

yachts (computer-operated sails): three with up to 148 passengers and 440-ft length, one 308 pax-535 feet. These are upscale, luxurious full-service cruise motorsailers with diving offered (at \$50 for a one tank dive). Cabins are all the same — bright, spacious en-suite with 24-hour cabin service, one larger owner's cabin. Food is world-class and varied, served in open seating restaurant or terrace café. The comparatively small size assures service you will not experience on a larger cruise ship — more like having your own yacht. This is an excellent holiday for the diver with non-diving family members — you dive, they beach it or do a shore excursion. April is NZ's fall, sunny and warm. Diving on the northeast quadrant of North Island can be spectacular — White Island, an active volcano can be dived (Dive White Island in Whakatane does day trips, at <http://www.divewhite.co.nz/>). Bay of Plenty and Bay of Islands are diverse, fishy and have engaging topography with lots of swimthroughs. Tutukaka/Poor Knights offers wreck diving and a spectacular marine preserve with pristine diving. Prices are low, with an exchange of almost NZD \$2.50 to the US Dollar. This St. Maarten-originating dive crew were reluctant to lay on much diving due to a small number of divers, or lack of familiarity with the waters and cool temps. In locations the onboard dive crew are unfamiliar with, don't count on doing much diving, and don't rely on Seattle sales agents to tell you much of value — they seemed clueless. Windstar

boats put in at small, cozy destinations, offering shore excursions, water sports from sailboarding to snorkeling and dive instruction. Prices are over \$4,000/person/one week MSRP, but one can get 40% discounts for advance booking, and some offers include free air to Tahiti. Everything is included. There is a “no tipping required” policy, and “casual elegance” (no ties, jackets, my kind of luxury). A very nice and luxurious vacation with diving in the Caribbean, a spectacular upscale holiday with very good diving in French Polynesia — where we had two dives day with experienced divers from Zodiacs (resort divers were accommodated separately). The dive crew was customer oriented and enthused. French Polynesian diving included colorful coral dive sites with sharks, mantas, Napoleon wrasse and more. (This was our 4th Windstar trip with diving.) Windstar Cruises <http://www.windstarcruises.com/> (800) 258-7245 Dive New Zealand magazine (stories, many links and resources) <http://www.divenewzealand.com>. Divers taken to site by rubber inflatable. Shipboard, crew flexible for rinse, secure storage, etc. (Ph: 877-827-7245; e-mail [info@windstarcruises.com](mailto:info@windstarcruises.com); website [www.windstarcruises.com](http://www.windstarcruises.com))

## PAPUA NEW GUINEA

*Chertan, April 2002, Allan & Barbara Jones (abjones@pacbell.net) Anaheim, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, calm. Our sixth trip*

to the Milne Bay and the best one. The *Chertan* is a comfortable vessel, which sleeps twelve with air conditioning in the cabins. The food is superb and we look forward to the fish, chips, and the fried bananas with ice cream. Topside is a covered photo worktable. E-6 processing — fully automated system with absolutely no film marking or debris! Rob Van Der Loos, an avid photographer, knows where to look for various critters. He has recently published a photographer's guide to the area: "Living Reefs of the Indo-Pacific." We could photograph pink and yellow pygmy seahorses, twin spot gobies, frog fish, regular and flamboyant cuddle fish, a variety of nudibranchs, octopus, eels, and various species of shrimp, pipe fish, and crabs. We did both muck and reef diving alternating between wide angle and macro photography. Manta ray cleaning station — two fourteen-foot mantas stayed long enough for everyone to finish a roll of film. Diving is at your leisure and we usually made two dives in the morning, two or three in the afternoon and a night dive. Coral bleaching is receding and the reefs are in good condition. We were on a private charter with five still and three video photographers. On a 14-day trip, we made forty-nine dives, with many exceeding seventy-five minutes. We stopped at Van Der Loos' resort now under construction at Hoia Bay, scheduled to open in 12-18 months. Our arrangements were handled by Cindi LaRaia at Dive Discovery, [www.divediscovery.com](http://www.divediscovery.com), who always does an excellent job for us, including

controlling Qantas! (Ph: 675-64-11167 (PNG); e-mail [info@Chertan.com](mailto:info@Chertan.com); website [www.chertan.com](http://www.chertan.com))

