

Vis: 20 to 40 Feet. Water: 73 to 76 F, currents. Advertised as a luxury yacht. Would have gladly traded the etched glass and fancy paneling for more sound deadener and roll dampeners. Rooms were minuscule, 6 ft x 7 ft. Being 6 ft 2 in, I could not even stretch out on the horrible mattress. The room was so noisy and vibrating and the boat rolled so much, we slept on top deck when the friend of the owner (a non paying guest) was not having a loud drunken party. The room a/c was either on, a freezing 66F, or off, hot and stuffy. The mini combination shower, head, stunk. There was no storage space and we had a superior room. The briefings were lousy. They did not tell you about the ripping current that slammed you back into the boat after doing a giant stride. They told you to stay with the divemaster, who proceeded to do aerobic enduro swims, so when you stopped to take a picture, he was gone. We were picked up fairly quickly even when spread out. The food was okay, but if you were unlucky to be in the two tables closest to the kitchen, you had to evacuate immediately when finished, so the crew could be fed. This was our 9th live-aboard. This boat is definitely third rate. The diving could have been interesting, but the information supplied by the boat pre-trip said the water would be 80-82 F, it was 73-74 F. We froze. Photography table used by everyone for everything, with electrical connections under the stairs, where dripping water from those going to top deck ran onto plugs, chargers, batteries and photo equipment.

Solmar V, Sea of Cortez, August 2002, Ken Mustello (kmustello@expertek.com) Carlisle, MA. Vis: 40-60. Water: 75-86 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130'/no deco. The staff on the *Solmar V* do an outstanding job. The food is excellent. Typical meals included shrimp, steak, sea bass, and traditional Mexican fare. Diving restrictions are flexible based on the experience of those aboard. Dive stations were spacious, but living quarters were cramped. Sea lions are seen on nearly every dive. Mantas were spotted on 2nd dive. It's hit or miss with other pelagics. Thermoclines in the Sea of Cortez cause water temperatures to drop significantly at depth. A full 3mm suit and hood are recommended. Tidal currents are also strong at times and may be of concern to inexperienced divers.

UNITED STATES

California

Iron Eagle, February 2002, Ted Gold (tgold@racalate.com) Huntington Beach, CA. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 20 to 45 Feet. Water: 55 to 58 F, choppy surge, currents. Plenty of sea lion interaction off Santa Barbara Island. 3 Sisters dive spot fantastic for nudibranchs. Lots of room on board. Great food and nice accommodations. Some divers encountered bad air fills that are apparently an ongoing problem. No respect for the camera tables. The camera tables were at various times covered with ashtrays, drinks, a ships bell, BBQ utensils etc. The boat is a work in

progress and with some improvements could be the best in Southern California. Overall a nice 2-day live-aboard. (Ph: 949-699-6145; website www.oceansportsadventures.com)

Iron Eagle, July 2002, Marilyn

Allen, Colorado. I put together a trip at a local dive shop for Instructors and Assistants. First it was scheduled over Labor Day. Since it had been confirmed with the boat owner, many of us bought nonrefundable air tickets and planned vacations. Thirty people signed up. The owner called in May to change the date because the boat was going to be in Mexico. Said he'd give us a great deal (he did discount his price by \$200) because he wanted our business. Now, however, the group is eighteen because people couldn't rearrange their vacations. No minimum was guaranteed, however. Two weeks before the trip, he called the shop to cancel, because his assistant hadn't been able to fill the boat (supposedly held thirty). The dive shop had already purchased our nonrefundable air tickets, to the tune of \$4000! After much discussion and his stating that the shop could probably sue him and win but he didn't care, the four owners of the shop kicked in additional money out of their own pockets (the rest of us didn't know about this until the end of the trip) to make the trip a go. Divemaster, Shawn was personable, competent and worked hard to please. However, when the crane used to lift the dingy started shooting sparks all over the upper deck, we had some concerns. three of five lights in our four-person

bunk room were out...replaced three bulbs myself, but top light never did work, main deck toilet didn't flush most of the time, downstairs toilet over flowed several times causing the carpet in the lower level bunk area to smell like urine, all the fresh (?) water smelled like gasoline, especially nice when showering; the hot tub worked only one day, then it smelled of gasoline...at least until the captain decided to pour two bottles of bleach and a little detergent into it...then we had a tub full of foam that smelled like bleach and gasoline; the boat ran out of napkins, toilet paper, fresh drinking water, didn't have a cook for first three days so Capt. did the cooking (food was basic at best, although a bit better when the "cook" came on board, never had a dessert (on a dive boat? You've got to be kidding), the boat was dirty throughout, bath room showers had orange and black mold around them, thick scum caked on shower doors and walls, dirty carpets and group room, needed paint, had trim falling off the walls so nail and screws were sticking out (a nice hazard when the boat was rocking), the "water toys" that were promised on the web site (jet ski, wave runner, sea kayaks) were nonexistent, the only seating on the deck consisted of flimsy plastic chairs that tended to collapse if they'd been in the sun too long, there were no lounge chairs, the only place to lie in the sun was on the very dirty, rough steel deck, one side of the boat had tank racks, the other side had a rope drawn from one end to the other, and twice, tanks fell out, captain didn't keep up with Nitrox fills. I am a

PADI Dive Master who has over 400 blue water dives and have dived in many places in the world. This is the worst operation I have encountered. This piece of trash is planning to move to Baja...Cabo or La Paz.

Peace, Peace Diving, February 2002, Gene Huff, San Ramon, CA. Vis: 15-50+ ft. Water: 49-58 F. Dives accrued: 180+. Eric is a great owner/captain. The entire crew is focused on provid-

ing top service. Boat is a little older and the bunks are not luxurious, but my wife and I simply love diving from the *Peace*. No depth or buddy restrictions. Dive your own profile. Did 16 dives on our last three day trip to the Channel Islands. Trip was geared toward hunters; photographers and sightseers also were welcome. No dive guides so not for new divers unless going with someone experienced. (Ph: 805-984-2025; fax 805-382-6178)

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