

sion obligations. This is advanced diving, and divers were treated like the experienced adults we mostly were. Water averaged 80-82 degrees with colder thermoclines and currents in the mid 70s — visibility varied from 30 to 90 ft. The weather varied throughout each day from torrential downpours to beaming sunshine. The island is a beautiful, prehistoric-looking mountain rising from the sea with numerous waterfalls pouring out of the island's flanks and lush jungle growing down to the waters edge. The underwater biodiversity at Cocos was truly unbelievable. Huge schools of jacks and sardines whirled and swirled in and out of baitball configurations. Giant marble rays cruised the rocky outcrops, eagle rays skimmed the sandy bottoms, green turtles chomped on sponges, yellowfin tuna zoomed by, manta rays and dolphins joined our safety stops, and I logged seven species of sharks during my adventure. (Whitetip reef, blacktip reef, silkys, Galapagos, silvertips, hammers, and a whale shark). Sharks were truly everywhere with multiple species noted on every dive. Don't expect much colorful coral or spectacular macro. Best trip of my life!

Undersea Hunter, August 2003,
Nikki Mahan, Bellevue, WA.

Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 79 to 81 F, currents. My third and best trip to Cocos Island. The silver tips are back at Silverado, and we saw hammerheads on every dive. The white tips are a constant, hundreds of them. The night dive was amazing, with the white tips hunting. We saw two whale sharks, a 25 ft male

at Dirty Rock and a beautiful 18 ft female at Manuelita. They both hung around letting us snuggle and take photos until we had to leave for our safety stop. At Alcyon, a beautiful, mostly black, huge manta ray buzzed us and posed for photos as well. We saw many eagle rays in formation, also as many as 15 to 20 marble rays at a time, surrounding us as we watched them. Two large frog fish make their home at 100 feet at Viking Rock. On the trip back we had schools of pilot whales, dolphins on the bow, and a lonesome false killer whale joining our trip.
 (www.underseahunter.com)

ECUADOR

Galapagos Islands

Galapagos Aggressor, September 2002, Greg Regnier (gregnier. interact@rcn.com), Chicago, IL.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 65 feet. Water: 65 to 73 F, currents. Trip of a lifetime. The service was excellent, the food extraordinary, the crew attentive and anticipated our needs. There were great evening activities that included fish ID classes and an excellent star gazing lesson on equatorial and southern hemisphere skies. To say that the diving is strenuous is an understatement. To do this trip again I would be spending a lot more time in the gym getting in shape. Getting out of a panga is easy, getting back in when you're a little older and not in peak physical shape — well that's another story. The animals are fantastic. Getting up close and personal with both sea and land animals is amazing.

The sharks are abundant and curious. Whale sharks? To see the sea animals up close is breathtaking. Penguins nibble on your toes, sea lions play with your fins, see eels, turtles and fish by the thousands plus some great rides on the currents. A whale and her calf was the crowning occurrence. The best thing that I had with me was a pair of kevlar gloves. In many instances the dives consisted of getting to a site, fighting the currents to get wedged into a spot and watching the animals swim around you. Having a pair of gloves that withstood the rigors of clinging to volcanic rock was priceless. I dove with a drysuit, but would probably go with a 5mm suit if I were to do this again. If you are inclined toward getting a chill, consider diving dry, but do not feel compelled to go out and get more gear just for this trip. My experience on the *Aggressor II* was great. (www.aggressor.com)

Galapagos Aggressor, May 2003, Cottrell Fox, St. Louis, MO. Dives logged: 600+. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 68 to 80 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 feet — nitrox. The dive-master, Chris Merz, and his crew were outstanding. Galapagos diving is not for beginners or even intermediates. Chris and his zodiac operators conducted these wild drift dives in 3 to 5 knot currents in a most professional and safe manner. The critters were fantastic. Turtles and sharks galore, all manner of rays, playful dolphins, and everyone's favorite, the sea lions. The birds and land animals were equally wonderful, as were the insightful land tours conducted by Mr. Merz. A five star experience.

Galapagos Aggressor, May 2003, Fred Turoff (fturoff@astro.temple.edu), Philadelphia, PA. Dives logged: 560. Vis: 20 to 40 feet. Water: 63 to 68 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 feet. Air temp: 69 to 75 degrees, so with wind, it made undressing after a cool water dive a chilly venture. We adapted and undressed in the hot shower on deck. Viz was disappointing — stuff in water made wide angle photography a hit-or-miss deal due to back scatter. Boat crew was excellent, and divemaster Cris Merz gave clear, detailed dive briefings and educational land tours. Terrific to see land life on the islands to complement the diving. Only thing missing was a whale shark. This was the shake-down trip after several months of dry dock, but any problems discovered were fixed a.s.a.p.

Galapagos Aggressor, July 2003, Lisa Carangelo, Swampscott, MA. Experience: 100+ dives. Vis: 40 to 60 feet. Water: 70-75 F. Not easy diving. Gear up on deck (except fins) walk across and try to step into rigid inflatable, which is bucking up and down precisely opposite of the mother ship's up and down, without falling. Lots of currents and whale sharks at Darwin. Crew did everything they could to make us comfortable and safe. Excellent American-style foods; eggs or pancakes for breakfast; tacos one day for lunch; dinners, often preceded by hot soups, then fish/chicken or meat served by Winter, the steward, in his crushed red velvet smoking jacket (very stylish). We added on 2-1/2 weeks on land in Peru for a very special trip!

***M/V Lammer Law*, December 2002, Donald A. Brooks (scuba1@aol.com), Westmont, IL.** Experience: Over 1,000 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 68 to 78 F, choppy, surge, currents. We had dove the Galapagos several years before aboard another live-aboard, and the experience was fantastic. We looked forward to spending most of this trip at Darwin and Wolf, where all the action is. Although the *Lammer Law* is a trimaran (93-foot) and designed to be fairly stable. In moderate to rough seas, the *Lammer Law* heaves and twists constantly and gives one the feeling that it is not seaworthy. In some of the rough seas we encountered, the boat creaked and banged loudly. Seawater splashing on the upper deck would often leak through the port holes in the bow cabins. Imagine being awakened with a bucket of salt water that has leaked through the window and splashes down on you and drenches you and your bed. Several nights the crew slept in the lounge due to the rough seas. The crew said that is quite often the situation in the Galapagos. The crew was helpful and performed their tasks well. The food and the service were good. We had two divemasters aboard, Patricia was excellent and tried hard to accommodate the guests. She was knowledgeable and her land tours were informative. She was an excellent diver, who cared for her guests. The other was an excellent diver, but lacked the personal touch that Patricia exuded. In several instances he was flat out rude to several guests (including me) for no reason. His comments were not becoming of a trip leader. He made the

trip uncomfortable for many. The *Lammer Law* was to have Nitrox, but none was available. With the promise of Nitrox I had purchased a new (\$600) Nitrox computer. The next night my new computer disappeared. Since I had dove with all of the guests before and many times, it only left the crew. I told Fabian however neither he nor other crew members were helpful; he said it probably had fallen off into the water. This was unlikely since it had been secured to my BC with its strap/buckle and a tie-wrap for extra measure. The owners of the *Lammer Law* (Duncan and Annie) said there was nothing they could do. (www.divinggalapagos.com)

***M/V Lammer Law*, February 2003, Ken Robertson, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.** Experience: 300-plus dives. Vis: 25 to 75 feet. Water: 77 to 81 F. Constant attention to diver comfort and safety. When a major U.S. airline had a “bad day” last November and couldn’t get us to Guayaquil, Ecuador, my wife and I were faced with losing our complete, prepaid live-aboard trip to the Galapagos Islands. Thanks to the efforts and understanding of Anne Muirhead and her Ecuadorian partners (Quasar Nautica) of the *M/V Lammer Law*, we were able to obtain a replacement trip this past February. We can’t say enough about how much we enjoyed this trip. The boat is a well-maintained 93-foot trimaran motor sailboat. The cabins are comfortable with a choice of natural airflow or air conditioning. The common living room is comfortable and spacious — we never once felt cramped. There is a lot of deck room to catch some sun or just

