokini Crater is 1-1/2 hours from Lahaina. It's also 1-1/2 hours to Lanai south coast. Better to drive to Kihei for Molokini Crater. We were disappointed in the tanks, aluminum 72's. Seemed like they just wanted everyone out of the water as soon as possible. (Ph: 800-998-3483 or 667-7496; e-mail lahdiver@maui.net; website www.lahainadivers.com)

Maui Dive Shop, Wailuku Guest House, March 2002, D., Oakdale, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 74- to 75 F, choppy no currents. The good: Captain Jim and divemaster Scott. The boats are spacious and all have marine heads. They account for all divers before leaving for the next dive site. Not pushy about tips. Nice assortment of breakfast sweets and deli stuff for lunch. Plentiful water, juices and

sodas. Non-watertight area under seats to store extra gear. They do set up of your gear. The bad: Make you sign a waiver every time you go out on the boat with them. They will not do multi-day releases. Zealous attitude about marine life interaction. They are clear that the green turtles are federally protected and divers are not permitted to harass them but their attitude toward other critters is extremely dissimilar. On way to dive site, divemaster Rama poled his group of six about whether or not they wanted him to take the octopus out of its hole and pass it around. On a different day, another DM (John) found a Spanish dancer nudibranch. It was passed around diver to diver and I observed the DM stroking its back with pressure that was squeezing it (like toothpaste). I requested it twice and put it back on the wall twice. He removed it again both times. I doubt it had any protective mucous covering left. On the same day, we were fortunate enough to encounter a whale shark. Captain made a point to try to get the divers into the water to get a chance to see it. All divers made a beeline toward the whale shark and several (some of them Maui Dive Shop employees on a day off) touched it and it left quite quickly after that. It showed up again after most divers had exited the water. I asked the Captain (Dan) if we could go in and see it on snorkel. He said "ok." He then dove off the bow of the boat and swam toward it in front of most of the guests who were exiting from the stern. The captain then free dove about 15 feet and rode the whaleshark. It was gone for good then.

The videographer was most pleased with himself: "I'm just glad that I got the captain" (riding the whaleshark). We seemed to be the only ones on the boat that were disappointed with this approach to seeing a perhaps once in a lifetime experience. We did not feel comfortable speaking with the captain or crew as many of them were overheard making comments such as "it is just ridiculous, nobody can touch anything any more." Wailuku Guest House: clean and inexpensive but uncomfortable bed and right across the street from a construction project. (Dump trucks every am at 5:15 and jackhammers all afternoon). We went on two different boats with Maui Dive shop, neither of which had any tables or places to work to set up a camera. They did have fresh water rinse coolers aboard that one could use to put a camera in following a dive. There is a great reasonably priced 24hour photo lab (called, logically, "Photo Lab") on the main drag in Kehei that does E-6 and print processing. They are fast and professional and can push/pull if needed. They will mount or sleeve your negatives. I believe that they can also do some repairs. They also have a decent assortment of film and filters etc. (Ph: **800-542-3483 or 808-879-3388; e-mail Sylvia@MauiDiveShop.com; website www.mauidiveshop.com**)

Mike Severns Diving, Outrigger, November 2001, Ari Reguicha, Manhattan Beach, CA. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 76-78 F. Logged dives: 500. Dive restrictions enforced: usually follow the leader. Mike Severn's is an

outstanding operation. Briefings are excellent and divemasters do a great job of showing you unusual sights, for ex., a nesting octopus, which I had never seen. only eight divers, divided in two groups of four, each with one divemaster. You don't have to follow the divemaster, but you'll miss a lot of goodies if you don't. (Ph: **808-879-6596; e-mail severns@mauigateway.com; website www.mikesevernsdiving.com**)

Mike Severns Diving, March 2002, D., Oakdale, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 70 to 100 Feet. Water: 74-75 F, choppy no currents. Well organized and good service. They have plenty of nice breakfast/lunch type snacks and coffee, hot chocolate and tea while waiting for other divers to show up. They provide rain jackets for ride to the dive site. They meet (Kehei boat ramp) earlier than the other operators to get a jump to Molokini Crater. They were willing to dive the back wall that is much less crowded and done as a drift dive. Small groups of six divers. Divemasters helpful in pointing things out and knowledgeable re: marine life. They set up your gear. The boat feels crowded when they have a full house. Places for cameras are limited. They only take certified divers and try to place similarly qualified divers in the groups of 6/divemaster. (12 passengers maximum) They do not freak if you see something of interest and lag behind the guide a little bit if taking photos. They are helpful in pointing out the "little stuff" or the interesting endemic critters. DM's will use little metal pointers to try to get fish to "get

in position” for the camera (I just figure if I can’t position myself for the shot and have the fish where it will look OK in the photo, I’m happy taking the photo in my head); they were also observed to have a lure to try to get octopus out of hiding places so guests could see them. Coolers to put cameras in between/after dives. No tables or space to work on the boat.

