

He told us we would sail at 0400 to be at a dive site early, and then slept until 10:00 so that we missed the morning dive. He seemed to have sodas and beer, but only the desalinized water was offered to guests though we asked. He followed his own agenda underwater, and we all cheered when a large Titan trigger attacked him. The entire facility and accommodation were so bad that we requested an early return and gave up a day and night of diving which we had paid for. A total disaster for which we paid dearly in dollars, travel time, and aggravation. While this boat operation might be ok for a honeymoon couple, it is totally inadequate for diving. A gentleman from South Africa who owns a dive operation and was there scouting for a boat opined that it was the worst operation he had seen, and complained as bitterly as we did. There was never an apology or attempt to make amends for the deplorable conditions. The boat looks pretty good on the Internet, but beware. (Ph: 254-0127-3517 or 254-0127-3224; e-mail recycle@africaonline.co.ke; website www.kaskazi.com)

INDONESIA

Baruna, September 2001, Carmen Scutella (quantum@madbbs.com)
Jamestown, NY. Vis: 40-100 ft. Water: 74-79 F. Logged dives: 100+. Dive restrictions enforced: Sometimes. Dove Sulawesi between Banda and Flores Seas. 44 dives — much damage due to blast fishing. (We were bombed twice in two weeks). Where there is reef is spectacular! Great night dives. What

pelagics are there are deep. I had to go to 180 ft. Saw a 6'+ grouper (600+ lbs.). (Ph: 62-361-753 820; e-mail baruna@denpasar.wasantara.net.id; website www.baruna.com)

Baruna, May 2002, Hank Silver, Dallas, TX. Aboard the *Baruna* a 100-ft solid vessel with marvelous accommodations for divers. Walter Davis, owner of The Scuba Shop in Dallas, assembled the trip. Walter has made so many dive trips to Indonesia we can't count them all. May avoids the rainy season and the typhoon season. We visited and dived Bali, Lombok, Alor, Rinca, Komodo, Flores, Sumbawa, Timor, Sumba, Roti, and some that had no names. *Baruna* handles 15 divers comfortably. There are 14 friendly crew members; there were only 11 divers so each had a cabin to themselves. The food was superb, varies daily, and is plentiful. I have been lucky to have dived around the world in 51 years of diving and rate these reefs as the very best. We were diving every day at 7 A.M. on pristine reefs, followed by four or five more dives a day into the starry nights. Every two hours the call "DIVE TIME" rang out and we donned gear for another plunge and new and exotic critters. I counted 26 species of nudibranchs! We saw pigmy sea horses, pipefish, rare moray eels, sea snakes, tiny shrimp and crabs, and the beautiful species of angelfish, butterfly fish, cuttlefish, rabbit fish, tunicates, cardinal fish, wrasses, anemone fish, and a few sharks, and turtles. There were so many lionfish we had to shoo them aside. Soft and hard corals

of every description, sponges and anemones in profusion, and snails galore. Water was around 82° F. Air never exceeded 85°. We slept under optional air conditioning, never to get uncomfortable. In the towns we visited, namely, Maumere, on Flores, Kupang, on West Timor, Bima, on Sumbawa, or in Denpasar, on Bali, or on Komodo, the air was humid, but with an ever-present breeze. Komodo Dragons are impressive. Gladly gave up a morning of diving to visit the national park there and walk out to view these beasts in their natural habitat. They told us a German left his group a week before we arrived. All they found of him was a sandal and a pair of sunglasses! These mommas are mean, fast, hungry and nine feet long! We made 60 dives in two weeks in the water. Some places there was current, some turbid water of only 20 ft vis, great for macro shots, but most dives were in 70+ ft. of vis. Except for myself, everyone wore a light wet suit. I never get cold. I did don skins on night dives and a few daylight dives. Saw something new on every descent. We dove with our buddy, our cameras. If you have ten saltwater dives and can handle yourself, it is some of the best diving the world has to offer. Call Walter Davis 972/404-8798 to book a trip.

