

sharks, leopard sharks, numerous ribbon eels, exotic nudis, and an assortment of tiny crabs, shrimp, and gobies on sea rods and anemones. Every site had nice schools of reef fish. The resort is trying to promote itself as a whale shark destination, but so far the contacts have been few. Happy hour features the feeding of a school of juvenile blacktips from the dining area. Turtle eggs laid on the island are collected and hatched in pens. Hatchlings are released at high tide in an area away from the blacktips. Malaysian military stationed on island to safeguard guests because of proximity to the southern Philippines. A nice side trip out of Sandakan is the Sepilok Nature Resort to see the orangutans. (Ph: 60-89-765200; e-mail info@lankayan-island.com; website <http://lankayan-island.com>)

Sipadan Island

Borneo Divers, January 2002,
James Lyle (jlyle@beachnet.com)
Hermosa Beach, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 15 to 30 Feet. Water: 80 F, calm. We were disappointed after hearing great things. The visibility was awful and there were no big schools of fish (reported to have been blown out by a cyclone last year). Lots of turtles. One dive site is called Coral Gardens. Coral Rubble might be a better name. Borneo Divers is a nice operation, the accommodations are Spartan but clean and adequate. The photo pro has left the resort and there was no E-6 processing available. A long way to go for not good diving. (Ph: 6-088-222226; e-mail Reservations@BorneoDivers.Info or

Information@BorneoDivers.Info;
website www.jaring.my/bdivers)

MALDIVES

These 7000 low-lying coral islands in a 1200-mile chain southeast of India will be the first to disappear if global warming raises sea levels significantly. Warming has already taken a serious toll on the reefs, which suffered significant coral bleaching. About 200 of the islands are inhabited (although visitors have very little interaction with the 175,000 predominantly-Muslim residents), and several are devoted entirely to small resorts that offer average to excellent tropical reef diving with big fish action - if the resort has a knowledgeable staff that knows where and when to find it. However, the Maldives are best dived from live-aboards. . . . Dive rules are strict for this part of the world. . . . Expect year-round daily temperatures of roughly 85 degrees and abundant rainfall, which is distributed evenly from May through December. . . .

Bandos Island Resort, October 2001, Barbara & Larry Murphy (lemurphy@aol.com) Atlanta, GA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, calm no currents. Chose this mid-priced resort for some jet lag recovery three days before boarding *Manthiri*. It's a 20 min. boat ride from airport that is a plus at 2:00 A.M. Guests are mainly the European sun, diving and disco crowd. Meals are an undistinguished

buffet cattle feed though one can opt for a more upscale menu at the resort's al fresco restaurant using the basic meal credit and paying extra. Huge dive complex caters to certifications taught in English, Japanese, German. Shop sells no dive supplies. Nitrox available but dive depths and times preset on boat dives. Check out dive mandatory on house reef where all hard coral was dead but reef fish life was abundant. We also spotted two sharks and tuna close up. Banana Reef was the best site with some live hard corals, lovely reef fish and macro subjects. An OK place to crash for a couple of days. Work on your camera in your room. No rinse tanks on boats because rides are short to sites. (Ph: 960 440088 Fax: +960 443877; e-mail sales@bandos.com.mv; website www.bandos.com)

Banyan Tree Resort, Maldives
Vabbinfaru, March 2002, Gar & Emily MacRae, Culver City, CA.
 Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Superremely fresh, varied and delicious food, miraculous due to Vabbinfaru's remoteness. A great dive team. Great staff. They were doing renovations so it was too noisy. However, they accommodated us with an afternoon quiet period so we could nap. There was reef damage from El Niño though at depth the soft corals were coming back. Abundant fish life including the elusive frogfish. Lions Head — nice fast drift dive along a wall. The reef had nice overhangs and crevices inhabited by big lobster and a big green moray. Don BiBi Thila — turtles and schooling fish. Lion fish,

