

scene of a small Costa Rican climbing on top of my husband, they were both yelling at each other. The current was spinning and tossing them both. The divemaster was trying to reconnect the power inflator while my husband is swimming to stay up. Meanwhile the boat Captain had moved off 100 yards and had to be called back. When he arrived, we found that they had no dive ladder and we all had to climb and be lifted over the gunnel to get into the boat. Visibility at its best was 10 feet down to 3 feet. We followed the divemaster who constantly lost us when someone stopped to look at anything. I saw several eels, two nudibranchs and a bull shark — none of which did the divemaster see.

Another diver badly cut the bottom of her foot climbing into the boat. We were directed to put our feet into the cold water ports to get into the boat. They pulled us up into the boat by our arms to get us in. Her foot slipped when they were not ready and dropped her into the propeller. We did not get a refund for my husband's dive/rental fee. The dive operators called any stingray a manta, as we saw several bat rays at the surface from the boat and they called them mantas to hype us up before the dive. (Ph: 800-4-DIVING or +506-670-0176; e-mail [dive@richcoastdiving.com](mailto:dive@richcoastdiving.com); website [www.richcoastdiving.com](http://www.richcoastdiving.com))

## MEXICO

Before Cocos Island, the sea-mounts of the Sea of Cortez were the place for schooling hammerheads and sea lions. The sea lions

are still there, although the hammerheads are harder to predict. . . . Some live-aboards now run to Isla Socorro to find hammerheads, although it's a long ride and there's no guarantee of sharks or good weather. . . . Manta rays are more reliable, and they have a reputation for letting divers approach them. . . . In winter and spring there's a thermocline, with 70 to 80 degree water on the surface and 50 to 60 degree water below 30-40 feet. . . . Visibility is determined by the plankton blooms; while it's low (25-40 feet) in midsummer, it generally improves to 80 to 100 feet by late summer. . . . From December through May winds kick up the water, which makes diving difficult. . . . Wear a wetsuit for protection from jellyfish even if the water's warm. . . . Whale-watching season is from December through March. . . . The nice hotels and restaurants from Cabo to the North have helped make it a long-week-end retreat for some California divers. . . .

## Sea of Cortez

### Baja Sur

**Baja, August 2002, David Kulka, Burbank, CA.** My wife and I took a 3-week driving and diving trip through Baja California and Northwest Mexico, diving with five operators during the trip. We brought all our own gear, including full tanks. I enjoyed diving there with my beloved 95 cubic feet steel tanks and realized

that with their negative buoyancy and the warm Baja water, often I could go without an exposure suit, and without a weight belt. However, using my own somewhat nonstandard tanks became a sort of test for dive operator “cooperation factor” Baja diving is notoriously variable as for visibility, water temp, and marine life seen. One could visit the same spots a month or year earlier or later, and have a totally different dive experience.

**Loreto:** Three days driving from San Diego. We stayed and dived with Baja Outpost. A 2-tank dive was \$110, double rooms were in the \$50-70 range include full breakfast. There is an attractive, low key property across the road from the beach with tropical atmosphere. Beers and sodas are on the honor system and they have two racks full of mountain bikes that guests use free. The rooms are quite nice. They have AC but our room was so poorly insulated that the unit had trouble cooling the room. The room was well decorated, but a bathroom door, clothes rod and reading lamp were missing. Still, we had a view of the water. They use “pangas,” the standard 25' fiberglass boat with outboard that is common in Baja. In the morning they tow the pangas to the dock and divers follow on foot. In It was already 90 F and some divers were not happy about working up a sweat so early in the day. Water was 85 on the surface, 72-85 at depth, vis maybe 40'. Parrot fish, Angels, Porcupine fish, and Sergeant Majors. The shop schlepped and rinsed all our gear. 95 tank sub-report: a hassle.

They agreed to refill them after the dive, but after they finished my gauge showed 2100, not the normal 2400 fill pressure. When I asked the owner to top them off he denied agreeing to fill them at all, refused to touch them again, and became quite testy.

**La Paz:** Stayed at Hotel Perla, an established older place in the center of town, facing the water. Rooms were around \$70. The place is attractive and well run. We dived with Cortez Club, whose operation is about 5 miles south of town, on the water, adjoining a large hotel. Cortez Club is a large operation with several dive boats including one or two awesome racing boats, which we never went out on. They have a large staff and a huge inventory of rental gear. A waterfront tropical style bar is right next to the shop. They charge \$110 for a 2-tank dive. And visit about 12 sites in the area, including one or two “advance diver only” spots. They always carried and rinsed all our gear. At La Reina, a seamount an hour from the dock, we did two dives and had great encounters with a giant Pacific manta. We also experienced an enormous “fish ball” with (by my guess) at least 10,000 medium fish that somewhat resembled grunts. Lots of eels, stone fish, and porcupines. Vis about 70', temp 75-85. Did several other dives with Cortez Club. Some were outstanding, some so-so. It all depended on the conditions. The wreck of the *Salvatierra* was a super dive, despite the poor vis and strong current that day. On our last dive day the motor conked out just after the second dive.