**Baruna Adventurer, August 2002,
Richard E. Wilson & Eliot M.
Girsang, Chesapeake Beach, MD.**

We completed a 10-day dive trip. We dove the Gili Islands, Moyo Island (near Sumbawa), Komodo and Rinca, as well Flores, Alor and less well-known, islands. The trip was excel-

lent. The diving was superb, thanks to the cheerful Indonesian dive staff, who were as good as the dive staff on any other live-aboard (this was our 5th). They work on their English all the time and always make themselves understood. They are enthusiastic divers, and they were usually able to answer our questions. A good briefing preceded every dive. During the dives, some of which were strenuous due to low visibility, low temperature or strong current, the divemasters kept a close watch without being intrusive or overbearing. Growing up with the long-standing difficulties in the Indonesian economy, each had to show an extraordinary amount of determination to become divemasters. The food was superior, thanks to the chef who has been on the boat for years. Indonesian dishes make up a large part of the menu. Breakfast is Western, if that's what you want. All the divers were American or European. The boat was not built as a dive boat, so the aft area, which is used as the dive deck, becomes crowded as divers suit up. However, they organize the divers into three groups, each with a divemaster, and after a couple of dives all the divers know the system so they don't get in each other's way. They call groups at 10-minute intervals. The covered camera area is small but adequate. To board the dinghies, carry equipment and tanks down a short stairway — the staff will carry tanks for anyone with physical problems. I'm in the senior citizens' category, and I had no difficulty. The dinghies were rubber inflatables and the drivers were experts at getting

divers following each dive. The dinghies were always close when we surfaced. Most sites were pristine and some dives I rank among the most memorable in my experience (700 dives) — Anemone Gardens, Cannibal Rock (near Komodo), Yellow Wall and Tatawa Island Others were merely outstanding. We saw evidence of dynamite fishing, but most of the area is so remote that there will always be new and unspoiled sites. We saw many cuttlefish (one pair mating), some sharks. On one night dive, I found what may be a previously unidentified species of eel, about 2/3 meter long, the thickness of a pencil, all white except for its tiny black head and a black stripe running the length of its spine. I thought it was a piece of string. I have not found anything in any book that identifies it. Cold water, currents on most dives and occasional low visibility. The temperature on several dives was 72 F or less. In one instance, my computer recorded 72 F on one dive and then, two hours later the next dive, registered 81 F. The two sites were no more than 5 miles apart. On a few dives the visibility dropped to 10-15 meters, but most of the time the visibility was 40 meters and more. The *Baruna* is not a cruise ship, but its living quarters are more than adequate. We had a deluxe cabin (twin beds, not bunks), so our stateroom was larger than the others, but the regular cabins also looked comfortable.

***Dewi Sri*, October 2001, Max Herndon, Pismo Beach, CA.** Vis: 60-120 f. Water: 79-81 F. Dives logged: 300+. This was a 14-day trip aboard

the *Dewi Sri* (Arini Diving), a 72-foot Indonesian motorized “pinisi.” It has three air-conditioned cabins, each with a sink and three separate heads that are small. There were a couple and two singles. I had a private cabin. Otherwise, because two of the cabins were small and had only one double bed, it would be a tight fit for two people. The salon was comfortable and had a color TV, stereo and a DVD. The boats deck was covered by a tarp and there was a padded bench and several chairs for lounging between dives. As for the food — lots of fish, rice, potatoes and pasta. The cook served up some good Indonesian dishes, but the western dishes usually missed the mark, though the portions were plentiful and we never went hungry. Jan the Belgian owner, served as divemaster. All four of us were experienced divers and treated as such. There were no restrictions, you could dive your own profile, go with your buddy or go solo. There was oxygen onboard, but you do need to be careful because the nearest chamber or decent medical facilities are a long way away. At least one day minimum, depending where you are. We dived from a 15-foot skiff with a 15-HP motor — no ladder, just a backroll entry and a hoist yourself up over the side exit. With five divers and motorman it was pretty tight. Most rides were only five to ten minutes. We did our first couple of dives on a sloping reef near the Wakatobi resort, dived their house reef then headed south through the Tukang Besi island group. From this point on it was mostly wall dives — spectacular wall

dives! The reefs on top were as beautiful as it gets, you could hardly find a square foot anywhere that wasn't covered with healthy hard or soft coral. Tropical fish were so profuse it was impossible to remember all that you saw. The highlights were the walls at Koromaka, Koka and Moromaha. On a wall dive at Koromaka, in just one section there were over ten barrel sponges each large enough to hide a diver inside. On most dives we saw turtles, dogtooth tuna, moray eels, lionfish, scorpionfish, fusiliers, surgeonfish, jacks and rainbow runners. This was the first time in the four years that Jan has been diving Tukang Besi that he went to Moromaha, the southern most island. Some fishermen who live seasonally on the island came aboard for a visit. At one point, Jan who is fluent in the language, started laughing. Explaining, he said he asked them if they see many divers out here and they replied — oh yes, in 1986. Moromaha offered spectacular wall dives with enormous swim-throughs, spotted rays, marble rays and beautiful reefs on top of the wall. Next we headed north to Paserwajo to pick up supplies and a day of muck diving in 10-30 feet of water among the cans, tires and other debris from the village we found dozens of lionfish, mantis shrimp, leaf scorpionfish, ornate ghost pipefish, assorted nudibranchs, crab, flounders, ribbon eels, crocodile fish, porcupine fish and more. From there we headed southwest into the Flores Sea to dive the walls off Batuata, Kakabia and Kaunadi before finishing our trip in Bira. The island of Batuata

is stunningly beautiful, sheer cliffs dropping down to a crescent white sand beach packed with coconut palms and 200 yards offshore were more spectacular wall dives. Kambing Island near Bira provided the best shark viewing with large gray and white tips at 150 feet. Here we saw the only evidence of bomb damage on a seamount. The diving around Wakatobi is excellent and deserving of the praise and accolades it has received, but of all the dives those ranked only in the middle of the pack. That's how good the diving is in the outer atolls and islands. Jan only does this in April and October when the seas are calm. This spot is not easy to get to. The amenities are not nearly on the same level as boats that cater to Americans, but once you are there you will be treated like an old friend and be shown some of the finest reefs and most dramatic walls in the world. (Ph: +62-411-858-762; e-mail jansoon@indosat.net.id; website www.arinidiving.com)

Evening Star II, Dive Komodo, July 2002, Ken Sherman (surnage@stratos.net) **Chagrin Falls, OH.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 76 to 80 F, calm. Huge coral gardens with more species of coral and reef fish that could we catalog. We dove Pink Beach, Biddardari, and Darat Passage, the best dives sites we have ever dived. It even surpassed Palau for corals and fish diversity. Plus we got to see the Komodo Dragons! Mark Heighes was an excellent Captain and dive master. The boat was comfortable

and spacious. The food was excellent. The waters were for the most part calm. We did have some current but nothing intolerable. Melasti Beach Hotel on Bali neglected to deliver us our domestic airline tickets after we requested them repeatedly. Dive Komodo had delivered the tickets to the hotel Friday, June 28 and we arrived at the hotel on June 30. Since we were unable to reach Dive Komodo Sunday and the flight out was the following morning at 9:35 a.m., we went to the airport and repurchased the tickets. The airline showed that we did in fact have reservations. After the trip, Dive Komodo was persistent in getting the hotel to refund our money for the airline tickets. Dive Komodo gave them a signed document accepting the delivery of the tickets Friday. We have traveled to over 70 countries and have become resourceful when problems arise.