long thin banner fish, bat fish, blue face angelfish, tear drop butterfly fish, clown trigger fish, unicorn fish, moray, anemone and accompanying clown fish, oriental sweet lips. Manta Point — great drift dive. Napoleon wrasse, turtles, and grouper together, a sting ray, a yellow moray, and scorpion fish. Rasfari — We descended upon four stingrays nestled next to a lionfish. Then we dropped over the edge of the reef to open ocean where there were sharks and barracuda and a Napoleon wrasse and a large grouper. A spotted stingray came right up to us. Madifarua was a wall with out-croppings and overhangs. It was a colorful reef. Nice drift drive. Among the rocks were sharks, lionfish, scorpion fish and another elusive green frogfish. Faranu North — The current was swift. Numerous moray. Fish of many colors, more wrasse, emperor fish, eagle ray, lionfish, lobster, and a 10 foot nurse shark. The soft corals and reef were in good condition. Bandos Rock — swift currents with up and down drafts. Two large octopi, a peacock flounder, more lionfish, four lobster bunched together and scorpion fish. Nassimo Thila — More reef sharks, Napoleon wrasse, tons of banner fish, harlequin shrimp, lionfish, a huge free-swimming green moray, a flat worm, butterfly fish, groupers, and eagle rays. There were abundant beautiful soft corals and huge gorgonian sea fans. If you would like to dive the Seychelles during the same time as a Maldives vacation, Air Seychelles has a nonstop flight every eight days for around \$400 RT. (Ph: +65 6849 5800; e-mail

reservations@banyantree.com;
www.banyantree.com)

**Soleni Dive Centre, Soneva Fushi
Resort, October 2001, Kinson Tong**
(kinsontong@netvigator.com)

Fanling, N/A. Experience: 26-50
dives. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy.
Soneva Fushi Resort is a premium
resort. Very good service, and friendly
staff. Before we hopped on the
seaplane we waited in an air-condi-
tioned room, with welcome drinks and
video tapes to watch. Staff from
Soleni Dive Centre are friendly as
well. They sent someone to pickup our
dive gears from our doorstep, wash
the gear and dry them. After our last
dive, the gear was sent to our door
step. It's my wife's birthday tomorrow
and she got a birthday card from the
dive centre yesterday. We saw two
mantas in the first 15 minutes on our
check dive at around 20 feet. During
the stay, we saw approximately two
mantas every two dives. A young
whale shark was feeding on the
surface and it swam so close that I had
to duck away to avoid its tail! Got
some showers in the early morning
and late evening, but no heavy rainfall.
(Ph: 00960 23 03 04/ 05; e- mail
soleni@dhivehinet.net.mvwebsite
www.soleni.com)

RED SEA

When the Red Sea was under
Israeli control, the reefs were well-
protected, but now, under Egyptian
domain, Hurghada dive operators
are failing to provide loving care to
nearby reefs. Live-aboards are
trying to move southward, but

they're having difficulties with
other governments. Most of the
good southern sites have been
closed. Check ahead to see if this
has changed. Water temperatures
can drop into the cool 60s during
February and rise into the 80s by
August. . . . Many divers combine a
Red Sea trip with a visit to Israel
and biblically historical sites.

Egypt

**Barakuda, Lotus Bay Resort,
June 2001, John Daneker**
(jedane@aol.com) FPO, AA. Vis:
100-150 ft. Water: 75-80 F. Dives
accrued: 300+. The Lotus Bay Resort
makes you feel like part of the family.
The rooms are spacious, roomy and
well maintained. The breakfast and
dinner buffets are real good, with eggs
any style. Nice beach and evening
accommodations. The Barakuda Dive
Center is a professional operation.
Everything is meticulously done. All
c-cards are checked. Log books
checked to ensure divers are put on
the right boat trip. All divers do a
check dive. One the first day consist-
ing of skills performed in confined
water dive. Once the DM is confident
in your skills the outer reefs, Pan-
orama, ABU KhaFan, Shab Sheer, and
Salem Express are yours to visit. Our
boat was the *Fantasia* and the crew
was great. They take care of you really
well. The midday lunch buffet was
good, hot and filling every day. No
time restrictions were placed on us.
We were asked on the outer reefs to
plan our dives carefully and dive the
plan. They asked us to watch our
depth and go no deeper than 40 m. All