

live-aboards that I have sailed on. The crew is helpful, knowledgeable and friendly. The diving is almost all wreck diving but the best there is. The rooms are very large and spacious, air-conditioned and well kept up. The food is great. The owner/capt and his wife make it a trip to remember.

## PAPUA NEW GUINEA

**Chertan, September 2002, Jim Jenkins (jajenkins@pacbell.net), Oakland, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 150 feet. Water: 75 to 77 F, calm, choppy, no currents. On a one to 10 scale, 10 for muck lovers; 7 for big fish lovers. Visibility good to very good. Muck dives had 40 feet or better. Go for the macro critters and the smaller, more intimate boat. There is plenty of large fish life; this trip is for muck divers who also want some variety. About 50% of our diving was muck diving or on reef tops looking for critters. Dives on reefs in open ocean produced a few sharks, schools of barracuda, eagle rays, turtles, schools of bump-head parrots, and healthy fish life. From the boat, we saw dolphins, a whale shark, a dugong, a swordfish, and mola molas. Some coral bleaching; the reefs are recovering nicely with large fans, sea whips, abundant black corals, soft corals, etc. Reef fish are healthy and diverse. While we didn't see everything (no leaf scorpion or lacy scorpion fish), we saw a great variety of exotic nudibranchs, ghost pipefish, snake eels, crocodile fish, scorpion fish, lion fish, blue-ribbon eels, numerous small shrimps and crabs, etc. Surprises like the wondrous melibe nudibranchs

(three of them feeding, one nearly 12 feet long) occurred on nearly every muck dive. Rob knows the sites intimately and excels at finding things. He dives most dives and is happy to guide you. The briefings were good. Generally good food with some delicious meals. Cabin space was adequate and similar to most smaller boats. Two heads (with showers) on the main deck, shared by all guests. A/C is a single unit under the stairs for all 6 units. Nice lounge area, adequate space for sunning and shade above decks. The boat is wide for its size. 80% of the diving is from the stern with side and up two sets of steps in the rear. No crowding and easy entries and exits. This is the most relaxed type of unlimited diving since you go in when you want, and come back to the boat when you want (although the crew keeps watch and will pick you up in the tender if you want). A few current dives on reefs were from the zodiac. No EAN. There is a large table above decks for cameras. The crew carries cameras up to the table after rinsing and will fetch them back down for you if you're lazy. Rob makes the trip fun and productive. Rooms are not made up daily. ([www.chertan.com](http://www.chertan.com))

## **Chertan, December 2002, David McKowen, Andalusia, AL.**

Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 100 feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. The best dive boat in the world. I just completed my six or seventh trip on the *Chertan* in PNG. Rob Vanderloos, the owner-captain, is an enthusiastic diver and videographer. Rob is always ready to dive and point out interesting critters.

On this trip Molly (one of the staff) discovered a new species of pygmy sea-horse and found numerous small to tiny critters that my >40-year-old eyes would not have seen without her help. The boat is small but well designed for divers with two ladders, a swim platform, three fill stations, huge air banks, and helpful crew. Pao, Rob's PNG partner, and her sister Molly are fantastic cooks as well as great dive guides. The only downside is lack of ensuite heads, but I was never inconvenienced.

Fantastic muck diving, good reef diving (but only if the guests want to miss out on more muck!). This boat is set up by and for underwater photographers and videographers with E6, a huge camera table, two rinse tanks, and careful staff.

**Golden Dawn, August 2002, Jim Jenkins (jajenkins@pacbell.net), Oakland, CA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 200 feet. Water: 81 to 84 F, choppy, currents. 14 nights out of Madang to the Manus, Hermit, and Ninigo Islands, south to Wewak. 79 F near Madang to 84 F in the North. This was one of my best trips. EAN highly recommended. Sea life, pelagics, and large fish: mobula, eagle, marble rays; white-tip, black-tip, gray reef silvertip sharks; huge napoleon wrasses, schools of bumphead parrots, jacks, barracuda, oceanic triggers, snappers, more.