Kararu Dive Voyages, December 2001, John Krayne
(wihcky@aol.com) **Rockford, IL.**
Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm currents no currents. The three operators, Tony, Lisa and Sascha, were helpful and pleasant, and let you dive your own profile. The boat was built in 1998 and is a beautiful Pinisi-rigged wooden-hulled Bugis schooner. I traveled with Ken from Island Dreams Dive Travel. We left Bali on our way to Komodo National Park. We dove in Lombok, Satonda, Sangeang Volcano and Banta Island along the way. The diving got better with each dive, but in Horseshow Bay at Rinca Island in Komodo I found my favorite in the

Yellow Wall. I dove it four times. Cannibal Rock was also spectacular. Dove all the way back to Bali and had other great dives. If you were looking for something different, you could call on the divemaster, Graham, to find it. The service was well above the normal. Food was great. You would not go away hungry. The crew made your stay as pleasant as possible including washing all your equipment at the end of the trip. The battery charging area new to be updated which they are planning to do. Camera space is adequate. I went back in March. (Ph: **(-62-361 282 931 (Bali); e-mail info@kararu.com; website www.kararu.com)**)

Kararu, February 2002, Luisa and Paul Weisbroat, NYC, NY. Flew into Bali, Kararu arranged Merapati flights (additional costs of approx \$325 per person for Merapati flights) from Bali to Sorong, Irian Jaya where we boarded Vessel *Kararu* for 10 days. Remarkably Merapati flights were generally on time! Generally a good vessel (115 foot wooden schooner of Indonesian design and manufacture), clean, well appointed and laid out. Individual AC controls in each cabin and does a good job of cooling. All travel was done via motoring, sails were never raised. The one thing lacking was shelves or drawers in cabins. The single closet was way too small for my wife and me. There was separate rinse barrels for cameras aboard main vessel and good assistance with cameras from crew who loaded all cameras on dinghies and handed to divers after backrolling into water off

dinghies. There were no rinse buckets on dinghies. There was a long counter outside the main salon that served as camera work station and had separate storage area underneath with doors for any items required. Battery charging was inside main salon and 110v and 220v were available. Diving ranged from fair to very good. They advised us upon booking that this was an exploratory trip and it was a new location. Operators check C cards and briefings were good; assumed that each diver is individually responsible and there is no one looking over your shoulder or rules to enforce. The nearest hyperbaric chamber is far away and if there is an emergency you may be SOL. They have O2 on board. Healthy reefs, multitudes of large schools of large bump head wrasse, triggers, reef runners, tuna (to name but a few), and singly turtles and huge groupers plenty of critters for macro: decorator crabs, nudibranchs, flat worms, juvenile bat fish, and a multitude of other things. Irian Jaya is an untapped dive area with great potential. Diving is from two aluminum tenders (they normally had three but only two were operating). Our trip had about 20 people diving so we were broken into three groups and dropped onto dive sites in spans of 10 minutes. Dinky drivers were waiting when we surfaced. Visibility ranged from 20 to 70 feet so macro was most productive. Currents ranged from mild to very strong depending on site and this changed while we were diving. Water 76 to 80 F. No Nitrox. Professionalism of operators — generally good, their desire to please all guests

was good. Averaged 4 dives/day. Crew was courteous, professional and attentive from the dinky drivers to the waiters. Food was lacking. The red meats served were inedible, completely unchewable and like shoe leather. The fish dishes tasted and smelled like they were prepared from old fish and not fresh seafood. Never been on a live-aboard that served leftovers for lunch from prior meals, especially one that charges \$325/person/day. Several times there were insufficient quantities for seconds of main courses. Not acceptable on a high priced dive trip. They ran out of many fresh fruits after a week and this was a 10 day trip. 50% of dinners were carbohydrates. They need much more vegetables and protein. We were guided by Eddie Fromweiller who has been diving this area for many years. Eddie runs his the *Pindito* in Indonesia and except for a third upper deck which serves as a sun deck aboard the *Kararu*, his boat is virtually the same as the *Kararu*. The *Pindito* charges about 35% less than the *Kararu* for four dives per day including one night dive) Given Eddie's considerable knowledge and extensive experience in Indonesia he probably can take you to dive sites in any area that only he knows about.

Komodo Dancer, April 2002, Steven Kovacs (NGFL2@hotmail.com)
Victoria, BC. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 73 to 84 F, calm currents. Inaugural seven day voyage. Typical first rate Peter Hughes boat. Plenty of lounging space and the dive deck is spacious. The best

food of all my live-aboard experiences. Gary, Susanna, Jan, and the crew were incredible, except Annie who could be arrogant and condescending but basically tolerable. She was also way too preoccupied with her own photographic interests to be of any use to anyone. E-6 processing was not up and running yet as promised. Lost eight rolls of film due to a faulty strobe that could have easily been caught on the first day by simply developing a roll. All diving is done from tenders. Can stick with the divemasters or do your own thing. There is a one hour time limit for the dives. Currents can be very strong making dive alerts and safety sausages a good idea. Availability of EPIRBs for everybody. If you get swept out to sea, you can simply activate the device. A signal is transmitted so that, hopefully, the boat can home in on your signal and find you. Diving, is outstanding. Visibility at times was diminished due to an algae bloom but that didn't detract from the phenomenal colors and life. Macro life was superb with a ghost pipe fish, pygmy seahorses, cuttlefish, octopus, squid, nudibranchs, various shrimp, crabs, and so on. One divemaster discovered a sea fan with ten pygmy seahorses on it! Larger animals could be found at the pinnacles such as GPS point where sharks and schooling pelagics were plentiful. Sharks around the pinnacles included black tips, white tips, and even a great hammerhead. First class operation. Camera table small. Can see things getting crowded if there are many photographers in the group. (Ph: 800-932-6237 or 305-

669-9391; fax 305-669-9475; e-mail dancer@peterhughes.com; website www.peterhughes.com)

Komodo Dancer, April 2002, Donald Rowe (donaldrowe@earthlink.net) **Glendora, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 120 Feet. Water: 85 to 89 F, calm. Crew, boat, and staff were outstanding. Service was eagerly given by the native crew who were always at the rail on our return smiling and asking how the dive went. I thoroughly enjoyed the trip, though I hate macro diving. There were enough high current drift dives and slow current gliding over beautiful soft coral to please me and, we did see an occasional shark or turtle or ray, and even a couple of mantas on the surface. The tenders were clumsy with side seats that made it difficult to sit with a tank on. This was only the second trip for the *Komodo Dancer* and it will be even better when the staff have all the hiding places of the neat critters identified. The boat is a beautiful sailboat with lots of room. The trip as under power except for a short sail on the way home. Meals were taken around a large light table on the after deck, since most of the photographers on board were using digital cameras, and this enhanced getting to know each other. The dive group was quite experienced. This must be the soft coral and small critter capital of the world. Macro photographers were happy with it.

Pelagian, August 2001, John Rigsbee (jr@macconnect.com) **San Francisco, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 25 to 100+ Feet. Water: 71

to 84 F. Dive restrictions: time limit; don't do anything stupid. Great trip with a lot of variety. Terrific macro environments and creatures, and healthy reefs. Reasonable amount of fish, but not many pelagics. Conditions varied from dive to dive, from ripping currents to clear, calm waters. Great dive operation; all diving from two comfortable tenders, on which the gear is stowed and refilled between dives. Larry Smith lives up to his guiding reputation and Anton does a great job as well. And both have an enthusiasm that catches — who needs a tank banger when you can just yell your head off when you find something. You could swim with the guides or on your own, but when I went off on my own, I didn't see nearly as much. *Pelagian* is a comfortable boat, with all the amenities (including cappuccino machine!) and well maintained. The food was terrific, with an emphasis on Indonesian and Asian style dishes at lunch and dinner. Don't miss the walk with the Komodo dragons — amazing creatures! (Ph: 800-962-0395 (US) or +66 (76) 263-732 (Thailand); fax 954-351-9740 (US); e-mail sales@div-asiapacific.com; website www.dive-asiapacific.com)

***Pelagian*, November 2001, PJ Halter (pjhalter@hotmail.com) Airlie Beach, QLD.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 25 to 100 Feet. Water: 74 to 28 F, calm. Thanks to *Undercurrent* notifying me of 1/2 price sale, we had the trip of a lifetime. Absolutely no problems. Boat carries 12 passengers; were only six this trip. Rest were from

