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

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

### RED SEA

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

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

### Egypt

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

divers dove with 12 liter steel tanks. 15 liter are available as is Nitrox. My favorite site was Shab Sheer, both the East and West side. The coral gardens are just like nothing I have seen. Lots of fish, giant black eels, blue spotted rays and white tip reef sharks and turtles. On our drift dive along Abu Ros Soma, we saw turtles, big eagle rays and three sharks. **(Ph: + 20 65 253911 or + 20 65 251040/1; e-mail Safaga@Barakuda-Diving.com; website www.barakuda-diving.com)**

**Divers International/Sofitel, August 2002, David Bryan (dabmushi@aol.com) Great Missenden, Bucks.** Experience: 51-100 dives Vis: 40 to 70 Feet. Water: 70 to 75 Fahrenheit, calm. Accommodation at the Sofitel was good. I live in the UK so travel was fairly easy. Decided to use dive operation on site as web site looked good and had own jetty at hotel. In reality had to be bused to town to get the boat. Logistics were poor and often it was an hour or two from meeting at the hotel's dive center to the boat actually sailing. Two dive trip could mean meeting at 8.45am and not being back at the hotel until about 6.00pm — an appalling waste of time. Lunch and drinks on boat weren't too bad but cost extra. All gear has to be transferred into plastic crates and they look after it and take to the boat every day. They never lost anything but it never looked that reliable a system. Sometimes had to wait up to 45 mins after getting back to hotel before gear arrived so that I could rinse it. On one three dive trip we decided to sit out the second dive.

After lunch we just sailed back to port. When I asked what was happening they said not enough people wanted to do the third dive. We had been at the dive center for 7.45 and got back at about 4.30 so all that for just one dive. Coral in poor condition in many places. Saw no large pelagics at all. Only large fish was a good sized napoleon wrasse. Smaller fish more plentiful but overall I was disappointed. Once I counted 14 boats moored at the same site for lunch — each capable of carrying 25 divers. Its just too much. Ports are a zoo as well with too many boats for the jetty space. On the last day I wanted to just do a shore dive. I had snorkeled over the "house reef" and it looked quite good. Max depth about 25-30 ft but they wouldn't let me dive it without a divemaster at a \$30 charge because I didn't have advanced certification. A few harsh words were exchanged but they wouldn't budge. Overall a nice place with friendly people but they need to get their act together with the diving or they are going to kill their main attraction. Instead, try Red Sea Diving College or Camel Club or Ocean College. **(e-mail info@diversintl.com; website www.diversintl.com)**

### **Israel and Egypt**

**Aqua Sport, June 2001, Lorey Fischer (corey@atjt.com) Kentfield, CA.** Vis: 60-80 ft. Water: 78-80 F. Logged dives: 125. Eilat itself is pretty dived out but the Marine Reserve is trying hard to restore Fringing Reef just off shore. Moses Rock — a pinnacle at 30' is well

populated by reef fish, eels, snappers, puffers, triggerfish, fairy basslets (Red Sea type — different species from Caribbean), red octopus, banner fish. But the best thing about Aqua Sport is that they have a branch in Taba, just across the Egyptian border. We drove to border in their van, walked across with our gear (an hour of red tape each way) and boarded a 40' dive boat at the Taba Hilton. Did two tanks a day at pristine sites on Egypt's Sinai Coast (Al Mukhabila, Maxwell's, the Gjord etc.) Never saw another boat. Most divers were Dutch and British and fairly experienced. Good divemaster, excellent briefings. Stone fish, dozens of lion fish, jacks, octopus, Red Sea coral groupers, Red Sea anemone fish etc. (Ph: 972-8-6334404; e-mail [info@aqua-sport.com](mailto:info@aqua-sport.com); website [www.aqua-sport.com](http://www.aqua-sport.com))