read a book. The meals are served on the back deck, which provides great ambiance. The food was great, plentiful and varied. The coffee was always on for the caffeine hounds. Honor bar system for the guests. The cabins are serviced daily, beds made, and towels changed. Our air conditioning went on the fritz one evening and was promptly fixed the next day — try to find that service on land! The diving was awesome. This is the place for big fish. One can see schools of hammerheads and Galapagos sharks, along with white tips and silkies all on the same dive. There are loads of other fish and sea life to see, some endemic to the islands and some common to the Indo-Pacific region. Turtles on just about every dive, and chances to snorkel with dolphins and basking sea lions. One day we saw a virtual underwater ballet done by 10 large spotted eagle rays and one golden ray. It lasted about four minutes and was as if they were performing for one of our group whose birthday it was. This was magical. And we did see a whale shark — albeit a juvenile one. The current diving is not for the new or limited-experience diver. We were tremendously impressed with the knowledge, which our boat captain and dive master had, of the currents. This knowledge came in particularly handy when the *Lammer Law* and the divers in our two pangas (diver zodiacs) managed to find a lost dive team from another dive boat that was also diving near Wolf Island. The *Lammer Law* people just seemed to know exactly where to look and sure enough, about 13 miles off the Northeast tip of the island, there they were — all seven

of them, quietly drifting toward Costa Rica. In the 19 dives I got in the nine-day trip, not once was one of our pangas more than 100 meters or so away from me on surfacing — this is diver coverage. In between dives, the guests get to do a number of shore excursions to see some of the Galapagos' unique wildlife — all well worth visiting. Our park naturalist (Antonio Moreano) was a joy to be with — for his knowledge, enthusiasm, and sincere concern for his National Park, both above and below the water. The *Lammer Law* folks also afforded every opportunity for my non-diver wife to come out in the dive panga to get some great shore viewing while they were following the divers. In addition to numerous species of shore birds, she was able to see turtles, penguins, sea lions, and marine iguanas close up, as well as a number of large fish, which were not too deep. This was much appreciated. The *Lammer Law* web pictures are a good representation of what guests will likely see. This is a first class operation!

Reina Silvia, June 2003, Al & Kathy Knoblock, Littleton, CO. Vis: 50 to 75 feet. Water: 68 to 78 F. Experience: 5,000+ dives. Dive restrictions enforced: you were asked not to go below 100 feet, but everything to see was 20 to 60 feet. Whale sharks on almost every dive off Darwin. Many large schools of predator fish. Schooling hammerheads on most dives. Galapagos sharks and silky on most dives — a few white tips. The extra \$300/person for the captain's cabin is worth every dime! Great crew, food, and naturalist. Could have used

another divemaster. Land trips as good as diving. (www.reinasilvia.com)

***Reina Silvia*, June 2003, David, Helen, Daniel, and Adam Dornbusch, Oakland, CA.** Vis: 50 to 75 feet.

Water: 73 F at the southern islands, 78 F at Darwin Island, currents. Dives logged: 200-220. The *Reina Silvia* is clean with skilled, personable, and responsive crew who conduct a safe and efficient trip and take excellent care of guests' dive gear. Good and plentiful food. Will meet special dietary requests. Especially good breakfasts. Afternoon snacks with hot chocolate. Hot tea and coffee always available. All rooms air conditioned. Hot towels after every dive. Full library of books on the Galapagos. Victor Mendia was a superb trip manager, dive master, and land guide. He was informative, well organized, often funny, and took/sold an excellent video of the trip. He made a special effort to give us the ultimate Galapagos experience — including putting us in perfect locations for four whale shark sightings near Darwin Arch, with close-up views of two different whale sharks on one dive alone. Also near Darwin Arch, saw as many as 25 to 30 hammerheads at one time, sea turtles, Galapagos sharks, white tip sharks, and huge schools of large and small fish on every dive, as well as dolphins on about half the dives, some who circled and darted between us. Dolphins joined the boat as we entered the Darwin Island area, and we often saw them flipping and spinning out of the water and surfing waves one day near the Arch. Many free swimming large morays. Playful sea lions joined

most of our dives near the southern islands. Sea horses and schooling barracudas on two dives. Snorkeled with penguins. Saw jumping and flipping mantas from the boat but not on any dives. Victor conducted a number of land excursions for close-up views of giant tortoises, marine iguanas, sea lions, and large populations of birds — including blue and red footed boobies, frigate birds, and pelicans — many of them mating, nesting, and feeding young. Reasonably calm seas everywhere, but strong currents near Darwin Island, where we had the best diving. All diving from pangas, which pick up divers within only minutes after surfacing. We all used 5 mm wet suits and gloves. We wore hoods near the southern islands, but not near Darwin, and were always comfortable — even on the two days when we made four dives; 14 dives total.