Octopus Reef, Napili Kai, April 2002, David & Susan Wisdom (docwisdom@attbi.com) Portland, OR. Vis: 60-75 ft. Water: 77 F. Dives accrued: 180-200. We dived 3 days with Octopus Reef. Rene took us on shore dives on both the northwest and southwest coast of Maui. She obviously loves her work and her enthusiasm is infectious. She is knowledgeable about the local fish life. The briefings were thorough and informational. It sort of felt like we were diving with a marine biologist. She was generous with her time — long, shallow dives. The rental equipment was first class. Through there were no large critters, I’ve never seen so many different types of wrasses. We saw numerous turtles (my wife was elated!), saw several free swimming octopi and many different eels. The highlight was seeing up close and personal a juvenile manta in about 12 feet of water. Note: Shore diving can be iffy if the swell from the southwest builds, or the weather turns bad. (Ph: 808-875-0183 ; e-mail info@octopusreef.com; website www.octopusreef.com)

Octopus Reef, May 2002, S. Inman, Orange, CA. Experience: 26-50

dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, calm. Our dive instructor, Renee took the time to find out what our experience level was, asked us if we had any special requests and did everything to accommodate us with the types of dives we were looking for. We saw tons of local fish, rare Kona crabs, frog fish, sea turtles, rays, reef sharks. We did a little cave diving and a lot of stopping and looking. We didn’t have to meet before the crack of dawn; we didn’t have to hurry up and get dressed; or hurry up and get in the water; or hurry up and get out; and then hurry up and get lost. They treated us with kindness and respect. This is something that I feel is sorely missing in the dive industry. Renee is also extremely knowledgeable about the ocean and the environment. She kept a keen eye open for safety issues but allowed us to have lots of fun. Octopus Reef, Kihei, HI 808-876-0183

Oahu

Dive Ecology: North Shore Diving Headquarters/Hilton Hawaiian Village, March 2002, Clem (cclapp@aol.com) Maplesville, AL. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 73 to 75 F, choppy surge. Very conscientious shop personnel and divemasters. Small boats (six pack). Good dive briefing. Friendly folks. Accommodated divers site wishes. They could not get Nitrox to the boat one day, so they substituted AL100’s for me. Slowed down to watch a large pod of spinner dolphins show off for some time. Only used their boats on North Shore and in

summer. Boats for these two trips were different charters for the east and west side of island. It seemed to work out well since the DM worked for the shop and had good control. Diving was as advertised most places, only fair.

Ocean Concepts Scuba, Pacific Beach Hotel, December 2001, Jenny, San Diego, CA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 70 to 74 F, calm. After several phone calls to dive operators in Oahu, and one telling us if we attempted to shore dive that we would drift out to sea to Guam unless we dove with him, we finally drove to Waianae, on the west end of the island. Jim, the Manager at Ocean Concepts, was professional and knowledgeable. They gave extensive dive site/safety briefings and always checked names before leaving the site. Viz was awesome. The wreck of the Mahi sits at 100' and was a fantastic site with sand and lava bottom. Eagle rays soared nearby, two huge morays rested under a pipe, and sea life encrusted on the ship was a fish magnet. Our DM was personable, had a great eye for sea life, lenient with bottom time, but quick to zoom over and ask if he thought we had trouble. He was the manager's son. The boat even had a hang bar with spare octo's and air. Bit of a current on all dives. Makaha Caverns, lava tubes and more turtles than on combined dives in Cozumel. Turtles resting in lava tubes, swimming by nonchalantly, eating. White-tip reef shark swimming under a ledge and yellow frogfish. OC picked us up and returned us to the hotel (1-2 hour RT trip in traffic)

provided fresh pineapple, guava juice, coffee in the morning. Boats had sandwiches and juices, and the post-dive Dagwood size meat and vegetarian sandwiches, chips, fruit, and juices were all included. I could have easily worn my 7-mil suit without overheating. My tall/big husband shivered in a 5 mil rented suit. Since it was overcast and windy, surface intervals were chilly. Ocean Concepts was a first class operation. (Ph: **800-808-DIVE or 808-677-797 or 808-682-2511**; e-mail **info@oceanconcepts.com**; website **www.oceanconcepts.com**)

Reef Trekkers, Hale Koa Resort, September 2001, Craig and Ruth Campbell, Long Grove, IL. Dives logged: Craig: 272, Ruth: 229. Vis: 30-60 ft. Water: 80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: go up @ 500 psi. Dive operation does not own boats and hires a charter for each day. No provisions for cameras, either fresh water rinse or tables. Dive guides have limited knowledge of marine life and could not identify many of the few critters we found. Most of the dives were deep (100') and surface intervals would have been too short if divers hadn't objected and waited until they felt enough time had elapsed. (Ph: **877-FLY-REEF or 808-943-0588**; website **www.reeftrekkers.com**)

Reef Trekkers, August 2002, John Bittner (jebittner@austinrr.com) Austin, TX. Vis: 25-50 ft. Water: 80 F. Dives accrued: 525. Interesting wrecks. Poor visibility. No dive shop, no permanent location. All dives were on charter boats.