They handled it like champs. Another dive boat towed us back to a small port, where CC met us with a smaller boat. On the way we stopped for a bit of snorkeling. They were so professional that no one minded the delays. Tank refill report: Helpful attitude, but still had to beg and plead for a full 2400 PSI fill. Why was it so difficult, when they fill the aluminum 80s to 3000 every day? **(Cortez Club: Ph: (+52) (112) 1-6120 or (+52) (112) 1-6121; e-mail [info@cortezclub.com](mailto:info@cortezclub.com); website [www.cortezclub.com](http://www.cortezclub.com); La Concha: Ph: (800) 999-2252; fax (619) 294-7366; e-mail [laconcha@juno.com](mailto:laconcha@juno.com); website [www.laconcha.com](http://www.laconcha.com))**

**Cabo Pulmo:** a national marine park a couple hours south of La Paz established about four years ago. It is one of the few living coral reefs in the Western Americas. You follow a road till the pavement ends, then another 7 miles of dirt road. Pulmo had three small dive shops, two bungalow style hotels, three restaurants, two tiny markets, and 50 residents. At Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort bungalows are \$60. No AC, fans only. Power is solar generated. The rooms were very hot. The beach is a three minute walk. They have a dive operation but the captain was on strike, so we dove with a shop a three minute walk down the beach run by Mario and his family. Simple pangas are pushed by a truck into the water from the sand. No oxygen or radios on board, limited briefings. The captains and dive crew are good, hard-working guys that do their best. A 2-tank dive is \$65 including tanks and weights.

Minimum two divers. Outstanding diving here. Tons of fish life. Schools of porcupine fish, loads of eels, big grouper, snapper, parrots. Lots more "fish balls." The coral reefs are still pretty impressive and the fish are more plentiful. On the surface we saw many groups of 4 foot mantas literally fly out the water and become airborne for a second or so, skipping like stones over the surface. They proudly filled my 95s to 2400 PSI, even gave me an extra (free) fill. Finally!

**Los Barriles/Buena Vista:** I found Vista Sea Sports on the Internet. Finding the actual shop was a little trickier. Vista is owned by a US expat named Mark. He runs it out of his large, beautiful home and has three boats. \$110 for a two tank dive. As Vista is about halfway between Cabo Pulmo and La Paz, they can and do visit both areas. Nice staff and boats, professional and together people. One site they took me to was one in Cabo Pulmo called Los Morros that beat the pants off the ones the Pulmo shop had taken me to. The divemaster was a young Israeli named Alon. He did a great job. Did four good dives with Vista including a 100' wall not far from their shop. Diving Los Morros, I saw more fish than I have ever experienced on any dive before. Outstanding. Everything the area has, in great sizes and great numbers. Saw flying mantas on the surface again. Excellent briefings, oxygen and radios on board. They cheerfully filled my tanks to 2400, loaded them on and off the boat, and rinsed all out stuff. We stayed at Martin Verdugo's beach

motel, about a mile away. \$50 for a clean, comfortable, waterfront room. They have a bar, pool, and restaurant (breakfast only). Many restaurants, some overpriced and far from authentic. Don't waste your money on fancy places in Baja - look for local clean places and your taste buds will thank you. **(Vista Sea Sport: Ph: +52 114 10031; e-mail Vseasport@aol.com; website www.vistaseasport.com)**

**San Carlos:** We (and our car) went by ferry from La Paz to Los Mochis. The cargo ferry left at 10:00 p.m. and took about ten hours. We boarded a comfortable catamaran at 8:00 the next morning and arrived four hours later. My car was waiting in a parking lot a few hundred yards away. The paperwork and permits for the car were formidable and confusing. The ferry office said we couldn't ride the cargo ferry with our vehicle, which was incorrect. All the truck drivers who use the cargo ship board it, many with their families. Passenger tickets can be bought at the terminal about 10 miles from La Paz. Near the terminal there is a good hotel (about \$60/night) with restaurant, bar, and full service dive shop. San Carlos is a small resort area near Guayamas, which is on the mainland side of the Sea of Cortez, about five hours south of the US border. San Carlos has many hotels and motels, in every price range and 2-3 dive shops. The most popular is Gary's Dive Shop, which seems to be an institution with Arizona divers. Gary's has seven boats and has been around since 1971. We were there over Labor Day, and Gary's was