***Reina Silvia*, June 2003, Todd Lichtenstein (toddlich@comcast.net), West Orange, NJ.** Experience:

101-250 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 feet. Water: 66 to 79 F, currents. Due to the cancellation of the only other group, my wife and I were the only two divers on this boat. For a surcharge of \$600 we had booked the owners cabin on the second deck, and it is very roomy and luxurious. Most cabins are below the main deck and are small but pleasant and serviceable, with a double lower and single upper berth, private heads with telephone showers, cubby holes or closets for storage, portholes or prism skylights, and just enough floor space to change clothes in. Divers use the covered upper deck to don wet-

suits, then descend to the aft platform and into inflatables to complete gearing up. All diving is from inflatables, which have rope ladders to make getting out of the water easier. The crew of seven (fewer than normal because of so few passengers) were all helpful. The meals were exceptionally good, and post-dive snacks varied and welcome. (Don't miss Chef Patricio's hot chocolate.) Visibility in the central islands was poor and water cold, but full of life, including many seahorses and scorpionfish at Cousins Rock, and obliging penguins, sea lions and swimming marine iguanas during a snorkel at Bartolome. In addition to our 5/7 mil wetsuits, we needed our 3 mil vests and beanies. At Wolf and Darwin, temps were about 10 degrees warmer (in 70s) and visibility better. Shark populations there were teeming; there were numerous Galapagos sharks and hundreds of hammerheads on every dive. We also saw silvertips, silkies and tiger sharks in lesser numbers. It was early in the whale shark season, but we saw two that surfaced alongside the boat, though we did not see them in the water. Victor Mendia, our intrepid dive master/naturalist/videographer, reported that many more were seen the following week. We were surrounded by large pods of dolphins at all times, and saw them feeding on several dives. Two cautionary notes: First, some kinds of integrated weight systems may not be suitable for diving in the 4-knot currents of the northern islands. My wife had one weight pocket ripped from her BC twice — the second time, for good. Use a weight belt. Second, we were assured that our overweight

bags would not be a problem, and on the Quito-to-Galapagos trip they weren't. However, leaving Baltra we were told we would be charged \$75 for overweight baggage. After some negotiation, we were able to send one heavy bag as freight on the same flight for \$25; we then spent about a half-hour at TAME Cargo in Quito retrieving it. Leave whatever you can in Quito. No camera tables on the dive deck. They use some of the tables in the salon for this purpose. On an uncrowded boat, this was no problem, but it would be more difficult if there were many divers on board.

Sky Dancer, August 2002, Matthew Rifkin, New York, NY. Dives logged: 120. Dive restrictions enforced: 1 hour, 100 feet max. Crew was great. Food was the best and most variety of any live-aboard I have been on. Spent an extra day at Wolf and Darwin islands, which was well worth it. Saw 25-plus whale sharks and hundreds of hammerheads over the four days we were at Wolf and Darwin. Go during whale shark season. An experience of a lifetime. Boat was fairly run down. A surprise since it has only been in operation one year. Bathroom smelled bad by the end of the trip. No C-41 chemicals, so no film process and the light table didn't work. Lounge area was not comfortable and TV/VCR set up was poor. Gift shop items were over-priced. Buy t-shirts on land. Crew was reluctant at first to give certification classes due to conflict with boat owner — Ecoventura — but eventually they relented. The crew and diving more than made up for the shortcomings. (www.peterhughes.com)

***Sky Dancer*, October 2002, Elaine Byland (jandeblyland@email.com), Fremont, MI.**

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 feet. Water: 72 to 74 F, calm, choppy, surge, currents. This was my first live-aboard experience. We saw more on one dive in the Galapagos than in a week at any other place I have dived. 6-5-4, 7 mm, or dry suit a must. Watch for El Nino years as this effects the shark, manta, and whale shark sightings. 72 to 74 degree water temperatures were the norm with a couple of dives up to 78 due to El Nino. We did not see the hundreds of schooling hammerheads, but we saw them on many of the dives in schools of six or so and many singles. Many sightings of Galapagos sharks, blacktip and white tip reef sharks, marble rays, diamond stingrays, so many turtles you could not count them all, and eagle rays. We saw water spout from whales at a distance and many pods of dolphins, snorkeled with penguins, and dove with sea lions on many of the dives. A couple of mantas were seen, but not by me. Currents on some dives were so strong that we had to go hand over hand on the volcanic rock walls. Make sure you bring extra gloves and safety devices (alert, sausage, etc.). The whale sharks eluded our group on this trip. Even though I really wanted a whale shark and manta encounter, it was still the best diving and best overall trip I have ever taken. The crew was friendly and helpful. We had one of the master staterooms. Go that way if you can afford the extra cost. We celebrated a birthday, Halloween, a 100th dive, my 200th dive, and the crossing of the Equator. We dove three to five times a day,

depending on the site and land tour schedule. Each day we experienced a once in a lifetime event. Spent a few days in the rain forest on the Napo River. If you are into birds don't miss this.

