

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

would refuse to let you clear your own plates or reuse the same glass twice. The dives start at the south end of the island working your way back to Kona. There were dolphins every day. In fact dolphins met us 1000 yards from the pier and led us out a mile. Good amount of coral and healthy, no bleaching. Beginning of the whale season. We had a mother and calf surface off our bow during a night dive. People in the water got to hear them. Most people dove three dives a day. The ship moved to two different sites per day. One day the Capt. asked if we would like to go on a predawn dive that was a site not often seen. I'm so glad we did it. Go under as many arches and lava tubes as you can. They have an astounding abundance and variety of crabs and lobsters. Morays; viper, yellow margin, spotted, dwarf, dragon and conger eels. Great array of nudibranchs, cone shells, cowries, Harlequin shrimp and peppermint shrimp. Wrasses and shrimp cleaning fish and eels on every dive. Hawaii has to be the butterfly fish capital. There are dozens of different varieties, on every dive. Octopuses' galore. One of our crew would pull a couple out from hiding spots on every dive she was on. Turtles enjoy the divers. We saw turtles on almost all 24 dives. Often they would surface for air and on the way down see us and swim over. Great air saver these turtles are, not making me swim after them to only get a picture of their back side. Feeding and sleeping turtles would let you approach within inches and several tapped the lens of my video camera. They gave all divers the

freedom to explore whatever and wherever they wanted to go within the limits. They gave us a dive briefing with a chalk board map of every dive giving us hints as to where to find certain things. Incredibly enough they were usually correct. The food is gourmet (thanks Dave). If you drink alcohol, you're a snorkeler the rest of the day. Hot towels after each dive. Hot water shower on dive platform is awesome as you climb on board. Snacks between each meal. Rooms are private with your own head. All rooms and toilets worked, no complaints from the other guests. Plenty of storage space for all your dive gear and all your stuff in your room. They have a TV and DVD/VHS player. We would crash by 9PM get up at 6AM for hot breakfast. Beds not the most comfortable but bearable. Hot tub was wonderful at night star gazing far from the lights of any cities. We took a Nitrox course onboard. Take a week to explore the big island there is so much to see. Video and still cameras have their own large table and recharging station. Two fresh water tubs dedicated to UWP's. Three crew members were well versed in the latest technology, and gave lots of free advice.

Kona Aggressor, November 2001, Brian Woods, Bothell, WA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 79 F, surge. The crew did a great job in less than great weather. After the first day we lost 1-1/2 days of diving because of a Kona Storm, 50 knot winds, high seas and rain. With the storm headed toward us, Travis, the captain, decided to run

back to their mooring at Kailua-Kona instead of risking it on a dive site mooring. The crew spent the night powering the boat into the waves on the mooring to take strain off the mooring. The next morning, we woke up to no power — both generators had failed — along with driving wind and rain. Two sail boats had broken loose during the night and were breaking up on the sea wall in Kailua-Kona. We sat hostage on the mooring for that day and through the night before heading out again for the southern sites. We were only able to make it down about half as far as the normal charters and slightly farther than the extended range day boat charters out of Kailua-Kona. The seas were stirred up, with a lot of surge. Some equipment stored in the fin storage bins on the dive deck was washed away during the storm. Large camera table and charging station, separate rinse tanks, daily E6 processing.

Kona Aggressor, Horizon Guest House, January 2002, Scott Burrows (scottyb@texas.net) **Spicewood, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 74 to 76 F, calm surge. There is so much to do and so many places to lounge or chill out between dives that we never felt confined. The *Kona Aggressor II* is a catamaran and stable, well maintained and the rooms were comfortable with adequate space. The camera facilities were excellent with a dedicated rinse tank at each dive platform and a camera table with air hoses and lint free towels. The salon and dining room were nicely laid out for the