US and also had zero problems. Because of the economics though most all dive boats are pulling out of Indonesia. Larry Smith, Divemaster Extraordinaire! Found us rare and exciting little critters that we researched between dives and often weren't even in books yet. Macro photo heaven! Bring your magnifying glass to see pygmy seahorses no bigger than a grain of rice — honest! Nudibranchs to die for, even seen mating. Pipefish, crinoids, frogfish and corals of all colors. Every whim or wish fulfilled. Amazing crew and ship. We had calm seas but can get rough they say. Check out them out: www.dive-asiapacific.com to see where they decide to stay after 2002 season. Four dives a day, great meals between, hot towels, huge (by dive boat standards) rooms. Land excursion to visit Komodo Dragons also fun. We have almost 500 dives. Never any ships or diving as spectacular as this. Half of us were photographers, one with three huge setups. It was fine — if boat was full of photographers, would be a problem.

***Sea Safari III*, November 2001, Robert Bruner (brunerrw@home.com) Reston, VA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 15 to 60 Feet. Water: 76 to 82 F, calm choppy. Kararu Dive Voyages. The food was creative, plentiful and well prepared. A different country's cuisine each night: Indonesia, Thai, Malay, French, Italy. Di-Di and his helpers were responsive. Sambal was available in various octanes. Continental breakfast before the first dive (7:30) included chocolate

filled croissants fresh baked. A prepared breakfast with 20 choices followed the first dive. Indonesian noodle soup with chicken was popular. Lunch and dinner had fresh baked rolls, a variety of entrées and usually fruit or ice cream. Food was nicely seasoned. I did not have to reach for my Pervacid once. Most comfortable live aboard we've been on. Plenty of lounging areas on three levels. Most cabins were below deck. We had one of the two cabins on the captains level above the main deck. The lounge, next to the dining area, had a good library/video area and overstuffed couches. Dive area was roomy. Tanks were marked with your name. Two dinghies. Crew would take your tank to the boat or you could macho it and wear it to the dinghy. Wide, stable ladder down to the two AL diving dinghies. Two fresh water deck showers with towels with your name on masking tape. Graham, the divemaster, gave excellent briefings. He often scouted conditions, placed a buoy, before we were briefed. He knew his critters and had a great eye. Graham led one boat. Tony Rhodes, an owner, led the other. Horseshoe Bay with varied sites was great, as was W-reef at Padar. We spent two days at Horseshoe Bay. We did one dive at W-reef. Other sites, were good to 1-2 bummers. The last day was spent on the *Liberty* wreck off Bali. We beat the shore divers for the first dive. At 100 ft I saw #1 on my fish wish list, a large Mola Mola being cleaned at the lower edge of the wreck. I was semi-paralyzed not believing I was seeing what I was seeing. 37 dives were

offered: 2-5 per day. We missed the first four due to delayed baggage (we started from Bima, not Bali). Five dives per day were a little tight due to the tardiness of the group to show up for the briefings. Hey this is a vacation. The boat is slow for the itinerary. But it is smooth. Hard to know when we were underway. Periodic bathroom system smell. It was a different system than the lower cabins. Crew unloaded and rinsed cameras and placed them on a towel in the camera work area. 24 inch wide bench had ample working space with door enclosed storage below each area for the safe keeping during the overnight moves. Charge station, 110 and 220, was in the salon on a long, 12-14 ft shelf. (Ph: (62) 361 282 931 (Bali); fax (62) 361 289 120 (Bali); e-mail info@kararu.com; website www.kararu.com)

***Sea Safari III*, November 2001, Kathleen Hedde**
(kdhedde@smindspring.com) **San Jose, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 78 to 86 F, calm currents. The "*Sea Safari III*" is operated by Kararu Voyages out of Bali (www.kararu.com). Most of the time, the boat goes from Bali to Komodo National Park and back. Our trip was a special arrangement, since we flew from Bali to Bima Airport, on Sumbawa, to save travel time. While the diving was great, the most terrific dives were in Komodo National Park, with Horseshoe Bay on the island of Rinca. Since we had saved a lot of travel time by flying to Bima, we spent two full days of diving in

