

infrastructure is nil except for a few small, remote dive resorts in beautiful settings like Uepi and the Gizo islands, although several live-aboards dive these waters. ... There are plenty of wrecks from WWII, lots of pristine reefs and walls, an abundance of fish (big ones too), and even more unexplored territory. ... Diving is year-round with plenty of places to dive in the lee, but April and May are the best months, followed by October, November, and December. ... The Solomons are a possible add-on from Fiji (1,300 miles to the southeast) or Papua New Guinea (700 miles to the west); Honiara is on the main island of Guadalcanal; use it only for overnighting. ... Solomon Islanders produce fine wood carvings. ... This is serious malaria country. ... While there is continued trouble between various Solomon Island factions, tourists aren't hassled.

Adventure Sports, Gizo Hotel, August 2003, Jan Breidenbach (aquafauna@aol.com), Granite Bay, CA. Dives logged: 800+. Vis: 60-85 ft. Water: 82-85 F. Things are much improved, prices excellent and people gracious and charming. Danny Kennedy's operation gives 110% to every diver. WWII wrecks, shallow to deep dives, good passes, reefs and short boat rides with delicious beach lunch! Well worth the effort to get there! (www.divegizo.com)

Uepi Island Resort, August 2003,

Jan Breidenbach (aquafauna@aol.com), Granite Bay, CA. Dives logged: 800+. Vis: 80-100 ft. Water: 82-85 F. Uepi Island Resort is the "best of the best" and that says it all. Pristine beauty above and below the water. Lovely resort with excellent managers and staff. Every sort of diving offered and fantastic snorkeling. Solomon Airlines does great job of getting you to Seghe, boat trip across Marovo Lagoon to the resort a real pleasure. This is a "don't miss" destination! (www.uepi.com)

TONGA

Dolphin Pacific Divers, Tongan Beach Resort, August 2003, Dan Purnell (Danpurnell@CS.com), Vancouver, WA. Vis: 80-150 ft. Water: 76-78 F. Dives logged: 400. Dive restrictions enforced: time. I spent nearly 2 weeks in Vana'u. I went scuba diving with Dolphin Pacific Divers and took a tour snorkeling with humpback whales with Whale Swim Adventures. Vana'u is a collection of beautiful islands, offering shelter to whales giving birth to their young. Although Vana'u was hit by a huge hurricane several years ago, there is still good scuba diving. Many of the diving sites are especially interesting from a geological perspective. Huge boulders, canyons, caves, swim throughs, split rock formations make the diving very interesting. There are some very nice tropical fish, but not nearly as many as you would find in Fiji or Palau. In some sites the hard corals are pristine, and in others they are heavily damaged by the hurricane. Some sites are breathtaking, while

others look like barren deserts. The corals are beginning to come back. The water is incredibly clear and blue. Dolphin Pacific Divers is a solid well run operation. They are very safety conscious, friendly and definitely enjoy diving. They probably should skip some of the more heavily damaged dive sites. Swimming with humpback whales was a once in a life time experience. Whale Swim Adventures is an exceptionally well run operation. They are very professional and know everything there is to know about the whales. We had a number of encounters snorkeling with Moms and their calves, and frisky males looking for a mate. They are such magnificent creatures, gliding through the blue depths of Tonga. In addition, we saw many whales from the boat, breaching and playing, just being whales. There are long periods where there are no whales to be seen, but it is an absolutely life changing experience when you get the chance to be in the water with these magnificent giants. The Tongan Beach Resort was very nice. The food was good, the accommodations were right on the beach, and the staff was very friendly. We sometimes could see whales breaching from the beach. You can see falling stars at night. This is definitely paradise.
(www.tonga.islands-resorts.com)

Central & Western Pacific Live-Aboards

AUSTRALIA

Quicksilver, June 2003, Jerry

Hamberg (dhamberg@remc7.k12.mi.us), Holland, MI. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 60 to 80 feet. Water: 81 to 77 F, calm. The Coral Sea can stay rough for long periods of time, but we hit it right on our trip, and it was quite calm; we even had mirror-smooth water a couple of days. I wasn't ready to hear that a dive guide would be with us on all dives, but it turned out okay; there were a couple of times that there was current, and we were 100+ miles off shore. You wanted to have more than just your buddy near during those dives. We had one dive that a large silver tip shark patrolled near us; they can be aggressive and at that point it was good to have more than just your buddy. We had the possibility of having 12 divers on the trip; we had six: three single guys, one single gal, and my wife and I. Five crew, most smoked, but not near the divers or inside of the boat. Took the boat from 5 p.m. until 6 a.m. the next day to get to Osprey Reef, and it was worth it; there are not many boats that go this far, and we didn't see any. The coral was in great shape; the big clams were beautiful, and the species of fish was high. We went on to Shark Reef eight miles south of Osprey which is seldom visited; it was really full of fish, a thousand blue and yellow fusiliers going in one direction while a stream of hundreds of black — one with blue neon stripes — swam in the opposite direction. There were schools of Moorish idols and pale blue surgeon fish. I saw fire gobies, blennies, and stonefish. The table corals and soft corals look healthy, there were white tip sharks, gray whaler sharks, and silver tip. As the boat moved closer to the