

Water: 78 to 80 F. Dives accrued: 150-160. Dive restrictions enforced: Swim with DM. Many, many fish: leopard shark, huge triggers, many and varied nudibranches, sting rays, clouded moray eel, schooling bannerfish, whiskered pipe fish, lion fish, raggy stonefish, black spotted porcupine fish, sweet lips, big fin reef squid, great anemones and coral. Could not dive without a DM in front of group and one in back. Finally told them we would not dive with them on third and last day if they didn't leave us alone, and they did. Water pretty silty. Dive boat a two-story and filled with maybe 40 people — a mess getting in the water. Lots and lots of sea life. ([www.westcoastdivers.com](http://www.westcoastdivers.com), [www.duangjit.com](http://www.duangjit.com))

## VIETNAM

### Nha Trang

**CoCo Divers, Vien Dong Hotel, April 2002, Anne Warburton, Yorba Linda, CA.** Vis: 90 to 100 feet. Dives accrued: 150-160. Dive restrictions enforced: Go with DM. Boats were old but getting new ones as we left. Heard dynamiting of reefs in distance. Reefs were in poor condition at Hon Nun. Even saw several dead fish in water. Many nudibranchs, feather stars, starfish, yellow tube worms, needle shrimp, ghost crab, lion fish, polka dot groupers, sweet lips, drum bat fish. Coral in terrible shape. CoCo Divers said they were trying to educate people in Vietnam regarding not dynamiting. ([www.cocodivecenter.com](http://www.cocodivecenter.com))

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## Indian Ocean & Red Sea Live-Aboards

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### INDONESIA

**Baruna Adventurer, April 2002, Linda Dunn ([deep66@earthlink.net](mailto:deep66@earthlink.net)), Riverside, CA.** Vis: 40 to 100 feet. Water: 79-82 F. Dives logged: 230. Indonesia has great dive sites. Not many Americans — we were the only two — all other divers Asian. Crew on Baruna wonderful. Macro stuff fantastic. Saw a cuttlefish that was brighter than any neon sign. Bali is exotic and beautiful — topside attractions excel. ([www.baruna.com](http://www.baruna.com))

**Kararu Sea Safari, April 2003, William Deertz ([wdeertz@centrin.net.id](mailto:wdeertz@centrin.net.id)), Los Angeles, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 45 to 75 feet. Water: 78 to 81 F, calm. Very comfortable boat with ensuite facilities. Splurge and get the upper deck cabins. Nice to have the back deck area to chill out between dives and in the evening with a nice glass of wine. Food was very good. 7 day trip from Bali to Komodo and back to Bali. Diving between Bali until you get to Komodo wasn't as good as in the park. On 7 day trip only had 2.5 days in Komodo park. Tradeoff to flying to BIM or Labuanbajo and doing entire 7 day trip in Komodo park. Along Sumbawa several interesting sites with black volcanic sand. Coral/fish life generally in very good to excellent condition. Well worth the trip. Adequate camera/charging station in saloon. ([www.kararu.com](http://www.kararu.com))

**Kararu Sea Safari, September 2003, Jennifer Meriwether (jen@delux.com), Oakland, CA.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 60 feet. Water: 71 to 80 F, calm, surge. This was our first live-aboard and our first trip to Indonesia and I can't imagine anything topping it. We did the 7 day itinerary from Bali-Komodo-Bali. The only drawback with our itinerary was that leaving from Bali (rather than Bima closer to Komodo) requires about 20 hours of transit time before you get to your first dive site and another 20 hours after your last dive to get back to Bali. The boat is a wooden "pinisi" style boat that is about 100 ft. long and 30 ft. wide. It has a total of 4 decks. Because we had only 7 passengers (out of 16 max), we were upgraded to one of the upstairs staterooms at no extra charge. The staterooms were large and comfortable with a fair amount of storage space and a queen-sized bed. All cabins had a sink in the cabin, ensuite bathrooms with toilet and shower and air conditioning (which worked quite well). The main salon downstairs was also comfortable and included 110 and 220 volt charging stations and a complete library including many reference books. All meals were taken there. Our chef, Didi, doubled as a massage therapist — for \$10 he gave a great one hour massage in your cabin. His meals were good — varied and filling. We started the day with fresh baked chocolate croissants and fruit, then came a full breakfast after the first dive with a choice of anything from omelettes to Nasi Goreng (fried rice with veggies). Lunch usually included stir-fried veggies and rice, lunch meats and cheese, green salad,