Healthy, large variety and quantity of triggers, angels, bat fish, lion fish, flat-heads, scorpion fish, octopus, etc.; huge sea fans, gorgonians, whips, etc. Good variety of nudis and some critters on wreck dives. We really didn't spend time looking for critters. Craig de Wit, owner/operator, accompanied some

divers on some dives. No other dive guides were available. Briefings were generally excellent. The boat does four or five different itineraries around PNG. The sites are pristine. No briefings. Food best I've had on any boat and almost any resort. Divers are treated as responsible adults. A glass of wine with dinner does not mean no night diving. Cabins: Clean, comfortable, and sufficiently roomy for a relatively small boat. Cabins 4 and 5 are on the main deck with ensuite heads. The crew cleaned the cabins and made beds daily. Each cabin has separate a/c. The lounge is spacious for 8 to 10 people. Meals are served at a large table above decks with a nice breeze. A wide-screen projection unit with surround sound for watching movies when there is no night dive. About 40% of diving is from the boat via side entries. Return is via a single set of steps up to the side. The steps flap and move wildly in the current and swell. I found this no problem. Others had some difficulty; Craig had them just surface for zodiac pickup. The crew was happy to take gear to the tender and help you put it on at the dive site. Only three photographers, and they used up the table and floor space in the lounge. The suiting-up area and gear storage were adequate. Crew and overall service excellent! Fills were perfect. Craig ran the tour and dove with us: good stories, good dive guide, and enthusiastic about the diving. Nice touches such as rinsing all the gear daily and doing the final gear clean up for you. E-6 available; projector and screen; good charging space; work space limited. ([www.mvgoldendawn.com](http://www.mvgoldendawn.com))

**Golden Dawn, December 2002, Nick & Donna Southall (nls1@bell-south.net), Mobile, AL.** Dives logged: 150-250. Vis: 50-150 ft. Water: 79-82 F. Dive restrictions enforced: back to boat with 500 psi. We were alarmed about the crime in Port Moresby but were picked up immediately on arrival at the airport by the crew. No problems with flights or baggage. Boat holds 12 divers, but there were only 4 on our trip. Rooms were large enough, individual a/c, and head. Gourmet type food. Boat, captain, and crew were excellent. Captain Craig was enthusiastic and seemed to have as much fun as we did. Lots of nudibranchs, tropicals, sharks, one manta, hard and soft corals were pristine, giant clams, Spanish dancers, schooling fish. Pilot whale came up next to us while we were boarding the tender after a dive. Our best dive trip yet, and ready to go back. Total cost for trip from Alabama for 2 was about \$13,000, we felt it was well worth it.

**Febrina, September/October 2002, Tom Wilson, Hanover, NH.** We went to PNG in 1987 and again in 1990, and we remember it as providing some of the best diving we ever had. The reefs were so healthy and colorful. There were so many different species of fish in one area. There was good wreck diving. We had unique experiences, such as diving with the chambered nautilus. That's why we decided to go back, but to areas that we didn't get to previously. We had some truly great dives and many good ones. But there were disappointments. We were at Duke of York Island just east of Rabaul. Jane, our enthusiastic

dive master (and cook) said: "This was a place where we always see a beautiful school of eagle rays. But you have to go deep. Just follow me." We found the current was extra strong. We had to pull ourselves along, clutching dead coral heads. The visibility was poor. We finally got to 100 feet, and there were no eagle rays. The effort used up half my tank of air, so it was time to head back. Because of the poor visibility, for a while we couldn't find the boat. Of course afterward we had to tease Jane about "the great dive to see the most gorgeous creatures in the sea." But let me tell you about Papua New Guinea diving at its best. It was on October 7th, my 72nd birthday. We were on the north coast of New Britain Island about half way between Walindi Plantation and Rabaul. We are diving on a series of bommies near an island called Lolobau. The nearby volcanos are active. Over on New Britain we can see a big pyramid with a plume of smoke coming out of the top. Our first dive site is called Kilibob's Knob, a coral mound with its top 25 feet under the surface. It is about the size of a basketball court, and it drops off steeply on the sides. The visibility is great, and there is a modest current. Some current is good because there are big schools of fish over the top of the bommie and on its up-current side. We are swimming under schools of jacks that are so big and close together that you can't see the surface above them. Some 200-pound tunas swim by. Off to the sides a school of 40 to 50 barracuda in close formation. Occasionally a white-tip or grey reef shark cruises by. A friendly turtle lets us get up close as he munches on a sponge. An octopus

comes half way out of his hole to study us. He changes colors in the blink of an eye. Close to the coral are thousands of goldfish-sized anthias in brilliant colors, perfectly choreographed to move in unison. Our dive guides find little critters such as leaf fish, decorator crabs, mantis shrimp, and colorful nudibranchs for us. But there is so much action over the top of the bommie that it is hard to see it all. We have a second dive on Kilibob's Knob. This time we have a shark feed. The divers go down first and settle on one side of a small gully which runs through the top of the bommie. Then the dive master comes down quickly with about thirty pounds of fish heads, tails, and large scraps strung on a wire. On the previous dive we'd see one or two at a time. Now there were a dozen or more, and some of them were bigger silvertips. For about five minutes they swoop in and tear at and shake the fish parts on the wire. A moray eel and a Titan triggerfish joined in the action. That day we had two more dives on nearby bommies. One featured a large school of batfish. The other had an amazing fluorescent anemone. At dinner I did get a cake with one crooked candle. (I guessed that might be some sort of comment on my old decrepit state.) Our trip was for 13 days. About half the time I got in five dives a day. Altogether I did 54 dives. Twice I was the only guest going on a night dive, but they didn't mind and sent a guide with me. Sunrise was at 6 a.m., and we were in the water by 6:30. Then we had a full breakfast and did a second dive about 9 and a third about 11:30. The afternoon dive was at 3 p.m. The sun set at 6 and within a half hour it was dark and Venus

was shining as a brilliant evening star as we did our night dive. Dinner was at 8 p.m. and lots of fairly good Australian wine was on the house. But beer was extra (sad face). Our diving was mostly in the Bismarck Sea. We started in Kavieng, at the west end of New Ireland Island. We went around New Hanover Island counterclockwise and had some great dives in the straits between New Hanover and New Ireland. An overnight trip south took us to the Witu Islands. They are wonderfully remote. Then it was further south to the north shore of New Britain Island, and we gradually worked our way east to Rabaul. We were 11 divers plus a crew of ten. The *Febrina* is only 72 feet long, but she is well laid out and all systems worked — engines, electric generators, desalinization machines, compressors to fill our dive tanks, and refrigerators. The loss of any of these could ruin the trip. The food was generous and mostly good. The other divers were a diverse and interesting group. There was one German, a rather slow moving and reticent fellow. He was so large we had trouble imagining him in an economy class airplane seat. He had negotiated for a larger tank than the rest of us were given. This caused some resentment. He would go down and stay in one place photographing a tiny creature and sometimes coming up well after the rest of us did. He did take excellent underwater close-up video pictures. There were three Aussies, all doctors: an cardiovascular surgeon, an ophthalmologist, and a family practitioner. And they had all been on the *Febrina* regularly over the years. The surgeon was loud and profane. The family practitioner was origi-

nally from Dublin, Ireland, and was a whimsical fellow. There was a wealthy business man from Florida (the only one older than I was), and his young lady friend/roommate, who was half his age. The business man was said to have a nondiving wife back home, but we didn't probe. And there was Suzie, George, and Paula from the Washington, D.C., area, well-travelled divers and good companions. Then one evening the *Star Dancer* went up on a reef, not hard enough to do damage, but she was thoroughly stuck. They wanted us to come and rescue them that night. We got to the area where she was the next day at sunset. The *Febrina* pulled her off on the second try. You can imagine the questions and the humiliation for the new young captain of the *Star Dancer*. Why had he misread the charts and gone between those two islands? We wanted to know why we didn't get a whole case of champagne for our efforts. After all, we did give up a dive or two to steam over to them. One morning there were extra big swells, but we dove anyway. While we were down, the dive platform across the stern of *Febrina* broke when it got lifted up and smashed down by a couple of rogue waves. One of the crew, named Nelson, got his hand caught and mangled. When we came up from the dive, *Febrina* was out of sight. After 10 or 15 minutes the dinghy picked us up out of those big swells and took us to the mother boat which was anchored in the lee of a nearby island. Then we hurried two and a half hours to Walindi Plantation near Kimbe. We got the injured man to the simple hospital they had there. He lost the distal third of three fingers on his

right hand. Nelson is a good man, and we felt for him. The next day we had a few dives off the small dive boat that the Walindi Plantation has. In the meantime our dive platform was being rebuilt. We spent three days in the Highlands. It is startling to realize that until about 1930 these highland people were unknown to the rest of the world. 80 percent still live in small villages and are subsistence farmers. We stayed at a lodge near Mount Hagen. It is run by Maggie Wilson, who is the niece of one of the original gold prospectors. We took two tours to five different native villages. There the people demonstrated how they built their houses, how they started fire by friction, how they cooked in pits, how they raised their pigs, and how they celebrated and how they worshipped. Missionaries have been in the Highlands for 60 years and people go to church but still retain many of their old customs and beliefs. A man and his family pay so many pigs or Kina (originally seashells were the currency; now it's PNG coins.) for his bride. That leads to the attitude that the wife is owned by her husband and his family unit. Gradually Papua New Guinea women are fighting for their rights. Audrey McCollum, a psychotherapist in her own right, had met and befriended a Highlands lady and wrote a book called *Two Women/Two Worlds* which describes their friendship; Joan/Mimi and I both read the book, so we asked if we could meet Pirip. That was arranged on our last morning there, and we had about 45 minutes with her and a translator. She speaks Pidgin. She is indeed an impressive lady. We had half a day in Port Moresby on the way back, and we

had a car and a nice guide named Steven. We spent a total of 60 hours on planes. The longest leg was from Frankfurt, Germany, to Singapore. That takes 12 hours. Our route took us north of Iraq on the way out and south of it on the way back. On the way we had to fly from Singapore to Brisbane, Australia, to Port Moresby, PNG. That was because the Singapore to Port Moresby flight was cancelled. The local Air Niugini flights were regularly changed around, and one of the airports, Hoskins, was closed because of recent volcano activity nearby. Somehow we managed and all the luggage came through. We weren't aware of many mosquitoes, but we faithfully took our malaria preventive pills. ([www.febrina.com](http://www.febrina.com))

***MV Pelagian*, January 2003, Allen Tisch (ptat268@huc.rr.com), Cornwall, NY.** Dives logged: 200. Vis: 60 to 100 feet. Water: 78 to 82 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 feet. *Pelagian* (formerly *Fantasea II* of Red Sea and Seychelles fame) is now a live-aboard of the same caliber as *Bilikiki* (Solomons), i.e., better than *Febrina*, not quite as good as *Manthiri* (Maldives) or *Wave Dancer* (Palau). Great muck and reef dives thanks to presence of the Halsteads, who know Milne Bay better than anyone. Great seahorses, wobbegone shark, and dugong thanks to our photographer and DIVE editor, Douglas Siebert. Evening movies by the Taylors of their great white dives made for a special trip. All do their own thing underwater, but a dedicated divemaster watches you (as one does on all above boats but

*Febrina*). If food were world class, *Pelagian* would still be queen of the seas.

