

KIRIBATI (CHRISTMAS ISLAND)

Christmas Island is 1300 miles due south of Hawaii, about a 3-hour flight, but across the International Date Line. It's the world's largest coral atoll, 45 miles long and between 7 and 25 miles wide, although lagoons make up nearly 2/3 of that area. The island was named after the day in 1777 when Captain James Cook first happened upon it, but it remained uninhabited until the 1950s, when the British chose it as the site for their nuclear weapons development and induced a small Micronesian work force from the Gilbert Islands to relocate there. The British pulled out, leaving behind a few Micronesians and a great deal of debris. Today the island's 4400 residents are citizens of the Republic of Kiribati (pronounced cure-a-BOS).

MICRONESIA

Chuuk (Truk)

This is the world's most diverse wreck diving on hundreds of Japanese ships sunk during a battle in WWII, with lionfish on the bridge, giant clams on the deck, and bottles of ink and erasers for students of the vanished Japanese Empire still visible in the hold. . . . Most wreck dives - other than on superstructure - are in the 80'+ range, but there's fine diving even without wreck penetration. . . . Expect calm water, occasional poor visibility, little or no current,

and temperatures that can hit the high 80s. . . .

Blue Lagoon Resort, February 2002, Nikki Mahan, Bellevue, WA.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. Return trip; we were surprised at the deterioration of the wrecks. The coral is as beautiful as ever. This is a wreck diver's dream. Plenty of penetration and deep diving is available. New divers are in awe as many artifacts can still be seen. Diving the zero bomber is pretty cool. The dive sites are an average 30 minute ride from the resort. The dive masters know the sites well and will leave you alone if you are competent. (Ph: 800-367-5004 or 808-955-6221; e-mail info@castleresorts.com or reservations@castleresorts.com ; website www.castleresorts.com)

Kosrae

This small, unspoiled island didn't get jet service until 1987, and it still hasn't changed much. . . . Its high volcanic peaks are lush and green, and a close, fringing reef makes the diving easily accessible, but it's not high-voltage diving on a par with Palau.

Kosrae Village Resort, December 2001, Michael N. Hofman (mhofman@jmoyerlandscaping.com)

San Francisco, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 83 to 91 F, choppy. When we arrived we were the only people clearing customs and the immigration officer knew we were coming and got the hotel rep for us! The hotel and dive operation were started about

seven years ago by a California couple and they've done a great job of getting both going. While the diving is probably great, we couldn't do too much because we visited during a tropical storm. The people are extremely friendly, there are walks and ruins to see and the food in the restaurant attached to the hotel and dive operation is top notch, creative and healthy! The diving operation is well run: in the morning you drive to the boat location (a pleasant 15-20 minute drive), then take the dive boat from a 10-30 minute ride to the dive sites, depending on the location on the island. Lunch (which you order), snacks and towels are available on the boat. If it's raining, plan on everything getting wet because it's humid. Also, while there are lights in the well laid out thatched roofed huts, they tend to be not bright. Great off-the-beaten-track destination. (Ph: +691-370-3483; e-mail Info@KosraeVillage.com; website www.kosraevillage.com)

Kosrae Village Resort, July 2002, H. C. Wood (wood1028@comcast.net)
Sarasota, FL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, choppy, surge. GOOD -- The dive guides were friendly and competent. Nitrox was cheap, priced according to the O2% (\$7 to \$13). The meal on the boat was good. The food at the resort was good and varied. The hard coral was beautiful. The dive operation was poorly run. The van for one of the three docks left at 9:00 am along with pickup with gear. The boat then had to be loaded while you waited, oops, we forgot gas. The short

version that coupled with a slow flat-top boat you arrived at the dive mooring 1 to 1.75 hours. The reverse was true at the end, the resort was called to send the van after arrival at the dock. It took 20 to 30 minutes to get to the dock then 20 to 30 minutes back to the resort. Divers were allowed to wear gloves (no current) and two did. One diver went to each coral he passed and pushed on it with his finger. Bring DEET, your room is open to the outside. The resort is about 8 years old but looks about 40. It is billed as environmentally friendly but I think that means run down. There are no attractions on land. WISH I had known the scarcity of fish life. No rinse tank on boat or at dock which was 20 to 30 minutes from resort. After asking at the resort I was given a tub, however the only exterior water source was brackish and dirty (hauled water from shower). The accommodations were damp (take ziploc bags and plenty of drying agent) and leaked, even when it wasn't raining, making recharging a challenge. I put chargers under tables and beds.