chicken or fish sate, and then one special item like chicken-potato salad, or a Spanish style egg torta with bell peppers. Dinners were a different theme each night — Thai, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Mexican, etc. Everything was good. The dive deck comfortable for 7 although it would probably be a bit crowded with 16. All fills were made at your dive station and were consistently 3,000 psi or higher. No Nitrox was available for our trip but supposedly they were getting it the following week. All diving was done from 2 small tenders. We found it much easier to gear up on the boat. This boat carries a crew of 19 plus two divemasters and someone was always around to help you gear up, help you onto the tenders, etc. The crew was fantastic, helpful, cheerful, nothing was ever too much trouble. Even the captain assisted divers gearing up, and everyone greeted you after the dive with the question "Good dive?" and seemed genuinely pleased when we responded yes. There were always two crew on each tender and we never waited more than one or two minutes to be picked up at the end of the dive. Every dive was so good that it is hard to pick a favorite although Cannibal Rock in Rinja definitely lives up to its stellar reputation. Our first two and last two days were spent diving in warmer (78-80 degree) waters on the way to and from Komodo. Once we got to Komodo and Rinja, the water temps dropped to 71-75 but the reefs were so gorgeous that after the initial shock, you didn't really notice it that much. All the reefs were pristine with huge plate and staghorn corals growing to within 10 ft of the surface, a staggering variety of tropicals and critters, tons

of anemone fish, leaf fish, frogfish, pygmy seahorses on the seafans at 80-100 ft, mantis shrimp, cuttlefish, nudibranchs galore, sea apples, zebra crabs, snake eels, devil scorpionfish, you name it, we saw it at one time or another. Our divemasters, Carl and Linda, were excellent at finding the balance between pointing out cool stuff but not mother-henning. They never limited bottom time, just asked you to come up with 500 psi. We typically we did three or four dives a day depending on the schedule, including a night dive on four of the nights but that was plenty without Nitrox. Although we did see some larger pelagics, including 5 huge mantas at Manta Alley and a pod of dolphins in the water, this trip is really much more for macro lovers. One passenger was looking for big fish and he was somewhat disappointed but the rest of us were thrilled with the variety of creatures and the health of the reefs.

***Komodo Dancer, November 2002, Bradley Bowen, Farmington, UT.***

Experience: 251-500 dives. Water: 80 to 82 F, currents. Number of dives: 319. Getting to Indonesia is a chore. Three days of travel before our first dive, five days of diving, and three days of travel after our last dive, with a required overnight stay in San Francisco on the way home. It is a long way to go for five days of diving, but I would go again. We saw many fish and other creatures not seen in other live-aboard destinations, such as Fiji, Palau, and Hawaii. Saw some angelfish and butterflyfish not in our ID books. Lots of nudibranchs, several of which I could not locate in our Helmut Debelis

nudibranch book. Thousands of miniature yellow sea cucumbers at Komodo Island. To do this dive you must take the short version of the land tour and go back to the boat to do the dive while the others are doing a longer land tour. Komodo dragons were interesting, but the short tour was plenty. There is an outdoor pearl necklace market where the dive tender lands on Komodo. A medium quality, long strand of pearls sells for roughly U.S. \$20. Visibility is variable. Ripping currents at several sites, including K-2, which also had poor visibility. There is a high probability that you will see many giant Pacific manta rays at Langkoi. It took a half hour before we saw the first manta, but then there were a bunch that we were able to enjoy watching as we desperately fought to conserve air and extend our dives, while fighting a current I'd estimate at 7 knots. One afternoon only four of us entered the water. As a photographer, I became separated from the other three and had an incredible half hour experience with a six foot long female cuttlefish hiding her eggs among the coral, who allowed me to approach and even gently pet her back. Saw two reef sharks at "The Point," and a black tip at another dive site. The pygmy seahorses at Gilli Lawah Darat were interesting, but on a night dive we discovered that dynamite fishing had left nothing but rock and rubble. Some other dive sites also showed signs of dynamite fishing. My expression of extreme dissatisfaction at being taken to a dive site that had been bombed into nothingness after traveling so far, was met with the reply that this was

the only place that the crew could count on finding the pygmy seahorses. Cannibal Rock was breathtaking and has to be one of the premier dive sites in the world. It made the trip worthwhile, and I have not been able to identify a number of creatures photographed at this site. Food on the *Komodo Dancer* — by American standards — I wouldn't rate any better than average. The boat ran out of noncarbonated beverages after a few days, despite a pre-trip request. All the cabins are small and storage space is limited. The trip back to Bali is against the current, which stirred up horrible odors that awakened us the last two nights. The crew slowed the boat down, and we were able to go back to sleep. This delayed our arrival by many hours. The crew was great at calling ahead and arranging for ground transportation to meet those who had flights that afternoon on a beach at the North end of Bali. I found my polar fleece dive skin to be adequate thermal protection. My wife wore her dive skin as well, but occasionally wore a three mil wetsuit. Our experience was limited by four inexperienced men who were attracted by the relatively low price and cheap airfare. They did not realize they could get out of the current by ducking behind a rock, and they were too stupid to hold onto a rock or dead piece of coral to avoid being swept several miles out to sea. They were lucky that a competent crew kept track of them, but their inexperience prevented us from diving K-2 more than once, and prevented us from diving other good sites with current. The crew are top notch. They gave us warm towels and

back massages after every dive, and were extremely friendly. Photographers table is on the bow.

([www.peterhughes.com](http://www.peterhughes.com))

***Komodo Dancer*, December 2002, Richard Lehach (lehachrw@hotmail.com), Larchmont, NY.** Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 10 to 60 feet. Water: 77 to 81 F, choppy. Komodo has some of the best reefs I have seen for color and diversity. Some overfishing is evident in the scarcity of large fish on some sites. Visibility in late Dec., early Jan. was 30 to 50 feet on most dives. Did have two with 10 to 15 feet that was disappointing. A few had 80 to 90 feet. Boat is comfortable. Meals are eaten on foredeck, weather permitting. Main salon is cramped with full boat. Unfortunately the salon also leaks when it rains, along with four of the eight cabins. Breakfast was standard live-aboard, lunches were usually good, but the sit-down diners were usually on the poor side (the chef should stick with what he knows; dinners were usually more western-style dishes and inferior in quality). Captain left port without enough fuel in the tanks and lost a full day of diving in Komodo when we had to refuel outside Komodo. Expected 46 dives to be available on 11 day trip (9.5 days of diving), and only 30 dives were made available (max. of four dives on full dive days). This was a real disappointment, and Peter Hughes should change their advertising if this is what is to be expected. *Komodo Dancer* is on the pricey side for Indonesia and would be worth it if the boat were in top condition and all dives were delivered, crew

was friendly and helpful. Camera table was on foredeck and exposed to the elements. Charging station inside main cabin. Table inadequate if more than three photographers on board. E-6 processing available. No rinse tanks on tenders. Cameras had to be brought into a/c cabin/salon when boat underway due to location and storage facilities of the table.

***Komodo Dancer*, January 2003, Pat Wikstrom (pwikstrom@murphymedical.org), Warne, NC.**

Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 25 to 100 feet. Water: 76 to 83 F, calm. My twelve day tour from Bali to Komodo Island and points in between showed off some of the most spectacular diving anywhere in the world. And the 100 ft long traditional twin masted motor sailor, *Komodo Dancer*, is a wonderfully exotic, comfortable vehicle to explore these islands from. I did 29 of the 32 offered dives with an average dive time of 56 minutes and recorded hundreds of new species in my log book. Surprisingly, since it was only a couple of years old, the *Komodo Dancer* was showing some wear and tear during our voyage. Steel rigging, rails, and the crane were rusting, paint was flaking, and some lighting was defective. But she was scheduled to go into dry-dock after our trip. The upper decks weren't sealed in any way other than the three times a day the crew poured salt water on them to keep them swollen. This allowed rainwater to percolate through the roofs of the cabins causing much consternation in those divers whose bunks got wet. Also the water maker was broken requiring peri-

odic stops near inhabited islands to obtain deliveries of barrels of water from the locals. However these problems paled in comparison to the beauty of the vessel riding at anchor in a cove as seen from the dive skiffs, or the enthusiasm of the fourteen man local crew, or the professionalism and attentiveness of our four person dive staff, or the usual high level of Peter Hughes service. Food was excellent and plentiful with marvelous curry, garlic, and Thai sauces, snacks between meals, wine with dinner, and beer and rum drinks all included. I did, however, get a little tired of rice by the end of the trip. The all wooden ship was filled with beautifully polished hardwood throughout. The seven cabins were relatively spacious with en-suite baths, individually controlled A/C, adequate storage, and comfortable bunks. The multi purpose salon, which was smaller than usual, doubled as a gathering place, computer and photo workshop, air-conditioned haven on hot days, and the sick bay during our one instance of potential DCS which required a diver to lay down and suck on the oxygen bottle for a couple of hours. Most meals were served at a huge table on the main deck covered by a tarp laid across the yard arm on the main mast. During hard rains we either got wet outside or squeezed into the salon. The small sun-decks on the Lido deck, both tarp covered and uncovered, were frequent gathering places. The dive deck, while not huge, was well laid out for the purpose; with camera table, charging stations, showers, and sufficient gearing up space for fourteen divers. The *Dancer* carried two 20 ft long open