mobbed by divers. He probably sent over 75 divers out the day that I went. One boat held over 30 divers. I showed up early in the morning without reservations and watched as divers stormed the docks with all their gear. I was put on the last boat to leave, which was also the slowest. It crawled to the site at maybe 5-6 knots. (After first telling us my boat would return at 1:30 or 2, I was later told the time would be 4 or 5. Gary assured me he'd get word to my wife. She spent three hours waiting at the dock, then went to Gary's office, worried there had been an accident. A big thumbs down. The diving at San Pedro Island was outstanding that day. 80' vis, 86 degree warm water. No wet suit needed at all. Lots of fish and sea lions. Cool U/W topography, blue water, canyons, mini caves. Super dives. It was \$110 including tanks and weights, and what Gary's repeatedly calls the best fish tacos in the world, but the fish tacos ran out well before everyone was full, especially for the last folks to return from the first dive, who got slim pickings. We were out more than eight hours. The boats have oxygen and radios. Safety standards seemed very good. The briefing at the dock was good, but no dive site briefing. The crew were nice men, and helpful, but spoke less English than folks on the other boats I'd dived, so communication was a little spotty. Gary, full of apologies for the mixup with my wife, gladly agreed to fill my tanks free after we returned. His staffer asked for a tip before connecting the fill hose (I responded with a joke instead of cash), then pumped my tanks to 2200.

**Cabo Pulmo**

**Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort, Royal Solaris, November 2001, Larry and Fawn Lovecchio (lovecchio@frontier.net) Ignacio, CO.** Vis: 20-40 ft. Water: 82 F. Dives logged: 150+. Dive restrictions enforced: 500 psi on boat. Tell divemaster @ 1000 psi. Cabo Pulmo on the Sea of Cortez side has been designated a national marine park and the sea life is more plentiful and larger than in other areas. Although the coral isn't as varied as the Caribbean, there are some nice sea fans and the rock ledges housed many enormous green moray eels and some spotted ones. Never have we seen so many large puffer fish! Another highlight included a dive on a fishing trawler wreck where mounds of nets provided a good habitat for fish among fields of garden eels in the sand. The wreck was also home to a few octopus, two of which were mating and were flashing spectacular colors. Cabo Beach Resort and Divers is a good operation that allows divers to dive their computers if you notify the divemaster when you register 1000 psi and back onboard with 500 psi. We opted to stay 1.5 hrs. away in San Jose del Cabo that is a delightful town with many shops and all the amenities. We stayed at the all-inclusive deluxe 5-star resort Royal Solaris that was first class in every aspect. Procure discounted rates through their referral program, lovecchio@frontier.net if interested. (Ph: +52-114-10244; e-mail pulmo@caboworld.com; website www.caboworld.com)

**Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort, July 2002, Laura L. Todd, Arcata, CA.** Vis: 25-50 ft. Water: 68-82 F. Dives logged: >175. Cabo Pulmo Beach Resort 52 (624) 141-0244 pulmo@caboworld.com, cole@cabopulmo.com, reservations@transcabo.com.mx. Challenging to get to, but worth the trip. The theme here is big fish. There are groupers the size of Volkswagens, I swear. Also huge tuna and jacks that will swim right up to you if you're quiet. Marvelous assortment of rays: eagle rays, bat rays, mobulas with their wing tips sticking above the surface, the little electric rays, the elaborate bullseye rays and one manta. Several brief hammerhead sightings. Lots of eels. Great variety of reef fish. The dive operation is basic. Diving is from open pangas: no shade, no head, no snacks, bring your own water. The boats are hauled on and off the beach for each trip with a combination of four wheel drive trucks and sheer muscle power, then customers wade out and climb in. Short boat rides — 20 minutes at the longest. Boat captains find the sites by triangulation; mooring buoys are not used, so there is a certain amount of adjusting before you can get in the water. To get back in the boat, take gear and weight belt off in the water, then climb up the tiny ladder. The quality of the dive staff is a little uneven — one instructor gave my friend a wonderful resort course, but the next person who guided her didn't watch close enough to keep her from popping to the surface from 40 feet. The snorkeling is delightful, with almost as many critters as diving. Was

only doable at high tide — dangerous at other times. The resort charges \$35 for a boat ride to a beautiful rock encircled beach with good snorkeling about 10 minutes away. The resort consists of several individual little houses with their own kitchens (deluxe units at \$85 per day) and shady patios. None are right on the beach. It's a 25-50 yard walk. If you must be on the water, use the net to look up Casa/Villa Del Mar, two small, joined beachfront houses that are affordable if you have a group. The casitas are otherwise delightful with both outdoor and indoor showers, hammocks and tiled floors. No hot water. Electric floor fans only. Each unit has its own half-walled courtyard lined with bougainvillea, so you're in your own little oasis. The kitchens have pots, pans, utensils, etc., but no cooking basics. If you want to cook, bring spices. There are two small markets with tortillas, milk, tomatoes, onions, junk food and a few canned goods. Tuesday, the fish seller will come with fresh fish and seafood in ice chests in the back of his truck. Thursday is bread day. Just hang out in your yard and they will find you. There are four restaurants. Go to Tito's for the atmosphere, Caballero for inexpensive (\$6-\$12) straightforward Mexican food, La Palapa (open for lunch only) for the fabulous beach and Nancy's for the most varied menu and margaritas that will knock you over. No working phones anywhere in the village. If you can afford a rental car and don't mind paying for having it sit there while you're diving, it's an easy trip. The last 8 miles are dirt

road, but was in good shape. Spring for a 4-wheel drive to explore south to Los Frailes. Start early — the roads are everything you've read and more — nobody drives at night. TransCabo will drive you to and from the Los Cabos airport if you reserve ahead for the ludicrous price of \$100 per person each way.

#### **Cabo San Lucas**

**Amigos Del Mar, La Esperanza, August 2002, Samantha Deutch (p77sam@peoplepc.com) NYC, NY.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 10 to 70 Feet. Water: 60 to 86 F, choppy, currents. Based on our two previous dive trips the experience was fair. What made our trip tolerable was that the impeccable Esperanza Resort and Spa. The marine life that made our trip worth taking were: manta rays, a friendly sea lion that swam with us, a few sea turtles, plethora of spotted, zebra, and pacific green moray eels, tons of sea cucumbers and puffer fish, other tropical fish and the beautiful buttercup coral. From accounts from fellow divers, diving in Loreto and La Paz are far superior to Cabo San Lucas "this is what we wished we knew in advance." What little reef we observed was in poor condition and the pelagics are over fished. We even encountered a barbaric fishing outfit that proudly displayed a juvenile silky shark they caught on the dock. We made our trip arrangements six months in advance based on the urgency to do so by the dive operation, Amigos Del Mar. They were hosting a dive festival and we needed to reserve a space as they were

expecting droves of divers, the implication was we would have difficulty finding a dive operation to dive with if we hadn't — we also had to pay for the entire trip five mo. in advance (payable by check through US operation). They told us that all of our diving instructions would be waiting for us at our hotel upon our arrival and what we found was a half explained diving itinerary and after several phone calls we were told that we would get our complete itinerary the following day at the dive shop. Our first dive was fairly uneventful; the second local dive of the day produced a friendly and playful sea lion that showed off. Our second day we had difficulties with our divemaster, this was never resolved as a result our experience was compromised. Because of our early complication with the dive master, he refused to help us with our equipment or answer any of our questions that day. This guide ignored one diver when he informed him that he was low on air and in turn the diver had to buddy breathe to the surface. These mishaps continued the seven days of diving. From copious amounts of complaining by the staff of the insurmountable work they had for the festival, I was left with the belief they were understaffed for such an undertaking. I told my husband that if we wanted to be abused and pay for it we should have stayed in NYC. Any diver who encounters a similar experience is to get your money back and dive with another dive shop. (Ph: -52-114-30505; e-mail [sealion@cabotel.com.mx](mailto:sealion@cabotel.com.mx);

website [www.mexonline.com/amigosdelmar.htm](http://www.mexonline.com/amigosdelmar.htm))

**Amigos del Mar, Plaza Las Glorias, August 2002, Mark Bryant/Instructor ([bryant3280@aol.com](mailto:bryant3280@aol.com))**

**Pensacola, FL.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 Feet. Water: 70 to 82 F, choppy. Kevin at Amigos del Mar did an excellent job giving us great service. We left our gear after each dive and they rinsed it and had it onboard for the next day's dive, much appreciated. The best diving was Cabo Pulmo with mantas, turtles and huge schools of fish specific to the Sea of Cortez. Our divemaster, Hector, was brilliant and put us smack dab in the middle of the action. Gordo Banks was also a must-do dive day. Kevin printed digital photos for my entry into a photo contest which I indeed did win, thanks to him. We were there for the Skin-Diver Summer Dive Fiesta and enjoyed the daily cocktail parties. Food in the restaurants were more expensive than I expected and the appetizers served at the parties helped us save a lot of money.

**Amigos del Mar, Villa del Palmar, August 2002, Michael Drumstas ([Griswald8@aol.com](mailto:Griswald8@aol.com)) Worcester, MA.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 70 to 80 F, currents. Amigo del Mar had two comfortable trimarans and a comfortable panga. If a creature were there Julio would find it. We got extended dive times after others in our group ran low on air and were escorted back to the anchor line. Did not see any pelagics but we did encounter abundant life, lots of morays and tropicals.

Cabo Pulma was two hours from Cabo San Lucas the last 40 min. on dirt roads complete with speed bumps! The setting was idyllic. The reef has current but the panga would just follow our bubbles. One beautiful reef! We also dove the sandfalls in Cabo San Lucas where we moored on a sand mound then followed the mound down to 60-70'. Pretty wild watching these rivers of sand running between boulders, to who knows what depths. Villa del Palmar is a first class resort with good food and great service. Then there's the shopping and night life! We were hoping to see a whale shark or mantas but it was not to be. No rinse tanks on board any of the boats but they took care when handling equipment.