buffet meals. No matter how early I got up, there was always fresh brewed Kona coffee, local fruits, breads, and cereals, followed by cook eggs, French toast, or other breakfast favorites. The meals, including snacks, were fresh, imaginative, and appetizing. The crew seemed genuine and participated socially as well. Anytime a dish sat idle, it was swept away promptly. This service carried over to the diving. I was impressed by their handling medical emergency from a reaction to a jellyfish sting. They medicated the guest in total darkness through the surf to a small, remote fishing village to meet the EMS. After captain Travis returned to the boat and much discussion of the event, everybody went to bed. Much to everyone's surprise, the guest was sitting at the breakfast table greeting everyone as they walked out of their rooms for breakfast the next morning. This level of professionalism means a lot. The diving was interesting with lava tubes, black sand, and mostly hard corals. The fish were colorful and plentiful with 70% being endemic to Hawaii. We saw manta rays, dolphins, hammerhead sharks, turtles, an eagle ray, and a whitetip reef shark. There were more eels of different varieties than we have ever seen, on every dive. Divemaster Marcie was constantly getting inked by the octopi. She also found an undulating Spanish dancer on a night dive. I got some great macro shots such as the underside of a "crown of thorns" starfish with tiny cleaner shrimp going along for the ride and a wide angle close-up of a really cool red crab with black claws

walking across some black sand. Horizon Guest House is a 4-room B&B that sits on 40 acres next to a 3000-acre ranch about 30 miles south of Kona. It is at 1200 feet elevation and has 180 degree view of the Pacific from the infinity pool, hot tub, or from the lanai (patio) of any of the four rooms. You recognize, by the furnishings and design, that Clem, the owner/operator, is a perfectionist. This transforms into his hospitality and his gourmet breakfast and coffee he serves each morning.

Kona Aggressor, April 2002, Kerry Thompson, Scottsburg, IN. Vis: 40-70 ft. Water: 74-75 F. Dives logged: 310. Dive restrictions enforced: 110 ft. Crew was efficient and friendly. All tried hard to make it a great cruise. Capt. Gui ran a good boat — safe, yet not so rigid as to make the divers feel like school children. Food was excellent. Easy to do 4-5 dives per day. Fast tank refills. E-6 processing had a problem on first film run and a couple of rolls of film did not properly develop (thankfully, no great shots were on the film). Easy diving, but not adventure diving.

Kona Aggressor, April 2002, Richard R. Gala, Royal Oak, MI. Diver experience: 250 open water dives. Water temperature: 77 to 79 F. Visibility by actual measurement using a Neverlost under water navigation device: 40 to 130 ft. Weather: mainly cloudy. Dive limit: 130 ft and you and your buddy could follow your own dive profile or go with the dive master. Comfortable

catamaran; they have added another cabin, so it can take 14 people in seven cabins. Six are on the main floor off the lounge/dinning area. They are identical and one has a larger door to accommodate a wheelchair (the *Kona Aggressor* is a disabled-approved dive vessel). The cabins have bunk beds with a queen down and a single up. The sink and small built-in dresser are ht along side the beds and it is easy to step on the lower bunk to the sink to climb onto the top bunk. There are drawers below the bottom bunk that require you to close the door to open them. Each room has its own spacious shower and head. There are plenty of hooks and medicine cabinet/shelves. The 7th room is on the top deck and has more space and a full size dresser. At the head of each bunk is an excellent reading light. The dive deck is on the same floor as most cabins and there is plenty of space for wet gear under your seat. A large basin is provided for dry gear under a large camera table. Entry into the water is down three stairs on either side of the back of the boat onto a platform. There are compartments on the platform to store your fins. On each dive platform are warm fresh water showers. On the top deck there is a bar and a hot tub for 6-8 people. The hot tub was fantastic after the 4th dive. The meals were substantial and tasty and dessert was the chief's specialty! Diving was off the western shore of the Big Island and most days were windy so we looked for a place to hide from the wind. There are some interesting under water lava tubes but coral is almost nonexistent. The