Horseshoe Bay. A diver's paradise (minus large pelagics). The reef systems are incredibly diverse, complex and healthy. The bio diversity is incredible (Komodo is past the Wallace line) and makes for great critter hunting. Dive guide Graham was an accomplished spotter, and found many great photo subjects. Took a land excursion to see the famous Komodo dragons. The ranger offered a short trail walk, where we saw one dragon resting by a water hole, and there were more around the ranger station. As we made our way back to Bali, the diving was still good, but became gradually less spectacular, in part due to reef bombing and cyaniding. The last day of diving was spent in Tulamben, Bali, at the wreck of the *Liberty*. While some basic structure is left, it is beautifully overgrown. Since it lies on black sand bottom, it is a fish aggregation point. A large school of jacks moves around the wreck. The wreck has a diverse macro life. For the evening, the crew had arranged a traditional Balinese dance performance in a small hotel on the beach. The boat is an Indonesian design, called a bugis schooner. While it has sails, it always moves under engine. Has a lot of room, especially in the common areas and relatively roomy cabins. Since it is an all-wood hull, it has a little bit of a "tall ship" feeling. Four meals a day: cold breakfast before the first dive, warm breakfast after the first dive. Lunch, a snack and dinner after the night dive. All meals are family style in the large, air-conditioned salon. Lunch usually sports some Indonesia fare, e.g.,

curries and sates. Dinner has a different theme most nights, e.g., Indonesian, Italian, French, etc. Fresh fruit and veggies always available. The food is tasty, varied and plentiful. The cook will sell a recipe book for a nominal fee! Diving is off two chase boats. The crew will carry dive gear down for each dive and back up to the dive deck for air fills afterwards. All crew were great spotters, and nobody had to wait long for a pick up. The crew has a terrific attitude, and will help divers dress on the dive deck (everybody helps, including the captain) to opening the door to the salon, and knowing all names after the first day. After the last dive on the *Liberty*, the crew rinsed our complete dive gear, so that it would be ready to pack the next morning. Great group of dive guests, and a savvy travel agent (www.islandream.com). Photos from the trip on my website (<http://kdhedde.home.mindspring.com>). Guides safety conscious on the chase boat, good rinsing facilities, camera table and battery charging station (110V and 220V) in the salon, E6 development on board.

If you're about to spend a few grand on a dive trip overseas, you ought to spend a few bucks to make sure you've picked the right place. Become an Undercurrent Online member: www.undercurrent.org

Sea Safari III, December 2001, Dr. Gary Jones. Water: 74-84 F. My dive buddy (Chet Tussey) and I met at LAX for an 11:30 p.m. flight. We flew to Taipei then to Singapore, then to Denspasar Bali, where we overnighted in a nice hotel. The trip was 36 exhausting hours. We arrived at the Hotel at 2:00 p.m.. Bali time. Then at 8:00 a.m. we were off to board a plane for Bima. We boarded the boat *Sea Safari III* at noon. Big wooden yawl with lateen sails, all teak inside and out. Great crew — never had to touch a piece of gear. The staterooms were spacious with no need for anyone to use a bunk bed. Clean linens, private bath for each room with hot shower and daily maid service. Checkout dive after we got underway but poor visibility. Mostly overcast skies, strong currents and less than ideal visibility. The water ran from 84 F to 74 F. I was quite comfortable in Polartec skins and a 3-mm vest. We headed to the island of Komodo motoring all the way (the sails were mostly for looks) and diving along the way. For the most part viz was 50 ft. and sometimes less. The dive guides, although helpful and eager to please, didn't know the dive sites well. We spent a lot of time doing exploratory dives. The food became monotonous, a steady diet of various curries and over-spiced oriental food. Dessert was mostly sliced fruit with the owner springing for an occasional ice cream on a stick. The cook attempted an apple pie but the food was just not up to the standards of other live aboards. The owner and crew were most helpful and accommodating. It would