***Sky Dancer*, Nov/Dec 2002, Dale, Houston, TX.**

The boat, crew, and operation is as good as the Miami office is questionable. I did a two week back-to-back charter. I wrote one check for \$1600, with instructions that \$800 was for charter#1 and \$800 for charter #2. They posted the entire amount to one itinerary and billed me for the other. The same thing happened for the final payment. After mailing the final payment 45 days prior, I call the office a week before departure to make sure every thing is in order. They indicate all is well. I show up and they say "your name is not on the itinerary." Thank God the *Dancer* was not overbooked. I usually arrive a few days early to scout out the land and wait for luggage to catch up. I emailed the PHD office and the Ecoventura operative the hotels I would be staying at. They agreed to call my hotel Saturday night (leave message) to inform me when and where to board the *Dancer*. They left the message at the wrong hotel. I wound up hitching a water ride to the *Sky Dancer*. Don't assume anything; take your paid-in-full statements; confirm everything. If the flight path is uncomplicated, consider booking your own flights. Because of its high profile, the *Sky Dancer* will list significantly if the wind is blowing broadside. I woke up three different mornings to the foul smell of what looked like raw sewage 2 inches deep sloshing around my show-

er. In the dining area the air conditioner had two settings: (1) off where everyone sizzles and (2) high blower wind where many folks complained. Don't misunderstand me; the *Sky Dancer* is a good vessel. I showered on the dive deck. I'd give the 12-person Ecuadorian crew an 'A' for attitude and performance. Captain Frank is a kind gentleman and well-able manager; always with a smile. Every other dive, he is in the water with the divers and assisting and pointing out interesting things. He accompanied one air diver doing a 12 minute deco stop in a strong current. Our zodiac picked them up 2 miles away. Santiago is an excellent guide and draws superb 3-D diagrams for the dive briefing. Sandra is a fine hostess and integrated well with the needs of the passengers. I had a minor medical emergency (toenail) for which she helped me at the hospital at Puerto Ayora and attended bandages on the boat for the 2nd week. Antonio (Dr Nitrox) ensured we always had great fills to 3400 psi. Hugo seems to work from dawn till dusk as the most upbeat, efficient waiter. They wash and hang your suits for you; all you have to do is suit up and board the zodiac. They do the grunt work of moving heavy things back onboard. They are careful with cameras and expensive regulators and computers. All diving is done from the two zodiacs. For the kind of gorilla diving done at Wolf and Darwin, air divers will be significantly disadvantaged. BYORH (Reef Hook); you'll need both hands to operate your camera as your reef hook holds you in position against hurricane blast currents. Sometimes it is dead calm. I'd suggest a good, strong

stainless steel \$6 hook (barb cut off) with an arm-length 500-lb lanyard. Attach at belt level so you will 'fly' off the reef. Don't be surprised if you drag a bolder over the sand. Wells-Lamont black gum rubber neoprene gloves (\$6-hardware store) are best to hold on to the volcanic rocks that are mostly covered with sharp barnacles. Other gloves are likely to shred. At Wolf and Darwin, you'll board the zodiac on the leeward side of the island. When the zodiac arrives at the entry point, expect 8-10 foot seas. I'd suggest photographers on the four ends (of the zodiac) so that you can hang your camera in the water with one hand a moment before you roll in. Expecting the tender to hand your camera to you (with all the other photographers and high seas) may not be practical: You need to work out how to enter the water with camera — preferably with a bungee lanyard. On the way back keep your fins on and mask ready as there is no telling what you might encounter for an unexpected stop and snorkel. Weight belts are preferable over integrated weight pouches when it comes to handing them to the zodiac tenders. Night dives are usually in calm water @ 40 min. In Ecuador credit cards are charged an additional 10%. There are ATMs. I tend to arrive and leave the middle of the week for these reasons: (1) gives a chance for your luggage to catch up. (2) acclimates you to the time changes. (3) gives you a chance to scout out the land and take some tours that are more comprehensive than the side tours the *Dancer* is permitted with their tight dive schedule. (4) gives you a better view of the flora, fauna, people and