fiberglass dive tenders powered by twin 40hp engines. On most dives both tenders went to the same site although the drops were staggered or the specific point on the site was varied. Dive staff loaded and unloaded our gear so all we had to do was step aboard with camera in hand, sit down in our position, and shrug into our kit. Dive tender staff occasionally fouled up peoples tank weights and weight pockets, or banged up gear as it was hoisted up over the side. They preferred we not climb up the ladders wearing gear. Diving was fantastic. From the first check out dive off Satonda Island where I noted a wide array of hard and soft coral, lionfish, five different species of nudibranchs, morays, turtles, free-swimming crinoids, and huge schools of colored anthias. Great boulder sites like Pillarsteen with rocky caves, cracks, and swim throughs with blacktip reef sharks lurking about; ripping current dives at Tatawa Besar where mantas cruised in the pea soup vis; wonderful night dives on sites like White Beach with Spanish dancers, octopus, sealslugs and moreys foraging. On some of our stops every site was spectacular. Gili Banta held "K-2" a true pristine coral garden, "Star Wars" with staghorn coral in fields of green, yellow, brown, purple, and grey colorations, and the thrilling "GPS Point" where high voltage currents and vibrant colors added up to a washing machine dive through an artists pallet. Nusa Kodesland serves up wall dives on either side of the channel; Yellow Wall and Pelican Point, where Yan found us pygmy seahorses, banded sea snakes, sea dragons, ribbon eels, frogfish, and dozens of different

nudibranchs. Nusa Kode is also home to Cannibal Rock the most colorful accumulation of sea life I've ever seen. This shallow sea mountain is packed solid with multicolored anemones, crinoids, sponges, sea fans, and delicate soft coral in green and orange, purple and pink, gold and reds all crammed together in an unbelievable density. Three day and one night dive at this one site still wasn't enough. During one picture perfect surface interval riding at anchor in the bay we saw Komodo dragons stalking the little wild pigs on the beach, white headed eagles were soaring on the wind overhead, while a marlin jumped right behind the boat. The land excursion to Komodo itself was lots of fun with great photo-ops of dragons fighting and getting frisky. The island of Bali seemed safe, friendly people, beautiful temples, interesting culture, good shopping, and hot nightspots. Slide processing daily if needed, well set up for UWPs.

***Komodo Dancer, January 2003, Sherwin Isenberg, M.D., Los Angeles, CA.*** Vis: 40-80 feet. Water: 77 to 82 F. Dives logged: 450. Bali: Few tourists, great service and hotels. Accessible directly from Singapore, HK, Bangkok, Taiwan, Tokyo. *Komodo Dancer*: Gorgeous boat with hardwood paneling, flooring. Almost no plastic. Cabins average-size with oversized bathroom/shower. Much storage. All dives from tenders. Lovely sites emphasizing creatures — pygmy seahorses, huge Spanish dancers, mantas (not for us), cuttlefish, turtles, beautiful nudibranchs. Food — Western and Indonesian — very tasty. Crew extremely

warm and caring, even native Indonesians. Divemasters from Britain, Germany, Indonesia — excellent. Only negative was relatively long cruises to and between islands. Fascinating land hike on Komodo Island to see Komodo dragons — 10-foot long lizards so ugly they are engaging.

**Komodo Dancer, May 2003, Dale Treadway (trdwy@tconl.com), Omaha, NE.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 90 feet. Water: 78 to 84 F, calm. Boat is roomy and comfortable — salon and two separate sun/shade areas. Dining either salon or alfresco. Food wonderful with Asian and American most meals with fresh fish several times. Diving is as easy as it gets. Never handle gear and gear off in water before exit. Staff assisting at all times. All drift dives from two tenders with quick pick up after dive completion. All dives sites in Komodo National Park have great color and healthy coral. Reefs are alive with small nudis, fantastic feather stars of numerous colors, many different tropical fish including leaf scorpionfish, and some but fewer sharks and turtles. At “The Alley” there were well over 100 mantas for the fly by, but they generally keep their distance. Water was cooler in the southern dive sites but not as cold as previous reports indicated with 3 mm and hood being good. Only eight divers (14 for full boat) and 19 crew. This is a great staff and with more than two staff for every diver the service was out of this world. It will never get better than this. From the pick up by divemaster Gary at hotel to drop off at airport, this trip was world class. Bad:

Three canceled flight segments, a day and two going and return. UW Photography Comments: Separate rinse buckets, large camera area, staff handled in and out of boat/water.

**M/V TemuKira, Grand Komodo, April 2003, Terry Anderson (tha@tamu.edu), Bryan, TX.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 85 F, currents. Second trip with Grand Komodo since the service and diving are exceptional, first one in 2001. The TemuKira only holds 12 divers and we only had five for the 9 day trip in an area where we never saw another dive boat, hardly any other people, Irian Jaya north to the equator, diving reefs, seamounts, and coastal areas. The food is Indonesian, plentiful and great. The crew is outstanding, helpful and friendly. We had three divemasters for five divers for nine days. The other divers were from Sweden, two DMs and one instructor, and they took professional digital photography which we watch after dinner with cold beers. By the first day the crew knew everyone’s equipment and you never touched your gear until you packed to leave. Three long dives during the day, and we would anchor behind an island in the evening and take a long night dive. We even took a 5 am dive to watch the sea come alive with sunrise. Just ask the crew; no problem. And the critters! We saw more than a dozen species we never had seen in over 300 each dives in Caribbean, Pacific, or Indian Ocean. Pigmy seahorse, harlequin ghost pipefish, Spanish dancer, ocellated frogfish, slipper lobster, electric clams, Randall’s goby, mandarin fish, numer-