North Mariana Islands

Abracadabra, Hyatt and Condo, February 2002, Jennifer, Catonsville, MD. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm currents. The availability of ample shore diving was nice. A boat is not available always; as most shops do not own their own boat since the shore diving and Grotto are readily accessible. Ed and Jeannie Comfort of Abracadabra could not be more accommodating. Abracadabra is one

of the few shops that cater to the American and expat divers. Eagle Ray City was amazing, as a large group of eagle rays hang almost motionless in the current. The Grotto is also beautiful, with underwater topography being the star of the show. But the hike back up 110 stairs with full gear puts a slight damper on an otherwise great dive. All resorts cater to Japanese tourists, but the Hyatt was nice, but expensive. Beach dives would have been almost impossible for UWP with a large set-up, given that you had to pull yourself out and back on a rope. (Ph: 670-233-7234; e-mail abracadabra@saipan.com; website www.abracadabra.saipan.com)

Marshall Islands

After years of radiation monitoring, the historic shipwrecks of Bikini Atoll have been opened to recreational divers. Monitoring is still being done by the U.S. Department of Energy to ensure that radiation levels in the lagoon are low enough to permit safe diving. This is a wreck diver's paradise, but be prepared: most of them are deep. . . .

Majuro Atoll

Bako Divers, Robert Reimers Hotel, October 2001, Thomas Lippert (thomas.lippert@psi.ch) **Brugg, AG Switzerland.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 40 meters. Calm. Every dive (9) was lead by Jerry (owner of the dive shop). He dives with twin tanks (why? It is not technical diving). We dove inside the lagoon and outside. The coral reef was

in good shape with lots of coral fish, napoleons, white tip sharks, ray etc. There were also some interesting walls, sometimes with currents. Jerry is quite relaxed and pays not too much attention to the divers. Was fine with me, but we had a Japanese guy on one dive who got into trouble and the response was quite slow. The Hotel is nice (I had a bungalow), with OK food -- pickup by boat at the hotel pier. We did 2 dives a day with 1 hr. surface interval and lunch box supplied by the dive shop. (Ph: 11-692-625-2525 Ext. 140; e-mail jerryr@ntamar.com; website www.bakodivers.com)

Bako Divers, Ltd., June 2002, J.D. Webster, M.D. (jwebs6740@aol.com) **St. Calir, MI.** Vis: 80-110 ft. Water: 84-85 F. Dives logged: 5,500. Dive restrictions enforced: dove my computer, extended range dives available. The diving in the Marshalls is exceptional and Bako Divers made each of my three trips to Majuro a success! Extremely accommodating, Jerry Ross, owner, and his staff go out of their way to help you -- not only diving but getting around town as well. Captain Robin handles the "Paula Jean" dive boat like no other boat driver I've ever ridden with. The boat is fast -- 25' Glass-Pro with twin 90 hp. Honda outboards and it handles rough seas very well due to its deep-V hull. In all my 50 years of diving, I would classify Jerry Ross at Bako and Art Pickering at Provo Turtle Divers as the best I've had the opportunity to dive with. Jerry is a very large man -- 6'2" and 280 lbs. -- but he swims gracefully and always watches out for

your safety. He's one of the best, and I've logged over 5,500 recreational dives since 1953. Lunch is provided on the boat, which consists of sandwich, chips, fruit and plenty of bottled water. Capt. Robin cannot do enough for you, and with my injured knee, he practically put my whole rig on me every time. The dive boat ties up at the Outrigger Hotel dock each morning, 50 feet from the dive shop, and only 20 feet from the restaurant where I had breakfast each day. They kept my gear overnight and had my first rig set-up when I arrived each day. The dive sites are incredible and range from "steep and deep" walls to lovely coral gardens. The corals are dense and extremely healthy. Over 350 varieties of hard and soft corals can be found in the Marshalls along with 1,200+ species of fish and invertebrates. I saw all the "tropicals" including multicolored angelfish, decorated dart-fish; butterflies of every distinction and more abound. As well, we encountered huge populations of pelagics including enormous dogtooth-tuna, barracuda, sharks (white-tip, gray reef, nurse, silver-tip, blacktip), dolphins, eagle rays; green-sea and hawksbill turtles, and more. Occasionally Galapagos and hammerhead sharks are seen as well. On one dive in particular, the Aquarium, we dove the wall at the deepwater pass in Majuro Lagoon during an incoming tide where we watched what appeared to be 10,000 big eye jacks feeding on the rich incoming tidal flow. Scores of gray sharks cruised within the school. The current was swift and the dive was