number and size of fish were disappointing. Lionfish impressed me by their beauty but not their size. Spinner dolphins showed up and we snorkeled with them. They came quite close twice during daylight and once at night. Alan Roberts, from the *Aggressor* home office, was on board, so the crew was on their best behavior. However, I suspect the attention we received was normal. Alan gave a demonstration on a rebreather unit. He also lectured about the benefits of Nitrox and encouraged us to certify aboard the boat. But at \$10 a fill up, I felt the lecture was a bit self-serving. Captain Gui informed me that no fishing (catch and release) would be allowed off his boat. We were not in a marine park and people on other boats were fishing all around us. The Captain said that it is the policy of the boat. I usually bring fishing gear with me when I dive off a live-a-board and this was the first time I was told that I could not fish when all the divers were out of the water and when we were not in a marine park. From what I saw underwater, however, there was not much to catch anyway!

Kona Aggressor, May 2002, Bradley Bowen, Farmington, UT. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 120 Feet. Water: 77 to 80 F, calm. Five cabins directly connected to the main dining and living area, and has renovated a crew cabin into an additional guest cabin upstairs, so the boat now accommodates twelve divers. At meals eight divers sit at one table and four at another. The dive deck is adequate for twelve divers and

crew. Camera table was large and identical to other *Aggressors*. Perfect size for twelve divers, most of whom were using camera equipment. The hot tub was up and running, and was pleasant after the night dive. The crew worked hard to keep guests happy. Even the captain took his turn making beds. Two chefs traded off cooking duties. The cuisine prepared by Jamie, to be five star quality. The other chef did a good job, but everything Jamie prepared, (including fabulous home-made soups at lunch on three days) was scrumptious. The diving is mediocre. The reefs are low-profile and there are fewer huge schools of fish than in the other destinations we have visited. The *Aggressor* crew knows where every frogfish lives and they showed them to us, the first frogfish I have seen in 300 dives, and they ranged from lemon yellow juveniles to old adults so camouflaged that I'd have to show you their outline in my photos for you to distinguish the fish from the reef. I did find some higher profile reefs and larger schools of fish by swimming away from the inshore dive sites into deeper water (70' to 80'). One divemaster saw manta, a diver saw a hammerhead and several saw a whitetip. Lots of nudibranchs. The volcanic underwater topography is interesting (pinnacles, tubes and caves) though it's not very colorful. Saw a dozen turtles, but had to book a night dive with Eco Adventures to see a manta, and the manta only stayed for twenty seconds. We wore polar fleece skins with polar fleece hoods and 3 mil wetsuits on several night dives. Other guests were

using 5 to 7 mil wetsuits. I appreciate the advice of another *Undercurrent* reader who advised getting a hotel room for Friday night due to requirement that the *Aggressor* dock at least a mile away from the pier. Excellent advice. We booked in advance at the King Kam (which is where the *Aggressor* docks), but after hearing the plan for Saturday morning, three other couples decided to do the same and booked rooms from the boat.

Kona Aggressor, June 2002, John & Patty (2fish40@tampabay.rr.com) Turbeville, Bradenton, FL. Dives accrued: 800+. We dove our own profiles, computers were welcome and preferred. They gave restrictions for each dive, max 100' but if you went a few feet deeper it was ok within reason. Lots of pretty little tropicals, a few lionfish, frogfish and leaf scorpionfish, a couple nice green turtles. We met good friends on the trip. We had fun. Gui, the captain, seems to "do it all." No sharks, no mantas, no big stuff. We counted on the famous manta dive, but alas, the motel had closed and the lights were out, no manta dive. The crew was helpful at times, but they are in couples and seem to have their own agendas. Most times, there was no one on the dive platform when the guests surfaced. Nitrox ran out after the 3rd day. Most of us were diving Nitrox and paid full price for a week of Nitrox. Go prepared if you want a drink when you finish diving, the advertised bar is not as advertised. I wish: we knew the manta dive was a "has been." I wish I knew they had no

"kool aide" type drink for during the diving hours. I wish there had been more "big critters" and more adventure (Hawaii is pretty "touristy" even offshore). I wish I knew they stayed on each dive site three times, no matter how much the guests question this practice.