***Chertan*, May 2002, LeRoy (landersonsprint@earthlink.net)**  
**Salt Lake City, UT.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 150 Feet. Water: 75 to 85 F, choppy currents. While there is some bleaching, which is distressing, there are sections of Deacon's Reef below forty feet that are covered with breathtakingly beautiful coral and dramatic wall formations, surrounded by clouds of colorful fish. There is spotty coral bleaching on other reefs along the north coast, some extensive, some minimal. There is some coral regrowth also in these areas. On the southern coast of Milne Bay, and on the outer open ocean bommies, and by the manta cleaning station, the hard coral formations are breathtaking. We dived non coastal outer open sea bommies, such as Tania's Reef (aka Banana Bommie), and Crinoid City (aka Trish's Bommie), which breathtakingly beautiful, exactly as described in *Undercurrent* articles covering the *Chertan* and *Paradise Sport* operations in Milne Bay. After seeing acres of dead staghorn coral in other areas, both along the north coast and earlier in Palau, it was refreshing to see acres of breathtakingly healthy staghorn corals! The muck diving was fine, at Lauadi (aka Dinah's Beach) and other areas, I saw octopi, frogfish, leaf fish, cuttle fish, a variety of nudibranchs, a new species of sea cucumber, ghost pipefish, mantis shrimp, a baby moray eel, and the first purple hairy ghost

pipefish Rob Van der Loos had ever seen. Rob, the divemaster and boat captain, still enjoys diving after 12,000 dives and is happy to guide divers to the many hard-to-find sites. Overall the finest diving I've experienced. No E6 processing, but ample help with cameras and large areas to work with camera setup and gear.

**Chertan, May 2002, Skip & Mary Harutun, Carbondale, CO.** Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82-85 F. Dives logged: >1250. Owner, Rob, is accommodating and knowledgeable. He's an excellent host! His crew also is fabulous especially Clark and with the super constantly good food from Melita (Molly) the service is beyond reproach. With no bathrooms in the rooms (they're on a different level) and 12 divers. The boat is great but too small. All divers can't eat at a table at the same time or use the dive deck (about 8 ft. wide x 15 ft. long). This boat would be super for eight guests.

**Chertan, September 2002, Jim Jenkins (jajenkins@pacbell.net), Oakland, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 75 to 77 Fahrenheit, calm, choppy, no Currents. On a one to ten scale, 10 for muck lovers; 7 for big fish lovers. 75F to 77 F. Visibility good to very good. Muck dives had 40' or better. Go for the macro critters and the smaller, more intimate boat. There is plenty of large fish life, this trip is for muck divers who also want some variety. About 50% of our diving was muck diving or on reef tops looking for critters. Dives on reefs in open-ocean

produced a few sharks, schools of barracuda, eagle rays, turtles, schools of bump-head parrots, and healthy fish life. From the boat, we saw dolphins, a whale shark, a dugong, a swordfish, and mola molas. Some coral bleaching; the reefs are recovering nicely with large fans, sea whips, abundant black corals, soft corals, etc. Reef-fish are healthy and diverse. While we didn't see everything (no leaf scorpion or lacy scorpion fish), we saw a great variety of exotic nudibranchs, ghost pipefish, snake eels, crocodile fish, scorpion fish, lion fish, blue-ribbon eels, numerous small shrimps and crabs, etc. Surprises like the Wondrous Melibe nudibranchs (3 of them feeding, one nearly 12" long) occurred on nearly every muck dive. Rob knows the sites intimately and excels at finding things. He dives most dives and is happy to guide you. The briefings were good. Generally good food with some delicious meals. Cabin space was adequate and similar to most, smaller boats. Two heads (with showers) on the main deck, shared by all guests. A/C is a single unit under the stairs for all 6 units. Nice lounge area, adequate space for sunning and shade above decks. The boat is very wide for its size. 80% of the diving is from the stern with side and up two sets of steps in the rear. No crowding and easy entries and exits. This is the most relaxed type of "unlimited" diving since you go in when you want, and come back to the boat when you want (although the crew keeps watch and will pick you up in the tender if you want. A few current dives on reefs were from the

zodiac. No EAN. There is a very large table above decks for cameras. The crew carries cameras up to the table after rinsing, and will fetch them back down for you if you're lazy. Rob makes the trip fun and very "productive." Rooms are not made up daily.