truly remarkable. Most of the dives I did were drift dives on mild currents at both Majuro and nearby Arno Atoll, a 10-mile boat ride to the east. Arno is seemingly untouched by man, although I was told there are some 2,000 residents spread out over the small islands there. The water was warm, 84 degrees with no thermo cline, and clear, although we did encounter some challenging weather that stirred up the vis on a few of the days. Visibility still lingered at 80 feet + on those days. As if that weren't enough, there are also some fantastic WWII planes and other wrecks in the lagoon, along with some of the most beautiful coral reefs I've ever seen. We made a few dives "inside" on the days when the wind was kicking up and it was fantastic. There is a WWII Grumman F6F Hellcat fighter plane in 115' just 500 meters from the dock at Bako Divers and a rare Grumman "Duck" float plane 3 miles down the lagoon. We also visited a reef area inside the lagoon where an "Avenger" fighter lies in 110'. That dive was also of note as we found over a dozen lionfish, four species of anemone, three species of anemone fish, nudibranchs, octopus, and thousands of tropicals dancing over hard coral pillars that rise from a sandy slope. Dive restrictions were minimal and you are allowed to dive your computer. If you don't have one, Bako rents Aladdin Pro computers at \$10 per day. Extended range and solo diving are available to qualified divers who demonstrate ability and good judgment. 30 and 40 cu. ft. pony bottles are also available for rental and

Jerry dives with twin 85 steel tanks each day covering all bases with extra air and redundancy, just in case. This was my third trip to Majuro with Bako Divers in 4 years. This place is one of the last that has superb diving and is basically undiscovered and not overcrowded. There are no other dive boats. My trips to Majuro range from 14-21 days and I'm never ready to leave at the end of my stay. The Outrigger Marshall Islands Resort has complete rooms (cable TV, refrigerator, A/C, etc.) The "Enra" restaurant there offers great food and drink and is open liberal hours. The local people are extremely friendly, helpful and always smiling.

Palau

Long day-boat rides to the best diving weave through calm water and past magnificent rock islands, but there's the potential for rough seas on the outer edges of islands. . . . Most serious divers prefer live-aboards due to the length of the daily commute from Koror. . . . Marine biodiversity here is among the greatest in the world, but major coral bleaching and commercial fishing is taking its toll. . . . Visibility can exceed 200', while currents range from nil to dangerously strong. . . . The capital city of Koror, well along the way to being Caymanized by massive tourism, has excellent ethnic restaurants. . . . The best handicrafts are prisoners' carved wooden story boards for sale at the jail in town; hand-pressed coconut oil from street vendors is a good gift for your personal massage practitioner. . . .

Fish N Fins, Palau Pacific Resort, September 2001, Elissa and Jody Thompson (descentline@attbi.com) Corona, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 Feet. Water: 84 to 86 F, currents. Snorkeling in Jellyfish Lake, and night diving were spectacular as was diving on the many WWII wrecks. The five wrecks we dove afforded spectacular wide angle photo and video opportunities. Black and white photography seems to impart a historical feel to the image. Diving here means drift diving for experienced divers. Though floating along with the current is relaxing and enjoyable, one must keep an eye on depth as most dives were along walls that dropped into the abyss. Some dives involved dropping into blue holes which eventually lead to open water. This is simply beautiful as you look up to the sky. Not for the faint of heart. At the Blue Corner and a number of other strong current sites, we hooked onto dead coral with reef hooks and sat suspended as the pelagics rose from the abyss. With a signal from the DM, we unhook and drifted away under a dive float, which the boat followed to pick us up. Our dives averaged 1-1/2 hours. For lunch we would pull up to one of the white sand surrounded rock islands. Snorkeling revealed more creatures not seen in the open ocean. Species ID books available on Micronesian Reef Fishes and Invertebrates were indispensable. Our main divemasters John and Wilson, were friendly, competent, skilled, and enjoyed pointing out creatures we might have missed. Soloman runs Fish N Fins Barracuda