Kona Aggressor, June 2002, Dale Thompson (dthompson1@san.rr.com) Del Mar, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm. Well maintained boat, hard working and cheerful crew. Food above average for a live-aboard — new chef, Jamie. Staterooms well designed and furnished but small and bunks are built-in; upper bunk's a single and lower a double, with upper set back from edge of wider, lower. Somewhat awkward and hard to get into upper with stepping on roommate in lower bunk! Should design a built-in step or ladder. Diving good but not up to Belize. Lots of colorful fish and small critters (numbers and species), fewer large fish or pelagics although turtles frequently. 1-2 crew were in the water and willing to lead groups to find odd and hard to see critters such as frog fish. Bottom was usually cobblestone/rock with coral growth on it but lacked the vibrant and wide spectrum of colors of a Caribbean reef. Due to Southerly swells, boat was confined to a few dive sites midway along the Kona coast and dove one site twice, a few days apart. Stayed at the King Kamahamaha Hotel the night before boarding. Reasonable, clean and across the street from the dock the Kona uses. Don't

book through the Kona office. You'll pay twice as much. Also, when I asked whether the boat would be tied up and stable the last night, Friday, the Kona office assured me it would be. Do not believe them — the boat moors out to a buoy in the harbor the first night after boarding (Saturday) and the last night (Friday) and it is the worst ride of the whole trip. Book a room at the King Kam for Friday night and get off the boat when they return to harbor Friday afternoon. You're last chance to dive is Friday a.m., so you can book flights home from noon Saturday.

Kona Aggressor II, September, 2002, Keith & Ellen Irwin (irwinkw@earthlink.net), San Jose, CA. Experience: 101-250 dives Vis: 80 to 120 Feet. Water: 78 to 81 Fahrenheit, calm, surge, no Currents. This is easy diving with a great crew and superb food and service. The boat is an 87' catamaran with five ensuite cabins off the large salon and a quad cabin on the top deck. All had queen size beds below and a single bunk above. A sink, vacu-flush head (no smells), and a shower are in each stateroom. A/C is controlled by individual thermostats and was comfortable. The food was fabulous. Christine is a graduate of the San Francisco Culinary Academy and Brian came from the Culinary Institute of America in New York. Both had wonderful creations but were very willing to adapt to meet individual needs. You hook up your own gear for the first dive. After that, your tank is immediately refilled after every dive. Fins stay on the dive deck and other

gear can go in a locker under your bench. Nitrox is 100 for the week. Water is the warmest his time of year.

I dove mostly with a polartec skin but used a 3 mil wetsuit at night. Others dove in a t-shirt and swimsuit. The very competent and friendly staff will leave you alone or go with you on the dive. At least one divemaster is in the water and another on the dive deck. The diving is typically shallow. I never exceeded 65 feet except at Au Au crater where we went to 100 feet to see a Lion Fish. The number of little critters far exceeds Caribbean diving. Also saw lots of eels and a number of turtles. Lots of opportunities for macro photographers. But the bottom is mostly lava formations covered with hard corals. No soft corals and few sponges. Not a lot of color. We saw few large critters. At the Maze, we spotted two very large tarpon cruising the drop off. And on the last night we were treated to a spectacular show by four Mantas who cavorted about for over an hour scooping plankton and other small critters attracted by the lights on the boat and the under water video cameras. It was breath taking. Porpoises often followed the boat but we didn't see any while diving. Dedicated dive table and 2 rinse tanks. Onboard processing. Video player on board. Captain Gui is a photo pro and very willing to share his knowledge.

MICRONESIA

Chuuk (Truk)

Odyssey, Reg Bennett, San Marcos, CA. Vis: 50-70 ft. Water: 78-80 F.