***FeBrina, October 2001, Mickey Gershtenson, Golden, CO.*** We boarded at Walindi on New Britain Island spending 10 days diving and disembarked at Kavieng on New Ireland Island. The diving was superb; both the coral and critters were extensive in quantity and genus/species. The visibility varied from 70 to 100 feet. Water was too warm — consistently 86 degrees F. Excellent dive boat. Captain Allan Raabe who owns the boat seems to run a tighter and better ship than non-owner skippers. Always had two "guides" in the water pointing out things to those divers who were interested. They were not necessarily dive masters and were certainly not nursemaids! (Ph: 011-675-9835441 (PNG); fax 011-675-9835638 (PNG); e-mail Alan@FeBrina.com; website www.febrina.com)

***FeBrina, June 2002, Gary A Lindenbaum, MD, Rose Valley, PA.*** We were picked up at Hoskins airport by a representative of Walindi resort. The drive takes an hour. We were greeted at the boat by Mick, the new captain, and Andrew, who is usually the cook on *Star Dancer* and was filling in. Divemaster Andrew was temporarily not diving because he had been bent. Mick is more laid back than

Alan Raabe and does not display Alan's rather manic style. Mick is a capable boat captain, highly motivated to please, and a nice guy. *FeBrina* was clean and comfortable. I had A/C problems and plumbing problems in my cabin and the water maker broke, but all problems were fixed within forty-eight hours. After 20 live-aboard trips, mechanical problems during a cruise are no surprise to me. For the most part, the food was very good. I would have preferred more choices for dinner, more variety, and at least one meal with seafood. Lunches were huge affairs with multiple choices for main courses, soup, fruits, and salads. All very good! Breakfast was the usual live-aboard bacon and eggs, "cholesterol disaster" as Stan Waterman once said. Abundant fruit and another choice such as pancakes or French toast. Andrew's strong point is baking and desserts. His mid dive snacks such as "Neutral Buoyancy Bickies," chocolate chip cookies — more chocolate than cookie — were a meal in themselves. Andrew is a PNG native with plenty of stories to tell. Elsie, the head divemaster, was another "refugee" from *Star Dancer*. She is an excellent finder of macro stuff. I shoot digital stills and left with over 2000 images, mostly macro. Elsie was aided during the dives by Nelson, the boat's engineer, and Josie, another *Star Dancer* refugee. The dive operation ran smoothly and safely, despite much of the divemasters time spent trying to prevent one guest from killing himself and the reef creatures. Elsie lacked a tank banger to attract attention to the critters she had found,

so I gave her mine at the end of the trip. The dive operation was more regimented than previous cruises. Maybe this is a Peter Hughes thing? They offered five dives a day; one before breakfast, two between breakfast and lunch, one before dinner, and a night dive. This was a new concept on *FeBrina*. I prefer to dive my own schedule and will, occasionally, do as many as seven dives in a day. When I requested an extra dive one day, they granted the request without any fanfare. I like getting into my gear on a small boat like *FeBrina* and diving off the mother ship as opposed to diving off tenders. When I've been on larger boats such as *Star Dancer* by myself, groups of guests traveling together or couples tend to keep to themselves and I get lonely. The layout of *FeBrina* literally forces everybody to get acquainted and "friendly." *FeBrina* is a photographer-friendly boat with more than enough padded storage space on the dive deck for cameras and related equipment. Ample storage space is provided for dive gear and tons of charging consoles for 110V and 220V. *FeBrina's* crew handles cameras nicely and assists with onboard repairs. This cruise produced sharks on almost every dive in multiple numbers and species, a comforting sign considering rumors about finning and long line fishing in the Indo Pacific. This *FeBrina* cruise was my best ever, despite the absence of Alan, Hannah, and divemaster Andrew (sort of). Mick is a competent skipper, highly motivated, and a nice guy. I'm sure the *FeBrina* office will let you

know when Alan is doing a *FeBrina* charter if you wish. Tips: Expect delays. I have never flown Air NuiGuini without some delay. Plan your entry into the PNG with a day layover before your connecting flight to prevent you from missing a connection due to a delayed flight and give time for your luggage to catch up if it gets lost. Dive shops are not abundant — if you lose your luggage, it's a major problem. Avoid checking your luggage all the way through to your final destination to make it easier to locate it if mislaid. *FeBrina* does not have rental gear. Plan the fewest number of flights to get to your destination — save time, minimize the amount of "schlepping" through strange airports, and reduce the chance of lost luggage. Air Nuguini has direct flights to Port Moresby from major Asian cities such as Singapore. Air NuiGuini allows divers 40 kilos of luggage; overweight baggage charges are \$1U.S. per kilo, but must be paid in Kina. Spend your leftover Kina in PNG, because the only country that I've been able to get rid of the Kina in has been Australia. Flying to PNG will take you through cool destinations such as Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore. Take an extra day or two in these places. Your work can do without you for a couple more days. Life is short!

***FeBrina*, May 2002, Dan Purnell**  
**(dan-purnell@compuserve.com)**  
**Vancouver, WA.** Vis: 60-150 ft.  
 Water: 78-82 F. Dives logged: 360.  
 The *FeBrina*, under the command of Captain Alan Raabe, is an incredible

experience. Alan and his topnotch staff are exceptional. They are professional, friendly, and helpful and share their insights about the people, history and islands. The food is out of this world. Alan provides quite a bit of local color that makes the *FeBrina* rock. Alan and the Divemasters know the PNG waters like the backs of their hands. They chose a great mix of muck and big fish action. They are experts at finding the smallest of critters. Ghost fish, pipe fish, leaf and devil scorpion fish, rock fish, mandarin fish, sea horses, turtles, sharks, ribbon eels, morays, too many varieties of anemone fish to count, cuttlefish, dolphins, lion fish, bat fish, jacks, barracuda, tuna and a rainbow of reef fish. It's all quite incredible. The reefs are pristine and teaming with life. The soft and hard corals are pristine, healthy and in places gigantic. There are some barrel sponges and sea fans almost the size of skyscrapers, well maybe not quite that large. One highlight of the trip, and an absolute must, is the Jerry Garcia Memorial dive. Alan personally leads this expedition. Another must dive is Jayne's Gulch, where visibility can be impaired by schools of jacks, tuna and sharks. Jayne, the *FeBrina's* legendary chef and dive master pioneer, discovered this dive site. Dolphins are a common occurrence. One day we snorkeled with a pod of several hundred. They raced all around us and played. It was an awesome experience watching them in the clear blue waters.

***FeBrina*, May 2002, Fred Turoff**  
(fturoff@astro.temple.edu) Phila-

**delphia, PA.** Vis: 30-100 ft. Water: 83-84 F. Dives logged: 500+. Captain Alan Raabe is a good character, he kept us smiling and offered much info. on the dive sites. All divemasters did their best to point out various life forms. Muck diving opened a new world to me. How did they find 1/4 in. pygmy seahorse on a 5' sea fan (two locations)? Saw many nudibranchs, stone fish, leaf scorpion fish, plus several ghost pipefish and cuttle fish. Warm water made diving easy. Critters galore. Stuff in water column made wide-angle photography hit or miss, but close-up photos are dear and full of color.

***FeBrina*, August 2002, Vicki Singley**  
(vsingley@hotmail.com) Houston, TX. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82 F. Dives logged: 125. Dive restrictions enforced: time/approximately one hour. My two sons, their wives and I had a fabulous trip to the Kavieng area. The owner, Alan Raabe, was onboard as a guest and he definitely lived up to his colorful reputation. Equally colorful is the new captain, Mick, another fun-loving Aussie. For the next dive season, Alan is going to designate which trips he will do on the *FeBrina*, and which trips he'll do in the *Star Dancer*, to avoid the confusion of this past year. However, nobody should hesitate to go with Mick — he is absolutely great. The crew was wonderful. Excellent divemasters, great food and personal attention to every diver. Luckily, we only had eight divers onboard. So the whole experience — both above and below the water — was intimate and individualized. The diving was terrific.