ous wobbling sharks, and epaulette and bamboo sharks. That besides the usual crocodile fish, scorpion and lion fish, manta rays, reef sharks and hawksbill turtles. One day we saw a school of a thousand dolphins. This is for the adventurous, the curious, and advanced divers. My fifth live-aboard, and never been treated better: Grand Komodo even picked us up at Bali airport since there had been a tragic bombing six months earlier. Then we flew to Irian Jaya; they set up all arrangements. Look up Grand Komodo Tours on the web; about \$1,800 for 9 days on the live-aboard, plus your flights. ([www.komodoalordive.com/vessels.htm](http://www.komodoalordive.com/vessels.htm))

***Nusa Tara, Tarata, and TemuKira, Grand Komodo Tour and Dives, July 2003, Peggy & Jose Miguel Duran, M.D. (drjoseduran@stx.rr.com), Corpus Christi, TX.*** Experience: Over 1,000 dives. Vis: 35 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 84 F, calm, currents. 5th live-aboard trip, in the last three years, to Komodo & Rinca Islands (Indonesia) with Grand Komodo Tours & Dives. This is an Indonesian owned and operated company that was the pioneer for the Komodo area (See *Undercurrent* March 1994) and it has branched out to Alor, Wakatobi and now Raja Empat. We fly from Bali to Flores Island, and from there we sail 2 hours to Komodo. This has the great advantage of avoiding the long sail from Bali to Komodo. At the end of the trip we usually sail to the port of Sape in Sumbawa Island and overland to Bima for the short flight back to Bali. We like the *Tarata*, though this summer we also tried the

*Nusa Tara* which is smaller and has cabin fans instead of AC, not needed anyway even in July/August as the boat lounge area is open and the cabins have large windows which can be kept open. (The room fans operate on batteries, so the engines and compressor are turned off at night, for a quiet rest.) The *Nusa Tara* has a new engine, is faster than the other boats, and will sail even if there are only 2 divers although it can sleep 10. Dives join and depart the boat on their own schedules. The *Tarata* is larger, about 75 ft, with six cabins with their own showers and heads, and individually controlled a/c. It has enclosed dining/lounge area with large fans and big windows. The dive-staging area is roomy and well-designed, and it has an upper deck partially shaded, ideal for sun-bathing or enjoying the amazing sunsets (and sunrises). Most open areas on the deck are covered with nonskid mats. It can accommodate 12 divers, but we have never been more than 8 and often just the two of us. The food is excellent and the crew cares for all your gear from setup to rinse and dry after the last dive. They also have the *Temu Kira*, a 110 ft Pinisi sail/motorboat for Alor-Komodo, Wakatobi and Raja Empat. We have been on more than 20 live-aboards and the level of comfort and convenience of Grand Komodo Tours boats and the quality of the diving provided can hardly be matched, and at prices almost half of their competitors. Just check their web page at [www.komodoalordive.com](http://www.komodoalordive.com). The head divemaster, Anton, has trained many of the younger divemasters on the other boats in the Komodo area and is very



adept at finding the unusual critters experts on Indo-Pacific sea life come here to see. The crew's thorough knowledge of the area is very important as Komodo is also known for its tricky currents. The captains are excellent at bringing these shallow draft boats close to the reefs so that often we dive from the boat. Divers are brought to the boat as soon as they surface and the dinghy returns to wait for the other divers, so you can dive as long as you wish without worrying about other divers waiting for you. The sea life is simply magnificent. All the creatures you only see in photo books and many you never knew existed. After more than 1,500 dives, we find new creature on nearly every dive. Possibly due to the coral bleaching in so much of the rest of the Pacific and the Indian Ocean following El Nino of 1998, there are more boats traveling longer distances to dive in these great waters. Because of the rich cool currents, these are healthy reefs with an occasional exception at the outer limits of the Marine Park where some old dynamite damage can be found. New patrol boats partially funded by The Nature Conservancy are doing a great job in keeping out poachers. Reno & Nyoman Kirtya, the owners of GKT&D, have been very vocal and active in the establishment, maintenance and protection of the Komodo Marine Park. Another reason why we keep returning is that once you have shown your proficiency, they let you dive your own profiles and treat you like adults. Dive as long as you want, the divemaster or the dinghy is always nearby. They choose dive sites with careful consideration of the expe-

rience level of the divers and the prevailing currents. If the current is not right, it is very easy to move to another excellent dive site usually no more than 15-20 ft away. Reno and Nyoman Kirtya, have taken great pride and pains in slowly developing their business. They take a personal interest in the divers, personally meeting us before and after the trip to make sure that everything was satisfactory and listen to any suggestions for improvements. They are very helpful with arrangements for transportation and hotels if you want to spend extra time in Bali or the other islands. We were tempted to keep this operation our personal secret, but Indonesia needs our tourism. We were there 10 days after the Bali tragedy in October 2002 and it was sad to see the streets so empty and hear the Balinese ask us to "Please tell your friends in America that we like them, this was not done by Balinese and we want our American friends to come back." We returned last April and July and it was encouraging to see more tourists returning but, sadly, few Americans. We have been more than 14 times to Indonesia over the last 12 years and we have always been treated with utmost kindness and courtesy by the people in all the Indonesian Islands we have visited. The best diving in the world at the best price with the best people. UW Photography Comments: Adequate rinsing and setting up space. 220 Volts. Need round plug adapters. Good voltage stabilizer. NTSC/PAL Monitor for videographers. No onboard film development. ([www.komodoalordive.com/vessels.htm](http://www.komodoalordive.com/vessels.htm))

***Pelagian*, Diving4Images, June 2003, Jon Bertsch/Rosemary Chengson (jon.bertsch@ucop.edu), Oakland, CA.** Experience: 501-1,000 dives. Vis: 20 to 100 feet. Water: 73 to 84 F, choppy. We did a few day dives in Bali and then a 10 day cruise on the *Pelagian* with Graham from Diving4Images. Excellent guide with a talent for spotting hard to find subjects. Tell him what you want to find and he'll go looking or tell you where to try. Diving was mostly black sand/muck diving. In Bali did some day dives near Padang Bai; lots of critters but the reef is nothing special. On the cruise traveled from Bali through Sumbawa to Komodo. Four dives a day including a night dive every night. Critter diving was excellent. We saw just about everything. New nudibranchs on almost every dive. Hunting cuttlefish, octopus (including blue-ringed), squid. Wasp fish, Pegasus sea moths, stargazers, inimicus, rhinopias, frog fish, eels, snakes, turtles, sharks, manta, two pygmy seahorse species. A huge variety of crustaceans. Did a couple of dives in new spots around Rinca and saw sharks and some large marble rays. Didn't see large schools of fish in general, but around Komodo and Rinca there where some big grouper, travallies, Napoleon wrasses, barracuda, and schools of jacks. Water temp in Komodo area was 73 to 79 F, and you really needed a 7 mm suit with a hood to be comfortable. The rest of the time it was low 80s and 3 mm was fine. Currents and viz were variable. In Horseshoe Bay (Rinca) viz was around 20 to 30 feet with lots of junk

in the water. Around other sites viz was up to 100 feet, but mostly in the 30 to 40 foot range. Excellent cruise and a great time diving in Bali. If you are going to Bali and want a guide for the area I highly recommend Graham. If you want to go on a cruise he does charters on the *Pelagian* and other boats. This was Graham's first on the *Pelagian*, and it was superb. On the *Pelagian* there's a camera room with 120/240 outlets. Good amount of room for cameras, onboard developing if required. Large rinse tanks. Crew was careful with equipment. ([www.diveasiapacific.com](http://www.diveasiapacific.com), [www.diving4images.com](http://www.diving4images.com))

***Sea Safari III*, June 2003, Fred C. Drury, Wheaton, IL.** Went back to Komodo on an 11-day live-aboard trip with *Sea Safari III*. Our route took us east from Denpasar, along the South coast of Bali and then Northeast and along the North coast of Lombok. After travelling all night, we did our first dives at Gili Lawang, in the lea of Gunung Rinjani, the island's 10,700-foot high volcano. Then it was off again for another 18 hours until we reached Sangeang Island, off the northeast corner of Sumbawa. Here we did two dives at Menjeng Wall, one of the region's famous black-sand dives populated by nudibranch species and other interesting invertebrates including ghost pipefish. By the morning of our third day we were in the north end of Komodo National Park. Real changes have taken place in the four years since I last visited. There are lovely bommies that rise to within 15 feet or so of the surface. In the past

these were lush coral gardens with plenty of attractive soft corals, crinoids, and anemones populated by clown fish, but overall limited reef fish and few schooling fish. Well, the fish are back big time. Throughout our dives here we were surrounded by clouds of anthias, as well as a wide variety of other reef fish, both small and large; schools of jacks, bannerfish, triggerfish. Ranger patrols have been effective in reducing fishing pressures. Next morning I dived Valerie's Rock (aka Red Beach), where I first witnessed the symbiotic relationship between fire urchins and Coleman shrimp or zebra crabs. This time I was pleased to see increased fish population. We moved south through the park doing four to five dives per day and spending three days diving the reefs around Horseshoe Bay (aka Rinja Island), the "mother load" of biodiversity in this area. Both ends of this bay are fed from the Indian Ocean; this is much colder water, and the plankton has much to do with the superior biodiversity. Here the reefs are incredibly rich with life, hard and soft corals, incredible mixtures of yellow, red, white, orange, green. Plenty of invertebrates. This may be as close to paradise as this sinner will ever get. Two dive sites stand out: Burt Jones' "Cannibal Rock" and Larry Smith's "Yellow Wall o' Texas." As we retraced our path to Bali, we anchored in a sheltered bay off the village of Bantoh — several ornate ghost pipefish, yellow and white skeleton shrimp (the largest I have ever seen), magenta, and white ornate ghost pipefish, soft coral gobies, squat lob-

sters on crinoids, numerous nudibranchs, commensal shrimp, crinoid shrimp, and more! *Sea Safari III* is the largest and most comfortable live-aboard I've been on. The boat is 115-foot-long, Pinisi-rigged Bugis Schooner constructed in 1998. The boat is all wood, and the style, which dates back more than 400 years, is still a workhorse in this region. Slow and heavy, it rides the region's seas with an easy grace, providing much comfort. The ship has 4 decks. The lowermost is the location of the guest cabins. The cabins, 8 with twin beds and 2 with double beds, are huge by live-aboard standards and have greater-than-normal under-the-bed storage. All cabins are en suite and have individual air-conditioning units. Above this is the main deck, where the lounge and the dive prep area are located. The dive area is forward. The lounge includes a huge selection of DVDs and a library. Also the dining area, where meals are served family style, and a charging station which includes both 110v and 220v service, and incorporates voltage regulation electronics to suppress voltage spikes and protect rechargers. The camera area is outside the main salon and includes storage cabinets beneath its working-level counter. The bridge deck is where the crews quarters are along with 2 owners'-cabins (queen beds and en suite) as well as a large canvas covered area to the stern, which we found perfect for reading, morning coffee, and a post dive, pre-dinner cocktail. It also became my headquarters for sunrise and sunset images. In south Komodo the Indian Ocean water averaged 73 F,

80 F cooler than the Pacific waters just a few miles north. The ship has a crew of 18, so guests are pampered. The crew is friendly and sees to it that one's every needs are met. The dive guides, Linda Johnston and Karl Klingeler, find just about any critter you are interested in seeing. The dive day begins with juice, fresh fruit, freshly baked croissants. The first dive is typically at 7:30 a.m. and as you gear up you give the dining steward your (big) breakfast order. The first dive is followed by a leisurely breakfast and sun and camera prep work. Most mornings we did a 2nd dive at about 10:30 a.m., which was followed by lunch. The 3rd dive was typically at 2 p.m., or perhaps a little later depending on the distance to the site, followed by an afternoon snack. Most days we did a dusk-dive at about 6 p.m., sundown in this region, followed by an evening beverage and dinner at 8 p.m.. The evening meals feature cuisine from a different nation each evening. All were excellent; I preferred the Mexican and Chinese. Diving is from skiffs where the crew has placed your fins and camera(s). After gearing up one proceeds down a short ramp to the skiffs, which makes the short trip to the dive site. The skiffs remain at the dive site throughout the dive, and each is equipped with convenient ladders. I've done far more than my fair share of live-aboards, and most all are good but this one was special. *Sea Safari III* sets a new standard. ([www.kararu.com](http://www.kararu.com))

***Serenade*, Murex Manado Resort,  
Jim Parkhill, March 2003, Edinburg,**

**TX.** *Serenade* live-aboard boat operated by Murex Manado Resort. The website for Murex states that the *Serenade* has 6 cabins and a capacity for 12 divers. With only five of us, we each had our own cabin with en suite bath. However, the cabins are cramped and would not have been comfortable in a double occupancy situation. Storage space in the cabins is at a premium. Furthermore, even with only five divers on board, the dining area and the dive deck seemed crowded. Camera work space is limited. The food was almost entirely Indonesian and after a couple of days, everything began to taste the same to me. The chef was positively heavy handed with the garlic. I virtually lived on white rice, peanut butter and toast during the trip. The crew on the *Serenade* did everything that one could ask to make the trip pleasant and productive. Divemaster Opo was a real pro. The second DM, Kennedy, was almost too eager to please. This meant that he got commissioned into becoming the personal camera sherpa for our lone female diver/photographer for the majority of the dives. Our itinerary was rather strange. We departed from Manado and made a rough night crossing to Bangka Island, passing by the Bunaken Islands. We did a couple of morning dives at Bangka which served up beautiful soft coral, a couple of pigmy seahorses, an assortment of eels and octopi, along with a fair variety of reef fish. Since the other four divers in the group were suffering from the after effects of mal de mer from the rough night crossing, they voted not to make the crossing from