#### La Paz

**Baja Diving and Service, Club Cantamar, August 2001, Steven Singerman (ssingerman@aol.com) Toronto, Ontario.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Water: 80 F, calm currents. Some of the best diving I've done. Pods of dolphin ride the bow of the boats, whales are in the distance, large game fish leapt out of the water, and beautiful scenery from the boat on the way to dive sites. Such an abundance of marine life, absolutely remarkable. Giant manta rays and sea lions were the crowning touch, not to mention the octopus going after its prey, two snake eels fighting over territory, sea horses, hundreds of garden eels, and tremendous varieties of schools with hundreds and thousands of fish. Currents ranged from site to site, from calm to very strong.

Strongest currents were at El Bajo yet the drift back made it all worth it (take a safety sausage and noise maker with you.) The boats are fast and comfortable, the captains and dive masters were helpful, knowledgeable, friendly and excellent. Lunches and drinks were plentiful and tasty between dives on the boat. The hotel was a 30-second walk to the boats. The rooms were clean, air-conditioned, comfortable and spacious (no phone, no television, no problem. Nice relaxing swimming pool with swim up bar and great bartender, wonderful kitchen staff and office staff. Club Cantamar is twenty minute drive from La Paz. Scheduled shuttles go back and forth, and taxis and buses are reliable and reasonable. The people of La Paz are warm, wonderful, friendly and genuine. The town is mellow and just as its name says, peaceful. A wonderful town to get away from the hustle and bustle, a fun relaxing place to chill out and hang with plenty of excellent restaurants (ranging in prices but none overpriced, shops, bars, banks, etc. (even two movie theaters and a small skate board track.) Beautiful walkways with beautiful views from town overlooking the Sea. (Ph: +52-112-21826 or +52-112-27010; e-mail [ajadiving@lapaz.cromwell.com.mx](mailto:ajadiving@lapaz.cromwell.com.mx))

**Baja Diving and Service, Club Cantamar, September 2001, Georgina Wiersma (gwiersma@caiwnl.nl).** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 10 to 20 Meters. Water: 28 to 30 Celsius, choppy. Operator had only one or two boats going every day, which made choice of dive sites limited, because



all 'new' divers (about 6-8 each day) wanted to go to either El Bajo (no hammerheads though, water far too hot), or Los Islotes (sea lions). Saw many manta rays, sealions, seahorses, jawfish and nudibranch. Lots of schooling fish. Wreck of the *Salvatierra* is a must! Club Cantamar offers good service and nice rooms. Staff of hotel and dive operation (Baja Diving) friendly and helpful. Dive-masters willing to point out special critters, but you can make your own dive and do your own profile.

### **Baja Diving and Service, Club Cantamar, July 2002, Laura L.**

**Todd, Arcata, CA.** Vis: 10-50 ft.

Water: 68-82 F. Dives logged: >175.

Fabulous! The dive sites are distant, but this is the closest place to stay, so it cuts the ride down to an hour or so.

And the things we saw on the way!

Dolphins trying to outdo each other with spectacular leaps in the stern wake, mobula rays jumping out of the water, flying fish and turtles. Dives are scheduled daily. Most sites are fairly shallow, around 70' and above, but below the thermocline — a toasty 82 at the top and a chilly 68 at 40'.

The staff insisted I wear a 7-mil suit, which was overkill. They encourage you to overweight by 10% due to high salinity. No real current, but plenty of surge, depending. Sunny and hot, with occasional afternoon clouds that never brought rain. Seas ranged from a slightly bumpy 3' swell to the glossiest calm. Visibility varied from 10' at La Reinita to a good 50+ the second trip to La Reina. Critters were fabulous: three mantas (one of whom was new

to the researcher on board), occasional turtle, seahorse, green morays everywhere plus more unusual eels, barracuda, huge lobsters, one or two octopi, and the wonderful little electric rays and of course the sea lions at Los Islotes. This time of year the babies were still staying mostly on the rocks, but the big bulls in the water were becoming less aggressive. Big assortment of reef fish plus schools of creole fish and grunts in the thousands. Sharks absent. Lunch on the boat is simple: make your own mystery meat sandwich, chips, cookies and soda. Boats are 30-33 feet with head, kitchen and at least two decks. Safety gear including oxygen on board plus a small chamber right at the hotel. Large camera tank on board. Can get pretty crowded with the full allotment of divers (about 15) — pleasant with eight or less. They usually send new folks to Los Islotes where they check your skills; after that they give you a lot of freedom. They assign you to a boat each day, with clients having some say in the destination. The staff changes your gear between dives, but customers are responsible for getting everything on the boat and for rinsing and storing in free lockers every evening. Great crew of friendly, multinational guides — one, however, didn't know any English fish names. Request the delightful *Fang Ming* wreck: largely intact freighter with lots of big holes for safe penetration; nice bridge, passageways and staircases; good view of the prop plus lots of interesting small critters; doable on sunlight, better with a light. El Bajo by request