Plenty of pelagics, an astounding variety of medium and small stuff, and mind blowing hard and soft corals. We saw some things that I have never, or rarely, seen — mandarin fish, leaf scorpion fish, ghost pipefish, sea-horses, Spanish dancer etc. Some dives had a lot of current, so if you don't want to deal with that go to Kimbe Bay. Some viz wasn't as good as I would have hoped, but this was a minor blip. One of my sons and I also did a land trip before the dive trip. It is a fascinating country and not to be missed. We did four days on the Sepik River aboard the Sepik Spirit, and then two days in the Western Highlands. We were originally scheduled to go to the Southern Highlands (Ambua Lodge) but could not go because civil unrest set off by national elections. You have to be flexible traveling in PNG. Both our land and dive trips were handled by Kirsten Treais at Reef and Rain forest (Kirsten@reefrainforest.com). She is extremely knowledgeable and great to work with.

**Golden Dawn, January 2002, John Sommerer** (john.sommerer@jhuapl.edu) **Silver Spring, MD.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 100+ Feet. Water: 83 to 86 F, calm currents. Fantastic operation. Captain Craig De Wit living and enjoying his dream; he typically did three dives a day himself and was proud to show off "his" reefs (no coddling during the dives). Crew service-oriented, friendly. Magnificent boat, comfortable and beautifully maintained. Even e-mail on the boat.

Want to dive a site again after the boat needs to move to night anchorage? No problem: a dinghy and crew member waits for you and brings you back. Eastern Fields has magnificent, pristine coral; incredible variety. A few days kind of slow for pelagics, but there was always something fascinating. It doesn't seem reasonable to keep a book "1001 Nudibranchs" until you've been here. Many days with unbelievable big fish action, e.g., tuna bigger and scarier than sharks. "Carl's Ultimate" not oversold a bit. "Point P" provided dozens of sharks swimming in 100+ ft vis with no current. After a dive there, Blue Corner can stuff it. Coastal diving the first day interesting, but lousy vis at this time. Very strong currents on many dives. No land in sight, though the boat has both dynamic and static stabilizers and is comfortable even in higher seas. De Wit has about five different itineraries around PNG. Fascinating country! We trekked in the Tari Valley — just the two of us and 30,000 Huli. UW Photography: Great for the digitally inclined. Captain Craig De Wit even burned a CD-ROM of his week's photo for us. No onboard film development for those still using chemistry. (Ph: 675 325 6500; e-mail inquiry@mvgoldendawn.com; website www.mvgoldendawn.com)

**Golden Dawn, August 2002, Jim Jenkins** (jajenkins@pacbell.net), **Oakland, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. 14 nights out of Madang to the Manus, Hermit and Ninigo Islands south to Wewak. Visibility up to 200'. 79F near Madang to 84F in the North.

This was one of my best trips. EAN highly recommended. Mobula, eagle, marble rays; white-tip, black-tip, gray reef silvertip sharks; huge napoleon wrasses, schools of bumphead parrots, jacks, barracuda, oceanic triggers, snappers, more. Healthy, large variety and quantity of triggers, angels, bat fish, lion fish, flatheads, scorpion fish, octopus, etc.; huge sea fans, gorgonians, whips, etc. Good variety of nudi's and some critters on wreck dives. We really didn't spend time looking for critters. Craig de Wit, owner/operator accompanied divers on some dives. No other dive guides were available. Briefings were generally excellent. The boat does 4 or 5 different itineraries around PNG. The sites are pristine. No briefings like "there are two leaf scorpion fish on the wall at 60'." Food: Best I've had on any boat and almost any resort. Divers are treated as responsible adults. A glass of wine with dinner does not mean no night diving. Clean, comfortable, and sufficiently roomy for a relatively small boat. Cabins 4 & 5 are on the main deck with ensuite heads. The crew cleaned the cabins and made beds daily. Each cabin has separate A/C. The lounge is spacious for 8 – 10 people. Meals are served at a large table above decks with a nice breeze. A wide-screen projection unit with surround sound for watching movies when there is no night dive. About 40% of diving is from the boat via side entries. Return is via a single set of steps up to the side. The steps flap and move wildly in the current and swell. I found this no problem. Others had some difficulty; Craig had

them just surface for Zodiac pickup. The crew was happy to take gear to the tender and help you put it on at the dive site. Only three photographers and they used up the table and floor space in the lounge. The suiting-up area and gear storage was adequate. The whole crew did an outstanding job. Fills were perfect. Craig ran the tour and dove with us: good stories, good dive guide, and very enthusiastic about the diving. Nice touches such as rinsing all the gear daily and doing the final gear clean up for you. E6 available; projector & screen; good charging space; work space limited.

***Moonlighting*, March 2002, Uwe Haensch (uwahaensch@t-online.de) Flensburg, Denmark.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 10 to 100 Feet. Water: 80 to 85 F, calm. *Moonlighting* is a 50 ft, fully air-conditioned live-aboard that takes up to six passengers in three cabins. The (best) port cabin has a private ensuite with shower, the starboard cabin shares en-suite and shower with the V-berth cabin in the bow. The cabins are small for two people, not much room to store things. I had one cabin to myself (only three guests). The boat has a large salon on the main deck and a covered sundeck on top where sometimes lunch/dinner is served. The boat is run by an Australian/Scottish couple, very nice and fun. She is a great cook. The atmosphere is family-like (the owners live on the boat), enjoyable and relaxing. *Moonlighting* is not particularly well-suited for diving. It has a big and stable platform and



well-designed tank racks. A freshwater shower is available and towels and snacks after each dive. The “dive deck” is a small space behind the salon, which will be cramped with 6-7 divers. Besides a “bucket of opportunity” there are no facilities for photographers. The boat has a desalinator and I would rate the compressor medium regarding noise and capacity. I did a ten-day trip from Alotau (Milne Bay) to Madang. Quite some time of motoring was involved, but only twice overnight. Not a fast boat (7-9 knots). They only offer this trip twice a year; the boat came straight out of a refit in Australia. The first two days were spent in the Milne Bay area, then the Blackjack B17 bomber wreck at Cape Vogel followed the next day. With the boat continuing north, the wrecks off Tufi and a dusk dive at the Tufi wharf were next. The wreck of the S. Jacob followed by two days diving at offshore reefs. Farther north, the Tami islands and the Finschhafen area were visited. After a long passage in rough weather Long and Crown islands were reached for two days of diving. The last day was spent outside Madang diving at Planet Rock, the wrecks of the Henry Leith and the B25 Mitchell bomber. Up to four dives per day with much flexibility. The briefing covered all aspects of the site, but what to see was only mentioned briefly. Most of the time Tony or Lorraine (the owners) was in the water as well, but if you did not ask they would not lead the dive, show you things or serve as a buddy. Solo diving was the way to go, fine for me. They will show you any rare small

things that otherwise you would not see. The diving was the best. The underwater life was always pristine and variety and colors were unreal. Sharks, rays, schools of barracudas, jacks, travelers, Spanish mackerel, tuna — the whole nine yards of reef fish, colorful and abundant soft and hard corals and all the rare and small creatures, lots of everything. Because of the season and occasional runoff from streams, some sites had limited visibility. *Moonlighting* is the only live-aboard around Madang. There was diving in a lagoon where probably almost nobody has ever dived before 50 miles away from land. There was blue water, ripping current diving on top of an underwater seamount. There was muck diving over sandy bottom in 15 feet visibility and there was world class wreck diving. Comfortable journey on a boat that is well run by a pleasant and capable husband/wife team. (Ph: +61-145 130 880; e-mail [info@blueseacharters.com](mailto:info@blueseacharters.com); website [www.blueseacharters.com](http://www.blueseacharters.com))

