

## Product Review – of a live aboard

By Sandy Sondrol

# NAUTILUS EXPLORER

Dive vacations are supposed to be relaxing. This is doubly so for a dive vacation on a live aboard dive boat. You don't have to haul gear back and forth after every dive; the hot tub is only a few steps away, convenient meals, fellow travelers who also love diving, plus the chance to dive in remote, pristine areas, away from crowds of day boats.

Beyond the basics, the variables of live aboard dive boats are vast. Accommodations run from bunks in dorms with one toilet and shower for 20 people to multi-room individual suites and from make-your-own peanut butter sandwiches to true gourmet dining with vast arrays of fine wines. Prices of the trips, of course, vary accordingly.

Many divers find that compromises between the extremes of accommodations work best for them. Individual cabins with private bathrooms plus, a well maintained, safe boat, casual dining with great food and a crew that works very hard to provide customer service create what most divers feel is a superb live aboard experience. When you take all of this, plus a boat that was custom designed as a live aboard and add in itineraries that are well out of the ordinary, you have defined *Nautilus Explorer*.

I spent 5 days on Nautilus Explorer in September of 2007 on a trip to see Great White Sharks at Guadalupe Island, Mexico. Here are my personal observations:

Launched in 2000, the boat is fairly new by live aboard standards. She is a Canadian built and owned boat that was designed to operate as a live aboard dive boat in the challenging waters of the west coast of Canada. She was built to international safety standards and is safety inspected by Transport Canada (Canadian Coast Guard) every year.

During my trip, we experienced some heavy seas, from some particularly nasty directions, and even though the boat was rolling around from the wave action, I never felt concerned about safety. This boat is a small ship and feels like it.

One significant way that I judge a live aboard is the quality of its everyday maintenance. There is a lot to do for crew members on a live aboard, and it is very easy to postpone routine maintenance. Then, all of a sudden, the boat looks shabby and things stop working. Not so with Nautilus Explorer. The engineers clearly understand why they are there. The boat is beautifully maintained. Door hinges are a good example; one afternoon I mentioned to the engineer that one of the hinges on my cabin door squeaked. Obviously this is not a big thing. 10 minutes later, when I went back down to my cabin, the squeak had been fixed. It was a big thing to him and he took care of it.

The boat accommodates up to 24 divers. A majority of the cabins are staterooms which contain either twin beds or a queen size bed, with a toilet and shower in each room. There was plenty of storage space. The staterooms are well appointed, clean and comfortable.

The salon area has plenty of comfortable chairs and couches, a DVD, computer and large screen, and a bar, plus picture windows on both sides.

The dining area is set up with long tables and chairs or benches. The food was set up in a serving area against one wall of the dining area and guests helped themselves to whatever they chose to eat. The food was very good and very plentiful.

The dive deck is spacious. However, one of the really cool elements of the dive operation was not on board for the Guadalupe Island trips. During regular dive trips, the dive boat, a large aluminum skiff, is carried on a ramp built into the dive deck area, and launch during diving. There are two large camera tables that are well protected from the weather with plugs for chargers right there as well.

With spacious accommodations for the obligatory hot tub and sun deck, the boat creates a great cocoon for a dive trip.

Finally...the crew. The crew on a live aboard dive boat will either make or break your trip. This crew clearly intended to make our trip and they succeeded superbly.

I never saw a grumpy face or heard a grumble among the entire crew of 7. Each and every one was interested in the guests, and did everything they could to help make the trip a good one. To a person, they were knowledgeable and above all, nice.

You have many opportunities and many destinations available to share on Nautilus Explorer. Alaska, British Columbia, the California Channel Islands, Guadalupe Island, The Socorro Islands and the Sea of Cortez are all within your reach when you dive on Nautilus Explorer. If you love diving live aboards, you'll love Nautilus Explorer.

You can learn a lot more from their web site: [www.nautilusexplorer.com](http://www.nautilusexplorer.com).