only in favorable weather conditions after staff assesses your skills. Nitrox fills plus certification and rebreather training available. They also have an office on the waterfront in La Paz and bus folks staying in town to the marina daily. The hotel is actually part of a marina next to the ferry terminal (some industrial noise) and has only a tiny man-made beach. Decent snorkeling off the jetty. Nice pool with swim up bar and palapa full of hammocks. You can choose from double rooms or mini condo suites ranging from \$70 to \$120. Great package prices with diving. All rooms have air conditioning, ceiling fans, TV's and balconies; phone in the office only. Bottled water is supplied. The restaurant has simple Mexican and American food at reasonable prices. The beef medalions and garlic shrimp are great for dinner. Breakfast (five choices; no meat) and lunch included on dive days. There are three other restaurants within a long walk. The hotel provides free rides into town every evening between 5 and 7, returning between 9 and 10. Taxis are \$15 each way for the 10-mile ride. The French restaurant behind Carlos and Charlies is wonderful, with a garden setting and heaps of continental food for cheap. Leave room for the fabulous ice cream at any of the places along the Malecon. Hotel staff gracious, go out of their way to help.

**Club Cantamar, September 2002, Fred Gentry (fred@beanandgentry.com)**  
**Olympia, WA.** Vis; 20-70 ft. Water: 80-84 F. Dives accrued: 1000+. Club

Cantamar runs a pleasant operation. Located 20 minutes from town. Good restaurants on premises. Dive staff excellent. In September water warm, but cool (66 degrees) in spring when we were further North in Loreto. (Ph: 612-122-1826; e-mail [info@clubcantamar.com](mailto:info@clubcantamar.com); website [www.clubcantamar.com](http://www.clubcantamar.com))

#### **Loreto**

**Baja Outpost, October - November 2001, Bill Mashek (rubicon@sonic.net)** Forestville, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 65 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, calm. Islands and sea mounts. No shore diving. Sea life is prolific and seasonal. Pelagics are usually seen in the summer. Saw dolphins, sea lions and a broad array of tropical fish, spiny lobster and moray eels. Three dive operations, all are good. Baja Outpost is a small b&b that caters to divers. Accommodations are somewhat humble, yet comfortable. Personalized service. The divemaster, Manual was extremely competent and open to whatever we wanted to do. KiKi was in charge of the panga and an excellent guide. The only drawbacks about Loreto are the logistics of getting there. They have three flights per week out of Los Angeles. (Ph: 888-649-5951 or +52-113-51134; e-mail [outpost@bajaoutpost.com](mailto:outpost@bajaoutpost.com); website [www.bajaoutpost.com](http://www.bajaoutpost.com))

**Baja Outpost, Villa's de Loreto, November 2001, Bill Mashek (rubicon@sonic.net)** Forestville, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. We really

enjoyed our 4-night stay at Villa's de Loreto. The rooms are big, the prices are competitive and the grounds are well kept. There is camping, RV sites and a swimming pool on site. Villa's de Loreto, is a stopover for serious ocean kayakers, bicyclists and out door enthusiasts. I dived with Baja Outpost because Dolphin Dive Center (American owned—Southern CA) was more expensive than any of the other dive operations, though I was impressed by them. [www.rubiconadventures.com](http://www.rubiconadventures.com)

**Baja Outpost, March 2002, Debbie Anderson (daafy@san.rr.com) San Diego, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 63 to 67 F, choppy, no currents. Leon and his family made the trip special. Really casual place to stay. Food was outstanding! We never had the same lunch twice the five days we dove and this was all packed and served to us while out on some cool island during our surface interval. Fish life was great. Large schools of amber jacks, cudas, bait fish. Great macro. Wide assortment of nudies. Just tons of dolphin and fin-backed whales on the trips out. Aero-California canceled our trip home so we got to dive an extra day. Turned out to be the best dives of the trip. Plan to go later in the season. The wind did not help the vis and it blew hard three of the five days we dove. The panga dives were a bit rough but Capt. Kiki did a great job. Manolo the DM was so helpful and took us to some interesting spots. We shoot digital so no facilities — no problem. As long as we could recharge batteries

we were great. Boats are pangas and were a little tight and bouncy at times. Hold on to your stuff!