***Paradise Sport, September 2001,***  
**Martha & Jeff Hubbard**  
**([hubbard182@att.net](mailto:hubbard182@att.net)) Glenmont,**  
**NY. Vis: 40-60 ft. Water: 79-81 F.**  
 Dives logged: 970 each. Milne Bay is remote, but jet service from Port Moresby is fairly reliable. Mike Ball's crew will meet your flight. “Muck diving” — small benthic creatures — held our interest better than expected and makes Milne Bay special. Reef diving and corals are good, though there was some heat-associated bleaching last year. (The briefed dives avoid the bleached areas, but we saw

it by asking to visit sites at the same moorings that we had seen before.) Not much current, but a sausage and Dive-Alert come in handy. Crew members deserve all the praise they receive, including the office personnel in Cairns. It rained a lot and we hardly noticed. It's hard to pick a "best dive" but flashlight fish (Photoblepharon) on a night dive at The Ranch were memorable and the B-17 Blackjack is among the dives of a lifetime. Plenty of freedom for advanced divers. (Ph: 800-952-4319 or +61 (0)7 40 315484 (Australia); e-mail mbde@mikeball.com or resv@mikeball.com; website www.mikeball.com)

**Paradise Sport, November 2001, Wendy Beach** (beach@together.net) Vergennes, VT. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 Feet. Water: 79 to 84 F, calm no currents. 4 staff to 21 guests (some onboard training going on), but the experience on the boat was first rate. The diving and the land tours were superb. Briefings were accurate, sites were well researched, sites were large enough so that you could dive with your buddy without seeing other divers. The ship was spacious, and the dive deck so user friendly — diving four or even five times a day was easy and enjoyable. The food was well done. The cruise director was experienced and professional.

**Paradise Sport, April 2002, Thomas Berne, Los Angeles, CA.** Vis: 40-70 ft. Water: 84-86 F. Dives accrued: 160. Dive restrictions enforced: 130'. The USC Department of Surgery takes a

dive charter each year and this is the best we have done. The boat, the crew, the weather, the food and what we saw underwater was all outstanding. The "muck diving" was initially challenging, but once we learned what to look for there were many critters that were amazingly beautiful but "firsts" for most of us.

**Star Dancer, September 2001, Jim Weber, Wiekcliffe, OH.** Vis: 50-100 ft. Water: 82 F. Logged dives: 400. Great boat with easy access off dive platform. No skiff diving. Excellent crew. Food fair — cooked with flame throwers and napalm. Warm water. Warm air. Nitrox available. Good camera table. Rental equipment good and easily available. Cabins clean and nice. Good showers. (Ph: 800-932-6237 or 305-669-9391; e-mail dancer@peterhughes.com; website www.peterhughes.com)

**Star Dancer, January 2002, James Lyle** (jlyle@beachnet.com) Hermosa Beach, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 125 Feet. Water: 85 to 86 F, calm currents. Great boat, fantastic crew and wonderful warm water diving. We were told that we were limited to 70 pounds of luggage each in two checked bags, but were not charged for excess. The coral is in good shape and the fish and invert life is plentiful and healthy. Lots of space on camera table.

**Star Dancer, June 2002, Mike Toombs** (toombs@attbi.com) Colleyville, TX. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 200 Feet.

Water: 83 to 85 F, calm. Great room, large comfortable bed, adequate storage, and good private bathroom and shower. Good a/c with a controllable thermostat. 5-star service and gourmet dining. Friendly, happy crew made sure you had a great time. Captain Alan Rabbe dined with a different group every evening, was personable and a great story teller. Chef Andrew produced fantastic meals, even for the vegetarians. His death by chocolate dessert was to die for. Service was superb. You could not even get up to refill your glass without the crew offering to do it. Captain Rabble's humor kept everyone laughing and his crew functioning perfectly; they even put your fins on you. We moored over great dive sites, making long swims unnecessary. A trip to the "Witus" for muck diving was incredible. Ken Knezick at Island Dreams made the trip hassle-free except for Air Nuigini's 66 lb. baggage allowance and 11 lb. carry-on requirement. The "best" of the eight live-aboards we have been on. Large multilevel table, with compressed air, just for photographers. Separate charging station could have been a bit larger, but everyone shared the multiple strip connections.

***Star Dancer*, July 2002, Jody and Elissa Thompson**  
(descentline@attbi.com) **Corona, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 86 to 88 F, calm, currents. Pristine, healthy reefs, a backdrop of active and inactive volcanoes, jungle, WWII history, amazing people. A glimpse of PNG.

