

why the big boat was not routinely used. Taveuni has gorgeous soft corals. The White Wall is breathtakingly luminous with white and lavender ones. There is an abundance of reef fish: butterflyfish (I collected a couple of dozen species), angels, chromis, anthias, fusiliers, bannerfish (every one in my book), surgeons, unicorns, triggers, breems. A bewildering number of wrasses. Some sightings of whitetips, but the largest fish were groupers; three huge batfish shadowed us one entire dive. Banded sea snakes were common. One of the loveliest sights was a sea snake swimming toward the surface through a sunlit school of bannerfish. Lots of banded pipefish. A few needlefish. Some unspectacular nudibranchs, a few morays. Stonefish. One turtle. There were some strong currents below, and especially strong ones on the surface. The divemasters chose sites to minimize currents at depth, but surface currents sometimes could not be avoided. Quite a few times you had to pull yourself hand over hand down the anchor line with your body streaming out like a flag. Naturally ascents were also pretty challenging. Manageable certainly, but be forewarned.

Vanua Levu

Cousteau Fiji, December 2002, Leonie Walker (LeFlies@aol.com), Portola Valley, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water: 75 to 80 F, calm. We found the resort staff the friendliest we've ever encountered. The resort wasn't busy. The diving was among the best we've ever experienced in terms of diversity, abun-

dance and health of the reefs, fish, etc. We got to Namena one day, which was spectacular. The food was terrific, accommodations simple and lovely. Afternoon excursions to waterfalls, mangrove project, visit to village chief were well organized and enjoyable. Mediocre weather — cloudy, some rain and only one truly sunny beautiful day. That didn't affect diving, however. (www.fjijresort.com)

FRENCH POLYNESIA

Tahiti and Moorea are everyone's dream of the South Pacific, and despite their pricey resorts and food, these French-speaking islands have just begun attracting American divers since there is plenty of reef shark action. ... There are a range of accommodations, though generally it's expensive. ... The once snotty French attitude toward others has lessened considerably.

Bora Bora

Bora Diving Center, Beachcomber Intercontinental, June 2003, Lauren Henderson, Kona, HI. Vis: 50-100 ft. Water temp. 82 F. Calm seas. Dives Logged: 375. Weather — Sunny, mid 80s. Dive restrictions: 500 psi or 45 min. due to flight problems I missed a day of diving and was only able to do 3 dives with Bora DC. Anne and Michel Condesse who own this intimate dive operation (and speak English), responded to all my inquiry e-mails. They picked me up in a van in the morning for a two tank am dive. I

had all my equipment except a BC (packed light because of 45 lb weight restriction on inter-island flights). They gave me one at no charge, I learned that all gear is included. The shop was small but had a nice selection of T-shirts for sale and they also had a dry area to leave personal stuff. The boats are snug but comfortable. We did not have a full load so this made moving about easier. The crew and most passengers spoke French but they did a good job translating all instructions in English. Our first dive was inside the lagoon. Visibility was only about 50 ft. Two lovely mantas (one was pregnant as evidenced by the bump on its back) cruised by a couple of times. The second dive (vis about 75-100 ft) and had a lot of treats including an eagle ray, octopus, and some interesting big triggers. My companion went along to snorkel these two sites; for \$20 it was a great experience for a non-diver. The boat ride through the perfect turquoise lagoon was treat in itself. 45 min. scenic boat ride to Muri Muri also known as a shark dive. Upon entering the water (vis about 100 ft), gray reefs and black tips circled under the boat but kept their distance. The reef was lovely with lots of healthy hard corals but with the sharks lurking around it was hard for me to focus on the bottom. Near the end of the dive we gathered on the mooring line or on the bottom and the boat captain threw a little bait in. Great feeding frenzy and close enough for shots. Afterwards the sharks circled closer, you could look them right in the eye. The Intercontinental Beachcomber Resort is a dream come true. The water taxi picks you up at the airport for a gor-

geous 30 min. boat ride to the Resort. The over water bungalows are postcard perfect. Very expensive. The interiors are tropical, deluxe, and spacious. Private entries to the lagoon for snorkeling and tables made of glass that open up so you can turn on your flood light and feed the fish at night, are just a few of the special amenities. The hotel restaurant is good and the Polynesian show is not to be missed. Other restaurants provide transportation. Bora Bora is truly a lovely and expensive place but it a long way to go. Inter-island travel is easy, none of the FAA security checks. Just on and off the plane. Baggage weight was checked but although I was a few pounds over (souvenirs) I was not penalized. (www.boradive.com, <http://tahiti.french-polynesia.intercontinental.com>)

Top Dive, Hotel Bora Bora, August 2003, Edwin Granite, Wilmington, DE. Vis: 100-200 ft. Water: 80-82 F. Experience: Too many to count — 35+ years 'round the world. Manta rays galore! They are pregnant in August, ready to deliver — males chasing them frequently to try copulation. Gray sharks and lemons and white tips and silvertips and black tips, schools of barracuda and jacks and tropicals, etc., etc. Two mantas feeding every night at the dock which has underwater flood lights. You can get in the water to view them or just stand on the dock! Diving here is a 9.8! (www.topdive.com)

Manihi

Blue Nui, Pearl Beach, August 2003,

Edwin Granite, Wilmington, DE.

Vis: 100-200 ft. Water: 80-82 F.

Experience: Too many to count — 35+ years 'round the world. Great dive operation. Thierry and Nikko (dive guides) are great! Diving here is a 9+! French Polynesia is the best diving I have seen in 35+ years of diving!

Better than great whites in So. Africa, Palau, Red Sea, Truk, Fiji, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Hawaii, Caribbean, etc. No need to do live-aboard if you can afford to do hotels.

(www.bluenui.com,
www.pearlresorts.com/bora/main.asp)

Marquesas

Centre Plongee Marqueses, Mave Mai (pension-mavemai@mail.pf), January 2003, Laura Todd, Arcata, CA.

Imagine the best of California diving, sans kelp, transported to the equator; now add clouds of tiny tropicals as if you were in the Red Sea and the occasional big pelagic cruising by and you'll have something like the Marquesas. Although the only dive operation has some serious issues, mostly in the area of service (see below), the destination as a whole is simply stunning. Conditions are easy, with limited visibility of 35 to 50 feet, no currents, depths from 50 to 80 feet, some surge and warm (86 F) water.

November to March is the calm season, but I managed to show up during the windiest January in memory. On two days there were winds of 80 kph. We never did get to see the pygmy orcas Nuku Hiva is famous for. What we did see, an amazing assortment: single black and white tip sharks, sev-

eral mantas, two sting rays, variety of mid-size tropicals, several different kinds of eels, octopuses close, small colorful shrimp, nudibranchs galore, lion fish, including the striking black and white juveniles, scorpion fish, dozens of shells, some quite large and some endemic, plus the mother of all puffer fish. (I was taking a photo of a biggish normal puffer, about 20 inches, when out of a cave came one 4 feet long, I swear.) Dives are from a rather spartan cabin cruiser, with plenty of room and a large dry area. The biggest crowd we had was six people — it can take twice that many. Staff loads gear; customers set up, change over, and help rinse with a hose right at the dock. Good briefings; divemaster Sylvie speaks English. Group is expected to stay together. She would often end dives early, at about 45 minutes with around 80 bar left. We missed two days diving due to illness of the only available divemaster. On the last day the owner refused to do a second dive because only two customers wanted it; he declined to take the other four (for some reason, a lot of Europeans prefer only one dive per day regardless of depth) the half a mile back to the dock. He wasn't impressed with my point that it's expensive to get here and that folks who make the trip want to maximize their diving but did refund me about 60% of the missed dive. Be aware that the dive shop does not take credit cards (although they do take checks drawn on French banks). You can prepay for packs of five dives from any Papeete travel agent. They will meet your flight with a set of vouchers. I found Tahiti Tours ([360](mailto:sales@tahiti-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

tours.pf) to be organized and reliable. Adjacent to the dive office is a little shop featuring the sculpture of the owner's wife, who does exquisite carvings; the mantas are especially nice. It's expensive to get to the Marquesas (about \$500 round trip from Tahiti), but you don't have to break the bank to stay here. I recommend the Mave Mai. Jean Claude and Regine are gracious hosts, and the pension is just up the hill from the dive shop. I had only to express my merest wish in my lame French, and, voila, here came a relative of the owners, and we were off fulfilling it. The rooms have tile floors with fans, one queen and two single beds, private bath, and a patio or balcony with great views over Taiohae Bay. The meals were simple but consistently great, featuring poisson cru, steak and potatoes, local fish, plus dessert. Breakfast was always baguettes, fruit, and coffee. The huge green grapefruit are the sweetest, juiciest treats imaginable. Your lodging will provide bottled water. The island of Nuku Hiva is gorgeous, from the striking rock pillars at Hatiheu to the lush Hakau valley and waterfall. There are two walks and one boat excursion that must be done. A week is not too long here for divers. See at least one more Marquesan island, although there is no diving. Go to Ua Pou for the stunning skyline or Hiva Oa to see where Gauguin lived, plus some of the best ancient sites. From the exquisite scenery to the thriving culture and beautiful art, friendly people and unique diving, the Marquesas make for a fabulous trip. (www.marquises.pf/pagestour/page108.htm)

Centre Plongee Nuku Hiva, August 2003, Linda Dunn (deep66@earthlink.net), Riverside, CA.

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 feet. Water: 79 to 80 F, choppy. Saw hammerheads & mantas on same dive, sharks were 5-7 ft. away and not afraid. Saw octopi frequently during day. No other divers, only shop in town, sometimes only 2-3 divers. Can't get to see pygmy orcas unless weather permits due to rough seas; only go during Marquesan summer, December-April, if you want to see them. Wild, remote, pristine, rustic accommodations, beautiful island; expect the unexpected.

Rangiroa

Blue Dolphins Diving Center, Kia Ora Resort, June 2003, Lauren Henderson, Kona, HI. Vis: 100 ft.

Water temp: 82 F, calm seas. Dives Logged 375. Weather-Sunny, mid 80s. Dive restrictions: 500 psi, stay with guide on drift dives. Blue Dolphins is located at the Kia Ora Resort. I did 4 dives total. Gear is provided at no extra charge. The BC I used was old and a little large but it did the job. Gear can be left at the shop and there is a hose and rinse bucket available. Rangiroa is known for the drift diving through the passes and the pelagics that enjoy the ride. I did not experience the smorgasbord of sharks and mantas I was hoping for. On the first dive we were dropped outside the lagoon (only about 10 min. from the dive shop) and then swam along a lovely coral wall till we entered the Tiputa Pass. No current. We saw some sharks far below. In the afternoon we did a second along the

outside reef; lots of tropicals, nice hard corals, barracuda, turtles and a few white tips. Nice dive but still no cigar! Day two: Another pass dive at Tiputa, this time the current was rippin', like being on a waterslide. Sharks were visible from a distance of 30-50 ft. or so. The dive was over in 40 min. as the other divers ran low on air trying to fight the current and follow the guide into the center of the pass. My final dive was an afternoon dive and with no current. Lots of life on the reef and a small pod of bottlenose dolphins at the surface; I even saw my first swimming marlin. Blue Dolphin's Christelle and Rodolphe Holler (and their sweet baby Celeste) did a great job taking care of me. My dive guide Franz did his best to brief me in English as everyone was pretty much speaking French. Kia Ora is a lovely palm studded resort with a nice little beach and lots of excursions to places like Pink Beach and Blue Lagoon. The 10 over water bungalows are deluxe with private entrances into the fish filled lagoon. The on site restaurant is the only game in town. It is good but pricey like everything in French Polynesia.

(www.bluedolphinsdiving.com,
www.hotelkiaora.com)

Six Passengers, Raie Manta Club, Le Merou Bleu (merou_bleu@hotmail.com), January 2003, Laura Todd, Arcata, CA. From back roll to safety stop, all diving here is done as a group (never more than six people) due to the fast and somewhat unpredictable currents. Some deco diving (to around 150 feet) is done, depending on where the critters are. Rangiroa diving is not

for beginners. At a minimum, you need to be able to: get your gear on without dallying, descend immediately, have above average buoyancy control skills, and do blue water safety stops. All the operators use hard-bottom, inflatable boats without ladders for the short rides. The secret to getting back in the boat is to kick hard so that you can use your upper body to push down on the ropes and lever yourself in; if you are trying to pull up on the ropes you'll never make it. All the dive shops follow a strange schedule consisting of dives at 8:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. only. They say the long surface interval is for safety due to the possible depths, but four hours? Customers are expected to provide their own lunch and amusement, as they close the shop. One could stroll down the beach to the Kia Ora for an expensive lunch (restaurant opens at noon) or walk the 15 minutes or so to the little restaurant at the harbor. I took to eating at the harbor and then sneaking into one of the many hammocks at the Kia Ora. They will transport you back to your lodging between dives; all dive shops will pick you up in the morning and drop you off after the last dive of the day. Safety equipment on boats but no water or treats. Tea and coffee at the shop between dives. No bathroom at either shop. Water was 84 degrees and flat inside the lagoon, with the passes being pretty lumpy. When the tide is incoming, you do drift dives; whatever is there, you're gonna see it fast. On the outgoing tide, dives are done outside the reef (four- to six-foot waves). All the operators emphasize Tiputa pass, which has the more varied critters, but I think Avatoru should not be overlooked, with

its predictable black tips, grays, silver tips, and the big lemons. The advertised critters are all there, but I found encounters to be a little hit and miss. Some times sightings were quick, or deep. In five days, saw the above sharks, plus one great hammerhead about 25 feet below, several white tip sharks, one manta close, brief eagle ray, lots of the huge, curious Napoleon fish, plus many barracuda. In every dive hawksbill turtles, which would let you get close. Also got to see the spinner dolphins quite close from the boat — the bigger the waves, the more they like to play. Local lodgings — they are one third the price of the Kia Ora. Some are pretty down scale, but the Raira Lagoon is a good mid-range option. The Merou Bleu is small, with four beautiful bungalows at Avatoru pass. The view is dramatic, but snorkeling is not possible due to depth and currents. Somehow, many quite nice shells make it through the hunks of coral that constitute the beach. It is also close to the village. They have free bikes. The meals are quite good; we had duck for dinner one evening. Breakfasts are simply baguettes, fruit, and coffee. Your lodging will sell bottled water. Only the dive shops and pearl stores take credit cards. To avoid carrying a lot of cash, you can prepay everything through a Papeete travel agent. They will charge your credit card in euros (ouch!) and meet your flight with a packet of vouchers and tickets. I found Tahiti Tours (sales@tahititours.pf) organized and reliable. You will be way more comfortable here if you speak some French. People are patient with those who give it a try. Each dive operation has at least one person who speaks

English, but it's pretty limited. Most of your diving companions will be French, Italian, or German. Here's a good starter sentence: "J'ai vue un marteau" = "I've seen a hammerhead." At banks and other places where waiting is typical, one waits outside on the bench provided. All retail places close from noon until 2 p.m. or 3 p.m. or whenever the proprietor feels like coming back. Phone cards — the only reasonable way to call home — are sold at the post office. The exquisite black pearls can be had for good prices — there are several large farms located here. Loose pearls are the best deal; make sure to read up before buying. Combine Rangiroa with another Tahitian island: Moorea for great shark action, Bora Bora for mantas, Rurutu for whales, or Nuku Hiva for a little bit of everything.

(www.the6passengers.com/anglais/index.htm, <http://raiemantaclub.free.fr>, <http://le-merou-bleu.ifrance.com/le-merou-bleu>)

Top Dive, April 2002, Harvey Monroe (CheMono@aol.com), Santa Fe, NM. Vis: 100 to 200 feet. Water: 75 to 82 F. Dives accrued: 170. Dive restrictions enforced: 500 psi. We stayed at inexpensive hostel with cooking facilities. Top Dive is the newest of six dive operations. They were a few dollars more but didn't pack their six-man zodiacs with 14 people. We dove some deep (160 feet), exciting, and challenging spots, which varied depending on the current and animal life. The spot was usually the same but with different fish. Divemaster was enthusiastic about diving and would allow the divers to dive to their experience and ability. (www.topdive.com)

Top Dive, Kia Ora, August 2003, Edwin Granite, Wilmington, DE.

Vis: 100-200 ft. Water: 80-82 F. All diving on this atoll is from zodiacs. Great diving! Great dive operation. Ocean "pass" diving in 6 knot current (into lagoon) is fantastic! Diving here is a 9.6!

Tahiti

Bora Bora Blue Nui Dive Center, Bora Bora Pearl Beach Resort, December 2002, Gary Redman (cglredman@worldnet.att.net), Mercer Island, WA. Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 75 to 150 feet. Water: 84 F, calm, choppy, no currents. Gilles and Frank run a solid, top-notch operation. We never dove with more than four people. Entry is back roll, and BC and tank can be removed prior to climbing out on ladder. You set up your gear for the first dive each day, and then they changed it between dives. Two one-tank dives in morning and one dive in afternoon (class or beginners). Usually one dive inside lagoon and second dive outside. Dive shop has rinse facilities, fresh water showers, and well ventilated, locked storage facility for gear left overnight. Gilles and Frank are safety conscious, gave complete and detailed dive briefings, and were eager to point out interesting finds during each dive. They are personable and enthusiastic and knowledgeable about local sites and marine life. Hard coral abundant and in good condition — no soft coral or sponges. Fish were curious, swimming right into your mask. Saw a few black tip and lemon sharks on each dive as well as turtles, sting rays, large trigger fish

guarding nests, lionfish, variety of eels, barracuda, remora, and plentiful reef fish. Steel tanks are used so reduce weights accordingly. Well-run, first class operation — enjoyable. UW Photography Comments: No fresh water rinse tank on board boat but available upon return at dive shop. No photo processing at resort.

(www.bluenui.com,
www.pearlresorts.com/bora)

Bora Dive Center, August 2003, John McGill (jmcgill@austin.rr.com), Austin, TX. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. My girlfriend is a fairly new diver (less than 20 dives). We dove for 3 days with Bora Diving Center. The service was wonderful. We had 3 guides on the 3 days and each one went out of their way to make my girlfriend comfortable. They shared air with her to extend her bottom times and I think went beyond the call of duty. And on top of that, the diving was great. Our first dive was at a location in the lagoon. We entered in 20 feet of water and went down to 50 feet. The whole dive was a manta fest. There must have been 15 mantas who swam through the pass with us. A 40 minute, constant manta dive. The second dive was at a site where some fish was placed in a coral head and then the lemon sharks arrived. Probably 8 lemons ranging from 7 to 10 feet in length. You can also see mantas playing in the lights at the Hotel Bora Bora dock at night. Bora Diving Center is one of the best operations I have ever dived with. Bora Bora is a very romantic place. We also dived on Taha'a with the shop at the

Pearl Beach resort. Again great service. Also dived 2 days On Huahine with Blue Nui. I understand that operation will soon have new ownership, which is probably a good thing.
(www.boradive.com)

Moorea Blue Diving, Moorea Pearl Resort, January 2003, Gary Redman (cglredman@worldnet.att.net), **Mercer Island, WA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 feet. Water: 84 to 85 F, calm, choppy, no currents. Raphael Bonneau has just started the dive program at this six-month-old resort after working for other dive operations for 10 years on Moorea. He is highly competent, safety conscious, extremely knowledgeable of local dive sites and marine life, and has an engaging personality. His pre-dive briefings were informative, he followed safe and appropriate dive profiles, and he has a wealth of local knowledge that he shared with us. He made each dive interesting and exciting. He is enthusiastic, ambitious, hard working, and fully capable of developing a world class dive facility at the Moorea Pearl Resort. On one dive we had 50+ black tip, white tip, gray, and lemon sharks which he attracted and fed with a tuna head. Hard corals were healthy and plentiful, but there were no soft corals or gorgonians. The fish were extremely curious, swimming right into your mask! We encountered turtles, a variety of eels, pelagic trigger fish, tuna, barracuda, lionfish, and an abundant, colorful supply of reef fish. There are currently no rinse tanks, gear storage, or drying facilities — dive bags can be picked up at your room and delivered

to the dock and later returned to your room — call front desk for baggage pickup. You need to rinse all your gear and hang it to dry back at your room. Two-tank morning dives and one afternoon dive. Steel tanks are used so weights should be reduced. Entrances are a back roll. Shed your BC and tank before climbing back aboard up ladder. This is a beautiful place with wonderful diving and with the resort's support, Raphael will develop a world-class dive operation. (www.pearlresorts.com/moorea/diving.asp)

Raie Manta Club, Pension Teutamatea, August 2003, David Shem-Tov, London, NA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 15 to 25 Meters. Water: 22 to 23 Celsius, choppy. Between July and September humpback whales can be seen off the coast of Rurutu, in the remote Austral chain. RMC offers 3-hour whale watching tours with opportunities to snorkel with them. Water can be choppy and my companion felt seasick on every trip. However, we were able to swim with the whales 4-5 times on each occasion. The experience is indescribable. It is essential to book and prepay the trips as they are in extremely high demand. One of the three boats on the island was commandeered by the BBC, and RMC had to turn people away even when compromising their policy of having just 6 passengers per boat. Many people who have not prepaid were not able to go — a major disappointment given the cost and trouble of getting there. While quite modest, Pension Teutamatea is probably the best on the island and is managed by an

efficient lady who is an excellent cook.
(<http://raiemantaclub.free.fr>)

Te Ave Nui, Maitai Dream, July 2003, David Shem-Tov, London, NA.

Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 20 to 30 Meters. Water: 26 to 27 Celsius, choppy, currents. Operation offers essentially two superb dives: high energy pass dive with inbound tide into lagoon, and a wall dive outside the lagoon when the current is outgoing into the ocean. Fairly rough 30 minute rides on hard-bottomed zodiacs to dive sites. (They have one covered and one uncovered boat — and they get to decide which to use.) Caters mainly to French divers, though guides make an effort in English. Generous 12 litre steel or optional 15 litre steel tanks ensure long dives and no need for weight belts. Divemaster Cherie will blend your Nitrox on request with advance notice (he uses a rebreather). I chose to stick to air. Strongest drift dive I experienced (more than Palau or Conzumel). I enjoyed the wall dive even better than the pass dive. We launched into the blue. Very dramatic approach to an almost vertical wall. Compared to Rangiroa, less big fish/pelegic life but hard coral in pristine condition. Unfortunately, poor diving techniques tolerated by divemasters will mean that coral will soon deteriorate. I was shocked to see one diver who decided to propel herself throughout the dive simply by grabbing the coral using gloved hands. (This was not the drift dive — where such practice encouraged here, is questionable anyway.) Although divemaster empathized with my concern, he did not feel there was

any point in bringing the matter up with the diver concerned. (I did.)
(<http://tuamotu.plongee.free.fr/engfaka.htm>)

Te Ava Nui, Havaiki Pension, September 2003, Laura Todd (LTodd@co.humboldt.ca.us), Arcata, CA.

Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 80 F, calm, currents. This is the biggest pass in all of Polynesia, and what I mostly got was sharks — the mantas, whales, and hammerheads did not make an appearance. But the shark wallpaper is pretty impressive with literally dozens of blacktips (5-6'), smaller white tips and the occasional big lemon. They get really close; be sure to look behind you. We also could count on the big Napoleon wrasses, barracuda and dog-tooth tuna. Not much in the way of small stuff. The coral is much nicer than say Rangiroa, in the same vicinity. The weather was beautiful and the sea was utterly flat. Be ready for the ripping current. On the last day, there was an especially nice vertical swirling bait ball of hundreds of sennet-looking fish with baby black tip sharks cruising through. Overall, the diving was good with the potential to be great. The same can't be said of the dive operation. There is no bathroom at the shop — guys are encouraged to pee off the dock and the back of the boat, women wherever. There are two hard bottom inflatable boats with safety gear and drinking water. The lagoon is often rougher than the ocean due to wind and the local driver is a maniac who goes at full throttle no matter what the conditions; count on getting beat up and bounced

around. I found sitting down in the bottom of the boat with my back up against the stern minimally painful. They offer only 2 dives per day, one each morning and afternoon. After each, there is an inexplicable hour allotted to drinking tea and hanging around. As is typical here, they do transport you to and from your lodging. They use large steel tanks, which means most folks won't need a weight belt (cool), but the things are sooo heavy and the staff acted like it was an imposition to have to carry them. There is a little bit of anti-French discrimination going on. Each morning the owner would give the briefing in French, adding "current more than yesterday" in English, then ask in English, "you understand?" The staff encouraged divers to hang on to and pull themselves along the coral. Now there's a bunch of Japanese beginners who think that's how it's supposed to go. There was also the constant promise of a day trip to dive and picnic around some uninhabited motus that never materialized. The owner took a group of (mostly) beginners whose skill level he had no idea about (it became clear) to one of those shallow crevice/tunnel type sites with skylights, etc., that can be quite pretty. However, even in calm seas the surge put this site completely beyond this group. One person repeatedly hit her head on the ceiling of the tunnels, and everybody crashed into something or somebody at least once. The owner led this bunch into more than one dead end and pointed out absolutely nothing. I found a nudibranch, some cool shells and a few little sharks on my own. If Havaiki were to add a solar hot water heater,

they would easily be the best small pension in all of Polynesia. The setting is exquisite on a small white sand beach. Your bungalow is within arm's reach of the gorgeous turquoise water. The fabulous view faces the pass and the sunset. Each bungalow has a small and large bed, porch, private cold water bath and is simply but lovingly decorated. We had no bug problems but mosquito nets are provided. Kayaks and bikes are free to guests. Snorkeling right out the door is decent. I could go on for days about the food: whole mahi mahi, roast lamb, fresh parrot fish, all with exquisite sauces, pasta carbonara, homemade soup, each meal better than the last. Desserts were on the simple side. Clothilde and Joachim run a pearl farm and will let you watch whatever process is underway. When we were there, they had tons of "D" quality pearls for \$6 each, and good prices on high quality ones. Night life consists of the sunset accompanied by Clothilde's potent rum punch. Word to the wise: rinse off your beach chair first thing — their adorable boxer "Cassis" is a sweetie but has the unfortunate habit of peeing on them. The weekly Hawaiian Air flight from Honolulu stranded us for four days on the return. On day #2, they actually woke up a plane full of people at 2am, put them on the aircraft for a 5am "departure" only to announce that the part was not yet in Tahiti and probably wouldn't be for two more days! I got myself out of there on the next Air Tahiti Nui flight (night flights meant I was only awake for 48 hours unlike a lot of my fellow strandeers) and am eagerly awaiting the many first class round trip tickets Hawaiian is no doubt

busily printing. There are no accommodations on either boat or shore for photographers aside from a big set of shelves that could be used to work on cameras. The boat ride could be fatal to your camera; the driver only knows 2 speeds — full stop and full out, which means that with the slightest wind in the lagoon, both you and your camera will spend most of the 20 minute trip airborne, only occasionally crashing down into the boat.

HAWAII

Hawaiian guides have developed great skill in finding the unique: On the big island of Hawaii, Spanish dancers, rare juveniles, and lionfish are regulars. Kailua-Kona is filled with trendy shops to extract dollars from tourists in tacky hula shirts. The diving is mostly lava flow dives with relatively low coral cover. Sea turtles belly-up to boats of snorkelers to be fed lettuce, dogfood, or "turtle chow". ... There's excellent access to good shore diving. ... Kauai has special trips available only in the summer. ... Maui's diving is often to the backside of Molokini or Lanai and boats leave at 7 a.m., or earlier. ... Development in Honolulu has burned out most Oahu diving, but go to the northside. ... Some reefs are barren due to commercial collection for aquariums. There are few soft corals and dull hard corals, but colorful, plentiful, and unusual fish make the diving interesting. ... Expect clear water, visibility

that's usually better than the Caribbean — around 100 feet — and air temperatures in the low 80s. Water temperatures hit the very low 70s in January and February ... From mid-December to mid-February, squalls can last several days; otherwise the climate's pleasant and unoppressive year-round. ... There are plenty of condos available everywhere (many with cars, which you'll need since the dive boats are not berthed at hotels); ask your dive shop to find you a place; they often have good prices.

Kauai

Bubbles Below, January 2003, Nikki Mahan, Bellevue, WA. Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 78 F, surge. Linda and her crew make diving Kauai a lot of fun, no matter what the experience level. Divers go up as they run low on air, so light breathers are not hampered by time limits. The turtle cleaning stations are so wonderful. We saw many turtles on each dive. The mandarin shrimp are so cute.
(www.bubblesbelowkauai.com)

Bubbles Below, Lae Nani Condominium Resort, February 2003, William Edwards, Placerville, CA. Dives logged: 210. Vis: 70 to 100 feet. Water: 65 to 70 F. Dive restrictions enforced: a five-minute safety stop. Dive staff is friendly and knowledgeable. Anthony, our divemaster, was extremely good at finding small critters. I dove with them on two different