lianaka to Ruang. Instead we came back to the Sulawesi mainland on following seas to dive at Paradise Resort. This site starts along a wall and ends up as a true muck dive at the foot of the resort's pier. It was a productive "critter" site, giving us such fare as mating cuttlefish, crocodile fish, Pannatas batfish, razor fish, a seahorse and some harlequin ghost pipefish. After the night dive there, the group voted to head north again, cruising that night past Bangka to Ruang. The next day we dived the two lava flows around Ruang and Pasige Island. Abundance of colorful anemones, crinoids, fans and sponges. These sites also produced many nudibranchs, batfish, scorpionfish, barracuda, Napoleon wrasses, eels, sea snakes and the usual reef fish. The dive at Pasige was not as colorful but did give us more Napoleon wrasses, giant clams, cuttlefish, huge sponges and acres of Staghorn coral. Normally, the plan would have been to continue cruising north until we made it to the underwater volcanoes. However, the seas were picking up again and the other members of the group opted out of fighting rough seas to get there. The vote took us back south all the way to Manado and the Bunaken Islands. One of the problems that we had in negotiating the rough seas was that the captain had no control of the throttle from the pilot house. If he wanted to slow down, speed up or go in reverse, he had to signal the engine room by means of a series of coded horn blasts. This not only made handling the seas challenging for the captain but the frequent horn noise

became a major irritant. So, the next day found us diving the Bunaken Islands which can be done from Manado as a day trip. Actually, the dive sites were as good as those that we had dived in the Sangihe Islands except that they did not have the proliferation of soft corals. Mantenage Island, Mandolin and Lakuan. One gave us some white tip sharks, huge sponges, schools of tuna, long nosed hawkfish, robust ghost pipefish, Napoleon wrasses, numerous nudis, several turtles and a nice variety of reef fish. Two of us hazarded a night dive against the bulkhead in the middle of nasty Manado harbor. We were pleasantly surprised with a plethora of interesting critters including Spanish dancers, several octopi, many eels, leaf scorpionfish, Pannatas batfish and hordes of lionfish. That night found us making the crossing yet again out to Bangka and Tanjaung Islands. Two morning dives there produced more Napoleon wrasses, honeycomb eels, numerous nudibranchs, mantis shrimp, and a frogfish. Making every effort to confuse the captain even more with our requests, we cruised back to the Sulawesi mainland for another afternoon and night dive at Paradise Pier. Since we were all scheduled to spend the next week at Kuungkungan Bay Resort on Lembah Strait, we convinced the *Serenade* crew to cruise to Lembah and drop us off at KBR as opposed to going back to Manado on the *Serenade* and making the drive to KBR. We made three dives the next day at Lembah off the *Serenade* before getting dropped off at KBR. This is hardly a fair representation of what the

typical trip aboard the *Serenade* might be like. Presumably we missed the marquee dives of the trip by not getting farther north or out to the underwater volcanoes. The *Serenade* crew was outstanding, as evidenced by their willingness to let us call the shots as far as the itinerary and choice of dive sites were concerned. However, when it comes to the frills and the creature comforts, it doesn't compare with live-aboards of the standards of, say, the Aggressor fleet. If I were to decide to dive this area again, I would book on the *Ocean Rover*.

([www.manado-liveaboards.com](http://www.manado-liveaboards.com),  
<http://murexdive.com>)

## MALDIVES

**Manthiri, December 2002, Glenn Davis, Pittsburg, CA.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 40 to 100 feet. Water: 81 to 82 F, choppy, currents. Diving was very nice. Usual dive was starting outside of a reef and flowing inside through a channel in the reef along with a mild to strong current. Nice, small soft corals; hard corals were mostly broken up and dead — some starting to grow back. Saw sharks, eagle and stingrays, turtles, Napoleon wrasse, lots of lion fish, honeycomb and moray eels, many smaller colorful tropical fish and some nudibranchs. Nice underwater topography and good vis outside of the reef and going through channel. Not for the novice, relatively strong currents at times, surface was sometimes pretty rough, as were exits from water. I was used to this from Monterey and other dive experiences — but my compan-

ion got a bit bruised on the ladder a few times. The boat crew handled everything well. The dive master and captain were excellent. Really liked the crew. One to four dives a day, including a night dive, though not every day. First day got one dive; last day of diving got in three dives; in between, three to four a day. Eight-day cruise including last day which was in port where we left after breakfast. While I liked the diving and the crew, the boat left much to be desired. Perhaps for Maldives live-aboards it is great but not compared to what I have read about Peter Hughes and related classes of boats. Upon boarding the boat found it had been fumigated and the odor was quite unpleasant. Read another post to *Undercurrent* that this boat has a cockroach problem, and they do this between trips. They need to do it and do it again, as we had many cockroaches, mostly recent hatchlings and a few large ones. They didn't seem to open up all the cabinets to get the fumigant into all spaces and so it wasn't thorough. Also, they didn't air out the boat before the guests arrived, and so it was quite sickening. Cabins were pretty noisy due to generator that always ran to power lights and A/C. A/C was turned up so high that we froze much of the time inside the boat. As we learned where the switches were we turned most off but never found the one for the hall outside the cabins — the engineer didn't know where that switch was either, so it was an arctic dash to get into our cabins wet after diving. Food was OK. Occasionally a very good dish. Breakfasts were white bread toasted,