We planned eleven days in PNG: seven days aboard on Peter Hughes *Star Dancer*, four days at Walindi Plantation, one day rest stops in both directions at the Cairns Colonial Club in Australia. Not only was our dive gear lost once but twice! (dive bags and cameras short tagged to Guam at LAX. Laptop missed flight from Cairns to Port Moresby. We booked through Peter Hughes Dive Easy Travel and after some worrying a sleepless night and phone calls, Jeff and Terri could get our dive bags to us (via Tokyo!) in time to make the boat. The laptop took another week, but Jock, *Star Dancer's* Captain, and all around great guy offered us his if needed. *Star Dancer's* accommodations are first class. We had cabin two. It has a tub, queen bed, roomy storage, large picture window, air conditioning, plenty hot water and perfectly working toilets. Every morning beverages are brought to your room and laundry is collected. Andrew "six star Chef of the Pacific" works his magic with local food. We're vegetarians and Andrew made fresh from scratch soups, muffins, main courses, snacks and his incredible chocolate cake — alone worth the plane ticket to PNG! An elegant sit down dinner was served every night. *Star Dancer* carries an extensive collection of reference books and we spent time identifying the creatures we had seen. Diving was of two types: submerged bommies encrusted with corals, sponges and surrounded by an ever busy ecosystem of invertebrates and fishes of every color and description. (Depth 60-120 ft) and shallower

“Muck diving” (0-40 ft) where we found the strangest creatures ever! Week one we encountered strong currents and clouds, week two brought sunshine and little current. See our trip photos and additional info at [www.descentline.com](http://www.descentline.com). After disembarking, we checked into Walindi. On August 5 dormant volcano Mount Pago erupted and closed the airport stranding everyone. Again, Peter Hughes Diving came through for us: *Star Dancer* came back to Walindi to help. We and other guests became stowaways! Via ship’s phone and e-mail they helped us arrange new flights out of Rabaul. Must haves in PNG: trip insurance, phone/e-mail addresses of family at home and most importantly a desire for unexpected adventure. The trip of a lifetime.

**Telita, February 2002, Ridgely Duvall ([wokwhisk@attbi.com](mailto:wokwhisk@attbi.com))**  
**Cambridge, MA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 25 to 125 Feet. Water: 84 to 87 F, calm. Boarded the recently refitted *Telita* at Tufi. Had seven friendly and helpful crew to the eight (of a possible 10) of us. They became friends. Captain Jack Martin, ex-shrimp fisherman (Gulf of Carpentaria), fascinating raconteur, gentle and capable, dove with us about half our dives, which averaged four per day (air only), as we made our way south toward the China Straits. Jack was a knowledgeable guide and enthusiastic naturalist; he was trying to learn the ins and outs of a new darkroom and had mixed success. Some photographers were disap-

pointed. (Ph: +612 93993936; e-mail [info@telitacruises.com](mailto:info@telitacruises.com); website [www.telitacruises.com](http://www.telitacruises.com))

## SOLOMON ISLANDS

**Bilikiki, June 2002, Nick Ferris.** The *Bilikiki* operation is based in Honiara, Guadalcanal, capital of the Solomon Islands. There is a sister ship, the *Spirit of the Solomons*. The *Bilikiki* has ten spacious air-conditioned staterooms, all about the same size, each with its own private “facility.” The crew of 11 includes managers/divemasters Monte Sheppard and Michelle Gaut, a delightful and competent Australian couple. The ship serves tasty three meals a day plus in-between cookies, popcorn, and fruit. Drinks from the bar on the honor system. Most diving is from two “tinnies,” aluminum open boats that pickup divers after each dive. Divers are helped back aboard via the ladder at the stern. But first the boatman takes the camera from the diver and stows it forward. There is a large, sheltered, 2-layered camera table on the dive deck. Two large dip tanks are off limits to anything but cameras. As more cameras come back from a dive, those in the tanks are removed to the table. In the salon are more tables for camera preparation. E-6 processing is available (US\$11). First, rigged tanks are loaded into the tinnies. Then cameras, then divers. A divemaster or boat handler helps each diver into his B.C. Only six divers per tinny. The back roll is executed on the count of “three.” Some memorable confusion developed with the introduction of