***Star Dancer*, July 2003, Barbara and Irwin Beitch, Cheshire, CT.** Dives logged: 200. Divers for about 14 years. Ten days of diving with Peter Hughes' *Star Dancer*, three days at Ambua Lodge in the Southern Highlands, an overnight at Loloata Dive Resort. Our travel agent was Jen Darby ([jen@papuanewguinea.com](mailto:jen@papuanewguinea.com)), who has traveled extensively in PNG and knows what is great and what is not appropriate — especially for middle-aged travelers like us. She used her contacts in PNG to expedite arrangements for us. We used our frequent flier miles to travel business class on Qantas and the seats reclined almost completely for an uninterrupted sleep. We stayed two nights in Sydney and loved every minute. We went to Port Moresby (PNG's capital) via Air Niugini and waited at the Airways Hotel, one of two nice hotels that are conveniently located within view of the airstrip. We stayed at the other, the Gateway, on our way back home; both have pleasant restaurants and are clean, attractive, and safe. We spent one delightful night at Walindi Plantation; their staff met us at the airport, where we met six others who would be on *Dancer* with us. The transfer was efficient, with cold drinks in the van, friendly drivers and other employees who helped us with everything. Walindi gave us a friendly greeting — more drinks, a nice buffet dinner, clean and adequate accommodations, well-kept grounds. After din-

ner entertainment — a “sing-sing” by the local children — was delightful. The next morning Walindi dive master Dale took us on a two-tank dive, to Vanessa’s Reef and Susan’s Reef — both pristine. The weather was perfect, and the reefs were in great shape. After the dives, they cleaned our gear and transferred it to the *Star Dancer* for us; we did not have to lift a finger. Annie was the dive master and the *Star Dancer*’s purser; she is knowledgeable about fish and invertebrate behavior and enhanced 32 dives in 10-days. Opt for 10 instead of 7 days of diving. The crew was welcoming, and the staff members went out of their way for us in so many ways. We stayed in stateroom number 3, with a king-sized bed facing a huge window, as well as ample storage space and a spacious private bathroom with tub and shower. Jayne was the cook — on loan from the *FeBrina*, as was our captain, Alan — both are real characters! The food as creative, varied, and delicious. There were only 9 passengers — apparently the break-even number — even though the capacity of the *Dancer* is 16. Some of the people who were planning to join us canceled out at the last minute. With 12 crew members we received a lot of individual attention. We stayed in Kimbe Bay for a few days, diving Joy’s, Vanessa’s, Kirsty Jane’s, and Otto’s Reefs, and then crossed to Father’s Reef. It was a rough crossing, which began while we were having dinner. The galley chairs tip backward; one of us fell, with an impact to the back of the head. The crew was helpful and promptly offered an ice pack; that plus Naproxen fixed

everything up, we slept in for the first (6:30 AM) dive the next morning. Hopefully, Peter Hughes will replace the chairs in the galley or they will not serve meals during such rough times. Father’s Reef was as wonderful as Kimbe Bay. Jackie’s Knob was beautiful. Friendly, curious schools of batfish surrounded us on the first dive. During a surface interval Captain Alan treated us to an exciting dolphin snorkel; he maneuvered the school of paired spinner dolphins between us and the boat and brought them close to us. The next dive was Shaggy’s Reef. We loved it; they do a modified shark feed, lowering a big bait box filled with fish parts, with holes all around the outside of the box. Silvertips, white-tipped reef sharks, and some greasy came by, along with unicornfish, titan triggerfish, and trevallies, plus numerous smaller species. We have mixed feelings about this technique. Yes, we saw lots of fishes that we would not otherwise have seen, but not in their “natural” setting. In contrast, Blue Corner in Palau had spoiled us forever, in that respect. We had been on shark dives before (e.g., in the Bahamas) and we were acutely aware of differences in fish behavior due to human impact. On the other hand, we appreciate the argument that it is important to educate people, especially divers, about sharks. Alan’s Muck dive at 10 feet. We were aware of the delicate buoyancy control required so as not to stir up the volcanic sediment. White pygmy seahorses, lots of diverse shrimp, and immature crabs, but we aren’t really 100% sold on muck diving, yet. Huge, healthy anemones with their varied