uniqueness of the island. It puts some flare into your photography and video presentations instead of 100% underwater. (5) Staying a few days afterward really allows you to rest up and off-gas. The reality of this will hit you when you sleep in to 3pm. After intensive diving a little side trip helps offset post-dive blues. (6) Some mid-week airline prices are nearly half the Fri-Mon prices. (7) Airports, hotels and transportation are less crowded mid week, and the best. (8) you are less likely to fly in a sardine-packed aircraft. With the weight issues on tame airlines, it's not likely you'll buy 20 lbs. of souvenirs at the Quito market and certainly not on your way to the Galapagos. On the mainland, likely you'll want to flop for the night and get to the islands the next day. Quito: Marriott or Hilton is good. Guayaquil: Oro Verde is great and only 10 minutes from the airport. Great food; fabulous French pastries. For a dive safari, there's really no justification to go to Quito at nearly 10,000 ft altitude. The airport is on small island of Baltra, north of Santa Cruz. Tame buses (free) take you from the airport to two destinations: Baltra Harbor or Baltra Channel (if you arrive on Sunday of course, the PHD staff will be waiting for you at the airport). To the Channel, the bus ride is 5-10 minutes. You cross the half-mile channel in a 'cattle-boat' ferry for 75 cents. On the other side is the island of Santa Cruz. You have two transportation choices: (1) the local buses for \$3 with under-carriage luggage area and (2) four-door flatbed truck-axis for \$15, about 25-30 minutes. Once in charming town of Puerto Ayora, taxis are abundant for \$1.

There is a heavy military and police presence and women and children walk the streets at night in safety. Had I known the *Dancer* itinerary (they are in port Saturday night), I could have asked the captain if there was room on the *Dancer* and boarded that night. Instead of making my way all the way back across the big island, across the channel, and to Baltra Harbor the next day (Sunday). Places to stay in Puerto Ayora: The Grand Hotel. This 6-story newbie is also called Hotel Lobo Del Mar Galapagos (05-526-188). Quito office 022502089 and 022520810 another with individual villas is the Hotel Galapagos which is American owned and operated and has family atmosphere. 593-5-526-330 and 593-5-526-296. It is directly on the oceanfront of lava rock and has a land-base dive operation. On one of my land tours, I met a journalist that invited me to dinner at the Royal Palm Hotel in the middle of the island above in the mist. I've traveled the world and seven seas and never have seen a place like this — especially in the Galapagos?! If you are highly developed in your upper right-brain (artists, composers, interior decorator) and can afford it, you will be blown away by this fantasy in the mist. Seventeen rooms/villas range \$900-1,500 per day. Of course, you just might forget about diving, your name and the world until your money runs out. 593-5527-409 Owner/operator Rene is one of the most interesting gentlemen I've met.

Sky Dancer, February 2003,
Richard Litsch, Santa Rosa, CA.

Dives logged: 400+. Vis: 30 to 60 feet.

Water: 69 to 79 F. Covered 650 km during our 10-day trip. Very comfortable boat, stable during the long crossings between dive sites. Food was not up to Peter Hughes standards, but this was probably due to lack of quality ingredients and not the crew's fault. Dive operations were excellent, but this is no place for beginning divers. Strong currents were at Roca Redonda, Wolf, and Darwin. I used a 5/4/3 suit and barely got by. If you tend to get cold, bring at least a 5 mm and a hood, thermoclines are cold! Don't follow the "average temp" guides given in the literature, because some of the dives will be below 70 F. Diving was awesome, enough said. Land excursions were not to be missed; we did four during our 10 days. Traveling thru Ecuador to get out to the Galapagos was no joy and seemed to try my patience more than other Latin American destinations.

***Sky Dancer*, May 2003, Art Chester, Grosse Pointe, MI.** Dives logged: 170. Vis: 20 to 40 feet Water: 63 to 72 F. Dive restrictions enforced: no decompression. Peter Hughes release form is very unprofessional. They will not take responsibility, even if they are grossly negligent. This was given to us only two weeks before the trip. If we had seen it before making a deposit, we would not have signed up. Also the mattresses on board are very, very hard and no "toppers" are available. The good: Relatively fearless sea life up close. Global Dive Expeditions (tour leaders) staff was excellent.