Bar. Try the falafel! We were picked up every morning either by van or at the dock, with our gear already onboard. Being vegetarians, we are often at a loss in finding places to eat. Tova, an owner of Fish N Fins gave us several recommendations, our favorite is the Sea House Restaurant which has outstanding Indian Food. Palau Pacific Resort ocean front room doesn't get better than this. The room was immaculate. We had the King and Queen Dinner (special order vegetarian) for my birthday. It was five star! Palau uses US currency and the US postal system, but you can buy stamps issued in Palau, which make great souvenirs. One regret — we spent all of our time diving, almost ten days, with only one day to tour the island. Visit our website at www.descentline.com for a photo gallery of images from our trip. (Ph: 680-488-2637; e-mail fishnfin@palaunet.com; website www.fishnfins.com)

Neco Marine, Palau Pacific, January 2002, Diane and Ned Elton (EELTON@Stern.nyu.edu) Ridgewood, NJ. Vis: 75-150 ft. Water: 82 F. Dives logged: 250+. The corals are not near as colorful as on our pre El Niño trip. However fish life is still there. For fish life it's the best, Neco is great to dive with and the Palau Pacific is a lovely resort but unfortunately with a Holiday Inn kitchen. Food in town was better. (Neco Marine Ph: 680-488-1755/2009; e-mail NecoMarine@palaunet.com; website www.seapalau.com)

Neco Marine, Palau Pacific, March 2002, Diane & Ned Elton

(elton@stern.nyu.edu) Ridgewood, NJ. Vis: 80-150 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 200+. Palau Pacific is a magnificent resort with expensive food. This is our second trip. Clearly El Niño damaged the corals severely and the fish life is less prolific. However, it still is day-in-day-out the best place we have dove. Currents on occasion can rip. Neco is first rate but there are other equivalent good choices for a dive operation.

Sam's Tours, West Plaza Coral Reef, January 2002, Carl Scott (cdscott@swbell.net) Spring, TX. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 70 Feet. Water: 76 to 78 F, choppy. Sam's met me at the airport and picked me up every morning at the hotel, a short ride across the small town of Koror. Good organization and attention to service. Special requests are solicited. Pre-dive briefings were excellent, often consisting of the divemaster drawing a layout of the 1st dive site for the day and explaining conditions and likely fish activity. Our divemaster, Jonas, paid close attention to tides and moon phases, and took us to what he thought would be the best sites for the day. He's the most competent overall dive guide I've been with to-date, even if he does look like Arnold Schwarzenegger in surfer mode. Backscatter was a constant photo issue. Schools of Moorish idols, being fed on by trevally, gray and white tip reef sharks, and napoleon wrasse at Blue Corner twice (worth diving twice). Most wall dives had these sharks and other predators. The manta cleaning station at Devilfish

City was in high traffic mode, and the mantas swam within inches of me, once the other divers surfaced. Lots of macro stuff on most dives. Sam's dives all sites, though some are up to an hour away, even with their fast boats (which are in good condition). Lunch was provided every day, usually on nice beaches with plenty of shady areas. The West Plaza Coral Reef is new and it's on the level of a Best Western. These hotels have no "property" to speak of, so don't look for a pool, courtyard, or anything else, except a minimal parking area. Most hotels are simple and aged, but clean. February is a Japanese holiday month, and there are more Japanese than fish in the water. Red Rooster beer is poorly brewed and not worth it. Practice your chop stick skills. You may not always have a choice! Meals ranged from \$4 to \$10 and it's mostly Asian. Use your Continental frequent flyer miles -- they are the only commercial airline landing there, and they take advantage of it in their pricing. No rinse bucket on boat, unless you ask for it. However, as with any other request, they are quick and happy to accommodate. There is a nice rinse tank set aside for cameras at the dock, however, and a large table to organize gear, etc. (Ph: 680-488-1062; e-mail samstour@palaunet.com; website www.samstours.com)

Sam's, Palau Pacific Resort, February 2002, Reg Bennett, San Marcos, CA. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 244. Dive restrictions enforced: no deco dives. Fourth trip to Palau. The resort needs maintenance work; Sam's

was excellent as usual with several new and bigger dive boats; large predatory fish seemed in decline. Small reef fish were in abundance and the reefs were recovering from La Niña. A substantial number of long line fishing boats may be contributing to the decline. Get there before it is too late!