**Baja Outpost, May 2002, Reed Nescher, Beaumont, CA.** Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 25 to 60 Feet. Water: 68 to 74 F, calm. They have a power problem that makes sleeping hard. Hot at night. Clean but not well maintained facilities. Food was the best of all. On the road at the sea wall and the locals like to cruise late on weekends, and no beach. Town is behind the outpost. The owner is a dreamer and if his dream comes true it will be a nice place and maybe in five or ten years the over fished fish will come back. Until then it is just above camping with good food and friendly people. Not enough fish, not enough diving, not enough air-conditioning, not enough water pressure, not enough electricity, not chips and salsa or any other snacks. It is Mexico after all, really Baja if you know what I mean. The dive staff are some of the best with what they have to work with. They bust there butts and put you first. The people make this place. No accommodations for uwp except ice chest in boat and water tank and hose at village. Hard on cameras, etc., not much to take pictures of. Micro was good and lots of eels. California diving with some tropicals and no kelp. Cold upwelling and no large animals was disappointing. One sea lion, one small manta on the surface and lots of little fish and schools. In one week the most dives you can do is 13. Only shot three video tapes and less than a 100 stills.

**Baja Outpost, June 2002, Kyle O'Malley, Le Center, NM.** Vis: 30-40 ft. Water: 70-75 F. Dives logged: approximately 150. Baja Outpost, operated by Leon Fichman is on the water/boardwalk in the middle of Loreto. Clean, basic rooms and palapas with window. A/C units (no phone, no TV). Great breakfasts with room price. Sometimes water pressure not there, sometimes dives/boats don't go as scheduled but no big hassle. Diving was excellent — varied sites and tons of fish everywhere. The price was an outstanding deal, relaxing atmosphere. Loreto has excellent, interesting, small sidewalk restaurants with low prices. Hard to spend more than \$10 on a first class meal! Last night line up a boat at the marina to go squid fishing and take home a cooler of calamari for \$40! Big fun!

#### **San Carlos**

**Desert Divers' Ocean Sports, Plaza Las Glorias, June 2002, Jay (jwv@door.net) Lubbock, TX.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 60 to 70 Feet. Water: 79 to 84 F, choppy, surge, no currents. Desert Divers is a Tucson five shop that owns the dive shop in San Carlos. They run the dive boat "Ocean Spirit" out of their shop at San Carlos Marina. I booked my hotel and diving through them in Tucson at DesertDivers.com. Excellent new dive boat, but was docked too far from hotel. No equipment storage, but that may be remedied when the harbor is completed and the dive boat and shop are in one place. Remote. Need a car. Good food at hotel and small restau-

rants in walking distance or via taxi. Taxis are good. Lots of fish, big and small. Sea lions plentiful. Playful pups. Schools of dolphin. Green morays, trumpets, etc. **(Desert Divers/ Ocean Sports, San Carlos Marina: Ph: 52-622-22-60696; website <http://www.desertdivers.com/DDmain.html>)**

**Gary's Dive Shop, Plaza San Carlos, May 2002, Catherine (cathy@otc.isu.edu) Pocatello, ID.** Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 50 to 60 Feet. Water: 70 to 75 F, calm. Took the trip to Seal Island with Gary's Dive Shop. The ad states it takes 1 hour on their new, fast boats. Well, we were on an old, slow boat that took over two hours each way. Gary gave a brief overview of the first dive site before we left the dock, was friendly, and then left us with two Spanish speaking dive masters who didn't seem to care what anybody did. No briefing at either site, neither one got in the water. They set up our gear well enough, but neither one warned us about some pretty significant currents in the area. The dive masters made us lunch (fresh fish tacos) that were excellent, but there was not enough to go around — we were glad we brought some snacks aboard. Seal Island was great — lots of friendly seals that would pose and play. It was not as colorful as the Caribbean, and much colder. The second site had some serious thermoclines that left me shivering. There was a big green eel, lots of chocolate chip starfish, parrot fish, emperor angels, a few lobsters, guitar sharks, lettuce slugs, etc. Variety of life not as extensive as

Caribbean, but interesting nonetheless. Gary's wife was unnecessarily nasty to our entire group. We showed up exactly on time per Gary's e-mail to me (7:15 at the dive shop), but were greeted with "You people are so late — they are holding the boat you!" I tried to show her my c-card — she glared at me and said, "Put that away!" She took an imprint of my AMEX and said we'd settle later. After the trip I returned via taxi to finish the transaction, and was told "We don't take AMEX!" They sent a minion to our hotel the next day to get my Master Card imprint (refused to do it over the phone) and he would not give me a receipt. I was concerned because the transaction was done in pesos and I wanted some documentation in case there was a problem. I made him handwrite me a receipt on a piece of paper. 3mm shortie definitely not enough in May. **(Gary's Dive Shop: Ph: 52-622-226-0049; e-mail [gary@garysdivemexico.com](mailto:gary@garysdivemexico.com); website <http://www.garysdivemexico.com>)**