behoove the crew to learn where the critters are and to avoid putting out of shape Americans in the water with strong currents. As we approached the Island of Komodo the diving improved drastically. Horse Shoe Bay was as good diving as I have seen anywhere. Hannibal Rock was outstanding. Komodo was the high point with an opportunity to photograph the dragons up close and personal (sometimes too close). The natives have superb carvings of the dragons, native masks and real pearls. They call you Baba and are persistent trying to sell you their wares. Prices are a bargain. (\$20 American for a string of 7 mm real pearls or \$15 for a hand-carved mask inlaid with mother of pearl.) Tony, one of the owners, helped me immensely in getting my treasures packaged for transport and in arraigning for the airport to allow an extra 10 kilos for my purchases. The crew washed our gear at the end of the trip and hung it up to dry. Transportation to and from the airport was provided with no additional charges. Smooth seas and the crossings (done at night) were smooth. Between 4:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. the most nauseating odor permeated the cabins below decks. It smelled like someone had been spraying our rooms with cheap insecticide. Compared with Sipadan, before it was ruined, Bali has the same virgin reefs but not nearly as many subjects to shoot. PNG and the Solomons also appear to have more photographic opportunities than Bali but, again, that may be only due to the inexperience of the crew. The people of Bali are as friendly and welcoming

to Americans as you could hope to find anywhere (and certainly more so than most other countries).

Sea Safari III, May 2002, John Sommerer
(john.sommerer@jhuapl.edu) **Silver Spring, MD.** Experience: 251-500 dives Vis: 15 to 80 Feet. Water: 65 to 82 F, calm currents no currents. Very spacious and comfortable boat, especially with light load. Service very good, food excellent and plentiful. Boat crew spoke little English, but were friendly and helpful. Maintenance an issue: peeling varnish; slow drains; satellite phone not functional; engine failure that cost us a day of steaming while crankshaft and bearings replaced; some rental dive gear with problems. Diving excellent, with good briefings. Flexible schedule responsive to diver preferences. Divemasters for this trip Sascha (an owner) and Graham Abbott were both great at critter spotting. Typically four dives per day, including a night dive. We did five at Rinca, when the boat didn't need to be moved. Currents quite changeable. Huge variability in vis and temperature between north and south part of Komodo Park. Land excursions very worthwhile. Saw lots of dragons in Komodo, and visited a small village in east Bali for their annual Barong dance. Crew needs to be more careful with cameras. Frequently loaded cameras in wrong tender. Three guests' cameras damaged.

Northern Sulawesi

M/S Symphony-Murex, September 2002, Jerry (JerryL3515@aol.com) **Las Vegas, NV.** Experience: Over

1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, calm, currents. We spent two weeks on *M/S Symphony* — a basic boat with three reasonably comfortable cabins — air-conditioned but they turned it on only at night. The dive deck is spacious and workable with an excellent ladder for reboarding. There is no inside lounge and meals are taken topside under a canopy. The dining area was spacious and the service was good. Food is basic, hot and plentiful. Fish, chicken, pork and rice. Diving and pickup was done both from the boat and from an inflatable. The inflatable had no ladder and the mounting of the oars made getting in and out clumsy. Diving is fantastic in Northern Sulawesi. Beautiful reefs, coral untouched by El Niño and abundant sea life make this one of our favorite places in the world. The boat went where we wanted when we wanted. We did four dives a day but could have added a fifth had we wanted. The current on some dives was strong and unpredictable. The divemaster "Big Opo" made everything happen. One battery charging station. No camera storage, except in stateroom. (Ph: 62-431) 826091; e-mail info@manado-liveaboards.com; website www.manado-liveaboards.com)

MALDIVES

Manthiri, October 2001, Barbara & Larry Murphy (lemurphy@aol.com) **Atlanta, GA.** Cruised the north Male atolls for two weeks. Many reefs are showing slight signs of hard coral recovery after the El Niño of