Sam's Tours, February 2002, Fred Hightower, Salt Lake City, UT. Vis: 75-100 ft. Water: 78-84 F. Dives accrued: 90+. Dive restrictions enforced: must go deep, must go into big current. Sam's Tours manages to do an 8-person "cattle boat." I asked for a shallow easy shakedown dive, no current, no pressure to keep up. I told the shop over the phone. They said I could do it. I told the shop in person. They agreed. I got on the boat. They said ok. Then they took us to "Blue Hole." Huge surge. Heavy current. A cave dive. I had to agree to go 100 feet to get out of the cave, due to surge. I had to refuse the dive.

Pohnpei

Sleeping Lady Divers, The Village, December 2001, Michael N. Hofman (mhofman@jmoyerlandscaping.com) San Francisco, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 Feet. Water: 83 to 91 F, choppy. Small operation that's been around for years. The dive operation is in a building next to the reception desk. They have a few spare parts and equipment but you bring your own equipment. Dives leave from an area about a 10 minute steep walk down from the hotel (there's a funky old pickup truck that takes gear down to the water). Dives

are in small dive boats that can be uncomfortable for the rides sometime one hour plus. Dive guides and captains are helpful, knowledgeable and friendly. My wife, who snorkels, had a great time snorkeling near the dive sites -- only a few divers (or just us). Lots of tropical fish, smatterings of sharks and rays, and beautiful coral. Large fishing factories in the harbor were depressing. They go out every night. Order the bentos for lunch -- (fish and rice wrapped out in a banana leaf). Food at the resort was okay but a challenge for those of us who don't eat high fat food. It's a small island. No great facilities for cameras on land or on small dive boats. **(The Village Ph: +691-320-2797; fax +691-320-3797; e-mail thevillage@mail.fm)**

Yap

Yap is a very traditional island: bare-breasted women, men in loincloths (thu), and huge wheels of stone money quarried in Palau and hauled to Yap in open boats. The people are extraordinary sailors, having navigated the Pacific for thousands of years. . . . Reputedly the best betel nut in the South Pacific, useful for trading or gifts for locals on other islands. . . . Inexpensive restaurants and hotels. . . . Guaranteed mantas with Yap Divers. . . . There are steep coral-covered walls and dropoffs and plenty of fish. . . . Expect clear water except in the entrance of the lagoon where mantas pass. . . . Yap is a good two- to three-day add-on to a Palau trip.

Manta Ray Bay Hotel, February 2002, Nikki Mahan, Bellevue, WA.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 83 F, choppy. Return trip so we dove many more sites than just the mantas. Yap is underutilized as far as the other awesome diving available. Some coral gardens are so cool -- not too many fish, but the coral is in perfect condition. One site has many mandarin fish in 15 to 30 feet of water. Bill Aker does a great job. He has a four star chef and the moored ship is a super addition. There are currents on the open water dives, but the dives are done as drift dives, mantas are wonderful, vis wasn't great, however. **(Ph: +691-350-2300; e-mail yapdivers@mantaray.com; website www.mantaray.com)**

Trader's Ridge Resort, February/ July, 2002, Michael Fox, Tsukuda, Tokyo. Vis (Outgoing Tide Channel Manta Dives (20~40 feet), Incoming Tide Channel Manta Dives (80+ Feet). Outer Reef (100 Feet+). Water Temp 80+. Traders Ridge Resort is a beautiful hotel overlooking Colonia Harbor. Rooms and dining exceptional and everyone went out of their way to help. Beyond the Reef (Dave, Jesse, Gordon) was a personalized/friendly operation. Boats were small (about five divers max with no head) but offered a shaded area and drinks/ snacks after each dive. Some days, early check in (6:45am) allowed us to catch the incoming tide at Miil Channel. Along with the multiple mantas, there were about 50~60 juvenile sharks, large schools of bass/

jacks. During the summer, I was able to dive Goofnuw Channel, a sandy channel at 50~65 feet and ridges running up either side to 20 feet. Thousands of convict tangs on one dive, cuttlefish, dragon wrasse, banded pipefish, 30 humphead parrotfish, whitetips and occasional reef sharks. Outside Goofnuw Channel is a small wall with dramatic topography with lots of tropical fish and some nurse sharks. For mandarin fish sightings, try the late afternoon dive at a large coral head at 25 feet near the mouth of the Colonia Harbor. I saw 3-45 each time I went. In the summer, there were two days when I was the only customer on the boat. Yet, each time, Dave or Jesse went out of their way to find a good site (taking in the tides and sea conditions). (Ph: 691-350-6005; e-mail traders@ite.net; website <http://tradersridgeresort.com>)

Yap Divers, Manta Ray Bay Hotel, January 2002, Frank Zegler (frankzeg@aol.com) Idledale, CO. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 Feet. Water: 83 to 84 F, choppy. Many people we were with went home disappointed after three straight days of no mantas. Miil channel, where the mantas are in the winter, is a narrow pass where water from nearby mangroves drains on outgoing tides. The range of the tides strongly influences the visibility (more range is better) and your chances of seeing a manta. Having a full moon is a good thing. Also the town of Colonia (where the boats are) is separated from the Miil dive site by a narrow and

shallow man-made channel. This channel limits the times the boats can pass and low water means you are blocked from access. Dive times are adjusted every day. Strong trade winds in the winter months also make going out treacherous at times and this can limit access. You may end up diving on nearby reefs that although nice are probably not why you flew 7000 miles to get here. Dive is conducted by you kneeling calmly on a sandy bottom at 70 feet with only a few soft corals for company-waiting. You and what must be the most photographed batfish in the western Pacific. Once the mantas show though all that is forgotten as they appear from the gloom and cruise back and forth over your head. They tend to stay if everyone is calm. One bonehead can ruin this entire experience. You are essentially tucked into the crannies near their cleaner stations and blundering upwards will spook them. Visibility as low as 30 ft-average 50 and lack of contrast can frustrate some auto focus systems. The dives normally end by traversing up the coral boundary of the channel that is in remarkably good shape given the El Niño and diver wear and tear. That shallow reef is one of the most intensely alive hard coral reefs we saw in two months in Micronesia. We wished for a reef hook since the currents were strong here. These currents also encouraged plenty of schooling fishes. Diving the western coast of Yap is typically a drift dive along steep slopes (a few notches below a true wall) with interesting formations at Yap caverns and the chance to see schools of tuna and

rainbow runners cruising out in the blue. Corals on the western coast of Yap were not as affected by El Niño as on Palau and are further along in recovery. Lettuce coral formations are pretty impressive. There is a whole dive devoted to mandarin fish in Yap -- right near the dive operation. The dive boats are at best mediocre. Small with only horizontal tank storage and a cluttered deck make diving in rough conditions a pain. A low sunroof of thin, flat, fiberglass is at guillotine height for anyone above 6 feet. The depth of water at critical channels limits the boat size but these should be upgraded to be more diver and especially photographer friendly. The Yapese dive guides were outstanding and went the extra mile -- including recovering gear from 80 feet of water for a diver who lost three items on a single dive. Their knowledge of the reef denizens made finding cuttlefish and a huge mantis shrimp too easy. The dive operation is well run and Nitrox is available. Freddy, who manages day to day ops, did an outstanding job of giving us the straight scoop when conditions were non-ideal. The freshly made banana breads on the boats were a treat between dives. All gear is stored on the premises in a secured room so transport is minimized. The Manta Ray Bay Hotel is one of those mysteries of marketing. It adjoins Yap Divers but is neither inexpensive nor particularly nice. Ocean view rooms now overlook a giant ship turned into a bar. The restaurant is good but pricey. Darnn near every other place to stay is within a 2-5 minute walk so

there is no compelling reason to stay there. The nicest place in town is the Trader's Ridge Resort that has a pool and a serious American chef who can transform fish into something heavenly. The place is new, rooms are American upscale size, well furnished and the ambiance is pleasant. Not to mention that lunches M-F are \$6.50. The Pathways used to be an outstanding place and despite the nice staff the facilities are becoming less than OK given their prices. Food is marginal. They have a tame fruit bat though. If you don't mind a 15 minute drive and can afford a rental car (\$50/day for a Rav4) we can recommend a great homestay. Cyprian (Cy to everyone) at the visitors bureau built next to his home a bungalow on stilts over the water reached via a 50-foot bamboo dock. Very basic with a futon, lights and your own flush toilet/cold shower (not a big compromise given the mid eighties air temp) on the shore. The bungalow has a huge palm thatched porch to decompress on. If you like ocean breezes, the sound of the ocean near at hand and simplicity, this is the place. \$35/night which includes dinner for two-and his wife knows how to cook-better than most offerings in town. The kind of place where you come for three days and end up spending a month. (Ph: +691-350-2300; e-mail yapdivers@mantaray.com; website www.mantaray.com)