### Southern Mexico

#### Ixtapa

**Ixtapa Aqua Paradise, December 2001, Curt Finley, East Wenatchee, WA.** Vis: 20-30 ft. Water: 75-80 F. Dives logged: 30+. Dive restrictions enforced: 60 ft., 40 min. or 500 psi. There were eight of us and four were real beginners with less than six open water dives. Cheyenne, the divemaster, exuded both authority and a sense of fun. He spoke English and his native Spanish. The business limits the number of divers to eight that, with a

divemaster and a captain, is max for the 30' open boats. We made four dives at different locations. Although we saw few fish over about 18 inches, and no pelagics, turtles or sea mammals, we saw several kinds of coral, spiny puffers, box fish, eels, sea snakes, sea fans, needle fish and surgeon fish. There were also sea horses. We dove as a group but were allowed latitude if we kept the group in sight. This was not hard on three of the dives as there was excellent visibility. The fourth dive was in 20-30 ft. of water on a choppy afternoon but visibility was still easily 10 ft. Upon surfacing the captain was there within three or four minutes to collect gear and help people aboard. **(Ph: 52-755 - 553 1510; e-mail [info@ixtapaaquaparadise.com](mailto:info@ixtapaaquaparadise.com); website [www.ixtapaaquaparadise.com](http://www.ixtapaaquaparadise.com))**

#### Puerto Vallarta

**Twin Dolphins II, Club Viva Vallarta, October 2001, Jenny Wergin ([jaffa747@yahoo.com](mailto:jaffa747@yahoo.com))**  
**Green Bay, WI.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 60 to 95 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, currents. No turtles, dolphins, one large manta ray seen from the boat. Lots of strong currents. Dive master Alex was more concerned about catching his dinner than our dive experience. Did not point out hardly any fish, or sea life. Left us waiting on the boat while he went spear fishing. Alex caught a lobster, a big no-no in the area. Alex used his hands on the coral to move himself around all the time! 45 minute bottom time limit or 700 psi air limit whichever came first. Some dives were

50-60 ft. Club Viva Vallarta is about a 40 minute bus ride to the boat. Resort staff, rooms, food were excellent. It was an all-inclusive resort. Each night they put on a show and the lights, sound and dancing were very professional. (Ph: 3-293-19-05; e-mail [tdscuba@twindolphinssp.com](mailto:tdscuba@twindolphinssp.com); website [www.twindolphinssp.com](http://www.twindolphinssp.com))

## **UNITED STATES**

### **California**

#### **Catalina Island**

**Catalina Divers Supply, August 2002, LeRoy Anderson (leroya@vmh.com) Salt Lake City, UT.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Water: 60 to 70 F, calm, no currents. I just returned from Papua New Guinea, so I expected the dives around Catalina a lot less fun, however, but I had just as much fun in Catalina as I did in PNG, maybe because my expectations were lower. The divemaster, Ron, was helpful and competent. The water was calm and bright. Swimming through healthy and thick kelp forests among schools of fish with sunlight filtering through the kelp was relaxing and scenic. Critters included schools of surface smelt, schools of medium sized fish of several varieties, a 2-meter giant sea bass, sea hare nudibranchs about two feet long, spiny lobsters, moray eels, sculpins, spotted scorpionfish, ubiquitous juvenile and adult Garibaldis, tiny spectacular fluorescent red and purple gobies, which were everywhere. The underwater gardens, apart from the kelp seemed healthy and abundant. A

great place, and a great operation. (Ph: 800-353-0330 or 310-510-0330; fax (310) 510-1629; e-mail [cds@catalinas.net](mailto:cds@catalinas.net); website [www.catalinadiverssupply.com](http://www.catalinadiverssupply.com))

**Catalina Scuba Luv, August 2002, Mike Kwas (kwasjazz@comcast.net) Andalusia, PA.** Experience: 100+ dives. Vis: 30 to 60 Feet. Water: 59 to 66 F, calm, no currents. Booked a 5-day trip through Tina at Catalina ScubaLuv. Flew Philly to LAX, took Super Shuttle van to Long Beach pier and picked up Catalina Express ferry. Check out dive at Casino Point (shore dive). Dove The King Neptune (three tanks/no guide) for three out of the four days and Prince Neptune (two tanks with guide) for one day. Captain Bob and Jamie were a fun team on the King Neptune, very helpful. Jamie briefed us and even found giant sea bass. Prince Neptune was equally enjoyable with an enthusiastic crew and dive master, Vicky. We ran into a pod of dolphins that swam with the boat. The kelp forests are thrilling. It is like flying through a majestic forest. Sun beams through kelp are incredible. Purple and green algae covered rock formations provide a haven for creatures such as anemone, urchin, lobster, eels, etc. We saw several bat rays, blue, horn and leopard sharks. Sea lions are around, but we only saw one on the surface before a dive. Atwater Hotel is cheap — no air, phone in room nor elevator (three floors). The room was small, but clean. There is a storage room for scuba but no rinse tank. The water was cold for August (59-66) and the weather