resident anemone fish abounded on almost every dive. Night diving was available almost every night. Witu islands — dived Crater (muck diving with mandarin fish, juvenile hot lips, courting pipefish, four-eyed leaf fish, crab-eyed goby, and on and on), Krack-A-Fat (pristine and “fishy”), Swamp Tinny (with a significant current — we stayed in groups of two guest divers plus a crew member — with no moorings it was sort of a drift dive from the mother ship), Barney’s Reef (cuttlefish, turtles, jack schools, and so on), Dicky’s Knob, “Zee Arches” (pygmy sea horses that live on and mimic a white soft coral, both sporting little red knobs over their surface), and Dickie’s Place. That was another muck dive, on which we saw some cool nudibranchs, unusual clownfishes, and some litter. Dickie came aboard for a couple of days; he is an Aussie expat and a character. We also dived Joelle’s Reef. We returned to Kimbe Bay and dived Susan’s Reef again (our 200th dive), then a site packed with titan triggerfish guarding their nests — quite an obstacle course — and murky because our new replacement captain, after Alan had to leave for another obligation, had stirred up the bottom — we were relieved to find and get back on the boat with only a bite on one of my fins! We stayed anchored near Walindi’s the last night and disembarked for dinner there; it was pleasant — lobster, steak, and all the trimmings. During the afternoon we toured the nearby conservation institute (a sidearm of The Nature Conservancy, apparently), at the far end of the

Walindi property. We flew Air Niugini from Hoskins to Port Moresby (where through previous arrangement by Jen Darby we stowed our dive gear and most of our other luggage with Steve and Harold, from Trans Niugini Tours for a few days), and then on to Mt. Hagen, a bustling sprawl of a town about a mile above sea level. We were probably the only Americans on that flight and certainly among the few passengers who were wearing shoes! At the Mt. Hagen airport we were transferred to and overnighted at the Highlander Hotel, apparently the classiest place in town; it was certainly pleasant enough. Incidentally, security in PNG airports is a joke. The X-ray machine in POM was broken. Where the X-ray machine was working, they were not interested in inspecting our 47 rolls of film, which they gladly passed around, avoiding having them irradiated. Our plane ride the next morning to Ambua Lodge, in the Southern Highlands, was in a little four-seater plane, with spectacular mountain scenery. We were greeted by a charming reception committee consisting of over a dozen Ambua employees and their children. We had three wonderful days there, taking nature walks through the rain forest, looking for rare birds of paradise, and visiting three villages in the valley. We learned about the incredible art of wig-making, about their spirit dances, and in general about their daily life. We’re not sure how much longer this virtual stone-age culture can be maintained, with encroachments and pressures from the outside world. The lodge — a truly luxurious and exotic wilderness



resort — was beautiful. Our accommodations in our own attractive hut with a panoramic view of the mountains and valley were outstanding, and the food, served in the magnificent lodge, was tasty and imaginative. It took two planes to get back to the capital city of Port Moresby, where we were transferred to Loloata Resort to overnight until our flight back to Australia the next day. The staff were not among the most friendly we had met, the food was uninspired, and the accommodations were far away from everything else, reached by a somewhat littered footpath. We vegged out there until the next afternoon, poking around looking for tree kangaroos, wallabies and other exotic island wildlife. ([www.peterhughes.com](http://www.peterhughes.com))

***Star Dancer, August 2003, Sean Bruner (sean@bruner.net), Tucson, AZ.***

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 feet. Water: 84 F, choppy, surge, currents. The diving was the best I've done. The corals were the healthiest I've seen, and the variety was outstanding, perhaps 200 different types of soft and hard corals. The fish life and variety was incredible. Everything from the pygmy seahorses, miniature mandarin fish, harlequin shrimp, and plentiful nudibranchs to schools of huge batfish, barracuda, whitetip, silvertip, and gray reef sharks, and everything in between. Many first time sightings: cuttlefish, octopi mating, crocodile fish, banded pipefish, and a few macro creatures I'd never seen anywhere else. Elsie, the divemaster, was especially helpful at finding small critters, tiny crabs on sea

fans, pygmy seahorses, miniature mandarin fishes. Gave up trying to find stuff myself and just hung out with Elsie, especially on the night dives, where she found amazing critters. Jack, the captain, tried to make the best of the weather, although it was overcast most of the week, and the seas were rough. He was a great old salt though and accompanied us on many dives. Annie, the dive instructor, was helpful especially to the photographers and was also noteworthy for her fun disposition and great sense of humor. Andrew, the cook, put out plenty of good food, including special meals for one diver who couldn't eat anything with sugar, including many fruits, and strict vegetarian fare for another diver. There was always a wide selection of meat, fish, and poultry, as well as vegetables and salads. On the rainy days, the soup at every lunch and dinner were especially welcome. There were four dives every day plus a night dive. The crew made every guest feel special and met special needs. Air Niugini makes it difficult to get there and also charged us excess baggage on the flight from Port Moresby to Hoskins, where we got the boat. Although we didn't get charged the excess baggage on the way back, the flight was three hours late, making our connection to Sydney tight. We had to stay in Australia one night each way, although our flight in arrived in Sydney at 7 a.m. Why one cannot get to PNG the same day one arrives at 7 a.m. in Sydney is a mystery. But it was worth the hassle. There was a large table on the back deck of the boat for cameras, and a compressed air gun for

drying cameras. E6 processing available on board, but we had to mount our own. Two divers reported that their last two roles were ruined by negligent processing. Instructor Annie Crawley, an accomplished underwater photographer and videographer was incredibly helpful, making suggestions above/below the water, reviewing our slides, and allowing us to use her expensive equipment. I learned more from her in a week than from all other trips combined.

### SOLOMON ISLANDS

***Bilikiki, November 2002, Wuni Ryschkewitsch, Gainesville, FL.***

Vis: 50 to 150 feet. Water: 80 F. Dives logged: 3,350. Excellent crew, excellent boat, tinny easy to dive from and get into. I have hip and knee replacements and need some help and got it every time. Very good operation all around and a friendly crew. Eleven crew, eight divers.

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

***Bilikiki, August 2003, Jan Breidenbach (aquafauna@aol.com),***

***Granite Bay, CA.*** Dives logged: 800+. Vis: 75-90 ft. Water: 80-85 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 120 ft. How easy dive life can be! Diving from the "tinnies" meant no surface swims. Wonderfully laid out dive deck, camera area, great staff. Excellent dive guides for novice and expert divers. Friendly local people — natural beauty. Solomon Is. doesn't deserve travel advisory. It is great there.

***Spirit of the Solomons, September***

**2003, Nikki Mahann (nikkim@oz.net), Bellevue, WA.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 80 to 100 Feet. Water: 82 to 84 F, calm. We were disappointed as far as seeing pelagics, only a lone shark or turtle showed up. The macro was very good. The sea fans and soft corals are magnificent. We used reef hooks on several of the strong current dives, what a great way to watch the huge schools of jacks, tuna and barracudas! We searched for the seahorse but didn't see one. I was lucky to see the elusive shrimp gobie on a dive at White Beach. The crew couldn't have been better which compensated for the age of the boat. Meals were plentiful and satisfied the needs of the health conscious eaters as well as the picky ones.

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

### TONGA

***Ha'apai***

***Nai'a, August 2003, John Sommerer, Silver Spring, MD.***

Previous diving Caribbean, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Micronesia, PNG. 250-500 dives. Sunny, cloudy, windy. Calm & flat, choppy, currents, no currents. 73-75 deg. F. 3mm wetsuit. Vis: 40-100 ft. Dive own profile. Dive guides had a tendency to urge you to come up after about 50 minutes if they could find you. Great facilities. Ten of sixteen passengers were UWPs, and each had more than one camera. Plenty of workspace, charging capacity, etc. The film photographers had a bad day when a whole batch of E6 went bad, but Rob Barrel