Yap Divers, Trader's Ridge, January 2002, Ned and Diane Elton, Ridgewood, NJ. Vis: 50-75 ft. Water: 82 F. The Traders Ridge was everything a resort should be. Outstanding

food and accommodations. Our friends who stayed at Yap Divers soon ate at Traders Ridge. It is three blocks from Yap Divers so that it is almost as convenient. The island is fascinating so we would go back. The diving was so-so. After two days of siting waiting for mantas we did reef diving but the reefs don't compare with the better Caribbean reefs.

Yap Divers, Manta Ray Bay Hotel, March 2002, Jerry Loveless (JerryL3515@aol.com) Las Vegas, NV. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Water: 78 to 82 F. The Hotel had recently experienced a typhoon so some facilities were under repair. However, the 'can-do' attitude of everyone at the hotel made up for deficiencies. They met us at the airport (in the wee hours) handled all of our gear, and were most efficient about the check-in. The hotel is not the most luxurious, but it is comfortable and the people involved are courteous and helpful. The food was good and had reasonable variety. Yap Divers, at the hotel, was convenient and professional. They accepted our gear upon arrival at the hotel. Next morning we were assigned a gear locker where we hung our equipment after diving. Rinse tanks were provided. To get to the dive areas requires a twenty minute boat ride across the bay and through the German Channel that is covered in mangroves. It's a pretty and relaxing ride. We did two dives a day with a third optional in the afternoon. Occasional night dives were also offered. We went to see mantas and

we saw them -- on every dive. Not dozens but several on each dive. Up close and personal. They often passed close enough to fill our wide angle lenses.

Yap Divers, Trader's Ridge, March 2002, Diane and Ned Elton (eelton@stern.nyu.edu) Ridgewood, NJ. Vis: 40-100 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Dives logged: 200+. The resort was outstanding and so was the food. As time progressed, others on our dive boat visited and ate at the resort. This became a nightly ritual and they expressed a wish they had stayed there as well. The diving is ok but doesn't compare to Palau. We became bored sitting waiting for mantas we tried some reefs. The reefs are so-so. The resort was outstanding, the people delightful and the culture interesting. A nice addition to Palau.

Ulithi Atoll, Yap State

Ulithi Adventure Resort, December 2001, Bill Knoblauch, CA. The resort was fine. It had ten rooms with air conditioning. The rooms only have a double bed. They shut off the water at night, saying they were worried about the pipes breaking, which didn't make sense as the water was on throughout the day. The food was adequate. Usually eggs, bacon, ham, toast and coffee for breakfast. Lunch and dinner were rice with whatever they caught that day. All meals were buffet. They charged us \$30/day for food (there is no other place on the island to eat. Bud was \$4 per can (I hate to fly 8,000 miles and have to drink an American beer!). Sodas and

ice tea were \$1.50. The staff at the hotel was great. The cook was willing to take suggestions on how to make the food better. Remember, these people are not used to having tourists on their island. The manager of the dive operation was there with us and he ruined the diving. Gregg, from Water Sports Adventures in Kauai, treated us as if we were beginning divers. The first dive he told us 60' for 45 minutes, which didn't go over well with the group of highly experienced divers and instructors. Gregg tried to herd us like we were beginners. We dove off two boats and instead of having each boat away from each other, he made us dive together. The photographers strayed off so Gregg aborted the dive and chewed us out on the surface, yelling about staying together. He threatened to take away our diving for the rest of the trip! Several of us calmed him down and we continued diving. We had looked forward to doing some "exploratory" diving, but never had the chance. We did dive on the *USS Mississinewa*, the only known US ship sunk by a Japanese Suicide Sub. It was only found last April, so it was a thrill diving on it (it rests at 120'). The dive boats are primitive by today's standards. We used two open boats, approximately 25' long, powered by two 40-hp outboards. They did the job, but there was no place to sit and no cover from the sun. The local dive guides were great. However, I was disappointed in the shortage of pelagics. We saw a few white-tipped reef sharks, a couple eagle rays, several turtles, and encountered a