***Sky Dancer*, June 2003, Pat McGuire, M.D., (mcguirepat@earthlink.net),**

St. Louis, MO. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 feet. Water: 65 to 75 F, currents. The *Sky Dancer* is a great boat in good shape. We were on a special itinerary allowing 4 days at Wolf and Darwin on a 7-day trip. We did check out dives in Los Lobos with sea lions and snorkeled with penguins before making the 12-hour crossing to Wolf Island. Conditions were challenging — heavy currents, surge, and cold (65 degree) water. The divemasters used reef hooks — which I would do next time. We hung on the rocks and watched the superhighway of pelagics pass — hundreds of hammerheads, mantas, Galapagos sharks, eels. Conditions at Darwin were better, the water was warmer, but I still used a 7mm suit, vest, and hood. The dive site was the same for each of 4 dives per day for the 3 days — the base of Darwin's arch. We dove from Zodiacs with experienced drivers who dropped us together with a backroll into the water. The group of 8-10 divers would descend to the platform to hang on in the current and wait for the whale sharks. One dive the zodiac captain dropped us on top of a whale shark! If the whale shark didn't come after about 10 min. the divemaster would signal to leave the platform and we drifted with the current until we saw one. In 3 days and 12 dives at Darwin, between the 2 Zodiacs there were 18 sightings, including dives in which we would see 2 whale sharks. One dive we saw a large whale shark during the safety stop @ 15 ft. Also hundreds of hammerheads — we joked that we had to push the hammerheads out of the way to see the whale sharks! The crew

was great, the boat was clean and nice, the food good. After each dive the crew would take your gear to prepare for the next dive, including rinsing and hanging our wetsuits. Someone always had warm towels, snacks, and hot chocolate or tea ready as we came aboard. There are some land tours, to see the turtles, sea lions, bird life. Most days we were offered 4 dives, and one day a night dive was offered for 5 total, but conditions were not good for night dives — i.e., current. A great trip if you like big animals. The crew and 12 other divers on board were great. This may not be a trip for beginning divers because of the current and cool waters.

***Sky Dancer*, July 2003, Russ Lido (rlido@comcast.net), Sterling Heights, MI.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 10 to 100 feet. Water: 61 to 77 F, calm, choppy, surge. Our fourth live-aboard with Peter Hughes. We flew into Quito, Ecuador, and were put up at a nice hotel for the night. We were told not to venture too far from the hotel because Quito has a crime problem. The next morning we flew to San Cristobal, Galapagos, on AeroGal Airlines. Despite all the baggage fears, we weren't charged for excess weight. Try to fly that airline instead of Tame Airlines. We traveled 565 miles on the *Sky Dancer*. It's a fine boat, but book the upper deck cabins because the water can get rough. The cabins are more money but well worth it. We cruised the Galapagos Islands and saw lots of sea lions, penguins, schooling hammerhead sharks, turtles, stingrays, and over 20 whale sharks. There is so much sea life you can get sensory

overload, but don't expect to find magnificent coral. Darwin and Wolf Islands are some of the best diving I have ever done. Best times are June thru Nov., if you want to see the whale sharks. I would go June, July again because the water at Darwin and Wolf is warmer (77 F). The other islands it was 61 to 69 F. The diving can be challenging and not good for beginners. We also did three land tours and two snorkel trips, which were also good. The crew did a great job of taking care of the divers. They even helped you get your wetsuit off and they rinsed and hung it up for you. The food was worst part. They cook a local menu, and it was not up to the Peter Hughes standards we were used to from other live-aboards. Galapagos were a true adventure of a lifetime. Large camera table and electrical outlets for charging 110-220v.

MEXICO

La Paz

***Don Jose*, October 2002, Robert Bishop, Mesa, AZ.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 110 feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, calm. Half my dive gear was lost in flight and arrived two days late. The captain modified the itinerary to meet a launch sent out from La Paz ferrying my luggage. I just assumed I would not see my gear until the week was over. They made the extra effort seem like their day service. The visibility was much better than anticipated. The crew was as good as any of the 7 live-aboards I have used. I do fish surveys for REEF and was surprised at the number of fish species. We had two