### United Arab Emirates

**Al Boom Diving, July 2002, Phil Hamilton ([Jeepster@scubadiving.com](mailto:Jeepster@scubadiving.com))**  
**Sugar Land, TX.** Experience: 51-100 dives Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 90 to 91 F, calm. Al Boom diving is at the Sandy Beach Hotel in Khor Fakkan. Shark Island — 45ft/36 min — is off the coast. The air temperatures were in the 120s F. Because of the location in the Gulf of Oman, open to the Arabian Sea, the fish life was much better than the Persian Gulf. Clownfish were in abundance. Everywhere were anemones, each fiercely guarded by its clown. We also found a Moorish idol, some Oman butterflies, a moon wrasse, orange dottyback, bridled triggerfish, and several bluetail boxfish. In the summer, the hot water

is clouded with bacteria and plankton. I assume much better photo opportunities exist in cooler months. As we circled the small island, we found yellow ear angelfish, gardeners butterflies, two bar bream, and an exquisite collared butterflyfish. I paid about 200 Dirham in Dubai, and a little less in Khor Fakkan, which equates to \$50-55 US, including most of the gear. I took my regs, computer, mask and camera only. The busy season is winter as Europeans (primarily from the UK) escape the miserable northern winters. Over the winter months, I am told the air temps are in the low 80s F, and the water is about the same. (Ph: 971-4-3422993; e-mail [abdiving@emirates.net.ae](mailto:abdiving@emirates.net.ae))

**Scuba Dubai, June 2002, Phil Hamilton ([jeepster@scubadiving.com](mailto:jeepster@scubadiving.com))**  
**Sugar Land, TX.** Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 35 to 40 Feet. Water: 88 to 91 F, calm. Thursday and Friday are the weekend here. Scuba Dubai is at the Meridian Hotel. Like most dive shops in the region, Scuba Dubai has a couple of 28-foot boats with Bimini tops. We dove the *SMB Barge* wreck, over 150 feet in length, which sank 2 miles offshore of Dubai. The vessel is upside down, with a gaping hole in the port side, and several other holes as the craft decays in the highly saline environment. The barge is broken in the center, and one can penetrate way through boat, and make limited penetrations in other locations. There are crab traps, and fishing line, and ropes and lines left over from her working days, so one has to be mindful. The water is quite salty due

to the incredible heat and evaporation. We descended the line right into the hole in the barge's hull. All around swarmed a huge school of snapper. We kept going down to the sand and headed for the stern. Most of the fish either were a totally different hue, or were altogether different species than one sees in the Caribbean. The water is rich in plankton, cutting visibility. We found several crab traps scattered around the wreck. We had to rehydrate on our surface interval. The temperature was 122 F. so several of us did our surface interval in the water, where it was 90 degrees. Second dive was to the stern, and swimming through the wreck, then we came up through the wreckage on her starboard quarter, and ascended to the bottom of the hull. We descended into the wreck, seeing daylight on the other side. There is a virtual tunnel through the center bulkhead area, an easy swim through. Down in the hold, we spotted a school of whitish goatfish, and more angels. Dive one: 74ft 25 min. Dive 2: 77ft 26 min. (Ph: 00-971-4-3317433)

## SEYCHELLES

Billed as 3000 miles from anywhere, this group of islands has been trying to promote itself to divers as THE place to see whale sharks, but this is unproved. From time to time live-aboards run to the out-island of Aldabra, which is reported to have excellent diving. . . . Island prices are high. . . .

## THAILAND

Thailand is a bargain. . . . Whale shark season is usually from March through May, with Richelieu Rock providing an excellent chance of encounters. . . . Trips to the Burma Banks were stopped for political reasons, but this area has been re-opened along with some other new areas. . . .

**Big Blue, August 2001, Maureen Flood, Washington, DC.** Vis: 20-45 ft. Logged dives: 15. Dive restrictions enforced: depth limits. The on-land operations of Big Blue are a mess, so I stay elsewhere if not taking a course. The instructors are amazing. The diving on KoTao is not so good, as much of the coral is dead. Due to the time of the year, visibility was low. But overall, we had a good time. (Ph: 66-77-456050; e-mail [info@bigbluediving.com](mailto:info@bigbluediving.com); website [www.bigbluediving.com](http://www.bigbluediving.com))

**Dive Asia, Evason Phuket, April 2002, Kinson Tong (kinsontong@hotmail.com) Fanling, NT.** Experience: 51-100 dives Vis: 50 to 100 Feet. Calm. Diving at PP Island was extremely disappointing. Water was murky, many sea urchins but not many fishes. More than 30 divers on the boat, so overcrowded both above and under water. Saw some coral shrimps and ghost pipe fish. Two leopard sharks, one cruising and other resting at the bottom. (Ph: +66-0-76330598 or 76284117; e-mail [info@diveasia.com](mailto:info@diveasia.com); website [www.diveasia.com](http://www.diveasia.com))