large pod of dolphins. Of course, the locals "live off the land," and harvest what they need to survive. There are lots of small fish: large anemones on just about every dive, with their ever-present clownfish. I saw a few Crown-of-Thorns, and Lionfish, and Clown Triggerfish. There was an abundance of trumpetfish, hogfish, damselfish, surgeonfish, and butterflyfish. The hard corals were in excellent condition as were the soft corals. The giant clams were gorgeous as were the sea fans. We only got to dive six sites, so it is hard to determine what the entire area would be like. Two of the sites were wreck sites, one was where the U.S. Navy sunk landing craft after the war was over. Since there is no recompression chamber, we took long surface intervals, and were cautious on depths for our second dives. The seas were rough, and with the long boat rides on uncomfortable boats, it made for long days on the water. A lot of particulates in the water, made anything other than close-up photography a nightmare. Getting to Ulithi is a chore. We flew out of LAX on Continental, changed planes in Hawaii and headed to Guam where we spent the night. We had an early morning departure for Yap, aboard Continental. At Yap, we boarded two small airplanes, operated by Pacific Missionary Aviation, each with a capacity of eight. We were extremely limited on how much weight we could have, so we left our BC's, regs, surplus clothing, etc. behind at the Yap resort. Ulithi had all new dive equipment, fins, masks, BC's, regs, and computers, which we

could use at no cost. (Ph: 808-821-9321; e-mail info@diveulithi.com; website www.diveulithi.com)

Ulithi Adventure Resort, February 2002, Nikki Mahan, Bellevue, WA.

Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 81 to 83 F, calm. Pristine diving. The operation is new but everyone is eager to learn. We pointed many critters out to the divemasters, they were excited to see them. We saw many cuttlefish interacting with each other. Several fish we couldn't even find in the books. The creatures didn't know what we were so hung around to check us out. We dove a newly discovered (2001) *USS Mississinewa*, a World War II wreck that had us all feeling like we had the ghosts of those 35 men trailing us. Outstanding diving. Worth the helacious trip to get there. We were able to name a dive site, Silent World.

Ulithi Adventure Resort, May 2002, Rick Frost, Pittsburgh, PA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 Feet. Water: 78 to 82 F, calm, choppy. The accommodations were new and quite comfortable but the water was turned off at night, and you were alone in the hotel till morning. They said they would prepare any type of meals you asked for but we ate their cuisine (which was excellent). They do not have a dock so you wade to the boat. There is a weight limit of 60 lbs. on Pacific Missionary Airlines that is the only way there from Yap. Annoying if you have camera equipment. This would be a good side trip from Yap. Several times we dove on sites that no

human being, including the divemaster, had seen before. The wreck of the *Mississinewa* is not to be missed. Probably a trip for divers with at least an intermediate level of experience and non-divers will find nothing to do. The freedom to dive your own profile coupled with the primeval conditions was unbeatable! There was lots of good subject matter except for the large stuff. While their support facilities were nonexistent (they're new to this and just learning) they were always eager and enthusiastic to oblige. They need fresh water buckets on the boat and you bring all the batteries you might need. (Ph: 808-821-9321; e-mail info@diveulithi.com or reservation@diveulithi.com; website www.diveulithi.com)

MIDWAY ISLAND

Midway Sport Divers, Bachelors Officers Quarters (BOQ), July 2001, Tom Wilson, Hanover, NH.

Vis: 30-100 ft. Water: 75-78 F. Logged dives: 1200. We were surprised at the paucity of coral. It reminded us of the Sea of Cortez and Socorro Island south of Baja California. In the winter at Midway, the water temperature gets into the upper 60's, which is the lower limit for tropical coral life. On some dives we dealt with moderately strong currents. We were impressed that the surge created by the long waves that cross the Pacific affected us underwater so that we oscillated back and forth even at 50-60-70-feet down. But it was the fish life that made the diving so great at Midway. That reminded us of Cocos Island. These creatures