

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; website 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; website 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

was uncharacteristically cloudy. (Ph: 800-262-DIVE or 310-510-2350; e-mail prneptune@aol.com; website www.scubaluv.com)

Long Beach

Express Divers, Island Time, June 2002, William and Frances Ungerman (Elitecorps@aol.com) Santa Ana, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 10 to 20 Feet. Water: 66 to 58 F, choppy currents. A great little dive operation for Catalina trips. They advertise "resort style diving" and that's what you get. Two departures each dive day: AM at 0800 and PM at 1330. Fast, 75 minute run to Santa Catalina. Extremely accommodating and helpful. People oriented with no big hand out for tips. It was never mentioned. Skipper "Chris" is former Navy SEAL. D/M Darren watchful, but no hand holder. Aluminum 80 tanks are furnished, bring your own weights. Boat is a fast Pro 48 at 22 knots. Ask where the guests want to dive. \$78 for a two tank dive. You only spend a half day on the boat, leaving the balance (or prior portion) free. Bravo all around. Rinse bucket. They help with entry and exits. (Ph: 866-488-3483; e-mail expressdiverslongbeach@msn.com; website www.expressdivers.com)

San Diego

DCI San Diego, February 2002, Ted Gold (tgold@racalate.com) Huntington Beach, CA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 5 to 20 Feet. Water: 51 to 52 F, calm currents. The good: the challenge of the big San Diego

wrecks *Yukon* and *Ruby E.* The Bad: Visibility can be abysmal to the point of inducing some disorientation. Overall the DCI service is excellent. They service Wreck Alley, offshore San Diego islands and kelp beds, and handle open water shark cage diving. The *Yukon* is an advanced dive due to depth, penetration possibilities, VIS, and disorientation. The *Ruby E* is a better wreck as it has plenty of marine life and sits upright. On the *Yukon* there is little marine life, but it is perfect for wreck training. (Dive Connections Inc.: Ph: 888-420-3047 or 619-523-9282; fax 619-523-9286; e-mail Info@GottaDive.com; website www.gottadive.com)

Lois Ann, February 2002, Judy Flagg (judyflagg8@aol.com) Wallingford, CT. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 45 to 50 F, choppy. Full day, three tank trip out to the Coronado Islands. The boat was clean and the staff polite and helpful. They served breakfast soon after we left the dock. The almost two hour boat ride was comfortable. Woody, the boat captain took care to pick sites that had less current and gave a great dive briefing for those on our first trip to the Coronado's. Snacks and then lunch was served between the dives. Great diving, we dove in drysuits and were comfortable. The vis was 60 feet. We saw and had interaction with plenty of seals. Lots of small schooling fish! The trip back was exciting, we were not only treated to dolphins but also saw a whale. Great dive experience. (Ph: 800-201-4381 or 858-780-0130;

e-mail info@loisann.com; website www.loisann.com)

LIVE-ABOARDS

CANADA

Nautilus Explorer, December 2001, Sami Laine (sami@kelpdiver.com) Santa Clara, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 42 to 45 F, calm currents. Fourth trip on the boat, an excellent operation, outstanding value. Crew is courteous and fun, as long as you don't endanger yourself or others; safety conscious. ISO Quality Certificate. Main boat is excellent: functional, clean and nice, not flashy. Staterooms have adequate space, top deck suites comfortable. Many invisible upgrades have increased comfort: more sound insulation, new silent hydraulic pump for winches. Food is good home cooking, could use more non-meat options (fish, vegetable dishes, etc.) and more imagination. Dive "skiff" is huge and outstanding: good ladders, spacious gear stations, fast. Runs to dive sites are short, just enough time to gear up; be ready to splash and you can maximize the bottom time that is limited to 50 mins. New year in BC equals cold water, proper drysuit setup a must. Thorough dive briefings. Nitrox, Argon and large steel tanks available (request in your reservation). Read the "What to Bring" section of reservation package, as you need to

bring own towel and toiletries. Very large camera table, separate charging station with stable power (110v) and plentiful outlets, onboard E-6, galley has built-in slide table and power outlets for your own tables or laptops. Two TVs in lounge for video review. (Ph: 888 4 DIVE BC; e-mail mike@divebc.com; website www.divebc.com)

Nautilus Explorer, April 2002, Nikki Mahan, Bellevue, WA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 46 to 51 F, surge, currents. We did an exploratory trip to the Hakai Pass area; most of the dives were very good. We were buzzed by a huge stellar sea lion at 60 feet, cool! Browning Wall was the most spectacular area with incredible red, purple and hot pink soft corals and of course the Irish Lords, decorator crabs, war bonnets, grunt sculpins. The six wolf eels at Dillon Rock are amazing. Many huge octos were out playing. The dive off Nakwato Island with the 20 knot current, to see the long necked goose barnacles, is always great. This is truly some of the best diving in the world. Mike and Mary Ann Lever have one of the best live-aboard operations I've been on. Mike's dive briefings and knowledge of the dive sites is the best. The boat is comfortable and accommodating. I have to mention Jud and Carrie as two of my favorite all time crew members.

COLOMBIA

Sea Hunter, June 2002, Nikki Mahan, Bellevue, WA. Experience: